

## **Her Part in the Honors: The Hidden History of Feminism in Ancient Rome**

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### **Abstract**

The Roman government's standing as the bedrock of Western civic structures is largely a result of the striking and durable innovations its people made in determining the relationship of the individual with his or her administration. Ideas essential to the mindset of modern Western civilization, equality before the law, enfranchisement, civil liberties, etc. all have deep-rooted connections to the practices of Rome. This paper identifies episodes of feminism in the Roman state from 207 BCE to 27 AD, a period that came as a result of the collision between a supposedly egalitarian state and a patriarchal society. The essay explores the prerequisite conditions that catalyzed feminist thinking in both administrative and social settings. The assemblage of the first governmental women's council came in tandem with breakthrough instances of female voices in public protest. A review of Hortensia's famous oration against the triumvir Marc Antony, effective as it was revolutionary, focuses on the high-level and explicit incursions into the male-dominated legal society. Finally, a short tour of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* reveals the popular dissent against the compulsory roles placed upon women in social and dating life, concluding that the republican and feminism experiment are inseparable, whether it be during the Roman age or in the Revolutionary era 1900 years removed. The sparks of a gender equality debate in an otherwise patrician Rome cements this link, and a dedicated group of progressive thinkers impacted the basis of Western civilization in ways unavoidable in the modern world.

## Introduction

The 1848 Seneca Falls convention marked the beginning of an organized feminist movement whose ideas would dominate global policy and upend millennia of social and political norms in mere one-hundred-seventy years. Or, at least, that is one accepted narrative. A more expansive look at history paints a different reality – the ideas associated with Elizabeth Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, etc. continued a long-neglected debate that began some two-thousand years before their time.

The inception and egalitarian development of the Roman Republic invited many groups within its borders to petition for political and social empowerment. Between the First Secession of the Plebs (494 BCE) and the Social War (91-88 BCE), the foundations for a nation of universal suffrage were being formed, with classes of people progressively further from the original Roman elite earning full or substantial enfranchisement throughout the centuries. Adjacent to the advancement of merchants', plebeian, non-Italians', etc. rights, the question of where women stood in a political society that supposedly espoused equality, yet hesitated to deliver, saw development up through the collapse of the Republic and the beginnings of the Roman Empire. Cato's predictions in 195 BCE that what the women of Rome were "longing for [was] complete liberty, or rather - if we want to speak the truth - complete license."<sup>1</sup> saw increasingly greater merit in successive centuries. Some two hundred years after Cato, the matron Hortensia identified the crux of the question: "Why should [women] pay taxes when [they] have no part in the sovereignty, the offices...the policy-making [of the Republic]?"<sup>2</sup> Her query demonstrated just how far political feminist thinking had progressed from a time that had once seen no public rights for women. The following contributions to the gender equality debate in the Roman Republic and Empire are indicative of a history of feminism with much deeper roots than the women of Seneca Falls.

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<sup>1</sup> Titus Livius, "Titus Livius (Livy), the History of Rome, Book 34." Translated by Evan T Sage, Titus Livius (Livy), The History of Rome, Book 34, chapter 4, Perseus Digital Library, Accessed October 27, 2021, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0164%3Abook%3D34%3Achapter%3D4>.

<sup>2</sup> Appianus, and John M. Carter. "Books 32-33" in *The Civil Wars*. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

## Status of Women in Ancient Rome

The public status of women in the Roman world was substandard to the point of barbarity. “When it comes to silencing women, Western culture has had thousands of years of practice.”<sup>3</sup> Women in every iteration of the Roman state were classified as mothers, daughters, wives, goddesses, or prostitutes. They were required by law to have a male relative advocate on their behalf in court, prostitutes could not prosecute for rape and violated female slaves were considered property damaged at the hands of their owners.<sup>4</sup> Women had no enfranchisement whatsoever, and the only form of political power they could wield was through personal influence over their powerful spouses, relatives, and associates – though these were highly unique cases that fell short of any form of public participation.

The singular major and dedicated role women played in public life was in the Vestal Virgin priesthood. Restricted from marriage or sex for thirty years, the Vestals were charged with considering and performing religious rites specifically devoid of male participation. These rituals included the preservation of the fire of Vesta, which was consecrated to the well-being of the city of Rome. Men, of course, played an ongoing role in the suppression of women in public and social life. Cato the Elder (234-149 BCE) reportedly banned boys from attending senate meetings out of concern that they might report the political happenings of the day to their mothers.<sup>5</sup>

Though shut out of public matters, Roman women found substantial success in business, were able to own and inherit property, and “appear[ed] as much engaged in business and as interested in speculation as the men.”<sup>5</sup> Aristocratic women, well-read and competent, were savvy investors and were often preferred creditors and proponents of public works projects.<sup>6</sup> Women operated brick factories,<sup>7</sup> and female owners of businesses were exempt from prosecution for the strict adultery laws that dominated life during the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> A

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<sup>3</sup> Beard, Mary. 2017. *Women & Power. A Manifesto*. London: Profile Books, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Cartwright, Mark. “The Role of Women in the Roman World.” *World History Encyclopedia*, World History Encyclopedia, 25 Jan. 2022, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/659/the-role-of-women-in-the-roman-world/>.

<sup>5</sup> Boissier, Gaston, and Adnah David Jones. 1898. *Cicero and his friends; a study of Roman society in the time of Caesar*. New York: Putnam, p. 89

<sup>6</sup> Lane Fox, Robin. 1987. *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Knopf, p. 464

<sup>7</sup> Abbott, Frank Frost. 1963. *Society and politics in ancient Rome: essays and sketches*. New York: Biblo and Tannen, p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> Lefkowitz, Mary R., and Maureen B. Fant. 2005. *Women's life in Greece and Rome: a source book in translation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 104.

dedicated corps of female calligraphers and scribes emerged during the Republic,<sup>9</sup> and women flourished in the takeaway food industry, which serviced a vast majority of Roman urban dwellers due to the lack of kitchens in most apartment buildings.

The status of women in Ancient Rome consisted of a high-octane mix: on one hand, the complete disenfranchisement of half the Roman population and lack of many legal rights left many women under a seemingly incurable patriarchy. On the other, a flourishing and dynamic group of educated and competent aristocrats and businesswomen – who were able to see the egalitarian rhetoric of their male counterparts, analyze its hypocrisy, and make competent reproaches in its wake – were an indispensable part of the Roman economic livelihood. The twin realities created a theatre for feminist thought and advancement that would reach a scope unseen until the French Revolution some two-thousand years later.

### **Carthage: Catalyst for Change**

Among the conflicts that defined the Roman Republic's ascension from the city-state to the Mediterranean empire, the Punic Wars proved to be the most consequential for the advancement of female political enfranchisement. Historically speaking, war, especially war between two equally capable powers, creates the necessary conditions for social change out of the desperation and societal impact derived from nation-threatening struggles. Rome's multiple and potent conflicts with the Carthaginian empire are a testament to this reality and enabled women's first breakthrough into the world of Republican politics.

The results of the Second Punic War (218-202 BCE) effectively introduced the dominant Roman state that soon produced the conquering figures of G. Marius, G. Caesar, Augustus, etc. Yet the exploits of the Carthaginian Empire nearly ended Roman ambition in one extensive campaign throughout the Italian heartland. Led by Hannibal Barca, the decades-long Italian theatre of the Second Punic War proved disastrous to the Roman well-being and spirit. The Battle of Cannae (216 BCE) was a unique catastrophe in a uniquely catastrophic era for the Romans, seeing some *one-fifth* of Roman men between the ages of 18 and 50 perishing under the Carthaginian sword.<sup>10</sup> Similar

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<sup>9</sup> Rawson, Beryl. 2003. *Children and childhood in Roman Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10266573>, p.80.

<sup>10</sup> Battle of Cannae." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., n.d. Accessed November 4, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Cannae>.

calamities dotted the timeline of the early war. Hannibal's ravaging of the Roman homeland forced many principled Romans to cast off previous reservations about women and their role in the administration of the Republic.

The immediate aftermath of Cannae showed the first signs of direct female participation in matters of the state. Looking to make additional profits off of his extraordinary victory, Hannibal sent several prisoners to beg the Roman Senate for the ransom necessary for their release. A crowd of desperate friends and relatives gathered in the public meeting space, frantically pleading for the return of their kin. The petition was rejected, and the prisoners were accompanied by the sympathetic crowd to the Roman gates. Principally, both men and women partook in the protests throughout the crisis, a previously unheard-of phenomenon. Livy contends that the women were compelled by their "fear and destitute condition to mingle in the Forum with the crowd of men"<sup>11</sup> – the miserable conditions of the Punic war had finally begun to take their toll, revealing cracks in the divisions between the sexes in participation in public policy.

Hannibal's molestation of the Italian cities continued until 203 BCE when Roman pressure in North Africa necessitated a return to Carthage. Four years before he abandoned the peninsula, the Carthaginian war unveiled another breakthrough in women's political participation in the Republic.

The birth of a hermaphrodite infant the size of a toddler, deemed a bad omen by the Roman College of Pontiffs, called for a religious response. The College decreed that Rome's Vestal Virgins must drown the androgyne and that the ritual be accompanied by hymns. During the procession, though, a bolt of lightning struck the temple of *Juno Regina*, inciting declarations of the goddess' anger and the necessity of a gift to the angered deity. In other circumstances, the Vestals may have been punished for the calamity, but in rare instances, their recommendation was followed. The officers relegated to organize this sacrifice to Juno themselves innovated when they invited all matrons within ten miles of Rome to assemble the necessary funds. The matrons selected 25 of their women to act as treasurers for the endeavors from their dowries and raised the money needed for the golden basin gifted to Juno. The women's committee embodied the first known instance of explicit female administration of a Republican program. In Rome, religious matters were state matters, and the relegation to a board of women a

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<sup>11</sup> Livius, Titus. "Book 22." Essay. In *History of Rome*, translated by B. O. Foster, 5:396–396. Loeb ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020.

matter of such religious significance is a major landmark in an increasingly tangible political feminist movement.

The mark of Cannae and the Second Punic War era irrevocably altered Roman women's standing in both the determination of policies and participation in public discourse in the upper echelons of the Republican government. Untouched milestones that had once been unthinkable – those being active female engagement in political protest and the creation of a Women's Committee on religious financial matters – were surpassed in the span of a decade. The conclusion of Rome's most perilous conflict made it the predominant force of the Western Mediterranean and paved the way for an empire that would eventually stretch from Britain to Mesopotamia. The influx of wealth, cultures, and ideas forced the Romans to negotiate their unequal treatment of the sexes within a Republican system that prided itself on equality. The succeeding centuries would forge the durable bonds between Feminism and Republicanism, and create opportunities for individual women to transcend the Roman Senate to become politicians in their own right.

### **Hortensia, the Orator**

Throughout the course of the Roman Republic, the very idea of a civil war was one of sacrilege. The gods had favored Roman armies to expand the nation's territories and defeat enemies of the state – what would happen if these troops were cast against each other? This mindset, among other things, destroyed the integrity of the Republic in its final decades. The misery and fear from these conflicts were later at the forefront of the justifications required to concentrate power into Octavian, later Augustus, at the inception of the Empire. Between the years of 91-31 BCE, no fewer than twelve instances of secessionist combat were waged,<sup>12</sup> each interrupted only by a host of revolts, conspiracies, and invasions by foreign tribes. Towards the end of these sixty years, popular patience was at its breaking point. The process of continuous bloodshed, of innumerable brothers, husbands, and sons who never returned home sent anxiety throughout the Roman people that contributed to the rapid abandonment of Republican principles.

During the penultimate civil war of this era, that between the Second Triumvirate (Marc Anthony, Octavian, and Lepidus) against the assassins of Julius Caesar, a new edict was imposed: a select 1400 of the richest women were required to evaluate their property and contribute a portion of their wealth to the triumvirs to use as they saw fit.

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<sup>12</sup> "Rome and Its Civil Wars." *UMass Amherst*. University of Massachusetts Amherst, n.d. Accessed November 15, 2021, <https://www.umass.edu/civilwars/about.html>.

Furthermore, anyone caught hiding her assets would be punished, and informers rewarded. The aggrieved women subject to the tax decided to appeal to the wives of each Caesarian but were unable to gain the support of all three women, being crudely rebuffed by Marc Anthony's spouse, Fulvia. At this obstacle, the congregation turned their sights towards the triumvirs themselves by forcing their way into an ongoing tribunal and selecting Hortensia as their spokeswoman. The daughter of Q. Hortensius, a famous statesman, historian, and legal rival of the largest names of the day, Hortensia was well-versed in rhetoric. Amid a stunned crowd, facing a livid Marc Anthony, her railing against the injustice of the tax simultaneously criticized the anaemic role of women in stately matters.

As was proper for women of our rank petitioning you for something, we addressed your womenfolk. But Fulvia's rudeness has driven us here...Why should we pay taxes when we have no part in the honors, the commands, the state-craft, for which you contend against each other with such harmful results? 'Because this is a time of war,' do you say? When have there not been wars, and when have taxes ever been imposed on women, who are exempted by their sex among all mankind?<sup>13</sup>

The present triumvirs were enraged at the women who dared assemble themselves in public while the men remained silent and ordered them escorted out. The wholly male crowd, though, demanded that Hortensia's delegation be allowed to stay and participate in the tribunal. Under mounting pressure, Marc Anthony announced that one thousand of the original 1400 women would be taken off the tariff list and that all men, foreign or not, who possessed more than a designated amount of money would be taxed. In this way, all able groups in Rome were made to contribute to the state.

From the very first sentence of Hortensia's oration, two powerful questions follow: Did the aristocratic women of Rome have a unified civic identity? Was this an example of that identity demanding political representation? The implications of her reference to the "women of our rank" are vast. Valerius Maximus, a collector of historical anecdotes under the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius (r.14 AD–37 AD), referred to the recipients of the tax as the *ordo matronarum*, or the "class of matrons."<sup>14</sup> This order received exclusive and identifying clothing

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<sup>13</sup> Appianus, and John M. Carter. "Books 32-33" in *The Civil Wars*. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Maximus, Valerius. "Women Who Pleaded Before Magistrates for Themselves or Others." Essay. In *Memorable Doings and Saying*, translated by Bailey D R Shackleton, 2:211–213. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

from the Senate, but no official senatorial status was ever mentioned when discussing the group. Women of Hortensia's rank were also legally required to appeal first to the wives of a magistrate when petitioning for a cause, the designated protocol being yet another indication that there was a common denominator among those taxed on the day of her speech. Finally, during the Second Punic War some two-hundred years earlier, the Republic did appreciate a distinct status for certain women when considering a new levy on its citizens,<sup>15</sup> namely employing those women into an administrative council dedicated to raising funds for religious activities. While a technical definition of this *ordo matronarum* is lost, several indicators of a common political identity are present throughout the duration of the Roman Republic and are evidence of a coherent body that, if pressed, could have a say in matters of the state.

The issue of whether Hortensia's speech was a deliberate demand for enfranchisement offers similarly few concrete answers. It is a fact that her father, Hortensius, wrote the best contemporary recount of the Social War, a rebellion on the part of Italian cities under Roman rule for their right to vote. In this, the idea of the daughter of the greatest historian of a voting rights movement being the woman most aware of the implications that her speech held is appealing. Considering the context of where she spoke, and the lack of vagueness in the reasoning she gave for rejecting the tax, it is clear that Hortensia would not have been satisfied with restricting her argument to a mere matter of personal finance.

Regardless of the details surrounding its delivery, Hortensia's message was clear. In some one-hundred words, she had articulated a stance that many historians of the American Revolution would later understand in only four: no taxation without representation. If women had no formal participation in the politics of their nation, then by what means were they required to contribute when it tears itself apart? In the context that the order of women *was* being taxed, there was no room for confusion on the part of the recipients of her speech. No such ideas of the relationship between the state and its women would be promulgated to an audience of such influence until the inception of the feminist movement of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>15</sup> Bauman, Richard A., and Richard A. Bauman. "Hortensia and the Order Matronarum." Essay. In *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*. Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 1994.

## Ovid, the Poet

While Hortensia's demonstration engaged the legal aspect of Roman Feminism, the poetry of Ovid brought gender equity out of the political and into the human realm. His *Ars Amatoria* catapulted the women of Rome into the intellectual debate on women's place in the social sphere. His writings would go against the conservative and women-targeting decrees of the government, and add an unseen dimension to the ongoing gender equity conversation that emerged from the Roman Republican spirit. Ovid's pragmatic works reflected upon a progressive era of Roman penmanship, and in that, he became a priority target for exile by the contemporaneous emperor Augustus.

The works of Ovid are, in a word, diverse. They range from Genesis-style creation myths<sup>16</sup> to his *Ars Amatoria*, a guide to love introduced by a rejection of godly knowledge and an insistence that all included tips on the art of love-making are borne from experience alone.<sup>17</sup>

*Non ego, Phoebe, datas a te mihi mentiar artes,  
Nec nos aëriae voce monemur avis,  
Nec mihi sunt visae Clio Clisusque sorores  
Servanti pecudes vallibus, Ascra, tuis:  
Usus opus movet hoc: vati parete perito;*

I boast no aid the Delphian god affords,  
Nor auspice from the flight of chattering birds,  
Nor Clio, nor her sisters, have I seen,  
As Hesiod saw them on the shady green:  
Experience makes my work a truth so tried

In the conservative era of Augustan Rome, many of Ovid's compositions were repudiated on moral grounds. On this basis, Ovid himself is one of the most censored authors in human history<sup>18</sup>, with the

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<sup>16</sup>bkm5145. "BHAVIK M CAMS E-PORTFOLIO." *Bhavik M CAMS EPortfolio*. Last modified October 2, 2015. Accessed August 6, 2021.

<https://sites.psu.edu/bkm5145cams045/2015/10/02/metamorphoses-vs-genesis/>.

<sup>17</sup>Naso, Publius Ovidius. "Excerpt from the Erotic Poems." Translated by Peter Green. *Penguin Random House Canada*. Last modified 2004. Accessed August 6, 2021. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/261092/the-erotic-poems-by-ovid/9780140443608/excerpt>.

<sup>18</sup>"History of Ovid's Banned Books from Antiquity to Present." *History of Ovid's Banned Books from Antiquity to Present | Ovid and the Censored Voice*. The Censored Voice, 2021. Last modified 2021. Accessed August 6, 2021. <http://web.colby.edu/ovid-censorship/censorship/history-of-ovids-banned-books-from-antiquity-to-present/>.

*Ars Amatoria* seeing various national suppressions from within the decade it was published (1 BCE) until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Book III of the *Ars Amatoria* offers scholars of Rome a unique take on the status of women and the societal expectations put upon them during Ovid's time. More specifically, it contains valuable and forward-minded perceptions of the meaning and conduction of love. The *Ars Amatoria* advances modern notions on the state of sexual and colloquial culture in the society of the Early Roman Empire and provides keen insight into the world into which Emperor Augustus enacted his public morality legislation.

In the years between 25 BCE and AD 8, Ovid took it upon himself to gather the proper experience for a book on love-making, if unaware that he was conducting research at the time. Marrying three times and divorcing two, the author's sexual conduct and erotic writings eventually ran him afoul of the public morality-driven Augustus, who sanctioned his exile to the far-out city of Tomis, in modern-day Romania. While the specific reasons for his verdict are unclear, Ovid himself declared that he had been cast out based on *carmen et error* (a poem and an error).<sup>19</sup> The *carmen* is believed to have been the *Amatoria*, the error of an adulterous run-in with the emperor's daughter.

The *Ars Amatoria* consists of three books contingent on helping their readers in the sometimes-daunting task of picking up a lover. The first two books, dedicated to men, focus on surprisingly modern-relatable concepts for one's method of getting the girl. Sections such as "Aphrodisiacs", "Respect Her Freedom", and "Don't Forget Her Birthday!" sound straight out of an article from the *Cosmopolitan*, and demonstrate a level of humaneness in Roman society that often grows lost among the endless maps, battle dates, and abbreviated first names that much of Roman history is comprised of.

Book III of the *Amatoria*, segmented into parts as "Cover Your Defects", consists largely of advice to women relating to physical appearance than behavioral ones, as he prescribes for men. Within this third book, though, lie two sections that contain decidedly unique opinions on the nature of love – casting it as a matter of mutual gratification<sup>20</sup> over the Augustan *leges Juliae*, which promoted strict, patriarchal marriage with the intent of children throughout the Empire.

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<sup>19</sup> A. D. F. Brown, "The unreality of Ovid's Tomitan exile", *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 10.2 (1985), pp. 18–22.

<sup>20</sup> Dutton, Jacqueline, *The Rape of the Sabine Women, Ovid Ars Amatoria Book I*: 101-134, master's dissertation, University of Johannesburg, 2005

These chapters, parts I and XVI, facilitate knowledge of the liberal minds of Roman society in an era of political conservatism.

Part I of Book III, titled “It’s Time to Teach You Girls”, illuminates Roman history in that it exhibits a popular social consciousness present at the time. During a period when the *Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus* imposed a soft requirement that all Romans marry, any major social publication that rejected the reduction of women to mere marriable legal objects (through promoting and aiding their efforts for more casual relationships) was politically radical.

*Dixerit e multis aliquis ‘quid virus in angues  
Adicis, et rabidae tradis ovile lupae?’  
Parcite paucarum diffundere crimen in omnes;  
Spectetur meritis quaeque puella suis.<sup>Ibid</sup>*

“But,” some exclaim, “what phrensy rules your mind?  
Would you increase the craft of womankind?  
Teach them new wiles and arts? As well you may  
Instruct a snake to bite, or wolf to prey.”  
But sure too hard a censure they pursue  
Who charge on all the failings of a few;  
Examine first impartially each fair,  
Then, as she merits, or condemn or spare.<sup>Ibid</sup>

Part I offers yet more contradiction with Augustus’ morality laws, as seen in the *Lex Julia de Adulteriis Coercendis*, a collection of ordinances that, among other things, allowed fathers and husbands to kill their daughters and wives caught in infidelity. While addressing pimps and actors, the law is decidedly lacking in its specifications on the fate of most men caught cheating, reflecting the general conception of male virtue and female wickedness in adultery. Within the first lines of his third book, Ovid turns this conception on its head, stating that *men* are the primary adulterers of Roman society, yet receive a disproportionately small amount of the blame.

*Saepe viri fallunt: tenerae non saepe puellae,  
Paucaque, si quaeras, crimina fraudis habent.<sup>Ibid</sup>*

Men often are false: not often tender girls  
Yet they have few, if you look, accusations of fraud.<sup>Ibid</sup>

Ovid’s take on the fallibility of men reaches beyond the laws of the day, as evidenced in Part XVI of the *Ars Amatoria*, “Make Him Believe He’s Loved”, dedicated towards the masculine disposition of being foolishly quick to perceive infatuation.

*Efficite (et facile est), ut nos credamus amari:  
Prona venit cupidus in sua vota fides.  
Spectet amabilius iuvenem, suspiret ab imo  
Femina, tam sero cur veniatque roget:  
Accedant lacrimae, dolor et de paelice fictus,  
Et laniet digitis illius ora suis:  
Iamdudum persuasus erit; miserebitur ultro,  
Et dicet 'cura carpitur ista mei'.*<sup>Ibid</sup>

[Women,] Perpetual fondness of your lover feign,  
Nor will you find it hard belief to gain;  
Full of himself, he your design will aid!  
To what we wish 'tis easy to persuade.  
With dying eyes his face and form survey,  
Then sigh, and wonder he so long could stay;  
Now, drop a tear your sorrows to assuage,  
Anon, reproach him, and pretend to rage.  
Such proofs as these will all distrust remove,  
And make him pity your excessive love.  
Scarce to himself will he forbear to cry,  
"How can I let this poor, fond creature die?"<sup>Ibid</sup>

In giving female readers pointers on how they can manipulate their male counterparts, Ovid articulates a revolutionary social stance, compared to depictions of victorious masculinity, often in the face of feminine interference,<sup>21</sup> within works such as the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*. Such takes on the relationship between the sexes were criminally revolutionary for the time, and similar notions resurfaced only by the nineteenth century.

The people of Rome are not its Senate, nor its emperors, nor its generals. They lack the privilege of being the primary focus for the majority of Latin literature that has survived to the modern day. To say that the period of Augustus' reign was defined by emergent social conservatism of the *Leges Juliae* alone would be an anaemic take on the matter. Ovid refutes this notion time and again with the *Ars Amatoria*, from its popularity to its intention. In his exceptionally real work, Ovid has painted a picture for historians of the society of Romans beyond military camps and palace walls – of a people who look, evidently, like humanity today.

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<sup>21</sup> Naso, Publius Ovidius. "Cornelius Tacitus, the Annals Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodribb, Ed." Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. *Cornelius Tacitus, The Annals, BOOK III, Chapter 24*. Perseus Digital Library, n.d. Accessed August 6, 2021.  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0078%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D24>.

Throughout Book III of his *Ars Amatoria* are passages dedicated towards the redefinition of love, rejecting the restrictive and sexually controlling society of Augustus for the attainment of common pleasure between man and woman. While subversive and feminist in its own right, the *Amatoria*'s widespread success and adoption by groups lobbying against the patriarchal laws of Augustus<sup>22</sup> are testaments to the progressive social and sexual landscape of the time; one that, after the triumph of Christianity, would not largely see light until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Conclusion

While no direct link between the feminists of Rome and those of Seneca Falls exists, Hortensia's oration on the relationship between the state and its women redefines the scope of the history for a "greater" feminist movement. Valerius Maximus accredits most of Hortensia's eloquence to her father, stating that she had merely "revived her father's elegance...Q.Hortensius then lived again in his female progeny and inspired her daughter's words."<sup>Ibid</sup> Yet it was not the male Hortensius who had breached all social and legal protocol by barging into a tribunal and condemning the edicts of the most powerful man in Rome. It was not Cicero who, while consuming Rome's paper supply for his anti-Antonian pamphlets, rebuffed the triumvirs. It was not Brutus, nor Cassius who, while hunted down by the armies of Marc Anthony and Augustus, vanquished the heirs of Caesar. It was Hortensia; she successfully carved out a place for women in the patriarchal Roman Republic, far before any other political feminist, and did what the giants of the era could not do solely through her power of argumentation.

Ovid advanced women's position in the social stage through defiance similar to that of Hortensia. His *Ars Amatoria* rejected the male supremacism advanced by Augustus' morality legislation and replaced it with an egalitarian vision of love as an act of mutual satisfaction, inspiring readers across the Mediterranean and speaking for dissent against the emperor's laws. Christianity would do its best to destroy Ovidian love, yet the ideas of the modern sexual revolution are eminently described in an era two-thousand years removed.

The introduction of the Republic into the political consciousness of the Ancient and Western Worlds necessarily raised the question of gender equality. It is no coincidence that at the same time that republics became the most widespread form of government in the revolutions of the nineteenth century, the feminist movement saw its ascendancy. The

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<sup>22</sup> "Ars Amatoria." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., n.d. Accessed November 15, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ars-amatoria>.

Roman state between 100 BCE–100 AD, during the height of its Republicanism, underwent the universal consequence of attempting to manage an egalitarian state that denied specific citizens the political liberties enjoyed by their others. The underlying phenomenon that drove centuries of Roman Feminism, culminating in the productions of Hortensia and Ovid, is the same as the ones that sparked the Women’s Suffrage Movement some two millennia later: the representative governance conversation is inexorably linked to the gender equality conversation; If the latter is lacking, then the former ceases to be a republic.

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