

Juvenal delinquency: a delineation of the bodies of women



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History, as humankind knows it, encompasses a body of words, and accompanied with these textual artifacts are the ideals, thoughts, and morals of a particular society. Culture, shaped by the thoughts of our predecessors and expanders, can be defined by history's literary works and texts. In terms of societal and intellectual growth, a culture is progressing and thriving due to the product of its literary concepts, according to Gloria K. Fiero in *The Humanistic Tradition*. With that said, when a historically misogynistic and satirical jab is aimed towards women, to what extent is the Roman society considered "culturally thriving?" If one group of society is not pushed to its fullest potential in sectors such as politics, education, and human decency, how can historians and civilians alike consider Roman culture as superior to its antecedent cultures? To delineate this question, one must consider that Juvenal's *Satire VI. "Against Women"* is a satirical piece that centralizes on the corruption of women in wake of luxury and adultery. The answer historically, socially, and culturally can be explored through the historical works of other authors as well as modern interpretations of Juvenal's work. Juvenal's satire, "Against Women," exudes misogynistic sentiments, and in accordance with the fall of Rome and comparative works from other centuries, paints women as sinful monsters driven by lust and luxurious commodities.

Juvenal's general stream of consciousness stems from these ideals, and as an effort to take women's feminine sexuality and exaggerate it, portrays them in such an extent that leads to vice. His writing style is in alignment with typical satirical style, and does so to entirely ridicule women by exemplifying their actions to take over men's role in society. Juvenal's text

outwardly states that in alignment with the impoverished Rome, “ what value is there in a poor man’s serving here in Rome?” (Ramsay). Historically, this question can be contemplated in accordance with the time by which this was written, and how women did not hold many more rights than their Ancient Greek ancestors. Rome was significantly deteriorating as a society, and with that came the origins of these delineations of women. This “ unrefined sensuality” that Juvenal depicts in his work is a replacement for the “ lack of formation” from an Aristotelian dictum of women, and because women lack the societal and intellectual formation needed to thrive in society, according to Allen Prudence, their sexuality and feminine features are overcompensated to paint an unrealistic and false picture of womanly nature (Prudence 183). Straying from portrayals of intellectual and able women, Juvenal seeks origins and solace from Aristotelian thought, and through the insatiable depictions of women sensuality, compensates for the “ lack of formation.”

Given that this is one of many of Juvenal’s satirical works, it is only understandable and inevitable that his other works in this satirical anthology would strengthen his satirical motifs in “ Against Women.” While the other satires do not encompass women, they still follow the same “ continuing thread of themes, tones, and words that evolve and act as an intertextual and intratextual ongoing commentary,” according to Barbara Gold (qtd. from Gold). The centrality of this satiric program can be seen as fortifying for Satire VI, as his previous satires follow the streams of “ anger and its consequences, the family, the city, foreigners, and the disenfranchisement of the poor citizen” (qtd. from Gold). An exemplification of this can be

deciphered through Juvenal's exaggerated and detrimental dictum, questioning men's alternatives to marrying a woman. He asks if he "can submit to a she-tyrant when there is so much rope to be had, so many dizzy heights of windows standing open, and when the Aemilian bridge offers itself to hand," in an effort to show other alternatives (Ramsay). What Juvenal is merely referring to shines light on the emotional perspective that is adopted throughout the piece, as the "dizzy heights of windows standing open" and the "Aemilian bridge" are ways for one to take their lives. To compare such means, Juvenal views this as a latter and better option, discounting marriage as harmful to man's existence. With the fall of Rome and how it has flourished Juvenal's perspectives on women, his previous satires, whilst not surrounding the same subject matter as "Against Women," were in alignment with the social climate of the time.

The "arena of satire" that David H. J. Larmour facilitates welcomes the emergence of satire in forms of other literary works of the same satirical merit. In an effort to delve into the philosophical aspects of Juvenal's satire, Larmour introduces a comparative work by Seneca to exemplify the lack of philosophical embroidery in Juvenal's work. The purpose of this comparison, according to Larmour, is to seek how imagery is portrayed in the search for "stable categories in a world that is out of joint" (Larmour 7). Seneca's works and Juvenal's works are practically codependent on each other, as Seneca's moral discourse is rooted in the same ideals as Juvenal's satirical discourse, and with that, they share a commonality of "Juvenalian" intensity of language and a "grotesque" fascination with the body. Both comparative literary authors use strong, picturesque language to uncover what they

believe to be true in a climate that is not considered culturally thriving in a historical standpoint.

The notability of the satire can be recognized through the fact that Juvenal's work is used both as a comparative and as a supplementing resource for a written play. Ben Jonson, a Renaissance playwright, aimed to write a play that combines both stern and relaxed moralities. He uses Ovid's work, *Ars amatoria*, and Juvenal's "Against Women" to produce ambiguities of tone, as Ovid's work paints a more habitual and realistic account of the world, while Juvenal does not spare any lighthearted details and completely emerges straight into the grotesque and satirical views of life (Barish 213). To Barish, author of "Ovid, Juvenal, and the Silent Woman," it is astonishing as to how two completely comparative and drastically opposing works could come together to form the commonality that is Jonson's play. The manicure and pedicure of women is facilitated and encouraged to be a means of improvement of nature, but is quickly juxtaposed by Juvenal's view of nature, and, where he sees fit, views falsification as a better substitution. Where Ovid would naturally find beauty in the natures of life, Juvenal would see a rejection of the world. This rejection of the world can be seen as an "arcade," with Juvenal questioning how our "arcades show [Postumius] one woman worthy of your vows" (Ramsay). These two extremities, fluctuating between the acceptance of the world as is and the rejection of the contrived beauties of the world, aim to be the main focus of Jonson's play, and in turn create for discords which are never fully resolved through plot and diction (Barish 214).

It is as if the bodies of women in satirical works are at a focal point of scrutiny, to the extent of metaphorical conceits that ultimately define a woman's body as over-sexualized and exaggerated. A comparative work that seems to undermine this specific aspect of the satire is John Dryden's translation of Satire VI. In his opening statement, Dryden states that "whatever [Juvenal's] ladies were, the English are free from all his imputations" (qtd. from Dryden). By completely dissociating himself from his own work, he is merely expressing that he does not agree with Juvenal's depictions of women. There is a powerful depiction and running conceit of the perception of the feminine through Dryden's modern interpretation of the dressing room scene. The dressing room, illustrated as a military fortification, is portrayed as a guarded fortress for the women to arm themselves in wake of lust and inconstancy. What occurs in a dressing room, according to Dryden, is unknown to the male species, and with that emerges a plethora of uncertainty and scrutiny amongst men. It is "when all the stage draperies have been put away; when the theatres are closed, and all is silent save in the courts, and the Megalesian games are far off from the Plebeian" where the woman prepare for "battle" (Ramsay). However, on an unrelated note, there is a mysterious aura that exudes from the dressing room. This "fortress" is a private sector in a woman's life where she can shy away from the public eye and detach herself from society. A woman in a dressing room is essentially a woman's sexual independence, and in that, a man's entrance into that unknown world overturns her independence, moreover leading to associating with vice and lust once again (Nussbaum 544). Metaphors, specifically targeting women's bodies as a source of

wonderment and contemplation, aim to dilute women of human decency and true respect in these comparative works and poems.

Feminism in the modern world is an emerging discussion amongst today's youth, older generations, and historians alike. The sheer purpose for studying the role of women throughout history is for origin purposes, as many of the treatments of women as well as the advancements of women in society can be explained by humankind and our social advancement as a society. Barbara K. Gold's "The House I Live In Is Not My Own" is a clear, modern interpretation of how women's bodies are the center of condemnation in Juvenal's satire. Much like the historical predecessors, Gold's interpretation follows the metaphorical form by portraying women's bodies as mere embodiments that are formed by Juvenal's judgement. She takes a corporeal and physiological standpoint, relating Juvenal's depictions to the new and ever changing vocabulary of "Generation Y." Focalizing bodies in the manner of Juvenal and in the millennial perspective speaks volumes as to how much society has changed since the time of the fall of Rome. To have feminism emerge as a result of the condemnation of women in misogynistic works such as "Against Women," society today has culturally thrived. The performative aspects of gender, which are the foundations of many satirical works in Juvenal's time, are not "static, distinct, limited, certain, or innate," in relation to gender categories (Gold). According to Gold, these gender categories presented in antiquity texts do not take a binary form, but rather are formidable to many manifestations and changes. This can be in alignment with recent terminology and the distinct truth that the world that Juvenal paints is strictly heteronormative, with the woman as

instigators for sex and adultery. Female bodies investigated through the context of these ancient texts do not typically encompass the vocabulary that is prevalent to our socially forward world, so Gold states that gender, in this case, has to be “ investigated through cultural assumptions that underlie the writer’s fears and attitudes” (Gold). The parallels that can be drawn from these ancient texts and today’s perceptions of gender can be explored through the fact that gender roles in history were defined by political, social, and economic discourse, meaning that the performative roles and gender behaviors were fluid. In totality, the “ subversion of gender roles was based on a felt, observed, and legislated” environment that dictated how women were viewed in that time period. The modern correlations are strong, and while do not take a fixed stance in terms of fluidity, find a commonality in the stance that political and social environment form perceptions of how gender roles are perceived in society.

Juvenal’s work also finds comparative tangents through the Pastoral Epistles in terms of women being portrayed as gossipers. Plutarch, a Greek and Roman biographer, is notable for forming the “ busybody” archetype, with busybody meaning one that gossips and/or meddles. In a biblical context, gossiping is looked down upon, so portraying it in any historical context speaks volumes as to how the author feels about such “ gossiper.” Marianne Kartzow’s delineation on gender and gossip focuses on the characteristics of how Juvenal once again juxtaposes private and public life, further exemplifying the womanly domination of the private sector of life. In this private sector, it is said by poet, Ramsay, that “ Juvenal holds up a mirror to every part of the private life of the Rome of his days, and by the most

caustic and trenchant invective seeks to shame her out of her vices” (qtd. from Ramsay 89). Juvenal seeks to uncover this “ private life” because it is where the unchasteness of women lies. This “ gossip” and adulterous archetype is presented and imbedded in his protocol of women’s vices. It is done so through the extensive and excessive descriptions of women “ attending men’s meetings and talking with unflinching faces” (Juvenal). In G. Ramsay’s translation, he outlines these “ lusts” that drive women to the brink of gossiping by describing these lusts as “ not the matron of the family, nor the maiden daughter, not the as yet unbearded son-in-law to be, not even the as yet unpolluted son” (Ramsay). For example, Eppia, a woman presented in the satire, “[assumes] a night-cowl, and attended by a single maid, issues forth; then, having concealed her raven locks under a light-coloured peruque, takes her place in a brothel reeking with long-used coverlets,” therefore solidifying a woman that is a liar and gossip (Ramsay). By crossing the seemingly private life of women with the public sector of life that is seemingly dominated by men, Juvenal is portraying women as intrusive in parts of life where women are not typically harbored for growth. One of the women described in his satire is thought to have blended local scandals with natural disasters, therefore creating a conglomeration of actuality and falsehood, just merely based on the fact that her info transgresses the private sector (Kartzow 92). If anything is beyond her “ limited” knowledge, according to the delineations of Juvenal, the woman is committing the sin of gossiping. The “ intrusive” nature that the woman exhibits crosses cultural and political means, and in alignment with cultural and biblical contexts, is seemingly acting beyond herself.

With such an extreme and overpowering piece of history that completely and utterly attacks a whole group, how is society to react? “ Juvenal On Women In General” takes a male’s perspective on Juvenal’s work. The declarations in this work pose many questions to specific plot points and comparisons in Juvenal’s satire, in an effort to uncover the true matter at hand. Essentially, delving once again into the cross-transitional grace period between the private and public parts of life, the author directs attention to higher, godly powers instead of the distinctly “ minute” issues of the home life. To look at what “ Emperor Claudius had to put up with” would truly put the women’s problems to shame, according to the writer (“ Juvenal on Women”). All chance of domestic harmony between the woman and her chastity is slim to none when put into perspective of the portrayed “ bigger issues” at hand. By putting two drastically different situations together and juxtaposing them, the problems of women are considered insubordinate when compared to a highly and godly power.

There is one distinct perspective on feminism in ancient Rome that illustrates ancient thoughts of feminism as one of the clear reasons for the fall of Rome. Due to the inability of the Roman empire to expand, there was a limited amount of the influx of gold, and with that, the male was not pushed to become affiliated with marriage. “ Bachelor taxes” were enforced for married men that had at least 3 children, whilst at the same time punishing unmarried men and shaming them in light of a slowly deteriorating society. With this, many questions emerge. Was feminism a catalyst for the further fall of Rome? Did it proceed after the fall of Rome? Historically and socially speaking, there is a correlation with the social status of men in this socially

deprived society and the opinions of Juvenal in his satire. The video “Feminism in Ancient Rome” explores how if a man was to become married, he would lose his sexual freedom (Sandman). Many gender role perceptions come forth as a result of the social status of men. The portrayal of men in this time period are what drove Juvenal to portray women in such an ungodly manner: as partakers in society that abuse the deteriorating social status of men to take over political and marital sectors.

Eppia, a woman described in the translation of Juvenal’s satire, was known to have “run off with a gladiator to Pharos and the Nile, and the infamed city of the Lagos, Canopus” (Ramsay). With that one example of a woman leaving to pursue her sexual pursuits, is that harbored by historical representations of women leaving for a more masculine, god-like being, or is it mere exaggerations of nothing? The extent to which feminism comes into play in this historical context can simply be answered by the fact that Juvenal’s works are naturally satirical in nature, and that feminism is taken with a grain of salt. With the decay of feminine virtue, there comes a growing need for feminism and the efforts to strengthen the feminine to a level of pure human decency. This degraded state of female morality in accordance with being portrayed as uncontrollable in the presence of a multitude of men, as gossipers, and as unvirtuous wives, calls for a judgement on if feminism caused the fall of Rome, or if historical events housed for this debate of discussion.

It can be understood that the descriptions of women in Juvenal’s satire are amplified by the literary techniques typical to a satirical style of writing as well as the sheer text that constitutes the bodies of women and their

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emphasized sexuality. Juvenal essentially uses a body of words to dictate the bodies of women, evident in the “ use of inversion... meant to invite political criticism without attracting the wrong kind of autocratic attention” (Gould 74). There are central motifs of authority, family, and household that must be understood in a historical framework, according to Gould. Gould takes the position that for one to understand Juvenal’s true message here, one must not look at the jabs towards women, but rather the depictions of Roman society. To understand this and to fully immerse yourself in Juvenal’s words, Gould suggests to keep in mind of the typical and orderly “ Greek and Roman antiquity” that accompanies “ figured speech” and “ metaphorical discourse” (Gould 76). Within this style of writing, it is known that family life is typically satirized, as it is practically familiar with everyone in a social realm. In this focus on private and domestic life once again, Juvenal, according to Gould, takes on a political power standpoint, crossing social and political aspects of life. A “ father-son relationship [is] portrayed en bloc into the political domain, structuring power relations in terms of authority over family” (Gould 76). This inversion on politics and authority in family life employs a familial norm in the Roman agenda.

Juvenal’s creative style and approach to portray family life in this way compensates for the way that women are portrayed in the satire. We live in a society built on our ancestors and their cultural and artistic achievements. Throughout history, society has progressively moved forward in terms of portraying the equality of women in a representative and positive light. However, when someone from this generation looks at a satirical piece such as Juvenal’s sixth satire, is one to think that at one point societal progression

took a step backwards? If anything, Juvenal's Sixth Satire challenged public discourse in a society that was already progressively deteriorating, and much to a feminist's dismay, exhibited an unwarranted authority over the dictation of women's bodies and how one should control their sins. Juvenal's Sixth Satire, an artifact that concludes one point of view that was adopted in this time period, emerges as one of the most prevalent and powerful misogynistic pieces of work.