

Not Often, but I'm Hedging My Bets Here: Juvenal 9.74

In an apostrophe to his ironically-named client Virro, the bisexual gigolo Naevolus, “Juvenal’s finest creation”,¹ begins the long account of his most valuable service – or perhaps we should say servicing (9.70-78):²

uerum, ut dissimules, ut mittas cetera, quanto 70
 metiris pretio quod, ni tibi deditus essem
 deuotusque cliens, uxor tua uirgo maneret?
 scis certe quibus ista modis, quam saepe rogaris
 et quae pollicitus. fugientem saepe puellam
 amplexu rapui; tabulas quoque ruperat et iam 75
 signabat; tota uix hoc ego nocte redemi
 te plorante foris. testis mihi lectulus et tu,
 ad quem peruenit lecti sonus et dominae uox.

74 saepe Ω : nempe Housman | 76 signabat Ω : signabant Eden : migrabat Hight

Housman provides no argument for his conjecture in 74, but Courtney notes its advantages: “75-78 certainly look as if they refer to one occasion . . ., and the corruption to *saepe* could easily be due to 73; but in any case *sēpe* and *nēpe* are liable to confusion”.³ On the other hand, *nempe* doesn’t add much, and I have an alternative proposal even closer to the paradosis: instead of *saepe* (‘often’), how about . . . *saepe*? I mean, of course, the ablative of *saepes*, ‘fence, hedge, enclosure’, which tends to cause trouble for scribes.⁴ Now Virro’s wife is ‘fleeing from her pen’, like a runaway animal – a suitably degrading metaphor here, since her husband is having her bred like a beast with his prize stud Naevolus. If a preposition seems advisable, one can be provided at small cost:

¹ So John Henderson, *Figuring Out Roman Nobility: Juvenal’s Eighth Satire* (Exeter, 1997), 96, who spells out his reasons in amusing detail.

² My text is the modern vulgate with the usual emendations confined to the apparatus to avoid prejudicing the reader – and because one of them is wrong. There is a clear translation in Braund’s Loeb, which I forbear to quote in case any of my middle- and high-school students read this site.

³ Please note that the cedilla under the first *ē* in *sēpe* should be turned the other way, like a Greek smooth breathing rather than a rough one. I cannot find a font that includes the correct symbol.

⁴ The form is found twice in Propertius: 2.23.10, *captus et immundae saepe latere casae*, ‘and, when you are caught, skulk in the pen of a foul hovel’, where scribes who thought *saepe* was the adverb corrupted the context to *immunda . . . casa*, and 4.1.14, *centum illi in prati saepe senatus erat*, ‘a hundred of them in the fenced corner of a field were the senate’, where scribes again altered to *prato*. Heinsius made both corrections, and S. J. Heyworth (whose translations I quote) has the details: *Cynthia: A Companion to the Text of Propertius* (Oxford, 2007), *ad locc.* I wonder if there are more hedges skulking in corrupt passages of other authors disguised as adverbs.

fugientem <e> saepe puellam

Then again, *saepe* in the same *sedes* in adjacent lines with entirely different meanings is a bit awkward with or without a preposition, but there is yet a third possibility:

fugientem saepta puellam

There is little difference in meaning between singular *saepes* and plural *saepta*, and the latter would have been very easily corrupted to *saepe*. Juvenal uses *fugere* with a direct object in 2.64-65 (*Fugerunt trepidi uera ac manifesta canentem / Stoicidae*) and 11.52 (*patriam fugientibus*),⁵ with *e(x)* plus the ablative in 11.55 (*fugientem ex Vrbe*).

Like a donkey between three bundles of hay, I am unable to decide between *saepe* (the noun, not the adverb), *e saepe*, and *saepta*, though I lean towards the last at the moment. Perhaps my readers can help me decide which to put in my web-text of Juvenal (2nd edition) and which to leave in my web-apparatus or even omit entirely.

⁵ Also 3.59 (*quos praecipue fugiam*) and 3.81 (*horum ego non fugiam conchylia?*), where it means ‘avoid’ – not quite the same thing.