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MARTIAL'S SEXUAL ATTITUDES

Martial's subjects are many: he wrote about the thrills of the amphitheatre and the circus; the pleasures of country life as well as the more dubious enjoyments of city living; he composed touching epitaphs on dead boy and girl favourites for their masters; he could caricature as well as any Roman satirist the countless types his dependent life as a client forced him to encounter: the ostentatious, the pretentious, the immoral and, above all, the parsimonious. Indeed, this handling of the satiric epigram was one of his greatest talents as a writer, a talent duly acknowledged by his friend Juvenal in his frequent plagiarisms. He could write wittily turned dedications, memorials, and compliments; he could sound most variations on the hoary poetic themes of Live for the Day and The Simple Life; he could translate and expand Greek epigrams, particularly at the expense of doctors, and make them seem his own, and he could even put dinner menus into verse. Nevertheless, a considerable obstacle to the study and critical appreciation of his work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been his adulation of Domitian and, above all, his obscenity in those poems which, although tamed by some modern standards, are best left, as they say, "in the decent obscurity of a learned language."

If we exclude the Liber de Spectaculis of A. D. 80, the Xenia and Apophoreta of A. D. 84 or 85, the twelve books of Material's miscellaneous epigrams, published between A. D. 85 and 101, contain eleven hundred and seventy two poems. Of these there are only eighty six which a Victorian amateur of Latin literature

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1 This article is based on part of the Gray Lectures delivered in Cambridge in February/March 1978.
2 See e.g. R. E. Colton, Juvenal and Martial (Diss. Columbia 1951).
3 A rough estimate of the number of obscene poems in the oeuvre may be made by counting the items left untranslated (except in Graglia's Italian) in the Bohn Classical Library's translation of Martial (London 1859), which, like A. E. Housman's Praefanda, has been a great stimulus to the learning of Latin among English schoolboys. The untranslated epigrams were Englished by an anonymous translator in: The Index Expurgatorius of Martial (London 1888). Byron points out a similar feature in the Delphin edition of Martial in which all "the grosser parts" are relegated to an appendix (Don Juan, Canto I. 44. 345—53). To be precise, these poems are: 1.46; 1.58; 1.90; 1.92; 1.94; 2.28; 2.45; 2.47; 2.49; 2.50; 2.51; 2.54; 2.61; 2.62; 2.70; 2.72; 2.84; 3.72; 3.73; 3.75; 3.79; 3.81; 3.88; 3.96; 3.98; 6.36; 6.37; 6.56; 6.81; 7.18; 7.35; 7.55; 7.58; 7.62; 7.67; 7.70; 7.75; 7.82; 9.27; 9.33; 9.41; 9.47; 9.57; 9.67; 9.69; 10.55; 10.81; 11.21; 11.23; 11.25; 11.28; 11.29; 11.30; 11.43; 11.45; 11.46; 11.51; 11.58; 11.60; 11.61; 11.63; 11.65; 11.71; 11.72; 11.73; 11.74; 11.75; 11.78; 11.81; 11.85; 11.87; 11.88; 11.95; 11.97; 11.99; 11.104; 12.33; 12.35; 12.43; 12.55; 12.75; 12.85; 12.86; 12.95; 12.96; 12.97.
would blush to offer in a literal English translation, which is considerably less than eight percent of the work. This is a surprising statistic in the light of Martial’s reputation as a pornographic classic like Catullus, Petronius, Juvenal, and Strato of Sardis.

The distribution of the grosser epigrams throughout the twelve books is interesting: five in Book 1; twelve in Book 2; eight in Book 3; none at all in Books 4 and 5; four in Book 6; nine in Book 7; none in Book 8, which specifically excludes them (8.1), being addressed to the Emperor Domitian; seven in Book 9; two in Book 10; but twenty-nine in Book 11 and ten in Book 12 (which may suggest a backlog from earlier eras but, more likely, derives from Martial’s disillusionment with his prospects of patronage and his retirement to Spain).

In this side of his writing Martial was following a timehonoured, if sometimes defensive, literary tradition in Latin poetry which deserves closer attention. And I venture here the somewhat speculative suggestion that Martial wrote these poems because they were expected of him as a practitioner of his chosen poetic genre, the epigram or short poem. They were perhaps written almost as fillers for the libelli, the personally circulated and highly complimentary slim volumes which Martial presented to potential or existing patrons before gathering them together annually at the request of his booksellers, Trypho, Arectus or Secundus, into the libri which have come down to us. In effect, Martial, though an adept flatterer by necessity, was not necessarily, in my critical opinion, a natural writer of amusing or interesting obscene verse, hence the frequent grossness and reliance on sexual explicitness.

Pliny the Younger, one of Martial’s patrons, offers us a contemporary insight into this long line of Latin erotic poets (Ep. 5.3). His testimony indicates that the writing of erotic or obscene verse was a hobby or an interest which, unlike the writing of memoirs, biographies, or histories, one had, however, to defend against critics, particularly if one belonged to the senatorial class, which had, in the fairly recent past, taken such a censorious attitude to Nero’s athletic, artistic and poetic enthusiasms. Martial demonstrates that even those writers of such verse who rose no further than the equestrian class and so did not belong to the upper crust of society, were almost as defensive. Pliny cites in defence of his risqué verses such other famous practitioners as Cicero, Calvus, Asinius Pollio, Messalla, Hortensius, Brutus, Sulla, Quintus Catulus, Quintus Scaevola, Servius Sulpicius, Varro, Torquatus (and other members of his family), Gaius Memmius, patron of Lucretius, Lentulus Gaetulicus, Seneca, and Verginius Rufus, as well as Julius Caesar and such respected emperors as Augustus, Tiberius, and Nerva. As Sherwin-White observes⁴, Pliny confines himself here to the senatorial class in his list of past amateurs of such writing, because his senatorial dignity rather than the morality of writing such stuff was in question. He alludes only glancingly

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to the disgraced Nero and to non-senatorial, but socially respectable, practitioners of erotic verse such as Accius, Ennius, Vergil and Cornelius Nepos. He could have added to his list other distinguished contemporaries such as Vestriicus Spurinna, Arrius Antonius, and perhaps Pompeius Saturninus. His basic defence, apart from being in this distinguished company, is that he is human and likes reading as well as writing in less dignified literary genres than oratory and history (Ep. 5.3.2).

Martial, though not a senator and so with less cause to worry about his dignitas, felt impelled also to defend his similar, and perhaps more obscene, short poems against analogous criticism. His protective gambit goes back to Catullus, who, along with Domitius Marsus, Albinovanus Pedo, and Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulus, furnished both his models and his guarantee of poetic respectability. Martial's by now traditional defence, even in his first book, is that his lines may often be louche, but his life is guiltless.

We are not dealing, then, with a society in which, sexually or otherwise, anything goes, as Juvenal, following in Martial's footsteps, might lead us to believe. Traditional social pressures among the more respectable members of society were strong, if not always conformed to. Hence the importance in Martial's apologetic poems of the literary symbol of Cato. Cato Uticensis had become a symbol of Republican liberty among the senatorial opposition to imperial government, most notably in Lucan, yet, in contrast, he also furnished such writers as Petronius and Martial with a convenient symbol of puritanical and censorious Roman attitudes towards erotic and obscene writing of all types. It may well be that he was merged in this tradition with his equally austere great-grandfather, Cato the Censor, which might explain the not infrequent use of the plural Catones as something more than poetic practice. On the other hand, the story retold by Valerius Maximus of the younger Cato's exit from the Floralia to avoid spoiling the customary strip show, an anecdote disparagingly referred to by Martial himself, indicates that it was the figure of Cato Uticensis himself who provided these disparate and, to us, almost contradictory images of freedom and repression. It should be observed further that Martial elsewhere alludes briefly to him as an exemplary stoic hero (e.g. 1.78).

Martial then is perfectly willing to admit that certain segments of certain books are obscene in a tradition going back to Catullus and beyond, which still flourished, somewhat apologetically, in his own times, and which was practiced by men of senatorial status. He even makes a few jokes about bored readers finding their interest reviving when encountering the dirty parts; he inserts facetious warnings that respectable women should not proceed further and then comforts them when they do (3.86) and he invokes the licence of the Floralia and

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*Sherwin-White, op. cit., 289—90.*
*Book 1, praef.; 11.15.11ff. For similar defences, compare Catullus (16.3—6), Ovid (Trist. 2) and Petronius (Sat. 132).*
*Cp. Val. Max. 2.10.8 and Mart. 1 praef.; see also Cic. Att. 16.1.6; Sen. Ep. 97. 8, 10; Mart. 5.51.5; 9.23.3; 10.20.21; 11.2.1; 11.15.1; 11.39.15; 12.6.8; Juv. 2.40; 11.90.*
the *Saturnalia* in their defence (1. praef., 1.35, 11.2). (Both these festivals, of course, were ultimately connected with fertility rites, where obscenity acted as homocopathic magic.) Clearly, the majority of his patrons, and their spouses, male or female, expected such salt to be added to the customary blandishments and the commissioned poems.

Of course, this is not to suggest that Martial wrote on particular erotic or pornographic themes to order, in the way he might write poems for gifts, anniversaries, tombs, weddings, deaths, spectacles, dedicatory offerings, garden Priapuses, newly acquired *objets d'art*, special household ceremonies, and so on. In these instances, the content and tone of the poem were dictated by the obvious circumstances and the natural expectations of the recipient. Still, even in his non-commissioned writing, Martial's aims were to please, importune, and titillate. He played on his patron's *Schadenfreude* by his satiric epigrams; he challenged their pride through his attacks on their paltry gifts; their mean dinner entertaining; and their general tight-fistedness; and, not least, he pandered to their vanity with his adulatory compliments on their literary or material elegance or their accomplishments in war and peace.

Martial's more disreputable poems therefore, like his others, had an audience in mind, even if these were, as was suggested above, somewhat of the nature of "fillers", or the spice, for his large or small collections. And it may be surmised that the disreputable areas of Martial's work may have encouraged the great interest finally taken in his work by his publishers; after all, the works associated with the town of Elephantis, the ancient world's equivalent of Arretino or Alex Comfort's volumes on *The Joy of Sex*, were still obtainable at bookshops, as Martial himself testifies (12.43).

In approaching this complex subject — the audience for, and its expectations from, Martial's obscene poetry — there are several potential traps to be avoided. Martial is a self-proclaimed realist (10.4) and it is therefore unrealistic of us to assume that there is no connection between the man and the work; that all the material is purely conventional and that the poems should be judged *in vacuo*. This is in no way to imply that poetry is either autobiography or even psychohistory; that, for example, Martial is faithfully recording, even under assumed names, genuine personal encounters and particular experiences in every case; there are too many derivative poems on traditional themes for that. But an understanding is needed of how poets, particularly satirists, actually work; how they transmute personal, social, historical or literary materials into art, but art which embodies life and experience. Most classical poets have an audience in mind: poetry of the confessional kind, the versified diary, the cries of scarcely formalized pain, which we nowadays associate with Robert Lowell in his later days, is uncommon in the Greek and Roman world: epistolography and memoirs

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* On this critical topic, see, most recently, J. Griffin, JRS 66 (1976) 87ff., who protests against this view as most visible in the Hubbard-Nisbet editions of Horace's *Odes*.

7 *Zeitschrift für Philologie*, 2
may have served that function, but not poetry. Caution then is advisable in any study of Martial’s obscene poems, but still the poet is bound in such realistic epigrams to reveal something of himself, of his society, and his patrons, if only by the subjects he chooses and those he avoids. His more decent epigrams demonstrate that he did cater for his audience: primarily his patrons and, somewhat later, the Roman world at large.

The matter is one of tact, but cautious inferences about Martial’s audience, its knowledge and expectations, about his poetic persona, less surely about his personality, may be drawn if we bear in mind such questions as these: Is the motive for a statement or the choice of a subject to produce the point of an epigram or is the information conveyed incidental to the thrust of the poem? Is the incidental information, the location of his villa, for example, in the public domain, or is it intrinsically uncheckable and therefore open to poetic fiction or exaggeration? Is the public information consistent with external historical or literary evidence or with internal evidence from elsewhere in the oeuvre? Are certain statements dictated by the conventions of a particular genre or theme? How likely is it that an ancient poet, such as Martial, would write about matters alien to himself and his audience? Is he not more likely to choose material which is at least ben trovato, subjects of common knowledge, concern, sympathy, fear or laughter. To give some examples: if there are several poems on the parsimony of patrons and no references to the pox of the sort we find in Martial’s Elizabethan and Jacobean imitators, we may infer that there were some stingy patrons and that the pox, if it did exist, which I doubt, was not a subject in ancient Rome of either horror or amusement, as it was with later writers of epigram. Similarly, if many of the epigrams refer to specific social or sexual behaviour on the part of Martial himself, of his subjects, or of his audience, it is reasonable to assume that such behaviour was common, or at least not rare, even though the particular events and personages were invented for the sake of the poem. Surrealism is not part of the stock-in-trade of most ancient writers. Let us take a more detailed example: Martial’s marital status. There are several gross epigrams addressed to a wife (2.92; 3.82; 4.24; 11.104); there are several boasts that the poet has been given, by two emperors, the via trium liberorum (e.g. 9.97); one epigram chides a man for requesting this privilege, since he has a wife and could therefore beget three children naturally (8.31); there are also a number of poems taunting women who wish to marry him along with others manifesting pederastic sexual preferences as well as the use of prostitutes. And there is no external evidence to contradict the plausible conclusion that Martial was unmarried, at least in the period of his greatest fame between A. D. 85 and 102.

There is one final methodological principle to be borne in mind: we cannot easily distinguish, in Martial or his audience, between what is reality, i.e., common sexual facts or practices, and what is desired or feared, sometimes even repressed,

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* See now my "Was Martial Really Married? A Reply" CW 72 (1979) 238f.
which subsequently shows itself in somewhat fantastic, funny, or hyperbolic sexual fantasy. (Cases in point would be the exaggerated size of a penis in 7.14 and of a vagina in 11.21.) But this material is just as relevant to our purposes.

With these caveats, we may now examine the sexual attitudes exhibited in Martial’s work. The most obvious point, which strikes the reader immediately, is that Martial naturally shares the standard Roman assumption that almost all males were both heterosexual and homosexual. This belief is paralleled in the work of Catullus, Tibullus, Petronius, and Suetonius, among others; and of course, the prominent bisexuals alleged in our Roman historical sources would be too numerous to list. This assumption prefigures Freud’s view that mankind, being born “polymorphously perverse”, has natural bisexual tendencies. The ready availability of charming slaves of both sexes, plainly seen in Martial, would culturally reinforce these tendencies, as would the strong influence of Greek ideas in upper class Roman society.

There is, however, no such acceptance in Martial of bisexual behaviour in the case of women. Martial displays strong animosity against tribadism or lesbianism in any form. His conception of the practices involved in this behavioral orientation is somewhat naive, as were perhaps the views of most Roman authors on the subject; Greeks such as Herodas, Machon, and Lucian certainly knew better. One of his more vicious and artificial epigrams against lesbianism, which he terms a monstrous and enigmatic form of female adultery (1.90) summarizes his attitudes perfectly:

Quod numquam maribus iunctam te, Bassa, videbam
quadque tibi moechum fabula nulla dabat,
onne sed officium circa te semper obibat
turba tua sexus, non adeunde viro,
esse videbaris, fatores, Lucretia nobis:
at tu, pro facinus, Bassa, futor eras.
inter se geminos audes committere cunnos
mentiturque virum prodigiosa Venus.
commenta es dignum Thebano aenigmati monstrum,
hic ubi vir non est, ut sit adulterium.

That I ne’er saw thee in a coach with man
Nor thy chaste name in wanton satire met;
That from thy sex thy liking never ran,
So as to suffer a male servant yet;
I thought thee the Lucretia of our time:
But, Bassa, thou the while a Sappho wert,
And clashing (cunne) with a prodigious crime
Didst act of man th’ inimitable part.
What Oedipus this riddle can untie?
Without a male there was adultery.

(Tr. Sir Charles Sedley)
If we juxtapose this attitude with his favourable attitudes towards pederasty (1.92), the keeping of boy slaves as catamites (e.g. 1.58; 5.83), his own request to a patron for an Alexis (8.56), his moving epitaphs for such pretty favourites, then his double standard is plain. It is also typical of Roman patriarchal society and conforms with our other literary evidence from the first and second centuries A.D. It may be said in his defence that only Musonius Rufus in first century Rome stands out as an exception to standard thinking on the subject of sex, and even he advocates sexual restraint for married men rather than equal sexual rights for women. Martial’s heightened indignation, furthermore, is connected with his fear and hatred of sexual women, as we shall see below. Nor is Martial tolerant of the whole range of male homosexual behaviour. His approval, indeed alleged preference, is predominantly reserved for active pederastic behaviour, generally with handsome young slaves or former slaves (14.205). This would probably reflect to some degree his audience’s tastes also, to judge from other literary sources such as Vergil, Tibullus, and Petronius. Sodomy, anal penetration in particular, was the preferred form of intercourse, as is clear from 11.43, in which he rejects his fictive wife’s offer of anal intercourse after she has caught him with a young slave indulging in the same activity.

Pathic or passive homosexuality, whether anal or oral, is regarded by Martial as unseemly and disreputable in a mature citizen10, as is male prostitution (1.96). This disapproval was the prevalent attitude in the ancient world, as we know from our Greek sources11, from the Priapea and from Catullus’ notorious combinations against Furius and Aurelius. Martial has particularly strong objections to oral sexuality, whether fellatio by or on males or cunnilingus on females. He clings firmly to certain superstitions, namely, that oral sexual practices lead to halitosis, an unhealthy pallor, an unclean mouth, and to boycotting in the public baths. In a number of epigrams he objects to being kissed by certain suspect acquaintances, to the use of strong scents which may be to hide fetid sexual smells, and so on. The frequency of his reference to these sexual practices and their concomitants may be construed as evidence for the frequency of their occurrence in his society, particularly since the allusions are often cryptic in their jocularity, e.g., the perverted Oppianus has to write verses, also associated with pallor, as a cover-up for his more nefarious activities (7.4). Yet jokes on such subjects must have been immediately comprehensible to his audience.

Connected with this are certain other prejudices against deviations from his preferred norm of behaviour and his ideal love objects. There are a number of sneers at those verpas who have been circumcised by their masters in order to gratify their perverse sexual tastes, although there is also evidence from other poems that Martial, like many Romans and provincials, was contemptuously

10 Cf. e.g. 2.42; 2.51; 2.54; 2.61; 2.62; 2.69; 3.28; 3.71; 3.73; 3.82.33; 3.95.13; 4.48; 5.41; 6.33; 6.37; 6.44; 6.50; 6.56; 6.81; 6.91; 7.10.1—2.
11 See J. J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (London 1978) passim.
anti-Jewish\textsuperscript{12}, a fortuitous but ominous portent of what would happen to the Jews during the seventh, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Martial’s homeland. He is no less hostile to that curious Roman practice of infibulation (11.75; 14.215), which was supposedly beneficial to professional singers, and was certainly helpful, psychologically, to jealous husbands and lovers. Like the medieval chastity belt employed by the Crusaders, it was painful to fit, indecorous to display, and ultimately useless when love was determined to find a way.

Castration is another of his \textit{bête-noirs}, which he associates with sexual depravity (6.2) and loss of masculinity (11.75), for Martial has a strong genital orientation, as the many epigrams involving the penis (e.g. 2.51; 6.16; 6.23) and the jokes that center on impotence and old age (2.45; 3.70; 73, 75) indicate. This instinctive dislike of castration and contempt for secular or religious eunuchs (e.g. 11.75.6; 3.91) would be reinforced by the fact that Domitian banned the practice (6.2, cf. Suet. \textit{Dom.} 7). (One might add, for completeness, that the association of philosophy with homosexuality, a traditional charge since the days of Socrates, furnishes the target for several of Martial’s epigrams, but it is the hypocrisy involved rather than the homosexuality itself that Martial and his readers disliked.)

Martial’s attitudes to homosexuality then tend to reflect ancient prejudices and superstitions and this is the case also with his views on masturbation. He does cite the story of Hector’s household slaves masturbating behind the door because they could witness Androamache’s riding of Hector (11.104.13—14), but only as proof of the heroine’s sexual ardour. His basic view is that masturbation is aborting a human life (9.41); it is a view inconsistent with his attitude towards male homosexuality, but is consonant with official imperial policy about population growth. Doubtless, his position on abortion would therefore coincide with Ovid’s. Martial’s attitude to women in general and female sexual \textit{mores} is consistent with his predominantly pederastic orientation. He does not disapprove of prostitutes (1.34; 2.53), only of the high prices of some of them; a number of epigrams reflect his admiration, conventional enough, for devoted widows, such as Lucan’s relict, Polla Argentaria (7.21, 23; 10.64), \textit{univirae}, exemplary matrons such as Porcia and Paeta (cf. 1.42; 1.13), and even for pretty young slave girls such as Erotion (5.37), for all of these present no threat to his masculinity\textsuperscript{13} or

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. e.g. 4.4.7; 7.55.7—8; 7.82; 12.57.13. For discussion of anti-semitism at this time, see M. Grant, The Jews in the Roman World (New York 1973) 206ff.; E. M. Smallwood, The Jews under Roman Rule (Leiden 1976) 356ff.

\textsuperscript{13} This fear of threats to his masculinity may be triggered by even an overly aggressive pathetic homosexual, as in 1.46:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Cum dicis, "Propero, fac si facias," Hedyle, languet proinuis et cessat debilitata Venus.}
expectare iube: velocius ibo rentius.
\textit{Hedyle, et properas, die mihi ne properem.}
\end{quote}

\textit{Hedyle}, the reading of the MSS, was emended by Bentley (followed by Schneidewin), to the femi-
his sexual image of himself. A good example of his resentment of female sexual demands occurs at 6.23, where even Lesbia's skillful foreplay cannot counteract the chilling effect of her domineering expression:

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\begin{align*}
\textit{Stare \ iubes nostrum semper tibi, Lesbia, penem:} \\
\text{crede mihi, non est mentula quod digitus.} \\
\textit{tu licet et manibus blandis et vocibus instes,} \\
\text{tu contra facies imperiosa tua est.}
\end{align*}
\]

To understand this and the other epigrams against women, we must put them in their sociological context. The evidence indicates that between the closing years of the Republic and the years when Christianity gained social, and then official, influence in Roman society, the female sex, at least in the social strata most visible in our documents, enjoyed a personal, sexual and economic liberation unparalleled in civilized states before the latter half of the twentieth century in America and some parts of Europe. The causes of this phenomenon are complex. But testimony is to be found not only in the voluminous pagan and early Christian literature, but also in such works as the Digest (in its discussions of guardianship and property ownership) and in the fragmentary history of imperial legislation regulating civic morality. This relative freedom for women sprang from a number of causes. Firstly, there was the growing instability and casualness of marriage, in particular the decay of the type of marriage where the legally absolute rights (\textit{manus}) of the father, the \textit{paterfamilias}, were handed over to the husband. Concomitant with this there were the legal developments concerning a wife's dowry. For all practical purposes a husband had little more than the right to the income from it so long as the marriage lasted. The dowry, in the event of divorce or the husband's death, could be sued for and so it belonged in substance to the wife and in form only to the husband. The wife's property was thus a trust made over for a certain time to the husband.\(^{14}\) This state of affairs gave Roman women of substance the same sort of power over their husbands that American women have in certain states of the U.S.A. through their spouses' fear of heavy alimony awards by the lawcourts.

Another factor was the cynical (or perhaps sensible) view the Romans adopted towards multiple divorce and \textit{mariages de convenance}, whether for political or financial reasons; the matrimonial history of such eminent worthies as Cicero and Cato Uticensis would otherwise be very surprising. Again, the Roman attitude towards their offspring, which ties in with their attitudes towards abortions, supposititious babies, foundlings, and natural children by female slaves,\(^9\) nine form \textit{Hedjii}, which would certainly fit in with Martial's patent dislike of sexually aggressive women, but Martial's use of the name for a pathetic homosexual in two other epigrams (4.52; 9.37) tells against the emendation.

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was considerably different from that of later Western cultures. To us, the frequency, indeed the apparent desirability among upper class Romans, of adoption must seem surprising, a good example being the willingness of Claudius to make Nero his almost certain successor instead of his own son, Britannicus. Concern then over a cuckoo in the nest, the romantic desire to be the first and only man in a woman's life, would appear to have been minimal in well-to-do Roman males. Indeed the recorded eulogies to univirae, wives who had had but one husband, which would be a phenomenon generally unremarked in later European societies, point to the rarity of this status in Rome at this period. A number of Martial's epigrams, for all their epigrammatic hyperbole, make a similar point; 6.7, for example, in which the poet jeers at Telesilla who has just married for the tenth time: this, he says, is merely legalized adultery.

There would have been other factors contributing to this emancipation: the frequent absence from home of the male on business, military, or civic duties; contact with the more matriarchal cultures of the East, particularly Alexandria, and the role models set up by the Cleopatras and the women of the Seleucid dynasty. And then of course Republican and Imperial Rome in turn produced striking examples of women who were distinguished, or notorious, for their "unfeminine" behaviour or character; such were Clodia, Fulvia, Porcia, Julia, Agrippina and Messalina.

Again, just as the Roman male attitude towards adoption is almost incomprehensible to the modern guardians of the Judaeo-Christian nuclear family tradition, so too, even in these times, it is impossible to imagine the enormous accessibility to all varieties of sex that exist in a slave society, such as that of Rome or the American South before the Civil War. (And even in the American South, because of the limitations in racial choice and religiously engrained social attitudes towards homosexuality, sexual access was considerably more delimited than in Rome or various oriental cultures.) There are in Martial such revealing epigrams as 1.84, directed against a member of the equestrian order who could not be bothered with the problems of a wife, but preferred to produce sons, homebred knights, with the help of female slaves, which jibes with Pliny's mention of an ex-praetor, Lascius Macedo, who kept several concubines (Ep. 3.14.3). The point of Martial's epigram depends rather on social snobbery (he might free these servile sons and adopt them) than on any questioning of Quirinalis' abuse of his power. It is hardly likely that Roman women would not take a perhaps more discreet advantage of this availability of slaves for sexual services. That they did so may be deduced not just from the evidence of Petronius, Martial, and Juvenal, but also from the complex and often penal legislation governing the relationships, legal status and offspring of free women and male slaves. A typical, if hyperbolic, epigram to illustrate this whole topic is 6.39, in which Martial claims that Cinna's wife, Marulla, has made Cinna seven times a father—not of free children, for neither friends nor neighbours nor he were involved. No, the curly-haired brat is the son of the North African cook; the negroid child is
the offspring of a local wrestler; the third belongs to the baker; the fourth has inherited the homosexual traits of Cinna’s own catamite; the fifth was clearly fathered by the local idiot; the girls, one dark, one redhead, spring from the loins of a local musician and Cinna’s own farm manager; and there would be more if two of Cinna’s slaves were not eunuchs. Another more humorous squib (7.14) retails a female friend’s recent calamity; she has lost her plaything, which is not Lesbia’s sparrow or Violentilla’s dove, but a twelve year old slave whose tool had not yet reached half a yard (or almost half a metre) long.

This then is the background against which epigram 6.23 must be read. Women were claiming equal rights also in the most intimate areas of their personal lives. What Ovid had advocated as properly thoughtful behaviour, indeed as a method of control, by a sensitive and self-confident male, mutual pleasure (quod iuvat, ex aquo feminæ virgine ferant. / odi concubitus, qui non utrumque resolvunt, A.A. 682—3), women at this period were now demanding as standard behaviour in their menfolk. It is true that Roman women did not develop an ideological consensus in these areas, although Plato’s Republic was not yet lost to sight during this period, since Epictetus, himself a student of Musonius Rufus, mentions that women frequently had in their hands copies of the Republic to justify their sexual emancipation (Arr. Epict. Fr. 15). Personal and sexual freedom seems to have been gained circumstantially and unsystematically by individually determined women. They did not make “unnegotiable demands” or offer a social, philosophical or political platform; they merely saw their opportunities and took them. In Juvenal’s words, wrenched from a different and more hostile context, the Roman wife said hoc volo, hoc iubeo; sit pro ratione voluntas. The effects on some males in a fundamentally patriarchal society, as documented in our literary and non-literary evidence, would be easily predictable by any sociologist or woman’s liberationist. Martial’s record of the male reaction can be paralleled in many private and public documents of the reaction of men in the twentieth century to the Women’s Liberation Movement, with all that this entails in personal relationships and domestic life. The subsequent jealousy and spying are humorously recorded in such epigrams as 1.73:

nullus in urbe fuit tota qui tangere vellet
uxorem gratis, Caeciliane, tuam,
dum licuit: sed nunc positis custodibus ingens
turba futurorum est — ingeniosus homo es!

So also is the complaisance of some husbands (cf. e.g. 5.61).

Martial provides us with additional, if derogatory, evidence about the sexual freedom exercised by the women of his time or earlier. One need not dwell on the frequent references to unpunished adultery committed by women (cf. 2.39; 2.56); this is an age-old theme. But consider in particular Martial’s confirmation
of a recent modern study\textsuperscript{15}, that the preferred position in Roman heterosexual intercourse was the male supine with the female on top, whether in the position known as \textit{Venus averta}, with no eye contact, or, as in some of the Pompeian brothel paintings, with the female above, and facing the male. This contrasts with the Greek preference for vaginal entry from the rear, and with the modern European and American preference, now being rapidly overtaken by other preferences, for the so-called "missionary position" with the male superior and the female supine.

Now, as modern sexological studies indicate, the female superior positions give greater powers of control, and therefore enhanced means of sexual gratification, to the woman, as well as slowing down the ejaculation time of the male, which is again in the interest of the more sexually capable female. (That the ancients were aware of the female's greater sexual capacities is clear from the myth of Teiresias, who stated that a woman derived nine times the pleasure from the sexual act than a man did, cf. Ovid, \textit{Met.} 3.316–38.) It could be argued that these positions project the image of the male being taken care of, the inert \textit{dominus} being tended by the industrious \textit{serva}, but the physiological facts militate against this theory, inasmuch as these positions are somewhat harder to sustain by an unenthusiastic or lazy male partner, and the loss of physical control would, in any case, point to a passive attitude consonant with any theory of domination by the supine participant in the act.

In further evidence may be adduced Martial's strong dislike of oral sex and in particular of that frequently mentioned, and, in the eyes of Martial (and presumably his audience), that most detestable sexual practice, cunnilingus\textsuperscript{16}. Now this is hardly a sexual technique that would establish itself spontaneously in societies where women were not accustomed to demand and receive extensive foreplay, orgaem, and indeed sexual satisfactions comparable to those of males. (Female sexual exhibitionism\textsuperscript{17} is another of Martial's butts for ridicule (1.34). Such shamelessness in a free woman might indicate an emancipated disregard for social conventions or the liberated gratification of her unnatural sexual needs. In either case Martial would have strong objections to it.) In Athenian society, in the time of Aristophanes, a society which was, according to one authority\textsuperscript{18}, far more polymorphously perverse, in the Freudian sense, than Rome's,

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\textsuperscript{15} See M. C. Marks, \textit{Heterosexual Coital Positions in Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome and Modern North America as a Reflection of Social Attitudes} (unpublished Diss. State University of New York at Buffalo 1978), and the bibliography there. The statistics, of course, are only reasonably reliable, due to the fragmentary nature of pictorial and literary evidence from ancient times (e.g. Ovid, \textit{A. A.} 771ff.) and the sometimes mendacious and changing responses to sexual questionnaires in the modern era. For the linguistic evidence, see A. E. Richlin, \textit{Sexual Terms and Themes in Roman Satire and Related Genres} (unpublished Diss. Yale University 1978), 166–170.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. 3.80; 3.81; 3.84; 3.88; 3.96; 4.43; etc.


cunnilingus, although known and alluded to in Comedy, is rarely depicted on our surviving vases; and the comic poet directs some of his most telling invective against a certain Aripadres, a notorious cunnilingus, who had to frequent brothels in order to indulge his perverse tastes, doubtless because women of the upper and middle classes were far more segregated and protected in Athens than were their counterparts in imperial Rome.

More of Martial’s animus is directed against older women who are still gratifying their sexual urges (3.32), although the Roman definition of “older women” might differ considerably from ours — the legal age of marriage (or the consummation of a marriage) was, after all, twelve. Biting barbs are directed at aged widows hoping to remarry (3.93) or aging Lady Chatterleys, who buy their sexual pleasures by purchasing handsome young slaves (2.34). He also, expresses dismay at blatant and excessive sexuality in any female, whatever her age or social status (4.12). A particular target, for instance, is fellation performed by females. Severe criticism is directed also at the non-servile lovers of such aging women.

His general cynicism, then, about contemporary female chastity will come as no surprise to the reader; it is no more than a variation on Ovid’s dictum: casta est quam nemo rogavit. Martial doubtless shared this point of view with most of his audience and certainly with his younger friend Juvenal and his near contemporary Petronius. Not surprisingly, we may divine in Martial (and Juvenal) a pervasive fear and resentment of female sexuality and of the personal liberty that women now claimed and obtained for themselves, whatever their official legal status vis-a-vis males. This is then expressed in an almost Swiftian disgust at female body odours (4.4; 6.93) and stinks (4.87), as well as the scents and other subterfuges used to disguise the symptoms of our animality — this extends to similar signs which Martial associates with oral sex of any kind, homosexual or heterosexual (6.55). So he finds equally offensive the phenomenon of “tympantes” or “meteorism” (vulgo intestinal gas) and that noisy, if perhaps flattering, indication of female lubricity which Martial terms poppsymata cunni and derides in 7.18 (the phenomenon, being harmless, has no scientific term that I know of in modern gynaecological science).

In sum, Martial displays in his work a patent fear of women, particularly of rich and therefore more liberated women, whose status cannot be gainsaid by an indigent poet, even though a male. One of his more revealing epigrams, whether

13 See, however, ARV I.4 113 (I owe this reference to W. M. Calder III).
19 One notices that there is no criticism of grizzled centurions or aging poets, such as Martial himself, who have (or hope for) similar pretty slave boys (2.48; 2.49; 3.65; 4.7; 4.42; 5.46; 5.48; 6.34; 7.29).
21 Cf. 1.94; 2.50; 3.87; 4.84; 6.69.
22 Cf. e.g. 3.76; 4.5.5; 4.28; 5.45.
23 Cf. Ov. Am. 1.8.43; A. A. 705ff. and cp. Ma. 1.62; 4.71; 4.81. See also 7.30 for Caesia’s xenophilic promiscuity. For similar views see Petr. Sat. 110.7 and Juv. 6 passim.
it be more revelatory of himself or his audience, is perhaps 8.12, which concludes with the ringing male chauvinist sentiment:

\[\text{inferior matrona suo sit, Prisco, marito;}\]
\[\text{non aliter siunt femina virque pares.}\]

The relationship of poetry to life and daily experience varies between one genre and another, between one poet and another, indeed perhaps between one poem and another. Again, a particular work may reflect the expectations of the audience rather than the fantasies or experience of the writer, just as the very choice of traditional sexual \textit{topoi} may furnish clues to the interests of both. This makes it hazardous to offer a psychohistory of Martial, even though he claims that he is a realist (\textit{hominem pagina nostra sapit}, 10.4.10). The most we can legitimately attempt is to delineate the poetic \textit{persona} he offers us in his obscene or sexist epigrams, whether this is construed as a reflection of his fantasy, inner wishes, or everyday experience or, as in the case of modern pornography, a reflection of his reader’s fantasies, fears, and moral values.

With these \textit{caveats}, one may summarize the picture Martial presents of himself as follows: his sexual orientation is predominantly pederastic, although he has at times satisfied his sexual urges with whores, about whom he is somewhat fastidious. He has nothing but contempt for older passive male homosexuals, in accordance with standard Greco-Roman attitudes. Again, following ancient, particularly Roman practice, he is in no way sexually exclusive; his more complimentary remarks on female sexuality are, however, reserved for prostitutes and similar loose women of the lower classes, who present no threat to his virility. Despite some devastating epigrams on a fictitious wife, he presents himself as a well set-up bachelor with a strong dislike of domineering, oversexed, ugly or, what is much the same thing to him, older women. He dislikes and satirizes all sorts of deformities and practices that seem aberrant from his social and sexual norms: circumcision, infibulation, fellation and cunnilingus (by either sex), lesbianism, masturbation, sexual hypocrisy, particularly when practiced by frequently married women or Stoic philosophers. His preference for young and handsome males leads him to hate smells and the perfumes used to disguise them, which he associates with pathetic homosexuality. From this stems his dislike of social kissing (“where have those lips been?”), whereas he enjoys kissing pubescent slaves. He is defensive about pornography, while believing it a reflection of reality, and in a literary tradition to which some of the most famous figures in Roman social and literary history have contributed. The picture presented is generally consistent, once we discount the contradictory evidence in the epigrams about his marital status (see p. 292 above). His nauseating epigrams on his non-existent wife must be seen as the ancient equivalent of the jokes told about their wives by music-hall or burlesque comedians; he is also witty at the expense of women who want to marry him. His reverence for domestic bliss, which was somewhat broader than our definition, includes young boy and girl slaves who
would be their master's favourites; new brides; univirae who died before, or with, their husbands (Arria Paeta, for example), as opposed to the rich and many-times divorced women of his time. He praises devoted widows who revered their husbands' memories long after death.

We find therefore, to our surprise, that Martial, far from being a classic of pornography, an adventurer into seas traversed by the writers of Elephantis, by Sisenna, Petronius, and Juvenal, seas which were later to be crossed by the Marquis de Sade, Sacher-Masoch, and Henry Miller, was really, by the lights of his age, fairly conventional, if not prudish, in his sexual values, indeed in everything except his frank language, which was hallowed by literary tradition and contemporary practice. This make may more acceptable the suggestion that Martial's obscenity, which certainly varies in quantity from book to book, came from his head rather than his heart (or guts) and that those scandalous sections of his work, with their coldly frank language and their obsession with perversion and disgust rather than with the joy of uninhibited sex, were the padding rather than the core of his inspiration, even though they explain partly why Martial was to become such a popular classic among sixteenth and seventeenth English literati and then fall into disrepute and neglect in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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