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Catullan Obscenity and Modern English Translation

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS
Department of Classics

Catullan Obscenity and Modern English Translation
by
Tori Frances Lee

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
of Washington University in
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requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

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Introduction

The Power of Obscenity

In late 2009, British businessman Mark Lowe found himself in the news for matters unrelated to finance. A former employee was suing him for sex discrimination, and it came to light that Lowe had sent a questionable message to a female intern. She had referenced the line from the Gospel of Matthew, *diligite inimicos vestros*, “love your enemies”; Lowe had sent back the first line of Catullus’s Poem 16, *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*. While this particular exchange was not the focus of the lawsuit, one party had deemed it pertinent enough to bring up in a tribunal. What bearing could a poem from the first century BCE possibly have on a trial two thousand years later?

NPR brought Mary Beard onto “All Things Considered” to discuss this very issue. “Lucky Catullus,” Beard wrote on her blog, *A Don’s Life*, when the case broke, about a month before going on air with NPR. “He has had more publicity in the last 24 hours than in the last 24 years.”¹ Called to elucidate what must have seemed to the general public like a curious and esoteric piece of the story, Beard summarized the exchange between Lowe and his intern as follows²:

Beard: The Latin he wrote back was—and I will give it to you only in Latin—(BEEP) *vos et* (BEEP), which is a quotation from a poem of Catullus.

Guy Raz: And what’s it mean in English?

¹ Beard, November 25, 2009.

² “Ancient Poem Focus of Modern-Day Harassment Case.” *All Things Considered*. NPR. December 13, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=121395860>.

Beard: I can tell you what it means in English, and you will have to bleep it out. It means, “I will (BEEP).”

Raz: Oh my gosh. Well, here’s roughly what it means—

Beard: —What it indicates is that what you should do to your enemies is something quite different from love them in the Christian sense.

NPR censored not only Beard’s translation of the explicit line into English—a bleep which lasted two full seconds—but also the original Latin, leaving audible only the *vos et* and the first letters of *pedicabo* and *irrumabo*. NPR’s radio editing did not discriminate based on language, even when one of those languages happened to be dead. The innate profanity of the first line of Poem 16 was so trenchant that it transcended social contexts and language barriers, registering even two thousand years after its composition as inappropriate to particular forms of media. Catullan obscenity is not dead.

Readers of English can feel the repercussions of Catullus’s literature even today, whether or not they happened to be listening to Mary Beard’s fateful radio interview. English translations of Catullus abound, and as the world of publication has become more accessible thanks to self-publication and the Internet, they gain exposure to a greater audience of non-Classicists.

Translators of Catullus face peculiar challenges beyond those faced by translators of modern languages, or even those who translate Homer or Vergil. They must not only capture the nuances of a dead language in a modern vernacular, not only decide how best to render explicit words so that they transmit their full force to the reader, but they must combine these two tasks: how does obscenity translate from one language to another, particularly when one of those languages is no longer spoken?

Students of second languages may recognize the phenomenon of speaking vulgarities in their adopted tongues.³ Misuse or overuse of slang and profanity is often the one giveaway that a fluent speaker is not actually a native. It is often easier to curse in another language; one simply does not feel the impact or taboo of the words in the way that culturally native speakers do. To the native speaker, obscenities carry instinctive shock value, disgust, or aversion; to the non-native, they are just sounds. Translating profanity is a uniquely difficult task, on which I will focus throughout this paper.

For this thesis, I will begin in my introduction by establishing a definition of obscenity and a system of categorizing words that describe potentially offensive topics. I provide a catalog of the Catullan vocabulary in these categories, as well as some of their English translations, in the Appendix. I will then examine how Catullus uses these words, focusing on three poems in particular from the corpus. Next, I will shift gears to modern English literature, looking at how translators of Catullus use these words. I am interested in discovering how far and in what ways translators have strayed from Catullus's choices of when to be obscene; what new choices the translators themselves make; and how these choices affect the tone, sense, and meaning of the poems.

The Potential to Offend

In an attempt to pin down some sort of definition of Latin obscenity, I will first determine the subject matter it describes. Obscenity is concerned with concepts and ideas connected with sexuality and excretion. The taboo nature of the material gives these concepts the potential to

³ Dewaele 2004, 84-5; Bardovi-Harlig 2001.

offend, although content alone does not make obscenity. I study the words that are connected with these taboo topics, and whether or not these words themselves are offensive, inoffensive, or could be interpreted either way. I use the terms obscenity/obscene, profanity/profane, vulgarity/vulgar, and explicitness/explicit as synonyms throughout this paper.⁴

Other scholars base their studies of this same taboo material on the contexts and functions of the potentially offensive words, noticing when the language that describes it is and is not obscene. In the introduction to *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, Adams lists “some” functions of sexual language in Latin as apotropaism and ritual, aggression and humiliation, humor and outrageousness, and titillation (4-8). Certain words or images may be associated more with some uses than others; for example, the phallus with apotropaism. Lateiner, who focuses specifically on this poet in his article “Obscenity in Catullus,” repeats the idea of vulgarism as an outlet for aggression, writing that “Obscenity is therapeutic because it clarifies Catullus’ feelings and grants relief from acute discomfort” (2007, 275). He further identifies an intellectual function of profanity, “to play with the reader’s mind,” and a humorous function, “to approach the forbidden and uncomfortable” (2007, 164). Fitzgerald also echoes these ideas of arousal and aggression as functions of obscenity in his book *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*. Vulgarity may involve “titillation as well as assault,” but it has a deeper agenda than just light humor and stimulation (1995, 59). Fitzgerald writes, “But, in general, obscenity is less concerned with invitation, temptation, and teasing than with usurpation; less with issues of enjoyment and consumption than with the threat of pollution; less with the play of surface and

⁴ The *TLL* gives the etymology of *obscenitas* as deriving from *obscenus*, which originally referred to whatever was appropriate only for the stage (*scaena*), according to Varro *Ling* 7.96.97; however, it comes to function as a synonym for *turpis* or *sordidus*, “that which incurs shame” (*quod pudorem movet*, *TLL*, s.v. *obscenus*, 9.2.159.70).

depth than with the violation of boundaries” (1995, 59). Lateiner agrees with Fitzgerald’s identification of a transgressive element, going so far as to say obscenity partakes of the criminal and illicit (2007, 278).

Catullus utilizes sexual and scatological imagery to its fullest throughout his corpus, from apotropaic descriptions of sex in the Fescennine wedding hymn of Poem 61 to the comically obscene neologism *fututiones* in 32, but these images are not necessarily profane. A truly explicit word would not belong in a wedding hymn, while a watered-down description of sex is deemed appropriate for the context. Adams limits obscenities to those words that are common in graffiti and epigram (Catullus, Martial, and the Corpus Priapeorum) but specifically absent from other genres.⁵ These words have no place in civil conversation,⁶ nor in most genres of literature. In public, they may appear in graffiti, but not in commissioned inscriptions. We can locate and identify these words through a combined analysis of comments by the Latin authors themselves and of occurrences of words in literature.

Adams uses the following definition of what he terms “basic” or “primary” obscenities: “A language will generally have a set of words which can be classified as the most direct and obscene terms for sexual parts of the body and excretory acts. As a rule, basic obscenities have no other, primary, sense to soften their impact” (1). Aside from these basic obscenities, “the bulk of attested terms of sexual parts of the body and sexual acts in Latin” come from what Adams calls metaphors and euphemistic designations (2-3). Adams breaks the sexual vocabulary down into categories of obscenities, metaphors, euphemisms, miscellaneous terms, and other

⁵ The exception to this rule is the first book of Horace’s *Sermones*, as discussed by Adams 1982, 2.

⁶ Cic. *de Orat.* 2.252: ..., *non solum non foro digna, sed vix convivio liberorum*, “Obscenity is not only unworthy of the Forum, but scarcely worthy of a dinner of free men.”

specialized terms. These are semantic, syntactical categories. He bases these categories on the degree of societal taboo associated with each (1981, 232):

A distinction must be made between the extra-linguistic taboo which places a restriction on the mention of certain objects or themes, and the linguistic taboo associated with certain words. For non-linguistic reasons one does not find the anus mentioned in certain types of polite writing, such as epic, but nevertheless there are sober genres in which the organ must be dealt with (notably medical writings). Here the operation of the linguistic taboos can be observed.

Lateiner, on the other hand, uses taboo in a different way. He creates subcategories within the greater set of obscenities to distinguish between the sexual, the scatological, and what he calls the “jolting juxtaposition,” an extension of the idea of profanity to include the technique of placing a pleasing image immediately before a lewd one (2007, 263-4).

Defining Obscenity

I propose a division into three main categories—obscenities, technical terms, and circumlocutions—and one sub-category—euphemisms, which fall within the bounds of circumlocutions. Obscenities are those words relating taboo ideas—most commonly sexuality, the body, or excretion—which occur in certain “low” contexts—i.e., graffiti but not epic, epigram but not polite conversation. They function in particular ways, as mentioned above, in order to elicit reactions that include some degree of discomfort. Since the threshold for discomfort differs from person to person, we can only hypothesize about intent—that is, how much discomfort the speaker or writer of obscenity intends to cause in readers. How much readers themselves perceive is beyond our knowledge. Obscenity intends to cause the listener to conjure a disturbing mental image, where technical terms and euphemisms often do not. The

second category, technical terms, also directly addresses taboo ideas, but they aim to avoid discomfort, generally by using medical terminology.

The majority of terms for sexual activity in Catullus, however, are not direct. Rather, they are circumlocutions and euphemisms, alternative ways of describing the same taboo ideas, but without stating a single, direct word to represent them. Circumlocutions may occur outside the contexts and genres reserved for obscenity, and they may or may not be intended to cause discomfort. Euphemisms, then, are the subset of circumlocutions that attempt specifically to avoid discomfort. The distinctions between these categories can be understood by English speakers through the example of the male genitalia. The obscene term “cock” (*mentula*) is direct and intends to cause discomfort; the technical term “penis” (*penis*)—direct, but tries to avoid discomfort; a circumlocution like “a long rod” (*trabs*)—indirect, with the potential, but not the necessity, for discomfort; and the euphemism “private parts” (*pudenda*)—indirect, attempts to avoid discomfort.

With these categories established, it is important to note that a completely accurate and precise definition of Latin obscenity is impossible. Just as it is difficult for students of a foreign language to fully grasp the connotations of the slang they learn, it is even more difficult for scholars of a dead language to piece together all the implications and undertones of Latin words. The social taboo that makes up one-third of the definition of profanity is missing, and though we can recreate a model through literary and archaeological study, without participating in the society itself, it is impossible to understand. Lateiner writes that “obscenity is defined not merely by subject matter or language, but depends largely on the relation between creator and audience,

and the social context the two are found in" (278). This social context is what we attempt, in vain, to restore when defining Latin obscenity and investigating its use in the Catullan corpus.

It is similarly impossible to pin down a precise, universal distinction between categories. What one person takes in stride may elicit discomfort for another; what one person might call obscene, another might call simply a coarse slang term. To an individual, the line between what is profane and what is not may appear very clear, following the example of Potter Stewart's famous "I know it when I see it" judgment on what constitutes obscenity and pornography.⁷ We are aiming at a moving target that only becomes more dynamic as we take time and place into consideration. Even within the English language in the last half-century, what might have been obscene in the U.K. in 1970 is different from what was obscene in the U.S. in 1970, and both are very different from what is considered obscene in either country today. Even Catullus and Cicero may have had varying judgments on what constituted profanity, and they both operated within the same social class of the same city at the same time. When possible, we can fix a specific word at a specific place and moment in time in dictionaries or lexica; often, however, such reference works choose to avoid the very gray area of ambiguous profanity that we seek to elucidate. These challenges prompt larger epistemological questions of what exactly obscenity is. Can we pin down meaning, obscene or otherwise, and can that meaning be conveyed in translation?

⁷ In the 1964 Supreme Court case *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, Justice Potter Stewart speaks this line when delivering his verdict that the material involved in the case was not obscene (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964)).

While I do not attempt to answer these questions fully, I discuss below the two lenses I use—philology and translation—within my first two chapters to examine these and similar questions.

Scope of the Thesis

Catullus has been known since his own time for his dirty mouth. About a quarter of the poems in his corpus contain some sort of obscenity, and far more describe explicit scenes or images in circumlocutory ways. Obscenity and euphemism are two sides to the same coin: both are means of expressing what might be the same action or thing, but by employing opposite approaches. I aim to explore how Catullus uses obscenity and euphemism as literary devices and identify what he accomplishes through this usage. I will begin in my first chapter by outlining some broad patterns within the Catullan corpus, before focusing on the use of obscenity in a few particularly explicit poems. I will use philological methods to do close readings of poems 16, 37, and 97, and how obscenity functions within each. In Poem 16, Catullus preaches that dirty poems do not make a dirty poet. His talent as a poet stems from his ability to write his obscene poems artfully. In Poem 37, Catullus creates a speaker who derives his power from his ability to wield obscenity skillfully, and he asserts his dominance by choosing when to be vulgar and when to refrain. His abstinence from profanity becomes just as powerful as the profanity itself. Poem 97, a vicious invective against Aemilius, employs profanity in yet a different way, providing no breaks from explicit language and images, but rather piling on vulgarity to create a cumulative effect by the end of the poem. In these three invective poems, Catullus reveals that a successful poet is one who can strike a balance between obscenity and circumlocution and derive his power from the tension they create.

After examining Catullus's corpus itself, I will turn to look at its modern English translations. As Roberts writes of the translation process, "Expressions in the source language are often metaphorical, and thus pose the usual challenges of figurative speech; and if (as often happens) the target language lacks any unmarked terminology in these areas, the translator may be confronted by a choice between the scientific, the euphemistic, and the colloquial" (2008, 278). Though scholars have been translating Catullus for centuries, it is not until recently that translators have made honest attempts at conveying the obscenity and euphemism he uses. Commentaries, editions, and translations have historically bowdlerized the original text, employing such tactics as adding additional euphemisms, leaving words in the original Latin, and omitting words altogether. Nott's 1795 translation of the first two lines of Poem 16 does the former, reading "I'll treat you as 'tis meet, I swear./ Lascivious monsters as ye are!"; Whigham's 1966 Penguin translation, on the other hand, leaves the first line in edited Latin, resulting in "*Pedicabo et irrumabo/ Furius & Aurelius/ twin sodomites.*" We have no idea what Richard Burton chose to do with the offending words, since his wife removed them after his death but before printing, leaving behind only "I'll...you twain and .../ Pathic Aurelius! Furius, libertines!"⁸ Fordyce infamously excluded an entire chunk of the corpus in his 1961 Oxford commentary, noting that "a few poems which do not lend themselves to comment in English have been omitted" (v) ("A few" here meant 32 out the 113).⁹ Fitzgerald comments on Fordyce's explanatory note on his omission: "The now infamous words...are the last echo of centuries of embarrassment, swelling frequently to outrage, at Catullan obscenity" (1995, 59-60). In her

⁸ Gaisser 2001, 136-7.

⁹ Henderson 2006 provides a detailed description of the correspondence between Fordyce and the Oxford University Press regarding this commentary, which was intended for students. He partially—but not completely—exonerates Fordyce for his bold editorial choices and omissions.

chapter “Catullus and ‘comment in English’: the tradition of the expurgated commentary before Fordyce,” Gail Trimble summarizes the developments and trends in censorship of Catullan obscenity up until 1961, focusing on texts accompanied by commentaries. I hope to pick up here where she left off on the fruitful path of examining the reception of Catullus in modern English.

I will focus on translations, rather than editions and commentaries, of Catullus that are post-1961, and thus post-Fordyce. A loosening of sexual and cultural taboos in the late 1960s and 1970s coincided with a rush of Catullan scholarship, including the first new complete, scholarly commentary in English since Ellis’s in 1876: Quinn’s 1970 commentary from Bristol Classical Press. Shortly afterwards, the early 1980s marked a watershed in scholarship on Latin obscenity with Wiseman’s 1979 article on presence and absence of Catullan obscenity, Amy Richlin’s 1981 article on the meaning of *irrumare*, and the publication of Adams’s *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* in 1982. The moment was ripe for a new generation of translators to reexamine the Catullan corpus through a more modern lens and provide translations aimed at contemporary readers.

I have chosen a small selection of translations published since 1961. This is not intended to be a representative sampling that necessarily reflects broader patterns of new translations across the board; rather, I tried to choose works from translators who approach the corpus from a variety of perspectives. They skew towards the more recent, both because there seem to be more translations published over the last twenty years than in the twenty years between 1961 and 1981, and because the newer translations represent a more diverse range of translators and translation styles that prove interesting for study. I list the translations here in chronological order from earliest to latest.

My earliest translation, published in 1970, is the joint product of Reney Myers and Robert J. Ormsby, a Classics professor and an English professor, respectively. Myers is “primarily responsible for translating from the Latin,” while Ormsby “devised the rhyme schemes and metric patterns, [and] collaborated in shaping the translation into its present form” (ii). The translations are in rhyming verse.

Guy Lee’s translation was published by the Clarendon Press in 1990. It includes an edition of the texts based on other printed editions and commentaries, an English verse translation, and notes. Lee is a Fellow at Cambridge and has translated numerous other texts from Latin, including work by Ovid, Vergil, Tibullus, and Persius. In his introduction, he asserts his method of literal translation, remarking that “there is surely no point in adding yet another to the number of free translations or paraphrases, however lively...there is quite enough ‘creativity’ about, and perhaps what is most needed in a world of hype is a little honesty.”¹⁰ Lee believes that “the translator’s best course will be to...produce a version as reliable but even more compressed”¹¹ than previous translations.

Josephine Balmer translated a 2004 collection that I originally did not want to include, because she does not translate the entire corpus.¹² It was, however, the only text I could find that was translated by a woman, which gives it a unique and important perspective. Balmer reorders the poems topically into chapters and gives them titles, and she omits the Latin text. She discusses her philosophy of translation in her introduction:

...the translator needs to be considered and thoughtful, putting as much energy into understanding their translation’s contemporary context, its impact on its target culture, as they might expend on

¹⁰ Lee 1990, xxiv-v.

¹¹ Lee 1990, xxv.

¹² Balmer omits 34, 61-64, 66, and part of 68.

understanding the intricate web of culturally-specific references in its source text. That said, it is also important not to be afraid of having fun, as Catullus himself certainly did, using up-to-the-minute slang words and colloquialisms alongside antiquated learned jargon, mixing in neologisms and foreign words, attacking sensibilities, shocking with the new. After all, if the original takes risks, then so, too, should the translation.¹³

Balmer also recognizes the danger of “over-translating,” as she terms it, or creating new versions that exaggerate the effects of obscenity that Catullus himself provides. Balmer aims for a translation that captures the original as closely as possible while still creating a product that a contemporary reader can understand.

Peter Green’s 2005 book includes a Latin text, a facing English translation, and a commentary. A Classics scholar, he came to Catullus late in his career. Green prioritizes meter, replicating in English the original Latin meters of each poem, including and especially Poem 63’s galliambics. His translation is colloquial and legible, and it provides the perspective of one modern Classical scholar. In his introduction (xi-xii), Green describes his readership as one that is simultaneously broad and one that is bilingual and can make use of his facing Latin text:

...the more often the reader is tempted to shift from right to left, from translation to text, the better I shall have succeeded in my aim...So, who is my reader? I would like to think that the way this volume has been set up will attract as wide a readership as possible: the intelligent Latinless lover of literature who wants to get closer to a famous, moving, but difficult, elusive, and at times highly disconcerting poet; the student, at whatever level, from high school to university graduate, who is coming to Catullus through a slow mastering of the Latin language; the teacher—again at whatever level—who is guiding the student’s footsteps.

In recent years, more translators of Catullus have emerged whom I consider non-traditional in that they are not Classical scholars. They are instead translators by profession, or

¹³ Balmer 2004, 23.

writers, or teachers, or others who have simply been inspired by Catullus and now contribute to the ever-growing body of literature that surrounds the original 113 poems. My other most recent translation is more literary, the product of Ryan Gallagher in 2008. He translates the entire corpus with accompanying essays and notes on translation. At the time of publication, Gallagher was a high school English teacher and the owner of a small press, which published his book. His translation is coarser than Green's, with less focus on meter. Gallagher concludes his short preface by writing:

Catullus must saturate your tongue saliva. Let him lie with you softly, for he is as sensual and potent as sex. I have dressed his poems in a contemporary bluesy American English dialect. Strip my words away slowly with your lips and let him lie on your knees. Hold this manuscript in hand and feel all the fire and pain of being human.

Gallagher emphasizes the sexual and emotional Catullus in his translation.

The final two translations I use are published online. The first is anonymous, and compiled by a number of translators, rather than a single author. It is Wikisource, the free online library branch of Wikipedia. Wikisource describes itself as “the free library that anyone can improve” and functions as a branch of the Wikimedia Foundation, whose tagline is “Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. That's our commitment.”¹⁴ The Internet allows for countless translations to become accessible to the public, and Wikisource taps into that public to create the translations themselves. Unfortunately, many of the poems in the corpus are not translated, so I will also look at A.S. Kline's complete online collection hosted on the website Poetry in Translation. Although he has a background in mathematics, Kline now writes chiefly for the internet, providing free, accessible translations

¹⁴ Wikisource. 2016. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Main_Page.

from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese, and other European languages, as well as original poetry.¹⁵

In Chapter 2, I will investigate the same three poems I deal with in Chapter 1. How do the translators handle Catullus's use of obscenity and euphemism in these poems? Where do they remain faithful to Catullus's choice of lexical register, and where do they stray? I will look at the effects they create and identify intersections or disparities with the effects created in the Latin. In my conclusion, with the aid of Venuti's theory of domesticating versus foreignizing translation, I will analyze places where each translation succeeds or fails at conveying aspects of the Latin text and at preserving Catullus for contemporary English readers

¹⁵ Kline, A.S. "Poetry in Translation," 2016. <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/>.

Chapter 1

Os an culum? Obscenity and Circumlocution in Catullus

How does Catullus use obscenity—that is, words that discuss taboo topics with the intention of eliciting discomfort—in his work, and to what effect? As Lateiner writes, "linguistic virtuosity helps obscenity contribute to poetry."¹ In other words, it is Catullus's skill and precision as a poet that lend a literary quality to his use of profanity; this is what distances Catullus's *irrumare* from that which is scrawled on a wall in graffiti. Perhaps surprisingly, out of all the Classical Latin authors, only Catullus, Martial, the first book of Horace's *Sermones*, and the *Corpus Priapeorum* include profane words as Adams defines them²; my own categorization allows a few more authors into the mix, such as Plautus and Petronius, though they trail far behind in their frequency of usage. Catullus remains the pioneer, as far as extant texts show, of using explicit language in a literary context. Even other texts that are lewd or explicit in content, such as Juvenal's *Satires*, steer clear of the particular subset of obscene words, choosing instead to utilize technical terms, circumlocutions, and euphemisms to illustrate less savory images.

Catullus, too, chooses at various times to employ or avoid explicit language.³ Sheets observes the effects of this interplay between lexical registers, noting that "the vital, edgy idiom that results from his [Catullus's] synthesis of vulgar, polite, and poetic language enhances the illusion of candor."⁴ The fluidity with which Catullus shifts between bold obscenity and subtle

¹ Lateiner 2007, 272.

² Adams 2.

³ This contrasts with the overall lack of obscenity in Greek epigram. Adams 1981, 263: "The Latin epigrammatists from Catullus to the author of the *Priapea* innovated in introducing basic obscenities to the genre, but they did not reject the metaphorical language favored by their Greek predecessors."

⁴ Sheets 2007, 195.

circumlocution—even when that circumlocution describes an image or act perhaps more grotesque than if he had written the profanity itself—is where Catullus shows his “linguistic virtuosity.” If use of coarse language is somehow politically or socially subversive, as Irvine and Johnson argue,⁵ what of the moments when Catullus chooses to write in a less vulgar poetic register? The persona of the speaker prevents us from viewing Catullan obscenity too much as a window into—or an outlet for—what Skinner refers to as Catullus’s personal “explosive feelings.”⁶

Of the 113 poems in the Catullan corpus, about a quarter (24%) contain obscenities as I have defined them⁷; far more deal with other, non-explicit forms of invective or sexual content.⁸ 30% of the polymetrics and 21% of the epigrams contain obscenities.⁹ The *Carmina Maiora*, importantly, have none, as is fitting for a group of poems that contains hymns and an epyllion, distinct in genre from the rest of the corpus. The few references made in the *Carmina Maiora* to sexual acts and aspects of the body use only euphemism, circumlocution, and technical terms. Their unique vocabulary defends their position in the corpus as a separate, self-contained group of poems. Because of the lack of profanity in the *Carmina Maiora*, discussion here will focus on the polymetrics and epigrams.

⁵ Irvine 2001, 42-3; Johnson 1982, 112-3.

⁶ Skinner 1991, 2; Fitzgerald 1995, 63.

⁷ The figures provided are all approximate. Some terms, especially rare words and hapaxes, remain resistant to categorization due to our lack of attested uses. Scarcity of evidence makes it impossible to fit each word into a category with absolute certainty. As a result, there will always be some degree of ambiguity to the calculations, and the boundaries of each category remain permeable.

⁸ Cf. Skinner 1991, 1. Richlin 1992, 144 concludes that 62 poems contain invective and/or sexual material, while Arkins 1982, 1 finds sexual behavior in two-thirds of the poems.

⁹ Cf. Lateiner 2007, 279-80 and Ross 1969 on the comparative use of obscenity in the polymetrics and epigrams.

The most common obscenities in Catullus revolve around male sexuality and penetration. The three used most frequently are *mentula*,¹⁰ *cinaedus*,¹¹ and *irrumare*.¹² Each term, along with its related forms, occurs eight times throughout the corpus, appearing in six different poems. *Futuo* and related forms are used seven times in seven poems,¹³ while *culus* and related forms are used six times across four poems.¹⁴ In these five most recurrent profanities, Catullus covers the gamut of penetration: the *mentula*, which is the penetrator itself; the *cinaedus*, who is the recipient of anal penetration, and the *culus*, the anus itself; and *irrumare* and *futuere*, the verbs for penetrating the mouth and the vagina. These words govern the central theme of Catullan obscenity: penetration in its many forms.

Catullan obscenity functions in the poet's invective in part as a weapon with which he can attack his victim. As Amy Richlin concludes, for Catullus, a poem is equal to a weapon is equal to a phallus.¹⁵ The act of writing an insulting poem to use as a weapon against an enemy is an assault akin to penetration; each time the poem is read, the victim is attacked again. Skinner observes that ancient Mediterranean cultures, "having reduced sexual practices to the mutually exclusive polarities of activity and passivity...valorized the agency of the male penetrator," and

¹⁰ 29.13, 37.3, 94.1, 105.1, 110.7, 114.1, 115.1, 115.8. The frequency of *mentula* can be attributed to Catullus's adoption of the term as a nickname for Mamurra, against whom he inveighs in numerous poems. This also explains the predominance of its use in the opening line. Five out of the eight instances of *mentula* occur in the first line of the poem, introducing Mamurra/Mentula as the subject. The word is also attested in Martial, the Corpus Priapeorum, and in various inscriptions (*TLL* s.v. *mentula* 8.0.782.40).

¹¹ 10.24, 16.2, 25.1, 29.5, 29.9, 33.2, 57.1, 57.10. The *TLL* defines a *cinaedus* as a *scortum masculum*, *vir obscaenus* and includes references from Plautus, Lucilius, the Corpus Priapeorum, and Petronius (*TLL* s.v. *cinaedus* 3.0.1059.40).

¹² 10.12, 16.1, 16.14, 21.8, 21.13, 28.10, 37.8, 74.5. The word also appears in Martial, the Corpus Priapeorum, and various inscriptions (*TLL* s.v. *irrumo* 7.2.443.70).

¹³ 6.13, 29.13, 32.8, 37.5, 41.1., 71.5, 97.9.

¹⁴ 23.19, 33.4, 97.2, 97.4, 97.12, 98.4.

¹⁵ Richlin 2007, 292.

thus, “in any patriarchal society, the most appalling ‘dirty words’ are those that disarm male invincibility, that pronounce masculinity itself, at least in its exaggerated phallic form, a fragile imposture.”¹⁶ The most common Catullan obscenities revolve around the penetrator and the penetrated, as well as the power dynamics that exist between them when the speaker can be one or the other. Readers, then, have a choice: if they align themselves with the speaker, they become attackers; if with the victim, they themselves are violated. Yet readers already experience obscenity to some extent just by reading the poem, and this experience itself can be discomfiting.

There is no better illustrative example than Poem 16.¹⁷ It contains four different obscenities, two of which are used twice, for a total of six occurrences of profanity in the poem:

<i>Pedicabo¹⁸ ego vos et irrumabo,</i>	1
<i>Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,</i>	
<i>qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,</i>	
<i>quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.</i>	
<i>nam castum esse decet pium poetam</i>	5
<i>ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est,</i>	
<i>qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,</i>	
<i>si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici</i>	
<i>et quod pruriat incitare possunt,</i>	
<i>non dico pueris, sed his pilosis,</i>	10
<i>qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.</i>	
<i>vos quod milia multa basiorum</i>	
<i>legistis, male me marem putatis?</i>	
<i>pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo.</i>	

I will fuck you up the ass and in the mouth,
 queer Aurelius and faggot Furius,
 who think, because my little verses are
 a little soft, that I’m not chaste enough.
 For it is fitting for a pious poet to be chaste
 himself, but it is not necessary for his little verses to be,

¹⁶ Skinner 1991, 3; 10-11.

¹⁷ Nappa 2001, 57: “Poem 16, with its violent obscenity, is designed to drive home the point that Catullus’ concern with the words and opinions of others is to be taken as a serious and significant part of his art.”

¹⁸ For my Latin text, I use Mynors’ 1958 Oxford Classical Text.

which then indeed have wit and charm,
if they are a little soft and not chaste enough
and can excite something to arousal—
I don't mean boys, but these hairy guys,
who can't move their stiff groins.
You, because you read many thousands of kisses,
you think I'm not a good man?
I will fuck you up the ass and in the mouth.¹⁹

Catullus opens the poem with two striking profanities, immediately pledging to sexually dominate Furius and Aurelius, the victims of his invective, by penetrating the anus and mouth. Although it is likely that Catullus does not seriously intend to perform these actions,²⁰ the sexual dimension is still in the foreground of the reader's mental image. The second line follows with two more obscenities, calling out direct slurs against the addressees. Yet despite what at first appearance seems to be a crass, outraged exclamation, the first two lines of the poem are skillfully crafted. *Pedicabo* and *irrumabo* frame the opening line, surrounding *ego* and *vos*, which are neatly juxtaposed. This creates a visualization of the penetrative action. Catullus threatens to rape Furius and Aurelius in two ways, penetrating orifices located at opposite ends of the body. *Pedicabo* and *irrumabo* sit at opposite ends of the line. The elision of *pedicabo ego* turns the phrase into one word, removing the speaker from the inside of the line, where the victim, *vos*, lies, and joining him with the verb of which he is the agent. By putting *vos* in the first line, before the names of the addressees, the speaker situates the reader on the side of the

¹⁹ All translations are my own, unless otherwise specified. Here, for translations of *pathice* and *cinaede*, I used Selden's renderings of *queer* and *faggot*, which I thought captured the slur and sexual submissiveness nicely.

²⁰ For discussion of the reality/performativity of the threat, see Merrill 1893 ad loc., Buchheit 1976, Richlin 1981, Richlin 1992, Selden 1992. Yet, although he may not carry out the actions, this does not mean we should forget the sexual nature of the verbs, or reduce their meaning to a more general insult. As Nappa writes, "The purely metaphorical interpretation, then, is untenable, and probably arises from the desire to sanitize Catullus" (2001, 47n4).

victims and against himself.²¹ Chiasmus occurs again in l.2, where Aurelius and Furius now frame the line, embracing their explicit descriptors.

We see Catullus wielding these obscene words as weapons, carefully placing one at each end of the opening line, as the speaker would have to place himself at either end of the bodies of Furius and Aurelius in order to carry out his threat. The reader here is both a third-party spectator to the penetration of Furius and Aurelius as well as a victim of the profanity itself. On one level, readers are spared the obscene action of penetration, but on another, they are subject to the obscene words that describe it.

After this opening, the explicit language dies down. Yet, just as *vos* falls between obscenities in the first line, so the body of the poem lies in between the first and last explicit lines. The profanity penetrates the reader at the beginning and at the end, just as the speaker threatens to penetrate his victims in the front and back. This creates a contrast between the first and last lines and the rest of the poem. The obscenity has relented for a bit, but we know it will return at the end; the first line has clued us into this pattern.

In l.3-6, Catullus draws the distinction between a chaste poet and chaste poems—his own values are not those of his poetry.²² The very softness and lack of chastity that Furius and Aurelius have apparently called into question lend the verses *salem ac leporem*. The impetus behind this poem is the implied accusation by Furius and Aurelius that Catullus is *male marem*, bad at being masculine—effeminate. The rhetorical question implies that the speaker asserts the

²¹ Cf. Sheets 2007, 207 on the positioning of the reader; Richlin 2007, 286-7; Selden 1992, 488 writes that the reader, reading the address to *pathice et cinaede*, is submissive to the personified pressure and aggression of the text; by reading, the reader “compliantly sets ‘himself’ in the position of receptor (*cinaedus*).”

²² Richlin 2007, 286.

opposite.²³ His verses are soft—they discuss *milia multa basiorum*—but he himself is not.²⁴ In the opening two lines, the speaker immediately reasserts his masculinity with the obscenities he chooses. Furius and Aurelius are the soft ones, as they are *pathice et cinaede*. They, and the reader, are the recipients of the speaker’s phallus, the passive parties in the homosexual sex act.²⁵

Beginning at l.7, Catullus describes another sexual idea, but he refrains from obscenity. He uses a present factual condition: “only then” (*tum denique*) do the poems have wit and charm, if they are “a little soft and not chaste enough” (*molliculi ac parum pudicum*) and if they can excite arousal. Here we find a euphemism: *et quod pruriat incitare possunt, / non dico pueris, sed his pilosis, / qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos*. While the exact meaning of *duros...movere lumbos* is ambiguous, it is probably suggestive of passive homosexual activity, taking on a meaning similar to *cevere* to describe how one might move or wiggle the buttocks to invite sex.²⁶ Yet, because these men are old, their *lumbos* are stiff and difficult to move. It is easy to arouse young boys, but Catullus’s verses have the power to excite even those less prone to arousal. The poet uses words that, when read in the context of the sexual obscenities in ll.1-2 and within proximity of one another, conjure notions of sexual activity: *pruriat, incitare, duros, lumbos*. Yet none of these words are obscene, or even always necessarily sexual, in and of themselves.²⁷

²³ Selden 1992, 485.

²⁴ This is a direct reference to Poems 5 and 7, as Nappa 2001 agrees. Some scholars, however, erroneously point out that those kisses, since they are directed at a woman, have no particular effeminate quality to them; therefore, Catullus must instead be referencing Poem 48, on Juventius (Thomson ad loc; Arkins 1982, 105; Merrill ad loc; Sandy 1971, 51). In fact, it is the excess of the kisses that is important and implies effeminacy (Richlin 2007, 289).

²⁵ Nappa 2001, 47, 49n9.

²⁶ *TLL* s.v. *ceveo* 3.0.982.30; Plaut. *Pseud.* 864; Mart. 3.95.13; Juv. 2.21, 9.40; Pers. 1.87; Cf. Selden 1992, 485; Rankin 1976, 91; Sandy 1971, 53.

²⁷ *prurio* is a technical term meaning to feel arousal, which can be sexual or nonsexual depending on its context (*TLL* s.v. *prurio* 10.2.2391.25; Adams 188); *durus* does not have specific sexual connotations in this period, and is not even mentioned in Adams (*TLL* s.v. *durus* 5.1.2302.20).

Instead of being profane, as he was in the opening lines, the speaker paints an unappealing image using language that is vivid yet not explicit.²⁸ It is important that he chooses to refrain from obscenity here, in the lines describing the conditions upon which his poems are considered witty and charming.²⁹ It is not his use of profanity that makes his poetry successful; rather, it is his ability to weave this profanity into his poems seamlessly, moving deftly back and forth between the obscene and the circumlocutory.

The image in ll.9-11 does not trump the shock that greets us in the opening two lines of 16. Nevertheless, the *his pilosis* are an example of the way that Catullan invective does not rely simply on profanity, but on the interplay between what is profane and what is not. In the final line of the poem, Catullus repeats the first line once more, *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*, bringing his threat to fruition as he uses obscenity to penetrate the poem from both ends.³⁰ We see once again that profanity is a “legitimate poetic device,” as Lateiner writes,³¹ and one that Catullus wields with skill; however, it is not what defines him as a poet.

Poem 37 does not end with a bang of profanity as 16 does, although it includes three out of the five most common Catullan obscenities. Forms of *mentula*, *irrumare*, and *futuere* appear, along with *sopio*, which may or may not be obscene:

Salax taberna vosque contubernales,

1

Lumbus “seems to be used of a vaguely defined area within which the sexual organs might be situated, but not necessarily conterminous with them...it might sometimes have been interpreted as a euphemism for a sexual organ” (Adams 48). It is used by a number of authors from Plautus to Virgil to Pliny (*TLL* s.v. *lumbus* 7.2.1807.70).

²⁸ Nappa 2001 links *his pilosis* with the *senes severiores* of Poem 5.

²⁹ Fitzgerald 1995 writes, “Catullus tells us...that the success of his poetry can be measured by whether it sexually excites hairy old men” (34).

³⁰ There is a similar repetition of an obscene first line used again as the last line in Poem 57, against Caesar and Mamurra. Rankin 1976, 92 sees this as “a species of Q.E.D. to the argument of the poem.”

³¹ Lateiner 2007, 263.

*a pilleatis nona fratribus pila,
 solis putatis esse **mentulas** vobis,
 solis licere quidquid est puellarum
confutuere et putare ceteros hircos? 5
 an, continenter quod sedetis insulsi
 centum an ducenti, non putatis ausurum
 me una ducentos **irrumare** sessores?
 atqui putate: namque totius vobis
 frontem tabernae **sopionibus** scribam. 10
 puella nam mi, quae meo sinu fugit,
 amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla,
 pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata,
 consedit istic. hanc boni beatique
 omnes amatis, et quidem, quod indignum est, 15
 omnes pusilli et semitarii moechi:
 tu praeter omnes une de capillatis,
 cuniculosae Celtiberiae fili,
 Egnati, opaca quem bonum facit barba
 et dens Hibera defricatus urina. 20*

Lusty tavern, and you, its tent-mates,
 at the ninth pillar from the cap-wearing brothers,
 do you alone think you have dicks,
 do you alone think you can fuck
 whatever's there of girls, and consider the rest goats?
 Or because you sit together all witless,
 a hundred or two, do you think I wouldn't dare
 to face-fuck two hundred of you, sitting there, all at once?
 Just think about it: I'll draw cocks
 all over the face of your tavern.
 Since my girlfriend, who fled my embrace,
 was loved so much, as much as no other girl will be loved,
 sat down there. All you good and rich men
 love her, and yes, even though it's shameful,
 all you tiny little back-alley man-whores:
 you more than everyone, one of those long-haired guys,
 son of rabbit-filled Celtiberia,
 Egnatius, whom a thick beard makes good
 and whose teeth are brushed by Iberian urine.

This invective poem is aimed first at an undefined group of men and later at Egnatius in particular. The opening word, *salax*, dictates the tone of the poem: while not profane itself, it means lusty, and it readies the reader for the harsh words to come. We are expecting sex, and not

chaste sex. We are primed for obscenity. The speaker is angry with these men, and, as a result, he threatens to inflict sexual punishment on them.³² The first two obscenities, *mentulas* and *confutuere*, describe the tent-mates. The prefix of *confutuere* emphasizes the collective nature of the tent-mates. They all take part in one, unified action of fornication.³³ By opening with a direct address to the tent-mates and following up with direct questions in the second person, the speaker situates the reader alongside the addressee, as he does with *vos* in 16. We feel the obscenities just as the tent-mates do. The anaphora of *solis* at the beginning of lines 3 and 4 is important here. “Do you alone think you have dicks? Do you alone think you can fuck whatever’s there of girls, and consider the rest goats?” These questions, and the tone in which they are asked, imply that they are incorrect and foolish thoughts; of course these are not the only men with penises, nor the only ones who can sleep with girls—the speaker can, as well.

Catullus follows up these two profanities, however, by choosing the comparatively innocuous term *insulsi* to describe the men in line 6. *Insulsi*, meaning “saltless” or “witless,” carries particular connotations of a lack of urbanity.³⁴ The speaker, who is not shy about cursing, chooses not to curse here, but to insult the men by identifying them as specifically unrefined. The speaker’s wit and urbanity are now in contrast with the tent-mates’ lack thereof. In *Pro Caelio* 6, Cicero writes *maledictio autem nihil habet propositi praeter contumeliam; quae si petulantius iactatur, convicium, si facetius, urbanitas nominatur*, “However, abuse has no object except insult; if anyone is attacked more impudently, it is called reproach; if more wittily, it is called

³² He is setting himself up, as Richlin 1992 and Krostenko 2001 would argue, as a Priapic figure.

³³ Cf. Nappa 2001, 63-4 on the unification of multiple entities into a collective as a dominant trope of the poem.

³⁴ 10.33, 17.12. Uses of *sal*, *salus* and *salire* to describe wit or humor occur at 12.4, 13.5, 14A.16, 16.7, 17.2, 63.16, 86.4; more examples at *TLL* s.v. *insulsus* 7.1.2040.80. For a discussion of *sal* in the vocabulary of urbanity, see Fitzgerald 1995, 87-113; Ross 1969, 105-12.

urbanity.” *Insulsi* is key in establishing the validity of the obscenity as a literary device. Before it, the speaker is an angry man ranting and cursing; afterwards, he is a poet crafting clever invective.

In the lines that follow, the speaker returns to his original line of questioning—but now we are assured of his dominance. The following line, “Do you think I wouldn’t dare to face-fuck two hundred of you sitting there all at once?” returns starkly to profanity. Yet the word order in line 8, *me una ducentos*, again emphasizes the contrast between speaker and addressee. One speaker is strong enough to sexually dominate two hundred men simultaneously—a bluff, but one he can fulfill in some figurative way by drawing figures (*sopionibus*) on the outside of the tavern, in which the men reside.³⁵

We do not know the precise meaning of *sopio*, but its usage in Pompeiian graffiti tells us it is some sort of obscene drawing.³⁶ Adams believes it probably signifies a penis (64-5). Yet even without entirely grasping its meaning, we are able to understand that the threat to cover the front of the tavern with *sopionibus* is indeed a threat of defacement.³⁷ Having felt the anger of the speaker, and being now familiar with his vocabulary, we assume whatever he draws on the tavern will not be polite.

³⁵ Nappa 2001, 65; Fitzgerald 1992, 66.

³⁶ A graffito at Pompeii reads *diced nobis Sineros et (?) sopio* and, in another hand, *ut merdas edatis, qui scripseras sopionis*. (CIL IV.1700). This is the only citation in the *OLD* aside from Catullus (*OLD* s.v. *sopio*).

³⁷ Cf. Adams 64-5. An insult aimed at Pompey, quoted by *Sacerdos Grammatici Latini* VI.461.30-462.3: *illud de Pompeio qui coloris erat rubei, sed animi inuerecundi, “quem non pudet et rubet, non est homo, sed sopio.” sopio autem est aut minium aut piscis robeus aut penis*. Commentaries by Baehrens, Kroll, Lenchantin de Gubernatis, Merrill, and Quinn all read some sort of obscene graffiti. Nappa 2001 believes “there is little point rehearsing the tired history of the word *sopio*” (63).

The tone, however, changes in the next lines. The speaker describes how his girlfriend has left him and gone to this *salax taberna*. Yet he aims no obscenity at her. The explicit language is reserved for the tent-mates, even though the girl herself takes quite a bit of agency in this betrayal—she flees from the speaker’s embrace, *quae meo sinu fugit*. The lack of obscenity here is as striking as its abundance in the opening lines. Although the girl participates in the same sexual activities as the men, the speaker directs no anger or profanity towards her.³⁸

He returns to the men, calling them *boni beatique* and *pusilli et semitarii moechi*. Whether the men are good and rich or low-class fornicators, they all love this girl. When the sexual acts concern the *puella* specifically, the men no longer wield *mentulas* or *confutuere*; rather, they simply love (*amatis*). This can be examined in contrast with *amata* and *amabitur* in l.12. The word seems to shift meanings from l.12 to l.15. Earlier, the girl is “loved” by the speaker;³⁹ later, she “sleeps with” other men. Using *amare* as a euphemism for sex here softens the blow for the speaker; the verb *consedit* here is likely also euphemistic for sex.⁴⁰ He does not want to discuss her sexual acts explicitly, so he talks around them.

The poem ends when the speaker singles out one man in particular, Egnatius, at whom he directs the final blow of invective—yet, this time, without obscenity. The speaker paints an unattractive image of Egnatius and his ignoble heritage. As a foreigner, he is far removed from

³⁸ Lateiner 2007, 277; Skinner 1991, 6: “the speaker’s rage is displaced throughout the poem from her onto her customers”; Wiseman 1979, 11-15 notes that he avoids obscenity around Lesbia in general: “In both love and hate Catullus took Lesbia seriously, and felt, perhaps, that mere obscenity was too cheap a style to use on her.” Although the *puella* in 37 is unidentified, perhaps Catullus’s forgiving verbal treatment of her points us towards identifying her as Lesbia, a jump that Wiseman is willing to make.

³⁹ 8.5 *amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla*

⁴⁰ Adams 1982, 165; Skinner 1991, 6n23; Herescu 1959; *TLL* s.v. *consedeo* 4.0.387.25.

Rome and the urbanity of the city.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he spares Egnatius from profanity, crafting a four-line description whose most risqué word is *urina*, which Adams characterizes as “clearly the polite term” for urine by the end of the Republic.⁴² While the speaker opens with a stream of obscenity directed at the indeterminate group of tent-mates, he closes with a carefully worded, vivid image of insult directed at one specific man. This ends the poem on a powerful note. We know the speaker is urbane and clever, and we know he has the ability to be vulgar. But he refrains, and this is what marks Egnatius out as special. The image itself is so vivid and offensive that Catullus needs no profane words to add to it.

The speaker asserts his dominance over Egnatius by showing him a sort of clemency from the verbal sexual attack that he inflicts upon the rest of the men. The *puella* is too good for obscenity; Egnatius is too awful for it. Catullus’s abstinence from profanity here is just as striking as the profanity itself, and it gains power from this juxtaposition. He could have simply threatened Egnatius with *irrumatio*, as he does Furius, Aurelius, and the other two hundred men; however, instead he spends the final four lines of the poem characterizing him in insulting detail, which he later picks up in 39. In 37, Catullus skillfully uses obscenity and euphemism as literary devices that play off of one another, creating a powerful speaker who employs his cleverness to control his language and direct his invective specifically where he wants it.

⁴¹ Cf. Nappa 2001, 59-84.

⁴² Adams 1982, 246. The alternative term, *lotium*, originated as a euphemism that referred to washing liquid, since Romans laundered their clothes in urine (*TLL* s.v. *lotium* 7.2.1682.75). We are not completely sure of the specific valence of *lotium* by the time Catullus was writing, but it occurs much less frequently than *urina*, and in more vulgar contexts, especially in later Imperial and post-Imperial Latin. Adams 1982, 247 provides a chart comparing usages of *lotium* and *urina*. Catullus uses each term once in the corpus. *Lotium* appears in 39.21. Like *urina* in 37, *lotium* is also the last word of the last line of an invective poem aimed at Egnatius.

Poem 97 is likewise full of profanity, but this time it continues throughout the poem up until and including the last line. In fact, there is relatively little scholarship devoted to 97, partially due to its obscene subject matter, and partially because it is overlooked as being supposedly simple, straightforward invective.⁴³ This poem is aimed at Aemilius⁴⁴ alone, although it does not directly address him. Thus, as readers, we do not identify with the victim of invective as we might in Poems 37 and 16. This time, the speaker versus victim dichotomy places us on the side of the speaker, and the excessive obscenity serves to enforce this division. 97, like 16, contains anaphoric profanity, this time of the word *culus*. There are five obscene words in 97, three of which are forms of *culus*:

<i>Non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putavi</i>	1
<i>utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio.</i>	
<i>nihil mundius hoc, nihiloque immundius illud,</i>	
<i>verum etiam culus mundior et melior:</i>	
<i>nam sine dentibus est. hoc dentis sesquipedalis,</i>	5
<i>gingivas vero ploxeni habet veteris,</i>	
<i>praeterea rictum qualem diffissus in aestu</i>	
<i>meientis mulae cunus habere solet.</i>	
<i>hic futuit multas et se facit esse venustum,</i>	
<i>et non pistrino traditur atque asino?</i>	10
<i>quem si qua attingit, non illam posse putemus</i>	
<i>aegroti culum lingere carnificis?</i>	

Not, if the gods love me, did I think it mattered at all
 whether I smelled Aemilius's mouth or his asshole.
 One is no cleaner, the other no dirtier;
 really, the asshole is cleaner and better,
 for it has no teeth. The mouth, with teeth a foot and a half long,
 truly has the gums of an old wagon box,
 and meanwhile it's wide open like the split cunt

⁴³ Forsyth 1979 discusses it in context with its surrounding epigrams. More recent studies include Lateiner 2007, 270-81; Lambert 1993; O'Bryhim 2012.

⁴⁴ The only mention of such an Aemilius in the corpus. Forsyth 1979 thinks he might be L. Aemilius Paullus; Lambert 1993 supports this identification, with some reservations. O'Bryhim 2012 gives Aemilius Macer, a contemporary poet of Catullus. For the purposes of this paper, identifying a historical Aemilius is not necessary.

of a pissing mule in the heat.
He fucks them all and makes himself out to be charming,
and he's not handed over to the mill and the mule?
If anyone would touch him, wouldn't we think she would
lick the asshole of a sick executioner?

Each repetition of *culus* occurs in the same spot of the couplet. The arrangement in 1.2 of *os an culum* presents us with the same choice the speaker faces;⁴⁵ the anaphora in the rest of the poem, however, solves the problem for us: *culum, culus, culum*. *os* never appears again. The arrangement of *culus* in 97 follows a similar pattern to the arrangement of obscenity as a whole in 16: it occurs twice in the beginning (in 16, 1.1 and 2; here, 1.2 and 4), then again in the last line. This has the effect of establishing an obscene tone up front, then cycling back to it at the end. 97, however, takes no hiatus from profanity—just a hiatus from *culus*. Explicit subject matter repeats over and over—as do many of the words in this poem. Anaphora, in addition to *culum/culus/culum*, is profuse in ll.1-5: *nilo mundius/nihiloque immundius* (3), *mundius/immundius/mundior* (3-4), and *dentibus/dentis* (5). Catullus is hammering his point home in this invective.

In 1.8, we see the only occurrence of *cunnus* in Catullus,⁴⁶ one of the few obscene mentions of female genitalia in the corpus. Here, it refers not to a woman but to a mule.⁴⁷ ll.5-8 take us through a series of increasingly disturbing images: first, the mouth with its long teeth is described without obscenity; then the gums, also without obscenity; finally, the mule in all its glory, with the punchline coming in the form of *cunnus* at the center of 1.8. In this image,

⁴⁵ For discussion of the Roman fascination with the dirty mouth as obscene, see Richlin 2007, 293ff.; Nappa 2001.

⁴⁶ Forms of *cunnus* occur rarely throughout literature as well—most of our references come from graffiti and epigram (Adams 80-1). Other mentions occurs in Horace *Satires* 1, Martial, and the Corpus Priapeorum (*TLL* s.v. *cunnus* 4.0.1410.5).

⁴⁷ Perhaps such a word used of a woman would be too harsh even for Catullus?

Catullus chooses to use profanity, and he selects one emphatic word to complete the picture.⁴⁸ In this image, however, as in the rest of the poem, no obscene action is done to Aemilius: either he performs them himself, or they metaphorically describe him. This distinguishes 97 from 16 and 37. Why does the speaker refrain from threatening explicit sexual punishment on such a hateful man? Perhaps the continuous onslaught of invective is punishment enough, or perhaps Aemilius is so disgusting that the speaker cannot even bring himself to punish him in this way. *Irrumatio* and *pedicatio*, the two punishments threatened in 16 and 37, would require the speaker to insert his penis into Aemilius's mouth or asshole—the very filthy parts he was considering in 1.2. By withholding sexual punishment, the speaker can avoid the choice between *os an culum*. Here, it seems that denying Aemilius punishment may be even more offensive than exacting it.

Aemilius considers himself *venustus* in relation to his constant *fututio*. Here, again, we see a word relating to charm and cleverness cropping up in the context of obscenity.⁴⁹ And, again, clever charm is set up in opposition to the obscene. Aemilius seems to think that, because he sleeps with a lot of women, he is therefore *venustus*; the speaker begs to differ. As Lateiner writes, “Catullus resented few things more than a fool thinking himself *venustus*...to prove his right to belabour his victim, Catullus must show that he is *venustus*. The commonness of the thought is counterbalanced by the elegance of the insult.”⁵⁰ In Poem 37, it was the abstinence from using profanity that showed the speaker's skill, contrasting him with the *insulsi*. Here, we see that actually performing these profane acts does not make Aemilius charming or urbane, as

⁴⁸ By contrast, *meientis*, from *meio/mingo*, is a technical term, as Adams 246 describes: “But though it is by no means common in literature, it was not an outright obscenity. It is admitted in various works from which basic obscenities were excluded.” *TLL* s.v. *meio* 8.0.604.20 lists these occurrences. Also cf. 67.30.

⁴⁹ 3.2, 10.4, 12.5, 22.2, 31.12, 35.17, 36.17, 86.3, 89.2. As above in n.28, see Fitzgerald 1995, 87-113; Ross 1969, 105-12.

⁵⁰ Lateiner 2007, 271.

he makes himself out to be; the speaker, who does not perform any obscene sexual acts in this poem, is the clever one.

In 97, Catullus opens with obscenity, then describes an image using more obscenity, and finally closes with another image that returns to the original obscenity. Unlike 37's speaker, 97's does not refrain from explicit language in the final couplet. Any girl who would tolerate Aemilius would also lick the asshole of an executioner. This is another peculiar, vivid image.⁵¹ When presented with the choice between *os an culum*, licking the asshole of an executioner (who also is sick⁵²) seems to be on par with, if not preferable to, kissing Aemilius.⁵³ The closing couplet is the worst of all, the last in an ascending tricolon of disgusting images that the reader of 97 must envision, in Fitzgerald's words a "hair-raising climax."⁵⁴ The triple repetition of *culus* enforces this cumulative effect. This scathing invective conjures intense mental pictures. The audience is part of the first person singular *putemus*; we must all agree with the speaker in his revulsion.⁵⁵ We, as readers, are now disgusted by Aemilius, just as the speaker is, and we must fill our own mouths with obscenity in order to read the poem aloud, mirroring the behavior of Aemilius's girlfriend.⁵⁶ Just as, in Poem 16, the profanity of *pedicabolirrumabo* in the first and last lines penetrates the poem from both ends, here both the front and back end of the poem, the

⁵¹ Lateiner 2007, 271: "This poem musters fecal, urinal, and sexual obscenity, and then ends with an image which combines all with additional elements of blood and slaughter."

⁵² The word *aegrotus* does not necessarily connote a particular illness, although a digestive one would make Catullus's image appropriately foul (*TLL* s.v. *aegrotus* 1.0.955.50). Balmer takes this approach in her translation, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

⁵³ As we learned in ll.3-4, the *culus* is in fact cleaner. Cf. Richlin (1992) 26-31 on the cleanliness vs. dirtiness of the mouth as a facet of obscenity.

⁵⁴ Fitzgerald 1995, 79.

⁵⁵ Pedrick 1993, 176.

⁵⁶ Fitzgerald 1995, 80.

os and *culus*, are explicit and filthy. We have no choice between them; in reading the poem, we must read both ends.

If we were to map out obscenity in the poems I have investigated, the arc of Poem 97 would be a straight, steadily increasing line—more and more profanities, uglier and viler images, ending at its apex in the closing line. Poem 16 is cyclical: it begins with explicit language, and it ends with the same explicit language—there is nothing in between. Poem 37 proceeds in the opposite direction from 97: it moves from a profane beginning to an ending that, while offensive, contains no obscene words. Catullus structures his obscenity in each of these three poems to support their unique functions.

In each of these poems, profanity appears in opposition to urbanity and poetic success. Catullus demonstrates that his skill as a poet allows him to use explicit language how he wants. The dirty words and actions themselves are not what make Catullus witty and clever, but how he wields them—purposefully and exactingly, in order to create the humor and shock of his invective. He uses obscenity describing penetration often to assert his virility, as well as his power as a poet. The moments Catullus refrains from profanity are as important as the moments he employs it, and each necessitates the other. Catullus reveals his skill and success as a poet through the dexterity and fluidity with which he changes syntactical registers, writing not one *culus* too many nor one *irrumatio* too few

Chapter 2

Traduttore, traditore: English Adaptations of Catullan Profanity

If Fordyce's commentary marks the the last stage of a centuries-long tradition of bowdlerizing Catullus, the transition that follows is not a clear-cut progression from euphemism to complete frankness in translation of obscenity. Rather, subsequent translations run the gamut of lexical registers, from continuing to use paraphrase and circumlocution to dysphemism, the use of derogatory or explicit words instead of neutral ones (such as those that function as euphemisms or technical terms). As Roberts writes, "It is perhaps partly as a reaction to the diminishing effect of the obscene that late twentieth-century translators sometimes engage in the reverse of euphemism."¹ It seems that Catullus's reputation often precedes him, to the point that some translators, now allowed the freedom to write and publish poems as "dirty" as they wish, feel compelled to exaggerate the profane quality of the corpus, adding obscenity in places where Catullus himself uses no such language.² As Skinner writes, "For most readers of Catullan texts, the mere presence of such obscene matter no longer poses a moral problem."³ In other words, simply presenting the audience with the sexual imagery or explicit language that Catullus did will no longer shock and trigger the sense of taboo that it once did. The translation of Catullan obscenity in the modern day lacks moral valence; if we look at Fordyce through this lens, we might come to the same conclusion that Trimble does: "Fordyce's statement that some poems 'do not lend themselves to comment in English' can be read as a historical as much as an

¹ Roberts 2008, 306.

² Cf. Roberts 2008, 306; Ziolkowski 2007, 410-11; Fitzgerald 1995, 60n3; Jocelyn 1980; Witke 1980; Wiseman 1979.

³ Skinner 1992, 1.

absolute judgment, since many of the poems he omits *had* not often lent themselves to such comment.”⁴ Now that such comment is possible, what do translators do?

In this chapter, I will focus on how translators interpret poems 16, 37, and 97 and the obscenities within them. Do they render all of Catullus’s profanities and euphemisms as such? How do the English versions compare in tone and lexical register to the original Latin poems? Most importantly, what patterns or observations can be discovered that will shed light on the modern reception and interpretation of Catullus’s most explicit poems?

I begin with translations of Poem 16. For convenience, I reproduce Catullus’s Latin text again, with the explicit words in bold:

<i>Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,</i>	1
<i>Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,</i>	
<i>qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,</i>	
<i>quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.</i>	
<i>nam castum esse decet pium poetam</i>	5
<i>ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est,</i>	
<i>qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,</i>	
<i>si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici</i>	
<i>et quod pruriat incitare possunt,</i>	
<i>non dico pueris, sed his pilosis,</i>	10
<i>qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.</i>	
<i>vos quod milia multa basiorum</i>	
<i>legistis, male me marem putatis?</i>	
<i>pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo.</i>	

Myers and Ormsby’s 1970 translation of 16 omits some of the obscene words Catullus uses:

I’ll **fuck**⁵ you both **right up the ass**,
Gay Furius, Aurelius,
For saying I’m not chaste, what brass!

⁴ Trimble 2012, 155.

⁵ For clarity, I will bold all the translations of obscenity in the English versions I provide. I will underline any additional uses of coarse slang or obscenity that do not have explicit Latin precedents. Any italics or other formatting is the translator’s own.

Because my poems aren't. Thus
You miss the point; my poetry
Is simply not the same as me.
But all my verses really owe
Their wit and charm and all their salt
To spicy, merry, sexy flow
Of words that even stir up halt
And hairy granddads—no young crew—
Whose stiffened loins can hardly screw.
Well, read my poems: If your brass
Insists my verse makes me like you,
I'll **fuck** you both **right up the ass**.

The translation is light and brisk. Myers and Ormsby use the English sestet form, with the rhyme scheme ABABCC, but they return to the opening ass/brass rhyme in their final three lines. The iambic tetrameter, a meter frequently used in English nursery rhymes and children's songs, adds to the playful feel. Myers and Ormsby open with a loose translation of the obscenity of the first line, letting *pedicabo* subsume *irrumabo* and providing only one verbal action, rather than two. The translation of *pedicabo* is accurate in terms of tense and straightforward definition, and the register remains obscene; however, the force of *irrumabo* completely disappears, leaving its connotations absent in the English version. The order of Aurelius and Furius is reversed in the second line, and Aurelius loses his descriptor *pathice*. For *cinaede Furi*, Myers and Ormsby provide "Gay Furius," using a slang term that was just becoming more widely used around the time they published their translation.⁶ Thus, though "gay" is now Standard English, in 1970 it was still imbued with derogatory connotations.⁷

By declining to translate *irrumabo* and *pathice*, Myers and Ormsby do away with part of the cyclical effect that Catullus creates with his profanity: two types of rape, from two sides of

⁶ J. Green 2011.

⁷ J. Green 2011. The reclamation of the term by homosexuals began c. 1970 with the emergence of the Gay Liberation Front, beginning in the U.S. and following in the U.K.

the body, to two different types of recipients. They do not shy from translating the explicit language in itself—they use “fuck” twice—but they simplify and reduce what is present in the first two lines. Further down, Myers and Ormsby translate *movere* in l.11 as “screw,” increasing the lexical register of an image which Catullus chose a euphemism to describe. Their translation is loose overall: Myers and Ormsby omit any mention of the *milia multa basiorum*, which reduces the emphasis placed on Catullus’s alleged effeminacy and removes much of the context of the poem. The lack of any oral valence to the first and last lines also precludes the image of Catullus literally filling the mouth of those who have spoken accusations against him. In fact, Myers and Ormsby eliminate the oral aspect from every instance of *irrumare* that they translate.⁸ While there is some interplay between the obscene and the acceptable, it is not quite the same as that in Catullus’s Latin. The result is a slightly watered down version of 16 that prioritizes a “spicy, merry, sexy flow,” as supported by the rhyme and meter.

Lee’s translation also embraces circumlocution:

I’ll **bugger** you and **stuff your gobs**,
Aurelius **Kink** and **Poofter** Furius,
For thinking me, because my verses
Are rather sissy, not quite decent.
For the true poet should be chaste
Himself, his verses need not be.
Indeed they’ve salt and charm then only
When rather sissy and not quite decent
And when they can excite an itch
I don’t say in boys but in those hairy
Victims of lumbar sclerosis.
Because you’ve read of my x thousand
Kisses you doubt my virility?
I’ll **bugger** you and **stuff your gobs**.

⁸ See Appendix.

Lee uses coarse British slang throughout his poem, employing some circumlocution where Catullus uses profanity. The valence of “bugger” ranges from coarse slang to expletive, depending whether the meaning is literal (as it is here) or is softened to mean “spoil” or “ruin.”⁹ “Poofter”¹⁰ is derogatory slang; “kink” is used in the U.S. for “various slang applications.”¹¹

Thus, Lee preserves Catullus’s vernacular tone and uses coarse words that vary in register.

Unlike Myers and Ormsby, Lee does include some sort of translation for all the obscenities in the Latin original; however, he uses circumlocution more, as in the case of “stuff your gobs” for *irrumabo* (the phrase is indirect, but not necessarily less offensive than the original profanity). This translation includes the oral aspect of *irrumabo*, but the circumlocution, while graphic, is humorous. “Gob” is a slang term for mouth, and the tone of the phrase is not as serious as *irrumabo*.¹² Similarly, “kink” and “poofter” have an almost silly phonetic sound, though derogatory. The phrase “Poofter Furius,” with its repeated “f” sound and long “oo,” is amusing to hear.

The humorous, slangy vocabulary takes a hiatus where Lee translates l.10, *qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos*. He calls the old men who are aroused by Catullus’s poetry “victims of lumbar sclerosis,” an interesting departure in tone towards a more technical medical vocabulary. Lumbar sclerosis is not the name of any particular, specific medical condition, but simply, it seems, a sclerosis, or stiffening, of the lumbar region, which can refer to the low back or loin.¹³ Although Lee broadens the scope of the anatomical region slightly in his translation, he preserves the sound of the original *lumbos* by using “lumbar.” This line is a jarring departure

⁹ Partridge 1984.

¹⁰ *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “poofter, n.1.”; J. Green 2011.

¹¹ *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. “kink, n.1.”; J. Green 2011.

¹² *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. “gob, n.2.”; J. Green 2011.

¹³ *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. “lumbar, adj. and n.1.”

from the vernacular insults of the first two lines, and Lee follows it with a direct reference to “virility,” another word of a more formal register than Catullus’s *male...marem*. Yet he cycles back around to vulgar slang in the last line, which is a repetition of the first. Thus, although Lee does not preserve the obscene register in his translations of Catullan profanity, he preserves the cyclical structure and change in register from the Latin version of 16, substituting circumlocution and coarse slang for explicit language.

Balmer translates 16 (called 36 in her book) as follows:

36: Furius and Aurelius’ Disapproval

Bugger off and **get stuffed**, Aurelius
prick-sucker, and **dick-lover** Furius,
if you keep taking me at my verses –
that if ‘sensuous,’ I’m not quite virtuous.
Goodness in a poet might be fitting,
it’s just not essential for his scribblings;
in fact they can only have spice and bite
if they’re sensuous – and virtuous? Not quite.
They should stir us, get us roused (not just boys
but men who’ve lost all movement in the loins).
But you, you read my ‘million kisses’
and have me half a man, mawkish, missish.
Still I think you will find me hard enough
as **I bugger you both** and **stuff you up**.

Balmer switches the agency of the verb in her opening line. Rather than let the speaker orally and anally rape Furius and Aurelius, she turns the future indicative verbs into present imperatives.

Like Myers and Ormsby, Balmer removes the oral aspect of *irrumabo*, rendering it as “get stuffed” without specifying that it is in the mouth. The words she uses are not obscene, but “bugger” is coarse and “get stuffed” an offensive circumlocution. The terms act here as crude exclamations: “bugger off!” Yet, by removing the speaker as the subject of the two verbs, Balmer removes some of his potency. He is not the one exacting revenge on his accusers; he can

only insult them and order them to do it themselves—a rhetorical request, with which one cannot imagine they would comply.

Aurelius and Furius become “prick-sucker” and “dick-lover,” two hybrid words that serve to preserve Catullus’s profane register while also conveying the sense of a homosexual slur. What was lost in the omission of the mouth in Balmer’s translation of *irrumabo* is gained back a little bit in “prick-sucker”; however, the descriptor acts as more of an insult and implies Aurelius’s agency in commonly practicing this sexual act. The speaker’s threat to put his penis in his accusers’ mouths and thus prevent them from speaking is still lost. In this way, Balmer’s translation is like Lee’s in that it removes the oral aspect from the opening lines and translates most of Catullus’s obscenities into coarse slang that is not quite profane in English.

Balmer, however, does not repeat the first line verbatim as the last. Instead, she returns to the original first person subject of the verbs, but keeps them in the present tense. Thus, while the last line is almost the same as the first, the agent of the verb changes. The result is a progression, rather than a simple cycle. The speaker opens by insulting Furius and Aurelius, then he tells them off, and he finishes by completing the insult that he shouts harmlessly in the first line.

Green’s translation reads as follows:

Up yours both, and sucks to the pair of you,
Queen Aurelius, Furius the faggot,
who dared judge *me* on the basis of my verses—
they mayn’t be manly: does that make *me* indecent?
Squeaky-clean, that’s what every proper poet’s
person should be, but not his bloody squiblets,
which, in the last resort, lack salt and flavor
if *not* “unmanly” and rather less than decent,
just the ticket to work a furious itch up,
I won’t say in boys, but in those hirsute
clods incapable of wiggling their hard haunches.
Just because you’ve read about my countless
thousand kisses, you think I’m less than virile?

Up yours both, and sucks to the pair of you!

Green employs the same strategy as Balmer in the first line, using exclamatory, offensive insults that are not quite obscene. He translates Catullus's *pedicabo* and *irrumabo* into English phrases that are sexual in origin but function more as offensive insults ("Up yours," for example, becomes equivalent to "go to hell" or "fuck off").¹⁴ As in Balmer, Green's speaker does not actually commit or threaten to commit sexual acts of revenge upon Furius and Aurelius; while the mouth is implied by "sucks," we do not have as strong of an image of oral rape as in the original Latin poem.

In l.2, Green uses "queen" to describe Aurelius, a word that itself is acceptable, but is offensive in its context as a homosexual slur. Faggot is an obscene slur.¹⁵ Thus, of the first four obscenities in 16, Green translates one of them into an English obscenity and uses circumlocution for the other three. Green does add "bloody" as a modifier for *versicolorum*, a term that still often functions as an expletive or taboo word in the U.K.¹⁶ Throughout the poem,

¹⁴ Urban Dictionary 2003. The phrase "sucks to you!" has effectively lost its connection to the meaning of "suck" as "fellate" and come to be simply a rude exclamation (J. Green 2011, Partridge 1984, Spears 1981). The term was censored in *The New York Times* as recently as 1978, but Rawson 1989 writes that "the pejorative but traditionally printable meanings of *suck* [i.e. those that are so distant from the original etymology that they have lost the idea of oral sex] seem to have fused with the sexual sense during the overheated 1960s to produce a figurative but powerful verb for expressing contempt or disgust...the widespread use of the word in nonsexual situations has helped diminish the taboo on its employment in public with the other, explicit meaning." (375-7).

¹⁵ J. Green 2011; Urban Dictionary 2006; Spears 1981.

¹⁶ *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "bloody, adj., n., and adv.": "This word has long had taboo status, and for many speakers constituted the strongest expletive available"; J. Green 2011: "Like other so-called 'obscenities' or 'Anglo-Saxon words', *bloody* has experienced a fluctuating position as regards usage... When bloody does appear in the press it tends to be in direct, quoted speech and is printed in full, but the term, in the U.K. at least, has yet to enter 'polite' society." Yet Rawson 1989 writes that the taboo nature of the word wore off around 1920 (51-2). Spears 1981 writes that, in the 1800s, it was the British equivalent of the U.S. "fucking," but by 2004 it has lost that

he uses italics to emphasize a contrast between poet and text—“*they*” vs. “*me*.” These italics also appear in the final line of the poem, which is otherwise identical to the opening. The italics accompanied by a final exclamation point add a nonverbal emphasis to the reiteration of the original insult. Nevertheless, the speaker never actually takes any action against his accusers. Green’s speaker, then, might be even less potent than Balmer’s. Not only does he use obscenity in only one of six opportunities, but he declines to take any action, sexual or otherwise, on Furius and Aurelius. Nevertheless, the persona of the speaker is sarcastic and irascible, and this personality comes through with the help of Green’s italics.

Gallagher’s translation of 16 reads:

I will **plug your mouth and ass**,
Aurelius **spread wide** and Furius **who fucks children**.
You’ve summed me up from a single line of verse,
(which was lewd, and a little less than virtuous)
“For pureness is said to be in the poet’s practice.”
Not one verse needs this.
They only wield a bit of spice and charm when
they are lewd, and a little less than virtuous,
and if they can rouse up an itch
(and I don’t mean for young boys)
in the gray haired limp.
So, choose to flip through my many thousand kisses
and sum it up as a mouthful of salt,
and then **I will plug your mouth and ass**.

Although Gallagher’s translation uses circumlocutions, it is arguably just as obscene, if not more, than Catullus’s Latin version. His first line uses a number of English words which, while not individually explicit in English, combine to convey the same two obscene images that Catullus creates with *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*. The same goes for “Aurelius spread wide”—though the words themselves are not profane, the image they present is explicit. Gallagher does not use

meaning: the top definition on Urban Dictionary asserts, “DOESN'T mean 'fucking' you screwheads.. We use that word too!”

offensive insults that hint at sexuality, as Balmer, Lee, and Green do; rather, he uses bold images that are sexual almost before they are insulting. The images are striking. Only once the reader pictures what Gallagher describes can he or she understand that it must be insulting. Gallagher does, however, add a sexual sense to *molliculi* by translating it as “lewd.” Not only are the speaker’s poems effeminate, they are crudely sexual—as is shown in the poem itself.

The descriptor “Furius who fucks children” is an interesting case. Certainly, Gallagher does not attempt here to accurately translate the Latin *cinaede*. Catullus makes no mention of children anywhere in the poem. Gallagher uses dysphemism here, creating an image that is even worse to a modern reader than the original; ironically, the idea of an adult having sex with minors, as long as they were slaves, may not raise eyebrows in Ancient Rome. Yet, a *cinaedus* is one thing; a person who has sex with children is another. One relationship is consensual, one cannot be. By using such a phrase, Gallagher is perhaps trying to capture the feeling of shock and horror that a Roman might feel reading the opening of 16; he may be attempting to convey the emotion, rather than the specific definition, of the line. In terms of specifically translating from what is obscene in Latin to what is obscene in English, Gallagher comes closest of all the book translations; however, in terms of capturing the tone and persona of the original, Gallagher strays more. His dysphemism and aggressive circumlocution create a speaker cruder and more belligerent than Catullus’s.

The two online translations differ in their treatment of obscenity in 16. Kline translates the poem as follows:

16. A Rebuke: to Aurelius and Furius

I’ll **fuck** you and **bugger** you,
Aurelius the **pathic**, and **sodomite** Furius,
who thought you knew me from my verses,

since they're erotic, not modest enough.
 It suits the poet himself to be dutifully chaste,
 his verses not necessarily so at all:
 which, in short then, have wit and good taste
 even if they're erotic, not modest enough,
 and as for that can incite to lust,
 I don't speak to boys, but to hairy ones
 who can't move their stiff loins.
 You, who read all these thousand kisses,
 you think I'm less of a man?
 I'll **fuck** you, and I'll **bugger** you.

Kline uses a very accurate translation of meaning with a looser interpretation of lexical register.

If we assume his first line preserves the Latin word order, then he translates *pedicabo* as “fuck” and *irrumabo* as “bugger,” reducing the intensity of each obscenity. If, however, we take “bugger” as the translation of *pedicabo*, a closer relative in meaning if not in tone, then he has taken “fuck” for *irrumabo*. Either way, Kline omits the oral aspect of the verb, as he does in every instance of *irrumare* that he translates.¹⁷ He retains the first person subject and future tense, and he repeats the first line as the last line word for word. Kline chooses “pathic” for *pathice*, the English derivative term that, as such, has the same definition and sound.

Nevertheless, it is a technical term in English, so it loses its obscene valence; the same goes for the translation of *cinaede* as “sodomite.” Thus, while Kline is not afraid to use explicit language, he only uses it twice in six opportunities, both to translate the same word.

Wikisource works similarly:

I will **sodomize** you and **face-fuck** you,
Cocksucking Aurelius and **bottom-man** Furius,
 You who think, from my verses
 Because they are delicate, that I have no shame.
 For it is right for the devoted poet
 To be chaste himself, but it's not
 Necessary for his verses to be so.

¹⁷ See Appendix.

[Verses] which then indeed have taste and charm,
If they are delicate and a little shameless,
And because they can incite an itch,
And I don't mean in boys, but in
Those hairy old men who can't get it up.¹⁸
You, because you have collected many thousands of my kisses,
You think me less of a man?
I will **sodomize** you **and face-fuck** you.

Our anonymous translators choose “sodomize,” which preserves an accurate definition but switches lexical registers from obscenity to technical term. Of all the translations, Wikisource provides the most precise rendering of *irrumabo*, keeping the profanity, the meaning, the vernacular tone, and the oral aspect of the verb with the English “face-fuck.” The first line also preserves the first-person speaker and future tense, and it repeats verbatim as the last line. The translation of *pathice* remains explicit and adds an extra emphasis to the idea of oral sex, while that of *cinaede* is euphemistic, but conveys the meaning of *cinaede*. Wikisource’s translation is interesting in its variable lexical registers. “Sodomize” is a formal technical term in English, while “face-fuck,” which appears in the same line, is vernacular and obscene. “Cocksucking” is also profane and vernacular, but “bottom-man,” in the same line, is a circumlocution. Wikisource translates *qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos* as “those hairy old men who can’t get it up,” using modern English slang to impute *movere* with a meaning of clear sexual impotence that is not as subtle as Catullus’s euphemism. Wikisource lacks the unifying agenda that we see in some of the book translations, like Gallagher’s valuation of obscenity and shock value, or Lee’s offensive slang and circumlocution. It is literal to an extreme in preserving the meanings of words, and this at points causes it to lose accuracy in preserving their registers and thus the tone of the poem as a whole.

¹⁸ I chose not to underline the phrase “who can’t get it up” because, while it is dysphemistic slang, it does not include any obscene words.

The register of Poem 37 varies more than that of 16. In the Latin version, Catullus shows his strength by opening with obscenity and threats, but avoids it when discussing the *puella* and Egnatius. His long, offensive—but not profane—description of Egnatius at the end of the poem is just as powerful as his explicit moments, and it reveals Catullus’s skill at wielding obscenity as a literary device. Abstinence from obscenity reveals the speaker’s skill and contrasts him with the witless (*insulsi*) tent-mates. How do modern translators interpret this in their versions of 37?

Catullus’s original Latin reads:

<i>Salax taberna vosque contubernales,</i>	1
<i>a pilleatis nona fratribus pila,</i>	
<i>solis putatis esse mentulas vobis,</i>	
<i>solis licere quidquid est puellarum</i>	
<i>confutuere et putare ceteros hircos?</i>	5
<i>an, continenter quod sedetis insulsi</i>	
<i>centum an ducenti, non putatis ausurum</i>	
<i>me una ducentos irrumare sessores?</i>	
<i>atqui putate: namque totius vobis</i>	
<i>frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam.</i>	10
<i>puella nam mi, quae meo sinu fugit,</i>	
<i>amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla,</i>	
<i>pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata,</i>	
<i>consedit istic. hanc boni beatique</i>	
<i>omnes amatis, et quidem, quod indignum est,</i>	15
<i>omnes pusilli et semitarii moechi:</i>	
<i>tu praeter omnes une de capillatis,</i>	
<i>cuniculosae Celtiberiae fili,</i>	
<i>Egnati, opaca quem bonum facit barba</i>	
<i>et dens Hibera defricatus urina.</i>	20

Myers and Ormsby translate the poem thus:

You barflies of that crummy tavern, who
 Raise so much hell, you’re nine short posts from where
 The brothers Castor, Pollux, get their due,
 Do you think, fatheads, only you can bare
 Your **pricks** and **screw** the girls, and all
 The rest of us are only goats, because
 Your silly clique, swelled up with nasty gall,
 Hangs out together, a loud, stupid force

Of one or two hundred? You think I now
 Won't dare to **fuck** you all and fix the score?
 Just sit there in a row! You'll also soon see how
 I scrawl your **peckers** on the tavern door!
 My girl, who runs from my embrace, has left
 Me flat: who else would be insane as I,
 Who fought for her so hard—and am bereft?
 She hangs around your joint and is not shy,
 But sleeps with pimps who crawl the streets at night,
 And screws for all your gang, both low and high,
 Ignatius worst of all. It's his delight
 To brag of rabbity Spanish forbears; he
 Thinks that a bushy beard, teeth brushed with piss
 Make him a man of parts. Well, I agree,
 Of private parts, and what a prick is this!

Myers and Ormsby write in iambic pentameter using an ABAB rhyme scheme, which brings to mind the Shakespearean sonnet. Their language, while certainly not formal, is not quite as profane as Catullus's. They use "pricks" for *mentulas* and "screw" for *confutuere*, both coarse slang terms that border on obscene but are not quite so. They are vulgar and vernacular, but do not necessarily intend to offend to the same degree as profanities (for example, "Screw you!" can be seen as a lesser, watered-down version of "Fuck you!"). Unlike Catullus, Myers and Ormsby include both of these words in the same line, adding a punch to that specific part of the poem. For *irrumare*, Myers and Ormsby use "fuck," which is obscene but eliminates the oral aspect of the verb, as we see them do in their translation of 16. They choose "peckers" for *sopionibus*, a humorous euphemism for penis, which they appear to accept as the definition for the word. Overall, Myers and Ormsby downgrade the lexical register of Catullan obscenity in their translation of 37, using only one profanity in four opportunities and choosing euphemism and coarse slang for the other words.

Myers and Ormsby do, however, add some crude language where it does not occur in Catullus. They write that the *puella* "screws," using the same English verb (presumably for the

Latin *consedit*) as they do for *confutuere*. This does not bring obscenity per se into contact with the *puella*, but it brings the vocabulary of the *puella* into the same register as the vocabulary of the insult to the *contubernales*. Myers and Ormsby first decrease an obscenity to arrive at “screw,” and then they increase a euphemism to arrive at the same English word. They also use “sleep with” for *amare*, interpreting a word that is ambiguous in Latin, as is fitting when discussing the *puella*, as certainly sexual. Where Catullus creates a discrepancy between the levels of profanity he will use for the *puella* versus the *contubernales*, Myers and Ormsby do not follow suit.

Nor do they follow suit in the description of Egnatius. Myers and Ormsby add the final line, “Well, I agree/ Of private parts, and what a prick is this!” which seems to have no direct parallel in the Latin text. They add the notion of “private parts,” which does not exist in the original, for the purpose of a pun, and they specifically add the word “prick,” which they use for *mentulas* earlier in the poem. Myers and Ormsby translate *urina* as “piss,” converting to coarse slang a word that is a technical term in Latin and has a clear English derivative available of the same register and meaning (“urine”).¹⁹ Thus, their descriptions of both the *puella* and of Egnatius, while not obscene, are on the same vulgar register as the insults against the *contubernales*. Myers and Ormsby spare no one in their translation, despite softening all but one of the profanities.

We can compare Lee’s translation:

¹⁹ While it did not originate as obscenity, as late as 1989 “piss” bordered between the profane and the simply coarse. Rawson 1989 writes, “Today, the word is still debarred from most formal writings, though it is heard often enough...” (302). Spears 1981, however, writes that “In some parts of the English-speaking world this term can be used in polite conversation without giving offense,” and Partridge 1984 agrees that “it has, since ca. 1960, been regaining very fair respectability.” J. Green 2011 mentions no vulgar connotations.

Randy Inn and all you ‘Inn-attendants,’
 Ninth pillar from the Brothers with Felt Hats,
 D’you reckon you’re the only ones with **tools**,
 The only ones allowed to **fuck** the girls
 And that the rest of us are stinking goats?
 Or, since you clots are sitting in a queue
 One or two hundred strong, d’you think I would
 Dare **stuff** two hundred sitting tenants at once?
 Well, think again. For I shall scrawl the Inn’s
 Whole frontage for you with **phallic graffiti**—
 Because a girl who ran from my embrace,
 Loved by me as no other will be loved,
 For whom a great war has been fought by me,
 Has settled here. With her the good and great
 Are all in love and what’s more (shame upon her!)
 All the shoddy backstreet adulterers.
 You above all, ace of the longhaired mob,
 A son of rabbit-ridden Celtiberia,
 Egnatius, whom a shady beard upgrades
 And teeth rubbed down with Iberian urine.

Lee reduces *mentulas* to the euphemism “tools,” but he keeps the same register for *confutuere*, translating it as “fuck.” This creates a contrast in obscenity level within the same sentence, between the action and the instrument used to undertake that action. For *irrumare*, Lee provides “stuff,” a euphemism that yet again removes the mouth from the meaning of the verb. He translates *sopionibus* as “phallic graffiti,” a technical term that is so precise in meaning and formal in tone as to seem almost artificial. Although we are not certain what valence the Latin word had, the threat of defacement loses some of its force when described in such tidy terms.

Lee also uses a technical term to close the poem, “urine” for *urina*, a derivate English word. He translates *amatis* as “are all in love,” providing a soft rendering of the verb. While not inaccurate—*amare* means “to love”—Lee ignores its function as a likely euphemism for sex. Thus, he mirrors Catullus’s choice to avoid obscenity around the *puella* and Egnatius, but he reduces the profanity level of the poem overall, so this contrast is not as pronounced.

Balmer translates 37 (which she labels 6) thus:

Keeping Bad Company

Up for It Inn and its uppity inn-mates,
nine down from the sign of Castor and Pollux,
what makes you think you alone have the **bollocks**,
sole rights to **fuck** any old girl you fancy
and then call the rest of us goat-like, randy?
Or now that you are lined up like bar-room fools,
a hundred or two, do you think I won't wait
to **stuff** you in centuplicate, one sitting?
Well, think on: believe me, I will ball you all,
daub your **pricks** on every spare inch of wall.
For my girl has left me, evades my embrace—
the one loved more than any other could be,
over whom I have fought long wars, and many—
to set up stall there. Now, she's loved by all: great
and good, men of wealth, even—to her disgrace—
weaklings, wastrels, such low-life inferiors;
and above all by you, most hirsute of youths,
rabbit-runt from rabbit-rich Iberia,
Egnatius, of Celtica Cuniculous,
bewhiskered, bearded, oh so suave and refined,
teeth bleached white by your finest Spanish urine.

Balmer takes a very similar approach to Lee. She reduces *mentulas* to the coarse slang “bollocks,” making it part of a vernacular phrase in which “bollocks” comes to mean “gall” (equivalent to “balls” in American English, i.e., “He has the balls/bollocks to do such a thing?”).²⁰ Like Lee, she keeps the obscene register for *confutuere* and translates it “fuck,” producing the same discrepancy in levels of profanity between the two words in that sentence. Balmer also uses “stuff” for *irrumare*, like Lee, pairing it with “centuplicate,” an uncommon, formal English word that marks a sudden, humorous shift in tone from “stuff” just two words earlier. This speaker oscillates between lexical registers, just not in all the same places as Catullus’s speaker. Balmer uses “pricks” for *sopionibus*, accepting the definition of penis and

²⁰ *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. “bollock, n. and adj.”

translating it into vulgar slang. Yet she then translates *amatis* as “she’s loved by all,” coming very close to an ambiguous reading of *amare*, as is present in the Latin text, and switching from an active verb with the men as the subject to a passive verb with the *puella* as the subject. Balmer also ends the poem with “urine” for *urina*. Thus, like Lee, Balmer reduces the overall obscenity of 37, so that the descriptions of the *puella* and Egnatius do not stand out as much in their lack of explicit language.

Green holds a little bit more true to the obscenity Catullus writes:

Public house, bordello, and you, its habitués,
nine doors along from the felt-hatted Brethren—
you think your crowd the only ones with **cocks**, then?
the one lot licensed to **fuck** all the girlies,
while the rest of us are goats? Because there’s one,
or maybe two, hundred of you dumbass fuckwits
sitting lined up here, you really supposed I wouldn’t
dare **fill** two hundred **cocksucking** squatters’ **mouths**?
Well, think again. *And* I’ll cover the whole frontage
of your damn tavern with **obscene graffiti**—
for that girl of mine, now fled from my embraces,
once loved by me as none shall be, ever again,
for whose dear sake I fought great wars, now has
taken up residence here. All you smart and wealthy
buzzflies are mad for her, and so (to her discredit)
is every petty adulterer from the backstreets,
and you above all, king of the long-haired ponces,
product of Spain with all its teeming rabbits,
Egnatius, aping class with your thick, black beard and
flashing teeth scrubbed white with Spanish urine.

Green preserves the profanity of *mentulas* and *confutuere*. For *irrumare*, he translates “fill...mouths,” and he adds the adjective “cocksucking.” This comes closest of all the translations so far to conveying the accurate meaning of the verb, complete with mention of mouths; however, the descriptor “cocksucking” lends some of the agency of the action to the recipients of the *irrumatio*. Green follows Lee’s choice in turning *sopionibus* into a technical

term, “obscene graffiti,” but he distinguishes himself from the other translators in not accepting any specific definition of “penis”; rather, he assumes only the obscenity of the drawings. Like Myers and Ormsby, Green includes additional coarse language in his English translation that does not exist in the Latin version: he calls the *contubernales* “dumbass fuckwits,” a loose translation of *insulsi*, and he calls the inn a “damn tavern.”

Green does, however, preserve the separation between the *puella* and Egnatius and the rest of the poem, adhering closely to Catullus’s distinction in usage of obscenity. He writes, “All you smart and wealthy/ buzzflies are mad for her,” giving *amatis* an innocuous meaning absent of any sexuality, and creating an amusing image of flies buzzing around a girl, “mad” for her. The additional obscenity — “dumbass fuckwits” — and lively images — “king of the long-haired ponces” — lend Green’s speaker a playful persona and the poem a lighter tone, despite its explicit language.

Gallagher translates 37 as follows:

And you slaves of the whore taverns, nine pillars
down from the Freedom Brothers in funny hats,
do you think only of your **cock**?
And that for a price, anyone can **be your little girl**?
Are the rest of us old goats, repressed and rotting?
Perhaps one or two hundred of you sit in line,
none knowing that I have the audacity to **plug** each
tasteless **mouth with my cock** while you sit there gaping.
And then with my **cock**, as you sit in stupor,
I will stain the front of your tavern completely.
For my girl, who just left my lap,
loved as none will ever love,
left me for a life of fist fucking.
A lover once soft and of beauty,
now anyone’s, anybody’s, any
indecent slime who fucks in dark alleys.
You’re the best, you hairy-assed
Celtiberian rabbit, Egnatius —
your dark beard is made soft

from brushing your teeth with Spanish piss.

Gallagher's translation goes furthest in its dysphemism, standing opposite to Lee and Myers and Ormsby, who reduce obscenity as well as the distinction between the *puella*/Egnatius and the *contubernales*. He uses the English word "cock" three times: once as a translation for *mentulas* (preserving meaning and obscene register, but changing a plural form to a singular), once as part of the translation of *irrumare*, and once for *sopionibus*. In between these profanities, however, is a curious euphemism. Gallagher softens *confutuere*. While most of our other translators provide "fuck," keeping the obscenity intact, Gallagher uses "be your little girl." He reverses the subject and object in the sentence: rather than asking if the tent-mates think they can fuck any girl they want, he asks if any woman can be the little girl of the tent-mates. He return to the explicit immediately, translating *irrumare* as "plug...mouth with my cock," the most accurate translation with regards to both definition and lexical register.

He then moves into dysphemism with the image of the speaker defacing the tavern. Gallagher writes, "And then with my cock, as you sit in stupor./ I will stain the front of your tavern completely." Here, Gallagher takes the idea of phallic graffiti much further than the other translators have: rather than simply drawing images of penises on the front of the inn, the speaker threatens to ejaculate on it. Gallagher interprets *sopionibus* as the speaker's penis itself, instead of depictions of a phallus.

He continues this high level of profanity when discussing the *puella*, writing that she just left his lap (most others provide "embrace") for a "life of fist-fucking" and consorts with the type of man who "fucks in dark alleys."²¹ Gallagher's *puella* is not sacred or safe from the explicit; in

²¹ Gallagher could be alluding here to the *quadriuis* of Poem 58. He takes a literal approach to translating the allusive *glubit* there, however, providing "peeling back the skin."

fact, she engages in sexual behaviors that are deviant and kinky, which take place literally outside the bounds of normal sexual activity. Egnatius, while he is spared such a severe degree of obscenity, is described as “hairy-assed” and brushes his teeth with “piss” rather than urine. Gallagher uses dysphemism in his translation to create a constant tone of profanity that pervades the poem and does not distinguish between victims. His speaker is aggressive and mean, just as the speaker of Gallagher’s 16.

Kline takes a different approach:

Free for All: to the Regulars and Egnatius

Lecherous tavern, and you its regulars,
nine pillars along from the Twins’ pillars,
do you think you’re the only ones with **cocks**,
the only ones who’re allowed to **trouble**
young girls, and consider the rest of us goats?
Or, because a hundred or two of you sit in a row, you,
dullards, that I daren’t **bugger** two hundred together?
Think on: I’ll **draw all over** the front
of the tavern with your leavings.
Because my girl, who’s left my arms,
whom I loved as no other girl’s ever been loved,
for whom so many great battles were fought,
is there. You, all the rich and the fortunate, love her,
and, what’s so shameful, it’s true, all the lesser ones,
all the adulterous frequenters of by-ways:
you, above all, one of the hairy ones,
rabbit-faced offspring of Spain,
Egnatius. Whom a shadowy beard improves,
and teeth scrubbed with Iberian piss.

Kline’s translation returns to a more euphemizing approach; the only obscene word he uses is “cocks” for *mentulas*. He greatly softens *confutuere* to “trouble,” and uses the coarse slang “bugger” for *irrumare*. Like Green, Kline leaves out any interpretation of the definition of *sopionibus*, but he goes even further to omit any idea of profane graffiti; he describes simply

unspecified drawings. Egnatius and the *puella* are spared from explicit language, but so is the rest of the poem.

The Wikisource translation is true to Catullus's obscenity, but it does not use dysphemism as Gallagher does. As in the case of Poem 16, the two online translations are not unified in their interpretation of Catullan obscenity:

Lustful tavern and you comrades-in-arms,
the ninth column from the Temple of Castor and Pollux,
do you think that to you alone there are **dicks**,
that you alone are permitted to **fuck all at once** whatever number of girls,
and to think everyone else goats?
Or can it be that because one hundred (or two hundred?) of you idiots sit in
an unbroken line,
you do not think I would dare to **make** all two hundred of you lazy asses
suck my dick!
Know this: I will plaster the exterior of your entire tavern with **drawings of
cocks**.
Because my girl, who fled my lap,
having been loved as much as no other will ever be loved,
for whom by me great wars were fought,
sits together with them in that place. This one you fine and well-to-do
fellows, all of you, love, and – which is undeserved indeed – all small-time
thugs and alleyway adulterers;
Above all others, you, one of the long-hairedes,
son of your bunny-filled borderlands,
Egnatius, whom a dark beard
and teeth scoured with Spanish piss make a fine gent.

Wikisource is the only translation to attempt to translate the *con-* prefix of *confutuere*, which it renders as “fuck all at once.” It provides “dicks” for *mentulas* and “make...suck my dick” for *irrumare*, both of which preserve the profanity of the original, although the agency of the *irrumator* is split: the subject does the forcing, but the objects still do the sucking. “Drawings of cocks” for *sopionibus* is both explicit and literal in meaning (assuming the meaning “penis”). Wikisource sticks most closely of all the translations to Catullus's obscenity, providing profane English words in all four cases of Latin profanity, and only those four cases. The language

remains clean around Egnatius and the *puella*. Wikisource provides “all of you love” for *amatis*, again very literal, but missing the sexual innuendo that exists in the Latin text. The only difference is the increase in register from *urina* to “piss.” Wikisource is again very literal, creating a speaker without a clear personality whose voice is disjointed.

Across our translations of 37, a few patterns emerge. The majority of translators minimize the obscenity across the board, so their treatment of Egnatius and the *puella*, while not profane, does not differ from the rest of the poem. Myers and Ormsby, Lee, Balmer, and Kline take this approach. Their speakers are similar to the Catullan speaker in tone: they insult, but they do so in a clever way. Gallagher exaggerates profanity throughout the poem, subjecting Egnatius and the *puella* to explicit language, unlike Catullus, and also eliminating the difference in lexical register between their descriptions and the language used around the tent-mates. This gives Gallagher’s speaker an angrier and more aggressive persona. Green and Wikisource, on the other hand, adhere closely to Catullan usage, thus preserving the contrast in profane versus acceptable from the original Latin text. Green’s speaker is playful in his images and shifts in lexical register, while Wikisource’s is so focused on the literal that his voice is lost.

Do these translators follow the same strategies in dealing with Poem 97? Lambert discusses translation of 97 in his 1993 article, “Catullus 97: Aemilius is a Real Stinker.” He believes “translations of the poem, predictably, obscure the obscenity in misleading euphemism or exaggerate it with perverse relish; few make any attempt to come to grips with what Catullus actually says.”²² Catullus, as we have seen, maintains a high level of obscenity throughout, emphasized by the triple repetition of *culus* and the explicit language at the beginning and end of the poem:

²² Lambert 1993, 113.

Non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putavi 1
*utrumne os an **culum** olfacerem Aemilio.*
nilo mundius hoc, nihiloque immundius illud,
*verum etiam **culus** mundior et melior:*
nam sine dentibus est. hoc dentis sesquipedalis, 5
gingivas vero ploxeni habet veteris,
praeterea rictum qualem diffissus in aestu
*meientis mulae **cunnus** habere solet.*
*hic **futu**it multas et se facit esse venustum,*
et non pistrino traditur atque asino? 10
quem si qua attingit, non illam posse putemus
*aegroti **culum** lingere carnificis?*

Myers and Ormsby read 97 as follows:

I couldn't tell the difference worth a straw,
 I swear it, whether I sniffed head or **tail**
 Of that Aemilius; he would overawe
 Me either way, but truly now I fail
 To find his **ass** so bad: it has no teeth,
 While his mouth's full of choppers. And their shape!
 Their length is half a yard, with gums beneath
 Like broken wagon frames. They yawn and gape,
 The open **cunts** of pissing mules in heat.²³
 How well he **screws**, how much his charm and stink
 Would suit a slave! The babe he fucks would eat
 The rotting **ass hole** of a dying hangman fink.

Myers and Ormsby do not use the same word for their three translations of *culus*; rather, they progress from acceptable to obscene, beginning with the euphemism “tail,”²⁴ following with the profane “ass,” and ending with the profane and more specific “ass hole.” They add the idea that the speaker “fail[s] to find his ass so bad”; in the Latin poem, the *culus* is quite bad, but it is still

²³ Myers and Ormsby produce one of the two translations that reads *in aestu* as “in heat” rather than “in the heat/summer.” The *TLL* does not suggest any meaning of *aestus* as a state of sexual arousal for animals, though it can be used to describe “burning” love; its only special animal-related meaning is rare and refers to physical body temperature (*TLL* s.v. *aestus* 1.0.1118.60).

²⁴ Cornish’s 1913 translation, included in the 1968 Loeb, also uses “head” and “tail” for *os* and *culus*, which Lambert remarks “conjure[s] up the beginning of a cricket match” (1993, 113).

better than the filthy mouth because it lacks teeth. Myers and Ormsby here lessen the disgust at both the mouth and the anus with this line.

The translators do not always adhere to Catullus's usage of obscenity, but neither do they stick to a single pattern of reducing or enhancing it. Myers and Ormsby choose the English derivative "cunt" for *cunnus*, which preserves the obscenity, but they translate *meientis*, a technical term, as "pissing," coarse slang. They downgrade *futuit* to "screw," but add an additional obscenity by translating *atingit* as "fucks" (and switching the subject of the verb from the girl to Aemilius). Thus, Myers and Ormsby have no aversion to using the English word "fuck," they just choose to place it in a different context. Myers and Ormsby's Aemilius does not necessarily consider himself charming; the anonymous narrator only remarks that "his charm and stink/ Would suit a slave!" Thus, the speaker's angry rant is not so much a consequence of Aemilius's assertion as it is in the Latin. Myers and Ormsby's speaker, therefore, is less angry and more casual about the whole matter; this is emphasized by the choice, again, to write in iambic pentameter and use an ABAB rhyme scheme. The Latin text's *ita me di ament* is reduced to the playful, slangy "I couldn't tell the difference worth a straw," and the speaker refers to Aemilius's teeth as "choppers." Nevertheless, the increasingly profane translations of *culus* contribute to the ascending tricolon of images, forcing the reader to zoom in from an image of a tail, to an ass, to an ass hole.

Lee translates 97:

I thought (so help me Gods!) it made no difference
Whether I smelt Aemilius' mouth or **arsehole**,
One being no cleaner, the other no filthier.
But in fact the **arsehole**'s cleaner and kinder:
It has no teeth. The mouth has teeth half-a-yard long
And gums like an ancient wagon-chassis.
Moreover when it opens up it's like the **cunt**

Of a peeing mule dehiscent in a heat-wave.
And he **fucks** many girls and fancies himself a charmer
And isn't sent down to the mill and its moke?
Wouldn't one think that any woman who touched *him*
Could lick the **arsehole** of a sick hangman?

Unlike Myers and Ormsby, Lee uses the same translation, “arsehole,” for all occurrences of *culus*, adhering to Catullus’s anaphora and maintaining a high level of explicit language from start to finish.²⁵ He translates “cunt” for *cunnus* and “fucks” for *fuit*, both accurate in terms of lexical register and definition. Nevertheless, he translates *diffissus* as “dehiscent,” a Latinate word that is very technical and formal, and *ploxeni...veteris* as “ancient wagon-chassis,” also formal. Lambert agrees, writing that Lee’s translation “preserves the poetic shape of the original and is accurate and consistent: it has one flaw. The pretentiously Latinate ‘dehiscent’ (8)...” (1993, 114). Thus, while Lee closely follows the original Latin pattern of obscenity, his translation of the other words surrounding the profanity creates a more formal tone.

Balmer follows the Latin poem as well (69 in her edition):

Aemilius’ Mouth (and Arse)

I thought, so help me God, that I couldn’t tell
if Aemilius’ mouth or **arse** made that smell;
for mouth, arse, who can separate foul from clean—
but on balance, yes, the **arse** is less obscene
since it lacks teeth. His mouth’s are sesquipedal,
poking out of gapped gums, spokes on rotted wheel,
besides, it grins like a **cunt**, split, fissured
like a mule peeing at the height of summer.
Still he **fucks** them all, seems irresistible
(for which he should do donkey-work on treadmill).
As for the women, let’s try to define them:
they would lick the **arse** of diarrhoed hangman.

²⁵ “Arse” is actually the original term whence the U.S. “ass” derives; the latter is simply a dialectic pronunciation (*OED*, 1st ed., s.v. “ass, n.2.”)

Balmer similarly uses “arse” for all three translations, but she adds an extra occurrence, in 1.3, where *culus* does not occur in the original Latin text. In the final line, she translates *aegroti* as “diarrhoed,” using a technical term to add vivid detail to the closing image and render it somehow even more disgusting. Like Lee, she translates “cunt” and “fucks.” Like Myers and Ormsby, however, she does not emphasize Aemilius’s characterization of himself as charming; rather, the narrator seems to agree that he “seems irresistible.” Thus, although Balmer adheres closely to the obscene register throughout the poem, she does not capture its original function as a vehement response to Aemilius’s bragging.

Green translates as follows:

I didn’t, god help me, think it mattered whether
I put my nose to Aemilius’ mouth or **ass**,
neither being cleaner or dirtier than the other;
but his **ass** in fact is cleaner, not so crass—
no teeth, for starters. His mouth’s a cemetery inside:
headstone grinders, gums like old wagon-leather.
What’s worse, that grin of his yawns about as wide
as a mule’s **cunt** splits for pissing in hot weather,
and he **screws** all the girls, thinks he’s got charm and class—
the mill wheel’s the place for him, let him go grind
grain, forget pussy! Any woman who makes a pass
at *him* would lick a sick hangman’s rank **behind**.

Instead of keeping a steady tone, like Balmer and Lee, or emphasizing the ascending tricolon like Myers and Ormsby, Green creates a descending tricolon by translating the first two instances of *culus* as “ass,” but the last as “behind.” Like Myers and Ormsby, Green reduces *fuit* to “screws,” but it is the final euphemism that makes the most impact. He adds in “pussy,” coarse slang with no counterpart in the Latin text that here lessens the women with whom Aemilius sleeps. In the next and last sentence, however, the woman in question would not lick an ass, but only a “behind.” He adds to the softening by translating *atingit* as “makes a pass,” eliminating

the idea of physical touching or sexuality. The powerful final image is rendered less powerful when Green closes with a euphemism.

Gallagher also declines to use obscenity for all of his translations of *culus*, but he chooses a technical term rather than a simple euphemism:

How foolish of me to forget that whether you put it in
Aemilius' mouth or **colon**, it reeks.
It doesn't matter whether this is cleaner or that is dirtier.
Truthfully, his **colon** is always cleaner and smoother
because it doesn't have teeth. The teeth in his mouth are a foot
and a half long from his gums which are the color of old wood,
not to mention what kind of disgusting piss he takes in
all summer with his wide-open mouth on the **pussy** of a mule.
He **fucks** many of them and he can be charming,
and not just in the barn with the asses and traitors.
So if anyone is able to kiss him, then shouldn't she be able
to lick the diseased **ass** of an executioner?

Gallagher translates *olfacerem* as “put it in” instead of “smell.” This implies penetrative sex from the outset, a topic Catullus specifically leaves out of 97 so the speaker does not have to penetrate such dirty orifices. Gallagher ends the poem with “ass,” but his first two translations of *culus* are “colon,” a technical term for the lower intestine that stands in for the asshole by metonymy here. To what effect? As the locus of digestion, the colon contains excrement, so Gallagher emphasizes Aemilius's filth without using an explicit word. Thus, for the mouth to be considered dirtier here, it must be dirtier than the colon, rather than just the anus. When he follows that “truthfully, the colon is always cleaner and smoother,” than the mouth, this makes the mouth even filthier. Thus, while Gallagher replaces two obscenities with two technical terms, he does not lessen the crudity of the image.

This is true also in his rendering of the mule image. Although Gallagher lessens the obscenity of *cunnus* by providing “pussy” rather than “cunt,” he takes the entire simile to new

extremes. Where Catullus compares Aemilius's gaping mouth to the genitalia of a urinating mule, Gallagher changes this to describe Aemilius's mouth gaping around the genitalia of a urinating mule. What was previously an insult via metaphor has become a more horrible insult via accusation. Aemilius can be viewed in comparison to Egnatius here, as he literally has urine inside his mouth.

In the following sentence, Gallagher turns what is a question in Latin—*hic futuit multas et se facit esse venustum,/ et non pistrino traditur atque asino?*—into a statement in English—“He fucks many of them and he can be charming,/ and not just in the barn with the asses and traitors.” This also changes the meaning of the sentence: whereas, in Catullus, the speaker is surprised that Aemilius is not in the mill as punishment, Gallagher's speaker asserts that Aemilius is in the mill among other criminals. While the level of profanity does not remain the same throughout Gallagher's version of the poem, the vulgarity and severity of the images increases. He seems to conform to Lambert's belief that some translators of 97 “exaggerate [the obscenity of the poem] with perverse relish” (1993, 113).

Wikisource does not translate Poem 97. This may partially be due to its omission from the old AP Latin curriculum, and likely from many high school Latin curricula, which guide some of the content of Wikisource. As recently as 2012, O'Bryhim attributed the lack of study on 97 to its “coarse subject matter.”²⁶

Kline, then, is our last translator, and he renders 97 as follows:

Disgusting: to Aemilius

I did not (may the gods love me) think it mattered,
whether I might be smelling Aemilius's mouth or **arse**.
The one's no cleaner, the other's no dirtier,

²⁶ Lambert 1993 and Forsyth 1979 agree.

in fact his **arse** is both cleaner and nicer:
since it's no teeth. Indeed, the other has
foot long teeth, gums like an old box-cart,
and jaws that usually gape like the open
cunt of a pissing mule in heat.
He **fucks** lots of women, and makes himself out
to be charming, and isn't set to the mill with the ass?
Shouldn't we think, of any girl touching him,
she's capable of licking a foul hangman's **arse**?

Kline uses the same words for Catullus's obscenities as Balmer does, remaining constant in translations of *culus* and including Aemilius's self-image of charm. He translates *aegroti* in the final line as "foul," which indicates disgust while removing the idea of actual sickness or illness. Otherwise, Kline's translation is literal, and the persona of the speaker closely mirrors that of Catullus's.

Overall, the English translations of 97's obscenity are much closer to one another than those of 16 and 37. This is partially because *culus* is used for three out of the five occurrences of profanity, allowing for fewer different obscene words. In addition, the three explicit Latin words in 97—*culus*, *cunnus*, and *fuit*—all have English equivalents, while *irrumo* does not.

Translators of 97 are free from the struggle of conveying the meaning of a word that does not exist in the target language. Myers and Ormsby use euphemism early in the poem for *culus* to emphasize the ascending tricolon, while Green uses it at the end to create a descending tricolon. Balmer, Lee, and Kline stay true to the Catullan pattern of obscenity, writing at a uniformly high level of profanity. Gallagher uses euphemism to create a dirtier mouth for Aemilius, even when the words used are cleaner.

None of these modern adaptations of a few of Catullus's most profane poems follow the author's pattern of obscenity in its entirety. Rather, the translators assert their perspectives on the text by using their unique vocabularies and tones to make the poems their own.

Conclusion

Did the loosening of the norms of publishable language lead us to translations of Catullus that are closer to the original than their predecessors? In many cases, they are closer; in others, less so. Nevertheless, none of the versions examined fully capture the original. Fitzgerald's proclamation that Catullan obscenity is now "positively relished, even occasionally enhanced" might be true—but this pleasure and exaggeration has not necessarily led to more accurate translations, nor ones that come closer to capturing the sense of the Latin text.¹ Meanwhile, more freedom in language did not lead to a straight progression from euphemism to dysphemism, nor from euphemism to complete accuracy in translation of obscenity; rather, it inspired a broad range of responses that includes all three. The same is true for new media: online translations are no more vulgar than those in books, and, in the case of Wikisource and Kline, they are even more conservative than some printed versions.

As I discuss in Chapter 1, Catullus uses obscenity in a meticulous way that reveals his cleverness and skill as a writer. He switches deftly between lexical registers at strategic points within each poem. In 16, Catullus uses repetitive profanity at the opening and close to create a cyclical effect, pointedly keeping it away from his defense of his poem's wit and charm. He employs explicit language of penetration to assert his virility in response to Furius and Aurelius's accusations of effeminacy. In 37, Catullus opens with a flurry of profanity against the men who frequent the tavern, but he slows down and spares the *puella* and Egnatius from obscene language, using creative descriptions to discuss them in a more acceptable register. 97 provides a

¹ Fitzgerald 1995, 60n3; cf. Roberts 2008, 305.

consistent onslaught of explicit language and imagery, culminating in a closing image that aligns the speaker with the reader in their disgust at Aemilius.

How do different translators handle these poems and the obscenity within them? To what degree are they successful in capturing Catullus? Lawrence Venuti's discussion of the dichotomy between foreignizing and domesticating translation provides a helpful lens through which to examine these adaptations of Catullus and determine the ways in which they are and are not successful.² The distinction he draws between foreignizing translations—those that bring the reader closer to the source text and culture—and domesticating—those that bring the texts closer to the target culture—appears as a dividing line between Catullus translations.

The culture of Ancient Rome, however, is inaccessible to modern readers in that it no longer exists and there are no extant members of its society. No native Latin speakers can serve as counterparts to our native English-speaking translators. A completely foreignizing translation, then, might be impossible. If there is still a body of Latin words whose meanings scholars cannot puzzle out after centuries of study, how can one consider oneself literate enough in the source language to create a translation that is sufficiently foreignizing? Does it even make sense to work towards a foreignizing translation when any understanding of the source culture is inherently colored by the ethnocentric perspective of modern scholarship?³

Many translators take a different approach, aiming for a translation that reads naturally and fluidly in the target language. Venuti identifies a dichotomy between fluency and lack thereof. As he writes in his opening to *The Translator's Invisibility*, "The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or

² Cf. Venuti 1995, building on Schleiermacher 1963.

³ Cf. Venuti 1995.

meaning of the foreign text.”⁴ Fluency refers to the degree of naturalness of the sound of a text as perceived by a native speaker of a language. The opposite of the fluent translation is often referred to as “translation-ese”: it may convey to the audience that the translator understands the text—and can thus provide a literal version that is evidently derivative from a source text. Although fluency and domesticity in translation are not equivalent terms, they often go hand in hand: something that is familiar to a reader of the target culture seems to read more easily and fluently. At the same time, a text that is foreignizing is often not fluent. It is important to remember that these two dichotomies—fluent/not fluent and domesticating/foreignizing—are not stages of a Whiggish progression from the Victorian era to the present. As our translations show, there is not necessarily an evolution from older/domesticating to newer/foreignizing, and we have contemporary translations that are far from fluent.⁵ Rather, the translators’ purposes and target audiences often dictate which paths they choose to take.

Venuti contends that a fluid translation leads to an invisible translator and thus a closer relationship to the original text. Yet, as some of our translations have shown, fluency alone can

⁴ Venuti 1995, 2.

⁵ The first book-length translations of Catullus were published around 1800, in an era where “Fluent, domesticating translation was valorized in accordance with bourgeois moral and literary values, and a notable effort of resistance through a foreignizing method was decisively displaced” (Venuti 1995, 98). Yet, these two early books differed in their translation strategies: Nott 1795 was foreignizing, while Lamb 1821 was domesticating. Though foreignizing translation was not in vogue, Nott argued for it thus: “When an ancient classic is translated, and explained, the work may be considered as forming a link in the chain of history: history should not be falsified, we ought therefore to translate him fairly; and when he gives us the manners of his own day, however disgusting to our sensations, and repugnant to our natures they may sometimes prove, we must not endeavour to conceal, or gloss them over, through a fastidious regard to delicacy” (x-xi). Yet, foreignizing as Nott may aspire to be, he still subjects his verses to some modern standard, translating the opening of 16, for example, as “I’ll treat you as ‘tis meet, I swear./ Lascivious monsters as ye are!” (discussed in the Introduction).

actually obscure both writer and text.⁶ To a reader who knows Catullus's Latin, the English versions end up revealing more about the translator than they do about the translated poem. Some of the translations, like Myers and Ormsby's, Lee's, Green's, and Wikisource's, facilitate the comparison themselves by providing facing Latin text; Gallagher provides the Latin text at the end of his volume. The inclusion of the original Latin adds a foreignizing element to what otherwise might be fairly domesticating translations: there is a visual reminder for the reader on each page that the English version he or she is reading is just a version. For the reader who is literate in Latin, this allows a direct conversation between original and translation; looking at both side by side, perhaps, illuminates the differences, which can reveal insight about the translator and his or her culture, as well as Catullus and Roman culture.

Domesticating and foreignizing methods interact with obscenity when it comes time for translators to decide how to render explicit words. Euphemism is domesticating in that it subjects the text to the moral standards of the target culture and censors it accordingly; Venuti discusses this in his chapter on Graves's translations of Suetonius, Caesar, and other historians in the late 1950s and 1960s. "It requires," Venuti writes, "...the inscription of the foreign text with values that are anachronistic and ethnocentric."⁷ Roberts even calls expurgation a form of castration, which, when applied to Catullus's work, renders the poet as emasculated as his own Atys.⁸ Use of dysphemism, however, is also domesticating. As Gallagher shows us, trying to preserve the obscene register and shock value of an ancient text for the modern reader—by translating, for

⁶ Cf. Venuti 1995, 60: "Fluency assumes a theory of language as communication that, in practice, manifests itself as a stress on immediate intelligibility and an avoidance of polysemy, or indeed any play of the signifier that erodes the coherence of the signified."

⁷ Venuti 1995, 31. See 68-81 for discussion of the adoption of domesticating perspectives on vulgarism in canonical texts.

⁸ Roberts 2008, 302.

example, *cinaede Furi* as “Furius who fucks children”—takes us just as far, if not further, from the original definition than euphemism does. The desire to translate the audience reaction to obscenity for the target culture is domesticating just as much as censoring it. Thus, translating obscenity literally might be the most foreignizing approach. For words, like *irrumare*, that have no English equivalent, attempting to convey both the meaning and the explicit nature of the word is a challenge for translators, and one that may bring the audience closer to understanding the source culture.

For obscenity to be fluent, it must fit in with the text in tone and meaning. Thus, clunky, four-word descriptions of what it means to *irrumare* (“put penis in mouth,” for example), read less fluidly than “fuck,” even though the latter does not convey the complete meaning of the word as well as the former. Fluent profanity is often domesticating, as it must fit intuitively and intelligibly into the target culture both in meaning and in lexical register; it should sound like it is coming from the mouth of a native speaker. While obscenity often operates against a smooth reading of a text—making a word or line surprising or jolting, perhaps causing the reader to stop and do a double take—the type of fluency we are discussing here refers more to the fluidity of the specific language (i.e., Does a sentence sound like English the way a native speaker would say it?) than to the smoothness of the language itself. For example, a sentence might read like perfect idiomatic English while still inserting a surprising expletive in the middle that causes the smoothness of reading to be interrupted: “I was walking home—Fuck, I forgot my keys.” This may inspire the translator who seeks some sort of fluent translation to avoid “translating” an obscenity from one language to another, choosing instead to substitute an explicit word in the target language that shares tone or register with the original word for one that shares meaning. Green does this when he translates *irrumabo* as “sucks to the pair of you!” Non-fluent profanity

translates meaning at the expense of tone, like the use of “sodomize” for *pedicabo* in Wikisource.

Now, with an eye to domesticating and foreignizing elements, as well as fluency, it pays to re-examine the English translations. How successfully did translators capture the elements of each poem, and how did their translation strategies affect the English versions they produced?

Myers and Ormsby tend to minimize obscenity in their translations, using both euphemism and dysphemism to increase and decrease the lexical registers of Latin words to arrive at a plateau of coarse slang that is neither profane nor pleasant. In 16, they capture the mood well by using modern English meter and rhyme and a loose, fluent translation. Nevertheless, they simplify and reduce the obscenity, eliminating any mention of oral rape or of accusations of softness, and thus removing the driving cause behind the poem. In 37, they again produce a fluid translation and mollify the profanity across the entire poem. In this case, however, Myers and Ormsby add coarse language around the *puella* and Egnatius; hence, they do not preserve the distinction Catullus creates between his verbal treatment of the tent-mates and that of the *puella* and Egnatius. In 97, Myers and Ormsby deviate from Catullus’s usage of profanity, but to strong effect: they create an ascending tricolon of images that builds up to the last line, rather than maintaining a steady level throughout the poem.

Overall, Myers and Ormsby eliminate the fluctuations of Catullus’s language to create a speaker who is more consistent—but often less Catullan. Their translations are loose and fluent, written in recognizably English poetic forms; thus, they tend to domesticate, modifying the original text in accordance with the literary standards of their target culture. This culture is the 1970s United States, as they indicate in the subtitle of their book, *Catullus: The Complete Poems*

for American Readers. By applying English schemes of meter and rhyme, Myers and Ormsby impose upon the text their ideas of what a poem is.⁹ They capture Catullus's choice to write in light poetic meter, even though a different meter conveys this sense of recognizable "poetry" in 1970 than it did in the first century BCE. In this way, Myers and Ormsby appeal to an educated but non-scholarly audience, making a text that is accessible, fun, and recognizable as poetry, even as it obscures the original poem in other ways. Myers and Ormsby's rendering of Poem 16 into an upbeat English sestet is so fluent that we almost do not notice that the Roman Catullus and his images of oral rape and alleged effeminacy have disappeared.

Lee, who published his translation 20 years after Myers and Ormsby, followed their example by forgoing obscenity in favor of coarse vernacular. Lee's version of 16 captures the Catullan fluctuations between lexical registers well, but not necessarily in the same order that the author does. He alternates between slang like "Poofter" and formal terminology like "lumbar sclerosis," even while he lowers the poem's obscenity overall by substituting coarse slang and circumlocution for profanity. As a result, he conveys Catullus's linguistic play well, if not authentically. In 37, as well, Lee preserves the contrast in lexical registers between addressees, but he reduces profanity on the whole, making the discrepancy less noticeable. He succeeds in preserving language, but less so in preserving tone. This is true of his 97, which adheres to the Latin pattern of obscenity, but uses more formal language around it, giving the poem a less vernacular tone. The crude "pissing mule" is described with the Latinate "dehiscent," for example. Catullus chooses to make switches between lexical registers in places where it is striking or humorous, and Lee prioritizes these playful changes in his own translations.

⁹ Cf. Venuti 1995, 17-39, who discusses imposition of ideas of form for a target culture.

This follows the philosophy of translation that Lee lays out in his introduction. He eschews loose, fluent translations like Myers and Ormsby's in favor of those that are more literal and compact, as he describes in his introduction.¹⁰ Lee is accordingly more literal and foreignizing in his interpretation, adding occasional formal language that sets a more staid tone and creates a speaker whose words are more recognizably translation. Block picks up on this in her review in *Classical World*, writing that "Lee has produced an accessible version of Catullus' poetry, without oversimplifying its tonal complexities."¹¹ Lee's poems are more foreignizing in that they combine words from different registers in a noticeable, often jarring manner, but they lose the persona of the Catullan speaker in the process. The result is fluent, but with occasional jarring moments caused by words that seem out of place in their formality.

The most foreignizing text, and the one most immediately recognizable as translation, is Wikisource. Its version of 16 does well at preserving the meanings of words, but it takes this to an extreme and loses the obscenity and tone of the poem along the way. It does the same with 37, which keeps literal definitions and provides a distinction in register between the language surrounding the tent-mates and that surrounding the *puella* and Egnatius. Yet the faith to accuracy of meaning creates a speaker without a clear voice or personality. Thus, where Catullus forces readers to choose between aligning themselves with the speakers or the addressees, taking on the role of either the attackers or the victims, Wikisource allows readers to exist more as external observers. Readers are not violated by the simple act of reading the poems, since they are not forced to plow through lines of obscene or offensive language. We cannot fully even examine this phenomenon, since Wikisource does not provide a translation of 97, the poem in

¹⁰ Lee 1990, xxiv-v. I discuss this further in my introduction.

¹¹ Block 1991, 136.

which readers must take the position of Aemilius's girlfriend fill their mouths with filth in order to read the poem aloud. This reveals another weakness of crowdsourced translation—it only exists where people decide it shall, and is subject to no guiding forces. Thus, Wikisource chooses exactly which poems to translate and which to ignore, which to subject to lengthy editing and re-editing processes and which to leave alone.

The medium of the Internet precludes the need for an editor in order to publish, and our two online translations diverge in their responses to this freedom. Wikisource provides as literal a translation as possible, prioritizing accuracy in definitions above all else. It is the only translation to provide “penis” and “phallus” as translations for *mentula*, “prostitute” for *lupa*, “harlot” for *scortum* or “sodomize” for *pedicare*.¹² The crowdsourced translation is neither more accurate nor more obscene; its vocabulary is one of the tamer of the bunch. It is also the most foreignizing, including a facing Latin text that allows the reader to easily match up translation with original. The resulting voice is disjointed and awkward, and the poems are far from fluent. Yet such an artificial sounding translation might be just what Wikisource's audience is looking for: after all, if readers do not like what they see, they can change it themselves. For the student looking for translation help, or the casual Googler, a literal translation with facing Latin text provides a helpful and digestible aid. Catullus's aims diverge from Wikisource's here: whatever audience he writes for, be it a circle of intellectual literati or the general Roman public, it almost certainly is not young students learning Latin for the first time. Thus, while Wikisource loses a lot of the flow and humor of Catullus, this may not be considered a “loss” for its readers.

Kline's translation, although it is also published online, is written by a single author and so may have a more unified philosophy of translation than Wikisource. His translation of 16

¹² Cf. Appendix.

removes the idea of oral rape and fails to capture Catullan obscenity overall, using explicit language only twice. He also uses euphemism freely in 37, going so far as to omit the presumed profanity of the graffiti on the tavern and remove any distinctions in lexical register by rendering the entire poem free from obscenity, save one mention of “cocks.” His translation of 97 is literal, but calls the hangman simply “foul,” removing the added disgust of illness.

In general, Kline is conservative in his language, choosing technical English equivalents like “pathic” and “catamite” for *pathice* and the harmless “droppings” for *cacata carta* in 36. The freedom the internet provides does not necessarily lead to dirtier mouths. Although he does not avoid obscenity altogether, Kline frequently uses euphemism and circumlocution to minimize profanity, flattening the peaks and valleys of Catullus’s lexical registers into one uniform vernacular tone. He thus uses a domesticating approach. Kline prioritizes legible, understandable translations that are easy for any reader to digest. His focus is not as much on capturing the nuances of specific verbs, but on producing a clean translation. His translations are not particularly fluent: they sound like English, but include awkward turns of phrase that reduce readability and make the reader miss the original. Catullus uses obscenity and euphemism in his poems as literary devices that interact with one another and combine to show the power of the speaker and the cleverness of the author. Kline, however, uses much more euphemism, creating an imbalance that skews the interplay between lexical registers. His speakers are less dynamic, and his translations are less about revealing the literary dexterity of the writer (or, in this case, translator). Kline aims to make as many translations as possible widely available and accessible, and he does so; his prolific website containing thousands of texts sits on the other end of the spectrum from Catullus’s *nugae*.

Like Kline, Balmer provides a domesticating translation by adding a vernacular tone. She reorders the poems in the corpus, giving them her own numbers and titles and dividing them into thematic sections; she also refrains from providing a Latin text. This highly domesticating approach fits with the philosophy of translation Balmer espouses in her introduction.¹³ She wants to capture as much as possible of the original text—taking risks where the author does, for example—while remaining sensitive to the modern audience’s reception of the translation. Balmer takes ownership of the corpus by rearranging the poems, and she even maintains editorial control over some of the content: by grouping certain poems together, Balmer influences how readers identify characters and themes. Balmer’s translations are fluent, and they do take risks, reassessing some structural aspects of the original poems. Balmer’s 16 is a progression from threat to punishment, rather than a cycle; she modifies the structure that Catullus originally chose. She forms an effective rhetorical strategy, although she also eliminates oral rape and thus fails to capture the potency of the threat. While this is an important emphasis of Catullus’s 16, it takes a lesser role in Balmer’s. Her version of 37 is readable and fluent, although it does not distinguish between tent-mates and *puella*/Egnatius in lexical register and fails to follow Catullan patterns of obscenity anywhere. Balmer’s 97 is also fluid and fun, but it eliminates Aemilius’s evaluation of himself as charming, thus re-situating the poem as an independent diatribe against Aemilius rather than an angry response to him.

Thus, Balmer eliminates the context and impetus behind these poems, where Catullus chooses to express them as the consequences of prior actions. Balmer omits oral rape, which is the consequence of accusation of effeminacy; she chooses not to single out Egnatius as an exception from obscenity, where in Catullus’s 37 he is treated uniquely as a result of his

¹³ Balmer 2004, 23. I discuss this in the introduction.

presumed actions towards the *puella*; she removes Aemilius's self-characterization, which Catullus provides as the reason behind the angry poem's existence. Balmer is an example of a fluent, domesticating translation that obscures the original more in overall meaning than in specific vocabulary; this stands in contrast to Lee, Kline, and Myers and Ormsby. Garrison's review of Balmer's translation recognizes this, writing that Balmer's renderings "can likewise be read as poems inspired by Catullus and can best be judged as translations if we allow the translator a degree of autonomy."¹⁴ Balmer writes for a general audience that does not want or miss a Latin text nearby.

Green combines approaches. His verses are fluent and lively; he holds fairly true to Catullus's uses of explicit language, although he does employ dysphemism for acceptable language and occasional euphemism. Green's version of 16, like most of the others, also ignores the oral rape, turning the threat into a colloquial one that implies little real sexual imagery. He uses circumlocution and coarse language for obscenity, thus not preserving Catullus's patterns of profanity; yet his slang and clever italics create a sarcastic, fun persona for the speaker. In 37, the speaker is likewise playful and lends the poem an upbeat tone, despite its explicit language. Green successfully preserves profanity in 37, as well as the discrepancy between registers for the different addressees. In 97, he uses dysphemism to create a descending tricolon and an interesting rhetorical effect, though he consequently fails to deliver the final punch that Catullus does.

Green uses domesticating elements such as modern slang and formatting (eg. italics) to give his speakers clear personas, yet he foreignizes the sound of his poems by writing in the original Catullan meters. His choices of lexical register do not follow a clear pattern or agenda,

¹⁴ Garrison 2005.

either in minimizing obscenity or in mapping close to the Catullan usage. Instead, Green simply uses the words he believes will be most effective, regardless of whether or not they are explicit. In his introduction, he identifies simultaneously a broad readership and one that is bilingual and can make use of his facing Latin text.¹⁵ Green writes for a broad audience, but not as broad as Kline's or Wikisource's. Green's readership is educated enough in or curious enough about Catullus to appreciate facing text and explanatory notes. As Ramírez de Verger and Zoltowski believe, Green aimed "to provide both Latinists and a wider audience for Catullus with a splendid appetizer, enough to whet the appetite for more."¹⁶ Green's readership will appreciate his translation as one that does not prioritize faithfulness to the original text, but rather a fluent, readable, domesticating translation that acknowledges the original and asserts the translator's own mastery of it.

Readers of Gallagher's translation, on the other hand, might question his mastery of the original text, since his translation strays so far from the literal meaning of Catullus's Latin. Gallagher employs dysphemism frequently and shockingly. In 16, Gallagher remains faithful to the original in translating Latin obscenity into English obscenity; however, he strays in meaning and imagery, creating a different tone and persona for the speaker, affecting the role of both the victims of the poem and of the readers. He adds so much profanity in 37 that he obliterates any variations in lexical register. The poem loses its humor and reads as straightforward, angry invective. Gallagher changes so much of the meaning, imagery, and tone of 97 that Aemilius is one of the only recognizable elements that remains. Nevertheless, Gallagher's translations all read fluently and intelligibly to a modern English audience.

¹⁵ Green 2005, xi-xii. I also discuss this in my introduction.

¹⁶ Ramírez de Verger and Zoltowski 2006; see also Sutherland 2006.

The definitions and images Gallagher changes combine to modify the personas of the speakers, as well as the tones and meanings of the poems entirely. Gallagher chooses to prioritize the obscene aspects of Catullus's poetry—not only words, but images as well—over preserving the tone and mood of the original. In 10.4, Catullus describes the *scortillum* he meets in the Forum as “*non sane inlepidum neque invenustum*”; Gallagher translates this as “immediately/uncharming and unfuckable.” Thus, he removes Catullus's playful litotes while at the same time turning a nonsexual, non-explicit description into one that is explicitly sexual. As I mention in the introduction, Gallagher's preface ends with the quote:

Catullus must saturate your tongue saliva. Let him lie with you softly, for he is as sensual and potent as sex. I have dressed his poems in a contemporary bluesy American English dialect. Strip my words away slowly with your lips and let him lie on your knees. Hold this manuscript in hand and feel all the fire and pain of being human.

Gallagher reads Catullus as inseparable from sex and feeling, and he attempts to infuse this within each translation, sparing no expense. In this way, he accomplishes the mission he sets out in his preface. Gallagher's affinity for exaggeration might be explained by Venuti's analysis of Nida and de Waard: “For Nida, accuracy in translation depends on generating an equivalent effect in the target-language culture: 'the receptors of a translation should comprehend the translated text to such an extent that they can understand how the original receptors must have understood the original text.'”¹⁷ Thus, Gallagher is the most domesticating translation in that he goes to extremes to translate emotion and shock value into terms a modern audience will understand. His dysphemizing mode of translation is partially a product of the modern lack of taboo around obscene language; it would not have been acceptable for Fordyce, for example, to

¹⁷ Venuti 1995, 22 quoting Nida and de Waard 1986, 36.

translate this way. On the other hand, Gallagher is the only one of the translators examined to take linguistic freedom to such an extreme. Although it is now permissible to dysphemize, it is not a universally common response. Gallagher, perhaps, wants to shock and offend modern readers with his language in a way that simple, straightforward profane words might not effect anymore. On the way, however, he creates a belligerent, aggressive speaker and inverts Catullus's meticulous ordering of explicit versus acceptable language.

The wide variety of strategies, styles, and approaches that surround the translation of Catullus into English is evidence of the difficulty of the task at hand. Simply loosening up the norms for publishable language has proved insufficient for providing adaptations that fully capture the original. Neither foreignizing nor domesticating strategies emerge as the "better" option for a translator of Catullus, although the latter is more utilized by the translations I discuss. Foreignizing translations may bring us closest to literal meaning while sacrificing comprehensibility for a modern audience, while domesticating translations lose Catullus's meticulous wordplay and exacting shifts between lexical registers.

Similarly, there is no single ideal spot on the spectrum of fluency; Gallagher's fluent translations lose meaning, while the unnatural-sounding Wikisource translations preserve meaning but ignore other narratological elements. Even the editor-free space of online translation, both crowdsourced and single-translator, is filled with euphemism; even the most obscene versions of poems miss something of Catullus by going even further in their dysphemism than the poet himself. We now have access to English versions that are exacting and literal, and those that are free; we can compare Latin and English side by side in hendecasyllables, or read the poems in a new arrangement with no evidence of the source

language to be found. Each translator of Catullus into modern English aims at a specific, new audience, one for whom Nott could not have written in 1795, nor Fordyce in 1961. The future of Catullan obscenity is in the hands of translators yet to come and the minds of audiences yet to exist.

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Appendix: Catullan obscenities and their English translations

Latin root	Line	Catullus	M&O ¹	Lee	Balmer	Green	Gallagher	Kline	Wikisource
<i>cacare</i>	23.20	<i>cacas</i>	shits	shit	shit	shit	shit	crap	
	36.1	<i>cacata</i>	shitty	crap	shit-smear	crappy	shit	droppings	shitted
	36.20	<i>cacata</i>	shitty	crap	shit-smear	crappy	shit	droppings	shitted
<i>cinaedus</i>	10.24	<i>cinaediorem</i>	bitch	bitch	slut	bitch	ass-up whore	shameless thing	rather slutty girl
	16.2	<i>cinaede</i>	gay	Poofter	dick-lover	faggot	who fucks children	sodomite	bottom-man
	25.1	<i>cinaede</i>	²	fairy	bum-boy	queenie	your faggot ass	sodomite	sodomite
	29.5	<i>cinaede</i>	faggy	poof	chief bum-boy	fag	faggot	sodomite	homosexual
	29.9	<i>cinaede</i>	gay	poof	chief bum-boy	fag	faggot	sodomite	homosexual
	33.2	<i>cinaede</i>	fairy	faggot	rent-boy	bum-boy	faggot	sodomite	profligate
	57.1	<i>cinaedis</i>	fags	sods	bum-boys	buggers	assholes	buggers	
	57.10	<i>cinaedis</i>	fags	sods	bum-boys	buggers	assholes	buggers	
<i>culus</i>	23.19	<i>culus</i>	ass	arsehole	arse	asshole	ass	arse	
	33.4	<i>culo</i>	ass	arsehole	arsehole	backside	ass	arse	anus
	97.2	<i>culum</i>	tail	arsehole	arse	ass	colon	arse	
	97.4	<i>culus</i>	ass	arsehole	arse	ass	colon	arse	
	97.12	<i>culum</i>	ass hole	arsehole	arse	behind	ass	arse	
	98.4	<i>culos</i>	ass holes	arseholes	arseholes	assholes	ass	arses	
<i>cunnus</i>	97.8	<i>cunnus</i>	cunts	cunt	cunt	cunt	pussy	cunt	
<i>fellare</i>	59.1	<i>fellat</i>	sucks	sucks off	sucks off	sucks... cock	sucking off	gives head	
<i>futuere</i>	6.13	<i>effututa</i>	sagging	fucked-out	fucked out	fucked out	fuck	spread	sexually tired

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¹ Myers and Ormsby.

² Blanks represent areas where the obscenity was not translated. In this case, Myers and Ormsby allow *cinaede* to be subsumed into their translation of *pathice*. There is a high number of blank spaces in the Wikisource column because many a lot of the corpus is left untranslated.

Latin root	Line	Catullus	M&O	Lee	Balmer	Green	Gallagher	Kline	Wikisource
	29.13	<i>diffututa</i>	fucking	multifucking	fucked-out	shagged-out	exhausted	loose-living	worn-out
	32.8	<i>fututiones</i>	screws	fuctions	fuck- fuckings	fuckfests	fuckings	fucks	
	37.5	<i>confutuere</i>	screw	fuck	fuck	fuck	be	trouble	fuck
	41.1	<i>defututa</i>	twat	fuck-up	goes and goes	fucked-out	I fucked all of	fucked by all	
	71.5	<i>futuit</i>	make love	fucks	fuck	fucks	fucked	fucks	
	97.9	<i>futuit</i>	fucks	fucks	fucks	screws	fucks	fucks	
<i>irrumo</i>	10.12	<i>irrumator</i>	chief	a shit	mouth-fucker	fuckface	cocksucker	bugger	pervert [irrumator]
	16.1	<i>irrumabo</i>		stuff your gobs	get stuffed	sucks to you	plug your mouth	bugger/fuck ¹	face-fuck
	16.14	<i>irrumabo</i>		stuff your gobs	stuff you up	<i>sucks to you</i>	plug your mouth	bugger/fuck	face-fuck
	21.8	<i>irrumatione</i>	screw	stuff your gob	mouth- stuffing	serve a proper mouthful	fuck your mouth	bugger	my dick in your mouth
	21.13	<i>irrumatus</i>	feel my prick in your tight bum	gob-stuffed	trap stuffed	mouth crammed to bursting	gagged from sucking cock	buggered	with a dick in your mouth
	28.10	<i>irrumasti</i>	fucked	stuffed	fucked me up	force-fed	filled with cock	buggered	
	37.8	<i>irrumare</i>	fuck	stuff	stuff	fill cocksucking mouths	plug mouth with my cock	bugger	make...suck my dick
	74.5	<i>irrumet</i>	screw	stuff	fuck mouth	stuff in open mouth	plug mouth	buggered	
<i>lupa</i>	42.13	<i>lupanar</i>	fucked-out whore	trollop	whore house full of tarts	scrubber	whore	brothel	brothel
	99.10	<i>lupae</i>	whore	whore	whore	whore	whore	whore	prostitute
<i>mentula</i>	29.13	<i>mentula</i>	prick	tool	Prick	prick	cock	tool	penis
	37.3	<i>mentulas</i>	pricks	tools	bollocks	cocks	cock	cocks	dicks
	94.1	<i>mentula</i>	Pricko	TOOL	Prick	Prick	Fucking Dickhead	Mentula the cock	
	94.1	<i>mentula</i>		Tool	prick	Prick	fucking	cock	

¹ It is unclear from Kline's translation of 16 which translation agrees with which verb. Cf. Chapter 2.

Latin root	Line	Catullus	M&O	Lee	Balmer	Green	Gallagher	Kline	Wikisource
	105.1	<i>mentula</i>	Pricko	TOOL	Prick	Prick	dickhead	Mentula the cock	Penis
	114.1	<i>mentula</i>	Pricko	TOOL	Prick	Prick	Dickhead	Mentula the cock	
	115.1	<i>mentula</i>	Pricko	TOOL	Prick	Prick	Dickhead	Mentula	Penis
	115.8	<i>mentula</i>	prick	TOOL	prick	PRICK	dick for a head	Cock	phallus
natis	33.7	<i>nates</i>	ass	Buttocks	buttocks	asshole	ass	arse	As
pathicus	16.2	<i>pathice</i>		Kink	prick-sucker	Queen	spread wide	pathic	cocksucking
	57.2	<i>pathico</i>	his	poofers	catamite	bitch-queens	who is bent over	catamite	
	112.2	<i>pathicus</i>	those by whom he's made	poof	split your crack	queen	pathetic	pathic	sodomite
pedicare	16.1	<i>pedicabo</i>	fuck you right up the ass	bugger	bugger off	up yours both	plug your ass	fuck/bugger	sodomize
	16.14	<i>pedicabo</i>	fuck you right up the ass	bugger	bugger you both	<i>up yours both</i>	plug your ass	fuck/bugger	sodomize
	21.4	<i>pedicare</i>	become seducer	bugger	bugger	rogering	bend over	fuck	sleep with
scortum	6.5	<i>scorti</i>	slut	tart	tart	tart	piece of ass you've bent over	little whore	harlot
	10.3	<i>scortillum</i>	slut	tartlet	two-bit-tart	"little scrubber"	little slut	little whore	little whore
verpa	28.12	<i>verpa</i>	dick	Prick	prick	yard	cock	circumcised cock	
	47.4	<i>verpus</i>	hard on	Priapus	prick	prick	cock	circumcised	

