

## **E. Del CHROL**

### **Waiving Their Traditional Manhood: Philosophy, Education, and the Redefinition of the Elite Roman Man**

At the outset of the second book of his *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero attempts to put a chipper face on his being driven from the political into the philosophical sphere: "what can I do better, especially while doing nothing else?" (*nam quid possum, praesertim nihil agens, agere melius?* II.i.1). Cicero's initial deprecation of philosophy as activity for when one cannot be effective in the political world is somewhat miscast, and the stereotype of the frustrated academic making fervent love to his stilus is only half the picture, half the draw to philosophy. The life of the mind presented a redefinition of masculinity, a countercultural concept of what it is to be a man, but one which was integrated into elite struggle as a safe form of rebellion. Greek philosophy is a unique form of social reproduction, one which purposes to produce primarily more philosophers, but when it is appropriated by the Romans, creates a more restrictive class of elite. It provides a release to elites who were stymied in their struggle for power, especially from the first century BCE into the first century CE, when the traditional arenas for masculine display and the accretion of honors became even more dangerous, and political power became instantiated in the hands of the few. During an era which crucially redefined masculinity, becoming a philosopher, not simply a philosophaster as had been the pattern for Roman males heretofore, was a palatable alternative to the frustration, and a manner of withdrawal and rebellion which could be practiced without disturbing the Roman social order. The changes it effected were internal to its adherents, not ones dangerous to society at large, and, most importantly modified the vision of the proper aim of a man's life but did not affect the traditional outward tokens of manly virtue.

This paper explores the contact zone between Greek philosophy and Roman elites with respect to the manner in which it promulgates a counter-cultural masculinity through education in the era loosely bounded by Cicero to Seneca. I compare the images of philosophy, philosophers, and educational theory in the *Tusculan Disputations*, the letters of Seneca, and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* with their Stoic and Epicurean models. I also analyze these texts in light of Bourdieuvian theories of social reproduction in education as presented in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977), *Logic of Practice* (1990), and *Masculine Domination* (2001). The particularly Roman manifestations of Greek philosophy reveal a tension between, on the one hand, the informal gendering education which develops a youth's primary habitus and concepts about *virtus*, with, on the other hand, more formal educational and philosophical training which, in its treatment of the telos of a man's life, affects the socially constructed secondary and tertiary habitus. Philosophy, then, became a safe outlet to contest the traditional social indicators of masculinity, the ones generally removed from elite competition under the Principate, without an uncomfortable reappraisal of the tokens of gender most deeply inscribed in their skin.