

Put Your Relatives in their Place: Juvenal 7.27-29

In “Notes on the Text and Interpretation of Juvenal” (1988),¹ one of the arguments R. G. M. Nisbet adduces for deletion of 6.588 is that “the interpolator . . . perhaps . . . did not like a relative clause to begin a sentence”. In passing, he mentions his previous repunctuation of 14.7 and half-way endorses the deletion of 14.119 endorsed by Duff and others, both of which also result in sentences that begin with a relative clause. I believe the same preference led some scribe to scramble the order of 7.27-29:²

frange miser calamum uigilataque proelia dele,
qui facis in parua sublimia carmina cella
ut dignus uenias hederis et imagine macra.

The first problem with these lines is syntactical ambiguity. The purpose clause (29) must be subordinate to the relative clause (28), but can just as easily be taken as dependent on the main clause (27) by an unwary reader. It is only half-way through 29 that the reader realizes that breaking one’s tools and destroying one’s work is no way to achieve glory and therefore cannot be what Juvenal meant. Such sloppy writing seems unworthy of a poet of his quality. If we transpose 27 after 28-29, the sentence begins with the relative clause, in fact puts both subordinate clauses before the main clause, but the syntax is clarified and the rhetoric much improved. Here are the same lines reordered, with the sequel:

qui facis in parua sublimia carmina cella	28
ut dignus uenias hederis et imagine macra,	29
frange miser calamum uigilataque proelia dele.	27
spes nulla ulterior; didicit iam diues auarus	30
tantum admirari, tantum laudare disertos,	
ut pueri Iunonis auem.	

I find this much clearer, and like the way the vigorous imperatives *frange* and *dele* now lead right into *spes nulla ulterior* and the rest.

¹ From *Vir Bonus Discendi Peritus: Studies in Celebration of Otto Skutsch’s Eightieth Birthday*, ed. N. Horsfall (*BICS*, supplement 51, 1988), 86-110, at 98, reprinted in R. G. M. Nisbet, *Collected Papers on Latin Literature*, ed. S. J. Harrison (Oxford, 1995), 227-60, at 245.

² My text is from Clausen. The only variant is *calamum/calamos* in 27, which does not affect my argument either way.