

Virginia Fabrizi (ed.)

The Semantics of Space in Greek and Roman Narratives

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Breaching Boundaries: Collective Appearances of Women Outside Their Homes in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*

Virginia Fabrizi

Abstract: This paper analyses a recurrent motif in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, namely collective appearances of women outside their homes in the city-space of Rome. The main interest of such narratives lies in the fact that, since they involve groups of women rather than individual characters, they create an intratextual web which can be reactivated from time to time to generate new meaning. In particular, I focus on three elements of special significance to gender-related semanticisations of space in narratives: boundaries and their breaching, women's movement through the city-space, and women's emotional experience of the city-space. I show that Livy emphasises the boundary between 'private' and 'public' space and depicts women's presence outside their homes as a transgression of such a boundary; moreover, I argue that the historian tends to portray women in the urban space according to a conventional image of the frenzied woman, which graphically embodies the notion of socio-political unrest.

1. Space, gender, and Livy's history¹

The relevance of space to the production of historical meaning in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* is well known among scholars by now.² Livy's history of the *urbs* has been interpreted as a literary city in its own right, growing alongside the physical city whose history it purports to tell and constantly renegotiating notions of civic and imperial space.³

Among the main features of Roman space as constructed in the *Ab Urbe Condita* is the fact that it is heavily gendered. The use that men and women respectively make – or are supposed to make – of the space of the city appears as a major issue throughout the work. Thus, it is not surprising that virtually all major treatments of gender in Livy tend to address spatiality as well.⁴ The spatial model underlying the *Ab Urbe Condita* has been shown to be fundamentally patriarchal and asymmetrical – centred on a distinction between 'private' spaces (i.e. the individual

¹ The text of the *Ab Urbe Condita* is quoted from the following critical editions: Ogilvie 1974 (Books 1–5); Briscoe 2016 (Books 21–25); Walsh 1989 (Books 26–27); Walsh 1986 (Books 28–30); Briscoe 1991 (Books 31–40). Translations of Books 1–10 are by T. J. Luce (from Luce 1998), of Books 21–30 and 31–40 by J. C.

Yardley (from Yardley–Hoyos 2006 and Yardley–Heckel 2000 respectively).

² Cf. e.g. Feldherr 1998, esp. 187–212; Jaeger 1997; 2006; 2007; 2010; Kraus 1994a; 1994b; Krebs 2012; Milnor 2007; Riggsby 2009.

³ Kraus 1994a; 1994b.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Joshel 1992; Joplin 1990; Milnor 2005, 141–179.

households), which belong to individual male citizens, and the ‘public’ space, where the political life of the city is performed.⁵ While men are both masters of their own domestic space and entitled to move freely in public space, women belong in the private spaces of their male kin.

It should be stressed that that spatial model was the product of idealization (and ideology) rather than a faithful reproduction of reality. The traditional assumption that certain ‘public’ spaces were mostly inaccessible to women has been proved to be over-simplistic by recent archaeological and historical scholarship;⁶ moreover, even the dichotomy between ‘private’ and ‘public’ spaces has come to be seen as problematic as far as the Graeco-Roman world is concerned.⁷ Nonetheless, a gendered distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ is clearly relevant to the *narrated* space of Livy’s Rome. More to the point, the *Ab Urbe Condita* appears to use such a distinction to speak about the socio-political order of Republican Rome and the

dangers that threatened it. Breaching the gendered boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces often signals a disturbance of that order.⁸

In this paper, I focus on a recurrent motif involving the breaching of gendered boundaries in the *Ab Urbe Condita*, namely collective appearances of women outside their homes in the urban space of Rome. The main interest of such narratives lies in the fact that – since they involve otherwise undefined groups of women rather than characters with individual features – they recall one another across Livy’s work and thus create an intra-textual web, which can be reactivated from time to time to generate new meaning.

I read Livy’s text with an eye on three elements, which narratologist Natascha Würzbach has recently singled out as particularly relevant to what she calls the *Konkretisierung der Geschlechtsproblematik im erzählten Raum* (‘the concretization of gender-related issues within narrated space’):⁹ 1) accessibility and boundary-breaching;¹⁰ 2) position

⁵ See e.g. Feldherr 1998, 187–217; Milnor 2005; 2009, 284–285. Cf. Heitmann-Gordon in this volume (esp. 17–21) for a similar spatial pattern in 4th-century Athens.

⁶ Cf. e.g. Allison 2006; 2007; Russell 2016a, 49; 2016b; Trümper 2012.

⁷ See e.g. Riggsby 1997; 1999b; Russell 2016a; Zaccaria Ruggiu 1995.

⁸ Among the best-known instances of the breaching of gendered boundaries, in the *AUC*, are the accounts of rape which mark turning-points in the socio-political development of early Rome. In the account of the fall of the Roman monarchy (Liv. 1,57–60), for example, Tarquin’s rape of Lucretia is quite literally represented as the violation of the private space belonging to Lucretia’s husband Collatinus, in whose bedroom the rape takes place (cf. Feldherr 1998, 194–203; Joshel 1992, 122; Matthes 2000, 49). In cases like this, a man’s violation of another man ‘private space’ (i.e. his house and the women who belong in the house) signals his disrespect for the communal bonds among male citizens and thus his tyrannical attitude (for the significance

of rape in the history of ancient Rome, see also Joplin 1990; Joshel 1992; Matthes 2000, 23–50). On the other hand, women’s invasion of ‘public’ space can also work as a symbol for their illegitimate claims to political power or, more generally, of the confusion between family concerns and the welfare of the State; for examples and discussion, see Feldherr 1998, 187–193; Milnor 2005, 154–179 (on the Oppian Law, on which see below).

⁹ Würzbach 2004, 57 (but see the whole chapter for a discussion of gender-related semanticizations of space).

¹⁰ The study of boundaries as objects of spatial semantics goes back to the seminal observations of Lotman 1973, 327–347; 1974, who points out that abstract spatial oppositions (in/out, limited/unlimited, etc.) play an important role in the construction of both narrated space and the symbolic-ethical world of a work of literature. In particular, boundaries and movement (or lack thereof) can be crucial to the moral characterization of the actors of a story. Although he did not specifically treat gender, the approach he

and movement of characters; 3) gender-specific modes of experience and attributions of meaning. In other words, I investigate the ways in which the *Ab Urbe Condita* thematizes the notion of the boundary, I examine how it represents women's movement through the city-space, and I track the specific modes of experience of the city-space that it attributes to women.

In Livy's history, groups of women appear on the streets, in the temples, or in the Roman Forum for two main reasons: as a response to major events of public interest or in order to participate in religious ceremonies. A unique case is constituted by the public demonstrations staged by women demanding the repeal of the Oppian Law in 195 BCE (Liv. 34,1,5–7; cf. below). As I hope to show, all these different types of appearances (which I examine in Sections 2, 3 and 4), are closely related to one another and create a coherent semantics of urban space throughout the *Ab Urbe Condita*. In Section 5, I read Livy's account of the Bacchanalian Scandal of 186 BCE (Liv. 39,8–19) as complementary to such semantics.

2. Suppliants: women outside their homes as a response to major events of communal interest¹¹

A widespread motif in the *Ab Urbe Condita* is the portrayal of the reactions of people in Rome to the news of major events, such as military defeats or victories, the approaching of enemy armies, plagues, etc. Collective scenes of this kind serve to create a lively and pathetic narrative that involves the reader in the events and, in some cases, stresses the moral strength of the Roman people in times

of crisis.¹² Descriptions of women in the streets, in temples, or occasionally even in the Forum figure prominently in most of these passages. Although Livy's work includes several variations of the motif, some common features can be singled out.

First, the text tends to represent women's presence outside their homes as something unusual. It bears to be stressed, once more, that the reality was probably quite different. However, the *Ab Urbe Condita* deploys various strategies to suggest to readers that the scenes it narrates should be seen as exceptional circumstances.

One such strategy consists in attributing the *matronae's* presence in public to a specific reason (usually an emotional one such as fear or joy), which justifies their extraordinary behaviour. This is the case, for example, in 5,18,11–12, where false news spreads in Rome that the Etruscans are about to attack the city:¹³

11 His tumultuosiora Romae, iam castra ad Veios oppugnari, iam partem hostium tendere ad urbem agmine infesto, crediderant; concursumque in muros est et matronarum, quas ex domo conciverat publicus pavor, obsecrationes in templis factae, 12 precibusque ad dis petitum ut exitium ab urbis tectis templisque ac moenibus Romanis arcerent Veiosque eum averterent terrorem, si sacra renovata rite, si procurata prodigia essent.

11 At Rome people believed the situation was even more chaotic: that the camp at Veii was already under attack,

developed can be very fruitful in the analysis of gender-related semantics.

¹¹ The relevant passages are commented upon and discussed in Kowalewski 2002, 355–366. 376–381.

¹² Cf. Kowalewski 2002, 357.

¹³ The action is set in 396 BCE and belongs to the brief narrative of a campaign against the Falisci and Capenates (Liv. 5,18, 7–12).

that some enemy forces were already headed for the city prepared to attack. People rushed out onto the walls, while the matrons, whom fear for the nation had brought forth from their homes, supplicated the gods, 12 asking that if the sacred rites had been correctly repeated, if the prodigies properly expiated, they ward off destruction from the houses, temples, and walls of Rome and turn the panic upon Veii.

The term *obsecratio*, which Livy uses in Section 13, might have referred to a form of communal prayer to the gods in the face of special danger.¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that, in the passage we examine, the text does not explicitly mention any input from public authorities; rather, it presents the matrons' prayers in the temple as a rather spontaneous reaction, not so different from the people's rushing to the walls. In this context, the mention of fear as the force that drove the women away from their homes (*ex domo*) casts their presence *en masse* in the temples¹⁵ as a departure of the norm, even if – in fact – religious buildings were surely not exceptional places for *matronae* to be.¹⁶

Similarly, at 22,60,1–2, fear and the need to plead for their relatives are the reasons why women go down to the Forum, as the Senate debates whether to ransom the Roman soldiers captured by Hannibal at Cannae. After the spokesman of the prisoners delivers his speech in front of the Senate, Livy provides us with a vivid, if brief, collective scene:

1 Ubi is finem fecit, extemplo ab ea turba quae in comitio erat clamor flebilis est sublatus manusque ad curiam tendebant, orantes ut sibi liberos fratres cognatos redderent. 2 Feminas quoque metus ac necessitas in foro turbae virorum immiscuerat.

1 When he finished speaking, a tearful wail immediately went up from the crowd in the Comitium. People stretched out their hands to the Senate house begging the senators to restore their children, their brothers and their relatives to them. 2 Fear and the dire situation had also brought women to join the crowd of men in the Forum.

The exceptional circumstances following the disaster at Cannae account for women's exceptional access to the most masculine space of all—the Forum.¹⁷ It is probably not a

¹⁴ The *AUC* mentions *obsecrationes* on a couple of occasions (cf. 4,21,5; 26,23,6), sometimes in conjunction with *supplicationes* (27,11,6; 31,8,2; 31,9,6; 42,20,3). The relationship between *obsecratio* and *supplicatio* is not clear. While it was argued that *obsecratio* was a type of *supplicatio* (see e.g. Wissowa 1912, 423–426), the use of the two terms side by side in the aforementioned passages from the *AUC* seems to rule out such an identification (cf. Schultz 2006, 32. 163 n. 9). For *supplicationes* and the role played by women in them, see Schultz 2006, 28–33 (with further bibliography).

¹⁵ Ogilvie's (1978, 669) observation that 'the panic at Rome with the scene of the women on the walls and of public prayer are taken from the *Iliad*, as Hector goes out to battle' seems to miss the point, since in Livy it is not women but rather

an undefined collective of people (*concursum est*) who rush to the walls. What women are specifically said to do is make supplication to the gods in the temples.

¹⁶ For the various forms of women's worship in temples and sanctuaries in Republican Rome and central Italy, see the epigraphic and archaeological evidence discussed by Schultz 2006, 47–120. Most of those practices receive little or no attention in literary sources, which, as a rule, tend to focus on State-related religious activities (e.g. *supplicationes*, dedication of temples, etc.).

¹⁷ Here, again, Livy's idealized representation should not be taken at face value. It is likely that, in fact, women were normally present in the Forum Romanum; however, Roman writers consistently think of the Forum as a masculine space and provide virtually no information about

coincidence that Livy uses the generic term *feminae* ('women') instead of the more common *matronae* ('married women') here, since in this way the contrast *feminas/turbae virorum* receives a stronger emphasis.

Another way in which Livy constructs women's presence outside their homes as unusual is the drawing of an explicit dichotomy between 'private' and 'public' spaces. This is, for example, how the historian describes the fear in Rome at the news of Hannibal's approach in 211 BCE (Liv. 26,9,6–8):

6 Romam Fregellanus nuntius diem noctemque itinere continuato ingentem attulit terrorem. Tumultuosius quam allatum erat †cursu† hominum adfingentium vana auditis, totam urbem concitat. 7 Ploratus mulierum non ex privatis solum domibus exaudiebantur, sed undique matronae in publicum effusae circa deum delubra discurrunt crinibus passis aras verrentes, nixae genibus, 8 supinas manus ad caelum ac deos tendentes orantesque ut urbem Romanam e manibus hostium eriperent matresque Romanas et liberos parvos inviolatos servarent.

6 At Rome, meanwhile, a messenger from Fregellae, who had made a non-stop journey of a day and a night, brought sheer panic to the city. But people † running about †, adding pure

fiction to what they had heard, threw the entire city into even greater turmoil than had the initial report of danger. 7 It was not just a matter of women's lamentations being heard coming from private houses: all over the city married ladies poured into the streets, and ran around the shrines of the gods. They swept the altars with their dishevelled hair; they fell to their knees 8 with hands held palm-up to heaven and the gods; and they begged the gods to rescue the city of Rome from the hands of the enemy, and save Roman mothers and little children from abuse.

Comparison with the parallel narrative in Polybius' *Histories* (9,6,1–4)¹⁸ can reveal some significant aspects of Livy's literary strategy. Polybius first portrays the general turmoil in the city (1–2) and then turns to the actions of men and women respectively (3–4): 'The men therefore immediately manned the walls and occupied the commanding positions outside the city, while the women made the round of the temples and besought the gods to protect them, sweeping the pavements of the shrines with their hair, as is their custom at moments when extreme peril threatens the country.'¹⁹

Through the explanatory remark addressed to the non-Roman reader in Section 4, Polybius aims to normalize the women's behaviour as part of Roman custom (although it should be noted that he refers to situations of grave

women's everyday activities there (see Boatwright 2011, 110; Russell 2016a, 61; 2016b, 167–169).

¹⁸ The relationship between Polybius and Livy in the Third Decade – i.e. whether the former was or was not a source for the latter – is a well-known matter of contention in Livian scholarship. For contrasting opinions on the topic (with further bibliography), see Levene 2010, 127–59; Tränkle 1977, 193–245.

¹⁹ 3 Διόπερ οἱ μὲν ἄνδρες τὰ τεῖχη προκατελάμβανον καὶ τοὺς πρὸ τῆς πόλεως εὐκαίρους τόπους, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες περιπορευόμεναι τοὺς ναοὺς ἰκέτευον τοὺς θεοὺς, πλύνουσαι ταῖς κόμαις τὰ τῶν ἱερῶν ἑδάφη· 4 τοῦτο γὰρ αὐταῖς ἔθος ἔστι ποιεῖν, ὅταν τις ὀλοσχερῆς τὴν πατρίδα καταλαμβάνῃ κίνδυνος (English translation by I. Scott-Kilvert). The measures taken for the protection of the city are related by Livy at 26,9,9.

danger, i.e. to unusual circumstances). On the other hand, the *Ab Urbe Condita* – with its richness of pathetic details concerning the women’s prayers – seems to do the opposite. By articulating a dichotomy between ‘private houses’ (*ex privatis domibus*) and the ‘public space’ into which women pour (*in publicum effusae*)²⁰ through a *non... solum... sed* construction (7), the historian suggests that the houses are where one would expect women to be, while the presence of the matrons in ‘public space’ stresses the exceptional panic stirred by Hannibal’s approach.

An even more explicit statement of the boundary between the house and ‘public space’ is found in Livy’s narrative of the aftermath of Cannae. After providing the usual portrayal of consternation at Rome²¹ – where ‘ears were ringing with the noisy lamentations of women’ (22,55,3) – the historian reports several measures taken by the Senate to maintain order in the city. Among other things, the dictator Quintus Fabius Maximus declared that (22,55,6):

[...] *illud per patres ipsos agendum, quoniam magistratum parum sit, ut tumultum ac trepidationem in urbe tollant, matronas publico arceant continerique intra suum quamque limen cogant [...].*

[...] the senators, meanwhile, had jobs to do. Given the shortage of

magistrates, they had to suppress any public disturbance or panic. They had to keep women from appearing in public, compel them all to remain within their homes [...].

The Senate’s reestablishment of public order, of course, is not Livy’s invention,²² but it is possible that the wording he used is his own, since it resonates with analogous expressions found elsewhere in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. In particular, Livy’s Quintus Fabius Maximus not only states that women should be kept away from ‘public space’ (*publico*), but also – through mention of the *limen* – reaffirms the idea of a physical boundary separating the spheres of feminine and masculine action.

One further feature shared by most passages concerning women outside their homes in Livy is the chaotic nature of the women’s appearance, as signalled by both their physical untidiness and the disorder of their movement through space. A good example is offered by the above-quoted passage from Book 26 concerning Hannibal’s approach to Rome (Liv. 26,9,6–8). There, the act of going down into the streets is expressed through the verb (*sese*) *effundere* – which is frequently applied to women in Livy, and which implies the notion of unbounded or uncontrollable movement: originally describing the ‘pouring out’ of liquids, it can apply to feelings

²⁰ For a general discussion of *privatus* and *publicus*, in particular as applied to space, cf. Russell 2016a, 25–42 (with further bibliography).

²¹ Livy begins with a sort of *recusatio*, affirming his inability to describe the unparalleled panic following the disaster of Cannae (Liv. 22,54,8), but later offers a summary of the situation in a *cum* clause at Liv. 22,55,3. These rhetorical moves suggest the highly conventional character of such descriptions.

²² Cf. Val. Max. 1,1,15; Plut. *Fab.* 17,5–18,3. Neither Valerius nor Plutarch, however, mention the order that women should remain at home.

The former, in coherence with the topic of his chapter *De religione*, only reports a *senatus consultum* setting a limit of 30 days on women’s mourning (cf. Liv. 22,56,5), so that the celebration of religious rites could resume after that period. The latter has a list of measures which is very similar to Livy’s, but only makes a general reference to the fact that Fabius ‘checked all womanish lamentations, and prevented those who wished to bewail their sorrows from assembling in public’ (Plut. *Fab.* 17,5; English translation by I. Scott-Kilvert).

that are ‘given free play’, to things let loose, and to the ‘pouring out’ or ‘streaming forth’ of crowds, armies, and the like (especially things or animated beings that previously used to be confined or held tight).²³ On the other hand, *discurro*, which the historian uses to describe the matrons’ movement from one temple to the other, expresses the idea of ‘running off in several directions’ or ‘moving here and there’.²⁴ The unrest of this flood of women spreading through the whole city is reflected in their distressed looks as they fall to the ground with their hair loose (*crinibus passis*) and raise their hands in the typical manner of suppliants.

Analogous representations are present elsewhere. Matrons are described as *vagae* (‘moving from place to place without clear direction’) on at least two occasions: in the aftermath of the Roman defeat at Lake Trasimene in 217 BCE, when they ‘roam the streets’ in search of information about their loved ones (Liv. 22,7,7), and immediately before the battle of Metaurus in 207 BCE, when they made supplications to the gods by ‘roaming through all the shrines’ (Liv. 27,50,5). Above all, the running about of dishevelled women figures prominently in an episode that functions as a sort of prototype for all public interventions of women in Roman history, namely the plight of the Sabine women as their fathers and husbands battle in the Roman Forum (Liv. 1,13,1–2):

1 Tum Sabinae mulieres, quarum ex iniuria bellum ortum erat, crinibus passis scissaque veste, victo malis muliebri pavore, ausae se inter tela

volantia inferre, ex transverso impetu facto dirimere infestas acies, dirimere iras, 2 hinc patres, hinc viros orantes, ne se sanguine nefando soceri generique respergerent, ne parricidio macularent partus suos, nepotum illi, hi liberum progeniem.

1 It was at this moment that the Sabine women, whose abduction had caused the war, boldly imposed themselves amid the flying spears. Their misfortunes overcame womanish fear: with hair streaming and garments rent, they made a mad rush from the sidelines, parting the battling armies and checking their angry stride. 2 Appealing to fathers on one side and husbands on the other, they declared that kin by marriage should not defile themselves with the impious carnage, nor leave the stain of blood upon descendants of their blood, grandfathers upon grandsons, fathers upon children.

Mary Jaeger has shown that the Sabine women come to act as a boundary themselves in this scene: by interposing themselves between the two groups of fathers and husbands, they ‘offer themselves as an alternate space in which Roman and Sabine blood can intermingle’.²⁵ Thus, their transgression of the implicit boundary between ‘public’ and ‘private’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ spaces (the Forum here is also a battlefield, which makes its masculine connotations even stronger than usual)²⁶ avoids the subversion of the more crucial boundaries that allow for the peaceful development of communal

²³ Cf. TLL 5,2,214–227; OLD, 593.

²⁴ Cf. TLL 4, 1366–1367; OLD, 552.

²⁵ Jaeger 1997, 46–49; see also Joplin 1990, 56–58.

²⁶ Although the battleground where the Sabine women throw themselves between the two armies was, at the time of the narrated events, little

more than an open field between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills, the image of the future Roman Forum is forcefully superimposed onto the historical setting throughout the whole episode: see the detailed analysis of the episode in Jaeger 1997, 30–56.

relationships.²⁷ The pathos of the scene is emphasized by the very syntax of the narrative, with its repeated anaphora;²⁸ the emotionality of the Sabine women and the transgressive nature of their actions are stressed once again by the mention of fear overcome by present misfortunes, as well as by the graphic representation of their outer appearance – their loose hair and rent garments.

This scene, just like the one from Book 26, seems to re-use a specific image of the suppliant or mourning woman, whose typical characteristics were loose hair, raised hands, and torn clothes. A number of incarnations of this conventional figure are known from Latin poetry and prose;²⁹ in historical accounts, the dramatic presentation of suppliant women often constitutes a narrative device to increase pathos in military scenes.³⁰

Things are somewhat different when women are driven out of their homes, not by fear or sorrow but by joy. However, disorder and lack of composure can characterize women's behaviour on such occasions as well. A case in point is the scene described in Liv. 4,40,2–3, where a contingent of Roman cavalry returns to Rome after the false news of their deaths has spread through the city. In Livy's portrayal of the general shift from grief to joy

among people in Rome, women are granted a prominent role:

2 [...] *et ex maestis paulo ante domibus, quae conclamaverant suos, procurreretur in vias, 3 pavidaeque matres ac coniuges, oblitae prae gaudio decoris, obviam agmini occurrerent, in suos quaeque simul corpore atque animo, vix prae gaudio compotes, effusae.*

2 [...] from houses that had lately been plunged into grief the mourners streamed into the streets; 3 trembling mothers and wives forgot decorum in their euphoria by rushing out to meet the approaching troops and, besides themselves with happiness, flung themselves with their bodies and their souls into the arms of their loved ones.³¹

Here, stress is laid on the emotional status of wives and mothers—who are 'scared' (*pavidae*) at first but then overwhelmed by joy (*prae gaudio*, twice repeated)—as well as on their lack of composure as they rush out of their homes (*ex... domibus*) and throw themselves (*effusae*, again) into the arms of their men.

²⁷ That such boundaries are often constituted by women has been stressed e.g. by Joplin 1990.

²⁸ Cf. Ogilvie 1978, 78–79.

²⁹ Ogilvie 1978, 78 notes that the phrase *crinibus passis*, which we have found in Livy 1,13,1 and 26,9,7, and which appears again in 7,40,12 and possibly in 39,13,11 (cf. below, p. 44 and n. 57), is very rare and poetic in classical Latin literature. It is found twice in the *Aeneid* (1,247–250; 2,402–405), once in Ovid's *Tristia* (4,2,43–44), and twice in mock-epic scenes from Petronius' *Satyricon* (54; 111). In all of these cases the expression applies to either suppliant or grieving women.

³⁰ A good example is the behaviour of women during the siege of Gergovia in Caesar's *Bellum*

Gallicum: Matres familiae de muro vestem argentumque iactabant et pectore nudo prominentes passis manibus obtestabantur Romanos, ut sibi parcerent, neu, sicut Avarici fecissent, ne a mulieribus quidem atque infantibus abstinerent, 7,47,5; Quorum cum magna multitudo convenisset, matres familiae, quae paulo ante Romanis de muro manus tendebant, suos obtestari et more Gallico passum capillum ostentare liberosque in prospectu proferre coeperunt, 7,48,3. Cf. Cipriani 1986, 52–59.

³¹ I have printed the translation from Luce 1998 with the addition of 'with their bodies and their souls'; Luce does not seem to have translated *simul corpore atque animo*.

Although what the women are displaying is legitimate affection for husbands and sons, the stress placed on the forgotten *decus* evokes some more unsettling ideas. A matron's *decus* was seen to be connected with her chastity; when the *Ab Urbe Condita* uses the term in connection with women, it is usually to speak about their *pudicitia*, decency, and physical inviolability.³² Thus, the temporary neglect of *decus* suggests the dangers implicit in women's breaching of gendered boundaries, even in a case – such as the passage we are considering – when their sexual behaviour is not deviant in itself. In other words, while the momentary breach of accepted norms of behaviour is justified by the exceptional circumstances, the kind of spatial promiscuity described here seems to be represented as potentially problematic.

3. Women's participation in religious ceremonies

All the public interventions of women that I have examined up to this point appear to play a similar narrative function. Through the (alleged) exceptionality of their occurrence and the disorder embodied in both the women's movement through space and their emotional and physical condition, they signal particularly critical moments for the Roman State.³³ There is a way, however, in which the transgression of a boundary – or more precisely, the control of such a transgression – may be

felt to be important to the successful resolution of a crisis. We can observe this if we turn our attention to the second major type of public interventions by women in Roman public space, viz. their participation in religious ceremonies.

In truth, this category of public interventions overlaps with the former in a number of cases. As we see, praying to the gods is often part of women's reactions to military defeats or other dangers. In the passages examined above, however, the accent seems to be placed on women's spontaneous invasion of 'public' space rather than on the formal context of a religious ceremony. In this section, I focus on some narratives in which such a context plays the dominant role.

On a number of occasions, the *Ab Urbe Condita* mentions supplications or other ceremonies involving women.³⁴ In most of these cases, however, Livy only reports the fact that a certain ritual took place without providing an extended narrative of it. There are only two instances in the whole of the extant books in which ceremonies performed by women are extensively described.

The first concerns the expiatory rites decreed by the pontifices in honour of Juno Regina in 207 BCE, following a series of distressing

³² At 1,58,5, for example, Sextus Tarquin, after raping Lucretia, is portrayed as *ferox expugnato decore muliebre* ('exulting in his seeming conquest of the woman's honour'); at 26,49,16, Scipio Africanus praises the Spanish female hostages, who have implored him to make sure that they are protected from sexual assault, because 'even in misfortune', they have not 'forgotten the respect due to a lady' (*ne quidem malis oblitae decoris matronalis*); at 34,6,8, the preservation of *decus matronale* is one of the issues at stake in the debate about the Oppian Law – a context in which women's sexual behaviour is explicitly put into question (cf. below, Section

4). For instances of *decus* used in a similar meaning by other authors, see TLL 5,1, 236–237.

³³ The fact that public interventions of women, in literary sources, mark a 'disruption of normal order' is pointed out by Boatwright 2011, 108.

³⁴ Cf. e.g. Liv. 3,5,14; 5,31,3; 10,23,1–2; 22,1,18; 22,10,8; 25,12,15; 27,51,9; 37,3,6 (for a discussion of these and similar occurrences, cf. Kowalewski 2002, 379–381). A lively narrative concerning a religious cult – but not describing the cult itself – is the story of the founding of the temple of Pudicitia Plebeia at 10,23,1–10.

prodigies (27,37).³⁵ These ceremonies involved the participation of two groups of women. First, matrons, drawing on their own dowries, made a gift of a golden bowl to the goddess and sacrificed in her temple (27,37,9–10). Second, a chorus of 27 maidens went through the streets of Rome singing a hymn composed by the poet Livius Andronicus. The procession is described at length by Livy, who is very precise about both its order and its topography (27,37,11–15).

The second narrative of a public ceremony performed by women refers to the reception of the Idaean Mother in 204 BCE (Liv. 29,14,5–14).³⁶ The ship carrying the black stone, which was believed to be the Idaean Mother from Pessinus, is received at the haven of Ostia by a delegation composed of ‘the best man in Rome’ in the person of Publius Scipio Nasica and ‘all the matrons’ (29,14,10). Scipio takes the stone from the ship and gives it to the leading matrons of the community (11–12), who then bring it to Rome (13–14):

13 Eae per manus, succedentes deinceps aliae aliis, omni obviam effusa civitate, turibulis ante ianuas positis qua praeferebatur, atque accenso ture precantibus ut volens propitiaque urbem Romanam iniret, 14 in aedem Victoriae quae est in Palatio pertulere deam pridie idus Apriles, isque dies festus fuit.

13 The ladies kept passing the goddess to each other, from hand to hand, on their journey, as the entire community

poured out to meet them, and there were censers placed before the doors along the routes where she was borne. As incense burned and people prayed that she should enter the city of Rome with grace and favour, 14 they carried the goddess to the temple of victory on the Palatine. This was on the 12 April, which was thereafter a holy day.

The uniqueness of these two episodes within the *Ab Urbe Condita* is significant. Clearly, Livy is interested in stressing women’s presence in rituals decreed in exceptional circumstances. It is not chance that both the procession for Juno Regina and the reception of the Idaean Mother took place at crucial points of the Second Punic War – the former was aimed to avert the wrath of the goddess in the imminence of Hasdrubal’s arrival in Italy, while the latter was a propitiatory move in view of the attack on Africa soon to be launched by Publius Cornelius Scipio (the future Africanus).

In this respect, the narrative function of the two episodes can be compared to the one played by public interventions of women in response to events of communal interest. At the same time, both passages present a very different portrait of women in public than the one offered by the episodes examined in Section 2: women’s movement through the city-space is orderly and dignified and follows a linear path; moreover, women are accompanied by male magistrates or priests. The crucial feature of such ceremonies is that they are strictly supervised by the public authority: they represent acts of boundary-breaching that are felt to be necessary in order to

³⁵ For a discussion of these rites, see Schultz 2006, 33–37.

³⁶ As Livy reports (29,10,4–11,8), an oracle had been discovered in the Sybilline Books predicting that, should a foreign foe invade Italy, he could be vanquished if the Idaean Mother were

to be brought from Pessinus to Rome. Consequently, ambassadors were sent to King Attalus of Pergamum, who allowed them to take away a black stone, believed by the inhabitants of Pessinus to be the Idaean Mother.

respond to a disturbance of the social order, but that are kept under control – both spatially (the path followed by the women is accurately defined) and temporally (they are only temporary trespasses).

A good way to account for both the similarities and the differences among the various passages hitherto analysed is to think of them as representing different degrees within a spectrum ranging from totally spontaneous interventions (e.g. the women rushing to meet the returning soldiers in Book 4) to strictly State-controlled ones (the public ceremonies decreed during the Second Punic War). Intermediate degrees are constituted by passages such as 3,7,7–8, where, upon the insurgence of a plague, the Senate invites the Roman people ‘to go with wives and children to supplicate the gods and to seek their appeasement.’ Although the original impulse here comes from public authority, women’s supplications – whose pathetic description constitutes the core of the scene – do not take place in any formally regulated way (8): *Stratae passim matres crinibus templa verrentes veniam irarum caelestium finemque pesti exposcunt* (‘Everywhere, the matrons prostrated themselves, their hair sweeping the temple floors as they beseeched the deities to abate their anger and the disease’).

Depending on an episode’s position within the spectrum, women’s experiences in public space vary: participants in public ceremonies move through the streets of Rome in an orderly fashion; on the other hand, women leaving their homes on their own impulse are

governed by violent emotions, rush here and there, and, in some cases, reflect their inner turmoil in their untidy outward appearance.

4. Rioters and warriors: the debate about the Oppian Law

The transgression of gendered boundaries is central to an episode which can be read as a sort of meta-historical discussion of issues implicit in the whole *Ab Urbe Condita*: namely, the account of the debate over the repeal of the Oppian Law in Livy 34,1,1–8,3. The matter of the dispute was a law regulating women’s display of luxury items, which had been passed during the Second Punic War, in 215 BCE.³⁷ Twenty years later, in 195 BCE, two tribunes, Marcus Fundanius and Lucius Valerius, presented a motion to abrogate it, which met with the opposition of some senators and, most notably, the consul Marcus Porcius Cato. Women from Rome and neighbouring towns staged public demonstrations in the streets of Rome and around the entrances to the Forum, pleading for the repeal of the law. In the end, the law was abrogated. Livy turns the episode into a dramatic highlight of Book 34 by inserting a pair of opposing speeches delivered by Cato and Valerius respectively.³⁸

As scholars have shown, the significance of this narrative lies in the fact that it presents two competing interpretations of the relationship between the public and the domestic sphere and of the role of women in Roman

³⁷ Livy is famously silent about the passing of the law during his account of events of 215 BCE and even admits that the debate of 195 BCE was, per se, a trivial matter (Liv. 39,1,1 *res parva dictu*; cf. Milnor 2005, 158–159). The prominence of the incident in his narrative of Book 34 is probably due to the opportunities it offered both for characterising such an important politician and

historian as Cato (cf. Briscoe 1981, 39–42) and for highlighting the theme of moral decline that would become more and more prominent in later books (cf. Luce 1977, 251–253).

³⁸ It is clear that both speeches are Livy’s own creations and that no speech of Cato about the repeal of the Oppian Law was known in Livy’s time: cf. Briscoe 1981, 39–42.

society.³⁹ While Cato thinks of women as co-extensive with the domestic sphere, Valerius argues that they play a role as an integral component of Roman civic life; and while Cato ‘argues that women’s presence in the streets illustrates exactly the kind of disorderly female conduct which the Lex Oppia was meant to restrict’,⁴⁰ Valerius sets their public intervention within a set of past episodes in which women played a positive role in the resolution of political crisis.⁴¹

Since the episode has already received important scholarly treatments,⁴² I will not examine it in detail; rather, I will focus on the way in which the themes of boundaries, movement and experience of public space are exploited.

The theme of boundaries comes to the fore, at very outset of Livy’s account, in the narrative which introduces the pair of speeches (Liv. 34,1,4–7):

4 [...] *Capitolium turba hominum faventium adversantiumque legi complebatur*; 5 *matronae nulla nec auctoritate nec verecundia nec imperio virorum contineri limine poterant, omnes vias urbis aditusque in forum obsidebant, viros descendentes ad forum orantes ut florente re publica, crescente in dies privata omnium fortuna, matronis quoque pristinum ornatum reddi paterentur*. 6 *Augebatur haec frequentia mulierum in dies; nam etiam ex oppidis conciliabulisque conveniebant*. 7 *Iam et consules praetoresque et alios magistratus adire et rogare audebant*.

4 [...] The Capitol was thus filled with hordes of supporters and opponents of the law. 5 As for the married women, there was no authority, no feeling of modesty, no order from their husbands that could keep them at home. They blocked all the roads in the city and the approaches to the Forum, and made earnest entreaties to their husbands when they went down to the Forum. The Republic was prospering and everybody’s private fortune was increasing day by day, they said, so married women, too, should be granted the restoration of the finery they once enjoyed. 6 This large gathering of women kept growing every day, for they were even starting to come in from the country towns and administrative centres, 7 and they were already presuming to accost consuls, praetors, and other magistrates with their appeals.

Here, the reuse of the expression *contineri limine* (5), this time in the negative form, once more underlines the exceptionality of women’s presence outside their homes. Moreover, as remarked by Kristina Milnor,⁴³ the verb *obsidebant*, which designates women’s occupation of streets and accesses to the Forum, compares them to a besieging army.

Cato, who speaks first (34,2–4), constructs a stark dichotomy between the private space of the *domus* and the public one of the Forum,⁴⁴ and he repeatedly portrays women’s movement in public space as undisciplined and chaotic. He speaks, first, of *consternatio* (‘riotous behaviour’, 34,2,6), then uses the

³⁹ See in particular Milnor 2005, 154–179; Riggsby 2009, 161–164; Russell 2016b, 169–170.

⁴⁰ Milnor 2005, 160.

⁴¹ Liv. 34,5,5–13.

⁴² Apart from the studies quoted above, n. 39, see also Chaplin 2000, 97–101.

⁴³ Milnor 2005, 163.

⁴⁴ Cf. Milnor 2005, 165; Riggsby 2009, 161–164.

expression *in publicum procurrere* ('to run into public view' or 'into public places') twice, at 34,2,9 and 3,6 (in the latter case, together with the adjective *consternatae*, 'in an uproar').

Scholars have repeatedly stressed the significance of the political jargon used by Cato: not only is *consternatio* a term elsewhere used for civil upheavals, but the consul also goes as far as to define the matrons' public demonstrations as a secession (34,2,7)⁴⁵ and to imagine them driving around the city in chariots like triumphant generals (34,3,10). As the latter image suggests, women's political interference borders on military aggression; as Milnor (2005, 165–166) has pointed out, use of military metaphors is consistent throughout Cato's speech (cf. e.g. *agmen mulierum*, 'an army of women', 34,2,8;⁴⁶ *obsidendi vias*, 'to besiege the streets', 34,2,9 – which recalls the image of the introducing narrative). At the same time, he explicitly addresses the erotic potential of women's presence in public space when he stresses the fact that their freedom of movement implies physical proximity with males (the senators going to the Forum), while it would be appropriate for each wife to address entreaties to her own husband at home (34,2,8–10).

Valerius' speech, which immediately follows Cato's, presents a very different picture. Apart from openly rejecting Cato's definition of the matrons' intervention as *coetus*, *sedition* and *secessio* (34,7,14), the tribune also associates the local terms *in publico* and *in publicum* with verbs suggesting a much more orderly and decorous movement: see e.g. *in publicum processerunt* and *in*

publicum apparuerunt at 34,5,7 as well as *in publico vos rogassent* at 34,5,5.

Andrew Riggsby has compared the different views on Roman space contained in the speeches with the framing narrative of 34,1,4–7.⁴⁷ In particular, he has argued that, while Cato's words express the idea of a binary opposition between 'private' and 'public' space, the primary narrative implies a tripartite spatial division: besides the Forum—the centre of political action—and the domestic spaces of individual households, there exists 'a space which is neither individually owned nor collectively used',⁴⁸ viz. the urban but not politicized space of streets (*viae*) and approaches (*aditus*) to the Forum. In fact, it is this third space that the women occupy; they do not physically enter the Forum. In Riggsby's reading, then, two different spatial models are at work in the text, and Cato's 'rhetoric of space' is 'ultimately undercut by the spatial facts and descriptions of the rest of the text'.⁴⁹

While it is true that Cato seems to simplify the spatial division implicit in the introductory narrative for his own rhetorical aims, it should be noted that Cato's speech agrees with the primary narrator's spatial model of the city in significant respects. This is most evident if we consider how that spatial model is structured, not only in this particular episode, but also in the *Ab Urbe Condita* as a whole. First of all, as I have shown, the dichotomy between 'public' and 'private' space is a recurring motif in portrayals of women outside their homes throughout the work. Secondly, at 34,2,10 Cato expresses the wish that 'modesty kept married women

⁴⁵ On the notion of *secessio* as applied to women, see Cavaggioni 2004, 226–227; Milnor 2007, 169–170. The point seems to be that – according to Cato – women are endangering the unity of the body-politic, just like Plebeians did in the 5th century BCE.

⁴⁶ *Agmen*, of course, also means a 'throng' of people (cf. TLL 1,1341,72–1342,65); Cato is probably playing on the ambiguity of the term here.

⁴⁷ Riggsby 2009, 161–164.

⁴⁸ Riggsby 2009, 163.

⁴⁹ Riggsby 2009, 164.

within their proper limits' (*si sui iuris finibus matronas contineret pudor*). By invoking a metaphorical boundary, the consul echoes expressions that we have found both in the introducing narrative and at 22,55,3. Finally, Cato reinforces the portrayal of women's movement in public space as chaotic and emotional, which is a recurrent theme throughout the *Ab Urbe Condita*.

It is significant that precisely these three elements are once more emphasized in the narrative coda which follows the pair of speeches.⁵⁰ On the day following the debate, an even greater crowd of women poured down into the streets (*sese in publicum effudit*, 34,8,1) and besieged the houses – literally, 'the doors' (*ianuas obsiderunt*: cf. 34,1,5) – of the two tribunes who had vetoed the law, until the latter withdrew their veto. Paradoxically, it is women who, in the end, threaten to confine men behind the boundary of their own thresholds.

It is probably impossible to decide which of the two speakers is 'right', i.e. who sketches the most convincing spatial pattern. As recent scholarship tends to emphasize,⁵¹ both orators seem to be both 'right' and 'wrong' in different ways, and the pairing of their contrasting views serves most of all to problematize crucial issues in Augustan culture. What matters, for the purposes of my investigation, is that their debate turns the reader's attention to some features of narrated space which recur throughout the *Ab Urbe Condita* – and, in so doing, it invites the reader to

consider those features as significant. At the same time, it suggests that the topos of the distressed woman running here and there through public space could take on more aggressive connotations – those of a rioter and warrior rather than a suppliant.

5. Frenzied women and subversive space: The Bacchanalian Scandal

In my previous examination of episodes in which women appear in Roman public space, I stress the recurrence of certain elements such as emotionality, loose hair, a lack of decorum, and a disorderly way of moving through the city. I also show that such a representation of women is usually accompanied by an explicit or implicit functionalization of the notion of the boundary. In the remaining part of my paper, I examine a narrative that pushes those very motifs to their limits, namely the account of the Bacchanalian Scandal of 186 BCE (Livy 39,8–19).⁵²

This famous narrative, whose sheer length and dramatic elaboration make it a high point of Book 39, reports the discovery and repression of a Bacchic cult that had spread in Rome and Italy. Livy starts by describing the origins of the cult, which was first brought to Etruria by 'a Greek of no importance' and had spread secretly 'amongst men and women' (*per viros mulieresque*, 39,8,5). The historian particularly insists that the promiscuity of the sexes characterized the Bacchic rites and stresses that, through the mixing of men and women, young and old, a

⁵⁰ Chaplin 2000, 99–199 and Milnor 2005, 161–162 stress the surprising fact that, although the two speeches constitute the core of the episode, their actual effect in determining the outcome of the debate appears minimal: the law is not repealed because Valerius has convinced the audience, but because women force the other tribunes to yield. This way of narrating a debate is frequent in Livy and usually signals that the speeches are thought more for the external

audience (i.e. as a means for problematizing historical issues) than for the internal one: cf. Chaplin 2000, 73–105.

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Milnor 2005, 162.

⁵² For a survey of bibliography concerning this famous narrative and a general treatment of some of the main questions raised by it, see Briscoe 2009, 230–250.

metaphorical boundary (*discrimen [...] pudoris*)⁵³ had been breached (39,8,6). Every kind of sexual depravity followed, and sexual abuse became an integral part of the rituals (39,8,8):

*Occulebat vim quod prae ululatus
tympanorumque et cymbalorum
strepitu nulla vox quiritantium inter
stupra ac caedes exaudiri poterat.*

The violence was kept secret, however, because, amid the fornication and bloodshed, no scream of protest could be heard above the shouting and the beating of drums and cymbals.

After that, the Bacchic cult spread, like an illness (*velut contagione morbi*, 39,9,1), from Etruria to Rome, but remained hidden until news of it came to one of the consuls of 186 BCE, Spurius Postumius Albinus. The story of the uncovering of the rites is shaped by Livy into a remarkable dramatic narrative, reminiscent – as commentators usually observe⁵⁴ – of comic motifs.

A young man named Publius Aebutius was convinced by his wicked mother and stepfather to become initiated into the Bacchic cult. Aebutius revealed this to his lover, a freed-woman courtesan named Hispala Faecenia, who passionately exhorted him to oppose his mother's wishes. She revealed him that, when still a slave, she had accompanied her mistress to the Bacchanalian rites and had seen what happened there (39,10,7):

*Ut quisque introductus sit, velut
victimam tradi sacerdotibus. Eos
deducere in locum qui circumsonet
ululatus cantuque symphoniae et
cymbalorum et tympanorum pulsu, ne
vox quiritantis, cum per vim stuprum
inferatur, exaudiri possit.*

As each newcomer was brought in, he was passed on to the priests like a sacrificial victim. The priests took him to a place resounding with shrieks, and where instruments were playing and cymbals and drum beating, all intended to render inaudible the voice of anyone protesting when he was being sexually assaulted.

The words used by Hispala are very similar to Livy's own description of the cults in Etruria at 39,8,6–8: but here mention is explicitly made of a *locus* where the rites take place, although the location and features of such a place are left unspecified. No visual description of the setting of the Bacchic rites is provided: the only elements mentioned by the girl are auditory, and they are partly rendered though foreign words that make the place alien and unfamiliar. In other words, this place sounds very much like the opposite of the civilized space of the city – a black spot where every sort of crime can be perpetrated.⁵⁵

Aebutius reported the information to the consul Spurius Postumius Albinus, who questioned Hispala about the Bacchic rites, which, as we now learn, had been taking

⁵³ As Briscoe 2009, 252 (ad loc.) explains, this expression means the 'distinction between what was shameful and what was not'. The core meaning of *discrimen*, *-inis* is 'a separating line, space, structure etc.' (cf. OLD, 551).

⁵⁴ Cf. Flower 2000; Scafuro 2009; Walsh 1996; Wiseman 1998. I agree with Flower's view that such elements are not to be traced back to an

existing play about the Bacchanalian Scandal, but derive from the reshaping of historical events through the application of comic patterns.
⁵⁵ As Scafuro 2009, 339–340 notes, at 39,8,7 Livy also speaks metaphorically of an *officina* ('workshop') from which all the crimes come; this image is used again by Hispala at 39,10,6.

place in the ‘grove of Semele’, or ‘Stimula’ (39,12,4).⁵⁶ Here, for the first time, we receive a precise topographical indication; however, Hispala’s subsequent confession once again stresses the indeterminate nature of the *lucus*. In the beginning, the girl explains, the Bacchanalia were reserved for women. A Campanian priestess named Paculla Annia was the first to admit men to the rites, which she also started celebrating at night rather than in daylight; promiscuity and the freedom of action allowed by night are presented as the main reasons for the degeneration of the cult. At 39,13,12–13, Hispala offers one more description of the ritual:

12 Viros, velut mente capta, cum iactatione fanatica corporis vaticinari; matronae Baccharum habitu crinibus passis cum ardentibus facibus decurrere ad Tiberim, demissasque in aquam faces, quia vivus sulphur cum calce insit, integra flamma efferre. 13 Raptos ab dis homines dici quod machinae inligatos ex conspectus in abditos specus abripiant; eos esse qui coniurare aut sociari facinoribus aut stuprum pati noluerunt.

12 Men who appeared deranged would utter prophecies with a furious shaking of their bodies. Married women wearing the dress of Bacchants, and with streaming hair, would run to the Tiber carrying blazing torches; they would

plunge these in the water and draw them out again, the flames still burning because of the mixture of live sulphur and calcium on them. 13 They would tie people to a crane and whisk them out of sight into hidden caverns; these individuals were said to have been taken by the gods, and were those who refused to join the conspiracy, participate in crimes, or submit to sexual abuse.

Although we here receive one further topographical indication (*ad Tiberim*, 12), what immediately follows brings us back into the realm of the indefinite and the unsettling. We now learn of further hidden caverns (*abditos specus*), where every kind of horror is perpetrated. Once again, we find matrons running around (*decurrere*) with loose hair (*crinibus passis*).⁵⁷ Of course, loose hair and frenzied motions were traditional attributes of Bacchants in Greek and Roman culture.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note, however, that the expressions used here recall other descriptions of women disseminated throughout the *Ab Urbe Condita*. In other words, Livy’s narrative produces a mental association among different groups of women and merges their various features into one overarching image of a frenzied woman outside her home, graphically embodying the idea of political crisis.

The political implications of the Bacchanalia are articulated in terms that are both spatial

⁵⁶ The transmitted reading *Similae* is probably corrupted: cf. Briscoe 2009, 262–263.

⁵⁷ The reading *sparsis*, as well as the clearly corrupted *parsis*, are attested as well, alongside *passis*. The latter seems more likely to be the correct reading and *sparsis* its corruption (through the intermediate stage *parsis*): cf. Briscoe 2009, 166 (ad loc.). If this were true, the occurrence of the phrase *crinibus passis* for the fourth and last time in the extant books of Livy (cf. above, n. 29) would be even more significant, since that rare and mostly poetic

expression would create an association among various representations of women. However, the possibility that *sparsis* is the original reading cannot be ruled out.

⁵⁸ For loose hair, cf. e.g. Eur. *Bacch.* 695. 830; Verg. *Aen.* 7,394. 403 (but the whole passage 7,373–405, in which Amata leaves her home and turns into a Bacchant, is significant as a point of comparison for Livy’s representations of frenzied women); Ov. *Fast.* 458; *Rem. am.* 594; Tac. *Ann.* 11,31,2.

and gendered in the speech addressed by Postumius to the Roman people at 39,15–16. The consul starts by drawing an opposition between the ancestral gods of Rome and the evil foreign cult, i.e. between the ‘within’ and the ‘without’ of the city of Rome (39,15,1–3). Shortly afterwards, however, he proves the danger posed by the Bacchic rites by stressing their presence everywhere *in* the city (39,15,6):

Bacchanalia ita iam pridem Italia et nunc per urbem etiam multis locis esse, non fama solum accepisse vos sed crepitibus quoque ululatibusque nocturnis, qui personant tota urbe, certum habeo, ceterum quae ea res sit ignorare.

I am sure that you know that the Bacchic rites have long been practiced throughout Italy and are now been practiced at many locations in the city, and that you have heard this not simply from rumour but also from the noise and shrieking at night that resounds throughout the city.

The space where the Bacchanalia are celebrated is different from the city-space as Livy’s reader has learnt to imagine it. It is diffuse yet indefinite (*per urbem... multis locis*) and – just as Hispala describes – it has no visual, only auditory features. And yet, it is inside the city, spreading like an illness.⁵⁹ Rather than constituting a localized space within Rome, the space of the Bacchic cult represents a sort of alternative Roman space, striving to superimpose itself onto the real city.

The main feature of this alternative Rome is that all the major boundaries that articulate the ‘normal’ city-space – the ones between the ‘within’ and the ‘without’, between men and women, between good and evil – are subverted. Postumius stresses that the participants in this ‘conspiracy’ are primarily women, who are the real sources of the evil, and secondly ‘men in all similar to women’ (39,15,9). It is precisely because of the elimination of the boundaries of gender, of morals, and of the city that this space is inherently indefinite; its character as a subversive space of darkness and wilderness receives an even stronger emphasis through comparison with the urban, everyday setting on which the narrative of the uncovering is staged.⁶⁰

As in the episodes concerning public appearances of women, the subversion of social order is symbolized, in the narrative of the Bacchanalian Scandal, by the crossing of gendered boundaries, and embodied in the image of the frenzied woman. Of course, a major difference exists between this narrative and all the other episodes considered: here, women act not in a public space but rather in a space that is neither public nor private, neither ‘masculine’ nor ‘feminine’. At the same time, that very space appears to be complementary to Livy’s representation of women’s public appearances. While these represented partial and temporary transgressions, the Bacchanalian conspiracy constitutes an extreme pole by which every boundary within the city is trespassed and abolished and the

⁵⁹ Cf. 39,16,3 *crescit et serpit cotidie malum*. On the medical imagery used throughout Livy’s narrative of the Bacchanalian scandal, cf. Nousek 2010, 163; Scafuro 2009, 339–343.

⁶⁰ Livy specifies that Faecenia was Aebutius’ neighbour (39,9,6) and that both lived on the

Aventine (39,11,4. 39,12,1); the girl is summoned to the house of the consul (39,12,1–2) and is later kept in the house of the consul’s mother-in-law (39,14,2–3).

Roman political order is subverted from its very foundations.⁶¹

6. Conclusions

Conventional and recurrent scenes – like the ones portraying women outside their homes – play a structural role in the *Ab Urbe Condita*: running like a thread throughout the work, they shape and consolidate the spatial pattern of the narrated city and convey some features of that spatial pattern in the most graphic terms.

Short narratives relating women's participation in events of communal interest (such as those analysed in Section 2) create a basic dichotomy between 'private' and 'public' space. By directing readers' attention to the boundary separating these two spaces, they affirm the idea that women's presence outside their homes is not only exceptional but also transgressive. By representing women's movement through space as disorderly, they suggest that such a movement is potentially threatening. Moreover, by describing women's experience of public space as marked by heightened emotionality, they shape a conventional image of the frenzied woman in public space, which acts as an effective embodiment of the danger involved in political unrest.

Such an image undergoes a number of variations in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. Women outside their homes appear as suppliants, mourners, warriors, or Bacchantes. In truth, however, all of these incarnations of the topos recall one another. Suppliant women, for example, have certain erotic connotations, especially when they are represented as potential victims of foreign invaders; even clearer erotic

connotations apply to the Bacchantes, whose violent behaviour connects them, at the same time, to the warriors or rioters of Cato's speech.

A different representation of women in public emerges in the few descriptions of religious ceremonies performed by women. Here, the notion of the boundary remains implicit and women's movement is conceived as linear and dignified. Women's presence in public, however, works as a mark of crisis even in such cases, since the ceremonies Livy narrates are connected with the averting of danger at critical moments. As I have argued, the various instances of women's appearances in public should be seen as existing within a range from spontaneous interventions to rigidly supervised ones. In other words, there is a notion that women acting as a body and their consequent transgression of the private/public boundary may be necessary for the resolution of a crisis in particular circumstances; the problem is how to keep that very transgression under control. Such a tension between the awareness of women's essential role in the Roman State and the dangers they pose to the inner boundaries of Roman society is articulated in the debate about the Oppian Law in Book 34: here, the opposing speeches by Cato and Valerius invite the reader to negotiate his (or her) response to the problem.

Finally, I argue that the narrative of the Bacchanalian Scandal in Book 39 and the spatial patterns that underlie it are to be read against this overarching semantics of space. The space of the Bacchic rites results from the subversion of all the gendered boundaries that articulate the space of the city; precisely for this reason, it can function as an

⁶¹ For Livy's representation of the Bacchic rituals as antithetical to the socio-political order of the *res publica*, see also Cavaggioni 2004, 92–94.

alternative to the Roman city-space, a black spot spreading in the very heart of the city and threatening to replace it.

What the *Ab Urbe Condita* shows with particular clarity is the inherent fundamental contradiction at work in any patriarchal system. On the one hand, a patriarchal society needs women to be subordinated to men – more to the point, it needs them to function as commodities belonging to individual men or being exchanged between them – hence, the quasi-identification of women with the private spaces belonging to individual male citizens. On the other hand, a patriarchal system also needs the participation of women (as mothers and wives) to continue its existence.⁶² The awareness that women are essential can lead them to be seen as a specific component of the body-politic, one with its own duties and religious obligations; consequently, women (especially married ones) might be required to act as a collective on particular occasions. However, the lateral relationships among women that are thus created and legitimized threaten the patriarchal fabric of the society. When commenting on the debate about the Oppian Law, scholars highlight the fundamental ambiguity between women as private property (as Cato sees them) and women as an integral component of the community (a view supported by Valerius).⁶³ What I argue here is that such an ambiguity is much deeper and much more widespread in Livy's work. It is constitutive of the very way the space of the city – and the community it represents – is narratively patterned. More to the point, it lies at the very core of the community itself and, for this reason, can stand for a set of other ambiguities which constitute and at the same time threaten the existence of Rome (e.g. the

problematic relationship between the city and the external world, or between different social sectors of the citizen-body).

The construction of the Bacchanalian Scandal as a matter of promiscuity and sexual depravity falls in this context. What the AUC does here is to offer a view of what would happen if the order of the city were to be subverted and dissolved. Showing the alternate space of chaos lurking at the very heart of the city, the text reaffirms the need for the reestablishment of order – for the healing of the ailing body of the state.

The text does not attempt to solve the ambiguity of women's role once and for all. Instead, it constantly seeks a balance between women's private role and their role as a component of the community. The balance seems to lie in the appropriation of control, on the part of the State itself (i.e. of the public authority), on women's public acts. Women should, on some occasions, act as a group; when they do, however, they should be supervised. There also seems to be an awareness that the degree to which boundary-breaching is allowed depends on historical circumstances; the relationship between conquest and women's consumption, for example, is one major issue at stake in the debate on the Oppian Law.

Gendered spaces and gendered boundaries, then, work as a productive means for thinking about social and political stability in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. Boundaries have much to do with the establishment of control over an ultimately uncontrollable world, and the establishment of power relations between the genders is one of the primary forms of control for many societies. At the same time, boundaries are never stable: what they are

⁶² See Joplin 1991, 57–58 (on the episode of the Sabine women) and *passim*.

⁶³ Again, see especially Milnor 2005, 154–179.

supposed to keep in place constantly threatens to erupt. Frenzied women, with their chaotic movement and unrestrained

emotionality, are a highly effective embodiment of the various forces that might endanger the Roman political order.

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