

Gravis Occursu, Taeterrima Vultu: Zoomorphic Imagery and Verbal Humor in Juvenal 6
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Although animal metaphors are commonplace in satiric literature on women, Juvenal's use of animal imagery in the sixth satire is noteworthy for its frequency and for its vivid detail. How the animal metaphors serve to dehumanize the female and to reaffirm her inferior status within the hierarchical chain is a topic that has been well discussed in the literature (Gold 1994; Richlin 1984). The humor in these images, however, sometimes proves more difficult to explain. Ever since W.S. Anderson's seminal work on the persona of the angry satirist (1964, 1970), most attempts to explain misogynistic humor in Juvenal have tended to focus on the unreliable narrator himself (e.g. Wilson and Makowski 1990) and/or on the identity of his implied audience. If the narrator's rhetorical excess undercuts his stated message, he becomes an object of ridicule at whom we can easily laugh. Others have resisted contrived efforts to rescue the poet from bigotry and have observed how the narrator's claims, however hyperbolic, reflect and respond to contemporary cultural values (Richlin 1983, 1984 and *cf.* Vidén 1993; Gold 1994). More recently, Maria Plaza (2006) has reframed the discussion by demonstrating how extreme vice empowers the female character, effectively transforming her into a comic hero. I believe that Plaza is right about the inherent humor in Juvenal's caricatures, and in this paper I seek to demonstrate one of the specific mechanisms by which the poet provokes laughter.

My paper will examine several passages in *Satire 6* in which zoomorphisms (animal transformations) coincide with semantic shifts, i.e. verbal ambiguities or contradictions, in the text. Where the poet overtly compares woman and animal, as is often the case, the humor may need no additional verbal cues: the image of a woman having sex with a donkey (6.329—34), for example, is arguably humorous *per se*. At other times, however, the implication of bestiality works in tandem with the written text, providing an additional layer of complexity for the attentive reader. The passage in *Sat.* 6.306—313, an orgiastic scene at the altar of Chastity, demonstrates the phenomenon clearly. Here a double entendre in line 310 (*effigiem deae longis siphonibus implent*), which is suggestive both of urination and of sexual penetration, contains a latent hint of bestiality as well. This bestial implication is fully realized in the next line where the reader learns that the women “ride one another in turn” (*inque vices equitant*). Similar coincidences of verbal and visual humor may be observed in the scenes at ll. 63—66, 413—418, and 425—432. Through these examples I demonstrate how transgressive images serve as triggers for verbal humor and/or how latent transgressive images are realized in verbal joke structures.

Works Cited:

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