**Title:** A Note on the Speaker in Juvenal's "Satires"

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A Note on the Speaker in Juvenal's Satires

Abstract: The paper sets the thesis that Juvenal, aware that aggressive satire in Lucilian style sounded false and void when unrelated to its times, tried to avoid this danger and to pump up some drama into his poems, so the figure of a Speaker blinded by anger was introduced to the Satires. The torrents of enraged words were used in order to cover the fact that the objects of contempt were of little importance to the listening public.

Key words: Latin literature, satire, Juvenal

Juvenal's texts are intense with emotions which continue to overwhelm even today's readers and drag them into his very deeply personal vision of the world, a vision conveyed by angry attacks on depicted subjects. This literary strategy is aimed at gaining reader's complete attention and eliciting a conviction that the text is intrinsically linked to the external world, thus becomes important to the reader. In the first Satire an unmerciful review of contemporary literary output is given (1.1–14): boring epic poems and their out-of-touch-with-the-reality mythological intrigues. In 1.17–30 and further a literary manifesto is proclaimed that introduces the notion that writing is an obligation, text should confront vicious world, and satire is the best weapon in the war against the omnipresent depravity. Therefore, in light of this manifesto, there is little difference between a satire and a rhetorical speech. In Juvenal's hands, the genre is molded into a persecutor's heated address to a court – it should serve as a means of persuasion. Yet random mention of Speaker's rhetorical education (1.15–17) provokes one to see the Satires as a continuation of school progymnasmata, specially so, when the 170–171 are pondered upon. Those satiric suasoriae limit meting out justice only to those who are already dead, distorting thus the fundamental quality of the republican rhetoric: participa-
tion in actual events. Without closeness to a real world the rhetoric slips into declama-
tion. Juvenal blatantly breaks the rules of a) republican satire, b) republican rhetor-

cic.

Juvenal’s Satires are primordially deformed: they are intended as a remedy for a
decline of literature (difficile est saturam non scribere, 1.30), a salubrious breeze
of words that touch their listeners. Satiric poems should stigmatise evil-doers and
persuade the audience that no improvement is possible. Speaker’s focusing on the
past likens the Satires to the pompous epic productions dismissed by the Speaker
himself in the first lines of the programmatic poem and runs counter to the self-imposed
objective of creating fresh themes in literature, themes that could be vital
to his contemporary readers.

The yawning gap between the projected aim of the text and its unimportant
content is, in my opinion, laboriously buried by means of a construction of the
speaking self in the poems. I will try to define this construction after recalling the
most seminal views on the subject of the Speaker in Juvenal’s poems.

W.S. Anderson in his “Anger in Juvenal and Seneca”1 adopts Kernan’s thesis2
of the public and private character of the speaker in satires. Accepting Kernan’s
theory of “the satirist”, i.d. a constructed personality that presents the view on the
world in satiric poems, a mask of an author that should not be identified with his/her
private personality, Anderson believes that Juvenal, influenced by Seneca, created
in his text a twofold “satirist”. It is a raging warrior attacking insanely a corrupt-
ed world in the first three books of Satires, substituted with a more complacent
personality in the last two books, one that reminds of a Democritean philosopher.
The motto: facit indignatio versus (1.79) and its mad executor correspond to Sene-
ca’s De ira, while the Speaker of the 4th and the 5th book is close to the tenor of De
tranquilitate animi.

M.M. Winkler3 accepts the mask theory, but pursuing the opinions of Sullivan and
Feinberg4 he notes, that persistency of any author in depicting certain topics or
situations may justify a perception that speaker’s statements are similar to those of
the author.

Susanna Morton Braund in her edition of the first book of Juvenal’s Satires5
(largely after Anderson) accentuates the moral and political aspects of the use of
indignatio in rhetorical contexts. On the one hand, such use of indignatio could
alienate a speaker, because displaying strong emotions was deemed a sign of weak-

1 W.S. Anderson: “Anger in Juvenal and Seneca”. University of California Publications in


4 J.P. Sullivan: “Martial’s Sexual Attitudes”. Philologus 1979, Bd. 123, pp. 288–302;

ness by Roman listeners. On the other, *indignatio* could have been seen as opposed to *adulatio*, false flattery typical of Domitian’s reign⁶. S. Morton Braund follows De Decker and Cairns⁷ in stressing the rhetorical structure of Juvenal’s *Satires*. *Progymnasma*, *prosphonetikon*, *syntaktikon* are adduced as examples of rhetorical frames used to put ideas in. An analysis of the epic influences on Juvenal⁸ leads her to a statement that the first book of *Satires* forms a kind of epic poem with Lucilius as its hero.

I use all the interpretations and opinions reviewed above to corroborate the thesis that Juvenal was aware that aggressive satire in Lucilian style sounded false and void when unrelated to its times. The attacks on the figures of the past would make *Satires* fall prey to mockery. Trying to avoid this danger and to pump up some drama into his poems, Juvenal introduced the figure of a Speaker blinded by anger. The torrents of enraged words were used in order to cover the fact that the objects of contempt were of little importance to the listening public.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 17–18.