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The Distant Origins of "Fat Shaming" or why the People of Antiquity did not Ridicule Fat Women

Abstract. The phenomenon of "fat shaming" (in particular with its aspect of the especially harsh criticism of the corpulence in young adult women) seems nearly non-existent in the ancient Classical literature. The extant satirical depictions of fatness are uncommon and aimed, almost exclusively, at overweight men. The author of the paper analyses this satirical description, its background in the ancient moral philosophy, as well as comments on plumpness and gluttony in the context of assessments of the female physical beauty. He also attempts to explain how some ancient ideas may have evolved in the attitudes of today, showing some examples from the 19th-century prose as a step in the reshaping of the ancient ideas. Eventually, the author makes an attempt to offer a better understanding of this contemporary phenomenon, which only in some of its elements may be seen as rooted in Antiquity.

Keywords: fat shaming, history of mentalities, ancient literature, 19th-century literature, Prodikos, *tryphé*

We are all children of Hellas – and the influence of the Greco-Roman culture on our mentality is so profound that attempting to trace the origins of various attitudes in our modern culture to Antiquity seems to be justified in every respect. The aim of the present text is slightly different, however, as it is to show why the people of Antiquity had not been familiar with one of the currently very common phenomena, namely the derogatory, humiliating comments aimed at fatter people (in particular, young adult women), made often even with no reflection[1], and also why it is that in such rare instances when the ancient

[1] The phenomenon of "fat shaming" cannot be reduced to the derogatory language only as it also encompasses all the other forms of discrimination affecting those who are considered to be "too fat". Conceptually, two aspects can be distinguished here: 1) negative value judgements and the degrading ridicule of corpulent individuals regardless of their gender, 2) particularly harsh assessment of the women transgressing the ideal of the slender figure even in a slight degree (where we can see some strong connection between "fat shaming" and the phenomenon of anorexia). It seems that if at the early stage of the research (and the critical evaluation) of this phenomenon, the focus was on the latter (sexist) aspect (cf. K. Chernin, *The Obsession. Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*,

satire refers to more corpulent figures, one could discern – at the most – some very remote origins of the modern-day attitude. At the same time, it attempts to reveal the difference between the convictions of Greco-Roman Antiquity and those which we often hold as obvious and timeless, thus indirectly allowing us to understand which factors may have influenced their formation and development.

A timeless phenomenon?

The subject of the article is related to the issues of the ancient cuisine and ancient medicine in a way which is obvious only upon a very superficial glance. The presently common knowledge that obesity is (also) conditioned on a person's eating habits and it is (frequently) a significant factor affecting their health condition was not unfamiliar in the ancient medicine[2]. Even if we suspend all the objections which might be raised – from the medical perspective – because of the simplifications inherent in this widespread belief, such a statement can be claimed as scientifically objective for only as long as they would refer to the "obesity" understood

New York–San Francisco–Toronto 1981; S. BORDO, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkely 1993), it is given a more marginal treatment in more recent publications – at most, with some additional reasons being provided for the fact why a fat woman is criticized more stringently than a similarly overweight man (cf. A.E. FARRELL, *Fat Shame. Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*, New York–London 2011; K. LEBESCO, *Neoliberalism, Public Health and the Moral Perils of Fatness*, [in:] *Alcohol, Tobacco and Obesity. Morality, Mortality, and the New Public Health*, ed. K. BELL, D. MCNAUGHTON, A. SALMON, London–New York 2011, p. 33–46). Just as evident is the shift in attention from the interest in the subjective sense of shame (also peculiar to those who are quite far from the actual excessive weight) to the social mechanisms of the discrimination against the individuals with a more noticeable above-average weight. Such a distinction is essential here, because my own research – as the title suggests – has been focused more on this inordinately harsh approach to the female "transgressions" in this regard, even though the context for such critical attitudes is, of course, the negative judgemental treatment of fat people in general, regardless of gender. My principal objective here is to complement the research results on the ancient perception of corpulence as found in S.E. HILL, *Eating to Excess. The Meaning of Gluttony and The Fat Body in The Ancient World*, Santa Barbara 2011 and in the following articles and papers: D. GOUREVITCH, *L'obésité et son traitement dans le monde romain*, HPLS 7, 1985, p. 195–215; M. BRADLEY, *Obesity, Corpulence and Emaciation in Roman Art*, PBSR 79, 2011, p. 1–41; K. KARILA-COHEN, *Les gourmands grecs sont-ils bien en chair?*, [in:] *Le corps du gourmand. D'Héraclès à Alexandre le Bienheureux*, ed. EADEM, F. QUELLIER, François-Rabelais de Tours–Rennes 2012, p. 109–132; Ch. LAES, *Writing the History of Fatness and Thinness in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, MS.AS 28.2, 2016, p. 583–658. Quite naturally, I have analyzed the material which has been featured, at least in part, in the abovementioned publications, yet I have done it in search of answers to a different research question.

[2] K. GUGGENHEIM, *Soranos of Ephesos on Obesity*, IJO 1, 1977, p. 245–246; D. GOUREVITCH, *L'obésité…*, p. 198–215; K. GUGGENHEIM, *Galen of Pergamon on Obesity*, Kor 9, 1988, p. 555–556; N. PAPAVRAMIDOU, H. CHRISTOPOULOU-ALETRA, *Greco-Roman and Byzantine Views on Obesity*, OSur 17, 2007, p. 112–116; S.E. HILL, *Eating to Excess…*, p. 63–80; Ch. LAES, *Writing the History…*, p. 619–629. Susan Hill is the only author to take notice of the marginal place of digressions about this medical condition in ancient medical sources.

as a certain objective condition of the human body, as defined and described by the natural sciences. However, it is just as obvious that "obesity" (or rather, the variously described fatness perceived as "more than permissible" in a given observer's eyes) functions in a much more complex way in our modern cultural reality – as a state which is associated with many very negative value judgements, and as such is the cause for feeling shame and putting others to shame, stigmatization, and ridicule. But, as a matter of fact, expressing value judgements, esthetical or ethical, is already beyond the range of the natural sciences[3]. It is also easy to notice that this pseudo-medical and culture-related category is expressed in an exceptionally arbitrary way. An anorexic girl may have a more serious problem with her imagined "obesity" than a person objectively in such a condition, a woman who puts on even a little weight is harshly criticized by a "well-built" man, compared with whom she is still a relatively slim-looking person. Judgements (and self-judgements) in this particular field are especially harsh in regard to adolescent girls and young adult women, which cannot be justified in any way with the use of various medical statistics so eagerly quoted by many self-proclaimed judges[4].

"Fat shaming" is so very well entrenched in our modern culture that even the critics of this phenomenon seem to agree on its underlying axioms. The feminists, contesting the requirement of conforming to the elevated ideal of the feminine beauty as prevalent in our culture and unmasking therein yet another embodiment of the male need for domination, recognize at the same time that – at least in our culture – the excess fat cannot be reconciled not only with the female beauty, but even with the "stereotypically feminine" features of character[5]. Every excess, it

[3] For obesity distinguished in terms of two categories: medical and cultural, cf. G. Vigarello, *The Metamorphoses of Fat. A History of Obesity*, trans. C.J. Delogu, New York 2013, p. 188–189.

[4] Without taking up a discussion on the adequacy of objections raised against the exaggerated accusations of obesity as the origin of every kind of disease (cf. K. Chernin, *The Obsession*…, p. 30–42; D. McNaughton, *From the Womb to the Tomb: Obesity and Maternal Responsibility*, [in:] *Alcohol, Tobacco and Obesity*…, p. 164–165, but see also M. Gard, *Between Alarmists and Sceptics: on the Cultural Politics of Obesity Scholarship and Public Policy*, [in:] *Alcohol, Tobacco and Obesity*…, p. 59–72 for the ideological entanglement of the criticism), I would like to take note (in a more common-sense way) of the universality of the potential harmfulness of this health condition, regardless of gender, sex and age. If anything, the particular harmfulness of the abdominal fatness should be a cause for concern for the obese individuals with the "typically male" rather than "typically female" type of figure. In addition, the risk of suffering from the obesity-related diseases such as diabetes or cardiovascular diseases would become quite likely higher with a person's age, in inverse proportion to the harshness of many opinions expressed on more corpulent women.

[5] For an outline of this position, cf. C. Hartley, *Letting Ourselves go. Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship*, [in:] *Bodies out of Bounds. Fatness and Transgression*, ed. J.E. Braziel, K. LeBesco, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2001, p. 60–73. The arguments used in the discussion can be divided into two categories: certainly correct observations of this phenomenon and disputable explanations, in particular those presented in Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth. How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*, New York 1992. If the "slimness trend" is actually procured by the male need to preserve the dominance in terms of physical size and strength, the tall stature and taking care

should be added, as the historian of mentality George Vigarello has observed, the specific phenomenon of the modern-day approach to overweight is the recognition of the homogeneous nature of this category, beginning from the first kilogram (or pound) after crossing the frequently very subjectively defined line[6]. Also in an article intended as "body positive", Venus of Willendorf and Venus of Milo can be found side by side as representations of "fat" women[7], (in consequence, the both figures are treated as different only in a degree of transgressing the ideal – even if the ideal itself may be contested by the author). This all-or-nothing approach gives a fairly clear indication that we are confronted here with a transgression which is not so much esthetical or health-related as moral or even quasi-religious: there are various levels of sin, but even the smallest one stands in contradiction to the absolute Good. Also the line of defence pointing to the multitude of the causes for the condition represented as "not culpable" recognizes – in a humble manner – the legitimacy of condemning all kinds of "faults" of the conscious choices or the neglect resulting in even a very minor deviation from the "perfect figure". Condemnations are also directed at the "fault" itself rather than at the outcome; the signs of plumpness (even if it is very distant from the actual obesity) turn out to be shameful as they expose the reprehensible lifestyle which leads up to this deplorable condition. As it is unnecessary to look for more drastic examples here, it is enough to point to such a peculiar literary genre as "personal" diet guidebooks of women who succeeded in achieving and keeping their slim figures – the guidebooks' inalienable fragments are apparently the expiatory confessions of dietary faults that once led the authors to the state where going on a diet was required.

This complex phenomenon of "fat shaming" is present in our culture in such a pervasive way that we can hardly imagine it could be absent[8] – at best, we tend to perceive the periods not overwhelmed with the modern-day obsession as the

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of physical fitness should be likewise in the negative spotlight (along with excess weight). At least equally convincing are, it seems to me, the claims that the current appeal of the slim figure is fueled by the wish to negate the "traditionally female social roles", normally associated with the more curvaceous shapes (cf. W. VANDEREYCKEN, R. VAN DETH, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls. The History of Self-Starvation*, London 1994, p. 212–213, but also A.E. FARRELL, *Fat Shame*…, p. 95–113 on the negative attitudes of suffragists to women's corpulence and S. BORDO, *Unbearable Weight*…, p. 206–208 on today's attitudes). And even if the largeness of a more rotund female body may be associated with domination, its plumpness may as well indicate the stereotypically feminine features such as softness and mildness (Latin: *molitia*). On the complexity of meanings connected specifically with the female fatness and thinness, cf. especially K. CHERNIN, *The Obsession*…, p. 45–95; S. BORDO, *Unbearable Weight*…, p. 185–212.

[6] G. VIGARELLO, *The Metamorphoses of Fat*…, p. 189–190.

[7] R. KLEIN, *Fat Beauty*, [in:] *Bodies out of Bounds*…, p. 26. Admittedly, the author points out that Venus of Milo is fat, "by our standard", but later on he himself seems to share this "standard" view without any further reservations.

[8] I mean the thoughtless attitude of those who make similar judgements; the researchers of this phenomenon are well aware of its historical character and have used a variety of ways to explain

world *a rebours*, where – for a change – the slim ones were held in contempt, they passed *onto the unpainted side of the canvas*, as the Polish Noble Prize-winning poet Wisława Szymborska puts it in her poem dedicated to Rubens' painting[9]. One way or another, the first thing to be judged in a woman's appearance would be apparently her corpulence. To make it easy to see how not obvious is this perspective, it is enough to reach back into the past – at this moment, only 150 years ago.

In the gloomy winter of 1870/1871, a group of citizens from Rouen attempts to flee Prussian-occupied Normandy by coach. Three wealthy married couples, more or less representative of the contemporary provincial elite (a nouveau riche profiteer, a respectable merchant, and a nobleman), two nuns, and two other people travelling alone: a fairly grotesque revolutionary radical named Cornudet and a wealthy prostitute Elisabeth Rousset, young woman whose remarkable beauty goes hand in hand with the excessive weight unusual for her young age (for which she was nicknamed *Boule le Suif*, variously translated as "Dumpling", "Butterball" or "Ball of fat").

Initially, the passengers treat the "woman of ill repute" with silent contempt, but when they become hungry during an unexpected stop-over in their journey, unfortunately without any food of their own, Dumpling apparently wins over their hearts by giving away all of her own ample provisions to her fellow-travellers. The situation becomes more complicated at a tavern where they decide to stay for the night – a Prussian officer stationed there demands spending the night with the nice-looking prostitute, but when she says no to his advances, he has the rest of the travellers arrested. First, they approve of the young woman's resistance (motivated by her sense of dignity as much as by her patriotism), but when the arrest is still not lifted, all of them – except for Cornudet – join forces in persuading her into changing her mind. Finally, it is achieved thanks to the morally perverse argumentation used by one of the nuns, who makes the woman feel guilty because of the patients waiting for the nun's assistance at the hospital of Le Havre, which is the travellers' destination. Dumpling yields to the pressure and the less decent passengers take great delight in listening to and commenting on the sounds coming from her bedroom. When they resume their journey, their attitude to the courtesan is changed completely as they show the depth of their moral indignation in frozen silence and begin feasting on their victuals in front of the hungry girl, eventually left with no food amid all the confusion of the unfolding events. Cornudet, as if in an attempt to distance himself from the group, can only make an empty gesture of spitefully whistling the *Marcellieuse* and the story ends with this whistled melody and the helpless crying of a morally abused and humiliated woman.

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its origin (cf. the last two chapters of this paper). I hope that the present article may be a minor contribution to the research.

[9] W. Szymborska, *Rubens' Women*, trans. J. Trzeciak, VQR 77.2, 2001, p. 267.

This dismal story, which brought literary fame to Guy de Maupassant[10], is rightly not included on any list of works dealing with problems of "plus size" women. Despite the fact that the title protagonist is humiliated in many ways in the course of the story, none of the other characters would even think that she could be also taunted about her weight. It is true that when the passengers become hungry during the stop-over early in their journey, the uncouth parvenu Loiseau makes a "witty" proposal of eating the fattest traveller, but both the whole company and the object of his remark herself clearly take this distasteful joke as a crude allusion to the sexual attractiveness of the protagonist, not a nasty remark about a flaw in her physical appearance[11]. Her beauty is noticed and recognized by all the members of the travelling party, and even if she is plump in a degree to justify calling her *Boule le Suif*, none of the not very kind-hearted fellow-travellers comes up with an idea to try to find any physical flaw here – and even more so, any possible moral defect behind it. In the modern scholar's eyes, there may be a parallel between the title protagonist's permissive lifestyle and her ample shapes[12], but neither the fellow travellers nor the narrator express such associations – we do not even hear any sarcastic remarks about her appetite, neither in the face of the abundance of her provisions nor when they refuse to repay her generosity later on.

The questions

This stopover in our time travel appears to be necessary as by entering the realm of Greco-Roman literature, we now immerse in a period where it is hard to find similar (full of psychological depth and insight) descriptions of interpersonal relations and common situations – where also a number of various taunting remarks referring to a person's physical appearance can be provoked. However, we have plenty of instances of satire and derision here to be able to expect the ridiculing of each particular human vice; we have the moralistic criticism of succumbing to desires, where gluttony is among the most prominently featured vices; and we also have the medical knowledge, with its awareness of the adverse consequences of the excess weight. Still, those elements would not make up any coherent whole and the mockery of fat individuals appears to be more of an incidental phenomenon. Moreover, it would be directed, almost exclusively, at male figures.

[10] G. DE MAUPASSANT, *Boule le Suif, The Dumpling*, parallel text, trans. T. CHILCOTT, 2008, www.tclt.org.uk/maupassant/Boule_de_Suif_2011.pdf, access [14 VI 2022]; the story was first published in 1880.

[11] G. DE MAUPASSANT, *Boule le Suif*…, p. 23.

[12] L. CRATON, *The Victorian Freek Show. The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction*, Amherst NY 2009, p. 115–119 – the author also argues that Dumpling's weight corresponds to her self-reliance and freedom in projecting her own sexuality, thus symbolically setting her apart from the bourgeois society confined in the strict moral corset. It seems to me that such a view offers an unduly optimistic vision of the social status of a prostitute (even if relatively well-off) in France in the 19th-century.

Attempting to examine something that does not exist may seem to be, in itself, a melancholic – or at least somewhat perverse – activity, but the (nearly total) non-existence of the phenomenon of "fat shaming" in Antiquity suggests a couple of interesting questions here. How is this possible that the common condemnation of gluttony is not accompanied with the parallel stigmatization of fat individuals as those who yielded to such a weakness? Or why, vice versa, does not the health condition, or the appearance of a fat person, become an extra argument levelled at the vice itself? Or why, ultimately, in spite of the fairly common belief in the weakness of the female character, the rare instances of such a criticism are not addressed particularly at women, let alone judging them according to some stricter criteria of appraisal?

The cases of fat people in Antiquity

We must remember that the world of Antiquity cannot be, of course, observed through the lens of our modern perspective. In this particular matter, the overall result would be no less than satirical. The author of the most comprehensive (and in most aspects, excellent) study on the signs of fatness in ancient images Mark Bradley has devoted an extensive passage to representations of female figures, with a notable example of… a statue of the Crouching Aphrodite (specifically, one of the versions of this particular representation known from the emperor Hadrian's villa at Tivoli)[13]. The British scholar is absolutely serious in placing this statue next to the imagery of corpulent emperors or large-bellied Silenus, mercilessly pointing to the "no less than six fleshly folds" on the stomach of the goddess, whose crouching position allegedly serves to exaggerate this detail. He suggest that the "voluptuous" shapes of many different representations of female figures have their origin in the belief in the significance of a "proper" amount of fat tissue to the female fertility[14]. At the same time, he does not ask if the people of Antiquity would even perceive the silhouettes of their goddesses as "ample" or if this is only a realization of the particularly restrictive modern observer. The ancient medic Galen defines the excess and the shortage of the body mass exactly through a criterion peculiar to art, i.e., the canon of Polikletos[15] – as a matter of fact, we do not possess any more precise criterion to indicate what kind of bodies were deemed as too thin or too fat in Antiquity. Even if the female representations, such as of the

[13] M. Bradley, *Obesity*…, p. 12–13.

[14] Soranos Ephesinus, *Gynaecology*, I, 34–35, [in:] Soranos d'Éphèse, *Maladies des femmes*, vol. I–IV, ed., trans. D. Gourevitch, Paris 2003 – but it should be noted that, on the other hand, this author considers the excess weight as harmful to fertility.

[15] Galen, *Ars Medica*, XIV, 1–6, [in:] Galen, *On the Constitution of the Art of Medicine. The Art of Medicine. A Method of Medicine to Glaucon*, ed., trans. I. Johnston, Cambridge Mass. 2016 [= LCL, 523]. For an overview of the ancient notions on *eusarkia* as the norm of the body size, cf. K. Karila-Cohen, *Les gourmands*…, p. 121–127, cf. also Ch. Laes, *Writing the History*…, p. 594.

Crouching Aphrodite or Ceres from the "Ara Pacis", should depart from such a canon, it is difficult to presume that the creators of ancient Classical sculptures may have wished to depict the figures of the goddesses as imperfect or excessively overweight. Therefore, they are not "obese" according to either ancient criteria or modern medicine and they would be "voluptuously fat", at the most in the face of our modern-day cultural norms which call for revealing and stigmatizing the slightest traces of plumpness in a young woman.

Another way of yielding to the modern-day patterns takes place when behind the accounts of the actual obesity of various historical figures, we tend to construe a peculiar didactic parable in which the ugliness, disability, or a disease are seen as a sort of a punishment for the sin of overindulgence. Indeed, the emperor Galerius, a persecutor of Christians, was reported to have his body bloated into a shapeless mass as a result of his gluttony, but his suffering and death were ultimately caused by an "ulcer", usually identified as a form of cancer, not by his obesity[16]. The more frequently cited examples from Suetonius are even more problematic. The corpulence of Nero and Domitian are not associated with the excesses of greediness at all[17], while in the case of Galba, a mention about his sagging side comes just before the sentence concerning his appetite, but no direct connection is indicated here and the two facts are only incidentally meaningful in the emperor's biography[18]. Only in the instance of Vitelius is gluttony depicted as a foremost feature of his character. The nature of his vice is two-fold: on the one hand, the emperor has the most exquisite dishes served to him, while – on the other – losing control of his greediness to such an extent that he would even nibble at animal entrails during his presiding over the officially performed offerings[19]. There is nothing on the physical effects of his overindulgence in the relevant passage, and it is only in the account of the lynching that the author makes a mention of the crowd sneering at his physical defects, including his large belly and the face turned purple as a result of his drinking in excess[20]. Nonetheless, the emperor's embarrassing appearance remains something of secondary importance, while his huge weight is not even indirectly responsible for his downfall. Vitelius' fatness is, at the most, the external expression of his inner ugliness, not a punishment.

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[16] EUSEBIUS, *Die Kirchengeschichte*, VIII, 16, 4, [in:] EUSEBIUS, *Werke*, vol. II, ed. E. SCHWARTZ, Th. MOMMSEN, Lipsiae 1902–1909 [= *GCS*, 9]. The huge body of Galerius is also mentioned by Lactantius (L. CAELIUS FIRMIANUS LACTANTIUS, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 9, ed. et trans. J.L. CREED, Oxford 1984, cetera: LACTANTIUS, *De mortibus persecutorum*), but this detail is completely insignificant in his account of the emperor's illness and death (LACTANTIUS, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 33).

[17] SUETONIUS, *Nero*, 51; *Domitian*, 18, [in:] *C. Suetonii Tranquilli De vita Caesarum libri VIII*, rec. M. IHM, Lipsiae 1907 (cetera: SUETONIUS). Domitian's large belly and gaunt legs would have been signs of his premature aging rather than obesity.

[18] SUETONIUS, *Galba*, 21–22.

[19] SUETONIUS, *Vitelius*, 13.

[20] SUETONIUS, *Vitelius*, 17.

The most spectacular instance of an ancient ruler who brought himself to the condition of being enormously fat on account of his overeating, even consciously choosing it as a sort of a specific method of suicidal death from taking delight in eating to excess is the tyrant Dionysios of Heraklea. He was reportedly so obese that his physicians had to awaken him by using a special needle inserted in the body, piercing through the mass of the insensitive layer of fat to reach the innervated tissue[21]. The weight of the further evidence is diminished by the fact that it comes from the comedy of Menander, while the whole account has clearly the characteristics of a mocking exaggeration. And even if the quoting author defends Menander against the possible accusation of being spiteful here, at the same time he also provides an account of this particular tyrant's unusually positive character[22], which – in the moralistic context of the setting of those anecdotes – appears to express at least a sense of distancing oneself from the mockery.

The description of Dionysios' complaint opens a peculiar catalogue of the "notorious fat men", which is unique in the extant ancient literature. Thus, some broader context is certainly given to a number of individual mentions in the sources, allowing us to understand the nature of the derisive remarks contained therein. In addition, it gives us an idea of the scale of this "problem" in ancient minds. In an extensive work recounting an erudite conversation between the sophists, who exchange anecdotes on many possible subjects, this specific brief excerpt[23] is inserted just before the examples of the abnormally thin individuals and following the tens of examples of notorious historical figures who indulged in many different kinds of pleasures and luxury.

As for the realism of the accounts provided by Athenaios, it is sufficient to recall the example of the notorious skinny man Kynesias, who was forced to carry a specially designed wooden frame around him for supporting his frail body structure[24]. The description of the obese ruler Ptolemy X Alexander is no less grotesque as the king was reputedly too fat to be able to move on his own, but when he heard the sound of the flute playing during a feast, he could dance barefoot longer than the most skilled dancers[25].

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[21] Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, XII, 72 = 549A-D, ed., trans. Ch. Burton Gulick, London–New York 1927–1941 (cetera: Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*).

[22] Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 72 = 549C-D.

[23] Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 72–74 = 549A–550F. The author also mentions Ptolemy VIII and X (cf. further on), the tyrant Megas of Kyrene, the publicly ridiculed Spartan Naukleides, and the resolute Byzantine Python, who made a reference to his corpulent wife for didactic reasons (vividly informing his fellow-citizens that when they both live in harmony, they can fit themselves under a small blanket even despite their own size).

[24] Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 76 = 551D.

[25] Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 73 = 550B. The author mixes up the numbers of the Ptolemeian rulers, referring to Ptolemy X as the "ninth" and to Ptolemy VIII as the "seventh" monarch of Egypt.

This anecdote is not as paradoxical as it may seem at first glance as the target of the ridicule therein is the decadent ruler's effeminacy, not his physical disability. The behaviour of Ptolemy X is considered as unworthy of a male, just as the attire of his father, Ptolemy VIII Physkos (Potbellied), to whom Athenaios refers in the previous sentence[26]. Likewise, the well-known narrative (barely mentioned and distorted by Athenaios[27]) about a Roman legate who made this Egyptian monarch walk through the streets of his city instead of being carried in a litter is aimed at the obese ruler's love of comfort rather than at his fatness (even if the latter was still considerable as he would be too fat to be embraced around the waist). As regards the causes for the extra-large obesity, gluttony is mentioned explicitly in the cases of the tyrants Dionysios and Megas[28], but a more general diagnosis is brought to the forefront: the love of luxury (ἡ τρυφή) and pleasure[29]. This association between fatness and luxury or effeminacy is evident in the selection of two anecdotes drawn from Agatharchidas (both concerning the customs of Sparta – the Antique paragon of tough masculinity, also reflected in the strict supervision over ephebes and any possible signs of their excess weight)[30]. The first anecdote refers to a public shaming of Naukleides, a Spartan whose fat figure showed the signs of neglecting the care for his physical fitness, while the other one tells the story of King Agesileaos ordering the disrobing of some Persian captives, all of them dressed in soft clothes, before his soldiers to reveal the "little worth" of their enemies' bodies. There is a suggestion here of the inadequate muscle mass, not the excess weight. The inclusion of the latter anecdote in the catalogue indicates that the fat man would arouse the feelings of contempt because of his weakness and disability rather than due to the body mass itself[31]. It seems that several analogical examples found in some other sources can be appraised likewise, even if the disability may

[26] ATHENAIOS, *Deipnosophistae*, XII 73 549D-E, cf. Ch. LAES, *Writing the History*…, p. 596–597.

[27] Cf. H. HEINEN, *Die Tryphè von Ptolemaios VIII Euergetes II. Beobachtungen zum ptolomäischen Herrscherideal und zu einer römischen Gesandtschaft in Ägypten (140/139 v. Chr.)*, [in:] *Althistorische Studien Hermann Bengtson zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Kollegen und Schülern*, ed. IDEM, K. STROHEKER, G. WALSER, Wiesbaden 1983, p. 117–119.

[28] ATHENAIOS, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 72 549A (Dionysios); XII, 74 550 C (Megas – in this case, his lack of physical activity is mentioned as well). Those two tyrants would have been the only examples of ancient rulers whose fatness reportedly brought them to death. However, Dionysios died at the age of 55 and Megas at 57 (at least), which is not premature at all, according to the standards of the contemporary period – thus, in contradiction to this particular detail from Athenaios.

[29] ATHENAIOS, *Deipnosophistaei*, XII, 72 549A, C-D (Dionysios); XII, 73 549E (Ptolemy VIII); 550 B (Ptolemy X); XII, 74 550 C (Megas); 550D (Naukleides).

[30] ATHENAIOS, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 74 550 C-E. Cf. AGATHARCHIDES VON KNIDOS, *Fragm*. 10–11, [in:] *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, vol. II.1, *Zeitgeschichte. A. Universalgeschichte und Hellenika. Texte*, ed. F. JACOBY, Berlin 1926 (a longer version of the first anecdote is preserved in CLAUDIUS AELIANUS, *Varia Historia*, XIV, 7, [in:] *Claudii Aeliani De natura animalium libri XVII, varia historia, epistolae, fragmenta*, vol. II, rec. R. HERCHER, Lipsiae 1866).

[31] Let us note that the passage on the notorious thin men is included in Book XII as well, which in general is concerned with the harmful effects of *tryphé*.

be clearly connected with the body size[32]. Although the "luxury" would also suggest (indirectly) the greediness and sloth, it is noteworthy that Athenaios does not insert those anecdotes next to the much more extensive passage enumerating the notorious excesses of gluttony[33], but exactly in Book XII – focused on multiple examples of *tryphé*.

Tryphé and gluttony

It is only the Latin equivalent *effeminatio* that invested this luxurious and vulgarly extravagant lifestyle, devoted to the satisfaction of the low and hedonistic pleasures, with a clear stigma of unmanly conduct (the Greek term *tryphé* should denote frailty or fragility). The moralistic criticism was at least partially of political and cultural character here, aimed at not only the personal way of life, but possibly also the conscious self-projection of some ancient Greek tyrants and Hellenistic monarchs, who would make every effort to portray themselves as splendid in their luxury, generous in handing the "crumbs from the table" to the people, and effectively promoting the joyful and unrestrained worship of Dionysus[34]. The most adept in this particular area were some members of the Ptolemeian dynasty, with a notable example of Ptolemy VIII. He was one of the rulers who had assumed the cognomen Tryphon[35], with the name Tryphaina given to his daughter, and it seems that he would even proudly present his corpulence on his coinage in token of prosperity that accompanied his reign[36]. Unfortunately to him, he became embroiled

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[32] Cf. the practice of prohibiting the equites from mounting a horse, if they were deemed too fat for horse-riding (Ch. Laes, *Writing the History*…, p. 69), and a very similar story (to that of Naukleides) of how a fat soldier was shamed by Epaminondas (Pseudo-Plutarchus, *Regum et imperatorum apophtegmata*, 192c-d = *Epaminondas* 3, [in:] Plutarchus, *Moralia*, vol. II, ed. W. Nachstädt, W. Sieverking, J.B. Titchener, Leipzig 1971 [= BSGR]). Likewise, Cato the Elder's derisive remark, *What use will the state have of the body in which everything between the throat and the legs is nothing but the belly* (Plutarchus, *Cato Maior*, 9, 6, [in:] Plutarchus, *Vitae Paralellae*, rec. K. Ziegler, Leipzig 1969–1980 (Μάρκος Κάτων, I.1, 1969, 287–331), cetera: Plutarchus), appears to assess the fat body in terms of the military ability.

[33] Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*, X, 1–13 = 411A–418F; also, sneering at a cynic showing his greediness during a feast – Athenaios, *Deipnosophistae*, III 51–52 = 96F–97C, III, 56 = 99F–100B, cf. S.E. Hill, *Eating to Excess*…, p. 96–101.

[34] J. Tondriau, *La tryphè: philosophie royale ptolémaïque*, REA 50, 1948, p. 49–54; H. Heinen, *Die Tryphè*…, p. 119–124; S.L. Ager, *Familiarity Breeds: Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty*, JHS 125, 2005, p. 22–26; T. Grabowski, *Tryphé w ideologii Ptolomeuszy*, [in:] *Społeczeństwo i religia w świecie antycznym. Materiały z ogólnopolskiej konferencji naukowej (Toruń 20–22 września 2007)*, ed. S. Olszaniec, P. Wojciechowski, Toruń 2010, p. 100–103.

[35] Like his predecessor, Ptolemy III and perhaps also Ptolemy IV; cf. T. Grabowski, *Tryphé w ideologii Ptolomeuszy*…, p. 100. Similar ideals (to the dismay of the austere Romans) were probably followed by the Seleucid ruler Antioch VIII (R. Fleischer, *Hellenistic Royal Iconography on Coins*, [in:] *Aspects of Hellenistic Kingship. Studies in Hellenistic civilisation*, vol. VII, ed. P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Petersen, L. Hannestad, J. Zahle, Aarhus 1996, p. 36).

[36] S.L. Ager, *Familiarity Breeds*…, p. 13, n. 71.

in a conflict with the intellectual elite of Alexandria, who would do everything they could to smear or tarnish his public image. However, their criticism had a much broader context – the aristocratic claims to moral superiority and the contempt for the low needs of the populace followed and pandered to by the destroyers of the established order: tyrants, "bad" monarchs, or populist politicians, while in terms of the Roman authors' reception, also the sense of superiority felt by the conquerors towards the "degenerate" rulers of the Hellenistic East[37].

The critical treatment of *tryphé* appears to be varied in its provenance and, as such, it may follow a course different than the one followed by the criticism of gluttony. This could be, in fact, an explanation of the phenomenon already observed by Susan Hill. The author of the only book-size publication (to date) with a holistic treatment of the attitudes to gluttony and fatness in the ancient world[38] is compelled to note, at multiple times in her work, that the Greco-Latin literature offers the material suitable, almost exclusively, for analysis of the former issue. The genres such as the philosophical treatise, comedy, or satire each take aim at the vice of gluttony in their own ways, yet without perceiving the bodily condition as its outward expression. If anything, the model examples of gluttons are Heracles or the athlete Milon of Crotone, both representing the excess of muscles rather than that of the fat tissue. This stereotype of the athlete-glutton is a recurring theme throughout Antiquity and the overweight (ἡ πολυσαρκία) of wrestlers is also criticized as a condition detrimental to physical fitness[39], but without this specifically modern-day, selective aversion to being fat[40].

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[37] A. PASSERINI, *La ΤΡΥΦΗ nella storiografia ellenistica*, SIFC 11, 1934, p. 35–56; U. COZZOLI, *La τρυφή nella interpretazione delle crisi politiche*, [in:] *Tra Grecia e Roma. Temi antichi e metodologie moderne*, Roma 1980, p. 133–145; N. FISHER, *Hybris. A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece*, Warminster 1992, p. 111–117, 329–342, 350–352; T. GRABOWSKI, *Tryphé*…, p. 93–94; R.J. GORMAN, V.B. GORMAN, *ΤΡΥΦΗ and ΥΒΡΙΣ in the ΠΕΡΙ ΒΙΩΝ of Clearchus*, Phil 2, 2010, p. 187–208.

[38] Eventually, in conclusions to her study, Susan Hill states that associations between the vice of gluttony and the fat body had been very tenuous, at best, until the 15th century (S.E. HILL, *Eating to Excess*…, p. 147). A little more cautious conclusion is offered by Karine Karila-Cohen; although the more corpulent figures found in ancient Greek literature are also considered as gluttons, as if by default, this particular association is stressed only sporadically (K. KARILA-COHEN, *Les gourmands grecs*…, p. 132). The issue is complicated by the fact that the ancient physiognomy would tend to treat certain aspects of the fat person's appearance not as the result, but the cause of gluttony regarded as a flaw in the human character cf. J. WILGAUX, *Gourmands et gloutons dans le sources physiognomoniques antiques*, [in:] *Le corps du gourmand*…, p. 34.

[39] K. KARILA-COHEN, *Les gourmands grecs*…, p. 114–117; Ch. LAES, *Writing the History*…, p. 606–607; more specifically on Heracles' corpulence, cf. R. NADEAU, *Héraclès, ce gourmand*, [in:] *Le corps du gourmand*…, p. 93–108. However, we must interpret the sources with caution. In the same context, Laes refers to Lucianus' sarcastic remark on the fat athlete Damasios' post-mortem soul, unable to fit itself inside Hermes' boat. Yet the actual cause for its size are the signs of the athlete's former earthly triumphs, which the soul must leave behind upon entering the realm of the dead – all of them achieved by the wrestler on the strength of his superior physical ability, obviously not disability (LUCIANUS, *Dialogi Mortuorum*, X, 5, [in:] LUKIAN, *Werke*, vol. I–III, ed. J. WERNER, H. GREINER MAI, trans. Ch.M. WIELAND, Berlin 1981).

[40] Paradoxically, *polysarkía* is thus closer to the modern medical category of "obesity" with its reliance on the BMI, i.e., the proportion between the height and the body mass, regardless of the type of

Although the blame of gluttony was certainly an earlier phenomenon[41], it seems that only the Platonic anthropology would set this particular vice in a context putting it closer to the stigmatized *tryphé*, all in relation to the theory of the hierarchical tripartite division of the soul, with its centralized localizations in the head, the chest, and the stomach: the reason, which should prevail over the spiritual part (responsible for the urges of aggression and ambition), and the lowest, appetitive part (dominated by greediness and sexual desires). Indulging in such cravings would turn the entire anthropological order upside down, turning a human being into a slave of not just those desires[42]. Plato compares such a condition of the soul with the political tyranny[43], associating the hedonistic lifestyle not so much with the good-natured sluggishness as the tyrannical cruelty, injustice, and perfidy – the ultimate degeneration of humanity.

In the proper criticism of *tryphé*, the themes of greediness and the love of comfort remain incidental, which is apparently similar to the identification of fatness as a deplorable effect of succumbing to such desires. On the other hand, the reverse correlation should be observed here as the historical figures whose fatness is mentioned in the sources are quite often wicked politicians, tyrants, "bad" kings, or the emperors condemned in the senatorial or Christian tradition[44]. In most of those cases, nevertheless, a short glimpse on the appearance seems to be supplementary, at most, to the overall negative picture. The ancient critics of *tryphé* were much more concerned with the degradation of a person's character than any potential physical ailments stemming from the hedonistic dissipation. This was, of course, the point of view of the moralists, not necessarily shared by the centurions responsible for the combat efficiency of their subordinates, but the ones who composed the literary works that have survived to our time were also the moralizing intellectuals, not the centurions[45].

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tissue building that mass. For the notion, cf. K. Karila-Cohen, *Les gourmands grecs*…, p. 127–131. A number of ancient Greco-Roman designations of fat individuals can be found listed in Ch. Laes, *Writing the History*…, p. 592, with only some of them explicitly referring to fatness (πιμελώδης, *pinguis*) or the characteristic features of a fat person's appearance such as large belly (γαστροειδής, μεγαλοκοίλος, *ventriosus*).

[41] For instance, a mockery of greediness can be observed in the satirical allusions to Heracles' unrestrained gluttony, as found in Aristophanes' comedy works (Aristophanes, *Ranas*, 465–534; *Aves*, 1371–1373, 1446–1449, [in:] Aristophanes, *Comoedias*, vol. I–II, ed. Th. Bergk, Lipsiae 1897–1900, cetera: Aristophanes).

[42] Plato, *Timaios*, 82a–88b, rec. C.F. Hermann, Lipsiae 1896, cf. S.E. Hill, *Eating to Excess*…, p. 45–52.

[43] Plato, *The Republic*, 575C–580A, 588C–589E, ed. J. Adam, Cambridge 1969.

[44] Cf. Cassius, a participant in Catilina's conspiracy (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Scripta quae manserunt omnia*, Fasc. 6, *In L. Sergium Catilinam orationes*, III, 16, ed. P. Reis, Lipsiae 1933), Mark Antony (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Scripta quae manserunt omnia*, Fasc. 28, *In M. Antonium orationes Philippicae XIV*, II, 63, ed. P. Fedeli, Lipsiae 1986 [= BSGR]). To the instances of the "bad emperors", we could add the chubby Justinian from the *Historia Arcana*, on whose face no traces of his (alleged?) fasting practices could be seen (Procopius, *Historia Arcana*, 8, 12, ed. J. Haury, Lipsiae 1963). Nevertheless, it should be also observed that it is exclusively in a description of Vitelius where the antihero's gluttony is shown alongside his cruelty (Suetonius, *Vitelius*, 13–14).

[45] Their view appears to be expressed in Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, I, 6, ed. M.D. Reeve, Oxford 2004; in his description of the preferred physical type of recruited soldiers, the author

Why are fat female rulers never mentioned in the ancient sources?

It could be argued that the association between fatness and *effeminatio* would account for the absence of the ridiculing of corpulent women in ancient Classical literature – after all, it is difficult to accuse a *femina* of effeminacy. But no simple wordplays can serve as an explanation here. The hedonistic lifestyle was indeed perceived as a betrayal of the prevalent model of manhood, but only in some secondary aspects may it have also relied on imitating women, e.g., by means of dressing up or assuming some "female" roles[46]. This would not mean that the "wicked" female rulers had it easier[47]. At most, their faults may have been reckoned as stemming from the weakness of character so "inherently peculiar" to women – as Cassius Dio puts it, explaining the reasons for the cruel and volatile behaviour of the Illyrian queen Teuta. Like a stereotypical tyrant, she would shift between the outbursts of mad arrogance and the equally mindless fear[48]. The image of a tyrant as a slave of his own desires stays within the logic of the criticism of *tryphé*, but the author makes no mention of any physical defects of the queen related to the "tyrannical" styles of living, despite the fact that in the case of the positively appraised Sophonisba, her virtues are evidently corresponding with her beauty[49].

Yet it appears that ancient authors found it more difficult to build a parallel between the flaws in the feminine beauty and the ugly side of a woman's character than to do the same thing for a male subject – thus, it was harder to lend a moralistic tone to a mention of a woman's corpulence. Already back in the works of Homer and Hesiod, the feminine beauty was regarded in a far more ambivalent way than the male appearance: in a man his looks are unambiguously associated with virtue (*kalós kagathós*), while the beauty of the unfaithful Helen is right at the root of the later calamities of war and Pandora is even described as a "beautiful evil" (*kalós kakós*)[50]. Among the "bad queens", none was potentially more vulnerable to the

underscores the importance of the muscles and the "small stomach", he believes also that height is less significant than physical strength.

[46] As collected in H. HERTER, *Effeminatus*, [in:] *RAC*, vol. IV, ed. Th. KLAUSER, Stuttgart 1959, p. 619–650.

[47] It is only in the early 20th century that we can observe the transferring of this pattern on to the ground of the nascent "fat shaming": the pseudo-scientific argumentation to the effect that obesity makes the male body acquire the characteristics reputedly peculiar to the female nature turns out, contrary to the logical obviousness, to be one-sided only as in no way can be seen an attempt to justify a more permissive approach to the female overweight with the tendencies that are (allegedly) natural to the female body – cf. A.E. FARRELL, *Fat Shame*…, p. 47–49.

[48] *Dio's Roman History*, XII, 49, 3–4, ed., trans. E. CARY, London–Harvard 1954–1961 (cetera: CASSIUS DIO) = *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome Historiarum*, VIII, 19, ed. L. DINDORF, Lipsiae 1868–1875 (cetera: ZONARAS); on this bipolar aspect on the tyrant's furor, see M. STACHURA, *Enemies of the Later Roman Order. A Study of the Phenomenon of Language Aggression in the Theodosian Code, Post-Theodosian Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, Kraków 2018, p. 166.

[49] CASSIUS DIO, LVII, 51 = ZONARAS, IX, 13; cf. B. JONES, *Teuta and Feminine Exemplarity in Cassius Dio's Roman History*, [in:] *Cassius Dio the Historian. Methods and Approaches*, ed. J.M. MADSEN, C.H. LANGE, Leiden 2021, p. 406–425.

[50] R. BLONDELL, *Helen of Troy. Beauty, Myth, Devastation*, Oxford 2013, p. 3–26.

criticism of *tryphé* than Cleopatra VII. The great-granddaughter of Ptolemy VIII Physkos deliberately followed that controversial ideal by organizing the lavish celebrations with Mark Antony represented as Dionysius, in turn effectively fuelling the propaganda of Augustus in which the imminent war was depicted as a conflict between the strict Roman principles and the Oriental moral corruption[51]. Nevertheless, despite some minor imperfections in her physical appearance, Cleopatra would be eventually remembered by the Roman as an ideal of beauty[52], probably because such a portrayal would fit in with the image of the stereotypical insidious seductress better than if her physical attraction had been diminished by her abuse of the Oriental life of pleasures. As it seems, the first literary representation of the famous monarch as an extra-ample and overfed allegory of *tryphé* can be found in a 19th-century novel (*Villette* by Charlotte Brontë): one of the scenes, where the narrator shows her disgust with the picture allegedly dedicated to the Egyptian Queen may be treated as an important testimony to the mental transformations leading to our modern-day mentality – to be discussed later in this paper[53].

It is of course possible to make a common-sense observation that Cleopatra is not represented in ancient accounts as a victim of *tryphé* simply because she did not display inclinations to put on weight in ways typical of some other members of her dynasty. If it is difficult to find a negative "heroine" of ancient history, whose weight would have been indicated as in the case of several negative male figures, the reason is also because this history has, generally speaking, definitely many more male protagonists than heroines, the public life of the period was basically a domain of men, while the list of ambitious female intriguers and "bad" queens is a relatively short one. Perhaps none of them had enough excess weight for any ancient Classical author to think it was worth writing about it as the slightly above-average corpulence would not be a personal feature exposed to critical commentary, either moralistic in nature or even in terms of appraising a woman's appeal.

Corpulence as a characteristic of the female beauty

The moralistic ambivalence in judging the feminine beauty does not mean that women in Antiquity did not take care of their good looks or attractiveness, and that such efforts would not be accompanied with sneering at some flaws in their appearance. Martialis and Juvenalis extend their incisively critical comments into the physical appearance of Roman women, the *hetaerae* of Lucan hold up their

[51] G. Marasco, *Marco Antonio « nuovo Dioniso » e il "De sua ebrietate"*, L 51, 1992, p. 538–548.

[52] Cassius Dio, XLII, 34, 4–5; Lucan, *The Civil War*, X, 138, ed., trans. J.D. Duff, London–Cambridge Mass. 1977; Plutarchus, *Antonius*, 25, 3 (Αντώνιος, III.1, 1971, 60–152).

[53] Cf. Ch. Brontë, *Villette*, Ware 1999, p. 186–187 (Ch. XIX). Only as an anecdote, it could be added here that Elizabeth Taylor would also blame her time on the set of the film *Cleopatra* and her subsequent, carefree, overindulgent life at the time of her affair with Richard Burton starring as Mark Antony in the film, for her considerable weight gain. (E. Taylor, *Elisabeth Takes Off. On Weight Gain, Weight Loss, Self-Image & Self-Esteem*, London 1988, p. 83–88).

rivals to ridicule, while Ovid gives advice to seductresses on how to look more presentable. It is characteristic that none of the scholars has taken note of such evidence in their research on the fatness in the ancient world – even Susan Hill, subscribing with her research, at least to some extent, to the social trend of countering the "fat shaming", a phenomenon so dominant in value judgements on the feminine beauty[54]. On the other hand, such searching efforts would turn out to be unproductive to a considerable extent[55]. As for questions of beauty care, the main point of concern for women in ancient Rome was focused on the signs of aging, not weight[56], with a particular obsession over hair and wigs – *vide* Ovid recalling his lover's embarrassing blunder as she put on her own wig back to the front[57]. And among more than a thousand, there is only one epigram by Martialis, incidentally aimed at women who are too thin – in the poet's eyes – which ends with a brusque comment that he does not prefer the "thousand-pound" women either, as he would rather put meat over fat[58]. Another epigram by the same author refers to a Roman woman with the exceptionally large breasts (expressed as a shameless compliment rather than as a derogatory remark)[59]. It was rather a small bust which should be corrected (by means of brasserie)[60], as it is mentioned by Ovid among the physical characteristics requiring women to take suitable precautions[61]. It is noteworthy that the prescribed remedial measures in this passage are intended for retouching such defects as excessive thinness or short stature, but – on the other hand – there is only a humorous piece of advice for a girl "with fat fingers": do not gesticulate too much[62]. The "precautions" against shortness or thinness as recommended by Ovid

[54] S.E. HILL, *Eating to Excess*…, p. 1–3, 9–10.

[55] It is all the more meaningful as in the satires of Juvenalis and Persius, but also in the *Epigrammata* by Martialis, there are examples of mocking remarks aimed at fat men; cf. M. BRADLEY, *Obesity*…, p. 9.

[56] *M. Valerii Martialis Epigramaton Libri*, II, 24; III, 32; III, 93; VII, 75; X, 90, rec. W. HERAEUS, ed. corr. L. BOROVSKIJ, Leipzig 1976 (cetera: MARTIALIS, *Epigrammata*); *D. Iunii Iuvenalis Saturae*, VI, 144–145, ed. A. WEIDNER, Leipzig 1873 (cetera: IUVENALIS, *Satura*); LUCIANUS, *Dialogi Meretrici*, XI, 3, [in:] LUKIAN, *Werke*… (cetera: LUCIANUS, *Dialogi Meretrici*).

[57] OVIDIUS, *Ars Ama*, III, 161–168, 235–250, [in:] *P. Ovidi Nasonis Amores; Medicamina Faciei Femineae; Ars Amatoria; Remedia Amoris*, ed. E.J. KENNEY, Oxonii 1961 [= SCBO] (cetera: OVIDIUS, *Ars Ama*); MARTIALIS, *Epigrammata*, III, 43; VI, 12; IUVENALIS, *Satura*, VI, 490–496; LUCIANUS, *Dialogi Meretrici*, I, 1.

[58] MARTIALIS, *Epigrammata*, XI, 100, 5–6: *Sed idem amicam nollo mille librarum / Carnarius sum, pinguiarius non sum*. A weight of thousand Roman *libra* is equivalent to 327.45 kg, which is obviously a conspicuous exaggeration indicating an extremely large overweight rather than an "ordinary" plumpness.

[59] MARTIALIS, *Epigrammata*, II, 52. The cunning baths attendant charged her, for this reason, a triple admission fee, which she paid after hearing such a curious explanation (*Novit loturos Dasius numerare: poposcit / mammosam Spartalem pro tribus; illa dedit*).

[60] OVIDIUS, *Ars Amatoria*, III, 274.

[61] OVIDIUS, *Ars Amatoria*, III, 263–277.

[62] OVIDIUS, *Ars Amatoria*, III, 275–276.

are, by the way, confirmed by Juvenalis who ridicules a Roman woman attempting to conceal the both defects in an apparently unsuccessful way[63], but nowhere in ancient Classical literature have I found a single instance of a woman making an effort to lose her weight or at least make it seem she is slimmer than she really is.

At the same time, the same dossier would confirm the American scholar's observation – as both Ovid and Lucan warn against the gluttony as a vice which is harmful also to a woman's physical appearance[64], while Juvenalis makes it one of the elements of the misogynistic ridicule in *Satire* 6[65]. Yet in each particular instance, the point is not the long-term effect reflected in unfavourable changes in a person's figure, but the evidently intense aversion inspired by even simply showing the intemperance in this sphere of life. It can be seen how the patterns arising from the foundation of the moral teachings are transferred into the domains having so much in common with the morals as the mother's quasi-moralizing advice ultimately with the intent of instructing her daughter on how to ensnare a wealthy client[66]. The greediness or drunkenness are obviously so intensely associated with the ugliness of a person's character that they can make people ugly in the physical sense as well, detracting from the attractiveness otherwise also employed for some morally nasty purposes. It is all the more intriguing in that the excessive weight is not perceived as an aspect of a person's appearance revealing the vice of gluttony, thus especially objectionable.

On the other hand, the fatness or thinness are perceived as fairly neutral – as the features harmful to women when in excess, but have more in common with their individual charm when appearing in a moderate degree. Several verses in Ovid referring to the art of using euphemisms tell us how to flatter women who are too thin, too fat, too short, or with a very dark complexion[67]. Each one of such characteristics is a defect in the feminine beauty only in extreme cases, but – for each – there is also a softer term suggesting the minor intensity of the feature's presence. Essentially, in the latter case, such terms remain compliments: being meagre like death or bloated (*turgida*) are recognized as "vices", but being slender (*gracilis*) as well as having full shapes (*plena*) are "virtues" in the words of the poet himself. The slight departing from the norm in any one of those aspects is most evidently in no way connected with a critical opinion or a sense of shame.

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[63] Iuvenalis, *Satura*, VI, 503–507. A woman's inordinate height would be an object of ridicule as well; cf. Martialis, *Epigrammata*, VIII, 60.

[64] Ovidius, *Ars Amatoria*, III, 755–762; Lucianus, *Dialogi Meretrici*, VI, 3.

[65] Iuvenalis, *Satura*, VI, 426–433. It is very often that the mockery of the drunkenness itself can be found in the sources.

[66] Lucianus, *Dialogi Meretrici*, VI.

[67] Ovidius, *Ars Amatoria*, II, 657–662.

An example of the ancient "fat shaming"?

There is one Classical text which could be contrasted with the above observation as it seemingly ridicules a plump woman because of her weight caused by her lifestyle habits, namely a parable in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, reportedly drawn from the sophist Prodikos[68]. The protagonist is Heracles in his young age, standing at the crossroads and faced with the choice of his path in life. Two women of splendid appearance approach to meet him: one is tall and beautiful, dressed in a plain white garment, while the other is dressed up, with a make-up on her face, "overfed to obesity" (τεθραμένη εἰς πολυσαρκίαν), and "very soft" (ἁπαλότητα, which may refer to plumpness but, at the same time, to a well-tended, delicate skin)[69]. The latter one comes up in a rush to meet him first, trying to persuade him into taking the path leading to the carnal pleasures and luxuries – and if he ever ran short of the material resources, she would tell him how to get them. When asked what her name is, she answers: my friends call me Happiness (Εὐδαιμονία), but I am called Vice (Κακία) by my enemies[70]. On the other hand, the woman introducing herself as Virtue (Ἀρετή) offers Heracles the life full of toil and effort, yet ultimately leading up to the pleasures which will be even greater for the fact that such an achievement is held in high esteem by everybody around[71]. Vice attempts to discourage Heracles by drawing his attention to how strenuous is the path proposed by Virtue and offering him – on the contrary – a short and easy path to the happiness[72]. And it is at this moment that her rival bursts out into a condemnatory speech beginning with the words as if taken from a dietary horror story: what sort of pleasure do you want to have without toil? You don't even know a real desire, you eat before you feel hungry, you drink before you are thirsty, you employ cooks, you chill your wine with snow for feeling more pleasure (in spite of your constant satiety), you seek more and more comfortable beds to recline on – but your sleep comes only from boredom (not from a healthy tiredness)[73]. The simple logic of the case is spoiled by the fact that the further mentioned offences of Vice and her pupils are lust, nightlife, and unnamed misdeeds. Those who were seduced by her in their old age are not described as fat; instead, they appear to be weak and dull, and what is more, held in contempt for their previous deeds[74]. The Vice also, though immortal, would be despised by all the good people and banished by the

[68] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 21–34, ed. W. GILBERT, Lipsiae 1949 (cetera: XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*). It is peculiar that in her search for the evidence of *corps du glouton* in ancient Greco-Latin literature, Karina Karila-Cohen has found only this one instance of a woman whose corpulence is associated with gluttony (K. KARILA-COHEN, *Les gourmands grecs*…, p. 129).

[69] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 22.

[70] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 23–26.

[71] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 27–28.

[72] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 29.

[73] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II 1, 30.

[74] XENOPHON, *Memorabilia*, II 1,31.

gods[75], but there is no suggestion that the well-rounded figure of the ex-goddess was even an additional cause for her disgrace. Nonetheless, the modern Readers cannot escape the overwhelming impression that they hear a well-known reprimand, where an overweight woman is scolded for the lifestyle by which she "got herself into" such a miserable condition[76].

It is fair to ask, however, how this text was interpreted by those who had not been marked yet by the modern obsession with the "slim figure". The parable of Prodikos proved to be a long-lasting inspiration for the people of Antiquity as well as the later periods. Its moralistic message is used by Cicero[77] and Basil of Caesarea[78], Silius Italicus places the young P. Cornelius Scipio in a similar scene[79], and Lucan irreverently replaces the two goddesses with Sculpting and Rhetoric, showing these figures in an argument over his personal direction in life (contrary to the intuitive feeling, it is the refined Rhetoric, not the stern Sculpting – a profession which the parents wished to persuade the writer to take up – that who turns out to be the "good one" in this pastiche)[80].

The ancient representations of the scene are not preserved to our day, but in the modern time, it would have been one of the favourite themes in painting[81]. Vice clearly personifies *luxuria* here, depicted as nude[82] or at least seductively exposing some of her body[83]. The attributes of her rival (helmet, sword, or spear) identify her

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[75] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II 1, 31.

[76] This is exactly the interpretation of (this particular aspect of) the parable as proposed by M. Bradley, *Obesity*…, p. 8.

[77] *M. Tulli Ciceronis De Officiis*, I, 118, ed. C. Atzert, Lipsiae 1963.

[78] Basilius Caesareae Cappadociae episcopus, *Homilia de legendis gentilium libris*, 5, [in:] *PG*, vol. XXXI, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris 1857. In his memory (the Church Father had heard the story a long time before writing those words), Vice personifies luxury and all sorts of pleasures, but there is nothing about her plumpness.

[79] *Silii Italici Punica*, XV, 18–128, vol. I–II, ed. L. Bauer, Lipsiae 1900–1902. Vice, who is called Voluptas here, is dressed up and perfumed with Oriental fragrances, but there is nothing about her physical appearance. She tempts the protagonist into spending an idle life in peace, while Virtue shows him the way to achieving his fame and glory as a war hero.

[80] Lucianus, *Somnium*, 6, 14, [in:] Lukian, *Werke*… On the reception of the parable in the ancient world, see E. Stafford, *Vice or Virtue? Herakles and the art of allegory*, [in:] *Herakles and Hercules. Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, ed. L. Rawlings, H. Bowden, Swansea 2005, p. 73–75.

[81] The most comprehensive study on the topic is cf. E. Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst*, Leipzig 1930.

[82] A. Dürer, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1498; L. Cranach the Elder, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1537; P.P. Rubens, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1610; G. Baglione, *Hercules chooses between Good and Evil*, 1642; S. Ricci, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, c. 1710–1720; P. de Matteis, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1712; I. Akimovich, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1801; P. Benvenuti, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1828.

[83] A. Caracci, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1596; G. di Benvenuto, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, first half of the 16th century; G.B. Zelotti, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1561; F. Boucher, *The Choice between Vice and Virtue*, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, c. 1567; P. Veronese, *Young Man between Vice and Virtue*, c. 1581 (certainly inspired by the ancient anecdote, even though the boy on the painting is not Hercules); copper engraving J. Sadaler I, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, c. 1590–1600 (King of Bavaria

more precisely as the Roman *virtus*, pointing a warrior's path to the young man[84]; the laurel wreath on her hair can be understood as playing a similar role[85], while in some other images the covered head would be evocative of modesty, *pudicitia*[86]. If the both female figures are contrasted also physically, then most often the difference is that Vice is portrayed as a blonde, while Virtue is dark-haired[87]. Sometimes, the former figure is shown clearly as a younger person[88], and only Rubens depicts her also as a more well-rounded woman, but what is communicated by this particular painter may be simply "more attractive"[89]. As it appears, no interpreter has noticed the detail in question, namely the overfed body of the Temptress. She is represented as an embodiment of carnal pleasures rather than as a "victim" of the pleasures experienced at the table.

In interpreting the original version of the parable, we should not limit ourselves, after all, to its ethical-philosophical dimension[90]. In particular, we should not overlook one obvious parallel in a text contemporary to Prodikos himself. Ironically, this composition is *Clouds*, a comedy which mocks Socrates, who reportedly

Maximilian I shown as the hero making the right choice); J. HUNERBEIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1595; N. POUSSIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1636–1637; G. DE LAIRESSE, *Hercules Between Vice and Virtue*, 1675; Ch. DE LA FOSSE, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, early 18th century; F. VAN MIERIS THE YOUNGER, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1727; P. BATONI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1748; B. WEST, *Choice of Hercules between Virtue and Pleasure*, 1764; G. DE MIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1812; Th. SULY, *Choice of Hercules*, 1819. In N. SOGGI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, first half of the 16th century she is fully dressed, but more ornately than Virtue.

[84] A. DÜRER, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1498; G.B. ZELOTTI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1561; J. HUNERBEIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1595; P.P. RUBENS, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1610; G. BAGLIONE, *Hercules chooses between Good and Evil*, 1642; Ch. DE LA FOSSE, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, early 18th century; P. BATONI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1748; P. PALAGI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*; I. AKIMOVICH, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1801; G. DE MIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1812; P. BENVENUTI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1828.

[85] F. BOUCHER, *The Choice between Vice and Virtue*, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, c. 1567; P. DE MATTEIS, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1712; A. CARACCI, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1596; S. RICCI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1710–1720.

[86] N. SOGGI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, first half of the 16th century; J. HUNERBEIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1595; G. DE LAIRESSE, *Hercules Between Vice and Virtue*, 1675; F. VAN MIERIS THE YOUNGER, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1727; Th. SULY, *Choice of Hercules*, 1819.

[87] P. VERONESE, *Young Man between Vice and Virtue*, c. 1581; A. CARACCI, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1596; Ch. DE LA FOSSE, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, early 18th century; S. RICCI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, c. 1710–1720; P. BATONI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1748; B. WEST, *Choice of Hercules between Virtue and Pleasure*, 1764; G. DE MIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1812.

[88] M. BALDUCCI, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 15th century; G. DI BENVENUTO, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, first half of the 16th century; copper engraving J. SADALER I, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, c. 1590–1600; G. DE MIN, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1812.

[89] P.P. RUBENS, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1610.

[90] As for instance Stelio Zeppi, who made an attempt to read this narrative in the spirit of a dispute between the vulgar hedonism and the utilitarian Eudaimonism; cf. S. ZEPPI, *L'etica di Prodicco*, RCSF 11, 1956, p. 266–268.

passed Prodikos' narrative, as it would agree with his own moral teachings, exactly as the one who would allegedly bring up the young people into the bad ways of life. The "Good" and the "Bad Argument" shown arguing in the interlude represent, respectively, the traditional and "newfangled" upbringing of young people, where the latter method is presented as leading to the immoral life in pursuit of pleasures (with more emphasis on the pleasures of the bed than on those experienced at the table), while the perversely employed rhetoric is a tool used to achieve it[91] – most probably corresponding to those secretive measures that Vice promised to tell Heracles. It appears that in the both instances there is a simple contrast between, on the one hand, the urban life and the morally doubtful means of earning one's living thanks to having the gift of speech and, on the other, the idealized labour of a peasant[92] – which is exactly what would constitute the *pónos* (ὁ πόνος) as recommended by Virtue. The pleasures personified by Vice are the luxuries of the city life (which only later will grow into the tyrannical *tryphé*) contrasted with the rustic simplicity. This has nothing to do with a discussion on "a caloric balance".

Why is it, then, that Vice is shown as "overfed to corpulence"? To put it more precisely, the term *polysarkía* denotes a large body, not necessarily with negative overtones; in any event, Vice is not described as clumsy or ugly because of her overweight as she is quite lively and enticingly well-rounded. It seems that this is one of the oppositions which characterize the appearance of the both female figures, where one makes some contrived efforts to measure up to or surpass the natural and simple beauty of the other: hence, Vice is dressed up, with a make-up on her face, but also well-fed in such a way as to look impressive – confronted with the natural magnificence of Virtue[93].

Fatness in the moral philosophy of the Church Fathers

It is worth noting that the researchers have found the chronologically first explicit mention specifically on the ugliness of women putting on weight as a result of their gluttony only in one of John Chrysostom's homilies. However, the author condemns there such pleasures and illustrates their pernicious results for the beauty and health of men and women in general, regardless of sex[94]. And even if the moral preaching of the Church Father is aimed against gluttony and luxury, his real concern is the health of the soul, its ability to be in control of the body. The plump

[91] Aristophanes, *Neves*, 955–1238. It should be noted, of course, that the image of the crossroads leading to Vice and Virtue derives from Hesiod; cf. M. Kuntz, *The Prodikean "Choice of Herakles" a Reshaping of Myth*, CJ 89.2, 1993/1994, p. 165–166, 170.

[92] V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes*, New York 1962, p. 73–94.

[93] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 22. R. Blondell, *Helen of Troy*…, p. 10 observes that unlike Virtue, Vice *shows an acute awareness of her body as an object to be viewed*.

[94] Iohannes Chrysostomus, *Homilia in epistulam I ad Corinthios*, 39, 9, [in:] *PG*, vol. LXI, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1962.

chariot horses from another one of his Homilies are a vivid picture of disobedience rather than of disability[95]. The constant references to the passages of the Old Testament evoke the ambivalent fat symbolism, as found in the Bible: a symbol of God's blessing, but also – on the other hand – a manifestation of the rich man's arrogance and his illusory hopes in the material prosperity[96].

Nevertheless, we cannot deny John Chrysostom's concern, even if secondary, also for the health and beauty of the body. After all, he begins his Homily with the following rhetorical figure: God tells us to love our enemies, while Satan depraves us to hate even our own body[97]. And if the condemnation of drunkenness and overeating is peculiar to the ancient moral thinking, concentrating on the negative long-term consequences of succumbing to the vices like the overweight seems to be a new feature. But this is not the only one or even the most common approach in the contemporary Christian moral teaching. Something opposite can be noticed in Jerome's complaining about the Christians so unaccustomed to the practice of fasting that they do not hesitate to identify an emaciated ascetic woman as a "Manichaean"[98]. There is no doubt that he considers such outward signs of asceticism as desirable, yet the spiritual beauty and health here is not parallel but – paradoxically – contrasted with the beauty and health of the body.

A similarity to the modern anorexic mentality suggests itself here[99], with the relevant works apparently showing the affinity between such attitudes, but not necessarily the clear-cut continuation[100]. The use of the body aversion language by the 19th-century anorectics, even if derivative of Plato or Augustine[101], does not have to be a manifestation of the ancient authors' influence as it is only indicative of employing their thought (well-known because of the classical education) for the purpose of expressing a new, not necessarily closely related, idea.

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[95] IOHANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS, *Homilia in Acta Apostolorum*, 27, 3, [in:] *PG*, vol. LX, ed. J.P. MIGNE, Paris 1962.

[96] S.E. HILL, *Eating to Excess*…, p. 32–34; Ch. LAES, *Writing the History*…, p. 629.

[97] IOHANNES CHRYSOSTOMUS, *Homilia in epistulam I ad Corinthios*, 39, 1.

[98] *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, *ep*. 22.13, vol. I, rec. I. HILBERG, Vindobonae–Lipsiae 1910 (cetera: HIERONYMUS).

[99] Even more, if we consider that one of the disciples of the Church Father, Blesilla, died because of her excessive fasting practices (HIERONYMUS, *ep*. 39, cf. A. CAMERON, *The Later Roman Empire A.D. 384–430*, London 1993, p. 81–82).

[100] W. VANDEREYCKEN, R. VAN DETH, *From Fasting Saints*…, *passim*. The essential difference between the ancient and Christian fasting practices and diets, which became a characteristic feature of our culture in the Victorian era, is the shift in their main object – as Susan Bordo put it briefly: from now on, a diet *becomes the project in service of the body rather than of soul. Fat, not appetite or desire, became the declared enemy* (S. BORDO, *Unbearable Weight*…, p. 185). But the simplicity of this difference may be complicated by the fact, that many features of character connected with the slim body are near to those, which the ancients wanted to achieve with their ascetical practices.

[101] A. KRUGOVOY SILVER, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, Cambridge 2004, p. 8–9, the similarities in the rhetoric of body shaming shown also in K. CHERNIN, *The Obsession*…, p. 42–44.

In spite of some isolated statements, the ancient Christian thought is far from judging the body corpulence as such. Even putting the gluttony at the top (or perhaps more precisely at the bottom[102]) of the cardinal vices list did not cause that the corpulent people began to be regarded as peculiarly "stigmatized" by their sinful way of life[103]. At the most, the fat body could be seen as a metaphor for the earthly pleasures and – thanks to the Old Testament – to the earthly vain glory.

A step towards the modern imagination

But – it seems exactly to be the point. Although we are still quite far from the modern-day mentality, it seems that a certain significant step towards it has been made[104]. If, on our return journey through time, we should make another stop among the great works of the 19th-century prose[105], we could encounter some striking parallels, linking the excessive corpulence of the young woman with vainglorious pride and the sinful seductive appeal, putting on weight would correspond with gaining the physical beauty, but at the same time the spiritual turpitude. Aware of the arbitrariness of my selection, I would like to refer to two vivid examples from Russian literature. The first one is the wife of Pozdnishev from *The Kreutzer Sonata*. After getting married, this slim and beautiful girl is tormented with illnesses of her children, while the constant care of them apparently devours her life and love. Finally, she falls ill herself and, on the advice of her doctors, she rejects the possibility of any further pregnancies for the sake of rescuing her own health (to the moral dismay of her husband, the narrator). She recovers and blossoms again, gaining weight and a definitely more self-assertive attitude – metaphorically described there as *fresh*, *well-fed*, *harnessed filly whose bridle's been removed*[106]. As her appealing, though a little excessive, corpulence reawakens her sexual appetite, she ends up failing to resist the temptation of infidelity (perhaps imagined by her jealous husband and murder). Another example is Grushenka, one of the protagonists in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the scene where she makes her appearance,

[102] Gluttony is treated as the least of all the cardinal sins, but – at the same time – the first in a cause-and-effect sequence as it leads to some more serious temptations.

[103] S.E. Hill, *Eating to Excess*…, p. 121–143.

[104] On the possible influence of Christian ascetics on the attitudes of today, cf. J. Coveney, *In Praise of Hunger: Public Health and the Problem of Excess*, [in:] *Alcohol, Tobacco and Obesity*…, p. 150–152.

[105] I am aware of the methodological questionability of this leap in time. An author writing a hypothetical "History of Plumpness" should certainly make a thorough research in medieval and early modern sources, seeking clues leading to the Victorian views addressed further on. Nevertheless, such a study would have to be much broader than the present piece of research. My task here is only to draw a comparison between the ancient and modern-day views as well as to show the moment of the mental shift which substantially contributed to the difference.

[106] L.N. Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, [in:] *The Kreutzer Sonata Variations. Lev Tolstoy Novella and Counterstories by Sofiya Tolstaya and Lev Lvovich Tolstoy*, trans. et ed. M.R. Katz, New Haven 2004, p. 41 (Chapter 18).

she is described as having *the lines of the Venus of Milo*, *though already in somewhat exaggerated proportions*, plump in an alluring way, an endearing figure full of feline charms, seemingly child-like and innocent, but in fact cunning and spoilt, a seductress cruelly manipulating people's feelings and emotions for fun[107]. But, as she confesses to Alosha in a moment of contrition, inside her vainglorious and immoral self acquired with wealth (and weight)[108], there is an innocent girl she once was: still crying inside, so thin and naïve, mistreated, abused, and abandoned by her former lover[109]. In both instances, a young woman's gaining weight becomes the outside expressions of putting on a new, morally corrupt personality, filled with vanity and immoral coquetry.

If we read the great works of the 19th-century prose more carefully, we may find some further examples when the young female protagonists' plump shapes appear to correspond with their more vivid temperament as well (at least with vanity and the penchant for coquetry)[110]. Perhaps not good enough to serve as the evidence material, but the literary motifs seem to be based here on some more widespread notions. When tracing the evolution of the meanings associated with greediness, Florent Quellier observes that it began to be treated, over time, as allusion to the pleasures of the flesh as well[111]. At least some forms of this particular vice (such as having a so-called sweet tooth) would begin to be also associated with the "typically feminine" weakness of character[112] (obviously, a view rooted in the standard criticism of *effeminatio*). The disapproval of the excess weight in women, as present in the Victorian period, appears to go two ways: on the one hand, putting on much weight is a sign of the premature aging process and the accompanying

[107] F. DOSTOYEVSKY, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. C. GARNETT, New York 2009, p. 164–190 (Part I, Book III, Chapter X).

[108] Let us add that Grushenka owes her relative affluence to some financial scheming and the assistance from her former lover, an old merchant (cf. F. DOSTOYEVSKY, *The Brothers Karamazov*…, p. 436–437 (Part III, Book VII, Chapter III) – this resembles her own position in society (a financially independent but socially disdained woman) to that occupied by the title heroine of Maupassant's short story.

[109] F. DOSTOYEVSKY, *The Brothers Karamazov*…, p. 450–451 (Part III, Book VII, Chapter III).

[110] For instance, let us notice a juxtaposition of the two young protagonists, "slim and humble" and "more well-rounded and more coquettish", like Emma Haredale and Dolly Varden (Ch. DICKENS, *Barnaby Rudge. A Tale of the Riots of Eighty*, Auckland 2010, p. 287–290, Ch. XX) or Paulina de Bassompierre and Ginevre Fanshaw (Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 247 (Ch. XXIII), p. 334 (Ch. XXXIII), while the flagship example of the slightly corpulent and immoral beauty in the French literature is Nana of the eponymous novel by Emil Zola (E. ZOLA, *Nana*, trans. B. RASCOE, New York 1922, p. 13, 16, 19 (Ch. I). But at the same time, we should note that this feature of the appearance is, in most cases, just a detail which we perceive only by very careful reading.

[111] F. QUELLIER, *Gourmandise. Histoire d'un péché capital*, Paris 2010, p. 98–106, 125–126. For the continuity of such a picture in our time imagination and its possible influence on the difference in the perception of men and women indulging in eating cf. S. BORDO, *Unbearable Weight*…, p. 110–134.

[112] F. QUELLIER, *Gourmandise*…, p. 94–96, 126.

loss of good looks[113], while – on the other – the exaggerated femininity becomes an expression of the lack of one's self-discipline and modesty[114], with the resulting suggestions of the correlation between the above-average weight and the licentious conduct of the contemporary prostitutes[115]. A further aspect of the contemporary mental shift is the birth of the phenomenon of anorexia as a peculiar form of the young women's opposition to sexual maturity and the aversion to one's body and carnal desires[116].

So characteristic of that early-Victorian perspective are apparently the sarcastic comments of Lucy Snowe (the narrator in *Villette*) aimed at the Belgian schoolgirls or the image of Cleopatra placed at the honourable place of the art gallery of Brussels[117]. Some of those biting comments sound like out of the modern-day arsenal of "fat shaming": observations of the more corpulent schoolgirls stealing sandwiches with marmalade[118], reflections on the amount of beefsteaks most likely

[113] G. Vigarello: *The Metamorphoses of Fat*…, p. 119–120.

[114] It was already in the early decades of the Victorian period that the "jiggling" of the female body was considered as contrary to a sense of decorum, as a sign of her lack of self-control (Eliza Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friends*, 1837, after A. Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature*…, p. 11); the manners of the genuine lady, her self-restraint were reflected in the modesty of her meals, while the more ample curves were associated with the lasciviousness and the aggressive, possessive sexuality; cf. *ibidem*, p. 9–13.

[115] A.J.B. Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution de la ville de Paris*, 1837 (after G. Vigarello, *The Metamorphoses of Fat*…, p. 120); C. Lombroso, *The Female Offender*, New York 1897 (after A.E. Farrell, *Fat Shame*…, p. 66–68). The same view can be found in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, in a description of the mode of living at a house of prostitution: eating generous amounts of food and laziness (L.N. Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. L. Maude, Oxford 2020 (Ch. II), undoubtedly connected with changes taking place in the physical appearance of Katarina Maslova (L.N. Tolstoy, *Resurrection*…, p. 35 (Ch. IX). For a shift in the appraisal of the female plumpness taking place in the course of the Victorian era, cf. also short overview by M. Matthews, *Victorian Fat Shaming. Harsh Words on Weight from the 19th Century*, 2016, https://www.mimimatthews.com/2016/04/25/victorian-fat-shaming-harsh-words-on-weight-from-the-19th-century/ [14 VI 2022].

[116] W. Vandereycken, R. van Deth, *From Fasting Saints*…, p. 2; A. Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature*…, p. 18. For the broader context in the Victorian mentality and its linking of women's slimness, modest eating, modesty and sexual repression cf. W. Vandereycken, R. van Deth, *From Fasting Saints*…, p. 181–216; A. Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature*…, *passim*.

[117] Ch. Brontë, *Villette*…, p. 186–187 (Ch. XIX). It has been assumed that the authoress was actually inspired by the painting *Une Almée* by Edouard de Biefvre, depicting a contemporary Oriental beauty. The identification with the Queen of Egypt is connected with the contemporary perception of Cleopatra as a peculiar archetype of the Oriental woman: sensual, dangerous, someone in direct opposition to everything a decorous Victorian lady should stand for (cf. I. King, *Study Help. Cleopatra Imagery in 19th Century Novels. Middlemarch and Villette*, 2018, https://owlcation.com/humanities/Cleopatra-Imagery-in-19th-Century-English-Novels-Middlemarch-and-Villette [14 VI 2022]. For the attitudes of Lucy Snow to eating and corpulence, cf. A. Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature*…, p. 100–115.

[118] Ch. Brontë, *Villette*…, p. 200 (Ch. XX).

served to the Egyptian monarch, having fun with the idea of difficulties in finding the scales for the body of that "Gypsy queen" (estimates it at 14–16 stones, i.e., c. 90–100 kg)[119]. But Miss Snowe does not question the health or beauty of the large bodies criticized; she would contrast it with a beauty more ethereal and spiritualized. In the criticism of Cleopatra and the excess and glamour around her, the English author ventures – rather unwittingly – on condemning *tryphé*, so much associated with the Ptolemeian dynasty. Contrasting the spiritual depth with the physical fitness follows in the footsteps of Jerome's words. Quite ironically, the Puritan woman regards the heartless solicitude for the latter as a distinctive mark of Catholicism[120]. The line leading from the Christian asceticism to the Victorian anorexia may seem to be obvious, but there is a significant new element here: the autonomous admiration for the sheer corporal beauty, for a type of good looks which is to correspond to that more profound spirituality – whether it may be the gaunt actress acting as Vashiti with a touching intensity[121] or the "alabaster" Pauline, with her petite figure and as thin as a child[122]. The classical beauty can be seen at the opposite end (in a fairly broad spectrum encompassing the statues of Classical Antiquity as well as the images of women in Rubens' paintings[123]), corresponding to the more superficial approach to life, the ordinary and plebeian tastes[124].

Back to our times

It could be presumed that the fatness adding to a person's sexual allure (even if vulgar, or seen as depraved and sinful) is infinitely distant from the fatness which is cast in direct opposition to sex appeal. Yet the researchers have linked the emergence of the "slim body" worship with the popularization and rationalization of the notions so characteristic of Miss Snowe. The late Victorian period saw the advent of a trend towards the healthy lifestyle with a clear moralistic context, curiously corresponding to the postulations of the contemporary movement for prohibition.

[119] Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 186 (Ch. XIX). The obsessive preoccupation with weighing oneself is a sign of the times as well – the popularization of scales and the practice of measuring one's body mass began exactly in that period; cf. W. VANDEREYCKEN, R. VAN DETH, *From Fasting Saints*…, p. 211.

[120] Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 116 (Ch. XIV). The accusation is justified to some degree in that by contrast with the rigid Protestantism, the Catholic Church has accepted over time the pleasures of the table (to a limited extent), recognizing the community-building aspect of the common feasting and perceiving the culinary art as a way of "loving your neighbour". The vivid clash of the two mentalities can be seen in the short story *The Feast of Babette* by Karen Blixen and its excellent film adaptation (F. QUELLIER, *Gourmandise*…, p. 39–58).

[121] Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 240–241 (Ch. XXIII).

[122] Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 247 (Ch. XXIII).

[123] Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 196, 241 (Ch. XX, XXIII).

[124] Ch. BRONTË, *Villette*…, p. 186, 192, 241 (Ch. XIX, XXIII).

In a way similar to alcohol and tobacco, the female corpulence was seen as likely becoming passé soon not because of some implausible arguments of the contemporary medicine, but as something "leading to immorality"[125].

It is paradoxical in a way that the Victorian ideal of the spiritualized and ethereal beauty has survived and even reinforced its position with a revision taking place in the evaluation of the sexuality itself, as the attractive appearance has evolved from being a temptation of sin to a quasi-moral obligation. Perhaps exactly for this reason, it may have acquired this rigour that is so peculiar to the moral obligations: from then on, a woman's figure should also reflect her self-discipline and ability to resist the temptations of gluttony and sloth[126].

It is still not very hard to notice the former stern moralizing behind the seemingly amoral ideal. Accusations of promoting obesity directed at plus-size models sound absurd from those who question the attractiveness of such women. If they actually inspired some kind of physical aversion or associations with bad health, they would be viewed as deterrent examples rather than propagators of a reprehensible lifestyle. Words of outrage are easier to understand as we discern the same moral outrage behind them that was once addressed at women of ill repute entering with confidence the venues reserved for decent ladies (or those who would decently conceal their indecency). The point is not the absence of the attractiveness, but the proud display of such in violation of the established norms. And the threat is so serious that the "sinful allure" must be denied and shouted down, even if by aggressively expressed mockery. The hidden sexual context of the "guilt" appears to be the simplest explanation for the asymmetrical treatment in stigmatizing women and men, unjustifiable on the basis of the medical science.

In the "overindulgence" attributed to the modern "sinful" woman, it is easy to recognize such aspect as drowning in a dark enslavement to the hedonistic *tryphé*[127]. Further accusations: the tardiness in conforming to the accepted norms or selfishly causing the society to incur the costs of "medical treatment" are more likely variations on the Biblical theme of a rich man's godless arrogance. As a matter of fact, even supporting the moral condemnation with medical arguments can

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[125] K. Bell, D. McNaughton, A. Salmon, *Introduction*, [in:] *Alcohol, Tobacco and Obesity*…, p. 4. I have to admit, however, that this lead is marginal in the modern-day attempt to explain the historical roots of the phenomenon. For instance, Farrell would rather blame associating fatness with the "uncivilized" ways of life of the "inferior" classes, ethnicities, and cultures. In this interpretation, she points out that in the early 20th century the sexual attractiveness of well-rounded female bodies was not completely denied, but rather ridiculed and despised as not appropriate to the "civilized" tastes (A.E. Farrell, *Fat Shame*…, p. 68–75). In my opinion, such attitudes, even if partially correct, fail to explain the extreme "genderisation" of the "fat shaming" in our culture, which results – among other things – in the statistics of anorexic patients (cf. K. Chernin, *The Obsession*…, p. 61–65).

[126] Even if the strictness has its roots in the Victorian imagination, it now serves to evaluate the woman's body in a very non-Victorian (or even anti-Victorian) style.

[127] J. Coveney, *In Praise of Hunger*…, p. 146–147.

be derived from the ancient thought – a belief that gluttony is the cause of all diseases combined with the moralistic criticism of the expensive and extravagant cuisine[128].

Although the list of accusations is known to the ancient, both Christian and pagan, moralists, they do not see – as yet – the clear stigma of such flaws and faults in the physicality of a fat person. All the more so, they do not see those in the physicality of a more or less corpulent young woman. The ambivalence in the perception of the feminine beauty would make it harder (rather than easier) to associate the flaws in character with those in one's physical appearance – and even if so, a woman's solicitude for good looks was criticized rather than praised. It is likely that such an ambivalence may have influenced the formation of the modern-day "fat shaming" – this apparently illogical passing from recognizing the more corpulent bodies as more immoral to deprecating their sexual worth. But this shift would take place at a much later time. As long as fatness and thinness were void of any moralistic connotations, without bringing any notions of vice or virtue to mind, they were simply one of many features of a woman's physical appearance, which could affect her good looks only when significantly departing from the norm. Otherwise, they were not seen as anything noteworthy – at most, regarded as something peculiar to a woman's individual charm.

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[128] As Seneca the Younger puts it: *diseases are innumerable? don't be surprised: count the cooks – innumerablis esse morbos non miraberis: cocos numera* (Seneca, *Ep.* 95, 23, [in:] *L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucilium epistolarum moralium quae supersunt*, ed. O. Hense, Lipsiae 1898).

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