

Virile Virro: A Name From Juvenal's Satires

With his keen interest in the use of personal names, the second century Roman satirist Juvenal was carrying on a longstanding tradition of that literary genre which his contemporary, the educator and rhetorician Quintilian, had termed "wholly Roman."¹ Hundreds of names, for characters both real and fictitious, occur throughout Juvenal's work. One of the most unusual, and one that typifies the poet's meticulousness in his selection and employment of names, is the cognomen *Virro*, which is given by Juvenal to one of the principal figures in two of his sixteen satires.

Satire Five (not much later than A.D. 110) condemns the degenerate state of the patron-client relationship, an institution pervasive in Roman society and one of Juvenal's favorite targets, by describing an imagined dinner-party to which the wealthy, but grudging patron Virro has invited several clients, including one Trebius, the poem's addressee.² Following a brief prologue in which he criticizes Trebius' servility in his quest for a free meal (verses 1-11), Juvenal details, course by course, the inferior food, drink, and service that the client will endure at Virro's board, while the lordly patron himself, observing his guests' humiliation with sadistic pleasure, dines in the grandest style (12-169). The characterization of Virro throughout this section is calculated to arouse the audience's indignation against him. But Trebius too is reproached once more in the poem's abrupt conclusion (170-74) for shamelessly enduring his patron's tyranny.

Juvenal's ninth satire (the most neglected of his poems, because of its obscenity) takes the form of a dialogue between the satirist, posing as a friendly advisor, and another parasite, the jaded homosexual Naevolus, who has been recently stricken with impotency.³ In his twenty-six line prologue the satirist feigns concern over Naevolus' haggard appearance and general well-being, thus prompting the reprobate's response: his long career as client-prostitute has proven ill-fated and unprofitable, and one man in particular is responsible for his current dilemma — Virro. Despite Naevolus' generous (and once amply-equipped) services, rendered on demand both to Virro and to his lordship's sex-starved spouse, the thankless *patronus* has now thrown him out, and without a pension! The pervert's invective against his former patron, interrupted briefly by the ironically sympathetic satirist-advisor at verses 90-91 and 102-23, fluctuates between boastfulness and self-pity, indignation and paranoia. His elegiac lament on the swift passing of youth (124-29) is countered by the satirist's consolatory advice: "just munch an aphrodisiac and the pansies will hasten forth from all the hills of Rome to be your patron-friend!" But he will enjoy no such luck, Naevolus is certain, and so the debauched anti-hero concludes his harangue with a whimpering complaint over the disappointment of all his life's most "modest" prayers (135-50).

There can be little doubt that Juvenal deliberately employed the extremely rare cognomen *Virro* for Naevolus' patron in the ninth satire (the closing poem of his third book) in order to insure that audiences

¹Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.93 (*Saura quidem tota nostra est*). For the tradition of naming attacks in Roman satire, see my "Horace and Onomasti Komodein: The Law of Satire," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.31.3 (Berlin 1981) 1790-1826. On some of the names in Juvenal, see G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford 1954) 289-94; cf. R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958) 777-78.

²The name *Virro* appears in Satire Five at verses 39, 43, 99, 128, 134, 149 (generic plural), and 156; for more on Virro's role in Five, see my "Juvenal's 'Friendly Fingernails,'" *Wiener Studien* 88 (1975) 230-35, and "Amicitia and the Unity of Juvenal's First Book," *Illinois Classical Studies* 4 (1979) 158-77, esp. 171-77.

³Victorian commentators, offended by the poem's obscenity, omitted text as well as notes from their editions; in fact, until the recent appearance of commentaries by J. Ferguson (London 1979) and E. Courtney (London 1980), the only line-by-line commentary in English was that of A.J. Maclean (London 1867). Nor has there been a comprehensive analysis of the satire (through see my "Juvenal Nine: Themes and Variation," forthcoming in E.S. Ramage and S.C. Fredericks, ed., *Contemporary Studies in the Satires of Juvenal*, Lawrence, Kansas, 1983); useful, however, for their examination of certain aspects of the poem are H.A. Mason, "Is Juvenal a Classic?," in J.P. Sullivan, ed., *Satire: Critical Essays on Roman Literature* (Bloomington 1968) 93-176, esp. 96-107; A.D. Pryor, "Experiment and sympathy in Juvenal 9," *Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 9 (1964) 33-34; F. Bellandi, "Naevolus cliens," *Maia* 26 (1974) 279-99; also helpful are Highet 117-21, 274-75, 370; W.S. Anderson, "The Programs of Juvenal's Later Books," *Classical Philology* 57 (1962) 145-60, esp. 155; and J.R.C. Martyn, "A New Approach to Juvenal's First Satire," *Antichthon* 4 (1970) 53-61.

would make the connection with Trebii's lord in Satire Five (the end-piece to Book One). The satirist depicts the unvirtuous *patronus* of both poems with near-perfect consistency: Virro is a niggardly, sadistic, calculating patron, who exploits his clients' services and grudgingly renders them only the minimal return. In Satire Nine, however, "a new dimension is added," as Martyn has observed: "the patron is still mean and spiteful, but now he is revealed as an impotent husband, a flaccid catamite."⁴

Juvenal likely intended Virro's name, in part at least, as an etymological pun. Connected with Indo-European **wiros* and Latin *vir*, the appellation is ironically appropriate for the vicious and (in Nine) homosexual patron who lacks utterly both *virtus* and *virilitas*, despite a vigorous public relations campaign to enhance his macho image with "proof of his manhood" (*tollis enim et libris actorum spargere gaudes / argumenta viri*: 9.84–85).⁵ Juvenal employs the significant name, a favorite device in ancient comedy and satire, several times in his five books. A related example was noticed by Gilbert Highet in Satire Two, a poem whose sexual theme is effectively developed and reworked in Nine: in his use of the unusual name *Hispo* (2.50), while he seems to have had an actual contemporary in mind, Juvenal hinted additionally at the aptness of the cognomen for the sort of reprobate whose "hairy limbs" (*hispida membra*: 2.11) conceal his effeminacy.⁶ In the composite of Satires Five and Nine, lord Virro, the antithesis of Virtue and Virility, is a ludicrous "Mr. Manly Goodman."

But something besides merely an opportunity for etymologizing first motivated Juvenal's selection of the name. While most commentators have regarded the character as wholly fictitious, the rarity of the name, its occurrence in both Five and Nine, and the lively detail of Juvenal's characterization all suggest the possibility that the satirist was thinking besides (as in the case of *Hispo*) of a real person, perhaps an historical figure from some earlier period as Friedländer supposed.⁷ Ronald Syme has observed that the characterization is appropriate to a member of the obscure *gens Vibidia*, the only Roman family among whom the cognomen *Virro* is attested:⁸ Vibidius Virro, a *novus homo* and "probably a Paelignian," was

⁴Martyn 61. For the identification of the two Virros see, e.g., Highet 262, note 2, and *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* (PIR)¹ V484; the character is lacking in Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (RE).

⁵The cognomen has *vir-* as its base, with (as my colleague Jared Klein has pointed out to me) expressive gemination of *r-* and an individualizing suffix (*-o*): the formation emphasizes the character's machismo and allows, in the context of Satire Nine, a *lucus a non lucendo* etymologizing pun. See below, note 8.

⁶Cf. *hirsuto* . . . *collo* (2.41). Highet, 291–92, commented on the pun and argued that Juvenal also meant *Hispo* as a slur on M. Eppuleius Proculus Hispo (PIR²E83; the identification was rejected by R. Syme, *Tacitus* [Oxford 1958], 778, but on insufficient grounds). Similarly, *Lamiarum* in 4.154 alludes to the Aelii Lamiae and at the same time puns on the vampire lamiae of folklore: see R.J. Rowland, Jr., "Juvenal's *Lamiae*: Note on *Sat.* 4.154," *Classical Bulletin* 40 (1964) 75, and LaFleur, "Amicitia" (above, note 2), 169–70.

⁷L. Friedländer, ed., *D. Junii Iuvenalis: Saturarum Libri V* (Leipzig 1895), note on 5.39; cf. F. Strauch, *De personis Iuvenaliantis* (Göttingen 1869) 61; Forcellini's *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis*, vol. 6 (*Onomasticon*), s.v. (where only Juvenal's Virro is listed); contrast G.A. Ruperti, ed., *D. Iunii Iuvenalis Aquinatis Satirae XVI* (Leipzig 1819), note on 5.19.

⁸R. Syme, "Personal Names in Annals I–VI," *Journal of Roman Studies* 39 (1949) 17. Outside of Juvenal the cognomen occurs only among the Vibidii (in Tacitus and the inscriptions noted below), though *Virro* was an emendation approved by several early editors at Catullus 71.1. The name is lacking in W. Schulze, *Zur Geschichte lateinischer Eigenamen* (Berlin 1904), and I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina* (Helsinki 1965); nor does it appear in the papyri indexed by F. Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (Heidelberg 1922), and D. Foraboschi, *Onomasticon alterum* (Milan 1971). A great variety of cognomina based on the root *-vir-*, common in Celtic names (see the name-lists in J. Whatmough, *The Dialects of Ancient Gaul* [Cambridge 1970], and esp. D.E. Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* [Oxford 1967], 286–88), appear in the inscriptions, particularly those of Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul, Spain, and Britain, but also in Italy and Rome: besides such familiar formations as *Virillis* (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* [CIL] 5.7046, 6.2443, 20098), *Viril* (*Ilio* (5.5503, 5626, 6484), and *Virillanus* (5.6271), are found *Viratus* (5.7299), *Virbicus* (5.5652), *Viridacus* (5.3482), *Virianus* (5.5467, 5542, 5689, 6087, 6.24011, 32800), *Viriatius* (5.7222), *Virico* (5.4594), *Virocannus* (5.5883), *Vironic* (3.15212^a), *Vironus* (2.5654, 5713, 5723–24, 5827, 6298), and such close counterparts to *Virro* as *Vira* (masc., 5.5100), *Viro* (3.14216²), *Virrus* (2.4970, 558, and cf. 12.5682, 46), and *Virso* (11.4613); see further Schulze 39, 253, 425; and cf. *Arviragus* in *Juv.* 4.127. In each of these cognomina the root *-vir-* most probably connotes the manly virtues: cf. Kajanto 257. Highet, 324 note 26, observes that Joseph Hall, "Byting Satires" (1598), adapts the names *Virro* and *Trebiius* for two of his characters (5.2.105–50); see A. Stein, "Joseph Hall's Imitation of Juvenal," *Modern Language Review* 43 (1948) 315–22.

among several political latecomers expelled from the senate by Tiberius in A.D. 17 and described by Tacitus with typical fervor as "wastrels impoverished by their debaucheries" (*Annales* 2.48.3: *prodigos et ob flagitia egentis*).⁹

Tacitus' prodigal is probably to be identified, as Syme suggested, with Sextus Vibidius Virro (*Prosopographia Imperii Romani* V373). Honored by the Athenians with a commemorative statue (*Inscriptiones Graecae* 3.603), this Virro was father of the vestal virgin Vibidia (*IG* 3.875), herself almost certainly the priestess who, as *virginum Vestalium vetustissima* (and thus *virgo maxima*), interceded with Claudius on Messalina's behalf in A.D. 48, after the emperor's discovery of his wife's illicit marriage to Gaius Silius.¹⁰ Thus the once ignoble and otherwise inconspicuous family had attained to a measure of both fame and notoriety during the reigns of Tiberius and Claudius, a period of recent Roman history that provided many characters for the Satires.¹¹

Besides Tacitus' gibe, there was precedent for a slur on this family within the tradition of Roman satire itself: a *scurra* named Vibidius was, not the host (like Virro in Juvenal Five), but one of the uninvited guests, a garrulous, hard-drinking parasite, at Horace's Banquet of Nasidienus (*Sermones* 2.8), a poem that was among the principal models for Juvenal's Banquet of Virro in the fifth satire.¹² Given the rarity of the cognomen *Virro*, Juvenal's audience would readily have seen his caricature as a slur on the Vibidii, or in particular on Sextus Vibidius Virro, whose scandalous behavior in 17 had been brought again to the public's attention in Tacitus' recently published *Annals*.¹³ At the same time the keenest satire aficionados might conceivably recall also Horace's depiction of another member of the family. The bibulous guest of *Sermones* 2.8 has, in a sense, been elevated by Juvenal (as his kinsmen had been, by circumstance, during that same century) to the opposite role of patron and host. The parvenu's behavior, however, has not improved but worsened, a development rich in implications typical of attitudes toward the nouveaux riches shared by the contemporaries Tacitus and Juvenal.

That Juvenal may indeed have been influenced in his treatment of Virro, to some extent, by Horace's Vibidius, and that he intended the more astute in his audience to comprehend and appreciate the reversal of roles he had engineered, receives some support from the comparable literary pedigree that can be documented for Naevolus, the client in Satire Nine. Like his unvirtuous patron, Naevolus is appropriately named: the cognomen's rarity among the upper classes reflects the parasite's social status; its etymology,

⁹The mss. read *Varronem*, but inscriptions support Dittenberger's emendation to *Virronem*; see *PIR* V372. *RE* "Vibidius" no. 2, and Syme (above, note 8) 17 and *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 456. Cf. Highet, 262, and P. Green, trans., *Juvenal: The Sixteen Satires* (Baltimore 1974), who observes that, if Paellignian as Syme posits, the family was situated only forty miles from Juvenal's own Aquinum (124 note 3).

¹⁰*Tac. Ann.* 11.32.2 and cf. 11.34.2; *PIR* V374. *RE* "Vibidius" no. 3. Koesteremann, in his note on *Ann.* 2.48.3 (ed., *Tacitus Annalen*, 1. Heidelberg 1963), rejects the likelihood of identifying the expelled senator with the Vestal's father on the grounds that the daughter of a man so dishonored would never have become *virgo maxima*. However, if *vetustissima* in A.D. 48 (i.e., about forty years old, if coopted at age ten and in or nearing her thirtieth year of service), Vibidia might have been appointed to the order just prior to her father's disgrace; the incident in any case would not have necessitated her expulsion from the priesthood, since upon her cooption she was emancipated from the *patria potestas* (cf. Dittenberger *Eph. Epigr.* i.108, as cited by H. Furneaux on *Ann.* 11.32.5 [ed., Oxford 1891]). Sextus Virro L. f. of the Sergian tribe, mentioned in Frontinus *De aquis urbis Romae* 129, is possibly related to this same family, which had attained no prominence in republican times (no Vibidii appear in T.R.S. Broughton, *Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, Cleveland 1952). To the epigraphic evidence for the name cited by Syme (above, note 8) 17, add P. Vibidius Atticus (*CIL* 11.1308, *PIR* V371); also *CIL* 2.599, and (in Rome) 6.2551 (32526), 26976, 28766-71, 33031 (37291); cf. Schulze (above, note 8) 92, 428, 438, 457; R.S. Conway, *The Italic Dialects* (Cambridge 1897) 162; P. Castrón, *Ordo Populusque Pompeianus*, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 8 (Rome 1975), 240 no. 456. Cf. C. Vibius Virillo, *CIL* 13.6241.

¹¹E.g., Sejanus, 10.61-107; Claudius, 5.147; the marriage of Silius and Messalina, 10.330-33.

¹²For Horace's Vibidius, only briefly mentioned by Syme (above, note 8) 17, see *Sermones* 2.8.22, 33-35, 39-40, 80; *RE* "Vibidius" no. 1. Vibidius' role as an *umbra* brought along by Maecenas to Nasidienus' dinner party for his table wit may be compared with Juvenal's characterization of Naevolus as *conviva ioco mordente facetus* (9.10). For the connection between Horace's poem and Juvenal Five, see L.R. Shero, "The *Cena* in Roman Satire," *Classical Philology* 18 (1923) 126-43, esp. 139-40.

¹³On the relative dating of Juvenal's Satires and the *Annales*, see R. Syme, "Juvenal, Pliny, Tacitus," *American Journal of Philology* 100 (1979) 250-78, esp. 274-77.

"Little Wart," whether or not it was meant to pun on the character's red and wrinkled face (verses 1-9), contributes to our impression of his unattractiveness; the diminutive form of the name has a preciosity suited to his role as homosexual prostitute.¹⁴ Another homosexual in Juvenal is similarly dubbed Varillus, "Little Master Knock-knee" (Satire Two, verses 22-23, where there is an apparent pun on *loripes*, "bandylegged"). More to the immediate point of our present discussion, Naevolus has been adapted, in a most ingenious manner, from the Epigrams of Martial (1.97, 2.46, 3.71 and 95, 4.83), who was, like Horace, a major influence on Juvenal.¹⁵ Martial's Naevolus, a vile, ungenerous, arrogant, passive homosexual patron, is transformed by Juvenal into the equally repulsive active homosexual client of Satire Nine, who is there — through a clever enactment of poetic justice — exploited by Virile Virro, the very image of his own former self.

Doubtless the Vibidii were as unamused at Juvenal's wit in depicting Virro as they must have been at the pejorative characterization in Tacitus' *Annales*; but there is no evidence to suggest that they were, by the early second century when the Satires were published, in any position to retaliate.¹⁶ The family had already receded into obscurity, where they would in fact have remained, had it not been for the name-calling of two Roman satirists and an indignant historian.

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¹⁴The common noun *naevolus/naevulus*, attested only in post-Augustan sources (Fronto *Epistulae* p. 42H, Apuleius *De mundo* 5.15, Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 12.1.7), is the diminutive of *naevus*, perhaps connected with *gigno* ("angeborenes Mal, Muttermal": Walde-Hofmann) and use of any birthmark of skin blemish, esp. a mole or wart (cf. Lucilius 572-73W, on physical imperfections in women: ἠοῦρην *eupaterciam aliquam rem insignem habuisse, verrucam naevum punctum dentem eminulum unum*; a *naevus* might, however, be regarded by a lover as a beauty-mark: Cicero *De natura deorum* 1.28.79, Horace *Sermones* 1.3.38-49, 1.6.65-67, Ovid *Tristia* 5.13.14, and Fronto and Gellius above); later *naevus* was used figuratively for a moral defect (Symmachus 3.34). Pryor, 34, terms *Naevolus* an "absurd" name, and so it may have been intended, but it was in actual use as a cognomen: although lacking in Preisigke and Foraboschi (above, note 8), it does appear in five inscriptions, though not for persons of any social or political eminence (CIL 3.7299 and 12690, funerary inscriptions set up by respectively, C. [Cor]nelius Naevolu[s] and P. Scrasius Naevolus; 5.6447; 6.5608, 33115). Cf. the related praenomen *Gnaeus*, the nomina *Naevius*, *Naevoleius* (CIL 9.2356, 10.1030), the cognomina *Naevianus*, *Naevidianus*, *Naevilianus*, and the similarly inspired *Gibbus*, *Macula*, *Struma*, *Tubero*, and *Verrucosus*, on which see Kajanto (above, note 8) s.v.

¹⁵For Juvenal's use of names from Martial, see e.g., H. Nettleship, "Life and Poems of Juvenal," *Journal of Philology* 16 (1888) 52-53; Colton "Juvenal and Martial" (diss. Columbia 1951) 120-25; and, on Naevolus, my "Juvenal Nine" (above, note 1). Two other names in Satire Nine seem also to have been adapted, in part at least, from the Epigrams: with Aufidius (verse 25) cf. Martial 5.61, and with Saufeia (117, and see 6.320) cf. Martial 3.72.

¹⁶No Vibidii appear after Sextus Vibidius Virro; none are listed in A.H.M. Jones, et al., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 1 (Cambridge 1971).