

A VIRGILIAN ECHO IN JUVENAL'S ELEVENTH SATIRE

In Satire 11 Juvenal rejects the excessive luxury of banquets and invites Persicus to a frugal dinner at his home. He describes the modest courses of food to be served (11.64–76); among these there will be fresh eggs:

*grandia praeterea tortoque calentia feno
ova adsunt ipsis cum matribus . . .* (11.70–71)

The phrase *grandia ova ipsis cum matribus* represents a characteristically Juvenalian image with its overtones of both the ludicrous and the grotesque through its implied anthropomorphism: the chicks in their shells, perceived as living yet still unborn beings, call to the reader's mind the unborn human children threatened with abortion at Sat. 6.596 (*homines in ventre necandos*; cf. 6.599: *pueris salientibus* [sc. *in utero*]). As he frequently does elsewhere, Juvenal in Satire 11 employs a vivid and highly imaginative short vignette to make his point. Inasmuch as it occurs in the context of a frugal dinner set against the *Gegenbild* of luxurious banquets, we may well wonder if Juvenal's inspiration for these two lines might not be found in epic poetry, particularly since banquets and food are among the basic themes of both epic and satire. But first a brief examination of Juvenal's choice of words.

Considered in and by itself, Juvenal's use of the term *mater* in an animal context is not surprising¹). The expression also occurs elsewhere, chiefly in order to describe the parent of a *vitulus* or *agnus*²). Most frequently, we find the term in the context of grand literature, especially heroic epic; particularly in epic similes the aforementioned anthropomorphism becomes prominent. Thus, at Aen. 9.59–64, Turnus is compared to a wolf threatening the lambs in their sheepfold; they, however, are *tuti sub matribus* (9.61). In Statius' *Thebaid*, the vigor of Hippomedon, warding off his attackers, is compared to that of a mother cow defending her young

1) Cf., e.g., Lucret., *Rer. Nat.* 2.349–50; Virgil, Aen. 8.632; Col., *Res Rust.* 7.9.1; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 11.49.

2) At least as early as Varro, *Res Rust.* 2.2.15, and as late as Stat., *Theb.* 7.397.

from the onslaught of a wolf (Theb. 9.115–19). In the same book of the *Thebaid*, young Parthenopaeus is likened to a lion whose mother used to feed the cub *cruentos cibos* (9.739–43); this simile is followed by a catalogue of the heroes Parthenopaeus slays in battle. The mother sheep or cow lends herself particularly well to such an anthropomorphic image in scenes describing her desperate search for lost or slaughtered offspring; the most famous example for this is the extended episode at Lucret., *Rer. Nat.* 2.352–70³).

Even the juxtaposition of *mater* and *ovum* is not exclusive to Juvenal (although quite Juvenalian in spirit and mocking tone); we find another example for this in Ovid (*Fast.* 4.696). In a context foreshadowing Juvenal's eleventh satire, Martial speaks of *ova matrum* at 7.31.1⁴). Juvenal's "eggs with their mothers" is, however, the more outrageous collocation in that the satirist employs epic diction (*grandia*) for the purpose of deflation as well as of undercutting his own circumstances by sarcasm⁵); this, of course, is one of his chief satiric strategies. Stylistic grandiosity in a context calling for the Low Style (such as a humble dinner) serves a dual purpose: it makes the satirist's description of his subject more vivid to his listener or reader while simultaneously satirizing the standards of traditional literary decorum. Thus it is not surprising that his phrase *grandia ova ipsis cum matribus* should not only have been inspired by Martial (through *ova matrum*), but ultimately hark back even to the greatest epic in Roman literature, as a direct verbal parallel will make evident.

Toward the end of Book I of the *Aeneid*, Virgil gives a detailed account of the lavish banquet with which Dido entertains Aeneas and his men. Preparatory to the description of this dinner, Virgil emphasizes the queen's humanity and *misericordia* by having her provide food and drink to Aeneas' companions who have stayed behind on their ships:

3) This Lucretian passage is imitated by Ov., *Fast.* 4.459–60, who compares Ceres searching for her daughter with a cow looking for her lost calf.

4) Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal's Bookcase*, *AJP* 72 (1951) 371 and note 7, refers to several passages from Martial as the basis for Satire 11. E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London 1980) 490–91, discusses Mart. 5.78 and 10.48 among sources for Satire 11. Robert E. Colton, *Dinner Invitation: Juvenal 11.56–208*, *CB* 41 (1965) 41, adduces Mart. 7.31.1 as the source for Juvenal's choice of *matres* for *gallinae*. Cf. also Mart. 3.58. 37–40.

5) Kenneth Weisinger, *Irony and Moderation in Juvenal XI*, *Calif. Stud. Class. Ant.* 5 (1972) 234, speaks of Juvenal's mock-epic "catalogue of dishes." He translates *grandia ova* as "lordly eggs," following G. G. Ramsey, *Juvenal and Persius*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., and London 1940) 227.

*nec minus interea sociis ad litora mittit
viginti tauros, magnorum horrentia centum
terga suum, pinguis centum cum matribus agnos,
munera laetitiamque dii*⁶). (1.633–36)

Close comparison of Virgil's phrase *pinguis centum cum matribus agnos* in line 635 with Juvenal's *grandia ova ipsis cum matribus* shows that the satirist in all likelihood had this Virgilian passage (and the banquet following it) in mind when he composed the section of Satire 11 in which he describes his own *cena*. The fact that Juvenal does not openly acknowledge or otherwise indicate Virgil as his source does not invalidate this view; after all, Juvenal often borrows without admission of this fact – indeed, poetic indirection is an integral feature of his frequently allusive style⁷). It should therefore not come as a surprise that Juvenal refrains from any explicit reference to Dido's feast. But the verbal congruity of the expressions referring to the mother animals (*cum matribus*) is a clear indication that Virgil even more than Martial is his ultimate inspiration here. Virgil's *pinguis* describing the lambs finds its counterpart in Juvenal's *grandia* for the eggs – a highly sardonic application of a Grand-Style adjective to a trivial subject. Moreover, *grandia* has another correspondence in Virgil's *magnorum* of line 634. While Virgil's numerals sensibly find no parallel in Juvenal, the satirist, not to be outdone by the epicist, however reinforces the phrase he adopts by placing an intensifying pronoun (*ipsis*) before it. And while he is too poor to match *viginti tauros* or *centum terga suum*, he will nevertheless serve a *pinguissimus haedulus* (11.65–66). In typically Juvenalian fashion, the superlative of the adjective – which is, after all, the same word which Virgil had employed to describe his lambs – is undercut by the diminutive in the noun following it.

Final confirmation that Juvenal in all likelihood had Virgil's lines in mind for the passage under consideration lies in the fact that, directly after mentioning the eggs, the satirist turns to the wine he will serve (*servatae / parte anni quales fuerant in vitibus*

6) On the variant readings at line 636 (*dii-dei-diei*) see R. G. Austin, P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus (Oxford 1971) ad loc.

7) On this aspect of Juvenal's satiric technique, especially as exemplified in his seventh satire, see the important work by David S. Wiesen, Juvenal and the Intellectuals, *Hermes* 101 (1973) 464–83; cf. also David Sweet, Juvenal's Satire 4: Poetic Uses of Indirection, *Calif. Stud. Class. Ant.* 12 (1979) 283–303. I make a similar point in my paper, Juvenal's Attitude toward Ciceronian Poetry and Rhetoric, *RhM* 131 (1988) 84–97.

uvae, 11.71–72), just as Virgil had rounded off the list of Dido's gifts to Aeneas' men by mentioning wine (line 636). To be sure, wine is to be expected at any feast; Juvenal's periphrasis in the Grand Style, however, imitates Virgil's metonymy as well as simultaneously mocking both his own humble status and the epic banquet tradition. That Juvenal, a poet who regularly employs the Grand Style of epic (and of tragedy; cf. *Sat.* 6.634–37) as one of his chief stylistic devices for satirization, was highly familiar with Virgilian poetry has long been recognized⁸). Even a short vignette such as the one discussed here well serves to illustrate not only the extent of Juvenal's familiarity with Virgil but also once again underscores the method and purpose of his literary borrowings. In fact, another reference to the *Aeneid* had occurred even before the passage in Satire 11 examined here; at lines 60–63 Juvenal names Evander and refers to Aeneas (and Hercules) in one of his typical periphrases (cf. *Aen.* 8.100 and 359–65, especially line 364). Toward the end of Satire 11 we find an appropriate tribute to Virgil – although not one lacking a mocking overtone – when Juvenal, mentioning Homer and Virgil as the poets whose works are to be recited at his *convivium*, implies that the latter's poetry might even win out over the former's:

*conditor Iliados cantabitur atque Maronis
altisoni dubiam facientia carmina palmam*⁹). (180–81)

To Juvenal's eleventh poem, the *Aeneid* represents nothing less than a substratum underlying the whole satire, culminating in his reference to Virgil by name. Since this occurs in the context of a dinner invitation, it is surely no undue inference to assume that Juvenal had Dido's feast, the best-known and most significant banquet in the *Aeneid*, in mind for the description of his own *cena*.

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8) For instance Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford 1954) 246 note 3, rightly calls Virgil "one of his [Juvenal's] chief models." See also Highet, *Juvenal's Bookcase* (note 4, above), 387–88, and Johannes Gehlen, *De Iuvenale Vergilii Imitatore* (Göttingen 1886), on which, however, cf. Highet, *ibid.*, 388 note 35. On epic in Juvenal cf. my paper, *The Function of Epic in Juvenal's Satires*, in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History V*, ed. Carl Deroux (Brussels 1989) 414–443.

9) Highet, *Juvenal's Bookcase* (note 4, above), 388, referring to these lines, calls Virgil "the author Juvenal himself says he loved" – perhaps an overinterpretation as well as a lapse into biographical speculation. On the comparison of Homer and Virgil see the references cited by Courtney (note 4, above) on *Sat.* 6.436.