



FOULMOUTHED SHEPHERDS: SEXUAL OVERTONES AS A SIGN OF *URBANITAS* IN VIRGIL'S *BUCOLICA* 2 AND 3

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Abstract:

This article argues that Virgil introduced sexual overtones, an urbane motif par excellence, in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 – the oldest of his bucolic poems – to forestall criticism from his intended audience: the *Poetae Novi* and their aficionados, who would have regarded bucolic poetry – however unjustly – as 'rustic'. It explains that due to his connection to these *Poetae Novi* (via Pollio), Virgil would have wanted to conform to their concept of *urbanitas*. A detailed analysis of the two poems shows how they might be read as parodies. *Bucolica* 2 as a parody of an elegiac *paraclausithyron*, riddled with obscene innuendo, and *Bucolica* 3 as some sort of bucolic satirical invective, where the obscene is used as a weapon between two quarrelling shepherds. The article lists words and passages with possible sexual overtones and argues why in poems *such as these* an ambiguity found is likely to be an ambiguity intended. Numerous parallels and analogies are given for the ambiguous use of words found in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 and evidence for the prevalence of sexual innuendo in Greek epigrams, pastoral poetry and contemporary Latin poets. In addition the article provides a refutation of several possible objections to its thesis including the charge of *hineininterpretierung*. This new interpretation does not intend to supersede more exalted explanations of these poems but can coexist with them, and throws light on the psyche of a beginning author from the provinces, trying to make his mark in Rome.

1. Introduction: *Bucolica*, a Literary Risk:

According to Virgil's biographer Donatus (*Vita Vergiliana* 90), Virgil's *Bucolica* were hailed as a masterpiece immediately after their publication. Considering the literary scene in Rome at the time, this is not as natural as it might seem to Virgil's admirers. After all, it was far from certain that a poem, with an idealized depiction of life in the country as its ostensible theme, would be a success in the upper circles of Rome with their preference for sophisticated, erudite poetry.

Although the *Bucolica* are not *really* a naïve glorification of rural life (The life of shepherds is very rarely idealized in these poems and the literary motif of 'Arcadia' as a paradise is largely a construct of later centuries), it nevertheless seems likely that when Virgil first introduced it in Rome, bucolic poetry as a genre would have been regarded with some disdain by the leading poets of his day, and that he would have to work hard to convince his urbane friends that it was worth their while. This may be the reason why, although bucolic poetry must have been known through Virgil's Greek predecessors, it does not seem to have been practiced by any Roman poet prior to Virgil, unlike other poetic Greek genres like elegy, lyric poetry and epigram. The point this paper is trying to make is that Virgil was well aware of the risks of his undertaking and that he took specific precautions to shield himself from the criticism that was to be expected.

Virgil explicitly introduces his *Bucolica* as a novelty in Latin poetry: 'Prima Syracosio dignata est ludere versu/nostra neque erubuit silvas habitare Thalia.' (*Our Muse was the first to deem it worthy to sing Syracusian verse, and did not blush while living in woods.*)

The choice of words here is significant. 'Dignata est' (*deemed it worthy*) and 'neque erubuit' (*did not blush*) suggest that others had refrained from adopting country life as a literary theme, most likely because of the none too flattering views the urban, intellectual elite held about the country. Jokes by *urbani* (city folk) at the expense of the crude, uneducated *rustici* (country folk) were to be found as early as Plautus (e.g. *Casina* act 1, scene 1 and *Mostellaria* act 1, scene 1) and still persisted after Virgil's time (e.g. Ovid *Amores* 3.4.37.).¹ When country

¹ We also find scoffing at rustic poetry in Catullus 22. Admittedly, the claim of precedence by Virgil may have been a literary conceit, but this would have been pointless if bucolic poetry already was a well-established genre. So though he may not have been the *first* Roman bucolic poet, he is likely to have been one of the first.

folk appeared in the literature of Virgil's days, it was often as a target for urban derision. Writing poems about or set in country life, even though at least the genre must have been known through Virgil's Greek predecessors, was risky.

From what we know about the poetry of the time when Virgil was working on his *Bucolica*, we can deduce what passed for acceptable poetry in 'urbane' circles. Some years earlier the *Poetae Novi*, of which Catullus is the only representative whose work has come down to us in more than small pieces, had taken love and sexuality from the realm of comedy and satire and had introduced it into lyric and elegiac poetry. Virgil's friends and protectors Gallus and Pollio (the latter being the person to whom - Donatus claims - the *Bucolica* were dedicated) were also members of this circle of 'new poets'.

Also the Greek poets from that era, like the epicurean epigrammatist Philodemos - a teacher to both Virgil and Horace and a friend of Catullus - and his contemporary Krinagoras, wrote about love and especially about the physical aspects of it. A second characteristic of the 'new poetry' was its technical perfection (the so-called *labor limae*) and its erudite nature under the influence of the Alexandrian poets, mainly Kallimakhos.

Probably the best summary of the literary creed of those days is to be found in the fragments of Philodemos' prose essay on poetry. In it he rejects the theories of Neoptolemos of Parion and his idea that poetry should be utilitarian in character. Philodemos advocates a philosophy of 'art for art's sake.'² Generally speaking it seems reasonable to say that the key word in Roman literary circles at the time of Virgil's debut was '*urbanitas*' (urbane sophistication).³ This term covers the notions of erudition, frivolity, refinement and a certain degree of arrogance. None of these is spontaneously associated with Virgil's *Bucolica*. Virgil had the added problem of his rustic origins, which made him extra vulnerable to the criticism of *rusticitas* (boorishness) in his poetry. This is not to say that bucolic poetry, as practiced by Virgil's Greek predecessors was

² For an in depth analysis of Philodemos' ideas on poetry: **Obbink** et al. Philodemos' views on utilitarian poetry are discussed by Elisabeth Asmis (chapter 8 pp. 148-77)

³ The claim that *urbanitas* was considered a virtue is supported by Catullus 22.2 and 9 where Suffenus is called *urbanus* as a compliment. In the rest of the poem Catullus expresses his surprise and dismay because this *urbanus* writes such 'rustic' poetry: *caprimulgus aut fossor (milker of goats and digger)* v.10: *infaceto...infacetior rure: '(duller than the dull countryside)* v.14).

naïve and unsophisticated. The *urbane* nature of Theokritos' Idylls has long been established. However, it seems that the *Poetae Novi* (however wrongly) regarded the genre as 'rustic', perhaps because of its subject matter, perhaps as a result of personal tastes.⁴

In the *Bucolica* there is evidence that Virgil was well aware of these views and that in a very sophisticated way he has taken the literary taste of his intended audience - i.e. the *New Poets'* aficionados⁵ - into account, mainly in his first eclogues (2 and 3)⁶. First of all by the choice of his themes and secondly by the way he developed them. The aim may have been to forestall the suspicion of *rusticitas*, which might arise from the general theme of his bucolic poems, by indulging his audience to a certain extent. Most remarkable in that respect are the influences of the Alexandrian poets and of Catullus, and especially the sexual double entendres in the second and third eclogue.⁷

⁴ **Hubbard** (The Pipes of Pan 54) sees traces of the author's insecurity towards his urban public in *Bucolica* 2. According to him, *Bucolica* 2 is 'a reflection of Virgil's anxiety about the failure of his own pastoral poetry in the eyes of his sophisticated literary audience. Corydon's yearning for a boy beloved to whom he can teach the country arts is clearly associated with a desire for poetic influence among a generation of successors.'

Clausen (1994, XVIII) states that 'Cinna, Catullus, Calvus and other 'disciples' of Parthenius would have disliked pastoral poetry as a genre. He adds 'Not for these poets idealized herdsmen and exquisite pastoral sentiment.'(p.XIX)

Leach (152) says *Bucolica* 2 is about a 'conflict between an aspiring poet and his limitations.'

⁵ Virgil admired Catullus and since his patron Pollio belonged to the same circle, it stands to reason he would have liked to 'fit in'. For Virgil's attitude towards Catullus see p.40 under 'The poet's motives'.

⁶ Although there is much debate about the order of the subsequent eclogues, the chronological primacy of *Bucolica* 2 and 3, as asserted by the ancient *vitae*, is pretty much generally accepted. It is also the view of **Coleman** (19) He gives the chronological order as: 2, 3, 5, 4, 7, 8, 1, 6, 9, 10. To object that Virgil intended eclogue 1 to be the introduction of his *libellus* would be to overlook the fact that - as Coleman also mentions - the Roman public or at the very least Virgil's literary friends would have heard private or public readings of the eclogues long before they were published in one volume.

⁷ The claim that the sexual theme would make poetry attractive is corroborated by Catullus 16, 5-9 '...nam castum esse decet pium poetam/ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est;/**qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,/si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,/et quod pruriat incitare possunt.**' : 'because a pious poet should be chaste, but there is no need for his verses to be; they only have wit

Virgil is seldom associated with sex. And despite the obvious ‘obscenities’ that occur in Theokritos – Virgil’s Greek predecessor –, most scholars treat the *Bucolica* as a highly serious book, apparently assuming (or is it ‘hoping’) that Virgil wouldn’t bother with ‘such frivolities’. Nevertheless, enough arguments can be presented to support the claim that Virgil actually did introduce sexual innuendo into his second and third eclogue.

Of course, this is not to say that all serious interpretations of these poems no longer apply and that *Bucolica* 2 and 3 should from now on *only* be regarded as sexual jokes. The sexual overtones presented in this article are a secondary but striking feature. *Bucolica* 2 and 3 can be and have been looked at from many different angles; what this article argues is that Virgil *at the very least* did nothing to prevent a possible sexual interpretation. Arguments for this claim can be gathered from the poet’s subject matter, his choice of words, the characteristics of his examples and similarities with the work of other authors. Furthermore it was *the manner* in which Virgil introduced this theme into his first bucolic poems that gave him some powerful weapons to stave off any possible criticism from his intended audience.

To make it clear what the effects were of Virgil’s *modus operandi*, first we will examine the texts in detail.

2. *Bucolica* 2

As is well known, Virgil’s second eclogue is a long soliloquy by the shepherd Corydon, who has fallen victim to a hopeless love for the young boy Alexis. Hopeless because Alexis apparently is the ‘favorite’ of his master (‘delicias domini’ - *the master’s pet* v.2), who has a lot more to offer than Corydon (‘Nec si muneribus certes, concedat Iollas.’ - *If you contended with presents, Iollas would not yield* v.57.)

and grace if they are a bit loose and not too modest, and if they can excite what is itching.’

Other authors have found some rather obvious sexual innuendo in the *Bucolica*, e.g. **Fantuzzi** who quotes *Bucolica*.3.66, ‘where Menalcas mentions the gift of ten apples for his extremely obliging puer (cf. ‘mihi sese offert ultro’: *he offers himself to me freely*)’

The poem starts with five verses describing the setting:⁸ Corydon has withdrawn into the forest and is talking to himself, as if rehearsing for a possible meeting with Alexis. From the beginning it is clear to the audience that the theme is an erotic one. This, in combination with the use of the hexameter⁹ would have created the expectation of some sort of satire, which would alert the audience to the possibility of sexual innuendo.

The first verse that can be regarded as ambiguous and that 'introduces' the hidden sexual theme is verse 9: 'nunc virides etiam occultant spineta lacertos' - *now the thickets even hide the green lizards*. On the first semantic level this statement's purpose is to indicate, along with verses 8 and 10-11, that the time is high noon and that it is so hot that even green lizards hide in the bushes, a detail mentioned to accentuate Corydon's devotion in following Alexis' tracks 'sole sub ardenti' - *under the burning sun* (v.13), an allusion to Catullus 64.353, there in a lofty, epic context (Lipka 81: '*such a highly poetic expression in the mouth of an uncouth shepherd like Corydon has a comic element*').

The claim that this verse can be interpreted in a sexual sense is supported by several arguments. First of all there is the strong resemblance of this verse to a passage in Horace (*Odes* 1.23.6-7) '...seu virides rubum/dimovere lacertae' - *be it that green lizards split the bramble-bush* -, where we find a sexual overtone acknowledged by modern scholars. In this poem Horace compares Chloë, a young, inexperienced girl who is afraid of sex, with a young deer frightened by 'lizards' sticking their heads through a 'bramble-bush'. Analyzing the metaphor, we can equate the deer with the girl, the *lacertae* (lizards) with the male sex organ and the *rubum* (bramble-bush) with the female pubic hair. The aim of the poem is to help Chloë overcome her fear of sex, because the poet's persona is out to seduce her¹⁰. So, the erotic

⁸ As **Berg** (113) points out, the Alexandrian influence is apparent from the beginning: verses 1-5 are an imitation of the elegiac poet Phanokles (Ἐφωτες, Powell, fragment. I.1-6) and the name Alexis is borrowed from Meleagros. It also appears in *A.P.* 7.100 attributed to Plato but probably from the third century BC, as shown by **Ludwig**.

⁹ One should remember that Latin poetry was read out loud, rather than in silence.

¹⁰ This is **Claes**' interpretation of Horace *Odes* 1.23 in his study *Claus-Reading* dedicated to the poetry of the Flemish poet Hugo Claus, who has alluded to this poem by Horace in his 1968 poem *De hese nacht en de wagen*. **Minadeo** (29) states that the image of the lizard in the bush '*inescapably intimates sexual*

connotation makes sense in the context of the poem. It seems highly likely, considering the close friendship between the two poets, that in this verse Horace wanted to allude to *Bucolica* 2.9, which suggests that he read a sexual innuendo in it, be it intended by Virgil or not.¹¹

Another striking and significant similarity between Horace's and Virgil's text is the choice of the adjective *viridis* (green) with *lacertus/ta*. Not only can the word mean 'vigorous', it is also a virtual homonym of *virilis* (male)¹². In Latin the word *lacertus* usually means 'upper arm, muscle' and metonymically 'strength'. Thus, *virid(l)is lacertus* can be understood as 'vigorous/male muscle' or 'male strength'¹³. This interpretation is supported even more by the fact that Virgil is the only poet in antiquity to use the masculine form *lacertus* to denote a lizard.

In addition, another poem, closely connected with Virgil – the *Copa Syrisca* from the *Appendix Vergiliana* – has a similar verse (28: 'nunc varia in gelida sede lacerta latet' - *now a spotted/different lizard is hiding in a cool spot*) in a clearly erotic context. A tavern girl is trying to lure a

intercourse'. **Ancona** (72) comes to the selfsame interpretation: "(...) *through the words mobilis (pliant, flexible) and inhorreo (shudder, bristle, stand on end/become erect) the poet evokes the symptoms of (Chloë's) physical arousal. Still further, the erotic potential awakened in this description of spring is realized in the vivid image of sexual intercourse suggested by the lizards moving apart the brambles (virides rubum / dimovere lacertae).*"

Clausen (1994, 66) also links this verse to *Bucolica* 2.9.

¹¹ The question of Virgil's intentions is of course crucial here. It is my view that if it can be established that language *and context* make it possible for the intended audience to read a sexual overtone, the poet must have intended that overtone. I will explain why later on in the article.

¹² **Adams**(137) states that phonetic suggestiveness is typical of sexual innuendo and cites the example of the word *crispo* (*I tremble*), used in the sense of *criso* = *futuo* (*I fuck*), and even *creat* (*he creates*) in the sense of *cacat*, (*he shits*) where the phonetic similarity is limited to the initial sound and the number of syllables. **Ahl's** study of Ovid and other classical poets (passim) is brimming with examples of similar wordplay.

¹³ See Stratôn's epigram *A.P.*12.242 cited below (note 15) where a large penis is called ῥοδόπηχυν: (a pink arm). **Adams** (34) points out that 'arm' (*bracchia macra*: long arms) is used as a metaphor for a large penis in *Carmina Priapea* 72.4 and mentions a representation of a satyr's penis resembling an arm in Dover (131), only to reject the interpretation (without explanation for his change of heart) in his addenda and corrigenda. Adams often fails to provide arguments when he rejects an obscene interpretation. Also *nervus* (tendon, muscle) is commonly used for the penis. Adams (38) cites examples from Horace, Petronius, Juvenal and Catullus.

passer-by into her tavern by offering him all sorts of pleasures, including food, wine, music and women. The verse is a clear echo of *Bucolica* 2.9 or - if we accept the primacy of the *Copa* - *Bucolica* 2.9 could be an echo from the *Copa*.¹⁴

Finally, the connection between lizard and penis can also be found in Theokritos, Pliny the Elder and the epigrammatists Stratôn and Martial.¹⁵

¹⁴ The objection that in the *Copa* the *lacerta* is hiding in a 'cool place' (*gelida sede*) - hardly an appropriate allusion to a vagina - can be countered by interpreting *gelida* as a prolepsis: the cooling down will be the result of the intercourse which is alluded to; if heat is seen as sexual arousal the vagina surely is the place where this arousal gets its chance to 'cool off'. The coolness promised also provides a neat contrast with the heat in *Bucolica* 2.10, making deliberate allusion - even *aemulatio* (one way or the other) - all the more probable. There is also a phonological link between *gelida* with the Greek verb γελλίζω: to tickle. As we will see later on, homophony with Greek words is a frequently used device for making a word ambiguous.

¹⁵ *Bucolica* 2.9 is an imitation of Theokritos' *Idyll* 7.22, where it also might be seen as a sexual joke. Lycidas 'with laughing eyes and a smile on his lips' asks Simichidas where he is hurrying off to in the middle of the day ἀνίκα δὴ καὶ σαύρος ἐν αἰμασιαῖσι καθεύδει. (*while even the lizard sleeps in the thorn hedge/brick wall*), i.e. while everyone else is having a 'siesta') αἰμασιαῖσι is commonly translated as 'in the wall made of dried bricks' but αἰμασία in the first place means 'thorn-hedge', which makes the parallel with Virgil and Horace perfect.

In *Idyll* 2.58 Simaitha is grinding up a σαύραν (lizard) as a κακὸν ποτὸν (poisonous drink) for her unfaithful lover. Another sign that the lizard was linked to sexuality. Magic usually works by analogy: to punish an unfaithful lover, Simaitha grinds up a lizard. If the punishment is to fit the crime, the desired effect of the κακὸν ποτὸν may well have been impotence. This is confirmed by Pliny (*Naturalis Historiae* 30.141) who claims a lizard drowned in the urine of a man, 'inhibits' the sexual drive of the same man, adding that lizards are, according to the Mages, linked with matters erotic (*inter amatoria esse Magi dicunt*.) In three of Stratôn's poems the link between lizard and penis is undeniable:

A.P. 12. 3.1-2 and 5: 'Τῶν παίδων, Διόδωρε, τὰ προσθέματ' εἰς τρία πίπτει/ σχήματα(...) τὴν δὴ ἤδη πρὸς χεῖρα σαλευομένην λέγε σαύραν'; (*The 'appendices' of boys, Diodoros, fall into three categories (...)The one that already jumps up to your hand you should call 'a lizard'*); A.P.12.207: 'Ἐχθὲς λουόμενος Διοκλῆς 'ανενήνοχε σαύραν'/ ἐκ τῆς 'εμβάσεως τὴν 'Αναδυομένην.' (*While bathing yesterday Diokles showed a 'lizard'/Like an Aphrodite emerging from her bath*); A.P.12.242: 'Πρώτην τὴν σαύραν ῥοδοδάκτυλον, Ἄλκιμ' ἔδειξας: / νῦν δ' αὐτὴν ἤδη καὶ ῥοδόπηχυν ἔχεις.'

In other words, beside the observation that the weather is so very hot that lizards hide in the bushes, the poet is also suggesting that some couples are taking advantage of the midday break 'to cool their passion' by engaging in love-play; an overtone which serves as a contrast to Corydon's frustrated desire and is altogether appropriate, considering the 'erotic' theme of the poem. Corydon explicitly mentions the presence of other people (harvesters: *messoribus* v.10 and *Thestylis* v.10).

This one verse draws the audience's attention towards sexual innuendo. Someone who spots a sexual overtone in one verse is likely to go looking for another one. So once a poet introduces innuendo, he can reasonably expect that in the rest of his text, anything that *consistently* can be seen as ambiguous will be thus interpreted.

Take the subsequent verses: 'Thestylis et rapido fessis messoribus aestu/ allia serpyllumque herbas contundit olentes' - *And Thestylis is grinding garlic and wild thyme, odorous herbs, for the harvesters, exhausted by the murderous heat (Buc.2.10-11)*. The harvesters (*messoribus*) are exhausted due to the murderous heat (*rapido aestu*), but because of the allusion to sexual intercourse in the previous verse we feel inclined to see the girl named Thestylis rather than the sun, as the source of that heat¹⁶. Virgil suggests she has 'exhausted' the harvesters. Notice the name Thestylis itself, not only the same name as Simaitha's maid in

(*Before, Alkimos, you showed us a 'lizard' like a pink finger:/ 'now you have one like a pink arm*).

Adams (30) mentions the lizard as a phallic metaphor with reference to Stratôn, although he calls the evidence for the currency of 'σαύρα' in a sexual meaning 'poor'. He does not mention the Latin equivalent *lacerta*, although elsewhere he repeatedly concedes that Latin equivalents of Greek sexual metaphors did acquire a sexual meaning (e.g. p.82 where the word *porcus* (pig) means vagina like the Greek χοῖρος.).

Finally there is a tantalizing distich by Martial (14.172): 'Ad te reptanti, puer insidioso, **lacertae**/ Parce; cupit digitis illa perire tuis.' (*Spare this lizard crawling towards you, treacherous boy./It wants to die between your fingers*), suggesting a request for masturbation by the 'puer insidioso', 'dying' (*perire*) being mentioned by **Adams** (159) as a metaphor for orgasm. Taking this distich literally would rob it of any sense: who would want to offer someone something so he can kill it?

¹⁶ 'Heat' is a common metaphor for erotic passion as is evident from *ardebat* (burned) in the opening line of the poem. **Putnam** (90) says *aestus* (heat) has erotic connotations and refers to Propertius 3.24.17-18. *Rapido*, which is linked to Thestylis by the caesura, is derived from *rapere* (to ravish), a metaphor for sexual intercourse cited by Adams (175).

Theokritos' second Idyll, another poem about lost love, but also a word sounding very much like that other ambiguous word in Latin: *testis* (witness', but also 'testicle')¹⁷. This counters the possible objection that the ambiguity in the previous verse is isolated and therefore, purely coincidental.

Furthermore, in antiquity, garlic (*allium*), one of the herbs Thestylis is grinding for the harvesters, was a notorious aphrodisiac¹⁸. This forms a nice contrast with Theokritos' second Idyll where Thestylis is assisting with the preparation of a κακὸν ποτὸν, a poisonous drink, used to punish her heartless lover, presumably with impotence (see note 15).

After this first introduction of the theme, the poem continues with a moral lesson by Corydon ('don't be too proud of your looks': a cliché from erotic epigrams and elegiac verse) and a passage in which Corydon brags about his wealth, musicality and looks¹⁹. From verse 28 onward Corydon is trying to rouse Alexis' interest in country life. His idyllic portrayal of the rustic lifestyle is wrought with possible obscene hints.

¹⁷ For the ambiguous use of *testis*: e.g. Plautus *Curculio* 32 and *Corpus Priapeorum* 15.7.

¹⁸ **Clausen** (1994, 67) points out that Thestylis is preparing a *Moretum*, (a dish made with cheese and herbs) but he notes – the poem *Moretum* from the *Appendix Vergiliana* in hand - that wild thyme (*serpyllum*) was not an ingredient in a proper *moretum*. This anomaly may have served as a warning to the audience that there is more to this *moretum* than meets the eye. *Serpyllum silvestre* is the Latin name for a herb called σισύμβριον in Greek, which is listed in a scholion on Theocritus *Idyll* 11.10 as one of the words denoting the vagina. Σισύμβριον is also the name of a prostitute mentioned by Theophilus, quoted by Athenaeus (See: *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*; lemma: σισύμβριον).

For references to the aphrodisiac properties of garlic and other bulbous plants in Aristophanes, Theophrastus, Galen, Aristotle, Martial, Petronius and others see **McMahon**.

¹⁹ There is one sexual overtone to be found in this passage. Corydon boasts about his ample supply of 'milk', a common metaphor for sperm (see **Newbold**).

Horace uses the same metaphor in *Odes* 2.19.10-11, where Bacchus' procreative influence is symbolized by *vinique fontem lactis et uberes... rivis*: (fountain of wine and rich streams of milk) (see **Minadeo** 213-214). That milk was a metaphor for sperm is also inferred in a coarse joke by Virgil himself in *Bucolica* 3, where the fans of his rivals Bavius and Maeuius are equated with people who 'milk he-goats', not only a useless act if taken literally, but also an obscene hint at bestiality not uncommon in invective (see e.g. Iuvenalis *Satire* 6.334). This is not to say that Corydon really *means* sperm when he says milk. An overtone doesn't supersede the literal meaning but adds to it.

First of all he invites him to ‘figere cervos’ - *to pierce deer* (29). Naturally he means hunting, but the words can also be seen as an allusion to sex with animals, familiar from epigrams, other bucolic poems and – with a bit of good will – even Virgil’s own work.²⁰

Again Horace echoes Virgil’s ‘figere cervos’ (*Odes* 3.12. 11: ‘cervos iaculari’ - *to spear deer*) with a sexual overtone, when Neobule praises her beloved’s skill as a (sexual) hunter.²¹

The reader should notice the reoccurrence in verse 30 of the word *viridi*, which has been made ambiguous in verse 9. Here it is combined with *hibisco*. These words can be regarded as a poetic dative of direction

²⁰ For ‘euphemistic’ references to bestiality see Theokritos *Idyll* 1.87-88: Ὠπόλος ὄκκ’ ἔσορῆι τὰς μηκάδας οἶα βατεῦνται/τάκεται ὀφθαλμῶς, ὅτι οὐ τράγος ἔγεντο - *When the shepherd sees how the young goats frolick, he regrets he wasn’t born a he-goat* - and *Idyll* 27. 7: καλόν σοι δαμάλας φιλέειν, οὐκ ἄζυγα κώραν - *It would be better for you to go and kiss heifers instead of an unmarried girl*. Also A.P.12. 41, in which Meleagros scoffs at ‘goat-jumping shepherds’ (ποιμέσιν αἰγοβάταις), Moschos *Europa* (*Carmen* 1. 94-98 and Virgil *Bucolica* 3.8: *novimus et qui te...transversa tuentibus hircis*: (*we know who...you, while the he-goats looked on askance*) (are the he-goats shocked, or jealous?)

For *figere* as a metaphor for sexual intercourse see Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 2.707-708 *Invenient digiti quod agant in partibus illis, /in quibus occulte spicula figit Amor* - *fingers will find something to do in these parts, which Amor stealthily pierced with his arrows* - and Tibullus 2.1.71: *(cupido) fixisse puellas gestit* - *Cupid longs to pierce the girls*. In both instances Cupid’s arrows bear a distinctive phallic connotation.

The link between piercing and sexual intercourse is an obvious one. One example can be found in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* 2, where the maid Photis eggs her lover Lucius on and refers to sexual intercourse with military language ‘occide, proeliare’ (*kill, fight!*).

Hunting in general can be a metaphor for erotic pursuit, culminating in sex. For instance, in *Corpus Tibullianum* 3.10, an imagined hunting party ends with sex: ‘*si, lux mea, tecum/arguar ante ipsas concubuisse plagas.*’ - *If it will be said, my love, that I made love to you right in front of the hunter’s nets*. In Ovid’s *Ars* examples of hunting as erotic pursuit abound, but sometimes the sexual act itself is hinted at (e.g. *Ars Amatoria* 1.391-393). See also **Batstone. Adams** lists instances where spears and javelins are metaphors for the penis. (*Corpus Priapeorum* 9.14 and 55.4 and Martial 11.78.6: *telum* and *Corpus Priapeorum* 43.1 and 4: *hasta*). He also mentions bows and arrows as phallic metaphors (21-22) and the verbs *traicere* and *inforare/perforare* (to pierce) (150) for sexual intercourse.

²¹ See **Minadeo** (30).

or as an ablative of place (driving the kids towards/gathering the herd near the green hibiscus), but also as an instrumental ablative (subduing the herd with a green/vigorous/male ‘hibiscus’). The hibiscus’ rather long pistil does have its shape and color in common with a male sex organ in erection²². In addition *hibisco* sounds a lot like ἡβίσκος²³, a diminutive form of ἡβος, a Theocritean (!) word for ἡβῶν meaning ‘youth’, (clearly derived from ἔφηβος: *young man, youth*). And Ἡβη (youth) is a metaphor for the penis in an obscene epigram by Stratôn (A.P.12.225, see p. 47). Youth and the penis are also linked in Latin. Adams (76) points out that although the original meaning of *pubes* was probably ‘pubic hair’, it is also used for the male genitals in general. He cites Celsus 2.3.1,2.4.3,2.7.12 and 4.1.11 as examples. However, *pubes* also means ‘youth’, especially sexually mature youth, as is evident from the use of the plural *puberes* to denote young men of a fighting (and procreating) age.

Furthermore, the *haedus* (‘kid’) was proverbial for its wantonness. (See Ovid *Metamorphoses* 13.79: ‘tenero lascivior haedo’ - *hornier than a tender kid*) Minadeo (203-204) mentions a *haedus* as a phallic symbol in Horace *Odes* 3.13.3-5: ‘haedo, /cui frons turgida cornibus/primis et Venerem et proelia destinat.’ - *a kid, whose forehead bulging with the first signs of horns destines him to love/sex and fighting*. So if the audience didn’t fancy the hint at bestiality, the *haedi* could be seen as a metaphor for wanton boys being herded together near or subdued with the ‘hibiscus/ penis’. The reference to Pan, a lover of both beasts and boys, in the following verses supports both interpretations (See below and notes 26 and 28).

In verse 31 Corydon says that Alexis will ‘imitabere Pana (canendo)’ - *you will imitate Pan, (by singing)*. Pan is known for his sexual escapades with animals: after all he is a fertility god, responsible for the increase of the herd. *Canendo* appears to strip the verb *imitabere* from its sexual overtone on the first semantic level. In fact it leaves the reader of the text with an amusing choice. He can choose to play a game with the audience, which is liable to react all too avidly to the sexual connotation of *imitabere Pana*, only to be embarrassed when the reader adds the

²² **McMahon** states that similarity in shape was one of the reasons why plants were linked to the sexual organs.

²³ The pronunciation of the η had moved towards that of the ε in the Hellenistic era and was on its way towards the ι in the second century CE. Homophony with a foreign word is a common cause of ambiguity, as any teacher who has taught the Latin word for the number six to a class of giddy youngsters will testify.

word *canendo* after a short pause and in an austere tone, denying any sexual innuendo, thereby creating a teasing anticlimax. On the other hand, if one accepts that *imitabere Pana* contains a sexual overtone, due to Pan's randy reputation, it follows that, if left to its own devices, the audience is likely to read the *overtone* of 'having sex' into whatever verb is used to describe the activity Alexis will imitate²⁴. So we only need to establish that Pan is commonly associated with sex to make *canere* ambiguous *in this verse*.²⁵ The link between Pan and sex is common in antiquity. We can even cite a reference with some relevance to Virgil: an

²⁴ The verb *canere* can be used for 'uttering just about any kind of sound'; it is certainly used for the utterances of animals, so could also refer to the inarticulate sounds people (or in this case Pan) make at the moment of orgasm. There are several arguments to support the claim that *canere* can refer to sex and does so *in this context* (note the emphasis!).

There is nothing inherently implausible about such a metaphor; in fact, it does exist, for instance in Dutch where the practice of coitus interruptus is described as 'voor het zingen de kerk uitgaan' (*leaving church before the singing starts*); where singing is a clear metaphor for the 'climax' of a 'ritual'.

The link between sexual and poetic power is also evident in Horace *Odes* 2.19, where Bacchus is depicted (vv.1-4) teaching *carmina* (songs) to the nymphs, followed by a reference to his mighty and phallic *thyrsus* (ritual staff: v.8) and its formidable powers of fertility (vv.9-12) (see **Minadeo** 211-214). Generally, performing song and dance was considered disreputable behaviour in antiquity, commonly left to slaves, who were beyond corruption. For instance, Sallust chides the woman Sempronia for being an accomplished dancer and musician in his *Conspiracy of Catiline*, 26.

Lastly, there is an example of a poet explicitly equating singing and sex. **Richlin** (185-87) points out that the satirist Persius equates bad poetry with effeminate sex. And that he sees his own poetry as the penis he uses to rape bad poets with (e.g. Persius *Satires* 1.21: 'tremulo scalpuntur ubi intima versu' (*when your innards are raped by my quivering verse*). The fact that he uses such a bold metaphor suggests that his audience would not have found it odd.

²⁵ This *doesn't mean* that this sexual overtone is always present in *canere* or even that it is always to be found when *canere* is found in connection with Pan; it remains possible to write about Pan making music without hinting at his sexual escapades. But Pan always carries the connotation of a sexually active god. That means that *in an erotic context*, where sex is the subject or the goal of the text (as it is here), this connotation is highlighted whenever it makes *sense in that context*, as it does here.

epigram by Theokritos (A.P.9.338) where Daphnis is warned against Priapus and Pan trying to rape him.²⁶

Verse 32 has possible sexual overtones as well. This time the allusion is based on a pun. 'Calamos cera coniungere', which in the first place means 'connecting reeds with wax', can - again under the influence of the preceding sexual overtones - be interpreted as a reference to sex with animals. *Cera* sounds like the Greek κεραίς: goat, and a *calamus*: 'reed' or 'arrow', shares the fate of all oblong objects in the rest of the poem: it can be seen as a symbol for the male sex organ²⁷.

To end this passage, Corydon ambiguously claims: 'Pan curat oves oviumque magistros' (*Pan takes care of the sheep and the masters of the sheep*), where the vague verb *curat* is subject to erotic connotations, considering the context.²⁸

²⁶ Also, a lithograph in **Famin** depicts a Satyr (or Pan) copulating with a goat'. (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/sex/rmn/rmn02.htm>.) The webpage also contains several references to sex with animals from Herodotos, Plutarch and Virgil.

²⁷ **Ahl** (251) finds a similar worldplay on *cera/κέρας* in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10.284-86 where Pygmalion's statue is brought to life and the ivory (which Ahl connects with the horns mentioned in the earlier story of the Cerastae) melts into flesh. Ovid describes this with a simile about wax (*cera*) from Hymettus (in Athens: according to Ahl a hint that an allusion to the Greek homonym is intended) that melts in the sun and is molded into shape. The melting of the wax has an orgasmic connotation - the coming to life is described as the result of Pygmalion making love to the statue and through the link with κέρας it also suggests the 'melting' of Pygmalion's penis after sexual intercourse. When the ivory/horn melts - i.e. after their love play - the two lovers are united. Ahl also links Cerastae with erastae = lovers (Ovid Met 10.223).

calamus is a homonym of the vulgarism *calare = futuere*: 'to fuck' (**Adams** 172-4) in the first person plural present indicative. Also (*coniungere*: 'to connect, to join', is mentioned by **Adams** (179) as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. Alternatively this passage might refer to homosexual intercourse. In this interpretation *cera* refers to the Greek κέρας: 'horn', an obvious metaphor for the penis, and *calamos* can be translated as 'stubble' referring to the hairs around the anus. (See also p. 48 for a reference to A.P. 12.41 where Meleagros may be using the metaphor 'hairy cave' for the anus.)

²⁸ Sulpicia uses the imperative *cura togae* in her fourth poem to pretend she is indifferent to Cerinthus' infidelity with a whore. On the first semantic level these words mean 'take care of your reputation as a citizen', but they also mean 'carry on with your whore', the toga being the traditional dress, not only of male citizens, but also of prostitutes (See **Batstone**). There is a similar use of words in English and French: 'to take care of' and 'arranger' = 'to have intercourse with'.

In this interpretation, Virgil (or Corydon) uses innuendo to make Pan into a mythological exemplum for the sexual behavior he wants to elicit from Alexis; a very urbane motif, familiar – in a more explicit form – from elegy and epigram. There also gods are associated with less lofty endeavors to achieve humor.²⁹

And the covert sexual seduction goes on in the following verse: ‘Nec te paeniteat calamo trivisse labellum’ - *You will not regret having bruised your lip on my flute*. For if we accept the equation *calamus* = penis, Corydon is inviting Alexis to do no less than perform oral sex on him. One might object that this can hardly be considered an attractive proposal to Alexis since throughout antiquity this practice was considered the most shameful form of sexual intercourse.³⁰ But in this verse Corydon is precisely trying to ‘bribe’ Alexis into doing it, suggesting he would make it ‘worth his while’. Besides, fellatio is only shameful when a grown man stoops to it; a young boy like Alexis is not regarded as a real man, so it would not (yet) be degrading for him to play a passive role (as he most likely does now with his master Iollas).

Furthermore the noun *cura*, derived from *curare*, is an equivalent for *amata* in Virgil’s *Bucolica* 10.22 and for *amor* or *cupido* in Propertius 1.15.31 and 3.21.3.

Hubbard (63) names Heliodorus’ statue ‘Pan teaching Daphnis to play the pipes’ as an influential image of Pan as a pederast. He acknowledges that verses 31-39 in *Bucolica* 2 have erotic overtones: *Corydon’s invitation... include(s) instructions in the art of the panpipe, the associations of such tutelage are both initiatory and homoerotic (my emphasis)*. **Fantuzzi** (8) detects an atmosphere of rural/poetic *enthousiasmos* in this verse, linking it to Bacchic orgies.

²⁹ E.g. Propertius 2.15, where naked (demi-) goddesses from mythology (Helen, Luna) are held up as examples for Cynthia in order to get her to undress, and Martial 11.104 where Hector and Andromache are presented as enthusiastic lovers, Penelope appears masturbating and great Roman figures from antiquity and Jupiter himself are upheld as exempla to promote the act of anal sex, all to entice a frigid wife to be more willing and active in bed.) The idea that introducing mythic examples (or any other exalted content) in an obscene context was a way of achieving humor, is also asserted by **Richlin** (146). She quotes Martial 11.104 as an example.

³⁰ See among others Catullus *Carmina* 16, 21 and 80 and Martial 1.77. The shameful of fellatio is also stressed and explained by **Richlin**, *The Garden of Priapus. Terere (trivisse: Bucolica 2.34)* is a common metaphor for sexual intercourse (e.g. Propertius 3.11.30; Petronius 87.8 and Corpus Priapeorum 46.9). As Adams points out, the imprecision of the verb permits it to be used in a variety of (sexual) senses, including oral sex. (**Adams** (185)).

One might also explain away the apparent anomaly by asking an important question: is Corydon *aware* of the ambiguity in his words? Or are the overtones merely an extra urbane feature, added by Virgil to play a game with his audience? In other words: is Corydon an urbane shepherd or is Virgil showing his audience that he is an urbane poet? If Corydon is thought to be unaware of the innuendo in his language, the urbane audience is given the opportunity to laugh at this *rusticus*, because he doesn't realize that in the city the meaning of what he is saying is different from its meaning in the country.³¹

Verses 35 and 36 also fit very well within the sexual sub-context. Verse 35 goes as follows: 'haec eadem ut sciret, quid non faciebat Amyntas?' - *What didn't Amyntas do to know these same (songs)?* Under the influence of the sexual connotations in the previous verses the reader may be tempted to surmise that whatever Amyntas has done (*faciebat*) to know (*sciret*) 'haec eadem' belongs to the realm of sexuality.³²

In verse 36 Corydon starts bragging about his panpipe (*fistula*), which, he claims, is 'comprised of seven unequal hemlock stalks' (*disparibus septem compacta cicutis*). Flutes and pipes are rather obvious metaphors for the penis, not only in Latin but also in English and other languages like Dutch and French. Furthermore the word *fistula* sounds a lot like and has the same number of syllables as the word *mentula*: 'cock'. Virgil uses the same procedure repeatedly in the third eclogue. There too the link between the three-syllable-words ending in -ula and their obscene rhyming word produces a meaningful sexual interpretation. (See further p. 28 n. 53)

³¹ If we assume Corydon is aware of the innuendo in his words, he comes across as an urbane seducer in bucolic disguise, (a mocking alter-ego for Virgil himself?), with a somewhat risqué sexual taste, enticing young boys to indulge in sex with animals and fellatio. Of course we don't have to choose between these two interpretations; they can coexist, in keeping with the theme of ambiguity in the poem.

³² **Adams** lists *facere* (204) and *noscere* (190), a synonym for *scire*, as metaphors for sexual intercourse. The ellipse of the noun after *eadem* creates ambiguity especially because the word usually supplied (*carmina*) can be seen as ambiguous by the association of *canendo* with Pan in verse 31. That this interpretation of this verse is not new is proven by a story by **Marcel Pagnol** (56) in his commentary to this poem in his translation of Virgil's Eclogues. He writes that the abbot Dellille in his earlier edition of the *Bucolica* not only changed the names of Alexis and Menalcas to Lycoris and Iope (to get rid of the homosexuality in the poem) but that he also omitted this verse because it was 'gênant'.

One might object to the equation *fistula* = *mentula* by pointing out that a mere rhyme forms a feeble ground to create a semantic link between two words, especially since a panpipe does not even have a phallic shape, but Adams (137) states that phonetic suggestiveness in sexual innuendo often depends on even scantier resemblances (see note 12). Secondly, ‘panpipe’ is not the first meaning of the word *fistula*: basically it means ‘tube’, or ‘reed’, both of which do have a phallic shape. Thirdly, there is a precedent for the link panpipe - penis in the epigrams of...Theokritos. In *AP* 6, 177, the shepherd Daphnis dedicates his flute (τοὺς τρητοὺς δόνακας = σύριγγα = *fistulam*; τρητοὺς: ‘pierced’ could be taken to refer to the urethral opening; the plural can be seen as a poetic plural), staff (λαγωβόλον), javelin (ὄξυν ἄκοντα), skin (νεβρίδα), and pouch (τάν πήραν) in which he carried fruit (ἐμαλοφόρει) to the god (and his lover) Pan. Seeing that Pan and Daphnis were lovers, the flute, staff and javelin can all be seen as metaphors for Daphnis’ penis and the skin and pouch with fruit, as metaphors for his scrotum (the use of the imperfect ἐμαλοφόρει suggests sexual exhaustion).³³

The same double entendre can be found in Horace. Minadeo (93) stresses the ‘phallicism’ of the ‘hanging *fistula*’ (‘*cur pendet tacita fistula cum lyra?* - *Why is the flute hanging with the silent lyre* v.20) in Horace *Odes* 3.19, a poem in which the poet, exasperated by a boring discussion, is determined to spice things up with wine, song and women. Minadeo

³³ Also in Theokritos *Idyll* 5.134-135, Lakoon in his last response of the amoebaion sings about a panpipe offered (τάν σύριγγῶν ὄρεξα) to the boy Eumedes and being rewarded with kisses. (ἐφίλησεν) It doesn’t take a great stretch of the imagination to see the pipe as an allusion to a penis and the kiss as an allusion to love-play. It certainly fits the erotic atmosphere of the passage. Also the song-contest between Daphnis and Damoitas in Theokritos *Idyll* 6 ends with the two boys ‘kissing’ (ἐφίλησε) and ‘exchanging flutes’ (χρῶ μὲν τῷ σύριγγῶν, ὃ δὲ τῷ καλὸν αὐλὸν ἔδωκεν) and the young calves (πόρτιες) ‘dancing on the grass’. The dance suggests moving bodies, mirroring the boys’ love-play, the calves can even be seen as metaphors for the two boys (in a homosexual encounter the use of the feminine can be seen as a joke or a jibe). Theokritos stresses the mutual satisfaction of the transaction in his last verse: νίκη μὰν ὀδάλλος, ἀνήσασατοι δ’ ἐγένοντο. – *none of them was the winner, they were both undefeated* (Theokritos *Idyll* 6.46). In *Idyll* 10 Boukaios is in love with Bombuka, whom he describes to his friend Milon as ‘she who the other day played the flute for the harvesters’ (v.16). Milon replies with a proverb indicating that Bombuka (whose name, incidentally, means ‘flute’) is easy to get, which sheds an erotic light on her flute playing.

sees the idle lyre, with its ‘hollow sounding chamber’ as representing the female element. The mention of the Bercynthian flute (18-19) (‘a ritualistic instrument of the cult of Cybele’), indicates the poet’s longing for ‘orgiastic music’ i.e. music and sex.

Likewise, in *Odes* 4.1, a poem full of sexual innuendo and imagery, Horace says Paulus Maximus, whom he presents to Venus as her next champion, will win ‘great triumphs’ in her army and will erect a ‘marble statue’ of her where she will hear songs accompanied (again) by the lyre, Bercynthian flute, ‘non sine fistula’ - *not without a flute* (v.24). If taken metaphorically the *fistula* becomes the instrument Paulus will ‘perform’ his art (*carminibus* see note 24) with as a lover.

In *Odes* 4.12 Horace invites Virgil to stop being so serious for a while and ‘enjoy life’: In this poem, the shepherds ‘play’ the *fistula* for the goats and delight Pan ‘cui pecus et colles Arcadiae placent’ - *who loves cattle and the Arcadian hills* -, maybe a covert allusion to sex with animals and a jocular reference to the *Bucolica*.

So the phonetic similarity between *fistula* and *mentula* must be seen as an additional hint to establish the link between them, and is by no means the only basis for it. The same mechanism can be seen at work in *spicula* (arrows) in Ovid *Ars* 2.708 and in *sicula* (small dagger) in Catullus *Carmina* 67.21 and *falcula* (small sickle) in *CE* 1900 – both cited by Adams (21 and 24).³⁴

³⁴ CE 1900 reads: ‘Li(nge) Le(li, l)inge L(eli) linge Leli fa(lc)ula(m).’ - *Lick, L(a)elius, my little sickle*.

Fistula is also found in an erotic context in two passages in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In 2.683, Apollo is evoked in the days when he was a shepherd and in love, and Ovid adds ‘dum te tua fistula mulcet’ - *while your flute comforts you* -, after having described the *fistula* in words reminiscent of *Bucolica* 2.35: ‘dispar septenis fistula cannis’ - *an uneven flute with seven reeds*. Of course, on the first level Ovid suggests that Apollo uses music to soothe the pain of unrequited love, but there is a possible hint at masturbation that fits in well with Ovid’s irreverent attitude towards the gods.

In accordance with the syllabic wordplay detected by **Ahl** (39) the syllable –tul – in both *mentula* and *fistula* might be connected by the audience with the stem *tul/tol*, denoting a ‘raising’ like in the verb *tollere*, which might evoke the image of an erect penis.

In *Metamorphoses* 4.122, Pyramus’ blood spurting out when he kills himself over Thisbe’s bloodied veil, is compared to water spurting from a broken *fistula* (here a water-pipe) The words ‘vitiato plumbo’, containing the word *lumbus*: ‘genitals’ (see Adams (48)) could be interpreted as ‘*when (a woman’s) genitals have been violated*’. Also the copious spurting gives the

If we accept the equation *fistula* = *mentula* in this verse, then Corydon is – covertly – bragging about the length of his penis. Of course in this case we should not imagine seven segments of reed lying side by side but rather one after the other. More accurately, *cicuta* means ‘the space between two knots of a reed’. The two knots can be seen as the scrotum and the *glans penis*, and if you put seven – albeit unequal – segments of reed in between you get a very long penis – an image that may have provoked some hilarity in the audience³⁵.

episode a distinct sexual atmosphere. The fact that the word *eiaculatur* (124) does not occur in a purely sexual context in classical times doesn’t make it unsuitable to suggest an ejaculation. Pyramus’ suicide can thus be seen as his last (premature) attempt to unite himself with his supposedly dead love. The imagery of death and sex is intermingled, just as Pyramus and Thisbe will eventually be united in death when their ashes are thrown together in the same urn. (To object that in this context a sexual overtone is inappropriate, since it ruins a perfectly chaste romantic story, would be to project modern attitudes about the incompatibility of love and lust on Ovid, to whom sex is an integral part of love. After all, what do all those romantic readers imagine Pyramus and Thisbe would have done, if they had succeeded in coming together? Furthermore, the sex is only in an overtone; it can be easily overlooked or ignored – and has been for many centuries – if the reader is so inclined.)

Finally, it appears that the metaphor was still recognized in later centuries: *fistula* – albeit in its medical sense – was used ambiguously by none other than William Shakespeare, who was obviously well versed in classical literature. In his ‘dark’ comedy *All’s Well that Ends Well*, so Hoole points out, the king of France suffers from a *fistula* and his illness is clad in sexual imagery, suggesting impotence, which is confirmed by the king’s warning to his nobles, as they go off to war in Florence, to beware of Italian women (Act 2, scene 1, 19-22), just as his healing by Helena is presented as a restoration of sexual vigor. (Act 2, scene 1, 73-77 and 124, where the king describes trusting Helena’s cure as to ‘prostitute our past-cure malady’) So when the king’s *fistula* is healed, his sexual prowess is restored. (Act 2, scene 2, 112-113 where Bertram refers to the recovery as: ‘your raising’).

³⁵ One could even construe another reference to sex with animals. Virgil’s use of *cicuta* as a segment of a panpipe is an allusion to a passage in Lucretius (*De rerum natura* 5.1382), where he uses *cicuta* with the same meaning. Without this passage, Virgil could not have used *cicuta* as a word to denote a segment of a panpipe. When the word occurs in other than bucolic contexts, it is invariably in a reference to the poisonous nature of the hemlock. But readers of Virgil who detected the allusion to Lucretius, will have remembered the only other passage in Lucretius where *cicuta* occurs (*De rerum natura* 5.899). There he tells us that although hemlock is poisonous for humans, one also frequently sees goats

At first glance, the link between *fistula* and *mentula* is made meaningless by verses 37-39. After all, how could Damoetas have given his penis as a gift to Corydon? But when subjected to a closer reading, this passage can make perfect sexual sense and further supports the ambiguity of *fistula*. Damoetas passing his flute on to Corydon on his deathbed, can be read as the two making such passionate love³⁶ that Damoetas ‘dies of pleasure’³⁷ claiming Corydon is his second lover. Of course, on this level *quam* in verse 37 must be seen as exclamatory rather than relative – an easy shift in a language that did not know punctuation: (*What a fistula/penis Damoetas “gave” to me* - Corydon is referring to Damoetas’ penis, not his own: he is reminiscing about his days as Damoetas’ *eromenos*, a role he would have Alexis play for him). Amyntas’ jealousy, then, becomes purely sexual.

There is also something odd about the little chamois (*capreoli*) Corydon offers to Alexis. First of all the word *capreolus* is very similar to the Greek *κάπρος* (‘boar’, but also ‘male sex organ’), and - even more fitting here - to the verb *καπρώω* (‘being sexually aroused’)³⁸. Furthermore, the word in this meaning is extremely rare in Latin poetry (the only other instance of *capreolus* meaning ‘chamois’ is in Columella’s *De Re Rustica* 9.1.1 a century later) and Virgil avoids it in

‘growing fat’ on it. Of course, he means it could serve as food for goats, but if transferred to this erotic context, with an allusion to sex with animals having already occurred, Corydon’s description of his *fistula* can be seen as a boast that he has plenty of equipment to impregnate animals. As if he sees himself as a true reincarnation of Pan. If we accept this overtone, it is clear that this is a Virgilian joke and that Corydon himself could not be aware of it, unless we want to see him as a pervert who isn’t ashamed to brag about his deviant sexual behaviour.

³⁶ Virgil writes that Damoetas *dono dedit* the *fistula*. *Dare* is the word used for assenting to sexual intercourse. (See among others Martial 4.71 and 11.104)

³⁷ In Latin *mori* can be used in this metaphorical sense, just as ‘to die’ can have a metaphorical (sensual) meaning in other languages. Take, for instance, the English phrase ‘He is to die for!’ or the common expression ‘to die of (envy, curiosity, pleasure,...)’. In French the expression ‘la petite mort’, denoting an orgasm has become notorious. See also Adams (159). See also the aforementioned epigram by Martial 14.172 (note 15), where ‘to die’ meant ‘to ejaculate’.

³⁸ One might object that this reference to ‘obscene’ Greek homonyms is farfetched. But is it, in a text explicitly competing with a Greek predecessor in a Greek genre, where the characters all have Greek names and which is altogether set in a Greek context?

the rest of the *Bucolica*³⁹ making it stand out. Their skin is *sparsis albo*, in the first place to hint at their age but also a possible allusion to sperm stains⁴⁰, which would support the sexual connotation attached to these chamois by the pun on their generic name.

Virgil says about them in verse 42: *'bina die siccant ovis ubera'*. On the first semantic level this means 'they dry up two udders a day'. But as Cicero points out (*Ad Familiares* 9.22.3), the word *bini*, *-ae*, *-a* was very ambiguous because of its similarity to the Greek βινέω: 'to fuck'. The combination of the Latin and Greek meaning of the word in the form used here, produces something like 'a pair of neuter objects used for fucking'. In other words: *testicula*⁴¹. Furthermore, the word *ubera*, being the plural accusative of the noun *uber*, *uberis*: 'udder, breast', can also be the plural neuter accusative of the adjective *uber*, *uberis*: 'fertile, abundant, big, well filled'. If by this interpretation we turn around the relation between adjective (*bina*) and noun (*ubera*) in the direct object of this sentence, and we take into account that the word *ovis* can also mean 'ram' and in Plautus (*Bacch.* 5.2.3) it even means *rusticus* in its connotation of 'imbecile', then Corydon is suggesting – again without knowing it – that these (randy) chamois (or toy-boys) daily 'drain the well filled testicles of a *rusticus*', i.e. have wild sex with him. If we surmise that the chamois were not choosy about the sex of their sexual partners, it is easily understood why the aforementioned Thestylis would like to acquire them from Corydon (43-44).

Admittedly, the sexual interpretation of the chamois-passage is less straightforward and requires more elaborate explanations than the passage about the lizard and Thestylis and the one about 'imitating Pan' or even the *fistula*. However, arguments will be presented to suggest that the Roman literary audience was very keen on this kind of innuendo and was very adept at detecting it, even when hidden very well. And even if

³⁹ In *Bucolica* 9 Lycidas tells Tityrus to keep his mind on his work and to beware of the '*capro*'. But in this context a sexual innuendo would be isolated and does not seem to be appropriate.

⁴⁰ For the link between white stains and sperm, see Catullus 80. **Richlin** (26-31) discusses the concept of staining in sexual invective.

⁴¹ Also, in Greek the word διδύμοι 'twins' is used for the testicles in epigrams (e.g. *AP* 5.105). Again, I must stress that this doesn't mean that *bini* could legitimately be seen as ambiguous in *every context* (even though Cicero's letter to Paetus seems to imply that it was virtually impossible to use the word without eliciting a snicker), only where such an interpretation would make sense: as it does here. The same applies for words as *testis* or *dare* or *coniungere*.

we choose to deny the presence of sexual innuendo in the *chamois*, this does not cancel the possible allusions detected earlier in the text. It is a characteristic of this text that the audience can switch between two layers of meaning at will.

The symbolism of the enumeration of flowers and fruits in verses 45-55 is hard to determine. Floral symbolism varies considerably from one culture to another and it is virtually impossible to determine exactly what every flower stood for in Roman times. But if this potential source of more sexual innuendo remains closed to us, a straightforward close reading of the passage yields enough to support the sexual interpretation of *Bucolica 2*.

Naturally the allusion to Narcissus (v.48) is a covert criticism of Alexis' behaviour. The Naiad bringing lilies is potentially ambiguous as well. The baskets containing the flowers are reminiscent of the *canephores* from Dionysian rituals: women carrying flowers and a phallus in baskets. A Naiad is a water nymph. The Greek word *νύμφη* also means 'bride' and the lily is a symbol of virginity. In other words: if Alexis has a preference for girls, he will surely find what he wants in the country.⁴² A fair number of the flowers are 'joined' ('iungit' v.48, 'intexens' v.49). White violets with red poppies (virginal with deflowered women?)⁴³, the narcissus (Alexis?) with the *flos anethi* (dill: but *ἄνετος* means 'wanton man/woman'), *Casia*, 'a cinnamon stick (!)', with *herbis*, 'herbs', but *herbae* is also a 'lawn' (compare with the image of the lizard and the bush). The (fair) *caltha* combined with the (dark) *vaccinia* (v.50) are a symbol of the desired union between the dark

⁴² In *AP 5.107* Philodemos, Virgil's teacher, depicts himself as taking revenge on an unnamed unresponsive lover by having sex with a *Naias*, an apparently more responsive girl. *Naias* might be the girl's name or a complementary metaphor, which would suggest that *Naiads* were willing lovers. The sexual appetite of *Naiads* is also evident in the story of the 'rape' of Hercules' dear friend *Hylas*.

⁴³ This combination has parallels in Propertius 1.20.37-38 where lilies and roses are used by the nymphs to seduce *Hylas* (in a poem where Propertius warns his friend Gallus that his pet boy will soon lose interest in him and will turn to women instead). Also in Propertius 2.12.28-29: violets and lilies, carried in a basket are used to allude to sex. In Tibullus 1.3.61-62: cinnamon and roses (penis and vagina) occur in a description of paradise, turning it into a love-nest. The addition of the myrtle (dedicated to Venus: see note 46) supports this.

And finally in the *Copa* violets, roses and lilies are offered in baskets to lure a wearied traveler into a shady inn, where sexual pleasures are promised implicitly and explicitly: another striking parallel with *Bucolica 2*.

Corydon and the fair Alexis, although the verb *pingit* (to color, to stain) could have a more obscene connotation here: remember the stains on the chamois' skin.⁴⁴ And the 'cana tenera lanugine mala' - *grey fruit with tender fur* (v.51) - have a lot in common with lightly furred testicles⁴⁵, as have the 'castaneas nuces, mea quas Amaryllis amabat - *chestnuts which my Amaryllis loved* (v.52). The joining of laurel and myrtle (vv.54-55) can be understood as an allusion to (anal) sex.⁴⁶

The rest of the poem (vv.56-73) contains less sexual allusions, since Corydon's virtual attempts to seduce Alexis have ended. However, there

⁴⁴ **Coleman** points out that – as the Cyclops in Theokritos *Idyll* 11 seems to realize, but Corydon does not – all these flowers couldn't possibly be in season at the same time. In my view this might well be a hint that the text can be read satirically (Corydon, the stupid peasant!) and that it should not be taken literally but metaphorically.

⁴⁵ **Goldberger** interpreted *mala* in this verse as 'testicles' **Smithers/Burton** cite *mala* as a metaphor for testicles in the notes to their translation of the Priapeia. ('list of agricultural and horticultural terms used tropically in a venereal sense.' <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/priap/prp103.htm>) Although the fruit mentioned here is commonly translated as 'quinces' (which is odd, since quinces are not 'furred'; peaches or apricots might be a better alternative), *mala*, apples, are an acknowledged erotic symbol since the gift of apples implies sexual interest. See among others Theokritos *Idyll* 2.120, 3.10, 5.88 and 6.6. See also. **Littlewood. Adams** (71) rejects Goldberger's interpretation, but fails to explain why. Adams also calls Goldberger's interpretation of *mala* = testicles in *Carmina Priapea* 72.4 absurd. I find that assessment perplexing and misguided. If one sees *grandia mala* in *Carmina Priapea* 72.4 as merely the direct object of *furaberis* (v.3) Adams is right, but it is equally plausibly a second direct object to *dabo* in v. 4, making Goldberger's interpretation straightforward. *Grandia mala* is placed in enjambement precisely to make this double use possible.

⁴⁶ Λαύρα is a 'sewer' and the myrtle was connected with 'wantonness'. It was dedicated to Venus (see Virgil *Bucolica* 7.62). In Lucian a randy young man is nicknamed Μύρτων. Myrtle can also be a symbol for the vagina. In Greek μυρτοχειλα are the labia and μύρτων is the vagina. See also Horace *Odes* 1.25.18.

This 'catalogue of flowers' has a remarkable parallel in Meleagros *A.P.*5.147. There we find the (white) violet (*Buc.*2.47: *pallentes violas*), the myrtle (*Buc.*2.54; *proxima myrte*), the narcissus (*Buc.*2.48: *narcissum*), the lily (*Buc.*2.45: *lilia*) and the hyacinth (*Buc.*2.50 *vaccinia*), next to the yellow crocus (*Buc.*2.50: *luteola...caltha*) and the rose - in Greek, a metaphor for the vagina - (*Buc.*2.47: *papavera*= *red poppies*.) as a gift (and sign of erotic interest) for the girl Heliodora.

are a few more significant hints. In the verses 58-59 Corydon concludes that he has 'spoiled it all'. The words he uses are two metaphors: one is the unleashing of a storm wind on a bed of flowers, and the second paints the image of wild boars being set free in a clear pond ('liquidis immisi fontibus apros' v.59). The wild boar is, as stated above, a powerful symbol of sexual passion.⁴⁷ By using this symbol Virgil may be suggesting that Corydon has 'spoiled it all' by his overdeveloped sex-drive, a suggestion which can only refer to the sexual overtones detected above, because there is no sign of anything sexual on the first semantic level of the poem. Of course, Corydon is not aware of this overtone in his metaphor: again, Virgil infuses his character's words with a covert message to his audience.

Finally there is the mythical example Corydon presents to Alexis: Paris. Again the overtone eludes Corydon; he is only interested in Paris as an important mythical hero who grew up in the country: an example Alexis should follow. But the audience is liable to see Paris primarily as the most notorious adulterer in antiquity and this sets him off against the very chaste Pallas (Athena). In other words, Corydon urges Alexis to choose a *rusticus* over an *urbanus* and Virgil urges his audience to listen to its (erotic) instincts (to accept his bucolic poetry), rather than to reason (i.e. its acquired literary taste).

That the verb *sequi* in Corydon's comparison between himself and various animals has a sexual connotation is obvious (see also Horace *Odes* 1.23, 2.5 and 3.11), and in the wolf (*lupus*) pursuing the goat (*capellam*) we might detect a hint of the connotation 'prostitute', attached to the female *lupa*. Significant in this respect is the fact that the goat is called *lasciva*; in the context this means 'avid, greedy' but of course it also means 'horny, lustful'. The innuendo here might serve to hint at the audience that the comparison between Corydon and the (horny) animals he mentions is even more fitting than he himself intends it to be.

In short, this analysis suggests that Virgil uses Corydon's virtual seduction of Alexis to seduce his audience, by infusing Corydon's innocent words with obscene overtones, made popular by the *Poetae Novi*, thus presenting himself as an *urbanus* and distancing himself from his characters. He allows the audience to laugh at his peasant, because the poor fool doesn't realize that his words are riddled with ambiguity, or because he is the pervert that many *urbani* see in the typical *rusticus*.

⁴⁷ See also **Minadeo** (30) and note 51 below.

Furthermore, Virgil's tactic of using innuendo rather than straightforward obscenities, offers the audience the choice to see this poem as an urbane joke or as a new genre, with its own merits.

3. *Bucolica* 3:

The third eclogue is a good example of an *amoebaion*: an 'answering (or alternating) song': a rigidly regulated song contest between two shepherds. But the 59 verses leading up to the actual *amoebaion* matter most to the theme we are discussing. They describe a quarrel between Menalcas and Damoetas, which gives rise to the contest. The sexual allusions that are to be found in this poem serve a different purpose. The aim is not so much to seduce as to score off the other and throw doubt on his sexual performance.

Damoetas kicks off the hostilities with the very 'chaste' verse 8, in which he – without saying it out loud – suggests something sexual, with Menalcas as the passive party: in other words something homosexual or – considering the presence and the disapproval of the he-goats from the herd – something involving an animal⁴⁸. The use of the *aposiopesis* hinting at some sexual activity was taken from Theokritos *Idyll* 1.105 ('οὐ λέγεται τὰν Κύπριν ὁ Βουκόλος...' - *Isn't it said that the*

⁴⁸ Catullus (Carmen 37) uses the word *hircus* in the sense of 'cheated husband' (because of the 'horns'?). Combining the literal and metaphorical meaning of *hircus* provides the image of a he-goat that has been cheated by its mate. It is not at all impossible that Virgil had Catullus' poem in mind here. However, we shouldn't conclude that the activity hinted at here is straightforward penetration by Menalcas of a female person or animal, since he is the direct object, not the subject of this sentence. Rather Virgil is playfully alluding to Catullus' use of *hircus* and introducing the idea of 'illicit sex' that his predecessor has associated with it. The imagination of the audience is allowed to fill in the blanks, aided by the grammar.

Quintilianus (9.3.59) already saw the *aposiopesis* in these verses as a sign of *verecundia*, suggesting something shameful is hinted at.

Hudson-Williams implicitly acknowledges a hint at passive sexual intercourse here and interprets the he-goats' sidelong looks as a sign of envy and desire, and as a deliberate allusion to the reverse situation in Theokritos *Idyll* 1.87, where a goatherd is jealous of the sexual pleasures enjoyed by his he-goats. See note 20.

Both **Smithers/Burton** and **Famin** cite *Bucolica* 3.8 as a reference to bestiality in Roman literature.

shepherd... Cypris) where Aphrodite is accused of having had sex with a mere shepherd (Anchises). The sentence contains a hint of reproach against the goddess for degrading herself by consorting with a member of a weaker, lower species, just as Menalcas has dishonored himself by his dalliance with a lower species. Without using one obscene word, Virgil introduces the obscene as one of the weapons used by the two quarrelling men.

In the next verse (9), Damoetas says he knows *quo sacello* Menalcas has performed his shameful deed. The word is an ablative of place: a *sacellum*, a sanctuary (in this case, of the nymphs), but it can also refer to the sanctuary between Menalcas' buttocks, that he has allowed to be defiled.⁴⁹

Menalcas' reply is full of irony. He says that 'that must have been when he ransacked Micon's garden', meaning Damoetas' present accusation is as false as an earlier one about Micon's garden. This also suggests that Damoetas himself was responsible for the 'ransacking' (and

⁴⁹ **Adams** does not cite *Sacellum* as a metaphor for the female genitalia or the anus, but *ara* and its Greek synonym ἐσχάρα are mentioned (87). Furthermore, as we can deduce from Longos' *Daphnis and Chloë*, sanctuaries of the Nymphs were commonly situated in caverns, a common metaphor for anus or vagina. In *AP* 9.338 Theokritos uses the word ἄντρον ambiguously as cave/anus in a poem where Pan and Priapus threaten to rape Daphnis. The same word, this time hinting at a vagina is used in *Idyll* 3.12-13, where Theokritos' persona who is in love with Amaryllis, says he would like to be a bee so he could get into her 'cave', which is surrounded by 'ivy and ferns' (i.e. pubic hair). The Priapeum '*Quid hoc novi est?*' in the *Appendix Vergiliana* uses *specus* as a metaphor for the vagina (v.28 and v.36). Ausonius refers to the vagina and the anus with the words *utramque cavernam* in *epigram* 71.7. **Adams** (85) lists *antrum* (from Ausonius *Ep.* 106.9) and *specus* (from the *Corpus Priapeorum* 83) as anal or vaginal metaphors.

Alternatively, *sacello* can also be heard as *sacello*, a diminutive of *sacculus* (a sack or bag or purse), referring to someone's scrotum or genitalia in general (see **Adams** 75: '*it is not surprising that words indicating containers, bags and the like should provide terms for the scrotum.*') This would make *sac(c)ello* an instrumental ablative. In this case, considering that Menalcas is the direct object in the aposiopesis, the sex-act hinted at might have been *irrumatio* performed on him by whatever sex-partner one might choose to imagine here. *Hircis* certainly hints at bestiality or at least adultery (see note 48). Again, Adams doesn't list the word *sacculus*, but he does mention synonyms, for instance *bursa*, and he also points out that synonyms of words that are considered obscene were subject to obscene interpretation (for an example see p.29).

presumably also for the shameful sex act he hints at). The reply is also subject to sexual interpretation. Plucking grapes is a common metaphor for robbing someone of his/her virginity and the implement used ‘*mala... falce*’(10) features in Adam’s list of phallic metaphors (Adams 24).⁵⁰

A reaction by Damoetas depicting Menalcas as jealous of the boy Damon’s ‘bow’ (= penis: Adams 21-22) prompts the accusation from Damoetas in vv.17-18 that Menalcas has stolen a he-goat. The verb used – *excipere* – is very vague, and gets its meaning of ‘to steal’ only by association with the word ‘*fures*’ in verse 16 (itself an imitation of Catullus *Carmen* 66.47 – not the last time Virgil will allude to this poem: see note 63). But *excipere* can also be translated as ‘to take, to receive’ in a sexual sense⁵¹. The fact that Damoetas hides in the bushes, as soon as he has been caught in the act by Menalcas in an attempt to avoid arrest, can just as well be explained as an expression of shame.

In verse 22 we encounter the word *fistula*, already found in the second eclogue. Damoetas claims his *fistula* has earned the he-goat with its ‘songs’ (*carminibus*). Considering the earlier equation *fistula* = *mentula*, the *carmina* can be seen as a metaphor for sexual favors⁵². This

⁵⁰ On this second, sexual level, these verses are not ironic. Menalcas emphasizes that he has committed an active sex act, not, as Damoetas alleges, a passive one. The adjective *mala* can even refer to its homonymic substantive mala (plural nominative or accusative of *malum*: apple, fruit), which, as pointed out earlier, can be a metaphor for testicles. See note 45.

⁵¹ See also in Horace *Odes* 3.12. There in a passage loaded with sexual symbolism, it is a ‘boar’ that is ‘taken’: as **Minadeo** (30) points out, ‘the very archetype of male sexuality’. See also my discussion above (pp.20-21) of the *capreoli* in *Bucolica* 2 and their connection to the ‘boar’ through their Greek homonym *κάρπος*, a metaphor for the penis. In *Bucolica* 3 the animal ‘taken’ (*excipere*) is a *caprum* again a homonym for *κάρπος*. Horace’s phrase differs one letter from Virgil’s (‘excipere aprum’ *Odes* 3.12.12 vs. ‘caprum/ excipere’ *Bucolica* 3.17-18), making deliberate allusion very likely.

In Ovid *Heroides* 18.101 (Hero and Leander) we find the expression ‘excipere amplexu’ in an erotic setting. *Excipere* as ‘receiving or taking lovingly or sexually’ is also used in Ovid *Heroides* 16.282, Petronius *Satyricon* 100.4, Seneca Minor *Medea* 284 and Seneca Maior *controversiae* 1.2.23.

The suggestion here that Damoetas has engaged in passive sexual intercourse with an animal or a dominant man matches the suggestion we detected in verse 8. Finally the word *furtum*, derived from *fur*, can also mean ‘illicit sexual intercourse’ (Adams 167-8).

⁵² See note 24.

makes Damon, the owner of the he-goat, an ungrateful ex-lover of Damoetas.

So far there is nothing to suggest that the characters are unaware of the ambiguity of their words. In this case, it would certainly fit the context if they were aware of it, since sexual mockery can be used as a weapon.

Menalcas reacts in verses 25-27, immediately following the reference to Damoetas' *fistula*. He contests the claim that Damoetas has a real *fistula* and ascribes to him a shrill *stipula*. Both a *fistula* and a *stipula* are flutes, but a *stipula* is a small one, consisting of only one reed. The word also means 'stubble'. Notice how *stipula* just like *fistula* rhymes with *mentula* (see my discussion of *fistula* 2 pp.16-19)⁵³. So, if we accept the same innuendo here, Menalcas has understood the sexual allusion in Damoetas' previous rejoinder and is making a derogatory remark about the size of Damoetas' penis⁵⁴, rather than about his favorite musical instrument.

⁵³ As stated earlier, these words denoting oblong objects, although not explicitly listed by Adams, could count as phallic metaphors even if they didn't end in -ula, but in my view the ending emphasizes the equation with *mentula* and links them to other words with this ending in *Bucolica* 3. *Stipula* is made ambiguous by its connection to *fistula*, which has been made ambiguous in *Bucolica* 2. A sexual interpretation of all subsequent three-syllable words ending in -ula (see further) may be triggered by their similarity in sound to the 'sexed up' *fistula* and *stipula*. The pattern (three syllables, ending in -ula) could serve as a hint to the audience. The sexual double entendres in the -ula words in *Bucolica* 3 doesn't depend solely on their phonetic link to *mentula*; they are all used ambiguously by other authors (see below and notes 33, 34, 55 and 58). But, in my view, Virgil used the *mentula*-link for two reasons: 1) as a signpost, announcing more sexual innuendo to the audience and 2) to specify what exactly these words are hinting at since some of them can be used in a rather broad sexual sense.

Seen from the viewpoint of the syllabic wordplay detected by **Ahl** (39) the syllable -pul- can be seen also alluding to the -pol- in a word like 'polus': which literally means 'the end of an axis' – so not the actual axis but merely the end of it, supporting the interpretation that this word is a slight on the shortness of Damoetas' penis.

⁵⁴ One might object that the ancients preferred a small penis to a large one, as shown by **Dover** in his *Greek Sexuality*. But the preference cited by Dover is an *aesthetical* one. Menalcas is not casting doubt on Damoetas' looks but on his performance as a lover. The idea that a giant penis is a desirable feature in a man is of course a frequent theme in the *Corpus Priapeorum* (e.g. 10) but it is also found in Martial (e.g. 9.33: 'Audieris in quo, Flacce, balneo plausum,/ Maronis

Damoetas doesn't take this insult lying down and challenges Menalcas to a song contest, which in the light of the connotations we have attached to musical instruments, can be interpreted as a contest in sexual performance. Significantly his stake is a *vitula*, a young heifer or calf, but also another word rhyming with *mentula*. *Vitula* in its feminine form is rare in Latin poetry, and there are strong indications that it was chosen for its phonetic likeness to *mentula*, which is, grammatically speaking also a feminine word.

Again, there are several other reasons besides its phonological likeness to *mentula* to interpret *vitula* as an allusion to the penis. The *vitula* is actually described as having two calves (*fetus*), which technically speaking, would make it a *iuvenca*: 'a heifer'. In my view, this stressing of fertility supports the phonological link.

Furthermore, *vitula* is derived from the Greek ἄταλος: 'bull'. Another word for 'bull', *taurus*, is a metaphor for (among others) the male sex organ in both Greek and Latin (see Smithers/Burton). This interpretation rests on the observation that synonyms of ambiguous words can be used ambiguously as well. The classic example for this is the word *penis*. Originally it just meant 'tail', but was used as a euphemism for the penis until it lost its original meaning (See Cicero's letter to Paetus *Ad Familiares* 9. 22). A synonym of *penis*, *cauda*, was subsequently used as a metaphor for the penis (Horace *Satires* 1.2.45).

More conclusively, in the opening verses of Horace *Odes* 2.5 *taurus*, *iuvenca* and *vitulus/a* are used with clear sexual connotations. A girl is described as being too young for the yoke (*iugum*: 1) or to bear the assault of the mature 'tauri ruentis in Venerem' - *bull rushing into love/intercourse* (3-4). She is presented as a heifer in heat (*iuvencae... aestum*: 6-7) eagerly desiring to play - but not actually playing - with 'calves' (*vitulis*: 8) in the moist thickets (*udo...salicto*: 7-8). The eroticism in these verses is pointed out by Minadeo (402) and Ancona(33-34). If the *taurus* stands for the penis of a grown man, the *vitulus/a* could refer to the penis of young boys. The *udo... salicto* creates an image of moist pubic hair, indicating arousal. The words *gravem...aestum* and *praegestientis* (also found in Catullus *Carmina* 64.145 denoting desire for sexual satisfaction) counter the objection that

illic esse mentulam scito.' – *In the bathhouse where you hear applause: know, Flaccus, that that is where Maro's penis is.* - The choice of the name Maro in this epigram is intriguing, though surely coincidental...) Also in *A.P.* 12.242 cited above (note 15) Stratôn mentions a very large penis with a comical but not derogatory metaphor, suggesting admiration rather than scorn.

the heifer's frolicking only refers to non-sexual child's play. Tortorelli calls the heifer at play 'a graphic sexual metaphor'. I agree with him that the poem's addressee desires a real marriage with Lalage, rather than a casual tryst (see *iugum*). She doesn't feel ready to marry, fearing the intimidating violence of adult sex (*tauri*), but her heat (*aestum*) and her desire for calves/penises (*vitulis*) suggest that she is on the verge of sexual maturity.⁵⁵

Very conspicuous is the occurrence of the word *binos* combined with *ubere* in verse 30, just as in the second eclogue. The sentence *binos alit ubere fetus* means: 'she feeds two calves with her udder', but like in the second eclogue (*Buc.2.42*: where *bini* also occurs in connection with an 'ambiguous' animal), there is another possible interpretation. As was mentioned earlier, *bini* is 'to fuck' in Greek, and *fetus* can be seen as a

⁵⁵ There is further evidence that calves and heifers were commonly linked with sexuality in general. In Odes 1.36 Horace gives a randy girl the name of Damalis, a Greek synonym for *vitula/iuvenca*, calling her 'ambitiosior lascivis hederis' (*more clingy than wanton ivy*). **Minadeo** reminds us that ivy clings to a tree, Horace's favorite phallic symbol. The use of this name to denote a sexually active girl suggests that calves and heifers were commonly associated with sex.

That this connotation already existed in Greek poetry is evident from, among others, Theokritos. There is a striking parallel to the 'frolicking heifers/calves' from Horace Odes 2.5 in Theokritos' *Idyll* 6, mentioned above (see note 33). There the 'dance' of the calves (πόρτιες) may serve as a metaphor for homoerotic love-play. The link between Δαμάλις and sex is even a phonological one, like the one between *vitula* and *mentula*. The word is a virtual homonym of δάμαλις, ('the subduer') an epithet for Eros in Anacreon 2.1. In *Idyll* 27.64 a shepherd says he will sacrifice his (small) πόρτιν to Eros and his (full grown) βοῦν to Aphrodite, just before he deflowers the girl he is seducing. If **Minadeo** (68) sees 'immolation in a dark place' as a 'stark metaphor for sexual initiation', how obvious is the metaphor of sacrificing/immolating something to Eros and Aphrodite? In a more jocular vein the sacrifice can be seen as a reference to the penis in its different shapes. The small penis (πόρτιν) will vanish (because it grows large) due to Eros (desire); the full-grown penis (βοῦν) will vanish due to Aphrodite (lovemaking, which would make it limp again). For another (sarcastic) link between a heifer and sex see *Idyll* 27.7. There the girl tries to get rid of her suitor by crudely suggesting that he'd better go and 'kiss a heifer', which, if taken as 'penis', amounts to the suitor indulging in fellatio, a scathing insult which fits well in the context here. Granted that the suggestion to kiss a heifer is a big enough insult in its own right which makes the equation with 'penis' unnecessary, at least the heifer *is* being presented (albeit sarcastically) as sexually desirable.

metonymy for young boys. *Ubere* can be translated as an ablative⁵⁶ of manner (in abundance) of the substantively used adjective *uber*, or, read in combination with *alit*, it can sound as *tubere*.⁵⁷ If *binos* is read as βινούσ: ‘fucking’ (feminine because *vitula/mentula* are feminine), this sentence can mean: ‘my fucking (penis) feeds young boys with its swollen part (or ‘abundantly’), which would make the description of Damoetas’ stake also a piece of bragging about his sexual performance.

Menalcas hesitates at first, but then he reacts with a stake of his own: ‘*pocula / ponam fagina*’ - *I will offer cups of beech wood (Buc.3.36-37)* -, another word ending in -ula, meaning he accepts the sexual challenge.

Again there are other arguments than phonology to equate *pocula* with *mentula*. The use of the plural in *pocula* can easily be seen as a poetic plural. The clearest link between the two is – again - to be found in Horace. In *Odes* 2.11, a typical *carpe diem*-poem, the poet eggs the young on with the exhortatory question: ‘*Quis puer ocius/ restinguet ardentis Falerni/ pocula praetereunte lympha?*’ - *Which boy will quickly douse the cups of burning Falernum in the passing stream?* (18-20). The mention of the girl Lyde in the subsequent stanza and her epithet *scortum* leaves little doubt as to the passage’s real meaning. Minadeo (74) sees the burning *Falernum* as sexual passion. This makes the *pocula* a symbol for the penis and the *lympha* one for the vagina.

The link between cups and genitalia is also to be found in Horace *Odes* 3.15.16 where Chloris is being criticized for being sexually active at an advanced age and is told that music and roses do not fit her old age, nor do ‘*poti ...faece tenus cadī*’ - *cups emptied to the dregs* -, hinting at (orally?) bringing a man to orgasm. Also in *Odes* 3.12 the right to consume wine is equated with the right to be sexually active (See Sutherland for this interpretation).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The alternative ablative *ubere* instead of *uberi* is mentioned in **Lewis-Short**.

⁵⁷ That combinations of words or syllables from two words could be understood as obscenities is a direct effect of the oral delivery of texts and is explicitly mentioned by Cicero (*Orator* 154-55).

⁵⁸ The link between cups and penis is very common in Horace *Odes*. E.g. 1.17.21-2; a tender bucolic poem, in which Horace is trying to seduce Tyndaris by presenting himself as a gentle lover: ‘*hic innocētis pocula Lesbii/duces sub umbra*’ - *here in the shade you will drink cups of innocuous Lesbian(wine); duces* can be understood as ‘to seduce’ and *pocula Lesbii* can be understood as, ‘the penis of a Lesbian/wanton boy or man’. In 1.20.12 - a drinking invitation (see Catullus *Carmina* 13) to Maecenas, who had a notorious sex life - Horace apologizes for the poor quality wine (or boys?) he has to offer, he also mentions

The cup-penis link is also implicit in the story of the rape of Ganymedes by Jupiter. Jupiter appointed Ganymedes as his ‘cup-bearer’, but of course he is also his toy-boy. The link between the two is also to be found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 10.157-159: ‘Nec mora, percusso mendacibus aere pennis /abripit Iliaden; qui nunc quoque pocula miscet /invitaque Iovi nectar Iunone ministra’ - *Quickly, beating the air with his misleading wings, he abducts the Trojan/ who now also mixes the drinks (unites the genitals) and offers nectar to Jupiter against Juno’s will.* The key here is the word *invita*, indicating that Jupiter’s legitimate consort Juno objects to the activities of this newcomer in her home. There would be no point in objecting if all Ganymedes did was ‘mix drinks’ (*pocula miscet*). *Miscere* is a common metaphor for sexual intercourse, which in this context instills *pocula* with a ‘genital’ connotation.⁵⁹

‘grapes’, a known metaphor for girl’s and boys’ virginity (See **Newbold** and also Horace *Odes* 2.5, 9-10, where someone is urged to leave an immature girl alone with the words: ‘tolle cupidinem immitis uvae’ - *restrain your desire for an unripe grape*. 2.11.20 is another invitation in which *pocula* and *puer* are mentioned in the same sentence and a fire metaphor is thrown in for good measure (vv.18-19). See also 3.19.12: an exhortation to a feast of wine and love (‘insanire iuvat’ - *acting silly is pleasing* - an echo from *Bucolica* 3.36), again with *pueri*, the ambiguous verb ‘*dare*’, with a possible overtone of ‘sexual intercourse’ and *pocula*, which can be seen as a metonymy for the penis. In *Odes* 4.12, the invitation to Virgil to ‘relax and have some fun’ (‘dulce est desipere in loco’ - *It’s nice to have fun now and then*), Horace says: ‘non ego te meis/immunem meditor tingere poculis’ - *I do not intend to wet you with my cups without getting anything in return* 22-23. This can be read as a threat that unless Virgil gives something in return, there will be no hanky-panky. Of course the words *non ego te* also occur in *Odes* 1.23 where Horace sanctimoniously assures Chloë that he has no intention of seducing her.

⁵⁹ The same allusion is evident in Martial’s *Epigrams* 11.104, where we find an explicit reference to anal sex in connection with – among others - Jupiter and Ganymedes. In Martial 11.26 ‘Pocula da labris facta minora tuis’ means ‘give me a drink/cup, “made less” (i.e. half drunk or worn away) by your lips’, but could also mean ‘give my shrunken (a *prolepsis*) penis to your lips’ (reading *labris...tuis* as dative), a connotation which fits in with the rest of the poem where this request for fellatio is the second step in a climactic poem, beginning with a request for drunken kisses (*basia uda*) and culminating in a request for anal sex (*gaudia vera Veneris*, with, again, a reference to Jupiter and Ganymedes). Cicero also often uses the word *pocula* if he wants to imply that his opponent (Verres, Antonius, Piso) has a lewd lifestyle (e.g.: *In Verrem* I.66: ‘Graeco more biberetur... poscunt maioribus poculis’ - *There was drinking in Greek style... they ask for bigger cups* - which leads to a lewd sexual proposition

Reading on in *Bucolica* 3, we find the word *fagina* (literally: ‘made of beech-wood’, but of course a virtual homonym of the word *vagina*). The word order *pocula* and *fagina* with the verb *ponam* (I will place/put) in between, suggests sexual intercourse. That this is intended is suggested by the prosody. *Pocula* and *fagina* are metrically identical and can be interchanged. Virgil did not do this, which suggests he did not want to avoid the sexual connotation in the text as it stands.⁶⁰

to the host’s daughter.) That cups could refer to the penis in Greek, is also evident from an anecdote in Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 13.603 about the tragic poet Sophocles seducing a cupbearer. He tells the boy to move the ‘cup’ to and fro slowly if he wants Sophocles to have a good ‘drink’. The rest of the anecdote, which ends with Sophocles kissing the boy, suggests that his words should be interpreted as a sexual invitation. **Richlin** (148) calls the link between food/drink and sex a normal association in Roman culture and refers to Catullus’ Mamurra poems, where gluttony and an exaggerated sex-drive go side by side. She also mentions Catullus’ sympotic sexual invective (*Carmina* 6, 13, 32, 45 and 55.). **Adams** (41-42) cites ‘vessels’ as metaphors for the penis, even suggesting that the ears of the cup could be seen as ‘testicles’. He gives the example of the word *vas* (vase, vessel) and its diminutive *vasculum*, which is found in Petronius. In the life of Heliogabalus in the *Historia Augusta* men with large penises are called ‘*vasati*’. One could also point at the existence of phallus-shaped drinking vessels mentioned in **Pauly-Wissowa** 9, p. 730 (phallus = Gefäß). In the *Historia Augusta*, life of Pertinax, 8, Capitolinus mentions *phallocritoboli* (or *-buli*): The *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon* gives as a definition: **poculum obscenae figurae, Priapus ex vitro**. Petronius *Satyricon* 24 and Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 11. 469a mention another phallic cup, called *embasicoetas*. Petronius says it also means *cinaedus* ‘homosexual prostitute’ and Athenaeus says that it was also called an ἔφηβος ‘young man’ and calls it (and the epebe) δυσχερεῖς: ‘hard to handle’. Although vessels are more commonly associated with the female sex organs, it is clear that the penis was sometimes viewed as a vessel, presumably, because it can discharge and therefore ‘contains’ fluids. In a purely male context, it would be clear which of the two sexual connotations of poculum/a the poet was hinting at. Seen from the viewpoint of syllabic wordplay, as described by **Ahl** (e.g. 39) pocula can be read as ‘po’ (a prefix denoting possession) and ‘cul/col(lei)’(=scrotum.): an object possessing a scrotum i.e. a penis.

⁶⁰ That Virgil was well aware of the connotations of *fagina* is suggested by the fact that he avoids it in the rest of the *Bucolica*, although *fagus* is used several times (*Bucolica* 1, 2, 5, 9). If he wanted to avoid the word here he could have used another kind of wood.

Lord disagrees with the common practice of pronouncing the 1st Century BC Latin ‘v’ as ‘w’. She gives an extensive examination of the ancient

The description of the carvings on the cups which Menalcas is offering, becomes a ridiculous eulogy on his own private parts, if we maintain the equation *pocula = mentula*.⁶¹ This absurdity is announced, as it were, by Menalcas' words in verse 36: 'insanire libet quoniam tibi'⁶² - *since you feel like acting silly, (so will I)*. Remarkably, the *pocula* contain *duo signa*: an image of the astronomer Conon and an unnamed colleague commonly identified as Aratos. Conon can be translated as 'servant'⁶³ and the fact that the second scholar is not named, but only referred to as *alter*, means that the name also applies to the second *signum*. If *pocula = mentula*, the 'servants' of the *mentula* can only be the testicles. The astronomical knowledge Conon and his unnamed colleague have revealed, can be understood as a commentary on the power of sexual impulses over country folk (*messor, arator*⁶⁴: harvester,

sources to promote the 'v'-pronunciation, quoting Ellis and Roby. If accepted this would strengthen the case for an allusion *fagina = vagina*. Significant in this context is a quote in **Lord** where Roby declares himself 'quite content to think that a labial V was *provincially contemporary* (to Cicero) and in the end generally superseded it. (my emphasis).' If we adopt this middle ground in saying that the V-pronunciation was provincial, this fits in rather well with the rustic setting of the *Bucolica*. Virgil also used 'rustic' language in the opening verses of *Bucolica* 3, and was chastised for it by critics (see note 72). To object that the 'i' in *fagina* is short and the one in *vagina* is long is irrelevant. In his introduction **Ahl** points out that in wordplay the length of syllables plays no role.

⁶¹ But the existence of penis-shaped cups (see note 58) makes the idea of carving figures in a penis more plausible. As mentioned above, (see note 29) to introduce an exalted content (like the astronomical knowledge here) in an obscene context was a way of achieving humor.

⁶² See Horace's 'insanire iuvat' (*Odes* 3.19) and 'dulce est desipere in loco' (*Odes* 4.12) both poems with erotic connotations. Words like *insanire* or *desipere* may well have been cues for the audience to look for hidden erotic innuendo.

⁶³ As in *κονέω*: to serve. Of course, Conon was the Samian astronomer (around 245 BC) who 'discovered' the cluster of stars he identified as Berenice's lock of hair. He is mentioned in Catullus 66, 7: another Catullan allusion.

⁶⁴ For the sexual innuendo in the *falx* (sickle), the implement of the *messor*, see above p.18. 'To plough' is a known metaphor for sexual intercourse. We find it in Sophocles. *O.R.* 1211-2: 'Πῶς ποτε πῶς ποθ' αἱ πατρῶαι σ' ἄλοκες φέρειν, τάλας/σίγ' ἐδυνάθησαν ἐς τοσόνδε' (*How, o how, wretched one, could the furrows of your father have born you for so long?*), hinting at the incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother. We have also found

ploughman v. 42). The *radius* - measuring rod - mentioned in verse 41 is explicitly listed by Adams (15) as a metaphor for the penis. In other words, the passage can be read as a sneer at the merely instinctive sexuality of the *rustici*. As their only guides they accept their own gonads.

If we want to maintain that Menalcas is aware of these allusions, we must assume that he puts himself above his fellow *rustici*. Alternatively, we can conclude that – like Corydon in *Bucolica* 2 - he isn't aware of them here or in the earlier verses. If we adopt that view, Virgil is again playing a game with his erudite audience at the expense of his characters. The sexual interpretation of this passage can be read as follows: Menalcas says he will copulate (*pocula ponam fagina*) (presumably with Damoetas' girlfriend but it can also be seen as a threat to bugger Damoetas: *fagina* does not have to refer to *the* vagina only to *a* vagina: a sheath), and describes his virile member as if it had figures carved into it (he means that it is heavily veined, meaning sexually vigorous). He eulogizes his two testicles (*duo signa*), the servants of his member, whose 'rod' (*radio*) is the only guide the country folk follow.

He ends the passage with the verse: 'necdum illis labra admovi, sed condita servo' – *I have not yet put them to my lips, but keep them safely stored* -, meaning Menalcas has never drunk from the offered cups and has kept them well hidden. But it might also mean that he has never had oral sex performed on his penis, but that he prefers to put it in the usual place.⁶⁵

Damoetas' reply in the verses 44 to 48 again contains some possible obscene allusions. Plausibly, the cups he mentions are just as ambiguous as Menalcas' (he explicitly mentions *two* cups, maybe to emphasize that his penis is twice as large as Menalcas', but it is significant that he describes only *one* carved image). The *ansas* (handles) mentioned here, surrounded by acanthus leaves, can be a poetic circumscription of testicles, surrounded by curly pubic hair.⁶⁶ Furthermore, *Orphea* in verse

messores in *Bucolica* 2.10. See also Adams (154). Virgil himself uses *sulcus* (furrow) and *arvus* (field) for the female genitalia (of animals) in *Georgica* 3.135-36. Persius (*Satire* 4, 52) uses *aratro* (plow) as a metaphor for the penis.

⁶⁵ *Condere* is the standard verb used with *vagina* in its military sense. e.g. *ensem condere vagina*: 'putting one's sword in its sheath'. The erotic connotation is obvious.

⁶⁶ See note 59.

46 is a virtual homonym of ὄρχεα⁶⁷, the accusative of the Greek ὄρχις: ‘testicle’, but also a tuberous plant, very similar to a *glans penis*. In this interpretation, Damoetas’ statement *Orpheaue in medio posuit – he put Orpheus/the glans in the middle* – is, anatomically speaking, completely accurate. *Medius* is on Adams’ list as a vague metaphor for the penis (e.g. Catullus 80.6).

Verse 47 is a sarcastic repetition of Menalcas’ words in verse 43, but the climax is to be found in verse 48, where Damoetas compares his *vitula* with Menalcas’ *pocula* and calls Menalcas’ stake insignificant in comparison, which can be read as a derogatory remark about the other’s sexual apparatus. Menalcas is paid back in full for his sneer at Damoetas’ private parts in verses 25-27.

This last insult is the signal to look for a referee and start the *amoebaion* as quickly as possible. Palaemon is prepared to be the referee. Again we find traces of Alexandrian influence. In verses 55-59, Virgil is once more imitating Meleagros (*A.P.* 9.363.19-23⁶⁸).

In the *amoebaion*, which consists of unconnected couplets, the sexual allusions are no longer logically linked, as in the aforementioned quarrel: instead, we find small flickers of possible eroticism to please the public, which may be hungry for more of the same. In this respect, verse 67 ‘notior ut iam sit canibus non Delia nostris’ - *so that not even Delia is better known to our dogs* - could be another reference to sex with animals. In verse 77 we have a reoccurrence of the word *vitula*, again

⁶⁷ Both φ and χ being fricatives, it would be no problem for the reader to keep the pronunciation vague. See also Adams’ mention of phonetic suggestiveness as a typical mechanism in sexual innuendo. To complement the phonological link, there is *Metamorphoses* 10.83-85, where Ovid calls Orpheus the person who introduced homosexuality and sodomy on earth. (After he lost interest in women because he lost Eurydice). Virgil’s *Georgica* 4.547 talks about the sacrifice of a *vitula* to Eurydice. If we accept the *vitula* = *mentula* overtone also in that passage, it can be read as an altogether appropriate (almost religious) allusion to Orpheus’ dismemberment (i.e. castration) by Bacchantes or a symbol for renouncing women and sex altogether after the loss of his great love.

⁶⁸ Εἰ δὲ φυτῶν χαίρουσι κόμαι καὶ γαῖα τέθηλεν/συρίζει δὲ νομεὺς καὶ τέρεται εὐκόμα μῆλα/καὶ ναῦται πλώουσι, Διώνυσος δὲ χορεύει/ καὶ μέλπει πετερινὰ καὶ ὠδίνουσι μέλισσαι./πῶς οὐ χορῆ καὶ ἀοιδὸν εἶαρι καλὸν ἀεῖσαι; - *if the leaves of the plants rejoice and the earth is blossoming/and the shepherd plays his syrinx and the sheep with beautiful curls are joyous/ and sailors sail and Dionusos leads a choral dance/ and the winged creatures sing and the bees collect honey,/ how can a poet not sing a beautiful song in the spring?*

with a possible sexual overtone ('cum faciam vitula pro fruges, ipse venito' – *when I will sacrifice a calf in exchange for fruit, come yourself*) Damoetas invites Iollas for a ceremony during which he will sacrifice his *vitula* in exchange for *fruges*. It does not seem too farfetched to interpret this 'fruit' as sexual favors. The sexual theme is fitting here, considering the overt eroticism of the previous verse, in which Damoetas asks Iollas to send him his daughter Phyllis for his birthday.

In the rest of the poem, Virgil rouses the interest of his audience with references to his patron Pollio (vv.84-89) and by criticizing his rivals Bavius and Maeuius (vv.90-91). Here we find another obscenity: 'mulgeat hircos' - *let him milk he-goats*. Taken literally, such an act is, of course, impossible and this emphasizes the absurdity of preferring Bavius and Maeuius to Pollio, but the innuendo in the image is not hard to detect.⁶⁹ Even the words 'frigidus... latet anguis in herba' - *a cold/insensitive snake is hiding in the grass* - can be understood as a warning to the *pueri* in verse 93 against an insensitive (or impotent?) seducer of boys (Menalcas?). Adams (31) mentions *anguis* (snake) as a metaphor for the penis, albeit a flaccid penis. Lucilius (72) uses *natrrix* (a water serpent) for the penis ('si natibus natricem impressit crassam et capitatam' - *if he presses his fat and thick headed water serpent between your buttocks*).

In verse 101 we find another possible allusion to sex with animals ('idem amor exitium est pecori pecorisque magistro' - *the same love means death for the cattle and its master*).

The contest ends in a tie, and Palaemon significantly says that both singers deserve a *vitula*. This could mean that they deserve to be 'buggered' with a large penis (remember Damoetas' disparaging comparison of his *vitula* with Menalcas' *pocula*). This ending might be an allusion to the ending of Theokritos' *Idyll* 6, also with a possible sexual innuendo (see note 33).

It is tempting to draw a link between Damoetas/Menalcas and Bavius/Maeuius. As Wills (98) points out, Palaemon links the contestants to 'quisquis amores aut metuet dulcis aut experietur amarus' – *anyone who will fear sweet love or experience bitter love* (109-110:).

⁶⁹ See also note 19. Milking a he-goat can be construed as masturbating an animal or performing fellatio on a *hircus*, a cheated husband. This behaviour provides a link with the insults Damoetas and Menalcas have hurled at each other. The audience might understand this as a hint that admirers of Bavius and Maeuius are to be equated with the other perverts in this poem, Menalcas and Damoetas themselves!

We don't know what kind of poetry Bavius and Maevius wrote, but the problematic relationship with love might well be an allusion to elegiac poetry. In this interpretation *Bucolica* 3 can be seen as a satirical attack on Virgil's critics. Ironically, he uses this 'rustic' poem, made urbane by - among other devices - sexual innuendo, to brand his rivals as *rustici*, without doubt retaliating for similar criticism he received from them.

The last verse is another imitation of Catullus⁷⁰, making it abundantly clear that Virgil wanted to be counted as a *Poeta Novus*.

4. The poet's motives: 'There was no reason to do it!'

The analysis of *Bucolica* 2 and 3 outlined above requires some clarification. As said before, it is hardly the intention of this paper to claim that these poems are first and foremost meant as obscene jokes and that from now on *fistula* and *pocula* should be translated as 'penis' and 'binos alit ubere fetus' as 'my fucking penis feeds two boys with its swollen part'. In the first place these bucolic poems are based on *imitatio* of and *aemulatio* with their examples - respectively Theokritos' eleventh and fifth Idyll - and have given rise to various interpretations, some of which I have referred to briefly. For instance, I share the view of Hubbard and Leach that Corydon's attempted and failed seduction of Alexis is a metaphor for Virgil's (hitherto failed) attempts to seduce his audience, and reflects his desire to be recognized as an urbane poet. But they seem to conclude that because Corydon's seduction is meant as a metaphor, its erotic character can be ignored; in fact they hardly mention this aspect of the poem in their analyzes.

What they failed (or chose not) to see is that the erotic theme was a powerful weapon in Virgil's struggle for recognition. An obscene interpretation of this poem does not cancel the more exalted one; in fact, it reinforces it. It sheds a fascinating light on the psychology and strategy of the young ambitious poet and offers an explanation why his unusual work, to say the least, met with the success it did, in circumstances that make such a success surprising, not least for the author himself.

As mentioned above, Virgil himself claims that the bucolic genre was new in Rome. The question in his mind⁷¹ may well have been if his

⁷⁰ Catullus 61.231-232: 'claudite ostia virgines/lusimus satis' - *Close the doors, girls, we have played enough*. Lipka (81-82) provides additional evidence for Catullan influences on *Bucolica* 2 and 3.

⁷¹ I emphatically want to make a distinction between the real taste of Rome's literary audience, which may well have been quite varied, and Virgil's

intended audience would be interested in the ‘adventures’ of a gang of *rustici*, a breed of people, frequently subject to contempt in the city, especially in intellectual circles.⁷² In addition, Virgil looked like a *rusticus*, as is attested by Donatus.⁷³ But by adding these sexual overtones, which were familiar and attractive to the audience of the *Poetae Novi*, Virgil tried to dissuade his audience from identifying him with his characters and looking upon him as a *rusticus*. *Bucolica* 2 and 3 are the oldest poems in the volume⁷⁴; they are the introduction. Virgil makes sure that his first ‘serious’ works also can be read as a parody of the classic *paraclausithyron* in a rustic setting about a peasant rehearsing a speech full of sexual double entendres – be they intended or accidental – to win his love, and a quarrel between two shepherds, full of

assessment of it, which would have been at least distorted by his sympathy for and friendship with the very urbane *Poetae Novi*. For Virgil's connection to the *Poetae Novi* see further p. 34.

⁷² . Donatus (*Vita Vergiliana* 170 and onward) writes: ‘obtretores Vergilio numquam defuerunt’ – *Vergil has never lacked detractors*. He adds: ‘Numitorius quidam rescripsit antibucolica’ – *One Numitorius wrote ‘anti-bucolics’*, quoting a parody of *Bucolica* 3: ‘Dic mihi Damoeta: cuium pecus anne Latine?/Non. Verum Aegonis nostri sic rure locuntur.’ – *Tell me Damoetas, is ‘cuium pecus’ Latin? / No. But that is how they talk in the country where our friend Aegon lives*. Note the accusation of *rusticitas* (*rure*) in this parody.

⁷³ **Harris** writes: ‘he was described as being tall and strongly built (*corpore et statura fuit grandis*), dark of complexion (*aquilus*), with a countryside appearance (*facie rusticana*).’ Exactly what a countrified appearance meant to ancient Roman eyes is hard to say. We could point to the redheaded Oscans, or Catullus' jocular list of local characteristics in # 39, but it does seem important that, at least from a citified point of view, he was clearly a country boy and apparently made no attempt to conceal his origins. This may not have been easy in a period which picked the term "urbanus" as a general stamp of approval.’ Harris also cites the parodic verses, criticizing Virgil's *Bucolica* as ‘rustic’.

Horace writes about Virgil: *Iracundior est paulo, minus aptus acutis/ naribus horum hominum, rideri possit eo quod/ rusticius tonso toga defluit et male laxus/ in pede calceus haeret; at est bonus, ut melior vir /non alius quisquam, at tibi amicus, at ingenium ingens/ inculto latet hoc sub corpore*. [...] (*Satires* 1.3.29-34).

‘He is a bit too excitable, less suited to the sharp noses of these people, he could be laughed at because his toga hangs too shabbily under his cut beard and his sandal sits rather loosely on his foot; but he is a good man, better than any other, a friend of yours, a great talent is hidden in that rough body.’

⁷⁴ This is the traditional view as outlined by **Schmidt**, based upon Virgil's ancient commentators. It is also adopted by **Coleman**; See note 6.

obscenities! In fact, if we make abstraction of the pastoral setting, *Bucolica* 2 has many characteristics of a lengthy erotic epigram or an elegy⁷⁵ and *Bucolica* 3 is some kind of satirical invective (note the use of the hexameter, which would be much more familiar to Romans from satirical poetry than from bucolic poetry: an elegy in hexameter could be easily interpreted as a parody of an elegy!). In my view, it can hardly be a coincidence that he chose the erotic and the satirical - the two main veins of Catullus' poetry - as his official 'debut'.

Some might object that the success of Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgica* in itself proves that Rome was ripe for 'rustic' poetry and that therefore there was no need for Virgil to introduce sexual innuendo in his poems. This would make the overtones this article detects mere coincidence at best, seeing that nothing near the same amount of possible innuendo can be found in the other eclogues. However, the success of Virgil's own work does not disprove this article's thesis. In my view, it was Virgil himself who helped create the positive attitude towards matters rustic, which was also promoted by Octavian and his entourage.

And even if we were to accept the objection and concede that this sympathy for the countryside existed before he published the *Bucolica*, one should ask the question how Virgil could have *known* this, since apparently there was no Latin bucolic poetry predating his own. It seems much more likely that - as was pointed out before - his view of the literary taste in Rome was determined by the circles he frequented (Pollio and the *Poetae Novi*) and by his sympathy and admiration for Catullus. Berg (162) cites Hermann, Klingner and Duckworth to prove the enormous influence of Catullus on Virgil by metrically, thematically and verbally comparing *Bucolica* 4 and Catullus 64. He claims (and supports this claim with compelling evidence): *Catullus (...) was Virgil's idol - whether he knew him personally or only by report from their mutual friend Pollio* (107). In his first chapter, Petrini (13) claims that the Catullan influence was still at work in the *Aeneid*, where he sees parallels between Virgil's mostly dramatic 'coming of age'-stories (e.g.

⁷⁵ According to **Coleman**(27-28), Virgil took the sexual theme from Theokritos. He calls Corydon comic and pathetic, like the Cyclops from Theokritos *Idyll* 2. He calls the rustic setting *but a masque for the presentment of a generalized study of the chagrin d'amour*. **Putnam** points out that there is a lot of elegiac vocabulary in *Bucolica* 2. **Coleman**(27) cites Propertius 2, 34,67-84 and Ovid *Tristia* 2, 537-8 as evidence that these elegiac poets recognized Virgil's *Bucolica* as a 'kindred voice'.

Nisus and Euryalus, Pallas) and the pessimistic views of Catullus on the same subject in his longer poems, especially Catullus 65.

Furthermore, even if Virgil had been aware of some sympathy for matters rustic in other circles, what is to stop him from catering to both tastes? By using sexual innuendo throughout an entire poem, rather than the straightforward ‘bawdy humor’ (to use the words of Leach) of Theokritos – a clear case of *aemulatio* - he ingratiates himself with his potentially hostile urbane audience both on the level of content by confirming their view that rustics are perverted (or stupid if we assume that they are not aware of what they are alluding to) and on the level of form by proving – through the use of urbane innuendo – that he himself is quite capable of using the devices of urbane poetry. At the same time Virgil smuggles the pastoral theme into the literary salons of Rome. While a part of the urbane audience laughs at these *rustici*, another part – if it already existed - could enjoy two apparently chaste and naïve bucolic poems, flavored with allusions to the Alexandrian poets and Catullus. The fact that Virgil gradually leaves out the sexual allusions and the parody in his subsequent poems might suggest that he decided he could do without them – having proven his *urbanitas* – when he found that the audience unexpectedly liked his new genre on its own merits.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ A second explanation for the ‘fazing out’ of the sexual innuendo could be that Virgil was criticized for overworking the device in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 (see the criticism in Donatus’ *vita*), which could be considered a sign of *rusticitas* (A *rustic* trying to behave as an *urbanus* but failing miserably). Also, as he gradually ingratiated himself with Maecenas and Augustus, he may have conformed to their (officially) austere taste. And although the same level of sexual innuendo never occurs in the other eclogues, it cannot be said that the sexual theme has completely vanished from them. But their themes just do not allow for the same amount of obscene innuendo. We do find some sexual allusions in *Bucolica* 6 when Chromis and Mnasyllus tie up Silenus and force him to sing them a song. Silenus consents but alludes to sex when he says that afterwards, he will give their companion, the nymph Aegle ‘a different reward’. Here the eroticism is no longer hidden in an overtone, but innocently put forward on the first semantic level, making it part of the story. The same goes for Pasiphaë’s story, which is featured in Silenus’ song. One could read the *pocula* in verse 67 of *Bucolica* 5 as a hidden obscenity because it ties in well with the Bacchic ceremony described there. But this is a detail, not a consistent subtext. In *Bucolica* 7 there are some possible erotic overtones but due to the fragmentary nature of the *amoebaion* these are mere tit-bits. In *Bucolica* 8, Damon’s erotic lament comes closest to *Bucolica* 2. Here the words *pocula* and *fistula* appear again and they can be understood as obscenities. There are also

But – as pointed out before - even if this was the case, Virgil could not have been sure his pastoral theme would be a success *before he published his first poems*. Let us not forget that in 42 B.C. - the year *Bucolica 2* was made public⁷⁷ – Virgil could not count on the unconditional support of Maecenas and Octavianus and had to make his way in Rome’s literary circles on his own. The fact that in attempting this he made use of the *urbanitas* of the *Poetae Novi* and (albeit covertly and therefore with added piquancy and humor) of the sexual theme they had made popular, seems not implausible.

5. Urbanitas versus rusticitas: ‘*Sex isn’t urbane but rustic!*’

One might object that obscenity was typical of the *rustic* lifestyle and rustic religious festivals. Introducing it in a poem would then add to its rusticity rather than to its *urbanitas*. Sexual symbols were indeed common in rustic ceremonies, but that does not mean that sex could not be mentioned in urbane literature. The real question is which types of sex were considered rustic and which were deemed urbane?

Rusticitas means ‘boorish behaviour’, a *rusticus* is ‘an unsophisticated, uneducated person’. Many victims of Catullus’ invectives are represented as unsophisticated and boorish by referring to their rustic descent (e.g. Egnatius in 37, 39, Mamurra in 29, 57), and although the term *rusticus* is never explicitly used to describe their aberrant sexual behaviour, it is often inferred. Ovid, on the other hand,

some other subtle obscenities in the text. For instance verse 24: ‘Panaque, qui primus calamos non passus inertis’ (*and Pan, who was the first not to allow the reeds to be idle*). Alphisiboeus’ magic scene on the other hand is remarkably ‘chaste’; even Theokritos’ lizard-potion is not mentioned, although there is a possible allusion to impotence in the words ‘frigidus in pratis cantando rumpitur anguis’ (*the cold snake is broken in the meadows by incantations v.71*). The *fistula* in *Bucolica 10* hides no obscene connotation and the only allusions to love-play are not hidden in the subtext but innocently put forth on the first semantic layer of the text when Gallus wishes he could frolic in the country with Phyllis or Amyntas. The poem is more an elegiac lament than a seduction-poem or invective, so there would be no point in extensive hidden sexual innuendo. **Minadeo** (53) does find a phallic metaphor in *crescit* (*Bucolica 10.54 and 73*), where the growth of Gallus’ love is associated with the growth of (phallic) trees.

⁷⁷ See **Coleman** (15). To me, to be made public means ‘to be read in a *recitatio*’. Again I want to stress that in this period we are talking about *individual* poems, not a collection of *Bucolica*.

seems to equate *rusticitas* with an exaggerated prudery⁷⁸. How can we reconcile these two ‘definitions’ of *rusticitas*?

The answer lies in the ancient principle of the *aurea mediocritas*. Although in Catullus’ epigrams immoral or illegal sexuality is vehemently attacked, one could hardly classify the poet as a prude. He only objects to very few kinds of sexual aberration such as fellatio, an excessive number of sexual partners, passive anal intercourse and incest (e.g. 57, 80, 88). What he considers accepted sexual behaviour obviously includes buggery and *irrumatio* (e.g. 16), two forms of punishment he frequently threatens his enemies with, and adultery, since he himself was carrying on with a married woman, a fact that takes the sting out of his attacks against adulterous men and women. Adultery was in fact a stock accusation both in satire and in rhetoric in order to discredit someone, and tells us more about the morals of the audience than about the accused himself. Furthermore, Catullus did not object to a promiscuous sex life per se, since he portrays himself as having affairs with prostitutes and boys (e.g. 32, 48).

What distinguishes Catullus from more traditional Romans is that he seems to look at sex primarily as a source of pleasure, and not merely as a means of procreation. The elegiac poets would do the same, going so far as considering women who had had babies as unattractive (e.g. Propertius 2.15.22). In this view, the *urbanus* is the one who has made sexual pleasure into an art, a game, a source of fun, disconnected from its procreative function. On the other hand (as suggested by Ovid), he does not need morality or legal restrictions to remain within the boundaries of what was considered ‘normal’ sexual behaviour. People not able to control their unnatural urges (the Mamurrae and Gellii of the world) or overly relying on (ancient) morals (like the anonymous husband addressed in Ovid *Amores* 3.4) and equating sexuality with fertility and procreation (as in many ‘obscene’ religious ceremonies and Augustan legislation on adultery and marriage) are considered unsophisticated, i.e. *rustici*.

So both obscenity and prudery fall under the term *rusticitas*. And if we confront Catullus 16, which cites the sexual theme as a quality in poems, with Catullus 22, where Suffenus’ poetry is dubbed ‘rustic’ and

⁷⁸ Ovid *Amores* 1.8.44; 2.4.13; 2.8.3; 3.1.43; 3.4.37; 3.10.17-18; *Heroides* 1.77; 4.102; 16.287; 17.13-16; *Ars Amatoria* 1.605-606; *Remedia Amoris* 329-330. The frequency with which Ovid uses this definition of *rusticitas* suggests that it was not just a personal view, but was familiar to his audience and therefore part of the literary heritage.

therefore no good, one can conclude that - at least in literature - the term *rusticus* apart from 'unsophisticated', 'naïve', 'not erudite' also meant 'overly prude'.

Sex was never a taboo in Latin literature, even before Catullus' days (Lucilius' Satires contain obscene language, Plautus' plays have many sexual allusions), but it was confined to genres dedicated to invective or derision. What makes Catullus' poetry new and sophisticated is not his use of sexual invective (although he did refine - the famous *labor limae* - the coarse form in which his predecessor Lucilius had written⁷⁹), but the fact that he introduced the theme of a naughty, playful, non-reproductive and therefore - in the eyes of more austere, traditional, 'rustic' Romans - 'obscene' sexuality in Latin poetry, following in that respect the example of the Alexandrian poets like Asklepiades, Dioskorides, Kallimakhos and Meleagros. Catullus created a new way (at least in Latin literature) of writing about love and sex as 'fun'.⁸⁰

So, sexual double entendres in Virgil's *Bucolica* are a sign of *urbanitas* not because they refer to sex but because they refer to playful, non-reproductive sex (*Bucolica* 2), and/or because they *are* double entendres, a sign of playfulness and sophistication (*Bucolica* 3), and because these allusions appear in a genre not traditionally associated with sexual invective or derision (satire and comedy).

6. Erotic ambiguity in the poetry of the Roman period. *'This kind of innuendo is too farfetched to be credible!'*

In this analysis the equation of similarly sounding words with obscene words might be controversial. Although phonetic suggestiveness is explicitly mentioned by Adams and Ahl as a means to achieve innuendo, one might ask the question if the words that this article calls

⁷⁹ The refinement was mainly a technical one. Catullus - like Horace after him - improved upon Lucilius' verse technique and introduced erudite allusions. But although his vocabulary is frequently very obscene when attacking rivals, he sometimes uses double entendres when he feels he has to watch his step or when he is only teasing or inviting friends and lovers.

⁸⁰ Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 19.9) mentions predecessors of Catullus (Valerius Aedituus, Q. Catulus and Porcius Licinus), but as **Richlin** (39) points out, they are mere translators or imitators of Greek epigrams, not introducers of a novel literary form in Latin literature. Their Latin epigrams do not appear to have set a trend in the days of the Scipiones and lack the personal involvement of Catullus' work.

ambiguous on phonological grounds are phonetically suggestive enough to warrant the assertion that they contain sexual overtones. There are other texts to be found in antiquity that corroborate the idea that erotic allusion can be hidden in similarly sounding words. The *locus classicus* is of course Cicero's aforementioned letter to Paetus (*Ad Familiares* 9.22) in which he jokingly deals with the theme 'obscenity'. From this letter several mechanisms that may give a word an obscene meaning can be deduced. There is the example of the word *bini*, where the obscenity lies in the obscene meaning of its Greek homonym. Other mechanisms are homophony (*illam dicam* for *ill' landicam*: clitoris; *cum nos* for *cunnos*: 'cunts') and the inclusion of obscene words in longer words (Cicero mentions the fact that the diminutive of certain words ending in *-menta* was considered obscene, because that would put the word *mentula* in those words. He cites *pavimenta*, which would become *pavimentula*. Another example is the word *divisio*, which contains the word *vissio* = fart.⁸¹). But these words and combinations are all phonologically identical rather than similar to the obscene words they are associated with. To find certain examples of innuendo hidden in phonetically suggestive words, other than the ones already mentioned by Adams (see note 12) we must turn to the *Anthologia Palatina*. For instance, the aforementioned Stratôn calls himself Ἀστυάναξ in one of his epigrams (A.P.12.11) to indicate that at a crucial moment he has failed to sustain his erection. He interprets the word as a combination of the *α-privativum* and στύω: 'to have an erection'. Fronto (A.P.12.174) makes the same pun with the name Ἀστυάγης.

In one of his poems Antipatros of Thessalonica also uses ambiguous names to give an, at first sight, very chaste poem a sexual meaning. One of the characters is called Μηριόνης because of the similarity to μηρός: 'thigh': an allusion to the so-called 'intercruel' sexual intercourse. Another character's name is Ποδαλείριος, a name indicating a problem with the feet, but in these epigrams feet are frequently a euphemism for the penis.⁸² Stratôn does something similar in

⁸¹ For a complete analysis of this letter see **Richlin** (18-26).

⁸² This interpretation is **Livrea's**. **Hodkinson** (4) points out that 'the psychological and sexual associations of the foot, as phallic symbol, are (...) seemingly universal'. Citing Henderson, he gives as examples Aristophanes *Ranae* 1324, *Lysistrata* 664 and especially 414-19 where a foot rubbing inside a sandal is a double entendre for sexual intercourse. Hodkinson finds a similar double entendre in Philostratos *Epistula* 18.

A.P.12.247. Marcus Argentarius (A.P.5.63) uses significant geographical names: an Αἰτωλή is a seducer (as in αἰτέω: to ask) and a Μήδος is someone who does not allow him/herself to be seduced (as in μῆ and δίδωμι) Philodemos (A.P.5.115) goes so far as to interpret his own name as ‘he who likes (the girl) Demo’. Rufinus (A.P.5.18) claims that he prefers Andromache to Hermione: in other words, he loves a woman ‘who fights with men’, ‘fighting’, meaning ‘making love’, just as the verb *luctari* often means ‘making love’ in elegiac poetry. Stratôn (A.P.12.185) says about some very handsome but arrogant boys that they are not for him but for the ‘raven’. He means ‘flatterers’ (κόραξ being very similar to κόλαξ). In A.P.5.156 the girl Asklepias with her shining sea-eyes invites everyone to sail on her sea of love. Ἐρωτοπλοεῖν is very similar to Ἐρωτοποεῖν (to make love), and the suffix πλοεῖν (another form for πλέω) reminds us of πλέος: ‘full’, ‘saturated’. So it seems that words that sound like obscene words can be made ambiguous if put in the right context.⁸³ Furthermore, it has been pointed out (See notes 33, 34, 53, 55 and 58) that in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 homophony is never the only reason why a word is ambiguous.

To further object that some of the double entendres detected in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 are farfetched and would never have been noticed by the audience, is to underestimate the sophistication of the literary audience in antiquity, as is apparent from some obscure sexual overtones in the *Anthologia Palatina*. In A.P.5.105 Marcus Argentarius uses the constellations Dog (κύνα) and Gemini (διδύμους) to indicate the male private parts. The Greek word κύων: ‘dog’ can - metonymically - mean ‘penis’, since it is also the word denoting the point where the foreskin is attached to the penis, which is derived from another meaning of the word, namely ‘rivet’. The ‘twins’ (διδύμους) require no explanation. In A.P.12.187 Stratôn plays a very obscure game. A music lesson becomes a lesson in sexual technique. The poet advises his interlocutor to storm at his detractors by uttering the letters ‘λ’ and ‘α’. These are not mere

Feet and sexuality are also linked in Catullus *Carmina* 71, where adultery leads to an infection with gout, which is treated as a venereal disease. **Kutzko** has found similar links in Aristophanes, Plautus, Horace and Martial. In Pliny’s *Naturalis Historiae* the two are linked through...the lizard. It is recommended as a cure for problems with feet, such as gout, in addition to its wholesome properties in sexual matters, mentioned above. (*Naturalis Historiae* 30. *passim*)

⁸³ **Sullivan** (246) mentions a similar pun in Martial where the name Paulinus is linked to Palinurus, which is explained as ‘he who urinates twice’.

musical notes, but also allusions to oral and anal sex (like Catullus' *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*)⁸⁴. In *A.P.* 12.225 Stratôn warns his fellow pederasts not to μίσγεσθαι τὰύρω...φλογόεντα κύνα in the morning, because if they do, they βρέξις τὴν λασίην Ἡρακλέους ἄλοχον: (*One should not mix the shining Dog with the Bull*' because then one risks to 'soil the hairy consort of Hercules.')

The link between 'dog' and penis has been explained earlier. But τὰύρος can also mean: 'the perineum' and therefore, 'the anus'. The 'hairy consort of Hercules' can be explained as follows: Hercules' consort is the goddess of youth, Hebe. Youth stands for virility and so once more for the male sex organ, which is 'hairy', indeed. So, Stratôn warns against anal sex early in the morning because one risks encountering one's lover's evening meal in his rectum!

Even more significant is the fact that we find similar (albeit less obscene) ambiguities in Alexandrian poets like Asklepiades, Dioskorides, Poseidippos and Meleagros, who – as we saw earlier – had a fair amount of influence on *Bucolica* 2. In *A.P.* 12.36 Asklepiades plays on the words ἀύχηρᾶς 'dry' in combination with καλάμας (remember *calamus* in *Bucolica* 2) and ἄσταχύων which allows several sexual interpretations; ἀύχηρᾶς echoes the sexually ambiguous word μηρός in verse 2 of the same poem. The word ἄσταχυς 'wheat' can also mean 'child, youth'. So Asklepiades might be asking who would prefer an old, dried up lover to a young one⁸⁵. In *A.P.* 12.46 the mention of a game of 'knucklebones' (ἀστρογάλοις) might well hide an allusion to the testicles or the penis. The word is reminiscent of στραγγαλία: glands or, alternatively, a kind of swelling provoked by a thickening of one of the 'humors'. In *A.P.* 12.42: Dioskorides uses the image of fishing without a hook, for a person who flirts without the intention of having sex. The hook is a metaphor for the erect penis. In *A.P.* 12.45 Poseidippos uses the image of the archer. Bow and arrow are obvious sexual images, especially when combined with the presence of Eros or, as in this case, 'Erotes', a possible metonymy for 'lovers'. In this context the verb

⁸⁴ The interpretation is by **Paduano** (332n.)

⁸⁵ Another tantalizing interpretation is possible: ἀύχηρᾶς also hints at to αὐχίη: 'vanity'. 'Vanity of the thighs' would be a reference to a homosexual inclination. Alternatively it is reminiscent of ἀύχην, narrow passage: the narrow passage of the thighs would be the anus. ἄσταχυς can also mean 'pubic hair' and consequently the vagina. Asklepiades is also asking who would prefer (homosexual) men (the anus) to women (the vagina), suggesting that he not only rejects his suitor because he is too old for his taste, but because he himself prefers women.

νικάω means: ‘to seduce’. And then there is Meleagros. It has been pointed out that the name ‘Alexis’ comes from Meleagros’ poems (A.P.12.127 and 164). It gets even more interesting when in A.P.12.164 we find a love scene between Meleagros’ beloved Alexis and the latter’s lover Kleoboulos. The parallel with the triangle Corydon-Alexis-Iollas is striking. And again, there is an ambiguity to be found in this poem. To describe the union between Alexis and Kleoboulos, Meleagros uses the metaphor of the sweetening of wine. He calls the result οινόμελι: a possible allusion to the sperm that would result from the union between the two boys.⁸⁶ Πικροῦ μέλιτος, ‘bitter honey’ in A.P. 12.81 invites the same interpretation. Another significant poem, directly linked to Virgil’s *Bucolica* is A.P.12.41, in which Meleagros swears off homosexual love and leaves the embrace of ‘hairy caves’ to the ‘goat-jumping shepherds’ (ποιμέσιν αἰγοβάταις). Here, homosexuality is brought upon a level with sex with animals. In A.P.12.154 he complains that the boy Μυῖσκος is playing hard to get and that, as a consequence, Desire (Ἔρως) ‘mixes the honey with bitterness’. Is Meleagros deploring a lonely masturbation session here? Also in Meleagros’ heterosexual epigrams we sometimes find subtle obscenities. In A.P.5.197 he enumerates the girls he has seduced and asks Eros for a breather. But if the god wants it, Meleagros is prepared to ‘draw his final breath’. The words he uses are πνεῦμα...ἐκπύσομαι: ‘I will spit out my breath’. But πνεῦμα can also mean ‘life’s essence’ i.e. sperm⁸⁷. In A.P.12.47 there is a similar wordplay on ἀστρογάλος as in the poem by Asklepiades mentioned above and again the word πνεῦμα is used, suggesting that Eros’ playing with Meleagros’ gonads has caused him to ejaculate. And, tantalizingly, in A.P.12.94 Meleagros omits an obscene word, just as Virgil did in *Bucolica* 3.8. If Meleagros and the others expected their audience to discover all these hidden obscenities, then it can hardly be called farfetched to say that Virgil’s audience would note the rather straightforward link between for instance *fistula* and *mentula* in *Bucolica* 2 and 3.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ The link between sperm and honey is undeniable in Nonnos’ *Dionysiaka* 7.255-279; where an ejaculation is described as a sprinkling with honey. See **Newbold**.

⁸⁷ This is not to say that πνεῦμα, Aristotle’s life’s essence, really ‘means’ sperm. But it can serve as a metonymy for it. Literary allusion is not an exact science but (like magic) works with analogy and similarities.

⁸⁸ **Sullivan** (247) writes that the audience in antiquity had a greater interest in puns/wordplay due to the belief that words are not mere arbitrary symbols, but

Another possible objection to the interpretation offered here, more precisely to the equation of oblong objects with the male sex organ, long before anyone had ever heard of Freud, can be refuted with countless examples. Let *A.P.*5.129, a poem by Automedon in which a pole has a clear phallic meaning, and *Corpus Priapeorum* 10, where Priapus refers to his *columna*, suffice. And as Minadeo points out (12): ‘*although a study such as this would be unthinkable except for Freud, it is not indebted to his authority. (...) the language of sexual symbolism was familiar to the poets from time immemorial.*’

7. Sexual innuendo outside ‘Priapus’ garden’? ‘*Such innuendo did not occur in “serious” (Latin) literature!*’

We have established that sexual innuendo was by no means rare in Roman times, and that it could be very sophisticated. But our examples thus far all stem from (Greek) epigrams. In her impressive study about the obscene in Roman literature, Richlin seems to draw a clear line, claiming that sex in Roman literature was confined to a reservation (The garden of Priapus), comprised of satire, comedy, rhetoric invective and epigram.⁸⁹ So one might say that there is no point in looking for sex outside this reservation. But in my view this is reading too much into Richlin’s conclusion. First of all, even if we accept the - in my view too broad - interpretation that most Romans would have considered *any* reference to sex in literary genres not belonging to the garden of Priapus as some sort of taboo, that doesn’t mean no poet ever defied that taboo. References to sex *can* be found in lyric, elegiac, even epic poetry. What made this ‘transgression’ acceptable to a degree⁹⁰ was the use of

reflect the essence of things. **Ahl** points at the many kinds of wordplay, most of which also occur in the aforementioned letter of Cicero. Syllables can infuse words with extra meaning (35), words can be part of other words (40). He also mentions anagrams and etymologies (44) and homonyms in other languages (60).

⁸⁹ **Richlin** (210) ‘(...) *Romans contemporary with the writers analyzed in chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 viewed sexual material in literature, explicit sexual language, and explicit descriptions of sexual acts as a distinct body of material. They tended to envision this material as a physical area; the term obscenus itself is strongly related to concepts of physical and religious taboo, (...)*’

⁹⁰ Although self-justifications by Horace and the elegiac poets and the fate of Ovid might suggest that writing too much about sex, even euphemistically, was

euphemism, metaphor, metonymy and innuendo. Secondly, Richlin seems to have a problem defining which genres belong in her garden and which do not. Some of the genres she includes do not fit her own criteria. She talks about ‘explicit sexual language’ and (not ‘or’) ‘explicit descriptions of sexual acts’ but she also includes rhetoric invective, which never uses explicit sexual language. The same can be said about the work of Ovid, which – again - contains many references to sexual matters, but no explicit sexual language or descriptions. Richlin calls Ovid’s work - a blending of elegy, satirical and didactic poetry – ‘hard to triangulate’ and only satirical in the sense that he is flippant. What makes it so hard for Richlin to ‘triangulate’ is the fact that the ‘flippancy’ and a primary interest in sex (as in satire or epigrams), isn’t associated with explicit language or explicit descriptions of sexual acts (unlike satire or epigrams). This, to my mind, is significant. It shows that the fence around the so-called garden of Priapus wasn’t all that high, and that you didn’t have to write satire, comedy or epigrams to be able to write about sex. In fact, if the characteristics of his work earn Ovid a membership to the Priapus club, many other poets (e.g. the elegiac poets and Horace) are equally eligible, since they are also ‘flippant’ about sex at times. It is clear that the ladder allowing sex to get over the fence around Priapus’ garden was... innuendo, i.e. euphemism, metaphor, metonymy and double entendres.

Richlin’s trouble with Ovid also suggests that it is never fruitful to consider a literary genre as a monolith with fixed characteristics. Indeed, Thomas (1999) has pointed out that in the Hellenistic and Roman period, the word ‘genre’ is of little significance. The concept of *aemulatio* constantly changes the characteristics of what is considered a specific genre. In his own days, Theokritos’ *Idylls* were considered some form of ‘epic’, although they differ immensely from Homer, as is apparent when comparing the image of the Cyclops Polyphemus in the *Odyssey* with that in Theokritos’ *Idyll* 11. And Virgil has taken the transformation further by changing Polyphemus into Corydon. So while Theokritos introduced pastoral (and satirical) elements in epic, Virgil introduced elegiac elements in pastoral poetry.⁹¹ Likewise, Horace playfully alludes

– at least in the days of Augustus - associated with - at best - naughtiness and - at worst - defiance.

⁹¹ **Thomas** (1999) detects a blurring of the genres in Virgil’s own work, when he compares Virgil’s *Aeneid* 3.641-44 – the description of the land of the Cyclops - with verse 99 from *Bucolica* 3 and verse 21 from *Bucolica* 2, and points out that Virgil introduced his own pastoral in his own epic. (261-62)

to sex in many of his *Carmina*, in a way familiar from epigrams, but that doesn't make these lyric poems into epigrams. Let us now consider some examples from Virgil's own time of sexual allusions in genres not associated with epigram, satire or comedy.

Innuendo in lyric poetry: Horace

I have already pointed out some sexual innuendo in Horace's *Odes* in order to support the claim that some of the words in the two eclogues under scrutiny here were in fact ambiguous⁹². But to avoid the accusation of 'begging the question' in this case I will present a somewhat more extensive analysis of Horace *Odes* 3.19 - a poem with an obvious 'erotic' content. In verses 1-8 the poet evokes a *recitatio*, clearly of some didactic or epic work, and Horace complains that this teaches him nothing about the pleasures of life (wine, warmth, hospitality). In verses 9-12 he orders a *puer* to pour him three cups of wine for a drinking feast using the ambiguous verb *dare*, which can also mean 'consenting to sexual intercourse', three times. As argued before, it seems appropriate in this context to read a sexual overtone in *pocula*, as we did in *Bucolica* 3. Richlin points out that food or drink is often equated with sex, so one can deduce that offering food or drink can be equated with offering sex.⁹³ The subsequent verses 13-16 focus on the question whether a bona fide poet should take three or nine helpings, one for every Muse, but Horace suggests that this would not be 'graceful' (*prohibet...Gratia*) meaning that it would lead to drunkenness and brawling (or that it would be a sign of an exaggerated sexual appetite: *rixa*: 'a brawl or fight' also means 'sexual intercourse', e.g. in Propertius 2.15.4). In verse 17 he introduces the notion of nudity (*nudis...sororibus*, referring to the three Graces, but – significantly - in a sort of enjambement, loosening the link with *Gratia* in verse 12). In 19-20 he mentions flutes (*tibiae, fistula*) in a question that can either mean 'why don't we play some music?' and 'why are we not engaging in sex?' Also the sprinkling of roses in verse 22 can have

⁹² See e.g. my discussion of the words *lacertus, fistula, vitula* and *pocula* above (pp.16-19; 29-33). For a convincing analysis of 'sexual symbolism' in Horace *Odes*, see **Richard Minadeo's** 'Golden Plectrum' (see bibliography).

⁹³ A good example is the first act of Plautus' *Menaechmi*, where Menaechmus makes an appointment with his favorite meretrix Erotium for a drinking contest/and meal hinting at sex afterwards. Also in the *Copa* the tavern-girl invites the traveler in with a mix of food, drink and sex.

sexual connotations.⁹⁴ The rest of the couplet is an exhortation to engage in a loud feast. In the last couplet, love (*amor* v. 28) is finally mentioned in connection with the girls Rhode and Glycera. Although the lyric convention requires that no description of intercourse is given, the sexual overtones in the rest of the poem suggest to the audience that the party also involved sex. So the poem remains chaste on its first semantic level, but gets its sexual dimension from innuendo. Without it this would just be a poem about drink and song. With it, it is about drink, song and sex.

We find the same kind of subtle innuendo in other *Odes* by Horace. For instance in *Odes* 1.19, a harsh winter vista inspires Horace to a poem with the famous ‘*carpe diem*’-theme. ‘Enjoy life, Thaliarchus, while you can.’ The things to be enjoyed also include sex; in the last couplet (vv. 21-24)⁹⁵ Horace evokes giggling girls and a *pignus* which is ‘stolen’ ‘...lacertis/aut digito male pertinaci.’ (*from/by the arm/penis or the very persistent finger*) *Lacertis* and *digito* can be taken innocently and then they are the arms or the finger of the girl from which a love token (*pignus*: *in this case a ring or a bracelet*) is taken. But they can also be taken as ablative of means, in which case they are the *lacertis* (‘arms’ or ‘lizard/penis’: see *Bucolica* 2⁹⁶) and the probing (*male pertinaci*: ‘very persistent’) finger of Thaliarchus, penetrating the girl.⁹⁷ In 3.9 Horace

⁹⁴ For the connotations of the flutes see **Minadeo**’s analysis outlined in my discussion of the word *fistula* in *Bucolica* 2 above (p. 17). For the sprinkling of roses see **McMahon**.

⁹⁵ ‘Nunc et latentis proditor intumo/gratus puellae risus ab angulo/ pignusque dereptum lacertis/ aut digito male pertinaci.’ - *Now the pleasing tell-tale laughter of a girl/hiding in a secluded corner/and the love token stolen from her arms/Or her hardly resisting finger.* (Horace *Odes* 1, 9,21-24.)

⁹⁶ In the dative or ablative case it is impossible – without context – to determine whether the nominative of this word is *lacertus* or *lacerta*. Since *lacertus* is used instead of *lacerta* in *Bucolica* 2 to denote an (ambiguous) lizard, *lacertus* (arm) can be used by later poets with the same possible connotations as its ambiguous ‘female’ variant. For other ambiguous ‘arms’ see also note 13.

⁹⁷ **Ancona** in her discussion of this poem writes: ‘The juxtaposition of *intimo* and *gratus* suggests (from the lover’s perspective) pleasure in inmost places, whether of the body or of the landscape. (*Intimo...ab angulo* could apply equally to the landscape or the body - an inmost corner outdoors, or an inmost corner of the beloved’s body.) In a footnote she also quotes **Minadeo** ‘who quotes Gilbert Murray: I am not sure that there is not something in ‘*intimo gratus*’ – ‘delightful in the deep’.’ (*The Classical Tradition in Poetry* [New York, 1957], 150). Minadeo continues: “I am certain that there is, especially seeing that *intimo* modifies the symbolic *angulo*. Finally, rarely does Horace achieve so fine a

makes a survey of all his lovers. He claims he would be prepared to die once for his current female lover Chloë and twice for his male lover Calais. But if Lydia came back to him he would gladly live and die with her.⁹⁸ If we take to die as ‘to have an orgasm’ (see note 37), Horace is actually saying that Calais gives him twice as much pleasure as Chloë, but that if Lydia came back to him, he would see to it that she gets her share of the pleasure as well, which proves she is special to him. For some, this interpretation might sound like a profanation of a sensitive and passionate love poem, but I don’t agree. Horace openly flaunts his promiscuity here, and although he might have genuine feelings for Lydia, they do not preclude having sex with her. Furthermore, these overtones are very subtle: the reader may miss them or even choose to ignore them if he is so inclined. They give the poem a little extra spice without destroying the overall flavor of devotion; Horace doesn’t ram his *mentula* down the reader’s throat, like Catullus or Martial.

Innuendo in (non parodic) elegy: Tibullus and Propertius

The same kind of subtle innuendo can be found scattered throughout the elegies of both Tibullus and Propertius. At first glance, Tibullus’ elegies have a much more chaste and religious tone to them than Horace’s (or for that matter Propertius’ and Ovid’s) love poems. He never actually describes or even mentions sexual intercourse. A more melancholy figure, he focuses on the pains and problems of love rather than on its physical pleasures. But that doesn’t mean there is no sign of sexual activity in his elegies.

In 1.4 the god Priapus gives advice on how to seduce boys. In verses 51-52 he suggests to let the boy win in military exercises that sound suspiciously sexual (‘*saepe dabis nudum, vincat ut ille, latus*’ - *you will often offer him your naked flank, so he can win*), *latus* being one of elegy’s stock euphemisms for the sex organs (of both sexes).

blend of delicacy and drama in his symbolic effects as in the final two images. Symbolically, both bracelet and ring are vaginal. By suggestion, then, the young lady is weak to resist the surrender not merely of pledges, but of love itself’ (**Minadeo** 21-22) If *pignus* is seen as a metaphoric vaginal ‘ring or bracelet’ my interpretation of *lacertis* seems plausible.

⁹⁸ ‘*Quamquam sidere pulchrior/illem est, tu levior cortice et inprobo/ iracundior Hadria,/ tecum vivere amem, tecum obeam lubens*’ (*Although he is prettier than a star/And you are lighter than cork and/More irascible than the cruel Adriatic/I would love to live with you, would gladly die with you.* Horace, *Odes* 3, 9, 21-24)

1.5 is riddled with sexual innuendo: In verses 21-28 Tibullus paints a picture of sober rural life with his beloved Delia. He describes her as 'custos frugum' (*guardian of fruits*) (v.21). *Custos* is potentially ambiguous because the Greek κύσθος means 'vagina' (or 'anus'). She 'servabit uvas' - *will tend to the/her grapes* (v.23). Grapes are, as was mentioned earlier, a symbol of virginity about to be 'plucked'. Here they are trampled underfoot, but as was pointed out before (see note 82) feet can be a metaphor for the penis. Her *garrulus verna* (talkative slave) 'will be used to playing in the lap (or bosom) of his loving mistress' (consuescet amantis/ garrulus in dominae ludere verna sinu). Also, the food she will offer the ithyphallic god Priapus, the farmer-god (*deo...agricolae*, v.26) – again grapes (*uvam* v.26) and ears of wheat (*spicas* v.27) – has a sexual ring to it. 'Deseruit Venus' (*Venus abandoned (me)*) in verse 40 is a euphemistic way of referring to impotence. And the bawd that has introduced Delia to a rich lover is cursed by wishing on her the humiliating punishment of 'tristia cum multo pocula felle bibat' - *drinking foul cups/penises with lots of gall* (v.50). This refers to poison, but it can also be an equivalent to the *irrumatio*, with which Catullus threatens his friends in *Carmen* 16. Horace reserves a similar humiliation for an ugly, randy *vetula* in *Epode* 8. And when Tibullus sings of the virtues of a poor lover he assures her that he will be 'primus et in tenero fixus erit latere' - *the first to cling to your tender side* (v. 62), possibly a promise of sexual prowess, in light of the sexual connotation in '*latus*' (see above).

In 1.7, Tibullus praises Osiris, whom he equates with Bacchus. Osiris is depicted as the god who introduced agriculture and the cultivation of the vine to man. Plowing (*aratra* v.29) as a sexual metaphor has been discussed earlier (note 64). And verses 33-34 can be seen as ambiguous considering the sexual connotations of *palus*, *falx*, *vitis* and *coma*. 'hic docuit teneram palis adiungere vitem/hic viridem dura caedere falce comam' - *he taught to join the tender vine/vagina to stakes/penises and cut/pound on the green/vigorous foliage/pubic hair with a hard sickle/penis*'. The equation Osiris = Bacchus makes the sexual interpretation appropriate. Furthermore, the overtone does not replace the first semantic layer of the text, but adds to it. Tibullus uses the celebration of Osiris/Bacchus as introducer of agriculture to hint at the sexually explicit rituals associated with Bacchus, making him also a *praeceptor amoris* of sorts, without having to resort to the use of sexually explicit words.

In 1.9.7 he uses the image of connecting the bull to the plough when talking about a *rusticus*: this could be a reference to anal intercourse (see the discussion about *A.P.*12.225 above for the bull as the anus and note 64 for the plough as penis). For all his love of the country, Tibullus remained an urbane poet, so covert satire against *rustici* is not surprising. Moreover, in this passage Tibullus is listing things men do ‘for profit’ in a poem where Marathus has ‘sold’ himself to a rich suitor. Hinting at male prostitution is appropriate in such a context. In verses 59-64 Tibullus insults his rich rival by wishing/hinting that his wife is sexually hyperactive. He does this by comparing her with her husband’s sister, criticizing her in the process. ‘Nec lasciva soror dicatur plura bibisse/pocula vel plures emeruisse viros.’ - *Let no one say that her horny sister drank more cups/penises (than your wife), nor that she ‘serviced’ more men (vv. 59-60)*. Having sex with men is associated here with drinking from a cup (*pocula*). If we equate *pocula* with *mentula*, as we did before (*vel* can be taken as explicative, so that *emeruisse viros* becomes an epexegetis of *bibisse pocula*), the insult is even worse, hinting at *fellatio*. The rest of the passage refers to the expert knowledge of both women about sexual positions in a manner unusually explicit for Tibullus.

In 1.10 Tibullus is praising the blessings of *Pax*. He explicitly hints at (rather violent) sex in the verses 51-59. At the end of the poem *Pax* is depicted as a benevolent goddess whose fruits (*pomis*) ‘pour’ from her clothes or bosom (*candidus sinus*), which suggests the image of a woman presenting her full breasts to her lover, which may be exactly the fruit Tibullus is craving. (The bull-plough-connection reoccurs and the hint at homosexual intercourse would be appropriate in a poem praising the advantages of *Pax*, but a sexual interpretation of the passage here is less straightforward and it is doubtful if any is intended.)

Finally, in 2.2.13-16 Tibullus is praising Cornutus’ wife and claims: ‘Nec tibi malueris, totum quaecumque per orbem/fortis arat valido rusticus arva bove/nec tibi, gemmarum quidquid felicibus Indis/nascitur, Eoi qua maris unda rubet,’ - *You would not prefer whatever field in the whole world is ploughed by a strong peasant with an enormous bull, nor would you prefer whatever gems originate in fertile India, where the waves of the Eastern sea are red* -, which might mean that Cornutus wouldn’t prefer sex with (*arat*: to plough, see note 64) any boy (*arva*) or woman (*gemma*: clitoris) to sex with his wife.

Propertius is a more playful poet than Tibullus. He is very much interested in the love act itself and describes it frequently, but through euphemism, or euphemistic metaphor (e.g. 2.2.4: *furta*, 2.15.4-5: *rixa, luctata est* and 11: *Venerem corrumpere*). He also uses sexual innuendo for invective (2.16.14: ‘*rumpat membra libidinibus*’ - *may his members be broken by lust* and 27: ‘*barbarus excussis... lumbis* – *a barbarian with exhausted loins*), or to give added piquancy to an at first glance innocent passage (e.g. 1.3.23-26: where fondling Cynthia’s sleeping body is disguised as an offering of fruit, using the like endings of dative and ablative and the absence of possessive pronouns in Latin to make the passage ambiguous: ‘*cavis poma dabam manibus*’ (24) can mean: ‘I gave her fruits with my hollow hands’ or ‘I presented my hollow hands with her fruits/breasts’. And ‘*munera de... voluta sinu*’ can mean ‘gifts poured from my bosom’ or ‘gifts poured from her bosom’). Sometimes it is used to emphasize the inferred sexual content of a poem. For instance, in 1.10.1, *testis* means ‘witness’, but also hints at what it was Propertius witnessed by its other meaning ‘testicle’, an allusion that is confirmed by the rest of the poem⁹⁹ (the same pun is used in 1.13.14).

In 1.14.11-12: the effects of Cynthia being in bed with Propertius are described in a simile about river Pactolus overflowing and the poet finding gems from the Red Sea. The first is a hint at a male orgasm and the second a play on the double meaning of *gemma* (gem/clitoris).

The use of flowers to hint at sex in 1.20.37-38 was discussed earlier (see note 43).

In 2.6.10: Propertius says he is so jealous, he even mistrusts babies in their cribs (*in cunis*) when they are around Cynthia. The pun with *cunnus* ‘cunt’, actually makes the image of Propertius’ sick jealousy that much more powerful. When it comes to Cynthia he can even imagine her having sex with babies! In the same poem he blames Romulus for introducing promiscuity in Rome, hinting at an explanation for Romulus’ wanton behaviour with the Sabine maids by calling him ‘*nutritus duro lacte lupae*’ - *nourished with harsh milk of a she-wolf*, where the second meaning of *lupa*, ‘whore’, shines through.

In 2.14.25-26 a votive offering to Venus is sexually ambiguous; Propertius writes that when Cynthia comes to him, he will fix great presents to Venus’ *columna* (meaning the pillars of her shrine). But Venus’ column is an obvious euphemism for the penis. So what he is also saying is that when Cynthia comes, he will have great sex with her.

⁹⁹ This interpretation of *Propertius* 1.10 is also that of **Miller** (83-84).

In 2.17.9 Propertius is criticizing Cynthia for having betrayed him and bemoans his fate saying ‘durius in terris nihil est quod vivat amante.’ - *There is nothing on earth with a harder life than a lover.* This observation of the harsh fate of a lover is explained by the innuendo, which suggests that Propertius is suffering from an excruciating hard-on he cannot get rid of because of his girl’s betrayal.

In 2.19.19-24 Propertius says he will be chaste in Cynthia’s absence and will turn to Diana. But he makes a clear distinction between two kinds of hunting. He says he will avoid hunting lions, a metaphor also used by Horace in *Odes* 1.23 to denote a sexually aggressive man, and *sues*: ‘pigs’, the Greek equivalent of which (χοιρος) carries the connotation of ‘vagina’ (see note 15). So at first sight Propertius uses double entendres here to emphasize his promise of chastity. He claims he will not hunt for a new lover but only for ‘*lepores*’ and ‘*avem*’ ‘hares’ and ‘a bird’. But for the really attentive reader the message of the double entendres is quite different. First of all, Diana is an ambiguous goddess, not only known for her virginity but also as a divinity associated with fertility through her role as protector of pregnant women. *Avem* might refer to the winged Amor and *lepus* is used by Plautus as a term of endearment for a girl (*Casina* 1.50). Petronius (*Satyricon* 131.7) even uses it as a metaphor for a penis, and *lepores* is also the plural of *lepor/lepos*: ‘charm, charmer’. Furthermore Propertius calls the *lepores* ‘*mollis*’, another sexually ambiguous word. Note also the bucolic setting and the use in this erotic context of the words *excipere*, *figere* and *calamo*, all of which occur in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 and are susceptible to obscene interpretation. If taken like this, and I think there is strong reason to do so, the sexual overtones in this passage suggest to the reader that Propertius really wants to stay chaste (abstaining from ‘lions and ‘pigs’), while Cynthia is away, but that deep down, he knows he will not be able to keep his own promise (the hares and the ‘bird’).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ For hunting as a metaphor for sexual activity see note 20. The erotic connotations of the hunting scene in this poem are missed or ignored by **Fantuzzi**. He links this passage to Biôn’s *Epitaph for Adonis* where Aphrodite is depicted as reproaching Adonis for having caused his own death by taking on dangerous animals. In his view Propertius presents himself as a ‘prudent Adonis’ who does not make the mistake of recklessness. But should we really believe that Propertius actually planned to go and hunt small animals while Cynthia was away? In my view, what Propertius really means is that whatever relationships he will have during Cynthia’s absence will be safe and meaningless as opposed to dangerous and submissive.

In two poems, the word *lacertus* in its normal sense of ‘upper arm’ is used in an amorous context, making the equation with ‘*mentula*’ meaningful. In 2.8.5 Propertius asks himself ‘*possum ego in alterius positam spectare lacerto?*’ - *can I bare the sight of her hanging on another’s ‘arm’* - in a poem about losing his love. The innuendo based on *lacertus* = *mentula* makes sense because it suggests what Propertius imagines when he sees his girl hanging on someone else’s arm, a vision which would hurt him much more than what he actually sees. The same allusion occurs in 1.16.33.

So not only Ovid, that somewhat peculiar satirist among elegiac poets, used sexual imagery and innuendo¹⁰¹; it can also be found in other elegiac and lyric poets of the era. The obscene can indeed be found *outside* the garden of Priapus, not as a major topic or primary concern, but as an overtone, an added dimension, which the reader (or listener) can take or leave as he fancies and which sometimes gives added depth to a poem.

8. *Molle et facetum*: Virgil and sex ‘*Bucolic poetry is not about sex, only about love! Virgil was not the frivolous type!*’

We have established that sexual overtones were not uncommon in the non-satirical poetry of Virgil’s days, and that *Bucolica* 2 and 3 contain words that are sometimes used for sexual innuendo and that therefore these poems *can* be interpreted in a sexual sense. But *should* we do so? There remains the danger of *hineininterpretieren*. It is true that, if one searches long and hard enough, an ambiguity *can* be found in

The motif is also taken up by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* 10.533-552, where Venus subjects herself to a *servitium amoris* by taking up hunting to please Adonis, but limits herself to hunting animals that are not dangerous (Ovid also mentions *lepores* ‘hares’), urging Adonis to do the same. Again, here, the overtone in *lepores* suggests that the goddess of love is not able to turn herself completely into a (virginal) Diana, (which would be dull for Adonis as well!)

¹⁰¹ We also find innuendo in Ovid’s less frivolous elegiac work, like the *Heroides*, e.g. in *Heroides* I. 90 Penelope speaks of the possible ‘rending of her *viscera*’ by the suitors, which is commonly understood as maltreatment of her ‘flesh and blood’, her son Telemachus, but which - in the context - can also be seen as a hint at (the risk of) being raped (*viscera* = *genitals*), in an attempt to give Odysseus an extra motive to hurry home.

many texts. In his collection of stories called *Het laatste boek* (The Last Book), the Flemish scholar and writer Paul Claes has given a hilarious example of such hyper-interpretation. In his book a poet interprets the opening verses of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and ultimately the entire epic, in sexual terms. One could say that this paper makes the same error. Or as one critic put it: sometimes a lizard is just a lizard. Maybe pastoral poetry was one of the havens for the chaste? Or maybe Virgil – considering his nickname Parthenias, which is usually interpreted as ‘virginal’ – just wasn't that kind of a poet?

In my view, there are several arguments to refute these assumptions.

First of all, the possible sexual ambiguities in *Bucolica* 2 and 3 are so numerous and constitute such a coherent subplot, that the chances that they are all coincidental and merely the fruit of *hineininterpretieren* are very slim indeed. Some of the ambiguities mentioned here might seem farfetched, but so do many of the acknowledged allusions in Greek epigrams. And even if some allusions require too elaborate explanations for some to believe in them, many more obvious ambiguities remain, once one is alerted to their presence. Furthermore, there is a huge difference between *Bucolica* 2 and 3 and the *Aeneid*. The *Aeneid* is not about love, much less about sex (there is some love and even sex in it, but they are by no means the main theme of the poem). *Bucolica* 2, on the other hand, can be read as a parody of a *paraclausithyron* disguised as a pastoral poem, and in *Bucolica* 3 Virgil is making a pastoral variation on the theme of satirical (sexual) invective as practiced by Lucilius and Catullus. Erotic ambiguities do make sense in a poem about the (problematic) love between two shepherds or in a quarrel in which the obscene is used as a ‘weapon’. Nobody in their right mind would give a sexual interpretation to the word *testis* in a juridical text. But in a scathing speech by Cicero, one of Martial's epigrams or the *Corpus Priapeorum* or even in a love elegy or in one of the more erotic stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (like in the story about Sol, Leucothoë and Clytië (4.225) where *sine teste* means that Sol, disguised as a woman, is talking to Leucothoë without witnesses, but since he shows himself in the likeness of Leucothoë's mother he is also ‘without testicles’, a typical Ovidian joke), such an interpretation is not out of place. Just as *lacerta* just means ‘lizard’ in Pliny, but can be an allusion to a penis in a love poem by Horace or an epigram by Martial. Or in a bucolic poem by Virgil.

Secondly, pastoral poetry, as a genre, was not ‘chaste’ at all. Coleman (10) points at the prominence of the sexual theme in

Theokritos' *Idylls*, for instance: the easy promiscuity of *Idylls* 5 and 27. *Idyll* 3 he characterizes as a 'parody of a *paraclausithyron*'! And he calls *Idyll* 11 comic and pathetic, linking it to satire.¹⁰² In *Idyll* 7, which has received a lot of attention because of its programmatic character and because it is considered a very urbane poem, in which existing poets are masquerading as shepherds, there is also some sexual innuendo, which can be considered as a joke between poets. In Lycidas' song, there is mention of his beloved Ageanax taking a trip to Lesbos. Lycidas says that on the day of Ageanax' arrival (in Lesbos or back home – this is not specified) he will celebrate, laid back on a bed of κνύζα τ' ἀσφοδέλω τε πολυγνάμπτω τε σελίνω (v.68) κνύζα is commonly seen as a syncopated form of κόνυζα, but the term itself means 'an itch'. As for ἀσφόδελος, this is a synonym for a plant called πόθος, which also means 'desire, love'. And σέλινον is a metaphor for the female genitalia, as is mentioned in a scholion to Theocritus 11,10, (see note 18); πολύγναμπτον can mean 'curly', or, 'with many curves'. So Lycidas' covert message here is that he will lie on a bed of 'longing', 'desire' and 'female genitalia' (maybe to comfort him for Ageanax' absence). Note that in this erotic context both cups (*pocula*) and flutes (*fistula*) are mentioned (κυλίκεσσι v.70 and ἀύλησεῦντι v.71), each allowing for a sexual interpretation consistent with an orgy. And then of course there is *Idyll* 27 where Daphnis, out to seduce a young girl invites her to come and sit under the elm trees, to 'listen to his flute'. And when she refuses, Daphnis tells her she will incur the wrath of Aphrodite, inferring that what she has declined belongs to the realm of physical love. In verse 46-49 Daphnis brags about his flexible 'cypress trees'. The girl reacts by telling her goats she will go and see his 'work' as he instructs his bulls (!) to graze peacefully because he wants to show the girl his 'bushes'¹⁰³, only to go and fondle the girl's breasts, claiming he wants to instruct her. Verse 54 is equally ambiguous 'ἀλλ' ὑπο σοῦς πέπλους ἀπαλὸν νάκος ἠνίδε βάλλω' Daphnis says he will 'throw a rug under the girl's 'peplos', to make her comfortable and to protect her clothing. But βάλλω can also be translated as 'to hit or strike', and the νάκος may be a thinly disguised reference to pubic hair, which indeed lies 'under' the girl's peplos.¹⁰⁴ And in *Idyll* 29 a sexually promiscuous boy who plays

¹⁰² For 'bawdy humor' in Theokritos, see also note 20 and 33.

¹⁰³ Again the plural can be interpreted as poetic.

¹⁰⁴ For more sexual innuendo in this poem see note 55.

hard to get with the poet is described as someone who ‘sits on a different branch every day’ (vv.14-15).

And the sexual theme is not limited to Theokritos. Biôn’s fragment 9 is an epigram rather than a pastoral. And Virgil’s successor Calpurnius Siculus, who is indebted to Virgil in more than one respect, describes a scene in his third *Bucolica* where the hotheaded Lycidas beats the bare breasts of Phyllis, out of jealous rage. Herôndas 6th mime, a genre also practiced by Theokritos, depicts two women discussing the merits of a cobbler who seems to specialize in leather dildos. It is clear that anyone in Virgil’s audience who was remotely acquainted with Greek pastoral poetry would at least expect the possibility of references to sex.

Furthermore, in antiquity Virgil *did* have a reputation as a ‘naughty’ poet. Horace writes about him in *Satires* 1.10.44-45 ‘molle atque facetum/Vergilio adnuerunt gaudentes rure Camenae’ - *the Muses who love the countryside granted wantonness and wit to Virgil* -, referring explicitly to the *Bucolica*. *Mollis* is exactly the adjective Catullus uses to describe his own erotic poetry in *Carmen* 16 and in *Carmen* 22 he calls the rustic poetry of Sufferus ‘*infacetus*’ (see note 3). Or as Clausen puts it in his introduction to his edition of Virgil’s Eclogues: ‘*Horace discerned in the Eclogues the wit that Catullus denied to country things.*’ Minadeo (133-135) goes so far as to deduce from Horace’s *Odes* 4.12 that Horace and Virgil were one time homosexual lovers, based on – among others - Horace’s phrase ‘*animae dimidium meae*’ (*half of my soul*), which is a term of homosexual endearment also found in Meleagros and Kallimakhos. He also mentions a recently discovered *Vita Vergiliana* of the ninth century, which characterizes Virgil’s life as *not to be imitated, nor worthy of remembrance*.¹⁰⁵ Pliny, in *Epistulae* 5.6, talks about serious writers who have indulged in ‘obscene poetry’, *inter quos vel praecipue numerandus est P. Vergilius*. Likewise Propertius and Ovid cite Virgil as a kindred spirit, again with reference to the *Bucolica*. Propertius treats Virgil as an author of interest to amatory readers in 2.34.67-84, a passage full of allusions to the *Bucolica*.¹⁰⁶ In this passage ‘the erotic potential of the Eclogues has become the sole preoccupation.’ (Thomas). Ovid cites Virgil in *Tristia* 2.537-8, his self-defense against

¹⁰⁵ See **Finch**.

¹⁰⁶ With verses like: ‘Thyrsin et attritis Daphnin harundinibus’ - *Thyrsis and Daphnis with their worn away flutes/stalks*’ (v.68) and ‘utque decem possint corrumpere mala puellas’ - *how ten apples can corrupt girls* (v.69) and ‘missus et impressis haedus ab uberibus’ - *the kid/wanton boy sent away from the pressed udders/breasts* (v.70).

the charge of obscenity, inferring that his great predecessor was equally obscene in his writings, and *'he was never punished by Augustus'*. Fantuzzi cites several passages in Propertius and Ovid (Propertius 1.18, 2.13, 2.19, 2.30, 2.34, 3.13; Ovid *Heroides* 5 and *Metamorphoses* 10.533-552) where these poets 'adapt' and idealize bucolic motifs (from Virgil, Theokritos, Biôn and also Leonidas and Meleagros) and concludes that (10) *'the bucolic environment quite often becomes, for Propertius and Ovid, the wishful setting of the 'road not taken' by elegiac love, namely the idealized happy prehistory or alternative to the urban environment where the unhappiness of elegiac poetry was enacted.'* In their work the bucolic is the setting, however idealized and unreal, where love is safe and happy. In a sense it is more erotic than the urban/elegiac setting with its connotations of lament and unhappy love. So, Propertius and Ovid must have found something in - among others - the *Bucolica* that suggested to them that *Arcadia* was a place of love without tears.¹⁰⁷ In 2.19 Propertius seems to attribute the safety of the countryside to a lack of temptations for his promiscuous Cynthia, only to 'contradict' this with an ambiguous hunting-metaphor (see above p.57). In 2.34 he emphasizes the easy access to lovers, suggesting that sex in the country was frivolous, without all consuming passions. This might seem strange, since *on the surface* Virgil's lovers seem distinctly elegiac in the sense that their loves are generally unhappy and all consuming (e.g. Gallus and Corydon himself). Also in Theokritos we find elegiac motifs like the shepherd Daphnis, prepared to die for his love. *But* the central thought of *Idyll* 11 that love can be cured by poetry is completely the opposite of the elegiac sentiment. Also in *Bucolica* 10, Gallus receives advice from Menalcas, Apollo, Pan and Silvanus to forget about his Lycoris. His love is dubbed insane (*insanis* v.22) and Gallus himself depicts the countryside as a possible place where he might be happy with other lovers, if only he could forget his Lycoris (vv.35-41). Similarly, in the last five verses of *Bucolica* 2, Corydon is urged to renounce Alexis and to go back to work, with the promise that he will find another lover. Again, like with the obscene overtones in *Bucolica* 2 and 3, there is some ambiguity as to who is talking here: Corydon or Virgil? To me, the passage does not ring true from Corydon's mouth after his very elegiac rhetorical question *'quis modus adsit amori?'* - *what limit can there be to*

¹⁰⁷ Fantuzzi (7) writes: *The possibility that erotic pathos may become controllable, without the sorrows caused by elegiac (or urban) love, when it is set within the coordinates of the pastoral world, is clearly formulated (...)*

love? (v. 68) -, and the observations that Corydon has talked to himself before in the poem and that in Virgil's model, Theokritos' *Idyll* 11, the Cyclops also gives *himself* a similar advice is not conclusive. It can be countered by the observation that giving the last five verses to Virgil makes a neat parallel with the five introductory verses of the poem and would make the poet a *praeceptor amoris* of some sort, recommending promiscuity as an antidote to an unrequited love (an advice also found in Lucretius and taken up by Ovid in his *Remedia Amoris*). This attitude might explain why Propertius and Ovid detected hints that in the *Bucolica* love isn't as seriously romantic as it appears.¹⁰⁸

These references to frivolousness and obscenity in Virgil's work are sometimes explained as references to some of the more 'obscene' parts of the *Appendix Vergiliana* and then dismissed because nowadays the *Appendix Vergiliana* is, unlike in Roman times, considered to be spurious. But Horace and Propertius explicitly refer to the *Bucolica*, not to the appendix, and a poem like *Catalepton* 7, which refers to pederasty, is usually regarded as 'probably authentic'. The *Appendix Vergiliana* also contains Priapic poems¹⁰⁹ and an erotic gem like the *Copa Syrisca*, which is of particular interest because it contains echoes from *Bucolica* 2. The main argument for regarding most of the pieces in the *Appendix* as spurious is one of style, (most pieces are too badly written to be by Virgil). But style on its own is a rather shaky basis for establishing someone's authorship, especially when the text under scrutiny is supposed to be early work. Style changes over time, and the works in the *Appendix* are considered early work. More secure arguments to condemn a piece would be references from contemporary writers and/or chronological inconsistencies in language and content ('Virgil could not have used this or that expression, or the event alluded to only happened after Virgil's lifetime'). As Coleman (19) points out, *Bucolica* 2, while

¹⁰⁸ The elegiac/romantic and the more frivolous attitude towards love are characteristic of Catullus' poetry, and therefore essentially urbane. Therefore the link in Propertius' and Ovid's work between frivolity and the countryside doesn't warrant the conclusion that frivolity was regarded as 'rustic', otherwise, these poets would not have presented it as their ideal. Clearly, for them, the rustic setting is just a décor in which idealized lovers might enjoy their very urbane, frivolous love. This also shows that they made a clear distinction between the rustic setting and the urbane character of the *Bucolica*, indicating that they, at least, did not consider Virgil a rustic poet.

¹⁰⁹ According to **Ribbeck** in his prolegomenon (5), Herzberg considered the priapic poems as a part of the *Catalepton* and as authentic.

published around 42, must have been written quite some time before that. That puts the *Appendix*, if considered genuine, in Virgil's teens¹¹⁰ or early twenties, which could account for imperfections in style. Of course there can be no certainty either way: the authenticity of any piece from the *Appendix* cannot be proven beyond doubt. But for some pieces one could ask the question if it wasn't their embarrassingly 'obscene' content rather than their stylistic inferiority that prompted some scholars to question the authority of the ancient *vitae* in this instance, while they accepted the same authority in other aspects (such as the question of which eclogues were written first). Moral outrage seems an even less conclusive argument than style to challenge the evidence from the ancient sources.

Let us consider the *Copa*, because most scholars seem to agree that there is nothing wrong with its style. In the Loeb edition it is called 'a rare gem' in the *Appendix*. As was mentioned before, the *Copa* contains several echoes from *Bucolica* 2, or vice versa.¹¹¹ If we maintain a neutral position in the question about the authenticity of the *Copa* there are three possibilities. Either the 'author' of the *Copa* has imitated *Bucolica* 2, or Virgil has imitated the 'author' of the *Copa* or Virgil has 'quoted' from his own earlier poem, as he sometimes did in later years (see note 91). In

¹¹⁰ Other poets started out very young. Ovid started on the first 5 volumes edition of his *Amores* when he was barely 18. The fact that he cut it down to three volumes later suggests that many poems from his early days were not up to standard. Tibullus' first book was probably published in his early twenties, so was Propertius' *Cynthia Monobiblos*.

¹¹¹ As pointed out and discussed above (pp.7-8) verse 28 of the *Copa*, referring to a lizard hiding in a 'cool' place, is an echo of *Bucolica* 2.9. Furthermore the tavern girl tries to lure her customers with a variety of flowers, food, drink and music. The passage is reminiscent of a similar offering in *Bucolica* 2.45-55. The words *rosa*, *mala*, and *cucumis* are acknowledged ambiguous words (See Smithers/Burton). *Fistula* also crops up. The words *pampinea umbra* can mean 'shadow under the vine leaves', but it can also mean 'a long haired (or alternatively 'epilated') Umbrian girl'. The tavern girl explicitly refers to girls as part of the attractions of her establishment. As we saw many times already, the offering of specific kinds of food, flowers and music serves to hint at sex, here as a means to lure an exhausted traveler into the inn. The reference to the donkey (*asellus*) finding shelter in the stable is equally obscene, seeing in antiquity the donkey carries the connotation of 'randy person' (See e.g. Apuleius *Metamorphoses*). The stable of preference for a 'randy person' can only be a brothel.

all three cases the obvious sexual overtones of the *Copa* make the same overtones probable in *Bucolica* 2.

And the ultimate suggestion that Virgil wasn't above sexual innuendo comes from his own work, namely... the *Aeneid*. Aulus Gellius claims (*Noctes Atticae* 9.10) that Annaeus Cornutus criticized Virgil for using the word '*membra*' – which he obviously regarded as containing an obscene overtone – in *Aeneid* 8. 406¹¹², where Venus rewards her husband Vulcanus for providing her son Aeneas with new armor by offering him 'an embrace' (*amplexus*, v.405). Cornutus clearly objected to the pun on *membra* ('limbs' or 'sex organs') because in his view this overstated the obvious conclusion (evident from the references to Vulcan's excitement and Venus' loveliness in the preceding verses) that what Vulcan really got was some satisfying marital sex.

In his introduction Minadeo (4) justifies his looking for sexual symbolism in Horace's *Odes* by claiming that Horace's predecessors Homer, Euripides, Aristophanes, Catullus and Virgil (my emphasis) employed it '*with as much calculation as they might any other figurative effect (...) with conscious purpose.*' As an example he cites *Bucolica* 10.54, where Gallus uses the word *crescit* ambiguously for the growth of trees and of his sexual desire.

And then there is of course the dalliance between Aeneas and Dido. When they are surprised by a storm, the queen of Carthage and her Trojan guest hide in a *speluncam*, a cave (*Aeneid* 4.165)¹¹³. Virgil leaves no doubt that they do more there than just hide (*Aeneid* 4.168 *connubiis*). The ambiguous nature of their hiding place hints at what takes place there to seal this 'marriage'. (If he had wanted to avoid the innuendo he could have had them hide under an overhanging cliff or a little hut.)

But to me the ultimate argument is Virgil's own, rhetorical education. In his *Institutio Oratoria*, when discussing the *elocutio* stage of writing an *oratio*, (book 8) Quintilian discusses the use of appropriate words, and he explicitly warns (with an example from Virgil!¹¹⁴) that the

¹¹² '... placidumque petivit/Coniugis infusus gremio per membra soporem.' - *And he sought peaceful sleep all over his members, reclining in /moistened by the lap of his wife.*

¹¹³ See note 49.

¹¹⁴ Quintilian quotes *Georgica* 1.357: '*incipiunt agitata tumescere*' - *stirred up they started to swell* - in a passage about waves being swept up by the wind in a storm. He claims some readers interpreted this line as a hint at masturbation, which elicits the exasperated comment: '*quod si recipias, nihil loqui tutum*' - *if you take it like that, nothing you say is safe* (*Inst.Or.*8.3.47). This emphasizes

audience will jump at any occasion to give a sexual interpretation to an ambiguous word. That Virgil is likely to have known this in his own rhetorical training is clear from the fact that the same warning already occurs in Cicero's *Orator* 154-55. The assumption that the audience was very well trained in finding even the remotest ambiguity is corroborated by the very sophisticated and farfetched nature of the innuendoes found in Greek epigrams. This makes it clear that a poet would have to be extra careful in avoiding any ambiguities if he did not want to be misunderstood, or he would risk public ridicule, *especially* if an ambiguity were to be found *where it was clearly out of place*. So, if an innuendo *can* be found *and* is *appropriate* in the context, it stands to reason that it is deliberate, otherwise, the poet would have rephrased his verse or used other words to prevent misinterpretation. (See above my discussion of Tibullus 1.10, where Tibullus uses the ambiguous concepts 'bull' and 'plough' in such a way that a sexual interpretation becomes difficult¹¹⁵). In none of the occasions where this article assumes a sexual

the need for extra care to avoid ambiguous phrasing when it is not wanted. Like Cicero in his aforementioned letter (*Ad Familiares* 9.22), Quintilian (8.3.46) also warns against words containing the letter combination *-pedo-* (from *pedere*: to fart), and words that were once safe, but that in his days had become ambiguous. He cites the example of *ductare* (8.3.44), in Sallust's days used for 'leading' an army, but in Quintilian's days understood as 'to seduce', so that *ductare exercitum* would indicate an overdeveloped sex-drive, rather than leadership. He also advises to use the word order *cum hominibus notis* ('with well known people') instead of *cum notis hominibus*, which could be heard as '*cunnotis hominibus*' 'people with cunts' (8.3.45)

In 9.2.65-66 Quintilian talks about ambiguity as a rhetoric device calling it appropriate when plain speaking is dangerous (*parum tutum*) or improper (*non decet*) and for the sake of elegance (*venustatis gratia*), to delight (*delectat*) the audience.

According to **Thomas** (2001: 9) also Virgil's teacher Philodemos had an interest in ambiguity.

¹¹⁵ This to emphasize once more that this article does not claim that the words it calls ambiguous contain sexual overtones in *every* text. As was said, context – immediate or broad – is what makes a non-sexual word ambiguous. It was perfectly possible to write about a bull pulling the plough without hinting at anal sex, or for a musician to play on a *fistula* without having him perform fellatio or for someone 'giving' something without insinuating that he consents to sexual intercourse. All that the poet had to do was make sure there was nothing in the surrounding words or verses that could trigger misinterpretation.

overtone is such innuendo out of place.¹¹⁶ I therefore think it is not a case of *hineininterpretieren* when I claim that in *Bucolica* 2 a *lacertus* is more than a lizard and in *Bucolica* 3 a *fistula* is more than a panpipe. Maybe it is time to recognize that Virgil was not the ‘virgin’ he was made out to be and that - as Harris has pointed out - the ‘virginal’ nickname Parthenias can equally well mean ‘citizen of Naples’ or even ‘Bastard child’.

9. Conclusions:

All things considered, a case can be made to support the idea that Virgil, in addition to other neoteric figures of style and motives, used the ‘lubricant’ of sexual allusions to introduce his new bucolic genre to a critical city audience. In doing so, he was influenced by the literary taste of his day, which was determined by the works of, among others, Catullus and Gallus and the epigrammatists (Meleagros, Asklepiades, Poseidippos, Dioskorides and Philodemos predate Virgil, Marcus Argentarius and Antipatros of Thessalonica are probably a bit younger), and which can also be detected in the work of (broadly speaking) contemporary authors like Horace, Tibullus and Propertius. Apart from the fashionable sexual theme, Virgil also proves himself to be a *poeta doctus*. Not only by alluding to the astronomers in *Bucolica* 3, but also by displaying a very detailed knowledge of the Greek language, the work of Greek and Latin predecessors and magical practices.¹¹⁷ If one accepts the interpretation of *Bucolica* 2 and 3 outlined above, it offers a fascinating insight in the psychology of a beginning author,¹¹⁸ who fears

¹¹⁶ Of course there is always the possibility that an author slipped up and left in a stray ambiguity he did not intend, but if he did, it would likely have been detected (to his embarrassment) during one of the pre-publication *recitationes* and the poet would have taken it out before publishing his text. Even assuming the ambiguity might be missed by the ‘test-audience’, this has no bearing on *Bucolica* 2 and 3, where we found not one (conceivably stray) innuendo, but an *entire sexual subtext* that can hardly be the result of carelessness.

¹¹⁷ For instance the lizard-penis link, which seems to stem from magical practices, as shown by the passages from Theokritos and Pliny the Elder cited above. (see note 15)

¹¹⁸ The *Bucolica* seem to have been regarded as Virgil’s ‘real’ debut. **Donatus** (44) mentions the earlier work from the *Appendix Vergiliana* but has virtually nothing to say about it. He states (65) that afterwards Virgil embarked on

his work will not be accepted by the literary circles of his day because of its content and his own 'rustic' descent, and therefore spices it up with elements that are in accord with the prevalent taste. As mentioned above Hubbard and Leach (see note 4) regard *Bucolica* 2 as a reflection of Virgil's insecurity towards his audience. Corydon's urge to seduce Alexis is a metaphor for Virgil's urge to seduce his audience. To my mind, sexual overtones fit very well into this context. They are a form of showing off ('See what I have to offer!') to a potentially critical, urbane audience. The fact that he did this in a covert and therefore all the more tasteful manner, and not without a certain amount of humor, merely advocates Virgil's writing skills. Furthermore, he never compromises his own literary aims: he does succeed in introducing an apparently new genre in Rome and in having it accepted by the literary intelligentsia. It can be said that, once he had made a name for himself, he did not conform to the prevalent literary taste as much as contributed to modifying it. At least to the extent that next to the sophisticated, ironic and erudite poetry of his day, which would live on in the work of the lyric and elegiac poets, his style of bucolic poetry, with country life as its unfashionable subject, was accepted and even praised.

'Roman matters', switching to the *Bucolica*, to please Pollio, Gallus and Varus, his 'patrons'. His account (90) of how Virgil's poetry was received in Rome starts with the *Bucolica*. Likewise when after his biography he begins the analysis of Virgil's work (194), he leaves out the *Appendix* and starts with the *Bucolica*.

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