

Hair as Symbol in the World of Martial's *Epigrams*¹

By Kirsten Traudt

Introduction

Addressing his native Hispania towards the end of *Epigrams* 10, Martial writes that “the Italian kingdoms changed my hair”² (*mutauere meas Itala regna comas*, 10.103.10), characterising his altered locks as a material representation of his thirty-four-year absence (10.103.7). Hair’s gradual growth, thinning, or greying marks the progression of one’s life, while daily styling and painless cutting permit immediate changes in one’s self-presentation.³ Even as he asks for “permission” to return home, Martial’s *comae* are an indelible proof both of his provincial origins and the life lived abroad that prevents an uncomplicated return to his past.⁴ Anthropologists have noted hair’s ability to serve as a multifaceted symbol of the self, a quality linked to its liminal position on the human body. As art historian Kobena Mercer has argued, although hair is a body part, it is never a “straightforward biological fact”; rather, it must always be “worked upon” by human hands, making it a communicative tool that enables an individual to identify (or consciously not identify) with an array of social categories and groups.⁵ Attempts to control the hair of others, whether through direct intervention or the critique of “non-normative” styling practices, reveal cultural anxieties,⁶ while the deliberate subversion of

¹ I would like to thank my anonymous reviewers for their comments, as well as audiences at the University of Oxford and Yale University for providing helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

² Cf. Oliensis (2002: 106) on Horace, *Ep.* 1.7, in which the poet “nostalgically recall[s]” having “a brow narrowed by black curls” (*Ep.* 1.7.26).

³ See Hallpike (1968: 257) for the “special characteristics” of hair.

⁴ Sullivan (1991) 183.

⁵ Mercer (1987) 34.

⁶ For example, Sandra Lee Bartky’s analysis of modern-day feminine body care in light of Foucaultian “discipline” demonstrates how hairstyling and hair removal control and diminish the female body in compliance with patriarchal norms (1988: 31-32); although anchored in modernity, her discussion illustrates hair’s central role in presenting bodily conformity.

hairstyling norms allows marginalized groups to resist oppression.⁷ Therefore, because of its unique significance, both visual and written representations of hair and hairstyling provide important insights into strategies of self-representation in any culture. However, the inevitable intersection of hair’s “natural” and “worked-upon” qualities within a single body make it difficult to establish a single, fixed “meaning” of these qualities.⁸ Instead, culturally constructed perceptions of hair and hairstyling are perhaps best understood by analysing how perceptions of or stereotypes associated with different types of hair are represented within related bodies of evidence.

It is for this reason that the last first-century CE poems of the epigrammatist Martial provide such a rich environment for the consideration of the symbolic meanings of hair in the Roman world. In hundreds of short poems on a wide range of topics, Martial frequently exposes his contemporaries’ foibles through emphasis on the material, bodily, and banal aspects of Roman life; therefore, he not only maps the values and norms of Roman society through his invective, but also documents elements of daily life and material culture that are less visible in other literary sources. Because the Romans, generally speaking, believed that internal character was reflected by one’s external appearance,⁹ the care and presentation of the self, or *cultus*, was used as evidence of social conformity or deviance.¹⁰ Naturally, haircare was an important element of *cultus*, as individuals attempted to balance a neat appearance with appropriate modesty.¹¹ Hair, as Martial’s poetry demonstrates, was not the only element of the visual performance of one’s social role, but it was a crucial one in both everyday life and ritual contexts; for example, alterations to one’s hair occurred as a part of mourning, sacrificial, and coming-of-age rituals, among other

⁷ For modern-day examples of hairstyling as a mode of resistance to oppressive cultural norms, see Weitz (2001) and Dabiri (2019).

⁸ Hallpike (1969) 273.

⁹ Gleason (1995) 61; Draycott (2018) 66; for the long afterlife of many of these ideas, see Parker (2004).

¹⁰ Gibson (2003) 128-130; TLL 4.1324.53-1339.31. For hairstyling in the Roman period, see Bartman (2001), Stephens (2008), Harlow, ed. (2019), and Olson (2008: 68-76).

¹¹ Harlow (2019) 3. These conflicting concerns led to an anti-cosmetic literary tradition; cf. Olson (2009: 293-294) and Gibson (2003: 21-25).

occasions.¹² Indeed, Martial argues throughout the *Epigrams* that despite the deceptive potential of hairstyling, hair can (and will) place an individual in his or her proper social role, and thus serves as a particularly important marker of one’s “true” identity. Accordingly, this article explores the ways in which Martial uses hair to reveal, question, or complicate truths about Roman identity, exploiting the variety of his corpus to consider hair’s status as a complex and multifaceted symbol of the self in the ancient world. Thus, rather than examining the historical *realia* of ancient hairstyling or representations of hair in visual art,¹³ it will sketch a “cultural imaginary” of Roman hair, taking the *Epigrams* as representative of elite thinking during the Roman imperial period. After first considering hair’s importance in defining the boundaries of empire, it will illustrate how Martial’s treatments of baldness, shaving, beards, and depilation contribute to his “construction” of the Roman male, before concluding with a discussion of how Martial’s depictions of women’s hair support his misogynistic invective. Throughout, it will consider, where possible, how Martial’s targets might have viewed their own hair, attempting to look beyond the *Epigrams*’ normalizing perspective to consider hair’s potential as a locus of resistance to prevailing cultural norms.

“Imperial” Hair

In *Epigrams* 10, Martial criticizes Charmention for calling him *frater* (“brother,” 10.65.3), writing that “you go about shining with curled locks / I [go] stubborn with Spanish hair” (*tu flexa nitidus coma vagaris, / Hispanis ego contumax capillis*, 7-8). Charmention’s oiled hair denotes “Greek” softness, while Martial’s is proof of a masculine provincial vigour;¹⁴ here, he exploits the same connection between hair and ethnic identity that he does in his address to Hispania at 10.103. Since the men occupy the same social space, it is their divergent approaches

¹² For hair’s role in mourning rituals, see Hope (2009) 122. For hair as (and in) sacrifice, see Draycott (2017) and Derbew (2022: 133-134). For the connection between hair and coming of age in the Roman world, see Hersch (2010) 73-106 and Laes and Strubbe (2014) 58.

¹³ For a historical study of ancient hair and hairstyling which includes further consideration of different hair-related industries, see Harlow, ed. (2019).

¹⁴ Sullivan (1991) 172; Williams (1999) 128-130.

to *cultus* that reveal disparate origins and value systems, as Martial contrasts Charmenton’s smoothness with his own “hairy shins and cheeks” (*hirsutis. . . cruribus genisque*, 10.65.8-9). In this poem, differences in hair texture and style are proof of meaningful distinctions between two individuals’ characters, but Roman writers were also interested in the link between *cultus* and character on a larger scale, connecting hairstyling norms to the characteristic behaviours of entire peoples.¹⁵ In the writings of Martial’s younger contemporary Tacitus, hair colour and texture reveal a people’s origins; in the *Agricola*, the reddish hair of the Caledonians and the curly hair of the Silurians is used to assign them, respectively, Germanic and Hispanic origins and traits (*Agr.* 11), while the uniformly reddish hair of the Germans “proves” their ethnic isolation (*Germ.* 4). Likewise, Pliny the Elder links the Aethiopians’¹⁶ “curled beards and hair” (*barba et capillo uibrato*) and the northern peoples’ “flowing blond hair” (*flavis promissis crinibus*) not only to each group’s geographical distances from the sun, but also to their stereotypical natures as *hebetes* (“torpid”) and *truces* (“savage”), respectively (NH. 2.80). Thus, he both “maps” the breadth of the Roman empire using descriptions of hair and suggests a link between the physical nature of this hair and the internal qualities which enabled these far-flung peoples to be conquered.

Martial employs a similar image in the *Liber Spectaculorum*, recalling how “the diverse voice of the people resounds, but then, it is one” (*uox diversa sonat populorum, tum tamen una est, Spec.* 3.11). This “voice” resounds from, among others, “the Sygambrians, hair twisted into a knot / and the Aethiopians with hair twisted otherwise” (*crinibus in nodum tortis. . . Sicambri / atque aliter tortis crinibus Aethiopes*, 3.7-8). This chiasmic juxtaposition of the braided hair of the Sygambrians and the curly hair of the Aethiopians uses the diversity of visible hair colors and textures to turn the arena into a microcosm of empire, united in praise of its sole ruler.¹⁷ But while the emperor is firmly in control of this multitude of heads, Martial also uses hair to suggest

¹⁵ Dench (2005) 266.

¹⁶ For the use of this term rather than the modern-day designation “Ethiopians,” see Derbew (2022) 12.

¹⁷ Cf. Fitzgerald (2007) 41.

cosmopolitanism’s destabilizing effects on the Roman *familia*. He writes that a certain Cinna’s children by his wife Marulla “betray maternal deceptions with their heads,” (*materna produnt capitibus suis furta*, 6.39.5), describing a son who “goes about like a Moor with curly hair” (*retorto crine Maurus incedit*, 6) and a pair of daughters who are *nigra* (“black”) and *rufa* (“red,” 18). This lack of family resemblance trades on age-old conventions of adultery humor, but Martial is also careful to note that the children are not born from “the son of a friend or neighbor” (*nec. . . amici filiusue uicini*, 3). Rather, their features testify to the parentage of individuals with occupations associated with enslaved or formerly enslaved people: the boy with curly hair is the son of “Santra the cook” (*coci Santrae*, 7), while the girls are the children of “Crotus the pipe-player” (*Croti choraulae*) and “Carpius the *uilicus*” (*uilici. . . Carpi*, 19), respectively. Cinna’s disordered house thus suggests a cultural concern about the assimilation of “non-Romans” into Roman society through manumission or having children with freeborn Romans;¹⁸ as Cinna’s legal (if not natural) sons and daughters, these children receive the benefits of Roman citizenship, even though their hair provides indelible proof of their “otherness.” Once again, Martial draws together the edges of empire with “othering” descriptions of hair; one child’s *retortus crinis* implies an Aethiopian origin, while red hair was a paradigmatic marker of enslaved people with northern origins from the Republican period onwards.¹⁹ Thus, although the Roman slave system did not mark out one single hair color or texture as a sign of enslaved status as the North American and Caribbean slave systems did,²⁰ the manifestations of different hair colors and textures in both the cheering arena and the “infiltrated” house pose the question of what “Roman” hair, which is assigned no definite qualities in Martial’s poetry, could be.

If curly “Aethiopian” hair represented one boundary of empire,²¹ blonde German hair, often used in wigmaking, represented the other. The *Apophoreta* includes a gift tag for hair, reading:

¹⁸ For concerns surrounding the integration of formerly enslaved people into Roman society, see Mouritsen (2011: 14-35).

¹⁹ Richlin (2017) 284.

²⁰ Patterson (1982) 61; cf. Snowden (1970) 6-7. For hair texture as a tool of discrimination, see Patterson (1982: 60-61) and Dabiri (2019: 9-34).

²¹ Dench (2005) 280-281.

“Chattian foam brightens Teutonic locks / you can be more refined (*cultior*) with captive hair” (*Chattica Teutonicos accendit spuma capillos / captivis poteris cultior esse comis*, 14.26). Ironically, Roman *cultus* is achieved through “captive hair.” Because some German tribes cut off their hair in defeat,²² wigs might be perceived as “trophies” of military success in the region.²³ However, in her study of representations of hair in Augustan elegy, Nandini Pandey argues that “captive” hair also “captures” the wearer, displacing one’s natural locks in a willing imitation of the subjugated; this gesture plays into the literary trope of Rome’s “enslavement” to imported luxuries.²⁴ Writing decades after the Augustan elegists, Martial likewise problematizes the relationship between elite Romans and blonde hair in an epigram addressed to a Lesbia, which states: “I sent you hair from a northern people, Lesbia, / so that you’d know how much blonder yours is” (*Arctoa de gente comam tibi, Lesbia, misi / ut scires quanto sit tua flava magis*, 5.68). This “anti-gift tag”²⁵ might allude to the hair loss caused by over-dyeing; as in Ovid’s *Amores* 1.14, the reckless pursuit of bloneness could end in dependence on a “foreign” wig.²⁶ However, Lesbia’s hairstyle does not only embody anxieties about overreliance on non-Romans in order to conform to elite urban beauty standards; it also complicates ethnic differences, as this “blonder than blonde” hair cannot be “located” within the observable imperial world. Martial expresses discomfort with Lesbia’s modification of her appearance, implying that the “deception” of hair dye amounts, in some sense, to a “foreign invasion.” Likewise, in Juvenal’s sixth *Satire*, Messalina prostitutes herself “with a blonde wig swallowing up black hair” (*nigrum flavo crinem abscondente galero*, 6.120), willingly exchanging her elite pedigree for the appearance of a conquered person.²⁷ It is no coincidence that, from the adulterous Marulla to

²² Pandey (2018) 475-476. In contrast, the Chatti, unusually among the Germans, grew their hair until they defeated another man in battle (Tac. *Ger.* 31).

²³ Sullivan (1991) 13-17. While Martial praised Domitian’s German victories, Tacitus alleges that his triumph was filled out by blonde enslaved people (Tac. *Agr.* 39), further emphasizing the role of hair in visual processes of ethnic categorization.

²⁴ Pandey (2018) 472.

²⁵ Shackleton Bailey (1993) 413.

²⁶ Olson (2008) 88; Pandey (2018) 470.

²⁷ As previously stated, no hair color was specifically “servile,” (Olson 2008: 72), but Messalina’s dark hair might hint at Italian origins.

the over-blond Lesbia, women instigate these disquieting incursions of foreign hair. In a typically misogynistic attack, Martial argues that female “submission” to non-citizen men or to extreme *cultus* threatens the integrity of the Roman citizen body.²⁸ In short, hair allows Martial to present an ambivalent portrait of a cosmopolitan empire: when presented as a morally-coded ethnic characteristic, it could emblemize imperial victory, but the unregulated integration of “foreign” hair into the *familia* could also suggest that the Romans themselves had been “captured” by their own dependence on provincial resources.

Baldness in Domitian’s Rome

One reason why the use of “foreign” hair was viewed with suspicion was the strong association between the growth of cephalic hair²⁹ and both virility and femininity.³⁰ Since a full head of hair symbolized self-sufficiency and strength, baldness was viewed as, in some sense, a moral failing.³¹ Although it could be excused as a sign of august old age, as in veristic portraits of Vespasian, who ruled in the years before Martial began to publish his poetry,³² cultural stigma meant that premature baldness was never depicted in statues or portrait busts.³³ Although Suetonius describes Domitian, the emperor who ruled when most of Martial’s extant works were initially circulated, as “deformed by baldness” from his youth (*caluitio. . .deformis*, Suet. Dom. 18), his surviving official portraiture provides no evidence of this.³⁴ From the time of Alexander the Great, abundant hair was considered a typical characteristic of a great leader;³⁵ Julius Caesar, who also “bore the deformity of baldness most disadvantageously” (*calvitii vero deformitatem iniquissime ferret*), even allegedly adopted a laurel wreath in public partially so that his head

²⁸ Sullivan (1991) 197-198.

²⁹ The term “cephalic hair” is used to denote the hair that grows from the scalp, in order to distinguish it from facial, body, and pubic hair.

³⁰ Draycott (2018) 67; Gleason (1995) 69.

³¹ Pandey (2018) 457-458; Draycott (2018) 69.

³² Parkin (2003) 82; cf. Martial’s less flattering description of a “three-haired” old woman at 12.7.

³³ Draycott (2018) 68.

³⁴ Portrait busts seem to depict him wearing a wig (Lightfoot 2015).

³⁵ Schwab & Rose (2019) 38-39; cf. Dio Chrysostom’s contemporaneous Encomium on Hair, which links hair to epic and historical military success.

would be covered (Suet. *Iul.* 45). Domitian apparently used humor to diffuse anxieties about his baldness, writing a tongue-in-cheek treatise on haircare.³⁶ Despite his efforts, though, this quality apparently reflected badly on him; in his *Panegyricus*, Pliny the Younger implicitly contrasts Trajan’s thick but prematurely grey hair with Domitian’s baldness, proclaiming that the former’s locks are “equipped with the marks of hastening old age, to the augmentation of his majesty” (*festinatis senectutis insignibus ad augendam maiestatem ornata caesaries*, *Pan.* 4.7). Here, Trajan’s greyness is reframed as a sign of wisdom, but Domitian’s energetic panegyrists Statius and Martial never attempt to “spin” his bald head. Martial’s telling silence therefore suggests that the negative perception of premature baldness meant that this topic required careful handling during Domitian’s reign.

Perhaps this fact partially explains why the *Epigrams* rarely mock baldness *per se*, preferring instead to criticise men whose failed attempts to hide it reveal a refusal to accept their true natures and play the social role that their age and circumstances demand. Martial castigates a nameless man who “lies” (6.74.4) by slicking back his “three-stranded bald pate” with ointment (*calvam trifilem semitatus unguento*, 2) and sticking a toothpick in his toothless mouth (3). While these traits might be attractive in a youth,³⁷ the subject’s deceptive self-presentation renders his old age even more undeniable and repulsive. Martial repeatedly returns to the notion that exchanging old age for the illusion of youth compromises an individual’s identity. For example, Marinus’ combover successfully covers his “wide expanse of shining baldness” (*latum nitidae...calvae/campum*, 10.83.2), at least until nature intervenes “with the wind demanding” (*iubente uento*, 3), he is revealed to be an old man pretending to be a younger one. Or rather, two younger ones: when the combover is displaced, Martial claims that “you would think Hermeros of Cydas stood between Spendophorus and Telesphorus” (*inter Spendophorum Telesphorumque / Cydae stare putabis Hermerotem*, 7-8). With a bald pate that interrupts inappropriately adolescent curls, Marinus has transformed himself into a grotesque, three-headed statue that is

³⁶ Morgan (1997) 213-214; Coleman (1986) 3094-3095.

³⁷ Olson (2014) 194-195.

both unacceptably more and less than human. Martial advises Marinus to have his head so he can at least appear *unus* (“one”); as he writes, “nothing is more shameful than a hairy bald man” (*calvo turpius est nihil comato*, 10-11). In other words, while baldness could be legitimately (if perhaps halfheartedly) accepted as a sign of ageing, a combover is the “shameful” and unstable simulation of what one is patently not.

Martial goes even further in 5.49, where the “deception” of partial baldness is imagined as an act of fraud. He describes Labienus who, like Marinus, is bald on the top of his head but wears his hair long on both sides; mistaken for three separate people at the distribution of the Imperial dole, Labienus received a triple allocation (5.49.10) as “the number of bald heads deceived” (*caluae. . . numerus. . . fefellit*, 3). In a crowd of clients, one had become many; thus, the “deception” of baldness plays both on a denigration of hairlessness and on patrons’ concerns about supplying money and resources to “intruders.”³⁸ Labienus’ partial baldness not only “demonstrates” weakness in a society which relies on physiognomy to make judgements about people’s characters,³⁹ but also compromises the “unity” of his person and the integrity of the Imperial dole. Biases against baldness illustrate why Labienus, Marinus, and others clung to their hair, but Martial argues that this practice is inherently deceptive, and perhaps even sinister. If they were honest, he suggests, they would display the lack of adherent to a masculine ideal or the signs of ageing that their pates connoted by shaving their remaining hair. Hair dye, another method of concealing ageing, is likewise criticized as “dishonest.” Martial writes that Laetinus’ “dyed hair” (*tinctis. . . capillis*, 3.43.1) is a deceptive “mask” (*personam*) which Proserpina will “drag” from his head (3-4). Like the nameless dinner guest of 6.74, Laetinus’ age is revealed by his attempts to hide it. Trying to “play the part” of a youth will ultimately result in vicious exposure by both the poet and death itself, linking efforts to “reverse” the effects of time on one’s hair with the futile desire to cheat one’s own mortality. In each of these portraits of balding or greying men, Martial argues that changing the unflattering “message” that one’s hair conveys is

³⁸ White (1975) 300; Cf. the anxious patron at Juv. 1.95-126.

³⁹ Draycott (2018) 70.

far worse than living with a “defect,” as it complicates one’s social legibility and represents a rejection of one’s true nature.

Martial also exploits the link between baldness and deceit to think through the “possession” of *ingenium*, or unborn ability. Hair’s position as an external sign of internal character invites comparison to creative manifestations of *ingenium*, like poetry, as Ellen Oliensis has argued in her study of the role of hair in Horace’s *Odes*.⁴⁰ While Oliensis is interested in how the arrangement of hair maps onto the sexual dynamics of Horace’s poetry,⁴¹ the works of Martial, a self-professedly professional poet writing for a commercial audience,⁴² show their hair is also a useful way for thinking through the economics of poetic production. Much like poetic talent, hair can be “owned” either by creating it oneself or by purchasing it;⁴³ in an early poem, Martial writes that though the plagiarist Fidentinus can recite his poetry (1.72.1-2), he is only as much a poet as a man wearing a wig is *comatus* (“endowed with hair,” 8).⁴⁴ Because Roman law generally lacked the concept of “intellectual property,”⁴⁵ Martial uses the analogy of hair to think through the difference between the physical possession of hair and the production of it oneself. Both hair and poetry emanate “from,” the self, and individuals can produce them to different degrees. And yet, as Martial’s poems argue, although one can buy the material, one cannot buy the ability to produce it (or the *ingenium* that their production demonstrates); this, purchased hair, like purchased poetry, is regarded as a deceptive substitute for an internal “deficiency.”⁴⁶ In two other poems, Martial illustrates the impossibility of truly “simulating” hair by satirizing Phoebus’ absurd attempts to conceal his baldness. Using an ointment that only makes him “dirty” (*sordida*, 6.57.2) and then a goatskin more appropriate for sandals (12.45.3-4), Phoebus’ attempts to make himself *cultior* only result in his humiliating defilement. These unsuitable

⁴⁰ Oliensis (2002) 93-94.

⁴¹ Ibid, 95.

⁴² Spahlinger (2004) 472-473.

⁴³ Fitzgerald (2007) 93-97.

⁴⁴ Martial offers to sell his *libelli* to Fidentinus in 1.29, using the character to present another examination of poetic “ownership.”

⁴⁵ Mira Seo (2009) 573-574.

⁴⁶ Draycott (2017) 89.

substitutes underline the absurdity of pretending to have what one lacks and suggest that even in a commercial centre like Rome, innate qualities are not for sale. In other words, although he lacked a robust legal vocabulary with which to do so, Martial thinks through the concept of “intellectual property” using the symbolically laden material of hair. Likewise, while his lack of a “defence” of Domitian’s baldness speaks to the stigma of premature hair loss, the emphasis in his invective on the improper concealment of baldness or greyness suggests that the “real” problem is an unwillingness to accept one’s limitations and perform one’s social role.

The Erotic and Dangerous Potential of Shaving

The value and importance of cephalic hair was undeniable, but men’s facial hair had a more ambivalent position in Roman society. On the one hand, beards were associated with Rome’s rustic past; Pliny the Elder writes that barbers were not imported from Sicily until the Republic (*NH* 7.211), while Juvenal mixes condescension and nostalgia with the quip that, in contrast to Domitian’s wary court, “it is easy to trick a bearded king” (*facile est barbato imponere regi*, 4.103). In Martial’s time, Roman men generally shaved or cropped their beards.⁴⁷ Accordingly, Martial stereotypes bushy beards as somewhat backwards, describing a farmer who gives a “goatish kiss” (*hircoso. . . osculo*, 12.59.5) as well as Linus, whose “frosty kiss” (*osculo niuali*, 7.95.2) is roughened by a beard like a goatskin blanket (12-13). This “goatish” rusticity clashes with urbane *cultus*, preventing these outsiders from seamlessly participating in city life. However, beards did not just differentiate rural and urban Romans; they also separated Romans from Greeks and were associated with representations of the stereotypical Greek philosopher.⁴⁸ In one poem, Martial describes a man with a “dirty beard” (*sordida barba*) as an actual “dog” rather than a Cynic philosopher (5.53),⁴⁹ caustically playing with this stereotype. Therefore, a

⁴⁷ Davies (2019) 155-156; Beards would not return to fashion until the philhellene Hadrian’s reign (Braund 1996: 257-258).

⁴⁸ Toner (2015) 97.

⁴⁹ The word “cynic” is derived from the Greek word *kunikos*, or “doglike,” hence the pun. Cf. 14.81.1, in which an anthropomorphised wallet asks that it should not carry the lunch of a bearded, naked philosopher (*ne mendica ferat barbati prandia nudi*).

beard could mark a man either as “too rustic” or “too Greek,” with a clean-shaven face serving as the urbane middle ground. Still, because of their connection to Rome’s “virtuous” origins, beards were never straightforwardly unacceptable, although fussier styles were criticised as evidence of male overemphasis on *cultus*.⁵⁰

Because regular shaving was an element of *cultus*, the regulation of one’s beard was a significant part of daily life. Jerry Toner argues that barbershops “served as a means for alternate male identity creation in the urban environment;”⁵¹ much like their contemporary counterparts, these functional spaces were also informal meeting places where a community of clients could regularly converse and gossip.⁵² Thus barbershops, like *fora* or private spaces like patrons’ homes, were areas in which social relationships between men were established and solidified. Accordingly, Martial attacks Gargilianus for “fearing” the barber, writing that he instead “polish[es his] face and head with depilatories” (*psilothro faciem levas et dropace calvam*, 3.74.1-2), a practice that he suggests is more suitable for a *cunnus* (“vulva,” 3.74.6). The removal of cephalic hair suggests the voluntary assumption of the “un-masculine” state of baldness, but the use of depilatories takes Gargilianus’ self-emasculation a step further. Depilatories were a “feminine” mode of hair removal associated with pubic hair,⁵³ making them an unacceptable way of dealing with a “masculine” beard. And yet, Gargilianus does not just degrade and feminise his head by turning it into a *cunnus*; he also rejects the masculine social space of the barber’s, refusing to engage with his peers and publicly perform masculinity through the everyday ritual of shaving. Thus, the use of depilatories is characterized not as a private choice, but as an act which destabilises the masculine social order, if on a relatively small scale.

⁵⁰ Cf. the *barbula* (“little beards”) that Cicero alleges Clodia Metelli prefers at *Pro Caelio* 33.

⁵¹ Toner (2015) 98. There is no Roman evidence of hair salons for female clients, which only became popular in the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; before that period, women’s hairdressing was done in the home (Smith 2008).

⁵² Recent ethnographic studies have particularly focused on the centrality of barbershops and hair salons in Black American communities; cf. Bryant Keith Alexander’s description of how old men’s barbershop talk “served both as a functional component of social exchange as well as perpetuating culture and community” (2003: 112) among Black men of all ages.

⁵³ Bartman (2001) 5; Olson (2008) 66.

Of course, the barber’s chair presented dangers of its own, perhaps inspiring individuals like Gargilianus to think twice about shaving. Despite its necessity for Roman *cultus*, barbering was a low-prestige occupation.⁵⁴ Martial rebukes Cinnamus, the “most famous barber in the city” (*tonsor notissimus urbe*, 7.64.1) by stating that despite his riches, he will always be marked by his occupational status (10).⁵⁵ Barbering, as William Fitzgerald has noted, required a higher-status person to submit to a lower-status person wielding a potentially lethal weapon;⁵⁶ Martial warns readers away from Antiochus’ stall by describing cuts on his face (11.84.16), using his own body to “display” the risks inherent in *cultus*. These risks were present for the urban population at large. Martial praises Domitian’s street-widening initiative by writing that “the blind razor is not drawn in the dense crowd” (*stringitur in densa nec caeca novacula*, 7.61.7). Although subtler than his critiques of “foreign” hair, Martial’s negative depiction of barbering might be more than the hyperbolic critique of an everyday inconvenience; rather, it could reflect latent concerns about how the performance of an elite identity requires individuals to participate in an initially foreign practice which, if only temporarily, inverts the social hierarchy. Indeed, Martial reckons with this power imbalance in a poem which compares promises made to a withholding sex slave (*delicatus*) to those made with a razor at one’s throat (11.58.5-6). In his comparison, Martial threatens to “break the arms and legs” of the “thieving” barber (*frangam tonsori crura manusque*, 10); Fitzgerald suggests that this strikingly violent threat attempts to restore the established social order, thereby characterising the temporary power of the *delicatus* or barber as only contingent and illusory.⁵⁷ Additionally, the poem implies a connection between the sexual domination of others and being shaved as activities which, despite their potential to place the Roman male in a vulnerable or weakened position, are nevertheless important ways in which he performs his social identity. Thus, the barber’s chair was a space which solidified masculine social bonds and

⁵⁴ Stephens (2019) 82-83; Toner (2015) 104-105.

⁵⁵ Juvenal alludes to Cinnamus as one “by whose shaving my heavy beard resounded as a young man” (*quo tondente gravis iuveni mihi barba sonabat* 1.25), bathetically insinuating himself into the Domitianic world; cf. Courtney (1980: 90).

⁵⁶ Fitzgerald (2000) 48-50; Stephens (2019) 83.

⁵⁷ Fitzgerald (2000) 48.

supported male self-presentation while simultaneously reminding an individual of the fragility of his position.

The connection between shaving and male sexuality is also explored in a pair of poems praising the skill of enslaved barbers (7.83 and 8.52).⁵⁸ Here, the act of shaving is careful and eroticised; Eutrapelus “circles the mouth of Lupercus” (*circuit ora Luperci*, 7.83.1), while the other barber, “having been commanded, goes back over the same hairs / the oversight of the mirror rules his hand” (*iussus repetit pilos eosdem / censura speculi manum regent*, 8.52.6-7). The barber is not simply *like a delicatus*; he *is a delicatus*, as his attention to the intimate task that he has been assigned might align with the expectation that he will provide sexual services to the enslaver under any circumstances.⁵⁹ The unnamed barber is described as a *puer* (8.52.1) lent by Martial to his friend Rufus (4-5); this act of “sharing” an enslaved person for the purposes of *cultus* and, perhaps, sexual exploitation reinforces the slaveholders’ social bond, suggesting another way that the *tonsor* could serve as a node in elite social networks. Both “barber poems” end with similar punchlines; Eutrapelus is so slow that by the time he finishes the job, “another beard has come up” (*altera barba subit*, 7.83.2), while the *puer* of 8.52 comes back “bearded” (*barbatus*, 10) himself, having taken so long that he perhaps “aged out” of the eroticised youthful role that he was sent to play at the beginning of the poem. Although lighter in tone than 11.84 and 7.61, the “barber poems” nevertheless explore the same link between shaving and male sexuality, as well as the potential challenges of submission to a lower-status individual. After all, even in poems like 7.83 and 8.52, where no threat of harm is present, the man being shaved loses time to the *tonsor*, temporarily stepping out of the public world in order to maintain his place in society.

⁵⁸ The barber in 7.83 is named Eutrapelus while the one in 8.52 is unnamed; it is unclear if they are the same person.

⁵⁹ Williams (1999) 72-73; Skinner (2013) 282-283.

Beards and Adolescent Fetishisation

Given the link between shaving and male sexuality, it is unsurprising that the appearance of a beard was an important sign of incipient masculinity which corresponded to the end of the “boyish” attractiveness that appealed to adult men.⁶⁰ This milestone was commemorated, at least in some cases, with a ritual first shave,⁶¹ a practice which Martial describes more than once. In one such poem, he laments Camonius’ untimely death with reference to his coming of age, writing that his “reddish offerings sprinkled the razor only once” (*libata semel summos modo purpura cultros / sparserat*, 9.76.5-6). In another, he also uses the language of “libation” to describe a beard dedication, writing that Marcellinus should also celebrate his father’s birthday as the day which “first received an offering from your flowering cheeks” (*libat florentes haec tibi prima genas*, 3.6.4), linking the continuation of his father’s life to that of his male line. A religious and social initiation into the adult world,⁶² the beard dedication also marked the moment when young men, no longer objects of male desire, were expected to engage in adult male sexuality themselves.⁶³ Martial is particularly fascinated by this transition, which, as Craig Williams notes, is also discussed in texts which treat medical and scientific phenomena, like Pliny’s *Natural Histories*, suggesting that this “fuss about body hair was no mere literary convention.”⁶⁴ Martial satirises the role of hair in marking out bodies that were “available” or “off-limits” for male erotic desire, complaining to the youthful Hyllus that “what you gave yesterday, today you denied” (*hæc quod dederas, hodie. . . negasti*, 4.7.1); he laments the boy’s refusal of penetration on the grounds of “a beard and years and hair” (*barbamque annosque pilosque*, 3). Even as the short distance between “yesterday” and “today” undercuts this boundary’s artificial sharpness,⁶⁵ Hyllus’ argument (or defence) relies exclusively on the presence

⁶⁰ Williams (1999) 26.

⁶¹ Harlow and Lovén (2019) 20.

⁶² Draycott (2017) 83-84.

⁶³ Richlin (1993) 534; Laes and Strubbe (2014: 58) indicate that cephalic hair offerings were also associated with assuming the *toga virilis*, which marked the beginning of adulthood. Cf. n.60.

⁶⁴ Williams (1999) 26.

⁶⁵ As one reviewer helpfully noted in their comments, even the first shave itself, which temporarily “restores” a youth to his pre-bearded state, complicates the idea of a hard line between adolescence and adulthood.

of hair on his body, thus reinforcing the idea that hair was a material that established and reinforced the limits of socially acceptable sexual desire.

Martial routinely fetishises the ephemeral beauty of the unshaven ephebe, a state emblematised by wispy facial hair. Addressing Dindymus, he writes:

Tam dubia est lanugo tibi, tam mollis ut illam
halitus et soles et levis aura terat.
Celantur simili ventura Cydonea lana,
pollice virgineo quae spoliata nitent.
Fortius impressi quotiens tibi basia quinque,
barbatus labris, Dindyme, fio tuis.

So doubtful is your down, so soft, that a breath and sun and the light air wears it away. Cydonean fruits are covered with like wool, which shine having been stripped by a maiden’s thumb. Whenever five kisses are planted on you rather strongly, I become bearded, Dindymus, from your lips (10.42).

Although Dindymus’ cultivation of “doubtful down” might not be a deliberate effort to *hide* his age, his “true” status as a (mostly) beardless youth is revealed by the natural forces of the sun and wind; as in the case of Marinus’ combover, nature restores hair to its “proper” place.⁶⁶ Just as Marcellinus’ “flowering” cheeks suggest the brief flourishing that the first beard represents, Dindymus’ nascent beard is compared to literal “peach fuzz,” emphasizing the temporary “ripeness” of his erotic appeal. Martial’s treatment of the beard likewise reinforces an existing interpersonal dynamic. With every kiss, Martial claims, he becomes “bearded by your lips”; this playful “theft” denies Dindymus his emerging adult sexuality while underlining the poet’s own agency. The beard’s literal and poetic “removal” is an attempt to keep Dindymus in his adolescent state, as hair once again becomes a focal point in the negotiation of the boundaries of adulthood. Elsewhere, Martial attempts to hold boys in perpetual adolescence by discouraging manual stimulation of their genitals, as “from there [comes] body odour and swift-coming hair

⁶⁶ See p.9.

and a beard marvelled at by mothers” (*inde tragus celeresque pili mirandaque matri / barba*, 11.22.7-8). By reversing the causal link between the appearance of hair and the end of acceptable desirability by adult men, Martial underscores how important hairlessness was to the ephēbe’s appeal. And yet, “doubtful” as it is, Martial’s poem makes it clear that Dindymus’ beard will someday appear. Accordingly, the youth’s facial hair, like the ageing man’s cephalic hair, is a material representation of the inevitable passage of time.

However, beards (or their absence) were not the only type of hair associated with the eroticised youth; these individuals were often represented with long hair which rendered their appearance more androgynous to a Roman observer.⁶⁷ Indeed, some enslavers seem to have deliberately cultivated these characteristics in their enslaved table-servers, whose bodies were also “offered up” at elite dinners.⁶⁸ Martial is interested in the curled hair and youthful beauty of these individuals, called *capillati* (“long-haired men”),⁶⁹ but the philosopher and statesman Seneca, writing a generation before him, has a different perspective. He complains that, despite their diverse ethnic origins, they all have “the same amount of first down, the same type of hair” (*eadem primae mensura lanuginis, eadem species capillorum, Ep. 95.24*). In slaveholding societies, enslavers routinely control the cut, style, and colour of enslaved people’s hair, thereby restricting the ability of the enslaved to assert their individual or group identities through hairstyling choices.⁷⁰ The *capillatus*’ carefully controlled curls and down are symbols of oppression; not only did this uniform style feminise a male enslaved person and further license his sexual exploitation, but it also removed the natural style and texture of that person’s hair. In fact, in his description of an ideal male “pet” slave (*delicatus*), Martial writes that he wishes that he wishes that the boy’s “soft hair whip his neck” (*molles. . . flagellant / colla comae, 4.42.8*),⁷¹ a

⁶⁷ Oliensis (2002) 104. Williams (1999: 23) discusses the “game” of comparing men and women as sexual partners.

⁶⁸ Cf. 9.25, in which Martial describes Afer’s *capillati*.

⁶⁹ Olson (2014) 188.

⁷⁰ Patterson (1982) 60-61; Draycott (2017: 89) notes that a scene of forced shaving in the Satyricon is described as “mutilation.” Patterson also notes hair’s potency as a symbol of life and vitality; thus, cutting it is a key part of the “social death” of enslavement in some slaveholding societies.

⁷¹ Many thanks to the anonymous reviewer who made this observation.

turn of phrase that illustrates the violence of cultivating human bodies as luxury objects.⁷² The *capillatus*’ hair deliberately erases his personal history, transforming an individual into a type, while also “stopping” or even “reversing” time, much as Martial writes that he did with Dindymus’ beard. This reinforcement of an aesthetic and erotic ideal plays into the slaveholder’s desire for complete control over another person, even as it is characteristic of a luxurious lifestyle at odds with normative Roman values.⁷³ Even Martial criticizes the *capillatus* when conspicuous consumption clashes with an individual’s financial reality; he criticises a man who, though accompanied by a “togate and curly-haired gang” (*grex togatus. . .et capillatus*) must pawn a ring to buy dinner (2.57.5-8). Whether admired or condemned, then, the hair of the *capillatus* provides a salient example of the perpetual tension between simplicity and luxury in Roman society, as well as the Roman slaveholder’s desire to control every facet of his slaves’ lives and identities.

The extant literature of the Flavian era demonstrates a marked predilection for enslaved “pets” (*deliciae*) whose special status within the *familia* was sometimes marked by elaborate hair dedications that were patterned on freeborn boys’ coming of age rituals. The imperial eunuch Earinus made the most well-known of these dedications, sending a lock of cephalic hair and a jewelled mirror to the temple of Aesculapius in Pergamum (9.16.1-2); this event is immortalized in Statius’ *Silvae* 3.4 and several poems in Martial’s ninth book of *Epigrams*.⁷⁴ In spite of Domitian’s anti-castration legislation (Mart. 9.5), Earinus was apparently a prominent (if disempowered) figure in the imperial court, and it is possible to read this hair dedication several ways. Domitian’s gratification as an enslaver was clearly an important reason for performing the dedication. The childless emperor might also have wished to raise the status of his *deliciae*; other childless men of the time, like Atedius Melior, also appropriated the rituals of a freeborn

⁷² Cf. Bartky’s feminist analysis of the violent processes that “engender the ‘docile bodies’ of women” in the modern period (1988: 27).

⁷³ Williams (1999) 37-38.

⁷⁴ 9.11-13, 16-17, 36. Henriksen (1997) 292. Juvenal alludes to this incident in his third Satire (3.186-187). Martial also wrote on similar hair-dedications in 1.31 and 12.84, suggesting that this practice was fashionable among the elite more generally.

childhood to validate their relationships with enslaved and freed children.⁷⁵ As a eunuch, Earinus was condemned to a “perpetual youth,” a state to which Martial alludes when he stages a dialogue between Jupiter and his cupbearer Ganymede, who implores the god to allow him to shave his “first down” (*prima. . .lanugo*, 9.36.5). Although Jupiter refuses this request, fearing that “shaved hair will give [Ganymede] a manly appearance” (*tibi. . .dederit vultus coma tonsa viriles*, 11) Domitian, at least in Martial’s account, graciously accedes to Earinus’ similar request. Although the poem is, like all of Martial’s works addressed to Domitian, designed to flatter the emperor, the hint at Earinus’ role in instigating the ritual suggests that the young man could have used this hair dedication to lend dignity to his exploitation.⁷⁶ Although he would never “naturally” transition into adulthood like Hyllus or Dindymus, Earinus might have pushed back on the restraints imposed upon his body by idiosyncratically using the potency of masculine coming of age rituals to mark his own entrance into adulthood. Thus, Earinus’ hair dedication, despite Martial’s use of the effeminising language of sweetness and softness,⁷⁷ could have marked his arrival at a new stage in life, even when “normal” rituals were inaccessible to him.

Cinaedi, Depilation, and “Private” Hair

Because the presence of facial and body hair was a reliable indicator of adult masculinity, men who voluntarily removed it were derided as *cinaedi*, or effeminate males who enjoyed penetration.⁷⁸ Whether they comprised a distinct group in Roman society or were largely the invention of literary invective,⁷⁹ *cinaedi* were certainly present in Martial’s work. As individuals who inappropriately prolonged the “softness” and hairlessness prized in adolescent boys, they threatened prevailing paradigms of masculinity and the use of hair as an indelible indicator of

⁷⁵ Cf. Stat. *Silv.* 2.1. In this poem, a funerary lament for the young freedman Glaucias, Statius writes that “already the infernal Juno holds his hair in her hand” (*iam complexa manu crinem tenet infera Iuno*, *Silv.* 2.1.147), linking Glaucias’ (imagined) coming of age with his untimely death, as Martial does at 9.76.

⁷⁶ Cf. Morgan (2016) 37.

⁷⁷ Cf. his description of the dedication itself, which consists of a mirror and “sweet hair” (*speculum dulcisque capillos*, 9.16.1). See also Williams (1999: 128-129).

⁷⁸ Williams (1999) 141-145; Gleason (1995) 68-70.

⁷⁹ Skinner (2013) 325-327.

gender and sexual identity. The Romans considered facial and body hair signs of the “inner heat” that produced sperm; thus, as Maud Gleason writes, those who depilated their bodies “were rightly suspected of undermining the symbolic language in which male privilege was written” by blurring the lines between masculine and feminine self-presentation.⁸⁰ Although the removal of some body hair, such as underarm hair, was an acceptable part of male *cultus*,⁸¹ Martial is sceptical of men’s claims that they removed their body hair to appeal to *women*;⁸² criticising Galla for marrying “six or seven *cinaedi* / since their hair and combed beards please you too much” (*sex aut septem. . . cinaedis / dum coma te nimium pexaque barba iuvat*, 7.58.1-2), he advises her to find someone more hirsute (8), who has the “right” kind of hair. Likewise, although Labienus’ shaved “chest” (*pectus*), “legs” (*crura*), “arms” (*bracchia*) and “cock” (*mentula*) could appeal to a “girlfriend” *amica*, Martial pointedly asks him “to whom do you offer the anus that you pluck?” (*cui praestas, culum quod. . . pilas*, 2.62). Crucially, it is the removal of body hair, rather than facial hair, that Martial views as a sign of non-normative masculinity; in the case of Galla’s husbands, the “combed beard” is in fact a sign of effeminacy.

Hair reinforced a rigid sexual paradigm in which the “penetrator” was expected to be hairy, while the site of penetration, whether on a male or female body, was expected to be hairless.⁸³ The “unnaturalness” of the *cinaedus*’ preferences are thus “proved” by his deliberate removal of his natural hair. Martial’s critique of body hair removal and insistence on a connection between baldness and “failed” masculinity⁸⁴ reach an absurd apex in his depiction of the hairless Chrestus (9.27). He may moralise like the “hairy men” of the Republic (*pilosorum*, 6-8), but Christus is bald from his “head smoother than a prostituted anus” (*prostitutis leuius caput culis*, 3) to his “depilated testicles” (*depilatos. . . coleos*, 1). The confusion between the *caput* and the *culus*, a body

⁸⁰ Gleason (1990) 403.

⁸¹ Williams (1999) 130.

⁸² Skinner (2013) 325; Olson (2014). Martial sometimes depicts these “dandies,” including the *bellus homo* (“pretty boy”) Cotilius who “arranges his curled hair in order” (*flexos. . . digerit ordine crines*) and has “plucked arms” (*bracchia vulsa*, 3.63), or the effeminate adulterer “Crispulus” (“little curly-haired man,” 5.61).

⁸³ Williams (1999) 24.

⁸⁴ Cf. the claim that the famously bald Julius Caesar was penetrated by King Nicomedes (Suet. Jul. 2).

part implicated in sex work, transforms Chrestus’ entire body into a penetrable genital region. As in the case of Gargilianus at 3.74, whose head becomes a *cunnus* through depilatory use,⁸⁵ or that of the “three-headed” Marinus, hair removal has unacceptably confused the typical bodies of the wizened *senex* and the “penetrable” adolescent, making Chrestus’ body both uncategorisable and unable to “perform” its proper identity. The poem’s punchline further invalidates his moralising rhetoric, as he apparently fellates youths with a “Catonian tongue” (*Catoniana. . . lingua*, 14). Like the Labienus (or Labienuses) of 5.49 and 5.62, Chrestus’ body simultaneously exemplifies the links between effeminacy and baldness and effeminacy and hairlessness, thereby “displaying” both concepts with a single grotesque human figure.

But while the absence of body hair distinguished the alleged *cinaedus*, Martial also expresses concerns about the *cinaedus*’ ability to appropriate the rustic and philosophical “meanings” of the beard to “hide” within mainstream society.⁸⁶ He writes that the “bearded Callistratus was the bride of bristling Afer” (*barbatus rigido nupsit Callistratus Afro*, 12.42.1), juxtaposing the image of rusticity their bodies initially send with the non-normativity of their “wedding.” In another poem, a nameless man with “unkempt hair” (*incomptis. . . capillis*) is also “a bride” (*nupsit*, 1.24.4). Once again, the mismatch between the man’s hairstyle, which aligns him with Republican figures like the Curii and Camilii (3), and his alleged sexual practises is the poem’s satiric target, as Martial castigates the man for supporting his hypocrisy by sending “false messages” with his body.⁸⁷ Similarly, Pannychus outwardly models himself on “whoever looks unkempt in hirsute busts” of philosophers (*quidquid. . . hirsutis sqalet imaginibus*, 9.47.2), but engages in actions that are “shameful for the hairy” (*turpe pilosis*, 5)—that is, penetration in his “soft buttocks” (*in molli. . . clune*, 6). Here, Martial directly compares Pannychus’ apparent hypocrisy to the mismatch between his hairy front and his hirsute behind. Therefore, like the comber, the beard can, on certain occasions, be the “simulation” of what one is not; in this

⁸⁵ See p.14.

⁸⁶ Williams (1999) 130; Skinner (2013) 326.

⁸⁷ Sullivan (1991) 190.

case, of a masculine ideal to which an individual may not adhere in the care of other parts of his body or in other behaviours. The idea that such a mismatch can occur might have been threatening in a society which relied so heavily on maintaining the binary between empowered sexual agents (free adult men) and disempowered sexual patients (enslaved men and boys or women). Martial’s warning to “not trust” the unkempt man’s “hairline” (*nolito fronto credere*, 1.24.4) anticipates Juvenal’s claim that “there is no credit in appearances” (*frontis nulla fides*, 2.8). Indeed, his second *Satire*, which takes aim at men who express a desire to be penetrated, picks up on Martial’s image of the “hairy *cinaedus*”, as the true nature of one individual with “hairy limbs” (*bispisa membra*) is exposed by his “smooth anus” (*podice lieu*, 2.9-10), while another “fills a golden net with huge hair” (*reticulum. . . comis auratum ingentibus implet*, 2.96), progressing beyond the removal of body hair to the overt performance of femininity. The “rewriting” of the *cinaedus*’ body through hair removal thus complicates traditional definitions of sexual agency, as this individual voluntarily adopts modes of self-presentation that complicate the line between “masculine” and “feminine.”

As Martial’s cautions against excessive rusticity and effeminacy have demonstrated, male *cultus* was a tricky balancing act that resisted a positive definition. Accordingly, Martial advises Pannychus that:

Flectere te nolim, sed nec turbare capillos;
splendida sit nolo, sordida nolo cutis;
nec mitratorum nec sit tibi barba reorum;
nolo virum nimium, Pannyche, nolo parum.
Nunc sunt crura pilis et sunt tibi pectora saetis horrida,
sed mens est, Pannyche, vulsa tibi.

I would not wish you to curl, nor to rough up your hair; I do not wish that your skin should be shining, I do not wish it to be dirty; your beard should not be like the ones of those wearing Eastern headdresses, nor of those on trial; I do not wish you to be too much a man, Pannychus, nor too little. Now you have shins and a chest bristling with shaggy hair, but your mind, Pannychus, is depilated (2.36).

It is striking that the tensions of male *cultus* are focalised almost exclusively through cephalic, facial, and body hair; once again, hair is the material that “speaks” important truths about an individual’s gender and sexual identity. The dichotomies that Martial presents are conventional;⁸⁸ as in the rest of his corpus, hairstyling can make one “too much of a man” or “too little of one.” The manipulation of one’s natural state is required for social acceptance, even as an overemphasis on *cultus* threatens one’s ability to be perceived as “masculine.” The poem concludes by castigating Pannychus (perhaps the same “hairy *cinaedus*” of 9.47) for achieving the mean through extremes: his body is “bristling” (*horrida*) while his mind is “depilated” (*uulsa*), evoking concerns about a mismatch between the interior and exterior self. By describing the “hairiness” even of Pannychus’ mind, Martial suggests how Rome’s patriarchal society is partly held up by the collective adherence to narrowly defined standards of appearance in which hairstyling plays a major role. Hair’s constant regrowth demands the continual maintenance of these standards.⁸⁹ Thus, although *cultus* is used to indicate one’s alignment to a given set of values, its result is never a natural state but is rather the constant assimilation to or reaction against normative values.

Martial’s policing of body hair throughout the *Epigrams* indicates that it, like cephalic or facial hair, must have been visible to the population outside one’s household, at least some of the time. He lampoons Charidemus for trying to avoid gossip by keeping his legs and chest hairy (*quod tibi crura rigent saetis et pectora villis*, 6.56.1-2), facetiously suggesting that he “rip out the hair from his whole body” (*extirpa. . . pilos de corpore toto*, 3) and be openly acknowledged as a

⁸⁸ Williams (1999) 130-131.

⁸⁹ For comparison, a twenty-first century study showed that American women who shave will spend nearly two months over the course of their lifetimes removing body hair (Herzig 2015: 10).

cinaedus rather than risk even worse rumors about his private life.⁹⁰ Here, hair is fuel for rather than a defense against gossip; since the “truth” cannot escape public scrutiny, Charidemus’ best option is to “realign” his self-presentation with his reputation—once again, hair reveals more than it conceals. It may be that this sort of public evaluation of others’ body hair was encouraged by the practise of communal bathing, which ensured that viewing the naked bodies of one’s peers was a part of everyday life.⁹¹ Martial even describes the bath as more revealing than the bedroom; in two epigrams (3.51, 3.72) he refuses to sleep with a woman without first bathing together, suggesting that they have defects that can be hidden in a dark, private bedroom, but not in the bright, public baths. Accordingly, though one’s body hair provided “evidence” of alleged sexual behavior, it was not “private.” Indeed, the *Epigrams*’ obsession with hair suggests that one’s body and sexuality were not personal at all, as adherence to norms of sexuality and self-presentation was characterised as essential to social stability. Outside of Martial’s invective poetry, however, hair’s symbolic potency might have contributed to the very types of self-presentation that he criticises. If a “community” of *cinaedi* did in fact exist, as Amy Richlin has explored,⁹² non-normative self-presentation could have been a signifier of group identity which encouraged stigmatised practises even within a hostile culture.

Hair and Feminine Power

Thus far, much of this article’s analysis has focused on the perception of men’s hair and hairstyling. Although Martial is concerned about men becoming effeminate through a self-presentation which rejects the “authority” of masculine hair,⁹³ the misogynistic nature of his corpus means that his poetry discusses fewer female subjects than male ones,⁹⁴ providing less evidence for how women’s hair was perceived; although the *Epigrams* provide many important insights into Roman life, the poet’s biases inevitably affect the details of his world that he chooses

⁹⁰ Shackleton Bailey (1993) 43.

⁹¹ Hakanen (2020) 44-45.

⁹² Richlin (1993) 541-554.

⁹³ Williams (1999) 138-139.

⁹⁴ Sullivan (1991) 197.

(or does not choose to depict). That is not to say that he did not treat the topic at all; many epigrams do in fact link women’s bodies to their perceived moral failings, a rhetorical stance which some have argued was a reaction against the growing visibility of elite women in the Flavian world.⁹⁵ Despite their continued exclusion from formal positions of power, women’s increasing importance as patrons and members of the imperial court⁹⁶ offered them opportunities to publicly express themselves through their self-presentation, of which hairstyling was an important element. Historically, women have sought power through hairstyling by alternately “resisting” and “accommodating” societal norms to their own ends;⁹⁷ it should then be somewhat unsurprising that as women became more visible in public life, they would assert their presence by adopting the towering hairstyles characteristic of the Flavian period.⁹⁸ These highly artificial arrangements demonstrated a woman’s access to material resources and leisure time in which she could have her hair styled,⁹⁹ while simultaneously reflecting her personal tastes and possibly even subverting male-imposed standards of “natural” beauty.¹⁰⁰ Because many hairstyles were also associated with members of the imperial family, a woman’s hairdo could also proclaim her political and social ties.¹⁰¹

In short, there were many ways in which a woman’s *cultus* could express her personal power. However, under Martial’s invective gaze, hairstyling could also become a practise which enabled uniquely female patterns of cruelty. He is particularly concerned with the abuse of female hairstylists (*ornatrices*) by the women they served, as when he attacks Lalage, who allegedly killed her *ornatrix* because “one curl from the whole circle of hair went astray / not well fixed by a wavering needle” (*unus de toto peccaverat orbe comarum / anulus, incerta non bene fixus acu*,

⁹⁵ Sullivan (1991) 197-207,

⁹⁶ Beard (2008) 214-215.

⁹⁷ Weitz (2001).

⁹⁸ D’Ambra (2013) 513. Cf. Oliensis’ discussion of women’s loose hair as a mode of “resistance” to control in Horace’s *Odes* (2002: 95).

⁹⁹ Bartman (2001) 5.

¹⁰⁰ Pandey (2018) 457-458.

¹⁰¹ Olson (2008) 71; D’Ambra (2013).

2.66.1-2).¹⁰² Martial identifies the murder weapon as a mirror, a potent symbol in his indictment of vanity, but also writes that the *ornatrix* was “struct by the wicked hair” itself (*sacuis. . . icta comis*, 2.66.3-4), drawing an unsubtle connection between female *cultus* and female cruelty.¹⁰³ As in 7.83 and 8.52, the act of hairstyling reinforces an enslaver’s dominance over the enslaved. But while those poems reinforced the importance of male *cultus* to the performance of masculine identity, Martial’s portrayal of Lalage as shallow, vain, and tyrannical undercuts the symbolic potential of female *cultus*. Her finished hairstyle is “deceptive” rather than “communicative,” as Martial writes that her reflection will “become worthy of a mirror” (*digna speculo fiat imago tua*, 2.66.8) only when her head is shaved and she is deprived of the ability to control her hair. In the absence of the poetic justice that Martial imagines, the poet casts aspersions on all elaborate female hairstyles, encouraging his audience to imagine the cruelty behind the beauty that they see, a double standard that reflects his misogynistic characterisation of women (and their hair) as inherently deceptive.

Lalage’s baldness would, unsurprisingly, be the ultimate proof of her moral failings; just as he criticises bald men for being old, insufficiently masculine, or both, Martial attacks bald women for their age and insufficient femininity, which he often augments by representing them as grotesquely hypersexual. Although wigs were common in antiquity, they were not strictly necessary to maintain all but the largest hairstyles; experimental archaeology has shown that most styles could theoretically be achieved with the wearer’s own hair,¹⁰⁴ making women’s wigs a natural target for critiques of the “deceptive” nature of feminine *cultus*. Like men’s hair, women’s hair was linked to inner character, or *ingenium*; since a woman could use her hair to exert influence in a patriarchal world, “lying” with a wig or hair dye—as in the case of Lesbia, whose overzealous styling pushes her “off the map”¹⁰⁵—is serious business. Martial writes that

¹⁰² The *orbis* was a towering hairstyle popular during this period, sewn together with a needle, or *acus* (Stephens 2008: 121-125).

¹⁰³ Ovid popularized the trope of a vain woman abusing a hairdresser (Pandey 2018: 459), a theme that Juvenal would later treat (6.487- 504).

¹⁰⁴ Stephens (2008).

¹⁰⁵ See p.7.

Fabulla “swears that the hair she buys is hers” (*iurat capillos esse, quos emit, suos*, 6.12.1-2) but that, in this, she “perjures” (*perierat*, 2). Like Charidemus, whom Martial exhorts to “swear that [he] depilate[s his] buttocks” (*te. . . pilare tuas testificare natis*, 6.56.4), or Fidentinus, with his plagiaristic “wig,”¹⁰⁶ Fabulla’s hair “summons” her to the court of public opinion where. Just as in the case of the latter, Fabulla’s ownership claim is found lacking, as hair, as symbol of selfhood, can be bought but never truly “owned”; thus, she is portrayed as a perjurer whose “unjust” deceptions will inevitably be revealed.

In a more extreme example, Martial paints an unflattering portrait of Galla, to whom he states: although you are at home, you are made up in the middle of the Subura / your hair is styled with you *in absentia*” (*cum sis ipsa domi mediaque ornere Subura / fiant absentes et tibi. . . comae*, 9.37.1-2). Galla’s purchased *cultus* is completely and uncannily alienated from her body, as Martial claims that “[her] face does not sleep with [her]” (*nec tecum facies tua dormiat*, 5). Her dislocated self, scattered among “a hundred boxes” (*centum. . . pyxidibus*, 3-4) is the result of a grotesque effort to relive a long-outgrown youth; in a striking detail, her ogling eyebrow “is brought out in the morning” (*prolatum est mane*, 6), so that she can deceptively claim a seductive stance that her body no longer naturally supports. Juxtaposed with this complex of hairpieces and cosmetics is the only real hair she has left, which is on her “gray vulva” (*canus cunnus*, 7). Martial describes this as “among [Galla’s] ancestors” (*inter auos*, 8), as she is so lost in the world of artifice that the hair which reveals her “true” self seems to barely be a part of her body. Galla’s hairy vulva contrasts with the depilated one expected of sexually active Roman women,¹⁰⁷ as Martial uses the symbolic language of hair to express a typically Roman discomfort with sexually active older women;¹⁰⁸ elsewhere, he chastises Ligeia for continuing to depilate her “little old vulva” (*uetulum. . . cunnum*, 10.90.1). By engaging in “manners [that] befit girls” (*tales munditiae decent puellas*, 3), Ligeia is portrayed as engaging in as much self-deception as bald

¹⁰⁶ See p.11.

¹⁰⁷ Olson (2008) 65-66.

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan (1991) 200.

men who maintain combers; once again, Martial suggests that nature will always resist efforts to “turn back the clock” on the changes that hair makes to the human body. Galla and Ligeia’s hairstyling efforts are, according to Martial, spurred on by desperate attempts to deceive younger lovers into sex. References to “penises” (*mentulae*) in both poems (9.37.9, 10.90.8) devalue female *cultus* by implying that its only purpose is to attract male attention; this allows the male poet to evaluate his subject by assessing the success or failure of these efforts. In Martial’s poetry, both successful and unsuccessful attempts by women to control their self-presentation through hairstyling are depicted as ways for them to hide their “true” selves, as the artificiality of women’s hair complicates authentic relations between men and women.¹⁰⁹ Martial’s treatment of women’s hair may therefore reflect cultural concerns about their increased prominence in the Flavian world; while stigmas surrounding baldness and the supplementation of one’s natural hair or overemphasis on *cultus* are also used against men, Martial deploys them against women to devalue hairstyling as a mode of feminine self-expression and the use of hair as a communicative tool.

Conclusions

In short, the literary world of Martial’s *Epigrams* is shot through with a rich symbolic “language” of hair and hairstyling, as the poet combines a number of conventional attitudes towards different types of hair to communicate important messages about gender, sexuality, and power. Due to its position at the “edge” of the body and its dual status as a “natural” and “worked-upon” material,¹¹⁰ in the Roman world, hair was viewed as a reflection of one’s internal character and was an important component in the presentation of one’s age, gender, and social position. Therefore, its non-normative growth, styling, or removal signified a corresponding divergence from rigid social norms. These norms pervaded society and affected elite self-presentation, even at the top of the social ladder: evidently, not even the emperor Domitian was

¹⁰⁹ Bartman (2001) 14.

¹¹⁰ See n.4.

immune to negative cultural attitudes towards his baldness. Therefore, even if the individuals that Martial discusses in his poetry (including his own poetic *persona*) do not entirely correspond to real people, the *Epigrams* are significant for their ability to capture real perceptions, biases, and stereotypes that shaped how Martial’s contemporaries viewed their world and lived their lives; the situations and characters may not be real, but the ideas expressed are.

Key to understanding Martial’s focus on hair and hairstyling is his interest in the tricky balancing act of *cultus*, an ideal in which elite self-presentation was supported by the labor of enslaved or low-status workers, thus replicating an imperial dynamic on the individual level. It is no wonder that Martial repeatedly relied on the symbolic potential of hair in his poetry. Not only does its ubiquity speak to Martial’s apparent interest in how wider social dynamics operated on an interpersonal scale, but hair’s ability to “speak for” the self allows him to use it to explore one of his favorite themes: the exposure of elite society’s everyday deceptions. Again and again, Martial invokes hair to demonstrate that his targets cannot outrun their “true natures,” which their bodies will always reveal through an interplay of natural and artificial elements. Additionally, Martial presents hair as a material that is indelibly linked to one’s progression through life and, thus, one’s mortality; from the “flowering cheeks” of the ephebe to the balding pates of old men to the poet’s own “changed” locks, hair is, perhaps more than anything else, a manifest representation of the effects of time on the human body.

However, hair is not only a material that is used to explore the nature of the individual. Rather, reading the *Epigrams* with close attention to the representation of hair and hairstyling enables connections to be made between poems written on a range of topics, from Rome’s complicated relationship with its provinces to the production of poetry to relationships between enslavers and the enslaved to the rules of sexual engagement among the Roman elite. By tracking how the “language” of hair is invoked in these different contexts, it is possible to examine the connections between apparently disparate elements of Roman identity formation. Martial, of course, presents a non-comprehensive view of Roman society, but his poetry demonstrates the ways in which a single element of self-presentation—hair—could have a range of meanings

which were activated in different contexts. Naturally, in many of the poems discussed, hairstyling interacts with other elements of *cultus*; facial features, clothing, and cosmetics or unguents also play important roles in expressing the status and sensibility of Martial’s subjects; still, hair seems to have a special symbolic potency which is linked to its unique material qualities. But though Martial’s depiction of the meanings of hair in the Roman world is certainly wide-ranging, it is far from complete, as the poet’s elite, male, and urbane bias cannot be entirely overcome by reading “against” the poems. Still, by looking broadly across the *Epigrams*, this article has built on previous studies of elegy and lyric¹¹¹ in order to support further analysis of the role of hair and hairstyling in a wide range of literary contexts, and of how these literary representations connected to real-life social norms. By doing so, it has argued, one can better understand the intersecting dynamics which governed the presentation and management of Roman bodies in a complex and multicultural empire.

Works Cited

- Bartky, Sandra Lee (1988) “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in Weitz, ed. (1998), pp. 25-45.
- Bartman, Elizabeth. (2001) “Hair and the Artifice of Roman Female Adornment,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 105(1), pp. 1-25.
- Beard, Mary. (2008) *The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found*. Cambridge, Mass.
- Biddle-Perry, Geraldine and Sarah Cheang, eds. (2008) *Hair: Styling, Culture, and Fashion*. London.
- Boyle, Anthony, and William Dominik, eds. (2002) *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*. Leiden.
- Braund, Susanna Morton. (1996) *Juvenal: Satires Book 1*. Cambridge.

¹¹¹ Oliensis (2002); Pandey (2018).

- Bryant, Keith Alexander. (2003) “Fading, Twisting, and Weaving: An Interpretive Ethnography of the Black Barbershop as Cultural Space” *Qualitative Inquiry* 9(1), pp. 105-128.
- Coleman, Kathleen M. (1986) “The Emperor Domitian and Literature,” in Hasse (1986), pp. 3087-3115.
- Courtney, E. (1980) *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal*. London.
- Dabiri, Emma. (2019) *Don’t Touch My Hair*. London.
- D’Ambra, Eve. (2013) “Mode and Model in the Flavian Female Portrait,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 117(4), pp. 511-525.
- Davies, Glenys. (2019) “Cultural Representations,” in Harlow (2019), pp. 145-161.
- Dench, Emma. (2005) *Romulus’ Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian*. Oxford.
- Derbew, Sarah. (2022) *Untangling Blackness in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge.
- Draycott, Jane. (2018) “Hair Loss as Facial Disfigurement in Ancient Rome?” in Skinner and Cock (2018), pp. 65-83.
- _____. (2017) “Hair Today, Gone tomorrow: The Use of Real, False and Artificial Hair as Votive Offerings,” in Draycott and Graham (2017), pp. 77-94.
- Draycott, Jane and Emma Jayne Graham, eds. (2017) *Bodies of Evidence: Ancient Anatomical Votives Past, Present and Future*. Milton Park.
- Fitzgerald, William. (2007) *Martial: The World of the Epigram*. Chicago and London.
- _____. (2000) *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*. Cambridge.
- Fredrick, David. (2002) “Architecture and Surveillance in Flavian Rome,” in Boyle and Dominik 2002, pp. 199-227.

- Gibson, Roy K. (2003) *Ovid: Ars Amatoria, Book 3*. Cambridge.
- Gleason, Maud. (1995) *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton.
- _____. (1990) “The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E,” in Zeitlin, Winkler, and Halperin 1990, pp. 389-416.
- Hakanen, Ville. (2020) “Normative Masculinity and the Decoration of the Tepidarium of the Forum Baths in Pompeii,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 124(1), pp. 37-71.
- Hallpike, C. R. (1969) “Social Hair,” *Man* 4(2), pp. 256-264.
- Harlow, Mary, ed. (2019) *A Cultural History of Hair Volume 1: A Cultural History of Hair in Antiquity*. New York.
- _____. (2019) “Introduction.” In Harlow (2019), pp. 1-14.
- Harlow, Mary and Lena Larsson Lovén. (2019) “Religion and Ritualized Belief,” in Harlow (2019), pp. 15-30.
- Hasse, Wolfgang, ed. (1986) *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (ANRW) / Rise and Decline of the Roman World, Vol. 32/5 Sprache und Literatur (Literatur der julisch-claudischen und der flavischen Zeit [Schluss])*. Berlin, Boston.
- Henriksén, C. (1997) “Earinus: An Imperial Eunuch in Light of the Poems of Martial and Statius.” *Mnemosyne* 50(3), pp. 281-294.
- Hersch, Karen K. (2010) *The Roman Wedding: Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity*. Cambridge.
- Herzig, Rebecca M. (2015) *Plucked: A History of Hair Removal*. New York.
- Hope, Valerie. (2009) *Roman Death: Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome*. London, New York.

- Laes, Christian and Johan Strubbe. (2014) *Youth in the Roman Empire: The Young and Restless Years*. Cambridge.
- Lightfoot, Christopher S. (2015) “Now On View: A Portrait Bust of Emperor Domitian,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2015/toledo-museum-loan-exchange>.
- Mercer, Kobena. (1987) “Black Hair/Style Politics,” *new formations* 3, pp. 33-54.
- Mira Seo, J. “Plagiarism and Poetic Identity in Martial,” *American Journal of Philology* 130(4), pp. 567-593.
- Morgan, Llewelyn. (1997) “*Achilleae Comae*: Hair and Heroism According to Domitian,” *The Classical Quarterly* 47(1). 209-214.
- _____. (2016) “The Eunuch and the Emperor,” *History Today* 66(5), pp. 21-27.
- Mouritsen, Henrik. (2011) *The Freedman in the Roman World*. Cambridge.
- Oliensis, Ellen. (2002) “Feminine Endings, Lyric Seductions,” in Woodman and Feeney, eds. (2002), pp. 93-106.
- Olson, Kelly. (2008) *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society*. Milton Park, New York.
- _____. (2014) “Masculinity, Appearance, and Sexuality: Dandies in Roman Antiquity,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 23(2). 182-205.
- Pandey, Nandini. (2018) “*Caput Mundi*: Female Hair as Symbolic Vehicle of Domination in Ovidian Love Elegy,” *The Classical Journal* 113(4). 454-488.
- Parker, Patricia. (2004) “Barbers and Barbary: Early Modern Cultural Semantics” *Renaissance Drama* 33, pp. 201-244.

- Parkin, Tim G. (2003) *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History*. Baltimore and London.
- Patterson, Orlando. (1982) *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Mass.
- Richlin, Amy. (1993) “Not Before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law Against Love Between Men,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3(4), pp. 523-573.
- _____. (2017) *Slave Theatre in the Roman Republic: Plautus and Popular Comedy*. Cambridge.
- Schwab, Katherine A. and Marice Rose. (2019) “Self and Society,” in Harlow (2019), pp. 31-46.
- Shackleton Bailey, D.R. (1993) *Martial: Epigrams Vols. 1-3*. Loeb Classical Library 94, 95, 480. Cambridge, Mass.
- Skinner, Marilyn. (2013) *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*. Hoboken.
- Skinner, Patricia and Emily Cock, eds. (2018) *Approaching Facial Difference Past and Present*. London.
- Smith, Kim. (2008) “From Style to Place: The Emergence of the Ladies’ Hair Salon in the Twentieth Century,” in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, eds. (2008), DOI: 10.5040/9781847887191/HAIR0007.
- Snowden, Frank M. (1970) *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*. Cambridge, Mass.
- Spahlinger, Lothar. (2004) “Quem recitas, meus est, o Fidentine, libellus. Martials Fidentinus-Zyklus und das Problem des Plagiats,” *Hermes* 132(4), pp. 472-494.
- Stephens, Janet. (2008) “Ancient Roman Hairdressing: On (Hair)pins and Needles,” *Journal of Roman Archeology* 21, pp. 110-132.

- _____. (2019) “Production and Practice,” in Harlow (2019), pp. 65-84.
- Sullivan, J.P. (1991) *Martial: The Unexpected Classic*. Cambridge.
- Toner, Jerry. (2015) “Barbers, Barbershops, and Searching for a Roman Popular Culture,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 83, pp. 91-109.
- Weitz, Rose, ed. (1998) *The Politics of Women’s Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*. New York and Oxford.
- _____. (2001) “Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power Through Resistance and Accommodation,” *Gender and Society* 15(5), pp. 667-686.
- White, Peter. (1975) “The Friends of Martial, Statius, and Pliny, and the Dispersal of Patronage,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79, pp. 265-300.
- Williams, Craig A. (1999) *Roman Homosexuality*. Oxford, New York.
- Woodman, Tony and Denis Feeney, eds. (2002) *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace*. Cambridge.
- Zeitlin, Froma I., John J. Winkler, and David M. Halperin, eds. (1990) *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. Princeton.