

## CLASSIS NUMEROSA: JUVENAL, SATIRE 7. 151

151      declamare doces? o ferrea pectora Vetti,  
             cum perimit saevos *classis numerosa* tyrannos.  
             nam quaecumque sedens modo legerat, haec eadem stans  
             perferet atque eadem cantabit versibus isdem.

WHAT is the meaning of *numerosa*? From the fifteenth-century commentaries of Valla and Mancinelli to the most recent translation of Juvenal into English, by Peter Green, interpreters are in nearly unanimous agreement that *numerosa* describes a particular annoyance of the rhetor's unrewarding life, namely, the large size of his classes.<sup>1</sup> A few commentaries, however, touch upon another interpretation, although without defending it. Pearson and Strong, after translating *numerosa* as 'overgrown', continue: *numerosa* might mean "in rhythmical cadence", referring to the sing-song implied in *cantabit*.<sup>2</sup> H. P. Wright too sees a possibility that the adjective might describe a musical or sing-song style of declaiming.<sup>3</sup> A brief examination of Juvenal's purpose here and a consideration of some passages from other writers will show that 'sing-song' is certainly the primary meaning intended here and probably the only one.

Juvenal makes two chief points in his account of the rhetorical teacher's unhappy life: the pupils' exercises are repetitious and boring, and, though many wish to learn the art of oratory, few are willing to pay. Overcrowded classes simply do not figure in the satirical description of the teacher's misery. If, then, *numerosa* meant 'crowded', it would be uncharacteristically otiose as adding no essential detail to the satirist's picture. The teacher of rhetoric would not, in fact, have any reason to deplore large classes, since this circumstance alone would offer him the hope of making a living, if, of course, the pupils paid. J. E. B. Mayor, ready as ever with a parallel passage of slight relevance, directs the reader to one of the several places where Quintilian comments on the proper size for rhetorical classes (*Inst. orat.* 10. 5. 21-2).<sup>4</sup> But Mayor fails to note that Quintilian dissents in general from the proposition *ut fugiendae sint magnae scholae* and dilates instead upon the educational advantages, both for pupil and teacher, of large classes.<sup>5</sup> Teachers, he finds, are *illa celebritate audientium instinctos*, though obviously a real *turba discipulorum* is not desirable.<sup>6</sup>

It might perhaps be urged on behalf of the meaning 'crowded' that the larger the class, the more painful the teacher's boredom, as one pupil after another rises to repeat the same exercise. But in lines 152-3 Juvenal, so far

<sup>1</sup> Valla's gloss runs: *numerosa multitudo declamantium*; Mancinelli comments: *discipulorum acies ac numerus*. Green's trans. (Baltimore, 1967), gives: 'You must possess iron nerves / To sit through a whole large class's attack on "The Tyrant"'. Cf. G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford 1954), 108: 'He [Juv.] says that schoolmasters are kept busy, with crowded classes.'

<sup>2</sup> *Thirteen Satires of Juv.*, ed. by C. H.

Pearson and H. A. Strong (Oxford, 1887), pt. 2, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Satires of Juv.*, ed. by H. P. Wright, (Boston, 1901), 81.

<sup>4</sup> *Thirteen Satires of Juv.*, ed. by J. E. B. Mayor, 4th edn. (London and New York 1889), i. 306.

<sup>5</sup> Quint. 1. 2. 15-29.

<sup>6</sup> Quint. 1. 2. 29 and 10. 5. 21.

from emphasizing the large number of pupils, does not even mention this inconvenience.<sup>1</sup> He does not say what G. G. Ramsay has him say in his Loeb translation of 1918: 'When each in turn stands up, and repeats what he has just been conning in his seat . . .' Besides, even if *numerosa* did describe the size of the class, it would mean not 'overly large', but merely 'well-populated' and hence would be a surprisingly weak word for a poet known for his overstatement to use of excessive size.

Since Juvenal's subject at this point in the satire is the repetitious character of rhetorical training, we shall do well to recall that any utterance repeated many times in succession will tend to be pronounced in sing-song fashion, or so at least will it seem to the hearer. But beyond such a general consideration is the fact that *numeri* and *numerosus* are terms that bear a distinct and important meaning in the technical language of rhetoric: they refer to the rhythmical quality of artistic prose. Cicero in his *Orator* (52. 174 ff.) discusses at considerable length the origin, cause, nature, and finally the use of prose that is 'well-knit and rhythmical' (*orationis aptae atque numerosae*). He emphatically lays down the doctrine that good prose must indeed be rhythmical, yet free from the regular beat that belongs to verse: *Perspicuum est igitur numeris astrictam orationem esse debere, carere versibus*.<sup>2</sup> Any resemblance between rhythmical prose and actual verse must be shunned as an *intolerabile vitium*.<sup>3</sup> The orator employing the plain Attic style avoids *numeri* altogether; a *numerosa oratio* is fitting for the expression of elaborate praise, but must be used sparingly.<sup>4</sup>

An oratorical fault closely associated with the excessively rhythmical style is the use of vocal modulations that make speaking resemble singing. This mannerism began as a characteristic of Asiatic orators, whose speeches were so musical as to resemble the canticum of a play,<sup>5</sup> but the practice later became fashionable in spite of its condemnation by virtually every commentator on the art of rhetoric from Cicero to the author of *On the Sublime*. How widespread was this sing-song style of delivery and how much disliked by men of taste is shown by the strictures of the elder and the younger Seneca, of Pliny, Tacitus, and Quintilian. Seneca Rhetor speaks of the popularity in his younger days of *explicationes . . . quas nemo nostrum non alius alia inclinatione vocis velut sua quisque modulatione cantabat*.<sup>6</sup> His son mentions as a particular example of corrupt oratory, *explicatio . . . infracta et in morem cantici ducta*.<sup>7</sup> Tacitus is apparently condemning the same tasteless and irritating mannerism under the term *histrionales modos*, while Pliny angrily denounces musical oratory (*illa cantica*) as deserving the accompaniment of Cybele's cymbals and tambourines.<sup>8</sup> In Quintilian we find repeated attacks on the fashionable sing-song style of speaking and even of reading, a vice which, Quintilian tells us, the youthful Julius Caesar censured with the excellent remark: *si cantas*,

<sup>1</sup> We are assuming that the subject of the verbs *legerat*, *perferet*, and *cantabit* is *classis* or the individual pupil. M. L. Clarke, who once suggested Vettius as the subject (*CP* lxiii [1968], 42-4), became less certain when he found evidence in the *Hermeneumata pseudo-dositheana* that 'the grammar-school boy had to perform twice, once seated and once standing'. See *CP* lxiii (1968), 295-6. If Vettius were the subject, the verbs would

probably be in the second person. Knoche finds the subject by reading *idem*, with several MSS., for *isdem* in line 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Orat.* 56. 187. Cf. *ibid.* 57. 195.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 59. 201 and 65. 220.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 23. 77 and 62. 210.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 8. 27 and 18. 57; *De orat.* 1. 23. 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Suas.* 2. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ep.* 114. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Tac. *Dial.* 26; Pliny *Ep.* 2. 14.

*male cantas; si legis, cantas*.<sup>1</sup> In his discussion of *pronuntiatio*, Quintilian stigmatizes the practice of rhythmical or musical delivery as the worst feature of modern oratory, practised *in causis omnibus scholisque*.<sup>2</sup>

If we turn back now to the passage of Juvenal under consideration, we will observe that the students described are practising *pronuntiatio*, delivery, the perfection of which was the chief object of *declamatio*.<sup>3</sup> It is with the same object of improving *pronuntiatio* that the pupils are portrayed as repeating their *suasoria de perimendis tyrannis*. Repetition, obviously, would not serve to improve the quality of the students' arguments themselves. The double recitation of the speech, delivered once while the pupil sits and once while he stands, may well correspond to the two subdivisions into which the rhetorical writers separate *pronuntiatio*, namely the development of voice and of gesture.<sup>4</sup> It would hardly be surprising if inexperienced youths exhibited two characteristic faults of tasteless or bombastic speakers, excessively rhythmic prose delivered in a sing-song voice. This must surely be indicated in Juvenal's words, *cantabat versus isdem*. J. D. Duff and other editors remark that *versus* can mean a line of prose as well as of poetry, and the point is readily granted.<sup>5</sup> But Juvenal in coupling *versibus* to *cantabat* surely means the reader to understand that the pupils had committed the *intolerabile vitium*: their prose sounded like verse. The words *numerosa* in the sense 'sing-song' fits in perfectly with this whole picture; the meaning 'crowded', on the other hand, is alien and extraneous to the scene.

Many commentators point out that in Satire 10. 105 Juvenal unmistakably uses *numerosa* to mean 'many' or 'numerous'. But the point is not apropos. No one would deny that *numerosa* can mean 'numerous'. But the poet is obviously not confined to using in one sense only a word that possesses several meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> Quint. 1. 8. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Quint. 11. 3. 57. Cf. also Dio Chrys. *Orat.* 32. 68; *On the Sublime* 41; Philostatus, *Vit. Soph.* pp. 513 and 620. See E. Norden, *Die Antike Kunstprosa* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1915), i. 294-5 and S. F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation* (Liverpool 1949), 21-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Auct. ad Herennium* 3. 11. 19 ff., ed. H. Caplan (Cambridge, Mass. and London,

1954), 189 ff. On the prime importance of *pronuntiatio* and its central place in rhetorical education see Cicero, *Brutus* 38. 142, *Orat.* 17. 56, *De Orat.* 3. 56. 213; Quint. 11. 3. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Auct. ad Herennium* 3. 11. 19-20; Cicero, *Brutus* 38. 141; Quint. 11. 3. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Satires of Juv.*, ed. by J. D. Duff (Cambridge, 1898), 287.