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# IMPERSONATING PRIAPUS

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*Gern erblicken mich nun verständige Männer, und denken  
mag sich jeder so gern, wie es der Künstler gedacht.*

- Goethe, *Roman Elegies* 24.596-7.<sup>1</sup>

What did Priapus mean for Goethe? Once properly reconstructed, his 1789 *Römische Elegien* begin and end with poems about the Greek and Roman rustic fertility god Priapus.<sup>2</sup> These poems combine motifs from the *Carmina Priapea*, Horace *Satires* 1.8 and the Priapic poems of Martial to produce Goethe's contribution to what he evidently sees as a discernible classical poetic tradition of 'Priapic poetry'. The second of the poems begins in the same way as *Carmina Priapea* 63 – Priapus laments that his wooden form has been so ravaged in his garden by time, the elements, and passing ravens relieving themselves. But it ends like Martial 6.73 – restored by a craftsman, Priapus exalts in his elegant new frame. Goethe's twist is to project Priapus' lament across the gulf of literary time: for so long, Priapus had been neglected by writers, but Goethe has now, like the craftsman, refashioned Priapus' frame by reviving, with wit and literary elegance, the tradition of Priapic poetry. There is, of course, a polemical aspect to this self-praise. It is, Goethe implies, repressive Christian morality which has left Priapus' form to be befouled in his garden by so many passing birds for so many centuries, but now Goethe has valiantly 'liberated' him, just as Goethe boasted in the 1830s that he had liberated the German literary scene for poets younger than himself.<sup>3</sup> For Goethe, Priapus represented a lost ideal: the symbol of a strong, pre-Christian, playful phallicism, which gained its character entirely by being no longer a part of

modern life as Goethe knew it. By restoring Priapus poetically, Goethe evidently hoped to give new vigour to this old social and sexual ideal.<sup>4</sup>

This article considers what Priapus meant for Catullus, focusing in particular on three of his poems which invoke Priapus either explicitly or implicitly: poems 16, 47 and 56. I argue that, as for Goethe, Priapus was for Catullus the symbol of a particular kind of sexual sensibility. However, Priapus' hyper-sexuality represented not sexual liberation for Catullus, but a model of sexuality which, in its single-minded and over-exaggerated emphasis on penetration and submission, seemed farcically boorish and unsophisticated. In this article, I first examine the popularity and extent of the genre of Priapic poetry, and examine the evidence for Catullus' participation in this tradition. I then examine poem 47 in order to determine some of the associations borne by Priapus in Catullus' corpus, and poem 56, to explore Catullus' manipulation of the conventions of the Priapic genre in a brief poetic experiment. It is poem 16, though, in which Priapus figures most largely, and it is through this poem that we can best understand Priapus' significance in Catullus' poetry. Catullus focalizes his much written-upon pronouncements on art and life through the character of Priapus, and the absurdity of what results, and its incongruity with major strands of the Catullan corpus, render this viewpoint inherently ridiculous. Priapus' various cultural associations – sexual rapacity, rustic gaucheness and interpretative incompetence – are all evoked in Catullus' brash, rash Priapic threats, to reveal a social statement of far more complexity than may first appear. There is a sophisticatedly Hellenistic – indeed, Callimachean – literary heritage to such an impersonation, which is in stark juxtaposition to the figure of Priapus himself, who was, in all probability, a symbol for urban Romans of rustic rudeness rather than a genuine cult of the countryside.<sup>5</sup> This juxtaposition is an integral part of the parody. Catullus implicitly contrasts “himself” (as, of course, textually constructed in other parts of his oeuvre) with the rustic boorishness of his Priapic poetic voice, and in this way constructs a public persona for himself by distinction from Priapus.

It will be clear from the outset, then, that reading these poems in this way runs counter to that strand of criticism which would seek to extrapolate from the text patterns of sexual behavior and ideology which can be mapped directly onto the reality of late Republican lives. Indeed, for many years now, the study of Catullus' poetry has been viewed as a useful starting-point for classicists' explorations of Roman sexuality and Roman conceptions of masculinity, and poem 16 is frequently referred to in this area.<sup>6</sup> In relation to ancient erotic art, Jaś Elsner lamented in 2004 the fact that the 'post-Dover study of ancient sexuality...has insisted on a remarkably literalist interpretation of images so as to argue that what they show is what people did', and such an approach elides the 'fundamental range of problematics' as to how viewers might have responded to the images. Whilst a reading of poem 16 which would seek to use it as literal evidence of actual rape seems no longer to be on the interpretive cards, an approach which would extrapolate from the poem's prominent threat of penetration direct evidence of the dynamics of ancient Roman sexuality seems to me to be similarly eliding the space within which our sources may be commenting on or critiquing that sexual ethos. The psychological distance in poem 16 between poet and Priapic *ego* – a distance which is created within the text by the poet's signaling of the very *textuality* of his poetic voice, its derivation from a specific generic tradition – is of importance to an accurate account of sexuality in the Roman Republic, since it allows at least one writer a circumspection about the rigidly schematic and colorless "culture" of dominance and submission which has, in recent times, been supposed to have constituted Romans' perceptions of sex.

Similarly, the figure of Priapus has been much utilized in explorations of Roman conceptions of masculinity and sexuality. In Amy Richlin's influential and oft-cited book, *The Garden of Priapus*, the author uses the phrases 'Priapic pose' and 'the Priapic model' to refer to a certain model of masculinity prevalent in Roman society. 'The general stance of this figure', she says, 'is

that of a threatening male. He is anxious to defend himself by adducing his strength, virility and (in general) all traits that are considered normal'.<sup>7</sup> Catullus adopts this Priapic pose in poem 16, although, she notes, in another group of poems 'he decries others who adopt a Priapic pose'.<sup>8</sup> Her designation is often useful, but the connection between the metaphorical use of the adjective 'Priapic' and the specific literary tradition of poetry about the rustic fertility god Priapus is sometimes difficult to discern. Here I suppose that Catullus' readers would have always perceived the explicitly *literary* aetiology of such a 'pose' – that is, its connection to the subgenre of *priapea* in Greek and Latin poetry.<sup>9</sup> Once this Priapic literature is considered in any depth, it can be seen that "Priapus" is not an objective reference point for a certain type of sexual behaviour or a certain kind of person, but rather a ridiculous figure, used to lampoon a hyper-sexual desire for penetration which Roman puritans, by and large, rejected as effeminate and foreign to its emphasis on self-control, and Catullus, I argue, simply thought boorish and silly. Moreover, what gives Priapic poetry its double edge here is that its native tendency towards artistically self-conscious impersonation makes it a perfect generic form for critique, in that it encourages its audience to perceive a disjunction between the narrative *ego* and the poet himself. When Catullus 'impersonates Priapus', he is less assuming Priapus' hyper-phallicism for himself than exploiting Priapus' own generic propensity for self-critique.

Of course, it might seem somewhat paradoxical to suggest, as I do here, that by recognizing the textual aetiology of this persona, we are brought closer to comprehending the way in which sexual behaviors were really viewed in ancient Roman society. In a riposte to Elsner's criticisms of literal-mindedness in the analysis of representations of sexual acts, Holford-Strevens writes: 'If actual practice was not reflected in the imagery that we have, what kind of imagery might we have expected to find instead if it had been? Without some such control, the flight from literalism becomes mere aprioristic speculation.' But Holford-Strevens is unfairly deprecatory of such speculation. It is true, as Duncan Kennedy, for one, has emphasized,<sup>10</sup> that the past is only

available to us in representations. So, although arguments about ‘focalization’, ‘personae’, and so on, tempt us to open up dichotomies between representation and reality – between, say, the Priapic persona and the “real” Catullus – these could be easily deconstructed. Catullus 16 would be no more or less a ‘representation’ of sexual behavior whether we read its threats of sexual violence as a fly-on-the-wall documentary of male locker-room exploits or as the wittily disingenuous effusions of an obviously generic persona. But the difference between the two is still important. (It is not the difference between representation and reality, but between different configurations of representations). And we *can*, from this distance, tell the difference, by the close reading of the poetry’s motifs, vocabulary and ideas within their literary traditions, and within the author’s own work, and by thereby determining the ways in which such motifs would have been received by Catullus’ expected, contemporaneous audience. Irony need not expire.

If we were to prove that the threats were wittily disingenuous, it would not, of course, disprove the existence of male-to-male sexual violence in Catullus’ Rome. Rather, by examining the ways in which such violence is presented by Catullus, and the ideological categories with which it is aligned by way of the symbol of Priapus (rusticity, cultural backwardness and so on), we may come closer to understanding how it was viewed by Catullus, and used by him as an “other” against which to develop his far more sophisticated persona (an ongoing project in his poetry as a whole). Such a maneuver depends on his audience sharing his assumptions, at least to a point. By such an analysis of these literary representations – inevitably aprioristic, since watching Romans have sex is no longer a viable scholarly option – we thus may gain insight into Roman sexual consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

We are no doubt hamstrung in our understanding of how Catullus manipulated Priapic literary motifs through the loss of those poems in which Catullus adopted the form in an apparently more straightforward manner. Only one poem (17) and two fragments of Catullus exist in the Priapean

metre. One of these fragments is a traditional dedicatory poem to Priapus, which appears to be complete but for the evident loss of a word at the end of the second line; the poem is almost unanimously attributed by ancient grammarians to Catullus.<sup>12</sup> The other is a part of a line quoted by Nonius (134 M) – *de meo ligurrire libido est* – which is usually taken to have been spoken by the god Priapus;<sup>13</sup> this would presumably have been Catullus' version of the 'minatory' Priapus poem, in which Priapus as guardian of a garden typically threatens rape to thieves. Although not uncommon in Greek, this variety of *priapeum* seems, on the evidence of the *Carmina Priapea*, to have been particularly popular in Latin.

After quoting the first fragment, Terentianus Maurus then says that 'we know that Catullus wrote a great many more poems of this sort' (*et plures similes sic conscripsisse Catullum scimus*). It is hard to see why modern scholars give this claim so little consideration.<sup>14</sup> It would have been keeping with Catullus' Callimachean poetics to take up the form, which has specifically Callimachean as well as generally Hellenistic precedent.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, there was a poetic vogue for Priapus in the period just after Catullus, which Catullus himself may have inspired:<sup>16</sup> three *priapea* appear in the Vergilian Appendix, and Priapus also features prominently in Horace, *Sat.* 1.8, Tibullus 1.4, the long poem *Quid hoc novi est?* also in the Vergilian Appendix (83 Bücheler), and a contemporaneous (?) epigram (*CIL* 5 2805) (both ascribed to Tibullus by Scaliger). Maecenas – a Catullan devotee, on the evidence of his experiments in the Galliambic metre and the Catullan diction of his surviving fragments<sup>17</sup> – wrote at least one poem in the Priapean metre, quoted by Seneca (*Ep.* 101.10-11), which may well also have been a true Priapean in content.<sup>18</sup> Priapus is mentioned by Vergil in the *Eclogues* (7.33-6) and the *Georgics* (4.109-111), and Suetonius tells us that young Vergil wrote a collection of *priapea*.<sup>19</sup> Two tales involving Priapus' rapacious sexuality are recounted in Ovid's *Fasti* (1.391-440; 6.19-346) and recalled at *Metamorphoses* 9.346-8. Given all of this activity, it is not at all unlikely that Catullus himself devoted a larger amount of space to the subgenre.

Of course, there are also the 80 *Carmina Priapea*, at least one of which has been ascribed to Ovid on the basis of a comment of Seneca the Elder.<sup>20</sup> If one were to accept that all the poems were written by one hand, that hand would then have to be Ovid's.<sup>21</sup> But this is unlikely, since, despite Ovid's obsessive self-referentiality, he never refers to them, and, in any case, we know that Ovid came under political fire for verses far less salacious. So the alternative hypothesis, that the collection is an anthology of various writers' forays into the same thematic area, is attractive, and certainly has its modern adherents.<sup>22</sup> If accepted, this would also tend to suggest that Priapic poems were considered a distinct subgenre of poetry in Rome. Either way, the connection between the collection and the poetry of Catullus in meter and diction, and very often in sexual attitudes and cultural presumptions, is very close. Although the fact that the poems were collected at a period considerably later than Catullus ought to make us wary in utilizing them to elucidate Catullus' manipulation of conventions from that subgenre in his own poetry, the Priapic subgenre was distinguished precisely by the *constancy* of its motifs across the centuries,<sup>23</sup> and, although notably more obscene in language, nearly all of the *topoi* which appear in the *Carmina Priapea* find parallels (albeit less-developed) in other, earlier Greek and Latin Priapic poetry.

Before turning to Catullus 16, it is worthwhile to note how Catullus evokes the character of Priapus in a number of other poems in the collection. In c.47, Catullus calls Piso a *verpus Priapus* – 'a Priapus, ready for action'<sup>24</sup> – playing on the god's rapacious sexuality, and associating this, as often in Catullus, with the immoderate desire for gain, and thus political corruption.<sup>25</sup> But it is not merely the pervasive cultural assumption about the link between rapacity in the sexual and political spheres that makes Priapus a useful character in political lampoon – it is also his ridiculousness. In Priapic poetry Priapus' constant, uncontrolled desire for penetration often makes him seem more over-exaggerated and farcical than, *pace* Richlin, virile or even 'normal'. A recurrent image in Priapic poetry, both in Greek and Latin, is of people laughing or mocking

the god.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes he gets his revenge by raping those that mock him, but the inordinate violence of his overreaction seems less the reassertion of virility than a part of the gag, as witnessed by the very early (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C) Priapic poem of Leonidas (*A.P.* 16. 236) (translated into Latin in *Priap.* 24) in which the thief is incredulous that rape is threatened for the sake of a few vegetables. Alternatively, in other poems the thief is portrayed as actually getting the better of Priapus, who (as a wooden deity) is either burnt, stolen, proven sexually inadequate, or otherwise outdone by a human rival.<sup>27</sup> There is some of the satiric lunacy of the comedic *miles gloriosus* in Priapus' hyperbolic boasting, which was no doubt intended to parody (rather than celebrate) men who constantly wore their sexual conquests on their sleeves. In short, Priapus' reputation is for being shown up as a fool by the very people over which he loudly claims to have power – which is why he is such an effective figure for Catullus to evoke in political lampoon.

In the penultimate poem of the *Carmina Priapea*, the Priapic poet, perhaps surprisingly, retrospectively characterizes the poetry of the collection as *chiding* Priapus on his oversized phallus – and, presumably by implication, the sexual hyperactivity that attends it.<sup>28</sup> *Priap.* 79 also has a remarkable parallel in a first-century B.C.E epigram of Erius (*A.P.* 16. 242), in which the poet not only ridicules the god for the size of his phallus and his unrelenting lust, but even advises him to settle down and get hitched. It is impossible to read the *Carmina Priapea* as an unqualified celebration of phallicism; while this seems contrary to initial appearances, it is in fact exactly what one would expect in light of Greco-Roman sexual morality, according to which sexual insatiety was associated with *effeminacy* rather than virility.<sup>29</sup> Priapus is not the ideal of Roman masculinity, but the parodic extreme against which it is expressed and defined.

On the other hand, Catullus himself becomes Priapus in c. 56, which more closely engages with the tradition of Priapic poetry. Catullus here facetiously “inserts” himself into a Priapic poem, as Priapus, as a literary joke. The poem begins with an address to Cato, who was in all probability

Valerius Cato, Catullus' fellow neoteric and an editor and 'defender' of the satirist Lucilius.<sup>30</sup> The subgenre may have been suggested by the fact that Valerius Cato had a statue of Priapus in his backyard.<sup>31</sup> Catullus spends the first half of the poem telling Cato that what he is about to hear is *iocosus* (the word ends lines 1 and 4) that is, 'funny', although *iocum* often denotes a joke with sexual overtones:

*O rem ridiculam, Cato et iocosam,  
dignamque auribus et tuo cachinno!  
ride quidquid amas, Cato, Catullum:  
res est ridicula et nimis iocosa. (56.1-4).<sup>32</sup>*

Here's something hilarious, Cato, really funny,  
worthy of you to listen to, and good for a cackle!  
So laugh like you love your Catullus, Cato:  
Here's something hilarious and *too* funny.

Stories about the sexual exploits of Priapus are often prefaced by messages to the reader that what is to follow is 'funny' (*iocosus*). Before relating a tale of one of Priapus' attempted rapes in *Fasti* 6, Ovid tells the reader '*est multi fabula parva ioci*' ('it's a little story, with a great many jokes'). At *Priap.* 49.2, the Priapic poet asks the reader not to take offence at his *carmina plena ioci* (his 'poems, full of jokes'). In Horace, *Sat.* 1.8, Priapus himself assures the readers that his story is funny and would have generated hearty laughter if they could have seen it take place (*cum magno risuque iocoque videres* at line 50). This consistent association of Priapus with joking (*ioci*) and laughter (*risus*) may have had its origin in religious rites, before becoming a literary commonplace; Diodorus Siculus (4.6.4) notes that the god was customarily introduced into sacred rites 'amidst laughter and sporting' ('*meta gelōtos kai paidias*'). Perhaps related to this, Priapus in

*Priap.* 41 says that he wishes poets to dedicate funny verses to him (*versus mihi dedicet iocosos* at line 2) – anyone writing serious verse will earn Priapus’ trademark retribution. Kloss (1998, 69) even sees a reference to this religious tradition in Catullus 17; the poem, he argues with some cogency, is to be understood as being spoken by the god Priapus, who therefore asks from the town the gift of very great laughter (*munus hoc mihi maximi da, Colonia, risus* at line 7).

After such a fulsome lead-in, we are expecting something grandiose. Bathos is, however, very much Priapus’ style:

*deprendi modo pupulum puellae  
trusantem; hunc ego, si placet Dionae,  
protelo rigida mea cecidi. (56.5-7).*

I just caught a kid banging his girlfriend.  
If it pleases Dione, I cut him down  
with my *hard-on* – three of us in a row.

Catullus/ Priapus, seeing a man servicing his girlfriend, himself penetrates the male partner, creating, as Tanner 1972 puts it, a *series triplex*.<sup>33</sup> The first word here reinforces the Priapic context: translating garden-variety voyeurism into the anti-Edenic world of Priapus porn, Catullus says that he has ‘caught’ the boy, with a verb frequently used for the ‘apprehension’ of thieves in Priapus’ garden.<sup>34</sup> The verb used for the sexual act, *caedere*, is commonly used for a sexual act as punishment,<sup>35</sup> and is specifically found elsewhere of Priapus’ rape of thieves.<sup>36</sup> Priapus is twice called the *rigidus deus* in the *Carmina Priapea* (4.1, 45.1), and it is not impossible that this appellation was known in Catullus’ time, which would thus make *rigida mea* in line 7 another programmatic marker. There might be something ‘rustic’ about the language here, as well, which

would fit Priapus' reputation as a rustic god; a *protelum* was literally a line of oxen for pulling a plough, and the metaphor may well have been live in *protelo*.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, while various explanations have been proffered for why Catullus invokes Dione in line 6, she was most probably chosen for her connection to Priapus. Dione, properly the mother of Venus, is occasionally addressed as the mother of Priapus in extant Latin (see, e.g., Petr. *Sat.* 133.3), but Dione is often used to stand for Venus/ Aphrodite herself, the usual choice in Greek and Roman sources for Priapus' mother.<sup>38</sup>

A similar threesome is depicted in a wall-painting in the *apodyterium* (dressing-room) of the Suburban baths at Pompeii, and John R. Clarke has rightly pointed to the parallel with poem 56.<sup>39</sup> In this painting, three individuals are having sex on a bed: one man is anally penetrating another man, who, in turn, is anally penetrating a woman, who buries her head in her pillow as she raises her buttocks to meet the man's thrusts. This scene was also, Clarke argues, designed to provoke laughter from the viewer. But what is significant here is the difference in how this sexual encounter is focalized in the painting and in Catullus 56.<sup>40</sup> In the wall-painting, the two men in the threesome do not appear to be differentiated in age or status. One man appears to hold the other's hand, surely a demonstration of tenderness, or at least a de-emphasizing of penetration, given that, as Clarke points out, any other choice for where to place his hand would have emphasized to a greater degree the mechanics of lovemaking.<sup>41</sup> The emphasis in the painting is – to a ludicrous degree, no doubt, to Roman eyes – on mutual pleasure. On the other hand, in Catullus' poem, the entire situation is focalized through the hyper-phallic male speaker: *he* apprehends the couple, *he* characterizes the other adult male as a mere *pupulus*,<sup>42</sup> *he* exercises the violence inherent in the vocabulary used to describe the encounter (*deprendi*, *protelo* and *cecidit*), and *he* is, after all, the one finding it funny. But if my links to the Priapean genre adumbrated above are to be accepted, then that narrative *he*, the poem's central persona, would have been understood as a Priapic generic pastiche rather than as Catullus speaking in his own persona. The cultured reader would have recognized the piece as a set-piece in the Priapean genre, a witty

literary joke, and would have read the ‘Priapic pose’ as part of the literary ingenuity. At the same time, as we might extrapolate from poem 47, this Priapic outlook would itself have been ridiculous, insofar as it co-opts the attributes of a figure in Roman culture who was an object of ridicule, the archetype of farcical hyper-sexuality.

Catullus 56 highlights an important distinguishing feature of the Priapic poetic tradition: that is, the explicit assumption of a generic *persona*, either that of Priapus, or, later, of the Priapic poet. If one *priapeum* is inserted in a poetic collection, as it is, for example, in Horace’s first book of *Satires*, it may be the only such rupture in the presentation of the poetic *ego*, and it is not a stretch to suggest therefore that the subgenre may have itself been associated with personification and impersonation. A certain metapoetic aspect seems, then, inevitable in poems of this kind: the narrative *ego* is explicitly and quite self-consciously a construction, an act, and one is therefore invited to consider the attributes of that *ego* against what we might normally expect from the poet. Furthermore, given this innate disjunction, the form lends itself to critique. This is the context in which we should view poem 16, in which we see Catullus, in a rather complex way, impersonating Priapus. In response to a (perhaps fictional) challenge to his manhood, he hyperbolically and facetiously fashions himself as an avenging “Priapus”, with his verses as his phallus. As we shall see, his adoption of the Priapic viewpoint and its obsession with penetration and sexual submission leads him to distort the nature of his own poetry, and in his ludicrous misinterpretations of the rest of his oeuvre he reflects the characteristic buffoonery and rusticity of the character of Priapus. In doing so, the aptly-named Priapic pose is, like excessive aspiration of consonants and questionable dental hygiene, implicitly subjected to Catullus’ urbane critique.

*Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,*

*Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,*

*qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,*

*quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.* (16. 1-4)

I'll fuck your ass and your face,  
 Aurelius, you faggot, and Furius, you queer,  
 who've thought me less than chaste from reading  
 my poems, since they're pretty effeminate.

The first line of Catullus 16 hardly advertises subtlety, but we could read it in a number of ways. Note firstly that this is the only place in extant Latin – with one notable exception – that a threat is made of anal and oral rape together. This is comically over-exaggerated phallicism (is he planning to do both at the same time?). This tone, combined with the fact that rape is threatened, may have immediately brought Priapus to mind. The exception is a threat placed in Priapus' mouth in poem 35 of the *Carmina Priapea*: 'if you've attempted three thefts, you'll have to undergo two penalties: you'll be fucked in the ass and the face' (*pedicaberis irrumaberisque*). It is just possible that the language and diction here were also associated with Priapus by Catullus' time, or that threats of both kinds of rape together brought Priapus to mind. But even if this passage was itself modeled on Catullus 16, the fact that the Priapic poet fashioned his Priapus on Catullus' literary persona may indicate that he read Catullus' lines as, in some significant way, Priapic.

If the resemblance to Priapus is recognized, then Catullus' threat becomes programmatic, rather than merely literal or metaphoric (the usual two choices), and should alert the audience to the presence of Priapic poetic motifs in what follows. What has induced this threat (and probably the generic form in which Catullus uses to express it) is the assumption of Furius and Aurelius that Catullus is effeminate based on his verses; or, focalized through the dichotomized worldview of Priapic poetry, that Catullus has become the penetrated, rather than the penetrator. Given the

programmatic first line, it is clear that the words *mollis* and *parum pudicus* (= *impudicum*) are to be read in the senses most relevant to Priapic poetry; *mollis* ('effeminate') is, then, the *vox propria* for the *cinaedus*,<sup>43</sup> who, most humiliatingly, *wants* to be penetrated, and *impudicus* ('unchaste' or perhaps better, 'violated') designates the person who has been penetrated.<sup>44</sup>

Catullus continues:

*nam castum esse decet pium poetam  
ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est.* (16. 5-6).

For a dutiful poet should be chaste himself,  
but there's no need for his little verses to be.

In the past, commentators have stressed the novelty of the sentiment contained in these lines – the moral division between a poet and his poetry is absent from discussions of poetry before Catullus.<sup>45</sup> The incongruity of their tone has also consistently excited comment – lofty aphorizing, in language with distinctly religious overtones, after the brute obscenities of the opening line. But both the sentiment and the tone are best explained with reference to the poem's Priapic generic background.

A constant tension makes itself felt in ancient accounts of Priapus between his divinity and the shameless licentiousness of his actions. This is manifest in a number of poems from the *Palatine Anthology* in which an *apologia* of sorts is put into Priapus' mouth. In the anonymous *A.P.* 16.260, Priapus delivers his characteristic threat to thieves, but then, defending himself against an imaginary chorus of detractors, says: 'You will say that it is shameful (*aischros*) for a god to have such a task./ Even *I* know it's shameful. But know this: it's why I was set up.' Similarly, in *A.P.* 237 (Tymnes), Priapus begins by saying that he makes no distinctions in his treatment of thieves

in his garden, even if the thief is Cronos himself. And then the objection: ‘Someone will say that it is not proper (*eprepe*) for me to say these things/ for the sake of greens and pumpkins. It isn’t – but I say them anyway.’

Both the motif of the defense against detractors and the self-consciousness it exhibits about the god’s obscenity were exploited by the poets of the *Carmina Priapea*. Often its poets put the defense in their own mouths. In *Priap.* 29, for example, the poet swears on oath that although it would shame him (*pudet*) to use obscene language, when in the presence of Priapus (that is, when writing Priapic poetry), he has a duty to be obscene.<sup>46</sup> These poets also expanded on the idea of the obscene poem about Priapus as itself a religious offering to be placed in Priapus’ garden, or more commonly, to be inscribed on the walls of a temple to the god.<sup>47</sup> Both *topoi* are combined in *Priap.* 49: here, Priapus himself tells a passerby that on the walls of his temple will be found *non nimium casti carmina pleni ioci*: ‘poems, full of jokes none too chaste’, a deliberately chosen allusion to religious purity to flaunt the tension between divinity and obscenity. Then, the imagined objection, and: ‘Stop being offended by the obscene words./ My cock isn’t so haughty!’<sup>48</sup> Of course, all of this mock-religiosity is merely a facetious excuse for the poets to be as obscene as possible, at which they excelled; it is also a deliberate travesty of the Greek tradition of far more serious religious poetry celebrating the dedication of various offerings (*anathēmata*) to Priapus.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, whether it is an inherited role or one which they hammer out for themselves, the poets of the *Carmina Priapea* gleefully envisage themselves as pious poet-priests of Priapus, for whom obscenity was not taboo but cultic prerogative.

These poems were collected after Catullus’ time. But once we realize that Catullus has sought to establish poem 16 within a Priapic generic frame, we see that the persona Catullus fashions for himself is very similar. ‘A dutiful poet should be chaste...’: dutiful to Priapus, that is, by writing Priapic verses, which are obscene not in reflection of the poet’s own morals but of Priapus’.

‘...But there’s no need for his verses to be’: *nihil necesse est*, like *parum pudicum* two lines above and below it, is an instance of litotes; of course, the Priapic poet’s poems *should* be obscene, as, indeed, Catullus 16 is, and ought to be if it seeks to achieve the goal it sets for itself in the lines that follow. Catullus’ precept, with its perverse combination of obscenity and religious devotion, is most sensible as an expression of the Priapic poet’s creed, according to which, uniquely, religion and obscenity were inseparably joined.

*qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,  
si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,  
et quod pruriat incitare possunt,  
non dico pueris, sed his pilosis  
qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.* (Cat. 16.7-11).

His poems only have wit and charm  
if they’re a bit effeminate and none too chaste,  
and are able to incite the part that itches –  
I’m not talking about for boys, but for these  
hairy men who can’t move their bristling loins.

With a number of other commentators, I interpret *movere lumbos* as alluding to the stereotypical motion of the excited pathic;<sup>50</sup> but I differ from most in arguing that what is in store for the ‘hairy’ men is not *pedicatio*,<sup>51</sup> but *irrumatio*. The ideal for which Catullus promotes these verses is not that they should be able to arouse men not easily aroused, but that they should be able to transform into sexual submissives even those not normally raped: bearded – that is, given the conventional dichotomy, adult<sup>52</sup> – men. So, in *A.P.* 16.243 (Antistius), Priapus warns a prospective thief that he ‘knows how to pierce all: your beard won’t help you’. In three poems in

the *Carmina Priapea*, Priapus distinguishes between the *types* of penetration appropriate for boys, girls and men: ‘I warn you’, he says at *Priap.* 13, ‘boy, you’ll be taken up the ass; girl, you’ll be fucked. A third penalty awaits the bearded thief’<sup>53</sup>... *irrumatio*, that is, as *Priap.* 22 makes clear: ‘If a woman should commit theft against me, or a man, or a boy/ she will offer me her cunt, he, his mouth, the boy, his ass’.<sup>54</sup> *Quod pruriat*, then, in line 9 of Catullus 16, is the ass for boys, but for hairy men who, as Catullus states quite plainly in line 11, are (no longer?) able to wiggle their asses as pathics do, it is the mouth.<sup>55</sup> This implicit reference to both *pedicatio* and *irrumatio* is also entirely in accordance with the first (and last) lines of the poem; but, from the development in 7-11, Furius and Aurelius should understand that the “penetration” threatened consists of being lambasted by verse (perhaps *this* verse), which is itself conceptualized as able to “penetrate” all who come its way.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, this kind of penetration – *irrumatio* – is gagging, silencing; in other words, transported to the metapoetical garden, Priapus’ haughty boast is of the capacity for his poetry, with its cocksure directness, to shut his detractors up.<sup>57</sup>

*vos, quod milia multa basiorum*  
*legistis, male me marem putatis?*  
*pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo.* (16. 12-14).

Since you’ve read of many thousands  
of kisses, do you think I’m less of a man?  
I’ll fuck your ass and your face.

We have seen in the poem to this point a progressive slouching towards textuality. The initial threat of rape presents Catullus as Priapus, but at 5-6, we see him as the Priapic poet, instead. The picture develops at 7-11: he presents an image of the poet as a combination of the two – his phallus, his weapon, is his verse (cf. Cat. 42), which will subjugate his detractors; thus the threat

is of *textual* rape.<sup>58</sup> This movement is complete in the last lines. Catullus cites in lines 12-13 his poetry as an explicitly textual (note *legistis*) construction of self (a ‘representation’, pointedly), and then issues a ‘real’ threat, but this threat is also out of a poem – this one – and it is therefore also a representation, no less a poetic construction of self. Catullus’ juxtaposition of two of his previous poetic positions in lines 13 and 14 is a winking reminder to his reader at the end of the poem of the constructedness of Catullus 16’s Priapic *ego*. The artistic self-consciousness with which Catullus takes up this persona is also another generic marker, since, as earlier mentioned, the assumption of a persona was one of the distinguishing features of the Priapic genre.

Commentators have dwelt on whether *milia multa basiorum* in line 12 was intended to refer to poem 5 and 7 (addressed to Lesbia), or poem 48 (addressed to Juventius). Older commentators tended to the latter view, believing that *mollis* denoted homosexuality in the broad, modern sense, a view now discredited. More recent commentators tend towards poems 5 and 7, on thematic (Nappa 2001, 50-6) or lexical (Schievenin 2000, 196-7) grounds, accounting for *mollis* by way of its wider meaning of an over-indulgence in pleasure.<sup>59</sup> But the evidence is against the employment of that broader meaning here. As we have already noted, after the first two lines, with their preoccupation with rape and penetration and establishment of a Priapic generic context, it is very likely that *mollis* and *parum pudicus* in lines 4 and 8 refer specifically to an allegation of pathic homosexuality. This is confirmed when Catullus rephrases their accusation in line 13 with ‘*male me marem putastis*’, apparently idiomatic for *cinaedi* – cf. Ov. *A.A.* 1.523-4 (*male vir*), Quint. *Inst.* 5.9.14 (*parum vir*). In truth, then, the allegation that Catullus is *male mas* on the basis of *milia multa basiorum* is applicable neither to poems 5, 7 nor 48, since the desire for endless kisses and for life and love, as expressed in those poems, hardly suggests that Catullus is a pathic homosexual. Even if we summon up the most conservative Roman worldview we can and surmise that Catullus was ‘effeminate’ because he was sitting at home writing about kisses

instead of, say, fighting somewhere, the terms in which this is expressed still seem strangely crude and extreme.

This discrepancy is, however, the point, as Catullus is here tendentiously *misdescribing* his love poems in accordance with the poem's generic agenda. The worldview inherent in Priapic poetry is strictly dichotomized. It offers up only two positions: the hyper-phallic, assertively active male on one hand, and the sexually passive woman or *cinaedus* on the other. According to this dichotomy, we may well suspect that Catullus' pleas for kisses would seem *cinaedish* to Priapus (but then, of course, with the exception of poem 56, just about everything in Catullus' corpus would).<sup>60</sup> In *Priap.* 68, Priapus reinterprets Homer; focalized through his worldview, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* become a series of cheap porn vignettes, in which all the characters are motivated by the constant desire for sex, as he is. 'If Trojan cock hadn't pleased Grecian cunt so much/ Homer would have had nothing to sing about', he begins his summary of the *Iliad*; Odysseus' wanderings: 'Odysseus was, however, hurrying home to his old lady/ and, Penelope, his entire mind was in your cunt'.<sup>61</sup> In lines 4 and 13 of poem 16, when Catullus characterizes his love poetry as *molliculus* and *parum pudicus* and himself as *male mas*, he is similarly focalizing his work through Priapus' worldview and the inappropriateness of these terms is entirely the gag. The strict illogicality of the movement in lines 7-11 – that his verses are "*mollis*" (that is, sexually passive), but, Priapus-like, penetrate everyone else anyway – adds to the farce, since it harshly exposes Priapus' ridiculous single-mindedness: penetration of others is his only solution in every situation, even in a discussion of literary principle, as lines 5-11 feign to be. This tone of farce is itself worthy of note. Far from subscribing to this dichotomized 'ethos of penetration and dominance'<sup>62</sup> himself, Catullus evokes it as literary burlesque and ridicules its limitations. By caricaturing his own brilliant and varied verses as *molliculi* and *parum pudici*, Catullus mocks the arid duality of Priapus' hyper-phallic worldview, which no doubt bore as much relationship to

actual Roman men's perceptions of sexuality as the size of Priapus' *mentula* did to the average Roman cock.

The joke in the 'literary principle' of lines 7-11 is similarly based on an implied contrast between Priapus' worldview and that of Catullus as it is manifest in another part of his corpus. In these lines, Catullus states essentially that poetry can only have *sal* and *lepos* if it can turn even grown men into sexual submissives. It is an obvious point, but few commentators have observed that this is a view that Catullus himself cannot possibly have held. True, the startling but amply attested conceptualization in Latin texts of communication between writer and reader as a kind of homosexual seduction may have made Catullus' statement less surprising to Roman ears,<sup>63</sup> and, with only a little interpretive strain, one of Catullus' poems could possibly be read as applying the dictum to one of his friends as a literary compliment.<sup>64</sup> But Catullus' statement is a *reductio ad absurdum* of this idea, and facetiously excludes the complex associations established for *sal* and *lepos* throughout the rest of his corpus, including literary polish (1.1), charm or style (36.10 and 17) and wit (12.4, 13.4, 86.4). Catullus' poetic dictum is, in the fullest way, "Priapic", since, as the repetitiveness of the *Carmina Priapea* bears out, only Priapus could judge the worth of a poem by whether it ends with someone being sexually subjugated or not. But, again, by adopting this Priapic voice, Catullus is only showing up its foolishness; in this case, he shows up its ignorance of neoteric aesthetic principles of class and style. Moreover, Priapus is, of course, the antithesis of Catullus' taste in men, with his avowed rusticity and bizarre, if not wrongheaded, literary judgment, and there is considerable irony in him pronouncing on matters of taste and wit.<sup>65</sup> In short, the speaker of poem 16 is everything which Catullus usually mocks – and his sexual ethos should be seen as part of his boorishness, too.

We might take this idea further and suggest that, in modeling his poetic role on that of the 'Priapic poet' in lines 5-6 (see above), Catullus means for us to sense a contrast between the

sentiment of these lines and his outlook as it is reflected elsewhere throughout his poems. Catullus' usual aesthetic judgments are idiosyncratically dependent on the interdependence of art and life. On a moral level, Caesar and Mamurra's sexual and literary debasement go hand-in-hand, so as to constitute one insult, in poem 57.<sup>66</sup> Mamurra's literary failure in poem 105 is presented suggestively amidst the cycle of poems lambasting him for his other faults. On an aesthetic level, poem 22 is dependent on our assumption that Suffenus' chic in real life will be reflected in his verse, and when it is not, Catullus 'punctuates this realization with a good deal of surprise' (Selden 1992, 477). The pure fact that Catullus cultivates the use of a set of adjectives with which to demonstrate aesthetic approval of both people and poetry is suggestive of a link between the two. Catullus' moves are similar, then, to Horace in *Satires* 1.4.53-62, who advocates a poetic theory which his audience would have recognized as not his own.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, from the evidence still available, it seems that, for a short time at least, Catullus' literary flirtation with the supernaturally-endowed garden-god was recognized as such by his readers. It is certainly suggestive that poem 16 is paired in the collection with *O Colonia*, another extended Priapic experiment.<sup>68</sup> Martial adapted lines 7-11 of Catullus 16 as a 'law' in his poem 1.35;<sup>69</sup> to let his readers know that he got the joke, he ends his poem '*Gallo turpius est nihil Priapo*' – 'there is nothing more disgusting than a castrated Priapus'. But lines 5-6 would prove irresistible in the defense of reputations, and influential citations by Pliny and Apuleius formed the basis for countless Renaissance imitations, which, in turn, seem to have heavily influenced modern readings that interpret the poem as a '*prise de position*',<sup>70</sup> and so on. Such readings use the poem as evidence of ancient concepts of "persona", and yet necessarily ignore Catullus' own construction of a persona in this very poem. Moreover, it is only when this persona is viewed in its original Priapic context that the cultural associations with which Catullus connects hyperphallic sexuality can be understood. We could gain much, then, by getting back, as they say, to the Garden.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Text of Luke 1997.

<sup>2</sup> The collection was bowdlerized on publication. It is therefore a matter of conjecture as to its original plan, but Vaget 1997, amongst others, convincingly argues that the two Priapic poems were intended to frame the work. Goethe also wrote critical commentaries on poems from the *Carmina Priapea*: see Eissler 1963: 1332.

<sup>3</sup> See Vaget 1997, ix-xi.

<sup>4</sup> Evidently the association between Goethe and Priapus stuck; Nietzsche tells us that ‘there was a time when Herder liked to use the word “Priapus” whenever he spoke of Goethe’ (1967 [1888]: 162).

<sup>5</sup> See Stewart 1997. As a figure less rustic than *rusticated*, Stewart argues that Priapus assumed a symbolic role in Roman culture within discourses which valorized the rural in different ways. Stewart’s account of the deliberate contrast between artistic sophistication and a pretense of rusticity in visual representations of Priapus provides a valuable comparison to Catullus’ own poetic practice in his impersonations of Priapus, which employ sophisticated poetic manoeuvres to parody a ridiculous *lack* of sophistication.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Rankin 1970; Richlin 1981 and 1992, 145-7; Hallett 1996, 328-9; Williams 1999, 164-5, Miller 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Richlin 1992, 58.

<sup>8</sup> At 145.

<sup>9</sup> For full accounts of the history of the subgenre, see Parker at 1-59; E.M.O’Connor, 1989, who clearly distinguishes between the different varieties of *priapeum*; and generally on the cult, Herter, 1932. Poems on Priapus in the Greek Anthology (37 in total) extend from the third century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. In Latin, outside the *Carmina Priapea*, there are about 23 *priapea* of various types. Although the earliest extant (near-) complete *priapeum* in Latin seems to be by Catullus himself (fr.1), there is evidence that Priapus was a popular literary character in Rome before this: so, for example, Macrobius (*Sat.* 6.5.6) tells us that Priapus spoke the prologue to one of the comedies of Afranius, whose works involved, according to Quintilian, pederastic themes (*Inst.* 10.1.100). *Triphallos*, an epithet of Priapus, was the title of a comedy of Naevius (Gell. 2.19.6), and also of a Menippean satire by Varro subtitled ‘*peri arrenotētos*’, ‘about manliness’ (Non. 131 M).

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy 1993, 1-23, esp. at 7-10.

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<sup>11</sup> The libertarian economist Ludwig von Mises: '[T]he significant task of aprioristic reasoning is on the one hand to bring into relief all that is implied in the categories, concepts and premises, and, on the other hand, to show what they do not imply. It is its vocation to render manifest and obvious what was hidden and unknown before' (1966, 38).

<sup>12</sup> See Zarker 1962, at 503 (with citations).

<sup>13</sup> See Parker 1988, 12. Richlin 1992 challenges this identification, but she is mistaken when she says that the fragment 'certainly concerns cunnilingus' (at 245). Neither Catullus nor Priapus ever show interest in cunnilingus, which was seen as unmanly and polluting – see Krenkel 1981, 39-53; cf. *Priap.* 78. Moreover, although there are a few extant examples, *ligurrire* was not commonly used to denote cunnilingus (*lingere* is its *vox propria*: Adams 1982, 135). It is much more likely that the poem belonged to that type of Priapic poem in which the god plays upon the double meanings of *ischas* or *ficus* to 'exchange' fruit from the garden for sexual assault – see *A.P.* 16.240, 241, *Priap.* 72b for the most developed examples; cf. *Priap.* 5 and 38 for the 'fair exchange motif' and cf. Mart. 6.49 and 7.91 for a similar verbal play. The verb *ligurrire*, which came to mean something like 'to eat in small portions', was used in both literal (e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.3.81) and metaphorical senses (e.g. Cic. *Ver.* 2.3.76) and would thus have been eminently suitable for such a gag.

<sup>14</sup> In the sixteenth century, Maurus' comment led to a scramble to insert extant Priapic poems into the Catullan collection, the legacy of which remains today in the gap created by the now-removed Catullus 18-20; see Gaisser 1993, 165-7.

<sup>15</sup> In *Iambi* 7 and 9, Callimachus gives voice to the ithyphallic herm, which Dawson suggests was formative for the Roman poets' use of the Priapus motif (1950, 83).

<sup>16</sup> Luck 1959 says that 'Priapus was a fashionable god among the *poetae novi*' (at 88) which I think likely, but it should be admitted that most of the evidence comes from just after their time.

<sup>17</sup> See Courtney 1993, 276-81 for text and commentary on the fragments.

<sup>18</sup> *debilem facito manu, debilem pede coxo/ tuber adstrue gibberum, lubricos quate dentes/ vita dum superest, benest. hanc mihi vel acuta/ si sedeam cruce, sustine.* ('Make me weak in the hand, weak with a lame foot,/ stick a crooked hump on my back, shake out my loose teeth,/ while there's life left, I'm fine./Keep me alive – even if I have to sit on a sharp cross'). Interpretation of this poem is difficult, but it is

likely given the use of the Priapean meter that the poem was somehow sexually-oriented, and one would think that the last phrase should have some *point* to it. Whilst *acuta si sedeam cruce* is presented ostensibly as the climax of a mounting tally of physical discomforts, perhaps here Maecenas is playing on the erotic double meanings of the vocabulary and assuming the conventional persona of the repulsive old woman or *cinaedus* who, despite decrepitude, actually *wants* to be penetrated by Priapus: for this comic motif in Priapic poetry, cf. *Priap.* 12, 32, 46, 57 (old women); 25.5, 51, 64, Mart. 6.16; cf. *A.P.* 6.254 (Myrinus) (*cinaedi*); for *crux* used of Priapus' *mentula* cf. Verg. *Priap.* 2.18 (85 Bücheler) (although the OCT emends this to *trux*); for *crux* generally as an instrument of genital impalement cf. Sen. *Cons. Marc.* 20.3; for the erotic connotations of *sedere*, see Herescu 1960; for women (literally) sitting either on Priapus or Mutinus Tutinus, with whom Priapus was identified, cf. Arnob. 4.7.1, Lact. *D.I.* 1.20.30, Aug. *de Civ. Dei* 6.9, 7.24. Like *Priap.* 80.9, this plea to Priapus might also be parodying the Roman saying that 'while there's life left, there's hope', which Seneca (*Ep.* 70.6) finds '*effeminatissimus*' anyway: see Otto 1964, 329-30 on this saying.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Vita Donati* (17.58-9 Hardie) and *Vita Servii* (14-15 Hardie).

<sup>20</sup> In the *Controversiae* the phrase *inepta loci* is dubbed by one of the speakers '*Ovidianum illud*' (*Contr.* 1.2.22), but, in extant Latin, this phrase appears only in *Priap.* 3. 8, suggesting Ovidian authorship of that poem.

<sup>21</sup> So Radford 1921. Buchheit 1962 argued for single authorship, but denied that that author was Ovid.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. O'Connor 1984, 92-100, 118-124; Hallett 1996, 333.

<sup>23</sup> So, Parker 1988 on the Greek poems: '...most of them cannot be precisely dated. Date has remarkably little significance, however, as their approach to their subjects remains much the same throughout' (at 2).

<sup>24</sup> On the evidence of Juv. 14.104 and Mart. 7.82.6 and 11.94.2, *verpus* is normally translated as 'circumcised'. But Ellis 1876 ad loc sees *verpus* as corresponding in a broader way to the Greek *psōlos*, an association accepted by Adams 1982, 13; see also Eden 1988, 121. The connotations of *psōlos* fit perfectly here: although, strictly speaking, it refers to a penis of which the foreskin has receded through erection, Henderson 1991 notes that in Old Comedy it was used more broadly of men who were "all phallus" (at 110) and was associated with figuratively-employed images of anal penetration (at 218). *Verpus* was also the name of a farce by Livius Andronicus (Fest. 182, 12 Lindsay), but unfortunately we know virtually

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nothing about the contents of the work (see Carratello 1979 at 73-4, though, on whether the word *ornamento* in the only surviving line referred to a *mentula*).

<sup>25</sup> On this cultural association, cf. Catullus 29, 56, 114 and 115 with Edwards 1993 at 91-2 and Konstan 2000. Dettmer 1984 is an alternative, insightful analysis of how Catullus emphasizes both gluttony and excessive sexual desire in c.47.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. *A.P.* 16.243, *Priap.* 10, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Burnt: Verg. *Priap.* 1.3-4, Mart. 8.40; stolen: *A.P.* 16.238 (Lucian), Mart. 6.72; proven sexually inadequate: *Priap.* 56; outdone by human rivals: *A.P.* 11. 224 (Antipater), *Priap.* 78, 79.

<sup>28</sup> *Priape, quod sis fascino gravis tento/ quod exprobravit hanc tibi suo versu/ poeta noster, erubescere hoc noli/ non es poeta sarcinosior nostro.* ('Priapus, don't feel bad that you're weighed down by that taut phallus, which our poet has chided you for in his verse: you're no more laden than the poet himself!') The *Aufschluss* here – that the Priapic poet's phallus is even larger than Priapus' – might be interpreted as identifying the writing of Priapic poems as a kind of ithyphallic activity of its own, an important association for my interpretation of Catullus 16.

<sup>29</sup> For this association, see Richlin 1992, 222; Edwards 1993, 84-7, 91-2; Williams 1999, 143-8.

<sup>30</sup> Neudling 1955, 172-6, summarizes the information on Valerius Cato which survives. For this Cato as a neoteric, cf. Ov. *Tris.* 2.436; for his connection with Lucilius, see the pseudo-Horatian prologue to Hor. *Sat.* 1.10. In light of Valerius Cato's highly probable membership of Catullus' literary coterie, and given what we know about the exchange of literary exercises between members *reddens mutua per iocum* (Cat. 50.6), there is no need to look to the far less likely candidate M. Porcius Cato as the recipient of this particular literary *ludus*.

<sup>31</sup> See Furius Bibaculus fr. 1 Courtney.

<sup>32</sup> The text of Catullus used is Mynors' Oxford Classical Text. Translations are my own.

<sup>33</sup> Constructions of the grammar have differed. *Trusare* appears only here but almost certainly has a meaning close to *trudere*, which means 'to masturbate' at Mart. 11.46.3. But *trudere* does not take a dative in extant Latin; if, then, *puellae* is genitive with *pupulum* ('my girlfriend's boy'), there are only two people involved and Catullus/ Priapus rapes the boy as he sits masturbating alone. Yet the word *protelo* clearly implies that there are three people involved: in Cato (Nonius 363.10) *protelo* is used to mean 'three in a

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row', and its usual extended meaning (see, e.g. *Lucr.* 2.531, 4.190) is 'in a [spatial] sequence, in a row', which would have no force if there were only two people here. These points are argued eloquently by Godfrey Tanner in *Hermes*, 1972 - citing the divine Marquis as a parallel.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., *Priap.* 44.3, 67.3, 76.3.

<sup>35</sup> Adams 1982, 145-6.

<sup>36</sup> See *Priap.* 26.10, 65.2.

<sup>37</sup> *Lucil. frag.* 247-8 (Marx), *Pliny, Nat. Hist.* 9.17.45 and 18.48.173. Of course, after we have read *cecidi* at the end of the line, it is also a pun – *pro/telo* = 'in place of a weapon'.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Servius on Verg. *Georg.* 4.111; *Diod. Sic.* 4.6.1; *Pausanias* 9.31.2.

<sup>39</sup> Clarke 2002, 169-172.

<sup>40</sup> On 'focalization', see Bal 1997: 142-161. The *locus Classicus* for the term's application to analyses of Latin poetry is Fowler 1990.

<sup>41</sup> Clarke 2002, at 171.

<sup>42</sup> *Pupu[lu]s* is certainly not an objective term for a 'boy'. *Pupus*, of which *pupulus* is the diminutive form, appears to have literally designated a baby: cf. *Var. ap. Non.* 156, 22, *CIL* 8. 10942. The extension of *pupus* to the 25-year-old Caligula by a crowd who had known him as a child is infantilizing but not hostile (*Suet. Calig.* 13). But the diminutive form of the word is exaggeratedly infantilizing and certainly deprecatory: in a letter of Seneca (*Ep.* 12), the word is used of an old slave who still, grotesquely, claims that he is his master's *delicioium*. I would suggest that the use of *pupulus* in Catullus 56 signifies not that the other male was literally a boy (since the word is never so used) but rather signifies the speaker's deprecatory attitude towards the adult he has 'caught'.

<sup>43</sup> *Priap.* 64.1; cf. *Cat.* 25.1, *Liv.* 33. 28, *Sen. Ep.* 87, *Mart.* 9.47.6 and 12.75.4, *Petron.* 126.2, *Juv.* 2.47.

<sup>44</sup> Note especially *Priap.* 59: *Praedictum tibi ne negare possis/ si fur veneris, impudicus exis* ('Here's a warning to you that you can't refute/ If you come here a thief, you'll leave violated'). Cf. *Cat.* 21.12-13. On *impudicus* as a specific designation of male sexual violation, see further Williams 1999, 172-4.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Jocelyn 1996 [unpaginated]: 'These verses stated a view of poetry which defied ancient convention'; Sandy 1971 at 54: 'Catullus makes the claim with the serious intention of debunking what had been and was to a large extent to remain a principal tenet of literary criticism: *non potest alius esse ingenio*,

*alius animo color*' (Sen. *Ep.* 114.3)'. Batstone 1993 rejects Sandy's comment, claiming (at 168) that Catullus' sentiment is 'at least implicit in several passages of Callimachus (*Aet.* 1.1.23-4; *Epigr.* 28 and 35 Pfeiffer)' but his parallels are very tenuous; they make mention of poetry, but none makes a *moral* distinction comparable to that in Catullus 16.

<sup>46</sup> 'May I perish, Priapus, if I'm not ashamed/ to use obscene and improper language./But when you, a god, are showing me/ your exposed balls, shame set aside/ "cock" as well as "cunt" I have to say' (*Obscenis, peream, Priape, si non/ uti me pudet, improbisque verbis./ sed cum tu posito deus pudore/ ostendis mihi coleos patentes/ cum cunno mihi mentula est vocanda*).

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g. *Priap.* 2.9-11, 41.2, 47.2, 49.1. For Latin poetry conceptualizing itself as inscription, see Habinek 1998, 109-114 and the bibliography there cited.

<sup>48</sup> *versibus obscenis offendi desine: non est/ mentula subducti nostra supercilii*. See Goldberg ad loc on the conventionality of the phrase *subducti...supercilii*.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. e.g. *A.P.* 6.21, 22, 33, 102, 192, 193, 232.

<sup>50</sup> See Sandy 1971, Wiseman 1976, Buchheit 1976, Fitzgerald 1995. Fitzgerald and Buchheit cite numerous parallels, but I find *Catalepton* 13.21 particularly decisive, in which the exact phrase, *movere lumbos*, is used in an attack on a man branded a *cinaedus*.

<sup>51</sup> The form *pedicatio*\* is often used by modern writers but unattested in Latin texts. A noun "*pedicum*" did exist: cf. Glossar. cod. Vat. ap. *C. G. L.*, IV, 18: '*Pedicum*'. *viciium mollitiae...*, citing Lucilius (frag. 74 Marx) '*Pedicum...iam excoquit omne*'. Perhaps it denoted anal sex generally without particular reference to who played which role.

<sup>52</sup> Hairiness may also have been redolent of sexual activity, rather than passivity, in that depilation was a stereotypical characteristic of *cinaedi* (cf. e.g. Mart. 10.65.8-9 and the passages cited by Edwards 1993, 68). Similarly, I have translated *durus* as 'bristling' on the basis of Sandy's convincing argument that the adjective was used of body parts to mean 'shaggy' or 'coarse', as opposed to the depilated body of the *cinaedus* (1971, 53, citing, *inter alia*, Juvenal 2.11-13 and 6.276-8).

<sup>53</sup> *Percidere puer, moneo: futuere puella:/ barbatum furem tertia poena manet*.

<sup>54</sup> *Femina si furtum faciet mihi virve puerve,/ haec cunnum, caput hic praebeat, ille nates*. Cf. *Priap.* 74: 'Through the middle of boys and the middle of girls/ my cock shall go. From bearded men, it seeks only the

highest regions' (*Per medios ibit pueros mediasque puellas/ mentula, barbatis non nisi summa petet*). This division was no doubt a cultural commonplace and is reflected elsewhere in Catullus' corpus; so, the *pupulus* ('boy') in c. 56 suffers *pedicatio* and Aurelius *pedicare cupit* Juventius at 21.4, but *irrumatio* is threatened to or suffered by *pilosi* like Aurelius (21.8, 13), Gellius' uncle (74. 5-6), a swarm of bar-flies (37. 7-8), and, well, Catullus himself (28.9-10).

<sup>55</sup> It is relevant here that the mouth was sometimes contemptuously characterized as a seat of sexual excitation for expectant *fellatores*. Cf. Mart. 1.96.11-13: *Uni lavamur: aspicit nihil sursum/ sed spectat oculis devorantibus draucos/ nec otiosis mentulas videt labris* – 'We bathe together. He doesn't look up at all/ but watches the *manly* men, his eyes devouring them/, and he eyes their cocks, his lips never at rest'. (On the meaning of *draucus* here see Kay 1985, 224-5, and cf. Mart. 11.72 and 9.27). This idea might also be implicit in Juv. 9. 35 and CIL 11.6721.24.

<sup>56</sup> Schievenin, who, somewhat over-dramatically, characterizes identifying the *pilosi* as 'il vero nodo esegetico del carne' (2000, 201), doubts whether Catullus would have used *his* with *pilosis* if he had wished to refer to Furius and Aurelius, who are elsewhere addressed directly with *vos* (lines 1, 12, 14) or verbs in the second person (lines 3, 13). But poem 16 is essentially a dramatic monologue and this discrepancy is deliberately inserted to provide 'stage directions'. We are to imagine lines 1-4 as addressed to Furius and Aurelius. Then in lines 5-11, with a change of tone and a movement to third person verbs, he declaims a general principle (to the audience, so to speak). The demonstrative *his*, the verbal equivalent of a hand-gesture motioning to Furius and Aurelius, redirects attention to these two, and, at lines 12-14, Catullus resumes the direct address.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Richlin 1992, 149; see also Cat. 74.5-6 and Mart. 3.96.3.

<sup>58</sup> See Selden's article on the performative nature of Catullus' text; as he says, 'the individual poems function less to communicate factual information than as agents of some pragmatic force...' (1992, 482).

<sup>59</sup> On this extended meaning of *mollis* in its social context, see Edwards 1993, 63-97.

<sup>60</sup> In relation to the *Carmina Priapea*, Rankin comments appositely, if politely, 'Though his [Priapus'] literacy is no doubt an improvement on his rustic origins, his attitude and manners are no better... There is no reason to suppose that the Priapus of these poems would be in the least interested in any sexual

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relationship that involved sympathy or love, since these sentiments would diminish the hostile and hurtful element which he dwells upon' (1971, 60-1).

<sup>61</sup> *Priap.* 68.9-10: *quid? nisi Taenario placuisset Troica cunno/ mentula, quod caneret, non habuisset opus.*

At 27-8: *ad vetulam tamen ille suam properabat, et omnis/ mens erat in cunno, Penelopea, tuo.*

<sup>62</sup> The allusion is to Halperin 1990: 'I think it would be advisable not to speak of it as a sexuality at all but to describe it, rather, as a more generalized ethos of penetration and domination, a socio-sexual discourse structured by the presence or absence of its central term: the phallus' (at 34-5). Halperin has revised his position somewhat since then, but still situates ancient perceptions of male sexuality within 'the hierarchical world of the sexual penetration of subordinate males by superordinate males' (2002 at 117). For a different criticism of such a focus on 'penetration', see Davidson 2001.

<sup>63</sup> See Fitzgerald 1992, who examines this conceptualization in Catullus, Martial and Pliny.

<sup>64</sup> That is, poem 50, in which, having been engaged in literary play with his friend Licinius, Catullus presents himself (in erotically-charged language) as 'incensed' by Licinius' *lepos* (*tuo lepore/ incensus* at lines 7-8).

<sup>65</sup> Priapus' very rusticity is no doubt itself reflected in the apparent ignorance of neoteric aesthetic principles in Cat. 16.7-11 and the willful misinterpretation of Catullus' love poetry in lines 12-13; see Watson 1990 on how 'rusticity' came to be used to denote artistic or interpretive (cf. Philetas *fr.* 10 Powell) ineptitude.

<sup>66</sup> See at lines 5-6, and Quinn 1973 *ad loc* on the literary pretensions of these two.

<sup>67</sup> See Freudenburg 1993 at 145-50.

<sup>68</sup> See Kloss 1998.

<sup>69</sup> *Lex haec carminibus data est iocosis/ ne possint, nisi pruriant, iuvare.* ('This law has been bestowed upon funny verses/ They can't be pleasing, unless they're arousing').

<sup>70</sup> Quinn 1973, 143.

<sup>71</sup> Thank you to the following people for their encouraging criticisms of drafts of this article: Frances Muecke, Marguerite Johnson, Alastair Blanshard, and the anonymous reader for *AJPh*.