IV. *Exempla* and Theme in Juvenal's Tenth Satire

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The usual title given to Juvenal's tenth satire since the time of Johnson is "The Vanity of Human Wishes," and certainly the theme of vain wishes is paramount in the poem. However, the role of Democritus and Heraclitus in this theme is often neglected.[1] Although these philosophers occupy only a few lines at the beginning of the poem (28–53), they are representative of an alternating tone found in the series of *exempla*. These *exempla* make up the main body of the poem (56–345) and present the misfortunes of ambitious men. Democritus and Heraclitus, as presented by Juvenal, respectively laugh and weep over the human situation, and similarly the tone of these *exempla* is now mocking, now tragic. By viewing the world through the eyes of Democritus and Heraclitus, Juvenal displays the mockery and tragedy of human wishes; in short, their complete vanity. While Eichholz[2] has shown certain connections between the mockery found in some *exempla* and the figure of Democritus, the equally valid connection of other *exempla* with Heraclitus has been neglected. The presence of this Heraclitean or tragic element in Juvenal's satires has received much attention in recent studies,[3] and may be illustrated by the end of Satire 6 where the poet notes that he has left behind the pedestrian muse of traditional Horatian

[1] See, for example, L. Friedlaender, *D. Junii Juvenalis Saturarum libri* 5 (Leipzig 1895) 2. 451–3; G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist; a Study* (Oxford 1954) 125–9; and J. D. Duff, *D. Ivnii Ivvenalis Saturae* 14; *Fourteen Satires of Juvenal* (Cambridge 1929) 327–60. These critics take no account of the philosophers' role in the poem.

[2] D. E. Eichholz, "The Art of Juvenal and his Tenth Satire" *Greece and Rome* 3 (2nd series, 1956) 61–9. Eichholz is one-sided in his analysis: "Everything . . . is . . . viewed through the pitiless eyes of a Democritus" (65). He is "inclined to deplore the absence of . . . pathos and humanity" in the poem (69).

[3] See, for example, William S. Anderson, "Juvenal 6: A Problem in Structure" *CP* 51 (1956) 92, I. G. Scott (Ryberg), *The Grand Style in the Satires of Juvenal* (Smith College Classical Studies 8 [1927]), and Augusto Serafini, *Studio sulla satira di Giovenale* (Florence 1957), 249 ff., "La satira tragica ed alta."

satire and transgressed upon the subject matter and style of grand poetry, of tragedy:

> fingimus haec altum satura sumente cothurnum
> scilicet, et finem egressi legemque priorum
> grande Sophocleo carmen bacchamur hiatu,
> montibus ignotum Rutulis caeloque Latino? (634–7)

Highet notes this tragic element in Satire 10 when he describes it as a "noble treatment of a tragic theme,"[4] but he does not show how this tragic element operates within the poem.

The last *exemplum* of Satire 10 (329–45) is the tragic story of Silius, who publicly married Messalina during Claudius' absence at Ostia and thus brought ruin on himself and Messalina. The wish for beauty is thus proven vain by showing how Silius' beauty brought about his downfall. Silius is here drawn as the innocent and sympathetic victim of Messalina's whims:

> optimus hic et formonsissimus idem
> gentis patriciae rapitur miser extinguendus
> Messalinae oculis. (331–3)

He has a choice, but the reader is reminded that whether or not he marries Messalina he must die:

> quidquid melius leviusque putaris,
> praebenda est gladio pulcra haec et candida cervix. (344–5)

His necessary downfall is painted with pathetic and tragic colors. Comparison with Tacitus' account[5] best shows Juvenal's calculated attempt to win the reader's sympathy for Silius and to give the *exemplum* a tone of pathos, for Tacitus makes Silius the cunning villain of the story. Silius urges the fatal marriage as a desperate attempt to escape imminent dangers, and his ruthless ambition is reflected in Messalina's fears that once married he will spurn her in his pursuit of power. Although both accounts have tragic dimensions, the Machiavellian overtones of Tacitus' account are suppressed in favor of sympathy and pathos in Juvenal.

[4] Highet (above, note 1) 129.

[5] *Annales* 11.26 . . . cum abrumpi dissimulationem etiam Silius, sive fatali vaecordia an imminentium periculorum remedium ipsa pericula ratus, urgebat: . . . Segniter eae voces acceptae, non amore in maritum, sed ne Silius summa adeptus sperneret adulteram scelusque inter ancipitia probatum veris mox pretiis aestimaret.

A similar tragic tone pervades the *exempla* of Nestor, Peleus, and Priam (246–72), who show the vanity of wishing for length of life. Suffering and helplessness in old age are here presented as piteous: grief over the loss of their sons is the price that Nestor and Peleus pay for length of life. The pomp and solemnity of the funeral that Priam might have had emphasize by contrast the pathos of his actual death. Like a sacrificial ox he fell before the altar of Jove after seeing his city in flames:

> tunc miles tremulus posita tulit arma tiara
> et ruit ante aram summi Iovis ut vetulus bos,
> qui domini cultris tenue et miserabile collum
> praebet ab ingrato iam fastiditus aratro. (267–70)

The pathetic and tragic tone of these passages and of the following *exempla* of Marius and Pompey (276–86) may be linked with the tearful Heraclitus introduced in lines 28 to 32. This connection of *exempla* with philosopher parallels that pointed out by Eichholz between the laughter of Democritus and the mocking treatment given to old age in lines 191 to 239 and to the three generals, Hannibal, Alexander, and Xerxes (133–87).[6]

In the *exempla* of Cicero and Demosthenes (114–32) Juvenal undercuts a potentially tragic tone with pointed humor; the division of tragedy and mockery is not as sharp here as in the above *exempla*. Admiration for Cicero implied in lines 120 to 121:

> ingenio manus est et cervix caesa, nec umquam
> sanguine causidici maduerunt rostra pusilli

is balanced by the Athenians' admiration for Demosthenes in lines 127 to 128:

> quem mirabantur Athenae
> torrentem et pleni moderantem frena theatri.

Like Silius, Demosthenes arouses sympathy through not being responsible for his downfall. The blame falls instead upon the adverse gods and sinister fate under which he was born (129) and, by implication, upon his father, who sent him to his death when he sent him away from the forge to become a rhetorician (130–2). Similarly, the responsibility for Cicero's death falls upon the excellence of his oratorical skill rather than upon any fault of his

[6] Eichholz (above, note 2) 66–7.

own (120–1). Instead of developing a wholly tragic tone around these elements of admiration and sympathy as in the *exemplum* of Silius, Juvenal intersperses the passage with touches of sarcastic laughter. Cicero is mocked for his ridiculous poetry:

> O fortunatam natam me consule Romam. (122)

This tone is carried through with the playful alliteration of *si sic/ omnia dixisset* (123–4)[7] and the description of Cicero's work as *ridenda poemata* (124). Finally, the semi-comic picture of Demosthenes' blear-eyed father and the grimy forge (*luteo Volcano*) (130–2) modifies the potentially pathetic effect of the preceding lines. To underscore the vanity of wishing for fame as an orator Juvenal has thus presented the downfall of two great orators and interwoven his presentation with strands of pathos and comic mockery. This alternating tone reflects the figures of Democritus and Heraclitus, who may now be considered as symbolic of the dual and complementary tone of these *exempla*.

Finally, Sejanus, in the initial *exemplum*, is pictured first as potentially tragic and then as ridiculous. Before revealing of whom he is writing, Juvenal draws a man of great proportions. He has a long and illustrious role of honors. Statues are dedicated to him complete with bronze horses and chariots. Adored by the people, he is *ingens*:

> descendunt statuae restemque sequuntur,
> ipsas deinde rotas bigarum inpacta securis
> caedit et inmeritis franguntur crura caballis;
> iam strident ignes, iam follibus atque caminis
> ardet adoratum populo caput et crepat ingens. (58–62)

The superb rhetorical arrangement of this passage is designed to arouse some degree of admiration for the falling hero, who, not yet named, has apparently fallen from power through no error or crime of his own, but because all power is subject to *magnae invidiae* (56–7). A touch of pathos is added to the scene in the suffering of the "innocent" bronze horses (*inmeritis franguntur crura caballis* 60): some of this pathos may be felt to radiate to the surrounding lines. The fall to this point with its potentially

[7] See F. J. Lelièvre, "Juvenal: Two Possible Examples of Wordplay" *CP* 53 (1958) 241–2.

tragic tone suggests the tearful Heraclitus. Then, with the word *Seianus*, Juvenal undercuts this tragic effect with sardonic laughter:

> Seianus: deinde ex facie toto orbe secunda
> fiunt urceoli pelves sartago matellae. (63–4)

The omnipotent politician, adored by the people, is made equal to "Pans, Cans, and Pisspots, a whole Kitchen Trade."[8]

This alternating tone continues in the description of the Roman populace (65–89), which is closely associated with the fall of Sejanus. Both tragic irony and bitter mockery, for example, may be found in the lines describing the servile Roman people:

> nam qui dabat olim
> imperium fasces legiones omnia, nunc se
> continet atque duas tantum res anxius optat,
> panem et circenses. (78–81)

Wishes for power, eloquence, fame in war, length of life, and beauty are thus satirized through the mocking or tragic tone of various *exempla*. The figures of Democritus and Heraclitus, introduced in a few brief lines at the beginning of the poem, are seen to be symbolic of the poet's complementary attitudes as revealed in the alternating tone of the *exempla*. Parallel and supplementary to this symbolic use of philosophers is a similar use of the *turris* (tower) image introduced in lines 103–13 to round off the whole passage on Sejanus (56–113):

> nam qui nimios optabat honores
> et nimias poscebat opes, numerosa parabat
> excelsae turris tabulata, unde altior esset
> casus et inpulsae praeceps inmane ruinae. (104–7)

Verbal similarities between this passage and the description of the fall of Sejanus' statues quoted earlier (56–64) relate the two passages and suggest that the *turris* image is designed to counterbalance that description. But the tower has a wider significance in the poem, for it may be seen as representative of the frustration implied in all the *casus illustrium virorum* presented in the following series of *exempla*.

[8] Dryden's translation, edition of 1697.

Juvenal has done more in this poem than satirize vain wishes. He has placed before our eyes a pageant of great men who represent human life as a whole: the poem's scope is universal:

> omnibus in terris, quae sunt a Gadibus usque
> Auroram et Gangen, . . . (1–2)

Universality is emphasized by choice of *exempla* in time from the past (Peleus, Priam, Alexander) as well as the near present (Sejanus, Silius), and in space, from Greece (Demosthenes) and barbarian lands (Xerxes) as well as from Rome (Cicero, Marius, Pompey) and Carthage (Hannibal). This universality is developed philosophically by division of vain wishes into two groups: the first series of *exempla* (Sejanus, the two orators, and the three generals) satirize wishes for things conceivably within man's power such as political control and military renown, but the second series (188–345) satirizes wishes for things outside of human jurisdiction, namely, length of life and beauty. This division corresponds roughly with the well-known Stoic division seen in the opening lines of Epictetus' *Manual*:

> Of all existing things some are in our power, and others are not in our power. In our power are . . . will to get and will to avoid. . . . Things not in our power include the body. . . .

Juvenal's choice of two philosophers with diametrically opposed but complementary world views and the poet's utilization of these men as symbols of his own attitudes towards the *exempla* further underline the sweeping range of the satire. While the theme of vain wishes determines much of the poem's structure, its subject matter seems to exist also upon another plane: the tragedy and mockery of the *exempla*, symbolized by the figures of Democritus and Heraclitus, point to a basic and universal frustration of man's attempts to exploit or control the world in which he lives. Any such attempt is met with downfall, symbolized in this satire by the *turris*, the toppling tower.

The satire's ending, though grand in its simplicity, is one of a piece with this pessimism. Man should pray for nothing; one should rather allow the gods to decide what is best for us (346–53). The "incongruously flippant" tone of the next lines (354–5), as

Eichholz has pointed out,[9] suggests that we are presented again with Democritean mockery:

> ut tamen et poscas aliquid voveasque sacellis
> exta et candiduli divina tomacula porci.

By depicting sacrifice in these terms the poet underscores his statement that man need pray for nothing, for the only thing rightly to be desired, *ut sit mens sana in corpore sano* (356), man can give to himself. Eichholz is undoubtedly right in maintaining the Democritean character of lines 354 and 355, but in the following lines (356–64 the end of the poem, since I follow Knoche in deleting 365–6[10]) Juvenal seems to be going beyond the world's tragedy and mockery symbolized by Heraclitus and Democritus to a semi-philosophical resolution. The diction in these closing lines of the satire is reminiscent of Stoic moral teaching and looks back to the beginning of the poem where also such diction occurs.[11] Such verbal correspondences suggest a semi-philosophical framework for the whole satire. Finally, the Stoic Heracles, bearer of cruel labors (*saevos labores*) emerges as the only *exemplum imitandum*. Stoic *virtus* alone can place man outside the pale of the world's tragedy and mockery:

> monstro quod ipse tibi possis dare; semita certe
> tranquillae per virtutem patet unica vitae. (363–4)

[9] Eichholz (above, note 2) 68.

[10] Eichholz (above, note 2) 68, however, regards lines 365 and 366 as genuine and maintains on this basis that the satire's ending is Democritean in character.

[11] For example, the following words or expressions at the end of the satire suggest parallels in Roman moralists: *animorum/inpulsu* 350–1; *caeca ... cupidine* 351; *mens sana* 356; *fortem ... animum* 357; *nesciat irasci* 360; *Herculis aerumnas* 361; *semita* 363; *tranquillae ... vitae* 364; *per virtutem* 364. Compare: *pauci dinoscere possunt/vera bona atque illis multum diversa* 2–3; *remota/erroris nebula* 3–4; *ratione* 4; *timemus/ ... cupimus* 4–5; *sapientibus* 28; *prudentia* 48; and *cum Fortunae ipse minaci/mandaret laqueum* 52–3. Such a "close semantic connection between the introduction and the conclusion of a Satire" is frequent in Juvenal, as William Anderson has shown in Book 1 (William S. Anderson, "Studies in Book 1 of Juvenal," *Yale Classical Studies* 15 (1957) 33–90.