Recently, a vivid interest in commentaries came into being, as did a sense of the important role commentaries have played in the transmission of the classical heritage, especially in the early modern period. Early modern intellectuals rarely read classical authors in a simple and “direct” form, but generally via intermediary paratexts: dedications, prefaces, and other introductory texts; *argumenta*; indices; illustrations; and above all, all kinds of commentaries – *annotationes, notae, commenta, commentaria, commentariola, animadversiones, paraphrases*, etc. These intermediary texts presented the classical text to modern readers in certain ways that determined and guided the reader’s perception of the text being commented upon. After all, the classical texts were composed in ages so very different from the period ca. 1450–1700. They were not only 1,000–2,000 years old, but they were written in a culture that in many respects had become alien to early modern readers. It was not self-evident to readers from 1450–1700 in what way these texts should be read, interpreted, and used. Take, for example, Martial’s *Epigrams*, which are full of explicit, partly homoerotic sexuality; they describe sexual practices and positions of lovemaking; they describe oral and anal sex, both heterosexual and homosexual; and many times they address pederasty. As Martial says in the first book of his *Epigrams*, his ‘verses cannot please without a cock’ (‘*non possunt sine mentula placere*’). In 1450–1700, however, sexual culture was directed on the one hand by Catholic Church, which – via a long tradition – had restricted not only the representations of sexual practices but the practices themselves

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2 Martial, *Epigrammata* I, 35.5.
to a bare minimum: sex was allowed only between a husband and wife, only for the purpose of procreation, and only to a certain “decent” degree that excluded much lust. And talking explicitly about such matters was certainly not encouraged. Protestants, on the other hand, were at least as eager as the Catholics to take a decent, restrictive, and moral stand. Thus, what could be the use of Martial’s verses?

Niccolò Perotti (1429–1480), Archbishop of Siponto, for example, composed an extensive commentary (completed in 1478) on the first book of Martial’s epigrams that numbered more than 1,000 folio pages, which would be some 3,000 modern standard pages. This commentary is at least 40 times as long as Martial’s text and overpowers it to such a degree that Martial’s verses get almost lost. What Perotti offers is in fact a manual on the authentic Latin language of antiquity, as its title indicates: *Cornucopiae seu Latinae linguae commentarior locupletissimi [...] Cornucopiae or Very Rich Commentaries on the Latin Language.* Via his commentary, Perotti transformed Martial’s text into a manual on the Latin language. To modern readers, this may seem to be a very strange project. Today, it would be a hopeless effort to sell a book of 3,000 pages, let alone a commentary of this length. In the early modern period, however, Perotti’s work was very successful: it became one of the basic texts of modern, advanced humanism. The classical writer Martial, on the other hand, would be more than surprised to see that in the 15th and 16th centuries he had become a lexicon; that the first 100 pages of his work – had he ever published a work of such a length? – would be a far cry from the frivolous humor for which he was famous. The Curio edition indeed starts with the paradigm of serious scholarship – a word index of 100 pages, with each page containing five columns of approximately 40 entries each, a total of some 20,000 entries. And Martial would be even more astonished if he discovered that the index entries do not refer to his poems but to an extensive commentary of about 3,000 pages that comprises the whole of the Latin language.

Perotti’s commentary on Martial, of course, represents an extreme form of early modern commenting; nevertheless, it may serve as a paradigm for the processes by which early modern commentators transformed the

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4 For example, Basel, Valentinus Curio: 1532. The index is placed in front, before the main text. Its length is approximately 100 folio pages, with five columns on each page; each page contains approximately 50 entries. For Perotti’s *Cornucopiae*, see Furno M., *Le Cornucopie de Niccolò Perotti. Culture et méthode d’un humaniste qui aima les mots* (Geneva: 1995).