Juvenal, Satire 3

Though he was one of Rome’s greatest writers, it is surprising how little is known about Juvenal’s life. His full name was probably Decimus Iunius Juvenalis. He was born at Aquinum, near Monte Cassino, probably in the reign of Nero (54-68 CE), but the exact date of either his birth or death is uncertain. Other than a few scattered references in Martial (ca. 45-104 CE), there is little evidence Juvenal was even well-known among his fellow Romans during his lifetime.

Juvenal’s first nine satires are the most powerful and least agreeable, establishing him as probably the most “politically incorrect” Roman poet if not also the most caustic. Fueled by the irrational or irresponsible behavior of foreigners, women, homosexuals and cruel and decadent rulers, Juvenal’s rage lashes out against greed, extravagance, vanity, stupidity, bad manners, urban blight and poetry recitals in August. It seems obvious why the poet must write satire, as he says in his own words: difficile est saturam non scribere (“it is difficult to not write satire”).

Our excerpt is taken from Juvenal’s Third Satire which is a rejection of city life in favor of bucolic simplicity. According to one modern critic, it is in this satire that his particular gift of vivid painting finds its best and bitterest observations about life in Rome.

Text and Translation

Satire 3. 41-45

Quid Romae faciam? mentiri nescio; librum,
What will I do at Rome? I am unable to lie; if a book

si malus est, nequeo laudare et poscere; motūs
is bad, I am unable to praise and request (it); I don’t know

41. mentiri: mentior, -iri, mentitus sum: not tell the truth, lie
42. nequeo: nequeo, -ire, -ivi, -itum: be unable
   poscere: posco, -ere, poposci: request, ask for
   motus: motus, -ūs, m.: movement
astrorum ignoro; funus promittere patris
the movements of the stars; neither am I willing

nec volo nec possum; ranarum viscera numquam
nor am I able to promise the funeral of a father; I have never examined

Inspexi; . . .
the guts of frogs; . . .

44. ranarum: rana, -ae, f.: frog
viscera: viscus, -eris, m.: the internal organs; here, guts

45. inspexi: inspicio, -spicere, -spexi, -spectum: examine

Satire 3. 74-80

. . . ede quid illum
. . . Proclaim what you think

esse putes. Quemvis hominem secum attulit ad nos:
that man is. He has brought to us along with himself any man at all:

grammaticus, rhetor, geometres, pictor, aliptes,
grammar teacher, orator, architect, painter, personal trainer,

74. ede: edo, edere, edidi, editum: proclaim

75. quemvis: quivis, quaevi, quodvis: any at all
attulit: adfero, adferre, attuli, adlatum: bring

76. grammaticus: grammaticus, -i, m.: grammarian
rhetor: rhetor, -oris, m.: orator
geometres: geometres, -ae, m. (Greek form): architect
pictor: pictor, -oris, m.: painter
aliptes: aliptes, -ae, m.: person who put oil on wrestlers; here, personal trainer
augur, schoenobates, medicus, magus — omnia novit
fortune-teller, tightrope walker, doctor, magician — the hungry little

Graeculus esuriens: in caelum, iusseris, ibit.
Greek knows all things: (if) you give the order, he will go into heaven.

In summa non Maurus erat neque Sarmata nec Thrax
In sum, it was not a Moroccan nor a Sarmatian nor a Thracian

qui sumpsit pinnas, mediis sed natus Athenis.
who put on wings, but a man born in the middle of Athens.

77. augur: augur, -uris, m/f.: interpreter of auspices; here, fortune-teller
    schoenobates: schoenobates, -ae, m. (Greek form): tightrope walker
    medicus: medicus, -i, m.: doctor
    magus: magus, -i, m.: magician

78. Graeculus: Graeculus, -a, -um: a little Greek (diminutive of Graecus); here, the
    diminutive has a contemptuous sense
    esuriens: esurio, -ire: be hungry
    iusseris: future perfect for future, in a future more vivid condition
    ibit: eo, ire, ivi, itum: go (future third person singular)

79. in summa: summa, -ae, f.: the most important point; here, in sum
    Maurus: Maurus, -a, -um: Moroccan; Mauritania was a Roman province in North Africa
    Sarmata: Sarmata, -ae, m.: a Sarmatian; the Sarmatians lived in southern Russia
    Thrax: Thrax, -acis, m.: a Thracian; Thrace is in northern Greece

80. sumpsit: sumo, -ere, sumpsi, sumptum: put on
    pinnas: pinna, -ae, f.: feather; in plural, wing
    Athenis: Athenae, -arum, f.: Athens; here, locative case showing place where; Juvenal is
    alluding to Daedalus, the figure from Greek myth who flew from Crete to Italy on wings
    made of wax and feathers
Satire 3.100-103

natio comoeda est. rides, maiore cachinno
The (whole) nation is a comedienne. (If) you laugh, he is rocked

concuitur; flet, si lacrimas conspexit amici,
by bigger guffaw; he bewails, if he has beheld the tears of a friend,

nec dolet; igniculum brumae si tempore poscas,
but does not suffer pain; if you should ask for a little fire at the time of winter

accipit endromidem; si dixeris “aestuo,” sudat.
he seizes a warm-up suit; if you say, “I am hot,” he sweats.

100. natio: natio, -onis, f.: nation, i.e. Greece
comoeda: comoedus, -a, -um: comic; here, a feminine substantive meaning “comedienne”
cachinno: cachinnus, -i, m.: loud laughter, guffaw

101. concutitur: concutio, -cutere, -cussi, -cussum: shake violently, rock
flet: fleo, flere, flevi, fletum: bewail
lacrimas: lacrima, -ae, f.: a tear
conspexit: conspicio, -spicere, -spexi, -spectum: behold

102. dolet: doleo, -ere, dolui, doliturus: suffer pain
igniculum: igniculus, i, m.: a little fire (diminutive of ignis)
brumae: bruma, -ae, f.: winter

103. endromidem: endromis, -idis, f.: a rough cloak worn by athletes after exercises to keep warm; here, a warm-up suit
dixeris: see iusseris, 78
aestuo: aestuo (1): be hot
sudat: sudo (1): sweat