

THE ANATOMY OF ROME FROM CAPITOL TO CLOACA*

By EMILY GOWERS

'Can I fix Rome for you on this poor sheet of paper?'¹ Something like Petrarch's lament must precede any attempt to sum up Rome in words; only an Atlas could do justice to the vast weight of such a city.² But there is at least one compensation: we are describing a city that we all know, or think we know. For Montaigne, it was the first city that entered his consciousness: 'I have had knowledge of the affairs of Rome long time before I had knowledge of those of my own house. I knew the Capitol and its platform before I knew Louvre, the palace of our kings in Paris; the river Tiber before Seine'. And for him it remained the ultimate city: 'And therefore can I not look so often into the situation of their streets and houses, and those wondrous-strange ruins, that may be said to reach down to the Antipodes, but so often must I amuse myself on them. Is it nature or by the error of fantasy, that the seeing of places we know to have been frequented or inhabited by men whose memory is esteemed or mentioned in stories doth in some sort move and stir us up as much or more than the hearing of their noble deeds or reading of their compositions?'³ For Freud, the city provided the best analogy for the human consciousness itself, an overlaying of past and present events, all capable of being experienced simultaneously. He asks us, in a flight of fancy, to 'suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past — an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into being will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one'.⁴

Throughout its history, Rome has been seen as a perennial palimpsest with antipodean roots. For the modern visitor, it may be seeing an ancient family's funeral busts embedded in the wall next to the neon lights of a butcher's shop, or walking a street that follows the curve of a former circus, that brings home the four-dimensional quality of the city. But the sense of continuity or forgotten meaning is really explained for us by Roman literature. That is what gives us the Roman consciousness of the city; that is what fills in the gaps, supplies the missing life to the ruins.⁵ Montaigne was moved by the physical Rome, but it was his reading that gave shape to what he saw. It is with literature that the sense of the infiniteness of the city begins: Cicero unable to walk the streets without treading on some trace of history; Pliny imagining an endless pyramid of all the buildings ever raised in Rome piled on one huge heap; and the extreme fantasy of the emperor Elagabalus, sending out for 1,000 lb of Roman cobwebs, and being presented with 10,000 lb instead.⁶ Rome, it seems, was a collection of dusty ruins even in its ancient past.

Rome was not just the greatest city in every direction: it was also the one that contained all the others. 'Rome is the epitome of the civilized world'. This epigram, which goes back to the sophist Polemo, is developed in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*, a work which itself survives as an epitome, a perverted digest of world culture, spewed in Greek from the mouths of collectors of words at a Roman dinner-party.⁷ According to Athenaeus, Rome embraced every other city: Alexandria, Antioch, Athens, the ABC begins. The *Deipnosophists* is rare for a Roman book,

* This paper is a revised version of one that formed part of a panel on The City of Rome at the annual meeting of the Classical Association in Oxford in April 1992. I am grateful to the audience there, especially the archaeologists present, for their stringent criticisms, and to the Editorial Committee of this journal for helpful corrections and suggestions. I also owe thanks to the Cambridge University Classics Faculty for a generous grant for travel to Rome in 1991. The paper develops some arguments already sketched out in E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table. Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (1993), 12–16.

¹ Petrarch, *Letters* vi.2, in M. Bishop (ed.), *Letters from Petrarch* (1966), 65.

² One of the best accounts of attempts to summarize Rome is N. Purcell, 'The City of Rome', in R. Jenkyns (ed.), *The Legacy of Rome* (1992), 422–53. See also D. Thompson (ed.), *The Idea of Rome from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1971); J. Vance, *America's Rome. I. Classical Rome* (1989); G. H. Tucker, *The Poet's Odyssey: Joachim du Bellay and the Antiquity of Rome* (1990).

³ M. Montaigne, *Essays*, 3.9, *Of Vanitie* (trans. J. Florio, 1965), 246, 247.

⁴ S. Freud in J. Strachey (ed.), *Civilization and its Discontents. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1953–74), vol. 21, 70. See also S. R. F. Price, 'Freud and Antiquities', *Austrian Studies* 3 (1992), 132–7.

⁵ See Vance, op. cit. (n. 2), 9.

⁶ Cicero, *de Fin.* v.2: 'tanta vis admonitionis inest in locis: et id quidem in hac urbe infinitum; quacumque enim ingredimur, in hac aliqua historia vestigium ponimus'; Plin., *NH* xxxvi.24.101: 'universitate vero acervata et in quendam unum cumulum coiecta non alia magnitudo exurget quam si mundus alius quidam in uno loco narretur'; SHA *Elag.* 26.6: 'dicens et hinc intellegendum quam magna esset Roma'.

⁷ Athen. 1.20b; cf. also Galen 18.1 p. 347K. The epigram (ἐπιτομή τῆς οἰκουμένης) goes back to the sophist Polemo (A.D. 88–144); see *RE* (Pauly-Wissowa) xxia p. 1339 s.v. Polemo (Sophist).

in that it is an example of a positive attempt to do justice to the size and scope of its setting. It shows no signs of the embarrassment about Roman wealth or the dismay at Roman corruption that emanate from most other Roman works. Athenaeus can afford to be positive because Rome provides an appropriately varied and catholic background for his own all-engulfing catalogue of culture.

How many books would you need to contain Rome? Livy made it 142. Nero, hypothetically at least, put the number up to 400.⁸ Many encyclopedias of Rome must have existed and been lost or mutilated like the ruins.⁹ We are left with some rather more selective views: Juvenal's teetering stilts, gaping cracks, and falling tower blocks, Tacitus' winding alleys or glaring boulevards, Propertius' antique forum, Martial's blackened taverns, and so on.¹⁰ If all these representations were amassed and piled on one great heap, like Pliny's vision of the buildings of Rome, they would still give us an incomplete and miscellaneous picture. But it is an indispensable one. Whatever its perspective, positive or negative, all Roman literature is a calculated response, direct or indirect, to the enormity of Rome; each writer shapes Rome in his own image, that is in the image of the work he is writing — or, at least, if he is a 'small' writer like Martial, as an ironic counter-image. These representations are worth having because they give us all that is left of the multiple consciousness of the city.

This paper will confine itself to one object of representation, a specimen monument whose meaning is created for us by the literary remains. Instead of aspiring to the heights of Rome, I will plumb the depths, and look at the relationship between one of Rome's most solid but dubious glories and the texts that shape it for us. This glory is the Roman sewer, the Cloaca Maxima. Modern interest in the subject has been mostly technical and topographical: the most recent investigation of its route, for example, was published under the aegis of a German institute for the study of waterworks.¹¹ However, I shall steer away from what Cicero calls 'minute quibbles about water-courses',¹² and concentrate instead on some of the symbolic aspects of the Cloaca.¹³

The Cloaca, rooted in the primeval centre of the city, is said to have been built in the sixth century B.C., and many of its original lines are still followed today. It was a permanent reminder to the Romans of their ancient history. The savage discipline underlying its construction by the two Tarquins was part of the *tanta moles* of building the city: sewer-workers who committed suicide had their bodies crucified as an example to the others.¹⁴ When Pliny writes about the sewer, he emphasizes its durability. Its fabric is so strong that it resists the impact of water. Blocks of stone are dragged along above it, but the tunnels do not cave in. It is pounded by falling buildings; the ground trembles with the violence of earthquakes — but

⁸ Dio LXII.29.

⁹ See C. Nicolet, *L'Inventaire du monde. Géographie et politique aux origines de l'empire romain* (1988), translated as *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (1991), on the Romans' obsession with cataloguing the contents of their Empire; with the review article by N. Purcell, 'Maps, lists, money, order and power', *JRS* 80 (1990), 178–82; now also T. P. Wiseman, 'Julius Caesar and the Mappa Mundi', in *Talking to Virgil* (1992), 22–42.

¹⁰ Juv. 3.195: 'veteris rimae cum texit hiatum'; 3.7–8: 'lapsus/ tectorum adsiduos'; 3.193: 'urbem... tenui tibicine fultam'. Tac., *Ann.* xv.43: 'erant tamen qui crederent veterem illam formam salubritati magis conduxisse, quoniam angustiae itinerum et altitudo tectorum non perinde solis vapore perumperentur: at nunc patulam latitudinem et nulla umbra defensam graviore aestu ardescere'. Prop. iv.1. Mart. vii.61.8: 'nigra popina'.

¹¹ H. Bauer, 'Die Cloaca Maxima in Rom', *Mitteilungen des Leichtweiß-Institutes für Wasserbau der Technischen Universität Braunschweig* 103 (1989), 45–67. Other recent surveys of the sewers include: P. Reimers, 'Opus omnium dictu maximum': literary sources for the knowledge of Roman city drainage', *Opuscula Romana* 17:10 (1989), 137–41; A. Scobie, 'Slums, sanitation, and mortality in the Roman world', *Klio* 68.2 (1986), 399–433; M. Grassnich, *Gestalt und Konstruktion des Abortes im römischen Privathaus* (1982). Preliminary explorations of the Cloaca are discussed by S. Picozzi, 'L'esplorazione

della cloaca Maxima', *Capitolium* 50 (1975), 2–10. See now also H. Bauer's article s.v. 'cloaca, Cloaca Maxima' in E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* (1993), vol. 1, A–C, with further bibliography; O. Robinson, *Ancient Rome. City Planning and Administration* (1992), 117–19; A. T. Hodge, *Roman Aqueducts and Water Supply* (1992), 332–43. Previous surveys include R. Lanciani, *Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries* (1889), 49–73; S. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (1929), 126–7. On Pompeian drains, see J.-P. Adam, *La construction romaine* (1984), 283–6.

¹² Cic., *Caecin.* 13.36: the *praetor urbanus* makes decrees 'de fossis, de cloacis, de minimis aquarum itinerumque controversiis'.

¹³ Studies of the symbolic aspects of other sewer systems include: P. Stallybrass and A. White, 'The sewer, the gaze and the contaminating touch', in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), 125–48, on sewers in nineteenth-century London and Paris; D. Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen* (1991). Reimers, op. cit. (n. 11), 137 n. 6, announced that a discussion of the symbolic aspects would form part of his planned monograph on Roman sewers. See also W. Lesser, *The Life Below the Ground: A Study of the Subterranean in Literature* (1987); R. Williams, *Notes on the Underground* (1990).

¹⁴ Plin., *NH* xxxvi.24.106 records this as a *memorable exemplum*.

even so, for seven hundred years, the sewer has remained impregnable.¹⁵ For Livy, the sewers were important because they preserved the original layout of the city at a time when building on the surface had become increasingly haphazard.¹⁶

At first sight, then, the sewer had a place at the heart of the rhetoric of those whom Pliny calls the *conditores rerum*, the foundation-layers of Rome's history.¹⁷ The Cloaca was one of the city's great tourist traps: the grammarian Crates of Mallos was laid up for weeks after breaking his leg in a Palatine drain (incidentally helping to lay the basis for the development of Roman literary criticism).¹⁸ Dionysius of Halicarnassus puts the sewers along with the roads and aqueducts as the three greatest marvels of Rome.¹⁹ Cassiodorus speaks of 'those splendid works that strike astonishment into the hearts of all beholders. There you see rivers as it were shut in by concave mountains, flowing down through mighty rafters. There you see men steering their ships with the utmost care, to avoid shipwreck. Thus may the greatness of Rome be inferred. What other city can compare with her in her heights, when her depths are so incomparable?'²⁰

But if we look at the language of praise more closely, we can see that the sewer had the potential for undermining too. As an eighth wonder of the world, it was a strangely inverted one. When Pliny describes its course as seven streams from the seven hills flowing into one channel, that sounds like an underground, backwards-flowing version of the seven-mouthed Nile.²¹ Rome, in his words, had become a hanging city (*urbs pensilis*), another Babylon, but that was only because of the subterranean vaults hollowed out beneath it.²² Just as Frontinus sets up the aqueducts as Rome's 'necessary' alternative to the 'otiose' pyramids of Egypt,²³ so the sewer's glory lay awkwardly in its functional role. It was Rome's substitute for more conventionally decorative and visible manifestations of the marvellous.

It was the contents of the sewer, of course, that above all compromised its status as a wonder of the world. Originally, it was designed to drain the marsh on which the forum was built; but by the imperial period an estimated 100,000 lb of city waste was being pumped through it every day into the Tiber.²⁴ Topographically it was central to the city: it began under the Argiletum, the street of the booksellers, flowed under the forum, then, joined by waste from the Esquiline, Viminal, and Quirinal, it discharged into the Tiber. One important collection point early on, as Juvenal chooses to emphasize, was in the middle of the Subura, the Soho-like quarter known for its restaurants and red-light district.²⁵

This starts to suggest where the sewer fitted conceptually. For a fuller picture, it is worth turning to metaphor, to one of the oldest and more consistent analogies for city-building in the ancient world: the human body.²⁶ In this case, the connection depends on ideas of hierarchy, the notion that each zone of the body relates to the others in a strict order: the head, the ruling part of the body, at the top; the dirty, internal and excretory parts at the bottom.

¹⁵ Plin., *NH* xxxvi.24.105: 'aliquando Tiberis retro infusus recipitur, pugnantque diversi aquarum impetus intus, et tamen obnixta firmitas resistat. trahuntur moles superne tantae non succumbentibus cavis operis, pulsavit ruinae sponte praecipites aut impactae incendiis, quatitur solum terrae motibus, durant tamen a Tarquinio Prisco annis DCC prope inexpugnabiles'. Despite this, a sewage contractor asked Aemilius Scaurus to give him security against damage to the drains when he had marble columns for his house hauled up to the Palatine (Plin., *NH* xxxvi.2.6).

¹⁶ Liv. v.55.5: 'forma... urbis sit occupatae magis quam divisae similis'. The sewers in Livy's time ran under private houses, although they had originally been built under public ground. In fact, this most permanent of fixtures was constantly changing. The number of water-courses siphoned into the main channel was frequently extended; the durable main fabric had to be patched and repaired; blockages were ostentatiously removed: see Bauer, *op. cit.* (n. 11).

¹⁷ Plin., *NH* xxxvi.24.106.

¹⁸ Suet., *gramm.* 2: 'cum regione Palatii prolapsus in cloacae foramen crus fregisset...'

¹⁹ Dion. Hal., *Rom. Ant.* iii.67.5: ἔργα θανμαστά καὶ κρείττω λόγου κατασκευασμένοι. ἔγωγ' οὖν ἐν τρισὶ τοῖς μεγαλοπρεπεστάτοις κατασκευάσμαι τῆς Ῥώμης, ἐξ ὧν μάλιστα τὸ τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἐμφαίνεται μέγεθος, τὰς τε τῶν

ὁδῶν ἀγωγὰς τίθεμαι καὶ τὰς τῶν ὁδῶν στρώσεις καὶ τὰς τῶν ὑπονόμων ἐργασίας.

²⁰ Cassiod., *Var.* iii.30.1-2: 'propter splendoras Romanae cloacas civitatis, quae tandem visentibus conferunt stuporem, ut aliarum civitatum possint miracula superare. videas illic fluvios quasi montibus concavis clausos per ingentia signina decurrere: videas structis navibus per aquas rapidas non minima sollicitudine navigari, ne praecipitato torrenti marina possint naufragia sustinere. hinc, Roma, singularis quanta in te sit potest colligi magnitudo. quae enim urbium audeat tuis culminibus contendere, quando nec ima tua possunt similitudinem reperire?'

²¹ Plin., *NH* xxxvi.24.105: 'permeant conrivati septem amnes'.

²² Plin., *NH* xxxvi.24.104: 'subfossis montibus atque... urbe pensili subterque navigata M. Agrippae in aedilitate post consulatum'.

²³ Front., *de aquis* i.16: 'tot aquarum tam multis necessariis molibus pyramidas videlicet otiosas compares aut cetera inertia sed fama celebrata opera Graecorum'.

²⁴ The figure is Scobie's, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 413.

²⁵ Juv. 5.106: 'mediae cryptam... Suburae'.

²⁶ On the body as a political metaphor, see B. S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (1984); on the ancient history of the metaphor, see Pease's commentary on Cic., *ND* ii.56.141-2.

This was an enduring notion in philosophy. Xenophon speaks of the divine foresight that lies behind the design of the body: what goes out is unpleasant; so the ducts through which it passes are turned away and removed as far as possible from the organs of sense.²⁷ Plato says that the stomach is housed as far as possible from the counselling parts of the body, so as to create the least turmoil and din.²⁸ Most revealingly, when Cicero adapts this analogy, he makes an explicit comparison between the body's guts and the sewage system of a house: 'just as architects, when they design buildings, keep those liquids that would, if discharged, be unavoidably foul away from the eyes and nostrils of the householders, so nature has kept similar substances in the body far away from the senses'.²⁹ Strabo, writing about the Cloaca, specifically praises the Romans for their 'foresight' in taking care of matters that the Greeks considered beneath them. Like the philosophers' divine creator, the builders of Rome had remembered at the beginning of the city to look to its bodily ends.³⁰

Was the sewer, then, seen as the excretory duct of the city? Livy clearly has a site in mind for the 'head' of Rome when he lays down the foundations of his history with the monumental works of the Tarquins.³¹ According to his legend, a human head was found on the site of the Capitol while it was being built, which was interpreted as a prophecy that Rome would be the *caput rerum*, the head or capital of the world.³² The Capitol was not only the uppermost part of the city, but also its public face, its moral figurehead and its purest sanctuary. The Flamen Dialis, for example, high priest of Jupiter, whose temple was on the Capitol, could not spend a night outside the city, or touch flour, yeast, or raw meat, which Plutarch, anticipating Mary Douglas, identifies as boundary-crossing foods.³³ Cicero saw Plato's bodily hierarchy mapped out in his own city: 'When Plato found a place for the chief aspect of the soul, the reason, he put it in the head as in a citadel (*in capite sicut in arce posuit*)'.³⁴

Dubiously married in the mythology with the Capitol was the Cloaca Maxima, the Tarquins' other great work.³⁵ The old proverb quoted by Cicero, to make an arch (*arcum*) or capitol (*arcem*) out of a sewer, shows how monuments and drains were conceptually poles apart.³⁶ Again, this suggests where the Cloaca fitted into a bodily scheme. Interestingly, in modern biological English, the word 'cloaca' is used to mean the back passage of a bird.³⁷ A similar analogy is found in Latin as early as Plautus. In his *Curculio* — a play that also incidentally gives us a seedy topography of Rome focusing on the open sewer,³⁸ the street of the prostitutes, the shrine of Venus Cloacina, and the fish-market — a drunken old woman calls for more wine, and the slave who grants her wish cries: 'Come on, pour it down the pit, get on and swill out the cloaca'.³⁹

²⁷ Xen., *Mem.* 1.4.5: ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ ἀποχωροῦντα δυσχερῆ, ἀποστρέφει τοὺς τοῦτων ὄχτους καὶ ἀπενεγκεῖν ἢ δυνατόν προσωτάτω ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθήσεων. ταῦτα οὕτω προνοητικῶς πεπραγμένα ἀπορεῖς πότρεα τύχης ἢ γνώμης ἔργα ἔστιν. Cf. Reid, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 29, on Haussmann's use of a bodily analogy for the Parisian sewers: 'The underground galleries, organs of the large city, would function like those of the human body, without revealing themselves to the light of day' (G. E. Haussmann, *Mémoire sur les eaux de Paris* (1854), 52–3).

²⁸ Plat., *Tim.* 70E: ἐν ᾧ οὐδὲν νεμόμενον πρὸς φάτνην καὶ δὲ τι πορρωτάτω τοῦ βουλευομένου κατοικοῦν, θόρυβον καὶ βοήν ὡς ἐλαχίστην παρέχον . . . διὰ ταῦτα ἐνταυθ' ἔδοσαν αὐτῷ τὴν τάξιν. A different account of the role of the stomach (though still in contrast to other bodily parts) is given in the fable of Menenius Agrippa (Liv. 11.32.9): he reproached the plebs for their rebellion against the Senate, on the grounds that it was like an *intestina corporis seditio*; the stomach, while appearing to be idle, was in fact what fed the rest of the body (the story is retold in Plut., *Coriolanus* 6.2–4). Cf. Cato's description of Rome as a 'belly without ears' (Plut., *Mor.* 198d).

²⁹ Cic., *ND* 11.56.141: 'atque ut in aedificiis architecti avertunt ab oculis naribusque dominorum ea quae profuentia necessario tatri essent aliquid habitura, sic natura res similis procul amandavit a sensibus'. Cf. A. Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture* (trans. I. Ware, 1738) (1965), 2.2: 'But as our blessed creator has ordered these our members in such a manner that the most beautiful are in places most exposed to view and the less comely more hidden; so in building also we ought to put the principal and considerable parts in places the most

seen, and the less beautiful in places as much hidden from the eye as possible; that in them may be lodged all the foulness of the house. . .'

³⁰ Strab. v.3.8: οὗτοι [the Romans] προϋνόησαν μάλιστα ὅν ὀλιγώρησαν ἐκείνοι [the Greeks], στρώσεως ὁδῶν καὶ ὑδάτων εἰσαγωγῆς καὶ ὑπονόμων τῶν δυναμένων ἐκκλύζειν τὰ λύματα τῆς πόλεως εἰς τὸν Τίβεριν.

³¹ Liv. 1.55. Livy (*praef.* 4) refers to the *immensum opus* that his own history involves.

³² Liv. 1.55.5–6: 'caput humanum integra facie aperientibus fundamenta templi dicitur apparuisse. quae visa species haud per ambages arcem eam imperii caputque rerum fore portendebat'.

³³ Plut., *Mor.* 289E–F.

³⁴ Cic., *Tusc. Disp.* 1.10.20.

³⁵ Liv. 1.56.2: 'vix nova haec magnificentia quicquam adaequare potuit'.

³⁶ Cic., *Planc.* 40.95: 'arcem/ arcum facere e cloaca'. Cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Roman arches and Greek honours: the language of power at Rome', *PCPhS* 216 n.s. 36 (1990), 143–81, esp. 145–6 on the double meaning of Latin *formix*, 'arch' or 'brothel', which caused the first meaning to become obsolete during the Principate. Cf. Tertullian, *Spect.* 20.2: 'sol et in cloacam radios suos defert nec inquinatur'.

³⁷ Presumably the metaphor is drawn from sewers, rather than the other way round: *OED* s.v.

³⁸ Plaut., *Curc.* 476: *canalem*.

³⁹ Plaut., *Curc.* 470–83; 124 (121 OCT): 'effunde hoc in barathrum, propere proluce cloacam'.

A more precise comparison comes in one of Varro's Menippean satires, called *Marcopolis*, or, 'Varro's City'. This satire is thought to be a parody of Plato's *Republic*, and this is borne out by one of the fragments, as follows: 'The senses are the gates, the veins are the aqueducts, the intestines are the sewers. . .'⁴⁰ The connection with Plato's bodily analogies is obvious.⁴¹ But what exactly is Varro's perspective? Is he, like Plato, starting with a city and finding in its different parts analogies from bodily organs? Or is he starting with a body, perhaps his own body, and finding for each part a topographical equivalent: gates, aqueducts, sewers? The second alternative fits better with a typically satirical perspective, in which the hierarchy of subject and metaphor is reversed. *Marcopolis* would mean, then, not 'Varro's City' but 'Varro: the city', Varro as Rome, the satirist in his urban incarnation. This isolated fragment suggests that, conceptually or metaphorically, the sewers were seen as the guts of Rome; or at least, that this connection was always there to interfere with the glorious aspects of the Cloaca Maxima, involving it with all the prejudice and disdain associated with its equivalent region in the body.⁴²

To extend the analogy between Rome and the body, the Subura, the restaurant and market area of Rome, with its huge drain feeding into the Cloaca Maxima, sounds a likely candidate for the 'stomach of Rome', on the lines of Zola's vision of Les Halles as the 'ventre de Paris'.⁴³ The closeness of the restaurant areas to the sewer would have been a reminder of the transience of food, provoking the same discomfiture that Agathias Scholasticus evokes on examining the contents of a latrine in Byzantine Smyrna: 'pheasants, fishes, mixtures pounded in the mortar and all the deceit of eating turned into dung'.⁴⁴

Little is known about whether the sewers were effective specifically as a means of removing human excrement. Few if any private houses in Rome had latrines connected to the public drains; public latrines and cesspits were rare, and not necessarily connected either.⁴⁵ Most Romans seem to have used chamberpots or commodes, but ancient historians become vague when they explain what became of their contents.⁴⁶ Fullers and night-soil collectors may have had some use for them, and Columella recommends as manure for country gardens 'whatever the latrine vomits from/through filthy sewers', but this is not enough to imply the kind of systematized channelling of excrement that exists in modern cities.⁴⁷

On the other hand, it seems inevitable that some human waste did find its way into the drains. To some extent, the historians' vagueness is a reflection of a semantic ambiguity in the Latin language. The word *stercus*, for example, can mean both 'dung' and 'refuse' in general.⁴⁸ This suggests that the distinction may not have been very important in Roman eyes. In any case, what is important is that civic waste, whatever the proportions of excrement and other garbage, was perceived as something that was evacuated down hidden channels in a similar way to human waste.

⁴⁰ Varro fr. 290 (Astbury): 'sensus portae; venae hydragogiae; clavae [cloaca] intestini'. See J.-C. Cèbe, *Varron, Satires Ménippées: édition, traduction et commentaire*, Collection de l'école française de Rome ix (1987), 1297: 'Varron établit un parallèle entre la structure rationnelle d'une cité et la constitution du corps humain'. Plotinus called Plato's *Republic* 'Platonopolis'. See also E. Norden, *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum* (1966), 11–12, for a list of parallels.

⁴¹ The categorization of city sites is based on Plato's division of his citizens according to the divisions of the soul at *Rep.* II.368E.

⁴² In the Church Fathers, *cloaca* stood for the 'gutter', a site of sin and depravity from which the soul had to be redeemed. E.g. Cyprianus, *Epist.* 55.26: 'lupanar aliquis ingressus ad cloacam et caenosam voraginem vulgi'; Commodianus, *Instr.* II.20.1: 'iustus ego non sum. . . de cloaca levatus'; Augustine, *C. Iul. Op.* 2.12: 'in odiosae arrogantiae cloacam deformiter fluere'; Ps. Augustine, *Serm.* 288.3: 'si vir cum multis ancillis in libidinis cloaca volutetur'; *ibid.*, 294.6: 'de cloaca ebrietatis. . . consurgere'. Cf. also Tertullian on the womb as a *cloaca*: *adv. Marc.* III.11.394: 'cloacam voca uterum, tanti animalis, id est hominis, producendi officinam'; *ibid.*, IV.2.491: 'Christus cum tanti temporis caeno per corporis cloacam effusus'.

⁴³ On Zola's 'stomach of Paris', see J. Brown, *Fictional Meals and Their Function in the French Novel, 1789–1848* (1984).

⁴⁴ *Anth. Pal.* 9. 642. Cf. G. Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale*, 534–40: 'O wombe! O bely! O stynging cod,/ Fulfilled of dong and of corrupcioun! At either end of thee foul is the soun./ How greet labour and cost is thee to fynde!/ Thise cookes, how they stampe, and streyne, and grynde,/ And turnen substance into accident,/ To fulfille al thy likerous talent!'

⁴⁵ Scobie, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 413–17; Robinson, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 117–20. Lanciani, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 31 had found no evidence of connections between private latrines and public drains.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Robinson, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 120: 'slaves will have emptied [chamberpots or commodes] down the drain, or perhaps loaded [them] on the wagons taking out the night-soil'; *ibid.*, 122: 'The disposal of excrement not washed down the sewers must have been a problem. The quantity must have been very considerable. . .'. Hodge, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 236–7, does tackle the question, suggesting a combination of the following: pipes linked from houses to cesspits and drains, public latrines, dungheaps, night-soil collectors, and the streets themselves. It is also possible that inhabitants simply dumped their waste directly in the river.

⁴⁷ Col. x.85: 'nec pudeat pabula praeberere novali/ immundis quaecumque vomit latrina cloacis'.

⁴⁸ See Scobie, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 408 n. 76; OLD s.v. *stercus*.

A number of Roman myths reinforce the bodily analogy, giving the sewer the role of waste-disposal unit, not just for city rubbish but also for political dumping. The emperor Nero was said to have used it to wash his hands of the victims of nocturnal brawls, and to have thrown statues of inconvenient winners at the games into public latrines. Elagabalus on his death was imagined as being dragged *sordidissime per cloacas*.⁴⁹ However, two more anecdotes taken in parallel express outrage against the conspicuous or excessive use of hidden channels, both civic and bodily. The first is Cicero's lurid picture of the effects of urban violence in Rome in 57 B.C., in which he describes the Tiber filled with the bodies of citizens, the sewers stuffed (*refarciri*) with more, and blood being mopped up from the forum with sponges.⁵⁰ The vocabulary of that sentence — 'stuffed' and 'sponges' in particular — suggests a direct analogy with the human gut. The sponge was the ancient equivalent of lavatory paper; a late veterinary writer refers to excrement in the guts of a mule as a *farcinialis*, a stuffing, on the analogy with sausages, stuffed animal guts transformed by cuisine.⁵¹ Cicero's meaning becomes clearer next to the other anecdote — a bit of blackest Seneca describing the suicide of a German *bestiarius*. He withdrew to a latrine, took a stick with a sponge on the end of it, 'for cleaning the obscene parts', stuffed (*infarsit*) the whole thing down his throat, and choked off his breath. This is how to die, says Seneca: showing death your contempt.⁵² Both passages exploit the normal practices of bodily and civic decorum by standing them on their heads. Cicero's city of Rome in crisis is like a constipated gut stuffed with citizens' bodies, which, as soon as they are dead, become so much garbage in a gut bleeding at its outlets, the forum and the Tiber. Seneca's gladiator stuffs down the top of his gut something reserved for the bottom, offending his own higher senses and those of the spectators. For Martial, the stick that this kind of sponge is attached to is *damnatus*, 'godforsaken'.⁵³

These scenes were, it must be admitted, unlikely to recur. How was the Roman sewer normally regulated and controlled according to the accepted proprieties of the human body? The myth of the 'far-sighted' creator's concealment of the body's guts possibly fuelled citizens' anxieties about uncovered sewers. Pliny writes to the emperor Trajan advising him that an open drain in the town where he is governor (Amastris in Pontus) needs covering. What poses as a river in the beautiful main street is nothing more than a stinking sewer, disgusting to look at and foul to smell; in the interests of health as much as of beauty it ought to be paved over.⁵⁴ The most publicized purging of the Cloaca Maxima, in 33 B.C., when Agrippa demonstrated how he had unblocked mountains of debris by riding through it in a boat, can be seen as a symbolic gesture in the context of contemporary medicine: purging was a standard element in bodily regimen too.⁵⁵

Conversely, the malfunctioning of the sewer provided a large-scale model for bodily impropriety. Although the sewers in Rome were built so that they sloped down into the Tiber, the river occasionally broke its banks, causing the city's effluence to flow backwards.⁵⁶ In Latin literature, descriptions of the belching, vomiting human body take their metaphors from the language of sewers gone wrong. Sidonius, for example, has a memorable tableau of a parasite,

⁴⁹ Suet., *Nero* 26: 'redeuntis a cena verberare ac repugnantes vulnerare cloacisque demergere assuerat'; *ibid.*, 24: 'subverti et unco trahi abicque in latrinas omnium statuas et imagines imperavit'. SHA *Elag.* 33. Myths of finding unexpected treasures among the sewer debris have an element of paradox: Hor., *Sat.* II.3.242: throwing pearls into the sewers as a sign of madness; Fronto p. 157.2N = Haines (Loeb) vol. 2, 104: silver found in the sewers: 'etiam laminae interdum argentiolae cloacis inveniuntur; eane re cloacas purgandas redimemus?'

⁵⁰ Cic., *pro Sest.* 77: 'corporibus civium Tiberim compleri, cloacas refarciri, ex foro spongiis effingi sanguinem'.
⁵¹ On sponges, see Scobie, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 411. *Mul. Chir.* 229: 'cum haec tamen causa evenerit, per anum farcinialis sero venire solet'; see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (1982), 234–7.

⁵² Sen., *Ep.* 70.20: 'ibi lignum id, quod ad emundanda obscena adhaerente spongia positum est, totum in gulam farsit et interclusis faucibus spiritum elisit. hoc fuit morti contumeliam facere. ita prorsus; parum munde et parum decenter; quid est stultius quam fastidiose mori?' There is perhaps significance in the fact that the hero of this story was a gladiator, in Rome the disposable body *par excellence*; Cicero's story, too, has the colour of the blood-filled

arena. Cf. Augustus on the fate of his only attempt at tragedy-writing: his Ajax 'fell on his sponge' (Suet., *Aug.* 85.2: here, primarily, an eraser).

⁵³ Mart. XII.48.7: 'damnatae spongea virgae'.

⁵⁴ Plin., *Ep.* x.98: 'nomine quidem flumen, re vera cloaca foedissima, ac sicut turpis immundissimo aspectu, ita pestilens odore taeterrimo. quibus ex causis non minus salubritatis quam decoris interest eam contegi'. Pliny here uses the pairing of *salubritas* and *amoenitas* so frequent in civic rhetoric (see A. J. Woodman (ed.), *Velleius Paterculus* (1983), ad Vell. 81.2: cf. e.g. Cic., *de Leg.* II.3, Suet., *Tib.* 11.1, Quint. III.7.27, Plin., *Ep.* x.90.2). Cf. Ulpian, *Dig.* XLIII.23.1, on the upkeep of sewers: 'quorum utrumque et ad salubritatem civitatum et ad tutelam pertinet: nam et caelum pestilens et ruinas minantur immunditiae cloacarum'.

⁵⁵ Agrippa's voyage: Dio XLIX.31; Plin., *NH* XXXVI.28.104, with Reimer, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 140, n. 33. Sen., *Apoc.* 7 uses the word *purgare* in connection with sewers: 'cloacas Augeae purgare'. Cf. Columella's use of *vomire* to describe a latrine (x.85).

⁵⁶ See G. Lugli, *Monumenti antichi di Roma e suburbio* II (1934), 231ff., for a list of floods.

who, like cloacal waste, stinks the more you stir him. His breath has a mephitic stench, topped up with food-stained belches from yesterday's feasts, culminating in a great cesspool of overflowing dinners.⁵⁷ This quagmire of a description, as the author terms it, may help to explain why so few Roman households seem to have been connected to the public sewer. One of the citizens' worst fears was that foreign filth normally channelled away into the Tiber might, when the river overflowed, confront the home-owner in his own drain;⁵⁸ that was why people preferred to tip their chamber-pots into the street, or store their excrement for collection by the fullers and night-soil men.⁵⁹

The Romans had mixed feelings, then, about their Cloaca. That comes out clearly in the oxymorons of one ancient etymologist. Festus derives *cloacae* from *conluere*, to purge; on another page, he relates the verb *cloacare* to *inquinare*, to stain.⁶⁰ It might be possible to trace a development in disgust in Rome similar to the ones some modern historians have found focused on the congested sewers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Paris — stinking cesspools under the *ancien régime*, sanitized technological miracles under Haussmann. The more the sewers concentrated and hid the city's waste, the more they grew in force as a metaphor for the filth they secretly contained.⁶¹ In Rome, this development may have been earlier than it appears. Plautus' *Curculio* seems to represent the sewer as an open canal (*canalem*, 476). But plays like this, with their emphasis on the seedy areas of Rome, flatter and excite an audience already detached from such squalor (one could compare Periplectomenus' pride in his civilized, un-Italian table manners at *Mil.* 647–8).

The literature that surrounded the creation of the Parisian sewage system offers some interesting refashionings of the ancient Roman commentary. Although technologically much more complex, the Paris sewers were renovated in conscious emulation of the Roman waste-disposal system, regarded as the concrete demonstration of enlightenment and a mark of civic pride by the *philosophes* and the authors of the *Encyclopédie*.⁶² The new Parisian sewer was advertised as making the aqueduct of Ancus Martius and Tarquin's Cloaca look like children's toys.⁶³ Yet the more efficiently the Parisian sewers hid the city's waste from view, the more the sewer emerged as an image of filth; the more novelists like Victor Hugo and Zola pried and dipped their toes into the sewers, savouring the dirt. Hugo's great disquisition on the Paris sewer in *Les Misérables* had the same effect as the intermittent sewage leaks he describes: it gave the city a taste of its own bile.⁶⁴

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the Paris sewer has its roots in Rome. In Paris, the sewers often surfaced as an image in times of civil disorder. The revolutionary Marat, for example, was imagined as a wild man who had taken up residence in the sewers, and, according to the myths, that is where his corpse was thrown.⁶⁵ In Rome, similarly, any unwanted and potentially seditious filth was described in metaphors from the world of sewers and their effluence: the native plebs, in Cicero's words the *infima faex populi*, the bottom-most dregs or scum of the city; or incomers like Livy's rustic inhabitants who evacuated themselves into Rome in a time of plague; or the dross that was sucked in towards Sallust's Catiline as if into a cesspool.⁶⁶ Is it insignificant that the seditious poet Lucan insulted Nero while noisily opening

⁵⁷ Sidon., *Ep.* III.13.2–6: 'est enim hic gurgis de sutoribus fabularum, de concinnatoribus criminum, de sinistrarum opinionum duplicatoribus... faeculentiae omnino par cloacali, quae quo plus commota, plus faetida est... mephiticus odor, quem supercumulat esculenta ructatio de dapibus hesternis et redundantium sentina cenarum'. Cf. Claud. Mam., *Anim.* 2.9 p.137: 'situ fetidinarum turpium ex olenticetis suis ac tenebris cloacam ventris... inhalare'.

⁵⁸ cf. Sall., *Hist. fr.* 4.50 (McGushin): 'redundantibus cloacis adverso aestu maris'. McGushin thinks the town referred to in this case is Heraclea Pontica.

⁵⁹ Scobie, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 413–17; Robinson, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 119–22.

⁶⁰ Paul. Fest. p. 55: 'cloacae a conluendo dictae'; p. 66: 'cloacare inquinare, unde et cloacae dictae'.

⁶¹ See Reid, *op. cit.* (n. 13), *passim*, esp. 49, and Stallybrass and White, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 125–48, esp. 145: the bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century Europe became more obsessed with the dirt of the city as a metaphorical and imaginative concept as it became, in reality, increasingly

separated from their own bodies. See also A. Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant. Odor and the French Social Imagination* (1982), esp. 89–135, 222–8.

⁶² See Reid, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 15.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 48. The Chevalier de Jaucourt, author of the entry for 'cloaque' in the *Encyclopédie*, transformed the Roman sewer goddess Venus Cloacina (ridiculed by Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 2.28) into a symbol of Roman civic spirit.

⁶⁴ V. Hugo, *Oeuvres Complètes* (1969), vol. 11/2, 878: 'Par moments, cet estomac de la civilisation digérait mal, le cloaque refluit dans le gosier de la ville, et Paris avait l'arrière-gout de sa fange'.

⁶⁵ Reid, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 19.

⁶⁶ Cic., *ad Q. F.* II.5.3; Liv. III.6.3; Sall., *Cat.* 37.5: 'ei Romam sicut in sentinam confluxerant' (with McGushin's commentary: 'sentina is strictly the place at the bottom of a ship where bilgewater collects; but it is often used as an alternative to *colluvies*, to mean filth or dregs: e.g. at Cic., *Cat.* I.12, 2.7; *Leg. Agr.* 2.70; *Att.* I.19.4; Liv. 24.29.3').

his bowels in a public latrine?⁶⁷ These images of obtrusive filth metaphorically realized the old fears of the sewers flowing back into the city. Ancient tales like Aelian's one about the octopus that swam up a drainpipe and ate a hoard of pickled fish are the ancestors of modern myths about creatures with teeth and arms that live down below: alligators and turtles in the sewers of New York; or the black pigs said to have bred in the sewers of Victorian Hampstead.⁶⁸

In the case of foreign immigrants, Roman bile became much stronger. Cicero makes much of the fact that Rome was built away from the sea and had thus avoided the fate of maritime cities, of being corrupted by the influx of foreign tongues and morals.⁶⁹ However, although he may have imagined Plato's rational citadel built in Rome, Cicero did also acknowledge that the ideal had disintegrated. He wrote of Cato as an isolated figure, who 'speaks as though he is living in Plato's Republic when he is in the middle of the dregs of Romulus (the *faex Romuli*)'.⁷⁰ Agrippa's purge of the Cloaca Maxima coincided with his symbolic expulsion of astrologers and necromancers from Rome.⁷¹ Extending citizenship to foreigners was also seen as a kind of polluting compromise. In Suetonius' eyes, one of Augustus' great achievements was to keep the citizen body 'pure and intact from all foreign and servile filth' ('sincerum atque ab omni conluvione peregrini ac servilis sanguinis incorruptum').⁷² The word most often found in conjunction with *conluvies* or *conluvium*, the word for 'filth', is *mixtus*, 'mixed', as though the disturbance of categories, the churning mass of unidentifiable effluent, was the most useful metaphorical aspect of the sewer.⁷³

The hierarchy of head and guts that determines the meaning of the Cloaca had another dimension in Roman culture. It also affected the ranking of literary genres. There tended to be a strong correlation between a work's place in the hierarchy of genres and the degree to which it exposed or excluded the ignoble functions of the body.⁷⁴ According to the Elder Seneca, for example, the word 'sponge' was enough to 'pollute' (*inquinare*) an orator's style irredeemably, along with other words such as *puleium* (fleamint), *lanternae* (lanterns), and *acetum* (vinegar).⁷⁵ Cato allegedly liked to avoid using any straight expression for 'sewage'.⁷⁶ Aulus Gellius, describing 'babblers', people with uncontrollable verbal diarrhoea, also resorts to the terms of the sewer: 'their speech flows constantly, and bubbles with the most filthy swirl of words'.⁷⁷

So what about the kind of literature that does bubble and swirl with foul language? In Rome there was a special relationship between the sewer and the dirtiest literary genre, satire. If the sewer was anatomized as the gut of Rome, teeming with rushing effluent, satire, too, took its metaphorical origins from guts. The name may be derived from that of an ancient *farcimen*, or forcemeat, called *satura*, named by analogy with a stuffed human gut, full of a savoury mixture of dubious food.⁷⁸ Satire, like the sewer, was connected with purging, yet at the same time it was inextricably contaminated with filth. Livy's description of the Cloaca Maxima, 'the receptacle of all the off-scourings of the city', is also a good one for satire's function as dustbin of all the other genres.⁷⁹

As for the satirist himself, his official role may have been analogous to that of the censor, whose duties, in the Republic at least, included not just the purging of public morals but also

⁶⁷ Suet., *Vita Lucani*: 'adeo ut quondam in latrinis publicis clariore cum strepitu ventris emissi hemistichium Neronis magna consessorum fuga pronuntiat: "Sub terris tonuisse putes"'.

⁶⁸ Aelian, *HA* XIII.6. See R. Daley, *The World Beneath the City* (1959), 187–9; T. Boyle, *Black Swine in the Sewers of Hampstead: Beneath the Surface of Victorian Sensationalism* (1990).

⁶⁹ Cic., *de Rep.* II.4.7.

⁷⁰ Cic., *Att.* II.1.8: 'dicit enim tamquam in Platonis πολιτείᾳ, non tamquam in Romuli faece'.

⁷¹ Dio XLIX.43.5. See J. Henderson, 'Satire writes "woman": gendersong', *PCPhS* 215 n.s. 35 (1989), 50–80, at 62.

⁷² Suet., *Aug.* 40.3.

⁷³ e.g. Liv. III.6.3: 'ea conluvio mixtorum omnis generis animantium et odore insolito urbanos et agrestem confertum in arta tecta aestu et vigiliis angebat' (forced cohabitation of town and country Romans in a time of plague; *confertum*, 'stuffed', recalls Cicero's metaphor *refarciri* for sewers stuffed with citizen bodies at *pro Sest.*

77); IV.2.5: 'colluvionem gentium adferre' (an explosive mixture of plebs and patricians); XXII.43.2: 'mixtos ex conluvione omnium gentium' (Hannibal's soldiers); XXVI.40.17: 'mixti ex omni conluvione' (a mob from Agathyrna); Tac., *Hist.* II.16: 'in multa conluvione rerum maioribus flagitiis permixtos' (Otho and Vitellius).

⁷⁴ See E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table. Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (1993), 22.

⁷⁵ Sen., *Cont.* 7 prol. 3: 'his admixtis sordibus non defendi sed inquinari'.

⁷⁶ Paul. Fest. p. 59: 'cloacale flumen dixit Cato pro cloacarum omnium conluvie'. One could compare the modern municipal euphemisms 'waste disposal centre' for 'rubbish tip' and 'waste receptacle' for 'rubbish bin'.

⁷⁷ Gell. I.15.17: 'quorum lingua tam prodiga infremisque sit, ut fluat semper et aestuet conluvione verborum taeterrima'.

⁷⁸ See M. Coffey, *Roman Satire* (1976), 15; and the discussion by Gowers, *op. cit.* (n. 74), 110, 112–13.

⁷⁹ Liv. I.56.2: 'receptaculum omnium purgamentorum urbis'.

the cleaning of the sewers.⁸⁰ Yet there was also something in him of the voyeur, like Swift's critic in *The Tale of a Tub*, who scours the Edinburgh streets in search of filth: 'Not that he is curious to observe the colour and complexion of the ordure, or take its dimension, much less to be paddling in or tasting it; but only with a design to come out of it as cleanly as he may'.⁸¹ This is the sort of complexion we can put on something like Pliny's letter to Trajan about the Pontic sewer. Why does Pliny uncover such an unpalatable subject? In order to show that he is fastidious enough to want it covered up again. But the main irony, not just for satirists, but for moralists like Seneca as well, is that one cannot purge a city of its dirt except by staining one's own writing, or, in Agrippa's case, one's public image, in the process. After rummaging in the underside of Parisian life, Zola deserved to complain: 'I heard my work treated as a puddle of mud and blood, as a sewer, as filth'.⁸²

Satirists may dwell on the underside of the city — the brothels, the taverns, the meat-markets and the sewers — but they also use the language of the sewer to contaminate or expose the contamination of the upper parts as well, like the nineteenth-century author of *Les Odeurs de Paris*, who peered down on Haussmann's boulevards and saw them as society's sewers overflowing with excrement.⁸³ Satirists see dirt diverted up above, as though the manholes had been lifted and the pipes had burst into the city. Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, for example, transforms upper Rome under the incontinent Claudius into an Augean sewer.⁸⁴

Of course, Roman satirists wallow in filth to different degrees. Lucilius talks about someone being 'down among the goat-turds, shit and pig-muck'.⁸⁵ But, after him, Horace offers a comparatively cleansed and rationalized version, from a quizzical higher perspective, his obscenities curiously at odds with his *purus sermo*. Rome's Esquiline hill had once been a stinking heap of paupers' corpses, animal carcasses and every other kind of garbage; seventy five rubbish pits were found in the last century in this Roman equivalent of the Parisian dump Montfaucon.⁸⁶ In Horace's eighth satire, where he presides over the former cesspit in the guise of a scarecrow Priapus, everything is now sweetness and light: the heap of bones is transformed into a salubrious promenade; Rome is now a garden city and Maecenas is its philanthropist, heralding the symbolic purge that Agrippa staged with his voyage through the great Cloaca.⁸⁷ Touching filth in Horace is like being taken on one of those nineteenth-century tours of the Parisian sewers designed to show that they no longer smelled — except, Hugo says, with the most imperceptible of sinister odours, like Tartuffe after confession.⁸⁸

Juvenal wallows closer to the ground than Horace, and it is in Juvenal that we get more than a whiff of the Cloaca, in images that link the city, the verse-form, and the satirist himself. The satirical notebooks that feed insatiably on vice find parallels among the denizens of river-banks and sewers: the Egyptian ibis that forages in the Nile scum, *saturam serpentibus*, 'fat on snakes'; and the river-pike offered to the unfortunate dinner-guest: 'fat with churning sewage, it had often wormed its way into the drain in the middle of the Subura'.⁸⁹

Two epigrams of Victor Hugo bring home the links with satire: the sewer is a cynic: it tells all. And: the sewer is the conscience of the city.⁹⁰ Because the Romans cleansed their city's

⁸⁰ Dion. Hal., *Rom. Ant.* III.68: censors let out cleaning and repairing of sewers at 1,000 talents. Liv. XXXIX.44: Cato as censor had existing sewers repaired and more built on the Aventine. The responsibility seems to have been taken over in the late Republic and Empire by praetors or aediles: Cic., *Caecin.* 13.36 (*praetor urbanus*); Plin., *NH* XXXVI.24.104 (Agrippa as aedile).

⁸¹ J. Swift, *The Tale of a Tub*, 'A Digression concerning Critics'.

⁸² Reid, op. cit. (n. 13), 60.

⁸³ Reid, op. cit. (n. 13), 49–50. Conversely, the sewers were the true boulevards (Louis Veuillot, *Les odeurs de Paris* (n.d.), 8: 'People take boat rides and hunt rats. Meetings are set up and already more than one dowry has been settled upon there'). There is a similar inversion in a line from G. Greene, *The Third Man* (1974): 'They [the sewer police] know this place just as I know the Tottenham Court Road'.

⁸⁴ Sen., *Apoc.* 7: 'cloacas Augeae'. The translation of 'stables' into 'sewers' is another piece of evidence suggesting that sewers were linked with excrement.

⁸⁵ Lucil. 1081W: 'hic in stercore humi fabulisque fimo atque sucerdis'.

⁸⁶ Lanciani, op. cit. (n. 11), 64ff.

⁸⁷ Hor., *Sat.* 1.8. The poem wards off all filthy defilers by inverting the statutory caution against defecation: 'mentior at si quid, merdis caput inquinare albis/ corvorum, atque in me veniat mictum atque cacatum/ Iulius et fragilis Pediatia atque Voranus' (37–9). Cf. A. E. Gordon, 'Seven Latin inscriptions in Rome', *G&R* 20 (1951), 75–92, at 77–8 on *CIL* VI.31615: 'stercus longe aufer ne malum habeas'. Cf. also *CIL* IV.3782, 3832, 4586, 5438 ('cacator cave malum'); *CIL* IV.6641 ('cacator sic valeas ut tu hoc locum transeas').

⁸⁸ Hugo, op. cit. (n. 64), vol. 11/2, 881: 'il exhale une vague odeur suspecte, comme Tartuffe après la confession'.

⁸⁹ Juv. 15.3: 'saturam serpentibus ibin'; 5.104–6: '+glacie aspersus+ maculis Tiberinus et ipse/ vernula riparum, pinguis torrente cloaca/ et solitus mediae cryptam penetrare Suburae'.

⁹⁰ Hugo, op. cit. (n. 64), vol. 11/2, 876: 'Un égout est un cynique. Il dit tout'; 'L'égout, c'est la conscience de la ville'.

conscience so assiduously and so durably, that meant that their sewers were associated with Rome throughout the world; they were the peculiar pride of the city. Yet to mention the sewer was the best form of deflation. The Elder Seneca tells an anecdote about Cassius Severus, who overheard the orator Cestius boasting: 'If I were a gladiator, I would be Fusius; if I were a mime-actor, I would be Bathyllus; if I were a horse, I would be Melissio'. 'Yes', retorted Cassius, 'and if you were a sewer, you would be the Cloaca Maxima'.⁹¹

To boast that your city has the finest sewers in the world is to expose yourself to ridicule. Once again, there is a parallel with satire. 'In satire at least we are supreme', boasted Quintilian.⁹² Yet what was there to be proud of in a genre that was just a swirling mixture of the effluent of all the others? Here was one of the ironic facts about Rome: the genre that told the whole unpleasant truth about the city was her most original contribution to world literature. It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that the Bocca della Verità — the mouth of truth — the moon-like bronze face outside S. Maria in Cosmedin in Rome, where newly-weds stick their hands, speak their minds, and wait for a crunch from below — was once the manhole-cover of a Roman sewer.

University College London

⁹¹ Sen., *Cont.* 3, *praef.* 16: 'si cloaca esses, maxima esses'. Cassius cannot then resist continuing the hygiene metaphor: 'ego negavi me de balneo publico exiturum nisi lotus essem'. Cf. the story of Lucan deflating Nero's verse on

thunderous earthquakes by imitating its sound in a latrine (see above, n. 67).

⁹² Quint., *Inst.* x.1.93.

Copyright © Emily Gowers 1995. Exclusive Licence to Publish:
The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies