

This paper examines the social, poetical, and ethical associations engaged when gout (*podagra*) appears in poems by Ennius, Catullus, and Claudian. When critics interpret gout simply, for example as synonyms for intoxication (Grilli 1978) or metrical (in)competence (Ferriss 2009), they obscure the disease's multifarious signification. As "one of a small number of 'literary' diseases that turn up in fiction with a frequency far exceeding their incidence in real life" (Rothfield 1987, 73), gout can function as a metaphor for both the afflicted individual and society. Like other metaphorical diseases—e.g. tuberculosis, cancer, and AIDS (Sontag 2001, 46)—gout "serves as a structuring factor in social situations, as a social actor and mediator" (Rosenberg 1992, 312). Through reference to philosophical, scientific, and medical texts, this paper reveals how gout functioned as a multivalent metaphor in Antiquity and how recognizing this enables readers to appreciate more fully poetry in which the disease makes an appearance.

The connection between goutiness and poetry appears among the earliest Latin poetry, when Ennius cryptically declared, *numquam poetor nisi podager* (*Saturae* 20 Courtney). Most scholars have seconded the interpretation offered by Horace, who links the bibacious Ennius with similarly inspired *vinosus Homerus* (*Epist.* 1.19.7–8). Although the association of wine and song is so pervasive as to scarcely need comment except to note that Ennius' slogan appropriates Greek—and especially Hellenistic—motifs of inspiration and conviviality (Kambylis 1965), Ennius does not simply connect artistic production with intoxication; rather he incongruously associates the crafting of verse with a chronic, agonizing disease (Aretaeus 1.12.1).

Understanding gout as metaphor requires appreciating how the ludic modulates the agony of the physical disease. So severe was gout's torment that respectable men went to excessive lengths to deceive themselves and others about their incipient affliction (Sen. *Ep.* 53.6; [Lucian] *Ok.* 5–7; *P. Oxy.* 2532; Libanius 1380, 1368). The hesitation to reveal oneself gouty was reinforced by the disease's moral and ethical implications. Although ancient medical literature connects *podagra* with arthritic senile deterioration (e.g. Celsus 1.9.1), the disease was strongly associated with excessive appetites, especially for rich food and drink, and love (Porter-Rousseau 1998, 14). As a tool to critique society and the individual, gout became the characteristic disease of the degenerate Empire (Sen. *Ep.* 95.16), while Galen admonished that as "contrary to nature, no sage, no doctor, should suffer from it."

Despite the pain and implications of the disease, gout's 'personality' has always been the subject of comedic and satiric treatments—gout was a disease that inspired jokes, as seen in epigrams, as well as the parodic *Tragopodagra* and *Okypous*. The disease's association with moral turpitude is deployed to humorous effect in Catullus 71, in which gout has been communicated through the licentious sex (Kutzko 2008, Nappa 1999). Likewise the deprecation of the gouty critic in Claud. *carm. min.* 13 transcends a mere critique of metrical acuity to a humorous denunciation of an intellect undermined by moral failure. Recognizing gout's paradoxical function as an implement of moral condemnation and generator of humor is vital to understanding those poems in which the disease appears.