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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Catullus' Priapean Poem (*c.* 17)

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Abstract

Catullus 17 poses a host of interpretational difficulties. The thorniest of these concerns its unity. How can the initial lines on the rickety state of Colonia's *ponticulus* be reconciled with the real focus of the poem, the precipitation from the bridge of a husband who is blind to his bride's erotic needs, in the hope of bringing him to his senses? Many attempts have been made to resolve the problem, but few persuade to any degree. This paper proposes that the key to the unity-question lies in Catullus' adoption of the rare priapean metre. This manoeuvre expresses itself in two ways: first, by infusing the poem as a whole with the thematic colours ascribed to priapeans by ancient metricians, that is to say a ludic, countrified but also mock-epic ethos: second, and crucially, by constructing the doltish *maritus*, the thematic locus of the poem, as an *alter ego* of the eponymous deity of Priapean literature; for just like the god of that corpus, the husband of the poem is a conspicuous sexual under-achiever, the butt of mocking laughter, inurbane, and little more than an insensate block of wood. In sum, by reading *c.* 17 through a specifically Priapean lens it is possible to discover in it an otherwise elusive unity.

Keywords: Bridge; unity; Priapean metre; Priapus; sexual failure; risibility; rusticity; wood

O Colonia, quae cupis ponte ludere longo,
et salire paratum habes, sed uereris inepta
crura ponticuli axulis stantis in rediuiuis,
ne supinus eat cauaque in palude recumbat:
sic tibi bonus ex tua pons libidine fiat,
in quo uel Salisubsali sacra suscipiantur,
munus hoc mihi maximi da, Colonia, risus.
quendam municipem meum de tuo uolo ponte
ire praecipitem in lutum per caputque pedesque,
uerum totius ut lacus putidaeque paludis
liuidissima maximeque est profunda uorago.
insulsissimus est homo, nec sapit pueri instar

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bimuli tremula patris dormientis in ulna.
cui cum sit uiridissimo nupta flore puella
et puella tenellulo delicatior haedo,
adseruanda nigerrimis diligentius uuis,
ludere hanc sinit ut lubet, nec pili facit uni,
nec se subleuat ex sua parte, sed uelut alnus
in fossa Liguri iacet suppernata securi,
tantundem omnia sentiens quam si nulla sit usquam;
talis iste meus stupor nil uidet, nihil audit,
ipse qui sit, utrum sit an non sit, id quoque nescit.
nunc eum uolo de tuo ponte mittere pronum,
si pote stolidum repente excitare ueternum,
et supinum animum in graui derelinquere caeno,
ferream ut soleam tenaci in uoragine mula.[1]

Catull. 17

O Colonia, you who want to sport on your long bridge,
and are ready to dance, but fear the ill-fitting
legs of the poor old bridge, standing on its recycled planks,
lest it fall flat and sink down into the enveloping mud:
May you get a good bridge in accordance with your desire,
on which even the rites of Salisubsalius could be undertaken,
on condition that you give me the gift of maximum laughter.
I want a fellow-citizen of mine from your bridge
to go headfirst into the mud, head over heels,
but (it must be) where in the whole pool and stinking marsh
the abyss is most discoloured and most deep.
He's a most idiotic fellow, and has as much sense as
a two-year-old child, asleep in its father's rocking arms.
Though he's married to a girl in the most verdant flower of youth,
a girl more frisky than a tender little kid,
needing to be watched more carefully than grapes at their ripest,
he lets her play around as she pleases and doesn't give a jot,
doesn't bestir himself for his part, but lies like an alder
in a ditch, hamstrung by a Ligurian axe,
feeling everything just as much as if it didn't exist in the first place.
That dim-witted friend of mine is like that; he sees nothing, hears nothing,
doesn't even know who he himself is, or whether he is alive or not.
Now it's him I want to toss headlong from your bridge,
in the hope that he can suddenly shake up his stupid lethargy
and leave behind his supine spirit in the dense mud,
as a she-mule casts its iron shoe in a clinging morass.

Catullus 17 is a vivid, lively piece which appears, on the face of it, to consist of two thematically disparate parts. The first seven lines, marked by an abundance of circumstantial detail, concern an upcoming dance festival on the

[1] The text is that of Mynors (1958), the translation mine.

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bridge of an unidentified *colonia* and the locals' anxiety that the bridge may prove insufficiently sound to withstand the 'jumping around' (*salire*) upon it which is integral to the festivities, so that it collapses into the marsh beneath (1–4). The speaker of the poem would have the *colonia* get a new bridge,[2] strong enough, unlike the existing one, to sustain dancing of the most uninhibited kind (*uel Salisubsali sacra*), on condition that the *colonia* provides him with 'the gift of maximum laughter' (5–7). In lines 1–4 the whole emphasis falls upon the ricketiness of the 'poor old bridge' (*ponticuli*),[3] the decrepitude of its structure, 'standing [as it does] on recycled planks' (*axulis stantis in rediuiuis*) and the vigorousness of the dancing thereon (*ludere, salire*), which risk the bridge falling flat and sinking into the marsh, there to be enveloped by the mud (*ne supinus eat cauaque in palude recumbat* 4). Lines 5–7 maintain the focus upon the unstable condition of the *pons*, with their emphasis on the desirability of providing the *colonia* with a bridge of unshakeable robustness, unlike, it is implied, the existing one. Up to this point, a modern reader might be forgiven for thinking that he or she was dealing with a poem not dissimilar in theme to the celebrated piece of doggerel by William McGonagall on the collapse of the Tay Bridge in nineteenth-century Scotland, and the fatal structural weakness of the bridge which supposedly led to the disaster.[4]

The remaining nineteen lines however take the poem in an apparently quite different direction. After a transitional section stipulating the price for the replacement or restoration of the bridge, the pitching of a fellow townsman of the speaker (*municipem meum*) head over heels into the bog beneath the *pons* (8–11), we arrive at the real subject of the piece; the crass insensitivity of the unidentified (*quendam*) *municeps* to his wife's youthful charms and sensual needs, his insouciant attitude as she seeks erotic release elsewhere, his sexual torpor and unawareness of what is going on around him, and finally, resuming the theme of 8–11, the proposed remedy for the situation, a ducking in the marsh in the hope of bringing him to his senses. In this second section of the poem, in marked contrast to the first, the focus is firmly on the erotic mismatch between husband and wife. There is on the one hand the youthful perfection of her physical attributes and the need to keep her rampant sexual impulses under proper control, on the other the – to the poet inexplicable –

[2] So Kroll (1968), Fordyce (1961), and Thomson (1997). According to Walsh (1985) 317 the speaker wishes that 'that the bridge become good' i.e., be restored as good as new. This certainly fits with the scenario in the poem, in which it is desired that the *maritus* be returned to his senses. Syndikus (1984) 148 and Kloss (1998) 62 hold that the meaning is 'hopefully the bridge will prove stable', the latter, along with Quinn (1969) 27 positing that the bridge has already undergone restoration or has been built afresh.

[3] There is no discrepancy, as has sometimes been thought, between *ponte longo* line 1 and *ponticuli* here. *Ponticuli* is a mock-pathetic diminutive, with no spatial connotations. See Carratello (1983) 42 n. 73.

[4] The poem ends 'Oh! Ill-fated bridge of the silv'ry Tay, / I now must conclude my lay / By telling the world fearlessly without the least dismay, / That your central girders would not have given way, / At least many sensible men do say / Had they been supported on each side with buttresses, / At least many sensible men confesses, / For the stronger we our houses do build, / The less chance we have of being killed.'

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unresponsiveness of the *maritus* to his bride's loveliness (*nec se subleuat ex sua parte*) and his blindness to her carnal needs and freewheeling pursuit of alternative sexual outlets in the absence of the expected conjugal attentions.[5]

Poem 17 has provoked nearly as many questions as it has lines. What is the identity of the anonymous *colonia* addressed in the opening verses? Is it Catullus' natal Verona?[6] Or another town in the vicinity of Verona?[7] If 17 is set in Verona (or an adjacent municipality), should it be classed, along with *c.* 67 on another sexual imbroglio likewise set in *Gallia Cisalpina*, as one of Catullus' earliest poems?[8] Is the lackadaisical *maritus* of the poem an invention of the poet, imaginatively modelled perhaps on the pseudo-Homeric fool Margites, who through congenital stupidity would not have sex with his wife?[9] Alternatively, is the *maritus* **not** a fictional creation, but a real person and, if so, who?[10] Is *c.* 17 perhaps only fully comprehensible to an inner circle of Catullus' intimates, fellow-Transpadanes who were *au fait* with its *dramatis personae*?[11] Is there a connection between the cure proposed for the neglectful *maritus*, precipitation from the *colonia*'s bridge, and the tag *sexagenarios de ponte*, which adverts to the Roman practice of tossing 'sixty year old men off a bridge',[12] as well as with the annual rite of the Argei (Ov. *Fast.* 5.621–62), whereby rush effigies of old men – perhaps in a relic of an original human sacrifice – were thrown into the Tiber from the *Pons Sublicius*?[13] In other words, does *c.* 17 represent the translocation of a Roman ritual to a Transpadane

[5] For the general situation compare Mart. 12.97, where an *uxor puella* of impeccable pedigree similarly suffers from the enervation (*mentula ... nec ... surgit*) of her husband, though for a different reason from that in Catull. 17.

[6] Fordyce (1961) 140: '*A priori,* Verona is the likeliest setting'. Similarly, Quinn (1970) ad loc. and Carratello (1983) 29–31. Kroll (1968) is sceptical. See also Kloss (1998) 66–7.

[7] Lenchantin de Gubernatis (1976) on line 1 and Carratello (1983) 29–31 list the various suggestions and related technical arguments. Kloss (1998) 66–7 thinks of a small rural settlement, inhabited by those *qui agrum colunt*.

[8] So Rostagni (1970), who detected in *c.* 17 precocious technical virtuosity, but not the impassioned genius of Catullus' later years.

[9] For the comparison with Margites, see Ellis (1889) 61 and Rankin (1968) 420. Carratello (1983) 28 n. 11, 46 n. 88 and Kroll (1968) on 17.18 disagree. See also following note.

[10] Quinn (1970) intro. to *c.* 17, Godwin (1999) on 17.8, and Kloss (1998) 63–4 suggest that the *municeps* is a fiction. Zarker (1969) and Deuling (2006) *inter alia* invoke the alleged parallel between *mula* 17.26 and 83.3 *mule, nihil sentis*? ('you donkey, aren't you aware of anything?'), referring to Lesbia's husband, to propose that the negligent *maritus* of *c.* 17 is Q. Metellus Celer. This hyperbiographical approach will not do. The purpose of tipping the husband of *c.* 17 into the bog is to awaken him to his marital obligations as well as to his wife's infidelities, something that would hardly be in Catullus' interest were the *puella* of 17 none other than Lesbia!

[11] Such an overtly autobiographical approach would seem to discount the capacity of the piece to be enjoyed in its own terms. The autobiographical reading of c. 17 seems to be epitomised, to judge from the online abstract, in Griffith (2018), which I have been unable to see.

[12] Otto (1890) 320. See also Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 100: *habeo etiam dicere quem contra morem maiorum minorem annis LX de ponte in Tiberim deiecerit* ('I can instance a man of less than sixty years whom, against the custom of our ancestors, he threw from the bridge into the Tiber').

[13] For detailed discussion of these two usages, with the relevant testimonia, see Birt (1926) and Carratello (1983) 32–5.

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setting?[14] Or is it instead inspired by an indigenous Cisalpine ceremony involving a bridge and dancing?[15] Is the offending husband really a *senex*, as in the supposedly parallel Roman rites? What exactly is the nature of his sexual problem?[16]

The list of questions traditionally prompted by *c.* 17 is not yet exhausted. In making a bridge central to the *mise en scène* of a piece involving the jesting humiliation of a husband, is Catullus alluding, in a kind of Alexandrian footnote, to Greek γεφυρισμός, derived from γέφυρα 'bridge', in its transferred sense of 'subjecting someone to mockery and abuse'?[17] If, with most editors, we emend the *sali subsili* (two words) of the manuscripts at line 6[18] to a single proper noun *Salisubsali* or *Salisubsili*, supposedly the name of an otherwise unknown deity, Salisubsalus or Salisubsalius, how do this putative god and the allusions in 2–3 and 6 to ritual dancing, *salire*, on the bridge connect with the priests of Mars known as the Salii, who engaged in a similarly lively *tripudium* (dance), but in a quite different venue, the Roman forum?[19] *Was* there such a figure as Salisubsalus (ius) – a cult title of Mars perhaps? – or is he just a convenient fiction, an extemporisation, to suit the poem's theme?[20] Does the treatment prescribed for the husband at the close of the poem, immersion in the smelly mud beneath the bridge (*putidaeque paludis*, 10), echo the prescription of the medical writer Celsus and Pliny the Elder for rousing lethargic patients (cf. *ueternum*, 24) from their condition by subjecting them to offensive smells and sudden cold showers?[21] What does the comparison of the husband to a two-year old sleeping in the rocking/trembling arms of his father signify for the characterisation of the *maritus*?[22]

[14] See e.g., Rankin (1968) 420.

[15] So Fraenkel (1961) 51, Veyne in Cèbe and Veyne (1969) 248–9, and Quinn (1969), who however rightly points out that the ceremony should not be the main focus of investigation in seeking to apprehend the poem. Worthy of note are games held at Lugdunum in Gaul, in which unsuccessful competitors ran the risk of being thrown into the neighbouring river (Suet. *Calig.* 20). Birt (1926) 116 hijacks Plut. *Sull.* 13 in an attempt to establish an ancient connection between bridges and dancing/capering, but the context is radically different from Catullus.

[16] It is easy to be seduced by *sexagenarii de ponte* into thinking that the husband of the poem is in reality a *senex* (see e.g., Quinn (1970) on line 13). Rather, he behaves like one (Carratello (1983) 35: 'si comportava da vecchio') and it is to this that Catullus objects. There is no need to suppose that he is 'effeminate' (Khan (1969) 91, 92 etc.), 'impotent' (Seagraves (1979) 209; apparently also Syndikus (1984), 150 n. 14), or even identical with the impotent husband of *c.* 67 (Friedrich (1908) 146).

[17] Cf. Birt (1926) 115–16.

[18] Defended by Birt (1926), 116–19, in his characteristically idiosyncratic piece, as an imperative exhortation to the townsmen.

[19] Commentators note that the Salii were also to be found in Cisalpine Gaul, Verona included (*CIL* 5.4492).

[20] If the deity Salisubsalus (ius) is a Catullan occasionalism made up to suit *c.* 17's theme of leaping or dancing, one might perhaps compare the little-known goddess of defloration Pertunda, who some have suspected is merely a malicious invention of Christian polemicists (Cowan (2013) 192–3).

[21] Rudd (1959), with reservations; Carratello (1983) 28.

[22] The point here depends on the negative opinion of childhood entertained by the Greeks and Romans, on the basis that children lacked the sense and wisdom of maturer years: see Manson (1978) 275–81, 288–91 and the still valuable remarks of Herter (1961) 146–51.

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If I have lingered over the various questions which students of *c.* 17 have posed down the years, it is for a very particular reason: almost all of these – no matter how valid and intriguing *per se* – do not, in view of their markedly autobiographical tenor, their ethnographic colour, their pursuit of literary allusion, or even just their focus on particularities in the text, contribute materially to the understanding of Catullus 17 as a totality. In order to address the poem in the round, as it were, it is necessary to concentrate attention, I submit, on two particular aspects of it. The first is the awkward isssue of its thematic coherence, the second an aspect of the poem which until quite recently was mostly ignored,[23] Catullus' use of the rare priapean metre, in particular the attendant expropriation of the literary conceptualisation of the god who gave his name to the metre and the implications for our understanding of *carmen* 17 of the multiple resemblances which emerge between the Priapus of poetic texts and the delinquent *maritus* of the Catullan poem.

As was noted at the outset, Catullus 17 consists of two themes which cannot easily be integrated, the material unsoundness of the bridge, and the conjugal inertness of the *maritus*. Let us deal first with the issue of poetic structure.[24] The difficulty comes most sharply into focus if we formulate the matter this way: what has the ricketiness of the bridge, upon which Catullus dilates at such length, got to do with the real concern of the poem, the husband's doltishness and sexual crassness, and the supposed desirabilty of remedying this state of affairs?[25] How can the two things be connected? The dilapidated and unstable condition of the bridge is *prima facie* irrelevant to the suggested cure. A person can be thrown off a bridge whether unsound or, for that matter, stable.[26] In that sense, the additional factor of the bridge's dilapidation makes the alleged connection with the *sexagenarii de ponte* and the Argei incomplete at best, so even these otherwise inviting parallels cannot be said to give the poem a compelling unity. Nor will it help much here to invoke the old standby of poetic 'indirection',[27] which is a mere fudge.[28]

One approach to the problem, adopted by Heine and Khan, has been effectively to sidestep it and propose that the piece is glued together by a tessellation of sexually charged words and *double entendres*.[29] Certainly *cupis, ludere,*

[23] Apart from the contributions of Kloss (1998) and Morgan (2010) 34–40, discussed below, the only other attempt seriously to address the issue of the poem's metre is Walsh (1985) who implausibly argued, on the basis of four lines in priapeans by the Hellenistic poet Euphronius (see Powell (1925) 176–7), that the metre conjures up thoughts of a comic ritual immersion for the *maritus*, in the manner of the Greek mysteries. Jocelyn's laboured attempt (1996) to distinguish *c.* 17 on grounds of metre and diction from adjacent poems as thoroughly melic contributes nothing to the understanding of the poem, the implications of Catullus' choice of metre included.

[24] On this see in particular Rudd (1959) and Kloss (see the two following footnotes), also Rutter (1967), and Carratello (1983) 42–3.

[25] The difficulty is particularly well formulated by Kloss (1998) 58, in remarks too long to quote here.

[26] Cf. Kloss (1998) 61: 'die Bestrafung des *municeps* kann freilich in der Sache von der Erfüllung eines solchen Wunsches (sc. from the provision of a structurally sound bridge) kaum abhängen'.

[27] So, in effect, Ronconi (1971) 185–9 and Carratello (1983) 43.

[28] Exemplified by Quinn (1969) 27: 'a good joke demands a measure of obliqueness'.

[29] Khan (1969); Heine (1967).

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salire and *Salisubsali, supinus, recumbat, libidine, sacra* and *munus* in lines 1–7, to name no more, are susceptible of a secondary, risqué interpretation which comports with the core sexual thematic of the poem, and is mirrored in the continued deployment in 12–26 of terms or expressions with implicit sexual overtones, such as *delicatior haedo, nec se subleuat ex sua parte, iacet, pronum* and *mula*.[30] It may also be argued that the two parts of the poem are held together by the theme of the bog, which awaits the collapse of the bridge, as it does the immersion of the *maritus*.[31] Addressing the structural issue more directly than do the proponents of a suggestive verbal glue that unites the whole, an important step forward was made by Rudd, who, observing that *crura* in line 3 is only here applied to an inanimate object, suggested that the dilapidation of the bridge functions as a symbol for the erotic dysfunction of the husband.[32] A refinement of this proposes that the *colonia,* with its desire to *ludere* and *salire*, personifies the sexual playfulness of the wife (*ludere hanc sinit ut lubet* 17), the bridge her sexually decrepit *maritus*.[33]

On balance, Rudd's approach seems the most persuasive: it goes a considerable way to resolving the apparent thematic incoherence between lines 1–7 and 8–26 by vesting bridge and *maritus* alike with some form of physical impairment. This brings me to the second aspect of the poem capable of lending to it a degree of unity, an aspect which, with a very few exceptions, has not received the attention which it deserves; Catullus' choice for *c.* 17 of what was, to the best of our knowledge, a highly unusual metre, the priapean.[34] What might the choice of such a distinctive metre have signified? The rest of this article will address itself to that question.

Some illumination is cast on the matter by what ancient metricians have to say about the priapean metrical system, a lively stichic mixture of glyconics and pherecrateans.[35] It was best known for being used from Hellenistic times onwards in hymns to Priapus:[36] Catull. fr. 1 Mynors is one instance.[37] It was, formally speaking, like the epic hexameter in its use of dactyls and

[30] Further *double entendres*/terms with a possible sexual colour in *c.* 17 are identified by Kloss (1998) 60 and 70–6, though his interpretation follows a different trajectory from Khan (1969) and Heine (1967).

[31] Rudd (1959) 242.

[32] Rudd (1959).

[33] Rudd (1959) 241–2; Quinn (1969) 28.

[34] A list of the meagre number of surviving poems in priapeans is found in Kloss (1998) 65 and Jocelyn (1996) 138. According to Terentianus Maurus, *De metris* Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.407, in addition to the four-line hymn to Priapus in priapeans which he quotes (Catull. fr. 1 Mynors), Catullus 'wrote more poems of a similar sort'. The neoterics, Catullus included, had a taste for unusual metres (Mattiacci (2007) 141–5, 174–6).

[35] Cf. Herter (1932) 54–6.

[36] Heph. *Enchiridion* 16.2, p. 56 Consbruch; Georg. Choerob. *in Hephaest.* 10.4, p. 241.11–15 Consbruch; Terentianus Maurus, *De metris* 2753 (Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.406); Marius Victorinus Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.151.18–19, ibid. 215.13–15, further Herter (1932) 54–6. For an example and relevant testimonia, see Powell (1925) 176–7 with the explanation of the cultic context by Walsh (1985) 320–1.

[37] *Hunc lucum tibi dedico consecroque, Priape, / qua domus tua Lampsaci est quaque ... Priape. / nam te praecipue in suis urbibus colit ora / Hellespontia, ceteris ostriosior oris* ('this grove I dedicate and

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spondees,[38] but disqualified from heroic status by the marked break at position 8 of the line.[39] Further, 'its very sound shows that it is suited to lighthearted, playful subject matter'.[40] In addition, many thought it suited to poetry on rustic or bucolic subjects.[41]

These definitions sit very well with the ludic, mocking ethos of poem 17, in which the inattentive husband is pilloried as a man-child, a sexual senescent, and a blockhead. The bucolic colour of the priapean scheme is duly reflected in *c.* 17's free deployment of imagery from the countryside (the girl is in the most verdant flower of youth, more skittish/naughty than a kid, to be watched more carefully than the ripest grapes, the husband lies like an alder[42] in a ditch hamstrung by an axe of the Ligurians, famous woodsmen). There is even a nod to epic in the comparison of the husband to a felled tree in 18–19, a parodic take on Homeric similes where warriors cut down in battle are likened to chopped down trees.[43] Most important, in keeping with the overriding preoccupation of the god who gave his name to the metre, both the language and the subject matter of 17 are highly sexual in character.[44]

Any poem deploying the priapean metre must naturally conjure thoughts of the deity himself. It is reasonable to suppose that Priapus is an important, if

consecrate to you, Priapus, where is your home at Lampsacus and where ... Priapus. For the shore of the Hellespont, more rich in oysters than other shores, especially cultivates you in its cities').

[38] Diomedes Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 1.494–5, Caesius Bassus Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 4.260, Atilius Fortunatianus Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.291–2, 297 ad fin., Marius Plotius Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.510.12ff. and 516.2–8.

[39] Terentianus Maurus, *De metris* 2746–8 (Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.406).

[40] Terentianus Maurus, *De metris* 2752 (Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.406). The frivolous detail *ceteris ostriosior oris* in Catullus' fragmentary hymn to Priapus (n. 37 *supra*) catches the spirit of priapeans nicely and reminds one of the similarly toned epithet τῷ φυκιοίκῳ, 'the seaweed dweller', used of Poseidon in Callim. *Ia.* 4.67.

[41] Marius Victorinus Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 6.215.13–15, Audax Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 7.340.24–341.1–2, especially *multi uolunt hoc genus compositionis bucolico carmini magis conuenire* 'many propose that this kind of composition is more suited to bucolic poetry' (sc. than to hymns addressed to Priapus).

[42] One of the referees draws my attention to the alder's lack of strength, as noted by Mynors on Verg. *Georg.* 2.451–2, and attractively suggests that the weakness of the wood may have influenced Catullus' choice of tree for a simile characterising the husband's feebleness.

[43] Kroll (1968) ad loc., followed by Kloss (1998) 74, refers to *Hom. Il.* 4. 482–7 '<Simoeisios> fell to the ground in the dust like a poplar which grows smooth-trunked in the lowland of a great marsh ... which a wagon-maker cuts down with gleaming iron ... and it lies drying out by the banks of the river'. Fordyce (1961) unreasonably rejects the suggestion, as having 'nothing in common with the vivid local colour of Catullus' image ... which calls up a picture of the forest-jungle of the wet Ligurian highlands', as if Catullus were incapable of combining a literary reminiscence with a more circumscribed detail, as he has already done in 15 with the second and third words of the phrase *tenellulo delicatior haedo*, which echoes Theoc. *Id.* 11.20 ἀπαλωτέρα ἀρνός, 'more tender than a lamb' (incidentally voiced by another ineffectual lover).

[44] Another Catullan instance of metre accommodated to sexually coloured subject matter is poem 63, on the emasculation of Attis, in galliambics, a system which seems always to have been regarded as effeminate, e.g., Mart. 2.86.5: *mollem debilitate galliambon* ('the galliambic effeminate in its weakness'); Diomededes Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 1.514.12–22. Other possible examples of the same phenomenon, involving ithyphallics, named after their employment in phallic processions celebrating Dionysus, are Hor. *Carm.* 1.4 (Morgan (2010) 167–70) and perhaps Callim. *Ia.* 7: see Uden (2007) 7 n. 15; Paule (2017) 49–50.

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unstated, presence in the poem. Kloss in fact went further and suggested that Priapus himself, and not Catullus,[45] is the speaker of the poem, Morgan that the *maritus* is a kind of anti-Priapus,[46] the god being best known for his rapacious sexual appetite and phallocentrism, characteristics in which the husband is conspicuously deficient. Morgan's well-argued case has its attractions, but I would like to approach the matter from an alternative angle, while still keeping the god firmly in view. I propose that the underperforming husband shows conspicuous similarities in at least four respects to Priapus as portrayed in literary representations of the deity – whose sex-obsessed instantiation as both living personage and statue erected to watch over gardens had crystallised well before Catullus[47] – so that the former is a very real sense the god's *alter ego*.

This suggestion might on the face of it seem counter-intuitive, but – and here is my first point – let us recall that, as Butrica put it, Priapus is a conspicuous sexual under-achiever, something that might be seen as one of the ambivalences that were intrinsic to this god.[48] From his very first appearance as a speaking statue in Hellenistic epigram, the god shows a greater propensity for *talk* than *action*, usually in the shape of loudly trumpeted threats to punish with rape thieves proposing to steal the fruit and vegetables which he is charged with protecting – threats which do not however come to fruition, but remain solely at the level of threats. *Anth. Plan.* 261 (Gow-Page, *HE* 2486–90), by the third-century-BCE Leonidas of Tarentum, gives a good sample of the manner: 'I, Priapus, stand watch by the twin roads, stretching straight out from my thighs my erect "club" / … but, thief, keep far off, otherwise you will feel sorry after receiving my swollen organ'. In the same vein are *Anth. Plan.* 236, also by Leonidas (Gow-Page, *HE* 2482–5) and 241 (Marcus Argentarius, Gow-Page, *GP* 1503–8), where a traveller is warned by Priapus against stealing his figs, otherwise he will suffer figs of another kind i.e.,

[45] In suggesting this, Kloss (1998) 64–6 underplays the fact that while the majority of poems featuring Priapus are voiced by the god himself, this is by no means invariably the case with the small corpus of poems written in the priapean metre. See discussion in the text below.

[46] Morgan (2010) 34–40. Somewhat along the same lines, Deuling (2006) 8 suggested, in a throwaway remark, that the metre is ironic, since the sexually freewheeling activities of the *puella* will certainly not result in legitimate offspring. She neglected however to buttress her case by noting Priapus' connection with marriage, in that the god presided over Roman brides' loss of virginity and over physical unions more generally: Herter (1954) 1928; O'Connor (1989) 24; Uden (2007) 7 n. 18; *CIL* 14.3565.

[47] Cf. *Anth. Plan.* 236 and 261 (Leonidas of Tarentum, Gow-Page, *HE* 2482–5 and 2486–9), *Anth. Pal.* 9.338 (Theocritus, Gow-Page, *HE* 3468–73), all of the third century BCE. Tymnes (perhaps third century BCE) *Anth. Plan.* 237 = Gow-Page, *HE* 3628–31 puts the verb πριηπίζω, 'I behave like Priapus', sc. *paedico*, in the mouth of a statue of the god, referring to his indiscriminacy in choice of sexual targets and unabashed focus on sex. Further evidence in Parker (1988) 1–12 and Uden (2007) 4 n. 9. When Catullus (47.4) sneers at Piso as a *uerpus Priapus*, 'a Priapus with retracted foreskin', it is clear that we are dealing with an established stereotype of exaggerated hypersexuality.

[48] Butrica (2000): 'the god of gardens seduces not one person in the entire book of poems <sc. the *Carmina Priapea*), his famous "three-fold punishment" never being actually inflicted on those who have threats hurled at them'. O'Connor (1989) 17 characterises Priapus as a kind of reconciliation of opposites, without however suggesting that this extended to his sexual performances.

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anal fissures,[49] as a result of the sexual *quid pro quo* demanded by the god. There are numerous poems on the same theme in the first-century-CE collection of Latin poems known as the *Priapea* or *Carmina Priapea* (*CP*),[50] not to mention a host of over-the-top boasts of penile size and sexual prowess. But *in reality* Priapus, and especially the Priapus of the *Carmina Priapea*, voiced by the deity in his traditional role as a wooden statue protecting orchards from intruders, is characterised by a phallic braggadocio which does not translate into deeds, and on the rare occasions when the god *does* achieve erotic release, it is almost invariably of an unwanted type, taking the form either of sexual predation by desiccated and superannuated females of unparalleled repulsiveness (*CP* 12, 32, 46, 57), or even fellation by the local dogs (*CP* 70). In fact, as Holzberg has noted, towards the end of the eighty poems in the *Carmina Priapea*, the eponymous god struggles with his famed potency, suffers a sexual drought, or even succumbs to temporary impotence.[51]

Nor are the god's difficulties with sex concluded with the *Carmina Priapea*. Particularly drastic in nature are the sexual debacles that overtake Priapus in two parallel narratives of Ovid's *Fasti* (1.391–440, 6.319–48), where attempts by the god to rape respectively the nymph Lotis and Vesta are aborted by the braying of an ass, which wakes the intended victims. So, Priapus, despite his ithyphallicism, his lecherous eye for the female form and the apparent availability of targets for his lust (*Fasti* 1.415–20, 6.333–6, Mart. 7.91, and Erucius *Anth. Plan.* 242.3 (Gow-Page, *GP* 2284): 'you are athirst for women') suffers a very public sexual humiliation – a humiliation risibly enhanced in the second *Fasti* passage by his having to flee in haste from the clutches of an angry *turba*.[52] In Ovid's words (1.437–8), 'the god, his obscene part very much at the ready, *was laughed at by all in the moonlight*'. Nor do his sexual humiliations end here. In another instance, Mart. 10.92.12, the goddess Flora successfully escapes his lustful attentions by fleeing into her laurel grove. In short, it appears that the god far more often pursues than *catches* his intended prey;[53] or as Frazel (2003) 64 puts it, 'ancient religious thought imagined Priapus as the embodiment of constant and *unfulfilled* [my emphasis] male

[49] On the erotic connotations of the fig and its connection with cult of Priapus see Buchheit (1960) and Hallett (1981).

[50] E.g., *CP* 69, 74. The question of the *Carmina Priapea*'s date, and of whether the collection was the work of a single author or combined in a single volume of *priapea* by a number of poets, is not germane to the present paper. On these matters, see Callebat (2017) xxv–xxxii and the useful synthesis of the question in Grewing (1997) 459–64.

[51] Holzberg (2005). In a parallel movement to this, the gardens over which the Priapus of literary texts presides describe over time a trajectory from bountifulness to infertility, the urban *horti* of the *CP* in particular being characterised by the meagreness of their yield: see Uden (2010).

[52] For the point see Murgatroyd (2002) and Frazel (2003). The flight of the *amator* is reminiscent of the mime, by which the Lotus and Vesta episodes have often been thought to be influenced.

[53] Other cases where Priapus' lustful attentions are frustrated are Ov. *Met.* 9.346–8, an alternative version of the Lotis tale in which the nymph, 'fleeing Priapus' aroused sex', escapes the god by metamorphosis into a lotus-tree, *Met.* 14.639 where the god is numbered among Pomona's unsuccessful suitors, and Theoc. *Anth. Pal.* 9.338 (Gow-Page, *HE* 3468–73), where the sleeping Daphnis is exhorted by the poet to flee Priapus and Pan, who are stealing upon him with lecherous intent. In Tib. 1.4 the god's supposed amatory expertise in capturing παιδικά proves quite worthless.

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sexual desire'. Worst of all, in *Priapea* 2 of the *Appendix Vergiliana* (85 Bücheler), after the garden god has threatened a would-be thief that he will sodomise him with his wooden *mentula*, his erect organ is violently ripped (*ualente … reuulsa bracchio*) from his groin by a brawny *uilicus* who repurposes it as a cudgel (*claua*) – thereby giving a risible literalness to Martial's figurative expression *Gallo turpius est nihil Priapo*, 'there is nothing more shameful than an emasculated Priapus' (1.35.15).[54]

To summarise the upshot of the last two paragraphs, there is a conspicuous gap between Priapus' crude, locker-room language, the frequently voiced urgency of his desires, his aggressive ithyphallicism, the accessibility of erotic targets and the *actuality* of his lived erotic experience. He is a deity characterised by verbalised hypersexuality, not by carnal deeds in the flesh – almost, one might say, an ἀλαζών of the sexual vaunt. In this regard he is not so different from the *maritus* of Catullus 17. This individual has before him a readily available and highly attractive sexual outlet: he is married to a girl in the freshest flower of youth, who is more frisky than a tender young kid – a species proverbial for amorousness. Furthermore, his *puella* has arrived at the very peak of erotic ripeness[55] and, in testimony to this, needs be watched over with the utmost care, lest she give free rein with friends and neighbours to her rampant erotic urges – as indeed she does, with the husband's unwitting, insensate connivance (17, 20–22). In sum, the husband, confronted with a wealth of irresistible sexual charms, fails conspicuously, just like Priapus elsewhere, to capitalise erotically on these, omitting to bestir himself erotically, but instead lying torpid like a felled tree (18–19). In both *maritus* and god, then, the erotic promise of the subject of desire, or simply the potential for sexual intercourse, fail to translate into concrete reality. Both are emblems of the sexual fiasco or non-event.

We have just noted the amused reaction of the bystanders to Priapus' humiliation in the Lotis episode of the *Fasti*. Equally of note is Ovid's preface to the Vesta scene (*Fast*. 6.319–20), 'shall I pass over or tell of your disgrace, rubicund Priapus? It is a short tale, but *a most amusing one*'. This brings me to the second point of convergence between the husband of Catullus 17 and Priapus. Both are the the subject of mockery, figures of fun. The pitching of the *municeps* into the bog will be for Catullus the occasion of 'maximum laughter', and the risibility of the plunge is reinforced not only by the particularity of the amusingly colourful details about the *maritus*' fate in 10–12 ('but let it be where in the whole pool and stinking marsh the abyss is at its most discoloured and deepest. The fellow's an utter clod…'), but also by a stark visual counterpoint between the repellent nature of the bog and the appealing winsomeness of the neglected *puella* (14–16); a contrast deliberately highlighted by

[54] For the idea cf. *CP* 55, where Priapus fears that thieves, having robbed him of his sickle, will return to steal his *altera tela*, sc. his *mentula*, transforming him from a Lampsacene to a *Gallus* (Gaul/castrate).

[55] The viticultural image of 16 refers to the stage when the grapes have attained perfect ripeness (*nigerrimis*), at which point they need to be plucked, before they begin to deteriorate or become overripe. The image of the ripening grape is more commonly applied to males on the cusp of maturity than it is to females: see Bulloch (1985) on Callim. *H*. 5.75–6.

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the use in lines 10–13 and 14–16 of a similar register, a cluster of superlatives and diminutives, to conjure up images that, in a neat effect of irony, are morphologically comparable but semantically antithetical. In a final touch of humour, the poem is rounded off by a concluding barb against the 'supine spirit' of the husband, who is likened to a mule, an animal proverbial for stupidity and sterility – and, insultingly, a female one at that.

In the same way as the *maritus* here, the figure of Priapus is regularly made the butt of laughter in the literary tradition, on account of his uncouth appearance and outsize organ, e.g., *Anth. Plan.* 86 on a statue of Priapus, 'made of fig-wood, not worked by a file, nor painted with red, but fashioned by a shepherd's self-taught chisel. Laugh pointlessly at me if you will…'; ibid. 243 (Antistius, Gow-Page, *GP* 1119–24), *CP* 10 'why are you laughing, you very stupid girl? I was not made by Praxiteles or Scopas, nor was I polished by Phidias' hand; I'm a simple lump of wood hewed into shape by a farm-overseer who said to me "be Priapus". Still, you look at me and repeatedly laugh. I expect you find the "column" standing erect in my groin an amusing matter'.[56] But there are many other scenarios in which the Priapus of literary texts is the target of humour. To name only a few, he is outdone in penile size by humans,[57] even though his enormous organ is his most distinctive feature (*CP* 9, 36.11); if there are no vegetables worth stealing in the garden over which he watches, thieves make off with his statue instead;[58] failing all else, he can always be recycled as firewood;[59] he is a downmarket Paris, judging a beauty contest of *hetairai*, not goddesses;[60] he self-identifies as the lowest divinity, among all the gods, 'the wooden guardian of pumpkins' (*cucurbitarum ligneus … custos*);[61] his misshapen genitals and ugly appearance so disgusted his mother Aphrodite that she rejected him.[62] In the same way, in the artistic tradition, Priapus is 'a god who regularly provokes laughter'.[63] The comic dimension of Priapus weighing his hypertrophied penis in the well known Pompeian painting speaks for itself, as do a couple of Attic *rhyta*, in the first of which the figure of a bearded Priapus ends in a phallus, not in feet, while in the second Priapus' features take the form of a glans penis.[64] These wittily conceived figures clearly anticipate the later humorous treatment of Priapus in literary texts. In sum, Priapus was a farcical figure, whose appearance in rites, Diod. Sic. 4.6.4 significantly tells us, was marked by 'laughter and

[56] Priapus' risible ἀμορφία also at Theoc. *Anth. Pal.* 9.437 (Gow-Page, *HE* 3474–91), Archias, *Anth. Pal.* 10.8 (Gow-Page, *GP* 3758–65), Hor. *Sat*. 1.8.1–5 (see n. 77 infra), *Cul.* 86, *CP* 56, Columella, *Rust*. 10.29–34, further Goldberg (1992) 96 and Callebat (2017) 98–9.

[57] By humans: Antipater *Anth. Pal.* 11.224 (Gow-Page, *GP* 631–2), Mart. 11.72, *CP* 79. By an ass: Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.32.2 Le Bouffle.

[58] Lucian *Anth. Plan.* 238, Mart. 6.72. See also *CP* 55.

[59] Appendix Vergiliana *Priapea* 1 (Bücheler 84), Mart. 8.40.

[60] Hedylus *Anth. Pal.* 6.292 (Gow-Page, *HE* 1825–30).

[61] *CP* 63.11–12.

[62] Hesych. s.v. Ἀβαρνίδα (a town near Lampsacus).

[63] Clarke (2007) 184. Similarly, Stewart (1997).

[64] Wortmann (1967).

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sporting'.[65] All in all, both *maritus* and Priapus are good for little more than a laugh.

A third point of resemblance between Priapus and the *maritus* turns on the axis of *urbanitas* and its inverse, *rusticitas*. That Priapus is literally *rusticus* is self-evident.[66] But he is likewise *rusticus* in a transferred sense: his speech is peppered with obscenities, he has a *crassa Minerva*, an uncouth intellect (*CP* 3.10), and he feels the need to apologise *rusticus indocte si quid dixisse uidebor, / da ueniam: libros non lego, poma lego*, 'if I, rustic as I am, seem to have said anything uncouth, pardon me. I don't peruse books but pick fruits', *CP* 68.1–2. But over and above this, to be *rusticus* also carries with it a deal of attitudinal baggage, not least in the sexual arena, an idea with which the poet of *CP* 10 revealingly plays. Here Priapus is made to condemn as *insulsissima,* 'very crass', a girl who regards as a *res salsa*, 'an amusing thing', the quasi-columnar erection that pokes out from his groin. But the sophisticated reader of the *Carmina Priapea* is undoubtedly expected to align himself or herself with the *puella*'s point of view, rather than the god's. It is not the girl, as he claims, but Priapus himself who is *insulsissimus,* someone not *au fait* with refined city manners and the attendant protocols of urbane wit. After all, the gigantic red phallus of the deity which the girl finds so amusing was regarded as intrinsically ridiculous, as both poetic and artistic tradition confirm.[67] Moreover, as Uden (2007) has intriguingly argued in connection with Catullus and in particular the much debated poem 16, the aggressive phallocentrism of Priapus, a feature of his literary profile since the third century BCE, his loudly voiced (if not actualised) threats of anal and oral rape, make him an 'archetype of farcical hypersexuality' which is profoundly at odds with Catullus' more nuanced, more urbane view of human sexual relations. But Priapus is much too *rusticus* to be sensitive to the sexual *mores* of the more polished society represented by Catullus and fellow urbanites.[68]

Now as is well known, *urbanitas*, literally 'citified sophistication', is a cardinal concept in Catullus' poetological world, one in which the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are formulated and policed by Catullus himself.[69] It encompasses such diverse phenomena as how to behave in homosocial intercourse,[70] what sort of poetry to write, and, not least, how to comport oneself in a sexual setting. One of the bedrocks of Catullan *urbanitas* is *sal* and its adjectival cognate *salsus*, a sort of conceptual *je ne sais quoi* which appears to encompass ideas such as wit, sparkle, verve, an attractiveness that goes beyond the merely physical, and a self-ironising awareness that allows one to see through

[65] Cf. *CP* 41.

[66] Tib. 1.4.7: *Bacchi … rustica proles*; *Anth. Pal.* 6.22.5: ἀγροιώτης; *CP* 14.6–7: *nos uappae sumus et pusilla culti / ruris numina*; *CP* 80.9: *rustice custos*; Appendix Vergiliana *Priapea* 2 (Bücheler 85) 1: *ego arte fabricata rustica.*

[67] See above, also *Anth. Plan.* 86 (*adesp.*), Antistius, *Anth. Plan.* 243 (Gow-Page, *GP* 1119–24).

[68] He is *non … politus* in both a literal and metaphorical sense *CP* 10.3.

[69] On the exclusivist, self-referential tendencies of Catullan *urbanitas*, see especially Fitzgerald (1995) 87–113.

[70] On homosociality as a key element in Catullan verse, see Wray (2001).

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to the realities of a situation.[71] Its antonyms are *insulsus* and *non salsus*. Thus in poem 10 Varus' girlfriend, initially described – in approbatory language which draws on the specialised idiolect of *urbanitas* – as a *scortillum … non sane illepidum neque inuenustum*, 'a little tart by no means without charm or sexual attractions', is by the end of the poem damned as *insulsa male*, 'thoroughly tasteless', for not having the wit and sophistication to appreciate that an injudicious boast made by the poet to an attractive girl is not to be taken literally. In poem 37 Egnatius and the barflies who congregate at a *salax taberna,* 'jumping shop', are branded *insulsi*, 'foolishly unaware' of how things actually stand sexually, on account of their misconceived arrogation to themselves alone of hyperphallic potency.[72] Cicero notes that anything done *insulse* is inimical to *amor* (*Att*. 9.10.2), while Martial uses the same adjective as Catullus in poem 17, *insulsissimus*, to berate as ignorant of the niceties of sexual barter a man who expects *puellae*, prostitutes, to provide their favours for free (12.55.2).

All the above serves as useful background to Catullus' labelling the neglectful husband of *c.* 17 an *insulsissimus homo* (12). Specifically, it means that the adjective here comes charged with a whole battery of pejorative, specifically *inurbane* nuances,[73] most particularly in the sexual arena. One is that the *municeps* is foolishly blind to the realities of his marital situation, another that he cannot see how ridiculous a figure he cuts, another again that he neglects to behave precisely as Catullus, more attuned to erotic niceties, would do, were he gifted a *puella* as attractive as the husband's. All in all, the *maritus* is a sexual *rusticus*,[74] a dolt, a *mulus*, like Lesbia's *uir* in *c.* 83, who is so labelled because, like the *maritus* here, he cannot see what is going on in front of his nose. And the idea of the *municeps*' sexual rusticity is further underscored in two ways: first, by attaching to his neglected *puella* the strongly contrastive term *delicata*, a term signifying 'naughty, sexually frisky', which has a strongly approbative flavour in the lexicon of Catullan *urbanitas*;[75] second, by bedding around the *maritus* a host of images which literally belong to the countryside (and are also at home in the world of Priapus). In addition to the just mentioned *mula* gibe, there is the striking assimilation in 18–19 of the *maritus* to a tree 'hamstrung' – i.e., felled – by a Ligurian axe, a simile which combines in a single picture a reference to woodcraft with a rare participle drawn from the terminology of pig-breeding. Most important here are 14–16, with comparisons drawn respectively from horticulture (the girl is 'in the freshest flower of youth'), animal husbandry, and viticulture, in particular the

[71] See e.g., Quinn (1970) on Catull. 86.4, Krostenko (2001) 219 n. 59.

[72] Lines 3–5 *solis putatis esse mentulas uobis, / solis licere, quidquid est puellarum, / confutuere et putare ceteros hircos?*, 'do you think that you alone have pricks, that you alone are permitted thoroughly to fuck all the girls there are and regard the rest as smelly goats?'

[73] It may be that *salire* and *Salisubsali*, representing the liveliness of the *colonia* in contrast to the inertness of the husband, pun on *sal* and *insulsus*.

[74] For *rusticitas* in the sense of 'not sophisticated in amatory matters', see Ov. *Am*. 1.8.44 with McKeown (1987). For its opposite, cf. Ov. *Met*. 11.766–7 on a rural dweller who *non agreste tamen nec inexpugnabile amore / pectus habe<bat>*, 'who had however a heart that was not rustic nor invulnerable to love'.

[75] See Fordyce (1961) on Catull. 50.3, Fitzgerald (1995), index s.vv. *delicatus* and *deliciae*.

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observation in 16 that the *puella* must be 'watched over (*adseruanda*) more carefully than the ripest of grapes'. Priapus was a guardian god (Mart 7.91.4) charged with protecting a garden or crop from thieves and predators – a task which he by no means always executes successfully. In the same way, the imagery of line 16 seems to suggest, the *maritus* fails in his Priapic duty of safeguarding the marital *hortus*.[76] To summarise, *rusticitas* in both a literal and a figurative sense, and the attendant condition of being *insulsissimus* represent the third respect in which Priapus and the *municeps* closely resemble one another.

Now for the fourth and final regard in which the husband of *c.* 17 and Priapus are aligned. It is a feature of Priapus' literary persona that he transcends transactional boundaries, that is to say he is at once a speaking entity who constantly looks forward to various forms of sexual commerce, and at the same time an inert lump of wood, a *truncus ... inutile lignum,* 'a trunk, a useless lump of timber' (Hor. *Sat*. 1.8.1), a *lignum rude* [*quod*] *uilicus dolauit*, 'a formless piece of wood hewed into shape by a farm overseer' (*CP* 10.4).[77] It is in this latter, ligneous, torpid aspect that the *maritus* resembles Priapus. For, as we have just seen, he is elaborately compared to a fallen tree, with a particular emphasis on his insensate condition (*sed uelut alnus / in fossa Liguri iacet suppernata secure / tantundem omnia sentiens quam si nulla sit usquam*, 18–20). This, in combination with the following lines (*talis iste meus stupor nil uidet, nihil audit, / ipse qui sit, utrum sit an non sit, id quoque nescit*) must surely call to mind the language of Roman insults, in which stupid, impercipient, and inert types, like the *maritus* here, are compared to a block of wood.[78] Among the more notable examples are Plaut. *Truc*. 674 *iam non sum truncus lentus*, 'I am no longer a dull trunk', Ter. *Haut.* 876–7 *in me quiduis harum rerum conuenit / quae sunt dicta in stulto: caudex, stipes, asinus*, 'any of these things applies to me which are said of a stupid person – "lump of wood, blockhead, ass."' Other instances include Cic. *Pis*. 19 *h<ic> maiali<s> ... tamquam truncus atque stipes*, 'this hog ... like a trunk and a stock', and *Nat. D.* 1.84 *qui potest esse in eiusmodi trunco sapientia*?, 'what wisdom could possibly be found a trunk of that kind?'[79] In other words, Priapus and the *maritus* are, in their respective ways, both blocks of wood.[80]

[76] I am indebted for this attractive suggestion to one of the referees.

[77] For Priapus' manufacture from wood, cf. Hor. *Sat*. 1.8.1–3: *olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum, / cum faber, incertus scamnum faceretne Priapum, / maluit esse deum* ('once upon a time I was the trunk of a fig tree, a useless lump of timber, when a carpenter, undecided whether to make me a bench or a Priapus, preferred me to be a god'); *CP* 6.1–2: *quod sum ligneus ... Priapus / et falx lignea ligneusque penis* ('while I am a Priapus of wood, and a sickle of wood and a penis of wood'); as well as 25.1–2, 43.1, 56 (his prick is only made of wood, so he has to depute to his randy master the task of irrumating thieves who threaten his domain), 73, and Appendix Vergiliana *Priapeum 'Quid hoc noui est?'* (Bücheler 83) 17 etc.

[78] Cf. Cèbe in Cébe and Veyne (1969) 242–3.

[79] Further examples of the blockhead comparison in Pease (1955) ad Cic. *Nat. D.* loc. cit. and Opelt (1965) index s.v. *stipes*.

[80] Priapus and the husband are also, in their ligneous aspect, paradigms of instability. The husband, whose sexual decrepitude is symbolised by the ricketiness of the bridge (see above), is compared to a fallen tree and is unable to lift himself up (18–19); Priapus is equally unstable, being made of fig-wood (Hor. *Sat*. 1.8.1, *Anth. Plan.* 86), a worthless and fissile kind of timber (Hor.

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It remains to discuss one possible objection to the interpretation proposed here, namely that the god, despite the multiple characteristics which he shares with the *maritus* of *c.* 17, deviates from him in one respect, namely that the Priapus of literary texts is aggressively vocal about his phallic prowess, whereas the husband is erotically retiring to the point of insensateness (and moreover contrasted by implication with the arrant penile assertiveness of the Catullan speaker in the flanking poems 16 and 21).[81] Such braggadocio on the god's part is however limited to those priapic poems where he speaks in the first person (as he does most notably in the *CP*). It is not, so far as we can see, a feature of poems merely composed, as is Catullus 17, in the priapean metre. The small number of surviving poems written in priapeans are of surprisingly varied character, hymnodic (Euphronius ap. Powell (1925) 176–7, *SEG* 7.14 to Apollo, Bergk *PLG* 3 p.1312 possibly addressed to Hygieia, Catull. fr. 1 Mynors to Priapus), sympotic (Anacreon 373 Page), and coarsely and provocatively insouciant about the fear of death (Maecenas fr. 4 Courtn.).[82] But they may also be, as one would expect, graphically sexual in character: instances are the truncated Catull. fr. 2 Mynors *de meo ligurrire libido est*, 'there is a desire to lick from my …'[83] and a verse attributed to Virgil by the grammarian Diomedes (Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 1.512.28) *incidi patulum in specum procumbente Priapo*, 'I fell into a gaping cave as (my?) Priapus tumbled forward'. Here *specus* is likely an insulting term for the vagina, as it is in the Appendix Vergiliana *Priapeum* '*Quid hoc noui est?*' 28 and 35,[84] and similar to Martial's *femineum barathrum*, 'woman's abyss' (3.81.1); *Priapo* is perhaps used metonymically of the *mentula*.[85] In sum, while we may expect poems written in priapeans to be awash with sexual material, as are Catullus 17, Catull. fr. 2, and the pseudo-Vergilian line just quoted,[86] the presence of a speaking Priapus who loudly proclaims his erotic

ibid. 1, 46–7) and, as we have seen, easily removable by the ill-intentioned from the place where he stands guard.

[81] Muretus, in his 1554 edition of Catullus, included between *cc.* 17 and 21 pieces on Priapus from the *Appendix Vergiliana* (nos. 85 and 86 Bücheler) and Catull. fr. 1 Mynors, in the priapean metre. Lachmann (1829) excised these, leaving a lacuna between 17 and 21 which later editors have maintained.

[82] *Debilem facito manu, debilem pede coxo, / tuber adstrue gibberum, lubricos quate dentes; / uita dum superest, bene est. hanc mihi, uel acuta / si sedeam cruce, sustine,* 'make me crippled in the hand, crippled with a lame foot, stick on my back a humped protuberance, shake my teeth till they're loose. As long as life is left, I'm fine. Preserve it for me, even though I should sit on a sharp cross'.

[83] For *ligur(r)ire* in a sexual context see Adams (1982) 140–1. In *CIL* 14.3565*c*.5 *puellae* are instructed *inguini <Priapi> oscula figite*, 'plant kisses on Priapus' groin'.

[84] = Bücheler 83. See Tränkle (1990) ad loc. One of the referees intriguingly suggests that in this Priapic poem, where the speaker rails at his 'accursed penis' for a sexual failure, the retributive fate (37) in store for the recalcitrant organ *uagum sonante merseris luto caput*, 'you will immerse your mobile head in the resonant mud' (sc. of a decrepit vagina) may be indebted to and consciously 'stain' the concluding lines of Catullus 17.

[85] 'Priapus' is used of an object of phallic shape in Mart. 14.69 and Juv. 2.95.

[86] Possibly also Maecenas fr. 4, quoted n. 82, if Uden (2007) 7 n. 18 is correct in his hypothesis that line 4 contains an erotic double meaning. The only other surviving text in priapeans, *Priapea* 3 in the *Appendix Vergiliana* (86 Bücheler), voiced by the god in the first person, is however free of any obscenity, unless we count a passing reference to his *arma* in the obscure line 15.

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appetites and capacities is by no means *de rigueur* in verse which utilises the eponymous metre.

To conclude: I have argued that Catullus' choice of the priapean system has prompted not just the humorous, eroticised tone of *c.* 17, but has opened on four fronts the possibility of viewing the *maritus* as a kind of Priapus in miniature. If I am correct, it follows that the resultant integration of metre and theme gives the poem an overarching unity of both ethos and content which to a large degree transcends the structural problems identified at the beginning of this paper.

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