nal translation. But Combellack’s translation is out of print and Way’s is dated. This one will hold the field by default.

ROBERT SCHMIEL
DEPARTMENT OF GREEK AND ROMAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
CALGARY, AB T2N 1N4
rschmiel@ucalgary.ca


The study of sexuality in Greco-Roman antiquity has made enormous strides since the publication of Kenneth Dover’s Greek Homosexuality (Cambridge, MA 1978). Even more, as Professor Skinner herself notes at the beginning of her “Preface,” undergraduate courses on gender and sexuality in Greece and Rome have become a popular staple of classics programmes at colleges and universities throughout the English-speaking world. For this reason, the author presents her book as a “textbook [that] is designed to help undergraduates engage with sexuality in all its otherness.” In addition, “[it] is also designed for the general reader, who may have heard rumors about exciting questions being broached in a proverbially conservative discipline” (xii). Written in a clear, engaging style that is enlivened with many touches of wit and humour, and, in addition, extremely well organized—a great challenge given the complexity of its subject—the book should succeed well in meeting this dual target. It is, in fact, the first comprehensive English-language textbook on the subject (as distinguished from the “women in Greco-Roman antiquity” themed sourcebooks and textbooks that have been appearing since the 1970s). For this reason, I judged it merited a detailed thematic review.

As the book’s bibliography shows, Professor Skinner herself has written extensively on the issues of gender and sexuality raised by modern readings of Greek and Roman literature, notably on Greek lyric as well as Catullus; with Judith Hallett, she was also co-editor of Roman Sexualities (Princeton 1997). Thus, besides expertly compiling and synthesizing conclusions arrived at in recent scholarship (the bibliography, as she explains in her Preface, being heavily weighted toward work published in the past ten to fifteen years), as a “practicing investigator” (xiii) she also does not hesitate to pass judgment on the plausibility of a certain position.
On a personal but most relevant note, the author reflects on how the timeline of her undergraduate and graduate studies in classics and her subsequent career as a professor took her through the gender and sexual conservatism still prevalent in the late 50s and early 60s into "the cultural watersheds of the sexual revolution, the Vietnam War, and the second wave of feminism" (xiii). As she recalls, "[a]gnosticism and inquisitiveness subsequently attracted me, as a freshly degree college professor, to the revolutionary domain of women and gender studies and finally into the history of sexuality" (xiii). These qualities are indeed manifest in her lack of dogmatism and her openness to different views and theories in contested areas of scholarship.

Apart from the "Introduction" and the "Afterword," there are ten chapters, six covering the Greek world from the Homeric Age to the Hellenistic Period, and four dealing with Rome. The author has not ventured into late antiquity, but in her "Afterword" considers whether Christianity's "code of sexual austerity" points to a "decisive break from Greek and Roman sexual principles or, on the other hand, continues and extends them" (284). She cites Michel Foucault's pronouncement in a late essay that there was more continuity than rupture between the two, but rightfully critiques it by underlining such late-antique developments as the Christian exaltation of virginity and celibacy, the establishment of monasticism, and the large-scale criminalization of homosexual acts.

In her "Introduction" the author does well to highlight the current topicality of Greco-Roman sexuality through her discussion of the 1994 Evans v. Romer case in the state of Colorado. In their testimony and submissions to the court, both sides used philosophical texts from antiquity, especially passages in Plato's Laws, to support their case, with the eminent classicist and philosopher Martha Nussbaum presenting a convincing argument that a correct translation and interpretation of the passages in question did not support the blanket condemnation of homosexuality that conservatives had read into them. Canadian readers will remember that, in the recent debate on the recognition of same-sex marriage by the federal government, some conservative opponents pulled out again the familiar canard of homosexuality's being one of the major causes of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

In the remainder of the "Introduction," the author does a good job clarifying what is meant by "sexuality," paying special attention to the contributions made in this regard by the writings of American "second wave" feminists and Foucault. Her discussion of the respective merits of the positions of "Essentialism" and "Constructionism" on whether human sexuality is basically biologically determined or socially constructed is nuanced and helpful, opting, with good reason, for a moder-
ate constructionist position. This choice is immediately validated by her use of classical Greek paederasty and Roman male sexuality as test cases. With regard to the former, she does well to emphasize already at this point that the Greek valorization of the adult male’s sexual attraction to an adolescent boy was tempered by an awareness of the correct behavioural protocols for both the erastés and his erōmenos, with the inevitable result that the erōmenos must have been placed in a predicament of some anxiety as to his proper response—which must be not too overtly self-seeking, not too sexual—to the advances of his lover. “Foul Mouths,” the section on Roman male sexual humour, anticipates the social and psychological tensions created by the construction of sexuality in the world of ancient Rome; these will be explored in full in the four final chapters.

Chapter 1, “The Homeric Age: Epic Sexuality,” focuses on the Iliad and the Odyssey as the canonical literary texts for this period, principally the earlier Archaic Age of the eighth century B.C. It excludes art-historical and archaeological evidence and thus makes only passing reference to Bronze Age Greece. Major subjects such as the close link between religion and conceptions of sexuality in agricultural societies, the primal nature and cosmic reach of Eros and Aphrodite, misogynistic constructions of women’s sexuality, sexuality as experienced and represented by Homeric gods and goddesses and heroes and heroines, and the disputed question of the presence of paederasty in the Iliad are all ably discussed. Skinner regards it as plausible that Aphrodite was a pre-Homeric import from the Near East into the Greek pantheon, but sees Homeric epic as making “a conscious effort to dissociate Aphrodite from the transcendent nature of the Eastern goddess of war and fertility, to foreground the negative implications of her powers, and to limit her sphere of activity to the bedroom” (25). The question remains, of course, whether this limitation is a Homeric construct, or reflects a widely accepted understanding of her powers. The cult of Aphrodite Pandemos, as attested in later sources, suggests that the former is more likely to be true. In the final section, “Achilles in the Closet?,” Skinner reaches the conclusion that “Homer recognizes the reality of strong homoerotic affect between two adult males” (44) but, again rightly, sees no evidence of institutionalized paederasty in the Iliad.

Chapter 2, “The Archaic Age: Symposium and Initiation,” starts off with “Ancient Greece was a song culture” (45), so it is not surprising that it focuses on the lyric, elegiac, and iambic poetry of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. The author also begins to draw on the iconographic evidence mainly as furnished by vase-painting. The chapter places the male love poetry, both hetero- and homo-erotic, in the social context of the sympotic gathering, which is viewed as an outlet for the “cultured
lifestyle" (47) of the men of the aristocratic and oligarchic upper classes. The sections "Fields of Erotic Dreams," "Singing as a Man," and "... And Singing as a Women" offer some fine analyses of the imagery and other stylistic conventions employed in both the male and female love poetry (Archilochus, Ibycus, Anacreon, Theognis, and Sappho). In "Boys Into Men," Skinner sketches the rise of institutionalized paederasty, drawing both on classical (Xenophon) and post-classical (Plutarch) literary sources. She appears to subscribe to the theory of Greek paederasty's initiatory-cultic origins in the prehistoric past—which was re- 

vived in the 1980s by Bremmer, Patzer, and Sergent—but fails to link 

male homocroticism to the rise of pan-Hellenic athletics and athletic nudity; this close connection—perhaps even causal in nature—has been 

convincingly demonstrated by the recent scholarship of Thomas Scan- 

lon. The section "Girls into Women" explores the female homoeroticism 

evident in the parthenela—especially the famous partheneon of 

Alcmn—which have a cultic thiasos as their venue. However, Skinner 

agrees with those who maintain that Sappho's homoerotic poetry does 

not really fit this model. There is, in her view, no evidence to suggest 

that homoerotic relations between women, before and even after mar- 

riage, were seriously unacceptable to men during this period. 

The third chapter, "Late Archaic Athens: More than Meets the Eye," 

is based on the visual evidence furnished by Athenian vase painting, 

which should be treated as a "foundation for wide-ranging discussions 

of attitudes and concepts shared by the general public to which it ap- 

pealed" (79). This chapter, in my judgment, indeed provides the best 

introduction available to the iconography of Athenian sexuality during 

the late archaic and early classical periods. The author divides the 

images into three general subject categories, which are discussed in con- 

siderable detail and, as much as possible, in chronological sequence: (1) 

"images of pursuit featuring gods, goddesses, or heroes running after 

youths or women who look back in alarm" (81); (2) satyrs; and (3) 

"homoerotic and heteroerotic encounters between human beings, cov- 

ering all stages of the relationship from courtship to intercourse, and 

presented in either idealized or vividly frank terms" (84). All this is 

aptly contextualized by a concise treatment of Greek theories of erotic 

arousal, which the Greeks explained primarily in visual terms. The rep- 

resentation of paederastic scenes, pornai, and hetairai as well as of 

wives and domestic servants is subjected to exemplary analyses draw- 

ing upon the best recent scholarship. After 450 B.C., "there are statisti- 

cally far more scenes of women in domestic surroundings" (109). 

Equally striking, even before this date, is "the decline in demand for 

paederastic vases" (109). Can these developments be adequately ex- 

plained by Athens' "democratic egalitarianism" (110), with its "idealiza-
tion of domestic life as a focus of social stability (110), as some scholars have suggested? Skinner seems to be inclined towards such an explanation, but it may not be the final word.

Chapter 4, "Classical Athens: the Politics of Sex," turns again to literary sources. Skinner elaborates on the apparent decline in the valorization of paederasty in democratic Classical Athens, as already noted in the preceding chapter: the discussions of male homoeroticism in the forensic speeches suggest a continuing "lack of stigma attached to interest in boys per se" (124); however, some comedies of Aristophanes, notably Knights, clearly evince widespread lower-class cynicism about the lofty ethical and pedagogical virtues attached by upper-class society to paederasty. This is followed by a lively, well-focused discussion of the "vampirology" (125) of the kínados, the ultimate transgressor of masculine values. The norms imposed on heterosexual marriage and the expectations from wisely virtue receive lengthy treatment; here good use is made of forensic literature, tragedy, and Xenophon's On Household Management, the last being surprisingly exceptional and progressive with its recognition of the good, well-instructed wife as the husband's "alter ego," as it were (145). As Skinner underlines in her "Conclusion," she has given strong emphasis to "the integration of sexuality and class issues, the role of the democratic polis in articulating sexual norms, and the degree to which it took cognizance of what we regard as strictly personal matters" (147). She is equally emphatic, however, that for all its cohesiveness, the masculinist, patriarchal socio-sexual system of the Athenians "also worked at cross-purposes" (147), engendering the representations of conflict, loss, and destruction with which classical literature is rife. She concludes: "Whether it [classical Athenian sexuality] affords a good model, in terms of either parallels or contrasts, for understanding present-day Western sexual ideology should be one of the key discussion topics in a course in ancient sexuality" (147).

Chapter 5, "The Hellenistic Period I: Turning Inwards," actually covers the late classical period (most of the fourth century B.C.) more than the following Hellenistic period, and after providing the political setting and social setting for the late Classical and early Hellenistic Greek world concentrates on medical and philosophical literature, the Hippocratic Corpus in the former, Pythagoreanism, Plato, Aristotle. Epicureanism, Cynicism and early Stoicism in the latter. In the Hippocratic Corpus, Skinner focuses on the gynaecological treatises, whose principal tenets regarding biological and psychological womanhood were perpetuated by Aristotle, while her discussion of philosophical attitudes to sexuality foregrounds the virtues of enkratieia and living according to physis. As a consequence of a stricter conception of physis, all non-
procreative sex, including homoeroticism, became more problematic to some thinkers and was even subjected to sharp condemnation, as in Plato's Laws. The discussion of the hetaira, begun in the previous chapter, is expanded here, with emphasis on her increasing celebrity status as already foreshadowed by Aspasia in the classical era. The author rightly concludes that in the Hellenistic Age "dealings between the sexes grew more complicated," with "subtle transformations in gender roles both in and out of marriage" (179). Thus "In rather surprisingly, visual art and literature exhibit a corresponding attraction to the feminine" (179). These conclusions are more fully explored in the following chapter, "The Hellenistic Period II: The Feminine Mystique," which is generous in the discussion of the richly diverse poetic literature of this period. More might have been said, however, about the homoerotic Idylls of Theocritus (Idyll 12 is, in my judgment, one of the finest homoerotic poems in extant ancient Greek literature), although mention is made of pseudo-Lucian's pro-paederastic Amores dating from the Roman period.

Already at the end of chapter 6, the author notes that "By the second century BCE, the Roman senatorial class was profoundly implicated in Greek affairs" (191), including all aspects of Greek culture, but insists rightly that we should not "process the distinctive flavors and textures of Greek and Roman thought into a bland puree." (Foucault had been guilty of this in the third volume of his History of Sexuality: The Care of Self.) At the beginning of Chapter 7, however, "Republican and Augustan Rome I: Noble Romans and Degenerate Greeks," she also takes care to underline the fact that major Greek cultural influences (as in art and religion) on Rome predate the second century B.C. for almost 400 years, even though there remained for centuries a paradoxical Roman ambivalence about the worth of Greek culture in which Roman self-control and uprightness were contrasted with Greek laxity and immorality—also in the realm of sexual behaviour.

Greek culture was heavily mediated to the Romans by the Etruscans, especially in the earlier stages of Rome's growth. This process of transmission included the Etruscans' striking erotic art, intended in its effects to be life-affirming, perhaps even sexually stimulating, according to some scholars, but whose function, in the author's own view, may have been simply apotropaic, as also seems to be the case with much of the later Roman visual erotica.

The cultural dissimilarity between the Greeks, especially of the Classical era, and the Romans needs to be heavily emphasized: there is, above all, the far more complex and non-egalitarian stratification of Roman society as the matrix for the Roman masculinist will to power, which degenerates so readily into sadism (including its sexually col-
oured manifestations). Thus, in its crudest expression, sex with a slave or prostitute (often the same) merited no shame or criminal stigma. The Roman adeptness, also in literary invective and satire, with sexual insult stems from the same sociopolitical mentality. Skinner herself is careful not to brand Roman society too quickly as uniquely macho-aggressive and sadistic in the ancient world, but in the section “Butchery For Fun” she does reflect on the social and psychological factors that might explain the “Romans pleasure in witnessing the infliction of pain” (210) in the bloody spectacles of the arena.

The other major cultural dissimilarity between Greek and Roman culture bearing on sexuality stems from the position of the Roman matrona, which is invested with both a dignity and a precariousness hardly paralleled in ancient Greek society. Thus Roman custom and law, throughout the ages, affirm the matron’s auctoritas while at the same time showing an obsessive concern about her chastity and the grave perils posed to family and state alike by female adultery.

Chapter 8, “Republican and Augustan Rome II: The Soft Embrace of Venus,” explores these themes in the literature of the Republic and the Augustan Age, ranging chronologically from Plautus to Ovid, with an insightful discussion of the cinacodus now in a Roman context. Catullus embraces the traditional Roman simplicitas in matters of sexuality, but is also capable of an un-Roman idealization of erotic love and the beloved person, which continues into the love elegy of the Augustan period, the acme being reached in Ovid, with his unique combination of eroticism and ludus that earned him the ire of Augustus. Something should have been said, I think, about Tibullus’ Marathus elegies, among the best homoerotic poems of classical antiquity in their playfulness and psychological finesse. The poetic identity behind and the unique female perspective of Sulpicia’s love-poetry receive a sharply focused two-page discussion (Skinner does not mention the hypothesis of Nicholas Holzberg and Thomas Hubbard that these poems may, in fact, have been male-authored—a wonderfully provocative hypothesis for classroom discussion). The chapter concludes with the Epicurean antiromanticism of Lucretius and concludes with Vergil’s ambivalent, even negative portrayal of amor in the Aeneid.

The key-themes and ideas of the previous two chapters, as well as corollary concerns such as the possibility of same-sex marriage for men, are vigorously pursued in chapters 9 and 10, “Imperial Rome I: Desire under Pressure” and “Imperial Rome II: On the Margins of the Empire,” covering the Empire until the middle of the third century A.D. Chapter 9 is focused exclusively on Roman literature (Seneca the Elder, Seneca the Younger, Petronius, Martial, Juvenal, and Tacitus and Suetonius on the Roman emperors) in the strict sense of the word, i.e., writ-
ings, usually reflecting the interests of the elite class, centred on Rome, whereas the much longer tenth chapter casts its net much wider, taking in not only literature—both Latin and Greek such as (once more) the *Satyricon*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Plutarch’s *Amatorius*, and the Greek romances—but also epigraphic texts and iconic representations that reflect the mentalities of a broader cross-section of the Empire. Male same-sex desire and love receive ample and excellent discussion. Skinner argues that Plutarch and the Greek romances can be viewed as moving towards “some radical rethinking of established gender roles” (273)—surely, once more, a most suitable topic for classroom discussion. At the conclusion of chapter 10, she does well to impress upon her readers that inclusion of the “culture-specific concerns” (282) of the Jewish and other ethnic groups would have made this chapter too unwieldy; in any case, “an enormous Kinsey II project” (282), so to speak, in an ancient context, on sexual attitudes across the Roman Empire would be simply impossible methodologically.

In her appropriately titled “Afterword: The Use of Antiquity,” concluding what I judge to be a masterly synthesis of existing scholarship and of her own insights into an immensely complex subject, Skinner returns to the present-day concerns she raised in her “Introduction” and in many of the following chapters. The Christian church left its mark on Western civilization with a perhaps unique eroticophobic obsession, the powerful remnants of which continue to motivate today’s sexual conservatives in the pursuit of their social agenda. This legacy cannot help but lend a contemporary urgency also to our study of sexuality in ancient Greek and Roman culture.

Beert Verstraete
Department of Classics
Acadia University
Wolfville, NS B0P 1X0


Among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered [LGBT] professional classicists who have followed the uninspiring record of the American Philological Association [APA] in the realm of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered rights, Thomas Hubbard, the author of this book, is well known. In the mid 1990s, when LGBT activists within the APA sug-