

## Excluded Husband and Two-Legged Ass

### Two Problems in Juvenal 9

Two subtleties in this elegantly repugnant poem seem to have been missed. Both involve metaphors, and in each case I begin from the note in Courtney's commentary.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1

The heart of Juvenal 9 — if so cruel a satire can be said to have a heart — is the tirade that the aggrieved Naevolus addresses to his absent patron (27-90).<sup>2</sup> Unwilling to face him, the disappointed client pours out his complaints to a not-very-sympathetic acquaintance, the speaker of the poem. The general accusation is that the patron is a *mollis auarus* (38) who has insufficiently compensated Naevolus for his sexual services, but the most shocking charge is that Naevolus saved his patron's marriage by fathering the latter's children for him (70-78):<sup>3</sup>

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 nempe puellam  
 amplexu rapui; tabulas quoque ruperat et iam       75  
 migrabat; tota uix hoc ego nocte redemi,  
 te plorante foris. testis mihi lectulus et tu  
 ad quem peruenit lecti sonus et dominae uox.

74 nempe *Housman* : saepe *libri* || 76 migrabat *Highet* : signabat *libri* : signabant *Eden*

<sup>1</sup> E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London, 1980). Text and apparatus are quoted from J. Willis, *Iuuenalis Saturae* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1997), omitting the less pertinent variants. 'Braund' refers to S. H. Braund, *Beyond Anger: A Study of Juvenal's Third Book of Satires* (Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> The patron is often identified with the Virro mentioned in line 35. Courtney (424) states that this is "quite unwarranted". Although he is right that we do not know they are the same man, my argument is hardly affected. If Virro is not Naevolus' particular patron, he is someone very much like him, and it seems fair to adduce evidence from the lines on him (33-37) while discussing the patron, as I do below.

<sup>3</sup> Naevolus' speech continues to line 90, but the remainder, in which he ironically congratulates his patron for having come up with 'proofs of manliness' (*argumenta uiri*, 85) in the face of nasty rumors, and even offers to produce a third child to fulfill the requirements of the *ius trium liberorum*, is not directly relevant to my point.

In his note on *te plorante foris* (77), Courtney briefly suggests that the patron “is in the situation of a lover chanting a παρακλαυσίθυρον”.<sup>4</sup> In a review, F. R. D. Goodyear objects at rather greater length:<sup>5</sup>

“The patron does not resemble an *exclusus amator*. The lover wails because he is not let in, this man because his wife is about to leave him or because he is sexually inadequate or both.”

It is true that the situations are not entirely parallel, but the similarities and differences are significant and more needs to be said.

On the one hand, Courtney is right to see some parallelism between the two. In each case, there is an unhappy man listening outside a door while another man and a woman are having sex inside. There is also a strong elegiac tinge to Naevolus’ language in 77-78. Lines 77-78 include or clearly allude to no fewer than five words listed in Pichon’s *Index verborum amatoriorum*.<sup>6</sup> Three of his definitions are particularly worth quoting (the other two words are *plorare* and *uox*). (1) “**Lectus** a nostris poetis adeo frequenter nominatur ut omnia loca laudare infiniti sit operis”. It is named twice in two lines by Naevolus, and the affectionate diminutive *lectulus* adds to the elegiac tone. (2) “**Fores** saepe nominant poetae, cum eas claudi doleant, aut ante eas iaceant, aut preces effundant, aut coronas ponant.” Of course, *foris* is not the noun ‘door’ but the adverb ‘outside’. However, the two words are etymologically related, and both *foris* and *peruenit* in the next line clearly imply the presence of a closed and (presumably) locked door. Our passage therefore comes under the second of Pichon’s categories, perhaps also the first and third. (3) “**Domina** saepe suam uim retinet imperiumque feminae in uirum significat: . . . Saepius

<sup>4</sup> Important treatments of the genre are F. O. Copley, *‘Exclusus Amator’: A Study in Latin Love Poetry*, American Philological Association, Philological Monographs XVII (Madison, Wisconsin, 1956); E. Burck, ‘Das Paraclausithyron’, in *Vom Menschenbild in der Römischen Literatur* (Heidelberg, 1966), 244-256; F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1972) and ‘Two Unidentified κῶμοι of Propertius: I 3 and II 29’, *Emerita* 45 (1977) 325-53. Although Cairns argues that what others call the παρακλαυσίθυρον is more properly a κῶμος, as in his second title, I will stick with the traditional term, since that is what Courtney uses and no procession to the beloved’s house occurs in this case.

<sup>5</sup> *PACA* 16 (1982) 51-60, at 57, reprinted in *Papers in Latin Literature*, ed. K. M. Coleman, J. Diggle, J. B. Hall, and H. D. Jocelyn (London, 1992), 61-69, at 66.

<sup>6</sup> R. Pichon, *Index verborum amatoriorum* (Hildesheim, 1991), reprinted from *De sermone amatorio apud Latinos elegiarum scriptores* (Paris, 1902), Pars altera, pp. 75-303.

uero *domina* nihil est nisi trita solitaque adpellatio qua amantes puellas suas salutant.” Courtney assigns our passage to Pichon’s first category: “*Domina* is the lady of the house, the usual form of address like δέσποινα”. However, the second seems equally appropriate, since the patron’s wife has some resemblance to an elegiac beloved: we might say that she is Naevolus’ ‘mistress’ in more ways than one. Of course, he is not in love with her, but he is making love to her, or at least having sexual relations with her, and that should suffice.

On the other hand, Goodyear is right to object that the two situations differ in important ways. The patron is not simply wishing that he were inside with his wife instead of Naevolus: that would defeat the whole purpose of the exercise. Nor is he unable to enter the room: as *pater familias* (if not actually *pater huius familias*) he can certainly enter any room in his house whenever he wishes.<sup>7</sup> However, Goodyear exaggerates the differences between the two situations. The elegiac *exclusus amator* would also be likely to suffer feelings of inadequacy, since there must be some reason for his beloved to prefer the other man.<sup>8</sup>

It seems to me that a convincing solution to this problem will combine some of Courtney and some of Goodyear, and that Juvenal here provides not a straightforward imitation of the παρακλαυσίθυρον but a twisted parody of it.<sup>9</sup> If the elegiac lover whim-

<sup>7</sup> There is insufficient information to determine whether he, or she, or both, or neither, would be sleeping in this particular bedroom on any other night. (Juvenal’s remark in 2.60, *diues erit magno quae dormit tertia lecto*, can surely be dismissed as rhetorical exaggeration.) The evidence for separate and shared bedrooms is collected in A. M. Riggsby, “‘Public’ and ‘Private’ in Roman Culture: the Case of the *Cubiculum*”, *JRA* 10 (1997) 36-56, esp. 37, 42, and 46 n 51. I wish to thank Prof. Riggsby, Christopher Nappa, and the other members of the Internet Classics list for helping to answer this question. J. L. P. Butrica, Francis Cairns, Malcolm Heath, and the two anonymous referees provided numerous useful suggestions throughout, not all of which I have been wise enough to follow.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, the shortcoming in those cases is usually in the pocketbook rather than the sexual performance.

<sup>9</sup> Monteverdi provides a different sort of parody of the παρακλαυσίθυρον in Act I, Scene I of *L’Incoronazione di Poppea*, where the future emperor Otho (Ottone) returns from a trip to find soldiers guarding his house while Nero is inside with Poppea, still Otho’s wife. He then sings an aria which is surely to be seen as the ‘lament of the excluded husband’. I know of no ancient parallel for this particular twist. Of course, the excluded husband is not entirely unattested in Roman literature, but (e.g.) Plautus, *Amphitruo* 1015-52 (unless something appropriate has been lost in the large lacuna at 1034-35) and Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 9.20 include no singing or pleading, rather shouts, threats, and pounding on the door. Braund (171-72) argues that Naevolus himself, now abandoned by his patron, has some of the

pers outside his mistress' door because he wishes he were inside with the woman in place of the other man, the patron of Juvenal 9 surely wishes that he were inside with the other man, in place of his wife: he is not so much *exclusus amator* as *exclusus ἐρώμενος*. His motivation for listening is no doubt a mixture of two different kinds of prurient envy: as in Goodyear's interpretation, he envies Naevolus for being man enough to do what he cannot, but he also envies his wife for doing — or rather for having done to her — what he would very much like to be having done to himself.

My interpretation may seem to disregard the erotic imagery earlier in the satire, where Naevolus is the beloved and the patron (or someone very like him) his lover, drooling over him (*spumanti . . . labello*, 35) and sending him love letters (*blandae . . . densaeque tabellae*, 36). Perhaps we should say that the patron is the ἐραστής in so far as he pursues Naevolus, the ἐρώμενος in so far as he is penetrated by him, and that his violation of the distinction between active pursuer and passive pursued is a great part of his offense. The idea that a freeborn Roman man should be willing — even pathetically eager, in this case — to allow himself to be penetrated by another man was abhorrent to Roman ideals, a fact which has much to do with the point of the satire. That the husband should play the role of *exclusus amator* would be shameful enough, even if he were playing a more manly and 'active' role: as *exclusus ἐρώμενος*, he is utterly contemptible. Another (minor) point in favor of my interpretation is that the patron's wife is a total non-entity, as unimportant to her husband as to Naevolus, except for producing heirs and avoiding the disgrace of a divorce:<sup>10</sup> just so is the elegiac husband or rival a mere featureless obstacle.

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characteristics of the *exclusus amator*. This is interesting and true, but not what I am arguing for in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> I do not mean to imply that divorce in itself was disgraceful in Juvenal's Rome, rather that the reasons for this particular divorce would have been likely to come out and make the patron an object of public loathing and contempt.

## 2

At the end of his tirade, Naevolus responds to a mock-sympathetic question from the speaker with a single line (90-92):

iusta doloris,  
Naeuole, causa tui. contra tamen ille quid affert?  
'neglegit atque alium bipedem sibi quaerit asellum.'

Courtney notes, with numerous parallels, that “[t]he ass was notorious for its lust”. No doubt it was. However, lust is the last thing Naevolus feels for his patron — or his patron’s wife. He is cold and calculating throughout, and only enthusiastic about his future property (140-45) and his consuming hatred and contempt for the patron (*passim*). As we have seen, it is the latter who drools over him and sends him love letters, and whom he calls a *passer* (54), a more typical ancient symbol of lust.

In this passage, the ass seems to symbolize two things. The first is Naevolus’ prodigious sexual endowment, *mensura incognita nerui* (34). That is not at all the same thing as lust, though the two tend to overlap in popular fancy, as in many of Courtney’s parallels.<sup>11</sup> So far, my argument may seem a mere quibble. However, the second way in which Naevolus resembles an ass is equally important: that is his reluctant endurance of near-intolerable burdens.<sup>12</sup> This particularly suits the satire’s theme of whining self-pity, turning to surly resignation in the end, as with Horace’s metaphorical ass (*demitto*

<sup>11</sup> F. Bömer gives references for the ‘sprichwörtliche Geilheit’ of the ass in his note on Ovid, *Fasti* 1.391. However, some of his examples refer to the size of the ass’s sexual equipment rather than any particular eagerness to make use of it. A good example is *S.H.A. Comm.* 10.9, on the emperor Commodus’ favorite: *habuit et hominem pene prominentem ultra modum animalium, quem onon appellabat, sibi carissimum*. Nothing here implies lust on the part of the favorite, though Commodus’ is clear enough.

<sup>12</sup> This hardly needs demonstrating, and three well-known parallels should suffice: the simile comparing Aias to an ass in *Iliad* 11.558-62, Ovid, *Amores* 2.7.15-16 (*aspice, ut auritus miserandae sortis asellus / adsiduo domitus uerbere lentus eat*), and — a little later than Juvenal — Apuleius, *Asinus Aureus, passim*. One of the referees adduces Horace, *Epistle* 1.13 as a closer, though more speculative, parallel, since it seems to include a pun on the cognomen or agnomen *Asina* in a context of bodily strength. In his first published paper, R. G. M. Nisbet argued that Horace’s Vinnius, son of a Vinnius *Asina* (*Asinaeque paternum / cognomen* 8-9), is the Augustan centurion known to the Elder Pliny (*N.H.* 7.82) as Vinnius Valens. His feats of strength, which included holding back loaded wagons with one hand and playing tug-of-war with multiple beasts of burden, would well suit Horace’s ironic emphasis on the supposed weight of his poems (e.g. *meae grauis . . . sarcina chartae* 6, *uiribus uteris* 10). Cf. R. G. M. Nisbet, “Notes on Horace, *Epistles* 1”, *CQ* ns 9 (1959) 73-76 = *Collected Papers on Latin Literature*, ed. S. J. Harrison (Oxford, 1995), 1-5.

*auriculas, ut iniquae mentis asellus*, *S.* 1.9.20).<sup>13</sup> There may also be some implication that a two-legged ass would be even more overburdened than the four-legged kind.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is tempting to contend that my argument particularly suits the “bitter diminutive” *asellum*, “contemptuous, of himself as much as his patron” (Braund, 152 and 134, respectively). However, it is not clear that Juvenal’s readers would have heard *asellus* as a diminutive, since *asinus*, “in the classical age, from Lucretius to Juvenal, . . . was excluded from elevated and even from refined poetry”. So A. E. Housman, “The Latin for Ass”, *CQ* 24 (1930) 11-13 = *Classical Papers* (Cambridge, 1972), 3.1163-65. I do not mean to imply that Juvenal could not have used *asinus* — Catullus (97.10) and Persius (1.21) both use the word to good effect in crude passages, and Juvenal’s satires hardly qualify as refined poetry — rather that *asellus*, being less crude and not in effect diminutive, has no advantage over *asinus* in contemptuousness.

<sup>14</sup> Although a two-legged ass might be seen as in some sense one-half of a standard four-legged ass and a mule is a ‘half-ass’ (ἡμίονος) in Greek, I doubt that Juvenal intends any reference to mules: Naevolus is certainly not sterile.