Historicizing Satire in Juvenal

The implications of the *persona* theory pose a problem for the interpretation of Juvenal’s early satires, because it presents the satirist as intent on nullifying his didactic stances. This leaves us with an unsatisfactory conclusion that excises Juvenal’s persistent treatment of themes consistent with contemporaneous authors who were similarly engaged in blackening the reputations of the famous dead. This article argues that a strict application of *persona* theory isolates Juvenal’s satirist from his volatile contemporary climate by excluding him from the reality that these authors—similarly directing their works to the past—were unabashedly writing only after the tyrant was safely dead. Tacitus and Pliny had lamented the servility and silence that predominated during Domitian’s reign, in which the Roman world endured fifteen years of terror without uttering a word. Into this literary milieu Juvenal announces his satirist, who begins with an echo of that silence: *semper ego auditor tantum?* With the death of Domitian and a new atmosphere that permitted the defamation of the deceased, Juvenal injects his venomous voice into the mix, taking advantage of contemporary literary appetites that allowed for the punishment, no matter how belated, if not of the person then of the guilty one’s memory. Any evaluation of Juvenal’s satiric project must be firmly rooted in this, his most immediate, context.

dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendi commercio. memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdíssemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere.¹

*Tac. Agr.* 2.3

We assuredly provided an abundant example of our submissiveness; and just as a former age has seen how far freedom extends, so we have done the same for servitude, deprived as we were of speaking and listening in exchange through oppressive investigations.² We would have also lost memory itself along with our voice, if it were as easy to forget as to keep quiet.

1. I have adopted the Loeb Classical Library’s edition for all cited Latin texts. All translations are my own.

2. See Juv. 4.45–52 for satirical exaggeration of the informers’ ubiquity.
Juvenal published his first book of *Satires* in the post-Domitianic period, an era seething with a palpable—if deferred—indignation. This potent anger, attested in sources from a variety of genres, is most evident in the denigration of Domitian, the last emperor of the Flavian dynasty, and his attendants. For Tacitus, the ascension of Nerva and Trajan conjoined the principate with freedom, two seemingly incompatible concepts, while for Pliny the new era presented an opportunity to act as a prosecutor of guilty informers (*delatores*) who had survived Domitian unscathed.

This new, relative safety likely allowed Juvenal to introduce his satirist boldly, whereas Persius’s muffled (*mutrire*) criticism of Nero forty years earlier seems to reflect the stress under which he created his short collection of *Satires*. Juvenal, like Pliny and Tacitus, took advantage of this new era in which, as Tacitus proclaimed, one may think what one wishes and say what one thinks (*ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet, Hist. 1.1.20*). Specifically, Pliny’s Epistles and his *Panegyricus* for Trajan are obsessed with the past, as he seeks to define his role during the brutal rule of Domitian and afterward, when many were looking back in anger and seeking the condemnation of infamous *delatores*, who were believed to have escaped punishment during the emperor’s reign.

While Tacitus in his *Annals* expands on this complaint and focuses on the degeneracy of the principate and the subjugation of the nobility, Juvenal, likewise, while reserving invective for Domitian in particular, takes aim in his first book at

3. Dio states (68.1.3) that reprisals in the chaos following Domitian’s death had reached such a pitch that Nerva was forced to intercede. Pliny’s *Panegyricus* and collection of epistles waste no opportunity to decry the state of affairs under Domitian.

4. *nunc demum redit animus; et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabilis miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, Agr. 3.1.*

5. *occiso Domitiano statui mecum ac deliberavi, esse magnum pulchramque materiam inscandi nobiscum cenaret, Ep. 9.13.2. Cf. Ep. 4.22, where Pliny relates Mauricus’s witty insult against Veiento, an informer under Domitian, who was seated next to the emperor Nerva at dinner. The emperor had wondered aloud what would have happened to Catullus Messalinus, another of Domitian’s *delatores*, had he been alive. At this, Mauricus sharply remarked that he would be “dining with us” (*nobiscum cenaret*). Juvenal groups together both Messalinus and Veiento among Domitian’s council of advisers in Satire 4.

6. A bold stance that somehow sits alongside the disappearance of the “autobiographical” satirist in the tradition of Lucilius and Horace. See Geue 2017 for the studied anonymity of the author in the *Satires*, a jarring and important departure from Juvenal’s satiric forebears.

7. Pers. 1.119–21: *me muttire nefas? nec clam? nec cum scrobe? nusquam? | hic tamen indicium. vidi, vidi ipse, libelle: | auriculas asini quis non habet?* The scholiast and *Vita* assert that Persius had written *Mida rex*, for which *quis non* was substituted upon publication for fear of offending Nero; see Harvey 1981: 51; Nikitinski 2002: 96 ad loc. Cf. Geue (2017: 286), who highlights paranoia as a predominating force in the *Satires*: “Despite likely composition under a generally ‘thawed’ principate (Trajan and Hadrian), the raw memory of Domitian would have provided ample cause for concern.”

8. Freudenburg 2001: 216: “Pliny’s letters repeatedly turn from the day-to-day affairs of a consular senator in early second-century Rome to the world of the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians.”

9. Once he had become emperor, Nerva executed slaves and freedmen who had turned against their masters, and he forbade the charge of treason (*maiestas*), which informers had used to inspire such terror. Many of the informers, as Dio relates, were put to death (68.1.2).
the patron-client relationship by including the themes of servility and silence not only among the upper echelons of society (Satire 4) but also the lesser patrons and clients (Satires 1, 3, 5). These unified currents of discourse among writers in the early Trajanic period illustrate the parallel concerns to rehabilitate silenced voices.

When we consider the historical context in which Juvenal chose to present his indignant satirist, in combination with the evidence for the positive reception of a rhetorically indignant style in the oratorical theorists, we may legitimately ask whether the speaker’s professed indignatio is more likely to be read as a unifying rather than alienating force, a position of critics who have focused on internal “tensions” (i.e., inconsistencies) to question the validity of the speaker’s self-professed indignatio. These tensions, then, are considered to be intentional devices by which the author has sought to distance not only himself, but also his own and subsequent audiences, from the views of the speaker(s) in the Satires. In this view, Juvenal and his audience would have disassociated themselves from the indignatio of the main narrative voice.10

By accepting the implications of the persona theory’s application to Juvenal and transferring the speaker’s invective against the targets of the texts onto the satirist, we risk not only excusing the satirist from his transgressions but also making Juvenal a figure palatable to modern audiences by over-reading our own scruples into his art. Thus, Juvenal becomes an author who shares our values and laughs with us at his creation.11 This approach reconfigures the biographical fallacy criticized in

10. Cf. Freudenburg 2005: 24–25: “. . . anger ranks as the least sociable of human emotions; and it is precisely this emotion that is most commonly associated with satire.” While acerbic satire certainly has the ability to repel, it also has the potential to unify. Various historical exempla, both ancient and modern, demonstrate that anger is used by rhetoricians and/or public personalities to unify their audience against a stated target. E.g., Cicero’s Catilinarian orations, even if we allow that their stylistic effects were drawn from a rhetorician’s handbook and are perhaps somewhat artificial, illustrate that an indignatio using the tropes of an artful anger, often employing acerbic humor, functions to unify Cicero’s audience against a common enemy. The fact that Cicero’s orations were polished after delivery does not obscure the successful presentation of immediate anger, as Cicero’s apparently persuasive speeches imply. For modern examples of anger’s unifying effect, witness the success of radio and television personalities in the style of Rush Limbaugh and the angry rhetoric that fueled the rise of Donald Trump, a figure whose anger ultimately proved to have a strong unifying effect even as it repels the American electorate. Also relevant is the unifying force of the “Day of Rage” demonstrations that swept multiple nations of the Middle East in 2011–2012.

11. Cp. Wray 2001: 163: “But in its [the persona theory’s] . . . application to individual texts both ancient and modern . . . it often tended to serve . . . as a way of rehabilitating, of naturalizing canonical authors . . . by reassuring the modern reader that whatever dreadful things great writers might have said in their Great Books, what they really meant—and this could be seen once the necessary adjustments for detached irony were made—never failed to embody the cultural and ethical values of the modernist new humanism.” I would add that the danger of applying extreme interpretations of the persona theory to Juvenal in particular is that it runs the risk of downplaying the virulent strains of homophobia, misogyny, and xenophobia present in the satirist’s (and often his contemporaries’) narrative. See further Uden 2015: 4: “. . . by emphasizing that the satirist’s cruel attacks are the utterances of a persona existing at an ironic distance from the author himself, critics could assuage some of the ethical discomfort almost inevitably felt when reading Juvenal’s vicious invective.” Cp. Geue 2017: 10.
G. Highet’s work, not in attempting to tell us what Juvenal believed but rather by defining his views in the negative and assuming to know the views to which he was unsympathetic. Whether or not we are to understand the poems as voicing the views of the historical poet, what is relevant here is that, as with the other extant work of the Roman satirists, Juvenal tries to present the main speaker as the satirist. By blurring this distinction between autobiography and fiction, and by including historical persons and actual events, Juvenal invites the audience to conflate speaker and satirist, and read the Satires as “real.”

If we begin, as the persona theory does, with the assumption of an arbitrarily idealized poet who would never present inconsistent views except by intention, and who condemns the positions expressed in his own poems whenever he departs from that idealization, we inevitably create a skewed, problematic picture. Hyperbolic language is not enough for us to conclude that Juvenal’s moral criticism is mock didactic. Wild exaggeration is, for example, how the political cartoonist hits his target, yet few would argue that the artist’s satire is meant to boomerang as a critique against himself. The sting of the persistent and sophisticated invective that we find in Juvenal is hardly mollified if we suggest that the satirist is “just kidding,” and the indignant professions and perceived inconsistencies are not enough to argue for an intentional undercutting of his sentiments.

It is hardly self-evident then that Juvenal’s employment of indignant rhetoric that forces his audience’s attention back to potent themes of violence and power, still very much alive in the discourses of post-Domitianic Rome, would have caused his audience to disavow his anger per se. All the more so when the indignatio of his more overtly political satires sounds all too familiar from the more elevated genres of his contemporaries for benign comedy. Tacitus indicates in no uncertain terms 12. Highet 1961. Highet attempted to recreate intimate details of Juvenal’s personal life from his satiric collection, as in his conclusion that Juvenal was unhappily married and divorced based on a literal interpretation of Satire 6.

13. So Anderson 1982: 314: “I would contend that Juvenal has provided ample reasons for disassociating him [Juvenal the author] from the attitudes expressed by his satirist. . . . he assigns to the satirist moral ideas that we could not possibly share, not so long as we have our wits about us.” Cf. Iddeng on regarding the speaker as an untrustworthy figure, distinct from the ideas and views of his creator: “[this approach] conditions an alternative access to ancient authors’ minds to be able to learn something about their real views and values, although such access is usually denied” (2000: 110).


15. Green 1998: xxviii: “What concerns me is the effect on Juvenal [from the application of the persona theory], which has been to turn the Satires into a series of contrived, semi-dramatic performances, structurally exotic and wholly removed from real life, performed by a literary quick-change artist with a bundle of formal masks behind which to hide, and a bagful of moral bromides and stock rhetorical tropes or literary allusions to suit every occasion. . . . For Susanna Braund Juvenal’s narrator has become ‘a spineless and petty bigot’ . . . thus subverting any moral standpoint that the Satires may originally have had.” Cf. Uden 2015: 4: “But the assumption of persona theory that these satiric performances are, at heart, self-satirizing play, existing in a rhetorical universe of their own construction, seriously limits our understanding of Juvenal’s capacity for critical engagement with contemporary life.” See further Keane 2012: 409: “. . . as we survey Juvenal’s poems it becomes glaringly apparent that they were written not simply in imitation of a satiric tradition, but in the shadow of monumental new historical works focusing on Rome and the empire in the past century.”
that authors and audiences were eager to write and read exactly the kind of bitter invective against fallen emperors and their favorites that Juvenal offers, particularly in his first book.16 For Juvenal, Pliny, and Tacitus, the informers’ perversion of the judicial system and the rise of powerful freedmen are inextricably linked to the decline of senatorial power and form a key element of their retroactive hostility.17 The concomitant themes of servility and silence resonate throughout early second-century literature and provide a major link between Juvenal’s *indignatio* and that of his contemporaries.

In addition to testifying to a vibrant interest in vindictive literature directed at deceased emperors, like that found in Juvenal’s fourth satire, Tacitus’s statement casts doubt on the claim that Seneca’s treatise on anger management, written approximately seventy years before the *Satires*, exercised control over the reader’s response to Juvenal’s corpus, as argued by proponents of *persona* theory.18 Juvenal’s literary contemporaries provide evidence that their audiences not only fail to adhere to Seneca’s philosophical views on anger but even relish the works of historiography imbued with anger, which formed a part of the revenge literature following the death of Domitian. Juvenal quite possibly found readers sympathetic to his satirist’s views, derived from a common fury toward the powerful individuals of the past, some of whose victims had relatives contemporaneous with the satirist.19

The parallels of Juvenalian invective to the sentiments and tone of authors in this historical tradition force us to confront the uncomfortable notion that the sources for the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods are also marked by the *indignatio* of their authors (despite Tacitus’s protestations),20 and are thus not as far removed from the *ira* of Juvenal as we would like. Seneca’s intellectual position was an expression of only one side of an ongoing discussion over the ethical quality of *indignatio* rather than a comprehensive framework through which all such professions were evaluated. By contextualizing Juvenal within the popular revenge literature of post-Domitianic Rome, we are better situated to understand the thrust of Juvenal’s invective against the past and its implications for the present.

16. *temporibusque Augusti dicendis non defuere decora ingenia, donec gliscente adulatione deterrerentur. Tiberii Gaique et Claudii ac Neronis res florentibus ipsis ob metum falsae, postquam occiderant recentibus odis compositae sunt,* Ann. 1.1. Cf. Tacitus’s similar statement that truth (*veritas*) had suffered through the extremes of flattery and hatred in the historical works composed after Actium and the establishment of the principate (1.1.7–13); Tacitus again highlights the ready reception for invective and defamation. See *Agr.* 1.4 for the reiteration of the claim that audiences lent a more willing ear to works of invective than to works of praise: *at nunc narraturo mihi vitam defuncti hominis venia opus fuit, quam non petissem incusaturus: tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora.*

17. Sinclair 1995: 13: “[T]he whole subject of informers and delation allows Tacitus to hint at the uncomfortable fact that a *princeps* could use the patronage system so dear to the nobility to control and harm their class.”


19. Courtney 1980: 229, e.g., comments on Juvenal’s reference to the murder of Lamia in the last line of *Satire* 4: “One [relative] at least was alive when this was written, L. Aelius Lamia Aelianus, cos. 116; he can hardly have read this passage with pleasure.”

An indignant tone is, however, not the only similarity that marks these historical and epistolary works and links them to Juvenal’s *Satires*. As we shall see, these same authors also attempt to account for the validity of their *indignatio* and its attendant desire for revenge in light of the elapsed time between the dates of their compositions and the historical persons they target. The apparent awkwardness of accounting for this anxiety in Juvenal’s *Satires* has led to the notion that he intentionally created his speaker as an ethically undercut “coward.”

It has furthermore been suggested that the creative output in multiple genres following the death of Domitian was sparked by the ascension of Trajan and an attendant surge in panegyric. This theory has found strong proponents and has offered a plausible interpretation of post-Domitianic revenge literature by explaining the indignant tone of the works from this period primarily as flattery, written to contrast the positive qualities of the new emperor with the negative ones of his predecessor. But viewing Juvenalian invective as panegyric has implications for the *persona* theory’s contention that Juvenal’s speaker was intended to be viewed unsympathetically in the “angry” satires of books 1 and 2 (and, if we follow Freudenburg, book 3), as it is questionable how we might reconcile a “spineless and petty bigot” with the flattering voice that Trajan was hoping would (however indirectly) sing the praises of the new golden age. If we allow that Juvenal’s audience interpreted his satirist in this way, however, we must also assume that it applied this evaluative terminology to those passages in Tacitus and Pliny that express the same fear and loathing of the lurking totalitarian monster, evidenced by their own long silence. In other words, such a negative appraisal of Juvenal’s satirist, while it conveniently sanitizes Juvenal for us, forces a major rift into the literary environment of the period.

The debate over the ethical quality of Juvenal’s speaker should, therefore, explore the tenor of the historical material composed in the decades following

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22. Principal among them is Ramage 1989.
24. Braund 1993: 67–68: “Contrary to first appearances, Roman satire on political subjects affirms rather than challenges the status quo and buttresses the present regime, which is often if not usually defined by reference to previous regimes. . . . the satire which at first sight may appear to be so revolutionary and anarchic and which likes to lay claim to a certain freedom of speech can itself, in its denigration of earlier emperors, be viewed as a disguised form of flattery and affirmation of the present regime.” It is difficult to reconcile the interpretation of an “unhinged” or “berserk” satirist with the suggestion that Juvenal’s satirist operated as an advocate for Trajan’s propaganda, especially as “[t]he denigration of Domitian in *Satire* 4 is not accompanied by any positive allusion to his successors, as one would expect if the analogy with Pliny’s *Panegyricus* is to be sustained” (Wilson 2003: 530). Wilson questions the supposition that Juvenal, Tacitus, and Pliny were primarily concerned with promoting Trajanic propaganda: “Would an emperor find it useful to have his policies promoted through a mouthpiece like the speaker of *Satire* 1 or *Satire* 6? The *persona* Juvenal presents is of a man who barely has his temper under control, who is irrationally angry, ruled by *indignatio*, xenophobic, misogynist, verbally aggressive, alienated and discontented, and who feels dispossessed of his birthright as a Roman. This extremism is a recipe for a public relations disaster” (530).
the Flavian period, and in this context we may ask whether we are right to dismiss Juvenal’s invective as comedy directed primarily against the satirist, who has “nothing terribly serious to say,” or whether, constructed in an exhausted political climate, Juvenal is engaged in a sociopolitical program every bit as serious and real as that of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny.

II

One method of tracing the theme of servility and silence common to the authors of the post-Domitianic period is through the indignation generated by the issues of delatio and the social mobility of freedmen, some of whom had advanced to the highest ranks of power. Pliny keeps his readers’ attention focused on the past in a variety of ways, including a continual reference to and denigration of the informers active under Domitian and earlier rulers. He explicitly claims that hatred, rage, and the attendant desire for revenge against those believed to have played a role in Domitian’s despotism were common after the emperor’s assassination in 96 CE, and that many seized this opportunity to vent their anger on personal enemies and those who had been elevated during the reign of terror.

When writing to Quadratus of his proposal to prosecute Publicius Certus, an informer instrumental in the prosecution of Herennius Senecio and Helvidius Priscus in 93 CE, Pliny relates the general animosity of the period. In the first days

25. Freudenburg 2001: 251 contends that Juvenal’s satire is too much, too late, and inevitably comes off as “clownish” since it so harshly attacks notorious figures of the past. He further argues that “making up for lost time in satire is an unlikely, if not irredeemable, notion. No one has ever used satire to do this before. The genre is not set up to work that way. Satire is a genre that must engage with the present, and any attempt to make it seem that it can work as a kind of retroactive payback has got to come off as just a little absurd” (237). Yet, Freudenburg had noted that Turnus’s satires appear to have “looked back to the cruel follies of Nero’s court rather than to the persons and activities of the contemporary Roman scene” (214n.7). As Knoche 1975: 141 states, “Contemporary criticism, especially that which took the form of polemic against living personages, had already disappeared at that time [under Domitian], as was subsequently the case in Juvenal.” Moreover, Seneca’s Apocolocyntosis was only published after Claudius was safely dead and deified. In addition, as Larmour notes, Lucilius targeted the enemies of P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus only after his death in 129 BCE, the year the satirist began to compose his satires (Larmour 2003: 401n.3). Furthermore, the suggestion that satire retains its efficacy only if specifically criticizing the living fails to explain the continued relevance of Lucilius’s satire well into the imperial period (and Juvenal’s popularity well after his own), with Quintilian highlighting his cult following in his own day (Lucilius quosdam ita deditis sibi adhuc habet amatores ut cum non eiusdem modo operis auctoris sed omnibus poetis praefere non dubitent, 10.1.93–4). Most importantly, the contention that Juvenalian invective too harshly attacks dead monsters to be taken seriously downplays the strong appetite for revenge literature, defined in the strongest terms, as evidenced by our sources. The acts described may be past, but revenge is ever present.


27. See Habinek, who emphasizes the playfulness of satire as a “rehearsal of élite identity”: “. . . the expansion of everybody else’s libertas was construed by élite Roman males as a reduction or loss of their own” (Habinek 2005: 181).
of the restored freedom (reddita libertatis) Pliny claims he preferred to pursue his enemy Publicius Certus when anger had returned to justice rather than “in the universal hatred” of the times (non communi temporum invidia, Ep. 9.13.4).

While Pliny pursues his target in the Senate and enshrines his vilification in the Epistles, Juvenal incorporates a similar ethic into his own poetic program, devoting his early satiric efforts to the defamation of the unpunished. This purpose is particularly evident in the peroration to Satire 4, as the speaker implicitly claims for himself the role of punisher and signals that his motivation is retribution for Domitian’s crimes against inlustres animas (claras . . . abstulit Urbi, inlustresque animas inpune et vindice nullo, 4.151–52). Juvenal’s vindice nullo, though in a different medium than Pliny’s Epistles, directly parallels the latter’s stated objective of avenging the pitiable (miseros vindicandi) and similarly reflects that author’s impulse to characterize his own speeches against Publicius Certus as the vengeance of Helvidius (Helvidi ultione, Ep. 9.13.1).

Pliny’s attack was at least partially successful. Though the emperor Nerva did not pursue a motion against Certus, the latter was, according to Pliny, prevented from taking up the consulship as a direct result of his implicit denunciation before the Senate. He furthermore lost his post as prefect of the treasury (aerarium Saturni), a position to which Pliny then advanced. Pliny reports that Certus died shortly thereafter, hounded by a vision of Pliny with sword drawn at the ready,28 as by a vengeful Fury. Pliny’s self-characterization recalls the terminology that satirists employ to describe their own purpose. Horace, Persius, and Juvenal all position themselves within the satiric lineage through reference to Lucilius as the authoritative founder of the genre. Juvenal does so by announcing his intent to follow in his footsteps,29 while similarly depicting Lucilius confronting the guilty with sword drawn.30 By specifically highlighting the vengeful nature of Lucilian satire and announcing his intent to follow in this tradition, Juvenal parallels Pliny’s persona of sword-wielding avenger.

Pliny continues the theme of denouncing delatores throughout his Epistles by an ongoing denigration of his bête noir, the informer Regulus. Regulus is portrayed as a man living in fear that he will ultimately have to pay for his crimes (Ep. 1.5) and who, Pliny gloats, did well to die, though not soon enough (Ep. 6.2). Pliny mocks the prosecutor as a holdover from a tyrannical age, though he seems to have generally ceased from accusatio after Nero.31 Yet, Pliny specifically makes the death of

29. cur tamen hoc potius libeat decurrere campo, per quem magnus equos Auruncae fletix alumnus, si vacat ac placidi rationem admittitis, edam, Juv. 1.19–21.
30. ense velut stricto quotiens Lucilius ardens infremuit, rubet auditor cui frigida mens est criminibus, tacita sudant praecordia culpa, Juv. 1.165–67. For satire as sword, cf. Hor. Serm. 2.1.39–41, in which the satirist, sword sheathed, takes a more defensive posture unless provoked. The threat, nonetheless, is clear. While Persius does not employ the same imagery of the sword, the vengeful nature of Lucilian satire is evident: seculit Lucilius Vrhem, te Lupe, te Muci, et genuinum friget in illis, 1.114–15.
Domitian the backdrop for his criticism of Regulus, who roused Pliny’s anger because of his participation in the prosecution of Rusticus in 93 and because he gave public readings of the speeches that had helped secure Rusticus’s death as proof of his rhetorical virtuosity.32

In terms strikingly similar to those of Juvenal, Pliny decries a city that produces and supports social climbers who succeed through corruption—men like Regulus. To his condemnation of Regulus as parasitic informer, Pliny includes another theme parallel with Juvenalian satire, the charge of fraudulent captator.33 Regulus’s unscrupulous legacy-hunting is to be expected, Pliny wryly notes, in a state where criminality and dishonesty is rewarded more than modesty and virtue, and where Regulus is able, through his outrages (flagitia), to gain immense wealth (Ep. 2.20.12–13). Pliny’s scathing indictment of Regulus, who shamelessly inserts himself into the wills of vulnerable individuals (quod est improbissimum genus falsi), would, if put into hexameters, be a near match to the signator falsi of Juvenal’s first satire, who has made himself rich through a few documents and a signet ring (signator falsi, qui se lautom atque beatum | exiguis tabulis et gemma fecerit uda, 1.67–68), and who is similarly permitted to flourish through a corruption of virtues (aude aliquid brevibus Gyaris et carceri dignum, | si vis esse aliquid, 1.73–74). The advancement of those men deemed socially and morally inferior is an overarching theme not only throughout Juvenal’s Satires but also in other authors of the period; Pliny’s specific complaint that Regulus accedes to power ex paupere reflects that critique.

Pliny’s attack against Regulus for his ill-gained riches (soon to have sixty million sesterces! ut ipse mihi dixerit, cum consuleret quam cito sestertium sessentiens impleturus esset, Ep. 2.20.13) is not limited to delatores but extends to the rise of influential Greek freedmen who are similarly blamed for the Senate’s servility and enforced silence. Pliny’s resentful assault against these social climbers has a clear affinity with the statements not only of Tacitus but also of Juvenal’s speakers in his early satires. The force of Juvenal’s attack against the Egyptian Crispinus,34 a powerful upstart under Domitian, is matched by Pliny’s indignatio against Pallas, Claudius’s Greek freedman,35 whom he refers to as “filth” and “scum” (caenum, sordes, Ep. 7.29.3), precisely because, like Regulus, he is viewed as unworthily advancing to the pinnacle of power.36

Pliny is nowhere more indignant than in his attack on the memory of Pallas and his outrage at the obsequiousness of the Senate in awarding financial and even praetorian honors to this Greek “slave.”37 Pliny devotes two letters to the denigration of the freedman’s memory and ironically concludes his first letter with the assertion

33. The criticism of legacy hunters is, in fact, a theme throughout the Roman satirists; e.g., Hor. Serm. 2.5; Juv. 5.98, 10.202, 12.111–14.
35. Ep. 7.29, 8.6.
37. Pliny indicates his derision by ignoring his freedman status and hyperbolically referring to him as if were still a slave.
that Pallas does not deserve his anger (*Sed quid indignor?*) before launching into a
more extensive and resentful second letter against the powerful freedman:

*quis adeo demens, ut per suum, per publicum dedecus procedere
velit in ea civitate, in qua hic esset usus florentissimae dignitatis,
ut primus in senatu laudare Pallantem posset? mitto quod
Pallanti servo praetoria ornamenta offeruntur (quippe offeruntur
a servis), mitto quod censent non exhortandum modo verum
etiam compellendum ad usum aureorum anulorum; erat enim
contra maiestatem senatus, si ferreis praetorius uteretur.*

Ep. 8.6.3–5

Who is so insane, that he desires advancement at the cost of his own and the
public’s disgrace, in this city in which this is the prerogative of the most dis-
tinguished rank—to be first in the Senate to praise Pallas? I’ll ignore the fact
that praetorian insignia were offered to a slave (seeing that they were offered
by slaves), and I’ll also leave unmentioned the fact that the Senate deter-
mind not only to encourage but even to compel him to wear a golden ring;
it was, of course, contrary to the dignity of the Senate that a praetorian should
wear the slave’s iron ring!

Pliny here employs techniques of *indignatio* similar to Juvenal’s assaults on freed-
men, including sharp rhetorical questions, *praeteritio*, and exaggeration. Juvenal’s
critique matches that of Pliny in specific detail; both seek to incite the *indignatio* of
the reader through a focus on the golden ring38 that has been granted to freedmen
of eminent social position:

*cum pars Niliacae plebis, cum verna Canopi
Crispinus Tyrias umero revocante lacernas
ventilet aestivum digitis sudantibus aurum
[nec sufferre queat maioris pondera gemmae]
difficile est saturam non scribere. nam quis iniquae
tam patiens Urbis, tam ferreus, ut teneat se...*

1.26–31

When Crispinus, part of the Nile’s rabble and a native slave of Canopus,
brandishes his golden ring in the summer heat, with fingers sweating, his
shoulder drawing back his purple cloak, and is unable to bear the weight
of a larger gem, it is difficult *not* to write satire. For who is so tolerant of
this prejudiced city, so iron-willed, that he is able to restrain himself. . . .

38. Juvenal’s reference is perhaps to the golden ring of the equestrian class, though *gemma* may
complicate this interpretation (Courtney 1980: 91). Braund (1996), following Nisbet (1988), recom-
mends deleting line 29 and allows that the golden ring signifies equestrian status. A decree of the sen-
ate in 23 CE “forbade the wearing of golden rings to all persons save those who had the equestrian
census” (Sherwin-White 1985: 453).
Juvenal, employing the rhetorical techniques of *descriptio* and vividness (*enargeia*) detailed by Quintilian, presents Crispinus before the reader, showing off his golden ring and flaunting his Tyrian purple cloak, while Pliny (a student of Quintilian) likewise invites his audience to view Pallas’s actions cinematically, as he presumes to accept or reject the Senate’s honors.

The technique of *descriptio* is subtly employed to similar effect in Juvenal’s depiction of the sacrilegious violation of a Vestal, where the poet once again summons Crispinus onto his satirical stage. Juvenal not only forces his audience to consider the violation of the virgin, a major crime against the gods, but with a single detail he underscores the outrage by depicting the Vestal in her sacred band during intercourse ("corruptor et idem | incestus, cum quo nuper vittata iacebat | sanguine adhuc vivo terram subitura sacerdos?, 4.8–10"). The poet’s vignette seeks to elicit a visceral reaction from his reader by highlighting the theme of foreigner as violator and corruptor. The effect of this technique, as in Pliny’s vivid narrative, is to inspire and enhance the *indignatio* of one’s audience—a task Pliny assumes is successful at the close of the letter (Ep. 8.6.17).

The culmination of Pliny’s complaint is that the Senate ordered a bronze plaque be set up in the most frequented part of the forum so that Pallas’s actions become a model of virtue. His resentment is shared by Tacitus, who records with his familiar mordant wit an account of the Senate’s bestowal of honors upon Pallas, in which “a freedman worth three hundred million sesterces was heaped with praise for his old-time frugality” (Ann. 12.53). In one of the rare instances in which Tacitus breaks into his narrative in an impassioned apostrophe to a potentially disbelieving audience, he proclaims that during the events he describes, the social world had become so corrupt that accolades, which the Senate once bestowed upon honorable men, were accorded to murderers. *Insima*, like those offered to Pallas and Narcissus, Tacitus wryly suggests, had become signs of a national calamity rather than emblems of honorable deeds (Ann. 14.64). Tacitus adds his indignation to the chorus of those who decry the diminished value of traditional honors, which have been cheapened by their bestowal upon men whom our authors deem unworthy.

Worse still for Pliny and Tacitus, freedmen such as Narcissus and Pallas snub the honors offered by the Senate. Upon the execution of Messalina, for example, Tacitus records that Narcissus, one of Claudius’s freedmen, is presented with quaestorian honors, “a most worthless thing to one who in his pride paraded himself above Pallas and Callistus” ("decreta Narcisso quaestoria insignia, levis-simum fastidio eius, cum super Pallantem et Callistum ageter, Ann. 11.38"). Pliny likewise denounces Pallas’s refusal of the Senate’s gift of fifteen million

39. *Inst.* 4.2.123, 8.3.61–70, 9.27 (quoting Cicero). For Juvenal’s use of *enargeia* to inspire *indignatio*, see esp. 1.63–72, with its use of the present *occurrere* to convey immediacy.


41. Ep. 8.6.11–12.

42. This concern is similarly at the heart of Umbricius’s smear against Greek freedmen who seek to dominate the households in which they serve (3.69–112).
sesterces, a fact that ultimately heightens the insult, as it places the value of money above the honors bestowed by the state.  

A necessary framework for understanding Pliny’s anger at the Senate’s decree honoring Pallas is the importance that he attaches throughout his Epistles to monuments and literature for their didactic purpose and their ability to confer immortality. In composing for publication a work in memory of a youth, Pliny highlights a direct connection between the arts, whether painting, sculpture, or literature, primarily because they all function to bestow immortality upon their author. So, for example, he praises Titinius Capito as an individual worthy of emulation for erecting a statue to the memory of Lucius Silanus, thereby bestowing immortality upon himself as well. The efficacy of this function is called into question as monuments to “slaves” mock and denigrate the overall value of such memorializing. That Romans of the best families should look to successful foreigners as models of emulation represents for Pliny and Juvenal an encroachment upon social values (inveniebantur tamen honesto loco nati, qui peterent cuperentque quod dari liberto promitti servis videbant, “People of noble birth, nevertheless, were found seeking and desiring to attain what they saw given over to a freedman and promised to slaves,” Ep. 8.6.16). So, too, the Juvenalian satirist disparages an Egyptian who “dared” to erect a statue of himself among the triumphales in the Forum of Augustus, thereby inserting himself among the monuments to the most renowned figures of Roman history. Juvenal’s suggestion that it is appropriate “not only to piss” at the Egyptian’s monument, is a vivid, if obscene, enactment of Pliny’s complaint.

Pliny’s uncle likewise finds, in his discussion of the chalk used to mark slaves for sale, a pretext for a seemingly spontaneous and indignant diatribe against Greek slaves and freedmen who have risen to power and enriched themselves, as the delatores have done, through the ruin and slaughter of Roman citizens (HN 35.201). The Elder Pliny proceeds from more distant examples (Chrysogonus under Sulla) to include Pallas and others of his own time, highlighting the grant of praetorian honors to Pallas as a particular degradation (quos et nos adeo potiri rerum vidimus, ut praetoria quoque ornamenta decerni a senatu iubente Agrippina Claudi Caesaris videremus, HN 35.201). In Juvenal, Umbricius invites us to imagine Fortune entertaining herself by elevating these men as a sarcastic joke (cum sint | quales ex humili magna ad fastigia rerum | extollit quotiens voluit Fortuna iocari, 3.38–40), and for

43. sprevit, quod solum potuit tantis opibus publice oblatis adrogantius facere, quam si accepisset. . . . imaginare Pallantem velut intercedentem senatus consulto moderantemque honores suos et sestertium centes quinquagies ut nimium recusantem, ut praetoria ornamenta tamquam minus recepisset, Ep. 8.6.9–11.
44. difficile, sed tamen, ut sculptorem, ut pictorem, qui filii vestri imaginem faceret, admoneretis, quid exprimere quid emendare deberet, ita me quoque formate regite, qui non fragilem et caducam, sed immortalem, ut vos putatis, effigiem conor efficere, Ep. 3.10.6.
45. Executed by Nero in 65.
46. neque enim magis decorum et insigne est statuam in foro populi Romani habere quam ponere, Ep. 1.17.4.
47. deinde forum iurisque peritus Apollo | atque triumphales, inter quas ausus habere | nescio quis titulos Aegyptius atque Arabarches, | cuius ad effigiem non tantum meiere fas est, Juv. 1.128–31.
Pliny, the social advancement of freedmen and slaves is attributed to arrogant Fortune (insolentis fortunae). Pliny considers the level of power attained by these men, with their feet so recently marked with the white chalk of the slave market (unde cretatis pedibus advenissent), to be a sign of Rome’s shame (approbrium), and Juvenal directly parallels Pliny’s sentiments when his satirist imagines various social classes at Rome waiting in line behind a freedman for their share of the sportula:

“da praetori, da deinde tribuno.”

sed libertinus prior est. “prior” inquit “ego adsum. cur timeam dubitemve locum defendere, quamvis natus ad Euphraten, molles quod in aure fenestrae arguerint, licet ipse negeam? sed quinque tabernae quadreringenta parant. quid confert purpura maior optandum, si Laurenti custodit in agro conductas Corvinus ovis, ego possideo plus Pallante et Licinis?” exspectent ergo tribuni, vincant divitiae, sacro ne cedat honorī nuper in hanc urbem pedibus qui venerat albis. . .

1.101–111

“Give to the praetor, then give to the tribune.” But the freedman comes first. “I was here first,” he says. “Why should I be afraid or hesitate to defend my place in line, although I was born on the shores of the Euphrates, a fact which the effete window-shaped holes in my ears gives away—even if I deny it. But my five taverns net me four hundred thousand sesterces.48 What greater hope can the purple stripe offer, if Corvinus tends leased sheep in Laurentine fields, while I possess more than Pallas and Licinus?” So, let the tribunes wait, let riches rule, so that he who had recently come into this city with legs chalked white does not have to yield to sacred offices.

The satirist here employs the standard rhetorical practice of prosopopoeia to personify a libertinus who illustrates precisely those criticisms found in the authors of the period. Juvenal’s reference to Pallas is passing but relies for its impact on a literary nexus that spans the post-Claudian period into his own.

One of the main themes of the first book of the Satires (and of a series of Roman authors) is that a dishonorable hunt for riches and advancement has led to general moral and social ruin. The argument has been advanced that Juvenal has intentionally sought to undercut his main speaker’s professed motivations to moral indignation, as “This claim does not sit easily with his evident envy of rich and successful people.”49 However, the assault against foreign social climbers is,

48. The minimum financial qualification for attaining the status of an eques.
49. Braund 1996: 120. Umbricius’s complaints in Satire 3 are similarly downplayed by the suggestion that Juvenal has sought to embody in his character mere jealousy of the socially successful Greeks whom he targets. Umbricius’s name in this schema, though not unattested (Plin. HN 10.19.4; Tac. Hist. 1.27; Just. D. 1.6.2p.r.11), is interpreted as “Mr. Shady” in a less than favorable
as we have seen, not confined to Juvenal’s Satires, and to problematize Juvenal’s presentation of such social dynamics as a particular untoward resentment is misleading, as it becomes a vibrant point of contention in other authors. To single out Juvenal’s indictment of the advancement of freedmen and ex-slaves, and to posit that the author wishes to characterize the speakers as “jealous,” does not sufficiently account for the widespread impulse to criticize these social trends. The criticism of Juvenal’s speakers against those whom they perceive to be foreign intruders into their social world is not on account of their ambition and energy, as if a virtue in the Hesiodic sense, but their duplicitous nature50 (non sumus ergo pares: melior, qui semper et omni | nocte dieque potest aliena sumere vultum | a facie, 3.104–106).

Sallust, for example, includes this quality as a fault in the character of Catiline, the paradigm of social corruption for many Romans,51 in addition to being an undesirable quality often associated with foreigners. Umbricius’s argument against the deceitful nature of the Greeks falls in line with Tacitus’s presentation of foreigners as duplicitous and untrustworthy groups52 and calls into question the suggestion that Juvenal seeks to present Umbricius as merely jealous of nouveaux riches and successful Greeks.53

As we have seen, Pallas, among other freedmen, is universally condemned by both Pliny the Elder and Younger, as well as Juvenal and Tacitus, precisely for his supposedly dishonorable acquisition of riches and ascension to power and influence. Yet, it has not been suggested that Pliny the Elder betrays his “jealousy” at the enriched freedmen, whom, in an inversion reminiscent of Juvenal, he indignantly depicts returning to their native land garbed in the highest accouterments of Roman office. Nor is it likely that his nephew intentionally seeks to undercut his epistolary persona by displaying his envy toward Regulus and Pallas. The assumption that such a high level of irony was objectively54 Juvenal’s intent can therefore be met with considerable skepticism.

50. “There is . . . ample evidence for Juvenal’s contention . . . that affluence springs from dishonesty. It is, therefore, misleading to speak of the satirist’s ‘irrational rage,’ as does Anderson (1982: 301)” (Tennant 2001: 177).

51. Cat. 5.4: animus audax, subdolus, varius, quois rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator. Cf. Umbricius’s further description of the Greeks: ingenium velox, audacia perdita, sermo | promptus et Isaeo torrentior (Juv. 3.73–74).

52. E.g., Hist. 4.37 and 4.57. “When the negative side of barbarian alterity is foregrounded, furthermore, plain-speaking is replaced by perfidy, directed as often at each other as at the Romans” (Shumate 2006: 97).


54. Braund 2004: 22: “Juvenal indicates the limitations of this character [the persona in Books One and Two] by exposing the contradictions between his view of himself as a morally pure and superior being and the more objective view of him as a narrow-minded bigot.” Cf. Winkler
Juvenal, Pliny, and Tacitus are, then, unified in their outrage at the rise of freedmen, the domination of delatores, and the resulting sycophancy of the ruling class. Tacitus is, if anything, even more unrelenting than Pliny in his retroactive pursuit of infamous delatores, and few passages cause us to question Tacitus’s intent to write sine ira et studio as those concerning the phenomenon of delatio. By emphatically placing this issue at the center of his Histories, Tacitus highlights its role in Rome’s social disintegration during the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods:

nobilitas, opes, omissi gestique honores pro crimine et ob virtutes certissimum exitium. nec minus praemia delatorum invisa quam sclera, cum aliis sacerdotia et consulatus ut spolia adepti, procurationes alii et interiorem potentiam, agerent verterent cuncta odio et terrore. corrupti in dominos servi, in patronos liberti; et quibus dearet inimicus per amicos oppressi.

_Hist. 1.2.3_

High birth, wealth, offices refused or accepted—these gave reason for charges, and virtue was the surest road to ruin. The rewards of the informers were no less hated than their crimes, when some attained priesthoods and consulships as spoils, others procuratorships and private power; they created chaos and turned the world upside down with hatred and terror. Slaves were corrupted against masters, freedmen against their patrons; those without enemies had friends to ruin them.

Tacitus traces the abuse of the _lex maiestatis_—which had previously been applied to Roman armies guilty of sedition but had come to be applicable to a wide range of “offenses”—to the reign of Augustus, though he asserts that it was fully revitalized under Tiberius, by whose will delatio became an all-consuming disaster.

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1983: 218: “The conclusions to be drawn about the persona . . . show us a narrow-minded and cynical bigot who blindly condemns what he does not like.”

55. Whitton argues that Pliny links Tacitus to his own epistolary program through parallel paths of literary vengeance—and Juvenal must be added to the mix: “Like Pliny in the _Panegyricus_, Tacitus emphatically separates the implied side of right, the authorial outrage which the right-minded reader is invited to share, from the side of wrong, the wicked delators who precipitate the cataclysmic social collapse of Flavian Rome, a collapse in which even the most canonical human antithesis of friend-enemy is overturned. Indignation blends with self-defense as the survivor stakes his moral ground: Tacitus condemns the delators, if anything more obsessively than Pliny, thereby asserting the gulf that divides him from them” (2012: 355).

56. _Ann. 1.72_. It is worth noting that both Augustus and Tiberius are said to have allowed the revival of the _lex maiestatis_ as a result of slander and satiric verses written against their person. Suetonius, too, stresses the domination of delatores under Tiberius and the rewards decreed for them (_Tib. 61.3_).

57. _Ann. 1.73_. Tiberius defended the practice of rewarding delatores, men “born for the destruction of the state” (_sic delatores, genus hominum publico exitio repertum, Ann. 4.30_), upon the successful conviction of their opponents. Cf. _Ann. 11.5_ for the license that Tiberius’s rule afforded to delatores.
As with Pliny and Juvenal, Tacitus focuses on the unscrupulous methods by which men like Caepio Crispinus, whom Tacitus credits with the dubious distinction of revitalizing and modeling informing under Tiberius, rose ex paupere to wealth by threatening the nobility.58 Tacitus’s picture of the informers turning the world upside down (agerent verterent cuncta odio et terrore) and inspiring the hatred of their contemporaries (odium apud omnis) accords well with the overall tone of Juvenal’s first book, as in his vivid image of the scavenging delatores snatching the remaining scraps (quod superest) of the carcass of an “eaten away nobility” (de nobilitate comesa).59 For Juvenal and Tacitus, the corruption of the delatores involved the broader societal compact of amicitia between patron and client. By identifying the delator specifically as an informer against his patron (magni amici), Juvenal reifies Tacitus’s account of the perversion of the amicitia relationship that has caused severe disruption in the social fabric at Rome.

The influence of delatio on the corruption of the amicitia relationship is further stressed in Juvenal’s and Tacitus’s parallel treatments of the accusations against Barea Soranus, whom the Stoic philosopher P. Egnatius Celer, a client and instructor of Soranus, condemned with his testimony in 66 CE.60 Juvenal had specifically named neither the informer nor his amicus at 1.32–36,61 but in the third satire he continues the condemnation of traitorous informers by employing Umbricius to voice an identical complaint with a specific historical exemplum.62 By using Celer’s denunciation of his own patron and student as an example of Greek treachery, Umbricius strengthens his argument against Rome as “a Greek city” (non possum ferre, Quirites, Graecam Urbem) with an allusion that takes advantage of the hostility against Celer, bitterly detailed in both the Histories and Annals of Tacitus, in which Tacitus castigates Celer as a traitor and corruptor of the friendship he pretended to teach (proditor corruptorque amicitiae cuius se magistrum ferebat).63 Both Juvenal and Tacitus use Nero’s attempt

58. Ann. 1.74. In lieu of a professional public prosecutor, it was up to individual citizens to bring charges. If successful, the plaintiff would receive remuneration from the estate of the defendant.

59. veniat . . . magni delator amici | et cito rapturus de nobilitate comesa | quod superest, quem Massa timet, quem munere palpat | Carus, ut a trepido Thymele summissa Latino, 1.32–36. Cf. Tac. Ann. 2.27 for the image of delatores devouring the state (rem publicam exedere). Baebius Massa and Mettius Carus were notorious informers under Domitian. Of Massa, Tacitus comments at Hist. 4.50 that he was ruinous to the best citizens as an informer (optimo cuique exitiosus et inter causas malorum quae max tulimus saepius redivit). It is most likely that Tacitus treated Massa in detail in the now-lost final book of the Histories. See Freudenburg 2001: 218.

60. The fact that Juvenal refers to Celer as a delator when he was technically a testis against his patron indicates the satirist’s typical interest in pointing the moral rather than considering literal truth; cf. Courtney 1980: 171–72.

61. Cf. Courtney 1980: 92: “None of the identifications proposed for this character can be right, and Juvenal probably had no specific person in mind but simply thought in general terms of those who practised delatio under Domitian.”

62. Stoicus occidit Baream delator amicum | discipulumque senex ripa nutritus in illa | ad quam Gorgonei delapsa est pinna caballi, 3.116–18. Soranus had been accused of plotting revolution during his proconsulate in Asia during the reign of Nero.

63. Hist. 4.10. The relevant passages are Hist. 4.10; Ann. 16.21, 16.23–33.
to “destroy virtue herself”\textsuperscript{64} by the ruin of Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus as an opportunity to critique corrupted \textit{amicitia}.

Juvenal’s first book is tightly bound by the theme of \textit{amicitia} corrupted, ubiquitously present in different settings and from various social perspectives. From Umbricius’s viewpoint in \textit{Satire} 3, dissembling Greeks have wormed their way into positions of power and displaced native-born Romans like himself from their service as \textit{clientes}.\textsuperscript{65} Juvenal links the authorial voice of the first satire to Umbricius’s complaint not only through verbal repetition (\textit{summoveant . . . summoveor})\textsuperscript{66} but also in the introduction to the third satire through an explicit sympathy with Umbricius’s perspective:\textsuperscript{67}

\begin{quote}
\begin{verse}
\textit{nam quis iniquae

tam patiens Urbis, tam ferreus, ut teneat se,}
\end{verse}
\begin{verse}
cum te \textit{summoveant} qui testamenta merentur

noctibus, in caelum quos evehit optima summi

nunc via processus, vetulae vesica beatae? \\
1.30–31, 37–39
\end{verse}
\end{quote}

For who is so tolerant of such an unjust city, so iron-hearted, that he is able to restrain himself, when those who earn their inheritance in the night displace you, those whom the best road to advancement—the snatch of some rich old woman—now raises to the heights?

\begin{quote}
\begin{verse}
\textit{nam cum facilem stillavit in aurem}

exiguum de natucae patriaeque veneno,

limine \textit{summoveor}, perierunt tempora longi

servitii; nusquam minor est iactura clientis. \\
3.122–25
\end{verse}
\end{quote}

In fact, when he [a Greek \textit{cliens}] has let drop into the patron’s willing ear a bit of that poison, so natural to him and his race, I am barred from the threshold, and all those long years of servitude are for naught; never has the abandonment of a client been of less concern.

Juvenal uses the image of entry permitted or denied to highlight the key theme of exclusion, whether it is the lowly \textit{cliens} shut out from dining on equal terms with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} trucidatis tot insignibus viris ad postremum Nero virtutem ipsam excindere concupivit interfecto Thrasea Paeto et Barea Sorano, Ann. 16.21.
\item \textsuperscript{65} usque adeo nihil est quod nostra infantia caelum | hausit Aventini baca nutrita Sabina?, 3.84–85.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Juvenal employs varieties of this compound three times (1.37, 3.124, 14.186). The two instances in book one are linked by the exclusion of the client in a critique of the \textit{amicitia} relationship. The \textit{te} whom the authorial voice addresses in \textit{Satire} 1 prepares for the transition to the voice of the \textit{cliens} embodied in Umbricius.
\item \textsuperscript{67} 3.1–20. The satirist’s voice (Umbricius makes clear at 3.321–22 that the authorial voice here is that of a satirist’s) foreshadows many of Umbricius’s criticisms.
\end{itemize}
his patron and forced to salivate over dishes passing him by on their way to the “king” Virro (rex), or the aristocratic senators excluded (exclusi) from the threshold of Domitian’s palace, similarly left to gape after the giant turbot as it passes through the double doors with its easy hinge (facile cardine) on its way to king Agamemnon (itur ad Atriden). In Juvenal’s first and third satires, we see the client displaced from the threshold of the powerful just as the senators are excluded. Juvenal, then, presents the decay of amicitia from the lowest to the highest echelons of society, consistently drawing upon exempla and themes that form an integral part of Tacitus’s and Pliny’s corpora in a sustained responsion designed to provoke the indignatio and odium of their contemporaries.

III

These authors of distinct genres (epistolography, history, and satire) are linked by the desire to cast themselves as avengers after the fact, and there is no reason to suppose that Pliny’s or Tacitus’s readership sympathized with these authors of retroactive denunciation in their studia but denied this same retrojection to Juvenal’s Satires. It is entirely plausible that those feeling the palpable anger described by Pliny would have laughed (albeit bitterly) along with the satirist at his mockery—however exaggerated of overthrown “monsters” and their henchmen, rather than perceiving him as an undercut speaker for voicing the same indignatio that Pliny and Tacitus suggest they themselves, along with their contemporaries, experienced.

Without a sufficient literary context in which to view Juvenal’s present in light of his recent past, recent scholarly contributions questioning the efficacy and purpose of a collection that so blatantly turns its attention to the past have puzzled over the notion of a satirist venting upon the deceased as a serious didactic enterprise. The schema of the persona theory, when superimposed upon Juvenal’s thematic statement at the conclusion to his first satire, has interpreted evasion as merely another facet of his undercut narrator. The fact that Juvenal, more than any other (extant) satirist, grants historical themes pride of place in his collection

68. aspice quam longo distinguat pectore lancem | quae fertur domino squilla, et quibus undique saepa | asparagis, qua despiciat convivia cauda, | dum venit excelsi manibus sublata ministri, 5.80–83.
70. 4.63–65. At the conclusion to Juvenal’s fourth satire, the council is dismissed and Domitian is left to devour his gigantic turbot alone.
71. Green 1972: 249: “Of course Juvenal exaggerates; so does every political cartoonist.”
72. See Uden 2015: 24: “The persistence of the theme of the informer in these early second-century writers suggests the existence of a lingering cultural trauma brought about by the experience of living and speaking during the ‘grim times’ of Domitian’s reign (temporibus diris, Juv. 4.80), a changed perception of the risks and responsibilities that attach to public speech. The critical mode established in the first Satire, which employs silence, inference, suggestion, and audience provocation in place of direct attack against contemporaries, is one . . . that is shaped by the experience of this specific cultural trauma.”
becomes in this view a belabored and circuitous mechanism designed to reveal the speaker’s cowardice:

“pone Tigillinum, taeda lucebis in illa
qua stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant,
et latum media sulcum deducit harena”

1.155–71, 170–71

“Write ‘Tigillinus,’ and you will burn as a torch where those men stand smoldering with their throats fastened, and [you] will trace a broad furrow through the arena. . . .” I will attempt what I may against those whose ashes are covered by the Flaminian and Latin roads.

It is telling that Juvenal’s claim to be prevented from writing contemporaneous satire is illustrated by the example of Nero’s praetorian prefect Tigillinus, who was executed by Vespasian thirty years before the publication of Juvenal’s first book. When the satirist writes “Tigillinus,” as he says he must not do if he is to preserve his life, he touches upon themes still vibrant and topical among his contemporaries, if we are to judge by the works of Tacitus and Pliny, whose gloomy and gruesome picture fits well with the world of Juvenal’s early satires. The satirist chooses to frame his profession in Satire 1 to write of the deceased with an example that Tacitus tells us was particularly distasteful to the Romans. Nero’s persecution of the Christians through, among other horrific tortures, immolation, was too shocking even for a people who loathed the burgeoning religion and were obsessed with the violence of the gladiatorial arena.  

Drawing from such a gruesome exemplum fits Juvenal’s method of painting stomach-churning images to elicit visceral reactions from his audience.

The very fact that Juvenal chooses Tigillinus as his potential executioner to illustrate the dangers of writing down contemporaries implies that he seeks to import his reader into the past precisely because he envisions historical exempla as ever present. One even gets the sense that Juvenal may not want to specifically write about his contemporaries and deploys his redirection at the conclusion of the first satire so that he can more easily focus his attention on the past. It is difficult to believe, for instance, that the scathing and vindictive nature of Satire 4 against the emperor Domitian was only grudgingly taken up because the satirist was unable to write against his contemporaries. In this light, Satire 1 reads like an explanation or excuse to direct his attention where his contemporaries wanted it: squarely on the Julio-Claudians and Flavians. The effect of Juvenal’s professed intent to only attack the dead is that he is free to employ historical exempla to reflect upon the values and behaviors of his era, while, at the same time, cashing in on the trend of attacking figures from the past, as did his contemporaries.

73. Tac. Ann. 15.43–44.
Undeniably, then, a certain reality obtains to the danger of attacking one’s contemporaries that argues against viewing Juvenal’s stance as an entirely artificial and literary one. Furthermore, judging authors concerned with the repercussions of criticizing contemporaries as “cowards” is not necessarily an assumption shared by Juvenal’s peers, as they similarly treat the issue of their own enforced silence and the limits of what they themselves were able to get away with under tyranny. Juvenal’s suggestion that writing against one’s contemporaries is a dangerous business that has and still may have very real consequences for the critic is enumerated by Tacitus in several instances, where an author’s works—particularly those of a satiric quality—drew the unwanted attention of the princeps or informers who sought their prosecution. Phaedrus, for example, writes that his chosen genre of fabulae was designed precisely to convey a moral through obfuscation when it was dangerous to name names, and he still fell afoul of Sejanus under Tiberius for suspected allusions to the praetorian prefect. In addition, Tacitus records that Tigellinus’s son-in-law Cossumianus Capito denounced the praetor Antistius after he composed slanderous poems against Nero in 62 CE and recited them at a dinner party. Fabricius Veiento (who would himself be an informer under Domitian and a target of Juvenal’s satire) was similarly exiled by Nero after he was prosecuted for composing libelous verses against senators and priests. Even setting these specific exempla aside, every extant satirist following Lucilius exhibits anxiety over the increased dangers of attacking powerful contemporaries. This fact is, of course, a comment and criticism upon present realities.

Juvenal’s turn to the past, therefore, might better be seen as a way of using real people, the critiques of whom are still applicable in Juvenal’s era (and later). Pliny, in fact, states that it is appropriate for Roman authors not to use the names of contemporaries when imitating the license of Old Comedy, the genre from which satire traces its lineage. It is evident that Juvenal usually employs historical individuals

74. Phaed. Pr. 3.40–47. Cf. Ann. 4.34 for Sejanus’s actions against Cremutius Cordus, who had published a collection of annals in which he praised Marcus Brutus and referred to Gaius Cassius as the “last of the Romans.”
75. Tac. Ann. 14.48–50. Veiento’s satiric verses took the form of a mock will (codicilli). Cf. Ann. 16.19 for Petronius’s real satric indictment of Nero’s debauchery in his actual will (again codicilli). The fact that Petronius was already condemned and even in the midst of opening his veins seems to have offered a rare opportunity for attacking his contemporaries.
76. Juvenal’s programmatic statement upsets the expectations of a genre that was at least theoretically designed to critique the vices of specific individual contemporaries. This was the function, after all, of Old Comedy, upon which the genre was founded. The disparity between the license afforded to Aristophanes and Juvenal is glaring, and while the Republican Lucilius appears to have been more successful as a detractor of his contemporaries, Juvenal is under no illusions that his libertas is on par with the outspoken critic.
77. nunc primum se in vetere comoedia, sed non tamquam inciperet ostendit, non illi vis, non granditas, non subtilitas, non amaritudo, non dulcedo, non lepos defuit; ornavit virtutes, insectatus est vitia; fictis nominibus decenter, veris usus est apte, Ep. 6.21.5. Pliny refers here to Verginius Rufus’s first attempt at Old Comedy. Important here is Pliny’s statement that Old Comedy is designed to attack vice, but that there is a concern to employ fictitious names when necessary, though real names can be used appropriately. This is precisely the method of the satirists, and the aims of the two genres are so similar that it is reasonable to apply Pliny’s ethic to contemporary satire. See now Ferriss-Hill 2015 for Roman satire’s substantial debt to Old Comedy.
to illustrate the themes he has chosen for his satire rather than making them the focal point. As Higet noted, virtually all Juvenal’s themes, even when explicitly citing historical events or persons, are universal.78 Juvenal here makes the contemporary coterminous with the figures he parades throughout the *Satires*, unaware that he was living at the beginning of an epoch that Gibbon would famously declare “the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous.” Juvenal had borne witness to a succession of collapsed regimes and perhaps had little confidence that history would not repeat itself; there is little reason, then, to wonder at the severe pessimism in his early satires.

Reading Juvenal’s “angry” satires through Seneca’s Stoic disavowal of vengeance and the ensuing narrative of an intentionally undercut coward does not account for the complexity of Juvenal’s historically situated critique and produces a reading in which the satirist’s insistence on placing historical themes at the center of his collection becomes a curious appendage. Rather, a consideration of the specific context in which Juvenal introduces his satirist is essential to approaching his indignant, moralizing creation, in whom the satirist personifies the spirit of vengeance so prominently highlighted by his contemporaries. This is where Juvenal’s satiric efficacy lies. His critical voice must be viewed in light of Pliny’s epistolary *persona*, who declares that only with the death of Domitian does the opportunity at last arise to make oneself known. It is furthermore difficult not to believe that Juvenal is attempting, at least in part, to make satire work within a vindictive literary trend that Trajan permitted (and some suggest promoted).79

Pliny in his *Panagyricus* illustrates many key themes that have been considered thus far: the enforced silence under Domitian, who would not tolerate criticism of his predecessors; the virtual requirement of morally righteous citizens (*piorum civium officium est*) to hate (*oderit*) the wicked emperors of the past (and one would assume this was not felt without some indignation); and the emphasis on memory as a crucial component of the vengeful works in condemning emperors who failed to serve as ideal paragons of behavior. Juvenal’s approach is to attack those famous dead whose tombs lined the Flaminian and Latin roads (precisely where Domitian’s remains rested) and, in so doing, Juvenal illustrates Pliny’s conception of how revenge literature functions: attacking evil rulers puts current and future rulers on notice that “there will be neither time nor place for the shades of ruined rulers to rest from the curses of posterity.”80


79. See Ramage 1989, who makes the leap from Trajan’s permitting of vindictive literature against previous emperors to the overt promotion of this enterprise in a variety of genres. Cf. Wilson 2003 for a critique of the revisionist historical perspective that sees Tacitus, Pliny, and Juvenal engaged in an overt and concerted propaganda: “The principal weakness of this way of reading the literature is that it completely ignores the issue of genre, by reducing all literary forms to one, that is, panegyric. . . Only by means of massive oversimplification and by ignoring the authors’ own definitions of their aims can these other genres be treated as if they are really organs of semi-official government communication” (529–30).

What is particularly noteworthy about Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, in addition to its testimony that the floodgates of criticism against former emperors had been thrown open, is the casual assumption that the only appropriate time to attack Domitian was after his death. The prerequisite for stepping out onto the public stage and seeking vengeance is clear: *occiso Domitiano.* A vivid enactment of Pliny’s praise of belated vengeance is offered by his description of the mutilation of Domitian’s statues after his fall:

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illae autem <aureae> et innumerabiles strage ac ruina publico
gaudio litaverunt. iuvabat illidere solo superbissimos vultus,
instare ferro, saevire securibus, ut si singulos ictus sanguis
dolorque sequeretur. nemo tam temperans gaudii seraque
laetitiae, quin instar ultionis videretur cemere laceros artus
truncata membra, postremo truces horrendasque imagines
obiectas excqetasque flammis. . . .
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*Pan.* 52.4.5

. . . those countless golden images [of Domitian] . . . in their overthrow and ruin were offered as sacrifice for the public’s delight. It was a joy to strike to the ground those most haughty faces, to attack them with the sword and to vent our rage with axes, as if blood and pain might follow each blow. No one so restrained himself from joy and exultation deferred that he did not seem to find a substitute for vengeance in the mangled and mutilated limbs, and finally the savage and frightful images cast into the flames and melted down.

It would be difficult to find another image that better demonstrates the impotence and futility of anger as the mutilation of statues, the destruction of which functioned as “a substitute for vengeance.” Nonetheless, Pliny is not embarrassed in his portrayal of such a powerless display of anger as the dismembering of statues that serves as a proxy for the lifeless Domitian. We may ask of Pliny and those desecrating Domitian’s statues, as K. Freudenburg does, “where were you when it mattered,” but this seems anachronistic, as the question does not appear to be how our authors framed their experience of Domitian’s death and its aftermath.

81. Cf. Freudenburg 2001: 232, who criticizes Pliny’s decision to “take action” only after Domitian’s death: “The race was on to ‘make oneself known’ (se proferendi), to invent yourself as a subject after the fall, to define yourself as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem. And the way you did this, Pliny indicates, was to mark off a clear distance between yourself and the enemy: to ‘attack the guilty’ and to ‘avenge the injured.’ His speeches directed against Publicius Certus, the praetorian senator who prosecuted Helvidius in the autumn of 93, are part of this project. And we may note with some slight discomfort that they are written not ‘in defense of’ Helvidius, but ‘to vindicate’ him (*de Helvidi ultione*). Pliny, when it really mattered, three years before when he could have ‘defended’ the man, said nothing. But now that Domitian has died, when it really matters to him, he has plenty to say. It is payback time. Time to start writing those speeches that have welled up inside him for the past fifteen years or more, the ones he found so very difficult to not write. It all sounds terribly familiar.”

There was plenty of finger-pointing at the guilty (particularly informers), who were believed to have unscrupulously enriched themselves, yet in neither of these passages does Pliny display a self-conscious concern that his peers may perceive him or those striking the inanimate statues as cowards, as it is understood that they were all bound by the same silence.

What about Tacitus? While he poignantly laments the loss of freedom under the rule of tyrants, and levels a blistering critique against the behavior of the Senate under various emperors, he does not seem to have offered a plausible alternative course of action but instead praises those who function with honor within the existing social structure under the principate. He directly addresses the issue of the culpability of the silenced under Domitian in his Agricola, where he condemns the ostentatious and ultimately futile deaths of senatorial “freedom-fighters”.

\[\text{sciant, quibus moris est inlicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abrupta sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt.}\]

Agr. 42.5.4

Let them know, those whose manner it is to marvel at illegality, that it is possible even under wicked emperors for great men to exist, and that compliance and respect for order, if a sense of purpose and energy are not lacking, excel to the height of praise, where most through perilous courses (though of no use to the State) have gained their fame by an ostentatious death.

Tacitus’s exhortation comes in the context of his defense of Agricola’s military performance in Britannia and his decision to turn down the governorship of another province due to his dangerous popularity, which had earned the despot’s envy. Tacitus does not conceal the fact that his father-in-law’s career had been advanced by Domitian, and he is not shy in admitting that his own career had also been furthered by the emperor. A certain amount of silence has its rewards.

83. See esp. Agr. 3.2 for the loss of freedom for fifteen years. Tacitus commiserates with the survivors of Domitian, but his tone is not one of condemnation for their cowardice but relief at the tyrant’s death.

84. See Tac. Hist. 1.1. Tacitus, while strongly criticizing the principate, seems to admit its necessity when he asserts that its introduction served the interests of peace.

85. “Tacitus admits that the Stoic martyrs won praise but adds that they achieved no good by it. The reference is to Thrasea Paetus and, above all, to Helvidius Priscus” (Ogilvie and Richmond 1967: 297).

86. See Ogilvie and Richmond, who similarly argue that Tacitus’s sentiments here “should not be seen as an embarrassed defence of Agricola’s and Tacitus’s personal collaboration with the régime of Domitian. It is in line with all Tacitus’s political thinking about the futility of ostentatious independence under the principate. The contrast with the immediately following account of Agricola’s death must be deliberate and reflect Tacitus’s view that Agricola no less than more controversial heroes of the time displayed virtus” (1967: 296–97).

87. As had Nerva’s and Trajan’s. See Tac. Hist. 1.1.
Juvenal’s proclamation that he will use the famous dead to illustrate his satires exploits the anxiety, evident particularly in works of the imperial period, over the issue of the freedom to criticize contemporaries. In this way, Juvenal transforms satire into an opportunity to concentrate on the deceased in competition with a variety of genres (e.g., historical works, Pliny’s *Epistles* and *Panegyricus*) and finds his own outlet in the revenge-taking industry. By reading Juvenal’s early satiric effort against this backdrop, it becomes evident that he seeks to historicize satire by marshaling more than any other satirist historical *exempla* to serve his moralizing didactic, rather than presenting his main narrator as coward. Juvenal’s *Satires* demand to be read in concert with the monumental literature being constructed and debated around them. To confine Juvenal to his text alone and to find there internal “tensions” to explain an undercut narrator excludes the historical context in which Juvenal chose to immerse us.

University of Washington
mritte@uw.edu

BIBLIOGRAPHY