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Making a Spectacle: deviant men, invective, and pleasure

Jonathan Walters

This investigation begins with Juvenal's second satire ¹ in which the object of invective is males whose use of their bodies is displayed for stigmatization as inappropriate for Roman men. My aim is to elucidate the rhetoric of this poem by placing the text in a Roman social and cultural context and thus to throw light on the policing of what was the acceptable use of the male body in Roman culture, in particular by an examination of the rhetorical process of stigmatization of nonconformist behavior. More specifically, I will argue that this satiric "putting on stage" ² of the deviant performing his reprehensible behavior can better be understood in the context of other formalized ways in which socially deviant behavior was marked out and stigmatized in Roman society and with an appreciation of the place of theater and spectacle in Roman culture.

I will also argue that the visual quality of these representations of deviant behavior, focussing on bodies and bodily activity, acts in two ways. First, and at the more obvious level, it defines precisely in what ways the objects of satire deviate from the norm and thus defines--or, perhaps more accurately, creates (since they are mutually reinforcing constructs)--this norm. More covertly, it enables the readership to implicate themselves pleasurably in the spectacle of deviancy while at the same time reaffirming **[End Page 355]** their own non-deviant status. ³ For this purpose, the exposure of the deviants' bodies is of vital importance.

This is a satire in which the theme of secrecy and disclosure, of looking at what is or should be hidden, is central. At the start of the text, we are warned that outward appearance is unreliable. ⁴ We are in the world of dissimulation and deception, which, as Gleason points out, was also the world of physiognomists, who could read people's bodies and proclaim the hidden inner truth of their character despite their often misleading outward appearance. ⁵ This text is permeated with language referring to the uncovering of hidden truth: "they pretend" (*simulant*, 3), "more truthful" (*verius*, 15), "admits" (*fatetur*, 17), "it is known" (*notum est*, 58), the assurance, however tendentious, in line 64 that what Laronia says is not merely *vera*, the truth, but *manifesta*, which means both "brought to light," and, in legal terminology, "proved by evidence," ⁶ and finally at line 129, *ecce*, a linguistic invitation to look.

Hidden from the community, but now being brought to light ("as the people stare," *populo mirante*, 67), is the infringement, indeed reversal (*more sinistro*, 87), of gender and sexual norms deemed to be agreed upon within the community, specifically of the behavior expected and demanded of Roman men. The most notable instance in this poem is the male/male wedding described in lines 117 onward with its elaborate parody of Roman marriage rites. ⁷ This behavior is characterized, through the mouth of the "truth-telling Laronia," ⁸ not simply as the deviant activity of one or more individual males, but, one might almost say, as the makings of a contestatory subculture of unmanly males: ⁹ "unmanly men all stick together" (*magna [End Page 356] inter molles concordia*, 48). The word which I have translated by "sticking together," *concordia*, is frequently used in Latin of agreement on a course of political action: the implication is that there is a conspiracy under way, that these deviants are a danger to "normal" society.

This behavior is represented as not merely contravening community norms, but as dangerous because it is liable to "go public" in the wrong way, to move from secrecy to openness, as we see from line 132

onwards (especially "these things will be done openly," *fient ista palam*, 136), to subvert and so *become* the norm ("they will be recorded in the official gazette," *et in acta referri*, 136). The narrator's bringing out of the closet of this hidden deviance, his exposure of it to the critical eye of the community, is, paradoxically, a pre-emptive strike, a prefiguring of what is to be prevented.

More specifically, what is being exposed, stripped of its covering, [10](#) and opened to view, is the deviant male's body. The play of seeming and being, of seeing and being seen, is sited from the start of the invective in the body. To return to *frontis* in line 8: this signals, through its primary meaning of "forehead," that it is the body that is in play here--more specifically, the surface of the body, that dangerous boundary between the inner and the outer, the place where feelings in the heart and thoughts in the brain cross over into behavior, activity in the world. But, as boundary, the surface of the body functions not only to project outward into the world the character of the person inhabiting the body; it is also the point at which the body can be penetrated from without, penetrated sexually, or penetrated by the knowing gaze of the onlooker.

This focus on the body is made more specific a few lines later (11-13): the hairiness and roughness, which by metonymy symbolized for Romans as for Greeks proper adult maleness, is deceptive: in a more hidden part of the body's surface, at the opposite end of the body from the **[End Page 357]** forehead, the anus has been emasculated. The outer surface of those parts of the body which are open to public view, the limbs, may be suitably hairy, but the hidden, secret area of the anus is effeminately hairless. The transgression of boundaries which is the focus of attention here is aptly symbolized by the grotesque image of the piles which extrude from within the body and which are to be cut back by the doctor. [11](#) Here, surely, the doctor represents the satirist, exposing the hidden sickness of the body politic (*morbum*, as it is called soon after at line 17) in order to cut it out. We, the readership, are at the same time being told what is being stigmatized--male gender deviancy--and, more particularly, that it is sited in the body, a male body on which we are invited, even forced, to cast a penetrating gaze. That this gaze is in some sense correlate with sexual penetration is implied by the unusual use in line 13 of the verb *caeduntur*. [12](#) Although this verb is of wide use, [13](#) it does elsewhere have a sexual connotation: [14](#) Catullus uses it of his rape of a boy (or slave) whom he has caught in a sexual act. [15](#) What the audience is being made to watch is an act of anal sexual penetration as much as a surgical intervention. [16](#)

The act of stigmatization performed by the narrator-embodied-as-text is a complex one. It brings to the attention of the community breaches of the norm. In so doing, it makes a claim to be defending that norm by enunciating it. The wrongdoer is put on show, acting out his misbehavior before the community which is assembled as readers of or, more accurately (since the text was intended, at least at first, for recitation), the audience of the text. If successful in its appeal to its public, it creates a community of the respectable, the right-thinking or at least (in public at any rate) right-acting, and punishes those detected in deviant behavior by ejecting them from this community. **[End Page 358]**

In the same way, the spreader of gossip about another member of the community rhetorically makes him- or herself the enunciator and upholder of pre-existing standards of conduct agreed within the community. However, gossiping can, of course, just as easily be understood as the calling into being of such standards, and, in effect, the creation of the community with these standards and norms. The gossip's strategy of appealing to a pre-existing community and what are supposedly already accepted norms is, partly at least, an attempt to convince his or her listeners to accept the norms which underlie and are implied by the gossip's invective. This community and these norms are defined, that is, given shape and form, by the successful placing of at least one person outside the community by convincingly making the allegation that he or she has transgressed those standards. [17](#)

To avoid misunderstanding, I wish to make it clear that I am not, in this essay, arguing for the social reality of the activities and behavior described in Juvenal's second satire; gossip is, after all, notoriously unreliable. And gossip is what we are dealing with in this text, for this form of satiric invective can be seen as a transformation into a literary mode of a more general social process: the spreading of gossip or, in Roman terms, the creation of *infamia*. [18](#) This word has two levels of meaning. Used informally, it means a bad reputation, notoriety. Such is its use in line 22 of this satire. More formally, in Roman law, an *infamis* was a man of such bad repute that he no longer enjoyed all the rights at law of a Roman citizen; significantly for the text under discussion here, men who allowed themselves to be sexually penetrated, who "took the woman's role in their body," as it was often put, came into this category. [19](#)

Clearly, the formal juridical **[End Page 359]** use of this vocabulary was a crystallization of an earlier informal social categorization, a judgement by his neighbors that such a man was no longer a respectable member of the community, in good standing. This was a juridical marker of loss of standing rather than a punishment for criminal activity, but, as Fraenkel pointed out, "the fear of defamation [is] a formidable threat in a relatively small community," ²⁰ and as Richlin points out in this connection, "in societies in which public reputation played such a large part, an officially bad reputation was no joke." ²¹ And it is exactly by drawing to other people's attention something disgraceful which another member of the community has done, something which they would, evidently, prefer to keep secret, that this sanction operates.

The Roman custom of *flagitatio* is also relevant in this context. This was a non-judicial means of trying to force the return of one's property from a recalcitrant debtor or borrower by harassing them, surrounding them, or standing outside their house and loudly demanding the return of one's property. ²² It was "[t]he popular method of extra-legal redress" by means of "the threat of public disgrace," as Marshall put it. ²³ Significantly, such public shaming is sometimes ²⁴ described as taking place in the forum, the formal center of Roman community life: this marks it as a matter relevant to the whole community as formally constituted, not merely a disagreement between two individuals.

Although *flagitatio*, as we know it from the extant literary sources, seems confined to a demand for the return of property, the related verb *flagitare* and noun *flagitium*, meaning "disgrace, dishonour, infamy, scandal, shameful act" ²⁵ certainly include sexual misdeeds within their compass. ²⁶ In Catullus' literary version of a *flagitatio*, poem 42, the demand for **[End Page 360]** the return of property is accompanied by abuse of the victim of the *flagitatio* on grounds of sexual misconduct, specifically that she is a slut (*moecha*). Significantly, in view of the theme of our text, we are told that the verb *flagitare*, in the passive voice and with specific reference to the penetration of the body, was used in early Latin of sexual passivity on the part of a male. ²⁷ Once again, it is the boundary of the body, the skin this time, which is referred to: the image is of a man being degraded by failure, or lack of desire, to protect himself from invasion of his body from the outside world; the social disgrace is envisioned as *entering his body* as the penis of the man who penetrated him did. The one penetration of the body can metaphorically parallel the other because, in Roman thought, for a man to be sexually penetrated marked a loss of status, a degradation from true Roman manhood to something less honorable. ²⁸ Similarly, for someone to be a recalcitrant debtor, if this fact were known to the community at large, would mark him or her as unreliable and thus no longer in good standing in that community. It would seem, therefore, that the original, core meaning of *flagitare* and *flagitium* was the bringing to public attention of behavior which contravened the norms of Roman respectability, behavior which transgressed the bounds of the acceptable.

So one way of reading Juvenal's second satire is as a literary analog of *flagitatio*, and of the creation of *infamia*, by the bringing into the public eye of a hidden breach of community standards. In this satire, the vivid depiction for the audience of exactly what was going on indoors recreates it for public gaze. The wrongdoers are, in effect, put on show, as they act out their misbehavior before the community, a community constituted as audience of the activities denounced in the text. Viewed in this light, this text can be seen also as a form of spectacle, like the theater. ²⁹ This text can also, more specifically, be likened to those public punishments of malefactors which took place as part of the Roman games: the killing of criminals by animals and, especially, the recreation, using real human **[End Page 361]** beings, of such mythological tortures as Prometheus having his liver eaten by an eagle or Hercules being burnt to death, wrapped in a flammable garment. ³⁰

In this context, it is illuminating to compare the Juvenal text we have been discussing with another which contains and links the same elements of male gender inversion, male sexual passivity, and the pleasures of sight and spectacle. This is a curious passage in Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* (1.16). In a discussion on mirrors, and specifically on distorting mirrors, he introduces a story about one Hostius Quadra, a rich man whose shocking penchant it was to submit himself sexually to other men and even perform cunnilingus on women. What is shocking is that, in Roman terms, this man is turning "nature" upside down in many aspects: social power and gender, as well as the sexual activity which, for Romans, at least in public discourse, combined and symbolized these two social statuses. Not surprisingly, Seneca marks his deviance, indeed his reversal of the natural order, from the beginning by defining him as a "slave to his millions" (*sestertii milies seruum*, N. Q. 1.16.1).

To add to his masochistic enjoyment, Hostius Quadra is reported to have installed mirrors (distorting mirrors which made his male partners' penises appear larger than life), so that he could see what was happening: "that unnatural freak had made his own filthiness a show," ³¹ "making himself a spectator of his own degradation." ³² The theme of spectacle is reinforced elsewhere in the story: the verb *spectabat* (he used to watch) is used three times in one paragraph (1.16.5) of Hostius in the middle of his orgies and he is contrasted unfavorably with prostitutes, "those bodies exposed to public abuse," ³³ who keep their sexual degradation decently veiled. This connection between gender-deviance and the showing of the body as spectacle is signalled in Seneca's first description of the man when he characterizes him as *obscentatis in scaenam usque productae* ("whose filthiness was even staged"). ³⁴ This expression appears to mean that his obscene acts were put on stage (as well as carrying a possible reference to **[End Page 362]** the etymological linkage of *obsceus* and the stage), ³⁵ or possibly that he made a show of them rather than keeping them decently hidden. In either case, the connection between his unmanly sexual passivity and the display of his body performing his deviancy is made clear from the start of the narrative.

So here we have a gender-deviant whose deviancy is marked by his turning upside-down of the normal protocols of sexual behavior and whose deviancy is associated with his desire to be spectacle rather than, or as well as, spectator. He surpasses the closeted deviant males of the beginning of Juvenal's second satire and joins those who, later in the poem, feel no need to conceal their deviancy. He has placed himself beyond the pale, choosing to make a show of his rejection of community standards. He is beyond the reach of satire or other forms of social control; his punishment is symbolic. When he is killed by his slaves, the emperor Augustus refuses, on behalf of the community whose standards he has openly rejected, to punish his murderers. He has become one of the outsiders who can be killed with impunity. Hostius' voluntary rejection of the status of proper Roman man is symbolized as much by his transformation of his body into an object of spectacle as it is by his "unmanly" sexual use of his body.

At all Roman public spectacles, the spectators represented the *Populus Romanus*, the Roman People, in its power and glory, just as the audience of the satire is cast as representative of the community of respectable Roman men who share norms and values with the narrator. All those whose part in the spectacle was to perform for the audience--free professionals, slaves, captives, criminals, animals--were defined juridically and socially as other than respectable Romans. They were outsiders or marginals, not members in good standing of the community. This community, on the contrary, was constituted by those who sat as spectators on the other side of the barrier, a barrier which was conceptualized as social and moral as well as physical. Of course, the spectators need the spectacle, and thus those who act in it, to enable them to perform their role as spectators; they need outsiders to watch, just as the community of the righteous and respectable exists only by envisioning those who are outside it.

This world of the spectacle and the low status of those who perform there is referred to specifically at the climax of the satire at line 143 **[End Page 363]** onward, where Juvenal asserts that for a high-status Roman man to be a gladiator is comparable to, but even worse than, being another man's wife. This has in the past been taken as a more-or-less irrelevant interruption of Juvenal's main theme, but this is far from being the case. ³⁶ In the case both of the sexually passive man and of the gladiator, what is at stake is a concept of manliness which is irreducibly bound up with the holding of power over others and which is radically incompatible with being the object of power of another. For a man's body to be sexually penetrated, used "like a woman" by another man, and for his body to appear as spectacle in the arena were both conceptualized as paradigms of the state of being in the power of another. Power and pleasure were for Roman men inextricably bound up together, perhaps especially so in the area of gender and sexuality. ³⁷ Therefore, the pleasure which the other man, penetrator or spectator, was seen as deriving from this use of another man's body added to and confirmed this ideological mind-set. It is not solely the sexual use of his body by another man that lowers a man's status; it is any use of his body by other men for their pleasure.

Viewed in this light, the spectacle portrayed through these bodies involved the social position of those on each side of the "footlights." On the one side was the powerful, respectable body gazing down; on the other, the despised body of the deviant acting out its deviancy as spectacle. It was a place where the boundary between the licit and the illicit was marked out for all to see. The spectacle was thus an act of stigmatization and also, at least some of the time, an arena of punishment where evil-doers were punished, their punishment forming part of the spectacle.

But theater and the games were not simply exercises in and demonstrations of power and punishment; they were, for the spectators at least, experiences of pleasure. ³⁸ This pleasure was implicated in that of the powered gaze, ³⁹ of looking at the bodies of deviants and outsiders as they performed these roles for the audience.

Satire, too, invites its audience to the pleasure of beholding the reprehensible and the deviant. This, I would like to argue, is one reason for [End Page 364] the emphasis on the bodies of those satirized and on the vivid portrayal of their bodily activity. The portrayal of these forbidden acts, while stigmatizing those who are alleged actually to have performed them, enables the readers of the satire to indulge themselves through their imagination in those forbidden pleasures (pleasures precisely because they are forbidden) while simultaneously preserving their own status of respectability. They were able, in short, safely to use the bodies of the deviants for their own pleasure.

In this particular case, Juvenal parades in front of his audience men who, in one way or another, fail to live up to the standards he sets for respectable Roman men, standards which he rhetorically places as common ground, shared between himself and his audience. In so doing, by this act of stigmatization, he marks the boundaries of what was acceptable for a respectable Roman man. This creates a pleasure in which author and audience collude, the pleasure of affirming their own righteousness. The placing of deviance, and deviants, on show necessarily positions those who watch, rather than enact, the spectacle as non-deviant, as examples of the norm against which deviance is judged and found wanting. The watchers' pleasure, however, goes beyond that merely of their own exemplification of the norm; it is heavily implicated in their experience of their own power over the others whom they watch. The act of bringing to light what another wishes to conceal, of choosing the moment to reveal another's secret, of forcing into public view a subculture still in the closet, is a demonstration of power that brings its own voyeuristic pleasure. And, of course, putting male sexual deviance on display provides yet another pleasure to those who watch: they can, as it were, enjoy the experience of the forbidden pleasure while preserving themselves from its taint. Their place as spectators, not actors, casts the censorious gaze elsewhere; whatever skeletons they may have in *their* closets remain unobserved. Their bodies remain safe from others' use. ⁴⁰

University of Southern California

Notes

¹. As will be obvious to readers, I am much indebted to the work on this satire which has been done by Richlin 1993 and Braund 1996a.

². On satire as stage, see Braund 1996b.

³. For other examples of the complex relationship between a culturally and socially dominant norm (and those who embodied it) and the "other," see Zeitlin 1985 (women in Greek drama), Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarague 1990 (Athenian men dressed as women and barbarians on Attic vase paintings), Halperin 1990 (Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*), Skinner 1993 (the Greek tradition of women's poetry).

⁴. *frontis nulla fides* (line 8).

⁵. Gleason 1990.389-416; more recently Gleason 1995. On the disharmony between outer appearance and inner reality, see Professor Gold's chapter in this volume and Wyke 1994.

⁶. *OLD* s.v. *manifestus* 2.

⁷. The dowry, the marriage contract written on wax tablets, the guests shouting "Good Luck!," the feast presided over by groom and bride, the flame-colored veil worn by the bride, are all features of the traditional Roman wedding ceremony.

⁸. *uera ac manifesta canentem* (line 64).

⁹. See Richlin 1993 and Taylor 1997, who argue for the existence of such a subculture in Rome. Although I find much in the arguments of these two scholars cogent, I am not convinced that it is useful

to speak in this context of a "homosexual" subculture, since it still seems to me that the deviance of the males in question is characterized as primarily one of gender-role performance. In so far as the participants in "pathic subcultures" are characterized as effeminate and as seeking satisfaction in "passive" sexual activity, they can perhaps most conveniently be seen as similar to the modern "queen," a term which is not coterminous with "homosexual," nor (as Richlin 1993.543 points out) "gay."

[10.](#) Braund and Cloud 1981.207 note that "[t]he poem is planned as a progressive stripping away of veils," which leaves it open whether it is the author, the narrator, or the deviants who do the stripping. More recently, some of these issues of secrecy and disclosure have been touched on in more detail in Braund 1996a (especially 169-70).

[11.](#) *podice levi / caeduntur tumidae medico ridente mariscae* (12-13).

[12.](#) As Braund 1996a.124 points out, the usual verb for surgical cutting is *secare*.

[13.](#) OLD s.v. 8 shows that it is used to mean "sever" or "cut," though more often with reference to wounding than to surgical intervention.

[14.](#) OLD s.v. 2 gives examples from the satirist Lucilius (283) and the comedy-writer Laberius (22) as well as Catullus. See also Adams 1982.145-47 for the use in sexual contexts of *caedo*, as well as its derivatives *percido* and *concido*.

[15.](#) 56.7: *protelo rigida mea cecidi*.

[16.](#) Closely allied to this theme of the stripping and opening up of the deviant's body is that of clothing and the extent to which it conceals or reveals his body. The significance of this is clear when, in line 169, change of clothing symbolizes change of behavior. Thus the unmanly orator in his see-through toga in court at lines 66-67 reveals his effeminacy in (half-) revealing his body and is then (line 71) proleptically stripped naked in court.

[17.](#) I accept, of course, that there can be, and perhaps usually is, more than one such community of the "right-thinking": norms and standards can and do vary within what it is still helpful to call one society, as different classes and subcultures adopt, develop, and enforce their own rules. As with "(good) taste," however, these local norms impose their authority, or attempt to, by denouncing or, preferably, rendering invisible and unthinkable any other standard.

[18.](#) I owe much of this part of the argument to the fundamental work of Greenidge 1894, and to the extended and illuminating discussion of the connection between *infamia* and male sexual passivity in Richlin 1993.555-61.

[19.](#) *qui corpore suo muliebria passus est*, Dig. 3.1.1.6 (of praetorian *infamia*). The term *infamia* is used in Roman sources of "censorial" *infamia*, but its use is frequently extended by modern scholars to "praetorian" *infamia*, and Richlin 1993.558-61 demonstrates the close similarity of the two varieties of stigmatization.

[20.](#) Fraenkel 1961.49.

[21.](#) Richlin 1993.560.

[22.](#) "*flagitatio* is so called from the loud noise" (*flagitatio a strepitu dicitur*), Donatus on Terence *Eunuchus* 382.

[23.](#) Marshall 1968.16.

[24.](#) E.g., Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 3.449.

[25.](#) OLD s.v. *flagitium*.

[26.](#) E.g., *si quis ancillam alienam subripuit et flagitauerit* ("if anyone has kidnapped and debauched another's slave-woman"), Dig. 47.1.2.5 (Ulpian); *nudatum supinatumque iuuenem execrandis oribus*

flagitabant ("once the young man was naked and laid out on his back, they began defiling him with their loathsome mouths"), Apul. *Met.* 8.29; *flagitia principis sub nominibus exoletorum feminarumque . . . perscripsit* ("he wrote out a list of the emperor's sexual misdeeds with the names of his male and female partners"), Tac. *Ann.* 16.19.

[27.](#) *inter cutem flagitados dicebant antiqui mares, qui stuprum passi essent* ("Early Romans spoke of males who had undergone improper sexual penetration as having been disgraced under their skin"), Paul ex Festus p 110 M (ed. T Lindsay 1913).

[28.](#) See Richlin 1983 and 1993, Cantarella 1992, Edwards 1993, Taylor 1997, Walters 1997b.

[29.](#) It is perhaps pertinent that the males stigmatized in this satire are first described, at line 9, as *obscenis* ("obscene, filthy"), and Varro gives as one possible explanation of the origin of that word that it refers to what should only be openly talked about on stage (*scaena*): *quare turpe ideo obscenum quod nisi in scaena palam dici non debet*, *Ling.* 7.96.

[30.](#) See Coleman 1990.

[31.](#) *illud monstrum obscenitatem suam spectaculum fecerat* (*N.Q.* 1.16.6).

[32.](#) *ut ipse flagitiorum suorum spectator esset* (*N.Q.* 1.16.3). It is noteworthy that the word *flagitium* is used in this passage.

[33.](#) *illa corpora publico obiecta ludibrio* (*N.Q.* 1.16.6).

[34.](#) *N.Q.* 1.16.1. This phrase has been most recently discussed by Hine 1996.31-32.

[35.](#) See footnote 29.

[36.](#) As Konstan 1993 pointed out.

[37.](#) See Walters 1997a.

[38.](#) Seneca (*Ep.* 7) emphasizes the pleasure afforded to most spectators by the killings in the arena, while taking care to distance himself, in his guise as Stoic philosopher, from such pleasure in mere butchery.

[39.](#) See Mulvey 1975.

[40.](#) This article began life, at least in part, as a paper given at the American Philological Association Meeting in San Diego, California, in December 1995. I would like to express my thanks to all those there who made helpful comments and criticisms, and to the British Academy and the Faculty of Arts of the University of Bristol for grants which enabled me to attend. My debt to Professor Morton Braund is only partly obvious from the works of hers which I have cited: I wish to thank her particularly for her patient and skilful comments on earlier drafts of this essay and for her support in hard times more generally. I wish to thank Professor Coleman for her help in elucidating the implications of Seneca's reference to Hostius Quadra. I wish also to thank Professor Amy Richlin (who, amongst many other favors, was kind enough to show me a pre-publication draft of what later became "Richlin 1993" from which I have benefitted enormously), and the readers and editors of *Arethusa* for their helpful comments, and the editors in particular for their patience. These and other friends and colleagues have saved me from innumerable errors.

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