

Chapter One

Introduction

The Latin sexual language has never been exhaustively discussed, although useful collections of material and comments on individual passages are to be found in various places. Of older works those by Pierrugues and Forberg are worthy of mention. Goldberger's often quoted articles contain much that is interesting, but are marred by inaccuracy. Some other scholars who have touched on the subject are Hey, Housman, Hopfner,¹ Opelt, Herter, Grassmann and Jocelyn. Of commentators on individual authors I mention in particular Brandt, Kroll and Citroni.²

1. Some types of sexual and excretory language

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 for various sexual and excretory acts. As a rule basic obscenities have no other, primary, sense to soften their impact.³ They are unusable in polite conversation,⁴ most genres of literature, and even in some genres which might be thought obscene in subject matter. Some of the Latin obscen-

¹ T. Hopfner, *Das Sexualleben der Griechen und Römer I* (Prague, 1938).

² On Greek, note Taillardat and Dover. J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven and London, 1975) is so inaccurate that I have chosen not to refer to it.

³ They may of course in origin have been metaphorical, but metaphors often fade.

⁴ On the unacceptability of the direct terminology in Latin, see Arnob. *Nat.* 3.10 'genitalium membrorum . . . foeditates, quas ex oribus [*oribus P, moribus Reifferscheid*] uerecundis infame est suis appellationibus promere' (cf. Cels. 6.18.1).

ities are well represented in the Romance languages, where their reflexes often retain a substandard flavour. There is not necessarily an exact correspondence between languages in the components of their sets of basic terms. *Irrumo*, for example, has no equivalent in English. Within the set, the various words may differ in offensiveness. In English the obscenity for the female parts would probably be considered by most speakers to be coarser and more emotive than any word for the male organ. In a dead language it is not possible to classify obscenities by degrees of offensiveness with any precision. One can set up a group of obscenities on the evidence partly of comments by Latin writers themselves, and partly of the distribution and use of certain words. But neither ancient comments nor distributions permit one to establish subtle distinctions of tone. Nevertheless there are signs that *mentula*, *cunnus*, *culus*, *futuo*, *pedico* and *irrumo* were more offensive than *coleus*, *fello*, *ceueo* and *criso*. And in the excretory sphere basic words for 'urinate' (*meio*, *mingo*) seem to have been less emotive than that for 'defecate' (*caco*; cf. *merda*, *pedo*), though *caco* itself may have been milder than the sexual obscenities (on excretory terminology, see the Appendix). The obscenities dealt with here are *mentula*, *uerpa*, *cunnus*, *coleus*, *futuo*, *pedico*, *irrumo*, *fello*, *ceueo*, *criso*. *Culus* I have discussed in detail elsewhere,¹ but a summary of the evidence is given in Chapter IV. Those words which can be identified as basic obscenities from the comments of Latin writers (notably *mentula*, *cunnus*, *futuo*, *pedico*) have a distinctive distribution: they are common in graffiti and epigram (Catullus, Martial, the *Corpus Priapeorum*), but almost entirely absent from other varieties of literature (including satire, if one excludes the first book of Horace's *Sermones*).² Certain sexual or excretory words not commented on in Latin literature which show the same distribution can plausibly be regarded as similar in status. It remains to add that various words of infrequent attestation are impossible to categorise (e.g. *muto*, *sopio*, *salaputium*). The important question to what extent the basic obscenities of Latin shed their primary senses and deteriorated into general abusive terms is dealt with below, pp. 132ff.

Metaphors and euphemistic designations provide the bulk

¹ Adams, *Culus*.

² Basic obscenities would also have been used in farce and mime: see p. 219.

of attested terms for sexual parts of the body and sexual acts in Latin. In a suggestive context almost any object or activity may be interpreted as a sexual image. The following general observations concerning the use of metaphors will be illustrated in the course of the book:

(a) Many sexual metaphors are not current in any variety of a language, but uttered off-the-cuff, particularly in jokes or to display linguistic inventiveness. Or a word used in a literal, non-sexual sense may be deliberately misunderstood, even though it possesses no established sexual meaning. Most sexual metaphors heard in a language may well be *ad hoc* coinages; certainly in Latin many metaphors seem to be of this type. The coining of metaphors was especially characteristic of Plautine comedy, Atellane farce and mime.

(b) The tone and implication of established metaphors varies. Some are slang terms with an offensive tone, others may be acceptable in educated parlance. The metaphor of ploughing in English, for example, has a literary flavour. *Anus* was a scientific term in Latin. The medical languages in Greek and Latin contain a number of anatomical metaphors of a sexual kind.

(c) Metaphors constantly fade; indeed basic obscenities may originate as metaphors (e.g. *irrumo*, perhaps *futuo*). In Greek γαμειν, originally a metaphor when applied to intercourse, eventually displaced the obscenity βινειν. By the time of Cicero *penis* had lost its literal sense; it is likely that some speakers did not interpret the sexual meaning as metaphorical.

Most sexual euphemisms refer to the sexual part or act by a name which is not its own (metonymy). In the case of the sexual organs the euphemism may strictly describe an adjoining part, or an extensive area of the body within which the sexual part is located (specialisation). In the case of sexual acts it is usually an act or event concomitant or associated with the sexual penetration which is mentioned. Another form of euphemism is ellipse, aposiopesis or the substitution of a pronoun for an indelicate noun, or pro-verb (*facio*) for an indelicate verb. I have dealt with euphemistic omissions elsewhere,¹ and offer here only a few examples.

¹ Adams, 'Euphemism'.

2. Some functions of sexual language in Latin

(i) Apotropaic and ritual obscenity

Apotropaic obscenities for the warding off of the evil eye or evil influences of an unspecific kind played an important part in various spheres of Italian life. Obscenities were shouted at triumphs.¹ Note especially Suet. *Iul.* 49.4 'Gallico denique triumpho milites eius inter cetera carmina, qualia currum prosequentes ioculariter canunt, etiam illud uulgatissimum pronuntiauerunt:

Gallias Caesar subegit, Nicomedes Caesarem:
ecce Caesar nunc triumphat qui subegit Gallias,
Nicomedes non triumphat qui subegit Caesarem.'

The other couplet quoted by Suetonius from the same triumph contains *effutuisti* (*Iul.* 51); it is highly likely that basic obscenities had an important place in apotropaic verses. In the *carmen* quoted above there is a play on the double sense of *subigo*, and Suetonius speaks of the soldiers as singing *ioculariter*. Laughter and jokes often have a ritual function.² For the persistence of jests at triumphs under the Empire, see Mart. 1.4.3, 7.8.9f.

It was not only obscene language which was apotropaic, but also phallic representations and illustrations.³ Sometimes the two, language and representation, go hand in hand. The *triumphator* had a phallic *bullā* (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.6.9 'quam in triumpho prae se gerebant inclusis intra eam remediis quae crederent aduersus inuidiam ualentissima'), and a phallus was hung under his car as a *medicus inuidiae* (Plin. *Nat.* 28.39).

Obscene verses (Fescennines) were sung at weddings: see Paul. Fest. p. 76 'Fescennini uersus qui canebantur in nuptiis, ex urbe Fescennina dicuntur allati, siue ideo dicti, quia fascinum putabantur arcere'. Such songs were sung especially by

¹ For the early period, see Livy 3.29.5, with R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 1-5* (Oxford, 1965), *ad loc.*

² See N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 214ff. for examples from various cultures of ritualistic jests, laughter and obscenity.

³ See Herter, 'Phallos', 1719ff., especially 1733ff. For a phallic drawing accompanied by the words 'hic habitat Felicitas', see *CIL* IV.1454; on phallic statues in the forum and in gardens, see Plin. *Nat.* 19.50, where it is observed that they were placed 'contra inuidientium effascinationes'.

boys (Varro *Men.* 10, Fest. p. 284).¹ There was also a physical representation of the phallus in the marriage ceremony (at least in the early period). The bride was compelled to sit on the phallus of the ithyphallic god Mutunus Tutunus (Lact. *Inst.* 1.20.36, Aug. *Ciu.* 6.9, 7.24).² This rite was no doubt intended to promote fertility as well as ward off evil.³ These two functions of an object or utterance, as apotropaic and conferring fertility, are often impossible to separate: by fulfilling the first the object assists in the second.⁴

At the festival of Liber phalluses were placed in carts and displayed at crossroads in the country and even taken into the city (see Aug. *Ciu.* 7.21 (cf. 7.24)).⁵ At Lavinium a month was set aside for the festival, a feature of which was the uttering of obscenities (Aug. *loc. cit.* 'cuius diebus omnes uerbis flagitiosissimis uterentur'). The two functions of the obscenities (and phallic display) again cannot be separated (Aug. *loc. cit.* 'sic uidelicet Liber deus placandus fuerat pro euentibus seminum, sic ab agris fascinatio repellenda').

At the festival of the Floralia in April mimes marked by obscenity were performed by prostitutes, who took the place of *mimae*: Lact. *Inst.* 1.20.10 'praeter uerborum licentiam, quibus obscenitas omnis effunditur'.⁶ The prostitutes also stripped at the demand of the spectators (Lact. *loc. cit.*). It is a common folk belief that indecent exposure may amuse and please a god,⁷ although there is no specific evidence that this was considered to be the purpose of the exposure at the Floralia.

Whatever the origin and function of the goddess Anna Perenna, at her festival on 15 March obscenities were chanted by girls: Ovid *Fast.* 3.675f. 'nunc mihi cur cantent superest obscena puellae / dicere; nam coeunt certaue probra canunt' (cf.

¹ On Fescennine verses, see further G. Wissowa, 'Fescennini uersus', *RE* VI.2.2222f.

² Cf. Herter, 'Phallos', 1719f., *RhM* 76 (1927), p. 423, 'Genitalien', 15.

³ Cf. Herter, *RhM*, *loc. cit.*

⁴ So Priapus was both efficacious against the evil eye (Herter, *De Priapo*, p. 111, nos. 81-2) and also a god of fertility (Herter, *op. cit.*, p. 225).

⁵ On Liber, see Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*² (Munich, 1912), pp. 297ff. On the festival, see Herter, 'Phallos', 1722; cf. 'Genitalien', 15.

⁶ On the indecency of the Floralia, see also Val. Max. 2.10.8, Mart. 1. prooem., *H.A.*, *Hel.* 6.5, Tert. *Spect.* 17.2-3.

⁷ See Richardson (see above, p. 4 n. 2), pp. 215ff.

695). There can be little doubt that these verses were intended in origin to be apotropaic or to promote fertility.¹

Maledicta and *probra* were spoken when various herbs were planted (Plin. *Nat.* 19.120, Pallad. *Rust.* 4.9.14). Presumably these utterances were obscene (for the sense of *probra*, see Ovid, *Fast.* 3.676 above).²

Whether on non-ritual occasions obscenities were deliberately uttered as apotropaic, just as various obscene gestures could be made for the same purpose (the *fica*, the *corna*, the *digitus impudicus* extended),³ is unclear. Note *Eph. Epigr.* III. p. 137 no. 111 'inuidiosis mentula' (accompanying a drawing of a phallus). Presumably the word might accompany a gesture, just as in the inscription it supports a drawing. At *CIL* III.10189.16 ('Dindari, uiuas et inuidis mentla', on a ring) the word appears to be apotropaic on its own.

(ii) Aggression and humiliation

Just as a sexual violation may be inflicted on an enemy as a punishment, so sexual threats or sexual abuse may be directed at someone as a means of venting aggression. I shall deal with the aggressive use of obscenities below (pp. 124, 128, 133f.).

(iii) Humour and outrageousness

Sexual language may have a humorous purpose. Dirty jokes probably have a place in all societies. For some sexual jokes made by Cicero, see *Att.* 2.1.5 and *Quint.* 6.3.75. Vespasian's jokes were sometimes in the most direct terminology (*praetextata uerba*) (Suet. *Vesp.* 22; cf. 23.1 for a sexual pun ascribed to the emperor). There is an interesting collection of jokes, some of them sexual, to be found at *Macrob. Sat.* 2.2–6. The humorous use of sexual language is to some extent linked with

¹ See K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1960), pp. 137f., J. G. Frazer, *Publii Ouidii Nasonis Fastorum Libri Sex*, vol. 3 (London, 1929), pp. 111f.

² See Henderson (mentioned above, p. 1 n. 2), p. 14.

³ For apotropaic obscene gestures, see Ovid *Fast.* 5.433, and O. Jahn, 'Über den Aberglauben des bösen Blicks bei den Alten', *Berichte über die Verhandl. d. sächs. Gesellsch. d. Wiss. Phil.-hist. Klasse* 7 (1855), pp. 80ff., C. Sittl, *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig, 1890), pp. 100ff., F. T. Elworthy, *The Evil Eye* (London, 1895), pp. 242, 255ff., 258ff., Herter, 'Phallos', 1739f., 'Genitalien', 18f.

the apotropaic and aggressive.¹ The obscenities spoken at weddings may have been apotropaic, but they were looked upon as jokes as well (Catull. 61.120 *Fescennina iocatio*); indeed one may wonder whether the apotropaic function was forgotten by the late Republic, and the ribaldry enjoyed for its own sake (as at modern European weddings). We have already seen that the obscenities associated with triumphs were regarded as jokes.

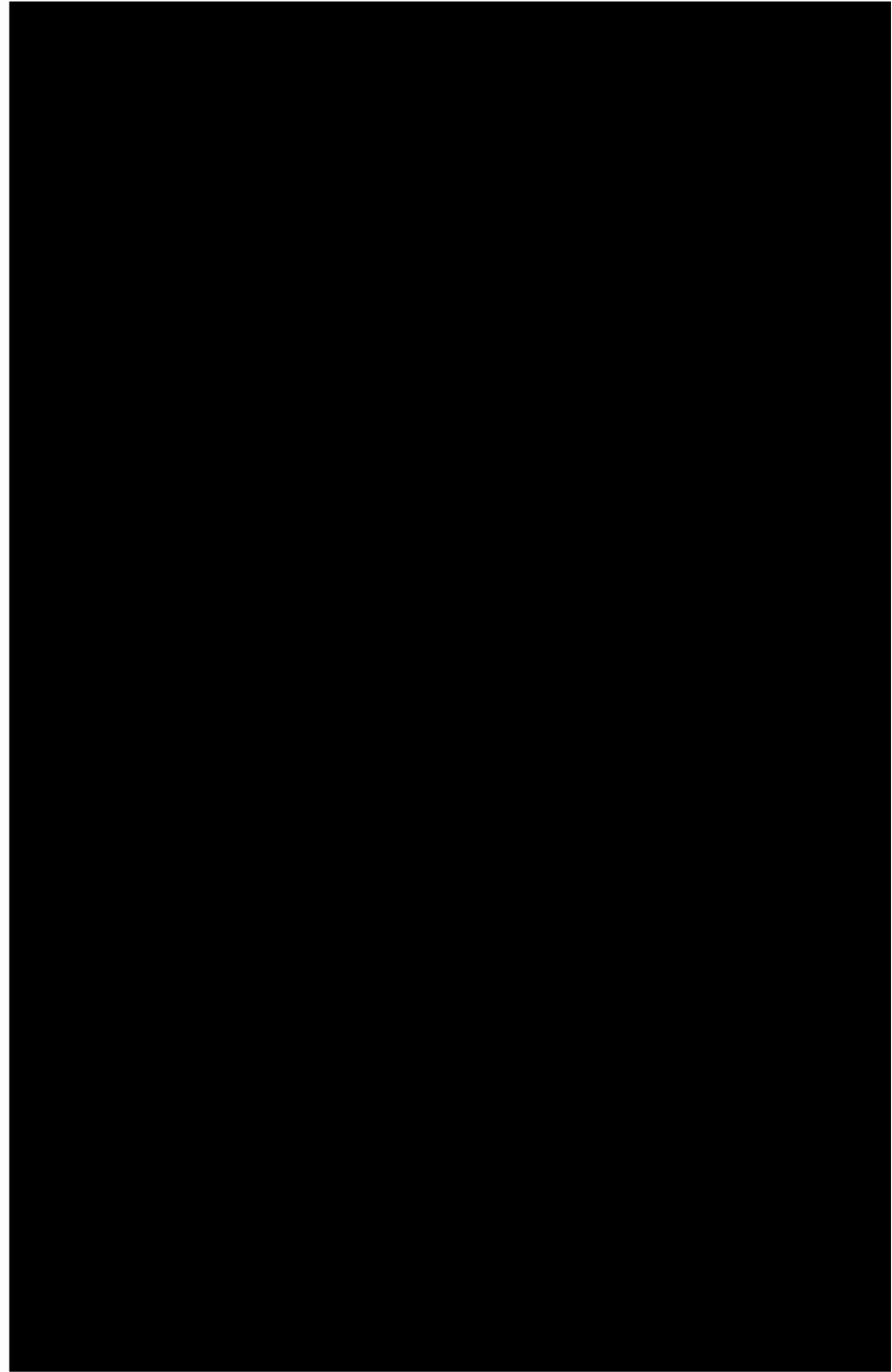
Martial insists again and again that his epigrams (he usually has in mind those with a sexual content) are *ioci*, and meant to provoke laughter (see 11.15.3). They were appropriate to the Saturnalia (see 4.14, 11.2.5), and the Saturnalia was a time for *ioci* (10.18.3, 10.87.7). For *ioci* etc. see further 1. prooem., 1.4, 1.35.10, 13, 3.99, 4.49.2, 6.82.5, 6.85.10, 7.8.9f., 8. prooem. In some societies at some periods oblique allusion has been the only acceptable means of making jokes of a sexual kind: direct language may be frowned upon as obvious and tasteless. That Martial could use direct terminology in literary epigram (unlike his predecessors in Greek) and still claim that his work might be amusing to sophisticated readers (including women: see p. 217) is something of a curiosity. To some extent he was expecting to amuse by being deliberately outrageous (see 11.16.7 for the *nequitia* of his verse contrasted with traditional *grauitas* (line 1); for *nequitia* as amusing, see 11.15.3f., and causing delight, 5.2.3f.; see also 6.82.5). The Romans (and not only men) clearly enjoyed blatant sexual language on special occasions (e.g. at the Floralia and at the festival of Anna Perenna) as a means of letting down their hair in contravention of expected public behaviour. Even a character of traditional gravity might be expected to abandon his *seueritas* for a while on an occasion such as the *Saturnalia* (see 4.14).

(iv) Titillation

Obscene pictures and language may be intended to arouse the viewer or the listener. Sexual illustrations are found in Pompeian brothels, and the role of language as titillating is recognised in the stress laid on the importance of words as an accompaniment to intercourse (Ovid *Ars* 3.796, *Mart.* 11.60.7,

¹ See S. Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York, 1916), pp. 138ff. for aggression and dirty jokes.

11.104.11, Juv. 6.406). Martial claims it as a function of his epigrams that they should arouse the reader. At 11.16.5ff. he speaks of the stimulating effect of his verse on both males and females. At 1.35.10f. he says that *carmina iocosa* should be arousing. And the pleasure which a woman receives from her husband's *mentula* is likened to that conferred by the word at 1.35.4f. Cf. Catull. 16.9.



(ii) *Pedico*

If *pedico* was genuinely derived from παιδικός, τὰ παιδικά,¹ it illustrates the tendency of Latin to take terms related to homosexuality from Greek (cf. *cinaedus*, *catamitus*, *pathicus*). The character of the word (= 'bugger', with object usually male, but sometimes female: Mart. 11.104.17; cf. 11.99.2) receives comment at *Priap.* 3.9f. ('simplicius multo est "da pedicare" Latine / dicere'). To use *pedico* was to speak *Latine*, to employ direct and basic Latin of a type which one might feel motivated to avoid. See also *Priap.* 38.1–3 'simpliciter tibi me, quodcumque est, dicere oportet, / . . . pedicare uolo', Mart. 11.63.4f. 'dicam simpliciter tibi roganti: / pedicant, Philomuse, curiosos'. One might compare Martial's remark (11.20.10) on the epigram of Augustus which contains *futuo*, *pedico* and *mentula*. Augustus, we are told, knew how to call a spade a spade ('qui scis Romana simplicitate loqui').

The distribution of *pedico* shows a familiar pattern. There are 13 definite examples in the Pompeian inscriptions,² and a few additional possibilities. In the *Graffiti del Palatino* an unambiguous example is found at I.364; at I.121, 232 *pedico* is probably a noun (on which see below). In literature the verb occurs in farce and mime (Pompon. 148, Laber. 21), in Catullus (3 times in hendecasyllables: 16.1, 14, 21.4) and epigram: Augustus *ap.* Mart. 11.20.6, Lucan *ap.* Mart. 10.64.6, 16 times in Martial, and at *Priap.* 3.9, 28.3, 35.5, 38.3 (cf. 7 and 67, letter puzzles of which *pedico* is the solution).

The nominal correspondents to *pedicare* were *pedico* and *pedicator*, both with suffixes productive in the popular language. *Pedico* was perhaps the predominating form in the first century (*CIL* IV.2194, 2389, 2442b, 2447 (the interpretation of the last three examples is not completely certain), 5 times in Martial, at *Priap.* 68.8; cf. *CIL* XII.5695.3 = *CE* 358, and the examples from the *Graffiti del Palatino* cited above), but it was rivalled by *pedicator*, which was used by Calvus in an epigram (*ap.* Suet. *Iul.* 49.1) and appears at *CIL* IV.4008. From the sexual and excretory spheres various such forma-

¹ See Ernout and Meillet, s.v. *paedico*.

² *CIL* IV.1691 add. p. 211, 1882, 2048, 2210, 2254 add. p. 216, 2319b add. p. 216, 2360, 2375, 3932, 4008, 4523, 8805, 10693.

tions are attested at Pompeii (*cacator, destillator, fellator, fututor, irrumator* and *perfututor*).¹

Pedico (unlike *futuo*) is sometimes used in threats. It is familiar to anthropologists and zoologists that punishment or humiliation may be inflicted on an enemy or malefactor, or one's rank asserted, by a sexual violation, particularly *pedicatio*.² Such acts, real or fictitious, are sometimes mentioned by Latin writers (e.g. Val. Max. 6.1.13 'Cn. etiam Furium Brocchum qui deprehenderat familiae stuprandum obiecit'). But sexual violations genuinely perpetrated are no doubt less common than substitute forms of linguistic aggression. Instead of carrying out a violation, an aggressor may threaten to carry it out. The intention of the threat, at least in origin, is much the same as that of the violation: the hearer is meant to imagine himself as the victim of a sexual attack. Such threats tend to deteriorate into empty verbiage. Catullus' 'pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo' (16.1, 14) scarcely indicates a real intention on Catullus' part, but is verbal aggression.³ That aggression manifested itself in this way in popular speech is clear from *CIL* IV.2254 add. p. 216 'Batacare, te pidicaro' (*sic*); note too the following inscription from Ostia, directed at those who scribble on walls: πάντες διαγράφουσι, ἐγὼ μόνος οὐδὲν ἔγραψα, πυγίζο πάντες τούτ[ους οἰ] ἐπὶ τοῖχο γράφουσι.⁴

Pedico shows signs of a weakening of sense. There is a type of joke in Pompeian graffiti whereby the reader of the inscription ('he who reads', or 'I who read') is said to 'be X', or to 'do X', where X represents a sexual term: *CIL* IV.2360 (= *CE* 45) 'pedicatur qui leget . . . paticus est qui praeterit . . . ursi me comedant, et ego uerpa qui lego', 4008 'pedic[al]t[u]r qui leg[et]', 8617 'uerpes [= *uerpa es*] qui istuc leges' (see also below, p. 131). There is a difference between an accusation of perversion directed against a specific referent, and that directed against any passer-by. In the second case the sexual term is used as generalised abuse. Weakening is particularly

¹ Examples in V. Väänänen, *Le latin vulgaire des inscriptions pompéiennes*³ (Berlin, 1966), pp. 89f.

² See Fehling, pp. 18ff., Dover, pp. 104ff., 204.

³ The interpretation of c.16 is not completely clear. For bibliography, see Fehling, *RhM* 117 (1974), p. 103 n. 1; add C. W. MacLeod, *CQ* N.S. 23 (1973), pp. 300f., Buchheit, *Hermes* 104 (1976), pp. 331ff., J. Griffin, *JRS* 66 (1976), p. 97.

⁴ See H. Solin, *Arctos* 7 (1972), p. 195; cf. Fehling, *RhM* 117 (1974), p. 106.

clear in the graffiti which contain the expression 'pedicatur qui leget', if it means 'he who shall read [or 'reads'] this is suffering *pedicatio*'. There is no question of a real act in progress: the passer-by's folly in stopping to read the graffiti is tantamount to a metaphorical submission to *pedicatio*. One could alternatively take the expression to mean 'he who shall read this is in the habit of suffering *pedicatio*' (i.e. 'he is a *pathicus*'). If so the writer has accused someone unknown to him, and the word would not be taken seriously by readers. Such jokes show that various sexual terms were thrown around with little or no thought for their cognitive force. That does not mean that in other contexts they could not be used with their proper sense. I shall return to this subject below.

In epigram *pedico* sometimes occurs in collocations found in graffiti, though the contexts may differ. With *CIL* IV.2048 'Secundus pedicaud pueros' (note the word order), cf. Mart. 7.67.1 'pedicat pueros' and 11.94.6 'pedicas puerum'; with *CIL* IV.2210 'pedicare uolo', cf. *Priap.* 38.3 (same phrase and word order) and also Catull. 21.4 'pedicare cupis'; and with *CIL* IV.8805 'Q. Postumius rogauit A. Attium pedicarim', cf. Aug. *ap. Mart.* 11.20.5 f. 'quid si me Manius oret / pedicem, faciam?'

(iii) *Irrumo*

Irrumo is by implication classed as obscene by Seneca, *Ben.* 4.31.4 '(Mamercus Scaurus) Pollioni Annio iacenti *obsceno uerbo* usus dixerat se facturum id, quod pati malebat; et cum Pollionis adtractiorem uidisset frontem "quidquid" inquit "mali dixi, mihi et capiti meo"' (see below), and its distribution suggests that its status was much the same as that of *futuo* and *pedico*. There are 6 instances of the verb in the Pompeian graffiti,¹ and one each of its derivatives *irrumabiliter* (*CIL* IV.1931)² and *irrumator* (1529). For an important inscriptional example from Ostia, see below, p. 130. In literature *irrumo* occurs 6 times in Catullus (16.1, 14, 21.13, 28.10, 37.8, 74.5; cf. *irrumator* at 10.12 and *irrumatio* at 21.8), 5 times in

¹ Two of them indexed; see further *CIL* IV.8790 (?), 10030, 10197, 10232.

² *Arrurabiliter* at 4126 is conceivably a misspelling of *irrumabiliter*, with both vocalic (*i* > *a*) and consonantal assimilation (*m* > *r*). The translation offered by A. Richlin, *CP* 76 (1981), p. 43, n. 6 ('plow - ably') does nothing to elucidate the problem. The second syllable is not consistent with a derivation from *aro*.

Martial,¹ and 4 times in the *Priapea* (35.2, 5, 44.4, 70.13). There is an isolated example in prose at Schol. Juv. 6.51.

Irrumo in etymology reflects the popular obsession among Latin speakers with a similarity felt between feeding and certain sexual practices (see pp. 138ff.). It is a denominative of *ruma* / *rumis*, 'teat',² and would originally have meant 'put in the teat'. For an analogy between 'putting in the teat' and an oral sexual practice, one might consult the anecdote told of Tiberius by Suetonius, *Tib.* 44.1. *Irrumo* and *fello* describe the same type of sexual act, but from different points of view: *irrumo* from the viewpoint of the active violator (= *mentulam in os inserere*), *fello* from that of the passive participant. Languages do not necessarily make such a lexical distinction. While *fellatio* is a widely recognised form of sexual behaviour, *irrumatio* is not universally seen as a positive sexual act. But the distinction was important to Latin speakers, and it gives rise to a few subtle jokes in the literature. At 3.82.33 Martial contemplates *irrumatio* as a punishment for Zoilus, but the act, he says, would be futile, because Zoilus *fellat*. *Irrumatio* holds no terrors for the *fellator*: he regards it not as *irrumatio*, but as *fellatio*, which he enjoys. The lexicon of standard English possesses no straightforward way of expressing the difference of attitude and role inherent in the joke '*irrumabo te*'. '*fello*'. A joke at Plaut. *Amph.* 348f. appears to be similar: 'ego tibi istam hodie, sceleste, comprimam linguam. SO. hau potes: bene pudiceque adseruatur'. The first speaker threatens to 'check the tongue', i.e. 'silence' the other. The second seems to take this as a threat to 'silence' him by *irrumatio*, and replies (in effect) that he does not *fellat*. In plain Latin the conversation could be rewritten in the form '*irrumabo te*'. '*non fello*'. *Comprimo* had a well-established sexual sense in Plautus (= *futuo*: see p. 182), which is elsewhere exploited in a double entendre (*Truc.* 262). One who *futu*it the *linguam* of another presumably *irrumat* (see Mart. 11.40.3 for *futuo*, with *dentes* as implied object, applied to *irrumatio*).³ It was a standard joke

¹ Always in two early books (2 and 4): see Krenkel, p. 85a. Thereafter Martial preferred euphemisms.

² See Ernout and Meillet, s.v. *ruma*, *rumis*.

³ Some doubt remains about the interpretation of the passage. It is possible that Plautus simply personified *lingua* as a woman, and used *comprimo* in the secondary sense '*futuo*'. Cf. *Asin.* 292, and see Fraenkel, *Elementi Plautini*, pp. 31f.

to speak of *irrumatio* as a means of silencing someone. An obvious case is at Mart. 3.96.3 'garris quasi moechus et futuro. / si te prendero, Gargili, tacebis'. Catull. 74.5f. is of the same type: 'quod uoluit fecit: nam, quamuis inrumet ipsum / nunc patruom, uerbum non faciet patruos'. Gellius has put a stop to his uncle's moralising about illicit affairs by committing adultery with the man's own wife; the uncle's shame is such that he dare not speak. Now, even if he suffer the greater humiliation of *irrumatio*, he will say nothing. The conclusion is paradoxical: if he suffers *irrumatio*, he will not be able to say anything in any case. Mart. 14.74 presents a variation on the theme: 'corue saluator, quare fellator haberis? / in caput intrauit mentula nulla tuum'. The crow was popularly believed to *ore coire* (Plin. *Nat.* 10.32 'ore eos (coruos) parere aut coire uulgus arbitratur'). But he cannot be a *fellator* (i.e. *irrumatus*), because he is so noisy. There is perhaps a further hint of the joke at Mart. 12.35.4 'dicere percisum te mihi saepe soles. / . . . nam quisquis narrat talia plura tacet' (Callistratus is a *fellator*).

Irrumatio was in general regarded as a hostile and humiliating act, of the sort which one's enemies might wish to inflict on one: see *CIL* IV.10030 'malim me amici fellent quam inimici irrumant'. In Catullus 74 the possible *irrumatio* of the husband is viewed as the ultimate humiliation which might befall him. And at *CIL* IV.10232 ('L. Habonius sauciat irrumat Caesum Felic(e)m') the juxtaposition of *irrumat* with *sauciat* indicates its aggressive tone. For the most part the object of the verb is masculine. At Mart. 4.50.2 ('nemo est, Thai, senex ad irrumandum') the poet is in effect threatening the woman. At 4.17.3 ('facere in Lyciscam, Paule, me iubes uersus / quibus illa lectis rubeat et sit irata. / o Paule, malus es; irrumare uis solus') he is addressing another male, and hence can be indifferent to the impact of the word on the woman. But at *CIL* IV.10197 (if the inscription has been correctly read) *irrumo* is apparently used as a neutral term for the active role in the act (complementing *elingo*, of the passive role): 'elige, [p]uela. iruman[ti] . . . nuli negant'.¹ For another neutral example, of the passive (female) role, see Schol. Juv. 6.51 'quia et irrumantur mulieres'. Like other obscenities, *irrumo* would have

¹ The editor fills the gap with *manu polluenti*, but in the illustration given I can find little justification for this reading.

derived its tone from the circumstances of utterance. Directed at a man in public, it would be very offensive indeed. Spoken to a female in private, when linguistic taboos need not operate, it might be emptied of its emotive content.

Irrumatio, like *pedicatio*, was regarded as a means of asserting one's rank or punishing a malefactor. At Mart. 2.47.4, for example, it is envisaged as a punishment for adultery; similarly *pedicatio* was often threatened against or inflicted on adulterers, as at Hor. *Serm.* 1.2.44 (see p. 142), Val. Max. 6.1.13, Mart. 2.60.2; cf. the symbolic act at Catull. 15.19.¹ In Catullus' threat at 16.1, 14 *irrumabo* is coupled with *pedicabo*. It is clear from the inscription published by H. Comfort at *AJA* 52 (1948), pp. 321 f. ('irumo te, Sex(te)', with present for future) that threats of *irrumatio* would have been heard in vulgar speech. The hyperbolic character of Catull. 37.7 f. ('non putatis ausurum / me una ducentos inrumare sessores?') implies that the threat was a substitute for action, though none the less aggressive for that. Exaggeration is part and parcel of linguistic aggression. An anonymous senator was able to take up Caesar's innocent remark, made in the senate, 'proinde ex eo insultaturum omnium capitibus' (Suet. *Iul.* 22.2), and interpret it as a threat to inflict *irrumatio* on all his opponents: 'ac negante quodam per contumeliam facile hoc ulli feminae fore'.

For other examples of the threat, see Catull. 21.7f. 'nam insidias mihi instruentem / tangam te prior inrumatione' (cf. 21.13 'quare desine, dum licet pudico, / ne finem facias, sed inrumatus'), *Priap.* 35.5 'pedicaberis irrumaberisque', 44.3f. 'deprensos ego ter quaterque fures / omnes, ne dubitetis, irrumabo'. It is often phrased differently: e.g. *CIL* IV.1854 'Caliste, deuora', 5396 'Cossuti [*sic*], fela ima', Mart. 3.83.2 'fac mihi quod Chione', *Priap.* 13.2 'percidere puer, moneo: futuere puella: / barbatum furem *tertia poena manet*' (compare the terminology at *CIL* XI.7263 'inuide, qui spectas, hec tibi poena manet'; the illustration is missing), 22.2 'caput hic praebeat', 28.5 'altiora tangam', 59.2 'si fur ueneris, impudicus exis' (cf. Catull. 21.12f. above); cf. Mart. 3.96.3 above.

Aggressive though the threat might have been in the appropriate context (as in the passages of Catullus above), one cannot but notice that it was deteriorating into a joke. It is

¹ See Fehling, pp. 21f.

sometimes motivated by the mildest of offences of a non-sexual kind, as at Mart. 3.83.2 (cf. 3.82.33, not strictly a threat but a contemplated *irrumatio*, which can be treated as an implied threat). The threat, implied rather than openly expressed, provides a source of humour at Plaut. *Amph.* 348f., Mart. 3.82.33, 3.96.3 and Suet. *Iul.* 22.2 (cf. Catull. 74.5f. and *CIL* IV.2360, discussed below, for joking allusions of different types to the practice).¹ Annius Pollio's shocked response to such aggression is presented at Sen. *Ben.* 4.31.4 as an abnormality.² These passages, along with the manifest exaggeration at Catull. 37.7f., indicate that speakers tended not to take *irrumatio* seriously. Even if there were no other evidence on the matter, one could say that conditions were ideal for a weakening of sense to occur. The repetition of a threat which is never carried out, and which is uttered on the flimsiest of excuses, will in due course cause it to be treated as no worse than non-specific aggression, and some speakers may become unaware of its original meaning. One can never be sure, even in a modern language, that all speakers are ignorant of the etymology of a threatening sexual term. But if they throw it around in contexts in which its cognitive force is not an issue, one can legitimately speak of a form of deterioration of sense.

A vacuous curse at *CIL* IV.2360 = *CE* 45 ('ursi me comedant et ego uerpa(m) qui lego') further demonstrates that *irrumatio* had degenerated into a source of jest. On Housman's interpretation (sc. *comedam*),³ the reader is made to wish *irrumatio* on himself. In effect the only *irrumatio* which he is in danger of suffering is that constituted by his stupidity in reading the whole of the inscription. I should not wish to maintain that a reader would be ignorant of the meaning of *uerpam comedam*; but in the context he would surely have treated the imprecation as equivalent to 'I have been fooled'.

The metaphorical use of *irrumo* can be illustrated from Catullus. Despite the graphic detail at 28.9f. ('O Memmi, bene me ac diu supinum / tota ista trabe lentus inrumasti'), Catullus does not mean that a sexual act took place. While on the

¹ Richlin's generalisation, *CP* 76 (1981), p. 43, 'the general threat is made by an irrumator who is claiming to be enormously virile; he sneers at his irrumated victim as effeminate, or at best emasculate', is something of an exaggeration.

² See Housman, *Classical Papers*, p. 733.

³ *Classical Papers*, p. 1179.

staff of Memmius he was treated with contempt (he was unable to enrich himself in the usual way), and he describes this ill treatment metaphorically as *irrumatio* (cf. 28.12f. 'nam nihilo minore uerpa / farti estis': Veranius and Fabullus were also badly treated on the staff of Piso).¹ So at 10.12 Catullus calls Memmius an *irrumator* for the same reason (note line 13 'nec faceret pili cohortem', which indicates the force of *irrumator*). When someone threatens *irrumatio* against another he is not speaking metaphorically, because, although he may have no intention of carrying out the threat, the act can be envisaged by both hearer and speaker as a possibility (at least up to the point when the threat becomes totally banal). But if he describes as *irrumatio* a non-sexual action which has already occurred, that action is by implication likened to *irrumatio*, and a metaphor has been used. The violence of the language is meant to convey only the strong disgust or resentment of the speaker; the sexual term has certainly been emptied of its full force.²

If further evidence were needed that *irrumo* was capable of losing its proper sense, it is provided by an inscription on a wall of the room of the Seven Sages at Ostia: 'amice fugit te prouerbium bene caca et irrima medicos'.³ The hearer is not being instructed literally to *irrumare* the doctors. He is told to *bene caca*, which act will in effect constitute an *irrumatio*. *Irruma* is a non-sexual (metaphorical) expression of contempt; its equivalent in English would be *fuck the doctors*.