V ANCIENT EPIGRAM IN RECEPTION

'Reception', the study of how the present recognizes and constructs its past, has developed from sober origins (the literary hermeneutics of Gadamer and Jauss) into a hot topic in contemporary classical studies. This rapidly changing field resists stable definition of methodology or subject matter, and elicits firebrand rhetoric. Some practitioners are explicitly confrontational, exposing the historically recent 'uses and abuses of antiquity' perpetrated in the service of reactionary ideologies, and critiquing the disciplinary sleights of hand by which classics itself has come into being.[1] Others use reception terminology to repackage *Nachleben*, the post-classical afterlives of ancient texts, or a broader 'classical tradition': the conventional study (blurring at times into optimistic hagiography) of the enduring influence of antiquity in literature and the arts. Recent trends are thoughtfully surveyed in Lorna Hardwick's New Survey, *Reception Studies* (Hardwick 2003).

Our closing chapter stakes out its own interpretative space within this contested domain by examining epigram in reception. The project demands clarification. Throughout this book, we have seen that the genre of epigram has always blurred any distinction that critics might wish to impose between the interpretation and use of a literary work. The meaning of an epigram, as of any text, is always subject to context, and in the particular case of epigram this context is always liable to rapid sequential change. Individual poems flit from stone to papyrus; from papyrus to the symposium, and back again; from the authored book into commonplace books, collections, and anthologies. Each reconfiguration of context refashions the epigram as a different aesthetic object, altering *what*, *how*, and *for whom* the poem 'means'. To take an example discussed earlier, the Milan Posidippus changes the nature of each of the previously known poems that it contains – each such poem has the same *text* as before (more or less), but becomes a different *work* when approached as a compositional element within the teasingly self-referential Milan book-roll.[2]

[1] Classicists' discussion of 'uses and abuses' looks back to Wyke and Biddiss 1999; for examples of disciplinary auto-critique see Stray 1999, Winterer 2002.

[2] Mukařovský's theory and terminology of the 'aesthetic object' (1979) apply extremely well here; see also Obbink 2004 and, on the difference made by what *sort* of book we think the Milan

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In this sense, epigram's history of meaning is *nothing but* reception – and always has been (and always will be?). The *Anthology* of Constantine Cephalas is the obvious end product of one particularly dense reception strand, codifying epigram's miscellaneous hand-me-downs as a completed tradition – a ready-made canon-within-a-canon. But this seeming end point is in turn the starting point for subsequent reading communities. Its re-emergence enables new and surprising reconfigurations of the ancient genre, as we will see.

Viewed within the confines of classical tradition, ancient epigram has an afterlife well worth studying. An established trend in Latin epigram scholarship traces the influence of Martial on the vernacular traditions of European verse from the Renaissance onwards.[3] As these studies make clear, the West has historically understood epigram (whether ancient, modern or somewhere in between) in terms dictated by Martial's own, highly idiosyncratic creative choices. This process has been continuous since his re-emergence as a poetic model in Late Antiquity (see Chapter 4). Martial's insistence on closing his poems with a satirical 'point' has been so pervasive in its influence that genuine Greek epigram struck many early modern connoisseurs as frustratingly un-epigrammatic. 'Martial has wit, and is worth looking into sometimes; but I recommend the Greek epigrams to your supreme contempt', wrote Lord Chesterfield in a letter to his son. Chesterfield's correspondence aimed at, and achieved, a pithy quotability that itself owed much to Martial's particular model of epigrammatic point.[4] Greek epigram has exercised a much more localized and less enduring influence as a literary model for Western authors than has its unusual Latin imitator; the story that we tell here is thus not 'classical tradition' in a conventional, grand-narrative sense.

Instead, we focus on one particular phase in the reception history of the *Anthology*: the late nineteenth century, when Greek epigram, previously the playground of a small educated elite, first impacted on the new literate mass culture of industrialized Britain. We will see that the mediation and promotion of this unlikely genre to the new popular readership through translations and handbooks was at least as much a process of reinvention as of rediscovery. The mobility and flexibility

roll was, Gutzwiller 2005b. On theorizing internal allusion and patterning, see Sharrock and Morales 2000.

[3] The obvious starting point is the final chapter of Sullivan 1991.

[4] Quoted at Neaves 1874: 2, probably from the edition controversially published the year after Chesterfield's death (1774) by his daughter-in-law Eugenia Stanhope.

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of epigram were pressed into service once more, to concoct a version of ancient Greece that flattered and responded to contemporary priorities and concerns. However, we will see that this reclamation of epigram for mainstream social convention only became necessary in response to an initial radical appropriation from within a marginalized subculture. The following discussion characterizes this response as 'conservative' – a convenient shorthand, but this is not (or not just) a narrowly political backlash against socially progressive self-expression. Some of the critics rushing to the defence of Hellas' respectability were political liberals whose revolution had been hijacked; they needed an ancient Greece that reflected their own progressive vision for society as a whole, and were unwilling to see it dirtied by association with what was then seen as a criminal minority.[5] This stampede of late Victorian men of letters should instead be seen as a species of broader moral panic – a hasty and overblown exercise in damage limitation, aimed at containing a dangerously subversive reception of a revered classical past.[6]

The Uranian *Anthology*

The source of this subversion was John Addington Symonds, 'Soddington Symonds', the aesthete and essayist who put homosexuality into the dictionary. Today Symonds is remembered as a pioneer of the emergent gay male subculture of the late nineteenth century. His treatises, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) and *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891), are placed among the founding texts of modern gay and lesbian studies: they broke new ground in asserting that homosexuality was neither sin nor disease, but a natural identity. In its best form it was even morally superior to the heterosexual norm. (*Greek Ethics* identified the 'heavenly' or Uranian pederasty of the Greeks as their distinctive contribution to mankind – and we use the gendered term advisedly; profane Pandemic Eros could be had anywhere, whether with men or women.) The fame of the *Problem* treatises was a long

[5] On Hellenism as a vehicle for Britain's liberal intelligentsia – 'a discursive language of social renewal' – see Dowling 1994: 35.

[6] Foundational to study of ancient Greece in Victorian reception are Jenkyns 1980 and Turner 1981; Dowling 1994 runs with their ideas and is of wider applicability than her title suggests. Whitmarsh 2005: 6–8, concisely analysing the 'invention' of the Second Sophistic in racialist German scholarship, is thought-provoking on how the nineteenth century negotiated antiquity's 'late' periods and cultural hybridities.

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time coming, however: in Symonds' lifetime they circulated *sub rosa* in tiny, privately printed editions. *Greek Ethics* is reported to have run to ten copies, and it took him years to gather the nerve to print even these.[7]

This was a Symonds that the Victorian reading public never knew. *Their* Symonds was a well-connected public intellectual, famous for two major works of popular scholarship: *The Renaissance in Italy* (1875–6) and *Studies of the Greek Poets*, first published as two 'Series' in 1873 and 1876.[8] These well-priced and accessible handbooks were bestsellers for decades: the third edition of *Studies* was reissued as late as 1920.[9] Largely forgotten today even by classicists, it initiated generations of readers into the glories of Greek literature, coaching them in a proper reverence for canonical authors including Homer, Pindar, and Sophocles.

Unfortunately, Symonds added the *AP* 12 poets Meleager and Strato to the list, turning aspirational outreach into barely closeted homosexual apologetics.

Black sheep of the Anglo-Hellenic empire

This was a blow for the conservatives who wished to keep Greece sexually pure. It was an article of faith that the Victorians were new-and-improved ancient Greeks. In one favoured formulation, popularized by Matthew Arnold, the British character struck exactly the right balance between free-thinking Hellenism (creativity and logic) and morally sound Hebraism (monotheistic piety).[10] This added ingredient would safeguard Britain from the eventual political and moral decline of Greece's Hellenistic era, enabling the robust racial

[7] Holliday 2000: 94–5.

[8] For wry comment on his public mask as 'the author of *Renaissance in Italy* and *Studies of the Greek Poets*', see Symonds 1984: 29.

[9] For convenience, all subsequent references are to this final version: it unites what were previously two volumes, regularizing their pagination, and is the easiest to find second-hand.

[10] Jenkyns 1980: 69–72 wittily picks apart the polarity. According to Butcher 1893: 38, Hellenic rationality – 'reasonable, fearless, temperate' – blatantly anticipated Britain's modern technological triumphs; and 'The Greek precocity of mind in this direction, unlike that of the Orientals, had in it the promise of uninterrupted advance in the future – of great discoveries' (12).

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essence of Hellenism (a 'pervading and quickening spirit') to inspire an empire without end.[11]

Hellenism was thus defined in 'our' own terms, and its boundaries were carefully policed – especially for the new mass readership. Approaching the ancient texts through the shortcuts of translation and paraphrase, the aspiring masses were held to lack the mental discipline and moral fibre instilled by a linguistically based classical education; they might thus jump to rash conclusions about the exemplary past.[12] Entire genres and periods were accordingly ruled out, especially anything un-classically late: standard accounts of Greek literature often ended with Euripides. With their unmanly intellectualism and flattery of despots, Hellenistic authors were not like us, or as we wished to be; so they were not really Greek. Theocritus, for instance, became notorious – less for anything he actually said in his poems than because gay Victorians used his name as a kind of semi-secret password to identify themselves to others in the know. Greece was pure, but *some* Greeks were the late-nineteenth-century equivalent of a hanky code – with classical education as a primitive gaydar.[13]

Even some properly classical authors and texts – the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* of Plato, for example, with their ill-considered talk of love between men – attracted an undesirable fringe readership, and required careful exegesis to protect the nation's youth from getting inappropriate ideas about their meaning.[14] School editions and mass-market translations of such texts were frequently censored;

[11] Jebb 1893: 273 (and see also 280): '[in] the province of religion and morals Hellenism alone is not sufficing… Yet there is no inherent conflict between true Hellenism and spiritualized Hebraism, such Hebraism as has passed into Christianity'. Butcher 1893: 1 declares that 'Hellenism [alone] has not given us enough to live by'.

[12] Jebb 1893: 279 praises the classical languages as moral and intellectual tonic – 'Hellenism… supplies a medicine for diseases of the modern mind, a corrective for aberrations of modern taste' – but on the next page warns of the moral dangers of a 'superficial or defective' understanding of the Greeks. (Acquired by reading translations, or by believing Symonds?)

[13] On Theocritean allusion as a subcultural code, see e.g. Jenkyns 1980: 290, a teasingly indirect example picked up on by Dowling 1994: 26–8. 'The colours of the [hanky] code… function less as signals for something precise than as…signs that a code exists and, more importantly, that a practice exists and is shared…use of the code presupposes difference': Worton 1994: 53. Aldrich 1993: 22–3 naïvely reproduces the nineteenth-century myth of gay Theocritus, egregiously misreading *Idyll* 2 (of which the narrating persona is explicitly female) as an expression of male same-sex desire.

[14] Gay love in the *Phaedrus* provokes the famous line by a classics tutor in E. M. Forster's *Maurice*, written in 1913–14 but only published posthumously in 1971: 'Omit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks' (61). After the class Maurice and Clive identify each other as potential romantic partners by talking about the *Symposium* (62).

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Aristophanes very frequently indeed.[15] Other authors were better not read at all – and now Symonds came, dragging the mire of Strato's *Mousa Paidikē* into plain view.

Symonds' timing was excellent. Greece was in vogue, and public taste was beginning to move away from Martial, seeing him as the mercenary lackey of a corrupt urban regime. Martial's Greek models could be presented as quite literally a breath of fresh Hellenic air. Symonds' canonization of the genre appropriated and modified an established Victorian rhetoric: it was an article of faith that the classics of Greek literature possessed marvellous health-giving qualities.[16] Symonds made it axiomatic that Greek epigram was intrinsically superior to its grubby Roman imitator; indeed, it sank to its lowest when it deigned to resemble him.[17]

Symonds' chapter on epigram was his biggest from the outset, and grew larger and more effusive with each new edition. Its position towards the end of *Studies* was notionally based on chronology, but also had the effect of making epigram the grand finale of the series. In it, the author singles out the erotic poems of Meleager for particular praise. *AP* 5 and *AP* 12 poems are mixed in indiscriminately, as though – unthinkably – one sort of desire was every bit as good as the other. Meleager's love is nobler, purer, and more beautiful than the heterosexual norm:

> Of all the amatory poets of the Anthology, by far the noblest is Meleager… The first great merit of Meleager as a poet is limpidity. A crystal is not more transparent than his style; but the crystal to which we compare it must be coloured with the softest flush of beryl or of amethyst…
>
> These quotations are sufficient to set forth the purity of Meleager's style, though many more examples might have been borrowed from his epigrams on the cicada, on the mosquitoes who tormented Zenophila, on Antiochus,

[15] Dover 1979; and see also Stray 2007b: 82–4 on Jebb's argument for prioritizing the moral 'purity' of a text over its philological 'integrity' in the preface to his bowdlerized Theophrastus. This included a running translation; rather than leave gaps in this where the content was unsuitable for the non-classically educated public, Jebb cut the relevant passages from the Greek as well. On censorship in this period generally, see the highly entertaining Perrin 1992.

[16] Sullivan 1991: 308 on distaste for Martial. Cf. Jenkyns 1980: 170–1: 'Youth, light and clear southern skies were blent together to represent the Greek genius as a kind of lithe, buoyant athleticism…clean fresh air became a symbol of the Hellenic spirit'.

[17] 'In Lucillius the Hellenic muse has deigned for once to assume the Roman toga, and to show that if she chose, she could rival the hoarse-throated satirists of the empire on their own ground. But she has abandoned her lofty eminence, and descended to a lower level' (Symonds 1920: 521).

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who would have been Eros if Eros had worn the boy's petasos and chlamys… Meleager had a soul that inclined to all beautiful and tender things.[18]

Strato was a borderline case. Meleager's pederastic Eros was discreetly Uranian – the ideal expression of Symonds' own anxious yearnings and relentless self-critique;[19] but Strato was a lusty Pandemic, the sort of brilliant bad boy who might give the movement a bad name. Symonds damned him in terms calculated to excite the admiration of Byron fans – 'the firmness of his touch, the cynicism of his impudicity':

…there are few readers who, even for the sake of his pure and perfect language, will be prepared to tolerate the immodesty of his subject-matter. Straton is not so delicate and subtle in style as Meleager; but he has a masculine vigour and *netteté* of phrase peculiar to himself. It is not possible to quote many of his epigrams. He suffers the neglect which necessarily obscures those men of genius who misuse their powers…[20]

And Symonds dropped broad hints to the privileged minority that this was all about the here and now, mangling Strato's coda (*AP* 12.258) to ventriloquize his own lifelong desires. To readers who knew their Greek, Symonds' root-and-branch revisions of what Strato actually wrote were a tacit declaration of the inherent and enduring nature of homosexual *eros*, and of a subculture with a future in which Symonds himself would be remembered as an important pioneer (this bit more or less worked out as he had hoped). Strato's original brags of its author's commercial adaptability in writing pederastic epigrams – 'these trifles', he calls them – to order, 'for various boy-lovers'. Symonds' reworked version slips in a token female object of desire as well. This veneer of deniability reinforces the strong implicit point made in his eulogy of 'noble' Meleager. Homosexual love is an inherent and lifelong identity, equal in nature to its heterosexual equivalent and perhaps actually surpassing it in value (the emphases indicate places where the Greek is deliberately mistranslated):

Here, lastly, is an Envoy, slightly altered in the English translation from Straton's original:—

[18] Ibid.: 521–4.

[19] On Symonds' intellectual and moral struggle to come to terms with his sexual identity, see now Kemp 2000 and, reflecting on her 1964 biography of Symonds, Grosskurth 2000.

[20] Symonds 1920: 528, 525.

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'It may be in the years to come
That *men who love shall think of me*,
And reading o'er these verses *see*
How love was my life's martyrdom.

'Love-songs I write *for him and her*,
Now this, now that, *as Love dictates*;
One birthday gift alone *the Fates*
Gave me, to be Love's scrivener.'[21]

Holding the pass

No-one had presented Greek epigram to a mass public before – and certainly not like this. Symonds' *Studies* were, if anything, greater eulogies of gay identity than the *Problem* treatises; they just avoided calling it by name, and countless common persons were reading him. Displacing gay love into the distant past made Symonds' ideas *more* dangerous, not less. This was the past that, by overwhelming consensus, stood in as Victorian Britain's own ideal prototype.

Thus it is that in the years following *Studies* we see a massive conservative backlash against Symonds' liberal reading of the *Anthology*. Previous popularizing critics had not bothered to write about the *Anthology* at all, and still less for a mass market; the genre was un-classically late and unashamedly minor. Like the more popular Latin epigram of Martial it had some small use as a linguistic teaching tool at the better public schools, and this had eventually spawned a messily edited mass-market translation, but the selection of poems in Bohn's edition had been safe enough, and no case had been put for the public taking the *Anthology* seriously.[22] Until Symonds, ancient Greek epigram could be safely ignored. From time to time, in the more upmarket literary magazines, gentleman scholars showed off their linguistic education in one-off compositions and translations; but

[21] A more neutral translation: 'Perhaps someone in time to come, listening to these boyish light verses of mine, will think that all these erotic *πόνοι* ['labours', 'exertions'; perhaps 'pains'?] were my own – but actually I'm forever penning assorted poems for various boy-lovers, since some god gave me this talent.'

[22] The Bohn edition: Burges 1854. On comparable school editions of Martial and the use of Latin epigram in composition exercises, see Sullivan 1991: 283, 304. In stark contrast to the series' *Greek Anthology*, Bohn's 1860 translation of Martial was complete and unexpurgated: ibid.: 304–5.

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there was no *scholarship* on epigram.[23] Now the critics had no choice, if ancient Greece was to be rescued from pederastic degeneracy: 'how greatly they misread the mind of Greece who think to become Hellenic by means of eccentricity tinged with vice'.[24]

Symonds had turned the genre's shortcomings into virtues. He had packaged Greek epigram as a rational recreation ideally suited to a nation of nature-lovers, package tourists, and devotees of Alpine spas. No other genre presented the ancient Greeks as they really were and always had been – exactly like us:

> The Anthology may from some points of view be regarded as the most valuable relic of antique literature which we possess…it is coextensive with the whole current of Greek history… Many subjects of interest in Greek life…are here fully and melodiously set forth. If we might compare the study of Greek Literature to a journey in some splendid mountain region, then we might say with propriety that, from the sparkling summits where Aeschylus and Sophocles and Pindar sit enthroned, we turn in our less strenuous moods to gather the meadow-flowers of Meleager, Palladas, Callimachus… [They] tell us that the Greeks of Athens or of Sidon thought and felt exactly as we feel. Even the *Graffiti* of Pompeii have scarcely more power to reconstruct the past and summon as in dreams the voices and the forms of long-since buried men.[25]

In Symonds' hands, the 'we' in 'exactly as we feel' was daringly inclusive. These ordinary Greeks of Athens (always the focal point of Victorian culture's identification with Hellas) took differing sexualities calmly on board as a fact of human nature.

Symonds' combination of selective translation and exegesis with a universalizing sales pitch was tactically convenient for his subcultural agenda, but it could very easily be turned around. The guardians of Greece's purity were caught in a double bind, unable to warn against Symonds' implications without drawing public attention to them. All they could do was to hint darkly at the 'unhealthy tendencies' and decadent 'fashion' of certain unspecified moderns whose grasp of the Hellenic genius was somehow 'defective'.[26] But the problem of epigram offered its own solution. If all human life was in the *Anthology*, then critics could present any version of it as the essential truth of our nature. All they had to do was to pick the right handful from its

[23] Stray 1998: 65–8 on classical quotation and the solidarity of the male elite, and 68–74 on composition in elegiacs as a 'heroic' attainment within that group. I view epigram translation in the magazines as an extension of this.

[24] Butcher 1893: 1, quoted with approval by Jebb 1893: 280.

[25] Symonds 1920: 499–500.

[26] Jebb 1893: 280.

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thousands of poems and arrange them to tell the right story – just as Symonds had. Symonds had actually been relatively faithful in his presentation of categories – his one major deception was to start with Book Six and take it from there, skipping not only the weird first four Books but also the heterosexual Book Five. His successors were less scrupulous in reporting the *Anthology*'s structure: instead they freely imposed their own categories and chronologies to justify including some poets and excluding others. New section headings knocked the *Anthology*'s Greeks into shape as a model family of proto-Victorians: sentimental devotees of home, God, and country.

Go tell it to the Victorians

Funerary and related categories were placed prominently within these schemes. Poems written as witty literary pastiches of the epigraphic habit were now reconfigured to deliver earnest moral closure as a presentist *memento mori*. The new schemes of arrangement attributed to the Greeks a glimmering of awareness that, without Hebraism, they could never *quite* become like us; pagan Hellenism itself would not be enough in the long haul. Rome was there to decline and fall for us in godless, heedless excess; Greece, to sensitize us through decorous reflection on its own beautiful death:

> [The] Greek genius kindled before the vision of life and death into a clearer flame… [I]n all of the best period there is a common note, mingled of a grave tenderness, simplicity, and reserve… There is…none of the ugliness of dying; with calm faces and undisordered raiment they rise from their seats and take the last farewell…so piercing and yet so consoling in its quiet pathos.[27]

In this sentimental image, Mackail's Greeks – Victorians before the fact, except in the crucial matter of faith – calmly take their leave, bequeathing to an intuited future the fearless Hellenic rationality that dimly foresees its own nineteenth-century resurrection and union with Hebraism. Beyond 'the bright and brief space of life' they perceive 'far away a shadowy and beautiful country to which later men were to give the name of Heaven'.[28]

[27] Mackail 1890: 65, 67. On the topos of Roman decline in Victorian reception, see Vance 1997 and 1999.

[28] Mackail 1890: 66. This prescient Hellas is clearly operating as a generic quasi-Christian fantasy space. Compare Frodo's vision of the Grey Havens as he passes into the West at the close

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The structure of Butler's influential *Amaranth and Asphodel* (1881) is indicative. The Greeks are there to fall in love; to offer sincere, but sadly misdirected prayers; to stop and smell the flowers; and to reflect on their own mortality for posterity's benefit:

> Love Poems
> Life, Time, and Moralities
> Temple Offerings
> Poems on Nature and on Art
> Poems on Death.

A later scheme outdoes Butler for nature worship and morbid piety:

> Religious
> Historical
> Dead Cities
> Seafaring and Fishermen
> Sailor's Graves
> Other Graves
> Life and Death
> Fountains and Wayside Gods
> Pastoral
> Grasshoppers and Crickets
> Love and Ladies
> Works of Art
> Miscellaneous.[29]

Redrawing the borders

The timeline could also be rearranged. Symonds had proposed a genre history of rise, peak, and decline, knowing that no-one could argue with his basic outline. The art historian Johannes Winckelmann had devised this now familiar story-shape to explain phases in classical sculpture, and the Victorians applied it indiscriminately to past, present, and future phenomena in human culture. The histories of nations, races, and literary genres all followed the same bell curve, often at more than one level. In standard Victorian accounts of Greek

of Tolkien 1966: 310: 'white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise'.

[29] Butler 1881; Fry 1915.

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civilization, Athenian literature of the fifth century was the pinnacle of Greek culture; tragedy was the pinnacle of Athenian literature; and Sophocles was the pinnacle of tragedy – a curve within a curve within a curve. The genre thus contained its own micro-trajectory of rise (Aeschylus), peak (Sophocles), and decline (Euripides, 'a herald of death to the art around which he threw [his] novel splendours'). Careers of individual authors could do the same.[30]

For Symonds, literary epigram ascended late (the Hellenistic era – full points for accuracy) and, as we have seen, peaked with Meleager. Strato occupied the Euripides role, as the brilliant and cynical harbinger of the genre's fall into decadence. After Strato, the phase of decline was populated by degenerate and disgusting latecomers, 'corrupted by the lusts of Rome and the decadence of the East' – coincidentally, all authors of heterosexual love poems:

> Very pale and hectic are the hues which give a sort of sickly beauty to their style… [A] man need be neither a prude nor a Puritan to turn with sadness and with loathing from these last autumnal blossoms on the tree of Greek beauty. The brothel and the grave are all that is left for Rufinus and his contemporaries.[31]

Pandemic heterosexuality is sick. Specifically, it is 'hectic' – a word that specifically suggests tuberculosis, 'hectic fever', the corrosive inner decay of the big city; but it is also figured as syphilitic, the link between the 'brothel and the grave'. By modern estimates, Strato and Rufinus may well have been contemporaries – both of them much earlier than was previously thought – but Symonds pushes the aggressively heterosexual poet centuries into the future to join Macedonius and Paulus Silentiarius (incidentally two favoured authors of the schools-derived Bohn translation) in a desolate post-Hellenic wasteland.[32]

One obvious conservative response was to move the bell curve back in time towards the classical period, cutting off Strato and other morally dubious writers of the Roman era. The ersatz epigrams at the symposium in Becker's *Charicles* are an isolated and eccentric foretaste of the full-blown trend of purposeful manipulation in the wake of Symonds' *Studies*; Mackail wrote, 'One sees [in the *Garland*

[30] For a lively introduction to Winckelmann's art-historical ideas see Beard and Henderson 2001: 68–74. For purely Hellenic spirit, see Jebb 1893: 216; and for 'herald of death', ibid.: 239. On Jebb's quasi-religious 'commitment to Sophoclean perfection' and avoidance of Euripides, see Stray 2007b: 80–1, 85.

[31] Symonds 1920: 527–8.

[32] On relative dating, see most recently the judicious summary by Coleman 2006: xxiii–xxiv.

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of Philip] the decline of art from its first exquisiteness.'[33] This often involved some tenuous special pleading – Symonds had been right about literary epigram's relation to the Hellenistic age, and denial of this easily shaded into overstatement and outright fibbing. Even Meleager could edge towards lateness: 'After [the Alexandrian era] comes nothing new but the jokes of Rome'.[34] Or away from Greekness, which amounted to the same thing: in this view, the passing of time and assimilation to Alexander's East had sapped the racial strength of Hellas and created a morbid mulatto identity.[35] The post-classical Greek epigrammatist 'has drunk of the wine of the Orient, but it holds no nepenthe against the thought of death'.[36] Touched with the tar-brush and already 'acute in his susceptibilities', Meleager becomes an opium addict:[37]

> Meleager was born in a Syrian town and educated at Tyre… In Meleager, the touch of Asiatic blood creates a new type, delicate, exotic, fantastic. Art is no longer restrained and severe. The exquisite austerity of Greek poetry did not outlive the greatness of Athens… The atmosphere is loaded with a steam of perfumes.[38]

> In Meleager, a native of Gadara in Palestine…whose temperament and genius are not without some Asiatic quality, love becomes a new and almost mystical ardour…though the antique simplicity is wanting. The colouring is richer, the imagery is often fantastic; the fragrance of oriental spices, the scents of lilies and roses are shed over the things of the heart.[39]

Whole classes of epigrams could be excluded on the same basis:

> Of the great mass of [*AP* 12] epigrams no selection is possible or desirable. They belong to that side of Greek life which is akin to the Oriental world, and remote and even revolting to the western mind. And on this subject the common moral sense of civilised mankind has pronounced a judgment which requires no justification as it allows of no appeal.[40]

[33] Mackail 1890: 17.
[34] Lothian 1920: n.p.
[35] The classic discussion of 'Orientalism', the Western construction of the East as its barbaric Other, is Said 1978.
[36] Soutar 1939: 246, a posthumously published 1890s doctoral dissertation.
[37] On Meleager's susceptibilities, see Neaves 1874: 6. On Classics' implication in colonial discourse, see Goff 2005; the very useful Hingley 2000 concentrates on the Roman side of this reception history.
[38] Mackail 1890: 33–4.
[39] Butcher 1893: 307–8.
[40] Mackail 1890: 36.

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Digging for victory

This Orientalist fantasy of diseased mysticism rewrote Symonds' Greek love as racially Other in explicitly presentist terms. Stamping out pederasty in the *Anthology* became part of Britain's civilizing mission as an imperial power, viewed in the same terms as eradicating white slavery and the harem.[41] Contamination by Eastern blood had turned the Greece of the *Anthology* into a Levantine shambles, in urgent need of colonial intervention and sprucing up. Its irrational structures of organization were tottering relics; enlightened modern administration swiftly brought order to the text.

These translators aimed to do the *Anthology* a favour by weeding and pruning it to remove racial impurity and reveal its wholesome original design. For the purposes of this scheme, a selectively read Meleager – elsewhere 'the voluptuous Syrian singer' – becomes the last 'good' epigrammatist.[42] His *Garland* is a tidy cottage garden, sadly spoilt by post-classical landfill.

As we saw in the Introduction, Cephalas' *Anthology* is in plain fact the end product of a millennium of endlessly repeated sifting, sorting, selection, and exclusion – to say nothing of loss. Each poem has been chosen, chosen, and chosen again by successive compilers. In late Victorian reception, however, the *Anthology* becomes its own polar opposite: the municipal dump of unwanted late-Greek culture:

> The Greek Anthology is no garden of chosen flowers… It is a garden full of roses, of waste ground, of rubbish heaps confused together. But it began as a flower garden, with the Wreath which Meleager made…[43]

The misrepresentation of the *Anthology* as a muddle of rubbish heaps is surely an inspired appropriation of the breaking news in textual studies: the excavation of thousands of Greek papyri from the genuinely confused rubbish mounds of Oxyrhynchus, the lost metropolis of Greco-Roman Egypt that we first encountered in our Introduction.[44] These tattered fragments of books and documents, thrown away as

[41] 'Both nations belong to one great and elevated family of the human race', and stand united against 'female degradation' (Neaves 1874: 80), and see also the harem fantasy at Mackail 1890: 37. For some striking examples of racialist fabulation in popular and scholarly reception of Greco-Roman Egypt, see Montserrat 1998.

[42] Soutar 1939: 249.

[43] Lothian 1920: n.p.

[44] For orientation see above, p. 18 n. 31; for images of the mounds, see Bowman, et al. 2007: 5, 8, and their Plate X.

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broken or useless by the ancient inhabitants of the provincial city, randomly sampled its textual production and consumption. Epigram was now imagined to be in the same sorry state of affairs:

> The Greek Anthology is a mass of heterogeneous material which may well dismay anything but the hardihood of scholars and editors… [A]s it stands, [it] is not a selection, in any proper sense – it is simply a vast reservoir, with some subdivision…a garden run to weeds in which the weeds predominate with varying degrees of worthlessness and noisomeness.[45]

Dross was mixed indiscriminately with gold, the former hugely outweighing the latter, and it was the job of the expert to pronounce on which was which. Translators bought into the new sub-papyrological idiom enthusiastically. The *Anthology* was not a selection of selections, but a discard pile; the bulk of its poems were accidental and unworthy survivors. Papyrology's scientific cachet as an all-new, technical sub-discipline of philology lent gravitas and objectivity to the task of epigram translation.

If translators were unable to find the proper flowers for their new Garlands among the aesthetic-*cum*-moral detritus of the *Anthology*, others could legitimately be brought in. The degenerate dross of the 'rubbish heaps' was no fit basis for a panoptic display of properly understood human nature. New blood was needed:

> The Greek Anthology, therefore, in its largest sense…may now be considered as consisting, not merely of the collections of Cephalas and Planudes, but also of a large number of other short poems…which it is likely that Meleager, Philippus, or Agathias, if we had them entire, would be found to have inserted in their collections, or might reasonably have done so.[46]

The new and morally improved *Anthology* would be anything its translators and exegetes wanted it to be. In their rhetoric of presentation, the 'garland' of cut flowers (always so quick to fade) blurred imperceptibly into a 'garden' that could be set right for perpetuity. They became avid plantsmen in the mould of J. W. Mackail, the 'Capability' Brown of epigram's afterlife in translation as an English country garden. His text-with-translation of *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* was the Chatsworth of modern anthology-making – a landmark in garden design, endlessly discussed, praised, and imitated.

[45] Anonymous review of Mackail 1890, *The Nation* 55.1425 (1892): 304.
[46] Neaves 1874: 13–14.

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Like Brown's landscapes, Mackail's improvements swept away what had gone before, erasing the *Anthology*'s historic design. For English readers and writers, *Select Epigrams* now simply *was* the *Anthology*. Its selection of 500 best poems included everything of value – 'according to the editor's best judgment, all which are of the first excellence in any style' – and was laid out in a design that gave the impression of always having been there.[47] Reproduced as our front-cover illustration, the book's frontispiece shows a no-nonsense female gardener-*cum*-anthologist at work on her drifts: it could be Vita Sackville-West at Sissinghurst.

After Mackail

Mackail's categories comprehended all human life – all that was fit to print. Epigram was now wholesome, sentimental, and patriotic, but not over-serious or intellectualizing; it ideally expressed the late Victorian and Edwardian craze for 'muscular Christianity'. The elegiac couplets of the reduced *Anthology* were

> a metre which could refuse nothing, which could rise to the occasion and sink with it, and be equally suited to the epitaph of a hero or the verses accompanying a birthday present, a light jest or a profound moral idea, the sigh of a lover or the lament over a perished Empire.

The editor's rhetoric of selection excluded later authors ('in any collection of Greek epigrammatic poetry these authors [of the Roman period] naturally sink to their own place'), and found room for honourable early outsiders such as Mimnermus and Theognis.[48]

Subsequent translators went to Mackail's Greek text and no further, transposing his distinctive landscape design and planting scheme into their own modest suburban plots. They proudly advertised his influence on their philosophy of epigram cultivation. Even the token departures from Mackail's selection were applications of his method:

> The pleasure which I derived from Mr. Mackail's *Select Epigrams*…is the origin of this little book. I have freely used his text, his notes, his bibliography and above all his translations. All the epigrams here translated are to be found in his selection, with the

[47] Mackail 1890: vii.
[48] Ibid.: 3, also the source of the 'lament'.

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solitary exception of the poem to the Grasshopper from the Anacreontica, which is not really an epigram, but a short lyric…[49]

It was just as I completed the usual scholastic training of our Universities, that Mr. Mackail's lesser volume of Selections came into my hands; and for some years it was my custom in leisure times to carry these little poems about with me, not in my pockets only, but in my head and heart… Of about half of [my translations from Mackail] I have in this book made a Garland after the ancient fashion, picking a flower here, another there…adding also a few things curious or characteristic, which took my fancy… I have rarely troubled to go behind his notes.[50]

The 'lesser volume' was the Greek text without translation or notes, in a smart and keenly priced pocket edition; a translation-only edition in the same format sold in yet greater numbers. All references were now to Mackail; *AP* dropped off the map, replaced with *M*.

Mackail's response to the Uranian threat is foundational to the subsequent reception of Greek epigram in the English language. The equation of epigram's decline with racial miscegenation (half-breed Meleager), the shifting of the bell curve, the search for the point at which the rot set in – all the tropes we have been tracking originate with him.

The *Anthology* in the twentieth century

'First you tell the lie, then you make it true.'[51] Mackail's decorous revisionism won the mainstream battle and set the terms for epigram's future use. Paton's solidly useful Loeb (1916–18) still churns over the Symonds-bashers' rhetoric: homosexuality is the effete 'fashion' of an age of decline, and 'much misunderstanding has been caused by people quoting anything from the "Greek Anthology" as specifically "*Greek*"'.[52] As late as 1929, a major translator of the *Anthology* was still reproducing Symonds' rhetoric of the brothel and the grave. Shane Leslie implicitly buys into *Greek Ethics*' binary of Pandemic and Uranian *Eros* to deny Symonds' point about naturally inherent sexual identities:

[49] Fry 1915: vii.
[50] Lothian 1920: n.p.
[51] Perrin 1992: 229.
[52] Paton 1918 vol. 4: 280–1, introducing *AP* 12; and vol. 1: x, general preface.

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In dealing with the Erotic, a frank cleavage has been made between the natural and unnatural… Too many Epigrams [in *AP* 12] had better been tied to a mill-stone and dropped into the sea… The apples of Sodom are generally omitted in Greek studies, but such of their dead blossoms as survive in the Anthology turn to dust in modern taste… No doubt [this love] was often too strong to be anything but Platonic. Its weaker side was gross.[53]

Leslie is still tinkering with the genre's Winckelmann curve – epigram's fifth-century inscriptional rise is now implausibly also its literary peak:

With Simonides the Greek Epigram reached an immediate height, to which it never reascended, but the decadence of Alexandria and Constantinople was strewn with the intellectual and the ingenious.[54]

And his *Anthology* is still most definitely a random rubbish heap:

Herein was stored flower and fungus, wreath and rubbish… All the vices, all the virtues, all the arts are represented and descend side by side. The scrap-heap of Greece survives in a scrap-book.[55]

Throughout the twentieth century, translators carry forward the Victorian insistence that the *Anthology* must be pruned and grafted for its own good – and is best translated very loosely:

Many of the translations came to me as I turned the Greek poem over in my head, with no text at all. Along with the epigrams of the *Anthology* are a few lyric fragments and some bits of Latin… In a few cases, what might seem to the pedant to be mistranslations are deliberate *jeux d'esprit.* I know what the Greek says.[56]

In the spirit of a Beat cut-up, this 1962 version of the *Anthology* by Kenneth Rexroth includes snippets of the archaic lyric poet Archilochus, the ubiquitous Martial (humiliatingly lumped in with his Greek models), Sappho, Petronius, and the mediaeval Latin lyrics of *Carmina Burana*. Epigram turns Rexroth into Kerouac: 'on the freight trains of my youthful years of wandering, in starlit camps on desert and mountain ranges…[epigrams] have been my constant companions'. Despite himself, the translator echoes the romantic Victorian insistence that Greek poetry is canned fresh air – and particularly that elegiac composition is best done on the hoof. The exercise of epigram-work

[53] Leslie 1929: 27. Strato is Pandemically 'gross' also at Paton 1916–18: *ad loc.*
[54] Ibid.: 10.
[55] Ibid.: 30–1.
[56] Rexroth 1962: n.p.

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unites the rail-riding Beat poet with the Oxbridge undergraduate reading party among the Lakes.[57]

There is still no complete translation into English, and probably never will be;[58] and the story of Soddington Symonds is part of why. For a time, he made epigram too hot to handle; then it sank back into unmarketable obscurity. The genre's profile in modern perception of Greek literature tracks Symonds' own posthumous Winckelmann curve. With Uranian Love a mere historical curiosity, it no longer seems to matter how or whether the public at large reads Strato and Meleager. Translators who would *like* them to must compete for attention with flashier contemporary pleasures – one translator of erotic epigram, struggling to come across as edgy and worldly wise, brags of inclusion in seedy men's magazines.[59]

'Grass of Parnassus'

Even the specialized scholarship continues to carry faint echoes of the Mackail method (and occasionally reproduces it verbatim); but what else are scholars to do?[60] The 'here's another pretty one' approach is probably less avoidable than ever before: it ideally complements the modern academic production line of journal articles and chapters in edited volumes, advertising philological acumen in a convenient nutshell. Scholars today show off with epigram much as earlier generations did. Besides, opportunities to study ancient epigram in its 'original' literary contexts have only now begun to appear – along with plenty of new pretties to distract us with their shine.

Nor is it terribly helpful to scoff at Mackail et al. as misguided in their educated instinct for repression; all being well, what *we* do with epigram (and with classics) will seem every bit as odd in a hundred years' time as opium-addict Meleager does now. Bits of this

[57] Ibid.; his rhetoric bears close comparison to, for example, Bowen's 'knapsack tour' and Butler's 'mountain walks, in solitary hours', quoted by Stray 1998: 67 and 71.

[58] Even Paton's Loeb – at five volumes, unlikely to be replaced any time soon – puts some poems into Latin instead of English: see e.g. *AP* 5.35, 36, 38, 49, 54, 55, etc. Book 5 is much more sexually explicit than Book 12, but Paton may also be trying to reinforce his editorial line that homosexuality is not so much a real sexual identity as a temporary accommodation to social pressures. 'In [Meleager's homoerotic epigrams], if I err not, we miss the distinguishing note of passion, which his other love-poems so often have… [They are] rather a matter of fashion' (Paton 1918 vol. 5: 281).

[59] Kelly 1986: 8.

[60] Littlewood 2005: 53 calls the *Anthology* 'a garden with possibly more weeds than flowers'.

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strange nineteenth-century back story even achieve a kind of topsy-turvy fidelity, replicating the steps of epigram's ancient reception history. Those early Victorian gentlemen's magazines are uncannily like the ancient symposium in their relaxed solidarity and keen eye for a class divide; it is hard to imagine a more congenial or indeed a more authentic space for the resurrection of classical epigram in translation and composition. The motives of a Mackail or Neaves in cutting Cephalas down to size were very nearly identical to those of their fourteenth-century hero, Planudes: they sincerely believed (and contemporary reviewers agreed) that they were doing the ancients a favour by winnowing their texts. By the standards of their time, they were if anything moderates in their approach to censorship of the classics.[61] Indeed, their claim to interfere was greater than Planudes'; they came from a nation of avid gardeners. Censors of classical literature had long characterized their activity as horticultural, separating flowers from weeds – 'rank tares and poisonous roots' – so an ancient genre that explicitly announced itself as flower-like was especially well suited by nature to enthusiastic hoeing, thinning out, and potting on.[62] These activities restored epigram, and the ancient world it represented, to their proper selves. When as modern scholars we restore what our predecessors cut, we feel the same warm glow of communion with the spirit of the classic – but they felt it more deeply.

One of their main advantages lay in possessing the skills to take this communion further, closing the loop. We supply no fresh translation of the following epigram because the Latin *is* the translation – the source text is in English:

> *'Stemmata quid faciunt?'*
>
> *Incluta multorum per nomina, Pontice, patrum*
> *Deducta est ad te linea clara diu:*
> *Sic uia deducta est Romanis incluta fabris;*
> *Sic in stagnanti desiit illa luto.*

[61] An influential American moral reformer, Anthony Comstock, was at this time pressing for a ban on *all* classical literature in translation; see Beisel 1997: 162–4, and cf. Perrin 1992: 6 on extreme attitudes to censorship of the eighteenth-century novel. Comstock was an authoritarian conservative with religious backing; Mackail, a liberal socialist. On Mackail's politics, see briefly Stray 1998: 229–30. For close parallels to various epigram-censors quoted in this chapter, see Perrin 1992: 25, 37, 84, 200.

[62] On the gardening metaphor, see Perrin 1992: 63; for rank tares, see 200.

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This classic example of elegiac epigram was composed by an Oxonian, Charles Gepp, and was selected for inclusion in a mid-nineteenth-century Anthology – *Sabrinae Corolla*, 'The Garland of the Severn'. This latter-day Garland (which ran to four editions) was one of several that collected miscellaneous poems in Latin and Greek by alumni of prominent public schools, in this case Shrewsbury.[63] Almost every poem is a translation into Greek or Latin of an excerpt from an English author, interspersed with occasional German romantics such as Schiller. The book is laid out like a Loeb in reverse (not that the Loebs existed then) – English on the left-hand page, Latin or Greek on the right. There is a great deal of Shakespeare (whose 'small Latin and less Greek' is thereby remedied) and almost as much Tennyson. A genuine epitaph for a child buried in Meole Churchyard becomes a Greek funerary epigram – Ὦ *Θάνατε παιών*! Time and again, English epigrams in the manner of Martial are transformed into Latin ones that might as well *be* by him. The reception supplements and supplants its ancient model – itself, of course, always already a reception *too*.

In this case the English original is by Robert Burns (1793):

> Bright ran thy line, O Galloway,
> Through many a far-famed sire:
> So ran the far-famed Roman Way,
> So ended in the mire.

This epigram was originally part of a run of topical poems by Burns, all targeting a dissolute contemporary landowner. Gepp (or the anonymous editors) fit it for inclusion in the *Corolla* as a stand-alone piece by assigning a generalizing heading and thus a broader moral application: 'Virtue alone is true nobility'. This newly manufactured title is then loosely 'translated' into a genuinely classical Latin tag, which becomes the title of Gepp's Latin version on the facing page: *Stemmata quid faciunt?*, 'What use are family trees?' (referring to the visual displays of ancestry in the atria of elite Roman households). This famous and much-quoted *sententia* (moralizing sound bite) opens the schoolroom-friendly eighth hexameter *Satire* of Martial's contemporary, Juvenal.

[63] By curious coincidence, Frederick Metcalfe (the translator of Becker's *Charicles*) was a Shrewsbury old boy. *Sabrinae Corolla* is anonymously edited; I cite from the third edition (1867): 314–5. On these local Garlands, and epigram composition as a badge of scholarly virtuosity, see respectively and very briefly Stray 1998: 69, and McKitterick 2007: 8.

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Moving on from the title into the text of Gepp's version, it is evident that the habits of Latin verse composition instilled at Shrewsbury have stuck. There are echoes of cleaned-up Catullus (*multorum per… patrum*, cf. *Carmen* 101.1), perhaps of the opening lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (his *carmen deductum*), and certainly of Martial, Gepp's main model. 'Ponticus' is one of Martial's metrically convenient stock names for comic targets.[64] The effect of its substitution here is uncanny. An epigram that could easily be mistaken for a classical original instead looks backwards in time, from a distinctly modern perspective, to classical culture's predetermined end point – the decline and fall of pagan Rome. To successive generations of readers, Burns's 'far-famed Roman Way' was doubly resonant. Laid bare for the edification of day-trippers by the new science of archaeology, famous Roman roads such as the Fosse Way connected nineteenth-century Britain to the infrastructural and administrative prototype of its own expanding empire; but the 'Roman Way' also called to mind the Roman *way* of doing things – slaves, gladiators, and orgies. This figurative path could only end in the 'mire' of Rome's moral and political collapse, a favourite cautionary tale diagnosed by Burns's older contemporary Edward Gibbon and busily embroidered ever since by popular entertainments.[65] *Sabrinae Corolla* is careful to steer us away from this pagan road to ruin: it ends with a section of Christian hymns, prayers, and psalms.

As consumers of epigram who are not also its producers, we cannot share the vertiginous frissons of the Victorians' literary correspondence with the classical past – except vicariously, through them. A Victorian translator of epigram could hail the 'Grass of Parnassus, flower of my delight!' and mean the heathers of his native Scotland, straightforwardly and without straining taste or tolerance;[66] but the old hallucinatory overlay of classical education and allusion (the 'virtual reality' of our Prologue) is forever lost to us. The most that we can hope for is to be usefully aware of our own situatedness as consumers and producers of 'classics' – and again, Mackail and Symonds and the rest were there before us: open-eyed, clear-headed, and surprisingly honest in their attempts to fit ancient texts to modern

[64] Mart. 2.32, 82; 3.60; 4.85, etc; for metrical equivalents, see e.g. 'Postumus' and 'Rusticus' in the invaluable 'Index of Names' at the back of Shackleton Bailey 1993 vol. 3.

[65] On Rome and the British imperial imaginary from 1860, see Hingley 2000. On Roman decline and fall in popular theatre, see Mayer 1994; in the novel, Turner 1999.

[66] Andrew Lang in the title poem of his collection (1892), which also includes a 'Little Garland' of thirty-five 'versions from' the *Anthology*; where in it, he does not say.

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needs. We would no sooner call Plato an epigrammatist than Dickens a blogger, for identical and soundly scholarly reasons – with the result that the symposium of Becker's *Charicles* reads strangely to modern eyes; but the late Victorians, knowing almost as much as we do, resumed an authentically classical game of let's pretend. Like ancient readers, they played along. They entertained the pleasant fantasy that Plato the philosopher-poet was 'one of us', a kindred spirit invisibly present at the symposium, gentleman's club, school reunion – or Decadent salon. Then as now, and as it always had, the past was seen to suffuse and motivate the present; and epigram supplied any and every past that could be desired. It still does.

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