

“Creticus, you are see-through!”: The Transparent Toga in Roman Invective

1. Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 5.114.3

toga a tegendo (“toga from covering”)

Isidore, *Etymologies* 14.3

toga dicta quod velamento sui corpus tegat atque operiat.

“The toga is so-called because it covers and conceals the body by its own covering.”

2. Varro, *Menippean Satires* 313.1 = Non. 448M, 536M

quam istorum quorum vitreae togae ostentant tunicae clavos

“...than *those* men whose glass-like togas show off the stripes of their tunic...”

3. Pliny, *Natural History* 11.76

ut denudet feminas vestis (Silk was invented “so that clothing would denude women”)

4. Cicero, *Philippic* 2.44

*sumpsisti virilem, quam statim muliebre[m]
togam reddidisti. primo volgare scortum; certa
flagiti merces nec ea parva; sed cito Curio
intervenit qui te a meretricio quaestu abduxit
et, tamquam stolam dedisset, in matrimonio
stabili et certo conlocavit.*

You assumed the man’s toga, which you immediately made a woman’s. First a common whore, you charged a fixed price for your shameful deeds, and not a small one; but Curio quickly intervened and took you from the prostitute’s trade and, as if he had given you a stola, he brought you into stable and sure matrimony.

5. Horace, *Sermones* 1.2.62-63, 80-85, 94-105

*quid inter-
est in matrona, ancilla peccesne togata?
[...]
nec magis huic, inter niveos viridisque lapillos 80
sit licet hoc, Cerinthe, tuum, tenerum est femur aut crus
rectius, atque etiam melius persaepe togatae.
adde huc, quod mercem sine fucis gestat, aperte
quod venale habet ostendit nec, siquid honesti est,
iactat habetque palam, quaerit quo turpia celet. 85
[...]
matronae praeter faciem nil cernere possis,
cetera, ni Catia est, demissa veste tegentis. 95
si interdicta petes, vallo circumdata — nam te
hoc facit insanum —, multae tibi tum officient res,
custodes, lectica, ciniflones, parasitae,
ad talos stola demissa et circumdata palla,*

What difference does it make whether you do wrong to a matron or a togate maid? ... Believe me, Cerinthus, her thigh is no softer or her leg straighter amidst snow-white or green jewels, and the togate woman’s are quite often even better. In addition, she presents the merchandise without disguise, she clearly shows what she has for sale, nor does she boast and show openly something fine while seeking to hide what is ugly. ... You can’t see anything except the face of a matron, moreover (unless she is a Catia), covered by her clothes all the way down. If you seek the forbidden, encircled by a rampart—for this makes you insane—many things block you. Guards, a litter, hairdressers, hangers-on, the stola down to her ankles and the encircling

plurima, quae inuideant pure adparere tibi rem. 100
altera, nil obstat: cois tibi paene videre est
ut nudam, ne crure malo, ne sit pede turpi;
metiri possis oculo latus. an tibi mavis
insidias fieri pretiumque avellier ante
quam mercem ostendi?... 105

palla, very many things which begrudge you a clear sight. As for the other woman, nothing stands in your way. In Coan silk you can see almost as if she were naked, lest she have a bad leg or an ugly foot; you can measure her side with your eyes. Or would you rather be ambushed and pay the price before you see the merchandise?

6. [Tibullus] 3.16.1-4

Gratum est, securus multum quod iam tibi de me
permittis, subito ne male inepta cadam.
Sit tibi cura togae potior pressumque quasillo
scortum quam Serui filia Sulpicia.

I am thankful that you, being carefree, now allow yourself a lot concerning me, in case I, being foolish, should fall badly all of a sudden. Have a care more for the toga and the whore burdened with spinning than Sulpicia, daughter of Servius.

7. Horace, Epistle 1.14.32-36

quem tenues decuere togae nitidique capilli,
quem scis immunem Cinarae placuisse rapaci,
quem bibulum liquidi media de luce Falerni,
cena brevis iuvat et prope rivum somnus in herba;
nec lusisse pudet, sed non incidere ludum,

One whom a fine-spun toga suited, and shining long hair, one who, as you know, though gift-less pleased greedy Cinara, who in the middle of the day would drink the clear Falernian, now enjoys a simple dinner and a nap in the grass near the stream; it is not shameful to have played around, but it is shameful not to cut it short.

8. Ovid, Ars Amatoria 3.441-50

Sed vitate viros cultum formamque professos,
Quique suas ponunt in statione comas.
Quae vobis dicunt, dixerunt mille puellis: 435
Errat et in nulla sede moratur amor.
Femina quid faciat, cum sit vir levior ipsa,
Forsitan et plures possit habere viros?
[...]
Sunt qui mendaci specie grassentur amoris,
Perque aditus talis lucra pudenda petant.
Nec coma vos fallat liquido nitidissima nardo,
Nec brevis in rugas lingula pressa suas:
Nec toga decipiat filo tenuissima, nec si 445
Anulus in digitis alter et alter erit.
Forsitan ex horum numero cultissimus ille
Fur sit, et uratur vestis amore tuae.
'Redde meum!' clamant spoliatae saepe
puellae,
'Redde meum!' toto voce boante foro. 450

But avoid men who are admitted experts in dress and form, who arrange their hair carefully. What they tell you, they've told a thousand girls; their love wanders around and settles nowhere. What can a girl do, when a man is smoother than she, and perhaps can have even more men too? ... There are those who proceed with a false appearance of love, and by this approach they seek shameful profits. Do not let hair most bright with flowing nard fool you, nor a short shoe-strap pressed into its creases: do not let a most finely-spun toga deceive you, nor if he has rings on several fingers. Perhaps the most elegant out of these men is a thief, and he burns with love for your clothing. "Return my clothes!" the stripped girls often shout, "Return my clothes!" with a voice echoing through the whole Forum.

9. Pliny, *Natural History* 11.78

*nec puduit has vestes usurpare etiam viros
levitatem propter aestivam: in tantum a lorica
gerenda discessere mores ut oneri sit etiam
vestis.*

Nor have even men been ashamed to usurp these [silken] clothes due to their lightness in summer: our habits have so far deviated from bearing the cuirass that even clothing is a burden.

10. Seneca, *Epistles* 90.20, 114.21-22

*...has nostri temporis telas, quibus vestis nihil
celatura conficitur, in qua non dico nullum
corpori auxilium, sed nullum pudori est?*

...the weaving of our day, by which clothing that will conceal nothing is made, in which I do not say there is no protection for the body, but none for modesty?

*...qui lacernas coloris improbi sumunt, qui
perlucentem togam, qui nolunt facere
quicquam, quod hominum oculis transire
liceat; inritant illos et in se advertunt; volunt
vel reprehendi, dum conscripti. ... Hoc a
magno animi malo oritur.*

...those who wear cloaks of unacceptable colors, who wear a transparent toga, who do not want to do anything which can be overlooked (lit: pass by the eyes of men); they stir them up and draw their attention to themselves; they wish even to be censured, provided that they attract notice. ... This arises out of a great evil in the soul.

11. Tacitus, *Annales* 2.33

ne vestis serica viros foedaret (“lest clothing of Eastern silk foul men”)

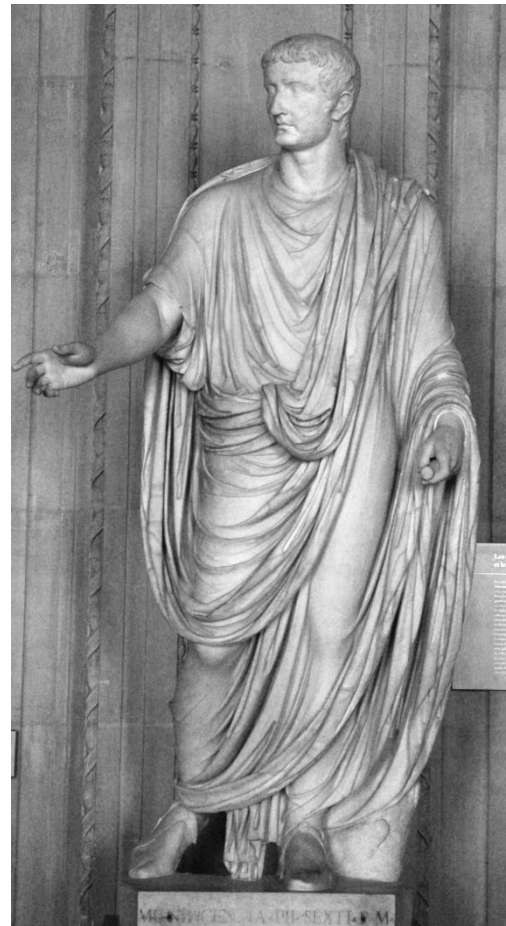
12. Juvenal, *Satire* 2.66-83

*Sed quid
non facient alii, cum tu multicia sumas,
Cretice, et hanc vestem populo mirante perores
in Proculas et Pollittas? est moecha Fabulla,
damnetur, si vis, etiam Carfinia: talem
non sumet damnata togam. ‘sed Iulius ardet, 70
aestuo.’ nudus agas: minus est insania turpis,
en habitum quo te leges ac iura ferentem
vulneribus crudis populus modo victor, et illud
montanum positus audiret vulgus aratris.
quid non proclames, in corpore iudicis ista 75
si videas? quaero an deceant multicia testem,
acer et indomitus libertatisque magister,
Cretice, perluces. dedit hanc contagio labem
et dabit in plures, sicut grex totus in agris
unius scabie cadit et porrigine porci 80
uvaque conspecta livorem ducit ab uva.
Foedius hoc aliquid quandoque audebis amictu;
nemo repente fuit turpissimus.*

But what will others not do, when you wear finely-woven cloth, Creticus, and, while people are staring in amazement at this garment, you deliver an impassioned finale against women like Procula and Politta? Fabulla is an adulteress. Imagine even Carfina found guilty, if you like. She would not wear such a toga if condemned. “But July’s blazing—I’m sweltering.” Then plead stark naked. Insanity is less disgusting. Just look at the outfit you’re wearing for citing laws and statutes, in front of an audience consisting of the populace fresh from victory with their wounds still raw and those famous mountain folk who have just put down their ploughs! Just think how you would protest if you saw those clothes on the body of a judge. I wonder whether fine cloth is right even for a witness. You fierce, indomitable champion of liberty, Creticus—you are see-through! This stain is caused by infection and it will spread further, just as the entire herd in the fields dies because of the scab and mange of a single pig, just as a bunch of grapes takes on discoloration from the sight of another bunch. Some day you will dare something more disgusting than this clothing. No one ever became utterly abominable overnight. (trans. Braund, modified)

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Tiberius, 1st cent. CE