

Juvenal

Satire VII: Patronage

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Sat VII:1-52 It's The Emperor Or Nothing

The hopes, the whole business of letters depend on Caesar;¹
He's the only one who cares for the sad Muses, these days,
When even famous and notable poets have begun applying
For a lease on a bathhouse at Gabii, or a bakery in Rome;²
When others no longer think it vile or shameful to act as public
Criers, when Clio, the Muse, from starvation quits the valleys
Of Helicon, Aganippe's spring, and flees to the market-place.
Because if you're offered never a farthing in the Pierian grove,³
You're better off stealing Machaera's name and profession,⁴
Selling the crowd whatever's at stake in the auctions' tussles;
Wine jars, three-legged tables, bookcases, trunks, those old copies,
Of third-rate plays—Paccius's tragedy of *Alcathoe*, Faustus's *Thebes* and *Tereus*.⁵
After all, it's better than being a paid witness, telling the judge
'I saw it' when you didn't; leave that to the knights of Asia,
The ones betrayed by a slave's fetter-mark, on a bare ankle.
Now, however, no one needs to submit to labour unworthy

¹ Caesar was the name of any ruler of the empire after the assassination of Juilius Caesar, when his son—Octavian—took control and rebranded himself as Caesar Augustus. J. here likely refers to Hadrian.

² The point is that poets need a primary source of income, and must banish poetry to the sidelines of their lives. Consider, in contrast, the immense *otium* (leisure) of a poet like Horace, or an historian like Pliny the Elder.

³ A mythical source of inspiration in Greek mythology and literature.

⁴ Unknown who this person is (if a real person), but the point is that they make good money as an auctioneer.

⁵ Roman tragedies, now lost.

Of their writings; no one, who weaves melodious measures
In an Eloquent voice; no one, who ever chewed on laurel.⁶
To work, O young men! Our Leader views all with indulgence,
He's urging you on to find fit matter, to exercise your talents.
Telesinus, if you're still seeking support for your income from
Anyone else, if that's what makes you fill the yellow parchment,
You may as well gather firewood straight away, and offer your
Compositions to Vulcan, husband of Venus, and god of fire,⁷
Or shut the sheets in the cupboard, let the bookworms gnaw them.
Break your stylus, you wretch, erase those battles you sat there
Penning all night, scribbling sublime verse in your tiny attic,
Just to win yourself the prize of an ivy-wreath, and meagre bust.⁸
Don't expect anything more; the miserly rich learned long ago
To offer the eloquent, admiration only; to offer them praise,
As boys do Juno's peacock. The years have flown by, in which
You might have toyed with the sail, the helmet, the hoe. Now
Boredom invades the mind, it's now that experienced but naked
Old age comes to hate itself, and Terpsichore, Muse of the lyre.
Let me tell you the ruses he, you fawn on, adopts, to avoid
Aiding you: spurning the shrine of Apollo and the Muses.⁹
He writes verse himself, and yields to Homer alone, due to
His thousand-year glory, but if you, fired by the sweetness

⁶ Laurel leaves are a sign of Apollo, and therefore a sign of poetic achievement. To this day, Italian universities crown their students in laurel wreathes upon graduation.

⁷ I.e., burn them. Virgil wanted his manuscript of the *Aeneid* burned, e.g., but it was compiled posthumously. Note the irony of modern readers, for whom a "vulcanized" manuscript is one preserved in volcanic ash. Many of these may soon be made legible with the help of AI. This would revolutionize our field.

⁸ For a poet to earn a bust was to become canonical, e.g. the busts of authors in Alexandria's library.

⁹ There seems to be a reference here to the libraries built by Caesar Augustus and his wife Livia.

Of fame, give a recitation, he'll lend you a down-at-heel room.
He'll order a far-off iron-barred hall placed at your service,
The doors of which echo the squealing of sows.¹⁰ He'll place
His freedmen in seats at the end of the rows, and knows how
To scatter his friends about, those with high-pitched voices.
But none of the nobles will give you the price of their seats,
Or the price of the raised platforms held up by rented beams,
Or those chairs in the front row, due to be given back later.
Still we labour away, marking our furrows in the fine dust,
Turning the sands of the shore with our ineffectual ploughs.
Try to stop: the itch for writing holds you fast in ambition's
Noose, grows old along with you in your sorrowful heart.

SatVII: 53-97 What Room Is There For Genius?

Yet the outstanding poet, with no ordinary vein of talent,
Who's accustomed to weaving nothing that is vulgar,
Who coins never a trivial song from the public mint,
Whose like I cannot point out but can only imagine,
He's the result of a mind free from care, devoid of
All bitterness, full of longing for nature, fit to drink
From the Muses' spring.¹¹ Sad poverty, you see, cannot
Sing in the Pierian cave, or grasp the thyrsus,¹² lacking
The means to live that the body needs, night and day.

¹⁰ A reference to one of Juvenal's contemporaries, Marcus Aper, whose surname means "boar," and who attacked poetry as an occupation.

¹¹ Then, as now, notions of leisure (*otium*) and free time were deemed essential for any serious creative enterprise.

¹² A wand held by worshippers of Dionysus, dating back to archaic Greek times. Dionysus was the god of wine and, given the close connection between intoxication and creativity, associated with poetry.

Horace had wealth enough, as he gave the Bacchic cry.¹³
What room is there for genius, unless your heart has
Only a single care, troubles itself over poetry alone,
Swept away by Apollo of Cirrha, Dionysus of Nysa?¹⁴
A mighty soul is needed, not one terrified of buying a
New blanket, if you're to envisage chariots and horses,
The face of the god, and the Fury who crazed Turnus.
If Virgil had lacked a slave-boy and decent lodgings,
All the snakes would have slid from the Fury's hair,
There'd have been no fierce blast from her war-trumpet.
How can we expect Rubrenus Lappa, to vie with ancient
Tragedians, if he's pawning *Atreus* for a dish and a cloak?¹⁵
Unhappily, Numitor lacks the cash to help out a friend,
Yet he sends it to Quintilla, and was rich enough to buy
A tame lion, that surely consumes vast piles of meat;
Are we asked to believe the creature costs less to feed,
While a poet's intestines possess a greater capacity?
Lucan may rest content with fame,¹⁶ in his marble-filled
Gardens, but what good does glory do Saleius Bassus
Or starving Serranus, if it's glory and nothing else?
When Statius made Rome happy, and fixed on a date,
Everyone rushed to hear his fine voice, and the lines

¹³ Recall our other readings, in which Horace thanks Maecenas for land and free time, which let him write poetry.

¹⁴ Showy intelligence. J. makes clear that he knows the aetiologies for these gods. Such learning, combined with creativity, is a hallmark of Callimachean poetics, and many Roman poets aspired to be like Callimachus.

¹⁵ Atreus is a figure from Greek mythology and tragedy, ported into the Roman arts as many Greek things were.

¹⁶ A pun. Lucan was a successful poet from Spain who flourished just before J.'s time. Though his fame was assured, so too was his death, as he became an enemy of the state during the hostile reign of Nero. Lucan, driven to suicide, thus rests in his fame, but also rests in his grave.

Of his dear *Thebaid*:¹⁷ the crowd's hearts were captured
 By the sweetness he affected, listening there, in ecstasy.
 And yet, when he'd stunned the audience with his verses,
 He'd starve, unless he sold his virgin *Agave* to Paris,¹⁸
 The actor who generously appointed to military office,
 And set the six-month gold ring on the fingers of poets.
 A dancer who gave what princes wouldn't. If you visited
 The great halls of the noblemen, the Barea and Camerini,
Pelops and *Philomela* appointed the prefects and tribunes.
 But don't go envying the poets such a theatre nourished.
 Who now will be your Maecenas,¹⁹ Fabius or Proculeius,
 Who'll prove your second Cotta, or be another Lentulus?²⁰
 Then reward matched genius, many found it worthwhile
 To look pale, and go without wine, for all of December.²¹

SatV II: 98-149 Historians And Advocates Do No Better

Is your labour any more profitable, you writers of histories?²²
 They too consume even more time, and more midnight oil.
 There's no limit to them, indeed, the thousandth page tops
 The growing pile, bankrupts you with that heap of papyrus,
 As the vast number of facts, and the laws of the genre dictate.

¹⁷ Statius remains one of Rome's greatest poets who survives, but he came after the great age of Augustan patronage.

¹⁸ Not the city, but a name of an actor.

¹⁹ The patron of Horace, Virgil, and Propertius (inter alia). Maecenas was closely intertwined with the reign of Augustus. His patronage was not only invaluable for the poets, but also for the propaganda of the state.

²⁰ Presumably all patrons of the arts.

²¹ December then, as now, was a month given over to festivals. Juvenal here refers to Saturnalia, a festival that has aspects of the Mardi Gras, but was chiefly a solstice celebration corresponding, at least on the calendar, with our modern Christmas.

²² History-writing was long a lucrative endeavor for authors of prose.

Yet what's the harvest, what's the fruit of your ploughed soil?
Who'll pay a historian what they pay him who reads the news?
'A lazy tribe,' they'll say, 'who love their couch in the shade.'
And tell me what advocates earn from their representations,
And the huge bundle of briefs that accompany them to court.
They talk big, especially when a creditor might hear them,
Or when one, more pressingly still, nudges them in the side,
Clutching his large account book, to claim some dubious debt.
That's when their mighty bellows breathe out immense lies,
And they cover themselves with spit; but if you want to know
Their true harvest, the wealth of a hundred such advocates
Weighs less than that of Lizard, the charioteer of the Reds.
The lords are seated, and you rise, a pale Ajax, to support
Your client's contested liberty in front of a boorish judge.
Strain and rupture your liver, you wretch, so, exhausted,
You can decorate your stairs with victory's green palm.
What's the reward for your speech? A tiny dried-up leg
Of pork, a jar of tunny fry, or ancient onions, a month's
Ration for a Moor, or wine brought down the Tiber, five
Flasks for your four cases. If you come by one gold piece,
Part of that vanishes, by your contract with the lawyers.
'Yet Aemilius names his fee, even when our work's better.'
That's because a bronze chariot with four great horses sits
In his vestibule, his ancestor himself on a fierce charger,
Looking menacing from the high saddle, with lowered
Spear, a one-eyed statue contemplating battle. Thus
Pedo is embarrassed, and Matho fails, and it's the end

For Tongilius, who disturbs the baths with his filthy crew,
And washes away with his great rhinoceros horn, weighs
Down his young Maedians' long litter-poles on his way
Through the Forum to buy slave-boys, silver plate, agate
Vases or villas; and yet his efforts work. His purple and
Violet robes sell advocacy; it pays him to live with a stir
And appearance, that cost well beyond his true income,
His seaborne purple of Tyrian weave acts as guarantor.
But prodigal Rome sets no limits to your expenditure.²³
In eloquence our trust? No one these days would give
Cicero two hundred, unless a huge ring lit his finger.
The first thing a litigant looks for, is whether you run
Eight slaves, possess ten clients, a litter to follow you,
Togas to walk in front. That's why Paulus for court hired
A sardonyx ring, and earned a higher fee than Basilus, or
Gallus. Eloquence rarely appears dressed in flimsy rags.
When is Basilus allowed to bring on a tearful mother?
Who can stand Basilus however well he speaks? If you
Make the decision to earn your living with your tongue,
Try Gaul, or better still Africa, the nurturer of advocacy.

SatVII: 150-215 Nor Do Teachers Of Rhetoric

Do you teach rhetoric? O Vettius, what a mind of iron,
You need, when a crowded class slays 'the cruel tyrant!'
For, whatever they've just read, sitting, each in turn

²³ People with lucrative jobs—lawyers, politicians, etc. Those who educate them, though, and up and coming orators (as we shall soon see) receive no patronage.

Gives standing, chants the same thing in identical lines.
 Such stale greens are simply murder for the poor teacher.
 They all want to know about style, what sort of cases,
 And the summing up, and the shots that are likely to be
 Fired by the other side, but not a single one wants to pay.
 'You're asking me to pay? But what have I learned?'
 'It's surely the teacher's fault, if our young dunce feels
 Nothing stir in the left side of his chest, as he fills my
 Poor head for five days with his 'dreadful Hannibal'.
 It hardly matters what the set topic is: whether to march
 From Cannae to Rome, or after the thunder and lightning
 Cautiously hold the troops back, drenched from the storm.
 Just state your price, you can have it now: what wouldn't
 I give to make the father hear him as often I must?' That's
 What six professors or more cry out with a single voice,
 As they abandon 'the rapist' to take part in some real case;
 The 'dosing with poison' is silent; the 'wicked ungrateful
 Husband'; the pounding out of a 'cure for chronic blindness'.²⁴
 So whoever descends from the grove of rhetoric to compete
 In the fight, lest he lose the he pitiful reward that purchases
 His ticket for the handout, which after all is the most he can
 Expect, if he'll follow my advice, he should definitely retire
 And find himself an alternative path in life. If you discover
 The tiny fee for which Chrysogonus or Pollio teach the sons
 Of the rich, you'll tear Theodorus's *Rhetoric* in tiny pieces.

²⁴ For Roman schoolchildren, oratory and declamation (i.e. practicing law) were essential cornerstones of being a good citizen. Schoolchildren honed their oratory skills and rehearsed being in the courtroom by arguing stock cases. Here, J. lists such stock cases.

Building the nobleman's baths costs him six thousand in gold,
More for the portico where he rides on rainy days. How can
He wait for blue skies, or spatter his equipage with fresh mud!
It's better here, the hooves of his mule stay bright and clean.
And he'll raise a dining hall elsewhere, resting on tall pillars
Made of Numidian marble, trapping sunshine when it's cold.
However much the place costs, someone will still be there to
Arrange the dishes skilfully, someone there to spice the food.
Twenty gold pieces, of all this show, will be fortune enough
For Quintilian: a son will cost his father less than nothing.
'So how come Quintilian owns so much land?' You have to
Make an exception for freaks of fate. The fortunate man is
Handsome and brave, wise and noble and generous as well,
On his black shoe is sewn the ivory crescent of the patrician.
The fortunate man is the greatest orator and javelin-thrower,
And, unless he has a cold, sings beautifully. It makes a huge
Difference you know what stars chance to greet you as you
Give your first cries, red-faced from your mother's womb.
If Fortune wishes, she'll make a teacher of rhetoric, consul;
If she wishes, she'll make a consul a teacher of rhetoric too.
What about Servius Tullius? Ventidius Bassus? What else
Was that but the stars, the strange mysterious power of fate?
Fate makes kings of slaves, and grants prisoners triumphs.
Nevertheless the fortunate man is rarer than a white crow.
Many teachers have regretted their idle and barren chairs
Of Rhetoric, as Thrasymachus' suicide proves, and Carrinas
Secundus': you saw his poverty, Athens, yet only chose

To offer him cold hemlock. May the gods make the earth
On our ancestor's graves weigh lightly, may they have
Flowering crocuses, and everlasting spring, in the tomb.
They thought a teacher held the sacred role of a parent.
When Achilles as a young man learnt music in his native
Hills, he went in fear of the cane, and was careful not to
Mock at the horse's tail of Chiron the Centaur, his teacher;
But now Rufus and the rest are beaten by their young pupils,
Rufus, so often called a Cicero, though only a Gallic one.

SatVII: 216-243 Or Schoolmasters

When do Celadus, and learned Palaemon, pocket the rewards
A schoolteacher's labour merits? Yet whatever it amounts to,
And it's less than a teacher of rhetoric's pay, even from that
The pupil's unfeeling attendant nibbles a chunk for himself
As does the cashier who pays it. Yield to them, Palaemon,
Be prepared to see some part of it vanish, as a pedlar does
When he haggles over a mat and a snow-white quilt for winter.
But make sure you get something, for sitting from midnight
Onwards where no blacksmith would sit, or a carder of wool
Used to drawing the staple out fine with a slant steel comb;
Make sure you get something, for breathing in the stench
Of as many lamps as boys, while your Horace grows wholly
Discoloured, and soot clings tight to your blackened Virgil.
Though it's rare to get paid without a tribune's investigation.
Yet you parents lay down savage laws for the schoolmaster,
Demand he should stick to the rules in his use of grammar,

Should read the histories, and know all the authors as well
As he knows his fingernails. If by chance he's asked a question
As he heads for the warm baths or the freeman Phoebus's spa,
He must know the name of Anchises' nurse, of Anchemolus's
Stepmother, and her birthplace, how many years Acestes lived,
And how many jars of Sicilian wine he handed to the Trojans.
You'll demand he forms tender characters under his thumb,
As if he were moulding faces from wax; you'll demand he acts
Like a father to that crowd, forbids them to play dubious games,
Or mutually indulge. It's no light thing to keep watch on all
Those boys, with their hands and eyes quivering with purpose.
'That's your job,' the parents say, yet come the turn of the year
You'll get, in gold, what the crowd grants for one gladiatorial win.

End of Satire VII