

## A NOTE ON JUVENAL 6. 627-61

Editors print these lines in one paragraph; W. S. Anderson<sup>1</sup> points out that an epilogue begins at 643, in which the tragic dimension of contemporary Roman society is brought into focus and the distance is established between the woman of the Golden Age, with whom *Satire* 6 began, and the modern Lesbians (cf. vss. 7-8). It is better still to begin the epilogue at 634, as Anderson himself appears to suggest in a later article.<sup>2</sup>

Lines 610-33 have dealt with the poisoning of husbands by their wives, with Caesonia (wife of Caligula) and Agrippina (wife of Claudius) as *exempla*. These imperial ladies are themselves so much part of the grand drama of history, and the consequences of the crimes so great (cf. 618-20, 624-26), that they belong more with the women of Greek tragedy than with contemporary, real, Roman women.<sup>3</sup> Mention of Agrippina, murderer of her husband and accomplice in the murder of Britannicus, leads to mention of stepmothers as poisoners of the husband's children: Agrippina's crime has already been mentioned earlier, at 133-35.<sup>4</sup> Lines 627-33 go closely with the previous section rather than with 634 ff., as they are usually printed.

At 634 Juvenal interposes four and a half lines of personal apologia: the crimes of Caesonia and Agrippina are worthy of tragedy and have no place, a critic will say, in satire, whose stage is the realities of contemporary life. But, replies Juvenal, these things have happened in Italy, and a woman of the noble class, closer to the mass of Romans than the emperor's wife, has openly poisoned her stepchildren.<sup>5</sup> The crime is of epic proportions

(hence the Vergilian overtones of 637), and its perpetrator likens herself to a mythological character, Niobe (642; cf. 172-77), here herself playing the part which the god had played in the earlier passage.

Juvenal had expressly turned his back upon epic and tragedy in *Satire* 1 (1-13, 51-80). The characters in those genres were there too far removed from the squalid reality of contemporary society;<sup>6</sup> only the genre of satire could be adequate to express the *indignatio* of the poet (l. 79) as he surveys the passions and activities of mankind (l. 85-86). By the end of *Satire* 6 even this genre fails—the distance between myth and reality has been bridged. In the drama of contemporary life, the Roman husband is an Agamemnon and his wife a Clytemnestra, a Danaid, an Eriphyle (6. 655-61). The satirist, then, has the same material as the tragedian, and the distinction between them drawn in *Satire* 1 no longer applies.

The personal declaration of 634-38 is therefore especially significant. It is a defense for the use of material hitherto not considered suitable to *satura*,<sup>7</sup> and it is a conscious revision of the declarations made in *Satire* 1.<sup>8</sup> *Satire* 6 had been epic in its proportions and even in its subject matter, as the epic *montana uxor* and the *Saturnia regna* of the opening indicate. By the end of the poem Juvenal has subsumed satire into tragedy as well as epic, and the epilogue, beginning at 634, is both a personal defense and a drawing together of the threads of the enormous tapestry of the whole *Satire*.

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1. W. S. Anderson, "Juvenal 6, A Problem in Structure," *CP*, LI (1956), 73-94.

2. See *CP*, LVII (1962), 152: "The conclusion begins at 634."

3. The aphrodisiac that destroys the husband brings Deianeira to mind: the author of the *Trachiniae* is appropriately referred to at 636.

4. The duplication drives G. Highet to the desperate but unnecessary step of transposing 133-35 to follow 626 (*Juvenal the Satirist* [Oxford, 1954], p. 267). The meaning of *paelice* in 627 is difficult: the scholiast suggests "first wife" (*de priore uxore*), but the only passage in which this meaning can be observed is Sen. *Herc. Oet.* 1499, where Juno is called a *paelice* in relation to Alcmena. In the other twenty-five cases

where it is used in Senecan tragedy, it always has the common sense of "mistress" or "rival." Agrippina herself is the *paelice* (i.e., second wife) in *Octav.* 125 (cf. Cornelia as fifth wife of Pompey in Lucan 3. 23 and 8. 104). It is not impossible that the scholiast's interpretation is the correct one.

5. Cf. Martial 2. 34, 6, 4. 43, 5, 6, 75, 4. Also Stat. *Silv.* 5. 2. 61-97.

6. The occasion of the outburst in 1. 52-54 is the breakdown of Roman marriage, as with the end of *Satire* 6.

7. Line 635: "finem egressi legemque priorum."

8. Further links with the first *Satire* in the closing lines of the sixth are: the poisoner-wife, 1. 69-72; the metaphor of the cliff, 1. 149 and 6. 649-50; *ira*, 1. 85 and 6. 647.