Satirist wanted; no experience is necessary

In the early 2nd century A.D., Juvenal peered around at the grotesqueries of wealth and abject poverty in imperial Rome. What he saw turned him into a satirist. His satires are packed with vivid images of the exotic creature comforts of the staggeringly rich and the extreme sufferings of the urban poor. Those poor included many down-sized old Roman citizen-farmer types whose solid and now neglected virtues had made Rome great. Their reward is to be shoved aside daily in the streets to make way for the well-to-do.

Juvenal’s nouveaux- riches and decadent anciens- riches travel in the Roman equivalent of Mercedes SUVs. They wear the prototypes of Armani suits and Rolex watches. One such manipulator of money flashes a bejeweled ring. It is a “summer-weight” ring specially designed so his finger does not become sweaty in the urban heat from the strain of lifting a heavier ring. In another vivid vignette, we meet a struggling common Joe named Cordus. Cordus lives in a tiny walk-up apartment. He owns a few papyrus book scrolls and a director for external affairs — a title thatCORDUS lives in a tiny walk-up apartment. Just consider the UT associate athletic director for external affairs — a title that makes it seem as if the $52.5 million-a-year sports conglomerate ensconced in the sky-box-laden Royal Memorial coliseum has its own cabinet ministry. When asked about a $22 million cash-and-merchandise-for-advertising deal, he replies, “I’m not sure I consider that a suitable ‘South-Austin good-old-boy persona.’” But Kelso’s pieces are suffused with gentle humor and lack the “Old-Testament-prophet” bite of Juvenal.

I hereby post an open want ad for a modern Juvenal who can do justice to the contemporary scene. No prior training is necessary. Juvenal makes it clear. Even if you have no literary talents whatsoever, just absorb what you see and facit indignatio versum: “Your moral outrage will write the satire for you.” Are you skeptical?

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A colleague of mine deadpanned, “Maybe it will be commercialization when they mount a burnt orange swoosh-logom atop the UT Tower.” But he showed no signs of moral outrage.

Nor did Sports Illustrated writer Steve Rushin commenting on NCAA rule 2.15 stipulating that postseason competition shall be controlled to protect student-athletes from commercial exploitation: “With the exception, one presumes, of the Thrifty Car Rental Federal Express Poulan Weed eater Tough-Actin Tinactin Tyn-D-bol bowls.”

Applicants for my position, please send proof of indignation. Salary: none. Virtue is its own reward, and, in the times in which we live, had better be.

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