

ALSO BY SARAH RUDEN

TRANSLATIONS

The Aeneid: Vergil

The Homeric Hymns

Aristophanes: Lysistrata

Petronius: Satyricon

ORIGINAL POETRY

Other Places

PAUL AMONG THE PEOPLE

THE APOSTLE REINTERPRETED AND
REIMAGINED IN HIS OWN TIME

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le walking into communities of happy pagans, at peace with nature and their bodies, and shutting down the Maypole dances—to the dancers' mysterious glee? Instead, he sacrificed his home, his health, his peace of mind, and eventually his life for the sake of the Greeks and Romans—whom, since they are long dead, it should not be politically incorrect to call kindergartners with knives. He must have helplessly, sufferingingly loved them.

CHAPTER 3: NO CLOSET, NO MONSTERS? PAUL AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Paul's longest passage on homosexuality, Romans 1:24–27, is the single most fiercely debated of his writings. The passage is obviously important, placed as it is almost at the beginning of what many scholars consider Paul's last and climactic letter, and forming as it does the heart of his most savage indictment of polytheism. And here Paul pronounces on the most divisive issue in Christianity today.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men commit-

ted shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

There are so many ways to abuse the Bible. The most obvious is to interpret a biblical statement in isolation from others; they are definitely not all equal in rank, as the Bible itself keeps saying. When I was at the University of Kansas, the Westboro "Baptist Church" used to picket the student union, and tiny children carried signs declaring that GOD HATES FAGS. The "minister" cited the above Pauline verses as part of his authority to disrupt the funerals of AIDS victims—ignoring, of course, the vital command to love one another set down in Jewish scripture, expanded by Jesus, and stressed again and again by Paul.

But to distort the Bible's historical context is, though a much less flamboyant violation of the Bible's purposes, in the long run a more damaging one. Think how many mutually alienated and suspicious people the Westboro rants bring together in spirit every time they make the news. Here, in contrast, is John Boswell on the Romans passage, trying to explain away the seeming condemnation of acts that were "characteristic" and "natural" in Greco-Roman society—and therefore "not morally reprehensible" to Paul. I cannot see in Boswell's words any contribution to peace and clarity among Christians (let alone others), but rather to further conflict, from politically correct disingenuousness on one side and angry bafflement on the other.

... the persons Paul condemns are manifestly not homosexual: what he derogates are homosexual acts committed by apparently heterosexual persons. The

whole point of Romans I, in fact, is to stigmatize persons who have rejected their calling, gotten off the true path they were once on. It would completely undermine the thrust of the argument if the persons in question were not "naturally" inclined to the opposite sex in the same way they were "naturally" inclined to monotheism....

... It is not clear that Paul distinguished in his thoughts or writings between gay persons (in the sense of permanent sexual preference) and heterosexuals who simply engaged in periodic homosexual behavior. It is in fact unlikely that many Jews of his day recognized such a distinction, but it is quite apparent that—whether or not he was aware of their existence—Paul did not discuss gay *persons* but only homosexual acts committed by heterosexual persons.

I'm trying as hard as I can to picture Paul standing outside the assembly, like a bouncer outside a nightclub, scanning with his *gaydar* (keen or otherwise) for the mere metrosexuals. I'm failing.

Wouldn't the Greco-Roman literature of homosexuality provide more insight and better terms for dialogue than Boswell does? This literature is the closest representation available of what people saw around them in polytheistic imperial cities like Rome, and what they thought of it.

But a first pair of eyes to look through is, of course, Paul's. For more than three hundred years before he was born, first the Greeks and then the Romans had ruled his home city of Tarsus and made it as similar to the cities of southern Europe as they could. But however much of the Greco-Roman

worldview Paul might have adopted, what he heard at home and in the synagogue would not have led him to tolerate homosexuality. Jewish teaching was clear: homosexual acts were an abomination.

But another teaching mandated circumcision for all males in God's covenant. Paul put this aside; Judaism would not always hand down what Christianity would practice. Perhaps, in the matter of homosexuality, what he saw as a boy influenced him more than his tradition did. Among the female prostitutes on the streets, or in the windows or doorways of brothels, were males, on average a lot younger. At any slave auction he found himself watching, there might be attractive boys his own age (blond Scythians, red-haired Germans?) knocked down to local pimps at high prices, to the sound of jokes about how much they would have to endure during their brief careers in order to be worth it. A pious Jewish family, as Paul's probably was, would not have condoned sexual abuse of any of its slaves, but he would know from his non-Jewish friends that household slaves normally were less respected as outlets for bodily functions than were the household toilers, and that a sanctioned role of slave boys was anal sex with free adults.

Flagrant pedophiles might have pestered him and his friends on the way to and from school, offered friendship, offered tutoring, offered athletic training, offered money or gifts. But adults he trusted would have told him that even any flirting could ruin his reputation, and at worst get him officially classed as a male prostitute, with the loss of all of his civic rights. After his conversion, as he preached what Jesus meant for human society, he wasn't going to let anyone believe that it included any of this.

Readers may think I am exaggerating, that the day-to-day

culture of homosexuality could not have been so bad. They may have heard of Platonic homoerotic sublimity or festive or friendly couplings. None of the sources, objectively read, backs any of this up.

The Roman poet Martial uses "to be cut to pieces" as the ordinary term for "to be the passive partner." The Greeks and Romans thought that the active partner in homosexual intercourse used, humiliated, and physically and morally damaged the passive one. Heterosexual penetration could be harmless in the Christian community, in marriage (see chapter 4); homosexual penetration could be harmless nowhere. There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all, in the sense of times or places in which it was mutually safe for men to have anal sex with one another.

In fifth-century Athens (the gay paradise we hear of), one of the most common insults in comedy was "having a loose anus," meaning depraved—not just sexually, but generally. Plutarch, writing after Paul's time but about fifth-century Athens, transmits a "smear" of the teenage aristocrat Alcibiades: that when he had run away to have passive sex with an adult man, his guardians glumly considered their options:

Antiphon wanted him denounced [or disinherited] publicly, but Pericles wouldn't allow that. He said, "If he's dead, we'll get the news a day sooner because of the announcement; but if he's alive, it will ensure that he's lost for the rest of his life."

Alcibiades was extremely lucky to keep his civic rights (probably thanks to the power of his family), and he even had a high-level political and military career. But his reputation

as a *kinaidos*, or effeminate, passive "queer," marred his short life. Here in Petronius is a Roman *cinaedus*, and this is a much more usual version:

A queer came in, a most vapid and washed-out individual, true son of that household. He snapped his fingers and spewed out a dirty something like this:

"Come hither, come hither, you faggots so frisky,
Come running, come prancing, come skipping here briskly;
Come bring your soft thighs, agile bottoms, lewd hands,
You flaccid old eunuchs from Delian land!"

When he had exhausted his supply of verse, he slobbered over me with the filthiest of kisses. Next he got on top of my bed and used his full strength to strip me as I fought back. Long and hard—what he did, I mean, not him—he ground his loins over mine. Hair tonic streamed over his forehead and down through so much powder between the wrinkles of his cheeks that he looked like a rough wall flaking in a rainstorm.

In my utmost grief I couldn't hold back my tears any longer. "My lady," I moaned, "is this the dessert you ordered for me?"

She clapped her hands affectedly and said, "Oh, you clever man! What a chic but earthy wit you have! Do you want your admirer to *desert* you already?"

To get the person to move on to my companion, I said, "Is Ascyrtos the only one on vacation here?"

"No indeed," said Quartilla. "Let's give Ascyrtos some dessert!" At this the pansy changed steeds, and when settled on Ascyrtos proceeded to wear him to

pieces with kissing and humping. Giron stood and watched all this, laughing himself into a hernia.

The reference to the island of Delos is about castration (the god Apollo, whose birthplace was thought to be there, was a sponsor of surgery), a workable analogy: both castrated men and *cinaedi* had lost their manhood to violence, either of the knife or of anal penetration. Both kinds of men were lower than women: there was no way to be a rare "good" *cinaedus*, or an attractive one—only quite fresh boys and youths had any charm for grown-up males. * The only satisfying use of an adult passive homosexual was alleged to be oral or anal rape—the satisfaction needed to be violent, not erotic. Greek and Roman men, in public, would threaten bitter male enemies with rape.

One joke among many was that a *cinaedus* had to pay for sex: had to pay someone who was destitute but could still look down on him from the height of his own all-important virility. The satirist Juvenal, of the late first and early second centuries A.D., gives such a man a monologue.

"So it's an easy thing, an inviting thing, to drive my respectable penis into your guts and run into yesterday's dinner? It's less wretched for a slave to plow a field than to plow his master. I guess you think you're a tender young thing, a beautiful boy worthy of serving drinks in heaven. . . . †

*The only exceptions I know of were Roman *glabri*, or "smoothies." A Roman slave might stay in sexual service as an adult but would have to wear a boy's clothes and have all his body hair plucked out regularly. Paul's contemporary Seneca writes that it is a pitiful form of oppression. †In myth, Zeus raped the prince Ganymede but compensated him with eternal youth and a job as the gods' bartender.

"Though you brush aside the other things and pretend, what do you think this is worth? My devotion as your retainer means that your wife's not still a virgin. . . ."

"I'm not going to be rewarded now, you cheat, you ingrate, for the birth of your little son and daughter? You bring them up as if they're your own, and you enjoy getting this proof of your virility in all of the newspapers. You're a father! Let the gossip chew on that. That's what I've given you. You have a father's rights, you can be someone's heir, get a whole legacy."

Paranoia about passive homosexuality was rife. Greek and Roman men led an intensely public life and believed that they could see character in nuances of clothing and gestures. Romans thought, for example, that scratching the head with one finger was a sure sign of a *cinaedus*. Juvenal depicted the doom of any actual passive homosexual's reputation as certain—to say nothing of other men it was merely easy to slander:

What can a rich man keep secret? Though the slaves are mum, his horses, dogs, and mules, his doors, his marble columns will speak. He can shut the windows, cover every chink with hangings, lock the doors, take the lamp away, send everybody out, let nobody sleep anywhere near him. Still, before dawn, by the second cock crow, the barman down the road will know. The master will also hear the things his head cooks, his carvers, his confectioner make up. Who'd hesitate to

invent a slanderous charge as payback for the lash? At the crossroads too, some drunk will run you down and swill the story into your cringing ear.

There was even a notion of closeted, protesting-too-much homosexuality—but only in the passive domain. In satire and epigram we see a small gallery of burly, hairy, stony-faced pervers (some of whom, like certain effeminates shown in literature, seem to have been real, not fictional persons). They can even play the role of stern, old-fashioned moralists, always ready to denounce others. Don't be fooled, their own denuncers warn us.

How could any man feel safe in his reputation for proper masculinity? I can understand the storms of preemptive verbal aggression.

The active partner had no comeback from his callous and selfish behavior. There were no derogatory names for him. Except for some restraint to avoid conflict within his actual household, he positively strutted between his wife, his girlfriends, female slaves and prostitutes, and males. Penetration, after all, signaled moral uprightness—sorry about the image. We get our word "virtue" from the Latin *virtus*, literally "manliness"; courage, honesty, and responsibility were strongly linked to physical virility in the Greek and Roman minds.

In fact, society pressured a man into sexual brutality toward other males. To keep it unmistakable that he had no sympathy with passive homosexuals, he would tour his attacks on vulnerable young males. Encolpius (Crotcher), the narrator in Petronius, who dramatizes his loathing of the *cinaedus* so memorably, is an unshamed and enthusiastic

pederast (especially of a youngster he shows in the role of Lucretia, a chaste, raped heroine of legend), though he chases women too.

Amy Richlin's celebrated book *The Garden of Priapus* lays out the system of ethics that locked people into this cruel regime. The regime included the erotic oppression of women. While Paul may seem to mention lesbianism, this was such a rare or little-noticed phenomenon in the ancient world that it is likely he instead means anal penetration of women by men. That *did* happen often, but men valued it less than penetration of boys: women were made to be penetrated anyway; a real man needed to transform an at least potentially active and powerful creature into a weak and inferior one.

The Greeks and Romans even held homosexual rape to be *divinely* sanctioned. There was an idol of sexual aggression, Priapus, the scarecrow with a huge phallus who was said to rape intruders, lawfully policing gardens through sexual threat, pain, and humiliation. A collection of Priapus poems comes down to us from around the turn of the millennium.

"Hey you, who can't keep your looting hand off the garden that's been entrusted to me: the magistrate's randy sidekick will go in and out of you until your gate's permanently wider. Two more will be waiting at your side, who've enriched themselves with a pretty pair of pricks from the public purse. They'll delve in you painfully as you lie there. Then a bawdy donkey no less well supplied with a dong will take his turn. So if a criminal has any sense, he'll watch out, since he knows how many dicks are waiting for him."

Adult passive homosexuals court the penalty, but Priapus refuses in disgust.

"Somebody softer than goose down is coming here to steal—in his itch for punishment. Let him steal on and on. I won't see."

NO WONDER PARENTS guarded their young sons doggedly. It was, for example, normal for a family of any standing to dedicate one slave to a son's protection, especially on the otherwise unsupervised walk to and from school: this was the pedagogue, or "child leader." A pederast in Petronius gets access to a pretty boy by *becoming* his pedagogue, but only after much work in convincing the boy's parents that he is a rare model of restraint.

Since success with fireborn, citizen-class boys was rare, predators naturally turned to those with no protectors, young male slaves and prostitutes. Besides that of the pedagogue, another telling slave profession—perhaps only among the Romans—was that of the *deliciae* ("pet") or *conubinus* ("bedmate"), a slave boy whose main duty was passive anal sex with the master. The public acknowledged such a child's status, as well as his vulnerability to being retired at a young age. His retirement was not likely to be a happy one; he kept the stigma of passive sodomy, but he lost the protection of his close relationship to his master, while usually remaining bound to the same household and the other slaves with their accumulated grudges. They may have refused him, as he would have passed his "bloom," even the status of a sexual plaything.

These threats lurk under the words addressed to the name-

less *concupinus* in a wedding song of the first century B.C. Roman poet Catullus. The little boy, a sort of catamite ring bearer, is forced to hand out nuts to celebrate his master the groom's new union that has made him redundant.

Don't let there be any gaps in the bawdy Fescennine joking; and don't let the bedmate refuse nuts to the children when he hears that his master has abandoned all love for him.

Give the children nuts, you lazy bedmate! You've been playing with nuts long enough, now you're a slave to this wedding procession. Let the people have their nuts, bedmate.

You sneered at the women out on the farm, yesterday and today. Now the hairdresser's going to shave your face. You poor bedmate, poor thing—let the people have their nuts.

They say you struggle to keep away from your smooth-skinned boys, perfumed bridegroom—but keep away. O Hymen Hymenaeus! O Hymen Hymenaeus!*

We know that you've only explored things that are allowed, but the same things aren't allowed for a husband. O Hymen Hymenaeus! O Hymen Hymenaeus!

The most pathetic portraits of *deliciae*, however, are in Petronius. Two rich freedmen, one of whom admits in a self-

*The refrain invokes Hymen, the god of marriage.

humiliating drunken monologue that he himself was a *deliciae* as a child, treat their *deliciae* almost as if they were their own children, boasting of how bright and talented they are, indulging them, playing with them—which makes clear their own emasculation. The freedmen are married but have sired no children. These youngsters are *not* proper substitutes; and sympathy with them, in fact, only suggests the masters' degradation. Here is one of the freedmen:

Trimalchio himself was imitating the sound of a trumpet, but then he looked at his pet slave, who was called Croesus. This was a cruddy-eyed little boy with teeth covered in scum. He had a black puppy, obscenely fat, that he was wrapping in a chartrouse scarf. He also put a half-eaten hunk of bread on the couch in front of the animal and forced the poor thing to eat, making it gag and heave.

This scene of thoughtful husbandry reminded Trimalchio to have Scylax, "the protector of hearth and home," brought into the room. In no time, the doorkeeper fetched an immense dog on a chain and kicked it into a sitting position beside the table. Trimalchio took some of the white bread and tossed it to the beast, remarking, "Nobody in this house loves me more."

The boy was upset at such lavish praise directed toward the brute. He placed the puppy on the floor and urged it to fight. As a dog will do, Scylax filled the dining room with ear-splitting barking and lunged forward, nearly dismembering Croesus's little Pearlie. The tumult spread beyond the dogfight when a lamp on the table was tipped over, breaking all the crystal dishes and spattering some of the guests with hot oil.

Trimachio, however, was chiefly concerned with appearing indifferent to the destruction of his treasures. He kissed the boy and offered him a piggyback ride. The little slave did not hesitate to mount his master and slap him again and again on the shoulder blades, laughing and shrieking the whole time, "Come on, horsy, how many fingers am I holding up?"

The bridegroom Carullus celebrates has the "proper" attitude: use the kid and throw him aside when convenient. Once you have polluted him, you can catch the same pollution by getting close emotionally. This is how twisted and doubled back the ethics of homosexuality were among the Greeks and Romans. This was what Paul and his readers were seeing.

WHERE, THEN, do we get our notion of a gay idyll, especially in the Greek world? It is mainly from Plato, with his whitewash of pederasty in philosophical and religious terms. Plato's fullest treatment is in the dialogue *Phaedrus*.

A good-looking boy makes the soul of his admirer "recall" the ultimate beauty it has forgotten through mortal life. The soul begins to grow the "feathers" it needs for flight. Lower and heterosexual natures have no chance for this spiritual advancement. Desire launches them "against nature" into straight sex and fatherhood.

The homosexual lover longs to impart his own spirituality to the beloved. He has picked someone with sublime potential and works to educate and improve him. Sexual attacks on the boy are part of the process, but are naturally cut short by the loftier elements of the passion—and, it is stated briefly,

by the fact that the boy and his circle take a very, very dim view of the adult's advances. This remark suggests to me either that it is actual sodomy and not lesser sex acts at stake here; or that the disapproval of sodomy covered lesser sex acts, which might lead to sodomy.

But according to Plato, as the lover persists, the boy will come to see him as a benefactor. The lover's attentions will trump regard for friends and family. The boy will desire the lover in turn and become compliant.

The lover will still make an effort at holy restraint. If the couple do not have sex, they will spend their lives in the most blessed of human relationships and have a proportional reward in the afterlife. If they do have sex, their love will still save them from Hades and put them on the road to the highest spiritual development.

It would take quite a lot of space to explain in detail how I think Plato got away with presenting this kind of fantasy homosexuality" at Oxford used his dialogues as sacred texts. He had going for him, among other things, a long-dead mentor and "source" of the dialogues, Socrates, and a long exile in which to write without the usual raucous Athenian public participation in literature. But suffice it to say that what he so lovingly paints is total hokey.

The pederastic writers, the most direct heirs of Plato's literary eroticism, force us to acknowledge how far outside mainstream values he stood. The densest source of their work is a section named "The Boy Muse" in the *Greek Anthology* of epigrams. These poems extend back several hundred years from the early second century A.D., when they were collected. Though Plato states that prepubescent boys are out of

bounds, no such scruples are visible in the generations after him. These later authors called themselves "pedophiles," lovers of children. True, several authors state that they want teenagers:

I enjoy twelve-year-olds at the height of their beauty. But a thirteen-year-old is even more desirable. And the one passing through his fourteenth year is a sweeter blossom of the love deities. More enjoyable is the one who's barely fifteen. Sixteen is the gods' year. Seventeen is for Zeus to hanker for, not me. But if someone has a yen for older boys, he's not playing anymore but looking to get some of what he gives.

But as this poem shows, pedophiles were supposed to want only passive boys they could treat as playthings; a young age was key. And the correct target was a child's body, a completely hairless one. Poem after poem tells of disgust at the signs of sexual maturity:

What a good goddess Revenge the latecomer is, for fear of whom we spit into the front of our tunics. * You did not see her coming behind you; you thought you would have your grudging beauty forever. Now it's destroyed. The thrice-jealous† deity has come, and your former worshippers now walk past you.

Now you want it, when a light first growth of beard creeps under your temples, and sharp wool fixes itself

*To avert evil.

†A pun for "smoothness with hair on it."

to your thighs. Now you say, "I like this better!" But who would claim that dry stalks are better than tassels of wheat?

The pursuer may be enraged that, whereas he prayed for the boy to return from a journey just as he was, the boy must have prayed for the stubble he now sports. A series of poems plays on this theme, but a contrasting series shows the boy ashamed of growing up and losing his "attractiveness":

Menippus, why is it that you're covered to the ground, when before you would pull your robe clear up to your thighs? You keep your head down and don't speak to me when you run into me. I know what you're hiding from me: the hairs have come, just as I said they would.

The parallel heterosexual erotic poetry is about degraded slave-prostitutes—not courtesans, and not ordinary freed-women. Some men felt that they could have a romance with either of the latter—single her out, get to know her, take some responsibility for her well-being; even one in a series of romantic conquests, according to the love poet Ovid, was someone to whom a man owed sexual pleasure. Hundreds of lines, whole volumes of poetry, were about individual women or personae such as Lyde and Corinna. Boys of all social classes in erotic literature got nothing like this: their poems were mostly epigrams, which half-drunken partygoers could compose and recite. It feels as if other men, and not the boys themselves, were the main audience for the poems, in a reign of gossip:

Son of Kronos [Zeus], I swore to you that I would never announce, even to myself, what Theudis promised me.

But my awfully disobedient soul has soared up in the air in its glee, and I can't keep this fine news in. I've got to say it—please forgive me: he did what I asked him to. Father Zeus, what's the joy in good luck if it's not known?

It is important not to assume too much about any reality behind these poems. Pornography tends to depict a world of fantasy. But the words—in a prestigious anthology and usually under authors' real names—do shock. And given what psychologists say about compulsion in pederasty, I can't imagine only a little lust vented in a lot of words.

How could what did go on have gone on for so long? Why did parents not hunt down at least the most obvious sources of danger? Virility in almost any form it chose was privileged, but how could it have been *that* privileged?

First of all, respectable free people did not, ever, countenance their sons' being seduced.* A lower-class parent who could not afford a pedagogue would try on his own to protect his good-looking son. If the boy had to work where he was vulnerable, his father would be hovering, aware of the all-day danger:

Just now, as I was going by a garland workshop, I saw
a boy weaving clusters of flowers—and I didn't pass on
without a wound. I stopped and whispered to him,
"For how much would you sell your wrath to me?" He

*There is one account, by the fourth-century B.C. historian Ephorus of Cyrene (in *Asia Minor*), of ritualized homosexual kidnapping in Crete, but this has no corroboration.

blushed redder than his buds, bent his head down, and said, "Get out of here, or my father will see." I bought some wreaths as a pretext and went off home to hang them up on the gods' statues—and prayed to get him.

But as open and as noxious as pederasty may have been, there was, in this society, hardly any way to combat it but to keep watch. For one thing, any special measures that drew attention to a boy would defeat the purpose of protecting him. Gossip was so vicious it would put the most evil construction possible on, for example, a family keeping its son at home if a would-be lover were hounding him. What had the boy done, or what was he likely to do? Much less could the parents prosecute anyone who had actually hurt him.

I have on my desk a late account (from Plutarch) of a very early alleged episode (from the 730s B.C.), part of which I cite in chapter 2 in connection to the *kérimos* (pp. 33–34): a pedophile and his gang pull a boy to pieces while trying to take him from his family and neighbors to rape him. This is one of only two stories I know of that include an official complaint (in this case, public display of the victim's corpse and a demand for justice) and open revenge (a curse accompanying the suicide of the victim's father) against an aggressor. It is easy to explain this exception. The father could act because his child no longer had a future to protect: he was dead.

The second story of striking back at pederasty is Roman, and it *really* confirms how vapid it is to assume that, because victims and their families did not want to acknowledge conflicts, there was tolerance for sodomy between citizens, or that sodomy was ever considered harmless, as opposed to

being usually directed against people like slaves, whose harm didn't count.

The historian Livy (late first century B.C., early first century A.D.) gives a version of the scandal leading to the expulsion of the cult of Bacchus from Rome in 186 B.C. An orphaned youth's stepfather conspired to have him "destroyed" by anal rape in the course of initiation into the cult: the stepfather wanted to snatch up the forfeited inheritance. But the boy's benevolent courtesan-mistress pounced on the danger that he in his naïveté had never suspected, and the government protected him and purged the cult in a reign of terror. Officials could act because no one could blame the intended victim, who had obviously been duped yet had escaped.

In such an unforgiving social world, there may have been a sort of standoff, with swarms of flaunting but frustrated pederasts and of quietly dodging, discreetly protected pupils. Here are more epigrams from "The Boy Muse":

Stop your useless work, poor pedophiles, leave off your hard efforts. You're crazed with impotent hopes. You might as well try to bail the sea onto the sandy shore, or to make a count of the drizzling particles of the Libyan desert, as to endure the desire for boys, whose arrogant beauty is sweet both to mortals and immortals. Look at me, all of you. My past toil has all been poured out for nothing on the barren beach.

Diphilos, these haughty boys with their purple-edged clothes,* boys that we can't get hold of, are like ripe figs on stony mountain crests, food for vultures and crows.

*The uniform of upper-class Roman boys.

Slave boys must have drained off much of pederasts' sexual energy; sex, according to the pederasts, was what good-looking slave boys were for.

A eunuch has pretty slave boys—but for what? Can he offer them unholy abuse? Truly the cunt is a dog in the manger, barking stupidly, doing no good for himself or anybody else.

But a man was not limited to his own slaves.

If you were still uninitiated in what I'm trying to persuade you to do, you'd be right to be afraid, perhaps expecting something terrible. But since your master's bed has made you an expert, why do you begrudge someone else what you've got? Your lord calls you in when he needs you, then he goes to sleep and lets you go—he doesn't even share a word with you. But here I can spoil you. You can play as an equal, chatter in confidence, and do other things because you're asked, not because you're ordered.

An adult could exploit an abused slave child's loneliness and humiliation again and again. It may be mainly slave children who are shown in the poems on bribery; the pederasts may masquerade as the parents or teachers the children do not have, and offer treats or rewards for "good" behavior.

Awwww! Why are you downcast and in tears again, my little one? Don't torment me, but come out and say it: what do you want? You hold your open hand out to me. I'm finished! I guess you're asking for wages now.

Where did you learn this? You're no longer content with farcokes and sesame seeds with honey, and nuts to shoot. * Already you're thinking of profit. May the man who taught you this die, since he ruined my little boy!

But amid the shamelessness of the poems, I began to lose any sense of how they might have been grounded, even in the writers' imagination. I stopped reading them when I couldn't get one ghostly dialogue out of my mind. The boy speaking might be a slave or free, experienced or inexperienced.

Don't you dare say that again to me!

Why's it my fault? He's the one who sent me.

So you're going to say it again?

I will. He tells you, "Come." So come on, don't dawdle.

They're waiting.

First I'll go to where they are, and then I'll get the

money. I've known for a long time what comes after that.

PAUL COULD HAVE, like generations of Greek and Roman moralistic and satirical commentators, lit into passive homosexuality, into the victims. But in Romans I he makes no distinction between active and passive: the whole transaction is wrong. This is crucially indicated by his use of the Greek word for "males," *arsenes*, for everybody; he does *not* use the word for "men," as the NRSV translation would have us believe. The Classical and New Testament word for a socially acceptable, sexually functional man is *aner*. In traditional parlance, this could mean an active but never a passive homo-

*The ancient equivalent of marbles.

sexual. But Paul places on a par all the male participants in homosexual acts, emphasizing this in Romans 2:1 (see below) and clearly implying that they are *all* morally degraded and that they *all* become physically debilitated from the sex act with each other. Such effects were unheard of among the Greeks and Romans when it came to active homosexuals: these were thought only to draw their passive partners' moral and physical integrity into themselves.

According to all of the evidence, Paul's revolutionary message struck. This may be in part because he told his audience a more resonant truth than that of sexual misconduct in itself. First look at what he immediately passes on to (Romans 1:28-2:1):

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. 29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

2 Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.

I picture Paul, flushed and sweating in his rage as he writes that *everyone* is responsible for what pederasty has made of

society: especially those who, egging one another on in an insolent, boastful clique, damage others with active sodomy and then blame them. These acts are "the very same things," no matter who is doing what to whom.

Compare the list of horrors here to the one in Galatians that I discuss in chapter 2. This list has a special relationship to the Greco-Roman version of sexual abuse through these terms:

1. wickedness, evil, malice
2. covetousness, envy
3. deceit, craftiness, inventors of evil
4. gossips, slanderers
5. insolent, haughty, boastful
6. heartless, ruthless, God-haters

Some terms here are rare or even unique, in the Bible if not in all the literature of the era: "inventors of evil," "rebellious toward parents," "gossips," "slanderers," and "God-haters." I think that is because Paul was pioneering a general condemnation of pederasty in the West and needed special language to show how deeply, uniquely evil it was.

"Inventors of evil": It did not look as if God had created sodomy, but that humans had. In its Greco-Roman form it was, like the idolatry it is linked with in this passage, essentially a worship of the self and its immediate desires, with all of the stupidity and cruelty that entailed.

"Rebellious against parents": This kind of rebellion was a parent's worst nightmare, the drug epidemic of the time, apparently the biggest threat for losing control of a son and seeing him lost to decent society.

"Gossips," "slanderers": The victims suffered and the per-

petrators got immunity because of crude gossip and the possibility of blackmail.

"God-haters": Those who practiced homosexuality showed a hatred of God—wait, what about *that* one? It's a shocker. The Greeks had used the same compound word passively for "hated-by-god(s)," and some biblical translators deny that Paul makes the term active. I disagree, as all of the other words in the list denote acts or traits and not judgments provoked. Where are we with the word, then?

It is probably related to words Paul uses to lead into his blasting of homosexuality:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

"Wickedness" sounds either comically old-fashioned or fairly vague to modern readers. But people of Paul's time who were fluent in Greek, if they could time-travel and learn English, would translate the word as "injustice." There is nothing vague about it. It is about hurting people. Paul pairs the word with "ungodliness" (more precisely, "failure in worship"), but he repeats "wickedness." Hurting people really shows how much contempt you have for God.

In the Greco-Roman as well as the Jewish tradition, outrageous cruelty or exploitation insulted divinity, which was roused to avenge the helpless. The Greeks and Romans didn't have a thoroughly just god in their traditional pantheon to correct these imbalances in the universe; usually the Greek Zeus or the Roman Jupiter, as supreme ruler, would have to do. Sometimes the polytheists invoked an unnamed god, or a

personification, Justice. Two or more deities might work together. But in any case, judgement was coming, and the arrogant and power-hungry were going to be sorry. Here is Hesiod from the seventh century B.C., the first identifiable Greek author:

*This fable is for rulers—and they'll get it.
High in the clouds, a hawk grasped in his talons
A spotted nightingale, and spoke to her:
Piteously she cried, pierced by his hooked claws.
In his great arrogance, he only sneered:
"Why are you squawking, fool? I'm so much stronger.
I'll take you where I want—though you're a singer.
I'll make a meal of you, or let you go.
Opposing power's stupid. You can't win,
But only bring on shame as well as pain." . . .
Leaders, you must consider what you're doing—
Is it just? Nearby, among you, are immortals
Who note how people wear each other down
With crooked judgments*—which the gods they scorn
Will punish. Three times infinite on lush earth
Are Zeus's deathless watchmen over mortals.
Covered in mist and ranging through the land,
They keep a watch on evil acts and judgments.
And Justice is a virgin, born of Zeus,
Feared and revered by the Olympian gods.
And when some twisted person blocks her, taunts her,
Right then she sits by Kronian Zeus, her father,
And tells of unjust men's thoughts, till the people
Pay for the crimes of leaders—evil-minded*

*Throughout the passage, this word can be translated literally as "justices."

*Twistings of judgments, verdicts launched astrew,
Leaders, bribe eaters, look to this! Pronounce
The law straight, and forget your crooked judgments.
The evil that you plot is for yourself.*

The concept did not change over the next six hundred years. Paul's Roman audience knew what justice was, if only that justice applied to homosexuality, of all things. But many of them—slaves, freedmen, the poor, the young—would have understood in the next instant. Christ, the only Son of God, gave his body to save mankind. What greater contrast could there be to the tradition of using a weaker body for selfish pleasure or a power trip? Among Christians, there would have been no quibbling about what to do: no one could have imagined homosexuality's being different than it was; it would have to go. And tolerance for it did disappear from the church.

All this leads to a feeling of mountainous irony. Paul takes a bold and effective swipe at the power structure. He challenges centuries of execrable practice in seeking a more just, more loving society. And he gets called a bigot. Well, it's not a persecution that would have impressed him much.