Classical Quarterly **42** (i) 253–268 (1992) *Printed in Great Britain*

EROTION: *PUELLA DELICATA*?

Martial's epigrams on the dead slave-child Erotion, especially the first (5.34) and third (10.61), have generally given rise to sentimental comments about the poet's love for young children or the humane concern which he displays for his slaves.[1] Scholars show less unanimity in their interpretation of the second piece (5.37), where the poet's *laudatio* of his lost *puella* is made the occasion of a joke against Paetus, who has managed to survive the loss of his noble and wealthy wife. The poem in question runs as follows:

Puella senibus dulcior mihi cycnis,
agna Galaesi mollior Phalantini,
concha Lucrini delicatior stagni,
cui nec lapillos praeferas Erythraeos
nec modo politum pecudis Indicae dentem
nivesque primas liliumque non tactum;
quae crine vicit Baetici gregis vellus
Rhenique nodos aureamque nitellam;
flagravit ore quod rosarium Paesti,
quod Atticarum prima mella cerarum,
quod sucinorum rapta de manu gleba;
cui conparatus indecens erat pavo,
inamabilis sciurus et frequens phoenix,
adhuc recenti tepet Erotion busto,
quam pessimorum lex amara fatorum
sexta peregit hieme, nec tamen tota,
nostros amores gaudiumque lususque.
et esse tristem me meus vetat Paetus,
pectusque pulsans pariter et comam vellens:
'Deflere non te vernulae pudet mortem?
ego coniugem' inquit 'extuli et tamen vivo,
notam, superbam, nobilem, locupletem.'
Quid esse nostro fortius potest Paeto?
ducentiens accepit et tamen vivit.

The main stumbling block in the past has been the apparent lack of harmony between the melancholy sentiments expressed in the first seventeen lines and the (typically Martialian) surprise ending with its attack on Paetus. Three lines of interpretation are possible. (1) The piece simply lacks unity, the intrusion of satire in the last few lines spoiling the earlier part of the poem.[2] (2) The satiric flavour of the ending casts doubt retrospectively on the sincerity of the sentiments expressed in the first part of the epigram. (3) There is something about the first 17 lines which indicates to the sensitive reader that they should not be taken seriously, thus providing a less

[1] Cf. W. C. A. Ker in his Loeb edition (rev. 1968), i. xi; L. Friedlaender, *Martialis Epigrammaton Libri* (Leipzig, 1886), p. 16; R. T. Bridge and E. D. C. Lake, *Select Epigrams of Martial, Books I–VI* (Oxford, 1908), pp. x–xi; H. J. Izaac in the Budé ed. (Paris, 1930), intro. p. xxiii, who also quotes H. E. Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry*, p. 274: 'M. was a child-lover before he was a man of letters'; G. A. Simcox, *A History of Latin Literature* (New York, 1883), ii.112 'Martial stands almost alone in Roman literature in his appreciation of mere girlhood.'

[2] E.g. W. C. A. Ker (above, n. 1), index s.v. Erotion; G. E. Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*[3], ed. Lachmann–Muncker (1895), xi. 242, quoted by Kenney (below, n. 3), p. 78 n. 2; S. Johnson, 'The Obituary Epigrams of Martial', *CJ* 49 (1953–4), 268.

incongruous lead-up to the finale.[3] In this paper I shall argue for the third interpretation: lines 1–17 are in themselves non-serious in tone, though for somewhat different reasons to those that have been suggested previously. In particular, it will be shown that the relationship between the poet and his *puella*, Erotion, is not as straightforward as has been thought.

The first clue to the tone of the first seventeen lines lies in their structure: this is more complicated than has been recognised. Although the change of direction at line 18 is the most obvious, it is not the only such change in the poem, rather, it is preceded by a number of witty unexpected twists. For instance, it is not until line 7 that it becomes completely[4] clear that *puella* in line 1 is nominative rather than vocative case, and the opening words might well be taken as an address to the poet's mistress, especially if the reader remembers similar passages (for instance, Virg. *Ecl.* 7.37f., Ov. *Met.* 13.789ff., Theocr. 11) where a series of comparisons is found in the context of an address to a *puella*: in particular, the use of the ablative of comparison construction, with which Martial's series commences, is common in erotic contexts.[5] Second, given that in such comparisons the addressee is normally living (that this appears to be the case here is reinforced by the present tense *praeferas* at line 4), the perfect tense *vicit* in the 7th line comes as a shock. And while the series of verbs between lines 7 and 14 referring to past time (*vicit ... flagravit ... erat*) serves to temper the surprise effect of the disclosure, in line 14, that the *puella* is in fact dead, the expression 'adhuc tepet', instead of the expected 'iacet', common on tomb-inscriptions, is jarring.[6] At line 14 also comes another unexpected twist: the *puella* is a five-year-old child. (This becomes clear as soon as the name Erotion is mentioned, since it is assumed that poem 34 has been read first.) Finally, the introduction, at line 18, of a new character, Paetus, is especially surprising in view of Martial's usual method of composition. In other poems where lists (whether taking the form of a series of conventional comparisons or else the repetition of a key idea) precede an unexpected turn at the end of the poem, the punch-line is invariably directed towards the person who has been the subject of the comparisons; in this piece, by contrast, it is the new character who is to be the butt of the poet's wit.

A second factor to be considered in determining the tone of lines 1–17 is the series of comparisons. Scholarly attention has focused on the conventional and hackneyed nature of these comparisons as a whole: to Lloyd this suggested that the sentiments expressed cannot be very deep,[7] while in Kenney's view[8] the poet is indulging in a

[3] E. J. Kenney, 'Erotion Again', *G & R* 11 (1964), 77–81, L. J. Lloyd, 'Erotion: a Note on Martial', *G & R* 22 (1953), 39–41. Lloyd (p. 40) finds the sentiments in 1–17 insincere, so that the ending of the poem is not too great a let-down: 'where sentiment is lacking sarcasm will do'. Kenney, though regarding the poet's grief for Erotion as genuine, feels that he has this grief in perspective, and so is able to mirror playfully in his language the baby-talk in which he used to engage with the little girl.

[4] Line 4 'cui nec lapillos praeferas...' might possibly, though not necessarily, suggest a following verb in the 3rd person.

[5] Cf. Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.16, 24f.; Theoc. 10.26ff., 11.20ff.; Virg. *Ecl.* 7.37f.; Catull. 17.15f.; Ov. *Met.* 13.789ff.; *A.P.* 5.48 (also a list of comparisons ending in a punch line), 121, 118, 270.3; G. Misener, 'Iconistic Portraits', *CP* 19 (1924), 97ff., esp. pp. 122–3. For comparisons as a feature of the literary language of love, see R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace, Odes Book 1* (Oxford, 1970) on *Od.* 1.19.6 and M. Citroni, *M. Valerii Martialis Epigrammaton Liber 1* (Florence, 1975), pp. 336f. (on Mart. 1.109.1).

[6] Cf. 10.67.6 'sita prurit in sepulchro' though this is obviously parodic. Contrast Statius, *Silv.* 2.1.2, where the same idea occurs, but in a serious epikedion: the words 'adhuc vivente favilla' are to be taken in a straightforward way.

[7] Above, n. 3, p. 40.

[8] Above, n. 3, p. 79.

playful adaptation of a convention, representing the sort of baby-talk in which the poet used to engage with Erotion.[9] Given Martial's practice elsewhere, the mere presence of a conventional series of comparisons is an indication that there will be a surprise twist at the end of the piece.[10] In this epigram, however, the comparisons are themselves overlaid with wit.

In the first place, the most striking thing about the list is that every example, with the exception of the last group of three, is qualified by an epithet or description of some kind. In this way the subject of each comparison is designated as the best of its kind: for instance, the pearls to which the girl is compared are specified as *Erythraei* (coming from the Persian Gulf), a species of pearl which according to Pliny (*N.H.* 9.106) surpasses all others. Similarly, the fairness of her complexion matches not merely the whiteness of snow but of *nives primae*: snow when it has just fallen is of course at its whitest. And even in the last three comparisons ('cui conparatus indecens erat pavo, / inamabilis sciurus et frequens phoenix' lines 12–13), where an accompanying epithet is lacking, the examples chosen represent the epitome of beauty, lovableness and rarity respectively: the peacock stands supreme among birds for beauty,[11] no bird is rarer than a phoenix (apart from a black swan!) and it is hard to think of a more lovable animal than a squirrel. The effect is further highlighted by the use of oxymoron. In short, the list is designed to highlight the girl's outstanding qualities to such a degree that the overall impression is one of deliberate hyperbole.

That the comparisons are meant to be overdone is further confirmed when the epigram is set beside other lists of the same type. Although it is common in such contexts for the object of comparison to be qualified in some way (e.g. 'Issa est carior Indicis lapillis' Mart. 1.109.4, 'candidior prima nive' Mart. 7.33.2, 'thymo mihi dulcior Hyblae' Virg. *Ecl.* 7.37, 'tenero lascivior haedo' Ov. *Met.* 13.791, 'levior adsiduo detritis aequore conchis' Ov. *Met.* 13.792), it is usual, however, to find a mixture of simple comparisons and those where the object of comparison is accompanied by an adjective: even in the obviously parodic catalogue put into the mouth of Polyphemus (*Met.* 13), qualified comparisons only marginally outnumber unqualified.[12] And though Martial himself shows an unusual preference for qualified

[9] As evidence Kenney cites the comparison 'concha Lucrini delicatior stagni' (line 3) which, in his opinion, carries the implication that Erotion is good enough to eat – a further clue that the words are addressed to a child. Although he is certainly right in taking this as a reference to oysters, for which the Lucrine lake was famous (cf. Pliny, *N.H.* 9.168), rather than to pearls, which according to Pliny (*N.H.* 9.106) came from the Indian Ocean and Arabia, I cannot agree with his conclusion that, given Lucrine oysters were a delicacy, the comparison suggests that the girl is good enough to eat. It is more likely to be a play on two senses of *delicatus*: a delicacy (in the gastronomic sphere) and a *puella delicata* (on which see further below: this is another example of a phenomenon to be discussed later, whereby the unexpected revelation that the poet's *puella* is very young is anticipated by the choice of language). Kenney might have also pointed to the *nitella* = a type of dormouse (Plin. *N.H.* 8.224 distinguishes between the *glis* and the *nitella*, though they are obviously closed related, both hibernating in winter): dormice were a delicacy on the Roman table (Plin. loc. cit., Varro, *R.R.* 3.15, Apicius, 8.9, Petr. 31, J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (London, 1973), p. 204 n. 22).

[10] Examples of poems where this technique is used include 1.41, 109.1–5, 115; 3.65; 4.13; 8.33; 9.57; 11.18, 21, 84. See also Citroni, op. cit., p. 130 on Mart. 1.41 intr. This does not necessarily mean that the lists are non-serious in themselves (e.g. in 4.13, a wedding poem, the felicity of the pair is expressed through a series of conventional comparisons; although there is a witty twist at the end, this does not detract from the sincerity of what has gone before).

[11] Cf. Varro, *R.R.* 3.6.2, Plin. *N.H.* 10.43, Ov. *Met.* 13.802, Sauvage, *Etude de thèmes animaliers dans la poésie latine* (Collection Latomus vol. 143, Brussels, 1975), p. 269.

[12] 17 qualified, 14 unqualified.

over unqualified comparisons, the present list is conspicuous in that, as we have seen, nearly all its components have an accompanying epithet.[13] The inevitable conclusion is that hyperbole is being used here to produce a tone of lightheartedness.[14]

A second element of wit in the series of comparisons is the way in which the ground is laid in advance for surprises to come by a judicious selection of language and subject matter.[15] Take, for instance, the first of the comparisons, 'dulcior ... senibus cycnis', an expression which has been considered by some highly amusing or at least recherché.[16] The choice of expression wittily provides the first of a series of clues that the *puella* whose virtues the poet will extol is a mere child.[17] The juxtaposition of *puella* and *senibus* suggests that the girl will turn out to be much younger than expected. The epithet *dulcis*, common on grave inscriptions,[18] anticipates the twist that this is an epitaph rather than a love poem. And the reference to swans, whose singing was sweetest at the time of death,[19] is another hint to the same effect.

A similar method is employed in the series of comparisons that follow. In particular, the revelation of the girl's age is anticipated frequently. Several of the images in the series suggest attributes that are especially appropriate to a very young girl. For example, the mouse (*nitella* line 8), though it is chosen primarily because the colour of its fur resembles that of the girl's hair, is also conspicuous for smallness of size,[20] as are the lamb (line 2) and the *sciurus* (squirrel, line 13).[21] Many of the images applied to Erotion connote youth, freshness and virginity: this is brought out particularly by the use of epithets. So, for example, in lines 5–6 the girl is said to surpass not merely snow but nives *primae*; the lily, a commonplace in comparisons involving whiteness,[22] is described as *non tactum* and the ivory (*pecudis Indicae dentem*) as *modo politum*, a phrase which suggests both whiteness and youth, given that ivory goes yellow with age.[23]

In lines 9–11, the sweetness of the girl's breath is likened to a rose garden, honey and amber, the last of which gives off a pine smell when rubbed. Here too, Martial chooses images and/or presents them in such a way as to throw emphasis on the idea

[13] Of 16 poems where a series of comparisons is used, the only clear case where unqualified examples are more numerous is 1.115.

[14] On the hyperbolic nature of qualified comparative expressions and their use in parodic contexts, cf. Citroni on Mart. 1.115 'loto candidior cycno', though in this example the application of *lotus* to a swan seems amusing in itself.

[15] Like many of the effects in the poem it is only fully appreciated in retrospect, or at a second reading.

[16] For a full discussion of the phrase, see appendix.

[17] The procedure is, of course, assisted by the ambiguity of the Latin word *puella* which can be used equally appropriately of a very young child or (in love poetry) of the poet's mistress.

[18] See *TLL* 2194.34ff. s.v. *dulcis*.

[19] Cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 84e–85; Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Od.* 2.20.10; G. Arnott, 'Swan Songs', *G&R* 24 (1977), 149–53; Sauvage, above n. 11, pp. 237–9.

[20] Servius on *Georg.* 1.181 identifies it with Virgil's *exiguus mus*: though Virgil is probably referring to mice or rodents in general (see R. Mynors in his recent commentary [Oxford, 1990]), the fact that Servius makes the identification indicates that he thought of the *nitela* as small.

[21] Perhaps these little creatures were kept as pets: so Toynbee, above, n. 9, p. 293, a suggestion based on the use of *amabilis* in this passage; cf. also O. Keller, *Die Antike Tierwelt* (Leipzig, 1909–13), p. 181. It might also be relevant that elsewhere when young girls (i.e. those just approaching puberty) are compared to animals it is to those of the larger sort such as heifers and fillies: see Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Od.* 2.5 intro.

[22] Cf. Citroni, op. cit., p. 352, on Mart. 1.115.3. Moreover, the phrase 'non tactum' suggests she will one day be *tacta*: see my discussion on the sexual resonances of the relationship between Martial and Erotion, see below.

[23] Cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.5.39f. ('... ne longis flavescere possit ab annis, / Maeonis Assyrium femina tinxit ebur'); cf. Plin. *N.H.* 8.7 (the whiteness of an elephant's tusks is an indication of its youth).

of youth and freshness.[24] The *rosarium Paesti* is not merely a conventional paradigm of fragrance, but roses also symbolize youth.[25] The Attic honey is specified as '*prima* mella', while the amber is described, somewhat unusually, as 'rapta de manu'. The practice, common among Roman ladies, of carrying lumps of the substance in the hand and rubbing it in order to bring out the pine smell is known from several passages in Martial and elsewhere.[26] Here, the use of *rapta* might be meant to suggest that the lump is removed quickly from the hand while the smell is still fresh and new.[27]

So far, I have discussed two ways in which the list of comparisons helps to establish the non-serious tone of the opening section: first, the hyperbolic manner of presentation in which each example is qualified in some way and second, the choice of language in order to anticipate surprises to come. The third, and most important, factor which must be taken into consideration when assessing the impact of the series of comparisons is the fact that though they are applied to a girl who turns out to be only five years old, such comparisons are elsewhere characteristic of erotic situations.

This unique scenario is emphasised by a method of composition unusual elsewhere in Martial, whereby the poet delays identifying the subject of the series of comparisons until the list is complete. In other epigrams of this type, the subject is normally named at the beginning.[28] In the present poem, on the other hand, the delay enables the creation of a surprise effect: the *puella* whom we might expect to be an adult, given that such comparisons are frequent elsewhere in erotic contexts, is in fact the five-year-old Erotion. The girl's name could not have been revealed earlier without spoiling the surprise, since she is already familiar from poem 5.34. (Poem 1.109 offers the closest parallel, although here the surprise is brought about in a slightly different way: a series of comparisons, in erotically-tinged language, is applied to a subject named Issa. Although Issa's canine identity is not revealed until the 5th line, she can be named earlier because, unlike Erotion, we have not met her previously. The unexpected twist in this case is not that language normally used in an amatory context has been applied to a five-year-old but that the Issa to whom such language refers is not human at all, but a pet dog.)

Even though the imagery of the first part of the poem, with its emphasis on youth and virginity, is, as we saw, a pointer to the fact that the *puella* is very young, this aspect of the wit is only appreciated in retrospect. To the reader approaching the poem for the first time, the language appears unequivocally erotic, recalling the

[24] In an age lacking sophisticated dental care, the freshness of the breath must have decreased with age and increasing tooth decay, so that really sweet breath would be a sign of youth. Cf. *A.P.* 5.118 where the breath of a youthful girl is said to be sweeter than spikenard; Long. *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.25; Mart. 3.65.1: the fragrance of the boy's kisses is likened to 'quod spirat tenera malum mordente puella'.

[25] Compare for example Prop. 4.5.59f. 'vidi ego odorati victura rosaria Paesti/sub matutino cocta iacere noto' and see K. F. Smith on Tibullus 1.4.29, Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Od.* 2.3.13, etc. Roses were also connected with fleeting beauty and early death: cf. H.-J. Van Dam, *P. Papinius Statius Silvae Book 2: A Commentary* (Leiden, 1984), p. 122, on Stat. 2.1.106–9.

[26] Mart. 3.65.5, 11.8.6; Juv. 6.573f., 11.50f.; Ov. *Met.* 2.365f.; cf. Plin. *N.H.* 37.30, 50–1; it has this smell because it is composed of fossilised pine resin: see Plin. *N.H.* 37.42 with D. E. Eicholz (Loeb edn, 1962) *ad loc.* See also P. Watson, 'Balls of Crystal and Amber: Fact or Fiction?' in *LCM* forthcoming.

[27] Perhaps one might also see in the use of *rapta* a reference to the 'cito rapta' formula common in tomb inscriptions for those who die young.

[28] Other examples include 1.53, 3.93, 4.14, 8.33, 9.57, 11.21 and 11.84. Another poem where the name of the subject (Diadumenus) is delayed is 3.65, but there the surprise is not as great because the comparisons are appropriate to a *puer delicatus*. And at 11.8 the punch line revolves round Martial's unwillingness to reveal the boy's name. In 1.109, although the name is given at the beginning, we do not find out Issa's real identity until line 5.

sentimental amatory situations of pastoral, the novel and the epigram. When it is discovered, then, that the poet's 'girlfriend' is a mere five years old, the use of sexual language might seem inappropriate, even distasteful. Kenney, as we have seen, overcame this apparent difficulty by suggesting that Martial's language is not intended to be erotic, but represents the kind of baby-talk in which the poet might have engaged with the child: this is possible, he thinks, because of the close similarity between the two types of milieu. Now the last point is of course true: the term *puella*, as pointed out earlier, means both 'little girl' and 'mistress', and sentimental language is applicable both to a child and to a lover. But why must it be assumed that the context is not erotic? Martial is not Erotion's father[29] but her master, yet because of her tender age, all previous commentators, as far as I know, have taken it for granted that the relationship between Martial and his little slave-girl is on the same platonic level as that of father and daughter.

This view is based on an inherent aversion to the idea of a grown man having a sexual relationship with a child, especially a female. The presupposition is that if Martial's sentiments towards a five-year-old girl included an erotic element, then he is a paedophile and as such would be condemned by a contemporary Roman reader, just as much as by a modern one. And since Martial does not portray himself as engaging in sexual activities which are not generally condoned in Rome (his relations with *pueri delicati*, for instance, are perfectly acceptable),[30] then his feelings for Erotion, following this way of thinking, must be entirely platonic.

There is, however, another possibility: that some sort of sexual interaction between adults and slave children was so commonplace at Rome that Martial's readers would think nothing of it. The term 'paedophile' used above is a concept invented by twentieth-century psychoanalysts to whom abnormal sexual behaviour is not only deviant but indicative of mental aberration. It is important, however, to distinguish between true paedophilia, i.e. a mental condition where sexual relationships with children are indulged in and/or desired to the exclusion of any other form of sexual activity, and casual opportunist contacts of a sexual nature, not necessarily or even generally involving intercourse,[31] where the child is merely a temporary substitute for a more mature (and preferred) relationship.[32] The latter type of behaviour is still regarded as an aberration in our society, but this does not mean that it is in any objective sense contrary to nature.[33] There is evidence that a significant percentage of

[29] *Pace* A. A. Bell, Jr. ('Martial's Daughter?', *CW* 78 (1984), 21–4) who suggests that Erotion was Martial's daughter by one of his slave women: his argument is based partly on the idea that the sentiments expressed about Erotion are too strongly felt to be merely those of a master for a slave.

[30] On Martial's sexual attitudes as generally reflecting the norm of society (apart from his own apparent *preference* for boys over women) see J. P. Sullivan, 'Martial's Sexual Attitudes', *Philologus* 123 (1979), 288–302.

[31] See J. W. Mohr, 'Age Structures in Pedophilia' in *Adult Sexual Interest in Children*, ed. M. Cook and K. Howells (London, 1981), p. 44; K. Plummer, 'Constructing a Sociological Baseline', ibid. p. 225.

[32] Though the distinction was made by Freud, most modern studies of the subject have concentrated on the deviant form. K. Howells emphasises that paedophilia proper represents only a small proportion of adult–child sexual relations ('Adult Sexual Interest in Children: Considerations Relevant to Theories of Aetiology' in Cook and Howells, above, n. 31, pp. 55–94).

[33] K. Plummer, above, n. 31, pp. 236–8; K. Howells, above, n. 32, pp. 79–80. K. Freund, C. K. McKnight, R. Langevin and S. Cibiri, 'The Female Child as Surrogate Object', *Arch. Sex. Behav.* 2 (1972), 119–33, found from experiments that even subjects classed as sexually normal show some degree of erotic response to female children from the age of five upwards. Such feelings are sometimes even admitted to: cf. Evelyn Waugh's remark to Ann Fleming (I

female children experience sexual relations of some kind with an adult male.[34] A small number of these involve father (or step-father)/daughter incest: it can be argued, in fact, that the incest taboo, widespread in all societies, does not reflect a universal feeling that such relationships are intrinsically abhorrent, but on the contrary it is widespread precisely because such relationships *are* natural, and therefore must be discouraged, whether for genetic reasons or to preserve the integrity of the family.[35] Childhood sexuality is a well-established phenomenon; it may be that children of the more affectionate and/or precocious type innocently encourage or even enjoy sexual play as a means of gaining or displaying the affection of adults.[36] As one writer puts it, the difference between a so-called paedophile and a normal male may be 'the provocation and proximity of an attractive Lolita'.[37]

P. Ariès[38] shows how the idea of the innocence of children, taken for granted nowadays, only gained ground during the seventeenth century, when concerted attempts were made to repress any signs of sexual awareness on the part of children. Before that, sexual freedom between adults and children was commonplace, at least among the aristocracy. The journal of Henry IV's physician, Heroard, for example, records vivid details of the upbringing of the future Louis XIII which include sexual jokes and play between grown-ups and the young prince. To quote Ariès 'The lack of reserve with regard to children surprises us: we raise our eyebrows at the outspoken talk but even more at the bold gestures, the physical contacts, about which it is easy to imagine what a modern psycho-analyst would say. The psycho-analyst would be wrong. The attitude to sex, and doubtless sex itself, varies according to environment, and consequently according to period and mentality. Nowadays the physical contacts described by Heroard would strike us as bordering on sexual perversion and nobody would dare to indulge in them publicly.'[39]

If it is accepted that the majority of adult males nowadays refrain from touching children sexually not from inherent distaste for this type of activity but because moral and social scruples intervene, then it could reasonably be argued that in a slave-owning society such as ancient Rome, where such behaviour would not be socially and morally unacceptable,[40] sexual play between masters and young slaves must have been normal.[41] After all, if it is granted that a master had sexual relations with his

September 1952): 'My sexual passion for my ten-year-old daughter [Margaret] is obsessive. I wonder if you'll come to feel like this about your son. I can't keep my hands off her' (*Letters*, ed. M. Amory (Penguin, London, 1980), p. 380). (I would like to thank the *CQ* referee for the preceding quotation.)

[34] See J. L. Herman, *Father–daughter Incest* (Cambridge, Mass./London, 1981), pp. 12f.: results of surveys by Kinsey and others show $\frac{1}{5}$–$\frac{1}{3}$ of all women reported some sort of childhood sexual encounter with an adult male; these figures may be lower than average because only white middle-class women were used as subjects.

[35] R. Summit and J. Kryso, 'Sexual Abuse of Children: A Clinical Spectrum', *Amer. J. Orthopsychiat.* 47 (1977), 237–51.

[36] J. Mohr, R. Turner and M. Jerry, *Pedophilia and Exhibitionism* (Toronto, 1964), p. 34; K. Plummer, above, n. 31, p. 226. For a contrary feminist view that children do not enjoy such encounters see Herman, above, n. 34, p. 28.

[37] Plummer, above, n. 31, pp. 229–30.

[38] P. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (tr. R. Baldick, 1962; reprinted London, 1973), pp. 98ff.

[39] Ibid. p. 101.

[40] It might be argued that the Romans felt the same sort of sentimental attachment towards their children as we do, and would regard sexual play with a young girl with the same abhorrence. Though this may well have been true in the case of freeborn *virgines*, a distinction must be made between freeborn children and those of servile status.

[41] Compare O. Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery* (London, 1967), p. 42 'the sexual exploitation of female slaves by white men was the most disgraceful and iniquitous aspect of Jamaican slave society. Rape and seduction of infant slaves; the raping of the common law wives

older male and female slaves as a matter of course,[42] why should these begin only at puberty? What scruples would he have had about engaging in some sort of sexual play with a pretty little slave girl who would in a matter of a few years become his mistress in the full sense of the word?

In an interesting article,[43] W. J. Slater discusses the social custom among the Romans, especially women, of keeping *delicia* (or *deliciae*) in the form of very young slave children (normally male) to amuse and entertain them by their witty chatter, especially at banquets. Often these were obtained from Egypt, but *vernae* could also be used for the same purpose (cf. Tib. 1.5.26 'garrulus verna'). Slater suggests that, although these did not necessarily grow up to become *delicati*, there may have been some overlap, and gives evidence that the activities of *delicia* may have extended from the dining room to the bedroom. So too H.-J. Van Dam, commenting on the status of the *delicium* Glaucias in Statius' epicedium for the dead slave-child, draws a distinction in principle between *deliciae* kept for amusement and older *delicati* used as sexual partners, but goes on to point out that *deliciae* can in literature be used in the sense *delicati*, and that 'there is, moreover, no reason to exclude the idea of having a sexual relationship with boys of prepubertal age'.[44]

The comment just cited could equally apply to female children, especially as the assumption on which it is based, that *delicia* were almost always boys, can be shown to be ill-founded. Although most of the literary examples of *delicia* cited by Slater are male (e.g. the *delicium* of the emperor Commodus who was called Philocommodus, and who shared his master's bed),[45] several of his inscriptional instances are for females. In fact, a detailed examination of the Roman inscriptions of *CIL* vol. 6[46] shows a very different picture from that suggested by the literary evidence. Of a total of 99 epitaphs for a *delicium* (very occasionally called *delicia*), the majority are for females – 53 cases, as opposed to 41 for males (in 5 the name cannot be read). Many of these are children of Erotion's age or younger (there are 12 epitaphs for girls of six years or less, as well as another 6 for females under the age of ten). And perhaps more unexpectedly, the term *delicata* is twice as common as *delicatus* (14 epitaphs are for *delicatae* as opposed to 7 for *delicati*). Slater noted that *delicatus* is often a synonym

of the male slaves... were the order of the day'; M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London, 1980), pp. 95f. '... unrestricted availability in sexual relations. This is treated as a common-place in Graeco-Roman literature from Homer on; only modern writers have managed largely to ignore it' (he lists some references but not to very young girls).

[42] See e.g. J. Schmidt, *Vie et Mort des Esclaves dans la Rome antique* (Paris, 1973), pp. 61f.; K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire* (Brussels, 1984), p. 118; Finley, above, n. 41; E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London, 1980) on Juv. 2.57; J. Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man* (tr. by T. Wiedemann, Oxford, 1974), p. 7; Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Od.* 2.4 intro. p. 67.

[43] W. J. Slater, 'Pueri, Turba Minuta', *BICS* 21 (1974), 133–40.

[44] H.-J. Van Dam, above, n. 25, p. 73. H. W. Prescott, 'Inorganic Rôles in Roman Comedy', *CP* 15 (1920), 261, seems to identity *delicia* and *delicati*: 'pueri delicati were a special type of handsome young voluptuaries... on intimate terms with their masters... conventionalized as pert youngsters furnishing entertainment with their saucy wit.' An example is Paegnium in *Persa* who provides patter talk to pad out Act 2. In Comedy, then, the functions of *delicium* and *delicatus* are combined. Note the absence in Comedy of *delicatae*: inscriptional evidence provides a different picture (see further below).

[45] Herodian 1.17, Cassius Dio 67.15. Slater (above, n. 43) does, however, make mention of Ausonius' Bissula, and Mau, *RE* s.v. *deliciae*, includes Martial's Erotion, though neither Slater nor Van Dam mention her (Slater gives Erotion as the name of a *delicium* but without referring to Martial specifically).

[46] Via the computer concordance compiled by E. Jory and D. G. Moore (1974), published as *CIL* vol 6 part 7.

for *delicium* in the inscriptions, in contrast to literary texts, where the reverse applies.[47] This is confirmed by the fact that *delicatus* is used four times of males aged nine years or less (two of these are three years old) and *delicata* 7 times of females aged ten and under (in three of these cases the age is three years or less). And whereas the term *delicatus* is in literary Latin most frequently applied to older male slaves who are used for sexual purposes, in the inscriptions the oldest *delicatus* whose age is mentioned is nine years old. There is one inscription for a *delicata* of 16, the others in which the age is given are for young children.[48] Finally, contrary to Slater's suggestion that it was mainly women who kept *delicia*, the inscriptions examined reveal a total of 51 male owners as opposed to only 38 female owners, and of these male owners half the slaves owned are female.

In the light of the above, I would suggest that the distinction between young *delicia* and older *delicati* was not as clear-cut as the common literary use of *delicatus* with specific reference to paederasty would suggest. It seems to have been common for both sexes to keep a favourite pet slave, called either *delicium* or less commonly *delicatus/a*. The degree to which there was a sexual element in the relationship between master (or mistress) and slave would have varied according to the age and sex of both slave and owner, as well as the owner's sexual preferences.[49] All slaves in this position were sexual playthings, whether potential or actual.

Before returning to Erotion, I should mention briefly two cases, one literary, the other from the inscriptions, in which a relationship between a male master and a very young female *delicium* possesses erotic overtones. The first is a series of poems by Ausonius on Bissula, a young German slave girl. References throughout the poems themselves and in the introductory prose preface emphasise the erotic nature of these *lusus* along with their generic levity.[50] The girl is obviously a *delicium*. The language of the 4th poem in particular is full of erotic commonplaces: 'delicium, blanditiae, ludus, amor, voluptas, / barbara, sed quae Latias vincis alumna pupas, / Bissula, nomen tenerae rusticulum puellae, / horridulum non solitis, sed domino venustum'. Although her age is not given, for these poems are not epitaphs, it seems she is very young (apart from the lines quoted, there is a reference in the third poem to the fact that she was a captured slave, lacking both mother and nurse; in two other poems she is referred to as *virguncula*). A more clear-cut example, in which the girl's age is given, is an epitaph (*CIL* 6.5163) set up for a 22-year-old man and his *delicium* Gutta, age 7, who died on the same day as her master and was buried with him: 'M Allienus Sp. f. Romanus decessit ann. XXII Gutta puella delicium eius ann. VII eodem die mortua uno rogo combusta in uno'. The notion of a man and woman being buried in the same tomb is an erotic commonplace.[51]

[47] I.e. *deliciae* (the literary equivalent of *delicium*) is used for *delicatus* in a sexual sense, e.g. Virg. *Ecl.* 2.2, 9.22, Plaut. *Most.* 15, *Pers.* 204.

[48] Conversely, the term *delicium* is occasionally applied to a person in their teens or early twenties (in the case of females, one is 23, four more between 13 and 17; of males one is 22, two are in their mid-teens), though in these cases the word could conceivably describe a function for which they were remembered but which they have outgrown.

[49] Male masters have more or less the same number of male as female *delicia* (25 female, 26 male); this contrasts with female owners of *delicia* who prefer female children (26 are by females for females, but only 12 for males by females). Though this last fact might suggest that there was no sexual element, it could equally well be that it was because of the possible sexual element that it was not thought as seemly for women to keep male (as opposed to female) *delicia*.

[50] Cf. (in the prose preface) 'obscuritas'...'arcana securitate'...'verecundia'...'erubesco' and in the second epigram 'pone supercilium' (line 2) etc.

[51] E.g. Ov. *Met.* 4.157 (Pyramus and Thisbe), Propertius 4.7.94. For a Greek epitaph on a young slave girl couched in erotically-tinged language, cf. Crinagoras' epigram on the 9-year-old

There can be little doubt that Erotion was Martial's *delicium*. Clues to this effect are found in the language which the poet uses of Erotion not only in this piece (cf. especially line 17 'nostros amores gaudiumque lususque') but also in the earlier poem 5.34, where he refers to the girl as his 'oscula ... deliciasque' (line 2: *deliciae* is the usual literary term to denote a *delicium*) and wishes that 'inter tam veteres ludat lasciva patronos / et nomen blaeso garriat ore meum' (lines 7–8). The verb *garriat* is especially significant: *delicia* were prized above all for their entertaining chatter. In this connection it is also noteworthy that Martial appends the phrase 'blaeso ore'. The adjective *blaesus* (= 'stammering, indistinct'), used also by Ovid of Corinna's parrot (*Am.* 2.6.24), has passed unremarked, presumably on the assumption that it is an appropriate word to apply to the speech of a young child. This would certainly be so if she were two or three years old. But Erotion died just short of her sixth birthday, by which age most children have learnt to speak clearly. We might recall at this point another passage of Ovid (*A.A.* 3.293ff. 'quid, cum legitima fraudatur littera voce / blaesaque fit iusso lingua coacta sono?...') where *blaesus* refers to a speech impediment deliberately affected as a sexual allurement. Is it possible that *delicia* were encouraged to talk in a babyish way which was regarded as adding to their charm?

Further evidence that Erotion was a *delicium* is offered by the name Erotion itself. It has generally been assumed that this was the real name of Martial's little slave-girl. But it is not attested as a slave name in Latin inscriptions: the closest parallel in *CIL* is the *cognomen* Erotio at 2.557, an epitaph for Helvia Erotio, (probably free-born) daughter of a freedwoman.[52] On the other hand, a *meretrix* in Plautus' *Menaechmi* is called Erotium, and the Greek form *Ἐρώτιον* is listed in *RE* (8.1362ff. K. Schneider) as an example of an *ἑταίρα* name.[53] The diminutive form is common in such names; others listed in *RE* include *Ἀδελφάσιον*, *Ἀηδόνιον* and *Ἀνθράκιον* (cf. also Plautus' Philocomasium (*Mil.*), Philematium (*Most.*), Philotium (Ter. *Hecy.*) etc.). It is possible that Martial chose the name Erotion as a pseudonym because of its erotic associations. An aura of unreality is also suggested by the Greek spelling of the word: in Latin, female diminutive names in -ion normally end in either -ium or -io.[54] An alternative explanation is that Erotion was the girl's real name (or nickname, perhaps) and that she was called this because she was her master's *delicium*.[55]

I do not mean to suggest by the above that Erotion's relationship with Martial involved actual intercourse. As stated earlier, most sexual contacts documented today between adult males and female children, even those involving men suffering from the mental condition known as paedophilia, do not include this element, and it is much

Hymnis (*A.P.* 7.643) which begins *Ὑμνίδα τὴν Εὐάνδρου, ἐράσμιον αἰὲν ἄθυρμα | οἰκογενές, κούρον αἱμύλον εἶναέτιν.*

[52] Occasionally it is found as a man's name e.g. M. Erotio, a priest. It is not listed by J. Baumgart, *Die römischen Sklavennamen* (Diss. Breslau, 1936), p. 68 among slave names at Rome, though this form of Greek diminutive in -ion (written in Latin -ium/io) is common e.g. Philematio/ium, Asterio, etc. It is found in first-century A.D. Greek inscriptions of slaves (see L. C. Reilly, 'Slaves in Ancient Greece', *AE* 1905, p. 196 no. 11 and *AE* 1917, no. 319, p. 35).

[53] It is also a freeborn name. For other examples, see P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1987), p. 168.

[54] J. Baumgart, loc. cit.; Plautus uses the ending -ium of women (mainly *meretrices*) and -io of men (except two who are *pueri delicati*).

[55] Slater, above, n. 43, p. 137 lists several names of *delicia* which are Greek: Euphrosyne, Thallusa, Methe, Apate etc. Cf. Lucretius' list of pet names at 4.1160ff. – mostly Greek forms are given, though note that two proper names (Palladium and Lampadium) are in the Latin spelling. Were *delicia* given Greek names as nicknames? All this assumes that Erotion is a real person: it is not impossible that the poems about her are *jeux d'esprit*, but I would not wish to argue this. On this point, see further below.

more likely that in Rome relationships with young *delicia* involved sexual play, graduating to a full-scale sexual relationship when the girl became old enough.[56] To assume that Martial's feelings for the slave-girl were merely paternal, however, is to view the situation through the eyes of a modern, not a Roman reader. K. R. Bradley,[57] using Martial's epigrams as evidence for the Roman attitude to slaves, says that the poet 'takes for granted the fact that slaves of both sexes *and of all ages* were objects of carnal sexual pleasure and that the contexts of his poems will reflect reality sufficiently to be understood by his readers'. To the examples he quotes I suggest that the Erotion poem be added.

To return to the epigram under discussion. When it is finally revealed that Martial's *puella* is Erotion, the surprise does not lie in the realisation that erotic language has been inappropriately applied to a child, nor, as Kenney thinks, is the surprise effect dissipated because the language of the first part of the poem reflects the way an adult might talk to a small girl. Rather, the reader discovers, to his amusement, that the kind of comparisons usually applied, in an erotic context, to an older *puella* have been used in relation to a little slave girl who is at present only an erotic plaything, a future, rather than an actual, mistress.

We started out with the contention that the first section of the poem is light-hearted in tone, effecting a smoother transition to the joke against Paetus in the second half and affording the piece as a whole a certain degree of unity. Apart from the general tone, there are two other ways in which the two halves are linked.

First, the device of wittily anticipating surprise effects, commonly employed, as we have seen, in the first 17 lines, is used in this section of the epigram as well. Although it only becomes clear in the closing line that Paetus is a hypocrite and that his consolation is therefore worthless, the surprise effect is prepared for in the foregoing lines. Paetus' behaviour is shown as conventional in the extreme: in line 19 he is depicted going through the traditional motions of beating the breast and plucking the hair, while line 22 bears a strong resemblance to a common type of grave inscription in which the virtues of the deceased woman are listed as a series of adjectives in asyndeton, e.g. 'hic sita est Amymone Marci optima et pulcherrima, / lanifica pia pudica frugi casta domiseda', *CE* 237 or 'nobilis Euphrosyne, facilis formosa puella / docta opulenta pia casta pudica proba', *CE* 1136.3–4).[58] Yet, as in the first part of the poem, traditional language is cleverly adapted to suit a somewhat less than usual situation: so in line 19 'pectus... pulsans pariter et comam vellens', the sincerity of Paetus' conventional behaviour is undermined by the emphatic alliteration.[59] And in line 22 the choice of epithets is revealing. In epitaphs for women it is usual to emphasise moral qualities, such as *pietas* and *pudicitia*, by applying to the woman in question adjectives such as *optima*, *lanifica*, *pia*, *pudica*, *fidelis* and so on. Here, by contrast, these traditional descriptions are replaced by *nota*, *superba*, *nobilis* and *locuples* (*superba*, normally derogatory, is especially disturbing), all of which stress the wife's wealth and social standing.[60] In other words, we are presented with a list of his

[56] Cf. Hor. *Od.* 2.5 and *A.P.* 5.124.1ff. on a young girl who is not quite ripe for sexual encounters.

[57] Above, n. 42, p. 118.

[58] See R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana, 1962), pp. 295–7.

[59] Cf. the parodic Ov. *Am.* 2.6.3 'plangite pectora pinnis' (addressed to the birds mourning the deceased parrot).

[60] For descriptions of women on epitaphs, see Lattimore, above, n. 58, pp. 275–80 and 295–7. There are no parallels in the *CIL* 6 index for any of these adjectives, with the sole exception of *nobilis* in *CE* 1136.3–4 (= 6.9693) cited earlier. There *opulenta* is also used. In the sense 'of noble birth,' *nobilis* is normally applied (in the classical period at least) only to men: in the case of

wife's virtues as Paetus, with his distorted moral values, sees them, culminating in her wealth: obviously the reason why he married her. By couching abnormal sentiments in the format of a commonplace epitaph, Martial is able to bring out the full extent of Paetus' hypocrisy: he affects a conventional display of grief, but this grief is not sincere, as his choice of epithets demonstrates, since his wife's death has not deprived him of the thing about her that he values most.

The second way in which the first and second sections of the poem are linked lies in the hyperbolic presentation of the list of comparisons (described above). Not only is the hyperbole designed to contribute to the tone of the first section, but as well it prepares the ground for the speech of Paetus. In lines 18–22, Paetus is portrayed adopting the typical stance of a *consolator*.[61] His reported words contain two of the most common *topoi* of the prose *consolatio*, namely the exhortation to the bereaved not to indulge in excessive grief[62] and the *consolatio per exempla*:[63] in this case, instead of giving historical examples of those who have suffered even greater losses, he uses the *exemplum* of his own bereavement: 'ego coniugem extuli et tamen vivo' (line 21). The point of most *consolationes* is not to prevent the addressee from mourning altogether, but from giving way to their feelings; this is especially common in the philosophical *consolatio* where restraint of grief is presented as a Stoic virtue.[64] That the emotion displayed by Martial is considered by Paetus to be excessive is suggested by the use of *deflere* (*de* is a strengthening prefix; at Virg. *Aen.* 6.220 and 11.59 the verb means to take one's fill of weeping; compare Lucretius 3.905f. 'at nos ...cinefactum te.../insatiabiliter deflevimus, aeternumque/nulla dies nobis maerorem e pectore demet')[65] and by 'tamen vivo', which is reminiscent of passages in *consolationes* where the bereaved person is urged to keep living if only for the sake of those other relatives left behind.[66] Paetus is suggesting that Martial is so overcome by grief that he doesn't want to live any more and so, like Seneca's Marcia, he is in need of consolatory advice.

In Kenney's view, Paetus has misunderstood Martial: the poet's behaviour, he argues, is realistic and his grief, albeit genuine, is restrained. Now the fact that Martial can use the death of Erotion to make a witty attack on the hypocrite Paetus would certainly indicate that, in reality, he has his grief in check (on this point, see further below). In terms of the dramatic situation depicted in the poem, however, the attitude of Paetus is perfectly logical. In the first section of the poem, the poet has adopted the

women it carries only its basic sense 'renowned'. See T. Hillard (whom I thank for this reference) in B. Garlick *et al.*, *Stereotype Attitudes Towards Women in Power* (Greenwood Press, forthcoming), n. 22, pp. 58–9.

[61] I.e. in both Stoic (prose) *consolationes* and also on real epitaphs (see Lattimore, above, n. 58, p. 217 for examples of the theme 'you should stop lamenting'. Perhaps the tombstone element is uppermost since, as we have seen, in listing the virtues of his wife Paetus sounds like a tombstone inscription.

[62] Cf. Sen. *Ad Marc.* 1.1, *Ad Polyb.* 4.1; *Cons. ad Liv.* 7f., 353f., 467ff.; Lattimore, above, n. 58, p. 219. Contrast the poetic epikedion, where excessive grief is the norm, cf. Van Dam, above, n. 25, p. 152.

[63] Cf. Sen. *Ad Marc.* 2.2, 12.4, 13.3, etc.; *Ad Polyb.* 14.3ff.; *Cons. ad Liv.* 59ff.

[64] See C. E. Manning, *On Seneca's 'Ad Marciam'* (Leiden, 1981), p. 42; cf. Seneca, *Ad Polyb.* 18.6, *Ep.* 63.1–3, 13–14, 98.18, 99.1–2, 15–21, *Dial.* 6.2, 11.4.3; also Hor. *Od.* 2.9.17–18 (with Nisbet and Hubbard *ad loc.*).

[65] Cf. Austin on *Aen.* 6.220; Prop. 1.16.13 has it in the sense 'weep to exhaustion' and Ovid uses it of Orpheus grieving over Eurydice at *Met.* 10.12.

[66] Cf. *CE* 59.12–17; Lattimore, above, n. 58, p. 203 points out that a common theme on tombstones is the wish not to go on living: cf. *Cons. ad Liv.* 323 where the widow prays for death; Sen. *ad Marc.* 3.3 (giving in to grief shows loss of desire to live). This is also a topos of the literary epikedion: cf. Van Dam, above, n. 25, pp. 86f, 154 and on *Silv.* 2.1.24–5.

persona of someone in the grip of an excess of emotion – and now we see the reason for the hyperbolic character of the imagery, with its parodic tinge. Lines 1–17, by presenting us with a *persona* overcome by excess grief, have offered in advance a *raison d'être* for Paetus' stance as *consolator* which in turn leads on to Martial's satiric attack.[67]

Having explored the way in which the poem works as a unified whole, I would like to address one further issue, namely the question of the extent to which Martial's grief for Erotion is genuine.

It is undoubtedly true that in writing such an epigram Martial (in contrast to the *persona* he adopts for dramatic purposes) is able to view his feelings about Erotion's death with a certain amount of detachment. This raises the question of the nature of these feelings, the sincerity of which has never, to my knowledge, been called into question. Even if the wit of the poem we have just examined has led some to consider it devoid of genuine sentiment, at any rate the first Erotion poem (5.34) and the later epigram in the 10th book have won universal admiration as a noteworthy instance of the display of genuine human emotion on the part of a Latin poet. Even Kenney, who deplores the tendency of twentieth-century scholars to be influenced by a modern-day sentimentality, remarks that the fact Martial uses Erotion to make a rhetorical point about the nature of human grief and hypocrisy 'is no reflection on his sincerity'.[68] So affecting does one scholar[69] find poem 5.34 in particular that he argues Erotion cannot be a mere slave but must be Martial's own daughter by a slave-woman.

It seems to me, on the contrary, that if Martial were really Erotion's father, or if his feelings towards her were as deep as a father's for his own child, he could not bring himself to use her death as the starting-point for a witty epigram such as 5.37. Could Cicero, for instance (supposing he had been a writer of epigrams and been able to take himself less seriously) have written such a piece after the death of his Tulliola? The same applies, to a lesser extent, to poem 34. Although this piece may seem a reasonably straightforward epitaph in comparison with its companion piece, if it is set beside other poems on the deaths of slave-children[70] or with actual tomb inscriptions, it is seen to be an extremely contrived piece in the manner of a Hellenistic epigram in which conventions are wittily exploited. In particular, we may point to the image of the little girl scared of the shades and the 'ora Tartarei prodigiosa canis' (the use of *prodigiosa* is witty) and, in the last couplet, the wish that the earth may be light on her since 'non fuit illa tibi', a witty adaptation of the traditional formula 'sit tibi terra levis' which Martial probably derived from an epigram of Meleager.[71]

I am not necessarily suggesting that Erotion is, like Ovid's Corinna, a mere figment of the poet's imagination. But it is wrong to allow one's judgement to be clouded by sentimentality, as most have done, simply because the girl is of such a tender age. The number of real epitaphs for young slaves that are preserved demonstrates beyond doubt that the Romans were able to feel a strong attachment for them.[72] In Martial's

[67] I am not suggesting that there is no genuine sentiment behind the first section of the poem or that Martial's elaborate catalogue of Erotion's attractions is no more than an exercise in hyperbole. As Kenney rightly noted, Martial's genuine feelings provide a foil for Paetus' lack of sincerity. I am merely attempting to explain why the poet's grief is expressed in such hyperbolic terms.

[68] Above, n. 3, p. 80.

[69] Above, n. 29.

[70] For instance Martial's epigrams 1.88 and 101 and also the third poem on Erotion which – apart from the expression 'exiguis manibus' – could stand as a real grave inscription; cf. also Catullus' poem (101) on his brother's death.

[71] *A.P.* 7.461; cf. 204, an epigram of later date for a pet bird.

[72] On epitaphs for slaves as showing genuine affection see N. M. Kay, *Martial Book XI: A Commentary* (London, 1985), on Mart. 11.91.

case, granted that Erotion existed, it would make no sense to write even amusing poems about her if he were not affected in some way by her death. And in the present poem, the satiric attack which forms its climax carries greater impact if the display of grief for Erotion which Paetus rebukes, though characterised for dramatic purposes as excessive, has some basis in reality: Paetus' insincerity is thrown into relief by contrast with the genuine grief experienced by the poet. But the point to be emphasised is that Martial's feelings for Erotion were those of a master for his little *delicium*, someone whom he loved and enjoyed the company of while alive but whose death he could regard with enough detachment to use it as the basis for two witty compositions. He no doubt felt rather as one would towards a pet animal whose death, though distressing at the time, is not on the same tragic plane as that of a human being, especially a young daughter.[73]

To summarise, in the foregoing discussion it has been demonstrated that poem 5.37 is a highly skilful composition in which Martial achieves unity by several methods. In the first place, he employs the same device throughout, namely a series of surprise twists, most of which are anticipated by the ambiguous use of language, though (as has been remarked) this aspect of the poem's wit is only apparent in retrospect. Secondly, harmony is attained between the two main sections of the epigram not only because both contain an element of humour, but also because the hyperbolic manner in which the girl is extolled in the first section characterises the grief displayed there as excessive and provides the impetus for Paetus' offer of consolatory advice. Finally, the nature of the poet's feelings for Erotion has been re-examined: they are not the quasi-paternal sentiments of an adult towards a small slave child but the playful, erotically-tinged, sentiments of a master for a delightful little *puella delicata* whom the poet will always remember with affection.

APPENDIX ON *SENES CYCNI*

In arguing that lines 1–17 are light-hearted, Lloyd and Kenney both pointed to the collocation *senes cycni*, which the former regarded as 'highly amusing',[74] the latter as 'impossibly recherché' (in other words, so recherché as to rule out the possibility that the phrase is entirely serious).[75] How valid are these assessments?

It is not particularly funny to apply the term *senex* to an animal rather than a human being: Ovid uses the word of *cervi* who shed their horns (*A.A.* 3.78); it is also applied to *corvi* (Priap. 83.12), *canes* (Phaed. 5.10.7) and *porci* (Juv. 6.160). Lloyd (loc. cit.) found humour in the fact that it is not old swans which sing but dying ones: to this literal-minded interpretation Martial would no doubt have replied that if a swan is ready to die it might normally be expected to be advanced in years.[76] Lloyd's reading of the line as humorous is based on the assumption that the sweet singing of swans is the main point at issue, but in view of the many comparisons in Greek and

[73] It is no coincidence that the Latin word *deliciae* is used of both animals and slaves.

[74] Above, n. 3, p. 40. P. Howell, *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial* (London, 1980) on Mart. 1.115 views 'lotis cycnis' as humorous hyperbole and compares Kenney's remark on 'senibus cycnis'.

[75] Above, n. 3, p. 79.

[76] He suggests that Martial either meant it to be amusing or else was being unwittingly funny through ignorance of this fact – but it seems scarcely credible that M. could be unaware of such a common topos. There is conceivably a reference to the fact that young swans (up to the second and occasionally the third year) have varying degrees of grey among their white feathers (cf. Peter Scott, *The Swans* (London, 1972), p. 23) so that pure white plumage is associated with older (i.e. old) birds.

Latin poets between the white plumage of swans and the hair of old men,[77] it seems likely that Martial purposely chose the epithet *senes* in order to suggest both[78] the characteristics for which swans were famous – their sweet voices and their whiteness – since both connotations are equally appropriate in the context.[79] Moreover, although the collocation *senes cycni* is found here for the first time, the phrase was repeated later by Martial in an address to the god Apollo (9.42.2: 'sic semper senibus fruare cycnis'), a passage in which a comic expression would be entirely out of place. Nor would Statius have chosen to employ the phrase in epic (at *Theb.* 5.341 Orpheus' voice is said to be 'mitior senibus cycnis') if he felt it to be anything less than completely serious in tone.[80] In short, the phrase *senes cycni* is not intrinsically humorous, as Lloyd claimed. What is, however, amusing is the context in which the phrase is used, that is, the comparison of a *puella* to *old* swans, the incongruity being underlined by the juxtaposition of *puella* and *senibus*.

As to the term 'recherché', which Kenney used to categorise the phrase *senes cycni*, I suggest that this description could equally be applied to the whole phrase 'puella senibus mihi dulcior cycnis', which is unusual in several ways: (1) in comparisons involving the adjective *dulcis* the object of comparison is normally something that is sweet to the taste (e.g. *dulcior melle* Plaut. *Asin.* 614, Ov. *Tr.* 5.4.29f.; *thymo ... dulcior* Virg. *Ecl.* 7.37; *matura dulcior uva* Ov. *Met.* 13.795; the closest parallel to the present use occurs at Seneca, *Phaed.* 302 'dulcior vocem moriente cycno', though there the force of the epithet is clarified by the accusative of respect *vocem* (*dulcis* by itself is never used in the sense 'sweeter-voiced'); (2) coupled with *mihi*, *dulcior* might be expected to be followed by *vita* as, for example, at Cicero, *Ep.* 14.17.1 'Tulliola nobis nostra vita dulcior est'[81]; (3) in other cases where an addressee is compared with swans, the main point at issue is the swans' plumage (e.g. Virg. *Ecl.* 7.37 'candidior cycnis', cf. Mart. 1.115; Ov. *Met.* 13.796 'mollior cycni plumis'). Martial is attempting to combine in one highly condensed expression a number of commonplace ideas: the singing of the swan which is as sweet as the girl's voice,[82] the whiteness of the swan's plumage (like the hair of an old man) which matches the fairness of her complexion, and the fact that she is *dulcis*, in the sense of 'dear', to the poet. In fact

[77] E.g. Aristoph. *Wasps* 1063ff. *νῦν | δ' οἴχεται, κύκνου τε πολιώτεραι δὴ | αἱ δ' ἐπανθοῦσιν τρίχες*, Eur. *Bacc.* 1365, Ov. *Tristia* 4.8.1 'iam mea cycneas imitantur tempora plumas', Mart. 3.43.2 (of a man who dyes his hair) 'tam subito corvus, qui modo cycnus eras').

[78] For both ideas at once compare Eur. *Her.* 108f. *ἐστάλην | ἰηλέμων γόων* [*γέρων* Nauck] *ἀοιδὸς ὥστε πολιὸς ὄρνις*.

[79] The whiteness of the girl's complexion is referred to later in the poem (surely this must be the implication of the images in lines 4–6) but it would be suggested also to the reader by the reference to swans, in view of the fact that the whiteness of swans is commonly used in Latin poetry to evoke feminine beauty: see A. Sauvage, above, n. 11, pp. 232–4. For the sweetness to Martial of her voice, compare poem 34. Translations like that in Ker's Loeb ('a maid, sweeter-voiced to me than aged swans') and the Budé edition of H. J. Isaac ('fillette à la voix plus harmonieux à mes oreilles que le dernier chant du cygne') are inadequate, since the implication of whiteness is missed and *dulcis* by itself cannot mean 'sweeter voiced'.

[80] Cf. also Nemes. *Cyn.* 314. I assume Statius is borrowing from Martial rather than the reverse: the *Thebaid* was published in 90–1, whereas Martial's fifth book can be dated to 89 in view of several references to an edict of Domitian of that year (e.g. poems 8, 14, 23) and to the victory over Dacia of the same year (see poem 3).

[81] Cf. Lucan 5.739 'vita mihi dulcior' [*sc.* coniunx].

[82] On the singing of swans see especially G. Arnott, above, n. 19, pp. 149–53. The presence of the idea here is confirmed by the fact that when Martial uses the phrase 'senes cycni' at 9.42.2 the context is about song (Apollo); cf. also Statius, *Theb.* 5.341 referred to above. The parallel with Eur. *Her.* 109f. (see n. 78 above) is also relevant. On the sweetness of the swan's voice, cf. also Isid. *Orig.* 12.7.18 'olor est avis, quam Graeci kuknon vocant ... a canendo est appellatus, eo quod carminis dulcedinem modulatis vocibus fundit'.

the whole line is largely a compression of Virgil's 'thymo mihi dulcior Hyblae, candidior cycnis' (*Ecl.* 7.37f.), a passage which readily springs to mind because of the similarity of context – a series of comparisons addressed to a poet's *puella*. Whether or not 'recherché' is to be equated with 'humorous' is a matter for the judgement of the individual reader; if it is, then (as I hope to have demonstrated in the foregoing discussion) the first line is even more amusing than Kenney divined.[83]

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[83] I would like to thank Dr L. Watson and Professor D. Konstan for help and encouragement; also the anonymous *CQ* referee.