



Summary of the Sixteen Satires of Juvenal

Book 1 (*Satires* 1-5) was probably published in or around AD 115 and establishes the poet as a man of 'savage indignation' railing against the evils of the city around him and the appalling behaviour of his contemporaries. The poems may be summarised thus:

1: J. denounces bad poetry and expresses the need to write satire to expose the vicious and unfair world he lives in: society needs the satirist rather than the derivative epic poet, and there is so much wrong with Rome that 'it is difficult not to write satire'.

2: J. here exposes hypocrites who pretend to be austere Stoic philosophers but who love perverted sex in private and who even carry out same-sex marriages to the disgust of the ghosts of the great dead Romans in the Underworld.

3: The poet speaks with Umbricius who is leaving Rome. Much of the poem is put into the mouth of Umbricius who criticises the city of Rome as a cesspit of noise, violence, rudeness as contrasted with the decent air of the Italian countryside.

4: A description of the absurd council summoned to discuss the problem of cooking the enormous turbot presented to the emperor Domitian—a fish which will not fit any of the available dishes.

5: A description of the the humiliation of the poor when they attend dinner-parties given by their rich patrons.

Book 2 (*Satire* 6) was published after AD117 and is one long poem. The text is a diatribe against marriage and women, couched in terms of advice seeking to dissuade a young man from getting married. The poem goes through many different types of women and concludes that happiness will be impossible with any of them.



Book 3 (*Satires* 7-9) published around AD120 (early in the reign of Hadrian) marks a slight lightening of the angry tone.

7: A description of the decline of literary professions, such as poets, speech-writers and teachers.

8: What's the good of noble family trees? The poet denounces the base currency which is aristocratic blue blood: old aristocrats debase themselves these days, and the only nobility that counts is nobility of character.

9: A poem on the theme of patron and client: the poor man Naevolus ('Mr Warty') earns his handouts from his patron by satisfying the lust of both his patron and his patron's wife.

Book 4 (*Satires* 10-12) was published sometime between AD120 and AD127. These poems deal with ethical concerns rather than simply scandalised exposure of folly and vice for their own sake.

10: 'The Vanity of Human Wishes': if we seek worldly success in terms of wealth, power, sex, or long life we will end up bitterly disappointed. The poet recommends seeking health of body and mind (*mens sana in corpore sano*).

11: An invitation to dinner contained in a lesson about living within one's means and enjoying the simple things of life rather than luxuries.

12: J. welcomes his friend back after an arduous sea-voyage and describes the storm at sea in lurid epic terms: the poem ends with the speaker insisting that he is not motivated by any desire to profit from his friend's legacy after death.

Book 5 (*Satires* 13-16) was published after AD 127. This final book, showing 'the old lion roaring away with a new access of vigour' (Hight *Juvenal the Satirist* 138), deals with the two false gods of money and power, promoting people over property and urging us to educate ourselves, our children and each other in habits of friendship and love rather than selfish greed while also exploring the ugly side of human nature to a degree not seen since the early poems.



13: A consolation to a friend who has been cheated of money; such fraud is commonplace in Rome and the crook will pay for it with a guilty conscience, urges the speaker.

14: The influence of parents over their children, especially in their attitude towards money: parents ought to set a good example against avarice.

15: A violent and lively critique of the Egyptians, culminating in a description of an incident of cannibalism.

16: J. discusses the privileges of the military and their abuses (incomplete).