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FLEEING SISTERS: THE GOLDEN AGE IN JUVENAL 6

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Abstract: The opening of Juvenal’s longest and maybe the most well-known poem, Satire 6, is based on the ancient concept of the “Ages of Man”, starting from the reign of Saturn and ending with the flight of the two sisters, Pudicitia and Astraea. The first part of this 24-line-long passage depicts the Golden Age by making use of two different sources: the idealized Golden Age appearing in Vergil’s poetry among others and the prehistoric primitive world from Book 5 of Lucretius. The Juvenalian Golden Age, presented briefly in a naturalistic way, is a curious amalgam of these two traditions, being the only time in human history according to the poet when marital fidelity was unblemished. However, while reading Satire 6, it seems far from obvious that the lack of adultery should be attributed to higher morals.

Keywords: Juvenal, satire, invective poetry, Myth of Ages, Golden Age, misogyny

Satire 6, Juvenal’s longest and maybe the most well-known poem has been the subject of a great deal of interpretational debates. In the last decades, opinions in the field of research turned from the traditional reading as a misogynistic, anti-feminist poem¹ towards the satire’s interpretation as a *logos apotreptikos*, a dissuasion poetic speech focusing on marriage and adultery. Braund thoroughly presents the features that separate *Satire 6* from the literary tradition of misogynistic poetry, focusing on what the poem does *not* contain:² her most important argument is the total absence of the two specific female characters who could have been easily attacked on moral levels, namely the witch and the prostitute.³ This

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¹ E.g. Bond 1979, 418–447, who traces back this “anti-feminist” poem to the elder Cato. His arguments are refuted by Richlin 2014, 64 among others.

² Braund 1992, 71–86 interprets the satire as being a dissuasion speech presented by a misogynistic poetic *persona*—I will return to this idea later in my paper.

³ Braund’s further arguments: Juvenal gives little place to the topics of Semonides’ famous poem on the types of women, like dirtiness, gluttony, quarrelling, slow-wittedness etc.; the subject of alcohol consumption, which is also often presented in this kind of literature, only has a marginal

is caused by the fact that the poem's subjects are not female beings generally⁴ but rather more specific ones: marriage and marital infidelity, and since the aforementioned women are (usually) not to be married with, Postumus, the addressee of the *logos apotreptikos* does not have to be dissuaded from them.

By mentioning the personified Pudicitia as the goddess of chastity in the first line, Juvenal immediately denotes the central motif and the subject of the poem. The short story of the goddess Pudicitia motivates the appearance of the first two ages of the “Myth of Ages” in the poem's prologue:

*Credo Pudicitiam Saturno rege moratam
in terris visamque diu, cum frigida parvas
praeberet spelunca domos ignemque laremque
et pecus et dominos communi clauderet umbra,
silvestrem montana torum cum sterneret uxor
frondibus et culmo vicinarumque ferarum
pellibus, haut similis tibi, Cynthia, nec tibi, cuius
turbavit nitidos extinctus passer ocellos,
sed potanda ferens infantibus ubera magnis
et saepe horridior glandem ructante marito.
quippe aliter tunc orbe novo caeloque recenti
vivebant homines, qui rupto robore nati
compositive luto nullos habuere parentes.
multa Pudicitiae veteris vestigia forsitan
aut aliqua exstiterint et sub Iove, sed Iove nondum
barbato, nondum Graecis iurare paratis
per caput alterius, cum furem nemo timeret
caulibus ac pomis et aperto viveret horto.
paulatim deinde ad superos Astraea recessit
hac comite, atque duae pariter fugere sorores.
anticum et vetus est alienum, Postume, lectum
concutere atque sacri genium contemnere fulcri.
omne aliud crimen mox ferrea protulit aetas:
viderunt primos argentea saecula moechos.
(Juv. 6, 1–24)*

Satire 6 is not the first poem in Juvenal's collection of satires which reflects on the Myth of Ages. In his programmatic poem, he names the deluge from the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha (or in other words: the beginning of the mythological Iron Age) as the starting-point of the spread of human sins.⁵ *Book 2* that contains

role in the satire; *Satire 6* lacks analogies between animals and women or parts of the female body that are other stock elements of misogynistic poetry—for the latter see also Richlin 1984, 70–71—; the husband-slave (or marriage-slavery) analogy is not prominent in the satire.

⁴ For authors interpreting *Satire 6* as a “catalogue of women”, see Braund 1992, 71, n1.

⁵ Juv. 1, 81–86: *ex quo Deucalion nimbis tollentibus aequor / navigio montem ascendit sortisque poposcit / paulatimque anima caluerunt mollia saxa / et maribus nudas ostendit Pyrrha*

only one poem, *Satire 6*, is opened by a prologue of similar length as in *Book 1*, and the Myth of Ages reappears here, in a slightly different way: Juvenal restates that the Iron Age infected the world with crime, but he singles out the seducing of other men's wives naming it as the oldest of all sins that already appeared in the Silver Age. The fact that the prologue of *Satire 6* deals with the origin of the most ancient sin, adultery, confirms that the topic of this poem is not the sins of women in general, but is a more specific one: the satire revolves around the motif of marital infidelity, while all the other sins appear in connection with this one. And it is also worth emphasizing that in its last words while referring to the oldest crime, Juvenal mentions seducing men instead of adulterous women, which is another argument against the clearly misogynistic reading, i.e. that only women are sinful according to the narrator.

The prologue has a key role in disclosing the real subject of the poem, being the first (and maybe the most important) argument in the endless poetic speech by stating that Pudicitia (the goddess of Chastity) abandoned mankind for good. The time of her presence among mortals, the Golden Age is recalled briefly in the first 13 lines, focusing on certain aspects of Saturn's reign. This opening of *Book 2* is largely different from the impulsive prologue of *Book 1*, as its tone is placid, its words are lacking any invective voice and emotion, and apart from the opening verb *credo* ("I believe"), it is entirely impersonal.⁶ The central figure of the passage is Pudicitia, who *lingered* on Earth during Saturn's reign according to the opening sentence. The word *moratam* suggests right at the beginning that Pudicitia's presence among humanity is only temporary since Earth is not her natural place as a goddess, and therefore her leaving—or as Juvenal puts it: flight—and the fading of chastity's virtue was inevitable.⁷

While revealing the explanation of this necessity, Juvenal presents the way of life in the Golden Age in three temporal clauses that should be interpreted on two different levels (2–7). On the one hand, most of the elements in these lines invoke the venerable simplicity that is traditionally attributed to the Golden Age; these are the chilly shade of the cave, the fire, the *Lar*, the herd, and its keeper. How-

puellas, / quidquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas, / gaudia, discursus, nostri farrago libelli est. Based on the previous section of the satire and the mention of *indignatio* as the poet's main inspiration, it is obvious that the enumeration in lines 85–86 is related to sins: *gaudia* are forbidden pleasures, *discursus* is rampant turmoil, *votum* is false oath or selfish prayer, while the negative connotations of fear, wrath and desire are even more clear.

⁶ Cf. Anderson 1956, 75.

⁷ See Singleton 1972, 152. In his commentary, Nadeau 2011, 20–21 and 50–51 connects the word *moratam* with Propertius 2, 2, suggesting that Pudicitia is presented as being very old, while *vestigia... aliqua* in line 14 refers to her inability to walk bigger distances because of her age. Watson 2012a is right to criticize this interpretation.

ever, on the other hand such simplicity is accompanied by the concepts of primitiveness, the lack of civilization, and moreover animality that is strengthened by the characterization of the woman, or as the poet names her, *montana uxor*, the wife from the mountain (5–10).⁸ In these lines, Juvenal refers to Propertius and Catullus indirectly when contrasting their muses, Cynthia and Lesbia with the women of the mythological Golden Age. The words *haut similis tibi* (meaning “they were not similar to you”) have dual meaning: they refer to the physical appearance and morality too. As Cynthia and Lesbia represent those contemporary women who are attractive and unchaste, unlike the women of the Golden Age, they become typical exemplars of the women of *Satire 6*.

Using the name of Cynthia is not the only way Propertius being referred to in the prologue, as a specific poem of his can be counted among the literary sources of these lines. In his second book, *Elegy 32* contains a passage mentioning the Golden Age, and having several elements that appear in Juvenal’s lines as well:

*tu prius et fluctus poteris siccare marinos,
 altaque mortali deligere astra manu,
 quam facere, ut nostrae nolint peccare puellae:
 hic mos Saturno regna tenente fuit.
 at cum Deucalionis aquae fluxere per orbem,
 et post antiquas Deucalionis aquas,
 dic mihi, quis potuit lectum servare pudicum,
 quae dea cum solo vivere sola deo?⁹*
 (Prop. 2, 32, 49–56)

Juvenal’s statement in lines 21–22 saying that “It’s an old and ancient tradition, Postumus, to shatter the bed of someone else” reminds us of the question of Propertius: “who could ever keep an unblemished bed after Deucalion’s ancient waters?” And moreover, both texts connect the disappearance of marital fidelity with the debauchery of gods, which is obvious from lines 55–56 of Propertius, while Juvenal presumably refers to it with the adjective *barbatus* of Jupiter. Scholars are divided on the question of the connection between the flight of Pudicitia and the growth of Jupiter’s beard. Courtney, for example suggests that it is a mere mythological time-setting, meaning that the traces of chastity remained in the world until Jupiter had grown a beard, which is considered as the beginning of the Iron Age.¹⁰ However, there is a fundamental problem with his explanation, as only a few lines later Juvenal states that adultery had already appeared in the Silver Age (23–24), and therefore the growth of the beard shall refer to something

⁸ Cf. Singleton 1972, 152–153; Nadeau 2011, *ad loc. passim*.

⁹ Nardo 1973, 17 quotes lines 49–52 only.

¹⁰ Courtney 1980, 264: “...but by the time Jupiter grew up and acquired a beard, the Iron Age, in which Astraea left the earth, had arrived.”

else. The reading of these lines is much smoother if we interpret them as rendering the growth of Jupiter's beard and together with that his reaching of adulthood as the beginning of his famous seductions, which also triggered the spread of lewdness among the mortals who followed the example of the main god.¹¹ And moreover, this explanation fits perfectly with the demythized and over-anthropomorphized way of depicting the gods that is typical of Juvenal's *Satires*.

Although both Propertius and Juvenal connects the infidelity of gods and mortals with each other, the satirist changes the tradition by placing the appearance of unchastity in the Silver Age. According to my interpretation, this change has a dual function making the main subject of the satire a special one among all the sins, and at the same time being another example of Juvenal's special treatment of the traditional mythology that can be noted in multiple poems of him.¹² He is, so to say, entering a dialogue with Propertius, who states that "The morals were like that during Saturn's age", to which Juvenal's narrator reacts in the following way: "I believe". But mere belief is not enough for him, so he starts to look for an explanation in the next lines, then turning to the Silver Age, about which he has a different idea from that of the elegist. In the first line of the Silver Age passage (14–20), the word *forsan* ("maybe") expresses his doubt in the Silver Age morals, and in the remaining part of the prologue, he tells his own version of the mythological story.

Discussing the differences between the Juvenalian and the more traditional depiction of the Ages of Men, it is worth mentioning another elegy of Propertius briefly, since the description of the Juvenalian Golden Age shows vivid similarities with that on the level of motifs and words:

...et portare suis vestitas frondibus uvas
aut variam plumae versicoloris avem.
his tum blanditiis furtiva per antra puellae
oscula silvicolis empta dedere viris.
hinnulei pellis stratos operibat amantes,
altaque nativo creverat herba toro,
pinus et incumbens laetas circumdabat umbras;
nec fuerat nudas poena videre deas.
(Prop. 3, 13, 31–38)

The words *frondibus*, *antra*, *silvicolis*, *pellis*, *toro* and *umbras* appear in Juvenal's short description as well,¹³ but the two scenes differ too: instead of kiss-giving young girls, we see the absolutely unattractive *montana uxor*, the "wife from the

¹¹ Horváth 1964, 21.

¹² E.g. in *Satire 13*, he leads forward the series of the "Ages of Men" from the Iron Age to the Ninth Age (see Juv. 13, 28–30).

¹³ The parallels are presented by Watson 2012b, 72.

mountain” in the cave of *Satire 6*. From the literary tradition of this type of idyllic Golden Age, Juvenal keeps the closeness to the nature and the lack of sins, but the total lack of attractiveness is added to the concept. Nadeau connects these two aspects with two different literary sources: the idealized Golden Age recalls *Book 2* of Vergil’s *Georgics*, while its primitiveness reminds us of *Book 5* of Lucretius.¹⁴ Nadeau also remarks that Juvenal’s text contradicts the primitive age of Lucretius, as in the *De rerum natura*, the cave-dwelling men did not use fire, nor did they wear clothes (Lucr. 5, 1011); thus he concludes that Juvenal blends two different stages of the Lucretian history of civilization here.¹⁵ However, the prologue of *Satire 6* is not based on Lucretius as closely as Nadeau assumes, as Juvenal uses multiple sources to build his own version of the Golden Age myth focusing on the leaving of Pudicitia in accordance with the subject of his poem. And moreover, in lines 11–12, he also seems to give a key to the heterogeneous nature of his description as a Lucretian line ending is followed by a Vergilian one:

...tellure nova caeloque recenti...
(Lucr. 5, 907)

quippe aliter tunc orbe novo caeloque recenti
vivebant homines, qui rupto robore nati...
(Juv. 6, 11–12)

...gensque virum truncis et duro robore nata...
(Verg. A. 8, 315)

These two parallels do not only give the text a sublime quality that is appropriate for presenting the Myth of Ages, but also throw light on the composite nature of the myth of *Satire 6*, as in the alluded passage Lucretius insists that the “Vergilian type” of the Golden Age is inconceivable. Juvenal’s version is an alloy of the Lucretian primitive age and the Myth of Ages known from the works of Hesiod, Vergil and Ovid among others, in which he presents the morals of the Golden Age and the leaving of Pudicitia in a different light. The most crucial sentence for my interpretation is the one that recalls the muses of Propertius and Catullus stating that women in the Golden Age were not similar to Cynthia or Lesbia. As I already suggested, this sentence is intentionally ambiguous, claiming that the primitive woman was not as immoral as these two, nor as attractive, but on the contrary, she had animalistic features. The breasts of the wife of the man in the mountain who eats and belches up acorn are mentioned by the word *ubera* that

¹⁴ Nadeau 2011, 18–24. The latter is connected with the Juvenalian passage by Mason 1962, 41 and Singleton 1972, 164 as well; for the parallels, see also Watson–Watson 2014, 79.

¹⁵ Nadeau 2011, 27 and 34.

frequently appears in the description of the idealized old Italic times as well as the Golden Age, but only denoting the udder of milk-giving animals;¹⁶ and the connotation of animals is strengthened by the word *horridior* (meaning “hairier”) in the next line.¹⁷

In this passage, Juvenal interprets the myth of the Golden Age. By starting the prologue with the word *credo*, he expresses that he is willing to believe that marital fidelity was intact in the Golden Age, but only because there is an explanation for that. This explanation is given by the remaining eight and a half lines of the satire’s first complex sentence: the unattractive, animalistic woman who lived in primitive conditions allured no one to seduce her. Therefore, the lack of lewdness and other sexuality-related sins is not attributed to a higher level of morality by Juvenal’s narrator—or at least not only to that. Speaking about the lack of sexual sins, Lucretius is mentioned again by Nadeau, emphasizing that in the primitive age of *De rerum natura* intemperate lust, rape and an ancient kind of prostitution appeared as well.¹⁸ I quote the words of Lucretius:

*et Venus in silvis iungebat corpora amantum;
conciliabat enim vel mutua quamque cupido
vel violenta viri vis atque inpensa libido
vel pretium, glandes atque arbita vel pira lecta.*
(Lucr. 5. 962–965)

Nadeau is right in the interpretation of the words of Lucretius; however, it is not relevant for Juvenal’s passage, in which we cannot find a trace of the presence of any sexuality-related sin, or even sexuality—the absence of the latter is suggested by the expression *nullos habuere parentes*.¹⁹ Concerning sins and morality, Singleton also connects Juvenal’s lines with Lucretius, about which he states that “[t]he first men *are* tough and pure but they have no morality (958–61), only the purely negative quality of innocence.”²⁰ I cannot agree with Singleton in this aspect, since the presence of Pudicitia and the emphasizing of her and Astraea’s flight do not characterize an age without morality.

The departure of the goddesses is also written in a dual way by Juvenal: he forms his own, new, unique version by making use of multiple elements of the literary tradition. The narrator who until this point was speaking about Pudicitia

¹⁶ See Ov. *Rem.* 175–178; Ov. *Met.* 15, 470–472; Ov. *Fast.* 4, 769; Verg. *G.* 2, 521–525; Tib. 1, 3, 45–46; Hor. *Epod.* 16, 47–50; Verg. *E.* 4, 18–23; Nadeau 2011, 40–41.

¹⁷ Cf. Nadeau 2011, 42: “But *horridior* in its more literal sense ‘hairier’, continues what starts with *ubera*, the assimilation of our ideal woman to the cows, ewes, she-goats of the idealized countryside.”

¹⁸ Nadeau 2011, 24.

¹⁹ Nadeau 2011, 47–50 gives the same interpretation of this Juvenalian sentence.

²⁰ Singleton 1972, 159 and 164.

only, at the end of this short mythological passage mentions Astraea as well, whose departure from the mortal sphere is known from Ovid (*Met.* 1, 149–150), while Aratus (96–105. és 133–136) leaves the question of her identification with the Maiden open. From another aspect, Hesiod's *Works and Days* seems to be the closest parallel, since he also presented two goddesses leaving together, however, the pairing is different.²¹

Vergil's *Eclogue 4* is also based on this tradition, in which he envisioned the return of the Maiden. The same is impossible in the case of Pudicitia according to *Satire 6* that is made even clearer by her later mention in the first scene after to the so-called "second prologue" of the satire (286–300), in which Roman women are involved in an orgy next to her altar, and then urinate on her statue expressing their disdain for the virtue of chastity in the most extreme way imaginable. The irreversible departure of the goddess is the first argument in Juvenal's *logos apotreptikos*, thus becomes the first 13 lines an integral part of the never-ending poetic speech. The presence of Pudicitia and the morality of the Golden Age both belong to the prehistoric mythological past only, being followed by a two-way development: on the one hand, from the ancient primitive conditions to the modern civilization, on the other hand, from the ancient felicity to the contemporary decay.²² In exchange for the restoration of the morality, simplicity and felicity of the Golden Age, mankind would have to give up the achievements of civilization itself that Juvenal's narrator does not consider either as desirable²³ or possible. That becomes obvious from the depiction of the Golden Age, and the same can be said about the return of the "wives from the mountain" in the place of contemporary women represented by Cynthia and Lesbia.

According to the generally accepted structure of *Satire 6*, the prologue and the core of the poem are connected by lines 21–24,²⁴ but the transition actually already begins with the description of the Silver Age. Since the narrator already proved that the chastity of the Golden Age is lost, his style changes from line 14, shifting from the mock elevation to the real satirical style. The impersonal form of speech gives place to a personal and more subjective one, starting with the word *forsan* that expresses scepticism in opposition with the opening verb *credo*.

²¹ Hesiod (*Op.* 197–201) presents Nemesis and Aidos, and although the latter could be seen as the counterpart of Pudicitia, the function of Aidos is much more general than that of Juvenal's Pudicitia representing specifically the morality in marriage and sexual life. Cf. Watson–Watson 2014, 83. See also Gatz 1967, 50–51.

²² Horváth 1964, 22.

²³ Cf. Singleton 1972, 164: "One point is essential; we have already seen that the attitude to the Golden Age depends on the attitude to civilization. A positive evaluation of civilization involves an adverse evaluation of the Golden Age and vice versa. If our analysis of the prologue to Juvenal's sixth Satire has any validity, we must suppose that the poet is, as it were, on the side of civilization."

²⁴ E.g. Nadeau 2011, 62–63.

The change of the style manifests in the use of some words, as *barbatus* that is classified as “unpoetische” by Urech or *Graecus* that is replaced by *Graius* in the poetic language after Ennius.²⁵ The former adjective, *barbatus* is not a simple mythological time-setting, but refers to the beginnings of the main god’s famous seductions in connection with the fade of chastity. Jupiter appears as a demythized pubescent womanizer in a passage having multiple sexual undertones,²⁶ and in this manner preparing the departure of Pudicitia and Astraea. The door is opened for sin and satirical invective, the first target of which are the Greeks swearing by other names. The goddesses’ flight ends the mythological introduction of *Satire 6* that is followed by highlighting adultery as the oldest of all sins in lines 21–24. The end of the prologue and the beginning of the *logos apotreptikos* blend into each other as with the expression *nostra tempestate* (25–26) the narrator looks back on the Myth of Ages one last time before throwing himself into the endless series of arguments.

In the prologue of *Satire 6*, Juvenal presents an ancient and permanently by-gone era without sin and without seduction. The absence of these however does not root in some kind of higher level Golden Age morality according to the narrator, but on the one hand, in the lack of civilization and therefore the non-existence of the sin’s concept itself, and on the other hand, in the unattractiveness of women (and men, of course) in the Golden Age, thus their inability to incite anyone to seduction. The aforementioned two-way development from this state is the first argument in the monumental poetic speech focusing on women that occupies the whole *Book 2* and presents the oldest sin, after Juvenal exhibited nearly all sins imaginable in five shorter satires of *Book 1* focusing on men. His first two books oppose and supplement each other at the same time when these aspects are taken into consideration: five shorter poems oppose the longest surviving Roman verse satire, a great variety of sins oppose one central motif, and men oppose women. And subsequently, it would be as mistaken to interpret *Book 2* as a poem claiming that marital infidelity is specifically a female sin, as it would be false to read *Book 1* concentrating on men that only the males are guilty in Rome according to Juvenal. Thus, there is no need to attribute the poetic speeches of the first two books to two different narrators (or *personae*), as they together present us a satirical speaker who deems men and women in Rome equally guilty.

²⁵ Urech 1999, 51 and 141.

²⁶ See Nadeau 2011, 51–58.

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