



With the Veil Removed: Women's Public Nudity in the Early Roman Empire*

This paper explores the dynamics of women's public nudity in the early Roman empire, centering particularly on two festival occasions—the rites of Venus Verticordia and Fortuna Virilis on April 1, and the Floralia in late April—and on the respective social and spatial contexts of those festivals: the baths and the theater. In the early empire, these two social spaces regularly remove or complicate some of the markers that divide Roman women by sociosexual status. The festivals and the ritual nudity within them focus attention on the negotiations of social boundaries within these spaces, and the occasions for cross-class identification among women they provide.

Twice in the month of April, the Roman festival calendar includes rites that involve the public nudity of women: on April 1, in honor of Venus Verticordia and Fortuna Virilis, women make a dedication and ritually bathe in the public baths, and at the end of the month, naked female prostitutes perform in mimes during games in celebration of the Floralia. In this study, I explore the dynamics of women's public nudity in the early empire by focusing on these two festivals, which offer opportunities (to the Romans and to the modern investigator) to see and think about female nudity in two distinct social spaces: the baths and the theater. For both of these festivals, Ovid's *Fasti* is a crucial source, which, in part, sets the early imperial historical focus of this study; in both cases, however, important historical developments in the early empire also reshape the social contexts of the festivals. Though I will briefly point to relevant details of the earlier histories of both the festivals and the social spaces in which they take place, I pay particular attention to how these

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changes in the early imperial period might have given new valences to the experience of ritual nudity. While Roman religion is remarkably (though not completely) conservative on the level of ritual, its lack of doctrine or liturgy means that it is also quite adaptable on the level of meaning. The production or grafting of myths, etiology, or commentary onto the framework of the rites helps participants build new meanings appropriate to a new social world and put old rites to work negotiating changed social circumstances.¹ Thus, when developments of the early imperial period in both the baths and the theater remove or complicate some of the cultural markers that identify women with their sociosexual status, we would fully expect these changes to affect the experience and the potential meanings of the festivals that played out within them. When the rites call for women to undress, that disrobing means something different in the early imperial period than in the time before the Augustan regulation of elite clothing, or before the public bathing habit came to full flower, or before the Augustan theatrical reforms. The festivals, and the element of women's nudity in each, also further charge the public spaces of the baths and the theater, focusing attention on the blurring of social boundaries and potentially activating cross-class connections between clothed and unclothed women, and between women as viewed and viewer.²

A starting point for our historical consideration of women's public nudity in the early imperial period must be the Augustan codification of status in dress, a development that will have had an effect on both these rites and their social contexts. Augustus's insistence on the toga as the appropriate public dress of Roman citizen-men is well known. In an anecdote in Suetonius, Augustus instructs the aediles not to allow any citizen into the forum or circus who has covered his toga with a cloak (*Aug.* 40.5).³ Clothing for Roman women is not as explicitly attested as being thus codified, but both literary and artistic evidence strongly suggest that the matron's costume, including a long overdress (*stola*) and woolen hairbands (*vittae*), was also standardized in the Augustan age.⁴ Women convicted

1. See discussions in Beard 1987; Scheid 1992b; Graf 1992; Feeney 1998: 127–33.

2. This approach is fully sympathetic to that of Strong 2016, which was published while this paper was in preparation; Strong treats both of these festivals briefly at 184–89. A subtheme of my discussion will be the documenting of certain historiographical and methodological distortions of the evidence occasioned by a basic assumption of strict boundaries between women of different social and sexual status, and by a reluctance to contemplate the nudity of elite women.

3. Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 44.2 on the stipulation of the *lex Iulia theatralis* that *pullati* (men dressed in dark colors rather than the whitish *toga pura* or the very white *toga candida*) sit at the back of the theater's *cavea*; on dark colors in men's clothing as a marker of low status see Olson 2017: 93. To this period belong also Vergil's naming of the Romans as the *gens togata* (*Aen.* 1.286) and a boom in visual depictions of *togati*. See Stone 2001, esp. 17, on the symbolic reconfiguring of the toga in the early empire: as the garment becomes bigger and more unwieldy, its symbolic value increases. Quintilian's extended discussion of the proper deployment of the toga by the late first-century CE orator (*Inst.* 11.3.137–44) reveals the complexity of the garment's meaning.

4. See discussions in Zanker 1988: 156–59; Sebesta 1998: 107–108; Edmondson 2008: 24–25; McGinn 2014: 92–93. On matron's dress see Sebesta 2001: 48–50; Olson 2006: 189–91 and 2008: 25–41. As Olson 2006: 191 makes clear, “the literary record describes what the *matrona* should look like and how her clothing should embody her moral stance; she seems to be described in terms of exemplary (not actual) appearance.”

of adultery under the Julian law, for example, seem to have been denied the *stola* and *vittae*, and were perhaps compelled to signal their exclusion from the category of matron by wearing a plain white toga. In the secondary literature the toga is also frequently associated with Roman prostitutes, though convincing evidence that they regularly wore them is scarce.⁵ When dress so strongly conveys public meaning, naked bodies begin to become both harder to “see”—that is, to read culturally—and at the same time more important to think about. In her study of the cultural meanings of nudity, Ruth Barcan rephrases a well-established anthropological dictum: “Nudity (like modesty) does not precede clothing; rather it comes into being with the invention of clothing” and, like clothing, it is “bound up in fundamental ordering categories of society, especially gender and rank (or class)—and with the power, politics and pleasures of sex.”⁶ While Augustus did not invent clothing (and therefore nudity), during his reign and in the following generations the new emphasis on and likely codification of “matron’s dress” as a marker of social and sexual status, and the concomitant definitions of appropriate clothing for adulteresses and prostitutes, ought to bring the issue of women’s public nudity to the fore.⁷ How did Romans “read” a naked female body? How did Roman women experience public nakedness, their own and that of other women? How are social boundaries both built and breached by nakedness in the early Roman empire? These questions will remain open as we turn our attention to the two April festivals and the social spaces in which they are celebrated.

We begin with the rites of Venus Verticordia and Fortuna Virilis, both of which fall on April 1. General scholarly consensus holds that the two were related, but it is unclear which was older, and the meaning of and participants in the rites are also unknown. Almost certainly, as with most of the Roman rites of spring, fertility was at its origin, but unlike many such festivals, its celebrants are not limited to matrons. This may be the result of melding two separate rites, but by the time we have any evidence for the festival, extricating the worship of the one goddess from the other is a futile effort.⁸ Ovid’s *Fasti* offers the most extensive treatment of

5. McGinn 1998: 156–71 and Olson 2006: 192–96 and 2008: 47–51 have both recently reviewed the evidence on this question systematically, and McGinn 2014: 91–97 returns to the issue in response to Olson’s work. For a sampling of other recent discussions of prostitutes and/or adulteresses and togas see Sebesta 2001: 50; Edmondson 2008: 25 and nn.16–17; Strong 2016: 21–23. See Ziogas 2014: 740–43 for a reading sensitive to the ambiguity of social status in *Fast.* 4.134. Some of the more important primary sources are Cic. *Phil.* 2.44; Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.61–63, 80–85 and Porphyry and Acro ad loc.; Sulpicia [Tib.] 3.16.3–5; Mart. 2.39, 6.64, 10.52; Juv. 2.68–70.

6. Barcan 2004: 1; cf. Cordier 2005: 13–14.

7. Recent scholarship has extended the once primarily art-historical study of the representation and symbolism of clothing into genuinely cross-disciplinary “clothing studies”: the collected studies in Edmondson and Keith 2008 are illustrative of this shift, which the editors’ introduction (1–17) discusses; see also Olson 2008: 1–6; Harlow 2012: 1–3. Most, however, have given very little attention to the question of nudity, particularly women’s nudity, although see Cordier 2005, a focused monograph on Roman “nudities” in historical and anthropological contexts.

8. Fowler 1908: 68 and Pestalozza 1932 see Fortuna Virilis as the original dedicatee and believe the rite was at base a fertility ritual. The most thorough and nuanced recent reevaluation of Fortuna’s claim to the day is Champeaux 1982: 378–95. Schilling 1954: 389–95 and Floratos 1960 see Venus as the primary

the rites and seems determined to keep the two entwined: he begins by summoning women to worship “the goddess” (an unspecified *deam*), naming groups of celebrants with three vocatives but summoning them all to a single ritual: the matrons or *matres familias* (*Latiae matres*); the young brides (*nurus*); and, surprisingly in this company, a group to whom the matron’s fillets and *stola* are forbidden (*et vos, quis vittae longaue vestis abest*) (*Ov. Fast.* 4.133–34). The identity of this last group, set off by both clothing and stichometry from the *stola* wearers of the hexameter, is unclear: commentators and translators often understand the reference to be to prostitutes, but there is little to support that identification. Regardless, these women are excluded from the category of matron, either by compulsion or by choice, and do not wear clothing that signals conformation to the strictures of marital chastity. Nonetheless, they are included with the matrons and the newly married women in the second-person plural verb of line 133 (*rite deam colitis*) and in the imperatives that follow, as Ovid instructs them in the undressing and dressing of a cult statue for a ritual *lavatio*: *demite . . . demite . . . reddite . . .* (135–37). In line 139 we learn that the goddess also requires a bath from her worshippers (again, named collectively in the second person plural: *vos quoque*); the bath takes place beneath myrtle, which the goddess once used to cover her naked body when surprised in the bath by some satyrs; and by so doing, she was “safe”: *tuta fuit facto* (144). These details, especially the use of myrtle, suggest that the statue being washed and the object of the cult is Venus, although Ovid avoids naming her until line 153.

In this passage, then, Ovid calls into a single ritual space women marked as socially separate precisely by means of their ideal or prescribed clothing, and within five lines has them all (presumably) naked for a bath. The bath in his *aetion* commemorates Venus’s visibility and the sexual vulnerability brought on by the removal of her clothing, as well as the “safety” accomplished by covering her body. The *aetion* suggests, quite reasonably, that women’s clothing protects, conceals, and keeps the body hidden and private. Varro reminds us that the conical hairstyle of the *mater familias*, wrapped in the *vittae*, is called the *tutulus*, which he etymologized as related to *tueri* and the adjective *tutus* (also used in the Venus Verticordia story), as it protects her hair (Varro *Ling.* 7.44). Recent work on Roman women’s clothing and feminine civic morality emphasizes, however, that this “tutelary” function of the matron’s dress and hairstyle is not simply a marker of private virtue but also helps to represent her in public as the guardian of the house and of Rome itself; indeed, Varro’s other association for the hairstyle is with the *arx* of the city, which is, he says, called *tutissimum*.⁹ The origin stories for the Verticordia cult, which Ovid points to in *Fasti* 4.157–60¹⁰ and are given in more detail by other authors, confirm

goddess in the rite; see also Bömer 1958, ad *Fast.* 4.145. The name “Veneralia” is late and thus does not indicate Venus’s priority. For more recent discussions see Fantham 1998: 115–23; Staples 1998: 103–113; Pasco-Pranger 2006: 144–51; Schultz 2006: 148 and n.46; Ziogas 2014: 740–43; Strong 2016: 184–89.

9. Sebesta 1998: 113 treats the *tutulus*, in particular.

10. *Roma pudicitia proavorum tempore lapsa est: / Cumaeam, veteres, consuluistis anum. / templa iubet fieri Veneri: quibus ordine factis / inde Venus verso nomina corde tenet.* “Chastity slipped at Rome in

the link between the chastity of women and the well-being of the state. Livy seems to have associated the founding of the temple in 114 BCE with the expiation of the *incastitas* of three Vestals.¹¹ Other sources report that a cult statue of the goddess was dedicated about one hundred years earlier by Sulpicia, the wife of Q. Fulvius Flaccus, in response to a Sibylline oracle; Sulpicia was chosen as the best of the Roman matrons to perform this service, thus particularly associating this cult with *matronae*.¹² Both sets of stories suggest that the cult is intended to ensure the chastity of Roman women in connection with the welfare of the state as a whole.

What, therefore, should we make of those women in the last line of Ovid's invocation, *vos, quis vittae longaue vestis abest?* Despite the implication of sociosexual distinction, the poet keeps them doggedly in the picture, as if, once the participants move into the bath and clothing is removed, we cannot separate these women from the matrons. He shifts smoothly from the *aetion* for the Venus Verticordia bath to another bathing-related ritual: "Now learn why you give incense to Fortuna Virilis in the place which is damp with cool water" (*discite nunc, quare Fortunae tura Virili / detis eo, gelida qui locus umet aqua*, *Ov. Fast.* 4.145–46). Here, again, Ovid uses a second-person plural verb, without narrowing its reference to one specific subgroup of the women. Rather, the purpose-driven *aetion* he offers emphasizes the universal nature of the rite, marked again by the removal of clothing:

accipit ille locus posito velamine cunctas
et vitium nudi corporis omne videt;
ut tegat hoc celetque viros, Fortuna Virilis
praestat et hoc parvo ture rogata facit. 150

That place receives all women together with their veils removed and it sees every fault of the nude body; this Fortuna Virilis offers to hide and conceal from men, and this she does, if asked with a little incense.

Ov. Fast. 4.147–50

Here, hiding and concealing are *not* equated with clothing—the women, all of them together (*cunctas*), are asking for divine help when their nude bodies are seen by men. Fortuna Virilis seems less concerned with chastity than with promoting women's charms and attractiveness, or at least concealing their bodily faults. Ovid then returns without comment or change of addressee to the rites of Venus Verticordia, including a ritual drink of poppy, milk, and honey commemorating Venus's own nuptial night.

our great-grandfathers' day: ancients, you consulted the old lady of Cumae. She commands that a temple be built to Venus: since this was done in good order, from then on Venus holds a name from hearts redirected."

11. Julius Obsequens 37 (97) gives the entire story. Livy *Per.* 63 and Orosius 5.15.22 give us the story of the Vestals' adultery but without mention of the temple.

12. Val. Max. 8.15.12; Plin. *HN* 7.35.120; Solinus 1.126.

An epigraphic calendar from the first decade CE, the *Fasti Praenestini*, which includes material based on the research of Ovid's contemporary Verrius Flaccus, also attributes a ritual offering in the baths on April 1 to the cult of Fortuna Virilis, but separates the women along status lines: *frequenter mulieres supplicat Fortunae virili; humiliores etiam in balineis quod in iis ea parte corpor[is] utique viri nudant qua feminarum gratia desideratur*. "In great numbers women supplicate Fortuna Virilis; the lower-class women also [supplicate her] in the baths because in them men, at least, are nude in that part of the body in which women's attractiveness is desired."¹³ Both epigraphic economy of expression and perhaps also prudish decorum make the causal clause difficult to understand despite the clarity of its syntax. The standard translation is something like: "because in them men bare the part of the body by which the favor of women is sought," laying emphasis on men's bodies, men's desire, and men's desirability: women perform this rite in the baths because men's desiring and desirable bodies (penises?) are exposed there.¹⁴ Translations along these lines either ignore the adverb *utique* or take it as a simple *adverbium affirmandi*, the equivalent of *certe*. This would be a highly unusual use of *utique*, which generally functions to affirm strongly against the possibility of objection, thus sometimes paradoxically implying possible exceptions, objections, or limits: it can even (rarely) act with restrictive force.¹⁵ Here, I think, the *utique* is quite pointed and is part of the euphemism of the passage: the inscription avoids publicly exposing naked women and thus restricts itself to saying that men at any rate (*utique*) are naked in the baths. The same prudishness may govern the inscription's limitation of the celebrants making offerings in the baths to the *humiliores*—it offers no alternate location for the elite women's *supplicatio*. Nevertheless, the causal clause refers to the offering and prayers of all the women, wherever the reader might imagine the less humble rite taking place.

My interpretation of the relative clause *qua feminarum gratia desideratur* depends, in part, on Ovid's more expansive explanation of the rite's aim; while this might seem circular reasoning, the shared dependence of the *Fasti Praenestini* and Ovid's *Fasti* on Verrius Flaccus's more extended commentary on the calendar should lead us to expect consistency between the two. By my translation, "that part of the body in which women's attractiveness is desired," I mean to imply "that part of the body in which women want to be attractive," that is, the eroticized parts usually covered by clothing. Again, the inscription avoids an explicit statement that women want to be desirable in their naked bodies and resorts to a vague genitive and a passive verb

13. For text and commentary see Degraffi 1963: 126–27 and 433–34.

14. Cf. Frazer 1929: 3:190; Pestalozza 1932: 177; Floratos 1960: 202–220; Ziogas 2014: 740. The note on the line in Fantham 1998: 120 characterizes the *Fasti Praenestini*'s explanation for the rite as absurd, but still translates the line in a way that obscures its syntax and makes men the center of attention and agency: "because there the part of the man's body is bared which desires the charm of women." Strong 2016: 186 follows this translation.

15. See all seven headings in the *OLD*, s.v. "utique," but esp. 4 and 5; the restrictive meaning is addressed in 7c. See also Risselada 2016.

to introduce women into the motivation of the rite they perform—the *utique* is the one indicator that this is not really about the men. While this interpretation posits a desiring other to whom women want their naked bodies to be pleasing, it also acknowledges the women’s own desire—they *want* to be sexually attractive. The *Fasti Praenestini*’s vagueness reveals cultural anxiety about the degree to which women’s desire and desirability is in play in the rite and, more broadly, in the baths. Ovid, as we might expect, is more direct. The poet makes an effort to interpret the rite as, in part, about women’s experience of the baths and of their own public nudity: there is perhaps an element of risk (remember Venus and the myrtle) but also an active ritual effort of women of a broad range of classes and statuses to make their naked bodies seem beautiful, free of fault, and sexually desirable.

Of course the baths also offered a practical and quotidian way to achieve the same thing: regular bathing and anointing enhanced the sexual attractiveness of both men and women. An anonymous epigram from the Greek anthology, couched as an inscription on a bathhouse, coincides with Ovid’s addressees on April 1 and the ritual aims he imagines for the rites on that day:

Ὅσσαις θηλυτέραις ἐστὶν πόθος (ἔστι δὲ πάσαις),
 δεῦρ’ ἴτε, φαιδρότερης τευξόμεναι χάριτος.
 χῆ μὲν ἔχουσα πόσιν, τέρψει πόσιν· ἡ δ’ ἔτι κούρη
 ὀτρυνέει πλείστους ἔδνα πορεῖν λεχέων·
 ἡ δὲ φέρουσα πόρους ἀπὸ σώματος, ἐσμὸν ἐραστῶν
 ἔξει ἐπὶ προθύροις, ἐνθάδε λουσαμένη.

However many ladies feel desire (and all of you do), come on in, and provide yourself with brighter charm. And she who has a husband, will delight her husband; but one who’s still a maiden will rouse many to offer gifts to marry her. And she who makes a living from her body, a swarm of lovers she’ll have on her doorstep, once she’s bathed here.

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The epigrammatist, like Ovid, sees the connection between desire, bathing, and desirability as relevant to all women, regardless of their sociosexual status. While both Ovid and the anonymous Greek epigrammatist imagine the prospective viewer of the women’s bodies as male, Ovid names the original “viewer” a little differently: the baths themselves see all women and see every fault: *ille locus . . . videt*.

In this focus on the ritual’s location in the baths, both Ovid and Verrius Flaccus (or his calendrical epitomizer) are surely responding to a cultural institution very much in ascendance and flux in the Augustan age.¹⁶ It is important to note that the performance of the ritual in the public baths cannot have been very old.¹⁷ Although the

16. My summary here relies primarily on Fagan 1999: 40–74, which marshals the textual and archaeological evidence for the introduction and growth of the bathing habit in Italy and the provinces, but particularly in the city of Rome. See also Nielsen 1990: 25–45; Yegül 2010: 40–79.

17. Champeaux 1982: 393 addresses this point.

bathing habit likely reached Rome by the third century BCE, perhaps imported from the cities of Campania, the rapid growth in the building and use of public baths came in the late second and early first centuries BCE. By the middle of the first century BCE, on the evidence of Cicero and Catullus, baths and bathing were a regular and accepted part of the landscape and life of Rome, with many privately owned public *balneae* in its neighborhoods. In the early Augustan age, we get the first of the larger scale (though still very small compared to what followed) *thermae*: the baths of Agrippa in the Campus Martius, fed by the newly constructed Aqua Virgo. These baths, built under the aegis of Augustus, if not in his name, and passing into the ownership of the *populus Romanus* on Agrippa's death in 12 BCE, marked the beginning of an even more prominent role for the baths in the lives of city dwellers.¹⁸

While the public baths were doubtless available to and used by women as well as men from early on,¹⁹ much scholarly energy has been devoted to the more complicated question of whether and when mixed bathing became common, and what methods Romans might have used to avoid it. Some of the republican-period baths in Pompeii and Herculaneum²⁰ have separate (and smaller and darker) bathing rooms for women. Varro tells us that in Rome, too, in early days, separate bathing facilities existed for women (Varro *Ling.* 9.68), implying, of course, that by his own time (the early Augustan age) women used the same facilities as men.²¹ Women, then, were regularly experiencing their own and other women's public nudity in the baths at least from the early first century BCE, and, while much variation is found in the evidence, it is likewise clear that at least by the mid-first century CE women commonly (though perhaps not universally) used the baths in the company of men. As this topic has been discussed at great length by others,²² I will only highlight some of the evidence: none of the imperial baths at Rome contains separate wings for women (nor do the later baths in Pompeii); Ovid recommends the baths to women for erotic rendezvous with men;²³ Martial sees it as anomalous and suspicious for a woman to refuse to bathe

18. Fagan 1999: 107–110.

19. Plautus already has a character complaining about how long women take in the bath; the passage makes it likely the comedian has some sort of public bath in mind, as he complains about waiting for a woman's return to the house from her bath (*Truc.* 324–25).

20. The Stabian Baths (VII.1) and Republican Baths (VIII.5) at Pompeii, and Forum Baths at Herculaneum. The Forum Baths at Pompeii (VII.5) also have a women's wing, probably belonging to an Augustan renovation. For a discussion of all Pompeii's republican baths see Fagan 1999: 56–60, with references there; Yegül 2010: 51–58.

21. Note that Varro is explaining why a plural form (*balneae*) is used for the public baths: *primum balneum (nomen est Graecum), cum introiit in urbem, publice ibi consedit, ubi bina essent coniuncta aedificia lavandi causa, unum ubi viri, alterum ubi mulieres lavarentur*. Varro's explanation (as is often the case with the antiquarians) is a conjecture from a cultural datum that is *not* immediately interpretable to his contemporary readership, which suggests the double nature of the baths was a thing of the remote past already in his day.

22. Ward 1992 focuses entirely on the broad question of women in the baths; Fagan 1999: 24–29 summarizes both the evidence and the modern discussion of the issue of "Nudity and Male/Female Mixed Bathing." See also Nielsen 1990: 135, 147; Yegül 2010: 27–34.

23. *Ars am.* 3.639–40.

with him,²⁴ and inscriptions from second- to third-century Ostia and Lugdunum show husbands and wives bathing together in public.²⁵ The *Fasti* passage certainly assumes women's public nudity in the baths and associates the visibility of women's naked bodies in "that place" with their visibility to men: it is not unreasonable to presume that a woman of any status participating in this rite also might bathe in the presence of men.

Not unreasonable, but also not universally accepted: under the influence of the *Fasti Praenestini's* decorous version of the rite and an interpretation of it originating with Theodor Mommsen in the late nineteenth century, more than one modern author has either missed the message in Ovid or willfully rejected it. Mommsen surmised, based on a sixth-century source, that some crucial words had been omitted, as the *Fasti Praenestini* epitomized Verrius Flaccus's longer work on the calendar and so "corrected" the *Fasti Praenestini* to read: *frequenter mulieres supplicant [honestiores Veneri Verticordiae] Fortunae Virili humiliores . . .*²⁶ the rites of Venus Verticordia and Fortuna Virilis are neatly divided by class, with the elite women completely cut off from rites concerned with sexual attractiveness. Mommsen's refusal to "see" Roman matrons naked and concerned about the attractiveness of their naked bodies was certainly a product of his time, and his supplement has in more recent years met with much skepticism.²⁷ Nonetheless, segregationist revisions persist that adopt a variety of strategies to reduce the "publicness" of matronal nudity

24. Mart. 2.53, 3.52, 3.71, 6.93, 7.35, 11.47.1–2, 11.75.

25. *AEpigr* 1987.179 (= no. 263 in Fagan 1999's collection of bathing-relevant inscriptions) and *CIL* 13.1983 = *ILS* 8158 (= Fagan 264).

26. Mommsen 1893: 390; the source reads: αἱ σεμναὶ γυναῖκων ὑπὲρ ὁμοιοῦς καὶ βίου σώφρονος ἐτίμων τὴν Ἀφροδίτην· αἱ δὲ τοῦ πλήθους γυναῖκες ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἀνδρῶν βαλανείοις ἐλούοντο πρὸς θεραπείαν αὐτῆς μυρσίην ἐστεμμέναι; ("The noble women pay honors to Venus for concord and chaste life; women of the masses bathe in the men's baths crowned with myrtle for the worship of the same goddess," Lydus, *Mens.* 4.45). Lydus's relevance is suspect: the rite was clearly much changed from the first century, with the festival now simply called the Veneralia and Fortuna out of the picture entirely; his list of etiologies for the festival seems independent of both Verrius Flaccus and Ovid, and thus a poor source for "correcting" the *Fasti Praenestini*; see discussion in Floratos 1960: 201–202.

27. Fantham 1998: 115–16 characterizes Mommsen's supplement as accepted by most scholars (though she rejects its wording for reasons of style); however, Degraasi 1963: 434 was already seriously questioning the supplement in his edition of the *fasti*, with some earlier voices of doubt cited. In addition to the objections above, the class division of *honestiores* and *humiliores* suggested by Mommsen on the basis of Lydus's Greek is a distinctly high Imperial development: see Garnsey 1970: 221–76—*honestiores* (or its Greek equivalent) is a natural pair to *humiliores* for Lydus but would not have been for Verrius Flaccus. In my reading, the calendar's euphemism only makes sense if the women participating in this rite included respectable women, though perhaps not of the highest classes: *humiliores*, in any case, does not mean prostitutes. The *Fasti Praenestini* uses clearer vocabulary to indicate prostitutes (*puerorum lenocinium* and *meretricia*) in its entry for April 25, so it is not shy about this language. Nonetheless, cf. Cordier 2005 (237): "Il ne fait guère de doutes qu'il faille reconnaître les prostituées dans les *mulieres . . . humiliores* des *Fastes* et les τοῦ πλήθους γυναῖκες du Lydien." Cordier follows Radke 1958: col. 1651 in this interpretation and cites as a comparandum Ov. *Fast.* 4.865, where *vulgares puellae* name the prostitutes who worship Venus Erycina near the Colline gate. *Vulgaris* is a far cry from *humilior*, however, and even *vulgares . . . puellae* requires a bit of clarification from Ovid to unambiguously indicate prostitutes: *numina, vulgares, Veneris celebrate, puellae: / multa professorum quaestibus apta Venus* ("Common girls, worship Venus's godhead.

required by the ritual bath or to work around what seems an unacceptable or unexpected cross-class identification of women in this ritual. Notes to a widely used 2000 English translation of Ovid's *Fasti* place the rite in the "men's baths . . . with courtesans bathing in them on this day" and further suggest that the statue being bathed in the *Fasti* passage is that of Venus Erycina, whose extramural cult is otherwise associated with prostitutes and, according to the commentators, is located outside the walls "for the protections of adolescents and mothers."²⁸ These notes encourage readers both to understand women's desire to be physically attractive as exclusively connected to prostitution and to separate "mothers" from prostitutes. Another interpretation goes further in eliding the public nudity of Roman women, hypothesizing against all evidence that the ritual bath for the participants, the bathing of the cult statue, and the offering to Fortuna Virilis took place not in the public baths but in the sanctuary of Venus Verticordia in the Vallis Murcia, and, on no other grounds than propriety, that the rites were not performed *en masse* with matrons among the participants but by a small group of soon-to-be married young women, thus domesticating bodily exposure and women's concern about their sexual desirability to the very particular and much more private context of the defloration associated with marriage.²⁹ A more nuanced and credible interpretation by Jacqueline Champeaux still makes a class division within the rite but explicitly based on a perceived inconcinnity between the image of Roman matrons bathing in the "men's baths" and the Augustan ideological emphasis on social order and "restored" morality. While Champeaux sees the aims of the rites of both Venus Verticordia and Fortuna Virilis as unified around the promotion of women's sexual union with men, and acknowledges that the sources are clear about the location in public baths, she nonetheless posits two versions of the rite: respectable women in large numbers would bathe in a single-sex setting and make their offerings to Fortuna Virilis, while the coarsest of women (and prostitutes in particular) would do the same in the men's baths, perhaps even with men present.³⁰ A final, almost comically ingenious, scholarly strategy for "unseeing" matrons naked in public in the Ovidian passage involves reading *posito velamine* in *Fasti* 4.147 (*accipit ille locus posito velamine cunctas*) as suggesting that a screen or curtain was erected in the bath to separate the matrons (who, it would seem, are clothed and just washing the statue) from the prostitutes, who are bathing naked.³¹ Ovid uses the collocation *posito velamine* and variants on it in several other passages, and always with reference to uncovering the body;³² his text undeniably shows much more interest in the blurring of social categories effected by the removal of clothing than in placing a veil between them.

Venus is well-suited to working girls' profits"). On the play of class between this passage and Ovid's treatment of April 1 see Pasco-Pranger 2006: 144–51 and Ziogas 2014: 740–42.

28. Boyle and Woodard 2000: 235; there is no evidence at all of this connection. Venus Erycina's cult falls much later in the month and is treated by Ovid at 4.863–900.

29. Floratos 1960: 199–206; see critique in Champeaux 1982: 381–82.

30. Champeaux 1982: 378–95.

31. Cordier 2005: 238.

32. *Am.* 1.5.17; *Met.* 2.460, 3.192, 10.575; *Fast.* 2.379. Cf. Fantham 1998: 120.

This scholarly resistance to the idea that Roman elite women participated in a rite that addressed the visibility and desirability of their naked bodies, and that they did so naked, in the presence of women of all classes, is surely misguided. It is also, however, a sensitive response on the part of scholars to a social tension and anxiety actually present in and perhaps addressed by the rite. Whether a Roman woman was newly married, a respectable citizen-mother, or excluded by status or choice from those categories, she shared with all other Roman women the reality of economic and political dependence on the judgment and favor of men. This dependence made the public and communal nudity that became more and more common with the rise of the public baths a more vulnerable situation for women than for men.³³ For women, bodily exposure could mean the loss of men's approval for their physical beauty, or for their careful performance of chastity, or both. Whatever the origins and the historical meanings of the Fortuna Virilis/Venus Verticordia rites, their placement in a space where women's bodies were regularly exposed to the public view at least of other women, and possibly of men, makes them more and more an appropriate venue for acknowledging and ritually addressing this shared risk. If we stop to consider the reality that the baths cannot have been the original place for the rituals, the argument shifts slightly: the cult moves to the baths precisely because the social dynamics of public bathing involve concerns and risks for women that need ritual handling.

These concerns are perhaps intensified in the Augustan age by the new emphasis on status markers codified in clothing. We have already seen in Ovid's account of the rites of April 1 that the removal of specific sartorial markers of status in some sense reduces the several categories of women into one. Ovid is clear that it is not just the rite that effects this reduction, it is the place itself, the baths: *accipit ille locus posito velamine cunctas* (4.147). In the new Augustan grammar of clothing, "the veil removed" does not just expose women in the baths, it renders them illegible or at least harder to parse specifically. Being "protected" or "safe," thoroughly wrapped in the garb of a Roman matron, is not so much a matter of concealment as of being publicly legible, and thus protected by both custom and law from bodily violation. Clothing alone, however, is not what provides that safety—the toga of the adulterous woman (or maybe the prostitute) makes her body likewise legible but quite differently inscribed and not socially protected in the same way.³⁴ Matrons' clothing renders women inviolate by proclaiming their social and legal protection based on their connection and subjugation to particular men; a woman's toga advertises the transgression of that subjugation through adultery or through commercialization, but it at least is part of the same ordered symbolic system. Nakedness, by contrast, may feel disordered, outside of social control. It is this

33. Dunbabin 1989, esp. 33–46, addresses the danger of *invidia* in the baths—envy but also the evil eye motivated by it—and the decorative programs used to protect bathers from it; Clarke 1998: 129–31 expands on the topic. See also Barton 2002 for a broader sense of the competing necessity and risks of being seen.

34. McGinn 2014: 96, cf. Strong 2016: 22.

vulnerable situation, one shared (or at least potentially shared) by all of Rome's women, that the sources suggest the rite of Fortuna Virilis addressed, at least in the age of Augustus. Ovid's attention to women's concerns about physical desirability in the baths, and perhaps also the *Fasti Praenestini's* rather delicate avoidance of talking about women's public nudity, serves as further evidence for the rapid changes the bathing habit was undergoing in the early empire: fast growth, certainly, but likely also a widening of the practice of mixed bathing that heightened these anxieties.

The question of the effect of the baths on social relations has been raised and explored in recent years in relation not just to women but to the whole of Roman urban society by J. P. Toner, who characterizes the baths as "a hole in the ozone layer of the social hierarchy," where the goal of corporeal relaxation resulted in a parallel relaxation of social rules and the nudity of the bathers removed visual markers of class.³⁵ Toner sees in the frequent complaints about conspicuous consumption and display at the baths an awareness that they offered a setting that threatened or loosened normative social order. Garrett Fagan acknowledges this view as "defensible" but suggests that the elite investment in, and regular attendance at, the public baths militates against this reading: "It seems unlikely that members of the elite, obsessed with their social status and the public appearance that declared it to the world, checked their *dignitas* at the bath door along with their cloaks."³⁶ Though social mixing was certainly an element of the bathing experience, Fagan argues that the baths offered yet another opportunity for elite bathers to reinforce their position. The size and quality of one's slave retinue and their behavior (clearing the way, etc.), the sorts of bathing implements employed, the distribution of *sportulae* to clients, even comportment,³⁷ could all serve to mark differences among "naked" bathers. There is some evidence that freeborn boys wore their *bullae* in the baths, and the evidence from drains makes it clear that jewelry could also be worn,³⁸ so there were certainly ways of working around or with the "hole in the ozone layer" effect, most of which were readily available to those of high status. A matron of modest means, however, might have to go to special trouble to ensure that she was safe from sexual predation or harassment in the baths. Pliny the Elder suggests that even a small piece of jewelry could communicate volumes, however, and might be worth the investment. In the midst of his complaints about Roman women's prodigal use of pearls, he writes: *cupiuntque iam et pauperes, lictorem*

35. Toner 1995: 56–58; cf. the discussion of Yegül 2010: 34–39 of the baths as a "democratic institution."

36. Fagan 1999: 215.

37. Yegül 2010: 37. Cordier 2005: 329–31 discusses the erotic vulnerability of young men in the baths in conjunction with the "Greek model" of the *gymnasium*. He suggests that bodily postures of anxiousness and ill-ease might signal high status and the *verecundia* associated with it; cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 4.71. The analogous erotic vulnerability of women does not come into Cordier's discussion, presumably because the women have no part in the Athenian *gymnasium*.

38. For *bullae* in the baths see Plut. *Mor.* 288A; on jewelry (and other oddities) in the drains see Fagan 1999: 215–16. On jewelry as a marker of social status see Stout 2001.

feminae in publico unionem esse dictitantes, “Now even the poor want them, saying that a pearl is a woman’s *lictor* in public” (*HN* 9.114). The idea that the wearing of even a single pearl on a necklace would grant a poor woman some degree of protection is suggestive, and one can imagine the particular desirability of such a *lictor* in the baths, where the necklace would be particularly visible and other protections would be lacking.

For women, however, the very markers of status that might protect their bodily integrity in the baths might also have drawn the gaze; the heightened visibility effected by elaborate hairstyles or jewelry, or by a large retinue, might likewise have increased the “endangering” effect of nudity. Kelly Olson has made strong arguments for how bodily adornment offered women opportunities for self-representation but also presented risks: “The way in which women rendered themselves sartorially spoke volumes to viewers, and the adorned woman who made herself conspicuous in society is often likened in the literary sources to a prostitute.”³⁹ As one of the speakers in Seneca’s *Controversiae* emphasizes, a made-up face can make even a clothed woman seem as naked as if she has stripped bare and is the equivalent of “pimping” herself;⁴⁰ imagine the dangerous effects of cosmetics on a woman who is actually naked.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the baths were distinctly sexualized spaces: Venus/Aphrodite is among their most frequent decorative motifs;⁴¹ they offer opportunity for *furtivos . . . iocos* in Ovid (*Ars am.* 3.639–40); Martial famously reads the bodies and comportment of his bathing comrades as evidence of their sexual practices;⁴² and graffiti and nearby *meretriciae cellae* suggest sex and prostitution took place there.⁴³ Women who drew attention to themselves while in a state of undress might well be marked by a sexualized gaze and perhaps even assimilated to prostitutes, so that social indicators normally meant to guarantee and reinforce class distinctions were in danger of having the opposite effect. Segregation of the sexes in the baths, whether temporal, spatial, or behavioral, may have helped women more clearly mark their social and sexual status, but

39. Olson 2008: passim, but esp. 80–95; quote at 94.

40. *prodite mihi fronte in omne lenocinium composita, paulo obscurius quam posita veste nudae . . . deinde miramini, si . . . aliquis repertus est, qui incurrenti adulterae se non subduceret!* (“Give me a woman with a face made-up for all sorts of pimping, hardly more inconspicuous than if she were naked with her clothes off . . . then do you wonder if . . . someone is found who doesn’t get away from the adulteress’ attack!” Sen. *Controv.* 2.7.4). By contrast, a woman who really wants to ward off the attentions of strangers should “go out adorned only enough that she isn’t untidy” (*prodeat in tantum ornata, quantum ne immunda sit*), should keep older companions around her, should keep her eyes on the ground; it is better that she seem rude than shameless (2.7.3).

41. Dunbabin 1989: 23–25.

42. Martial’s references to the baths are so numerous that Fagan 1999 uses the poet as the central source for his first chapter, “A Visit to the Baths with Martial”; see 24–29 for Fagan’s discussion of Martial passages that point particularly to the sexualization of the baths.

43. Fagan 1999: 34–36; McGinn 2004: 23–26; Yegül 2010: 31–32. For a different angle on this see Clarke 1998: 212–40, Clarke 2002, and Clarke 2007: 194–205 on the comic and apotropaic value of the sexual paintings in the *apodyterium* of Pompeii’s Suburban Baths.

the evidence for the regularity of such segregation is decidedly slim.⁴⁴ In an epigraph from Ostia, a husband boasts that his “very chaste” young wife “never was willing to go out in public, into the bath or wherever, without me.”⁴⁵ While the statement is general (“or wherever”), the bath is the one named location, perhaps indicating the anxiety associated with that place and suggesting a protective strategy women could adopt in it: an accompanying spouse or children might “re clothe” a Roman matron when literal nudity was the norm.

The ambiguity of social class that ensued from the removal of clothing in the rites of April, traces of which we saw in Ovid’s *Fasti* and the *Fasti Praenestini* (and in the scholarly reaction to both), thus seems to reflect and express intensely a very real part of the experience of nudity in the Roman baths, particularly that of women: the baths could blur social boundaries, and the risks of such blurring were high for women, not least because of the baths’ close association with sex and desire. The location of the women-only rites of April 1 at least partly in the public baths, the site of this difficult negotiation of self-presentation (of status and desirability) and self-protection (from sexual violation or degradation), allowed women of all statuses, grouped together and “with the veil removed,” to recognize some degree of shared experience and gender solidarity. Whether the solidarity expressed in the rite carried over to the baths more broadly to provide another form of protection in the vulnerable situation of public nudity is irrecoverable. Whatever the case, the meanings that Ovid and the *Fasti Praenestini* assign to the rites in the bath, centering on the risks associated with nudity and on the cultivation of desire and desirability, surely respond to the historical developments in the bathing habit and in the articulation of status through clothing. These changes in the social and spatial contexts caused the rites to take on new valences and to do work in the early imperial period they might not have done a century earlier.

With the rites of April 1 behind us, we can turn our eyes now to the end of the month and to naked bodies that initially seem a bit easier to see; indeed, ultra-visibility seems precisely the point. Our sources on the spring festival of the Floralia are few and mostly colored by Christian moralizing. Lactantius gives us our most explicit description of the festival’s unusual central *ludi theatrales*: *nam praeter verborum licentiam, quibus obscenitas omnis effunditur, exuuntur etiam vestibus populo flagitante meretrices, quae tunc mimarum funguntur officio, et in conspectu populi usque ad satietatem impudicorum luminum cum pudendis motibus detinentur* (“For in addition to verbal license, in which every obscenity is poured forth, prostitutes also are stripped of their clothes at the demand of the people, and then they act as mime actresses and, in the view of the crowd, until its shameless eyes are sated, they are detained with shameful motions,” *Div. inst.* 1.20). This odd amateur mime show seems to publicly and officially dramatize the identification of performers

44. Nielsen 1990: 135 gathers the evidence for the segregation of women from men in baths, and argues more strongly for its regularity than most scholars in recent decades.

45. *quae numquam sine me in publicum aut in balineum aut ubicumq(ue) ire volet* (AÉpigr 1987.179 = Fagan 1999 inscription no. 263).

with prostitutes.⁴⁶ In ritual terms, the prostitutes' nudity is surely connected to the promotion of fertility suggested by Flora's name and the spring date of the festival; an apotropaic function is also possible, with an element of carnivalesque inversion provided by actual nudity rather than the "nude" costume of mime actresses.⁴⁷

Tertullian, in chapter 17 of *De spectaculis*'s book-length tirade against the pagan games, represents the Floralia as, paradoxically, pushing women who by profession and name "stand out" or "put themselves out" for sale even further into the public view. The women are thrust onto the stage (*in scaena proferuntur*); their specialties and prices and other lurid details, generally kept in the shadows, are announced publicly (*praedicatur*), though Tertullian refuses to repeat them. This theatrical display shames even the prostitutes, and they blush. In Tertullian's reading, the women on the stage feel *pudicitia* and evince it in their bodies by blushing: their nudity is one part of this exposure, but the anomaly of their nudity on the theater stage is even more cogent. This humiliating superexposure is explained by the detail that women are in the audience, and it is for them alone that prostitution is (according to Tertullian) normally invisible: *plus miserae in praesentia feminarum, quibus solis latebant* ([the prostitute/actresses are] "more miserable in the presence of women, for whom alone they used to be concealed"). For Tertullian, it seems, the shamelessness of bringing elite (or at least respectable) women into the same public space as prostitutes is the most transgressive aspect of the Floralia.

Recent work on prostitution and its place in Roman cities suggests, however, that the strict spatial divide between prostitutes and other *feminae* imagined by Tertullian as the norm was not the reality. In the 1990s, both Ray Laurence and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill made arguments based on evidence from Pompeii for moral "zoning" or informal designation of "deviant streets" that separated brothels from the areas of the city most closely associated with elite public life and residences.⁴⁸ As Laurence puts it, the positioning of brothels in narrow side streets "placed the prostitute out of sight of those arriving to dine with other morally respectable people, in particular wives and unmarried daughters, at the main entrance to houses" and allowed elites to avoid the moral taint of being "confronted by the visibly deviant behavior of the prostitute."⁴⁹ Thomas McGinn, however, has carefully reevaluated the archaeological and literary evidence for the place and space of prostitution (again, with his focus on Pompeii), and demonstrated (1) that the division of brothels from elite residential areas is not supported; (2) that if

46. Explored, for example, in Edwards 1997 and Duncan 2006. Some scholars have suggested that these are, in fact, the same actresses that would perform in the mimes on other occasions (and perhaps also engage in sex work), with the connections simply made more explicit somehow for the festival; see, e.g., Wiseman 1998: 71; Perea Yébenes 2004: 21–23.

47. Cordier 2005: 216–23. Perea Yébenes 2004: 16–24 provides a good (if brief) anthropological reading of the known details of the festival in the context of "extranjerias" in Rome and calls for further work in this vein.

48. Laurence 1994: 70–87; Wallace-Hadrill 1995.

49. Laurence 1994: 75.

we take a broader view of places of prostitution the spatial division is not strong even for public spaces; and (3) that prostitutes were visible even in the most public elite spaces, such as the forum. McGinn goes so far as to argue, “Instead of keeping prostitution hidden away in the dark corners of their cities, the Romans preferred to have it out in the open as much as possible. The visibility of prostitutes was the ideal foil to the public persona of the respectable woman (*mater familias* / *matrona*).”⁵⁰ Anise Strong has recently bolstered this argument with a focus on the social importance of the public visibility of both matrons and prostitutes, and of the visual signs that distinguished them.⁵¹ Most of these markers were attached to the *matrona*: in addition to sartorial distinctions and those that displayed her status explicitly, such as accompaniment by family and/or slaves or being carried in a litter, a matron might mark her difference, particularly in the public presence of a prostitute, by veiling herself, glaring, or ostentatiously avoiding contact. These last two strategies would have been the ones most easily available to women of the lower classes, whose presence in markets and shops as both sellers and buyers perhaps placed them in closer contact with women engaged in sexual commerce, and whose lack of access to many of the more costly trappings of matronly status rendered them more likely to be mistaken for prostitutes.⁵² As Strong puts it, however, these interactions supported the social structure: “the very nature of Roman matronly *pudicitia* depends not only on regular encounters with strange men but on a contrast with women who do not possess *pudicitia*”; if, as she argues, “the archaeological evidence simply does not allow for gender, class, or moral segregation,” then the “Roman urban landscape becomes both a place of constant transgression and a setting where respectable women can repeatedly declare and defend their subjugation to a particular male.”⁵³ Prostitutes were under no obligation to avoid “respectable” women and men, but they might well have been cognizant of their visible snubbing

50. McGinn 2004: esp. 78–93 and 240–55; quote at 4. McGinn 2006 returns to the issue and also looks for the origins of “zoning shame” in Christian morality.

51. Strong 2016: 158–70. Hartnett 2017: 87–106 is also very helpful on this topic.

52. Both Olson 2006: 197 and Hartnett 2017: 102–103 discuss *Dig. 47.10.15.15* as evidence that clothing distinctions were not entirely reliable as markers of women’s sociosexual status: *si quis virgines appellasset, si tamen ancillari veste vestitas, minus peccare videtur: multo minus, si meretricia veste feminae, non matrum familiarum vestitae fuissent. si igitur non matronali habitu feminae fuerit et quis eam appellavit vel ei comitem abduxit, iniuriam tenetur* (“If someone has accosted young girls, but ones dressed like slave-girls, he is considered to have committed a lesser offence; much lesser, if it was women dressed in the clothes of a prostitute, not of a matron. Still, if a woman was not in matron’s clothing and someone accosted her or took her attendant from her, he is still held liable for charges of insult”). See further discussion of this evidence in McGinn 2014: 95–96. Though very late, a law of Constantinus of 326 CE discussed in Justinian 9.9.28 also gives a good sense of the slippery status of a woman in commerce, explaining that a (presumably married) woman who is the owner of an inn is still liable to adultery laws, but if she was serving drinks and thus fulfilling the role of a slave, then any men who slept with her and even she herself should not be viewed as having committed adultery, having placed herself effectively beneath the view of the law. A Roman matron of lower status would need to be extra careful to mark her status if she wished to preserve it.

53. Strong 2016: 169–70.

by other women.⁵⁴ The degree of shame, resentment, or defiant pride this treatment may have evoked is hard to recover.⁵⁵

This reconfiguration of our understanding of the daily public interaction (or ostentatious avoidance thereof) between prostitutes and other women should also reconfigure our understanding of the Floralia. The ritual relocation of the encounter between prostitutes and the rest of the Roman public into an architecturally structured space provides a safe occasion for men and women of all classes to turn their eyes toward the naked bodies of prostitutes. In the theatrical context, with the negotiation and display of class division expressed otherwise, and with commercial transactions momentarily off the table, we may also see an opportunity for the bodies of the women on stage to take on different meanings and for the performers to experience their visibility in a different way. During the Floralia, their bodies and sexuality are celebrated in ritual connection with the flowering beauty of the spring, and the fertility and abundance that it promises. John Scheid, while emphasizing the role of the *matrona* as “religious woman par excellence” in Roman religious life, acknowledges the exceptionality of “certain rituals specifically designed to celebrate female sexuality or the stages of a woman’s life,” where matrons are not at the forefront.⁵⁶ The rarity of occasions like the Floralia, where the most marginalized of women participated in the public religious life of the city in a very visible way, would have charged the performances with added significance for the performers and the audience both. The very direct affirmation of applause and the sense of contributing to the health and prosperity of the whole community may have made the experience of performing in the Floralia positive and integrative. A recent reading goes so far as to see the performances at the festival as converting the prostitute/*mima* into a sacralized representation of femininity and a priestess of Flora.⁵⁷ In any case, the shame response on which the Christian writers focus is not the only possible reading of the experience from the point of view of the women on the stage.

The specific association of the prostitutes’ performance with the genre of mime may also inform their experience and their reception by the audience. Though it surely had a presence in Rome earlier, nonliterary mime, a mix of largely

54. In the opening scene of Plautus’s *Cistellaria*, a *lena* advocates class solidarity among prostitutes in imitation of high-born women, whose social cohesion is expressed in part by their public condescension and their private hostility to prostitutes; this scene is briefly discussed in Strong 2016: 159.

55. Suggestive for this question is Hartnett 2017: 105–106, who interprets a series of Pompeian campaign notices in front of a bar in the via Dell’Abondanza (*CIL* 4.7864) as preserving a little history of this sort of interaction in a candidate’s snubbing of a barmaid’s endorsement by whitewashing her name (*Zmyrina*) from the notice; the woman and her fellow servers respond with a prominent and pointed endorsement of another candidate, with *Zmyrina*’s name given special emphasis. While this is not exactly an analogous reaction to daily snubs in the street, it does suggest an active assertion of presence and visibility by this set of working women in reaction to erasure.

56. Scheid 1992a: 405; see also Strong 2016: 170–96, in her chapter on “Pious Prostitutes.”

57. Perea Yébenes 2004: 21–23 reads Flora as the protector of prostitutes, and the prostitute *cum mima* as transformed into a priestess of Flora by the festival; with the festival’s close, “la actriz, la mima, vuelve a ser sólo una prostituta despreciable” (23).

improvised dramatic performance and other entertainments (acrobatics, dance, juggling), seems to be associated with the Floralia from the institution of regular annual games in 173 BCE. The real heyday of the mimes comes with the late Republic, when they may have been favored by the elite men who paid for the games as less inclined than tragedy to provoke political reactions in the audience.⁵⁸ The mime was distinct from other Roman theatrical genres in two ways important for our discussion. First, the performers did not wear masks or elaborate heavy costumes: their faces and bodies were visible and gesture, facial expression, and dance were central to the performance; we see some mime actors praised for their personal beauty.⁵⁹ Second, mime actors included women, and indeed many, if not most, plots were adultery narratives, in which the attractive young wife, played by a woman, and her lover deceive an older husband.⁶⁰ The mime plays, then, even outside the context of the Floralia, allowed a public venue for the safe appreciation of women's sexuality, desire, and desirability. Since the *mimae* acted in minimal dress (even barefoot),⁶¹ with their faces exposed, the identification of the actress with the role might be quite close, and a woman who received applause and admiration for her performance could reasonably receive it as personal affirmation. For a prostitute on stage at the Floralia, the mime performance might have played out her transgressive social positioning and even her social opposition to the ideal matron in a way that garnered applause and laughter rather than opprobrium and shame. The extension of her bodily exposure even to full nakedness would not of necessity undo this effect.

The viewing of these performances also might have been a more positive gendered experience for women in the audience than has often been acknowledged. While an encounter on the street with a prostitute would perhaps raise the prospect of contamination, accidental identification, or shame for a "respectable" woman, the theater disambiguates the encounter: if I am in the audience, I am clearly not on the stage.⁶² While it may seem counterintuitive, the safety provided by the architectural and spatial distinction between women in the audience and women on stage might have allowed the elite women more room to comfortably look at prostitutes, to see them without defensiveness or the necessity to mark distinctions, and thus possibly to recognize affinities with them. If the women on stage are also being received positively by the audience, and are even playing desiring and desirable matrons, women in the audience were perhaps all the more likely to identify with them and perhaps even to identify their own female bodies with the nude ones on stage.

58. See Beacham 1992: 129–39 for the history of the genre.

59. Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.178–80.

60. Cf. Ov. *Tr.* 2. 497–520; Val. Max. 2.6.76; Sen. *Con. ex.* 2.4. Reynolds 1946 discusses the genre.

61. Another word for a mime actor is *planipes* ("flat foot"), so not wearing the lifted sandals or boots of comedy and tragedy.

62. Cf. Parker 1999: 164–65 on the "hierarchical space" of the theater and, esp., on the "great gulf" separating stage and audience architecturally, but also legally and socially.

The safety provided by the theater's unambiguous spatial distinctions perhaps helps explain the utter lack of expressed concern about the prostitutes' nakedness in *praesentia feminarum* in our Republican and Augustan sources on the festival, in sharp contrast to the early Christian sources with which we began. The games of the Floralia had been held since the early second century BCE, and had included performances by naked prostitutes since at least the early first century BCE. An anecdote in Valerius Maximus about Cato the Younger betrays no uneasiness about it: Cato goes to the Floralia of 54 BCE; the people are embarrassed to call for the naked prostitutes in his presence; Cato realizes this and leaves so that the games may continue (*ne praesentia sua spectaculi consuetudinem impediret*); the people applaud him and call the *priscum morem iocorum* back to the stage (Val. Max. 2.10.8).⁶³ The story reveals the social norm of shame in associating too closely with prostitutes or looking too long outside this ritual context but, in the end, simply attests to the power of Cato's reputation for uprightness and severity, not his actual disapproval. In the *Fasti*, Ovid devotes some two hundred lines to the Floralia, mentions its celebration by prostitutes, its license and frivolity, but he, too—perhaps unsurprisingly, given the larger Ovidian oeuvre—nowhere seems concerned about the dangerous proximity of matrons and prostitutes: at this point, it seems the boundary between clothed women in the audience and the naked women on the stage holds.⁶⁴

Indeed, for Ovid, the Augustan *lex Iulia theatralis* would have made the theater a place where status was more clearly demarcated than ever, and where at least most women will have been seated in the highest rows of the theater, the *summa cavea*, at the furthest remove from the stage, but probably separated from the other occupants of the top rows.⁶⁵ The Vestal Virgins and possibly female relatives of the emperor had special seating in the front rows. Suetonius suggests that the relegation of women to the *summa cavea* in the theater came earlier than in the amphitheater (*Aug.* 44.2), though it may still be an artifact of the early Augustan age. Christine Schnurr has connected this move and some other elements of the *lex Iulia theatralis* to the extreme politicization of the theater as other venues for

63. This anecdote is often misunderstood as indicating Cato's condemnation of the tradition: see, e.g., Perea Yébenes 2004: 23–24 and Strong 2016: 188. Cf. also Sen. *Ep.* 97.8.

64. Fantham 1992: 50 makes much of Vergil's (and perhaps Livy's) failure to talk about Flora or the Floralia, concluding that "The goddess's mime festival was a scandal to the more severe, and this might explain what appears to be a pattern of neglect under Augustus." Flora appears, however, in Varro's *De res rustica* 1.1.5–7 with no embarrassment and in Ovid, of course; and while Flora's temple did not receive quick restoration by Augustus, it was restored no later than that of the squeaky-clean Ceres, its neighbor (*Tac. Ann.* 2.49).

65. True for the theater and the gladiatorial games of the amphitheater, but not, it seems, for the circus games, where mixed-gender seating continued. See Rawson 1987: 89–91; Edmondson 1996: 84–95. While the Floralia included games in the circus, Ovid makes it clear that in his day part of the festivities also took place in a theater (*Fast.* 5.189), whether it was one of the purpose-built theaters available at this point or a section of the circus adapted for this use. The proximity of Flora's temple to the circus makes a location there attractive; see the discussion in Favro 1999: 211–13.

popular political expression were shut down by the emerging principate.⁶⁶ The removal of women from the lower sections of the theater was a sign of the growing volatility of that space as much as it was a display of moral discretion. The question of whether the women at the back of the theater were in any way spatially differentiated from one another by class remains open. Arguments that *matronae* and their daughters were separated from “prostitutes and *probrosae*” are based on propriety, on analogy to a possible similar separation of *hetairai* in fourth-century Athens, and on a parallel to Augustus’s grant of a special section to the *mariti* among the plebs (Suet. *Aug.* 44.2).⁶⁷ A few scholars have even argued that senators’ wives and perhaps even the wives of the *mariti de plebe* continued to sit with them in the lower parts of the theater.⁶⁸

This scholarly push to affirm, in the absence of data, spatial demarcation of social distinctions among the women in the *summa cavea* is, like the concern about naked women in the rites of April 1, in part a sign of the scholars’ cultural sensitivity to a social anomaly. The shift of women to the rear of the theater has the strange consequence of removing them from their familial and social contexts, from the husbands or children whose presence we have seen was one important public marker of a woman’s status as matron. Elizabeth Rawson turns quickly to distinctions of clothing as she discusses this issue, and finally asks, “Did female slaves sit with their mistresses or not?”—that is, in her uncertainty about spatial divisions, she looks for other ways to make (high) status visible. But visible to whom? Who is looking at these women sitting in the back? They are certainly out of view of most of the Roman men in the audience (unless, like the flirty elegiac poets, they craned their necks to girl watch: *Ov. Am.* 2.7.3; *Prop.* 4.8.77); other occupants of the *summa cavea* were slaves, foreigners, or perhaps citizens too poor to own a toga. It is hard to imagine that this would not have felt, to the women who had previously sat with their families in lower parts of the theater, like relegation, an unusually clear marker of even “citizen” women’s otherness.⁶⁹ They did, however, remain thoroughly visible *to one another*: the subtleties of dress and adornment that distinguished women by status and rank would perhaps have been more legible and important to other women than to anyone else.⁷⁰

If, as it seems, this seating arrangement was new in the Augustan age, it is worth asking what effect it would have had on Roman women’s experiences of

66. Schnurr 1992: 155–57; see also the broader discussion of this development in Edwards 1993: 98–136.

67. See discussions in Rawson 1987: 89–91 and Schnurr 1992: 151–52.

68. Bollinger 1969: 19–20; Rawson 1987: 91.

69. Parker 1999 has some interesting readings both of the essentially feminizing effect of the Roman gaze (164–66) and of the class affinity and identification between the “front and back” of the theater, that is, the stage and the *summa cavea* (171–72). He is not thinking about the women in the *summa cavea*, but we probably should.

70. See Olson 2008: 96–104 on Roman women’s expression of status and power through clothing and *cultus*; the end of the same chapter (111–12) emphasizes women’s doubled role as both “spectacle” and “spectator.”

the Floralia and its characteristic *licentia*. I have already suggested that the architecture of the theater gave “respectable” women the safety to look without defensiveness at the nude prostitutes on stage, and perhaps that this safety allowed them to identify more closely with the desire and desirability these women embodied. If we imagine women separated from the husbands and families that are among their usual markers of sociosexual status, grouped in an arrangement that marks them primarily as women, perhaps a little resentful about it, does this change their experience of watching other women in perhaps full nudity on the stage? Does it make the women very conscious of their own female bodies? Does it put them in a sexually vulnerable position, separated as they are from family? Or perhaps does their segregation into an essentially single-sex environment both reinforce their safety and allow them to enjoy a modicum of personal *licentia* largely outside of the male gaze and free from male supervision? Augustus’s theater reforms, though clearly aimed at reinforcing social order, may have had the paradoxical effect of making all the theatrical games, but perhaps especially the Floralia, reinforce some degree of cross-class identification among Roman women, even if only for a ritual moment.

The *Fasti* offers some tantalizing details about the social positioning and dress of the Floralia’s audience that may suggest one way in which this cross-class identification was expressed or encouraged through the play of clothing and nudity. Although the women in the audience are clearly differentiated spatially from the naked prostitutes on the stage, Ovid imagines an audience for the Floralia at *Fasti* 5.349–52 with affinities to the performers: he asks “Why does a prostitute-y crowd celebrate these games?” (*turba quidem cur hos celebret meretricia ludos*, 349). Ovid seems to imagine an ideal audience that, though surely not literally made up of only *meretrices*, contains women loosed from the strictures of the matron’s role; he further describes it in lines 351–52 as excluding “serious types” (*tetricis*) and “important people” (*magna professis*), as, essentially, an audience of the commons (*plebeio . . . choro*). While the latter terms are fairly gender-neutral, Ovid’s first characterization of the audience as a *turba . . . meretricia* is more clearly gendered female: the term *meretrix* has no masculine cognate equivalent. As Ovid turns to discuss the multicolored clothing of the audience, appropriate to the goddess in all her floral glory and in flamboyant contrast to the white-garbed audience of the Cerialia (*cur tamen, ut dantur vestes Cerialibus albae, / sic haec est cultu versicolore decens?*, 5.355–56; cf. 4.619–20) just a couple of weeks earlier, he surely is again focused on the women.⁷¹ While sartorial distinctions in normal circumstances might have helped maintain status divisions among the women even when grouped

71. Roman men’s clothing in general was very limited in its use of color: see Stone 2001: 15; Olson 2008: 13–14 and 2017: 108–115. Perea Yébenes 2004: 21 seems to believe that it is prostitutes, in particular, who don *cultu versicolore* at the Floralia. While that may be the case, the regular association of *meretrices* with bright colored clothes would make such clothing unremarkable. The contrast to the Cerialia in Ovid suggests that he has in mind a broadly conceived analogous group—“women in the theater audience”—as the wearers of both costumes. The two audiences were perhaps not identical in their social composition, but the strict matron vs. prostitute division is not supported here.

en masse in the *summa cavea*, it would seem that at the Floralia no one is dressed as a model Roman matron. Though women of any status might wear colored garments, the extravagant use of color seems to have had strong associations with prostitution or at least with sexual license. Horace and Seneca both suggest that *matronae* are distinguishable from *meretrices* by the color of their clothes,⁷² and Pierre Grimal has argued that once the stola is marked as matron's wear, multicolored clothes worn in public are the marker of women who are outside the category of *matrona*, who have claimed the *licentia stupri*.⁷³ Ovid's litany of colors available to *puellae* looking to attract men in *Ars Amatoria* 3 is, we must remember, not addressed to stola-wearing matrons or to those determined "to wear their census class on their body" (*census corpore ferre suos*).⁷⁴ It is even possible that Ovid's description of a *turba meretricia*, dressed like a colorful field of flowers, excludes matrons altogether, or at least the most elite of them; we have no evidence, however, that this is the case. Perhaps instead, in this festal context and as a marker of the carnivalesque, even respectable matrons claim through their clothing choices some degree of *licentia*.⁷⁵ Clothing studies have shown the variety of color, fabric, and draping available to Roman women, and elite women would have more choices than others; Roman women made active clothing decisions as a matter of self-representation and identity-shaping, and ones that might shift with social circumstances.⁷⁶

If women attending the Floralia made active choices to dress as part of the *turba meretricia*, their choices would have to some degree erased more usual social distinctions, and their grouping together in the *summa cavea* would have reinforced the sense of cross-class connection among them, at least during the festival. We can go one step further to imagine that the clothing Ovid describes for the female audience of the Floralia was a means of (safely) bridging the spatial divide between the women's section of the theater and the stage by adopting an unaccustomed degree of public nudity. For a prostitute (or a mime actress) to be transgressively bare, to be "naked," might mean something very close to full nudity. For a matron to be "naked" might mean something very different: a lighter, more flimsy, or brighter dress, or uncovered or loosened hair, might give the festal, carnivalesque *feeling* of nudity, allowing the women in the audience to join notionally in the prostitute-mime's transgressive nudity and, perhaps, participate in a fantasy

72. Hor. *Epist.* 1.18: *ut matrona meretrici dispar erit atque / discolor*; Sen. *QNat.* 7.31.2: *colores meretricios matronis quidem non induendi*. Olson 2008: 11–13 points out, however, that we have evidence for women of many statuses wearing clothes of many colors and relatively few references to women wearing white. It may be, in fact, the Cerealia that is the more strongly sartorially marked of the two festivals, with women dressed in white to signal ritual purity.

73. Grimal 1985.

74. Harlow 2012: 42 points out that the list of colors Ovid enumerates overlaps pretty thoroughly with a passage of Plautus's *Epidicus* (225–32), in which the varied clothing choices of *meretrices* are under discussion. Styles, of course, may have changed in the nearly two centuries between, but bright colors are clearly not strongly associated with matronly *pudicitia*.

75. Cf. Roman citizen-men's eschewing of the *toga* to express bodily the license of the Saturnalia (Sen. *Ep.* 18.2).

76. Harlow 2012; see also Olson 2008: 96–112.

of the prostitute's sexual freedom. The development of an all-female *cuneus* in the theater would allow this sense of license to play out in relative safety: as the women on stage played at being (adulterous) matrons, the women in the audience might play at being *meretrices*, if only for the duration of the festival.

As I have already suggested, for prostitutes whose daily experience in public included pointed avoidance or "snubbing" by other women, this moment on the stage and this valuation of their bodily presence might have allowed some vindication and a sense of integration with the broader community. For women in the audience, the bodily experience of sitting as women *en masse* and of dressing in unusual colors in accord with the carnivalesque tone of the festival might once again, as we saw in the case of the rites of April 1, allow for an acknowledgment of gendered concerns with desire and sexuality that crossed social boundaries.⁷⁷ Both the prostitute-actresses and the women in the audience are invited to identify with the desirable and desiring female lead of the mime's standard adultery plot.⁷⁸

One more look at a set of early imperial texts is in order. These indicate close imaginative associations of the Floralia with the matrons' flirtation with sociosexual transgression, associations that might reflect this experience of identification.

In strong contrast to earlier sources, both Martial and Juvenal, writing in the late first- / early second-century CE, evoke the Floralia in places where elite women put in contention the distinction between themselves and prostitute-performers. In the prose preface to his first book of epigrams, Martial calls up the Floralia as a model for his poetry as he defends the saucy frankness of his language: *epigrammata illis scribuntur qui solent spectare Florales* ("My epigrams are written for those who are used to watching the Floralia," Mart. 1.praef.). Martial alludes to the anecdote from Valerius Maximus we looked at earlier, telling the potential Catos among his readers, "Don't come into my theater, or if you come in, watch!" (*non intret Cato theatrum meum, aut si intraverit, spectet*). This line, and its reworking as an epigram at the end of the preface,⁷⁹ constitute a subtle rereading of Valerius' story. For Martial, Cato's exit becomes not a concession to the *priscus mos iocorum* but a staged gesture of disapproval: he entered the theater precisely *in order* to leave in disgust.

77. Cels-Saint-Hilaire 1977 provides a detailed reading of the social and political functions of the *ludi Florales* in three different historical moments: their inception in the mid-third century, the institution of annual games in the early second century, and the age of Augustus. Though, oddly, she does not treat the mime shows, her observations on the integrative function of the games in the Augustan age as in some sense containing and domesticating the threat posed by marginalized elements of the *plebs* (272–74) might be turned to good use with regard to the role of women in the festival.

78. We hear from Valerius Maximus (2.6.7) that under Tiberius, Massilia banned mime performances altogether because of the ubiquitous adultery plots and the fear of imitation (*ne talia spectandi consuetudo etiam imitandi licentiam sumat*); cf. Lact. *Div. inst.* 6.20.

79. *nosses iocosae dulce cum sacrum Florae / festosque lusus et licentiam vulgi, / cur in theatrum, Cato severe, venisti? / an ideo tantum veneras, ut exires?* ("Since you knew the sweet rites of playful Flora and the holiday's games and the license of the crowd, why did you come into the theater, severe Cato? Or had you come only in order to leave?").

The preface has, thus, already focused our attention on the Floralia's audience (though not precisely on the women in it), and on the possibility of a moralizing reaction to the onstage "fun."

The Floralia resurfaces in poem 1.35, during a second round of poetic defense. Before we turn to 35, however, we must look briefly at the preceding poem, which, it seems, prompts this new defense. Poem 1.34 is the first really raunchy poem in Martial's collection, a warning to a certain "Lesbia" to cease her erotic exhibitionism:

incustoditis et apertis, Lesbia, semper
liminibus peccas nec tua furta tegis,
et plus spectator quam te delectat adulter
nec sunt grata tibi gaudia si qua latent.

Always with doors wide open and unguarded, Lesbia, you misbehave and
you don't conceal your stolen pleasures, and an observer delights you more
than a lover, nor do pleasures please you if they're hidden in any way.

Mart. 1.34.1–4

The name Lesbia is drawn, of course, from Catullus, and as such evokes the wayward Roman matron; her sexual adventures are marked as *furta*, so they are illicit; and, finally, Martial's use of the word *adulter* for the woman's lover should confirm that we have a married woman in mind. Lesbia's oxymoronic desire that her *furta* be open to view is contrasted with the secretiveness and, indeed, the modesty of prostitutes, in lines 5–8:

at meretrix abigit testem veloque seraque 5
raraque Summemmi fornice rima patet.
a Chione saltem vel ab Iade disce pudorem:
abscondunt spurcas et monumenta lupas.

But a prostitute chases off witnesses with a curtain and a bolt, and the
door barely cracks open at Summemmus's brothel. At least learn modesty
from Chione or Ias: tombs hide even filthy whores.

Prostitutes, it seems, are not entirely public and visible, nor are all matrons as private and modest as they ought to be. Martial's punchline lays out his advice to the woman with no holds barred: *deprendi veto te, Lesbia, non futui* ("I'm saying don't get caught, Lesbia, not don't get fucked," 10). Concealment, then, is no guarantee of either chastity (Lesbia can still "get fucked" behind closed doors) or safety from condemnation of sexual activity (the prostitutes are still "filthy whores"), and exposure is no guarantee of low social status.⁸⁰

80. For another reading of these two poems together, see Rimell 2008: 25–26 and 207–208. Rimell calls Lesbia a prostitute throughout her reading: an error, but one indicative of the grappling with categories Martial performs in the epigram.

From the startling obscenity of poem 34's last word follows poem 35. In the center of this poem, Martial offers three comparanda in defense of his risqué verses:

sed hi libelli,
 tamquam coniugibus suis mariti,
 non possunt sine mentula placere. 5
 quod si me iubeas thalassionem
 verbis dicere non thalassionis?
 quis Floralia vestit et stolatum
 permittit meretricibus pudorem?

But these books, just like husbands to their wives, can't be pleasing without a prick. What if you told me to sing a wedding song without using wedding song words? Who puts clothes on the Floralia and grants to prostitutes the modesty of a matron's dress?

Mart. 1.35.3–9

The last of these comparanda depends on a neat division between matron and *meretrix* accomplished through clothing and nudity: I shouldn't dress my poetry up any more than we'd dress the Floralia's whores in *stolae*; nakedness is right for prostitutes (and wrong for matrons), just as my language (though wrong in other contexts) is right for epigrams. The preceding two comparanda, however, make this strict dichotomy hard to take seriously: Martial's *matronae* have already been brought into the same poem as the *meretrices* and have already been eroticized. In the first case, the poems' prurient (though pleasing) language is likened to our ladies' husbands' penises; in the second, we are expected to remember that even the Roman wedding tradition includes risqué songs, the fescennine verses.⁸¹ In addition to all of this, of course, we have just seen in poem 34 a counterexample to any tidy distinction between modestly dressed matrons and naked prostitutes, with a matron who was anything but modest, and prostitutes who kept themselves politely out of view. If we consider Martial's deployment of the Floralia in light of the reading of women's experience of the festival for which I have just argued, this last comparandum fits right in: the Floralia (like the marriage song or poem 34) is a place where the line between matron and prostitute is played with as part of the ritual license of the festival: matrons can safely claim a degree of erotic license, flirt with an identification with prostitutes and the erotic implications of that identification, and perhaps imagine themselves in the role of the adulterous matron on view on the stage.

In Martial's contemporary, Juvenal, in the midst of the sixth satire's overblown dissuasion from marriage, we again see the Floralia evoked as a marker of a matron's sociosexual transgression. Before turning to that passage in particular, I will remind

81. See the discussion in Cordier 2005: 269–71, drawing attention to Fest. 282–84L, which neatly knits together questions of clothing and the ritual obscenity of the marriage ceremony. Festus defines *praetextus sermo* as language appropriate in the presence of children dressed in the *toga praetexta*; bride and groom, with their protective children's clothes put aside (*depositis praetextis*), are, at the unprotected moment of status transition, barraged with *obscena*.

the reader briefly of an earlier section of the same poem, in which Juvenal eroticizes women's experience as spectators of both theatrical and gladiatorial games. The speaker invites the potential bridegroom to notice a female theater audience's erotic reaction to a *pantomimus*:

chironomon Ledam molli saltante Bathyllo
Tuccia uesicae non imperat, Apula gannit,
sicut in amplexu, subito et miserabile longum.

When soft Bathyllus dances the Leda mime Tuccia can't control her bladder,
Apula growls like she's being embraced, suddenly and pitifully long.

Juv. 6.63–65

These watching women have dramatic bodily reactions to the onstage activity. It is perhaps telling that “soft Bathyllus” is dancing the part of a woman—he is surely Leda and is playing out her rape by Zeus in the form of a swan (though perhaps he is also the swan).⁸² Does Juvenal imagine Tuccia and Apula reacting out of desire for the mime-actor, or identifying with the character he is dancing? While the question is open here, a few lines later Juvenal warns his interlocutor that matrons actively pursue performers: if you marry, you are in danger of playing father to a citharode's, or flute player's, or gladiator's child (75–81). There follows a long section on a senator's wife named Eppia who runs off with a gladiator (82–113), and straight on the heels of this story comes the famous section on Messalina, the *meretrix Augusta*, who sneaks down from the Palatine to prostitute herself, wearing a blond wig and calling herself “Lycisca” (114–32). Despite the ranting effect of the speaker's tirade, there is an organized thematic progression here (as well as a progression up through social ranks): the women begin as erotic viewers of onstage performers and performances; they then cross the line to erotic pursuit of male performers; finally, we imagine Messalina actually becoming a prostitute/performer, donning a costume and a false name, displaying her body, and taking money to do so. It is a short step (at least for Juvenal's misogynist) from women watching a play to performance and prostitution.

The connection between women as spectators and women as physically exposed performers is already in the text, then, when the Floralia appears about a hundred lines later, as the speaker inveighs against female athletes (6.246–67), calling a matron practicing her swordsmanship “most worthy of the Floralia's trumpet” (*dignissima prorsus / Florali matrona tuba*, 249–50). The juxtaposition in the Latin of the licentious Floralia and the word *matrona* drives home the point: this woman is crossing the boundary of social class, practicing to make her body part of the public entertainment. As a result of this movement toward public exposure, and despite the fact that this particular matron's gladiatorial performance is anything but sexy, Juvenal's persistent use of double entendre through this passage

82. Bathyllus is a well-known *pantomimus* of the Augustan age; on male dancers of female parts see Jory 1996: 11–12.

eroticizes her actions and at times assimilates her to a prostitute. Some of the puns are simple phallic substitution: *palus* in lines 247 and 267, the wooden stake the matron wears away and groans at in her sword practice, can also be a slang word for the penis,⁸³ she also groans as she “endures the demonstrated thrusts” (261)—Messalina a hundred lines earlier had also taken “thrusts” (*ictus*) as a prostitute.⁸⁴ In lines 249–50, the matron’s mastery of *omnis numeros* qualifies her for the Floralia: the words refer to the swordfighter’s repertoire of maneuvers but also to sexual positions twice in Ovid.⁸⁵ The helmeted woman is shameless, she flees her sex and loves violence; nevertheless, she still wants to be a woman, for men do not get as much pleasure as women (253–54).⁸⁶ Finally, Juvenal dwells on the prospect of an auction of the matron’s equipment (255–58): somehow, this seems to be the ultimate humiliation. I suspect once again that the scene is meant to evoke prostitution, as the unlucky man who marries her is likely to end up with a girl “on the market” (*vendente puella*). While the woman is not literally naked as she practices her swordplay, the author’s focus on her anomalous clothing and exposed legs in lines 259–64 render her “nude” in the looser meaning of the word: we are asked to look at her lower legs wrapped in heavy *fasciae* in place of greaves, and then the author verbally exposes her further, asking us to laugh at her using a chamber pot to urinate in public. The use of a woman’s pot (the boat-shaped *scapheum*) exposes her female body to the viewer and the reader, symbolically if not literally.⁸⁷ The presence of the Floralia in this passage is, of course, central to my reading: in that line the matron is most expressly assimilated to a prostitute—a naked one, at that. Unlike the case of Martial’s Lesbia, no sexual misdeed has caused Juvenal to evoke the Floralia (and through it eroticization and prostitution). Rather, the matron has crossed the line from the audience to the stage; she has become a performing woman, exposed and to some extent “nude.” For Juvenal, this festival clearly stands as shorthand for concerns about the permeability of the boundary between women who sit (clothed) in the audience and watch, and women who are naked and on display.

If both Martial and Juvenal treat the Floralia as a locus of tension and potential equation between the women in the audience and the women on the stage, and as a byword for sociosexual transgression, what has happened to heighten

83. Adams 1982: 23–24.

84. Juv. 6.126, though the line is perhaps corrupt, appearing only in a set of late manuscripts and in two variants; both variants, however, contain the core *iacens . . . absorbit ictus* (Adams 1982: 148–49).

85. Ov. *Am.* 3.7.18 and 26.

86. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.320–21, where Jupiter and Juno debate precisely this topic; Tiresias, who has been both male and female, confirms Jupiter’s claim that women get more pleasure out of sex than men.

87. On the woman’s *scapheum* vs. the man’s *matella* see Jansen, Koloski-Ostrow, and Moorman 2011: 95–97. Whitehouse 1995 believes he may have identified *scaphea* in a group of six miniature glass “boats,” three of which were found in association with women’s burials. Picture a handleless, double-spouted gravy boat to be held to catch a woman’s urine. The *matella*, a vessel with a handle at one side and an opening at the other, could be used by a man with much less bodily contortion and potential exposure.

the transgressive potential of this festival between Cato's game departure from the theater in 55 BCE, signaling his tacit approval of the *priscus mos iocorum*, or Ovid's light-hearted celebration of the *Mater . . . florum, ludis celebranda iocis* (*Fast.* 5.183), and the late first/early second century CE? What has made the Floralia feel less like controlled flirtation with transgression and more like transgression itself? Here, we can draw on Catharine Edwards's work exploring the political manipulation by the imperial elite of the *infamia* associated with performers and prostitutes.⁸⁸ In the early empire, on several occasions, emperors like Nero and Caligula reportedly forced elites onto the stage or into the brothel as a means of public degradation;⁸⁹ other anecdotes suggest that certain elites may have chosen to go on stage or register as prostitutes to take advantage of the freedom and safety that exclusion from legitimate powers and honors afforded.⁹⁰ Whether or not these reports are accurate, they are part of a new way of characterizing the social instability of the reigns of the "bad" emperors. As Edwards points out, Nero and (later) Commodus themselves appeared onstage, and these appearances, amid all the misdeeds of their reigns, are treated in the sources as particularly shocking.⁹¹ Invective also arises surrounding imperial women, whose very public nature leaves them open to charges of prostitution when their proximity to power seems too threatening: the elder Julia, Nero's Poppaea Sabina, and Claudius's Messalina⁹² are three obvious cases. For a variety of social, political, and rhetorical reasons, then, the lines between the audience and the stage, and between matrons and prostitutes, were breached on multiple fronts in the early years of the empire.

The Floralia, where the equation between prostitution and performance was exposed, and where Roman women, possibly of all classes, sat in the presence of naked prostitutes dancing and acting in the mime plays, thus seems to have taken on a more dangerous quality in these years. What had previously been unthinkable, that a woman from the audience might (literally or figuratively) cross over to the stage, seemed now a possibility, whether as an instance of imperial compulsion or as a symptom of the social disorder and strange exigencies of those years. Martial and Juvenal write with these stories in the background and thus can evoke and manipulate this cultural concern simply by naming the Floralia. It is perhaps telling, however, that both poets center upon women's willful transgression of sociosexual boundaries rather than on the dangers of accidental *contaminatio* through "respectable" women's exposure to the naked bodies of prostitutes. As imaginary as Martial and Juvenal's scenarios may be, they both suggest that the Floralia's "nudity" was something attractive to Roman matrons, perhaps to be emulated in some small way.

88. Edwards 1997: 85–90.

89. Dio 59.28.9, 62.17–18; Suet. *Ner.* 12, 27, *Calig.* 41.1; Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.

90. Dio 56.25.8; Juv. 8.183–92.

91. Edwards 1997: 86–90; see also Edmondson 1996: 106–111.

92. On Julia: Sen. *Ben.* 6.32; on Poppaea: Tac. *Ann.* 13.45; on Messalina: Juv. 6.115 ff., Dio 60.31.11. See also Fischler 1994 and Joshel 1997.

As anyone who has wandered through the Vatican galleries or any other large collection of Roman statuary will know, in the first century CE Roman women in some quantity began to be represented on their tombs with portrait heads atop a nude body, most frequently a recognizable Venus type. Art historians reassure us that these women are clothed in goddess costume;⁹³ as Eve D'Ambra puts it, "Rather than suffering the shame of nakedness, the matron's physical presence and social status were enhanced by the acquisition of the resplendent divine body."⁹⁴ D'Ambra's sensitive analysis of this striking development brings to the fore the use of this sort of "divine portraiture" primarily by successful freedmen, and its calculated combination of a youthful body well suited to childbearing and a face expressive of maturity in its idealized, almost masculine, reserve. While I accept the explanation of the "god costume" and its continuity with an established tradition of depicting imperial women as (clothed) goddesses, including Venus, I nonetheless have always wondered how Roman women saw these statues, how they imagined themselves or their deceased friends or relatives portrayed with a nude body, how they imagined and experienced their own nudity and that of other women, and whether shame was necessarily associated with that experience.⁹⁵ Though these statues are evocative, I made a decision in pursuing this topic to stay away from art-historical questions, because I wished to keep my focus resolutely on the reality of women's public nudity in the early empire, working to understand what role nudity played in women's shaping and understanding of their social identities. By focusing on the social and historical contexts of two ritual occasions involving women's nudity, I have tried to suggest that these confined and particular festival occasions allowed women to explore and grapple with the implications of broader social contexts (the baths and the theater) that blurred and complicated boundaries between elite and nonelite, clothed and nude, and viewer and viewed. Thinking about the rites of April 1, public bathing, the Floralia, and women's experience of the theater have helped us consider not just the dangers and vulnerabilities inherent in exposure, but also the possible cross-class women's concerns about sexuality, desire, and desirability that might be explored or expressed in these rituals as they existed in the early empire. For matrons, who are usually both constrained and protected by their subjugation to husbands and fathers, I have been able to imagine the benefits of removing status-marking clothing not least as a means of connecting to desire and desirability. The naked bodies of lower-class women and prostitutes especially, are sometimes used rather instrumentally in this process: elites' connection with "the body" is accomplished in part through the bodies of women of lower class women. For those women too, however, and especially for the most

93. Bonfante 1989; D'Ambra 1996.

94. D'Ambra 1996: 221.

95. See Davies 2008 for the way portrait statues model gender roles but with a focus on heavily draped female figures. Harlow 2012: 40 considers the way portrait statues provided a means to "respectable women out in public . . . of assessing [their own] image, in the absence of adequate mirrors." Again, the nude statues do not figure in Harlow's discussion.

marginalized of them, the recognition in the rites of April 1 of concerns shared with the normative figure of the matron, and the Floralia's public approbation of their nudity in its connection with the public good, might have allowed a more integrative experience of their own bodies. Both points of view give us room to rethink or complicate a narrative that positions the naked woman as an object of shame in the Roman world.

University of Mississippi
mpranger@olemiss.edu

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