

*Per iter tenebricosum: The Mythos of Juvenal 3*

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All too frequently, the critics' reading of Juvenal's works has been intransigently "literal"—and Juvenal's reputation for poetic artistry has suffered from it. For the literalist critic understands Juvenal as a cunning and skilful rhetorician; he tends to find in Juvenal a man "driven" both by internal (or psychopathological) and by external (or environmental) forces to the writing of his satires; and such a literalist concludes that Juvenal is the epitome of the graphic—albeit angry and brutal—realist.

This is precisely the general critical opinion of Juvenal's Third Satire. Such opinion assumes that Juvenal is there the arch-rhetorician, seeking by all means to win his "case."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Third Satire's picture of Rome is accepted as sociologically sound and historically accurate—it is assumed, in short, that that satire's pictorialization of Rome is an ancient documentary, a kind of realistic "You Are There," austere presenting the true "facts" of decadent Neronian and Domitianic Rome.<sup>2</sup> Even the Third Satire's figure of Umbricius, when he is not believed to be a scant rhetorical mask for Juvenal himself, is thought to be a real person, some friend present in a satire that is treated as if it were a chapter in Juvenal's autobiography. Such critics treat Umbricius as "real" historical figure and search among inscriptions of the period or seize upon the *haruspex* of that name mentioned in Pliny

<sup>1</sup> For standard studies of Juvenal's employment of rhetoric, see Josué de Decker, *Juvenalis Declamans* (Ghent 1913), Inez Scott [Ryberg], *The Grand Style in the Satires of Juvenal* (Smith College Classical Studies 8; Northampton [Mass.] 1927), and William S. Anderson, "Juvenal and Quintilian," *YCLS* 17 (1961) 1-93. For the argument that *Sat.* III is a general attack on the urban, a *persuasio*, consult Edward Charles Witke, "Juvenal III: An Eclogue for the Urban Poor," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 244-48.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford 1954) 65, 178; J. W. Mackail, *Latin Literature* (New York 1895) 223-24. Edward Walford, relying upon the truth and accuracy of Juvenal, devotes Chap. 8 of his book to a reconstruction of town-life in Rome based upon information in the Third Satire (*Juvenal* [Philadelphia 1875] 132-49).

(*HN* 10.6.19) and in Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.27).<sup>3</sup> As a result, such literalists come away from the Third Satire convinced that Juvenal there is solemn and sincere, and such a Juvenal is identified as "a patriot of a rather narrow type," a man provincial and grouchily anachronistic (longing for bygone Republican days), a man nursing a mordant and reactionary "contempt for foreigners."<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, all such assumptions about the satirist and his work have it in common that they denigrate his work of art *as art*. In contradistinction to such assumptions, it shall be the purpose of this paper to treat the Third Satire as self-contained literary work, as completed *objet d'art*, of the kind comprehended by Aristotle's *Poetics*. We shall seek to understand his creation as one concerned preëminently with the shaping of a unified and decorous formal structure, accomplished by means of its *mythos*, or plot. In other words, Juvenal the satirist, if he is an artist at all, will be understood to have "made" an appropriate and plenary action. His "truthfulness" and "sincerity" in the satire will be beside the point;<sup>5</sup> for it is not a dedication to historical accuracy and autobiography that motivates the artist, but rather the creative observance of the coherence of plot that is the guiding principle of his construction. And it is exactly the nature of such a plot, such a complete action, in the Third Satire that shall concern us now.

Any such consideration of plot in this satire, first of all, must acknowledge William S. Anderson's acute exposition of its structure: at the heart of the Third Satire, as Anderson has shown, lies the ironic paradox that Umbricius' exodus from Rome

<sup>3</sup> *Thirteen Satires of Juvenal*, ed. A. J. Maclean and Samuel Hart (6th ed.; Boston 1889) 114, and Highet (above, note 2) 253. F. Münzer and Mauriz Schuster, *RE* 17 (1961) 594-96; and Rudolf Hanslik, *RE* Suppl. 9 A (1962) 1827, s.v. "Umbricius," cite four inscriptions for the name Umbricius, note the *haruspex* of Pliny and Tacitus, and discuss at length the deep friendship of Juvenal and his Umbricius.

<sup>4</sup> John Delaware Lewis (ed.), D. Iunii Iuvenalis, *Satirae* (London 1873) 212; see also Enzo V. Marmorale, *Giovenale*<sup>2</sup> (Bari 1950) 96-98.

<sup>5</sup> "... the profession of personal sincerity is itself a literary convention" (Northrop Frye, "Nature and Homer," *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* [New York 1963] 45). See Archibald W. Allen, "'Sincerity' and the Roman Elegists," *CP* 45 (1950) 145-60. Needless to say, the literary concept of characters in fiction made consistent with themselves and with the context of their action had been developing into a canon of *decorum personae* since Aristotle; see esp. René Bray, *La formation de la doctrine classique en France* (Paris 1961) 215-30. For a listing of a number of satiric conventions, see Mary Claire Randolph, "The Structural Design of the Formal Verse Satire," *PQ* 21 (1942) 368-84.

reverses the normal connotations implicit in a lonely exile's retreat from the cosmopolitan and cultural center of the Western world. In the terms of this satire's reversal, Rome is no longer, in any traditional sense, Rome at all; while Umbricius, that solitary outcast, is, in the sum of his virtues, most Roman: he *is* in essence Rome itself. Hence it is not a single alien and broken man that is leaving the great City, it is the great City that is abandoning the broken, the alien, and the decadent.<sup>6</sup>

In this satire, in other words, is rehearsed the traditional plot of fictional satire:<sup>7</sup> that paradoxical utopian victory of folly or vice,<sup>8</sup> or that equally paradoxical and utopian delineation of utter and reasonless defeat of the good man.<sup>9</sup> And, to be sure, such are the traditional plots regularly to be encountered in Juvenalian satire, where, as Gilbert Highet reminds us, the first three Books, for instance, rehearse again and again "ludicrous tragedy":

Satire I ends with the partial defeat of the satirist himself; 2 with the spread of moral infection from Rome through the world; 3 with the exile of Umbricius from his native city; 4 with Domitian killed by the wrong people; 5 with the conversion of Trebius into a clown and a slave; 6 with the murder of Postumus . . . by his wife; 7 with the least important professional men doing the most sordid job for the most bitterly stingy reward; and 8 with the assertion that the noblest Romans are descended from slaves and thieves.<sup>10</sup>

Here is "ludicrous tragedy" indeed; and fictional satire, we come to recognize, *is* ludicrous, paradoxical—precisely because its plot insistently violates the sensibilities and the expectations of common opinion. Thus Aristotle, in his own discussion of what he takes to be poor or "ludicrous" tragedy, enunciates very clearly just how satiric plots shock and rudely disappoint:

<sup>6</sup> William S. Anderson, "Studies in Book I of Juvenal," *YCS* 15 (1957) 55–68. Even though Anderson appears to be analyzing a work of poetic art, he nonetheless stresses Juvenal's rhetorical aims (pp. 57, 59, 67).

<sup>7</sup> Consult Philip Pinkus, "Satire and St. George," *Queen's Quarterly* 70 (1963) 30–49; John R. Clark, "*Fiat Nox*: The Nature of Satiric Creation. Study of Art and Tradition in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*" (unpublished diss., Univ. of Michigan, 1965) esp. 131–94; and Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven 1965) esp. Pt. III.

<sup>8</sup> As in works as various as Aristophanes' *Birds*, Horace's *Serm.* 1.5 or 2.4, the medieval *Reinicke Fuchs*, Pope's *Dunciad*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

<sup>9</sup> As in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, Horace's *Serm.* 2.6 or 2.7, in *Don Quixote*, in *Gulliver's Travels*, Goncharov's *Obломov*, and Orwell's *1984*.

<sup>10</sup> Highet (above, note 2) 275, n. 4.

It is obvious . . . that one should not show worthy men passing from good fortune to bad. That does not arouse fear or pity but shocks our feelings. Nor again wicked people passing from bad fortune to good. That is the most untragic of all, having none of the requisite qualities, since it does not satisfy our feelings [i.e., our sense of "poetic justice"].<sup>11</sup>

Clearly enough, in its plot, good satire *is* blatantly bad tragedy, violently dislocated romance, unhappy comedy—the serene imitation of improbable and immoral action. And it is just such a subversion of virtue and triumph of vice that is represented in the defeat of Umbricius and his permanent and lonely exile from a violent, an infernally utopian, and a superhumanly overcrowded Rome.

Moreover, such a plot, in the Third Satire as in fictional satire generally, is in Aristotelian terms deceptively "simple": herein are to be found neither reversals nor recognitions, nor any deeper sense of significance that attaches so often to the ordeals suffered by the protagonists of comedy and tragedy. For the single-minded corruption of Rome and Umbricius' single-minded determination to be gone are uninterrupted, unimpeded; with the arrival of his wagon of luggage, he *does* go: and there's an end to it. Here the bare, monolithic track of the satiric plot permits neither *personae* within the work nor audience without it the discovery of any deeper significance or any sense of fulfilment or renewal that at the end of so many other literary kinds renders an aesthetic satisfaction that we might call *katharsis*. Indeed, the "action" of Umbricius' removal from Rome is so monomaniacally determined and so unhesitatingly achieved that it might induce one to believe that here is no plot or action at all. Yet it must be argued that such a "simple" action *is* nonetheless very much the shaping principle of the satire. More than that, its simple action is not only one traditional to the satiric mode,<sup>12</sup> but also one that re-enacts a *mythos* recurrent in literary tradition generally.

<sup>11</sup> *Poetics* 13.2–4; the translation is from the Loeb ed. by W. Hamilton Fyfe (London 1927) 45. In a darker moment, life itself seemed to Swift to assume the form of "ludicrous tragedy" common to satiric plots: Life, he wrote to Pope, "is a ridiculous tragedy, which is the worst kind of composition" (April 20, 1731, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams [Oxford 1963] 3.456).

<sup>12</sup> Satire's plot tends regularly to imitate (or parody) the simplicity of a lame or single *thesis*—as in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, Lucian's *Vera Historia*, Horace's *Serm.* 1.5, Erasmus' *Encomium moriae*, Dryden's "MacFlecknoe," or the *cenae* and Country-house-weekend novels of Aldous Huxley.

The Indonesian myth of Hainuwele recounts the story of the first men upon earth and of their original sin, the slaying of the virgin Dema, Hainuwele. As a consequence of this crime, a second virgin maid, Satene, swears a solemn oath before these guilty aboriginals:

Because you have killed, I refuse to live here any more: today I shall leave. . . . I am departing today and you will see me no more on earth. Only when you die will you again see me. Yet even then you shall have to accomplish a very difficult journey before you attain me.<sup>13</sup>

Here, in miniature, is represented unalloyed that withdrawal myth of a goddess familiar to innumerable primitive races. Most frequently such a withdrawal of the goddess is associated in Indo-European nations with Korê or the White Goddess,<sup>14</sup> that aloof, virginal, and mysterious moon-goddess Hecate, or Artemis, or Ishtar, who periodically, like the coursings of the seasons, the cycles of the moon, and the generations of men, returns to earth where for a time she cohabits with mortal man—her Adonis, Hyacinthus, Hippolytus, or Attis—only at his death to withdraw once more into cold, unearthly places in anger or in mourning, most often metamorphosing, like Andromeda or Electra of the Pleiades and the Hyades, into a star.<sup>15</sup>

In the story of Adam and Eve it is Innocence and Paradise itself that recede from mortal man into the sky. And, of course, the classic instance of this withdrawal of the goddess from men, outside of the stories of Pandora or of Prometheus, is figured in the tale of the apotheosis of Astraea. Just as in Hesiod's account of the Fifth, or Iron, Age, Aidôs and Nemesis "forsake mankind to join the

<sup>13</sup> Adolf Jensen, *Das religiöse Weltbild einer frühen Kultur* (Stuttgart 1949) 34–38, quoted and translated by Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York 1959) 175, 176.

<sup>14</sup> See especially Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge 1908) 257–321; Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (London 1934) 153–216; Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York 1948) *passim*; and E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess* (London 1959).

<sup>15</sup> Jensen (as cited in Campbell [above, note 13] 176) also observes that Hainuwele's sister goddess, Rabiā, is apotheosized into moon, and such metamorphoses of humans into moon or star is quite common to myth; such is the translation of Orion and Andromeda, for instance, and so it is with Romulus (Livy 1.16), with Julius Caesar (Ovid, *Met.* 15.843–51), with Berenice's hair (Callimachus; *vid.* Catullus 66). Naturally, it is a subject frequently treated as well by the satirists.

company of the deathless gods: and bitter sorrows will be left for mortal men, and there will be no help against evil,"<sup>16</sup> so in Aratus we read of the withdrawal of Astraea; discovering

how of old she dwelt on earth and met men face to face, and mingled with them . . . immortal though she was. . . . men called [her] Justice. . . . Not yet in that age had men knowledge of . . . strife, or . . . contention, or . . . battle, but a simple life they lived. . . . Even so long as the earth still nurtured the Golden Race, she had her dwelling on earth. But with the Silver Race only a little . . . did she mingle. . . . But . . . when . . . the Race of Bronze was born, who were the first to forge the sword of the highwayman, and the first to eat of the flesh of the ploughing-ox, then [truly] did Justice loathe that race of men and fly heavenward and took up that abode, where even now in the night time the Maiden is seen of men [i.e., as the constellation Virgo].<sup>17</sup>

Kin to the removal of Astraea, numerous withdrawal myths abound in literature, and are recurrent and potent. Seen from a human and Arcadian point of view, the withdrawal appears as that death lamented in pastoral elegy for such figures as Bion, Daphnis, Lycidas. Seen, on the other hand, from the demonic or satiric point of view, this same withdrawal is almost joyfully celebrated in Lucian's *Dialogi mortuorum*, in the subversion of the Demos in Aristophanes' *Knights*, in the host of paeans to the Emperor Claudius, to Timon, to Thersites, to Folly, and to the Goddess Dulness, as well as in Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*.

Naturally enough, Juvenal knows well the story of the Golden Race and of the ultimate removal of Astraea. Like all satiric plots, his dramatize scenes from the Iron Age of human decadence.

<sup>16</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days* 199–201, in *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, ed. and trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Loeb ed.; London 1929) 17.

<sup>17</sup> Aratus, *Phaenomena* 101–36, trans. G. R. Mair, in *Callimachus and Lycophron, Aratus*, ed. and trans. A. W. Mair, G. R. Mair (Loeb ed.; London 1921) 389, 391. For a collection of such Astraeac and kindred passages in antiquity, see *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas*, ed. Arthur O. Lovejoy, Gilbert Chinard, George Boas, and Ronald S. Crane (Baltimore 1935) 1.23–53. Just as Astraea represents innocence and primal justice in the Arcadian world, so Justice (*Dikē*) reigns in the utopian world of Law: she and Peace are the daughters of Themis, "and they are resolute in repelling Insolence, the bold-tongued mother of Surfeit" (Pindar, *Olym.* 13.9–10, in *The Odes of Pindar*, ed. and trans. Sir John Sandys [Loeb ed.; London 1927] 133).

His famous Sixth Satire actually retells the story of Astraea's withdrawal (6.1–25), contrasting with it the Iron Age's superabundance of decadent women. Indeed, Juvenal normally implies a pristine Golden Age (as in 11.64–119) that is now so much debased; such an ancient golden world of Saturn serves as an idyllic common denominator against which the depraved world of Empire can be measured and assessed. Again and again Juvenal's speakers, with such a utopian tradition in mind, are all motivated, like Astraea, when they witness contemporary strife and vice, to flee such a world (1.158–171; 2.1–3; 15.171–173).

Moreover, Astraea's story of retreat is precisely recapitulated in the myth of the water-nymph Egeria, who consorts with the mortal King Numa in the early days of Rome's magical history. After Numa's death, the Diana-like nymph of Aricia was said to have withdrawn into her sacred grove in mourning, eventually metamorphosing into a fountain, a fountain not at all unlike those of Helicon and Aganippe—sources for sacred and lyric inspiration.<sup>18</sup>

In the dark satiric world of Satire 3, the setting, significantly, is that same sacred Grove of Egeria lying before Rome's Porta Capena. But now the goddess no longer consorts with the *nepotes magnanimi Remi* (Catullus 58.5):

hic, ubi nocturnae Numa constituebat amicae,  
nunc sacri fontis nemus et delubra locantur  
Iudaeis, quorum cophinus faenumque supellex. . . . (3.12–14)

In the barren Iron Age of Juvenal's satire, Numa now is dead. The Arcadian fields are lost and shepherds are decayed.<sup>19</sup> Now, the sacred fountains are dry, the Arician grove defiled; Egeria and Diana are irredeemable; the Muses silent. Likewise, the oracular Cumaean Sibyl—so powerfully evoked in Vergil's Arcadian Fourth

<sup>18</sup> On Egeria, consult Ovid, *Met.* 15.479–551, Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.762–63, Livy 1.21.3, Plutarch, *Numa* 13, and Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged ed.; New York 1951) 1–10, 169–71, 552–56.

<sup>19</sup> As civilization becomes more complex, more urban, the pastoral way of life naturally falls upon hard times. In addition, that "cultural primitivism" which would defend pastoral life or lament its passing is clearly a literary convention. Within such a convention lie Dion Chrysostomos' defense in the Seventh Oration as well as Milton's lament for pastoral corruption (*Lycidas* 64–131); in Juvenal's satiric worlds, pastoral decadence is the common condition: e.g., O pater urbis, unde nefas tantum Latiis pastoribus? (2.126–27.)

Eclogue (4.4), but reduced in the Petronian satiric world to the status of a freak suspended in a cage and yearning for death (*Sat.* 48)—in the Third Satire is dead.

Here is fully achieved and sustained that utopia-in-reverse, the barren Age of Brass. For, upon the streets of Rome, as in some ideally broken Ilion, only the herded, the patched, the foreign, the disjunctive mass together and endure (3.258–60):

quid superest de corporibus? quis membra, quis ossa  
invenit? obtritum vulgi perit omne cadaver  
more animae.

This is exactly the decadent world, the “hotchpotch” and the *olla podrida* that is ever envisaged by the lame satiric Muse. And it is a topsy-turvy world that is fully portrayed—the Juvenalian world where *omne in praecipiti vitium stetit* (1.149), a world whose inhabitants naturally *nigrum in candida vertunt* (3.30), a world from which man is sent, quite naturally, *down* to heaven (6.622–23).

For the satiric creation wholly delineates the omnipresent Underworld; its music is offered in celebration of drouth, detritus, and decay.<sup>20</sup> In such a world, consequently, it follows of necessity that inspiration is lost, that the vales of Aganippe, the Pierian spring, and the sacred founts are dry. Thus, in this vein Henry James well characterizes a similar invasion of Europe in the nineteenth century by barbaric hordes; in his Preface to “The Pupil,” James observes how a newer, penny-pinching, dishonorable race has inundated Europe. What is lost by such an invasion is precisely the traditional and the sacred; what is lost is, for instance, the special essence of the

. . . little old miscellaneous cosmopolite Florence, the Florence of other, of irrecoverable years, the restless yet withal so convenient scene of a society that has passed away for ever with all its faded ghosts and fragile relics; immaterial presences that have quite ceased to revisit . . . walks and prospects once sacred and shaded, but now laid bare gaping wide, despoiled of their past and unfriendly to any appreciation of it?—through which the uncon-

<sup>20</sup> Satire’s decadent world is especially well described in Northrop Frye, “The Nature of Satire,” *UTQ* 14 (1944) 75–89; with some alteration this essay reappears in Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton 1957) 223–39.



scious Barbarians troop with the regularity and passivity of "supplies."<sup>21</sup>

Here in full is restated the scene dramatized in satire. And, moreover, James's words have a special relevance to our discussion of Juvenal's Third Satire: for here again is the withdrawal myth, where those "immaterial presences . . . have quite ceased to revisit . . . walks and propects once sacred and shaded." It is not only that sacred founts and sacred, shady groves have been defiled, but also that the past of all tradition, the sacred spirit itself, has been undone. Similarly, in Juvenal's Third Satire it is appropriate that not only the Egerian grove is alienated, the spatially sacred shade despoiled, but also exiled are the temporal "shades," those "immaterial presences," the sacred shades of a dead spiritual tradition.

Thus we come to realize that Umbricius is no historical figure contemporary to Juvenal, a neighbor or a friend, but the "immaterial presence" itself—that shade or *umbra* representative of the deceased Eternal City. In the precincts of satire's infernal world, the fool and the knave are always animatedly zealous to destroy tradition. In Horace's phrase, *minxerunt in patrios cineres* (*AP* 471)<sup>22</sup>—they defiled the ashes of their ancestors. And this mandate of the satiric world of nonsense and vice is most clearly enunciated by Juvenal: *nil ibi maiorum respectus, gratia nulla umbrarum*, "no respect is rendered there to ancestors, no favor given to the shades" (8.64–65).

Finally, with Umbricius' withdrawal, we must recognize that not only the sacred founts and shaded groves are debased and man's communion with the immortal goddess annulled, but the very past of tradition, the sacred spirit, the "immaterial presence" or "shade" of a holy past is dead. Not only are the Golden Age, Egeria, and the Sibyl withdrawn: Umbricius himself, in the plot of the Third Satire, re-enacts that self-same *mythos* of withdrawal from the precincts of man. We come to realize that Umbricius is that "immaterial presence" itself, that shade or *umbra* of the Golden World who is at long last withdrawing from the broken

<sup>21</sup> "Preface to 'What Maisie Knew,'" *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* by Henry James, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York 1934) 152. For a typical example of James' own fictional satiric treatment of the death of the muse and inspiration, see his obscure but underrated novel, *The Sacred Fount* (1901).

<sup>22</sup> We have altered Horace's line, adapting it to our own purposes.

satiric world of corrupted men.<sup>23</sup> In its plot, then, it is this very dark journey, and the inverted satiric world which renders such a journey necessary, that Juvenal's satire so compellingly brings, once again, to life.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in this ultimate world of satire, it is still further ironically appropriate (as Anderson [above, note 6] 67 has shown) that the "last" shade of the true, essential Rome should be journeying to Cumae; for Cumae is the *first* Greek (i.e., foreign) settlement upon the Italian mainland (see Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.2, Strabo, *Geog.* 5.4.4). If Rome in this satiric action is conceived as wholly Syrian, Spanish, Jewish, Samian, Greek, it is but poetically just that the shade of the true pristine Rome should remove to the first and most foreign city on Italian soil.