
The female symbolism in Revelation and in Juvenal's VI *Satire*

Introduction

How is it possible to compare two works with such divergent literary genres and instructive purposes, such as the Book of Revelation and the satire of a Latin author? I believe that the comparison is possible starting with the common political-cultural climate, which links the two texts and from the conviction of the two writers that their ideals are the socio-ethical foundation of the public to whom they addressed, in a common time of perceived crisis. Several authors, who will be quoted in this article, have already noted a parallelism between the sixth *Satire* of Juvenal and the Apocalypse and, in this work, the intention is to note other relationships between the two writings. The comparison aims to consider a common element to the two works, namely, the female symbolism, which becomes a figure of society and a rhetorical device in expressing an ethical criticism. The use of feminine imagery, however, creates a question: how positive and communicative is the world of women in the prophet John and the satirist Juvenal? On this regard, the feminist interpretation, in the recent years, has provided new interpretations of the ancient texts, highlighting aspects unknown in the previous lines of exegesis.

For the Revelation, the feminist studies have underscored the historical context in which it took shape and its rhetorical and conventional language; for these reasons this more recent exegesis has recognized a mix of positive and negative gendered images in the Apocalypse.¹ Instead, some feminist interpretations claim the message of Revelation to be not only an expression of the past and a rhetorical

¹ E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *The Book of Revelation. Justice and Judgment*, Philadelphia (PA) 2nd 1998; ID., *Revelation. Vision of a Just World*, Minneapolis (MN) 1991; A. YARBRO COLLINS, «Women's history and the Book of Revelation», *SBLSP* 26(1987), 80-91.

language, but also to have repercussions on the present, since: «both women characters in the narrative and women readers are victimized».² Likewise, the post-colonial theory reproaches the Book of Revelation of using violent gendered imagery and offering a negative image of women.³ Finally, several other authors prefer to keep the character of a multiple meanings of Revelation, maintaining the elements of redeeming and tyrannical message.⁴ In this case, readers are called to choose the positive denotations,⁵ which become a reason of redemption and freedom for art, ministry and theology.⁶

The same discourse could be done for the sixth *Satire*, where the female imagery must be sought in the misogynistic sentiment, which characterized numerous Greek-Latin authors starting from the testimonies of Hesiod.⁷ However, there are some scholars who have understood Juvenal's satire in different terms: the so-called «persona theory» shows that in sixth *Satire* what is important is not the historical person of the poet, but his «mask», invented by the author himself, to express feelings and reactions. In this way, Juvenal's writing should be understood not as an anti-feminist vision: the matrons described therein, in fact, with their unrepentant behavior, appear resolutely triumphant and the excesses of their actions, contrary to the stated purpose, manifest a sort of approval by the poet and his subliminal femi-

² T. PIPPIN, *Death and Desire. The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*, Louisville (KY), 1992, 52; Id., *Apocalyptic Bodies. The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image*, London 1999.

³ J. KIM, «Uncovering her Wickedness»: An Inter(con)textual Reading of Revelation 17 from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective», *JSNT* 73(1999), 61-81; J.W. MARSHALL, «Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-imperial Apocalypse», in A.J. LEVINE – M. MAYO ROBBINS (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, London 2009, 17-32.

⁴ H. STENSTRÖM, «They Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women...»: Christian Identity according to the Book of Revelation», in LEVINE – ROBBINS (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John*, 33-54; L.R. HUBER, *Like a Bride Adorned. Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse. Emory Studies in Early Christianity*, New York 2007.

⁵ S. SMITH, *The Woman Babylon and the Marks of Empire. Reading Revelation with a Postcolonial Womanist Hermeneutics of Ambivalence*, Minneapolis (MN) 2014.

⁶ S. HYLEN, «Feminist interpretation of Revelation», in C.R. KOESTER (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, New York 2020, 477.

⁷ J. FERGUSON, *A prosopography to the poems of Juvenal*, Brussels 1998, 185-186; W.S. ANDERSON, «Juvenal 6: A Problem in Structure», in Id. (ed.), *Essays on Roman Satire*, Princeton (NJ) 1982, 255-276.

nist intention.⁸ This reading, however, distorts the position of the Latin poet who, in the other *Satires*, shows himself as a man of the Roman tradition, rather than as a revolutionary of the native customs. Finally, recent studies have led to a re-evaluation of the traditional consideration of Juvenal as a critic of his contemporary society. To carry out this attack, Juvenal uses a biting irony which, with the force of rhetoric and parody, offers the image of a female world irreparably corrupt.⁹ In this way, the strength of sixth *Satire*, through contradictions, hypocrisy, fallibility of women, has the purpose of convincing readers to share the writer's point of view.

In the comparison between Juvenal and Revelation, we will try to look at the two authors in their historical context, conditioned by an anthropological and cultural background, which cannot be judged on the basis of the acquisitions of the present. Therefore, the critical significance of their message will be highlighted, as well the common points and differences between the two works in the use of the female imagery. We also will note that in the Apocalypse woman serves to describe an ambivalent society: she is not only an image of a malevolent world, but an expression of renewed and redeemed humanity.

In this evaluation, the first step is to study the historical period in which the two works are found. Juvenal and John lived and produced their work in Domitian's era and used the symbolic world of the female gender as a communicative image of malaise, regret and hope. Starting from this point of contact, it will be noted that Revelation and the sixth *Satire* use the image of marriage and motherhood, treated as a lost ideal by Juvenal, and as an existential condition in the evolution of the woman-Church in Revelation. Furthermore, both authors highlight the figure of the prostitute as an aberration of family values. In their works, moreover, Juvenal and John describe the woman as a microcosm of the *urbs*/*πόλις*, though with a different meaning. Finally, the two texts condemn commonly unbridled luxury and the magical arts as aberrant peculiarities of women (Juvenal) or of the *γυνή*-empire (Apocalypse), emblems of a world dominated by a corrupt value system.

⁸ M. PLAZA, *The Function of Humour in Roman Verse Satire. Laughing and Lying*, Oxford 2006, 127-155.

⁹ L. WATSON – P. WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, Cambridge 2014, 40-48.

Revelation and Juvenal's VI *Satire*: their historical context

Considering the question of the common historical context, it must be said that there are many doubts regarding the dating of the two works. As regards Revelation, the Fathers of the Church place the book at the end of the reign of Domitian.¹⁰ Alongside this datum, two divergent theses appear: a maximalist one, based on two Syriac mss. (4th century), which identifies the confinement of John on Patmos at the time of Nero;¹¹ and a minimalist one, which from some data available of the text hypothesizes the composition of the book at the time of Trajan.¹² However, in considering the external attestations of Revelation, the book is mentioned by authors such as Justin, Marcion, Hippolytus,¹³ and the fragmentary papyri P¹⁸ P⁴⁷ and P⁹⁸ (2nd and 3rd cent. A.D.). Similarly, the internal narrative of the text presents a series of data, indicating its contemporary history.¹⁴ In the light of these observations, it can be concluded that the chronological placement of Rev-

¹⁰ IRENEUS, *Adversus haereses* 5,30,3.

¹¹ C.R. KOESTER, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB 38A), New Haven (CT)-London 2014, 72.

¹² H. KRAFT, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16a), Tübingen 1974, 92-93, 221-222, notes that Trajan, in the Greek abbreviation, NE. TRAI. S, corresponds to the number of the beast, 666 (Rev 13:18). Furthermore, the «throne of Satan» (Rev 2:13) is a possible allusion to the altar of Zeus in Pergamum, built at the behest of Trajan in 114 A.D.

¹³ JUSTIN, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judeo* 81; TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Marcionem* 3,14; IPPOLITUS, *Fragmenta in Danielelem* 4; *De Christo et Antichristo* 29; 36-41; 47-48; 49-50; 60; 65.

¹⁴ The name of Babylon (Rev 14:6; 16:19; 17:4; 18:2,10,21), used to indicate Rome, appears from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (A. YARBRO COLLINS, «Dating the Apocalypse of John», *BR* 26[1981], 35). The beast, which received a death-blow, but healed (13:3), seems to evoke the legend of *Nero redivivus*, whose definitive version dates back to the end of the 1st century A.D. The oldest version seems to be in *Syb. Or.* 4,119-124; 5,137-141, 361-396. The reproach of Christ to Laodicea, because of its wealth (3:17), if it were a reference to material goods, would be conceivable only after the reconstruction of the city, following the earthquake of 60/61 A.D. (TACITUS, *Ann.* 14,27.1). According to L.L. THOMPSON, *The Book of Revelation. Apocalypse and Empire*, New York 1990, 58, 104; G.K. BEALE, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids (MI) 1999, 335, the divine title ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (Rev 4:11) seems to be a controversy against the imperial cult. SUETONIUS, *De vita Caesarum* 13,2, in fact, says that Domitian called himself *Dominus et Deus noster* (Our Lord and Our God). On the contrary, F.O. PARKER, «“Our Lord and God” in Rev 4,11: Evidence for the Late Date of Revelation?», *Bib* 82(2001), 207-231, shows that the title *Dominus et Deus noster* does not necessarily derive from a polemic against Domitian, but has numerous references in the OT.

elation at the end of the reign of Domitian, with a final redaction during the rule of Trajan, remains the most plausible.¹⁵

Even for *Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis*, the place of his birth and his death are not agreed by all historians, since information is scarce, late and often contradictory. Furthermore, the transmission of his texts goes from oblivion until the 4th century A.D., when the production of manuscripts of his works restarts.¹⁶

Looking at external evidence, Martial, Juvenal's companion, speaks of the satirical poet's *facunditas* (eloquence), which made him famous in Roman society (*Ep.* 7,24; 91). There are, however, two conflicting testimonies on the social condition of the poet: in *Ep.* 12,18 Martial describes the satirist as a *cliens* (client, dependent), who frequents the houses of wealthy *patroni* (protectors), greeting him in exchange for a fee.¹⁷ Instead, from his *Satires*, criticizing the elevated corrupt class, Juvenal seems to belong to this same high society, but whose new style he does not share.

Regarding the historical position of the poet, scholars note some possible allusions to several figures, who allow contextualizing the period of Juvenal's writings. In *Satire* 1,49-50; 8,120 there is mention of Marius Priscus, proconsul in Africa, condemned for extortion around the first decade of the 2nd century A.D.¹⁸ Similarly, the possible reference to the annexation of Armenia to the Roman empire (*Satire* 6,407)¹⁹ and some allusions to the times of Hadrian (*Satires* 4 and 5)

¹⁵ D.E. AUNE, *Revelation* (WBC 52a-52b-52c), 3 voll., Nashville (TN) 1997-1998, I,CXX-CXXXIV, speaks of two editions of Revelation: the first, about 70 A.D., and the second during the reign of Trajan. Similarly, KOESTER, *Revelation*, 79, thinks that the historical-ecclesial environment of Revelation has more to do with social patterns in Asia Minor, during the final decades of the 1st A.D.

¹⁶ In the transcription of the texts, reference must be made to the medieval period in which scholars recognize two great traditions: 1) Montepessulanus bib. Med. 125 (= P), considered the best witness of Juvenal's text (9th century) by B. SANTORELLI, *Giovenale, Satire, nuova edizione. Testo originale a fronte*, Milano 2011, XIV. 2) Numerous mss. (= Φ) with larger interpolations, as affirms C. SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome* (Oklahoma series in classical culture 59), Norman (OK) 2020, 6-8. A separate consideration is done on the so-called «Oxford fragment» (O1-34), whose authorship the scholars argue (WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 51-55).

¹⁷ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 4.

¹⁸ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 3; F. BELLANDI, «Cronologia e ideologia politica nelle satire di Giovenale», in A. STRAMAGLIA – S. GRAZZINI – G. DIMATTEO (eds.), *Giovenale tra storia, poesia e ideologia* (BzA 357), Berlin-Boston (MA) 2016, 5-63.

¹⁹ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 3.

point to the same conclusion.²⁰ A discordant datum, however, comes from the *Satire* 4, when Juvenal attacks Crispinus, an Egyptian who became part of the *consilium principis* (advisers to the princeps), namely the emperor Domitian. In this text, through a parody of the epic, the satirist speaks of a fisherman who caught a large turbot and presented it to the emperor. The poet reports a meeting of friends of the emperor, of senatorial rank, summoned to discuss not political affairs, but the banal fate of that fish.²¹ With equal ironic sagacity, at the end of the *Satire* 4, Juvenal argues that it was better for Domitian to have devoted himself to these *nugae* (trivial things), rather than to commit arbitrary murders (lines 37-154).²² This criticism against Domitian helps to place this *Satire* around the 90s.²³ From these different data, therefore, we can argue that Juvenal began to write his works from the era of the last Flavian up to the reign of Trajan.²⁴ In this way, Juvenal's *Satires* are dated to that chronological period, contemporary with the Book of Revelation.

The time of Domitian and historical criticism

Contextualizing the two authors to the time of Domitian (81-96 A.D.), we have to consider briefly the judgment of historiography regarding the last of the Flavians.²⁵ The ancient authors such as Dio Cassius, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger and Martial,²⁶ offer heavy

²⁰ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 2.

²¹ In the fourth *Satire* Juvenal does not mention the names of the characters, for correctness, prudence and tact (P. SOUTHERN, *Domitian Tragic Tyrant*, London-New York 1997, 40).

²² S. MORTON BRAUND (ed.), *Juvenal and Persius* (LCL 91), Cambridge 2004, 194-195.

²³ B. JONES, *The Emperor Domitian*, London 2002, 29.

²⁴ K. FREUDENBURG – A. CUCCHIARELLI – A. BARCHIESI, *Musa pedestre. Storia e interpretazione della satira in Roma antica*, Roma 2007, 26; MORTON BRAUND, *Juvenal and Persius*, 20; SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 3s.

²⁵ Different modern historians have dealt with the reign of Domitian. I quote just some studies: D. CUSS, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Par. 23), Freiburg 1974, 50-88; P. SOVERINI, *Impero e imperatori nell'opera di Plinio il Giovane. Aspetti e problemi del rapporto con Domiziano e Traiano* (ANRW 32/1), Berlin-Boston (MA) 2016, 516-554; M. GRANT, *The Roman Emperors. a biographical guide to the rulers of Imperial Rome 31 BC-AD 476*, London 1985, 60-65.

²⁶ DIO CASSIUS, *Hist. Rom.* 67,1-2, defines Domitian: «bold [...] quick to anger and from these two characteristics he would often attack people». SUETONIUS, *Dom.* 3,2 tells that this emperor: «in his administration of the government showed himself inconsistent, with about an equal number of virtues and vices, but finally he turned the virtues also

considerations about Domitian as a tyrant and oppressor. These opinions, however, can be regarded as an expression of an aristocratic class, since this emperor, despite Augustus, alienated the Senate from any type of involvement in the management of power and this decision cost him the aversion of the upper class.²⁷ Even the first Christian authors considered Domitian as a persecutor associated with Nero.²⁸ In 1 Clement there is a certain terminology that apparently refers to the oppressive climate of the Flavian emperor against Christianity.²⁹ Likewise, Jerome (*Ep.* 108,7) speaks of Flavia Domitilla, the niece of Clement, bishop of Rome, who converted to Christianity and was martyred at the time of Domitian.³⁰ This notice, however, contradicts what Dio Cassius (*Hist. Rom.* 67,14,1-2)³¹ and Suetonius (*Dom.* 15) report about these characters, since none of them speaks of the Christian identity of Clement and Domitilla. On the basis of the Latin authors, therefore, one must consider that the Christian identity of Clement is not credible and historically late.³² However, since Dio Cassius tells that Clement and Domitilla were condemned, because they had converted to Judaism, it is probable that the Roman historian ignored the difference between Christians and Jews.³³

into vices». TACITUS, *Agr.* 3, commenting on the death of Domitian at the hands of the Praetorians states: *Nunc demum redit animus* (Now at last heart is coming back to us). PLINY THE YOUNGER, *Pan.* 48,3, defines Domitian *immanissima belua* (fearful monster). MARTIAL, *Ep.* 12,15,3-5, criticizes Domitian's delusions of grandeur declaring that even Jupiter «marvels [...] and views in amazement the whims and oppressive luxuries of a haughty monarch».

²⁷ GRANT, *The Roman emperors*, 64.

²⁸ EUSEBIO, *Hist. eccl.* 3,20; 4,26.

²⁹ L. W. BARNARD, «Clement of Rome and the persecution of Domitian», *NTS* 10(1963-1964), 251-260.

³⁰ R. CRISTOFOLI, «Domiziano e la cosiddetta persecuzione del 95», *VetChr* 45(2008), 71-72.

³¹ DIO CASSIUS, *Hist. Rom.* 67,14 speaks about an accusation of atheism (ἀθεότης) against Flavius Clement and Flavia Domitilla, but this crime was one of the main charges against Christians, as it is evidenced by ATHENAGORA OF ATHENS, *Legatio pro Christianis* 3.

³² JONES, *The Emperor Domitian*, 115.

³³ The same confusion is in Suetonius, *Claud.* 25,4, who testifies that the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome *impulsore Chresto* (because of the instigation of Chrestus). For Suetonius, therefore, Chrestus was at the origin of the dispute in the Roman Jewish community. From the tombstones of the Jewish cemeteries in Rome there is no character named Chrestus. One should think that the discussion was between Jews and Christians about the messianic identity of Jesus (Chrestus = Christ) and Suetonius was unaware of this question.

Apart from these negative judgments, recent historical research, in the light of new archaeological and epigraphical discoveries, re-evaluates Domitian.³⁴ In fact, he was an excellent military strategist, extending the dominions of Rome between the Upper Rhine and the Upper Danube, deserving of the title of *Germanicus*.³⁵ Even Suetonius, never indulgent towards Domitian, celebrates his qualities as a good administrator of public life.³⁶ Finally, Domitian was also an economic reformer and built an image of Rome as the undisputed capital. He constructed and restored many monuments, together with the sumptuous new imperial palace, all signs of the height of the empire.³⁷

For these reasons, it is necessary to circumscribe the past negative judgment, even though the positive aspects do not exclude the suspicious and superstitious character of Domitian, who feared any form of novelty. These are the undeniable reasons which led numerous personalities, to experience the empire of Domitian as a time of oppression and despotism, particularly in the Book of Revelation and also in the descriptions of Juvenal, who criticized the milieu created in this period of history.

The woman, wife and mother: the regretted ideal of the VI *Satire*

At the beginning of the sixth *Satire*, Juvenal presents his feminine prototype when he speaks of the ancient matron – married and mother of children, completely dedicated to the administration of the house.³⁸ The ideal woman, in line 45, is designated as *antiquis uxor de moribus* (wife of old-fashioned morals), where the ablative construction replaces the genitive of quality, in order to express what stuff matrons should be made of.³⁹ The satirist regrets the Latin chaste woman, when *humilis fortuna* (humble lot) reserved *parva tecta* (modest homes) for

³⁴ The forementioned monography of SOUTHERN, *Domitian Tragic Tyrant*, tries to consider the numerous contributions of Domitian during the years of his rule, without denying the dark years of his reign.

³⁵ GRANT, *The Roman emperors*, 62.

³⁶ SÜETONIUS, *Dom.* 8,1-2, tells how Domitian exercised justice and the control of city officials and provincial governors, to the point that there was never a bureaucracy made up of such honest and fair men.

³⁷ GRANT, *The Roman emperors*, 63.

³⁸ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 101.

³⁹ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 91.

her and she made her hands hard by the work with Etruscan wool, and protected from the vices of the present (lines 287-289). With an eye to the past, the poet mentions some virtues that characterized women of the golden age. First of all, *Pudicitia* (Chastity),⁴⁰ the best of the qualities of the matron,⁴¹ invoked as a divinity who reigned on earth *re gente Saturno* (when Saturn was king). Then, the *montana uxor* (cave-woman) prepared a frugal bed made of leaves, straw and animal skins (lines 1-7).⁴² This female paradigm, instead, is shattered by the behavior of contemporary women: in modern times, *pudicitia* disappeared and few women are worthy to touch the «Ceres's headbands»,⁴³ therefore it is difficult to find a *capitis matrona pudici* (matron with a chaste mouth: lines 49-50).⁴⁴ The modern matrons have abandoned tradition, going after Greek costumes, evoked in the mention of Corinth, Sybaris, Rhodes, Miletus and Tarentum (lines 295-297).⁴⁵ There was also a change in the ancient concept of chastity: women are considered chaste if they bring a large sum of money as a dowry. Regarding this, Juvenal quotes the case of Caesennia, called *pudica teste marito* (chaste, because her husband attests to it: lines 136-138). The extreme abandonment of decency is revealed in the two women who, through the excesses of alcohol, urinate at the simulacrum of *Pudicitia* and consummated a lesbian relationship (lines 307-311). This irreverent episode is equivalent to the total rejection of the cardinal values of the Roman matron.⁴⁶

Juvenal laments the betrayal of women above all in relation to two essential characteristics of their identity: marriage and motherhood.

⁴⁰ The root *pudic-* occurs 6 times in the *Satire* (lines 1,14,49,137,193,308) and, in 5 references (except line 193) it is the exaltation of an ancient virtue.

⁴¹ R. LANGLANDS, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, Cambridge 2006, 37-77.

⁴² P. WATSON, «Juvenal's *scripta matrona*: Elegiac Resonances in *Satire 6*», *Mn.* 60(2007), 630.

⁴³ Chastity was prescribed in Ceres' feasts; the «headbands» could be an allusion to the statue of the goddess and the bands worn by her devotees (B.S. SPAETH, *The Roman Goddess Ceres*, Austin [TX] 1996, 115-116).

⁴⁴ Probably as J.N. ADAMS, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, London 1982, 212, note 1, argues, *caput* indicates mouth (*os*) or tongue (*lingua*).

⁴⁵ Numerous Roman moralists criticized the new Hellenic customs, in 1st and 2nd cent., considering them as the cause of corruption of ancient traditions. PLINY THE ELDER, *Hist.Nat.* 33,150, asserts: «with the downfall of Carthage, a fatal coincidence that gave us at one and the same time a taste for the vices and an opportunity for indulging in them». TITUS LIVIUS, *Ab Urb. Cond.* 39,7, says: «for foreign luxury was originally brought to the city by the army in Asia».

⁴⁶ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 167.

Marriage constitutes for the satirist one of the cardinal points of society; the term *uxor*, in fact, is the most present in his work (15x),⁴⁷ compared to the other feminine appellations. Conjugal life, however, appears sidelined by the unbridled sexual desire, which grips wives to the point of arousing the exclamation of the poet: *O quantus tunc illis mentibus ardor concubitus* (so huge a desire for getting laid blazes up in their minds at this point: lines 317-318). In fact, there is no distinction between upper and lower classes, since *eadem summis pariter minimisque libido* (the highest and lowest of women all have the same sex drive: line 349). In this regard, there are numerous references to the male gender favored by matrons: from the usual lover (*adulter*) to servants and, in the absence of any other man, they arrive at zoophilia (line 334).⁴⁸ Even the mothers-in-law seem involved in hiding the adulterers of their daughters whom they send for, pretending to be ill, while the lover waits for the adulteress in bed (lines 231-241). In lines 457-464 the *mulier* (wife) appears in self-care, almost obsessed with the desire to make herself beautiful, not for the eyes of her husband, but for her lovers.⁴⁹ The impudence of the matrons goes so far as to take part in the festivities of *Flora*, the goddess of fertility whose celebrations were also attended by prostitutes (lines 250-254). In these festivals, women are attracted to the presence of gladiators who represent the «quintessentially masculine».⁵⁰ The aberration becomes greater when matrons lose their dignity, wearing the gladiator's helmet, which makes Juvenal cry: *quem praestare potest mulier galeata pudorem, quae fugit a sexu?* (What sense of modesty can you find in a woman wearing a helmet, who runs away from her own gender?: lines 252-253). The utterance highlights the contradiction between the term matron and the concept of modesty, questioned by the participation of women in such festivals.⁵¹

Motherhood is the peculiar aspect of the ancient Latin woman. The poet exalts her who *potanda ferens infantibus ubera magnis* (had teats from which their gigantic children drank: line 9).⁵² At present, how-

⁴⁷ Lines 5,28,45,76,116,143,166,206,211,267,348,365,379,535,617.

⁴⁸ The term *asellus* (donkey) probably alludes to the size of the genital organ, as it is found also in APULEIUS, *Metam.* 3,24-25.

⁴⁹ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 223.

⁵⁰ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 122.

⁵¹ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire 6*, 150.

⁵² The idea that in the golden age that children were bigger is present in LUCRETIUS, *De Rerum Natura* 525-527. Juvenal himself reaffirms this concept, in *Satire* 15,64-70,

ever, only the poor women do not disdain to be mothers (lines 592-601), while *iacet aurato vix ulla puerpera lecto* (hardly any woman lies in labor on a gilded bed: line 594). High-ranking women, instead, are worried about disfiguring their *silhouette* and, to avoid pregnancy, resort to different *artes* (skills) and *medicamina* (pills) as contraceptives or abortifacients (line 595). In line 597 the poet, ideally addressing the husband of this kind of women, exclaims with an oxymoron: *gaude, infelix* (be happy, unhappy man); he himself, in fact, would have to arrange for his wife to drink an abortive potion,⁵³ because he risks seeing somatic features of an Ethiopian or Moor imprinted in his heir (line 600).⁵⁴ Lastly, Juvenal blames those women who, despite being mothers, abandon their family. It is quoted, in lines 86-87, the case of *improba* (shameless) Eppia, wife of a senator who went, after her Sergiolus (lil' Sergio), and *natos [...] reliquit* (abandoned [...] her children). This noblewoman had reached the point of joining the group of gladiators, which included her lover. Eppia's behavior surprises the satirist, in line 87, as the expression *ut magis stupeas* (because you are more astonished) testifies, since she prefers the circus games of gladiators to family relationships, thus showing a disappearance of fidelity and a reversal of priorities. Women's aberration of motherhood drives them to the point of hating and killing *natos de paelice* (line 627), namely children born from a previous relationship between their husband and his first wife or a mistress. In this regard, the poet, in line 628, states satirically: *iam iam privignum occidere fas est* (at any moment now, it's acceptable to kill off a stepson), where the *geminatio* of the adverb *iam* expresses a chronological extension regarding the possibility of killing the stepson at any moment of time, starting from the present historical moment. If, however, in the past children born to concubines were hated, in the present women also kill their own children. For this reason, Juvenal warns *pupilli* about their mothers as possible killers (lines

when he ridicules the strength of contemporary men, which already failed when Homer was still alive.

⁵³ Many abortive methods consisted of potions (K.A. KAPPARIS, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, London 2002, 12-17).

⁵⁴ The conception of children outside the conjugal union is already indicated, mentioning the fascination of famous gladiators, citharodes and flautists. In lines 80-81, Juvenal quotes the young Trojan *Euryalus* and any *murmillo* (a category of gladiator) who, with his physical prowess, seduced the women. In lines 76-77, *Echion* is mentioned, a very common name in the middle-lower classes, and *Glaphyrus*, a flautist of the Augustan age, mentioned also by MARTIAL, *Ep.* 4,5,8.

629-633).⁵⁵ They must even beware of the food they prepared, making their *papas* (tutor) taste it. This custom was attested only in the royal house, but Juvenal extends it universally, thus showing the paradoxical meaning of his statement.⁵⁶ In a comparison with matrons, in lines 602-609, even the *improba Fortuna* (unlucky Fortune) appears more maternal, warming and pressing abandoned children to her breast, and giving even the poor the possibility of entering the *domibus altis* (exalted houses). This part of the *Satire* alludes to the custom of low-class people to leave their children, either to lack of economic possibilities, or because they were born from illegitimate unions. Ancient legends tell of noble women who, because of sterility or to avoid a pregnancy, adopted abandoned children, who later became *pontifex maximus* or *salii*.⁵⁷

From this picture of marriage and motherhood in the sixth *Satire*, it can be concluded that Juvenal offers a deviant and ephemeral image of a society, far from the ideal of the past. There is no space, except in the evocation of times gone by, for a positive paragon of women. It no longer represents society and the ancient values of *latinitas*, now lost in the imitation of foreign customs.

Woman as image of the redeemed in Revelation

Like Juvenal, Revelation also uses the image of woman in a corporate sense and identifies the essential characteristics of femininity in marriage and motherhood. In the Apocalypse, however, there is an ambivalence of the female imagery: the Church, mother and fiancée/spouse of the Lamb, and, at the same time the empire, described as the woman-prostitute. This dualism seems to be inspired by Qumran literature, where childbirth is used as a metaphor to express the state of communities in crisis. In particular, 1QH XI,1-18 presents the image of two women: one who gives birth to a «splendid counsellor» (פלא יועץ), the other who «is pregnant by a serpent» (והרית אפעה).

⁵⁵ The term *pupilli* indicates orphans under fourteen, the age beyond which a boy could dispose of his assets inherited from the deceased father. It is known that only in Hadrian's time mothers were awarded the right to administer their son's properties, inherited from his dead father. Probably, this maternal intervention was possible because some fathers explicitly mentioned mothers as administrators of their children (BELLANDI, «Giovenale 6,627-633 e il S. C. Tertullianum», *RMP* 149[2006], 165).

⁵⁶ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire* 6, 273.

⁵⁷ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 152.

This double technique serves to represent the ideological world of writer, conceived in a positive and negative way through female symbolism.⁵⁸

The positive meaning of γυνή is a tensive symbol, whose presentation starts in Rev 12: on the basis of prophetic tradition (Isa 52:1-2; 54:1-17; 61:10; 62:1-12; 66:7-13), woman here described, is not «a goddess subdued, tamed, and under control»,⁵⁹ but a «multivalent mythological symbolization» of the ecclesial community.⁶⁰ This personification is a way through which the author offers his audience an image of identification.⁶¹ If Juvenal is amazed by women, who subvert their feminine behaviors, carrying out masculine activities (lines 252-253), the prophet John, instead, performs a gender inversion, describing a community made up of men and women, with the female imagery of the γυνή. This woman-community is designated in her constant and continuous motherhood, as it is suggested by the prevalence of the present tense: ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, καὶ κράζει ὠδίνουσα καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν (12:2).⁶² If for Juvenal the attacks on motherhood are caused by xenophilic customs of Roman women, for Revelation the generative act is threatened by a deeper evil, the dragon (12:3-4), identified with Satan (12:9). This negative emblem reinterprets Gen 3, in light of the Python-Set myth, often used by Nero to celebrate his power.⁶³ In this way, Revelation uses this image of propaganda in an anti-political key, showing the empire as the diabolical opponent of God.⁶⁴ On this point, John presents a difference from Juvenal: if the Latin poet underlines the destruction of traditional values because of women's behaviors, John tells of external foes against the messianic com-

⁵⁸ C.D. BERGMANN, *Childbirth as a metaphor for crisis. Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1-18* (BZAW 382), Berlin-New York 2008, 216.

⁵⁹ PIPPIN, «The Heroine and the Whore: Fantasy and the Female in the Apocalypse of John», *Semeia* 60(1992), 72.

⁶⁰ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation. Vision of a Just World*, 80-82.

⁶¹ L.R. HUBER, «The City Women Babylon and New Jerusalem in Revelation», in KOESTER (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, 317.

⁶² A P⁴⁷ Ⓝ attest the present κράζει; the imperfect ἔκραζεν is in C and 2351, while ἔκραζεν is reported by Byzantine texts.

⁶³ DIO CASSIUS, *Hist. Rom.*, 62,20.5, reports an acclamation in honor of Nero: ὁ καλὸς Καῖσαρ, ὁ Ἀπόλλων, ὁ Αὔγουστος, εἰς ὡς Πύθιος. μά σε, Καῖσαρ, οὐδεὶς σε νικά.

⁶⁴ J.W. VAN HANTEN, «Dragon Myth and Imperial Ideology in Rev 12-13», in D.L. BARR (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse. Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (SBLSymS 39), Leiden-Boston (MA) 2006, 181-203.

munity and woman becomes a symbol of resistance:⁶⁵ although persecuted and pressured,⁶⁶ she does not give in to the flattery of the dragon (12:13-17) and endures for the entire duration of history.⁶⁷ At the end of the pericope, the author symbolizes the dragon's battle against the woman-community, speaking of the σπέρμα αὐτῆς (12:17): we are faced with the most accentuated form of gender reversal, since the word σπέρμα is attributed to the woman. It is true that this term can also mean «offspring» or «children» and, in this case, the feminine genitive αὐτῆς must be understood in an objective sense, but the attribution of a masculine quality to the γυνή creates a strong rhetorical effect.

Even the topic of marriage for John constitutes a positive value symbolizing the relationship between Christ and the Church, in continuous evolution up to the eschatological wedding. In this way, the book is in line with the rest of the NT,⁶⁸ whereby the authors re-read in a Christological key the nuptial image of the post-exilic prophets (Isa 54:5-8; 61:10; 62:3-5) to signify the renewal of the covenant. The spousal representation, however, in Revelation has two phases: 1) a preparatory moment, in which the Church processes her status as spouse; 2) a final stage, with the consummation of the wedding (19:7-9; 21:2,9; 22:17).⁶⁹ In this evolution the behavior of the Church is not always faithful and Christ, in his messages to the communities of Asia, highlights some ecclesial shortcomings: Ephesus is invited to return to its first love (2:4-5); the pagan climate of Thyatira is described in terms of prostitution and betrayal (2:20-22); the supper with the community of Laodicea (3:20) recalls the spousal language of Ct 5:2, where the dialogue between the spouses, after a moment of rupture, re-establishes full connection.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ D. LEE, «The Heavenly Woman and the Dragon», in F. DEVLIN-GLASS – L. MCCREDDEN (eds.), *Feminist Poetics of the Sacred. Creative Suspicions*, Oxford 2001, 212-213.

⁶⁶ M. SELVIDGE, «Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse», in *Neot* 26(1992), 161-163, speaks of «an impotent Goddess», in whom signs of strength (sun, moon, stars) and passivity (pains, childbirth, persecution) coexist.

⁶⁷ The time of divine protection of the woman-Church is calculated in 1,260 days (12:6), or as «a time, times and half a time» (12:14), a chronological span which indicates the post-Easter period (P. PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean* [CNT 14], Genève 12000; 2014, 299).

⁶⁸ Matt 9:15; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 2:1-11; 3:29; Eph 5:23 etc.

⁶⁹ U. VANNI, *La nuzialità nell'Apocalisse*, in R. BONETTI (ed.), *Mistero pasquale e mistero nuziale*, Roma 2003, 235-257.

⁷⁰ A. FEUILLET, *Le Cantique des Cantiques en l'Apocalypse. Étude de Théologie Biblique et Réflexions sur une méthode d'exégèse*, Paris 1953, 324-334; BEALE, *The Book of Revelation*, 307-308.

Compared to Juvenal's criticism against the betrayals of Roman matrons, the difficult moments of the nuptial relationship in Revelation are not an irreversible condition, because the interventions of Christ change the status of the Church in view of her final purification.⁷¹ In the pericope of 14:1-5 there is an anticipation of this final condition: John, in fact, offers a portrait of redeemed ones, calling them *παρθένο*s, because they «have not defiled themselves with women». If Juvenal considers chastity (*pudicitia*) as a lost female virtue, Revelation, instead, attributes this condition to the crowd of the saved. This language has created not a few difficulties in its interpretation, since it seems to reserve the condition of salvation only for males, whereas women are considered unclean and dangerous in a total male cultural system.⁷² In this case, however, the imagery of the Apocalypse does not want to exclude women from the circuit of the saved. In fact, *παρθένο*s is a state of an unmarried girl and, by calling with this feminine noun the followers of Christ, John continues to make his gender reversal, already noted in the image of woman-community.⁷³ Therefore, virginity becomes a female symbol that wants to underline the moral fidelity of the believers, women and men, and their full dedication to Christ.⁷⁴

The positive image of feminine language terminates in the celebration of the wedding, in the hymn of Rev 19:7a-9, where the Church chants her eschatological accomplishment. In this text, we find another gender inversion, because the entire community is now called to identify itself with the *γυνή*. The consummation of wedding is described as a synergetic act, since the arrival of the Lamb's wedding is connected with the preparation of the Bride (*ἡτοίμασεν ἑαυτήν*). The result of this historical operation⁷⁵ appears in the symbol of woman's garment in «fine linen, bright and pure» (v. 8). In this case, the adjective *καθαρός* (pure) assimilates the *γυνή* to the eternal city, the new Jerusa-

⁷¹ F. PIAZZOLLA, *Il Cristo dell'Apocalisse* (StBi 93), Bologna 2020, 192.

⁷² T. PIPPIN, *Death and Desire*, 50; ID., «The Heroine and the Whore», 68,70.

⁷³ HUBER, «The City Women Babylon», 318.

⁷⁴ D.E. AUNE, «Following the Lamb. Discipleship in the Apocalypse», in ID. (ed.), *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity* (WUNT 199), Tübingen 2006, 66-78.

⁷⁵ In 19:7 *ἡτοίμασεν* can be considered a «culminative aorist», which indicates the end of an act or state (D.L. MATHEWSON, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation. The Function of Greek Verb Tenses in John's Apocalypse* [Linguistic Biblical Studies 4], Leiden-Boston [MA] 2010, 56).

lem, namely the definitive condition of the community, built of «pure gold» (21:18[2x],21).

Revelation and woman as image of corrupted humanity

John uses also a negative feminine counterpart, which indicates the Roman empire, described as a woman and prostitute in 17:1-17. According to a certain feminist exegesis, this language helps to create the idea that women are images of evil and the exultation on the destruction of Babylon (Rev 18) implies that they are deserving of such violence.⁷⁶ This type of interpretation does not take into account the author's tensive symbol language, which describes imperial society in different ways and symbols.⁷⁷ The term γυνή, in fact, is used only at the beginning of the presentation,⁷⁸ but in 17:5 woman is identified with Babylon⁷⁹ and, from 17:18 on, she becomes the πόλις (18:10[2x],16,18,19,21).⁸⁰ In order to amplify its negative symbolic meaning, John uses the term γυνή for the city-Babylon just 6 times (17:3[2x],6,7,9,18), a numeric value which indicates a deficiency in her femininity. Unlike the Lamb's bride, the imperial symbol does not experience a marital relationship, but she has lovers (17:2; 18:3,9) and her bonds are designated as prostitution.⁸¹ If Juvenal's wealthy matrons avoid motherhood for aesthetic reasons, the great whore, as the mother-community (12:2-4), is called μήτηρ (17:5),

⁷⁶ S. GARRETT, «Revelation», in C. NEWSON – S.H. RINGE (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Louisville (KY) 1992, 381.

⁷⁷ In the chap. 13 the empire is symbolized by the two beasts and in the same chap. 17:9-12 the image of kings, who succeeded in their handling of power, is another way to speak of the Roman Empire.

⁷⁸ D.A. DESILVA «Revelation and Women», in ID. (ed.), *Seeing Things John's Way. The Rhetoric of Book of Revelation*, Louisville (TX) 2009 (position in Kindle 4322-4324), says: «Babylon is not a woman. "She" is a city. "She" is not an individual with a face who has been shaped by male fantasies and uses these, in turn, to her profit. "She" is the powerful center of a political and economic system of domination».

⁷⁹ Already in 14:8 and 16:19 the author used the pseudonym of Babylon to describe Rome and the same appellation is found in 18:2,10,21. John follows the footsteps of *4 Esd* 3:1-2,28-31; *2 Bar* 67:7; *Syb. Or.*, 5:143;159-160, texts which call Rome with this title after the destruction of the temple (70 A.D.). As the city of the Euphrates was the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem, so Rome destroyed historical Jerusalem and continues to support idolatry and instigate persecution against Christians (SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *Revelation. Vision of a Just World*, 98).

⁸⁰ A first mention of the negative πόλις is in 16:19.

⁸¹ The verb πορνεύω in 17:2; 18:3,9; the nouns πορνεία in 14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3; 19,2 and πόρνη in 17:1,5,15,16; 19:2.

but her generative language does not describe a real maternity, rather her being a source of corruption and depravity. The woman-empire has not crowned of twelve stars, as the γυνή-community (12:1), but defines herself as a βασίλισσα (18:8). This combination of royalty and prostitution recalls the image that Juvenal uses in sixth *Satire* for Messalina, called the *meretrix Augusta* (Augustan whore: line 118): when her husband, the emperor Claudius slept: «she preferred to lie on a mat rather than in her bed on the Palatine», within the *cella* (brothel), where her prostitution took place (*prostitit*).⁸² However, if Messalina's harlotry expresses a commodified sexual act (*aera poposcit*: line 125), on the basis of the OT,⁸³ in Revelation prostitution denotes a religious and ethical disqualification, which involves morals and religion.⁸⁴ About this, another parallelism can be noted between Juvenal and John: in line 117, the satirist blames Messalina for preferring a *tego* (rush mat) to the *cubile* (marital bed), an important symbol of ancient family values, as the author has already questioned by criticizing the Roman vice of *lectum concutere atque sacri genium contemnere fulcra* (pounding someone else's bed, belittling the Spirit of the sacred couch: lines 21-22).⁸⁵ This accusation is further highlighted by the image of Messalina who *foeda lupanaris tulit ad pulvinar odorem* (took back to the emperor's couch the stench of the brothel: line 132). The juxtaposition and alliteration between the *lupanar* (brothel) and the *pulvinar* (couch) contrast what is high and holy with what is low and dirty. In Revelation also, the bed becomes a symbol of reversed values as in the case of Jezebel (Rev 2:20). The prophetess is accused of «prostitution» (vv. 20,21), probably in the sense of being condescending to a syncretistic vision,⁸⁶ tracing the traits of the wife of King Ahab whose name she bears in caricature.⁸⁷ In his description of Jezebel, John shows a woman of

⁸² TACITUS, *Ann.* 11,12-13; 26-38, mentions the sexual excesses of Messalina.

⁸³ Isa 23:15-17; Jer 2:20-37; 13,27; Ezek 16; Hos 2:4-15; Nah 3:1-7.

⁸⁴ HYLEN, «Feminist interpretation», 468.

⁸⁵ Probably the *genius* is the figure of the *Lar familiaris* (guardian household deity), which decorated the lower part of the back of the bed (W.C.F. ANDERSON, «The meaning of "fulcrum" and fulcri genius», *CIR* 7[1889], 322-324).

⁸⁶ GARRETT, «Revelation», 378, shows that the sexual expressions of «adultery» and «fornication» are a reference to idolatry, but she considers this language as an androcentric connotation, which has contributed to a patriarchal climate, with a reductionistic categorization of women as «whores» or «virgins».

⁸⁷ The real name of the prophetess of Thyatira is not withheld because in the Book of Revelation some characters are called with a symbolic name. The same phenomenon

power and a great influencer, who still remains in power and her religious activity has followers.⁸⁸ For this reason, the «satirical» Christ urges the prophetess intimating her to convert, if she does not want to be thrown εἰς κλίνην, καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην (2:22).⁸⁹ In this comparison Messalina and Jezebel share a common guilt: they have violated the symbolic «sacred bed», the former desecrating the imperial dignity, the latter corrupting the integrity of the faith.

The theme of women being drunk is another negative aspect, common to Revelation and Juvenal. In fact, because of Babylon, ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς (Rev 17:2). This image recalls Jer 51:7 and shows Rome as a cause of intoxication, since her idolatrous lifestyle involves the inhabitants of the earth, as a prostitute does with her clients.⁹⁰ This language is amplified, in Rev 17:4 and 18:6, by the image of the cup (ποτήριον), whose association with the drunkenness (17:6) equates Babylon with a vulgar prostitute who drunkenly declares herself available to serve any client. Even in the sixth *Satire*, the theme of drunkenness characterizes the irreverent behavior of the women. In lines 303-305, matrons drink the precious Falernian in a *concha* (shell-shaped container), unable to hold the expensive wine.⁹¹ Equally, *rubicundula* (face flushed) appears the matron, who drinks the whole *oenophorum* (flagon of wine) and vomits during the banquet, having swallowed the alcohol on an empty stomach (lines 425-433). In this parallelism, it can be noted that the correlation between Juvenal and Revelation lies only in the use of the same semantic field, but with a different goal. The purpose of the satirist is to manifest the matron's contradictions, in her behaviors beyond the female sex. Instead, the image of alcohol in Revelation serves

appears in Pergamum, where the false teachings are attributed to Balaam (2:14), another biblical reference, which hides the true name of the local prophet. In this case, with the technic of irony, Revelation helps the communities to recognize the false aspects of some prophetic leaders, regardless of their gender. See F. PIAZZOLLA, «Balaam and Jezebel in Revelation: The Re-Reading of OT Figures», *Studia biblica Slovaca* 6(2022), 92-114.

⁸⁸ SELVIDGE, «Powerful and Powerless», 159-161.

⁸⁹ This adjective is used by S.J. FRIESEN, «Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3: Churches, Christians, True Jews, and Satanic Synagogues», in D.L. BARR (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse*, 133.

⁹⁰ Ézek 23:40-42; LUCIAN, *Dialogi meretricii* 6:2.

⁹¹ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire* 6, 166-167.

to show the action of Rome, who charms humanity and involves it in her intoxication.

In the Book of Revelation, particular evidence is given to the prostitute-woman's parure: she is described περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις (17:4). Purple, a very expensive natural dye, is seen in the Bible as a sign of wealth and high social status (Dan 5:7; 1 Mac 8:14; Mark 15:17,20; Luke 16:19). In the past, whores were often dressed and adorned in an elegant way, so as to attract their customers.⁹² In Juvenal's *Satire* there is no particular attention to the garments, since the author prefers to emphasize the contradiction between what is proper to women and their claim to be equal to men. In line 246, he ridicules the gladiators-women, who challenge in public entertainments,⁹³ wearing *endromidas Tyrias et femineum ceroma* (tracksuits in Tyrian purple and the feminine wrestler's oil). This phrase is constructed with two oxymorons, since the endromid was a cheap female cloak,⁹⁴ but in this case, it is made of expensive Tyrian purple.⁹⁵ In the same way, *ceroma*, an ointment for athletes, is accompanied by the adjective *femineum*, a sarcastic juxtaposition that shows the encroachment of women into areas that are not their own. This parodic contradiction is further accentuated when the satirist, in lines 259-260, shows the intolerance of women for delicate clothing as *cyclade*⁹⁶ [...] *panniculus bombycinus* (the thinnest wrap [...] the finest wisp of silk), but are willing to wear the gladiator's uniform.

⁹² This parallel between the city-prostitute and her jewels is no stranger to antiquity: PLUTARCH, *Per.* 12, criticizing Pericles' building reconstruction program, compares Athens to a ἀλαζόνα γυναῖκα (wanton woman). J. GLANCY – S.D. MOORE, «How Typical a Roman Prostitute is Revelation's "Great Whore"?», *JBL* 130(2011), 560, quote a Plautus' comedy, where a *meretrix* is described with the same characteristics of Babylon.

⁹³ L. ROBERT, *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*, Paris 1940, 188-189, mentions an inscription from Halicarnassus, where two women, Amazon and Achillia, fight in the arena.

⁹⁴ MARZIAL, *Ep.* 14,126,1.

⁹⁵ WATSON – WATSON, *Juvenal Satire* 6, 151.

⁹⁶ ΚΥΚΛᾶς was an elegant female dress, bordered around with gold decorations (K. OLSON, *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society*, London-New York 2008, 51).

The Urbs and the πόλις: two different perspectives

The city, as an image of society, is another emblem that unites the sixth *Satire* of Juvenal and Revelation, but with some differences. In the ancient world there are numerous examples of texts, coins and monuments through which the personification of cities and nations appears as women. The reasons for this identification are many and to be found both in the feminine gender, which the word «city» has in Greek (πόλις) and Latin (*urbs*), and in the idea of cities as containers with walls, which recall the female uterus.⁹⁷

In Juvenal's work, the identification between the reprehensible behavior of a woman and her collective representativeness as an image of the city, is in the case of Eppia: to go after her Sergius, she journeyed to Canopus in Egypt, a town famous for its extravagance and vices.⁹⁸ There, the senator's wife scandalizes also this corrupt city, which «expresses its disapproval» (*damnante Canopo*: line 84) in front of *prodigia et mores Urbis* (monstrous immorality of Rome). In this way, the matron, with her corruption, becomes a personification of the city par excellence. This datum recalls Rev 17:1-6, where Rome is introduced through the symbol of city-Babylon. Turning to the technique of *ekphrasis*, John uses the traditional celebratory elements in a satirical and parodic way,⁹⁹ to ridicule the corrupt Rome¹⁰⁰ and to convince his audience according to his perspective.¹⁰¹ The woman-city-Babylon is described as a vulgar πόρνη (17:1,5,15,16; 19:2),¹⁰² even though her association with the kings of the earth (17:2) shows her high-class as a *hetaira*. The description of the city, with her name written on the forehead (17:5a), recalls the custom of slaves, who were marked by tattoos, hence Babylon-woman appears as a low-level prostitute. Furthermore, the mention of

⁹⁷ HUBER, «The City Women Babylon», 309-310.

⁹⁸ SENECA, *Lucil.* 51,3 calls Canopus *deversorium vitiorum* (resort of vices).

⁹⁹ D.E. AUNE, «Revelation 17. A Lesson in Remedial Reading», in Id. (ed.), *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity* 240-249, shows how the descriptive details of Rome-Babylon can be found in a marble bas-relief and in numerous coins during Vespasian's time.

¹⁰⁰ S.J. FRIESEN, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John. Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, Oxford-New York 2001, 122-132.

¹⁰¹ R.J. WHITACKER, *Ekphrasis, Vision, and Persuasion in the Book of Revelation* (WUNT II/410), Tübingen 2015, 17-18.

¹⁰² HUBER, «The City Women Babylon», 314.

βδέλυγμα (17:5b) connects Rome to what is dirty and smelly.¹⁰³ As we have noted in the previous paragraph, Messalina also brings the stench of brothel into the imperial palace: that unpleasant smell becomes an image of the social disorder expressed by the imperial harlot.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, for John βδέλυγμα is an expression of the immorality of Rome and the counterpart of the virtues of the bride-Jerusalem, designated as καθαρός (19:8; 21:18[2x],21).

Between Rev 17 and Juvenal's Messalina there is still another point of contact, given by the stage name *Lycisca*, that the *meretrix augusta* gave herself in the brothel (line 123).¹⁰⁵ The term, if on the one hand could allude to the Greek origin of Claudius' wife, on the other would also recalls the feminine of the Greek λύκος, she-wolf, a lexeme which in Latin refers also to the prostitute. Even Revelation, speaking of Babylon-woman as μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν [...] τῆς γῆς (17:5), seems to allude to the ancient legend of the twins Romulus and Remus, suckled by the she-wolf. However, making a parody of this myth, John shows Rome not as a she-wolf, but as a whore, source of illicit carnal passions, freely practiced in the empire.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, in the Apocalypse the symbol of the city is not limited to being only negative: Babylon, in fact, has its counterpart in another tensive symbol, the eternal city (3:12; 11:2; 20:9; 21:2,10,14,15,16[2x],18,19,21,23; 22:14,18). In this ambivalent meaning, John evokes the *topos* of good and bad woman with the rhetorical aim of motivating the reader's choice in the face of a reality, imagined through the female universe.¹⁰⁷

Since the heavenly city is called also «Jerusalem» (3:12; 21:2,10), «woman» (21:9[2x]) and «bride» (21:2,9), this polysemic language leads readers to note a transformation of the community, previously presented as a woman-bride and then as the city-Jerusalem. Both the symbols, in fact, share a common language:

¹⁰³ C.P. JONES, «Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity», *JRS* 77(1987), 151.

¹⁰⁴ GLANCY – MOORE, «How Typical a Roman Prostitute is Revelation's "Great Whore"?, 565.

¹⁰⁵ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 111, thinks Messalina had placed her pseudonym on the entrance to the alcove, where she received her customers.

¹⁰⁶ AUNE, *Revelation*, III, 937.

¹⁰⁷ B. ROSSING, *The Choice between Two Cities. Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*, Harrisburg (PA) 1999, 17-59.

	Woman-bride	The city-Jerusalem
γυνή	12:1,4,6,13,14,15,16,17; 19:7	21:9
νύμφη	22:17	21:2,9
married to the Lamb	19:7	21:9
her preparation: ἐτοιμάζω	19:7	21:2
purity: καθάρως	19:8	21:18[2x],21

In the definitive image of the heavenly Jerusalem, Revelation indicates a universal coexistence of humans with God and the Lamb will be the fruit of a human-divine cooperation that will be fulfilled in the end time (Rev 21:1–22:5). The author describes the new Jerusalem as a wealthy woman, adorned with jewels (21:18-21) and shining with God’s glory (21:11). These characteristics of the eternal city evoke two important meanings:

- Gemstones, through a rich confluence of literary traditions, suggest the high level promised to the people of God in its eternal reward.¹⁰⁸
- Jewels are a sign of power and offer a positive image of the celestial city, in opposition to the wealth and pomp of the prostitute Rome. In this description of the eschatological Jerusalem, as a wealthy woman, the author shows he knows well the characteristics of female society, typical of the first century, operative but silent, where women managed riches, gave banquets and donated small or large gifts to their cities.¹⁰⁹

The image of the heavenly Jerusalem, therefore, as a woman and a city, serves to describe an idealized community to which the Revelation invites his audience as the last perspective of his terrestrial journey.

¹⁰⁸ The breastplate of the High Priest (Exod 28:21; 39:14); Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 6:20-22), the dress of Aseneth (*Jos. Asen.* 18:6), the description of the New Jerusalem at Qumran (S. PATTEMORE, *The People of God in the Apocalypse. Discourse, Structure and Exegesis* [MSSNTS 128], New York 2004, 209-210).

¹⁰⁹ S. HYLEN, *Women in the New Testament World*, New York 2018.

Magical arts in Revelation and the sixth Satire

Revelation and the sixth *Satire* share a common attack on magic, albeit with different emphasis, since this topic is only hinted at in the Apocalypse, while much space is devoted to it in Juvenal's work.

In Revelation, magic is condemned according to the biblical mentality, which is contrary to the occult arts, conceived as human control over mysterious forces. Religion, on the other hand, involves a submission to the transcendent world in the act of faith, without influencing the course of events.¹¹⁰ However, aspects of the Christianization of magic are not lacking in the Apocalypse,¹¹¹ as is the use of its rhetorical force.¹¹² In this context, we are concerned with the texts in which the negative aspect of the occult arts emerges, understood as a force on which imperial society bases its values and beliefs.

The first pericope, in which magic is mentioned, is the scene of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13-21), where 1/3 of humans is killed by the infernal cavalry, but they still do not convert ἐκ τῶν φαρμάκων αὐτῶν (v. 21). In this verse John, on the basis of biblical tradition (Ps 115:4-7; 135:15-17; Isa 44:9-20; Dan 5:23; Wis 15:15), blames idolatrous worship by equating it to spells and murders. This juxtaposition could depend on the idea that magic potions had a deadly power,¹¹³ as it will appear more clearly in Juvenal's satire. In Rev 18:23, instead, John mentions φαρμακεία as Rome's tool of deception: this text echoes some biblical writings (Nah 3:4 [LXX]; Isa 47:9), where the strength of Nineveh and Babylon comes from the power of their magic.¹¹⁴ Even *Syb. Or.* 5,162-165, thinks that the success of the Roman Empire is due to the force of spells and enchantments. The condemnation of magic returns at the end of the book, in the two texts of Rev 21:8 and 22:15, that look like the catalogs of vices and virtues of Hellenistic litera-

¹¹⁰ E.M. YAMUCHI, «Magic in the Biblical World», *IBRe* 34(1983), 169-200.

¹¹¹ D.E. AUNE, «The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic», in ID. (ed.), *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity* 240-249, 484-489; P.B. DUFF, «“I will give each of you as your works deserve”: Witchcraft Accusations and the Fiery-Eyed Son of God in Rev 2.18-23», *NTS* 43(1997), 116-123.

¹¹² E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, «Babylon the Great: A Rhetorical-Political Reading of Revelation 17-18», in D.L. BARR (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse*, 243-269.

¹¹³ KOESTER, *Revelation*, 470.

¹¹⁴ J. FEKKES III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions. Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (JSNTSup 93), Sheffield 1994, 220, note 74.

ture.¹¹⁵ These two lists of negative actions are intended to prevent believers from accessing the eschatological city and they are constructed in contrast with the positive acts required to enter eternal beatitude (21:6b-7; 22:14).¹¹⁶

The sixth *Satire* offers numerous scenes in which women practice magic and all the rites associated with it. Juvenal ridicules the matrons accustomed to resorting to spells in order to satisfy their desires or achieve their goals. The satirist displays women ready to let themselves be deceived by foreign haruspices, those who attribute special powers to themselves and dupe gullible matrons.

In the first scene (lines 526-541) the satirist criticizes the cult of Isis and Osiris by showing women ready to get to Meroe, *ad Aegypti finem* (to the ends of Egypt), and draw the water of the Nile, if the divine Io commands it. It was not necessary, since this water reached Rome through a process of bottling and export.¹¹⁷ Juvenal, in line 533, mocks the followers of this cult, describing them as *grege linigero* [...] *grege calvo* (a sheep in linen tunic, a bald sheep). The *geminatio* and the anaphoric position of *grex* (sheep) well express the sarcasm which judges the initiates of the cult as a load of sheep. In antithetical parallelism, Juvenal shows the priest of Isis *derisor Anulus*, who derides *plangentis populi*, the faithful in tears, for the disappearance of Osiris. The sarcastic mockery climaxes in lines 535-541, where the priest *petit veniam* (must apologize) for the matron, who had intimate relationships precisely when the calendar of worship required abstinence.¹¹⁸ In this case, the minister of the cult elevates for the woman *meditata murmura* (a litany in a low voice) and appeases the wrath of the god, called here *corruptus* Osiris, a title which constitutes a transposition, since the venality of his priest is conferred on the same god.

In the second picture (lines 542-547) the image of a Judean sorceress is a caricature of a people particularly criticized by Greeks and Romans. Juvenal's anti-Judaism, however, should be included in the

¹¹⁵ Prov 6:16-19; Isa 33:15; Ezek 18:5-18; Mark 7:22; Gal 5:19-21; Rom 1:29-31; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:3-5; Jas 3:13-18; 2 Pet 1:5-7; ARISTOTLE, *Eth. Eud.* II,1220b; PLATO, *Gorgias* 525 etc. L. AL LÓPEZ, «Vice lists in No-Pauline Sources», *BS* 168(2011), 178-195.

¹¹⁶ E. KAMLAH, *Die Form der katalogischen Paränese in NT* (WUNT 7), Tübingen 1964, 23, 35, 185-188; PRIGENT, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 248-249, 466-467; 494-495.

¹¹⁷ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 146.

¹¹⁸ PROPERTIUS, *Elegiae* 2,33A; R. SCHILLING, *La religion romaine de Vénus depuis les origines jusqu'au temps d'Auguste*, Paris 1954, 39-42.

author's *préférence nationale*, critical of all xenophile culture.¹¹⁹ This woman is presented as a quivering beggar (*tremens mendicat*), in her reverence for the matron. High-sounding titles are attributed to the Jewish woman: *interpretes legum Solymarum* (the expounder of the laws of Jerusalem), namely knowledgeable of the Torah; *magna sacerdos arboris* (high priestess of the tree), that is the *menorah*, which is shaped like a plant;¹²⁰ *fida internuntia caeli* (reliable intermediary of Heaven), messenger of the unpronounceable name of the God of the Jews. This caricature seems to recall the messages of Christ in Smyrna (Rev 2:9) and Philadelphia (3:9), where the expression συναγωγή τοῦ Σατανᾶ is found or the members of the synagogue are declared to be false (the verb ψεύδονται in 3:9). Even these phrases, however, should not be understood as a form of anti-Judaism, but they are linked to theological reasons, since Christians believed themselves to be the true Israel, as opposed to the Jewish pretention of divine election.¹²¹ In this attack on Judaism, Juvenal and the Apocalypse have in common the sarcasm against the religious beliefs of the Jews, except for one difference: for the satirist it is a question of alleged magical powers; for John, it is the dispute of the identity of the chosen ones, now claimed by the Christians.

In line 566 Juvenal, in his critic on magic, says that every man has his Tanaquilla, namely the wife of Tarquinius Priscus, an expert on haruspicy. Through the rhetorical figure of antonomasia and a process of universalization, the poet shows how Roman matrons, as the ancient Tanaquilla, use magic to the point of knowing the date of death of relatives, in order to take possession of their inheritance (lines 567-569).¹²² In important moments, such as the departure of her husband or his repatriation, women do not move without having consulted Thrasyllus' cabal, in case it foresees disasters.¹²³ The dependence on magic becomes hyperbolic when matrons resort to it in banal situations, such as to move to the first mile, to put eye drops or set food time (lines 575-579).

¹¹⁹ S. LAIGNEU, «Un exemple d'antijudaïsme dans l'Antiquité: Juvénal, Satires», *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 4(2006), 45.

¹²⁰ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 147-148.

¹²¹ F. PIAZZOLLA, «I messaggi alle sette chiese d'Asia (Ap 2-3). Una cristologia paradigmatica nel contesto ecclesiale», *Greg* 101(2020), 536-537.

¹²² Also in *Satire* III,42-44, Juvenal speaks of consulting the stars, in order to know the premature death of relatives.

¹²³ Thrasyllus was a famous astrologer at the time of Tiberius (DIO CASSIUS, *Hist. Rom.* 58,27,3).

Magic does not spare any social class: the *mediocris* (plebeian) woman can contact the numerous soothsayers at the Circus Maximus (lines 582-584) and these magicians ask their clients to make noises with their mouths, a gesture with an apotropaic meaning, to ward off bad luck.¹²⁴ Here, the poor flaunt *longum aurum* (long gold chain), perhaps a type of golden ornament, which women of humble condition wore in imitation of the matrons.¹²⁵ Parody emerges because they consult some astrologers to know about the opportunity to choose between the previous husband, an innkeeper, and the new suitor, a rag seller (line 591). Instead, the rich women can afford the best haruspices coming from Asia Minor (Phrygia) or India (line 585).¹²⁶ Matrons, furthermore, in lines 610-611, resort to *magicos [...] cantus [...] Thessala philtera* (magic incantations [...] Thessalian potions), in an attempt to rekindle or intensify the love of husbands and lovers.¹²⁷ In this case, Juvenal puts an emphasis on marital folly through the gemination of the adverb, which underlines: «that's the reason (*inde*) you're going mad, that's the reason (*inde*) for the haziness in your head» (lines 612-613).

The satirist offers also the implications of magic in political life through two characters. Caesonia, the fourth wife of Caligula (lines 615-619), who concocted for her husband the entire forehead of a foal, causing the madness of the emperor and the following difficult moments of the empire during his reign.¹²⁸ Similarly Agrippina, who poisoned her husband Claudius with mushrooms. In this case, Juvenal blames the process of Claudius' apotheosis through two contrasting images: the emperor's *descendere in caelum* (going down to heaven)

¹²⁴ The same rite is present in *PGM* IV,561.579.

¹²⁵ K. OLSON, «Matrona and Whore: The Clothing of Women in Roman Antiquity», *Fashion Theory* 6(2002), 399. J.R.C. MARTYN, «Juvenal Satire 6,582-591», *Hermes* 104(1976), 501-502, instead, thinks of a real gold necklace: this author sees a parallel with Petronius' *Satyricon*, whereby this would be a vulgar display of wealth by the new emerging classes.

¹²⁶ Line 585 has textual critical problems. In P Φ Σ we find *et inde* (and thence); *Indus* (Indian) is in the mss. Vatican 3192, while the *lectio Indae* (India) or *Indi* (Indians) would have caused the change, in the mss. F T U, of *dabit* into *dabunt*. MARTYN, «Juvenal Satire 6,582-591», 501, suggests that the plural is the result of an incorrect reading, for which Juvenal would have written *divitibus responsa dabit Phryx augur, eisdem dabit astrorum mundique peritu* (for rich ladies a Phrygian augur will prophesy, for the same a hired expert in astrology will perform), where the pronoun *eisdem* (for the same) was changed to *etidem* (the same), become later *et inde* (and thence).

¹²⁷ Thessaly was one of the regions most involved in this activity of love potions, thanks to the presence of special herbs, as it is attested by HORACE, *Carm.* 1,27,21.

¹²⁸ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 153.

corresponds with his insanity, as a man shaking his head and whose lips drip with strands of saliva (lines 622-623). The message, which comes from these images, shows how the misfortunes of the emperors were all attributable to the excesses of women operating in Caesars' family.¹²⁹ Furthermore, in these two examples it is more underlined the deadly power of magic potions, as it was previously noted in the hint of Rev 9:23, which juxtaposes «murders» and «sorceries».

At lines 624-625, Juvenal, moving towards the conclusion, emphasizes the extreme social impact of these erroneous behaviors. Through the triple anaphora of the pronoun *haec* (that), the poet accentuates the effects of the magic feminine *potio* (potion): *haec poscit ferrum atque ignes, haec potio torquet, haec lacerat mixtos equitum cum sanguine patres* (that insists upon steel and fires, that tortures, that mangles senators and knights in indiscriminate carnage). Even in this case, the social and political power of women recalls the image of Babylon in Revelation, whose strength is used to seduce and intoxicate the centers of power on the earth (17:2,15).

Conclusion

The comparison between the feminine characters in Revelation and Juvenal's sixth *Satire* shows the feelings of two authors, united by the critique of a society, which seems to have reached the heights of civilization but, in reality, has lost its fundamental values. Juvenal and John do not start from similar perspectives, nor do they reach the same conclusions. Apart from some parallels and analogies, we are faced with two works and two substantially different genres: satire and apocalypse. For the Latin satirist the root of evil lies in the abandonment of tradition and, to show the loss of the *mos maiorum*, the poet reviews the female universe as the main cause of this upheaval. The advent of a complementary world, made up of exotic and xenophile cultures, frightens this poet who was accustomed to the rustic simplicity and modesty of his ancestors. The same phenomenon, in parallel, can be affirmed of the author of Revelation who, faced with the heterogeneous world of the empire and its culture, perceives promiscuity and syncretism as a danger to his faith. Both Juvenal and John are shaken and disgusted by a world so different from their ideals and, for this

¹²⁹ SULPRIZIO, *Gender and Sexuality in Juvenal's Rome*, 154.

reason, they denounce its weaknesses and abuses. Their writings are proposed as a message that has the common purpose of changing and convincing the recipients to whom their works are addressed.

Regarding the question of gender, one must consider that Juvenal and John cannot be read literally, nor can one believe that their literary production is a war against the female gender. The authors just describe their world made up of vices and virtues by using the image of woman. For this reason, the awareness of gender equality cannot be sought in the past, seen through the eyes of the present. There is, in fact, a process of liberation that passes through the historical phases. If certain images shock our modern sensibility, they must be re-read in the language of metaphor and symbol, to condemn or celebrate their society, without necessarily wanting to see sexist or anti-feminist discrimination. In their purpose, Juvenal's and John's texts are not moved by a gender discrimination, but by a didactic style, in order to admonish and warn their recipients. If, however, in Juvenal's work an exclusively negative consideration emerges regarding a society that has abandoned ancient traditions, John's observations are different. Juvenal lacks the hope of a better world and women are the main cause of corruption. On the contrary, for John the figure of woman is not the source of ruin, but a sign to describe the ambiguity of society. If woman-Babylon represents a moral deformation and a claim to the absolute, woman-Church and the heavenly Jerusalem are seen as a positive symbol evolving towards fullness. We can then conclude by saying that the common point of view between Juvenal and John is given by the same time of crisis, whose excesses they condemn moved by their ethical and religious ideals, represented and criticized through the female imagery.

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Parole chiave

Donna in Giovenale e Apocalisse – Sposa e madre – Città e società – Magia, satira e apocalittica

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Sommario

In un comune alveo storico l'Apocalisse di Giovanni e la VI *Satira* di Giovenale utilizzano il simbolo della donna per descrivere la loro società contemporanea. Per il poeta latino peculiarità femminili, quali la maternità e il matrimonio, sono valori scomparsi; per Giovanni, immagini per esprimere una comunità messianica *in fieri*. Se nella VI *Satira* la donna è icona di tutti i mali della città-impero, nell'Apocalisse essa è parabola ambivalente: da una parte, prostituta e madre di prostituzioni; dall'altra, madre, fidanzata e sposa. Anche il simbolo della città conserva la medesima differenza: per Giovenale la matrona è icona della mostruosa immoralità dell'Urbe; per Giovanni, invece, da una parte c'è Babilonia, emblema negativo; dall'altra, Gerusalemme, città santa. In ultimo, il comune linguaggio della magia serve a Giovenale per ridicolizzare le donne credulone, mentre nell'Apocalisse mostra la causa del successo di Roma. Anche se i due autori usano le stesse immagini, i presupposti e le conclusioni sono differenti: rimpianto di un mondo perduto per il satirista; critica profetica, in vista di un rinnovamento, per l'apocalittico.

Summary

In a common historical context, the Apocalypse of John and the sixth *Satire* of Juvenal use the symbol of the woman to describe their contemporary society. For the Latin poet, feminine peculiarities, such as motherhood and marriage, are lost values. For John they are images to express a messianic community *in fieri*. If in the sixth *Satire* the woman is an icon of all the evils of the city-empire, in Revelation she is an ambivalent paragon: on the one hand prostitute and mother of prostitutes, on the other mother, fiancée and wife. Even the symbol of the city retains the same difference: for Juvenal the matron is an icon of the monstrous immorality of the City; for John, however, on one side there is Babylon, a negative emblem, on the other Jerusalem, the holy city. Finally, the common language of magic is used by Juvenal to ridicule gullible women, while in Revelation it shows the cause of Rome's success. Even if the two authors use the same images, the assumptions and conclusions are different: regret for a lost world for the satirist; prophetic criticism, with a view of renewal, for the apocalyptic.