

# Traditional Exempla and Nerva's New Modernity

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## Making Fabricius take the cash traditional exempla and the problem of modernity

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How a culture handles marvels is revealing, as Rebecca Langlands demonstrates in this volume. How it manipulates and twists its clichés is equally so. This paper investigates the handling of the clichés of exemplarity in texts of the Nerva/Trajanic period, with a particular focus on two relatively short texts, Martial 11.5 and Pliny *Ep.* 8.6. Both are about Republican *exempla* though they differ in genre and in mode: Martial's epigram seems to offer playful panegyric of a new emperor's effect upon the best of Rome's (long dead) Republican citizens, while Pliny's letter briefly adduces Republican *exempla* to attack the memory of an imperial freedman and deplore his effect upon the contemporary Senate – one of Pliny's rare moments of invective. What unites them is a treatment of *exempla* in counterfactual terms to explore human responses to powerful individuals. This counterfactual treatment of exempla strikes me as gaining ground in the period between Julius Caesar and Trajan, particularly in both satirical and panegyric modes as they appear across multiple genres – a curious phenomenon that is eloquent of the disconnection from (or rejection of) the past that marks the sense of modernity that defines the literary horizons of this period.<sup>1</sup>

Book 11 was Martial's first publication in the post-Domitianic period (its likely publication date is December 96), and presents itself as (yet another) collection for the Saturnalia, and the holiday's drinking and mayhem are celebrated in poems 2, 6 and 15. Although its opening poem is not addressed to the new emperor, it is clearly marked as Nerva's book; he presides over the Saturnalia in 11.2<sup>2</sup>, appears as Augustus restored in 11.3, as a third-time consul under the protection of Julian/Trojan deities in 11.4, and as the *princeps* who (unlike his predecessor) gives married women no easy cover for their infidelities and forces them to sin openly in 11.6. The book is distinguished by a high degree of obscenity, which seems to mark a renewed sense of freedom and gaiety under Nerva. The sense of a return to the Augustan Golden Age is also implicit in echoes of Ovid in the opening poems.<sup>3</sup> The representation of a new Emperor as a new Augustus is a rhetorical move that is, by now, conventional in the praise of a new Caesar, as each successive ruler is matched against the one Caesar who became the *exemplum* for them all.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the 'porous boundary' between praise and mockery, see Garthwaite (2009) 427.

<sup>2</sup> This poem too, with its implied *recusatio* of imperial epic, is expressed in the counterfactual (if there were a Maecenas now...).

<sup>3</sup> In 11.2, for example, the remark about Martial's works being read by the stiff centurion in the Getic frosts marks how far we have come since Ovid tried desperately to escape them and bring his poems home; see Fitzgerald (2007) 189-90. On Martial's Ovid, cf. Rimell (2008) 165-8; Hinds (2007). On the political quality of the opening poems of the book, see Fearnley (2003) 622.

<sup>4</sup> See Gunderson (2014) 132-3; Lowrie (2007) 102-8; cf. Kraus (2005) 186.

11.5, however, offers a solemn 'catalogue' of Republican heroes in an epigrammatic *nekuia*: the poet imagines summoning up the men of the Republican past (Camillus, Fabricius, Brutus, Sulla and the central figures of the Republic's dying struggle: Caesar, Pompey, Crassus and Cato) and observing their responses to the new Emperor.

Tanta tibi est recti reuerentia, Caesar, at aequi  
quanta Numae fuerat: sed Numa pauper erat.  
ardua res haec est, opibus non tradere mores  
et, cum tot Croesos uiceris, esse Numam.  
Si redeant ueteres, ingentia nomina, patres,  
Elysium liceat si uacuare nemus,  
te colet inuictus pro libertate Camillus,  
aurum Fabricius te tribuente uolet;  
te duce gaudebit Brutus, tibi Sulla cruentus  
imperium tradet, cum positurus erit;  
et te priuato cum Caesare Magnus amabit,  
donabit totas et tibi Crassus opes.  
Ipse quoque infernis reuocatus Ditis ab umbris  
Si Cato reddatur, Caesarianus erit.

Your reverence for right and justice, Caesar, is as great as was Numa's, but Numa was poor. This is a difficult thing, not to sacrifice *mores* to wealth, and to be Numa when you have exceeded many a Croesus. If the ancient fathers, mighty names, were to return, were it allowed to empty the Elysian grove, Camillus, unconquered in liberty's defence, will pay court to YOU, Fabricius will accept the gold if YOU give it; Brutus will rejoice in YOUR leadership, to YOU bloodstained Sulla will hand over his imperium when he is about to lay it down; and Magnus along with Caesar (the private citizen) will love YOU and Crassus will bestow on YOU all his wealth. Cato, too, himself, were he to be restored, called back from the nether shades of Dis, will be Caesarian.

We might read 11.5 as a new version of Horace 1.12.33-44 (*Romulum post hos prius an quietum / Pompili regnum memorem*, 33-4), where another exemplary catalogue illustrates, in an elaborate priamel, the ethical norms now matched and exceeded by the Caesarian honorand who brings a new *quietum...regnum*. Indeed, such positive readings of 11.5 abound. Nauta, for example, takes 11.5's exemplary catalogue as an assertion of Nerva's republican spirit, 'mirroring the official ideology', while Nordh regards it as 'the most accomplished of Martial's rhetorical comparisons'.<sup>5</sup> For such readers, the ghosts of the exemplary dead here acknowledge that Nerva's rectitude and his lack of tyrannical overreaching exceed anything they've met before.

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<sup>5</sup> Nauta (2002) 437. Cf. Nordh (1954) 234; cf. 231: 'waxworks skillfully arranged around the image of the emperor' (on such a reading one might say 11.5 is the epigrammatist's answer to the Forum of Augustus). Cf. Kay (1985) 68; Gowing (2005) 105; Rimell (2008) 162, O'Connor (1998) 193: 'in 11.5 Martial praises the emperor's rectitude, which is such that it recalls Rome's ancient heroes.'

Two factors should give us pause. First: an ethically normative use of Republican *exempla* is most uncharacteristic of Martial's own voice; indeed, as we shall see, he routinely ascribes such rhetoric to a *tristis turba* of hirsute hypocrites. That is not to say that Martial can't fawn over an emperor – such poems as 7.5, 8.4 or 9.93, in praise of Domitian, can be hard to stomach, and one can catch echoes of such material in Martial's praise of Nerva elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> However, although Martial's comparanda for Domitian included divinities and demigods, and particularly, in Book 9, Hercules, a Republican Heldenschau of this kind is not to be found among Martial's praise mechanisms for Domitian.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the ethical norms such exemplary figures usually represent are shattered by the disturbingly uncharacteristic behavior that is ascribed to them in 11.5, and further problematized by Martial's unorthodox handling of a classic rhetorical trope. In what could be a solemn, even frightening image, the poet summons his Republican *exempla* from the dead.<sup>8</sup> Such rhetorical necromancy fitted the grand mode in oratorical contexts, and was frequently used by Cicero to exert pressure on the living to behave properly.<sup>9</sup> Memorable examples include the ghost of Appius Claudius summoned to castigate Clodia in *Pro Caelio* 33-4, the 'thought experiment' in the *Pro Milone* that restores Clodius to life (*Mil.* 79.19, 79.12), the conjuring up of the elder Malleolus in *Verr.* 2.1.94, the appeal to Marius and other famous destroyers of Gauls in *Font.* 36.7, or the suggestion that Manlius and other criminally-minded Sullan colonists should summon up their great patron (*Cat.* 2.20.10). It is a means of speaking 'home truths' to the living, of bearing witness to crimes, and of re-affirming some traditional (often familial) virtue, but it is not, one would think, an epigrammatic mode: it needs big lungs (*ualentiorum haec laterum sunt, Orator* 85.9) and a grand occasion. Above all, the pressure is on the living to change their ways in accordance with the models of the past; the *exempla* themselves are the fixed benchmark. The point of *exempla* is that, whatever enhancements are added to the tales, they symbolize fixed traits. This is true of both good and bad figures: Cicero's rhetorical necromancy in the *Pro Milone*, for example, imagines what would happen if we could bring Clodius back; the point is precisely that Clodius could not change.

But Martial sketches a necromantic cartoon, as he empties out the Elysian grove (*Elysium liceat si uacuae nemus, 6*). Furthermore, when his ghosts arrive, they do so not to enact 'restored behaviour' by re-performing the values for which they traditionally stand, but only to affirm that in view of Nerva's

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<sup>6</sup> Nauta (2002) 436-7.

<sup>7</sup> Garthwaite (1993). On Hercules, see Henriksen (2012) xxviii-xxx and *ad* 9.64, 65, 101. Cf. *Siluae* 4.2.50-1; 4.3.155-7. In 9.65 we find a familiar reliance on the counterfactual (*si tibi tunc isti uultus habitusque fuissent...tu iussisses Eurysthea*); cf. 9.103 (Paris might have returned home with Castor and Pollux instead of Helen, had they been as beautiful as Hierus and Asylus).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Odysseus' fear as the dead pour out of Erebus: Homer, *Od.* 11.36-43.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cic. *Sest.* 130-1 (Publius Servilius 'summoned practically all the Metelli from the underworld' in order to enlist a contemporary Metellus (then a hostile consul) on the side of those who supported Cicero's recall from exile). On the grand challenge of bringing the dead back to speak to the living, see Cic. *Topica* 45, *Orator* 85.9, *Brut.* 322. On the motif *ab inferis excitare*, see Dufallo (2007) esp. 13-35; Steel (2013) 151-9; Panayotakis (2010) 300-3 on theatrical traditions of 'necromancy'.

existence they will no longer be the men they once were.<sup>10</sup> Making these *exempla* change so radically is Martial's innovation, and to illustrate the shock of this, I suggest a moment of counterfactual literary history. In the *Pro Caelio*, Cicero's Appius Claudius Caecus is the model of Claudian excellence against which his descendant's actions are to be judged, as Cicero imagines him asking her, "did I break up the treaty with Pyrrhus so that you could make shameful amorous bargains?" But let us imagine a poem by Catullus or Calvus in which Appius is raised from the dead, only to offer Clodia a chunk of Pyrrhus' money if she will sleep with him (after all, we all know those Clodii kept it in the family...). This is nonsense, of course, but it is the kind of thing that is going on in Martial 11.5. If *exempla* transmit models of behavior from the ancient world to a present one, Martial seems here to be jamming transmission, not least by selecting two of the most intransigently virtuous *exempla* available, namely Cato and Fabricius Luscinus, to abandon their *mores* in the face of Nerva.

The second text, Pliny 8.6, offers a briefer (but equally overblown and unexpected) list of *exempla*, this time contrasting the honours to conquering generals of the past with the immeasurably greater ones showered upon Claudius' imperial freedman and *a rationibus*, Pallas, as a reward for services performed as a civil servant in AD 52:

conferant se misceantque, non dico illi ueteres, Africani Achaici Numantini, sed hi proximi Marii Sullae Pompei – nolo progredi longius – infra Pallantis laudes iacebunt. (Pliny *Ep.* 8.6.2)

No necromancy here, but once again a catalogue of great Republicans is eclipsed by a single figure. In this instance, the *exempla* serve to show the absurdity and venality of the modern imperial world, a fawning senate's poor grasp of reality and of traditional values, and even the despairing sense of contemporaries that the honours for Pallas ought to have been no more than some kind of joke on the senate's part (*dicerem urbanos, si senatum deceret urbanitas*, 8.6.3).

Both these sets of *exempla* are presented in counterfactual terms, as thought experiments (let's empty out the underworld and see what the dead would think of Nerva ~ imagine piling up the praise of all these men and look at how modest it would seem by comparison with that for Pallas). Both are laden with irony, as Rome's greatest men are lined up to serve as backdrop to two very different moderns, one a new emperor and the other an easy target from a previous generation. Moreover, each text engages to some degree with the expectations generated by a traditional exemplary catalogue and the stock figures who typically populate it.

#### *Republican exempla under imperial rule*

The last decade has seen a brilliant demonstration that Republican *exempla* gradually lost force during the course of the first century AD, and that the early imperial period, in particular, is marked by shifts in attitudes to the

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<sup>10</sup> The term is originally that of the theatre anthropologist, Richard Schechner (Schechner 1985), but has been applied by Dufallo (2007) 75, in particular, to instances of exemplary prosopopoeia in the late Republican and Augustan periods.

depiction of traditional *exempla* in literature and in public architecture.<sup>11</sup> Under Augustus, Cicero's hortatory or apotrepitic use of *exempla* gives way to *exempla* used as contextualizing tools to depict the renewal of past virtues by today's Great Man; Augustus himself was said to have declared that he set up the statues of the great men in his forum to require people to compare his performance with theirs.<sup>12</sup> In imperial authors, republican *exempla* acquire a stock laudatory function in addresses to autocratic rulers, particularly at the moment of accession; in Pliny's *Panegyricus* for example, Trajan is portrayed not only as a 'type' of the old Roman (*vident enim Romanum ducem unum ex illis veteribus et priscis, Pan. 12*) but as having surpassed the traditional *exempla* and become himself his only rival and *exemplum* (*sine aemulo [ac] sine exemplo secum certare, Pan. 13.5*).<sup>13</sup> The special pressures of the contemporary world contribute to the excellence of the new *exemplum*, since it is so much harder to embody that degree of virtue when one lacks the inspirational atmosphere of the days of Fabricius, Scipio or Camillus:

hac mihi admiratione dignus imperator <vix> videretur, si inter Fabricios et Scipiones et Camillos talis esset; tunc enim illum imitationis ardor semperque melior aliquis accenderet (*Pan. 13*)

These are the sorts of things *exempla* are meant to do: measure the latest great man against the best standards (and, in encomiastic mode, find that he matches or surpasses them, or sets a new standard all his own for himself and others to follow).

There was still, of course, a fairly brisk trade in *exempla* writing; the deaths of each generation's great men acquired exemplary status, and biographical traditions were havens for new *exempla*-making and for the restoration of old *exempla*. In other contexts, *exempla* become a technical resource, tools of a trade (we might think Frontinus' collection of Stratagems, designed as a user-friendly sourcebook or indeed of Valerius Maximus' collection of exemplary tales). Above all, they were still bread and butter for the rhetorical schools. Quintilian expects the orator to store vast numbers of these figures in his mind for quasi-didactic deployment:

an fortitudinem, iustitiam, fidem, continentiam, frugalitatem, contemptum doloris ac mortis melius alii docebunt quam Fabricii, Curii, Reguli, Decii, Mucii aliique innumerabiles?

Take heroism, righteousness, trustworthiness, self-discipline, frugality, contempt for pain and for death. Who will better teach these lessons than Fabriciuses,

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<sup>11</sup> Gowing (2005) and (2009). Dufallo (2007) also argues for a change in this period in the handling of the *ab inferis excitare* motif.

<sup>12</sup> Suetonius *Aug.* 31.5. See Gunderson (2014) 135-6. Cf. *Res Gestae* 8: *multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi.*

<sup>13</sup> Gowing (2005) 123. The mode is set already by Cicero, *Marc.* 5. in which no previous Roman generals are mentioned by name, but all are swept up into a single group outclassed by Caesar himself.

Curiuses, Reguluses, Deciuses, Muciuses and countless others? (Quintilian 12.2.30)<sup>14</sup>

Such figures are, as Mayer notes, ‘the small change of the exemplary tradition’.<sup>15</sup> They were also, of course, done to death:

“decantatae,” inquis, “in omnibus scholis fabulae istae sunt; iam mihi, cum ad contemnendam mortem uentum fuerit, Catonem narrabis.”

Those tales are played to death in all the schools; any minute now, when we’ve got to the ‘death should be scorned’ schtick, you’ll be telling me about Cato. (Seneca *Ep.* 24.6)

So Martial 11.5 is playing heavily upon a cliché (with Cato as the climactic element, what’s more), one familiar from the rhetoricians’ schools but also from historiography or even epic. However, neither epigram or epistolography seems a natural haven for classic Republican *exempla*. Cicero uses them far less in letters than in speeches or other works; the same is true in Seneca, who, although generous with *exempla* in his dialogues, keeps them to an efficient minimum in letters. Even Pliny – never one to worry about appearing a bit of a prig – tends to avoid them, although he is happy to report a paid to him – by Nerva, of all people, about the *exemplum simile antiquis* that he himself has provided.<sup>16</sup> *Exempla* seem, perhaps, too formal for the genre.<sup>17</sup>

As for Martial’s epigrams, our modern, urban, disrespectful poet tends to adopt familiar distancing strategies (although, as we shall see, there is an unusual concentration of key Republican *exempla* in book 11).<sup>18</sup> *Exempla*, in Martial, are typically spoken by pontificating hypocrites, and if there is a lesson in their use at all, it is, “don’t be like the people who spout *exempla*.”<sup>19</sup> Take the depilated pretty boy of 9.27 who never ceases to invoke the bearded *maiores*,<sup>20</sup> but uses his ‘Catonian tongue’ for ‘unspeakable’ sexual acts whenever opportunity arises (*pu det fari / Catoniana, Chreste, quod facis lingua*, 14):<sup>21</sup>

Curios, Camillos, Quintios, Numas, Ancos,  
Et quidquid unquam legimus pilosorum  
Loqueris sonasque grandibus minax verbis,

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<sup>14</sup> In a familiar move, the great individuals become pluralized types in a catalogue of names; see Henderson (2011) 153, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Mayer (1991) 133. Seneca was particularly fond of including Fabricius (along with Curius) in his catalogues of *exempla*.

<sup>16</sup> 7.33.

<sup>17</sup> See Armisen-Marchetti’s response to Mayer: Mayer (1991)174.

<sup>18</sup> For an emperor’s book distinguished by a concentration of poems centred upon a single motif, cf. Garthwaite (1993) 85 on the theme of hypocrisy in ‘Domitian’s’ Book 9.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 4.11 where Antonius Saturninus likes to associate himself with Mark Antony; Lorenz (2002) 138f.

<sup>20</sup> For hairy *exempla*, cf. 9.47.1-2. On the absence of body hair as an indicator of effeminacy and mark of the *cinaedus*, see Kay (1985) 164.

<sup>21</sup> See Greenwood (1998) 244-5; Powell (2010). For the cultivation of an old-fashioned appearance and a fondness for *exempla* as hypocritical covers for inadequacy, cf. 1.24; 5.51; Quintilian 12.3.12; Juvenal 2.3 (*qui Curios simulant et Bacchanalia uiuunt*); contrast Sallust *BC* 54.6 on Cato’s preference for being (rather than merely seeming) good.

Et cum theatris saeculoque rixaris. (9.27.6-9)

You prate of Curii, Camilli, Quinctii, Numas, Ancuses, and of all the bristly philosophers we read of anywhere, and you vociferate in loud and threatening words, and quarrel with the theatres and the age.<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere, both Numa and Brutus become markers of boastful absurdity, as we find *consule...Bruto natus/natam* as shorthand for 'old' in 10.39.1 and 11.44.1, or the claim of Martial's addressee in 3.62.1 that he drinks a vintage from the days of Numa (*quod sub rege Numa condita uina bibis*). There is no moral exemplarity here, and the drinker's implied claim to connoisseurship is destroyed by the nonsensical exaggeration (a wine of so many centuries in age would be undrinkable were it even available).

*Exempla* in Martial might, alternatively, highlight the absurdity of someone who cannot respond appropriately to unglamorous reality. There's the lawyer who is stuck in his own grandiose rhetoric about long-dead tyrannies and injustices that might have suited a grand (republican?) case about public violence, murder or poisoning, but makes him a foolishly ineffective brief for a man who just wants to bring his neighbor to book for the theft of three goats.

6.19.5-9

tu Cannas Mithridaticumque bellum  
et periuria Punici furoris  
et Sullas Mariosque Muciosque  
magna uoce sonas manuque tota.  
Iam dic, Postume, de tribus capellis.

You, with a mighty voice and every gesture you know, make the court ring with Cannae, and the Mithridatic War, and insensate Punic perjuries, and Sullas and Mariuses and Muciuses. Now mention, Postumus, my three goats.

In 7.58, Galla has a depressingly large number of *cinaedi* among her list of past husbands, and our speaker advises her to look next for one of the rough, hairy sort who never shuts up about the Curii and the Fabii – only to correct himself: *sed habet tristis quoque turba cinaedos*. *Tristis turba* is the key phrase here; this is the misery squad, the harsh critics, the bores – the readers, in other words, who shouldn't be reading Martial in the first place.

So when in 11.5 Martial wades into the exemplary shallows, piling up his *exempla* in a catalogue in 11.5, and speaking in the epigrammatist's own voice, apparently with earnest panegyric intention, it seems unlike his usual practice. However, although 11.5 remains an extreme case, (Nerva's) book 11 as a whole does make more frequent use of republican or kingly *exempla* than any earlier book.<sup>23</sup> Usually they serve to mark contrasts between past and present (Fabricius' daughter and stern Cato in 11.2, Augustus and Maecenas in 11.3, Aeneas – and Nerva as himself the best *exemplum* – in 11.4, the blizzard of

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<sup>22</sup> See Henriksén (2012) 118. The plurals that imply endless repetition in 9.27.6 and 1.24.3 are also distancing and belittling strategies.

<sup>23</sup> On the Republican (and Augustan) flavor of Book 11, see Rimell (2008) esp. 162, together with the judiciously skeptical response of Lorenz (2010) 25.



*exempla* we've seen in 11.5). Even the counterfactual mode appears early in the book (11.3 asserts that if there were now a Maecenas, Martial would write epic rather than trivia to entertain frost-pinched centurions on the empire's rim).<sup>24</sup>

Two of Martial's stock figures of earlier books appear with particular frequency in Book 11. Fabricius, who is re-imagined as taking the famous bribe in 11.5, appeared in 7.68.4 as the model of old-fashioned serious virtue who might nevertheless have enjoyed Martial's *lascivos libellos*, and in 9.28.4 in fits of laughter at Latinus' mimes in 9.28.4.<sup>25</sup> He is the strait-laced template for the imagined reader in 11.16 (a useless one, since Martial's wanton verses will arouse him anyway), and the simple ploughman in 11.2 whose daughter is excluded – along with Cato – from reading Martial's book. Cato himself acquires programmatic significance from the very beginning of Martial's work.<sup>26</sup> In the Preface to Book 1, he is the archetype of the man who explicitly doesn't belong in Martial's audience and will have to leave – or adapt: *non intret Cato theatrum meum, aut si intraverit, spectet* (1 *praef.*).<sup>27</sup> This figure is in himself already a kind of counterfactual template in at least three other instances in Martial before he appears as the climactic *Caesarianus* in 11.5. Two poems of Book 1 are about the modern possibility of being a better sort of Cato: in 1.8 one can be Cato (or indeed Thrasea) without the dramatic suicide (*hunc uolo, laudari qui sine morte potest*, 1.8.6), while in 1.78 one can commit suicide without being Caesar's enemy (*hanc mortem fatis magni praeferre Catonis / fama potest. huius Caesar amicus erat*, 1.78.9-10).<sup>28</sup> In both poems the message is 'be as Cato was, but don't do as Cato did.' In 9.28 Cato is also among the figures who could be 'turned' into something different from what they were by Latinus (*Latinus / ille ego sum, plausus deliciaeque tuae, / qui spectatorem potui fecisse Catonem, / solvere qui Curios Fabriciosque graves*, 9.28.1-4).<sup>29</sup>

Like Fabricius, Cato too appears with particular frequency in Book 11. In 11.2 he re-appears as the undesired reader, along with Fabricius' daughter, while in 11.39 he is the absurd model for the disapproving freedman Charidemus. 11.15 and 11.16 function as a pair. 11.15 robustly excludes from its readership both Cato and any forbidding Sabine ladies. It calls instead upon all drunks and

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<sup>24</sup> 'If Maecenas were alive now' is a recurring counterfactual for Martial: 1.107; 8.56; 11.3, 12.4. See Saller (1983).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. 10.73.3 where Fabricius is imagined as too fond of simplicity to wear the fine toga recently presented to Martial by a friend.

<sup>26</sup> See Lorenz (2002) 142. Other Cato epigrams include 2.89 (*exemplum* for drunkenness); 11.39 *libertum Catonem*; 5.51 (the character who parades books and scribes, but can't offer a simple greeting in Latin or in Greek. On Cato as impediment to enjoyment see Citroni 1975: 11. Cato becomes a generic marker and a signal of persona and type (the exemplary version of Catullus' *seuiores*); Pliny embraces his own status as the 'Cato' figure in the verse of Martial (3.21) and of Suetonius Augustinus (4.27). We should also note his decision to stay away from the Saturnalia celebrations in 2.17.24, and that he is (?) extending his Saturnalia holiday by reading Tacitus as if he were Tacitus' teacher in 8.7). 'I'm a whole barrel load of Catos' he says (what would the collective noun be: a sphincter of Catos? I'm worth a thousand Catos) – but I'm the one ensuring the immortality of your verse, and I'm the one you're writing about.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald (2007) 71-3. Cf. 6.64 on the critic of Martial's verse who lacks the moral authority of a Fabius or a Curius.

<sup>28</sup> See Fitzgerald (2007) 81-3. A further modern improvement upon Catonian suicide is offered in 6.32, on the death of Otho.

<sup>29</sup> On the pairing of 9.27 and 9.28, partly by means of the *exempla uirtutis* around which the two epigrams are built, see Henriksén (2012), xxxiii

scented partygoers to make love to girls and to boys, and to speak of the penis in good plain Latin:

nec per circuitus loquatur illam,  
ex qua nascimur, omnium parentem  
quam sanctus Numa mentulam uocabat.

Martial's exhortation is framed in quasi-Lucretian terms: no reader of the *DRN* could read *illam, ex qua nascimur, omnium parentem, quam...* without anticipating praise of *alma Venus*, but Martial's readers should know better. Martial's invocation of venerable authority ('holy Numa') before the bathetic punchline (*mentulam uocabat*) suggests that his blunt word has the best and most moral of precedents, but this comic appeal to the (a?) history of language is as hollow as the appeal to Numa to validate claims about the vintage of the wine in 3.62.1. The *mentula* is the hero(ine), as it were, of 11.16 too; here, however, we see Martial taking advantage of his appeal to Numa in 11.15 to play further counterfactual games with *exempla*, as he imagines the effect of his poems upon readers who model themselves upon even the most moral figures of the Roman past:

O quotiens rigida pulsabis pallia uena,  
sis gravior Curio Fabricioque licet!

A girl from Patavium (i.e. a Livian girl, steeped in moral *exempla*?) will find herself aroused by them, and even Lucretia will seek secret titillation from them when Brutus is absent (a really nasty twist on a story that had this modest woman raped by Tarquinius in Brutus' absence). So it seems that Martial's poetry has the same power to 'turn' exemplary figures that Nerva's virtues have – he too can make Fabricius (or at least a fake would-be 'Fabricius') behave as he would not normally expect to, and can make Lucretia obsessed with sexual titillation in her husband's absence.<sup>30</sup>

In the light of all this, a reading of this epigram as a priamel in praise of Nerva starts to look unconvincing, precisely because of the way in which the poem expresses a knowing suggestion that exemplary figures can be 'turned' by an encounter with modernity. Moreover, a close reading will suggest that Martial is engaging creatively – and destructively – with the normal workings of exemplarity, and that his counterfactual necromancy has shattering consequences for the whole of imperial history before the winter of 96.

### *Undoing history*

Tanta tibi est recti reuerentia, Caesar, at aequi  
quanta Numae fuerat: sed Numa pauper erat.  
ardua res haec est, opibus non tradere mores  
et, cum tot Croesos uiceris, esse Numam.

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<sup>30</sup> Inversion of tradition is a typical move for Martial: see e.g. 11.104 on the disappointingly modest wife, with Watson (2005) *Mnemosyne* 58: 62-87.

Si redeant ueteres, ingentia nomina, patres,  
 Elysium liceat si uacuare nemus,  
 te colet inuictus pro libertate Camillus,  
 aurum Fabricius te tribuente uolet;  
 te duce gaudebit Brutus, tibi Sulla cruentus  
 imperium tradet, cum positurus erit;  
 et te priuato cum Caesare Magnus amabit,  
 donabit totas et tibi Crassus opes.  
 Ipse quoque infernis reuocatus Ditis ab umbris  
 Si Cato reddatur, Caesarianus erit.  
 (Martial 11.5)

This nekuia, reminiscent of Odyssey 11,<sup>31</sup> is Martial's version of the 'Parade of Heroes' in *Aeneid* 6, including not only Numa (*Aen.* 6.809-12), but also Camillus (taking over as the man who acts *pro libertate* from the Vergilian Brutus), Brutus himself, Caesar and Pompey (on good terms, as they are in Vergil's Underworld as Anchises makes his vain attempt to forestall their war, *Aen.* 6.832-5), as well as Fabricius (*paruoque potentem/Fabricium Aen.* 6.843-4). Vergil populated the underworld with the future worthies of Rome, whom Anchises shows to his son as inspiration; Martial empties out hell of past worthies, by contrast, to make them irrelevant and uninspiring in the face of the new 'special one'.<sup>32</sup>

The epigram's opening offers a playful adynaton that comments on the **impossibility** (implicit in *ardua*) of retaining *mores* under pressure of wealth. If no more of this epigram had survived than the first four lines, we would have thought it was a poem about wealth – a panegyric *nuga* complimenting Nerva on the paradox of his virtue amid riches.<sup>33</sup> As the epigram goes on, the wealth/poverty theme does indeed persist and develop: at least two of the *exempla*, Fabricius and Camillus, were famous precisely for rejecting the money of foreign invaders. A plutocrat of more degenerate recent times, Crassus, crowns the 'financial' narrative of this epigram. Both Fabricius and Camillus, however, overturn their own stories, as we see Fabricius finally taking the gold, and Camillus paying homage to Nerva; even grasping Crassus gives up his

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<sup>31</sup> Has Martial been inspired by Achilles wishing that he had made a different choice in life? See Holzberg (2004/5) 220 on the coincidence of book number, suggesting that 11.5 stands for the encounter with the Underworld that must precede Martial's 'Odyssean' Spanish *nostos*.

<sup>32</sup> Martial's scenario may owe something to mime: see Panayotakis (2008) 196 on the performances of Vergil's underworld scene in the theatre that are suggested by Augustine *Sermones* 241.5 (= PL 38,1135-6): 'it seems that the ghosts of deceased Romans somehow participated in the plot'.

<sup>33</sup> I owe this point to Andrew Morrison. The familiar link between poverty and goodness appears in the declamatory tradition with particular reference to some of the *exempla* in 11.5. Seneca reports an adoption situation described by Arellius Fuscus (*Seneca, Contr.* 2.1.8: a poor man's son refuses the opportunity to be adopted by a rich man who has disinherited his own sons; he expresses gratitude for the poverty that enables him to live blamelessly, and then adduces classic *exempla* in support: Croesus, Crassus, Tubero and Fabricius, three of whom appear in Martial 11.5. On the special value of such figures to the moralist, see Mayer (1991) 165. NB in Book 11, poverty and old-fashioned severity as paired concepts are rejected in poems 2, 3 and 5, and – to some extent – in 4 as well).

fortune to Nerva.<sup>34</sup> A cynical reading might suggest that all three have finally found someone so outlandishly wealthy that they finally give way (was it just a matter of finding someone rich enough?): indeed, they prove the general truth that it is difficult (i.e. impossible) not to give up one's *mores* in the face of real wealth. This pattern of abandonment of old-fashioned *mores* takes over in the remainder of the poem, as each hero changes his nature in the face of this Numa who is richer than Croesus but has managed not to give up his *mores*.

In keeping with the celebration of a new emperor's accession, a further motif emerges, namely the restoration of freedom in the smooth transfer of power to a worthy ruler. The Republican *exempla* draw force from a shared interest in how power is transferred and transmitted, and most of them belong to a 'civil war' template.<sup>35</sup> And with this theme comes the further paradox that dominates the main body of the poem: Rome's greatest symbols of freedom, as well as its most clichéd exponents of one-man rule, will also abandon their positions in the face of the new leader who has finally (in Tacitus' words) joined together the principate and freedom (*res olim dissociabiles*).<sup>36</sup> This is edgy, even potentially risky comic writing, as most of Martial's *exempla* are drawn from 'freedom' stories of various kinds. It is a study of the impossible, an adynaton from start to finish, in which even the most stable and reassuring material from the past is now re-considered and changed by its imagined interaction with the modern world.<sup>37</sup> One would have said, after all, that Fabricius taking the cash was impossible and unthinkable, and yet in this new world he will not just take it but want it (*uolet*). As Lowrie notes, well-functioning *exempla* are perfectly balanced between singularity and repeatability,<sup>38</sup> but Martial's exemplary figures are being undermined on both counts, as they are called back from the dead to be changed into venal 'wets' by the beneficent influence of Nerva.

The situation seems even more odd, when one asks where Nerva is positioned within these refashioned exemplary narratives. If this were 'straightforward' laudation, then Nerva would outclass Numa, Fabricius, Curius, Pompey and Caesar *in the very qualities they exemplified*. But the figure of Nerva seems to be inserted into Martial's counterfactual histories on the wrong side, as it were. He plays a more successful version of Pyrrhus (*te tribuente*) in the face of Fabricius' imagined ghost.<sup>39</sup> He outdoes Numa, but he does so not just as a modest-living ruler, but as the man who also beats Croesus (and who will then

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<sup>34</sup> Crassus exemplifies *avaritia* in Val. Max. 9.4.1, and his love of wealth dominates the opening of Plutarch's *Life of Crassus*. Cf. Seneca *QN* 5.18.10; Cic. *Fin.* 3.22 on Crassus' greed as the motivation for his Parthian adventure; For Crassus as *praepotentem* on the basis of his private wealth, see Cic. *Fin.* 2.57; Seneca *Contr.* 2.1.7; 5.1; 5.7; 7.2.7. Here the man of frugality and the man of greed will *both* change their ways for this versatile new Numa.

<sup>35</sup> On this template see Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010) 3-21. Camillus might seem an odd figure in this context, although in some ancient sources he too is associated with Concord and with the sharing and extension of power (as the man who vowed a temple of Concordia after a particularly difficult episode in the history of the struggle of the orders): Plut. *Cam.* 42.3-4; Momigliano (1942); Farrell (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 3.1.

<sup>37</sup> This mode is found in other epigrams that praise the emperor (e.g. 1.6 an adynaton of nature, associated with the gods).

<sup>38</sup> Lowrie (2008) 177.

<sup>39</sup> On Martial's verse as allowing a variety of incompatible, possibly uncomfortable perspectives, while still remaining light-hearted, cf. Garthwaite (1993) 94; cf. Lorenz (2002) 142 on Martial's persona as that of a 'naïve Figur, die eine komische Panegyrik vortragt'.

be further enriched by the counterfactual acquisition of Crassus' wealth too). What Crassus' presence here also communicates to us, of course, is that it is not just the positive *exempla* who abandon their natures for Nerva – any dominant characteristic, good or bad, is simply reversed by Nerva's existence in this epigram that now looks like one of the most thoroughgoing explorations of Saturnalian upheaval one could imagine.<sup>40</sup>

Let's take Fabricius, one of the most consistent of *exempla*, to whom are attached numerous colourful stories about his honourable aversion to bribery (and his rejection of bribes offered, variously, by Pyrrhus, Pyrrhus' doctor, and Samnite enemies), his resistance to the allure of great (even kingly) power, his personal poverty and stern insistence that others live by proper standards of frugality, his mental equanimity and even his contempt for the Epicureans' interest in pleasure. The common elements in all the tales of him are his poverty and his stability in moral rectitude: as Buszard observes, 'he is not virtuous despite his poverty; his poverty reflects and enhances his virtue.' He is accorded extraordinary prominence in Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus*, as the model Roman statesman. Plutarch also reports (here and in the *Apophthegmata*) his saying that if Pyrrhus' own people got to know Fabricius, they would choose his rule over that of Pyrrhus. This very consistency underpins Quintilian's view (*Inst.* 7.2.38) that Fabricius becomes an unusable *exemplum* for any context other than a praise of poverty (if, for example, one were trying to defend theft on the grounds of poverty).<sup>41</sup> This is, then, a most unexpected character to give way to the new wealthy 'Numa' who is virtuous despite his wealth.<sup>42</sup>

Just to enhance the bizarre 'Alice in Wonderland' feel, the changes are expressed in a crucial and unexpected shift from the 'future less vivid' construction, with its quasi-counterfactual present subjunctive (*redeant*), to the simple future indicative that is conjured into existence by the poet's thought experiment: if we WERE TO summon all our great men from the dead, they WILL behave in front of Nerva as they never did in life. It is conceivable that the influence of Vergilian prophecies and the Heldenschau of *Aeneid* 6 is to be felt in the apodosis in each imagined situation.<sup>43</sup> At all events, in Martial's epigram, those who stood for freedom (one way or another) WILL simply abandon that principle: Camillus, who fought for liberty WILL cultivate Nerva, Brutus WILL NOT be the assassin of tyrants, Sulla WILL change his decision to return power to its normal channels, Caesar and Pompey, who could not acknowledge any leader, will now do so, and even the third member of their triumvirate (the more modern Croesus) will cede his financial power. Cato, the ultimate symbol of

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<sup>40</sup> NB Dolansky (2011) 495 on the Saturnalia, when 'normative codes of behavior were reversed – is this part of the game here: that *exempla* turn themselves into their own opposites?

<sup>41</sup> Plut. *Pyrrhus* 20-21.4; Val. Max. 4.3.6; Cic. *Off.* 3.86; Columella 1. Praef 13f.; Cic. *Cael.* 39 (poverty and resistance to pleasure); Horace *Odes* 1.12.40-4; Seneca *Ep.* 120.6; Quintilian 12.2.30; Aulus Gellius *NA* 4.8.7; Florus 1.13.21; Tac. *Ann.* 2.88. On Fabricius, see Buszard (2005), esp. 482-6; Vigour (2001); Berrendonner (2001). (removal of Rufinus from senate for possession of excessive silverware, cf. Florus 1.13.21); Tac. *Ann.* 2.88 (Fabricius still a 'live' exemplum for Tiberius).

<sup>42</sup> On a special association of Numa with Nerva in Martial, see Henriksen (2012) 118.

<sup>43</sup> Think of such passages as *Aen.* 1.296-7 (*cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum frater Quirinus / iura dabunt*). The future tenses in Anchises' prophetic speech to Aeneas in Book 6 (in which, after all, he too implores Caesar to give up his attempt to gain supreme power) are in the background here too.

republican freedom, crowns this foray into the world of the impossible as the epigrammatic ‘point’ in this poem, by embracing the Caesarism that has (before this Caesar) been synonymous with the loss of freedom. That the climax of the poem is that Cato WILL BE a Caesarian (*Caesarianus erit*) acknowledges that our impossible, imaginary situation WILL call forth new reality; this is the crucial shift of outlook that guarantees permanence for Caesarism (a permanence that could no longer exist for Fabricius, Sulla, or Brutus). The poem shifts, then, from today’s Caesarian rectitude (*tanta tibi est recti reverentia, Caesar*), to an exemplary past (*Numa pauper erat*) that is now erased by the greater achievement of a new Caesar, to the certainty of a future that will itself also eradicate and undo the past (*colet, uolet, gaudebit, tradet, amabit, donabit, CAESARIANUS ERIT*). Despite the illusory Catonian teleology in the catalogue, we begin and end with (this) Caesar, and (this) Caesar also negates every bit of history in between. The two themes of money and freedom/succession work together in a counterfactual study of the flow of both power and money to Nerva, the man who already beats all Croesuses. Moreover, as each exemplary figure gives up the thing that makes him distinctive, there is no ethical re-assessment of the original deed in each instance: it is simply an unnecessary act in a world where Nerva exists, and so can be imaginatively and counterfactually excised from history.

The ‘Catonian’ punchline of the epigram emphasizes one further phenomenon: it is not the republic that has faded into the background (although its heroes are ‘undone’ here), but the imperial past. What Martial does, however, is even more radical, and positions us at multiple renewal points in history simultaneously, as he ‘undoes’ not only imperial history but the memory of republican history, too, sweeping away the triumviral wranglings of the 60s-40s and the dictatorship of the 80s, and imaginatively suggesting a new ‘regal’ period under the Just King Numa/Nerva – one in which the most unbending resisters of kings and tyrants willingly support the newcomer and all our civil wars never happened. That the ‘quiet’ Nerva’s avatar is the peaceful Numa (also often depicted as elderly, like Nerva), who was the first to *take over* power in the new Rome after the turbulence of Romulus’ foundation, only re-emphasises that this poem is marking a turning point in history, and that one of the things we are all turning away from in this Saturnalian jeu d’esprit is civil discord and the violent death of a ruler.<sup>44</sup> The most recent ‘transfer of power’ is elided in this fantasy tale in which one is never quite sure where one is on the historical timeline, and the new emperor is not, after all, the old man who came to power after a violent end to the previous regime, but the virtuous man of destiny, formed by nature to be a natural recipient of power willingly handed on. So far, then, this epigram does indeed work as a creatively bizarre panegyric.

### *Change and the Imperial Counterfactual*

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<sup>44</sup> Numa in this poem is could be retrospectively re-interpreted by Martial’s readers as the Numa in Vergil’s Underworld who bears the olive branch (and who follows in the sequence of Anchises’ speech not only from Romulus but also from Augustus): *Aen.* 6.809-12. Dufallo (2007) 119 ‘the importance of Numa’s achievement in bringing peace to early Rome appears, as a consequence, to lie first and foremost in its capacity to recall the possibility of peace to the subjects of Augustus.’

There is a counterfactual exemplary tradition under construction at this period, and Martial is pushing the experiment so far that it begins to feel uncomfortable. This is not, of course, the first attempt at a counterfactual treatment of classic Republican *exempla* in the imperial period – nor, indeed, is it the only uncomfortable counterfactual thought experiment associated with Nerva in our surviving texts. Pliny gives us a curious anecdote about a dinner at Nerva’s house (4.22.4). Conversation turns to the memory of Catullus Messalinus, a man of positively Juvenalian disrepute, and one of Domitian’s two most notorious informers (the other one is reclining beside Nerva at this very party). Nerva asks ‘what would have happened to him if he had survived until today?’ Mauricus replies ‘he would have been here, dining with us.’ It is easy to read this as a rather rueful story on Pliny’s part, but I suggest that it is precisely this kind of ‘what if’ question that is naturally asked at a period like the one immediately after Domitian’s assassination. Syme, indeed, suggested that this could be read as a rather sly gambit from a subtle and canny survivor, a provocative question that elicited exactly the answer he was looking for and shut down a potentially repetitive and even uncomfortable conversation. At all events, Martial 11.5, although seemingly a most unusual production in itself, may have been well addressed to an emperor who, as a poet in the lighter genres himself, would be sympathetic to such literary endeavor and who may have been a master in the handling of *exempla* himself.<sup>45</sup>

The counterfactual is (as a ‘contrary to fact in present time’ construction) built into the use of *exempla*, since the underlying question of so many appeals to *exempla* is ‘what would X do (if he were here now)?’ or Livy’s quasi-historical thought experiment: ‘what would have happened if Alexander had invaded Rome?’ However, the counterfactual mode begins to be used more frequently and ever more creatively during the imperial period. An obvious source genre for such things is that of declamation, which regularly required its practitioners to turn historical or mythological events on their heads and to ask counterfactual questions which are not too far away from the kind of thing we see in Martial 11.5.<sup>46</sup> The most famous examples relating to republican Romans include such questions as ‘should Cicero beg Antony for his life’ (Sen. *Suas.* 6) or ‘should Cicero burn his writings in exchange for guarantees of safety from Antony?’ (Sen. *Suas.* 7); arguments from character could be adduced that (e.g.) Cicero (being the man he was) would do no such thing (e.g. *Suas.* 6.14).<sup>47</sup> It is not difficult, then (though I know of no specific surviving instance), to imagine a declamatory exercise entitled ‘Should Fabricius take Pyrrhus’ cash?’

The undoing of the past becomes an implied feature of any *suasoria* in which a long-dead republican is addressed; even such texts as the two pseudo-Sallustian ‘Letters to Caesar’ imply that history might have been different if only the speaker had been able to persuade Caesar better than his contemporaries had. Cicero’s *Pro Marcello* ascribes to Caesar himself the wish that he could bring back civil war casualties from the dead – an ‘undoing’ of history in the very first ‘imperial’ panegyric, that is then reflected in Pliny’s speech for Trajan

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<sup>45</sup> For Nerva’s letter complimenting Pliny on being an *exemplum simile antiquis*, see Pliny *Ep.* 7.33. Nerva as Tibullan poet: Martial 8.70, 9.26. Cf. Pliny 5.3.5 for Nerva as writer of light salacious verse.

<sup>46</sup> See van der Poel (2009).

<sup>47</sup> See Roller (1997) 124.

(*infectumque reddere quidquid fieri non oportuerit*, *Pan.* 80.3). Although undoing the darker events of the past, as a kind of healing escapism, is not quite the same as the radical undoing of the great exemplary acts that Martial embarks upon, it is clearly part of the trend towards the counterfactual that we are tracing in this chapter.

Successive authors re-imagine a kind of 'ethical' time travel as they ask not only how the *exempla* of the past would have responded to today's conditions, but also how the men of today would be if they could be transported back to better times. On the one hand we might look at Livy's account of Cato's speech against the repeal of the Lex Oppia. Here Cato contrasts the virtue of the (relatively recent) past with the likely greed of today's women, who would stand in the streets (he says) to take the gifts brought by Pyrrhus' ambassador, Cineas (*si nunc cum illis donis Cineas urbem circumiret, stantes in publico inuenisset quae acciperent*, Livy 34.4.11).<sup>48</sup> On the other, we have the famous assurance in the *Dialogus* that just living in the past *would have* made today's men into good orators.<sup>49</sup>

There is also, of course, a further theatrical context in which the counterfactual was a routine element – one that Martial himself was very familiar with – namely the representation of classic stories (including Roman 'historical myths') in the arena. The tale of Mucius Scaevola burning his own hand appears more than once in Martial; the setting is not necessarily Scaevola's own contemporary world, and some of the Scaevola scenes are clearly set in the arena in Martial's own day (in, e.g. 8.30 and 10.25). In a theatrical re-enactment, of course, the 'outcome' of history could turn out differently.<sup>50</sup>

In the literary sphere, rejecting the exemplary past becomes a more frequent motif, as poetic counterfactuals take up the baton and perform a mock-rebellion against the ethical dominance of the past or re-think the past to make a non-traditional point. Ovid's cheeky rejection of stern *exempla*, for example has most to do with how much he himself refuses to conform to them (and welcomes new interpretations in which they conform to his requirements). In the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid asserts that he prefers the *cultus* of the modern day to the simplicity of the old days (*prisca iuuent alios: ego me nunc denique natum / gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis*, *A.A.* 3. 121-2), while elsewhere making light of one of the most familiar stories from Rome's earliest days, the rape of the Sabine women; once again, the counterfactual mode is the vehicle.

Romule, militibus scisti dare comoda solus:

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<sup>48</sup> See Chaplin (2000) 97-105. Here the (imagined) failure to live up to the *exemplum* is the classic symptom of moral decline; in Martial, overturning the *exempla* is the symptom of *mores* retained.

<sup>49</sup> *Dialogus* 41.5; see Gowing (2005) 116-7 on the argument that men like Cicero are no longer needed and that the Republican past is no longer relevant to today; cf. Mayer (2001) 215 on the parallel with Horace *Serm.* 1.10.68 (asserting that the rough Lucilius would change his ways if he were brought into life in the modern world). For the clichéd point that it was easier to live an exemplary life in the old days, see (e.g.) Seneca, *Contr.* 2.1.18 (*facile est, ubi non noveris divitias, esse pauperem*); Pliny, *Pan.* 13 *hac mihi admiratione dignus imperator <uix> uideretur, si inter Fabricios et Scipiones et Camillos talis esset; tunc enim illum imitationis ardor semperque melior aliquis accenderet.*

<sup>50</sup> See (e.g.) the bear that eats Orpheus (the one awkward element, Martial says, that is counter to the usual story) in *Lib. Spect.* 21: Coleman (1990) 62. We might also think of the staged naval battles that could, naturally, go either way: Coleman (1990) 71.



Haec mihi si dederis commoda, miles ero.  
(A.A. 1.131-2)

Later literary counterfactual treatments of exemplary figures, however, begin to imagine the effect of more modern environments on past individuals; from the pressure exerted by the past in traditional ethical exemplary contexts we move to the pressure *on* the past and the surprise effects that can be achieved by exploring the counterfactual. When Lucan, for example, shows us Caesar luxuriating at Cleopatra's banquet, and remarks upon the folly of showing such riches to a such a man, his meditation depends upon a counterfactual, as he imagines the temptations Egyptian splendours would have exerted upon even the most high-principled of the Republic's greatest paupers, Fabricius, Curius and Cincinnatus:

non sit licet ille nefando  
Marte paratus opes mundi quaesisse ruina;  
pone duces priscos et nomina pauperis aevi,  
Fabricios Curiosque graves, hic ille recumbat  
Sordidus Etruscis abductus consul aratris:  
Optabit patriae talem duxisse triumphum.  
(10.149-154)

Here again we find Fabricius and his like abandoning their integrity under the pressure of extraordinary opulence, while this Caesar remains unchanged and unchanging (albeit only in his persistent viciousness).<sup>51</sup> In Book 3, we have already seen Lucan surveying a catalogue of historical moments at which Rome's treasury was enriched, as Caesar breaks down its doors and removes the gold that the Gauls left behind when they were chased from Rome by Camillus, the wealth brought back by Pompey and Cato – and the wealth that Fabricius refused to take from a king (*quo te Fabricius regi non uendidit auro*, 3.160).<sup>52</sup> Once again, history is undone – here in a more straightforwardly sinister way – by the first of the imperial Caesars.<sup>53</sup>

For counterfactual panegyric, however, we can turn to an earlier poem in honour of Nerva's predecessor. Statius *Siluae* 1.1, in praise of Domitian's giant equestrian statue, already makes some of the same moves as Martial 11.5.<sup>54</sup> It offers an extended series of counterfactual propositions, in which the poet manipulates an array of *exempla* from the past, drawing upon the physical qualities of the statue and the historical or mythical associations of its environment to highlight the degree to which it (and, by extension, the emperor it depicts) towers above all forerunners. The counterfactual mode dominates: this horse is so much bigger than epic's Wooden Horse that Troy simply could

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<sup>51</sup> See Lintott (2010) 258.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Lucan 7.358f.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the punchline at 3.168: *pauperiorque fuit tunc primum Caesare Roma* ('then for the first time Rome was poorer than a Caesar'). Cf. Martial 12.15.3-5 on how the new emperor put Domitian's treasures on public display in temples (before then *omnes cum Ioue pauperes eramus*).

<sup>54</sup> Parallel noted already by Nauta (2002) 437.

not have held it, even if her walls had been pulled apart.<sup>55</sup> Statius builds his images from the Vergilian ‘reality’ of the Trojan Horse to an impossible climax that demolishes the traditional narrative of Hector’s death too as it imagines Aeneas and Hector together trying to pull the beast into the city (*ipse nec Aeneas nec magnus duceret Hector!*). In the Roman cityscape, however, Domitian’s horse, has made its way into the Forum, a place where it intimidates and surpasses all other ‘horses’ in the vicinity: Castor’s horse, Cyllarus, is terrified in the temple nearby (1.53-4) and Julius Caesar’s appropriation of the equestrian statue of Alexander in the nearby Forum of Caesar is entirely dwarfed by the new incomer. Finally, even Marcus Curtius, who famously performed a *devotio* by riding his horse into a chasm to pacify the gods, lifts his head from the lake named in his honour to acknowledge Domitian’s superiority as an equestrian.<sup>56</sup> A counterfactual that substitutes Domitian for Curtius rewrites the tale of Curtius’ sacrifice too:

Quod si nostra tulissent  
 saecula, temptasses me non audente profundo  
 ire lacu, sed Roma tuas tenuisset habenas

But if our age had borne thee, thou wouldst have ventured to plunge into the lake’s depths, though I dared not; but Rome would have held back thy rein.

The original Curtius plunged into the chasm because of an oracle requiring Rome to sacrifice her most valuable resource (*quo plurimum populus Romanus posset*, Livy 6.1); his courage *would have been* surpassed by this new horseman in the Forum (i.e. Domitian), who is, nevertheless, *too valuable* to sacrifice and would have been prevented from plunging to his death. The emperor’s superiority is expressed, then, in terms of his capacity to change history.

Above all, however, it is the interaction between the memory of the Caesarian and Augustan period and the presence of the Domitianic horse that is most revealing for our purposes, since Statius exploits the immediate Caesarian environment of the statue to construct a much briefer and more focussed Caesarian version of the counterfactuals we have seen in Martial 11.5. Once again the ‘punchline’ is Cato’s conversion to Caesarism:

hinc obuia limina pandit,  
 qui fessus bellis adsertae munere prolis  
 primus iter nostris ostendit in aethera diuis;  
 discit et e uultu, quantum tu mitior armis,  
 qui nec in externos facilis saeuire furores  
 das Cattis Dacisque fidem. te signa ferente  
 et minor in leges gener et Cato Caesaris iret.  
 (*Siluae* 1.1.22-8)

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<sup>55</sup> We are expected to remember Aeneas’ account in *Aen.* 2.235-9 of the partial demolition of Troy’s wall and the joyful efforts of boys and maidens to pull it into the doomed city. The Vergilian horse is suggested already by the speculation that Pallas could have contributed to its making (*an te Palladiae...effinxere manus*, *Silu.* 1.1.5-6 ~ Verg. *Aen.* 2. 15 *diuina Palladis arte*).

<sup>56</sup> Livy 7.6.1-6; D.H. 14.11.20-1; Val. Max. 5.6.2; Dio Cassius fr. 30.2 ~ Zonaras 7.25; Varro *Ling.* 6.148-50.

Once again the past acknowledges the superiority of the present, as Domitian surpasses Caesar in his characteristic clemency, and (in the poetic counterfactual) entirely eradicates the need for the real historical civil war: Magnus becomes *minor* and even Cato (the climax of all Caesarian ‘priamels’?) accepts this new Caesar.<sup>57</sup>

We can, then, read Martial 11.5 as a reworking (perhaps consciously alluding to Statius) of an old Domitianic panegyric, as the book for the new Emperor plays upon a literary predecessor’s work in another genre for Domitian. The counterfactual, it seems, grows and develops partly as a response to Caesarian power, and by December 96 is already becoming a distinctive modern mode of playful panegyric in the post-Julian world?

### *Bathetic teleology and the counterfactual catalogue*

But now finally we turn to Pliny, and look from a different perspective at some of the same themes that have emerged from the study of Martial. Once again, the primary focus is on a rare appearance of Republican *exempla* in a genre where they are not usually most at home, namely the list of Republican greats in *Ep.* 8.6 that acts as the comparandum for the absurd celebration of Pallas that Pliny has discovered. This time the exemplary catalogue is used for satirical and condemnatory rather than panegyric purposes, but once again the counterfactual mode is the delivery mechanism for quasi-comic exploration of the absurdities of power.<sup>58</sup>

This is the second of Pliny’s letters on this subject. In 7.29, Pliny has read an inscription in honour of Pallas, Claudius’ notorious freedman (and former slave of Antonia Minor), recording the award of praetorian insignia voted for him in 52, together with a substantial amount of money, which Pallas turned down (*‘huic senatus ob fidem pietatemque erga patronos ornamenta praetoria decrevit et sestertium centies quinquagies, cuius honore contentus fuit’*, 7.29.2).<sup>59</sup> 7.29 is a brief letter describing the text of the inscription and offering it as evidence of Pallas’ comically misguided attempt to turn himself into an *exemplum* of self-restraint (*ausus est...etiam ut moderationis exemplum posteris prodere*, 9. 27.3). Pliny’s addressee, Montanus, is expected to oscillate between laughter, outrage and disbelief (*ridebis, deinde indignaberis, deinde ridebis, si legeris, quod nisi legeris non potes credere*, 9.27.1). The honour paid to Pallas is farcically absurd (*mimica et inepta*).

In the much longer 8.6 Pliny repeats the inscription and then enlarges upon the backstory, revealing that the absurdity of the Senate’s original decree (which he has taken trouble to seek out) entirely eclipses that of the inscription itself (*postea mihi uisum est pretium operae ipsum senatus consultum quaerere. inueni tam copiosum et effusum, ut ille superbissimus titulus modicus atque etiam*

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<sup>57</sup> Dewar (1998) 73. On the Forum Romanum of the post-Augustan period as a ‘unified monumental precinct proclaiming the glory of the Julian house’, see Dewar (1998) 69-70. On another possible reference to Domitian’s equestrian statue in Book 11, see Nauta (2002) 438 on 11.21.

<sup>58</sup> On Pliny’s two Pallas letters, see Leach (2013).

<sup>59</sup> Pliny here makes no mention of Pallas’ extraordinary wealth, but his uncle made much of it (*NH* 33. 134: Pallas was among the freedmen who became richer than Crassus; cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 12.53).

*demissus uideretur*, 8.6.2). The letter responds to the decree section by section, exploring in excruciating detail the degree to which the panegyric quality of the decree is the marker of the senate's degeneracy. Pliny does not adduce Fabricius here (and I am not arguing for any direct relationship between Pliny's letter and Martial 11.5). However, once again, a 'modest' refusal to accept a cash gift is a key feature of the story, and, as 7.29 established, it is part of the absurdity that a freedman who was richer than Crassus tried to make himself an *exemplum* of moderation on the grounds that he refused to add yet more to his already swollen bank account. Moreover, the letter becomes a detailed study of misplaced panegyric offered by the Senate to a recipient unworthy both for his low social status and for the comparatively unglamorous service he had done for the state - the decree's effusiveness, Pliny says, would have been appropriate to grand conquests and legions saved (*prolatos imperii fines, redditos exercitus rei publicae credas*, 8.6.6). To add to the topsy-turvy quality of the whole affair, it seems the emperor intervened to beg Pallas to accept the money; *this* emperor, unlike Martial's Nerva in his counterfactual encounter with Fabricius, was unsuccessful, and he was forced to instruct the senate to withdraw the monetary award. Pliny dwells upon the inversion of the relative status of freedman on the one hand and emperor and senate on the other, as the ruler has to obey the public commands of the servant (*imaginare Caesarem liberti precibus vel potius imperio coram senatu obtemperantem*, 8.6.12) and the servile senate finds itself offering praetorian insignia to a slave (*mitto quod Pallanti servo praetoria ornamenta offeruntur — quippe offeruntur a servis*, 8.6.3). This inversion of the status of all parties is a public and political version of the temporary social upheaval of the Saturnalia, an implication that is reinforced by the juxtaposition of this letter with 8.7, in which Pliny writes to Tacitus that he is (metaphorically?) extending his Saturnalia holiday.<sup>60</sup>

Pliny's commentary on the text of the decree begins with the list of *exempla* that we have already seen. There is no suggestion that such *exempla* featured in the senate's decree, and the effects achieved by inserting them into the 'story' are Pliny's own. The exemplary figures are not summoned from the dead, but they are given agency in *gathering themselves* and *mixing themselves together* (*conferant se misceantque*) as the foil to Pallas. The brief catalogue is expressed in two parts, of three names each; in keeping with Pliny's observation in 8.6.6, all the names are those of Rome's greatest generals – obviously absurd comparanda for the emperor's freedman financial aide. The names are reported as generalizing plurals: first the great *cognomina* achieved by the greatest men of the middle Republic (*illi ueteres, Africani, Achaici, Numantini*), and then three more 'modest' (though no less notorious) familial names of the last half-century or so of the Republic (*hi proximi Marii, Sullae, Pompei*).<sup>61</sup> The plurals both suggest that the list could be far longer than it is, and downplay the great

<sup>60</sup> On such 'Saturnalian' effects created by juxtaposition of letters in Pliny Book 8, see now Morello (2015) 160-2.

<sup>61</sup> *Proximi* here can be read as merely in contrast with *veteres*, or as part of a collapsing of time (comparable with that we have seen in Martial 11.5). From the perspective of someone observing the senate's behavior under Claudius, of course, Pompey, at least (if perhaps not, perhaps, Marius or Sulla), could still seem part of relatively recent history, but by the time of Trajan, referring to any of these three as *proximi* requires a certain sleight-of-hand, and suggests that when we are dealing with Republican *exempla*, one of the natural ways to do so is to elide the decades of imperial rule.

individuals themselves, who are now subsumed into the collective and eclipsed by the unimpressive Greek name of the honorand, Pallas.

Furthermore, Pliny suggests an open-endedness in the list that is carefully avoided (*nolo progredi longius*), in a *recusatio* that invites the reader to consider the likely next element in a chronological sequence; if this short set of *exempla* has already felt like a potted history of how power and ambition has shifted over the generations, then to finish the sequence really brings us into the imperial world. Surely the next one in this sequence is Julius Caesar (and, indeed, every subsequent Caesar)? And although Pliny self-consciously avoids explicitly including Caesar among the ‘foils’ in Pallas’ priamel, the senate, it seems, is implicitly less discreet, since the plaque recording the honours paid to Pallas by the decree is affixed in the most public place possible: the base of Julius’ Caesar’s statue).<sup>62</sup> The senate, in selecting the location of the inscription, has achieved the ultimate comparative exemplum situation. If the equestrian statue of Domitian is an ‘equine cuckoo’ in a Caesarian nest, to use Dewar’s vivid image, then Pliny has converted the scenario to bathos: here the interloper is not Statius’ aggressive imperial equine but an absurdly unworthy hanger-on stuck to Caesar’s own statue base.

The final effect that is relevant here is the counterfactual mode. Once again, the subjunctives and the imagined piling up of *exempla* to demonstrate how low the world has fallen and how debased panegyric commemoration has become, suggest the despair about modernity that is characteristic of the period. Once again, the apodosis in the ‘future less vivid’ construction is a future indicative (a much more natural one, since we are not in the world of *adynata* here, and Pliny is merely predicting the inevitable and certain result of his thought experiment: *infra Pallantis laudes iacebunt*). The use of a counterfactual construction not for panegyric purposes, but as part of an attack on the senate’s failure to uphold its own traditional values, recalls a Ciceronian text that is illuminating here. In his second Verrine speech, Cicero appeals to the senate to consider its own reputation (*splendor vester facit ut peccare sine summo rei publicae detrimento ac periculo non possitis*, 2.1.22); in this instance, of course, this is to be expressed by taking action against Verres, whose crimes are set in a quasi-historical context by Cicero’s counterfactual ‘mixing up together’ of all past misdeeds (which will then be eclipsed by Verres’ wickedness):

quis est in populo Romano qui hoc non ex priore actione abstulerit, omnium ante damnatorum scelera, furta, flagitia, si unum in locum conferantur, vix cum huius parva parte aequari conferrique posse? (*Verr.* 2.1.21)<sup>63</sup>

In 8.6 Pliny is drawing upon a similar combination of ‘prosecutorial’ ethos and political ‘shaming’ of the senate, which he enhances by the addition of specific exemplary names from the past. His catalogue’s teleological drive is towards Caesarism and one-man rule. We begin the exemplary passage with men who are represented only by their ‘territorial’ cognomina, won by expansion into new provinces (including Greece) or final annihilation of old enemies; we move on to men with more prosaically familial (if nevertheless astonishingly powerful)

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Pliny NH 34.18 *Caesar quidem dictator lorica tam sibi dicari in foro suo passus est.*

<sup>63</sup> Cf., in eulogizing mode, Cic. *Phil.* 9.10: *omnes ex omni aetate, qui in hac civitate intellegentiam iuris habuerunt, si unum in locum conferantur, cum Ser. Sulpicio non sint comparandi.*

names, all with disturbing associations, who symbolized the threat of outstanding individuals and ambition for power. The *telos* here, is the Greek slave Pallas, in a context in which we have been led to expect the more usual Caesarian punchline.

8.6 'trumps' 7.29 by shifting the focus from the absurd self-promotion of an imperial freedman in his own inscription, to the infinitely greater and more disgraceful tributes paid by both senate and emperor (*inueni tam copiosum et effusum, ut ille superbissimus titulus modicus atque etiam demissus uideretur*, 8.6); not only is the panegyric that is the target of Pliny's attack much more effusive, but the practitioners of it are much greater. The most recent players in the story (the Claudian senate and the emperor himself) symbolized the decline that was implied in the catalogue. The inflationary process, in which the inscription is eclipsed by the decree, the freedman's self-praise is swept aside in favour of the shameful fawning of the ruling classes (and 7.29 is outdone by 8.6) works alongside the extreme deflationary process in the teleology of the exemplary catalogue.

Pliny plays heavily upon the comic aspects of the situation, not only asking Montanus to laugh with him at Pallas' self-importance, but suggesting that one's first response to the decree's text might be to see it as some kind of a joke, if it is not, after all, merely evidence of the senate's wretched condition (*urbanos qui illa censuerunt putem an miseros? dicerem urbanos, si senatum deceret urbanitas*). The decree then becomes, on one reading, a Catullan game, one in which the state's representatives of *seueritas* turn to *urbanitas* – but all this is so unthinkable that Pliny must turn to the subjunctive again to express such adynata.

We have here the attempt to create an *exemplum* by Pallas that is disgracefully assisted by the senate, and the failure of that attempt at exemplarity is illuminated by Pliny's addition of 'real' *exempla* (expressed in counterfactual terms). Such an exploration of exemplarity is situated, moreover, in a book in which the next letter of comparable length and weight in the book, 8.14, explores the consequences of the failure of exemplarity in the generations of senators immediately preceding Pliny's, as young senators could not learn proper senatorial behaviour from their fathers as they used to, but could only witness the mute servility of those who should have been their models:

priorum temporum seruitus ut aliarum optimarum artium, sic etiam iuris senatorii oblivionem quandam et ignorantiam induxit (8.14.2)

Both the Republican *exempla* of 8.6 and the paternal models that were missing in 8.14 have failed Pliny's generation. 8.6 offers a quasi-comic exploration of that phenomenon. The man who had no training by example in how to be a senator reports in 8.6 an instance of senatorial behavior from just before his own times, and points up its absurdity by reference to counterfactual *exempla*.

### *Conclusion*

The texts we have looked at, then, play upon different sorts of humour to be generated by the exemplary situations they build, employing the counterfactual mode to explore the ways in which modern versions of *exempla* don't quite work. This counterfactual mode of handling *exempla* seems to

become increasingly prominent in the imperial period, in a time in which nothing seems quite real anyway; it is applied in different ways and to different degrees, but always with a satirical acknowledgement that the exemplary catalogue is either all a game or just an appalling joke. Modern readers of *Private Eye* or the *Daily Mash* may find the persistent cynicism of this mode utterly unsurprising, but I suggest that in the period when Martial and Pliny are writing, this has become an important marker of modernity – the ways in which Roman writers can manipulate their culture’s most clichéd figures and those attitudes of mind that are built into Rome’s sometimes rather leaden exemplary traditions say something about the disconnection from certain elements of the past, particularly of the republican past. More seriously, of course, all this plays into a weakness that is built into an exemplary system when we get an individual who doesn’t fit the traditional mould and won’t play ball. Even as early as the *Pro Marcello*, the Caesar who eclipses all previous *exempla* becomes, by implication, the last *exemplum* standing, competing only with himself.

Martial’s Book 11 starts out being all about restoration and return to a renewed Augustan era – a better one for everyone, this time, including our poet whose poems attest to the fact that he’s done better than poor old Ovid, and can do a Vergil as well when he needs to. 11.5 is comic panegyric, but the reason it manages to be comic is that it allows the standard mechanisms of exemplarity to collapse into a kind of pantomime chaos, in which Rome’s great men are all set up in an elaborate (and repetitively cyclical) joke. Martial unpicks the normal functioning of exemplarity; as Roller explains, exemplarity functions in a four step process, beginning with the original individual deed, which is then evaluated and praised, subsequently commemorated and monumentalized, and in successive generations re-commemorated and re-evaluated for each new era’s changing circumstances.<sup>64</sup> That final stage might include bringing new elements to the fore, or adjusting the details of the original *exemplum* to make the exemplary narrative contribute more powerfully to (e.g.) a catalogue of *exempla* that establish a category or library of actions to illustrate a wider argument<sup>65</sup>. The only new category that Martial designs here is the group of *exempla* who give up the deeds and characteristics that made them exemplary in the first place (i.e. undoing the very first stage of Roller’s schema). In this book of ‘returns’ (to the golden Augustan era, to Caesarian peace, to freedom and joyous obscenity, to Saturnalian revelry) 11.5 imagines a situation in which there’s really nothing to return to except the joke itself. Martial composes a *Heldenschau* that echoes a persistent theme in his handling of exemplary figures: that they can (and should) be ‘turned’ to suit today’s *mores* and Martial’s poetic requirements. But funnily enough, whatever historical stuff did or did not happen there is a punchline, and that punchline is still a Caesar – another one.

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<sup>64</sup> Roller (2009) 216-17; cf. Roller (2004) 1-7.

<sup>65</sup> On the power and effect of exemplary catalogues, see now Roller (2015).

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