influenced by ancient Egypt; it appears to be a ‘known fact’ to the authors concerned. However, we are not to believe this, as none of these writers knew Egyptian and in any case they conceived of Egypt in Hellenic terms. Our disbelief of this evidence is shaped by the notion that ancient historians worked within a context that shaped what they considered to be the ‘truth’. Lefkowitz’s ‘deconstruction’ of these Greek writers is surely moulded by the intellectual milieu in which she is writing: the late twentieth century with its attendant notion of the dangers inherent in essentialising the ‘truth’. The artistic record (for example, aspects of Minoan art such as the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus and archaic Greek sculpture) suggests considerable Egyptian influence; the archaeological and linguistic records (despite Bernal’s ingenious and at times disastrous etymological games), on the other hand, suggest that the influence was minimal. What are the ‘known facts’? That the Greeks stole their civilisation from Africa? Obviously not. That there was some influence over many centuries? Perhaps, but this has to be debated, and the context and intention of the interpreter of or claimant to the ‘truth’ (Lefkowitz included) have to be considered. We may well have to come to the same conclusion Lefkowitz reached about Cleopatra’s grandmother: we do not know the ‘truth’, but such a conclusion seems possible only if one believes that in certain areas of cultural history there are no ‘known facts’.

There is no doubt, however, that Lefkowitz’s work can make a crucial contribution to the broader Eurocentric-Afrocentric debate presently taking place in many South African universities. After years of apartheid historiography, many of our students are keenly aware of myth and propaganda disguised as history and are eager to discover what they conceive of as a truly African historiography. Lefkowitz’s exposé of the excesses of the Afrocentrist view of antiquity comes as a timely reminder that ethnocentric historiography, whether written by Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus or George James, can be horribly blinkered and for political or cultural purposes can distort the evidence that exists or make claims on the basis of what does not exist. For those of us who teach classics in universities in Africa where, I trust, Mary Lefkowitz’s book will feature alongside those of Diop and Bernal in courses where the historiography of antiquity is debated, Not Out of Africa is essential reading.

POLYMORPHIC SEXUALITY


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This book traverses all of Graeco-Roman antiquity and touches on Jewish culture in giving an overview of attitudes toward sexuality, mainly male same-sex
coupling, and of men’s experience of sexual relations with other men. The overall thesis is that male-male sex had very different roles in Greece and Rome, that the later Roman view (at least from Catullus onward) is an amalgam of Greek and Roman views as the Romans absorbed the forms of Greek culture; that neither culture condemned active male homosexual acts, although the Romans detested male ‘passivity’ in sexual encounters, and that the condemnation of homosexual practice per se comes from Jewish culture and was transported by Christianity into a pagan culture already grown increasingly oriented toward marriage and chastity. There are eight chapters, four each on Greece and Rome, plus a conclusion. The four Greek chapters cover the ‘beginnings’, the classical period (in Athens, inevitably), philosophical views, and women. The Roman chapters are more of a historical sequence: the early Republic, the late Republic and Augustan period, the Empire, then finally Jewish attitudes toward same-sex intercourse as the ultimate source of change in Graeco-Roman sexual regulation.

Obviously, only the broad lineaments of cultural attitudes over such space and time could be drawn in 284 pages. Other questions besides the status and nature of male-male sexual activity are adumbrated. There are a few pages on female same-sex relations in Greece and in Rome and another few on the consequences for women of men’s involvement with men, but exploration of complexity or variability in attitudes at any one moment is ruled out. Cantarella relies extensively on earlier scholarship, notably that of K. J. Dover and Paul Veyne, to define the subject as well as to describe cultural formations, and so no new ground is opened up to scholarly cultivation. The Greek Hellenistic period is not treated (except for a few poems from the Palatine Anthology); we go from fourth-century Athens to Rome. On the Roman side the sequence of laws and edicts and the relevant court decisions, both Republican and Imperial, provide the spine of the treatment. Apart from these Roman culture is represented by poets (especially Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, Juvenal) and by gossip about Caesar and Augustus. Toward the end, Cantarella’s opposition to John Boswell and Michel Foucault emerges—to Boswell in describing the early Christian view of homosexuality, but to Foucault, oddly, only in the conclusion, although Cantarella’s reconstruction of the problems addressed by fourth-century Greek thinking about male sexuality contrasts strongly with his thesis that an ethic of self-control grew up from a sexually unconstrained (for men) Athenian culture.

The book proposes both to reveal men’s experience and to show the change in outlook shaping their experience over time. On the one hand the general movement it recounts of increasing permissiveness in the range of acceptable male-male sexual relationships in Greece and Rome separately, followed by disapproval and finally legal sanctions against all same-sex activity in the late Empire seems right. On the other hand I find the lineaments of each culture so reductively sketched as to be not even a caricature but a cartoon. Blunt generalisations from some prominent texts may be enough to plot large changes over long periods of time, but they are inadequate to illuminate the range of experiences at a given juncture. Since the level on which the book seems to make its case is so general, I shall concentrate on pointing out what I think are fundamental problems with the description of particular cultural formations.
I shall focus mainly on chapter 2, ‘The Classical Age’, because that is the material that I know best and that is the basis on which Cantarella’s description of Roman difference rests.

My difficulty is with Cantarella’s dogmatic and uninquiring approach. Analysis, in the sense of careful examination of the meanings of words, of the aim of various discourses, of the interactions of sexual behaviour with other aspects of social life, we do not get. Evidence is not examined but deployed, often familiar evidence to reductive ends. In chapter 2, paederasty emerges as monolithic, pervasive but rule-bound. All the social tensions documented by Dover and Foucault and highlighted by David Cohen have disappeared. Norms, law, and behaviour are collapsed together: boys should test their lovers before yielding, various laws abetted them in doing so, and that is what well-brought-up boys did. This reductionism does allow Cantarella to focus on the social demands made on boys as they matured. They were expected to change roles several times, from passive homosexual relations to active ones to relations with women. She points out that men may have moved with strain from a congenial role to an uncongenial one. But this observation is not followed up by any attempt to set out the actual range of acceptable adult male behaviour at Athens. Hints in Aristotle that some did not make the first transition are not brought to bear.

Likewise, there is no effort to test her central idea that paederasty at Athens was educational. The (very problematic) initiation hypothesis for the origin of Greek paederasty and the assertion of Pausanias in Plato’s Symposium (unreliable: see below) suffice to win her endorsement. Yet if one looks for positive confirmation that paederasty was a central educational institution at Athens the evidence is fugitive indeed. Cantarella explains the fact that lovers are kept out of schools and gymnasia, that paidagogoi shield boys from older men’s attentions, as an effort to ensure that boys choose lovers well. Lovers’ behaviour, according to Pausanias, does not sound educational: flattery, perjury, sleeping in doorways. On the other hand, the Alkibiades of the Symposium, who thinks he will get wisdom poured into him by Sokrates, never has a clue about what Sokrates is trying to teach him by ignoring his seductive moves; he does not even conclude that he gave in too easily, which on Cantarella’s model would be the obvious lesson. One might deduce that training by precept and example was not the standard pattern in erastes-eromenos relations at Athens. If its educational value was a rhetorical justification for paederasty that also served as a brake on men’s expectations, the overall effect might be similar to what Cantarella perceives—a system that dictates who is expected to do what when—but we would understand the need for obfuscation better.

Cantarella, like others, does not try to account for scenes like the one in the opening of Plato’s Charmides, in which a whole throng of ‘lovers’ dogs Charmides, pushing and jeering. The model of couples still controls discussions to such an extent

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1 Cantarella does refer to the Erotika attributed to Demosthenes, but there is no demonstrable notion of the boy’s yielding. Χρῆματος and the like are not used. The boy should οὐκελεῖν (‘associate’) with his lover if he renounces asking for anything disgraceful. Sex seems to be ruled out.
that the aspect of sheer public display in homoerotic pursuit goes unaccounted for. Citation of evidence follows the same pattern. For instance, Cantarella paraphrases _Iliad_ 24.128-30 as follows (pp. 9f.): ‘Achilles, says Thetis, must carry on living, and having forgotten Patroclus he must take a wife “as is proper”. The lines (128-31) actually say, ‘My child, how long, mourning and grieving, will you eat out your heart, remembering neither food nor sex (ἐνυπήγκτος)? For you will not live long, but already death and strong fate stand near you.’ Thetis could not possibly tell Achilles to get a wife, for she knows that he is about to die, and in a context in which κλέος is so important she would no more tell him to ‘forget’ Patroklos. This is not an isolated mistake; the reader cannot trust Cantarella’s paraphrases of ancient authors. The problem is that Cantarella focuses on the sexual possibilities in a literary scene (or any writing) to the exclusion of all other aspects, so that statements nonsensical in context are extracted from the words.

The same failure to attend to context or pragmatics means that passages are often flattened out, treated as straightforward descriptions of behaviour when they have quite other rhetorical goals. Pausanias’s speech in Plato’s _Symposium_ is taken as ‘an explicit piece of evidence, which makes it hard to imagine that boys were forever engaged in the pointless game of diehard resistance imagined by some scholars.’ (p. 20). Cantarella does not tell the reader that Pausanias is pushing for lifelong homosexual attachments that are to begin at the moment when a boy conventionally ceases to be attractive—hardly a statement of the norm! Nor does she remark that dramatically this is the speech of a lover to a company that includes his over-age beloved (Agathon). It is crafted as a seduction, not a sociology treatise. The weaseling distortion of Athenian ideas can be tracked to the second _nomos_ on voluntary slavery for the sake of self-improvement. While this may pass as a reference to apprentices and disciples, extending the idea to lover-beloved attachments is chicanery. Other cultural issues, such as competition and preserving one’s reputation and the problem of shame that is almost ubiquitous in Greek discussions of pederasty outside love poetry, are not factored into Cantarella’s description of the experience of male same-sex relations. When Cantarella must labour to find hints that support her thesis or torture them out of recalcitrant texts she does not ask why. Chronology is left vague. Words like ‘sex’, ‘love’, ‘degeneracy’, ‘passivity’ are used unreflectively as though ancient experience were a calque of ours (assuming that we agree on what these words mean!) and unnoticed value judgments no hindrance to understanding.

In chapter 3, Cantarella pays more attention to context because she wants to discount apparent opposition to male same-sex intercourse in Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle. She argues that these authors contrast eroticism with reproductive sex and

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2 Other examples: _Frogs_ 57-59 is taken to be Dionysos’ admission of desire for Kleisthenes (45); Aristotle _Pol._ 1272a (not 1972) does not condone male-male liaisons on Crete (68) but defers consideration of their moral status; Octavian’s epigram on refusing Fulvia is taken to imply his morality (160), ignoring the reason that he gives (‘... my prick is dearer to me than life itself’); Catullus 93 is mistranslated so as to say the opposite of what it does say (157; it is also misquoted: _audeo_ for _studeo_).
accept only the latter as legitimate; they make no comparison of homosexual and heterosexual relations. The pages on Aristotle (pp. 68f.) confuse and distort his meaning. Cantarella reports that according to Aristotle, ‘those who love other men “by nature” (phusei) are not immoral.’ True, but only because Aristotle places them outside the human arena in which morality is relevant (EN 1148b). The new praise of marriage in these authors sheattributes to reaction to the Peloponnesian War, for the moral decay caused by the war and the plague included loss of the ethical dimension of paederasty and extension of male-male liaisons beyond what was acceptable (for which the evidence is Aristophanes’ description of most Athenians as passive partners). The need for a higher birth rate after the loss of so many young people also added pressure. Cantarella does not compare her view that traditional morality was lost with Foucault’s interpretation, perhaps because she denies that male-male sexuality is the issue in these texts.

Chapter 4 includes a section on Sappho derived from Bruno Gentili. The pages on the impact of paederasty on women are interesting. Boys, she says, were not a real threat to wives’ position because the two occupied such different places in the social system. Emotionally, who knows? The chapter ends by calling attention to some of the debates over the relative merits of boys and women found in literature of the imperial period. Cantarella describes the debate in Achilles Tatius’ Leukippe and Kleitophon as a draw without mentioning that it is embedded in a novel that valorises romantic heterossexual love. The section on Rome begins (ch. 5) by connecting male sexuality with the will to dominate. Slave boys are therefore fit objects of attention but freeborn Roman boys are not. With the infiltration of Greek culture men began to ‘love’ boys and to pursue citizen boys, as poetry shows. But without the framework of educational paederasty there was no basis for mutual respect. Boys became spoiled (though not so badly as emancipated women [p. 149]) and no natural term set an end to relationships. Untraditional configurations of male-male coupling spread; despite its violation of Roman character more and more men began to find the passive position satisfying. Caesar, virile yet alleged to have played the ‘woman’ once, legitimised it. In this cultural context Cantarella places the development of Roman law on the subject.

The discussion of Roman legal developments that winds through the four Roman chapters is the most interesting feature of the book, as befits Cantarella’s area of expertise. The material is not nearly so well known as the literary texts, so non-specialists can benefit from having the issues and problems set out. Cantarella believes that the Republican lex Scatini (as she prefers to spell it) and a praetor’s edict served until the third century AD, when a series of ever harsher imperial prescriptions culminated in Justinian’s decree of the death penalty for all same-sex sexual activity. The lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis was not concerned with same-sex behaviour; the shift in official attitude is thus well into the Christian period. I am not sure that the law was responding to the ‘unstopabble spread’ (p. 155) of ‘passive’ male behaviour. ‘The facts show that real Roman males are getting rarer and rarer’ (p. 154), but the ‘facts’ are the assertions of Martial and Juvenal. Real concern was concentrated, it seems from the legal reaction, in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, by which time any spread must long since have occurred. On the other hand, the emperors’ slow efforts
to move toward Judaeo-Christian morality from a different pagan construction of sexual virtue must be at least part of the explanation.

The Italian version of the book came out in 1988. There has been a great deal done on these issues since, overtaking Cantarella’s attempt at an overview. References to the books of John Winkler, David Halperin, David Cohen and to Before Sexuality have been inserted into the bibliography; they contain more nuanced accounts of Greek practice than Cantarella offers. For ideologically savvy ‘thick description’ of Roman material one should look to Maud Gleason’s essay in Before Sexuality and especially to Amy Richlin’s outstanding essay on Roman ‘homosexuality’ in response to Foucault. She gives a much more satisfactory description of the interrelations of practice, attitude, and law. The book contains a bibliography and an index. The translation is smooth and usually idiomatic, the text free of typographical errors. There are a few mistakes: the names Rissman and Hallett are spelled incorrectly in the notes; some numbers in the references are wrong; and not all works cited in the notes are in the bibliography.

THE CHALLENGE OF TIME:
ROME’S PAST AND OVID’S PRESENT


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The flurry of scholarly activity that has been directed in the last few years at Ovid’s previously neglected or disparaged Fasti has included numerous attempts to define and characterise the work. Few critics accept it solely as what its title suggests it should be, a poetic account of the Roman religious year; along with its religious and historical aspects, its elegiac character, generic instability, the sincerity of its
