

JUVENAL'S THIRD SATIRE: ON THE CITY OF ROME*

Introduction

The poet Decimus Junius Juvenalis (ca. A.D. 60-140) composed sixteen verse satires in five books, the first of which was published about A.D. 110, during the reign of the emperor Trajan. Satire Three, the centerpiece to this first book, is thematically the most comprehensive poem of its volume and (with 322 lines) the longest. Like the rest of his work, Juvenal's satire "On the City of Rome" depends for its effect on the skillful blending of Lucilian invective with Horatian irony: the element of indignation predominates, indeed is purposely overplayed, so that the audience reacts not only with concern over the social conditions that are so passionately condemned, but also with an amused antipathy for the overly severe critic, who "doth protest too much," and for his ill-considered solution to the complexities of life in Rome.

The poem's emotional critic is Juvenal's imagined "friend" Umbricius, an aging, dejected client-friend whose curious response to the evils of a degenerate, "Greekified" Rome is to emigrate and settle at Cumae, oldest of the Greek cities in the heartland of Italy's Magna Graecia. Satire Three was the first in a series of poems (including Satires Six and Nine) in which Juvenal experimented with the dialogue form so successfully exploited by the Augustan satirist Horace in the Socratic "Conversations" of his second book. In Juvenal's poem the dialogue is vestigial: following the satirist's brief narrative prologue (verses 1-21), which neatly foreshadows several themes to be developed later in the piece, Umbricius is introduced and permitted to deliver—without any interruption throughout the poem's remaining three hundred lines—a farewell address to Juvenal and to Rome that is steeped in the bitter vinegar of sour grapes. The reported conversation is thus transformed into a diatribe on life in the imperial city as perceived through the myopic vision of an unsuccessful client.

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Umbricius is almost certainly fictitious: his name ("man of the shade," from *umbra*) was perhaps meant to suggest a type known from Horace, a sort of Country Mouse who shuns the anxieties of city life in search of a pastoral shade of seclusion and contentment. Certainly the character is not to be narrowly equated with Juvenal himself, nor his attitudes with Juvenal's own—this the satirist could hardly make clearer. In none of his satires is the distinction between poet and persona more precisely defined. Rather Umbricius functions in much the same role as Horace's interlocutors in his second book, and as Juvenal's own more grotesque Naevolus, the disappointed client-prostitute who lectures the satirist on morality in Satire Nine: all are variations on a stock satiric type, the absurd preceptor (or "Mad Satirist," to borrow Kenneth Reckford's term) who condemns some aspect of Roman life from a narrow or distorted perspective, espouses profound moral principles that he himself neither fully adheres to nor fully comprehends, and advocates behavior that is ultimately irrational. There are clues within the third satire suggesting that Umbricius was meant to be regarded as a litterateur of some sort, a petty poet most likely, who, like his poor comrade-in-spirit Cordus in lines 203-11 (a figure we know more about from Satire One), will never hesitate to recite his copious hexameters from dawn till dusk, even in the heat of a Roman August.

While Juvenal's audience would surely take interest in and even sympathize with the essence of many of Umbricius' complaints about the all too familiar ills of the bustling metropolis, they would nonetheless find his rhetoric often tedious in its bombast, sometimes laughable for its incongruity, rarely sublime or heroic, and never entirely convincing. They would find his reactions, especially the proposed self-exile, eccentric, puzzling, scarcely commendable; they would find his motives explicable, but hardly noble, and his circumstances and consequent disgruntlement quite commonplace, and hence without appeal to their sense of the tragic. Umbricius, in short, was designed to provoke rather than to persuade. Audiences have always esteemed Satire Three: the reason is to be discovered not only in the colorful and entertaining caricature of urban Rome presented in the poem, but in Juvenal's humorous and dramatic exploitation of the Umbricius-type as well.

Translation

Though bewildered at the departure of this aging client-friend,
 I praise him nonetheless for determining to settle down at lonely
 Cumae, thus granting one pure Roman citizen to Sibyl:
 it's the gateway too to Baiiae, a favorite retreat right on the highway
 5 to the shore. Why, I'd prefer some barren island to the ills of inner
 Rome. What place can you imagine so wretched, so wholly
 uninviting,
 that you'd not think it worse to stay in Rome and shrink in horror
 at the fires, the crumbling tenements, the countless frightful perils
 of our savage city, and most dreadfully—the dog-day babbling of
 poets!

Imagine now . . . while all his household goods are loaded on a
 10 single cart,
 he lingers in the shade of the old south gate, the dripping aqueduct,
 once a midnight rendezvous for Numa and his friendly nymph.
 Ah, but today the hallowed grove, the sacred spring, the shrine
 are rented out to Jews, haybaskets stuffed for their Sabbath snack:
 15 now every tree must yield a profit for the greedy mob,
 and so the grove itself begs foreigners for rent, evicts the native
 muses. Hence we descend into Egeria's vale, into the nymph's
 new,
 artificial grottoes: how much more intimate might the muse's
 presence be
 within these holy waters, if only grass enclosed the pool,
 20 if only alien marbles did not violate the native earth.
 At this very spot Umbricius then began:

“Since there

exists in Rome
 no place for honest skills, no profit for my labors,
 since my property is less today than yesterday, and tomorrow
 will erode something more from the tiny sum that's left, I plan to go
 25 where good Daedalus took off his wearied wings,
 while my hair is just now turning white, while I'm newly old and
 still can
 stand upright, while there's yet some thread for Lachesis to
 measure out,
 while I still can get about on my own two feet, without a staff,
 while . . .

Oh, let us withdraw from our fatherland! Let the upstart,
 freedman
 architects and low-born bureaucrats remain, men clever at
 30 convincing us
 that black is white, at winning rich contracts for building shrines,
 lucrative curatorships of riverbanks, harborworks, and sewers,
 vile undertakers, and masters at the art of selling slaves.
 These men were once musicians, trumpeters who worked the
 country
 35 shows, whose puffed-out cheeks were known in every town:
 now they *produce* the games and, when the rabble turn their
 thumbs,
 condemn the wretched losers for applause; then it's back to work,
 contracting for latrines. And what more suitable profession?
 Since they're the sort that Lady Fortune raises from the gutter
 and exalts to the greatest heights, whenever she wants a good
 40 laugh.
 But what am *I* to do in Rome? I'm not as skilled at lying; I can't
 praise and beg for copies of a book that's bad; and astrology's
 not a subject that I know. I've neither the will nor the ability
 to promise a son his papa's quick demise; nor am I that shady
 character
 45 who fingers frog entrails; others better know to carry billet-doux
 from an adulterer to a newly wedded bride. No man shall be a thief
 with me for his accomplice, and thus no magistrate will add me to
 his staff;
 it's as though I were a useless corpse, or maimed, a paralyzed right
 hand.
 These days who *is* esteemed besides the confidant whose seething
 50 conscience boils with a comrade's secret crimes? But the man
 who trusts you with an honest secret thinks he owes you
 nothing, and that's precisely what you'll get! The only chap a
 thieving
 governor like Verres will hold dear is one who can convict the
 crook
 any time he likes. But listen, don't reckon all the sand of shady
 55 Tagus, all the gold washed with it to the sea, as worth so much
 that you should lie awake at night, and grimly claim rewards
 you'll lose someday, always struggling to be feared by your great
 'friend.'

"Now I'll quickly, unashamedly confess what race it is, most
 warmly
 welcomed by our Roman rich, that I make utmost haste to flee:
 60 friends, Romans, countrymen, I can't abide a city that's gone
 Greek! And yet how many of our urban scum are Homer's brood:
 long ago the rivers of the east changed course and poured their
 waters
 into Tiber's stream, polluting its purity with foreign talk and
 foreign ways, sitars, flutes, exotic tambourines and
 65 prostitutes, exhibited at the circus by their lordly pimps!
 Well then, hurry to the racetrack if it's turbaned Arab whores that
 turn you on. Oh holy Romulus, these days even bumpkins wear
 those
 fairy 'trechedipna' dinner flats, sport Greeko wrestlers' 'niketary'
 prizes on their mud-caked necks. This one's come from Sicyon,
 that one's left
 Amydon; from Andros, Samos, Tralles, Alabanda, these Greek
 70 heroes come,
 aiming straight for the Esquiline and that rich knobhill we've
 named
 for the vimen-willow, first to become the slimy entrails of our
 richest
 homes, and then to become their lords. A quick wit, a villain's
 nerve,
 slick words ready to flow. Now, say, what do you think his
 profession
 may be? Whatever the service you need, he'll perform:
 75 grammarian,
 augur, geometrician, painter, masseur, sly rhetorician,
 rope-walker, doctor, or even magician. The lean Greeking
 knows everything—if it's flying you want he'll take wing!
 It wasn't a blacky, in sum, no Sarmatian or some upstart from
 Thrace
 who strapped on those high-flying feathers, but a home-grown
 80 Athenian Greek!
 Shall I not shun these Daedaluses, who strut in my own patron's
 clothes?
 Am I to let some Greeko claim a place of greater trust,
 or a better place at table, some lout blown in on a foul east wind
 with the figs and plums? Is it, lord, of no avail that my tender

85 infancy was nourished on the Sabine bean, on the purest Roman
 air?
 The cunning Greek, a master sycophant, extolls the diction,
 then the beauty, of his hideous, unlettered patron-friend.
 He compares the weakling's scrawny neck to brawny Hercules',
 when the hero strained to hold Antaeus high above the earth;
 he marvels at his squawking voice, a cackle as shrill as that
 90 henhouse
 paramour's when he pecks and pokes his favorite barnyard chick.
 Now when *I* try this flattery, it doesn't take: the Greeks are more
 convincing thespians. No one can outperform them,
 even when they act the part of whores, or wives, or slave girls
 stripped
 stark naked: you'd think that you were gaping at real women, not
 95 female
 impersonators. The Greekling's got so little hanging down below
 his
 belly, he could almost spread his slender little crack!
 Yet not their finest harlequin, not Stratocles, Antiochus, nor
 Demmy
 with his pansy protégé, can so astound an audience back home in
 Greece,
 100 where everyone's an actor. You laugh, and Greeko busts a gut;
 he bursts into weeping if he's seen a teary friend, though he feels
 no grief; if in the chill of winter you request a tiny fire, he'll rush
 to don his woolly wrestler's cloak; but if you say you're warm, by
 god,
 he sweats! Thus are we unequal: he's my superior, who always
 can,
 105 both night and day, expropriate expressions from another's
 face, prepared to throw his hands up high in admiration
 at his 'friend's' (his patron's) booming eructation, or his right-on-
 target
 urination, and the gurgling of his guzzling bottoms-up.
 What's worse is that his cock holds nothing sacred, none are safe—
 110 not our patron's godly spouse, their maiden daughter, nor her
 beardless beau, not even our patron's son, who once was chaste.
 And if none of these are near at hand, he'll lay his patron's
 granny (and not for sex, but just to learn the secrets of the house).

- While I'm on the subject of these Greeks, forget their naked
wrestlers,
115 and listen to the crimes of those whose dress is more genteel.
It was a Stoic sage, you see, who turned on Barea, his ward and
friend, a murderous old philosopher brought up on the banks of
that
eastern stream where bloody Medusa's feathered nag touched
down.
- There's just not a place for purebred Romans here in Rome,
120 where we're bossed around by literary, artsy, philosophizing
Greeks, who—the worst defect of their race—refuse to share rich
friends, but always keep them to themselves. For when the Greek's
dispensed into our patron's ready ear a drop of venom,
I am booted out, and all my years of fawning servitude have
125 gone to waste: nowhere are clients ditched with less regret!
“Besides (not to blame it all on Greeklings) what's a poor man's
effort worth, when, though he dons his toga and races off before
the crack of dawn, even a praetor spurs his lictor, orders him on
to the selfsame house, to greet some rich and heirless hags,
130 afraid his noble colleague may arrive to meet them first.
The sons of freeborn Romans must bow and curtsy to the rich
man's
slave. That dolt can spend as much on a high-class whore
as a legionary tribune earns in one full year
(that's just to hump her once or twice)—but you, poor chap,
135 must fret at the expense when you are tempted by the gaze
of Snowy-White, a cheap, but seductively bedecked young tart.
Summon to the courts in Rome a witness sanctified as Scipio,
the worthy host of Cybele, produce a Numa, if you can,
call forth Metellus, who saved Minerva from her blazing shrine:
140 the first question anyone will ask regards his bank account—
character comes last. ‘How many servants does he feed? What's
the acreage
he tills? His china—what's the pattern? How many places can he
set?’
A man's honesty is weighed against the coins his strongbox holds.
Though you swear before the gods of Samothrace as well as Rome,
145 you're judged—if poor—a perjured infidel who scorns the awful
thunderbolt (although the gods themselves must know the truth).

This same poor wretch becomes a butt for everybody's
 cruel laughter, whenever his cloak may be tattered and soiled,
 whenever his toga is dingy, or one of his shoes is split,
 150 its leather wide agape, and yesterday's coarse threads betray
 the scars of many a rip, of many a quick-stitched repair.
 There's nothing worse in wicked poverty than that it makes
 its victim seem a joke. 'Vacate those front-row seats,' we're told,
 'if you've any sense of shame, move off those cushions—they're
 155 reserved for knights! Your assets are too lean. Better let
 these sons of pimps perch here, noble offspring of some
 whorehouse
 down the street: make room for that splendid son of an auctioneer,
 who'll hurrah
 with his dandy chums, the well-bred progeny of gladiatorial
 trainers.'
 Otho's precise intent, no doubt, when he passed his foolish law!
 What youth was ever deemed a worthy son-in-law, unless his
 160 fortune
 matched the bride's? What poor man ever profits from a will? Or
 wins
 some job from the ministers of Public Works? Long ago we citizens
 of slender means should have mustered ranks and marched right
 out of Rome!
 It's not easy anywhere for a man to rise when his talents are limited
 165 by meager means, but at Rome the difficulty's greater still:
 the most pitiful lodging costs a fortune, my slaves' bellies cost
 a fortune, and a modest little banquet costs a fortune too!
 In Rome it's a disgrace to dine on earthenware, though you'd not
 feel
 ashamed if suddenly removed to some country town, to a rustic
 170 table, where you'd sit content in your coarse, blue, hooded cloak.
 Ah, in most of Italy, to tell the truth, no one ever wears a toga
 'til he's dead. Even when majestic holidays may throng
 the country theatre (lovely place, all rich in verdant grass)
 and some familiar comic afterpiece returns once more
 175 to the country stage, when the rustic infant trembles in its mother's
 lap at the gaping mouth of the actor's chalk-white mask,
 even then you'll see that men are dressed the same, in the front-
 row
 seats and all the rest: clean white tunics suit

the highest aediles as the badge of their nobility.

- 180 But here in Rome we empty out our pocketbooks on rich
attire, much finer than we need and bought on credit.
This is the universal vice in Rome: we are all of us
ambitious paupers. Not to keep you overlong, nothing's free
in Rome. What do you pay for the client's right to visit
185 noble Cossus, or to guarantee the goodwill of some vengeful lord?
One patron ceremoniously trims his beard, another dedicates
his boyfriend's curls, their houses filled with festive yeastcakes
you must *buy!* Take them, keep your own ferment inside:
it's our duty now to swell the purses of our patron's slaves.
- 90 "And say, who fears (or ever has) collapsing buildings
at cool Praeneste, or Volsinii, set amidst grove-shaded ridges,
at uncomplicated Gabii, or on the citadel of hilly Tivoli?
But the city we inhabit is mostly propped on slender stilts—
that's the way the landlord's bailiff tries to shore up
195 crumbling walls. And when he's patched long gaping cracks,
the scoundrel bids us sleep secure in the hanging ruin.
I've got to live where I need not shrink in horror at the fires
and the terrors of the night. Already your heroic neighbor screams
for water, grabs his poor belongings, while your upper floor just
now
200 begins to smoke, and you're asleep. When the alarm breaks out
on the bottom floor, he'll burn last who's protected from the rain
by just the rooftop tiles, where gentle pigeons come to lay
their eggs. Cordus, poor poet, possessed a bed too small to hold
his girl, and atop his marble sideboard six tiny jugs,
205 beneath a little goblet, a recumbent Chiron statuette;
an antique chest protected his precious few Greek volumes,
where unlettered mice once feasted on immortal verse.
Alas, poor Cordus (who could deny?) had nothing. And yet
he's lost that whole, unhappy naught. What's more, the last straw
10 on his load of sorrows, naked now and begging crumbs of food,
not a single man will offer room or board. Ah, but if
the mighty house of rich Asturicus should be destroyed,
matrons wail, lords wear black, a national day of mourning
is proclaimed; then all lament the city's loss, and curse
215 the odious fire. While his walls are still ablaze, up runs
some fellow with a gift of building stone; one brings resplendent
sculptured nudes, another fine objets d'art by Euphranor,

antique trappings from the shrines of Asian gods;
 one man offers books, and shelves, a bust of Pallas;
 220 another brings a case of silver. Thus our wealthy,
 childless sultan reaps interest on his meager loss,
 though he's suspected now (and rightly so) of torching his own
 house.

If you could bear to leave behind the races in the Circus,
 the finest home at Sora, Fabrateria, or Frusino could be bought
 225 for what you pay each year to rent some shadowy hole in Rome.
 Your country place would have a garden, a shallow well (no rope
 and pail) from which your tender plants are watered at your ease:
 oh, live there and love your hoe, steward of a cultivated plot
 so rich that you could feast one hundred Pythagoreans.

230 It's something of worth, whatever the place, wherever the fond
 retreat, to have made oneself the lord of a single lizard.

“Here many an ailing chap expires from lack of sleep
 (it's undigested food, I'd add, crammed into his seething
 gut, that made him ill); what lodging in *this* town permits
 235 one rest? Sleep comes only at great expense: yes, and that's
 the source of our suffering. Great carriages wheeling on through
 the

narrow, winding streets, and the curses of long-stalled drivers,
 are enough to roust a drowsy sea-cow (like Claudius) from his
 sleep.

When business calls the rich man, he'll be swept along, above
 240 the heads of the yielding crowd, in his huge Liburnian litter,
 and as he's carried, he'll read, or write, or rest within:
 the sleek sedan, its curtains drawn, produces sleep.

Thus at his ease, he will even arrive before us: as we hasten
 along, a tidal wave of bodies blocks our path, while
 245 to our rear the mob, a pursuing army, presses our flanks.

We're jabbed by elbows, poked with poles; our heads are smashed
 with jugs and beams. My ankles caked with mud, I'm trampled
 by gigantic feet and a soldier's hobnailed boot impales
 my toe! All this fire and smoke—don't you see?—is to celebrate
 250 the sportula, the day's free meal: a hundred diners, each
 attended by his kitchen staff. Stout Corbulo could hardly
 heft as many pots and pans as each wretched slave-boy
 balances atop his head, while he jogs along and fans the flames.
 Our just patched tunics are torn again; a great fir teeters on

- 255 the wagon racing down the street, while other carts transport their
 loads
 of pine, logs stacked too high and threatening pedestrians with
 sudden
 death. What if an axle snapped and that wagon-load of marble
 overturned,
 dumping its massive stone on the throng of passers-by?
 What would be left of their bodies? Who could identify those limbs
 and bones? Their poor mangled corpses would be as utterly
 260 dispersed
 as all their souls. Meanwhile the household slaves, carefree,
 scrub dishes, keep the hearthfire blazing, noisily arrange
 the brimming oil-flasks, towels, and scrapers for their master's
 bath.
 The slave-boys hurry over all their sundry chores, not knowing that
 265 their lord already sits beside the Styx, a neophyte agape in horror
 at the hideous ferryman: a poor soul desperate of transport across
 the murky swirl, since, all unprepared, he lacks the penny fare.
 "Consider now these other, diverse perils of the Roman night:
 270 how far loose tiles from our towering rooftops plummet before
 they smash your tender brain; how often heavy, shattered
 vases fall (are thrown?) from windows, lacerate and bruise
 the pavement. You'd be rightly deemed a reckless fool, if you
 should
 hazard out to dine and not have penned your will.
 The opportunities for death at night are quite as numerous
 275 as the lighted, open windows you may dare to pass beneath.
 Thus you must always hope, and carry with you this one piteous
 prayer:
 may those windows ever be content to douse you merely with
 their slops!
 "The drunken rowdy who, by chance, has failed
 to kill his man one night must pay the price: he'll toss
 280 in his bed as Achilles did when mourning the loss of his friend.
 Only a brawl will help him sleep; but drunk as he is and
 crazed with youthful insolence, the hothead never challenges
 a man whose cloak is scarlet, whose path is lit by torches,
 285 rich bronze lamps, a nobleman's parade of boon companions.
 But me—with just the moon to light my way, or a candle's

slender flame, which I'm at pains to keep from burning down too soon—

me he despises. Imagine, if you will, how the wretched brawl begins,

if 'brawl' is the word, when *you* deal out the blows and I just take them. He blocks my path and orders me to halt. One
290 must obey:

what else, when the thug accosting you is quite insane, and stronger too. 'Where *are* you coming from?' he shouts, 'With whose

cheap wine and beans is that potbelly bloated? What cobbler has bid you

to share in his feast of boiled sheep's lips and scallions? No answer?

295 Either speak or I'll kick your arse right now! Tell me, where is your hangout? What synagogue will I find you in when I come hunting?'

Whether you try to answer, or just quietly slink away, it's all the same: they'll thrash you soundly, then, enraged, they'll haul *you* up on charges of assault. Such is the poor man's

300 freedom—pounded and sliced by a villain's fists, his highest hope is to get back home with a few of his teeth still in place.

Yet that's not all you have to fear. For even when your house is closed up tight, your shop doors bolted, goods locked up, and all seems quiet, burglars lurk outside. And someday

305 your affairs will be all settled, in an instant, by some hoodlum with a knife (whenever the Pomptine marshes or the woodland nearby

Cumae are raided, secured for some short time by armed brigades, the criminals all rush to Rome, like poachers to a game preserve). What furnaces, what anvils now are not employed for forging chains?

310 So much iron goes for fetters nowadays that one must wonder whether any will remain for hoes and ploughshares. Most fortunate you'd deem our great-grandfathers' forbears, and fortunate

those generations kings and tribunes ruled so long ago—men who knew a Rome content with just one prison.

315 "Oh, Juvenal, I could add further reasons for my flight, but my cattle

call, the sun bends down its head: I must be gone.
All this while my muleteer has been shaking his staff, and nodding
his head
in my direction. So . . . good-bye! Keep me in mind. And whenever
Rome
surrenders you to holiday at your Aquinum, you must invite
320 me over to celebrate your patron goddesses of field and grove.
As to your Satires, I shall come (unless it shames them)
clodhopping into your cool country fields to help you write them!"