

Juvenal Satire 2 passage

“It’s the mark of the supreme general, I suppose, to slaughter Galba while pampering his skin, to aspire to the Palatine throne while plastering his face with a face mask of dough. That’s something not attempted by quivered Sameramis in her Assyrian city or Cleopatra grieving in her ship at Actium. Here there is no sense of shame in their language, no table manners, here is Cybele’s foul *** and the freedom to speak in an effeminate voice. A crazed white-haired old man is the priest of the rites, a rare and memorable specimen of enormous throat, an expert worth the fee. What are they waiting for? It’s already time for them to use their knives to hack away their superfluous flesh in the Phrygian manner.

Gracchus gave a dowry of four hundred thousand sesterces to a trumpeter—or maybe he performed on a horn that was straight. The marriage contract has been witnessed, felicitations offered, a huge company invited to the feast, and the new bride reclines in her husband’s lap. O nobles! Is it a censor or a soothsayer that we need? Would you be more horrified, would you think it more monstrous still, if a woman gave birth to a calf or a cow to a lamb? He’s wearing the bride’s flounces, long dress, and veil—the man who carried the sacred objects swaying from the mystic thong and who sweated under the weight of the sacred shields. O father of Rome, where has it come from, this appalling outrage that afflicts the shepherds of Latium? Where has it come from, this itch that taints your descendants, Gradivus? Look: a man illustrious in family and fortune is handed over in marriage to another man—and you’re not shaking your helmet, or striking the ground with your spear, or complaining to your father? Off with you, then—withdraw from the acres of the stern Campus which you don’t care about. “Tomorrow at sunrise I have a ceremony to attend in the valley of Quirinus.” “What’s the occasion?” “Oh, just a friend of mine marrying a man, and he’s invited a few guests.” If we are allowed to live just a little longer, those marriages will take place, they’ll take place openly, they’ll even want to be reported in the news. Meanwhile, the fact that they can’t give birth and use their babies to hang on to their husbands is a huge torment which these brides cannot escape. But it’s better that nature grants their minds no power over their bodies: they die infertile, and swollen Lyde with her secret medicine box is no use to them, no more than holding out their palms to running Lupercus. (Juv. 2.104-142)

“But suppose all this were true: what would Curius feel, and both the Scipios, Fabricius, and Camillus’ shade? What about the legion of Cremera and the fighting youth destroyed at Cannae, the dead of all those wars, what would they feel whenever a ghost like this came down to them from here? They would want to be purified, if they could get hold of sulphur and torches and moistened laurel. Down there—the shame of it!—we are paraded in disgrace.” (Juv. 2.153-59)