***Dress, posture and self- presentation***



Figure 1 Statue of a young Roman wearing a toga (1st century CE)

*Dress can do many things: it can signal status, cultural identity, gender, official rank and more. Clothing was no different in Rome, except that it changed much slower than now: fashions were relatively fixed, although the materials and colours that were used did shift faster as Rome expanded and trade networks could reach farther and farther.*

**Dress:**

***The Toga***

*The toga was very much* ***the*** *Roman garment – in fact, non-citizens and many exiles were not allowed to wear it (see Pliny the Younger below). The poet Virgil called the Romans ‘the togaed race/gens togata’ (Aeneid 1.282), but despite that it was originally worn by both the Romans and the Etruscans (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities 3.61). In the early days of Rome both men and women wore it, men wearing it without anything underneath except a loincloth; even later when it was worn nearly exclusively by men it continued to be worn by girls until they were 12. In its original form it was a very handy and useful garment, which could even be worn into battle if you tied it up. Later, as it grew larger and larger, it grew unwieldy and even more expensive, and gradually declined in popularity. By the time of the Emperor Augustus’ reign (1st century BCE-early 1st century CE) it was largely something reserved for formal occasions – a bit like black tie and formal gowns. In fact, Augustus had to enforce the wearing of the toga in reaction to this decline:*

Augustus wanted also to revive the old style of dress, and once when he saw a crowd of men in dark cloaks in an assembly, he cried out indignantly, "Look at them - “Romans, masters of the world and the togaed race”[[1]](#footnote-1), and he ordered the aediles never again to allow anyone to appear in the Forum[[2]](#footnote-2) or its neighbourhood except in the toga and without a cloak.

Suetonius, *Augustus* 40.5

*Augustus was very careful about his public appearance and the image of old time simplicity he presented to the world:*

73. 1 The simplicity of Augustus furniture and household goods may be seen from couches and tables still in existence, many of which are scarcely fine enough for a private citizen. They say that he always slept on a low and plainly furnished bed. He wore common clothes for the house, made by his sister, wife, daughter or granddaughters, except on special occasions; his togas were neither close nor full, his purple stripe neither narrow nor broad, and his shoes somewhat high-soled, to make him look taller than he really was. But he always kept shoes and clothing to wear in public ready in his room for sudden and unexpected occasions.

Suetonius, *Augustus* 73.1

*The toga was not an easy garment to wear and even harder to hit the right note with (it also had a tendency to fall off with any sort of vigorous activity, which was another problem because ancient oratory involved a* ***lot*** *of movement). In the following passage the educator and orator Quintilian advises the budding orator on how to wear it and what faults to avoid:*

137 With regard to clothing, there is no special clothing unique to the orator, but people see his clothing more often than that of others. It should, therefore, be distinguished and manly, as, indeed, it ought to be with all men of status. But excessive care about the cut of the toga, the style of shoes, or arrangement of hair, is just as disgraceful as excessive carelessness. There are also details of clothing which are altered to some extent by successive changes in fashion. Our ancestors, for example, wore no folds [in the toga], and their successors wore them very short. 138 Consequently it follows that in view of the fact that their arms were, like those of the Greeks, covered by the garment, they must have employed a different form of gesture in the exordium from that which is now in use.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, I am speaking of our own day. The speaker who has not the right to wear the purple stripe,[[4]](#footnote-4) will wear his belt in such a way that the front edges of the tunic fall a little below his knees, while the edges in rear reach to the middle of his hams. For only women draw them lower and only centurions higher. 139 If we wear the purple stripe, it requires but little care to see that it falls becomingly; negligence in this respect sometimes excites criticism. Among those who wear the purple stripe, it is the fashion to let it hang somewhat lower than in garments that are retained by the belt. The toga itself should, in my opinion, be round, and cut to fit, otherwise there are a number of ways in which it may be unshapely. Its front edge should by preference reach to the middle of the shin, while the back should be higher in proportion as the belt is higher behind than in front. 140 The fold is most becoming, if it fall to a point a little above the lower edge of the tunic, and should certainly never fall below it. The other fold which passes obliquely like a belt under the right shoulder and over the left, should neither be too tight nor too loose. The portion of the toga which is last to be arranged should fall rather low, since it will sit better thus and be kept in its place. A portion of the tunic also should be drawn back in order that it may not fall over the arm when we are speaking in court, and the fold should be thrown over the shoulder, while it will not be unbecoming if the edge be turned back. 141 On the other hand, we should not cover the shoulder and the whole of the throat, otherwise our dress will be unduly narrowed and will lose the impressive effect produced by breadth at the chest. The left arm should only be raised so far as to form a right angle at the elbow, while the edge of the toga should fall in equal lengths on either side. 142 The hand should not be overloaded with rings, which should under no circumstances come close to the middle joint of the finger. The most becoming attitude for the hand is produced by raising the thumb and slightly curving the fingers, only it is occupied with holding notes.[[5]](#footnote-5) But we should not go out of our way to carry the latter, for it suggests an acknowledgment that we do not trust our memory, and is a hindrance to a number of gestures. 143 The ancients used to let the toga fall to the heels, as the Greeks are in the habit of doing with the cloak: Plotius and Nigidius both recommend this in the books which they wrote about gesture as practised in their own day. I am consequently all the more   surprised at the view expressed by so learned a man as Plinly the Younger, especially since it occurs in a book which carries minute research almost to excess: for he asserts that Cicero was in the habit of wearing his toga in such a fashion to conceal his varicose veins, despite the fact that this fashion is to be seen in the statues of persons who lived after Cicero's day. 144 And only illness can excuse a short cloak, bandages used to protect the legs, mufflers and coverings for the ears.

Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 11.137-144

*Wearing a toga properly was serious business as can be seen by this anecdote from the 4th century work by Macrobius, the Saturnalia, about an orator of the first century BCE, Quintus Hortensius. He was a very successful orator and lawyer and was elected consul, but he was also known for his elegant and graceful oratory, and was given the name Dionysia, the name of a famous female dancer, because of his exuberant style of delivery. The story starts with a discussion of how peacocks came to be eaten in Rome:*

1. It is said that Quintus Hortensius was the first to have served [peacock] at a feast of the augural college[[6]](#footnote-6): decent men talked about it as an act of extreme luxury rather than an austere one. A large number of people followed him, and raised the price of peacock eggs so high that they easily sold for five denarii each, and the actual birds for 500. 2 Look: that peacock eggs sold at 5 denarii each back then and are not cheaper not is not only something that we should avoid admiring and criticize. 3. Hortensius was the same man who watered his plane trees with wine, and he was so enthusiastic about it that he asked Cicero to exchange places with him in a court case they were engaged in,[[7]](#footnote-7) so that he could go earlier to a plane trees on his estate in Tusculum and himself take care of irrigating them himself. 4. But perhaps even a Hortensius cannot shame an entire generation, a man so openly soft that he thought all decent appearance was in the arranging of his clothing. He dressed in the latest style, and to make sure he went out well dressed he looked at his appearance in a mirror, where, gazing intently at himself he draped the toga on his body so that a complex knot tied up the folds. He arranged them the folds with effort not by chance, and so that the fold of garment fell down in such a way as to flatter his upper body 5 Once when he had arranged his toga *very* carefully to look its best, he charged a fellow senator whom he had had to to pass in narrow passage and who had destroyed its arrangment as a result, with an offence, as he said he considered it a crime that the folds from his shoulders should be disarranged.

*Non-citizens were not allowed to wear the toga – and that included some exiles who had lost their Roman citizenship, as you can see from the story below from the 1st century CE:*

Have you heard that Valerius Licinianus is teaching rhetoric in Sicily? I do not think you can have done, for the news is very recent. He is of praetorian rank, and he used at one time to be considered one of our most eloquent orators in court, but now he has fallen so low that he is an exile instead of being a senator, and a mere teacher of rhetoric instead of being a prominent lawyer. Consequently in his opening remarks he exclaimed, sorrowfully and solemnly: "O Fortune, what jokes you make to amuse yourself! For you turn senators into professors, and professors into senators." There is so much gall and bitterness in that expression that it seems to me that he became a professor merely to have the opportunity of uttering it. Again, when he entered the hall wearing a Greek pallium - for those who have been banished with the fire-and-water formula are not allowed to wear the toga - he first pulled himself together and then, glancing at his dress, he said, "I shall speak my declamations in Latin."

Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 4.11.3

*In the Late Republic some began to experiment with new materials, and, as older forms of social control lost their power, felt able to abandon the traditional all wool toga. Others, like Cicero, used this as a way to attack their enemies, as in the following speech from 63 BCE. Cicero was in the middle of dealing with a potential revolution by an aristocrat named Catiline and had managed to get him to leave the city, and was now trying to get people to turn on his supporters. One avenue of attack was to make them seem unRoman by attacking how they looked and the clothing they wore:*

5. I wish he [Catiline] had taken with him those soldiers of his, whom I see hovering about the forum, standing about the senate-house, even coming into the senate, all oiled up, glittering in purple. If they remain here, remember that we should not so much fear the army out there as as these men who have deserted the army.

Cicero, *Second Speech Against Catiline* 5

*Later he describes Catiline’s supporters by portraying them as people who had transgressed all sorts of Roman norms. Notice how he goes from clothing to other forms off attack:*

21. There is a last class, last not only in number but in the sort of men and in their way of life: Catiline’s private bodyguard, personally selected; the friends of his embraces and of his heart, whom you see with carefully combed hair, glossy, beardless, or with well-trimmed beards, with tunics with sleeves or reaching to the ankles, and draped in veils, not with togas. All the effort of their lives, all the work of their sleepless nights is spent in suppers that last until dawn. 22.  In these bands are all the gamblers, all the adulterers, all the unclean and shameless citizens. These boys, so witty and delicate, have learned not only to love and be loved, not only to sing and to dance, but also to brandish daggers and to administer poisons. Unless they are driven out, unless they die, even should Catiline die, I warn you that the school of Catiline would exist in the republic. But what do those wretches want? Are they going to take their wives with them to the camp? How can they do without them, especially in these nights? And how will they endure the Apennines, and these frosts, and this snow? Maybe they think that they will endure winter more easily because they have been in the habit of dancing naked at their feasts. Yes – we should really dread a war when Catiline is going to have a bodyguard of whores!

Cicero, *Second Speech Against Catiline* 21

*Cicero was writing in the Late Republic, but the continued rise in wealth in Rome and the expansion of the Roman empire meant that more and more luxury materials were available to an elite that was growing richer and richer. The Emperor Tiberius legislated against the mixing of silk with wool in an attempt to keep men dressed traditionally, and blamed all of this excess on the East.*

On the next day of the Senate's meeting Quintus Haterius, an ex-consul, and by Octavius Fronto, an ex-praetor said against the luxury in the country. It was decided that vessels of solid gold should not be made for the serving of food, and that men should not disgrace themselves in silken clothing from the East.

Tacitus, *Annals* 2.33

*Emperors might pass laws, and society might disapprove of it, but, as the following poem by Martial shows, not everyone paid attention.*

Cotilius, you’re a good looking guy;[[8]](#footnote-8) Cotilius, many people say this.

I hear it: but tell me - what is a good looking guy?

A good looking guy is: one who arranges his curls in order

Who always smells of balsam and cinnamon

Who sings Egyptian songs, who hums Spanish ones

Who moves his hairless arms to different beats

Who wastes his entire day alongside women’s chairs

And who always is whispering something in someone’s ear

Who reads and writes notes here there and everywhere

Who shields his *pallium* from neighbouring arms

Who knows who loves whom, who is going to parties,

Who knows in and out the ancient heritage of Hirpinus.[[9]](#footnote-9)

What are you saying! Is this this, *this,* really a guy?

Then, Cotilius, your guy is something deeply troubling.

Martial Epigrams 3.63

*Romans moralists (of which there were quite a number) were particularly horrified at deviations from what they felt was the proper manly attire of a Roman male. Seneca the Younger attacked those who wore women’s dress, as well as tried to look younger than their ages, either to preserve their sexual appeal for others or so they could take up sexual roles that the Romans only thought suitable for younger men and teenagers:*

**7.** Surely you believe that men who put on women’s clothing live contrary to nature? Do not men live contrary to nature who try to look fresh and boyish at an age unsuitable for such an attempt? What could be more cruel or more wretched? Cannot time and manhood ever carry such a person beyond an artificial boyhood?

Seneca the Younger, *Letters* 122.7

*Seneca also complained about the custom of taking off the toga on the Saturnalia, a December holiday where gifts were given, slaves had the day off and were traditionally served by their masters:*

**1.** It is the month of December, and yet right now the city is in a fever. General merrymaking is permitted. Everything resounds with mighty preparations, – as if the Saturnalia differed at all from the usual business day! So true it is that the difference is nothing, that I regard as correct the remark of the man who said: "Once December was a month; now it is a year." **2.** If I had you with me, I should be glad to consult you and find out what you think should be done, – whether we ought to make no change in our daily routine, or whether, in order not to be out of sympathy with the ways of the public, we should dine in a more fun way and take off the toga. As it is now, we Romans have changed our dress for the sake of pleasure and holiday making, though in former times that was only customary when the state was disturbed and had fallen on evil days.

Seneca, *Letters* 18.1-2

*Christian moralists also took up the topic of dress. The Christian bishop and later saint Tertullian also attacked Roman men for spending too much time on their appearance:*

Of course, now, I, a man, and envious of women, am banishing them from their own domains.  Are there, in our case too, some things which are disallowed because of the sobriety we are to maintain on account of the fear we owe God?[ If it is true, (as it is) that in men, for the sake of women, just as in women for the sake of men, a defect of nature has implanted the will to please; and if our gender acknowledges that it uses deceptive trickeries of form peculiarly its own, such as cutting the beard too sharply or plucking it out here and there; shaving round about the mouth; arranging hair and disguising its greyness by dyes; removing all the hair on the body as it appears; fixing each hair in its place with some womanly pigment; smoothing all the rest of the body by the aid of some rough powder or other:  then, also, taking every opportunity for consulting the mirror and gazing anxiously into it. While, when once the knowledge of God has put an end to all wish to please by means of sexy attraction, all these things are rejected as frivolous, as hostile to modesty. For where God is, there modesty is, and there is sobriety asher assistant and ally.  How, then, shall we practise modesty without her instrumental mean, that is, without sobriety? How, moreover, shall we bring sobriety to bear on the discharge of the functions of modesty, unless seriousness in appearance and in countenance, and in the general aspect of the entire man, mark our carriage?

Tertullian, *On the Dress of Women* 2.8.2

*As wearing the toga was a way to show your Romanness and so it proved appealing wear for anyone who wanted to display Romanness. Tertullian, because he clearly had little else to be getting on with, also wrote an entire speech praising Greek pallium and attacking the wearing of the toga by the men of Carthage. In the process he also has a lot to say about how men and women should dress:*

**4**.**2** A change of clothing only starts to be a fault if it is not custom that is changed, but nature. There is an important difference between the honour we owe to the past and to religion. Let custom faithfully follow the age, and nature God. **3** So Achilles[[10]](#footnote-10) caused a breach of nature by changing into a girl, he, the man who had been reared on the marrow of wild beasts (this, then, is how he got his name, since his lips had not tasted breast milk), a hero who was taught by a coarse, wood-dwelling, monstrous teacher in a stony school! One may willingly tolerate in the case of a little boy a mother's concern. But no doubt he was already covered with hair, no doubt he had already secretly proved himself a man to somebody when he still put up with a woman's flowing robe, doing his hair, applying make-up, consulting the mirror, caressing his neck, his ears made effeminate by piercing, as may still be seen in his bust at Sigeum. **5** Certainly, later he is a warrior, for necessity restored his gender! There had been sounds from the battlefield, and weapons were close by. 'Iron itself,' so it is said, 'attracts a man.' Anyway, if he had persisted in being a girl even after this incentive, he might as well have got married -- how about that for a change?! **5** A monstrosity, then, he is, a double one: from a man he became a woman, and then from a woman a man, although neither the truth should have been denied, nor the lie confessed. Either form of change was bad: the former ran counter to nature, the latter was against his safety.

**3** More degrading still were complete changes in a man's dress because of lust rather than some maternal fear. Nonetheless you adore that man who ought to make you feel ashamed, this 'club-arrow-hide-bearer',[[11]](#footnote-11) who exchanged the outfit mentioned in his name for a woman's attire.So much then was granted to the Lydian secret mistress, that Hercules prostituted himself in Omphale, and Omphale in Hercules... **4** But there is something too about the man who earlier had come close to Hercules, Cleomachus the boxer.[[12]](#footnote-12) At Olympia he underwent an unbelievable change from his male condition by being cut inside and outside his skin. Well, he earns a crown amidst the *Fullers* of Novius and he has rightly been mentioned by the mime-writer Lentulus in his *Catinenses*![[13]](#footnote-13) Surely, just as he covered the traces of boxing-gloves with bracelets, so he replaced the coarse sportsman's wrap with some thin, loose-fitting garment. **5** About Physco or Sardanapallus we must keep silent: if they were not remarkable for their lusts, no-one would know them as kings.**…[[14]](#footnote-14)**

**8** Such clothing, therefore, that is not in agreement with nature and modesty deserves sharply fixed stares, pointing fingers, and critical nods. Really, if with Menandrean luxury a man can be trailing a refined dress behind him may he hear close by the words the comic author heard: 'What is this madman spoiling a splendid cloak?'But now that the eyebrow of censorial watchfulness has disappeared, how much ground for criticism does the lack of distinction provide? **4** [You can see] freedmen dressed liked equestrians, slaves scarred with floggings in the dress of the nobility, captives dressed as freeborn, and red-necks as city dwellers, idiots as men of the forum, citizens as soldiers. The corpse-bearer, the pimp, and the trainer of gladiators: they dress like you. **9** Look at women too. There you may see what Severus Caecina stressed before the Senate: matrons appearing in public without stolas. **2** Under the decrees of the augur Lentulus, those who had disgraced themselves this way were punished as if for sexual misbehaviour, since the garment that was the witness and guard of dignity had been felt to be an impediment to practice fornication and so had sedulously been dropped by some women. **3** But now, committing lechery against themselves and making themselves more easily accessible, they have renounced the stola, the linen attire, the rustling bonnet, the hairy head-dress, yes, even the litters and portable chairs, in which they had been kept private and apart even in public. **4** But some put out their own lights, while others kindle lights that are not theirs…**4.10** And when the manager of the public toilets fans her silken gown, and comforts with necklaces a neck that is less pure than the toilets, and uses bracelets - which, as parts of what was given to brave men, even matrons would indiscreetly have owned - to insert her hands that are guilty of every shameful deed, and fits on her maculate leg a white or reddish shoe, then why do you not look at these garments?

**…** **5.2** Now I will interrogate your conscience: how do you feel in a toga: dressed or oppressed? Is it like wearing clothes or enduring them? **2** If you deny this, I will follow you home, and I will see what you rush to do right after you get in the door. No other garment is taken off with such relief as the toga! **3** We say nothing about the shoes, that special torture of the toga, that most impure covering of the feet, and a false one too. For who would not be better off stiffening barefoot in heat or cold, than fettered in shoes? **4** Sure, a great support for walking has been taken care of by Venetian shoemaker-workshops in the form of effeminate boots! **(5.3)** **1** But there is nothing so convenient as the *pallium*, even if it is double, as that of Crates. On no occasion there is a waste of time in dressing, for all the effort it takes consists in loosely covering oneself.

*In the following frothing piece of loathing, better known as Satire 2, by Juvenal we see how tightly connected criticism of dress was connected with attacks on behaviour. (This satire was on the topic of hypocrites: people who are moralists, but engage in immoral behaviour. Which apparently included wearing see-through togas.)*

What will not other men do when you, Creticus,[[15]](#footnote-15) dress yourself in garments of gauze, and while the people are marvelling at your outfit, attack the Proculae and the Pollittae?[[16]](#footnote-16) Fabulla is an adulteress; condemn Carfinia of the same crime if you please; but even if found guilty, they would never wear such a toga as yours.[[17]](#footnote-17) "O but," you say, "these July days are so hot and humid!" Then why not speak [in court] without clothes? Such madness would be less disgraceful. Yours is a nice outfit in which to propose or expound laws to our countrymen flushed with victory and with their wounds yet unhealed, and to those mountain peasant who had laid down their ploughs to listen to you! What would you not say if you saw a judge dressed like that![[18]](#footnote-18) Would a toga of gauze be appropriate a witness? That you, Creticus, you, the keen, unbending champion of human liberty, are clothed in a see-through outfit! This plague has come upon us by infection and it will spread further, just as in the fields the scab of one sheep, or the mange of one pig, destroys an entire herd, and just as one bunch of grapes takes on a sickly colour from the appearance of its neighbour.

Some day you will try something more shameful than this dress; no one reaches the depths of turpitude all at once. In due time you will be welcomed by those who in their homes put headbands on,[[19]](#footnote-19) drape themselves with necklaces, and propitiate the Bona Dea with the stomach of a pig and a huge bowl of wine, though by an evil usage the goddess warns off all women from the door; none but males may approach her altar.[[20]](#footnote-20) "Away with you! profane women" is the cry; "no booming horn, no she-minstrels here!"... One draws out his eyebrows with some damp soot on the edge of a needle and lifts up his blinking eyes to be painted, another drinks out of an obscenely-shaped glass, and ties up his long locks in a gilded net; he is clothed in blue checks, or smooth-faced green; the attendant swears by Juno like his master. Another holds in his hand a mirror like that carried by the effeminate Otho,[[21]](#footnote-21) a trophy of the Auruncan Actor, in which he gazed at his own image in full armour when he was just ready to give the order to advance----a thing notable and novel in the annals of our time, a mirror among the weapons of Civil War! It needed, in truth, a mighty general to kill Galba, and keep his own skin shaved; it needed a citizen of highest courage to copy the splendours of the royal palace on the field of Bebriacum, and plaster his face with dough! Never did the quiver-carrying Semiramis have something like this in her Assyrian realm nor the despairing Cleopatra on board her ship at Actium. There is no decency of language here, no regard for table manners. You will hear all the foul talk and squeaking tones of Cybele; a grey-haired frenzied old man presides over the rites; he is a rare and notable master of the art of gluttony and should be hired to teach it. But why wait any longer when it is now time to lop off the extra flesh in Phrygian fashion?[[22]](#footnote-22)

Gracchus has presented to a cornet player----or perhaps it was a player on the straight horn----a dowry of four hundred thousand sesterces. The contract has been signed; the prayers have been pronounced; the banqueters are seated, the new made bride is reclining on the bosom of her husband. You elites of Rome! Is it a soothsayer that we need, or a censor? Would you be more aghast, would you deem it a greater portent, if a woman gave birth to a calf, or an ox to a lamb? The man who is now arraying himself in the flounces and train and veil of a bride once carried the quivering shields of Mars by the sacred thongs and sweated under the sacred burden![[23]](#footnote-23)

Father of our city, where did such wickedness among your Latin shepherds come from? How did such a lust possess your grandchildren, Gradivus? Behold! Here you have a man of high birth and wealth being handed over in marriage to a man, and yet neither shakes your helmet, nor strike the earth with your spear, nor yet protests to your Father? Away with you then; begone from that broad Martial Plain which you have forgotten! One says, "I have a ceremony to attend at dawn to-morrow, in the Quirinal valley." "What is the occasion?" "No need to ask: a friend is taking a husband; quite a small affair." Yes, and if we only live long enough, we shall see these things done openly: people will wish to see them reported among the news of the day. Meanwhile these would-be brides have one great trouble: they can bear no children with which to keep the affection of their husbands; has nature done well in granting to their desires no power over their bodies. They die infertile; naught avails them the medicine-chest of the bloated Lyde, or to hold out their hands to the blows of the swift-footed Luperci!

It was an even greater monstrous event when Gracchus, dressed in a tunic, fought as a gladiator, and fled, trident in hand, across the arena----Gracchus, a man of nobler birth than the Capitolini, or the Marcelli, or the descendants of Catulus or Paulus, or the Fabii: nobler than all the spectators in the podium; not excepting him who gave the show at which that netwas flung. That there are such things as Manes, and the realms below the earth, and punt-poles, and Stygian pools black with frogs, and all those thousands crossing over in a single boat-these things not even boys believe, except such as have not yet had their penny bath. But just imagine them to be true-what would Curius[[24]](#footnote-24) and the two Scipios think? Or Fabricius and the spirit of Camillus? What would the legion that fought at the Cremera think, or the young manhood that fell at Cannae; what would all those gallant hearts feel when a shade of this sort came down to them from here? They would wish to be purified; if only sulphur and torches and damp laurel-branches were to be had. Such is the degradation to which we have come! Our arms indeed we have pushed beyond Juverna's shores, to the new-conquered Orcades and the short-nighted Britons; but the things which we do in our victorious city will never be done by the men whom we have conquered. And yet they say that one Zalaces, an Armenian more effeminate than any of our youth, has yielded to the ardour of a Tribune! Just see what evil communications do! He came as a hostage: but here boys are turned into men. Give them a long stay in our city, and lovers will never fail them. They will throw away their trousers and their knives, their bridles and their whips, and carry back to Artaxata the manners of our Roman youth.

Juvenal, *Satire* 2

*Much of these details were invented and exaggerated for various reasons, but still some men in reality clearly resisted clothing norms. For example, in a discussion of inheritance law, the Digest, mentions in passing a senator who clearly liked to dress in women’s evening wear:*

There is no difference between the expressions ‘garments for men’, and ‘clothing for men’, but the intention of the testator sometimes creates difficulty, if he himself was accustomed to make use of some garment which was also suitable for women. Therefore it should, by all means, be ascertained whether the garment bequeathed was the one which the testator had in his mind, and not that which was actually destined for the use of women, or for men. For Quintus Mucius says that he knew a certain Senator who was in the habit of wearing women's clothing at the table, and who, if he should bequeath a garment used by women, would not be considered to have had in his mind one which he himself was accustomed to make use of, as if it was one suitable for his sex.

33. *Pomponius, On Quintus Mucius, Book IV. Digest* 34.2.33

*As we have seen, Cicero often went after his enemies on the basis of their unRoman dress. However, he also was capable of defending it. The following comes from a defence speech he made on behalf of Rabirius Postumus, who was on trial in 54 BCE for extortion and other offences. Rabirius had lent a great deal of money to the ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy Auletes; when he went there he got thrown in jail, from which he managed to escape. Once back in Rome he was charged for his actions in Egypt. Because Roman courts did not prevent you from bringing up what we would consider unnecessary information, the prosecution brought up the fact that as part of his attempts to get his money back (before the being thrown in prison part of the experience, naturally, Rabirius had dressed up in Egyptian dress and* ***not*** *worn the toga:*

Therefore, you may attack him as often as you want with wearing an Egyptian robe, and with having on him other ornaments which Roman citizens do not wear. For every time that you mention any one of these details, you are only repeating that same thing: that he lent money rashly to the king,[[25]](#footnote-25) and that he trusted his fortunes and his character to royal whims. 26 I admit that was foolish of him, but as things were as they were, either he had put on an Egyptian cloak at Alexandria, in order afterwards to be able to wear a toga at Rome; or, if he wore his toga in Egypt he must have discarded all hope of recovering his fortunes.[[26]](#footnote-26) We have often seen Roman citizens *and* youths of high birth, and even some senators, men born in the highest rank, wearing little caps for the sake of luxury and pleasure, not in their country residences or their suburban villas, but at Naples, a town everyone visits. 27 We have even seen the great commander Lucius Sulla in a *pallium*. And you can now see the statue of Lucius Scipio, who conducted the war in Asia and defeated Antiochus, standing in the Capitol, not only with a *pallium*, but also with Greek slippers. And yet these men not only were not liable to be tried for wearing them, but they were not even talked about; and, at all events, the excuse of necessity will be a more valid defence for Publius Rutilius Rufus; for when he had been caught at Mitylene by Mithridates, he avoided the cruelty with which the king treated all who wore the toga by changing his dress.[[27]](#footnote-27) Therefore, that Rutilius, who was a pattern to our citizens of courage, ancient dignity, and prudence, *and* a man of consular rank, put on slippers and a *pallium*. Nor did any one think of reproaching the man with having done so, but all attributed it to the needs of the time. And shall that garment bring an accusation upon Postumus, which afforded him a hope that he might at some time or other recover his fortune?

28 For when he came to Alexandria to Auletes, jurors, this one means of saving his money was proposed to Postumus by the king—namely, that he should undertake the management, and, as it were, the stewardship of the royal revenues. And he could not do that unless he became the steward. For he uses that title which had been given to the office by the king. The business seemed an odious one to Postumus, but he had actually no power of declining it. The name itself, too, annoying; but the business had that name or old among those people, it was not now newly imposed by the king. He detested also that dress, but without it he could neither have the title nor fill his office.

*Cicero, In Defence of C. Rabirius Postumus* 25-27.

*Just in case you thought Cicero might have gone soft on clothing norms at some point, in the following he attacks someone for wearing a black (mourning) toga to a funeral feast. Romans wore a dark toga, the toga pulla, to funerals, but not to the feast held after. However, in 59 BCE, Publius Vatinius attended the funeral feast of the father of Quitnus Arrius in this toga to show his opposition to Arrius. Cicero, who hated him for many reasons too numerous to list, attacked him publicly for this:*

[30] I want to know with what plot or plan you went in a black toga to the banquet given by Quintus Arrius, my very close friend? Who had you ever seen do such a thing before! Who had you ever heard of having done such a thing?! What precedent had you for such behaviour, or what custom can you use to defend it? You will say that you did not approve of those rites. Very well. Suppose that those rites were inexcusable. Do you not see that I am not questioning you at all with respect to the events of that year, nor of the circumstances in which you may appear to be concerned in common with any eminent men, but only about your own particular acts of wickedness? I admit that the rite was informal. Still, tell me, who ever went to a banquet in a mourning garment? For by such conduct the banquet itself is turned into a funeral feast, though the true intention of a banquet is to be a scene of enjoyment and praise.

Cicero, *Against Vatinius* 12.13

*Emperors, though, did not have to listen to convention, and rebelling against it was a way – if they wanted – to show their power and their unique status, as the most powerful man in the Roman Emperor.*

52 1 In his clothing, his shoes, and the rest of his clothing [the Emperor] Caligula did not follow the tradition of his country and his fellow-citizens - not always even that of his gender, or in fact, that of an ordinary human being. He often appeared in public in embroidered cloaks covered with precious stones, with a long-sleeved tunic and bracelets; sometimes he wore silk and a woman's robe; sometimes slippers or actors boots, again in boots, such as the emperor's body-guard wear, and at times in the low shoes which women wear. But he frequently showed himself with a golden beard, holding in his hand a thunderbolt, a trident, or a caduceus, emblems of the gods, and even in the dress of Venus. He frequently wore the dress of a triumphing general, even before his campaign, and sometimes the breastplate of Alexander the Great, which he had taken from his sarcophagus.

Suetonius, *Caligula* 52.1

*Nero was also described in much the same ways. Though, of course, the reason*

51 1. Nero was utterly shameless in the care of his person and in his dress, always having his hair arranged in tiers of curls, and during the trip to Greece also letting it grow long and hang down behind; and he often appeared in public in a dining-robe with a handkerchief bound about his neck, unbelted and not wearing shoes.

Suetonius, *Nero* 51.1

*You’ve seen a little from a Christian (Tertullian) and some others on women’s appearance. Here is Juvenal attacking women who dared take off women’s traditional clothing and put on exercise gear and armour, and even trained:*

I don’t even have to speak of the purple wraps and the wrestling-oils used by women. Who has not seen one of them striking a stump, piercing it through and through with a foil, lunging at it with a shield, and going through all the proper motions?----A respectable mother truly qualified to blow a trumpet at the Floralia! Unless, indeed, she is nursing some further ambition in her bosom, and is practising for the real arena. What modesty can you expect in a woman who wears a helmet, loathes her own gender, and enjoys feats of strength? Yet she would not choose to be a man, knowing the superior joys of womanhood. What a fine thing for a husband, at an auction of his wife's goods, to see her belt and armlets and plumes put up for sale, with a leg-guard that covers half a left leg; or if she fights another sort of battle, how charmed you will be to see your young wife disposing of her greaves! Yet these are the women who find the thinnest of thin robes too hot, whose delicate flesh is chafed by the finest of silk tissue. See how she pants as she goes through her prescribed exercises; how she bends under the weight of her helmet; how big and coarse are the bandages which enclose her haunches; and then laugh when she lays down her arms and shows herself to be a woman! Tell us, your grand-daughters of Lepidus, or of the blind Metellus, or of Fabius Gurges, what gladiator's wife ever assumed accoutrements like these? When did the wife of Asylus ever gasp against a stump?

Juvenal *Satire* 6.245-67

*As for slaves, they wore what their owners thought fit. Here is Cato the Elder on what slaves on a farm should wear:*

59 1 Clothing allowance for laborers: A tunic 3½ feet long and a blanket every other year. When you give out the tunic or the blanket, first take back the old one and have patchwork made of it. A sturdy pair of wooden shoes should be issued every other year.

Cato the Elder, *On Agriculture* 59.1

Speech, posture and movement

*Just as dress was important, so too was how you walked and talked and groomed yourself – and also how physically attractive you were. The Romans judged on appearance, and not on inner qualities: your outside was thought to reflect the inner person. Thus if you were going to attack someone you went after their appearance, as if you could show they were truly externally vile, people would more easily believe they were also internally vile. In the following Cicero attacks the looks and pretty much everything else of Cicero’s father-in-law, Piso:*

Do you not see now, do you not feel, you beast, what complaints men make of your audacity? No one complains that a Syrian, that a man whom nobody knows, that some one of that body of lately emancipated slaves, was made consul. For that complexion, like that of slaves, and those hairy cheeks and discoloured teeth, did not deceive us: your eyes, your eyebrows, your brow, in short your whole countenance, which is, as it were, a sort of silent language of the mind, led men into error, this it was which led those to whom this man was unknown into mistake and error, and blunders. There were but few of us who were acquainted with those foul vices of yours; few of us who knew the deficiency of your abilities, your stolid manner, and your embarrassed way of speaking. Your voice had never been heard in the forum; no one had had any experience of your wisdom in counsel: you had not only never performed any, I will not say illustrious exploit, but any action at all that was known of either in war or at home. You crept into honours through men's blunders, by the recommendation of some old smoke-dried images, though there is nothing in you at all that resembles them - except your colour.

Cicero, *Against Piso* 1

*Quintilian gave advice about how to speak and stand as well as other parts of the orator’s appearance in his book on how to become an orator:*

Just our language must be correct, clear, ornate and appropriate, so should how we deliver that language. It will be correct, that is, free from fault, if our speech is fluent, clear, pleasant and urbane, or in other words, free from all traces of a rural or a foreign accent. 31 For there is good reason for the saying we so often hear, "He must be a barbarian or a Greek", since we may detect a man's nationality from the sound of his voice as easily as we test a coin by its ring.[[28]](#footnote-28) If these qualities are there, we shall have those harmonious accents of which Ennius expresses his approval when he describes Cethegus as "sweet voiced," and avoid the opposite effect, of which Cicero expresses his disapproval by saying, "They bark, not plead."…Delivery may be described as correct if the voice is sound, that is to say, exempt from any of the defects of which I have just spoken, and if it is not dull, coarse, exaggerated, hard, stiff, feeble, soft or effeminate, and if the breath is neither too short nor difficult to sustain or recover.

Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 11. 30-31

*Quintilian also gives extensive advice on how to stand, move, and hold oneself in general:*

122 Be careful not to puff out the chest or stomach, since such an attitude arches the back, and all bending backwards is unsightly. The sides must follow the gesture, as the motion of the entire body contributes to the impact. Cicero argues that the body is more expressive than even the hands. For in the *On the Orator* he says, "There must be no quick movements of the fingers, but the orator should control himself by the poise of his whole upper half and by a manly inclination of the side." 123 Slapping the thigh, which Cleon[[29]](#footnote-29) is said to have been the first to introduce at Athens, is in general use and is becoming as a mark of indignation, while it also stirs up the audience. Cicero regrets its absence in Calidius,[[30]](#footnote-30) "There was no striking of the forehead," he complains, "nor of the thigh." With regard to the forehead I must humbly disagree with him: for it is a purely theatrical trick even to clap your hands or to beat your chest. 124 It is only on rare occasions, too, that it is becoming to touch the chest with the finger-tips of the hollowed hand, as when, for example, we address ourselves or speak words of exhortation, reproach or commiseration. But if we ever use this gesture, it is becoming to pull back the toga at the same time. As regards the feet, we need to be careful about our walk and the positions in which we stand. To stand with the right foot advanced or to shove forward the same foot and hand are alike unsightly. 125 At times we may rest our weight on the right foot, but without any corresponding inclination of the chest, while, in any case, the gesture is better suited to the comic actor than to the orator. It is also a mistake when resting on the left foot to lift the right or poise it on tiptoe. To straddle the feet is ugly if we are standing still, and almost indecent if we are actually moving. To go forward may be effective, provided that we move but a short distance and do so rarely and calmly. 126 It will also at times be found convenient to walk backwards and forward because of extravagant pauses caused by the audience’s applause. Cicero, however, says that this should be done only on rare occasions, and that we should not take more than a few steps. On the other hand, to run up and down, which, in the case of Manlius Sura, Domitius Afer called overdoing it, is total stupidity, and a rival professor once snarkily asked Verginius Flavus how many miles he had declaimed.

Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* Book 11.122-126.

*The merest suggestion of effeminate behaviour or gesture was enough grounds to attack even t most manly Romans. In 56 BCE Publius Clodius went after the famous Roman general Pompey the Great for scratching his head with one finger – supposedly the sign of a passive partner in a homosexual relationship:*

And finally, when Pompey appeared at a public trial, Clodius, having at his beck and call a rabble of the lewdest and most arrogant thugs, stood in a conspicuous place and put to them such questions as these: "Who is a lustful general?" "Who is the man looking for a man?" "Who scratches his head with one finger?" And they, like a chorus trained in responsive song would answer each question by shouting out "Pompey" every time he shook his toga.

Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 48.7

*Pompey’s enemy, Julius Caesar was also attacked for similar reasons, something Suetonius reports in his biography:*

45.2 [Julius Caesar] took too-good care of his person, being not only carefully trimmed and shaved, but even having extra hair plucked out, as some have charged. while his baldness was a disfigurement which troubled him greatly, since he found that it was often the subject of his detractors’ insults. Because of it he used to comb forward his thin locks from the crown of his head, and of all the honours voted him by the senate and people there was none which he received or made use of more gladly than the privilege of wearing a laurel wreath at all times. They say, too, that he was remarkable in his dress; that he wore a senator's tunic with fringed sleeves reaching to the wrist,[[31]](#footnote-31) and always had a belt over it, though rather a loose one; and this, they say, was the occasion of Sulla's witticism, when he often warned the nobles to keep an eye on the badly-belted boy.

Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 45.2

1. This is the quotation from the Aeneid mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Forum was where not only government business was done, but was also a centre for banking and all sorts of shopping from clothes to slaves. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gesture was an important part of ancient oratory. The toga restricted the use of one arm, meaning that Romans used only one arm to gesture with. The Greeks, wearing a different garment, could use both. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This refers to the broad purple stripe that only senators were allowed to wear. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It was acceptable to bring in some notes to prompt you in your speech, but you could only glance at them and not read your speech from them. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. These were an elected group who served as augurs and provided advice to the Roman state on certain bird signs. Lest you think this was silly stuff: the Romans really, really were committed to this type of telling the future and looking to see if actions were approved by the gods. Getting elected to the college of augurs was a big deal, too. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Roman trials often had a number of people speak for the defendant and the prosecution. In this case, Cicero and Hortensius were on the same team, but Cicero was slated to go earlier and Hortensius wanted to take his place so he could skip out of court early. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The word I translate as ‘guy’ is ‘homo’; using this word for a Roman man (who was supposed to be a ‘vir’, a ‘real man’) is an insult because Cotilius’ name is clearly Roman: [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hirpinus was a famous chariot horse. The Romans were deeply, deeply dedicated to chariot racing from the emperor on down, so this was important stuff to them as they also bet on the races. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Achilles, one of the greatest Greek heroes, was predicted to have a short life if he took up a life of warfare. So his mother hid him away and had him reared by the centaur Chiron, who is the monstrous teacher referred to above; later she dressed him in a dress and hid him with a princess and her court. He could only lured out when Odysseus turned up with weapons which he enthusiastically grabbed at. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The hero Hercules who wore as his distinctive dress a lion skin, and carried a club. He spent a year serving the Eastern queen Omphale, who liked to make him wear her clothes while she dressed up in his. According to most versions of the story, Hercules does not seem to have minded this arrangement. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This was infamous in antiquity. According to Strabo (14.1.41), he fell in love with a cinaedus and then with a girl they had raised for the sex trade; according to Strabo, as a result he started copying the mannerisms and clothing of a cinaedus. To fully realize the impact of this you have to understand that ancient boxing was brutal: there were no rounds and no weight classes and people basically just pounded each other anywhere (often with lead in wraps around their hands) until one keeled over. (Deaths occurred.) These were the manliest of manly men. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Both of these were Roman playwrights who had written comedies featuring him as a character (the comedies do not survive). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In the short missing section Tertullian rants on about philosophers wearing expensive, purple garments. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Most likely a name made up by Juvenal, and meant to evoke an aristocrat from a long dead clan, who had once conquered Crete. He apparently liked to wear father see through togas while attacking immoral women. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Seemingly these were names that once cited brought female adultery to the Roman mind; they may also be the names of some actual women, who had presumably been involved in some infamous adultery cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Women convicted of adultery were not allowed to wear the stola, the garment of respectable women, but had to wear the toga, like prostitutes. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Juvenal is going back to some old standards here: hard peasant soldiers and farmers coming to the city after a long day at the farm had not been a thing in Rome for a long, long time before this was written – if they ever had been in the way that later Romans imagined. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Headbands were apparently one mark of a respectable matron, though we can’t be sure of how often they were worn in reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bona Dea was a goddess worshipped by women in all female gatherings normally. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Otho was a briefly lived Roman emperor who lasted three months in 68 CE, after he murdered the previous emperor, Galba. He was known for his extravagance and love of luxury. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Here he refers to the custom of the Galli, the priest of Cybele, of self-castration. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This is a reference to the dancing priests of Mars, the Salian Priesthood. It was a highly aristocratic and exclusive priesthood and its priests did the dance of Mars for the good of Rome in full armour through the streets the Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. What follows are the names of traditional Roman historical heroes, who were meant to emulated by young boys. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. To the ruler of Egypt, at that time Ptolemy Auletes. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Losing all your money meant you also lost your position in the Senate, and probably, given that everyone was going to prosecute him when he got home, he could also look forward to spending what was left on trying to bribe the jury to let him off. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Mithridates the Great of Pontus fought a number of wars with the Romans. In 88 BCE he organized a massacre of Roman citizens and Italians (over 80,000 were killed) in a number of cities in Anatolia, from which Rutilius escaped by dressing up as a Greek. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This refers to the practice of testing whether coins were fake or not by checking to see if they rang true as they should. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. An Athenian orator and general, he died in 422 BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. A Roman orator of the 1st century BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This was a tunic with a broad purple stripe on it. This was not an unusual thing to wear; what was unusual was the fringed sleeves which would have made his gestures very dramatic. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)