



ROMAN HOMOSEXUALITY

CRAIG A. WILLIAMS

SECOND EDITION

FOREWORD BY
MARTHA NUSSBAUM

Roman
Homosexuality

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Homosexuality

Second Edition

CRAIG A. WILLIAMS

With a Foreword by Martha Nussbaum

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Foreword

To many nonspecialists, it may seem strange that there should be anything new to be written about the ancient Greeks and Romans. Their texts and achievements have been so thoroughly studied in so many nations for so many centuries that one might easily suppose that every worthwhile insight would have been expressed by now. “New” scholarship—at least where there are no new archaeological or textual finds—must, then, simply be old scholarship rearranged and repackaged. This thought, natural as it is, must be resisted.

Hardworking and skilled though scholars of Greek and Roman antiquity have been, each era’s cultural and intellectual blind spots impede its insights into other more distant times and places. Thus, for a long time it was generally assumed by historians of Greece and Rome that the interesting thing about history was its record of the deeds of political and military actors. Economic activity, domestic life, the doings of women and children, the lives of slaves—these and other central social realities were regarded as far less significant, if significant at all. The revolution in historiography that produced the rise of social and cultural history led, simultaneously, to a new approach to ancient sources, with new preoccupations and questions.

The household and the economy, though for many centuries little studied, had never been off-limits to scholarly study. Sexuality was different. Throughout Europe and North America—but perhaps especially in the Anglo-American scholarly world—the idea long prevailed that sex was an improper topic for public discussion. That the ancient Greeks and Romans did not agree was all too plain: indeed they talked about sex so much that it was difficult for proper Victorians and post-Victorians to avoid the topic once they engaged with the culture. Thus a whole industry of concealment arose: dictionaries that failed to offer precise definitions of terms designating sexual acts; editions of texts that omitted explicitly sexual material; translations into English that rendered the sexual parts into some non-English language (Latin in the case of Greek originals, Italian in the

notorious case of the old Loeb Library version of Martial), as if to shield vulnerable young people from some potential contamination. The type of sophisticated scholarship that could easily be found on most other aspects of ancient Greek and Roman lives, especially after the rise of social history, was simply lacking in this area. Even when sexually explicit material was not deleted from editions, commentaries on the text usually avoided it.

Prudish reticence about sex was ubiquitous in Anglo-American scholarship of the Victorian and post-Victorian era, but the Greeks and Romans came in for a disproportionate share of it, because anyone who looked could see that many of their discussions of sexual matters focused on same-sex acts and same-sex desire. But same-sex acts between males were criminal in Britain until 1967 (England and Wales), 1980 (Scotland), and 1982 (Northern Ireland), while the United States did not abolish all of its sodomy laws (which, unlike those in Britain, included women's same-sex acts along with those of men) until 2003. The fact that murder is a criminal act has never stopped scholarship on homicide. The problem with same-sex acts was, however, that the much-admired Greeks and Romans did not seem to think of them as in general heinous and criminal. Given the centrality of these cultures as models for the young, people invested in repressive sexual norms usually avoided mentioning the obviously very different attitudes to sex that prevailed in them. Typical is the scene in E. M. Forster's novel *Maurice* in which two young men, keenly interested in the (highly positive) depiction of same-sex desire in Plato's *Phaedrus*, which they are translating with their tutor, are told, "Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks."

Even when things began to get freer, during the 1970s, there was still a deplorable lack of methodological sophistication in what was beginning to be written about ancient Greek and Roman sexual mores. People typically assumed that what was being talked about in the ancient texts was very much the sort of thing that moderns talk about. The idea that emotions such as love, anger, grief, and fear are significantly shaped by social norms and do not have the same precise form in every culture was just beginning to be understood, as a result of collaboration between anthropologists and philosophers; it was not firmly grasped until a couple of decades later. The idea that sexual desire and experience are so shaped would have seemed to most people at that time to be very odd. (I note that these "odd" ideas were already firmly grasped by ancient Greek and Roman Hellenistic philosophers, so it was in part by failing to learn from the very texts they taught that people kept clear of these notions.)

Even when, gradually, it came to be seen that social attitudes toward same-sex acts and practices (for example) varied across place and time, it was still generally assumed that the basic categories of sexual desire and conduct were themselves static and uniform. Thus it was taken for granted that ancient Greece and Rome contained sexual actors directly comparable to modern "gay men" and "lesbians," that the idea of a sexual identity played the same role in those cultures as it does

in ours. The extent to which social norms could shape the repertory of sexual choices and sexual concepts in a culture—thus shaping sexual desire itself—was not fully grasped.

Kenneth Dover's *Greek Homosexuality*, originally published in 1978, inaugurated an era in which forthright and meticulous scholarship, uninhibited by prudery, began to confront the difficult problems of reconstructing the history of sexual activity and desire. Dover was already a scholar of widely acknowledged distinction. His impeccable intellectual reputation ensured respectful attention for the book, which was enthusiastically reviewed even by many highly conservative scholars. And—what should not have been an issue, but clearly was—his impeccable reputation for heterosexuality ensured that the book would be seen as dispassionate scholarship rather than as a piece of special pleading or advocacy. (Heterosexual scholarship about heterosexual love and desire never struck heterosexuals as special pleading.)

Dover's achievement is impressive by any standard, but it was all the more remarkable given the virtual silence on the topic before his book. In effect, he had to invent a methodology for the study of the topic, and this meant asking, concerning each type of evidence, how far it might be trusted as evidence for widespread popular norms and attitudes. His painstaking readings of oratory, comedy, philosophy, and vase painting are paradigms of methodological caution and clarity; even where they do not convince on some point of detail, they always pose the right questions. Dover showed that any decent study of the issues must be very careful about each type of text, asking what conventions and norms govern its production and reception and how far anything said there could be taken as evidence of norms active in people's lives.

In this painstaking way, Dover demonstrated that same-sex desire was not considered morally problematic by the Greeks, and that some types of same-sex acts were not either. Such restrictions as obtained were status-specific (care being taken not to dishonor future male citizens by casting them in the passive role in anal intercourse) and act-specific (oral intercourse being in general frowned on). Moreover, the idea of a lifelong sexual identity was apparently absent: although actors exhibited preferences for this or that type of sexual partner, the binary choice between "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" was not one that ancient Greek actors saw themselves as making. Indeed, married men typically would be expected to desire sex with men as well as women, and would often express that desire in action, whether with prostitutes or, in suitably restricted ways, with younger male citizens.

Dover did not theorize a great deal. He did not really pose, head on, the question of how discontinuous ancient and modern sexual categories were, and he allowed the facts I have just mentioned about sexual identities to be gleaned, rather than announcing them as a theoretical statement. Usually this does not cause difficulty in his argument, though here and there one may feel that some comparison between ancient and modern attitudes has been too hastily made.

Still, the need for an explicit theoretical statement about continuity and discontinuity could be felt by any reader of Dover's work.

A few years after Dover's magisterial volume appeared, the second and third volumes of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, building on Dover's historical research, advanced the conceptual sophistication of the enterprise by posing significant questions about the parochialism of the very concepts through which we had investigated the ancient world. Foucault took Dover's analysis one step further: the cultures of Greece and Rome confront us not only with different norms for behavior and desire but also with different basic concepts and categories. (So much, as I've suggested, is implicit in Dover's work.) Foucault argued persuasively that our own strong binary division between homosexual and heterosexual orientation did not exist in anything like the same form in the ancient Greek world, nor did different patterns of desire give rise to identity categories in anything like the same way. Nor, furthermore, did that world contain the idea that sexuality is an area of special moral anxiety, which at the same time contains the inmost secrets of one's being. Finally, Foucault showed that social norms affect sexual desire itself, not simply its expression in action; this conclusion too is implicit in Dover, but in an undeveloped form.

At the same time, philosophers working on the history of emotion and desire in the Greco-Roman world were making related contributions by showing that ancient thinkers thought of emotion and desire as involving complicated forms of intentionality and thought that could be, and almost certainly would be, affected by social norms. The burgeoning scholarship about Epicurean and Stoic philosophy that began around 1980 contributed indirectly to the understanding of ancient sexuality by showing how those philosophical schools—both of them highly influential in the general culture of Hellenistic Greece and particularly Republican and early imperial Rome—describe the many ways in which social norms inform the very shape and experience of passions such as anger, fear, jealousy, and hope. Many passions that trouble us are entirely social artifacts, both schools hold, and they included under this rubric the fear of death, passionate erotic love of individuals, and anger at insults. Even if the philosophers' views about these matters had been implausible, they were highly influential, and shaped many people's views of their own inner lives. But, in addition, these views are extremely plausible, and thus, even if people had not known about them in their philosophical form, they would remain very good candidates for the correct description of people's experiences.

By the late 1980s, the revolution that Dover and Foucault inspired had begun to have a widespread effect on scholarship about the Greeks, as younger scholars saw in sexuality a field for creative and original work. A little later, the new interdisciplinary conversations between philosophers and other classical scholars even began to close the largest gap in Foucault, namely, his silence about the many ways in which ethical considerations of various types (whether considerations

of generosity, kindness, freedom, or self-control) affected the Greeks' discussions and experience of sexuality. (To some extent these issues were addressed in Foucault's last writings.) Sexuality was not simply a domain of power relations but also an arena in which people attempted to cultivate themselves as restrained, decent, just, moderate, and courageous people.

The study of Rome, however, lagged behind. Roman sexual behavior and norms had not yet been addressed with the acuteness and sophistication Dover accorded the Greeks. Susan Treggiari's important *Roman Marriage* (1991) made a major advance in understanding how many Romans, during the republic and early empire, thought about their spouses, establishing that the ideal marriage in Rome, unlike Greek marriage, was envisaged as involving companionship and sharing in life's major events and aspirations. But no comparably detailed investigation had yet addressed same-sex desire and conduct. Even worse, on this question simple stereotypes abounded. Romans were thought by many to be more like good Victorians: they were said to reject Greek norms of pederasty and to show considerable suspicion about same-sex acts in general.

First published in 1999, Craig Williams' *Roman Homosexuality* does for the Romans what Dover did for the Greeks: it puts the key pieces of evidence together with scholarly precision, methodological caution, and a keen sense of genre. Williams has learned from Dover: like him, he does not generalize lightly from materials in one genre (e.g., satire) to those in another, but always points out the limitations of what each piece of evidence can tell us. Perhaps he is somewhat more sensitive than Dover to the possible gulf between social norms, as represented in texts of various kinds, and the daily reality of people's possibly idiosyncratic or rebellious lives. He claims only to portray the former, and is properly agnostic about the extent to which the latter diverged. Finally, like Dover, he is careful to preserve a sense of possible cultural distance and divergence, not assuming that the basic categories are the same as ours, or even closely similar. (Doing this while offering translations that are not just accurate but also stylish and, where appropriate, funny is a remarkable achievement.)

On this basis, Williams argues convincingly that for Romans over quite a long period spanning the republic and the early empire, same-sex desire was regarded as perfectly ordinary and unproblematic—for males. (The evidence for females is far scantier and more mixed, and this is not a central theme in Williams' book.) A freeborn Roman male would be expected in the normal course of things to desire other males and to act on this desire—in contexts carefully restricted by the status of the parties. Sex (on the part of males) with male (and female) slaves or prostitutes was seen as unproblematic, even for married men—though wives at times complained. Sex with freeborn males, by contrast, was strongly discouraged. Thus same-sex acts typically involved asymmetrical power relations.

Here there is a large difference between Rome and Greece, but it is not exactly where conventional views had located it. Romans did not approve of the sort of

pederastic relationship in which an older man educated and formed a young freeborn male, in the context of an erotic relationship (limited, as I've said, by strict norms about nonpenetration). That sort of relationship was asymmetrical in terms of experience and power, and asymmetrical as well (it was often observed) in terms of sexual pleasure, since the younger man was at least supposed to be relatively unaffected by desire. (Thus some Greek writers defended male-female sex as better than male-male sex of this sort, on the grounds that male and female have equal pleasure.) Still, the younger man was a future citizen and potential equal, and that sense of an education aimed at full virtue animated the ideal. In Rome, no such same-sex relationship was tolerated. Inequality of power was therefore a more permanent and deeper feature of the sexual bond. The sexual role played by the freeborn male was also significant: penetrating (as in Greece) was regarded as manly; being penetrated was often seen as a sign of loss of dignity and status.

Williams' book is not only about same-sex acts between men. It contains valuable discussions of marital norms, of sexual crime, and, especially important, of the norms and stereotypes surrounding the Roman ideal of masculinity. Far from being a narrow catalogue of approved and disapproved sexual acts, the book is generously conceived as an exploration of what the Romans thought a "real man" was—of how that norm was enacted, but also at times mocked and subverted.

If I have any criticism to make, it is simply that Williams' book, so meticulous and so ambitious, so thorough in what it does attempt, is not just the first in a multivolume work on the Roman ideal of the well-lived life. When a culture is as seriously committed to ethical notions of human goodness as Roman culture was, when those notions of justice, generosity, courage, temperance, and wisdom affect people's self-portrayals in letters, their criticisms of their enemies, and the advice they give to their friends, one can be sure that their experience of themselves as sexual agents was not untouched by such ideals. Thus it is likely that in a larger inquiry this book's emphasis on power relations would be enlarged and complicated by reflection on how Romans thought it was right to treat other people, what they thought about friendship and virtue, and how sex interwove with all these other concerns. Williams, wisely limiting his study to more or less explicitly sexual material, and controlling a huge amount of material from every genre with careful argument, leaves this larger inquiry for others, or for himself in a future book. Meanwhile, in this new edition he has done what one might expect such a careful scholar to do: he has listened to criticism, rethought points large and small, added appendices of new material, and framed the entire thing with a helpful reflection on developments in the scholarship on sexuality. The new edition is to be celebrated, and its author warmly (once again) congratulated.

—Martha C. Nussbaum

Note to the Second Edition

I AM honored by the continued interest in *Roman Homosexuality* and grateful to Stefan Vranka and Oxford University Press for giving me the opportunity to mark the tenth anniversary of its publication with this second edition. I also wish to thank John Bodel, Marco Formisano, David Halperin, Ralph Hexter, and David Konstan for their helpful comments and advice; my colleagues in the Department of Classics at Brooklyn College for their congeniality and support; and Martha Nussbaum, not only for agreeing to write a foreword to the second edition but also for her insightful suggestions as I revised the first.

For this second edition I have written two entirely new texts: appendix 4, bringing together and contextualizing the graffiti from the city of Pompeii that are cited throughout the book, and the afterword, in which I look back on *Roman Homosexuality* from the perspective of ten years later, bringing out and expanding some of its central themes, locating it within larger debates on sexuality, text, and culture, and responding to work that has appeared since 1999. I have left the five chapters of the first edition unchanged in substance but have edited them throughout. While I am conscious of the fact that my writing voice has changed somewhat since I wrote this book, I have not tried to alter it retroactively; but I have tried to strengthen and refine my arguments, made what I hope are stylistic improvements, and corrected typographical and other errors. With those goals in mind I have rewritten the book's introduction and appendix 1, as well as a few sections of some chapters—above all, the final sections of chapter 5. Within the apparatus of the notes, I have not removed citations of ancient sources or lists of parallels (I am gratified to know that this feature of the book has been appreciated by many), but I have shortened longer quotations and removed some that I now find unnecessary, and above all I have updated the notes and bibliography so as to take into account scholarship that has appeared since the first edition. Finally, I have revised and tried to freshen up my translations of the Greek and Latin texts quoted throughout.

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Acknowledgments from the First Edition

MY first debt of gratitude is owed to Ralph Hexter, my teacher and friend, who encouraged me to write the dissertation that has grown into this book: I have relied on his warm support and shrewd advice for more than a decade. My dissertation also benefited from the characteristic acumen of my other advisor, Gordon Williams, and I thank him again here.

Over the past six years I have entirely rewritten my dissertation, and the result is a very different (and, I hope, better) book. I have been grateful to David Halperin for his friendly encouragement and keen insights throughout this process; they have helped shape this book into what it is. Both he and Ralph Hexter have read and commented on the entire manuscript, as has Daniel Selden, and I offer all three of them my warm thanks here. Their contributions have strengthened my book just as their astuteness has saved me from embarrassment on a number of occasions, although it goes without saying (and so, like everything that goes without saying, will be said anyway) that the blame for any errors, infelicities, or wrongheaded conclusions lies with me alone. I also wish to thank Randolph Trumbach, who read parts of the manuscript and with whom I have had many helpful conversations on the history of sexuality.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of Oxford University Press's anonymous readers, who pulled no punches, and to express my warm gratitude for the support and advice of various friends over the years: Panayotes Dakouras, Lee Elliott, Mario Erasmo, Marco Formisano, Debra Hamel, Edward Harris, and Ned Lochaya.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations for ancient texts generally follow standard practice (see *OLD* and *LSJ* for lists). The following abbreviations are used for certain collections of ancient texts or works of modern scholarship.

- ANRW* Temporini, Hildegard, ed. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*. Berlin, 1972–.
- CGL* Goetz, Georg, ed. *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*. Amsterdam, 1965.
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin, 1893–.
- CLE* Buecheler, Franz, ed. *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*. Leipzig, 1895. (Vol. 2 of *Anthologia Latina, sive Poesis Latinae Supplementum*, ed. Franz Buecheler and Alexander Riese.)
- Ernout-Meillet Ernout, Alfred, and Antoine Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*. 4th ed. Paris, 1959.
- GLK* Keil, Heinrich, ed. *Grammatici Latini*. Leipzig, 1857–1870.
- ILS* Dessau, Hermann, ed. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin, 1892–1916.
- Lewis and Short Lewis, Charlton T., and Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford, 1879.
- LSJ* Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Revised by Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie. 9th ed. Oxford, 1940.
- OLD* Glare, P. G. W., ed. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford, 1982.

- RAC* *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Stuttgart, 1950–.
- RE* *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Munich, 1894–1980.
- TLL* *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Leipzig, 1904–.
- Walde-Hofmann Walde, Alois, and Johann Baptist Hofmann. *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 3rd ed. Heidelberg, 1938–1956.

Roman
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Introduction

ANCIENT Romans lived in a cultural environment in which married men could enjoy sexual relations with their male slaves without fear of criticism from their peers; in which adultery generally aroused more concern than pederasty; in which men notorious for their womanizing might be called effeminate, while a man whose masculinity had been impugned could cite as proof of his manhood the fact that he had engaged in sexual relations with his accuser's sons; in which men who sought to be sexually penetrated by other men were subjected to teasing and ridicule, but were also thought quite capable of being adulterers. These scenarios highlight some obvious differences between ancient and modern ideologies of masculinity, and one of the central aims of this study is to explore those differences.

But how can we make such claims concerning an ancient culture, or indeed any culture? What was the relationship between the patterns I have just described and the realities of living as a man in ancient Rome? What are the implications for us today of emphasizing historical difference over similarities and continuities? Any discussion of gender and sexuality in ancient culture raises such questions, even if only implicitly, and in this introduction I attempt to provide some preliminary responses to them, at the same time defining my terms and describing the conceptual framework within which I am working. Here I lay the foundations for the book as a whole, in which I will flesh out the cartoon figures of Roman men just sketched.

This book explores prevalent ideologies of masculinity among Romans by focusing on the representations and, when possible, the realities of men's sexual experience in general and sexual acts between males in particular. That formulation calls for expansion. When I speak of *ideologies* I refer to the systems of norms, values, and assumptions that were bequeathed to Roman men as part of their cultural patrimony and that enabled them to describe and evaluate individual experience in public contexts—in other words, to give

public meaning to private acts.¹ These ideologies were “prevalent” in the sense that, while different belief systems must have existed, these particular systems claimed the publicly pledged allegiance of the men who wielded social and economic power in ancient Roman culture and whose writings not coincidentally constitute nearly all of the surviving source material.² *Masculinity* refers to a complex of values and ideals more profitably analyzed as a cultural tradition than as a biological given: what it is to be fully gendered as a “real man” as opposed to simply being assigned to the male sex.³ I use the phrase *sexual experience* to refer to the realm of human existence that relates to stimulation of the genital organs and the desires related to such stimulation. That is a deliberately narrow formulation: I am consciously replicating Roman phallogocentric paradigms so as to interrogate them, and the practices described in this book almost always end up involving a man’s penis.⁴ Finally, while definitions of “Roman” culture are the subject of ongoing debate, I use the term *Roman* to refer to those individuals and groups, mostly living in Italy, who looked to the city of Rome as their cultural center and who wrote in Latin within a self-conscious literary tradition that identified itself as Roman.⁵ Roman cultural and literary traditions stood in a complex and often agonistic relationship with those of Greece, and throughout this study I consider similarities and differences between Roman and Greek ideologies.

HOMOSEXUALITY, HETEROSEXUALITY, BISEXUALITY

To judge by the textual material left to us, homosexuality turns out not to have been an important issue for Romans. Nor, for that matter, was heterosexuality. It is one of the fundamental premises of this book—one that it aims to justify—that Roman men were not encouraged by their cultural heritage to categorize, much less evaluate or judge, sexual acts and agents on the basis of whether only males or males and females were involved. (We will see that sexual acts between females were treated rather differently.) A study of Roman homosexuality would seem as incomplete and as peculiar to an ancient Roman as would a study of Roman heterosexuality. I would thus argue that the impulse to explore Roman attitudes toward homosexuality or heterosexuality is not so much an inevitable response to objective, transhistorical truth as it is a culturally conditioned predisposition. And yet my book circumscribes Roman homosexuality as its subject. The paradox is intentional. I apply the concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality heuristically, temporarily and strategically reifying them in order to expose their historical specificity and their inadequacy as categories of analysis in a description of Roman ideological traditions. For modern readers of the ancient material, homosexuality and heterosexuality may seem unavoidable terms, but by putting historical pressure on them, I aim to challenge them.⁶ In short, my entire project sets up an ironic distance from its subject, beginning with the title:

writing an analogous book with the title *Roman Heterosexuality* would make the same point.

It deserves emphasis that in its insistent problematization of the category “homosexuality,” my study differs from nearly all work on ancient Rome that had appeared prior to its first edition. Previous monographs dedicated to the question of Roman “homosexuality” or “bisexuality” interrogated those categories either in passing or not at all.⁷ Eva Cantarella’s 1988 book begins by acknowledging “how imprecise and misleading it is to speak of ‘homosexuality’ with reference to the ancient world,” but in practice constantly makes assertions about “homosexuality” in ancient Rome that could just as well be made about “heterosexuality.”⁸ Likewise Saara Lilja’s 1983 monograph *Homosexuality in Republican and Augustan Rome* described the “moral aspects of homosexuality” in these terms:

Homosexual relations with slaves seem to have been generally accepted, provided that the slave acted as the passive partner. The same sharp distinction between passive and active roles also determined the general attitude towards homosexual relations between freeborn citizens: while the active partner was accepted or at least tolerated, the passive partner’s submissive role was ridiculed. Bisexuality seems to have been considered as a normal phenomenon, but again only if the male in a homosexual contact acted as the active partner as he did in a heterosexual contact.⁹

But these are also “moral aspects of heterosexuality”: everything she says about men’s relations with male slaves and freeborn citizens is equally true of their relations with women.¹⁰ This is indeed what the last sentence quoted here seems to be saying, and the confusion created by its invocation of the concept of “bisexuality” well illustrates the problems. If we take our conceptual categories X and Y as our starting point and set out to investigate ancient attitudes to X, we will come to the conclusion that X is approved in contexts A and B and disapproved in contexts C and D, but that Y is also approved in A and B and disapproved in C and D. Clearly we need to discard X and Y and examine A, B, C, and D directly if we are to arrive at any useful insights. But enough of algebra: for X read “homosexuality,” for Y “heterosexuality”; “bisexuality” equals X + Y (or is it XY?).¹¹

Since language plays so crucial a role in the process by which culture shapes individual experience, words matter a great deal—both the words used by ancient Romans and the words we use as we attempt to describe ancient cultures and discourses. Here we run into the basic difficulty confronting both the translator and the ethnographer: how to describe one culture in another’s language (see the afterword for further discussion). On the one hand, it has often been noted that Latin has no words identical in meaning to “homosexual” or “heterosexual” (or, I would add, “bisexual”).¹² On the other hand, many of the

terms that Romans did use are untranslatable: *stuprum* and *puclitia* are far more specific than “debauchery” and “chastity,” and *cinaedus* is not the same as “faggot.” Since I seek as far as possible to reconstruct ancient discourses in their own terms, I refrain from translating such words as *stuprum* or *cinaedus*, nor will I use “homosexual” or “heterosexual” as an English rendering of any Latin word.

Yet, conditioned from birth to speak and think in terms of heterosexuality and homosexuality, we are probably incapable of purging them from our conceptual and linguistic systems. The dilemma appears inescapable, but as with the analytical categories “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality,” which I deploy only strategically and with a certain ironic distance, so with English words. The abstract nouns “homosexuality,” “heterosexuality,” and “bisexuality” will only appear in my discussion as heuristic devices: quotation marks are to be imagined around every occurrence of the words. I never use “homosexual” and “heterosexual” as nouns referring to persons (e.g., “Juvenal criticizes homosexuals”), but I have found them sometimes useful as adjectives referring to acts or combinations of sexual agents (e.g., “heterosexual anal intercourse”). As such, however, the words should be understood merely as referring to observable phenomena and as making no assumptions regarding identities. Similarly, I employ the adjective “homoerotic” and the phrase “same-sex”—and occasionally “heteroerotic” and “opposite-sex”—to refer to acts or the desire related to those acts.¹³ This care about linguistic usage reflects a central assumption of my work: while describing a sexual *act* as taking place between males, between males and females, or between females, can be a statement with relatively low ideological content, to speak of a *person* as “homosexual,” “heterosexual,” or “bisexual” is to trumpet an ideology. As we will see, Roman texts certainly show an awareness that just as there are males and females, men may engage in sexual acts with males or with females or with both; and that just as males and females exhibit physical differences, sexual practices between persons of the same sex may be compared or contrasted with such practices between persons of different sexes. But ancient writers quite consistently fail to suggest that these practices are significantly or essentially different. Rather, they are portrayed as two sides of one coin, differing mainly in surface detail. Some men were clearly more interested in one side of the coin than in the other, or even in one side exclusively; but in general, Roman men do not appear to have been inclined to focus on the obvious fact that the coin had two sides. If we emphasize precisely that fact, we will be importing a preoccupation alien to the Roman textual tradition.

It has been persuasively argued that the impulse to pigeonhole every human being as either *heterosexual* or *homosexual* (the sometimes uncomfortable category *bisexual* being reserved for intractable cases) is specifically characteristic

of contemporary Western culture, and that in its currently recognizable form the heterosexual/homosexual system emerged over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ The thesis has been developed over the past few decades. Mary McIntosh's pioneering 1968 study of "the homosexual role" distinguished between individual behaviors and social roles, arguing that the role of "the homosexual" does not occur in all human societies, and that it did not emerge in England until the late seventeenth century.¹⁵ Another landmark was Jeffrey Weeks' 1977 study of homosexual politics in Britain, in which he argued the following:

Homosexuality has existed throughout history. But what have varied enormously are the ways in which various societies have regarded homosexuality, the meanings they have attached to it, and how those who were engaged in homosexual activity viewed themselves. . . . As a starting point we have to distinguish between homosexual behavior, which is universal, and a homosexual identity, which is historically specific.¹⁶

A turning point came with Foucault's three-volume *History of Sexuality*, published in English translation in 1978, 1985 and 1986. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1990 *Epistemology of the Closet* summarizes and explores further implications of one of Foucault's central points: "What *was* new from the turn of the century was the world-mapping by which every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or a hetero-sexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal experience."¹⁷ Since the late 1970s, a growing body of studies of cultures other than those of the West has shown just how specific this entire conceptual apparatus is. Already in his 1988 survey *The Construction of Homosexuality*, the sociologist David Greenberg was able to conclude that in many cultures "mere involvement in a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex does not become the basis for classifying someone as a distinct type of person," and Stephen Murray's 2000 *Homosexualities* confirms and expands on Greenberg's observations.¹⁸

From a crosscultural perspective, there is much about Roman masculinity that is familiar, such as the hierarchical gendering of penetrative acts in such a way as to identify the penetrative or insertive role as masculine and superordinate, the receptive role as feminine and subordinate, and the frequent aligning of those distinctions with difference in age. Samurai in medieval Japan might have relationships with adolescent males or with young kabuki actors; in some Native American cultures a man may legitimately have a sexual relationship with a person who was born male but who in the course of his life changes role, not fully a man but not a woman either; in some Melanesian cultures, boys must be

inseminated by men in order to become fully gendered men themselves; men's passion for beardless youths is an important theme in certain phases of the Arabic literary tradition; and, perhaps most famously, publicly recognized relations between citizen men and adolescent males were a prominent feature of the cultural landscape in ancient Greece.¹⁹ In the Roman textual tradition, this dichotomy expresses itself as a tendency to associate the receptive role with women, boys, and slaves and to construe adult men who display a desire to be penetrated as effeminate anomalies, liable to ridicule or worse—yet welcome anomalies, it would seem, since (by a double standard characteristic of many patriarchal cultural traditions, discussed in chapter 5) fully gendered men might be perfectly content to express desire for, and enact their phallic masculinity with, the very men they ridicule as effeminate. In cultural contexts like these, then, men's publicly acceptable partners are marked as significantly *different*, even if they are of the same biological sex—a consideration that issues a simple but forceful challenge to the very concepts of *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality*, resting as they do on the assumption that the only significant sameness or difference lies in the biological sex of the participants in a sexual act.

Another challenge lies in the disparity between Roman representations of sexual practices between males and those of sexual practices between females.²⁰ The poetry of Ovid incisively illustrates the point. In his *Metamorphoses*, a compendium of Greek mythology for a Roman audience, we read of Iphis, a girl smitten with desire for another girl, who expostulates on her passion in a soliloquy overflowing with self-recrimination: cows do not yearn for cows, nor mares for mares, so why have the gods given her the burden of this unnatural desire (*Met.* 9.726–34)? Yet the same poem portrays desire and passion between males as a thoroughly unexceptionable feature of human and divine experience: Ovid tells the tales of Apollo and Hyacinth, Zeus and Ganymede, and others (*Met.* 10.162–219; see further appendix 1).²¹ In his *Art of Love*, Ovid observes that he prefers women to boys, but his explanation is revealing: “I dislike couplings that do not relax both partners; that is why I am touched less by the love of a boy” (*Ars amatoria* 2.683–4: “odi concubitus qui non utrumque resolvunt; / hoc est cur pueri tangar amore minus”). Ovid hardly disclaims all interest in boys (“less” rather than “not at all”), neither does he attempt a problematization of sexual practices or desire between males in general; the remark, although often highlighted in studies such as mine, is made very much in passing. Indeed, in the programmatic introduction to his collection of love poems, Ovid describes the proper subject matter for Roman love elegy, written from the perspective of the desiring male, as “either a boy or a girl adorned with long hair” (*Amores* 1.1.20: “aut puer aut longas compta puella comas”). In short, this poet and his readership seem to have perceived no significant parallels between sexual practices between men and boys on the one hand and those between women on the other, and in general the Latin textual tradition does

not suggest a cultural environment in which the set *homosexuality* consisted of the two subsets *male* and *female*.²²

TEXTS, REPRESENTATION, REALITY

This book's arguments are based on readings of Roman texts dating to the period from approximately the second century B.C. to the second century A.D. and embracing a broad range of genres: from obscene epigram to drama to epic and lyric poetry, from speeches delivered in the courts or before the senate to rhetorical and philosophical treatises to graffiti written on the walls of ancient cities.²³ Each text and genre has its own strategies, purposes, and audiences, and each stands in its own tradition, but nearly all surviving texts were composed by Roman men for an audience principally consisting of Roman men. They simultaneously reflect and reinforce cultural standards to which both writer and audience claim allegiance, and if we consider them as an ensemble, looking for what they commonly assail and what they commonly suppress, a consistent picture emerges.²⁴ A speech of Cicero, an epigram of Martial, a biography of Suetonius, and graffiti scratched on a wall all come equipped with an impressive array of cultural baggage, and I wish to begin the process of unpacking.

Central to this kind of inquiry is the complex relationship between representation and reality. The terms are contested and obviously not strictly antithetical.²⁵ Reality and representation interpenetrate: on the one hand, individual experience can only be given public meaning through the mediation of linguistic and visual representation; on the other, representations are representations *of something* and are understood as such by those who create and disseminate them. Still, the opposition has its analytical utility, allowing us to focus on the contrast between the lived experiences of real Roman men (for example, that on a certain day one man anally penetrated another) and the linguistic or visual portrayal of those experiences, whether real or imagined (for example: gossip reported by a historian to the effect that a certain man had been penetrated in his youth; love poetry in which the persona proclaims his love for a young man; or graffiti crudely proclaiming that someone performs fellatio). When we consider ancient representations, we are looking for the shared language of words, concepts, prejudices, and preconceptions concerning masculinity and men's sexual behavior that is detectable in the surviving sources: the discourse of masculinity.²⁶ In his poetry, Gaius Valerius Catullus casts himself in the role of lover of a young man named Juventius; the biographer Suetonius tells us that Julius Caesar was mocked for having had in his youth an affair with the Bithynian king Nicomedes in which he played the receptive or "passive" role in sexual intercourse. These are examples (and, as we shall see, typical examples) of Roman representation. But what was the reality that lay behind or within them? In these two particular cases, we simply cannot know. Catullus may have

been indulging in poetic fancy, and Caesar's enemies may have been spreading malicious but groundless gossip; on the other hand, Catullus may have really had an affair with Juventius, and Caesar with Nicomedes. We only have the representations; although there are moments in which we get a fleeting glimpse at realities that may or may not harmonize with them, in general the realities are lost to us.

The concept of the *persona* is most obviously relevant to first-person texts but is applicable beyond them as well. It should go without saying that when I speak of, for example, Catullus, Martial, or Cicero, I refer to the *persona* projected by each of those writers, which may or may not reflect the actual experiences, desires, or preoccupations of the men themselves, and the same holds true for other individuals appearing in their texts. Thus, when I speak of Martial or a character in one of his epigrams, or of Cicero or a character in one of his speeches, as "saying" or "doing" something, I do not mean that any of these individuals actually did or said it, but rather that they represent themselves (or are represented) as doing so. Martial may never have had a sexual relationship with a slave-boy named Telesphorus, but the point is that, as far as Martial's Roman readers were concerned, he *could* have. In fact, ancient writers easily made the jump from *persona* to person, breezily disregarding occasional protests against the practice.²⁷ In a passage from his *Tusculan Disputations* to which we shall return, Cicero warns of the dangers of sexual passion, and names some famous Greek love poets in the process:

quid denique homines doctissimi et summi poetae de se ipsis et carminibus edunt et cantibus? fortis vir in sua re publica cognitus quae diuenum amore scribit Alcaeus! nam Anacreontis quidem tota poesis est amatoria. maxume vero omnium flagrasse amore Reginum Ibycum apparet ex scriptis. (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.71)

In short, what do these most learned of men and greatest of poets reveal about themselves in their poems and songs? Consider what Alcaeus, recognized as a hero in his native land, wrote about the love of young men; and all of Anacreon's poetic oeuvre, of course, is about love. But out of all of them, Ibycus of Regium burned the most with love: that is clear from his writings.²⁸

The argument moves effortlessly between poetry and poets, and indeed makes no bones about it: poetry reveals the man. In a world of Ciceros, a poet would have to be very bold indeed to assign to his *persona* attitudes or behaviors with which he would be ashamed to be associated.

In other words, we cannot be certain what the particular experiences of any given man were, but we can learn a great deal about larger and perhaps more

rewarding questions: what a self-respecting Roman man would have publicly endorsed as acceptably masculine behavior (for example, erotically pursuing a beautiful young man) and what he and his peers would have considered to be a basis for accusation (for example, playing the receptive role in anal intercourse with a foreign king).²⁹ And so the questions I pose of the texts are these: In the arena of public interactions between men, which sexual practices were held to be acceptable and which were not? How did these practices affect a man's masculine status? How were these practices categorized, labeled, and evaluated, and what sorts of conceptual interrelationships existed between them? Finally, the crucial importance of appearances (see chapter 5) illustrates the complexities of the relationship between representation and reality. If a certain man actually played the receptive role in the majority of his sexual encounters, yet managed to keep that fact a secret known only to himself and his partners and otherwise maintained the appearance of a fully masculine man, then he *was* a fully masculine man in the all-important arena of public discourse, despite the fact that he actually was breaking the rules behind closed doors. By contrast, if there were persistent rumors to the effect that a man liked to play the receptive role in intercourse, even if the man himself had never actually been penetrated, he was *ipso facto* a marked man, metaphorically “fucked” even if not literally so.

DIACHRONIC CHANGE

Since the texts on which this book bases its arguments span four centuries of Roman history, diachronic change looms as a distinct possibility. Studies of Roman sexuality commonly assume or explicitly argue that there were significant changes over time, especially in connection with the powerful wave of Greek cultural influence that swept over Rome in the second century B.C., and with the transition between republic and empire in the late first century B.C.³⁰ On the point of Greek influence, I will be arguing in chapters 1 and 2 that only the specific practice of *paidierastia*—openly celebrated sexual and romantic relations between citizen men and freeborn adolescent males—was considered by Romans to be Greek, not “male homosexuality” in general. As for the transition from republic to empire, it is my argument that the traditional codes governing sexual behavior, and the conceptual systems informing those codes, underwent no significant alteration.³¹ To be sure, there may have been fluctuations in practice, such as in the open display of luxury or in the extent to which Romans felt free to admit to nontraditional behavior, and the reign of Vespasian (A.D. 69–78) may have seen a vogue for austerity. Less plausible is the argument that in the first century A.D. increasing numbers of Roman men were openly indulging their desire for being penetrated:

The ideology, then, has not changed: a man is only a real man if he is gloriously active. But the facts show that real Roman males are getting rarer and rarer. Even allowing for the exaggerated description of current practices, offered both by Martial and by Juvenal, passive behaviour has kept on spreading in a worrying fashion. And as we shall see, it goes on spreading. Here is the great, intolerable novelty.³²

It is hazardous to draw conclusions about how widespread certain sexual practices were from the hyperboles of satire and epigram—these texts tell us little about “the facts” of the matter—and the thesis relies on an argument from silence: we simply do not have enough sources from before the second century B.C. Those texts which do survive, moreover, directly contradict the argument for change. Consider this reading of the implications of Juvenal’s ninth satire:

The interest and novelty of this satire is obvious. Male prostitution, as we know, had always been widespread in Rome. But in the old days, boys sold themselves to be subjected to sex like women. Their paymaster was still a real man. Now, everything has changed. Naevolus is an active homosexual. The Romans have sunk to such a level of depravity that they no longer pay to put somebody else underneath them—they now pay someone to go on top.³³

Naevolus can hardly be called “a homosexual,” active or otherwise, as he not only services both his male patron and his wife but also expresses an interest in girls (*puellas*, 9.128); and neither this poem nor any other text suggests that Roman men no longer paid prostitutes whom they penetrated. But above all, the idea that a man might pay a prostitute to play the insertive or penetrative role was hardly a novelty: as we will see in chapter 1, in the early first century B.C. Pomponius staged an Atellan farce called *The Prostitute (Prostibulum)* whose main character was a male prostitute who makes it brutally clear that he penetrates his male clients. Who knows what other sexual stereotypes were exploited in the farces and mimes staged at Rome well before Pomponius or even Plautus, but now lost?

In short, any theorizing of significant changes in Roman men’s sexual practices must be viewed with great caution, and the formulation just quoted reminds us that what never changed was the *ideology*, precisely the main concern of this book. Even if we accept the unprovable hypothesis that during the empire more men openly broke the rules (flaunting, for example, their indulgence in adultery or their desire to be penetrated), the rules themselves never changed. Adultery was still adultery, and to take pleasure in being penetrated was still thought incompatible with a fully masculine image. The ideological traditions that were either affirmed or violated by individual Romans over the generations remained intact throughout the period studied in this book.³⁴

PAST AND PRESENT

No attempt at describing the past—especially a past so widely construed as playing so crucial a role in the formation of the present—can be entirely disinterested. The fact that, paradox notwithstanding, my book describes itself as a study of Roman homosexuality reveals my interest in the contemporary project of exploring the ways in which sexual practices between persons of the same sex have been given meaning over the course of human history. But I refrain from using terms like “gay history” for reasons that I hope are clear, and the same reasons lead me to focus on the *specificity* of ancient Roman discourses and ideologies. Feminist classicists like Amy Richlin have reminded us of the continuous history of oppressive patriarchal structures in Western cultures, and there are some obvious continuities in individual men’s experience as well: male human beings both then and now have consciously experienced desire for others, both male and female; they have sometimes embodied those desires in specific acts; and the basic forms that the physical consummation of those desires has taken are finite and familiar. The practices most often described in Roman texts are vaginal and anal penetration, fellatio and cunnilinctus; I take it as emblematic of a phallocentric preoccupation with penetration that apart from cunnilinctus (which is itself distinctly problematized), nonpenetrative acts such as mutual masturbation are very rarely mentioned. Beyond physical encounters, moreover, men have desired to form lasting bonds with partners both male and female, and the range of emotional states related to the pursuit and maintenance of those relationships seems to have remained basically the same in all its breadth and complexity. But what has changed, and what generally varies over time and between cultures, is the way individuals have been encouraged by their cultural heritage to *categorize* and *evaluate* these acts and actors, relations and relationships. That is precisely my interest in this book. In probing the gaps between antiquity and modernity with regard to ideologies of masculinity in general and sexual practices between males in particular, and by historicizing modern discourses on heterosexuality and homosexuality, my study will, I hope, shed light on both ancient and contemporary ideologies of masculinity, and on some of the mechanisms by which culture molds individual experience.

SCRIPTS OF ROMAN MASCULINITY

This book attempts to reconstruct a shared language of words, concepts, prejudices, and preconceptions concerning masculinity, especially as it relates to men’s sexual experience—in short, it attempts a partial reconstruction of Roman discourses of masculinity. Gender has also been described, most famously by Judith Butler, as a performance.³⁵ How, then, could Roman masculinity be *performed*? What did the performances look like? Who were the actors and what did they look

like? What were the scripts from which they read? What happened when they departed from their scripts?

Of the triad actor, performance, and script, it is the last to which we have direct access through the texts surviving from antiquity, and so this book focuses above all on the available scripts of Roman masculinity, and I have structured my discussion around the organizing principles informing those scripts. Chapters 1 and 2 are concerned above all with the relationship between Rome and Greece; I argue that, independently of Greek influence, Roman moral traditions always allowed for sexual practices between males in certain configurations and contexts; that what Romans saw as “Greek” in this area was the specific social institution known as *paidēraistia*; and that certain themes in the scripts of Roman masculinity (for example, the emphasis on slaves as sexual partners, or the value placed on unusually generous phallic endowment) are specifically and uniquely Roman. The next three chapters reveal some other organizing principles of Roman masculinity: first, the opposition between freeborn Romans and everyone else (slaves in particular) that protected the sexual integrity of free persons of both sexes and generally disregarded the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual acts (chapter 3); second, an opposition between masculine and effeminate traits or behaviors that was not aligned with the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual acts but instead associated masculinity with dominion and control (chapter 4); and third, a conceptual system concerned with the role played in sexual acts that was fundamentally structured around the antithesis between the insertive or penetrating role and the receptive or penetrated role, and that was undergirded by categories having to do with what we would today call gender rather than sexual orientation (chapter 5). A concluding discussion looks both backward and forward, offering a recapitulation and suggesting future avenues of inquiry.

Roman Traditions

Slaves, Prostitutes, and Wives

SOME of the most fascinating problems in the study of ancient Rome arise from the complex interactions between Rome and Greece that resulted in what is often called Greco-Roman culture, a term that points to the extraordinary influence exerted by Greece, nominally the captive nation. Roman writers were themselves fully aware of this phenomenon. The poet Horace's lapidary phrase, although concerned specifically with literary influences, is often cited as a typical perspective: "Captive Greece captured its barbarian conqueror."¹ The project of teasing out the native Roman from the imported Greek threads in the fabric of Greco-Roman culture (or, alternatively, of denying the utility or even possibility of such an attempt) has long engaged scholars interested in the history and nature of the Roman literary tradition and in the more general development of a Roman cultural identity in opposition to that of the Greeks.²

In view of the well-known Hellenic tradition of pederasty,³ the question becomes especially important for inquiries into Roman ideologies of masculinity and sexual experience. One common belief has been that, whether in historical reality or in ancient perceptions of that reality, native Roman ideals of masculinity before the advent of the corrupting influence of Greek customs demanded exclusive heterosexuality. According to this view, the acceptance of homosexuality—more extreme proponents imply even its practice—was one of the cultural items borrowed by Rome from Greece, one ingredient in the package of extravagance and luxury that was the conquered race's insidious gift to its conquerors, a sexual Trojan horse. L. P. Wilkinson and Ramsay MacMullen offer two especially vigorous formulations:

In the early Republic the Romans' attitude to homosexuality was that of most non-Greeks; it was a Greek idiosyncrasy which they despised.... But in the second century BC, when captured Greece captivated its rude conqueror, there was an increase in homosexual practices; and at some time a *Lex Scantinia* was passed against them.⁴

The Greek origin of “Greek love” among the Romans is suggested by its appearance disproportionately in Greek dress in early Roman literature.... It seems safe to conclude that “the man in the street,” or at least the man in the forum and law courts who constituted the ordinary audience for political statements, could be assumed to be the foe of male homosexuality.⁵

There have always been dissenting opinions,⁶ and two articles by Paul Veyne and one book by Eva Cantarella argue for the opposing view:

It is not true that “Greek” love was, at Rome, of Greek origin: like more than one Mediterranean society even today, Rome never opposed the love of women to the love of boys. It opposed activity to passivity: to be active is to be a male, whatever the sex of the passive partner.⁷

Rome did not have to wait for hellenization to allow various forms of love between males.... This is the world of heroic bravado, with a very Mediterranean flavour, where the important thing is to be the ravisher, never mind the sex of the victim.⁸

To sum up, homosexuality in itself was neither a crime nor a socially reproved form of behavior. Carrying on with a slave (so long as he did not belong to someone else) was accepted as normal behavior, as was paying a male prostitute. The only thing that was not acceptable was to make love to a young free Roman citizen.⁹

But whether in part or in whole, the complex of beliefs suggested by Wilkinson and MacMullen, although rarely so trenchantly expressed, is still widespread: that native Roman cultural traditions were uncomfortable with or even hostile to sexual experience between males; that only the philhellenizing upper classes adopted Greek perspectives on that experience, and thus tolerated or even celebrated affairs between men and boys; and finally that, whatever the historical realities may have been, Romans themselves associated male homosexuality with Greece.¹⁰

The tenacity of such views is no doubt partially due to the cultural milieu to which contemporary European and American scholars themselves belong, a milieu that encourages them to categorize and evaluate human beings as sexual subjects on the basis of the sex of their preferred partners and thus has induced many scholars to look for “Roman attitudes toward homosexuality.” But, as I suggested in the introduction, to inquire into Roman attitudes toward homosexuality and their relation to Roman attitudes toward Greece means also inquiring into Roman attitudes toward heterosexuality and their relation to Roman attitudes toward Greece. Traditional Roman standards of

acceptably masculine sexual behavior included, as we will see, provisions for sexual experience with both males and females in certain contexts (notably with one's own slaves and with prostitutes). Moreover, we will see that those sexual practices that could be represented as somehow "Greek" were primarily those involving freeborn boys openly courted in accordance with the Hellenic traditions of pederasty—and not all sexual relations between males—and that relations with fancy female prostitutes could also be given a "Greek" coloring. In the following two chapters I discuss the evidence for this view (which has been espoused by other scholars), but I also ask how "Greek" the practice of pederasty actually was: How large did pederastic traditions actually loom in Roman images of Greek culture, and to what extent were pederastic relationships in a Roman context actually colored as Greek? Chapter 2 then proceeds to explore certain specifically Roman features of the cultural landscape visible in the ancient textual tradition.

THE PROTOCOLS OF MASCULINE BEHAVIOR

Scholarly inquiry into human sexual behavior worldwide, from the earliest times to the present, has made one thing clear: apart from the modern social formation conventionally called "Western culture," very few cultures have issued a blanket condemnation of sexual practices between males as being in and of themselves objectionable.¹¹ While there are always restrictions and qualifications—this kind of sexual behavior is only acceptable in certain contexts—the same is true of *all* human sexual practices, among the most intensely scrutinized and policed of behaviors. As we will see, the sources left to us from ancient Rome make it abundantly clear that Roman traditions fell squarely in line with the worldwide trend: homosexual behavior was not condemned per se, and a citizen male could admit to sexual experience with males in certain contexts and configurations without fear of ridicule or reprisal, without the threat even of a raised eyebrow.¹²

By saying "certain contexts and configurations" I imply that there existed restrictions; but restrictions were placed even on a man's behavior with his legitimate wife. One ancient anecdote reveals something of the character of Roman traditions regarding publicly acceptable conduct. We will have several occasions to consider the figure of Marcus Porcius Cato. Consul in 195 B.C., and censor in 184 B.C., Cato has regularly been held by both ancients and moderns to be the very embodiment of traditional Roman standards, unswerving in his dedication to the *mos maiorum* or "ways of the ancestors" and unremitting in his attacks on decadence and luxury.¹³ During his tenure as censor, renowned for its strictness, he exercised one of the privileges of his office by expelling from membership in the Senate a man named Manilius. What was Cato's cause for complaint? The man had kissed his wife in broad daylight in the presence

of their daughter. According to Plutarch, the censor observed that he himself only fell into his wife's embrace when startled by loud thunder, jokingly adding that he was a lucky man when it thundered. Of course the second comment undermines the first one, as Cato is slyly admitting that kissing one's wife has its pleasures. But there was a time and a place for everything, and Manilius had apparently gone too far.¹⁴

What, then, were the traditional protocols¹⁵ governing sexual practices between males among Romans? To ask this question is really to ask about sexual protocols in general, as the most fundamental rules regulating men's sexual behavior were in effect regardless of whether their partners were male or female. Another crucial point made in the introduction, and that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5, deserves to be reiterated. What was at stake was less a man's actual behavior and more the *appearance* he gave and the *image* he had; how he was seen and talked about by his peers more than what he actually did in the privacy of his bedroom. With these important qualifications in mind, we now consider the basic rules of the game evident in the ancient texts surveyed in this book.

First and foremost, a self-respecting Roman man must always give the appearance of playing the insertive role in penetrative acts, and not the receptive role: to use popular terminology often unfortunately replicated in the language of scholarship, he must be the "active," not the "passive," partner.¹⁶ This can justly be called the prime directive of masculine sexual behavior for Romans, and it has an obvious relationship to hierarchical social structures. For according to this scheme, penetration is subjugation (in the sense that the act is held simultaneously to be a figure for, and to effect, subjugation), and masculinity is domination.¹⁷ This prime directive will be discussed in detail in chapter 5; for now it will suffice to note that a similar protocol for masculine sexual behavior can be found in many other cultural settings. At Rome, this paradigm can handily be called a Priapic model of masculinity.¹⁸ First worshipped in the Greek town of Lampsacus, the god Priapus, a fertility deity whose outstanding attribute was his prodigiously large penis, became extraordinarily popular among Romans, and a number of Roman texts, blending poetic conceit with folk beliefs, explore the notion that a statue of the god, with a sickle in one hand and his characteristic member jutting out from his crotch, would protect a garden by raping thieves, whether male or female.¹⁹ Priapus' popularity in the Roman world is suggestive. He can be seen as something like the patron saint or mascot of Roman machismo, and his vigorous exploits with women, boys, and men indiscriminately are clearly a mainstay of his hyper-masculine identity.²⁰ Like this phallic deity, a Roman man is ideally ready, willing, and able to express his dominion over others, male or female, by means of sexual penetration. By contrast, men who willingly play the receptive role in penetrative acts are imagined thereby to have abrogated their masculine privilege, to

have assimilated themselves to the inferior status of women, and are thus liable to ridicule and scorn.

A second protocol governing men's sexual behavior concerned the status of their partners, and here too the rule applied regardless of their partners' sex: apart from his wife, freeborn Romans both male and female were officially off-limits sexual partners for a Roman man (this protocol is explored in chapter 3). As always, it is worth bearing in mind that the existence of rules implies their violation, but here we are not concerned with what men actually did as much as we are with what they were *supposed* to do. According to the rules, freeborn Roman males and females other than his wife were excluded as acceptable partners, thus leaving slaves, prostitutes, and noncitizens of either sex as persons with whom a Roman man could have sexual relations without causing eyebrows to rise—provided always, of course, that the man observed the prime directive of maintaining the appearance of playing the insertive role in these sexual encounters.²¹

The next protocol did not constitute a restriction on men's sexual practices in the same way that the first two did. As we will see, the violation of the first rule by being penetrated damaged one's masculine identity (chapters 4 and 5), and the violation of the second rule by having relations with a freeborn Roman of either sex had certain moral and legal consequences (chapter 3). The third protocol did not have comparable consequences, and is less of a rule than a tendency pervading the ancient sources (see chapter 2): a noticeable proclivity toward smooth young bodies, such that, on the one hand, old women were the object of sometimes blood-curdling invective and, on the other hand, when the sources conceive of the kind of male partner who will normally arouse men's desires, they regularly picture a smooth youth. Men's normative sexual partners as represented in the textual tradition are therefore usually divisible into two classes: women or girls (*feminae* and *puellae*) on the one hand—treated indifferently as a group, but clearly excluding women thought to be past their prime—and young men or boys (*pueri*, *adulescentuli*, or *iuvenes*) on the other hand, excluding mature men (*viri*).²² Although we will see that this last restriction was not always observed, still, the ideal male partner, the *youth* or *boy* of our sources, belonged to the age-group roughly equivalent to what is now called adolescence. For Romans, this period's beginning was marked by the onset of puberty (generally held to occur between the twelfth and fourteenth years and to be marked by the maturation of the genitals and hence the arrival of sexual maturity, as well as by the appearance of a light down on the cheeks) and its end was marked by what they saw as the completion of the process of maturation, most notably the arrival of the full, manly beard (which is attested usually to have occurred somewhere around the twentieth year).²³ In between those two extremes lay the golden years, the “flower of youth” (*flos aetatis*), when boys were no longer prepubescent children, but not yet men; when they were at the peak of desirability.

BOYS AND GIRLS

A conceptual system that gives rise to a prime directive that a man should appear to play the insertive role with his partners, whether they are male or female, necessarily includes an understanding that it is normative (natural and normal, we might say) for a man to desire sexual contact with male and female bodies alike.²⁴ Such a perspective is evident in texts ranging from the earliest to the latest times, in all genres of writing from graffiti to lyric poetry. Nowhere do we find a suggestion that the protocols or behavioral codes, or the morality informing them, owe anything to the influence of Greek culture. It is true that the great majority of the surviving contemporary evidence dates from after the second century B.C.: after, that is, the wave of Greek influence had swept over Rome. But Roman writers were acutely aware of that influence and were quick to point out the ways (almost entirely pernicious, as they would have it) in which contact with Greece had affected the Roman cultural landscape, and they never suggest that the basic understandings of masculine identity sketched above had been taken over from the Greeks. What they do suggest, as we will see in chapter 2, is that Greek influence resulted in increased licentiousness in general, as witnessed, for example, by an increased indulgence in prostitutes.

Surviving quotations from second-century B.C. statesmen such as Cato the Elder, Scipio Aemilianus, and Gaius Gracchus provide helpful glimpses into contemporary popular morality during the period when the influence of Greece was beginning to make itself felt on a large scale. Not only do these fragments offer evidence for what Romans of the time actually did, but they suggest a great deal about the kinds of perspectives that orators felt comfortable espousing in the public arena, and thus ultimately about the assumptions and values they expected their audiences to endorse. In other words, we can assume that their speeches reflect a traditional Roman morality; public figures in a society renowned for its conservative moral and political traditions would hardly have subscribed to new-fangled notions recently arrived from Greece. That is, even if Greek traditions eventually caused significant changes in native Roman paradigms (and I am arguing that they did not), it is highly unlikely that any such changes could have become so entrenched in the course of the second century B.C. as to be fully incorporated into the moral systems shared by politicians of that period and their audiences.

When, in 124 B.C., C. Sempronius Gracchus returned from his quaestorship in Sardinia, he delivered a speech before the people that has been partially preserved by Aulus Gellius. In a surviving portion of the speech, Gracchus makes this proud claim:

biennium fui in provincia; si ulla meretrix domum meam introivit aut cuiusquam servulus propter me sollicitatus est, omnium nationum postremissimum nequissimumque existimatote. cum a servis eorum tam

caste me habuerim, inde poteritis considerare quomodo me putetis cum liberis vestris vixisse. (fr. 27 Malcovati; Gell. 15.12.3)

I spent two years in the province; if any [female] prostitute came into my home or if anyone's slave-boy was accosted for my sake, you can think of me as the basest and most worthless person in the world. Considering that I so chastely kept myself from their slaves, you can reflect on how you think I treated your children.

The assumptions are telling. First, Gracchus says nothing about his treatment of his own slaves; what he did with them was presumably not a matter for public discussion. Second, one can perceive an unspoken understanding between Gracchus and his audience: even if he had been unable to keep his hands off prostitutes and other men's slaves, his transgression would not have been particularly reprehensible; consequently, his actual conduct has been extraordinarily restrained. This implication is in fact a mainstay of Gracchus' rhetoric, for his ultimate goal is to head off any accusations of misbehavior with the freeborn young Romans in his province, a more serious offense. In any event, Gracchus obviously shares with his audience the understanding that an important man like himself might well be susceptible to the charms of attractive young men, and there is no hint of any blame attached to such desires.²⁵ The issues important for Gracchus and his audience are not an opposition between homosexual and heterosexual acts or desires but rather the distinction between slave and free, as well as the manner in which a Roman official in the provinces should treat the young citizens under his authority.

Scipio Aemilianus, consul in 147 B.C. and censor in 142, attacked P. Sulpicius Galus in a speech that included the following remarks:

nam qui cotidie unguentatus adversus speculum ornetur, cuius supercilia radantur, qui barba vulsa feminibusque subvulsis ambulet, qui in conviviis adulescentulus cum amatore cum chirodota tunica inferior accubuerit, qui non modo vinosus sed virosus quoque sit, eumne quisquam dubitet quin idem fecerit quod *cinaedi* facere solent?

(fr. 17 Malcovati; Gell. 6.12.5)

For the kind of man who adorns himself daily in front of a mirror, wearing perfume; whose eyebrows are shaved off; who walks around with plucked beard and thighs; who when he was a young man reclined at banquets next to his lover, wearing a long-sleeved tunic; who is as fond of men as he is of wine: can anyone doubt that he has done what *cinaedi* are in the habit of doing?

This man displays effeminate characteristics in his style of clothing and deportment (see chapter 4); he reclines at banquets with his male lover; he is crazy not only for wine but also for men (here Scipio indulges in a bit of word-play: *vinosus/*

virusus). The conclusion, Scipio would have us believe, is obvious: the man has done “what *cinaedi* are in the habit of doing.” The circumlocution, while euphemistic, drives the point home quite effectively: the man has been sexually penetrated.²⁶ The fragment nicely illustrates the mechanisms of men’s gossip, along with some possible topics of sexual innuendo, and we note that the criticism is directed entirely at the effeminate youth and that no attack is made on his lover.

In short, there seems to have been a traditional understanding among Roman men that, while effeminacy might lay a man open to abuse, it was perfectly normal for a man to desire and pursue boys as well as girls or women. In fact, the game of comparing the two types of partners seems to have amused audiences of Roman men from the earliest times. The audience of Plautus’ *Truculentus*, for example, was treated to a miniature debate on the virtues and vices of boy prostitutes as opposed to their female counterparts. Bantering with the slave-girl of a female prostitute whose favors he has enjoyed, a young man named Diniarchus pointedly observes that he is looking for “a small piece of land to plow.” The slave-girl retorts with rich innuendo:

AS. non arvos hic, sed pascuost ager: si arationes
habituris, qui arari solent, ad pueros ire meliust.
hunc nos habemus publicum, illi alii sunt publicani.
DI. utrosque pergnovi probe. AS. em istoc pol tu otiosu’s,
quom et illic et hic pervorsus es. sed utriscum rem esse mavis?
DI. procaciores esti’ vos, sed illi peiuriosi;
illis perit quidquid datur neque ipsis apparet quicquam:
vos saltem si quid quaeritis, exhibitis et comestis.
postremo illi sunt improbi, vos nequam et gloriosae.

(Plaut. *Truc.* 149–57)

ASTAPHIUM. There’s no field for plowing here, just a pasture. If it’s plowing you’re after, better go to those who usually get plowed—the boys! This field of ours is public land; they take public contracts. DINIARCHUS. Yes, I know them both very well. AS. Well, aren’t you the man of leisure, going astray both here and there! But which of them do you prefer to do your business with? DI. *You* are more impudent, but *they* are liars. Give it to *them* and it’s gone—you never see anything on them. At least *you* ask for it—but then you drink and eat it all up. In short, *they* are shameless, *you* are naughty and proud.

We will return later to the question of the value of Plautus’ comedies as a source for Roman belief systems (the trouble is that they were based on Greek originals). Here it will suffice to observe that in the monologue immediately preceding this scene the same slave-girl, complaining about how young men often abuse the generosity of female prostitutes, saucily reminds the audience that some of them

can vouch for what she is saying.²⁷ In this metatheatrical moment a direct link is made between the nominally Greek prostitutes of the play and the real experiences of the Roman men sitting in the audience, and that link is still in place when Diniarchus complacently draws on his experience with prostitutes of both sexes to weight their relative merits.

Diniarchus' main concern seems to be of a financial nature; he says nothing about any physical traits that might distinguish boys from women. By contrast, a line from Lucilius' satires that compares sexual relations with males and females is emphatically rooted in the body: "She bloodies you, but he on the other hand beshits you."²⁸ This line, like so many from Lucilius' poetry, and indeed from most early Roman literature, is preserved without a clue as to its original context. We can only conjecture, but it is nonetheless clear that the speaker of this line—whoever he was, whoever his addressee, whatever the dramatic situation—is commenting on the potential drawbacks of vaginal and anal penetration respectively.²⁹ The interchangeability of boys and women as objects of phallic attention lies behind another fragment of Lucilius, in which the speaker's praise of a lovely young woman culminates with the assertion that she is like a boy.³⁰ A certain androgynous quality could occasionally elicit praise from Roman men (Ovid lauds the virginal Atalanta as having a "face that you could truthfully call girlish on a boy, boyish on a girl"),³¹ and Lucilius' line gives us a glimpse at one man's publicly espoused tastes: this speaker can apparently find no better way to argue for a woman's desirability than to liken her to a boy. Another fragment has been variously reconstructed, but all scholars agree that it begins with the phrase "If no woman can have as firm a body"—as boys, that is.³² Yet another line speaks of a "beautiful boy" who is worthy of the addressee; in fact, since the ancient source preserving the line tells us that, like the remark about a woman's body, it comes from the fourth book of Lucilius' poetry, both fragments probably come from some kind of comparison between male and female sexual partners.³³ Another fragment seems to refer to yet another point of contrast: "They [masc.] will both ask for less and give to you much more properly and without disgrace [*flagitium*]." Since Nonius cites the lines as an illustration of the archaic use of the noun *flagitium* to refer to a "wrong-doing inflicted upon a maiden," the most likely interpretation is that the speaker is indicating the advantages of using boy prostitutes as opposed to having one's way with a young Roman woman (*virgo*).³⁴ Indeed, according to one interpretation, the entire seventh book of Lucilius' satires consisted of a discussion of the pros and cons of various sexual arrangements: with married women, female prostitutes, and boys.³⁵

It is interesting to hear a character from an Atellan farce by Novius claiming that "everyone knows that a boy is superior to a woman, and how much better is one whose voice is breaking [*cuius vox gallulascit*], whose branch is just growing [*cuius iam ramus roborascit*]."³⁶ The man avows a preference for boys who have just reached puberty,³⁷ and his jingling, alliterative evocation of an

adolescent's freshly burgeoning penis (observe not only the alliteration in *ramus roborascit* but also the homoioteleuton in *gallulascit...roborascit* together with the parallelism in *cuius...cuius*) is intriguing. Elsewhere boys and women are represented almost exclusively as objects or receptacles. Here, although we have been deprived of the passage's full context and thus face many unanswerable questions (What kind of character uttered the lines? Is he being mocked? How did his interlocutor[s] respond to his comment that "everyone knows" that a boy is better than a woman?), nonetheless we see that Roman audiences did occasionally face the fact that boys have penises, and that those penises might even be of interest.³⁸ In any case, it is clear that the relative merits of women and boys as the objects of men's phallic attentions intrigued third- and second-century B.C. Roman audiences, and the question continued to interest Roman readers into the second century A.D. at least.³⁹

The attractive quality of boys, conventionally held to fade with the arrival of body hair and the beard, serves as the raw material for numerous jokes in early Roman texts. Another line from Novius' Atellan farces spells out the implications of the appearance of body hair with typically Roman straightforwardness: "As long as they will be able to be submissive [*pati*], before their butts become hairy."⁴⁰ The meaning is unmistakable, even crude: boys are capable of being sexually penetrated (*pati*) only as long as their buttocks are hairless (for this implication of *pati*, see chapter 5). Perhaps the most celebrated writer of *togatae* (a genre of Roman drama which, like the Atellan farces and unlike the comedies of Plautus and Terence, was not based on Greek originals and thus brought Roman and Italian realities directly to the stage) was Afranius. Although we now possess only tattered remnants of his oeuvre, a comment by Quintilian makes it clear that among the themes treated by Afranius' plays were sexual intrigues with boys.⁴¹ One of the surviving fragments of Afranius most likely belonged to such a context: "What's more, my body is just now beginning to get hairy."⁴² The speaker is obviously an adolescent boy, and perhaps his words constitute an attempt to fend off the unwelcome advance of an older man; or he might be lamenting his fading desirability; or, like the speaker in Martial 11.39, he might be boasting of his newly achieved manhood. In any case, all this fuss about body hair was no mere literary convention. The elder Pliny recommends the application of ants' eggs to boys' armpits so as to prevent the growth of unsightly hairs, and he adds that dealers in slave-boys, in order to keep their merchandise as marketable as possible, used blood from the testicles of castrated lambs to delay the growth of the beard.⁴³ Elsewhere the same writer gives a dazzling catalogue of depilatory substances (bats' brains, fried viper, gall from hedge-hogs, the milk of a bitch who has given birth to her first litter, and so on), beginning with the remark that bats' blood will not work on boys' armpits unless followed by an application of copper rust or hemlock seeds.⁴⁴ It seems that a good deal of energy was expended on the obviously important problem of adolescent boys' body hair.

Not surprisingly, boys' role as men's sexual partners left traces in the colloquial language of the Romans. In his dictionary of Republican Latin, Festus tells us that the noun *pullus*, literally denoting a young animal in general or chick in particular, was used by the men of old (*antiqui*) as a term of endearment for a boy who was loved by a man, and he illustrates the usage with an anecdote that is as amusing as it is revealing. Q. Fabius Maximus, consul in 116 B.C. and censor in 108 B.C., was given the cognomen Eburnus (Ivory) because of his fair complexion, but after having suffered the misfortune of being struck by lightning on his buttocks, he was further nicknamed "Jupiter's chick" (*pullus Iovis*), as if having been raped by the king of the gods.⁴⁵ The ironic, even campy humor suggests a comfortable, long-standing familiarity with certain facts among Fabius' contemporaries. Festus also tells us that in Plautus the right hand is called *pullaria*: perhaps because the right hand, like a boy's body, might stimulate a man's penis to orgasm.⁴⁶ There is evidence, too, that Lucilius and his contemporaries knew this use of *pullus*. In an epigram by the fifth-century A.D. poet Ausonius, we read of a man so fond of anal intercourse with boys that a member of the Pythagorean sect, subscribing to a belief in the transmigration of souls, concludes that he will be reincarnated as a dung beetle. In the course of his description of this man, one of the speakers in Ausonius' epigram uses terms that he attributes to Lucilius: *subpilo* (plucker) and *pullipremo* (chick-squeezer).⁴⁷

The poetry of Catullus and Martial, among others, presents a palpably Priapic persona interested in both boys and girls: though usually with less violence than the god himself, this poetic persona willingly imposes his manhood on both male and female partners and does not hesitate to tell the world about it.⁴⁸ In one of his poems, Martial addresses his "wife"⁴⁹ who has found him anally penetrating a boy. To her nagging observation that she can provide him with the same kind of pleasure the poet responds with a catalog of mythological *exempla* illustrating the point that anal intercourse is more pleasurable with boys than it is with women, and he concludes with a harsh dismissal: "So stop giving masculine names to your affairs, and think of it this way, wife: you have two cunts." In other words, while he is perfectly willing to penetrate his wife anally, her anus is not a boy's anus, but only a second vagina.⁵⁰ A subtler but no less telling profession of a desire to penetrate both women and boys is found in an epigram that consists of a single couplet:

Uxorem nolo Telesinam ducere. quare?
moecha est. sed pueris dat Telesina. volo. (Mart. 2.49)

I don't want to marry Telesina.—Why not?—She is an adulteress.—But Telesina puts out for boys.—I want her.

Disinclined to marry Telesina because she is given to adultery, the speaker instantly changes his opinion upon learning that she bestows her favors upon boys (*pueri*).⁵¹ His sudden eagerness is explained by what Martial elsewhere calls

the “boyish punishment” (*supplicium puerile*, 2.60.2),⁵² one of the traditional modes of revenge allowed a cuckolded husband: anal rape of the adulterer. In other words, if he were to catch Telesina in the act with a boy, Martial would have the right to exact his (obviously sweet) revenge.⁵³ Another poem portrays the poet in the act of anally penetrating a young man named Hedylos. The latter, rapidly approaching orgasm, gasps an encouragement to his partner: “I’m coming! Do it if you’re going to do it!”⁵⁴ We can make no claims that Marcus Valerius Martialis actually had such an encounter with a boy named Hedylos, but the crucial point is that he was willing to let his Roman readership imagine him doing so.

Texts of a less blunt nature are likewise permeated by the assumption that a Roman man will openly seek to have sexual relations with persons of either sex. Prose writers such as Livy and Valerius Maximus imagine a Roman past in which men desired women and girls as well as boys,⁵⁵ while the love poetry of Catullus, Horace, and Tibullus presents the persona of a man experienced in the exquisite joys and hardships accompanying affairs with both women and boys.⁵⁶ Even the personae projected by Propertius and Ovid, while clearly drawn to women, hardly reject the love of boys out of hand: in one poem Propertius observes that affairs with boys are easier than those with women, and Ovid claims that he is “less” (*minus*) interested in boys than he is in women.⁵⁷ The idealized rural landscape of Roman pastoral poetry follows the same pattern: its shepherds pine for both boys and girls.⁵⁸ Finally, Roman writers sometimes present the image of a man who has been deprived of the pleasures of sex, and these pleasures include relations with both boys and women or girls. A poem in the voice of the phallic deity Priapus has the god issue this dramatic curse on a thief: may he burst with an erection while being deprived of boys and women. In lyric vein, Horace sadly observes his lack of interest in the erotic pleasures of youth (“I now find pleasure neither in woman nor in boy”) and in the vivid prose of Petronius, Encolpius, afflicted with impotence due to the wrath of Priapus, is said to be “unable to sell his goods, whether to a boy or to a girl.”⁵⁹ These men confirm by their misfortune the normative status of what is no longer theirs.

Passages taken from the work of two widely different yet equally Roman poets are emblematic. Ovid’s programmatic introduction to his collection of love poems known as the *Amores* describes the proper subject matter of love elegy, produced by and for Roman men, as “either a boy or a girl adorned with long hair.”⁶⁰ Lucretius’ poem *On the Nature of Things*, a vigorous attempt to make Epicurean philosophy meaningful and appealing to a readership of Roman men, includes this image of those who are most likely to arouse sexual passion among his readers:

sic igitur Veneris qui telis accipit ictus,
sive puer membris muliebribus hunc iaculatur
seu mulier toto iactans e corpore amorem,

unde feritur, eo tendit gestitque coire
 et iacere umorem in corpus de corpore ductum. (Lucr. 4.1052–6)

And so it is that whoever is struck by Venus' weapons—whether it is a boy with womanly limbs who takes aim at him, or a woman casting forth love from her whole body—aims for the origin of his wound and is eager to join with it, to cast into a body the fluid drawn from a body.

The theory is that beautiful boys and women stir up desire in the men who gaze upon them; that desire in turn causes a build-up of semen within the men, who then yearn to expel it, preferably into the very body that stimulated its creation. The assumptions are clear: men's desires are normally aroused by boys and women, who function simultaneously as stimulant, object, and receptacle.⁶¹

When Tibullus imagines a Roman man calling upon Priapus for advice in matters erotic, his specific concern is how to catch a beautiful boy.⁶² But more often this mascot of Roman masculinity is decisively nonspecific about the sex of his partners. A Roman poet or poets produced (probably in the first century A.D.) a collection of poems on the subject of this deity, now known as the *Carmina Priapea*,⁶³ and they often give the god a voice as he stands ready to protect his turf from thieves. And he does not mince words:

Percidere, puer, moneo; futuere, puella;
 barbatum furem tertia poena manet. (13)

Femina si furtum faciet mihi virve puerve,
 haec cunnum, caput hic, praebeat ille nates. (22)

Per medios ibit pueros mediasque puellas
 mentula, barbatis non nisi summa petet. (74)

I warn you, boy, you will be screwed; girl, you will be fucked; a third penalty awaits the bearded thief.

If a woman steals from me, or a man, or a boy, let the first give me her cunt, the second his head, the third his buttocks.

My dick will go through the middle of boys and the middle of girls, but with bearded men it will aim only for the top.⁶⁴

Consider, too, this slightly more decorous prayer from a verse dedication to Priapus made at Tibur (modern Tivoli), probably in the late first century A.D., by the freedman Julius Agathemerus:

...da mihi floridam iuventam,
 da mihi ut pueris et ut puellis
 fascino placeam bonis procaci

lusibusque frequentibus iocisque
 dissipem curas animo nocentes
 nec gravem timeam nimis senectam. (*CIL* 14.3565.2–7; *CLE* 1504)

Grant me a flowering youth; grant that I may please good boys and girls with my naughty prick, and that with frequent fun and games I may chase away the worries that harm the soul, and that I may not fear old age too much.

This prayer, whether pious or parodic, relies on the assumption that Priapus is the god par excellence of youthful masculine vigor, and that that vigor will express itself in penetrative sexual relations with boys and girls.⁶⁵

Graffiti from Rome, its port city Ostia, Pompeii, and elsewhere throughout the Roman world—messages scratched on walls by people (mostly but not exclusively men) of various backgrounds—offer a valuable insight into discourses of Roman masculinity in a context and format presumably less pervaded by the influences of Greek literary traditions; and these graffiti attest to the prevalence of the Priapic model for masculinity. A number of them boast of sexual conquests of males and females alike in bluntly penetrative terms. The following, for example, were scratched on the walls of Pompeii (see appendix 4 for further discussion):

hic ego cum veni futui, deinde redei domi (*CIL* 4.2246)
 Secundus pedicavd pueros luclre [...] utis (*CIL* 4.2048)
 futui coponam (*CIL* 4.8442)

When I came here, I fucked. Then I went back home.
 Secundus fucked [...] boys in the ass.
 I fucked the bar-maid.

A metrical graffito found in Spain and probably dating from the first century A.D. makes this blunt boast: “Surianus, who wrote this, fucked Maevis in the ass.”⁶⁶ Similarly proud messages can be found scattered around the Roman world: one man claims, “I fucked Nisus in the ass ten times,”⁶⁷ while another man shows himself to have been slightly more restrained: “I butt-fucked six times.”⁶⁸ Other graffiti similarly redolent of macho prowess range from an untranslatable pun describing the anal penetration of a male⁶⁹ to the considered opinion that it is better to penetrate a hairy vulva than a smooth one⁷⁰ to an only partially decipherable boast scribbled on the wall of a building in Ostia that seems to specify multiple modes of penetration of a male.⁷¹ Less coarse but equally typical is a metrical graffito found on a wall of Nero’s Domus Aurea in Rome that offers this opinion, possibly making a naughty pun in the process:

quisquis amat pueros, etiam sin[e] fine puellas,
rationem saccli non h[a]bet ille sui.

Whoever loves boys as well as girls without end, takes no account of his pouch.⁷²

The fact that a closely similar graffito was found in Remagen in Germany—on the fringes of the Roman world—suggests that the sentiment was something of a commonplace, maybe even a tag.⁷³ Finally, the so-called *glandes Perusinae*, lead sling-bullets dating from the siege of Perugia by Octavian's troops during the winter of 41/40 B.C., are inscribed with various messages, some of which direct a nakedly phallic aggression against both male and female opponents: "I seek Octavian's asshole"; "Loose Octavius, sit on this"; "Greetings, Octavius: you suck dick"; and, representing the other side, "Bald Lucius Antonius and Fulvia, open up your asshole" and "I seek Fulvia's clitoris."⁷⁴ Since these bullets are of a shape that might well be described as phallic, and since the Latin word for sling-bullet, *glans* (originally meaning "acorn"), has been used by medical writers both ancient and modern to describe the tip of the penis, the *glandes Perusinae* evoke the penis both visually and verbally.⁷⁵ These objects incisively symbolize the Roman male sexual persona in its most elemental form: the phallus, ready, willing, and able to assert its penetrative power with another person, whether female or male.

DIRTY JOKES

Lucilius' crude imagery for anal penetration in a line cited earlier—vaginal intercourse "bloodies" the penis while anal intercourse "beshits" it (1186 Marx)—brings us to another significant characteristic of Latin literature from the earliest times on: a readiness to indulge in an unabashed description of the physical realities of sexual practices, including those between males. Such jokes hardly come across as nervous references to suspect "Greek" practices: this is home-grown humor.

Marx's interpretation of Lucilius' line deserves mention. Prostitutes, he imagines the speaker to be saying, are so avaricious that they will take on customers even when they ought to excuse themselves: if they are female, when menstruating; if they are male, when suffering from diarrhea.⁷⁶ Certainty is of course impossible, since the line has been shorn of its context, but the reading is ingenious and quite possibly correct. Indeed, nearly two centuries later, the epigrams of Martial unambiguously make the point that diarrhea can interfere with the enjoyment of anal intercourse. In one mischievous poem we read of a certain Charisianus who complains that he has been unable to indulge in this practice—as the insertive partner, he claims—for quite some time; when asked why, he complains that he is suffering from diarrhea, thereby unintentionally revealing