“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."

   *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
   *sump sisti virilem, quam statim muliebrem togam reddistit. 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 peacesne 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 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 invideant pure adparere tibi rem. 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

**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.


quam 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**


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 aestivalm: 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?* ...

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

*...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? ...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* ("leth clothing of Eastern silk foul men")


*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 positis 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 Polita? 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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