Re-reading (Vestal) virginity*

Mary Beard

(one of) 16 Vestal Virgins, who were
    leaving for the coast,
– And although my eyes were open they might
    just as well have been closed. . . .
                (Procul Harum, *A Whiter Shade of Pale*, 1967)

there was something queer about the Virgines Vestales. . . .
                (Versnel 1993: 269)

The mythology of the Vestal Virgins is on the move. *Our* mythology. The spinster dons of ancient Rome (Balsdon's vision of a Julio-Claudian Oxbridge[1]) have had their day. So too have the pagan nuns of the Roman forum – Christian holiness and self-denial *avant la lettre*.[2] *Our* Vestals are much stranger than that: they are touched with a primitive, anthropological 'weirdness'; key players in a game of sexual ambiguity (interstitiality, marginality, anomaly, paradox and mediation) that in Balsdon's time would have seemed – if anything – the concern of ethnography rather than Classics. But not now. *We* have decided to take the Vestals seriously – at the cost of turning them into a model of primitive strangeness, forever lodged at the heart of sophisticated Rome.

    This paper is a critique of the new myth of the Vestals – and particularly of my own contribution to the formation of that myth.[3] It aims to expose the limitations and misdirections of the 'ambiguity model' for these priestesses; to suggest not so much that that model is incorrect (which it may or may not be), but that at a more fundamental level it 'misses the point' of Roman culture, and misdirects our attempts to reconstruct and analyse it. Also at stake in this argument, however, are issues much more specifically concerned with women's studies within ancient history: the limitations of our new myth of Vestal ambiguity are partly the limitations of a history of 'women' conceived without reference to a history of 'gender'; or rather the limitations of a history of 'gender' conceived as an objective category, without reference to its debated and contested *construction* within the wider cultural matrix.

THE SEXUAL STATUS OF VESTAL VIRGINS: BEARD 1980

Beard 1980 made an engagingly simple point. It started from the well-worn debate on the origins of the Vestal priesthood at Rome. Were the very first Vestal Virgins the daughters of the early kings of Rome? Or were they the wives of those kings?[4] 'Daughters' might seem the obvious answer: Vestals were, after all, always (officially) virgins and always plural. Surely only an argument for early Roman polygamy (and a very strange version of polygamy at that) could see their origin in the *wives* of the early kings. But, at the same time, these priestesses always seemed to resist simple classification as daughters: their priestly dress was the *stola*, the traditional costume of the Roman married woman; they arranged their hair in the style of the Roman bride on the day of her wedding; and their legal relationship with the Pontifex Maximus seems, in some respects, to have mirrored the relationship of wives to their husbands. Maybe then their virginity was to be interpreted not so much as literal virginity, but as the more general, moral, *pudicitia* of the Roman matron. The Vestals, in other words, could originally have been wives.

    My argument amounted to a refusal to choose between those two alternatives. Leaving aside any speculation about regal family life in earliest Rome, neither the (literally) virginal aspects, nor the matronal aspects of the Vestals could be ignored; any interpretation of the character of the priestesses (and of what I then called their 'sexual status' – probably meaning 'gender') had to allow them *both* aspects. And that, indeed, was precisely the point. Anthropology led the way. What Mary Douglas had done for the pangolin and for the prohibitions of Leviticus,[5] I could do for the Roman Vestals. So, the argument went, their ambiguity was not just 'odd', something to be explained away; it was an almost predictable marker of their sacred status. Their funny mix of categories, both/neither virgins and/nor matrons, was what showed them to be 'sacral'. Here was the *Purity and Danger* of the classical world.

Ambiguities multiply. The final flourish to *my* ambiguous Vestals turned out to be a tentative claim for a *male* dimension too. It was not just a matter of mixing virgins and matrons; some of the rights and privileges of these priestesses seem to have belonged characteristically to *men* – a lictor to attend them, seats at the games with the senators, testamentary powers equivalent to those of men. *Perhaps*, I argued, *perhaps*,[6] the sacrality of the Vestals was marked also by an ambiguity between the categories of male and female. Where would the confusion of gender categories end . . . ?

REACTIONS AND RESPONSE

These arguments hit a chord. They had found their moment: 1980 something – historians of Roman culture were looking for 'theory', looking to legitimate the status of Roman culture as *culture* . . . and here was (anthropological) THEORY, on a plate, and at the same time deliciously neat and simple, solving a problem, confirming the serious import of at least one part of Roman religious custom. Pure magic. It was hard not to fall for it; and most of us did. Vestals now became uncontrovertibly 'ambiguous, in-between' (Scheid);[7] 'honorary men' (Hopkins);[8] '(extra)-sexuelle' (de Cazanove).[9] There was nothing hypothetical about it, no 'perhaps' or 'maybe'. It was a 'fact' (Hallett);[10] the ambiguity was 'notorious . . . manifest . . . convincingly elucidated' (Versnel);[11] Beard had 'shown' that the Vestals 'were' both daughters and wives (Scheid).[12]

Not everyone agreed wholeheartedly, of course. Jane Gardner deployed her legal expertise (and a lot more of it than was necessary in the circumstances) to show that the legal privileges of the Vestals did not strictly add up to *male* privileges.[13] And Ariadne Staples minutely re-examined, yet again, all the recorded attributes of the Vestals – arguing that these did not so much indicate 'ambiguity', as a status outside all known categories of gender: a perfect symbolic representation of the undivided collectivity of Rome.[14] But in all this learned enquiry, no-one seems to have stopped very long to question the overall approach, or the theoretical models employed. Nor have they stopped to ask what might follow from that approach, or where it might take us next. The fact is that Beard 1980 has so far led almost nowhere in the wider study of Roman religion and culture; that, for all its great revolutionary claims, it seems to have been a more or less dazzling dead end.[15] Why might that be? What went wrong?

This paper is an affectionate critique of Beard 1980. It is not concerned with 'how the facts fit'. (For what it is worth, I am still broadly convinced that they fit well enough; but, no doubt, I am not the best person to judge.[16]) I want instead to think about the method and approach; to try to explain why it has been a dead end; to reformulate some of the questions in the light of more recent studies of the construction of gender and its transgressions; to suggest some new directions to follow. This is an attempt to do 'better' second time around.

RELIGION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Gender categories are not objective, cultural 'givens'. The major error of Beard 1980 is to treat them as if they were. The structure of its argument assumes the existence of the 'male', the 'virginal' and the 'matronal', as categories whose definition we can take for granted – different from our own maybe, but pre-existing, unproblematic. The Vestals are then artfully placed in the middle, as a strange mixture of all three – and hence 'sacral'. True, there is an occasional glimmer of concern in the text and (especially) notes about the *pre-existence* of taxonomic categories. Which came first, as Mary Douglas eventually wondered, the ambiguity or the sacrality? And who created the normative categories in the first place?[17] But this concern stops short; it never dares to follow its own logic – to turn the whole argument on its head.

The inverted argument would run something like this. Yes, it is obviously the case that religion may *reflect* the gender differences and categories operating within society more generally; it is obviously the case, too, that any system of religious symbolism may in part *be constructed out of* (or parasitic on) gender categories defined in the wider cultural world. Yet at the same time, religion itself plays a major part in actively *constructing*, *defining* and *negotiating* those categories – in defining what it is to be female, what constitutes virginity or marriage and so on. In fact, to put it more strongly, religion regularly acts as a privileged space, a key place within any particular culture for the definition of gender roles, for debate on gender norms and transgressions. Beard 1980 fails to recognise this function; and so, it concentrates narrowly on the strange amalgam of genders that constituted the Vestals – without exploring the implications of that amalgam in the wider social construction of gender at Rome.

Put simply, the Vestals constructed Roman gender, as much as gender (and its ambiguities) constructed the Vestals. What should lie at the heart of the 'problem' is not (as I chose to stress) the 'sexual status of Vestal Virgins', but the very terms out of which that 'sexual status' was defined: man, woman, virgin and matron.[18]

POLYTHEISM, SYSTEM AND MEANING

Roman polytheism is a complex *system*. Its claims to 'meaning', its hermeneutic functions, depend on that *system(at)ic* quality. 'Meaning' resides not in any individual element of the polytheism (whether god, festival, priest, ritual . . .), but is constructed in the connections, oppositions and tensions within the system, between its different elements.[19]

That is, no doubt, to state the obvious. But if Beard 1980 fails to engage with the Vestals' role in the construction (rather than just the confusion) of normative gender categories at Rome, that is partly because it fails to see the Vestal priesthood as one element within a *system*. Sure enough, it offers plenty of comparisons between Vestals and pangolins (the scaly ant-eaters discussed at length by Mary Douglas, part fish/part tree-climbers[20]), but almost no comparison or connection with any other element of Roman religion or culture. The Vestals are treated as if they were a strange and isolated anomaly – weird and interesting maybe, but natives of some abstract world of cross-cultural ambiguity, not of Rome.[21]

In fact, you do not have to look very hard among the priestly groups of Rome to find a systematic concern with gender, its norms and transgressions; a series of debates on and around the definition of Roman sexual categories – of which the Vestal ambiguities are just one part. Let me give one example of how that system might be perceived.

The priests of Magna Mater (the *galli*) are almost as well known as the Vestals for breaking the gender rules: self-castrated eunuchs (it is said), flamboyantly female in appearance, loud cross-dressers; 'not-men' at loose in the city of Rome, discomfiting hangers-on of an eastern cult.[22] The normative categories of *our* scholarship, of course, keep these priests well away from the Vestal Virgins: 'oriental' cults inhabit different books from the 'native' religion of Rome; eastern excess doesn't belong with the ancient heart of the city. Romans too had an interest in policing those same boundaries: the *galli* were as 'not-Roman' as the Vestals were 'Roman'; the *galli* as

'other' as the Vestals were 'native'.[23] Yet, at the same time, that opposition was also a *connection*, made to be displayed in contiguity; Roman literature and culture put the Vestals and the *galli together* in order to parade their difference. Like all differences, it could only be perceived by comparison; difference inevitably entails system.

Consider, for example, the famous story of the introduction of the cult of Magna Mater with her priests. The ship bringing the cult image and its servants from the east gets stuck on a sandbank just outside Ostia – and it is only dislodged by the intervention of a woman, Claudia Quinta, who miraculously pulls the boat in. There are many versions of the story. In some, Claudia Quinta is a Roman matron suspected of unchastity, who proves her innocence by the performance of the miracle. For Herodian, she is a Vestal under suspicion of *incestum*. The logic of this account is clear: the Vestals and the *galli* are conjoined at the very moment of Magna Mater's entry into the city; the *galli* are brought to Rome through the intervention of a Vestal.[24] This conjunction also operates in the visual topography of the city of Rome. Close to the temple of Vesta on the Sacred Way, going into the Forum, was a shrine of Magna Mater; from the reign of Augustus, adjacent to the temple of Magna Mater on the Palatine, in the emperor's house itself, was a shrine of Vesta. Vestals and *galli* shared a field of vision – to see one was to see both.[25]

We do not know in detail how these proximities were perceived; or by what process (if it is a chronological development) the story of Claudia Quinta the matron 'became' the story of Claudia Quinta the Vestal. But at the very least the conflations and proximities are enough to suggest a different agenda in 'reading' the Vestals' virginity; to suggest that – never mind the far-flung pangolin – the anomalies of the Vestals are part of a gender story told, retold and re-debated *within* Roman religion itself; that the priestly officials at Rome (whether of 'native' or 'foreign' cults) *together* offer ways of imaging gender; and that the norms and transgression are to be identified and paraded at the intersections of those images, not only in the single frame. Beard 1980 fails precisely because it chooses to tell an ethnographic story *at the expense of* a Roman one; and it looks for ambiguity in isolation, not in system.[26]

VIRGINITY AT THE CENTRE OF THE TEXT

Underlying Beard 1980 there is what can only be called a denial of reading. The ancient texts it considers are *excavated*, not *read*. The

method is a familiar one: the Roman antiquarian literature is combed – a bit of Labeo (quoted by Aulus Gellius) is dug out here, some convenient lines of Festus on the Vestal hairdo deployed there, with plenty of snippets from Pliny the Elder and Valerius Maximus sprinkled on for good measure. The byways of Latin literature ransacked and minutely dismembered, all (as intended) making a very learned impression. But what is left out of the picture (what Ancient History, as a discipline, has consistently ignored) is the character, point and focus of the texts so expertly dissected: what were these writers writing *about* when they wrote about the Vestals? Who wrote about Vestals, to whom, and why?

If I had asked those questions, I would quickly have seen that the overwhelming preoccupation of ancient writers is the punishment of the Vestals, the Vestals who broke their oath of chastity, or those suspected of having done so. Perhaps it was the lurid bits that made the best read. But even so, the effect of this concentration is to turn the discourse of and around the priesthood into a discourse of virginity lost, as much as of virginity maintained; a discourse of transgression, of rules broken, rather than rules kept. The Vestals, in other words, can be seen not merely as a parade of anomaly, but a focus of negotiation around the category of virginity, a negotiation of the boundary between virginity and non-virginity.

The clearest examples of this negotiation (and some of the lengthiest surviving discussions of Vestals – which, significantly, did not find their way into Beard 1980) are found in the *Controversiae* of the Elder Seneca; written versions of some of the declamatory exercises, part rhetorical training, part after-dinner entertainment, for the Roman imperial elite; arguments offered on either side of fictional law-cases – cases based partly on Roman law, partly on a fantasy construction of a never-never land legal system.[27] Several of these cases are concerned, either explicitly or by implication, with the Vestals – and with the alleged breaking of their vow of chastity. 'A Vestal Virgin wrote the following verse: "How happy married women are! O may I die if marriage is not sweet." She is accused of unchastity' . . . and the pleasure of the text that follows lies in the arguments that are rehearsed for and against the accused priestess. For the virgin: poetry is not necessarily the mirror of life. Against her: 'A woman is unchaste if she wants sex, even if she has not had it'; any Vestal who had written in those terms had by definition broken her vows.[28] At much greater length, another case takes up the problem of the virginal status of the priestess at entry to the priesthood:[29]

A virgin was captured by pirates and sold; she was bought by a pimp and made a prostitute. When men came to her, she asked for alms [*stips*]. When she failed to get alms from a soldier who came to her, he struggled with her and tried to use force; she killed him. She was accused, acquitted and sent back to her family. She seeks a priesthood!

Let us suppose the preamble says that the law is 'A priestess must be chaste and of chaste parents, pure and of pure parents' – does she qualify for the priesthood? Again a series of arguments follow – for and (mostly) against her chastity. Could she count as chaste if she had been *kissed*? Who, anyway, could countenance a priestess who had lived in the company of whores? If she had been so virtuous, why had she not been ransomed? Had she not, on the other hand, defended her chastity with *greater* commitment than women usually displayed? She had literally fought for her virginity. But then again she was now a murderer, and yet judged innocent of the crime.

These arguments are extended over pages and pages of the text of Seneca, and of other declaimers. Within this elite male institution, at the centre of Roman declamatory culture, not only was female virginity (and its definitions) a major theme, but that theme was played out in the context of *Vestal* virginity. Re-reading the Vestals would necessarily involve a reinstatement of this kind of text at the centre of the argument; a reinstatement of virginity and its transgressions above the neat schematics of ambiguity.

VESTALS AND THE PUZZLE OF 'BEING ROMAN'

All sorts of things about the Vestals were a puzzle to the Romans – a puzzle that Beard 1980 thinks it appropriate to try and solve. Romans confused; scholar knows best. But the process of reading the Roman discussion of the Vestals should have entailed taking those puzzles seriously – *as* puzzles. Maybe the puzzles were not always meant to be solved, but, as puzzles, they could have constituted a provocation and a proposition; the puzzle was the answer.

Let's take one. What (apart from the fire) was inside the temple of Vesta? Beard 1980 knows the important answer here – and can't resist falling for the wee passage of Pliny[30] that tells us about the . . . phallos. It is too good to be true: male sexuality lurking in the virgins' temple, a physical presence. Ambiguity again is writ large at the very centre

of the cult. But in the excitement of that one apparent 'fit', the over-whelming bafflement of most ancient writers is overlooked. For the truth is, of course, that *everybody* knew that *nobody* (except the Vestals, who weren't telling) knew what was inside the temple. Not for sure, anyway. There were lots of guesses, lots of 'it is said', lots of candi-dates for inclusion – the Palladium rescued from Troy by Aeneas, the Samothracian images that Dardanus took *to* Troy when he founded the city, maybe *nothing* but the fire – but no one really *knew*.[31]

What kind of point could this very pointed bafflement have? At the centre of Rome, on the very hearth that ensured Rome's contin-uance and safety, its essence, there lay a puzzle, and a series of conjectures, of wonderings. This is no accident, no failure on the Romans' part to know their own culture properly. It is a strategic deferral – deferral of certainty on what the centre of Rome, real Romanness, could or should be. As often with Roman culture, we are brought back here at its very heart(h) to a sacralised parade of the question of what Rome was, where it came from, how Romanness was to be defined as Roman. Rome as foreign – Trojan, Samothracian even? Rome as male – phallic power? Rome as the representation of nothing other than itself – the hearth is the hearth is the hearth, and nothing more (or less)? 'Answers' are not at stake here, but 'ques-tions'. Roman identity is shown to be debated, debatable, negotiated, negotiatable. This is a story not just about gender and its ambigui-ties (though it is no doubt partly that); it is a story about gender (and its uncertainties) mapped on to other cultural categories (and their uncertainties) – civic identity, nationhood and imperialism. The Vestals ask us to ask what it is to be Roman, what Rome is.[32]

OUR STORY

Fifteen years ago it was very hard to rethink the Vestals: hard to iden-tify the problem, hard to find the analogies, hard to deploy the anthropology of ambiguity. Yet at the same time, it was so easy to convince: so easy to feel that the effort had worked; so easy to show that the problem had been cracked; so easy to back a new ortho-doxy. Yes, 'there *was* something queer about the Virgines Vestales'. The 'queerness' was the answer. If that is now changing, if what was easy now seems too easy, then it is, of course, because *our story* of Rome, and of gender within Roman culture, has moved on. Beard 1980 (and the work that followed from it) is in a sense a final flourish of a dead subject: 'the history of women'. Rewritten as 'the history

of gender' the simplicities and certainties of ambiguity ('the Vestals were not *either* virgins *or* matrons; they were both, and . . . they were also men'[33]) could not and should not convince. Not, then, 'women in Roman history', but 'Roman history writes "woman"'; reading is always preliminary, before you . . .[34]

NOTES

* This re-reading comes with thanks to John Henderson (for help with the jokes); and with best wishes to Henk Versnel (who will enjoy them).

1 'Just as the halls of women's colleges in Oxford and in Cambridge have, hanging on their walls, the portraits of former Principals, so round the Atrium Vestae stood portrait statues of Senior Vestal Virgins' (Balsdon 1962: 242).

2 T. Cato Worsfold, *The History of the Vestal Virgins of Rome*, London 1932: 11 ('In modern days the sisterhoods of the nuns of the Church of Rome, themselves of great antiquity, offer the closest resemblance'); Balsdon, too, flirts with the image of the nun: 'To invent a parallel, you would have to imagine that in the whole of modern Italy there was only one body of Nuns, and that there were a mere six members of that body' (Balsdon 1962: 235).

3 Beard 1980. This paper started life as a seminar presentation, in a series organised by Keith Hopkins and Fergus Millar at the Institute of Classical Studies in London in 1979; and it was changed and expanded for publi-cation, partly at the insistence of the Editorial Committee of the *Journal of Roman Studies*. In general, those changes did little to help the argu-ment. I now have no interest whatsoever in the second part of the published paper (with its silly comparisons between the Vestals and various heroines of Greek tragedy); neither does anyone else – to judge, at least, from the thumbed or unthumbed state of the pages in any library copy I have checked. Consider them deleted.

4 Vestals as daughters: T. Mommsen, *Römische Strafrecht*, Leipzig 1899: 18; H.J. Rose, 'De Virginibus Vestalibus', *Mnemosyne* n.s. 54, 1926: 440–448. Vestals as wives: G. Wissowa, in Roscher, *Myth. Lex.* VI: 260; F. Guizzi, *Aspetti giuridici del sacerdozio Romano: il sacerdozio di Vesta*, Naples 1968: 102.

5 Douglas 1966: 41–57; Douglas 1975: 27–46.

6 The '*perhaps*' has a nasty tendency to get left out in transmission. See, for example, K. Mustakallio, 'The "crimen incesti" of the Vestal Virgins and the Prodigious Pestilence', in T. Viljamaa, A. Timonen and C. Kritzel (eds) *Crudelitas: The Politics of Cruelty in the Ancient and Medieval World*, Krems 1992: 'As Mary Beard stresses, the unfemale parts of their sacred role were quite obvious.' Hopkins 1983 (see note 8) is another victim of this overcertainty.

7 'In other words, the sexual status of the Vestal was ambiguous, in-between' (Scheid 1992: 384).

8 'Vestal virgins, honorary men' (Hopkins 1983: index)

9 'Mais justement, les Vestales ne sont pas des matrones, mais leur exact contraire. Non seulement par leur condition (extra)-sexuelle' (de Cazanove 1987: 169).

10 'Additionally the fact that the Vestals were defined symbolically as *both* unmarried daughters and more mature wives helps to clarify why their membership in the order benefited their blood families in the way that it seems to have done' (Hallett 1984: 85).

11 'The notorious ambiguity manifest in their two co-existent and apparently contradictory roles, that of virgins *and* that of matrons, has been convincingly elucidated by Mary Beard' (Versnel 1992: 48); see also Versnel 1993: 270: 'Beard vindicates the ambiguity as an essential and structural feature of the Virgines Vestales.'

12 'On the other hand, Vestals were neither matrons nor maidens as Beard (1980) has shown' (Scheid 1992: 383).

13 'Beard's suggestion that the Vestals' sexual status was ambivalent, that they were in part, classified as male and that this is shown by their being given certain privileges almost exclusively associated with men, does not really fit the facts' (Gardner 1986: 24). Gardner recognises, at least, that my 'suggestion' was just a suggestion, but she makes the predictable lawyer's mistake -- treating law only as a system of 'fact', rather than (also) a system of shifting cultural symbols. In other words, law can provide the Vestals with a penumbra of maleness, even if it does not technically invest them with exactly the same privileges as men.

14 A. Staples, 'The Uses of Virginity: the Vestals and Rome' (forthcoming) – a chapter of her Ph.D. thesis, 'Gender and Boundary in Roman Religion', Cambridge University, 1993. For other critiques, see H. Cancik–Lindemaier, 'Kultische Privilegierung und gesellschaftliche Realität: ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte der virgines Vestae', *Saeculum* 41, 1990: 1–16 (esp. 14–15); Versnel 1993 (esp. 271–272 – a cogent attack on the idea of the Vestal fire as a sacred mirror of the ambiguity of the priestesses).

15 The most sustained attempt to develop the argument is Versnel 1992 and 1993: 228–288. There are also a few circulating samizdat copies, fading xeroxes, of Helen King's (*c.* 1981) thoughts on a similar theme.

16 It is, of course, a question of the basis of the argument, and of what counts as proof. It may well be that there are numerous individual errors, misinterpretations, misplaced emphases in Beard 1980; it may well be that there are other ways to write the Vestals into Roman socio-religious history (see Cancik and Staples, note 14). But I have seen nothing to convince me that the ambiguity I identified was merely *my* mirage. See also note 13.

17 Douglas 1975: 276–318; Beard 1980: 20–21.

18 Not that we should reify these terms either. For general discussion of these issues, see P. Caplan (ed.), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, London 1987.

19 I suppose that one could – equally well? – argue that the point of Roman polytheism was that it was *no system at all*. If so, the arguments that follow apply even more forcefully.

20 Douglas 1975: 27–46. Dr Henderson points out to me that Mary Douglas appears to have missed an even more striking example of the pangolins' interstitiality: namely that they can walk on their hind legs – so confusing the categories of human and animal.

21 A consequence, maybe, of the undiluted structuralism at the heart of the paper. As the structuralist moment passes into the *post*-structuralist, cultural density and (at the same time) cultural specificity find their place again.

22 For a quick dissection Beard 1994; for loving detail, Sanders 1972.

23 The classic statement of policing the difference is Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2, 19. See also *Dig.* 48, 8, 4–6; Val. Max. 7, 6 – all discussed in Beard 1994: 174–177.

24 Claudia Quinta as a matron suspected of unchastity: Livy *History* 29, 14, 5–14; Ovid *Fasti* 4, 291–348. As a Vestal: Herodian *History* 1, 11, 4–5.

25 For Magna Mater on the Sacred Way: E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, vol. 2, London 1968: 34–35, read with L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, Baltimore, Md. and London 1992: 243; the precise location adjacent to the temple of Vesta is discussed by F. Coarelli, 'I monumenti dei culti orientali in Roma', in U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (eds), *La soterologia dei culti orientali nell'impero Romano*, Leiden 1982: 33–67 (esp. 34–39). For Vesta and the Vestals on the Palatine: Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary*, vol. 2: 511–513; and (more judiciously) Richardson, *Topographical Dictionary* 413.

26 In other words, Beard 1980 fails because it 'primitivises' Rome; any cultural model that fails to take account of Rome's seething sophistication, its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural cosmopolitan self-reflexivity, *must* be wrong.

27 For a general account of Senecan *Controversiae*, see H. Bornecque, *Les déclamations et les déclamateurs d'après Sénèque le père*, Lille 1902; J. Fairweather, *Seneca the Elder*, Cambridge 1981. Briefly, M. Beard, 'Looking (harder) for Roman myth: Dumézil, declamation and the problems of definition', in *Colloquium Rauricum* 3, Stuttgart and Leipzig 1993: 51–56.

28 Seneca *Cont.* 6, 8.

29 *Cont.* 1, 2.

30 Pliny *NH* 28, 39.

31 See, for example, Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 2, 66; Ovid *Fasti* 6, 295–298; Plutarch *Life of Camillus* 20.

32 Discuss.

33 Beard 1980: 18.

34 This is a (self-)parody. Cf. J. Henderson, 'Not "Women in Roman Satire" but "When Satire writes 'woman'"', in Braund 1989.