



Classical Antecedents

Marriage law and custom in Imperial Rome

The evolution of Roman marriage

In Republican Rome, marriage was a relatively stable institution chiefly because of the power of the *patria potestas*.¹ Marriage during the Republic signified the passing of a young woman from one *manus* (that of her father or eldest male relative) into another (that of her husband). The basis of Roman legal theory that mandated all women to be under the custody of males was the supposed weakness and light-mindedness (*infirmitas sexus, levitas animi*) of the female sex. In her unmarried state, a girl was in full dependence on the *pater familias*, the eldest male member in her family whose power extended to matters of life and death for all male and female members of the household. Sons were automatically emancipated after the *pater familias* died if they had by then reached adulthood, but girls only if they became Vestal Virgins.

Girls were married at an early age, and even though the father arranged their children's marriages, the consent of both partners was necessary for the betrothal and the wedding. The bride, however, was allowed to refuse only if she could prove that her prospective husband was morally unfit for the marriage (*Dig.* 1.12 [Ulpian]). This legal provision was probably without much consequence, for as Pomeroy observes, "it is unlikely that girls of twelve . . . were in fact able to resist a proposed marriage."²

Frequently, there was a great discrepancy of ages between the spouses, for even though fourteen-year-old boys were legally entitled to marry, they very rarely did so before age twenty-five or thirty, and then they married very young girls. Pierre Grimal comments on some of the reasons for this custom:

The husband's intention was naturally to form the character of the person who was to be the lady of the house, in accordance with his own desires. For him it was not enough to have her come into his home innocent and undefiled. He wanted someone who had not been exposed to any moral influence before his. Was this a precaution stemming from jealousy, from a conscious wish to establish his supremacy as a husband more easily? Or simply the inevitable effect of ancestral tradition?³

The reasons proposed by Grimal are, of course, similar to those advocated by Hesiod in the *Works and Days*. Hesiod recommends that a man marry, at age thirty, a girl of about fourteen so that he can teach her good working habits. There seem to be several reasons for the prolonged celibate life of men. In Rome, as in any slave society, concubinage was widely practiced and, unlike the wife, the concubine or mistress could be chosen by the young Roman himself. Moreover, society condoned a young man's premarital sexual liberty, as Cato's often quoted remarks on the subject indicate. One day, returning from the forum, Cato saw a young man leaving a courtesan's house and hiding his face. The stern censor is reputed to have said: "Courage, child, it is right that you should frequent harlots instead of going after honest women." The next day, the young man greeted Cato in the same spot, this time without trying to cover his face. Cato remarked, "I told you to frequent the house, not to live there."

The double morality continued after marriage and *de facto* polygamy was practiced widely. Adultery was a stain (*stuprum*) for the wife only, punishable by death and, in a later period, by banishment. According to Cato (*Au. Gellius* X, 23), a husband might kill his wife without fear of punishment, but if he was the one committing adultery, she must not dare to touch him with a finger, and, what is more, she would not have the right to punish him. The condoning of the double standard among the aristocracy seems to have been based chiefly on pragmatic reasons: having legitimate heirs was the husband's main concern. In addition, the concept of bloodtaint, as Grimal has admirably argued, lay at the heart of Roman sexual morality.⁴ A man could not contract this taint in any heterosexual affair. He

could, however, be tainted in a homosexual relationship if he was the “passive” (i.e., receiving) partner. Thus, there was no practical reason for restricting the heterosexual affairs of men and the relationships of women who were not considered worthy to be mothers: slaves, dancers, freedwomen, registered prostitutes, or any woman who happened to have contracted the *stuprum*. In fact, as Mommsen points out, Romans originally had no statutory prohibition of sexual relationships and of immoral behavior. Only women of the aristocracy were liable to punishment for prostitution (*Liv.* X, 31; XXV, 2) and in the official registers kept by the aediles only prostitutes were included but not dancers, fluteplayers, or actresses (*Tac. Ann.*, ii, 85). Consequently, any woman who did not belong to the upper classes of the indigenous population could conduct her sexual life with as much freedom as she wished.

Few spinsters were found in Roman upper-class society because most women married at least once. One reason for this occurrence is demographic: according to Cassius Dio, there were fewer women than men within the upper classes; some estimates place the difference as high as 17 percent.⁵ Pomeroy observes:

As in Greece, this disproportion was the result of the shorter lifespan of females, whose number fell off sharply once the child-bearing years were reached. There were the additional factors of the selective infanticide and exposure of female infants, and, probably more important, a subtle but pervasive attitude that gave preferential treatment to boys.⁶

Moreover, girls were expensive: dowries among the rich were recorded at a million sesterces. Cicero, for example, when forced to pay the third installment on his daughter Tullia's dowry, contemplated arranging for her divorce.⁷ The demographic imbalance of men and women is also attested by some archaeological studies. Lawrence Angel's study of skeletal remains in Greece under Roman dominion shows the adult longevity as 34.3 years for women and 40.2 years for men, and Keith Hopkins' tombstone findings show an even greater discrepancy in longevity: he places the median age of wives at 34 but of husbands at 46.5.⁸

The divorce rate was very low in Republican times and given the fact that the father's and subsequently the husband's power over the wife was almost unrestricted, and that they could kill her for certain crimes without fear of punishment, there was probably little opportunity or incentive for divorce.

Sterility, the reason for the first reported Roman divorce, was probably the chief practical reason for repudiation, for the Romans, as J. P. Wilkinson argues, were anxious about population: "Traditions about measures designed to increase the population . . . were [still] current in the late Republic."⁹

The cumulative implication from ancient writers regarding marriage in early Republican times is that marriage was a stable institution chiefly because of the unshakable and unquestioned power of the *patria potestas*. Consequently, the role and status of women were also stable, and their duties and responsibilities clearly defined.

A great change in the attitude toward women and marriage commenced with the political and economic upheavals in the second century B.C. and reached its height during the Empire. The change had many facets.

The military ideal was altered by the relatively unbroken peace; the religious climate changed because of the introduction into Rome of several almost omnipotent Oriental goddesses. The first century A.D. saw the growing worship of Cybele Magna Mater, the Bona Dea, and above all, the mysteries of the universal goddess from the Nile.¹⁰ The cult of Cybele was the antipole of the limited and restricted native cults of female deities, of the cults of the Pudicitia Patricia, the Fortuna Muliebris, and the Fortuna Virilis, for example, because Cybele was the goddess of wives, mothers, virgins, and prostitutes alike. While the cults of these female deities coexisted with the militant and masculine cult of Mithras, their growing popularity not only undermined the religious importance of the indigenous Latin gods and of the male hierarchy of the Olympians, it also counteracted the image of the often-defeminized and highly specialized Olympic and native goddesses. As Jerome Carcopino observes, "One great spiritual fact dominated the history of the Empire: the advent of personal religions which

followed on the conquest of Rome by the mysticism of the East.”¹¹

The economic status of women was greatly improved by the first century because of their ability to hold, accumulate, and inherit wealth. The economic change was fundamental to women’s relative emancipation, for, as Verena Zinserling observes in her study on Greek and Roman women, “the key to the relation to power between men and women is, as in all other things, private ownership. The greater the economic independence of woman becomes, the more emancipated she is in all spheres of life.”¹²

The legal emancipation of the Roman matron paralleled her economic freedom and was manifested in the growth of the number of marriages without *manus*, the abolition of automatic agnateship over women by Claudius, and in the increased divorce rate. By Hadrian’s reign, for example, a married woman did not need a guardian even to draft her will, and she was the mistress of her own property because of her *sine manu* status. The juridical doctrine of the moral weakness of the female was also impaired by Augustus’ legislation, for according to the *ius trium liberorum*, a freeborn woman who bore three children and a freedwoman who bore four children were exempt from any guardianship, because as Augustus argued, those women had demonstrated responsible behavior by bearing the children Rome needed. That the change in attitude regarding woman’s legal status was completed in the second century A.D. is clear from the remarks of Gaius: “There is no serious reason whatsoever why persons of the female sex who are of full age should remain under guardianship” (*Gaius*, 190, 191).

There is also some evidence for the limited political emancipation of Roman women. Otto Kiefer points out that during and after the reign of Tiberius, authors speak of an *ordo matronarum* (*Val. Max.* 2, 1), of *mulierum conventus* (Suet., Galba, 5), of a *conventus matronalis*, and *mulierum senatus*.¹³ Lampridius calls the women’s decrees “ridiculous” and says that they were concerned chiefly with etiquette. On the more serious side, we have Livy’s account of the repeal of the Lex Oppia due

to pressure from women. In addition, contemporary evidence from Pompeii attests to the fact that women there (*vicinae*) backed and endorsed local candidates for municipal elections. Moreover, women like Catullus' mistress Clodia (Lesbia) and Sempronia supported Catiline, using their wealth and influence for his promotion. Sallust gives us a vivid, if somewhat biased picture of one of these emancipated ladies:

Now among these women was Sempronia, who had often committed many crimes of masculine daring. This woman was quite fortunate in her family and looks, and especially in her husband and children; she was well read in Greek and Latin literature, able to play the lyre and dance more aptly than any respectable woman would have needed to, and talented in many other activities which are part of over-indulgent living. But she cherished everything else more than propriety and morality; you would have a hard time determining which she squandered more of, her money or her reputation; her sexual desires were so ardent that she took the initiative with men far more often than they did with her. . . . Yet she possessed intellectual strengths which are by no means laughable: The skill of writing verses, cracking jokes, speaking either modestly or tenderly or saucily—in a word, she had much wit and charm. (*Cat. Con.*, 25)

From Sallust's portrait of Sempronia one may infer the change in the intellectual status of Roman women that resulted from the increasing number of upper-class women receiving more and better education. The intellectual and cultural emancipation is reflected in their growing participation in the life of letters; several literary salons were known to have been organized and frequented by women, notably the two Sulpicias and the Empress Julia Domna. The young Agrippina wrote her memoirs, which were used as a reference by Tacitus, and Sulpicia composed passable poetry that was still read in fifth-century Gaul. Diodorus even mentions a female orator, Hortensia, whose speech was praised by as stern a critic as Quintilian (*Inst.*, i, 6), and some women gained vocational recognition; there is even record of a woman engineer.

Women's intellectual emancipation had vast implications: it made friendship between men and women possible. Previously,

because women were assumed to have weak minds and, therefore, did not receive the same education as men, men thought that friendship between members of the two sexes was unusual if not impossible, as Aristotle's statement in the *Nicomachean Ethics* testifies: "Since most husbands and wives are not equals, the wife cannot be a true friend to her spouse." Modestinus' definition of marriage in the *Corpus iuris*, however, reflects the changed conception of marriage and of women in the late Empire: "Marriage is a union of man and woman for the establishment of a community of their whole life and for the conferment upon one another of all rights whatsoever, whether connected with things human or divine."

By the second century A.D., the two essential ingredients of the *patria potestas* were gradually disappearing; the *pater familias* had been deprived of the right of life and death over his children, and the husband had lost his absolute power over his wife. The popularity of prolonged celibacy, as well as the widespread and socially condoned practice of concubinage and other extramarital affairs, and the bisexuality of some Roman men also combined to make marriage appear less desirable. From an economic point of view, the advantages of childlessness (notably the practice of "legacy hunting") outweighed the rewards of the Augustan pro-marriage legislation.¹⁴ In addition, the nature of the slave culture in ancient Rome occasioned that many of the functions usually performed by a wife were automatically done by slaves.¹⁵ Unlike the hardworking Hesiod, who recommended the acquisition of a ploughing ox and a wife to help with the farm chores, the young Roman had all of his personal and economic needs administered to by a multitude of specialized slaves. Moreover, the increased ease of divorce and woman's relative emancipation probably also acted as an impediment to childbearing. Finally, celibacy and childlessness were by no means unanimously considered immoral. The Epicureans, Cynics, and Neoplatonists—all minority philosophies—advocated celibacy in one form or another, while the younger Stoa strongly recommended marriage only as the civic and moral duty of the individual, and the Neopythagoreans advocated for women the traditional roles of mother and wife.¹⁶

The Epicureans, the most influential of the minority philosophies in Rome, discouraged the political and civic involvement of the wise man and were in general averse to public life. Family life shared the same fate as civic life with them, for Epicurus propounded that it is better for the wise man to forego marriage and the rearing of children because he would thereby save himself from major disturbances. Jerome quotes Seneca as saying: "Epicurus asserts that the wise man ought not marry because there are many inconveniences that come from married life" (*Adv. Jov.* 1, 49). Epicurus' marital views are a direct consequence of his materialism that would cause him to value connections freely entered upon and sustained over those held involuntarily.

The second minority philosophy in Rome, the Cynic School, was also opposed to the marriage of the wise man. Diogenes praised those who were about to marry but refrained (*Diog. Lives* 6, 29), and when asked about the right time to marry, he replied, "For young men, not yet, for old men, never." The Cynics advocated that a select order of philosophers devote themselves entirely to the welfare of humanity. These wise men, therefore, would have no time for wife and children.

The Roman Neoplatonists, however, came closest to advocating complete asceticism. This is naturally reflected in their views of marriage, because abstinence from pleasures also implies abstinence from sexual intercourse. Their greatest thinker, Plotinus, although somewhat removed from our present chronological field of inquiry, summarizes Neoplatonic dogma by suggesting that the truly human life is the *vita contemplativa* and, further, that "... to lapse into carnal love is sin" (*Enn.* iii, 5.1).

Thus, by Juvenal's time, we see Rome's upper class disconcertingly reduced in size in a city whose slave population had just reached one million and whose freedmen often held important administrative positions and possessed enormous wealth.¹⁷ In the face of this situation, officials of the Roman aristocracy were becoming increasingly concerned with the decline in numbers of the indigenous upper class and the growth

of celibacy. They were seconded in their attempts to increase the marriage and birthrates and in their advocacy of the familiar roles of wife and mother for women by the most popular philosophic school of the period, the younger Stoa. Evidently, however, both propagandas were without much consequence. Women were freer, ostensibly richer, better educated, more influential, and more visible than in Republican times; cosmopolitan men placed personal preferment over civic obligation. The stolid virtues born in a largely rural society were inverted. The situation contained everything, in short, that a satirist could ask for in his model.

**Misogyny and mirth:
Juvenal's *Sixth Satire* as prototype**

Juvenal's sixth and longest satire variously termed "satire on the female sex," a "legend of bad women," the "most horrifying of all catalogues of female vices," and a "formless, chaotic invective"¹⁸ might be best described by the Chinese pictogram for satire, "laughter with knives." Juvenal is appealing to traditional prejudices for comic effect while safely undercutting the validity of his misogynistic remarks by the paradoxicality and ambiguity of his arguments. The tone of the poem is sustained irony and the method of argumentation is the systematic inversion of two sets of commonly accepted moral ideals: the Stoic marital ethic and the concept of the sacred or archetypal role of women. The satire's persona presents these direct inversions as the organizing principles of the poem and, documented by exaggerated instances of contemporary female misbehavior, they constitute the subject matter of his exempla.

By far the most violent and one of the most influential of the pagan misogynous works, Juvenal's Sixth Satire is the first extant text of general misogamy, and, as such, its audience is not limited to a select group of philosophers and religious enthusiasts. Rather, the poem is designed for the amusement of Everyman, its long-lasting popularity reflecting both a broad-based sentiment and a masterful execution. The Sixth Satire is also preeminently a social barometer reflecting the recurring

relationship between misogynous literature and social/demographic trends because it responds to the tremendous alterations that had taken place in Roman law and custom from the late Republican to the Imperial period.

The topography of the poem

The prologue begins with a humorous and ambiguous eulogy of the commonplace chaste Golden Age of man.¹⁹ During the Golden Age, wild-looking husbands and their even more ferocious-looking spouses shared simple cave dwellings with their livestock. Wives breast-fed their numerous and healthy babies and were kept constantly occupied by having to fight for the bare necessities of life. People were virtuous then, Juvenal seems to suggest, because they had no leisure time for luxurious and, thus, potentially corrupting practices.

The equation of virtue with full occupation and a hardened way of life in savage circumstances establishes the moral index of the poem and the link is reiterated by the persona's answer to Postumus' question regarding the origin of present-day monstrosities later in the poem: "Unde haec monstra tamen vel quo de fonte requiris?" (line 286). In the old days of the Hannibalic wars, the adviser says, humble fortunes, toil, brief slumbers, hard work, and the threat of war kept Roman wives chaste; but now, luxury avenges a conquered world: "Nunc patimur longae pacis mala; saevior armis, luxuria incubuit vic-tumque ulciscitur orbem" (lines 292–293). The linkage of *desidia*, *longa pax*, and *luxuria* with *libido* as the reason for Rome's decline is traditional: it occurs in the writings of Sallust, Livy, Seneca, and in the fierce attacks of Cato on declining morals and their cause: imported luxury.²⁰ The date for the onset of declining morals given in the Sixth Satire is also traditional, for virtually all ancient writers agree that Roman morals deteriorated in the second century B.C. They disagree only as to when the decline began to accelerate noticeably.

Juvenal exploits the traditional topos by taking the argument *ad absurdum* without, however, idealizing Golden Age man. He implies that virtue is an act not of moral decision but of necessity and lack of temptation: Golden Age wives were

chaste not because of an innate, primeval, moral rectitude, but because they had little opportunity for vice.²¹

The chastity topos introduced in the prologue is followed by the establishment of beauty as an antivalue. The virtuous wives of the Golden Age were unkempt, unclean, and ferocious looking; their uncouthness, linked to their natural way of life, is initially established as a positive quality. The antibeauty topos recurs in direct and modified echoes throughout the poem; beautiful wives are either actually or potentially unfaithful, beauty is associated with artificiality, and the results of the beautification process are seen only by the adulterer: “interea foeda aspectu ridendaque multo/pane tumet facies aut pinguis Poppaena/spirat, et hinc miseri viscantur labra mariti:/ad moechum lota veniunt cute./Quando videri vult formosa domi?” (lines 461–65). On the linguistic level, the illusory nature of beauty is emphasized by the use of verbs of appearance such as *videri* (appear) and also by the extensive use of the passive voice in the context of the description of beauty rather than verbs of fact.

The persona completes the discussion of beauty as an antivalue by using the example of Bibula to show that physical beauty can only inspire short-lived passion: Sertorius loves Bibula’s beautiful face now and fulfills her every desire, but he will repudiate her as soon as a few wrinkles appear. He loves the face, not the woman: “Cur desiderio Bibulae Sertorius ardet? Si verum excutias, facies, non uxor amatur” (lines 142–43).

Neither beauty as an antivalue nor its opposite, the appearance of the *montana uxor*, are presented by the persona as absolutes.²² To introduce an ambiguity of values, Juvenal has his persona evoke the elegiac ideals of Cynthia and Lesbia in contrast to the crude Golden Age wives. As W. Anderson observes, Lesbia does not only function as a symbol of “the vapidness of her type,” but both women also serve as visual contrasts to the “uncouthness, the physical grossness of the aboriginal woman.”²³

A direct address by the poem’s persona to Postumus follows the prologue. Postumus, like the persona, is sketched with consistency, and everything we learn about him is incriminat-

ing: he finds marriage attractive because it will assure his eligibility as an heir according to Augustus' marital legislation. He once used to be the most notorious of Rome's lechers: "moechorum notissimus olim" (line 42) and also an occasional homosexual. Although the prologue condemns adultery as the root of all subsequent corruption, the persona sees it as madness for Postumus to surrender his former way of life in favor of marriage. This is the first link in the subsequent chain of paradoxes serving to develop the unreliable character of the persona.

The persona of the poem is outraged at Postumus' plans for marriage when there are ropes to be had, windows and bridges to jump from: "Ferre potes dominam salvis tot restibus ullam,/ cum pateant altae caligantesque fenestrae,/cum tibi vicinum se praebeat Aemilius pons?" (line 30–32). The adviser suggests that suicide is better than marriage, pederasty is even better, but remaining in his present state (i.e., as the greatest of adulterers) is the best choice of all for Postumus. He warns Postumus that if he refuses to listen to the persuasive "arguments of sanity," he, the once successful cuckold, shall become the cuckolded, subjugated, tormented husband himself, and what's worse, to "bring up a dear little heir," he will have to forego the pleasures of all the legacy-hunting delicacies of the meat-market: the fine turtle doves, and the bearded mullets (lines 39–40).

As if the generalities of the madness hyperbole were not sufficient to dissuade Postumus, the adviser plunges into a diatribe against the contemporary state of marriage, highlighting the special vices of Rome's matrons. In the best satiric manner, the persona does this by employing concrete examples. Foremost on his list is adultery, especially the erotic attractiveness of social and intellectual degradation, documented by examples from contemporary and near-contemporary life: Eppia, the senator's wife, ran away with a gladiator. The reason for her doting is a thinly veiled but brutally obscene double entendre: she is attracted not by the man, but by his "sword" (lines 110–12). The ironic mockery of the Eppia passage is clear from the almost epic tone of the denunciation which concludes on an anticlimactic note introduced by a suspenseful interpolation by

the persona: “She had no thought of her home, her sister, husband or country, /Wickedly left her children in tears, and—this will astound you!—/Even forsook the games and that marvelous Thespian, Paris” (lines 85–87). The last line probably contains a topical reference when it mockingly praises Eppia’s rejection of even imperial pleasures, for the handsome pantomime Paris was Domitian’s reason for separating from his wife (*Suet. Domitian*, 3).²⁴

The adviser alludes to many instances in which the fibulae of comedians, tragedians, musicians, and gladiators were endangered by the voracious appetites of upperclass matrons (lines 73–75). While in this passage women are reproached for not caring a bean for Quintilian, later in the poem (lines 267–85) the eloquent rhetor is shown to be cared for too much. Again, the context is *impudicitia*, for the wife caught in *flagrante delicto*, will outspoke Quintilian. Here, as in the Eppia passage, the language of obscenity is handled ambiguously. The persona uses expressions with clear double entendre such as, for example, “cantare vetent,” “solvitur fibula,” which, in the narrative context, clearly refer to intercourse with inferiors.

Parallel to this example of the attractiveness of social degradation runs the suggestion that the higher the woman’s status, the more corrupt she is and the worse example she sets. Thus, the adviser culminates his examples of base attractions with a recounting of Messalina’s nightly escapades. The characterization of Claudius’ wife may be more vivid and memorable than in some other contemporary accounts, but it is in accordance with Tacitus’ and Suetonius’ account of her. The visual and sensual impact of the Messalina passage shows the satirist at his best. The Empress appears exposing her gilded breasts and the belly that bore “noble Britannicus” to her crude customers; the nauseating odor of the filthy *lupanar* pervades every line of the description.

The gallery of concrete examples demonstrating the depravity and stupidity of wives also includes instances of insane fashions and cosmetics, of foreign and foolish superstitions, and of religious misuse. (These themes will become traditional to the misogamous canon.) The religious misuse topos is coupled

with the *impudicitia* topos in the episode concerning the Bona Dea, whose festivities disintegrate into orgiastic revels. The absurd and sensational treatment of the passage not only makes the reader wonder about the way Juvenal may have collected his information, but it also calls to mind details revealed during the famous Senate investigation of the Bacchanalia in 186 B.C. The passage, as Anderson points out, should invite skepticism, because the repeated use of terms like *omnis* and *nullus* openly call attention to the persona's tendency to exaggerate.²⁵

The all-pervasive theme of *impudicitia* underlies the "musical joys" passage (lines 379–84) as well. In consistently ambiguous vocabulary, the persona describes the joys of a musical wife who is so devoted to the talents and instruments of her tutor that his voice will not survive her attention:

If she delights in song, she will make the professional singers
Come at her bidding; she holds their instruments in her hands,
While her sardonix rings flash as her fingers are moving
Up and down the scale, and she holds the pick, and it quivers
As it used to do in the hand of the soft Hedymeles.
So she fondles it, finds it a joy and a consolation,
Gives it more than one kiss by way of endearing indulgence.
(lines 379–84)

The list of female vices in the Sixth Satire continues with examples of wives engaging in inappropriate (i.e., manly) behavior such as sports and court litigations. While the frequency of such instances is absurdly exaggerated (the persona uses the terms *all* and *never* with suspicious ease), we have other contemporary evidence for the details: Suetonius says that Domitian gave performances not only between gladiators and beasts but between women as well, and that in the stadium there were races between girls.

The persona also describes wives as always cruel toward their husbands, servants, and neighbors and attacks the prevailing female lust for dominance. The matrons of the Sixth Satire always win the fight for the breeches. Consequently, Juvenal's persona is remarkably reminiscent of the older Cato's fearful assessment of the disaster that would result should wives receive more rights. Cato had said: "Review the laws with which our forefathers restrained their licence and made them subject

to their husbands; even with all these bonds, you can scarcely control them. What of this? . . . do you think you will be able to endure them: the moment they become your equals they will be your superiors" (*Liv.* XXXIV, iii).

The misogynist persona of the Sixth Satire is consistent; even the perfect wife comes under attack. The absurdity of the *rara avis* passage scarcely needs comment: "Sit formosa decens dives fecunda, vetustos/porticibus disponat avos, intactior omni/crinibus effusis bellum dirimente Sabina,/rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cycno;/quis feret uxorem cui constant omnia?" (lines 162–66) The very existence of the good wife is questioned; she is described in the subjunctive mood and probably presents the general idea of the respectable Roman matron: beautiful, decent, rich, fecund, of old ancestry, and chaste. These are all qualities whose existence the persona either denies or whose inherent value he questions: beauty and riches in a wife have previously been established as antivalues; old and glorious ancestry is criticized in connection with Cornelia; fecundity and chastity, the adviser claims, have disappeared from Rome.

That Juvenal's persona meant to draw attention to the existence of the plague of assertive, intellectual, and thus inappropriately "unfeminine" women is clear from the structural punctuation of the poem, for one of the few narrative breaks in the Sixth Satire occurs in the context of the description of a bluestocking. In lines 451–56, the persona steps out of his quasi-altruistic role as friendly adviser when he describes what appears to be the most disconcerting type of wife:

How I hate them,
Women who always go back to the pages of Palaemon's grammar,
Keeping all of the rules, and are pedants enough to be quoting
Verses I never heard. If she has some friend from the country
Let her correct her speech! Is this a business for men?
Husbands should be allowed their solecisms in comfort!

(lines 451–56)

In this passage, the misogyny of the persona is coupled with a strong anti-intellectual tendency and the link is further emphasized by the jealousy exclamatory nature of the intrusion.

After an attack on mothers-in-law, gossips, and spend-thrifts, the catalogue of *exempla* concludes with the climactic section on murderesses using poison. Thus, Roman wives are shown to be not only immoral and worthless but also menacing and dangerous—of no value when poor, and more pain than they are worth when rich.

The accusations by Juvenal's persona are all-inclusive and categorical. Every type of rich Roman matron is under attack. The categorical denunciation immediately suggests a comparison with the categorical and ambiguous eulogy in the prologue: as structural parallels to the evocation of the elegiac ideal in contrast to the *montana uxor*, the supposed victims of the Sixth Satire's monstrous women, the husbands, are worthy neither of respect nor sympathy. Sertorius is a selfish man whose lust (*desiderio ardet*) for Bibula's beauty is scarcely more noble than Eppia's love for her gladiator, and his repudiation of her on account of three wrinkles and the impending loss of beauty in favor of a younger wife parallels Eppia's desertion of her husband. Similarly, Censennia's husband, judged by the persona's own dictum, is worse than all the lusty ladies, for he prostitutes himself for money (644–52). While the persona is obviously condemning Censennia, his criticism backfires once again, for her husband is even more incriminated. Monstrosities committed in passion are much less miraculous and wicked than those calculated or done for mercenary reasons, as are the husband's crimes (in blatant contrast to the preceding gallery of passion-ridden matrons). The ridiculousness of prophylactic-gulping Pontus has already been noted by Anderson, and Postumus' sordid character makes him a worthy member of the group.²⁶

The method of dissuasion

There is one discernible pattern in the catalogue of vices that seems to be compatible with the major themes of the satire (i.e., the general corruption of the times) and the tone of the poem (i.e., sophistic irony). Juvenal seems to be using the Ovidian *Remedia* technique of dissuading by inverting two generally accepted value systems. Just as Juvenal's Rome is cor-

rupt because of the inversion of ancient ideals (generous patron/stingy upstart; sacred ceremonies/drunken revels), so the ideals of marriage and of womanhood are shown to have been destroyed by inversion, and the Stoic commonplace “marriage and procreation are natural” is denied by the persona’s *exempla*.

This technique of inversion corresponds to the persona’s quasi-medical purpose in the poem—to cure his protégé who has gone mad—for the concept of remedy by inversion is fundamentally a medical one. While Hippocrates advocated that in most cases illnesses be cured by the repeated application of their symptoms (*similia similibus*), Themison of Laodicea (fl. in Rome ca. 50 B.C.) and later Soranus of Ephesus (fl. in Rome second century A.D.) proposed that contraries be cured by contraries (*contraria contrariis*). Consequently because Postumus’ madness manifests itself in his wish to marry, presumably because he has such a positive view of marriage, he has to be shown the opposite view of marriage in order to be cured. The gallery of examples consolidating the repugnant picture of marriage serves precisely that function.

Even though Juvenal subscribes to no orthodoxy, it has long been recognized that his philosophic sympathies are Stoic.²⁷ The Stoics distrusted emotion, viewed dependence on others with scorn, and asserted that there was a natural law by which acts unworthy of human beings might be judged.²⁸

Even though the older Stoa was relatively indifferent to marriage, and Zeno, their founder, even advocated a community of wives for the wise men, the younger Stoa, with the possible exception of Seneca, was unequivocally in favor of marriage and the rearing of children as the civic and moral responsibility of the Roman citizen.²⁹

Adherence to the Stoic ideal in general and the Stoic ideal of marriage in particular, however, is precisely what Juvenal’s persona is unable to find in Rome, and he makes the categorical inversion of this ideal the subject of the bulk of his exempla against marriage. The wives in the Sixth Satire epitomize reason subordinated to passion, lack prudence, are slaves to excess, and defy virtue and decorum. In fact, the previously mentioned burlesque on the sacred mysteries of Bona Dea (lines 315–48)

typifies this paradigmatic devotion to excess and disregard for virtue and decorum. Although the goddess frowns on any male presence in her sanctuary (even images depicting human and animal males must be veiled), her devotees celebrate orgiastic revels there. Similarly, the defilement of the statue of Chastity by women (lines 306–14), their irrational cruelty (lines 219–30; 413–18; 474–95), and their passion for the *spectacula* and the performers (lines 60–115), their foolish superstition (lines 511–91), as well as their homicidal practices (lines 627–661) are all clear inversions of the Stoic ideal. More specifically, the matrons of the Sixth Satire exemplify the inversion of the marital values of Stoic teaching.

Furthermore, the adviser's first and often repeated dissuasive arguments against marriage concern the offspring. He insists that heirs are either illegitimate or are aborted before birth because all wives are adulteresses. When introducing the topos, the persona links adultery, lust, and *spectacula*. This linkage, so well known from the early Christian Apologists, is indicative of rich matrons' erotic fascination with social and intellectual inferiority.³⁰ Incidentally, the illegitimate offspring is described as having "the lineaments of Euryalus or of a murmillo" (81) because all wives are attracted to lowerclass types, especially gladiators whose race, not that of the husband, shall be propagated. In fact, Postumus is urged to assist in the abortion of his wife's child, for his heir is likely to be an Ethiopian:

Rejoice, unfortunate husband,
Give her the dose yourself, whatever it is; never let her
Carry till quickening time, or go on to full term and deliver
Something whose hue would seem to prove you a blackamoor father,
Sire of an off-color heir you'd prefer not to meet in the daylight.
(lines 597–601)

Here, as previously, condemnation of adultery is not made on moral but on pragmatic grounds: obvious illegitimacy is far more inconvenient than abortion.

In having his persona depict women as sex fiends, Juvenal once more follows traditional wisdom, for in ancient medical and natural treatises, women were held to be much more libidinous than men.³¹ In addition, complaints about women's pro-

clivity for *impudicitia* were accelerated during the Empire. Thus, for example, Seneca says that the only chaste woman is an ugly one, and that no woman is satisfied with one man (*De ben.* 111, 2–4).

Concern for offspring is Postumus' chief reason for wishing to marry. He does not want children, however, in order to fulfill his civic or moral duty but for entirely selfish reasons: the famous adulterer now wants to be eligible "as an heir." But as the persona makes clear, even that purpose will be frustrated.

In his attacks on marriage in the Sixth Satire, Juvenal's persona only mentions one mother of a large family, while he provides abundant examples of women engaging in unprocreative intercourse employing castrati, abortifacients, and contraceptives. Even the example of the virtuous mother of a large family is a negative one, for "it is hell being married to Cornelia." Cornelia's terrible vice is that she is, justifiably, proud of her accomplishments:

I would rather, much rather, have a Venusian girl
 Than the noble Cornelia, mother of heroes, those Gracchi,
 Bringing, with all her virtues, those upraised and haughty eyebrows,
 Counting as part of her dowry parades and processions of triumph.
 Spare me your Hannibals, please, and your Syphaxes, conquered
 in camp;
 Get to hell out of here with your Carthage, whole kit and caboodle!
 (lines 286–92)

Paradoxically, Cornelia's fecundity is also presented as an anti-value: she is compared to Niobe and condemned by analogy. This reference to Scipio's daughter is especially paradoxical in light of lines 286–92, where the adviser nostalgically recalls the time of the Hannibalic wars as the virtuous epoch of Roman history and serves, once more, as an indicator of the absurdity of the persona's logic.

Interestingly, the persona of the Sixth Satire underplays the obvious arguments in favor of celibacy mentioned by contemporary writers: he does not dwell on the "rewards of childlessness" and the "opportunity for licentiousness and varied pleasures" (only alluding to them once in the prologue). Neither does he promote celibacy by subscribing to any of the cur-

rent philosophic schools advocating the unmarried state: the adviser avoids making use of the Epicurean argument against marriage (that a wife and child are major impediments to the pursuit of happiness), and of the Neoplatonic ascetic ideal which proscribes a contemplative life free of any carnal pleasure. Rather, he describes wives as such monstrosities and in such exaggerated terms, that no man in his sane mind would marry them—and no sane reader could believe in their existence.

As wives, the matrons of the Sixth Satire are formidable tyrants, lively examples of the topos *mundus inversus*: they invade spheres traditionally reserved for men. The persona implies that by abandoning their traditional roles, wives also abandon the very essence of their sex (252–53). In this context, Seneca's remarks on the physical and medical repercussions of inappropriate behavior are relevant: Seneca says that by practicing male vices women also fall heir to masculine diseases: "Beneficium sexus sui vitiis perdiderunt et quia feminam exuerant, damnatae sunt morbis virilibus." In addition, wives are adulteresses; as the adviser warns, they do not stay long with any one husband: one wife had eight marriages in five years (lines 229–30), and another Eppia, left home, husband, sister, and country, abandoning her weeping children for the love of a gladiator. The only pleasure wives are willing to give is to their lovers but never to their husbands. They are superstitious, prodigal, luxurious, and spiteful to their husbands.

Clearly, the wifely practices of the women in the Sixth Satire stand in direct contrast to the Roman conjugal ideal as reflected, for example, by surviving epitaphs from the Imperial period. Balsdon lists these inscriptions of traditional commonplaces praising the deceased wife's virtue of old-fashioned (*antiqua vita*), content to stay at home (*domiseda*), chaste (*puclitia*), dutifully obedient (*obsequium*), friendly and amusing (*comitas, sermone lepido*), careful with money (*frugi*), not overly dressed (*ornatus non conspiciendi*), religious without being fanatic (*religionis sine superstitione*), and commended for spinning and weaving (*lanifica, lanam fecit*).³²

In the climactic conclusion of the poem, the persona even inverts women's sacred role as the layer out of the corpse by