

Laronia Declamans

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1. Laronia's Speech

... *'felicia tempora,
quae te moribus opponunt. habeat iam Roma
pudorem:
tertius e caelo cecidit Cato. sed tamen unde
haec emis, hirsuto spirant opobalsama collo
quae tibi? ne pudeat dominum monstrare tabernae.
quod si vexantur leges ac iura, citari
ante omnis debet Scantina. respice primum
et scrutare viros: faciunt peiora, sed illos
defendit numerus iunctaeque umbone phalanges.
magna inter molles concordia. non erit ullum
exemplum in nostro tam detestabile sexu.
Tedia non lambit Cluiviam nec Flora Catullam:
Hispo subit iuvenes et morbo pallet utroque.
numquid nos agimus causas? civilia iura
novimus? aut ullo strepitu fora vestra movemus?
luctantur paucae, comedunt colyphia paucae.
vos lanam trahitis calathisque peracta refertis
vellera, vos tenui praegnantem stamine fusum
Penelope melius, levius torquetis Arachne,

horrida quale facit residens in codice paelex.
notum est cur solo tabulas impleverit Hister
liberto, dederit vivus cur multa puellae.
dives erit magno quae dormit tertia lecto.
tu nube atque tace: donant arcana cylindros.
de nobis post haec tristis sententia fertur?
dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas.'
fugerunt trepidi vera ac manifesta canentem
Stoicidae; quid enim falsi Laronia? (2.38–65)*

“What happy times, that set you up as the enemy of corrupt morality! Let Rome now develop her sense of shame: a third Cato has tumbled from the sky! But, by the way, where did you buy this balsam perfume which wafts from your shaggy neck? Don't be embarrassed to point out the shop-owner. But if it's a matter of waking up laws and statutes, it's the Scantinian law which should be summoned before all the rest. Look at men first, subject them to scrutiny. They behave worse, but they've got safety in numbers and in their phalanxes, with shield overlapping shield. The solidarity between effeminates is enormous. You won't find any example so revolting in our sex. Tedia doesn't tongue Cluvia, nor Flora Catulla, but Hispo submits to young men and turns pale from both diseases. We women don't plead cases, do we? Or claim expertise in civil law? Or disturb your courts with an uproar? Few women wrestle, few women consume the meat-rich diet. But you tease the wool and you bring the prepared fleeces back in baskets. You turn the spindle that's pregnant with fine thread better than Penelope, more deftly than Arachne, *** the sort of task which a dishevelled mistress does as she sits on the block. It's common knowledge why Hister filled his will with his freedman alone, why in his lifetime he made many gifts to his young, still-virgin wife. She who sleeps third in a large bed will be rich. My advice, young woman? Marry and keep quiet: secrets bestow jewels. After all this, is a verdict of 'guilty' passed on us? That's a judgment that acquits the ravens and condemns the doves.” As she uttered the obvious truth, the would-be Stoics ran away in a panic. After all, was anything that Laronia said false?

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¹ The Latin edition of Juvenal and block translations throughout are from Braund 2004. Other translations, unless noted, are my own.

2. Importance of Facial Expression

atque ita subridens... (2.38) describing Laronia

Dominatur autem maxime uultus. Hoc supplices, hoc minaces, hoc blandi, hoc tristes, hoc hilares, hoc erecti, hoc summissi sumus: hoc pendent homines, hunc intuentur, hic spectatur etiam antequam dicimus: hoc quosdam amamus, hoc odimus, hoc plurima intellegimus, hic est saepe pro omnibus uerbis. (Inst. 11.3.72)

The face is sovereign. It is this that makes us humble, threatening, flattering, sad, cheerful, proud, or submissive; men hang on this; men fix their gaze on this; this is watched even before we start to speak; this makes us love some people and hate others; this makes us understand many things; this often replaces words altogether.²

3. Structure

- invocatory opening (*exordium* 38–40)
- digression on her opponent's perfume (*digressio* 41–2)
- main argument (*argumentatio* 43–59)
 - male sexual practices are worse (*probatio* 43–6)
 - an anticipatory defence, that women respect the boundaries of gender norms (*refutatio* 47–53)
 - an example of men trespassing within the female sphere (*probatio* resumed 54–59)
- final exhortation (*peroratio* 60–3): an emotional appeal, rhetorical question, and a quippy and elegantly arranged *epiphonema* (63)

4. Women in Court

Women's appearance in the civic life of the Forum—even as depictions—was problematic. ... In the late Republic and early Empire women's presence in the Forum for other than religious purposes... was considered anomalous, perhaps even transgressive,... and reports of women [during this time period] repeatedly comment explicitly on the concomitant disruption of normal order.³

Ne de his quidem feminis tacendum est, quas condicio naturae et uerecundia stolae ut in foro et iudiciis tacerent cohibere non ualuit ('innate condition and matronly modesty were not sufficient to keep them quiet before a court'). *Maesia Sentinas rea causam suam L. Titio praetore iudicium cogente maximo populi concursu egit modosque omnes ac numeros defensionis non solum diligenter, sed etiam fortiter executata, et prima actione et paene cunctis sententiis liberata est. quam, quia sub specie feminae uirilem animum gerebat, Androgynen appellabant* ('because she bore a man's spirit under the form of a woman, they called her Androgyne').

V. Max. 8.3.praef–1

² Russell 2001, 123.

³ Boatwright 2011, 135 and 108.

5. Hypocrisy

hunc ego fatis/ imputo, qui vultu morbum incessuque fatetur (16)

'I will chalk it up to fate, if he confesses his affliction both in appearance and behavior.'

peiores... de virtute locuti / clunem agitant (19–21)

'the people that are far worse are those who speak about virtue while wagging their bottoms.'

loripedem rectus derideat, Aethiopem albus (23)

'Let the upright chastise the lame, let the white rebuke the black!'

6. Not Even in Hell

esse aliquid manes et subterranea regna,

Cocytum et Stygio ranas in gurgite nigras,

atque una transire vadum tot milia cumba

nec pueri credunt, nisi qui nondum aere lavantur. (149-152)

'The existence of ghosts and the underworld realms and Cocytus and the black frogs in the whirling Styx and the idea that all those thousands cross the water in a single boat—not even boys believe in that, except those not yet old enough to pay admission to the baths.'

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