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A Less Maculate Muse

Abstract: This chapter considers the nature of sexual humour in ancient Greek literature, with particular attention to Athenian Old Comedy and the pioneering work of Jeffrey Henderson in *The Maculate Muse*. Henderson argues that comedy describes sexual activities and sexual organs with a wide variety of primarily allusive terms. His work depends on close readings of thousands of individual passages, supported by a complex implicit theory as to how figurative language is established and deployed on the comic stage to shock and amuse. Through a series of case studies, it is argued that Henderson's treatment of specific obscenities (or alleged obscenities) is often inadequate, confused, or unclear, and that the humour of many individual passages in Athenian Old Comedy is not what he takes it to be. A larger concern is with how riddling, allusive language of this sort is created and employed, and — much more important — with how it can be detected, and the risks of misidentifying or misreading it.

Most readers today would agree that fifth-century Athenian comedy, the so-called "Old Comedy", is somehow "funny", and there can be little doubt that in its original performance context it was at least intended to be funny. Precisely how Old Comic humour works is a more complex and difficult matter. But obscenity — the use of coarse, "dirty" sexual language, often for mocking or abusive purposes — is generally and not unreasonably taken to be an important and perhaps central part of its appeal. This is a genre, after all, in which all adult male characters were outfitted with oversized leather penises that dangled outside their clothing, crudities seemingly equivalent to the modern English "fuck" and "shit" are ubiquitous, and the hero's ultimate triumph is routinely depicted as involving access to beautiful women and occasionally boys.

Like many classicists of my generation, I was introduced to Old Comedy and the nature of Old Comic humour in particular by Jeffrey Henderson's ground-

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breaking 1975 book *The Maculate Muse*.[1] *The Maculate Muse* (hereafter *MM*) is itself the product of an enormous cultural shift in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s that involved a recognition not just of the significance of sexuality in personal and political life, but of the right and indeed the obligation to acknowledge and discuss that significance. It had always been obvious that obscenity was an important component of Aristophanes' plays and their humour, even if the matter had never been given systematic scholarly consideration. *MM* amounted to a call for open acknowledgement of the pervasiveness and vigour of such language, which it converted into a basic tool for interpreting Old Comedy and genres cognate with it, such as *iambos*. The individual paragraph-entries in *MM*, moreover, showed that obscenity was far more pervasive in Old Comedy than earlier investigations of the matter had suggested, and far more inventive. The larger categories into which the material was collected also pointed to the existence of whole fields of metaphor and imagery not previously identified as such. The result was to open up new dimensions of the primary texts to consideration, and to invigorate discussion of a genre that up to that time had been generally treated as far less significant and exciting than fifth-century tragedy. It might accordingly be said without much exaggeration that the late twentieth-century reception of the Old Comic poets can be divided into two general periods, before the publication of *MM* and after it. The ripple effects of the book were even more significant, for if a word or idea could be shown to be obscene — and thus amusing — in the Old Comic poets, where the evidence was particularly dense and informative, the same word or idea could be tentatively treated as such in other, more fragmentary or less effectively understood genres and texts.

MM is equipped with a long theoretical introduction to the question of obscenity that situates its subject in a Freudian context (pp. 1–55). It offers no equivalent explicit discussion of what it takes to be the mechanics of figurative language, on the one hand, or its own philological procedures, on the other, leaving the reader to infer answers to such questions from the text itself. Broadly put, *MM* appears to treat most Old Comic obscenity as one of two forms of verbal play. "Primary obscenities" — words equivalent to "asshole" and "fuck" — are used for their shock value, as something like punchlines, where the unexpected and in one sense inappropriate crudity of the language makes the audience laugh with pleasure at the reference to a fact or function that ought not to be discussed openly. Other Old Comic obscenities — the type on which this

1 Henderson 1975. The book is generally cited from the 1991 Oxford University Press second edition. With the exception of a short section of "Addenda, Corrigenda, Retractanda" (pp. 240–252), however, the two editions are identical. For the topic in general, see more recently Robson 2006.

paper concentrates — are figurative: otherwise innocent words are used in a double sense, and the disjuncture between pedestrian and metaphorical senses becomes an object of amusement and delight in and of itself, with the delight further sweetened by the realisation that this is yet another way of saying and listening to "dirty things" in public. As for its style of philological argument, *MM* seems to proceed from a conviction — in one sense, not particularly controversial — that a case for a previously unsuspected figurative sense of a word is built in the first instance by citing parallels in an essentially exponential fashion: two examples of an alleged double sense are far more than twice as compelling an argument as only one, and so forth. More controversially, *MM* assumes that once a number of words of double sense falling into a general figurative field (agricultural language or language of sailing, for example) have been identified, other words belonging to the same field can be treated as potentially having a similar valence. The pervasiveness of such language emerges as fundamental to Old Comic humour as *MM* understands it, and indeed to the humour of texts of a number of other sorts.

In Section I of this paper, I take what I understand to be the implicit methodological assumptions of *MM* seriously, by examining the textual and lexicographic basis for its claims regarding seventy-two individual items falling into four broad figurative fields.[2] This analysis suggests that much of the evidence the book puts forward for a double sense for individual lexical items is weaker than it is represented as being. In addition, a number of the figurative fields and subfields *MM* identifies as rich sources of allusive obscenities, and thus of humour of various sorts, seem not to exist. All of this has substantial implications for how we read Old Comedy and how it was intended to be funny. Section II accordingly attempts to articulate some alternative basic principles for evaluating figurative language and the humour dependent on it in ancient sources, taking account of

2 Items are identified by their original paragraph-numbers in parentheses, and are generally placed with the figurative field to which *MM* assigns them. The inherent complexity of metaphor as a linguistic practice and the occasionally sprawling nature of the original discussion mean that some relevant terms may be omitted. My general contention is nonetheless that this is a sufficiently large and substantial subset of examples to suggest that my conclusions can be taken to apply to the volume as a whole. Because reference numbers for most of the primary texts cited in *MM* have changed since 1975, I routinely give the modern numbers (in the case of comedy, Kassel/Austin fragment numbers) followed by the number offered in *MM*. Where *MM* cites modern secondary authorities, I generally do not repeat the bibliographic information. References to standard commentaries and editions such as Dover's *Clouds* and Kassel/Austin's *Poetae Comici Graeci* are treated as self-explanatory.

the limited nature of the material available and our distance from the primary sources and the cultures that produced them.

Section I: *MM* on four alleged sets of figurative obscenities

A. Agricultural language used for the act of intercourse (1–11) and for the male genitals (12–16)

This appears to be a large and previously disregarded figurative field consisting on the one hand of verbs properly applied to agricultural activities given a secondary sexual sense, and on the other hand of nouns properly referring to agricultural products used in reference to the penis.[3]

1. ἀλοάω, "thresh" (§280). *MM* suggests that at Ar. *Ran.* 149 ἢ μητέρ' ἠλόησεν (literally "he threshed his mother") the verb means not figuratively "beat, cudgeled" (= LSJ *s.v.* I.2), as is generally assumed, but "had sex with", on the ground that the former meaning is insufficiently different from ἢ πατρὸς γνάθον / ἐπάταξεν ("or struck his father's jaw"), which follows. But it also acknowledges that the supposed metaphorical sense of the verb is attested nowhere else, and Ar. fr. dub. 932 ἀλοᾶν χρὴ τὰς γνάθους ("it's necessary to 'thresh' their jaws") with Phot. α 1021 = *Synag.* Β α 986 ἀλοᾶν· τύπτειν, βάλλειν ("to thresh; to strike, to hit") supports the traditional interpretation.

2. βωλοκοπέω, "break up clods (as in a field)" (§283). Ar. fr. 57 Dem. καλῶς με βεβωλοκόπηκεν is actually Men. *Dys.* 514–515 (cited as a *comparandum* at *MM* 166 n. 70), where the context shows that the verb is not being used as a sexual metaphor, but means something like "throw for a loss".

3. γεωργέω, "farm" (§284). As *MM* notes, at Ar. *Lys.* 1173 ἤδη γεωργεῖν γυμνὸς ἀποδὺς βούλομαι ("I want to strip naked now and work the land"; one of the Athenian ambassadors contemplates a reunion with Reconciliation, personified as a beautiful young woman), the verb gets its metaphorical sexual sense from context, in that individual parts of Reconciliation's body are compared to geographic features of the Greek world. The sexual overtones probably depend as well on what appears to be a standard Athenian marriage formula, in which a woman

3 *MM* catalogues other nouns from the same figurative field that allegedly describe the female anatomy (scattered through §107–204), but considerations of space make discussion of them here impossible.

was given to a man γνησίων παίδων ἐπ' ἀρότῳ (literally "for the ploughing of legitimate children"; e.g. Men. *Pk*. 1013–1014). There is no other evidence to support the notion that γεωργέω alone has an established sense "have intercourse with".[4]

4. διαλέγω, "pick out, separate, examine" (§155, 295). At Ar. *Lys*. 720–721 τὴν μέν γε πρώην διαλέγουσαν τὴν ὀπὴν / κατέλαβον ᾗ τοῦ Πανός ἐστι ταὐλίον (literally "I caught the first one picking apart the hole where Pan's cave is"), the heroine is describing the first in a series of attempts by individual women occupying the Acropolis to sneak off to their husbands. Σ^{R} glosses διαλέγουσαν with διορύττουσαν ("boring through, excavating"; cf. Hsch. δ 1129 διαλέξαι· διορύξαι) and adds κακεμφάτως ("in a vulgar sense"). Wilamowitz *ad loc*. rejects Σ^{R}'s interpretation as "willkürlich" ("arbitrary"); compares Hsch. δ 1116 διαλέγειν· ἀνακαθαίρειν, ᾗ δέον ἀπιέναι ἢ ἐκπλεῖν ("*dialegein*: to clear (a path) by which one needs to exit or sail out"); and argues that the point is that the woman is widening a pre-existing hole in the rock.[5] *MM*, by contrast, takes the scholion's κακεμφάτως seriously and argues for a second sense of διαλέγω (the woman has been caught picking open or enlarging her vagina), rejecting Wilamowitz's interpretation on the ground that it "serves to leach all the humour from the joke (and there *must* be a joke here) without offering either a reasonable defense of his explanation or an alternative source of humour". As *MM* itself concedes, διαλέγω is not specifically agricultural language and thus does not really contribute to the construction of this as a productive figurative field. But there are a number of additional problems with the argument. The first is that the claim that the passage is not funny on Wilamowitz's reading is misleading, for *Lys*. 720–721 remain just as amusing as the two lines that follow, in which another woman is said to have tried to get away from the Acropolis by means of a block-and-tackle, i.e. construction machinery being used for work on the Erechtheion, and which *MM* does not treat as sexual. What *MM* means by "funny" is thus apparently "enlivened by a sexual double entendre", which is a form of circular argument.[6] Nor do the first two anecdotes need to be obliquely sexualised in the way a number of those that follow are: the general joke is that the women are deserting the Acropolis in various ridiculous ways, and sexual humour is then mixed into the remarks that

4 Cf. Ar. *Lys*. 1174, where the Spartan ambassador in turn expresses a desire to κοπραγωγῆν (lit. "to spread dung", *sc*. on a field as fertiliser), referring metaphorically to the supposed Spartan preference for anal intercourse. Here too the double sense seems to be produced by context alone.

5 Cf. Ar. *Vesp*. 350, where Hermann proposed reading διαλέξαι (in reference to an ὀπή) in place of the paradosis διορύξαι.

6 "The passage is funny; it cannot be funny if there is no sexual double entendre; therefore the passage contains sexual double entendre".

follow. Equally important, *MM* cites no parallels elsewhere for the supposed extended sense of διαλέγω, and even if one accepts the general interpretation of the line as "obscene", διαλέγω need not have an unusual sense, the much more obviously ambiguous use of ὀπή alone being enough to generate the supposed humour.

5. καταγιγαρτίζω (§285). At Ar. *Ach*. 275, as the climax of a fantasy of raping a slave-girl caught stealing wood from his land, Dicaeopolis imagines μέσην λαβόντ', ἅραντα, καταβαλόντα καταγιγαρτίσαι ("after grabbing her about the waist, lifting her up, throwing her down, grape-seeding her down"). Σ^{REI^3} — citing no evidence in support of the thesis — maintains that γίγαρτον is a word for "penis" and glosses καταγιγαρτίσαι (a *hapax*) with συνουσιάσαι (~ "to have sex with"). But Σ^{REI^3} also suggests ἢ καταθλῖψαι, ἀπὸ μεταφορᾶς τῶν γιγάρτων ("or 'to press', metaphorically from *gigarta* (grape-seeds)"), whence van Leeuwen's *ex uvis prelo subiectis succum exprimere* (~ "to press like a grape") and Taillardat's "pressurer le raisin".[7] *MM* rejects the latter interpretation and follows Starkie in taking καταγιγαρτίζω to mean metaphorically "deflower",[8] apparently on the ground that "γίγαρτον … refers to virginity (and youthfulness)" (p. 166 n. 71) in *PLond. Lit*. 188.246 (*PLond. ined*. 1821). The word in the London papyrus (a Greek-Coptic glossary from the sixth century CE), however, is diminutive γιγαρτώνιον (= γιγαρτόνιον; otherwise unattested), and the gloss reads "the unripe grapes".[9] The evidence is thus overwhelming that van Leeuwen and Taillardat are right, and that the claim in Σ^{REI^3} that γίγαρτον means "penis" is merely a guess.

6. κοκκίζω, "extract seeds from" (§286). *MM* supports its interpretation of καταγιγαρτίζω (**5**) by comparing Ar. fr. 623 (610 K.) ὀξυγλύκειάν τἄρα κοκκιεῖς ῥόαν (literally "and you're going to seed a sweet-sour pomegranate, then"), following Dobree in understanding this to be a metaphorical reference to having sex with an under-age girl. But Dobree's interpretation of the verse is a guess — Pollux merely cites the line as evidence that κοκκίζω could be used of "seeding" a pomegranate — and there is no other reason to believe that the word has a second, sexualised sense, much less that it refers specifically to deflowering.

7. λέπω, "peel" and ἀποδέρω, "flay" (§288–291). At Ar. *Lys*. 736, one of the women occupying the Acropolis attempts to leave on the ground that she left her flax ἄλοπος ("unpeeled") at home; once she has "flayed it" (ἀποδείρασ(α)), she insists, she will return. These lines are full of seeming sexual double entendres,

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7 Taillardat 1962, §173 (not "le raison").

8 Henderson's phrasing ("The scholiast's alternative gloss, καταθλῖψαι") makes it appear that this too is an ancient explanation of the sense of καταγιγαρτίσαι, but it is not.

9 For the text, see Bell/Crum 1925, 177–226 (at 192, 210).

making it likely that *MM* is right that what the woman really wants to "peel" or "flay" is her husband's penis, i.e. she intends to make him erect and have sex with him. Expanding on this interpretation, *MM* cites for λέπω Eupolis fr. 465 (427 K.) λέπει; Alexis fr. 50.3 (49.3 K.) λέπεσθε (addressed to a group of women); Mnesimachus fr. 4.18 (4.18 K.) λέπεται κόρδαξ (part of a description of a wild party); and for ἀποδέρω Ar. *Lys*. 953 (the sexually frustrated Cinesias complains that his wife Myrrhine has gone away ἀποδείρασ(α)); Ar. *Vesp*. 450 (Philocleon reminds one of his slaves how once upon a time ἐξέδειρ' εὖ κἀνδρικῶς); Ar. *Lys*. 158 = Pherecrates fr. 193 τὸ τοῦ Φερεκράτους, κύνα δέρειν δεδαρμένην ("What Pherecrates said — to flay a flayed dog"; Lysistrata's response to Calonice's concern that their husbands may divorce the women, if they refuse to have sex with them); Ar. fr. 332.5 (320.5 K.) περιδέραι(α); Timocles fr. 19.1 (2.1 Dem.) δεδαρμέν[ο]ν. Neither verb is strictly agricultural in its primary sense, and in any case:

- λέπει in Eupolis fr. 465 (427 K.) is merely Meineke's suggestion for an emendation of the paradosis λέπτει found in Photius, although it is printed by Kassel/Austin. The sense is obscure, but Photius — i.e. the lexicographic source Photius has taken over — glosses κατεσθίει ("consumes"), suggesting that whatever Eupolis wrote, the sense was not obviously sexual.
- When Athenaeus (14.663c–d) cites Alexis fr. 50 (49 K.), he observes vaguely that τῷ δὲ λέπεσθαι χρῶνται οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐπ' ἀσελγοῦς καὶ φορτικῆς δι' ἀφροδισίων ἡδονῆς ("The Athenians use *lepesthai* in reference to crude, base sexual pleasure"). The meaning of the verb in the middle — not the active here — is obscure beyond this, and nothing suggests that fellatio is in question in verse 3, despite *MM*.[10]
- Mnesimachus fr. 4.18 (4.18 K.) λέπεται κόρδαξ (once again middle rather than active) is taken by *MM* to refer to "an obscene dance in which masturbation (note middle voice) is featured". This is difficult to extract from the text, which appears instead to mean something like "a lewd *kordax*-dance is being performed".

10 "λέπεσθε … clearly means 'get the penis ready for fellatio'". Note that the only evidence that the addressees are "prostitutes or flute-girls", as *MM* maintains, is that they are also ordered to drink toasts (προπόσεις πίνετε) in verse 2. The next command (the final one in the fragment) is ματτυάζετε ("prepare *mattuê*!", a fancy Macedonian-style dish), which *MM* seemingly takes as another reference to fellatio, citing Ar. *Nub*. 451 ματτυολοιχός (lit. "*mattuê*-licker"). But ματτυολοιχός is merely Bentley's conjecture for the paradosis ματιολοιχός, which Dover prints, noting that *mattuê* is otherwise referred to only in the Macedonian period. Even if the conjecture is accepted, it would have to mean "greedy parasite" (thus Dover *ad loc*.) *vel sim*. and scarcely "fellator".

λέπομαι thus seemingly had a secondary sexual sense that is activated in the use of the active in the *Lysistrata* scene. But its specific meaning beyond that is difficult to identify and may merely be a vague "excite" *vel sim*. As for ἀποδέρω:

- Cinesias' ἀποδείρασ(α) at Ar. *Lys*. 953 does not obviously mean anything more than "after tormenting me", which is precisely what Lysistrata has asked her to do (839–841).
- Ar. *Vesp*. 450 has nothing to do with homosexual rape, as *MM* would have it, but refers to a beating and is thus irrelevant.
- The "flayed dog" of *Lys*. 158 is obscure, but is taken by Henderson in his commentary *ad loc*. to refer to a leather dildo, making this passage too irrelevant.
- περιδέραι(α) at Ar. fr. 332.5 (320.5 K.) is < δέρη ("neck") and means "necklace", and is thus irrelevant.
- At Timocles fr. 19.1 (2.1 Dem.) δεδαρμέν[ο]ν is a reference to the flaying of Marsyas, and is thus again irrelevant.

8. ὀρύττω, "dig" (§292). As *MM* notes, the verb is used allusively at Ar. *Av*. 442 of penetrating another person's anus; cf. Ar. *Nub*. 714, where Strepsiades says of the bedbugs in his pallet τὸν πρωκτὸν διορύττουσιν ("they're boring through my asshole"). The image is not agricultural, however, but is drawn from the combat sports ("neither to bite me, nor to yank my testicles, nor to gouge…";[11] = the terms of the truce supposedly reached by an unfortunate knife-maker and his physically abusive wife), as also at Ar. *Pax* 898 (with specific reference to *pankration*-fighting). Nor is there any other evidence for a sexualised metaphorical use: of the other passages cited by *MM*, at Ar. *Pax* 372 ταύτην ἀνορύττων refers literally to "digging up" the goddess Peace, who has been buried in a cave, while at Pherecrates fr. 155.19 (145.19 K.) ὁ δὲ Τιμόθεός μ', ὦ φιλτάτη, κατορώρυχεν / καὶ διακέκναικ' αἴσχιστα ("And Timotheus, my dear, buried me and shamefully wore me away to nothing"; Music describes what she suffered at the hands of one in a series of lovers/composers), κατορύττω clearly refers metaphorically to abuse of some sort (thus LSJ *s.v*. 2.a "ruin utterly"), but neither verb has an obviously sexual sense.

9. σκαλαθῦραι (§293–294). The verb is attested at Ar. *Eccl*. 611 (what a man might want to do with a girl he desires), but otherwise only in the scholia and the lexicographers, who gloss it συνουσιάσαι (~ "to have sex"; thus Σ^{R} *ad loc*. = *Suda* σ 521) and ἀκολασταίνων ("behaving wantonly"; thus Hsch. σ 810). *MM* takes the second element to be < θύρα ("door"). But the *upsilon* in that word is short, and

11 The word "anus" is not used, but the point is clear from what follows ("(B.) Not your…? (A.) No, I'm referring to my eyes").

σκαλαθῦραι is more likely < ἀθύρω, so that the sense is "poke in a playful fashion" *vel sim.*; see below, the section on *Language of hitting, piercing, and the like*. This is not agricultural language in any case.

10. σκαλεύω, "stir, poke" (§294). *MM* takes Ar. *Pax* 440 ἔχονθ' ἑταίραν καὶ σκαλεύοντ' ἄνθρακας (literally "holding a courtesan and poking coals"; from a vision of the ideal life of peace) to mean "poking her hot coals" and thus metaphorically "her vagina". But sitting beside a fire is a standard part of homely images of felicity (e.g. Ar. *Ach*. 984; *Vesp*. 773; *Pax* 1131–1132), and there is no obvious reason to give either σκαλεύω or ἄνθρακας an extended, sexualised sense; cf. **17**. In support of an obscene interpretation of the line from *Peace*, *MM* cites Ar. *Ach*. 1014 τὸ πῦρ ὑποσκάλευε ("Fan the fire!"; Dicaeopolis gives directions to the slave helping him cook the eel). But there as well there is no obvious sexual allusion and no need of one to make sense of the passage.

11. τρυγάω, "gather (fruit)" (§287). At the end of Aristophanes' *Peace*, the hero and his bride Opora ("Summer Fruit") are hailed by the Chorus with a sort of wedding song in which they say of her (1339) τρυγήσομεν αὐτήν ("we will gather her in"). There are patent sexual overtones here, and the scene is an appropriate ending to the play, in that it celebrates a return to the countryside and the old farmer-hero's acquisition of a bride. But the double sense of the verb is attested nowhere else and is just as easily understood as dependent on the context.

12. ἀμοργίς, "mallow stalk" (§39). At Ar. *Lys*. 735–736, one of the women attempting to escape the Acropolis complains that she has left a mallow stalk unscutched (ἄλοπος) at home. The middle of λέπω (whence ἄλοπος) appears to have a sexual valence; see **7**. But nothing suggests that ἀμοργίς — glossed "the erect member" by *MM* — does as well, as opposed to serving to set up a quick one-off joke.

13. βάλανος, "acorn" (§40–41, 44). The word is applied to a variety of objects that resemble an acorn, including a bolt for locking a door (Ar. *Vesp*. 200), and at Arist. *Hist. an.* 493a 27, Poll. 2.171, and Gal. *De loc. aff.* 8.442.2 K. is used as a term for the head of the penis. The same sense appears to be activated at Ar. *Lys*. 413, where the Probulus describes a naïve husband whose wife has had the βάλανος ("pin" *vel sim.*) of her necklace fall out (410), and who asks a goldsmith to go to his house that evening while he is away and ἐκείνῃ τὴν βάλανον ἐνάρμοσον ("fasten the/your *balanos* for/in her!"). This is wordplay of a sort, but does not suggest that the head of the penis was metaphorically conceived of as an acorn, even if it was called by a word that properly meant "acorn". Nor do the other passages *MM* cites support a strong metaphorical sense of βάλανος:

– βαλανεύω at Ar. *Lys*. 337 (the female semi-chorus describe the male semi-chorus as bringing logs to the Acropolis βαλανεύσοντας) does not mean "in

order to penetrate sexually" but "in order to play the role of bathmen", i.e. "light a fire"; cf. **56**.
- At Ar. *Eccl*. 361 βεβαλάνωκε τὴν θύραν (cf. 370), the constipated Blepyrus does not complain that the wild pear he ate "is banging at my back gate" (~ "raping me anally"), but that it has locked him closed.
- Timocles fr. 2 (2 K.) καὶ τὸ γλωττοκομεῖον βαλανεύσατε ("and you gave a bath to the reed-case") can be regarded as obscene only if one assumes that both words have a double sense, which is a *petitio principii*.

14. ἐρέβινθος, "chickpea" (§42). This is patently a euphemism for "penis" at Ar. *Ran*. 545 τοὐρεβίνθου 'δραττόμην (literally "I was grasping my chickpea"; in reference to masturbation), as perhaps also in a joke of a different sort at Ar. *Ach*. 801 (Dicaeopolis proposes offering chickpeas to the Megarian's daughters, whom he plans to buy and put to sexual use). Cf. Sophilus fr. 9 (8 K.) ὁ πατὴρ ὁ ταύτης πολὺ μέγιστός ἐστι / κριὸς ἐρέβινθος ("this girl's father is far and away the biggest ram-chickpea"), where "ram-chickpea" might — or might not — be an even more extended metaphor ("penis" = "man"). *MM*'s claim that the word has the euphemistic sense "penis" at Ar. *Pax* 1137, on the other hand, depends on a problematic reading of that passage (see **17**), while at Ar. *Eccl*. 45 (cited as another parallel) chickpeas are simply a snack consumed along with wine.

15. κριθή, "barley" (§43). The word is patently used as a euphemism for an erect penis at Ar. *Pax* 966–967 (when Trygaeus notes that the women in the theatre have not got any of the sacrificial barley thrown to the audience, the Slave tells him the men "will give it to them this evening"). That this was a well-established secondary use is suggested by Ar. *Av*. 505–507 (the fact that the Phoenicians began to harvest wheat and κριθαί when the cuckoo calls is taken to explain the saying "Circumcised men into the field!") and perhaps Ar. *Av*. 566 (when sacrifices are made to Aphrodite, κριθαί should also be offered to the φαληρίς, "coot", but punning on φαλλός). Note also Hsch. κ 4106 κρίθων· ἐπώνυμον ἀνδρὸς μοιχαλίου ("*krithôn*: a nickname for an adulterer").[12] That the cognate verb **κριθάω/κριθιάω** also has a sexual meaning, as *MM* maintains, on the other hand, is not apparent. The basic sense seems to be "consume barley" and thus by extension "run wild" (of animals such as donkeys,[13] and metaphorically of

12 Characterised as a "comic name" by *MM*, but not identified by either Kock or Kassel/Austin as a comic adespoton.

13 Cf. Aesch. *Ag*. 1641 κριθῶντα πῶλον; Soph. fr. 876 κριθώσης ὄνου; Babr. 62.2 ἡμίονος … κριθιήσας (misidentified by *MM* as a reference to a human being).

human beings[14] and the like[15]). But none of the passages cited in *MM* has a sexual sense except the fragment of Cleanthes ἐκ κριθιῶντος ἀνδρὸς ἐν ἀφροδισίοις, where the addition of ἐν ἀφροδισίοις makes it clear that κριθιάω by itself lacks this significance. As *MM* notes, Cratinus (fr. 409 (381 K.)) is supposed to have used ἀμφίκαυστις (cognate with καίω, "burn") — a term for some particular variety of barley, or for barley harvested at a specific time or processed in a specific way — either to mean ὀσφύς or in reference to the genitals. But the ancient sources (collected by Kassel/Austin) show no sign of direct acquaintance with the original text, and the significance of the image remains obscure.[16]

16. σῦκον, "fig" etc. (§31–38, 122). *MM* begins §31 by qualifying the fig as "a common source of double entendres for the organs of both sexes", with the tree used as an image of the male genitals, the fruit as an image of the female genitals. The specific terms in question are:

a) **συκῆ, "fig-tree"** (§31). At Ar. *Eccl*. 708, δίφορος συκῆ (literally "double-bearing fig-tree") is patently a riddling reference to a penis and scrotum sack. The same image seems to be preserved at Antiphanes fr. 196 (198 K.) ἔστιν παρ' αὐτὴν τὴν δίφορον συκῆν κάτω ("It's down below beside the double-bearing fig-tree itself"), suggesting that this was established fourth-century usage. Pherecrates fr. 103 (97 K.) σῦκα τῶν διφόρων ("figs of the double-bearing variety"; unmetrical) *ap*. Poll. 7.152 might be another example (pushing the image back into the fifth century), but is not necessarily anything more than a simple botanical reference, as at Theophr. *Caus. pl.* 5.1.6 ὁ τῶν διφόρων συκῶν λεγομένων καρπός ("the fruit of the so-called double-bearing figs"). These are the only solid examples of συκῆ meaning "penis", and the point of the image would seem to be not so much that a penis resembles a fig tree, as that a scrotum roughly resembles a fig in shape; that it is "double-bearing" because there are two testicles; and that what the scrotum hangs from can therefore be riddlingly described as a "fig-tree".

b) **συκίς, "fig-shoot/fig-cutting"** (§32). At Ar. *Ach*. 995–998, the plantings the Chorus vow to undertake to celebrate their marriage to the personified Reconciliation include νέα μοσχίδια συκίδων ("new fig-tree shoots"), as well as grapes and olives. *MM*, building on the interpretation of the passages discussed in **62**, takes all this language to be sexualised in one way or another: not only are the fig-tree shoots ~ penises, but ἀμπελίδος ὄρχον … μακρόν

14 Cleanthes fr. 583 von Arnim (*Stoic*. 1.132) (quoted below); Poll. 7.24 (citing the fragments of Aeschylus and Sophocles).

15 Of δυσγένεια at Cercidas fr. 17.36 (17.16), p. 215 Powell.

16 *MM*'s "suggests the pubic hair" is a guess unsupported by the ancient evidence.

("a long row of grape-vines") and ἡμερίδος ὄρχον ("a row of *hēmeris* vines") pun on ὄρχις ("testicle"). The reading is both complicated and unnecessary to make sense of the passage, and there seem to be no other examples of συκίς suggesting "penis" or ὄρχος suggesting ὄρχις.[17]

c) **ψηνίζω, "pollinate figs by means of a gall-insect, ψήν"** (§35). The sense of the allusive adesp. com. fr. 12 K. (not included in Kassel/Austin) οὐδεὶς κομήτης ὅστις οὐ ψηνίζεται ("There's no long-hair" — i.e. "no aristocrat" — "who isn't pollinised") is apparent from the more straightforward adesp. com. frr. 13–14 K. (also not included in Kassel/Austin) οὐδεὶς κομήτης ὅστις οὐ βινητιᾷ ("There's no long-hair who doesn't want to be fucked") and οὐδεὶς κομήτης ὅστις οὐ περαίνεται ("There's no long-hair who isn't pierced"): to be "pollinised by means of a gall-insect", i.e. to be treated like a fig-tree, is to be sodomised. While ψήν may figuratively be "penis" here, therefore, this is not evidence that "fig" = genitalia. All these passages come in any case from the paroemiographer Macarius (fourteenth century CE) and cannot be treated as reliable evidence for Classical usage.

d) **ἀποσυκάζω, "test figs (*sc.* for ripeness)"** (§36). Ar. *Eq.* 259 ἀποσυκάζεις πιέζων τοὺς ὑπευθύνους (literally "you test figs, squeezing the men whose accounts are being audited"; of the Paphlagonian looking for victims) is a pun on συκοφαντία (the use of false accusations and the like). Despite *MM* §36, there is no obvious reference to homosexual rape, and if there were, the "figs" in question would presumably be anuses.

e) **θρῖον, "leaf"** (LSJ *s.v.* I.1), and thus by extension "a pastry baked in a fig-leaf or grape-leaf" (LSJ *s.v.* II) (§37). The only evidence that θρῖον could be used to describe a portion of the genitals is Ar. *Eccl.* 707–709 ὑμᾶς δὲ τέως θρῖα λαβόντας / διφόρου συκῆς / ἐν τοῖς προθύροισι δέφεσθαι ("But you [pl.] in the meantime take the leaves of your double-bearing fig-tree and beat off in the fore-courts!"), where the word perhaps refers metaphorically to the skin that covers the penis-shaft, *sc.* as a fig-leaf covers a fig-leaf pastry. As this is part of the elaborate image discussed in **16.a** and dependent on it, however, the verse is weak evidence for an established double sense "foreskin" *vel sim.* for θρῖον. *MM* also compares Ar. *Ach.* 1102 κἀμοὶ σὺ δημοῦ θρῖον· ὀπτήσω δ' ἐκεῖ ("And *you* fetch *me* a fig-leaf pastry; I'll roast it there"; Dicaeopolis to the slave helping him prepare for the Priest of Dionysus' dinner party), but understanding θρῖον there as a reference to the hero's foreskin makes the

17 *MM* §75 compares *Lys.* 409 ὀρχουμένης μου τῆς γυναικὸς ἑσπέρας ("as my wife was dancing in the evening"), where the general context is sexual (the speaker is accidentally setting himself up to be cuckolded) but a reference to a testicle is otherwise irrelevant.

passage neither funnier nor clearer. This is also true of Ar. *Ran*. 134, where Dionysus notes that if he leaps from a tower, ἀπολέσαιμ' ἂν ἐγκεφάλου θρίω δύο ("I'd wreck the twin lobes of my brain!").

f) **ἀποθριάζω, "remove θρῖα"** (§37). *MM* glosses the verb "draw back the petals" (*sic*) of a fig and claims that it "is in meaning identical to ἀποψωλέω" ("draw back the foreskin", i.e. "become erect"). The verb is actually attested only in the lexicographers and other late sources dependent on them, where it is said to mean τὸ ἀφαιρεῖν φύλλα συκῆς. καταχρηστικῶς δὲ καὶ τὸ ὀτιοῦν ἀφαιρεῖν ("to strip leaves from a fig-tree, but by extension to strip off anything"; Hsch. α 6349 = *Etym. Magn.* p. 125.46–48, cf. Phot. α 2495 = *Synag*. B α 1845).

g) **ἐνθριόω, "wrap in a fig-leaf"** (§38). At Ar. *Lys*. 662–663, the male semi-chorus discard their outer garments ὡς τὸν ἄνδρα δεῖ / ἀνδρὸς ὄζειν εὐθύς, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐντεθριῶσθαι πρέπει ("since a man must smell outright like a man, and it's not appropriate that he be wrapped up in a fig-leaf"). *MM* maintains that ἐντεθριῶσθαι not only alludes to the way pastries were prepared, but also means "to be hoodwinked" (cf. Men. *Sam*. 241) and "to remain limp and unerect … with foreskins unretracted". The first alleged additional sense is irrelevant to the passage, while the second is unnecessary. There is no other evidence that either the compound or the simplex had a sexual double sense.

17. φηγός, "acorn" (§165). *MM* maintains that the word can have the euphemistic sense "penis" based on its reading of Ar. *Pax* 1136–1137 κἀνθρακίζων τοὐρεβίνθου τήν τε φηγὸν ἐμπυρεύων, / χἅμα τὴν Θρᾷτταν κυνῶν (literally "and roasting some chickpeas in the coals and toasting acorns, and simultaneously kissing Thratta", i.e. the speaker's slave girl; of a party in the countryside), where the chickpea in question is supposedly the speaker's penis (see **14**) and the mention of ἄνθραξ "indicates the cunt inflamed by coitus and poked by a (phallic) stoker". There are no parallels for the supposed double sense of the word, and the passage is more economically interpreted as meaning what it appears to: the speaker happily imagines preparing rustic snacks by a fire and kissing a woman who is not his wife.

Very few of *MM*'s entries in this area thus hold up to detailed scrutiny. There are two examples of the direct metaphorical use of the name of a crop for the penis (ἐρέβινθος, κριθή), and one as part of what by the fourth century was apparently an established image (συκῆ). λέπομαι — although not λέπω — seems to have a sexual sense, but is probably not usefully regarded as "agricultural imagery". Something similar is true of βάλανος: while in other contexts the word can mean "acorn" rather than ~ "penis", this is not the same as saying that a penis is an

acorn. In three cases (γεωργέω, τρυγάω, θρῖον), agricultural language appears to take on a sexual valence from the context in which it appears; in two of these (τρυγάω and θρῖον) there is no evidence that this sense would be felt outside of the context. It is accordingly difficult to believe that there is in fact a figurative field of sexualised agricultural language capable of generating and supporting other alleged double entendres.

B. Phallic implements

This is a highly diverse collection, based on the notion that "From very early childhood all men are fascinated by tools and tool-making"[18] and are thus predisposed to represent their penis as one.

18. ἀλάβαστον, "perfume flask" (§45). At Ar. *Lys*. 947, the frustrated Kinesias responds to Myrrhine's λαβὲ τόνδε τὸν ἀλάβαστον ("Take this *alabastos*!") by observing ἀλλ' ἕτερον ἔχω ("But I've got another"), in reference to his erect penis. This is unquestionably a sexual double entendre. The lack of parallels for the use suggests that it is nonetheless also an example of one-off, situational humour, as opposed to an established image. In support of its interpretation of the word as an established euphemism, *MM* argues that at Ar. *Ach*. 1051–1066 "Dicaeopolis vividly demonstrates on the alabastos" the technique by which the Bride is to anoint the Bridegroom's penis with liquid peace, so as to keep him out of combat. But there is no evidence of this in the text, which instead shows that the hero pours a bit of peace *into* the flask, which the woman is holding (1063), his own hands being occupied with a pouring vessel. Nor is there any substantial ground for asserting that Ar. fr. 561 (548 K.) ἀλαβαστροθήκας τρεῖς ἔχουσαν ἐκ μιᾶς ("having [fem.] three *alabastos*-storage vessels made from (?) one"; from *Triphalēs*) is "unquestionably phallic", even if the idea — advanced originally by Blaydes — supplies an amusing interpretative framework for making sense of an otherwise obscure verse.

19. δόρυ, "spear" (§47). At Ar. *Lys*. 985, an Athenian mockingly pretends that a Spartan's erection is a spear (δόρυ). This is a joke, but not a figurative use of the word of the sort in question here.

20. ἔμβολος, "ram" (§48). For the word used figuratively to mean "(erect) penis", *MM* cites Ar. *Av*. 1256, where Peisetaerus warns Iris that γέρων ὢν στύομαι

18 *MM* p. 44. "Men" does not appear to be used in the general sense "human beings" and is instead a useful reminder that what pass for cutting-edge progressive attitudes in one generation can come to seem obliviously Neanderthal in the next.

τριέμβολον ("although I'm an old man, I've got a triple-ram hard-on"), and Ar. fr. 334.3 (fr. 317.3 K.) ὅστις ἐπεγερεῖ τὸν ἔμβολον (a wine "which will awaken your ram"); cf. Hsch. ε 2308 ἔμβολον· … τὸ αἰδοῖον ("ram: … the genitalia"). τριήρους ἐμβολάς ("the marks left by trireme rams"; a point of comparison for the impressions created on a barley-cake by the kneader's hands) at Eubulus fr. 75.12 (75.12 K.), on the other hand, is riddling dithyrambic language, and arbitrarily sexualising the line makes it neither clearer nor funnier.[19]

21. ἐπιβολή, "fine" (§50). ἐπιβάλλω (lit. "fall upon, attack") likely has the extended sense "assault (sexually)", given its use at Ar. *Av*. 1214–1216 (Peisetaerus asks Iris if any bird-magistrate ἐπέβαλέν … σοι, and she responds indignantly); see **57**. When Bdelycleon at Ar. *Vesp*. 768–769, in a mock judicial setting, tells Philocleon that he will be able to impose an ἐπιβολή (normally "penalty, fine") on a slave-girl who has misbehaved, therefore, the word may well take on a leering tone. It is nonetheless unclear that a "fine" is usefully described as an "implement".

22. ἐρετμόν, "oar" (§51). The word may have the allusive sense "penis" at Plato Comicus fr. 3.4 (3.4 K.) ἡ μὲν ἐλαυνομένη λαθρίοις ἐρετμοῖς, ὁ δ' ἐλαύνων ("she by being rowed with secret oars, he by rowing"; of Aphrodite and Dionysus, who destroyed Adonis through their separate sexual relationships with him); cf. **44**. It might just as well mean "rhythmic motions", however, and given the lack of any other examples of this use of ἐρετμόν, its obscene sense seems in any case to be determined by the use of ἐλαύνω.

23. ἐτνήρυσις, "ladle" (§52). Nothing about Ar. *Ach*. 245–246 ἀνάδος δεῦρο τὴν ἐτνήρυσιν, / ἵν' ἔτνος καταχέω τοὐλατῆρος τουτουί ("Give me the ladle up here, so that I can pour bean-soup over this flat-cake here!"; Dicaeopolis' daughter,

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19 In support of this interpretation of this fragment, *MM* §333 offers two additional examples of what are taken to be πιέζω (literally "press, squeeze") and cognates used to mean "'penetrate sexually' (in a rough fashion)": (1) Ar. *Eq*. 259 κἀποσυκάζεις πιέζων τοὺς ὑπευθύνους, where there is no hint of rape (see **16d**), however, and πιέζω patently has the extended sense "apply pressure to", *sc*. "to bend them to your will"; (2) Ar. *Lys*. 416–417, where an oblivious husband tells a well-hung young leather-worker τῆς μου γυναικὸς τοῦ ποδὸς / τὸ δακτυλίδιον πιέζει τὸ ζυγόν, / ἄθ' ἁπαλὸν ὄν ("the strap [of her sandal] squeezes the little toe of my wife's foot, given that [the toe] is tender"), and urges him (419) ἐλθὼν χάλασον, ὅπως ἂν εὐρυτέρως ἔχῃ ("come and loosen it/her up, so that it's/she's wider!"). Like the similar request made in the immediately preceding lines of the goldsmith, who is asked to "insert a bolt" for/into the man's wife, this is a patently sexual joke, in that the speaker is unknowingly asking to be cuckolded. On *MM*'s reading of the passage, 416–417 have the second sense "The bulk [ζυγόν] of my penis [ποῦς] is ramming my wife's little cunt [δακτυλίδιον]" (thus explicitly at §146). This is far too elaborate to be funny, particularly since it requires otherwise unexampled meanings of ζυγόν, ποῦς, and δακτυλίδιον.

making preparations for the celebration that will accompany the phallic procession) suggests that either ἐτνήρυσις or ἔτνος (supposedly an oblique way of describing *secreta muliebra*: §181) is to be understood as having a secondary sexual meaning.[20]

24. κέντρον, "pole, pike" (§53). At Sotades fr. 1 (p. 238 Powell; third century BCE) εἰς οὐχ ὁσίην τρυμαλιὴν τὸ κέντρον ὠθεῖς ("You thrust your pole into an unholy hole"; addressed to Ptolemy Philadelphus, who had married his sister Arsinoe), κέντρον is used as a crude riddle to mean "penis". Despite *MM*, there is no evidence that the word was common in this sense. In particular:

– The references at Ar. *Vesp*. 225–226, 406b/7, 1115, 1121 are to the stingers of the eponymous Wasps; none of these passages is enriched or clarified by taking the word to have an allusive sense "penis", and the Chorus does not normally wear a stage-phallus.
– The specific sense of κέντρων (nom.) at Ar. *Nub*. 450 (among the names Strepsiades happily imagines he might be called, were he to become a courtroom prodigy) is obscure. As *MM* notes, the only other attestation of the word is at Soph. fr. 306, where κέντρωνες is coupled with μαστιγίαι ("people who have been whipped", i.e. "worthless slaves, common criminals" or the like) and ἀλλοτριοφάγοι ("people who eat food belonging to others"), neither of which has an obvious sexual sense. LSJ *s.v*. suggests "one who bears the marks of the κέντρον", i.e. "torture victim" and thus "villain". None of the other abusive terms that surround κέντρων in the *Clouds* passage is obviously sexual in nature.

25. κήλων (§54). The word is attested in the Classical period only at Cratinus fr. 359.1 (321.1 K.) (of Pan), and earlier at Archil. fr. 43.2–3 ὥστ' ὄνου Πριηνέως / κήλωνος ἐπλήμυρεν ὀτρυγηφάγου ("it swelled full like that of a crop-eating Prienian *kēlōn*-donkey"; perhaps in reference to the penis of a sexually excited man). The Byzantine-era *Hippiatrica Berolinensia* uses it in reference to horses, and it most likely means "stud animal" rather than specifically "he-ass" (LSJ *s.v*. II),[21] and so by extension a man who is insistently eager to have sex, as at Suetonius περὶ βλασφ. 14 κήλων ὁ εἰς τὰ ἀφροδίσια ἐπιρρεπής, ἀπὸ μεταφορᾶς τῶν ὀχευτῶν

20 *MM* cites as parallels for the supposed sense of ἔτνος Ar. *Lys*. 1061 κἄστιν ἔτνος τι ("and there's some bean soup"; from the menu for a feast) and Ar. *Eccl*. 845 χύτρας ἔτνους ἕψουσιν αἱ νεώταται ("and the youngest women are boiling cookpots of bean soup"). Neither passage is usefully described as an "obscene banquet catalogue", and taking ἔτνος as a sexual euphemism makes them neither clearer nor funnier.

21 Note also Philo *de spec. leg*. 3.47.4 ὄνους ὑπερμεγέθεις, οὓς προσαγορεύουσι κήλωνας ("exceptionally large donkeys, which they refer to as *kēlōnes*").

ὄνων ("*kēlōn*: a man who is inclined toward sex, metaphorically from studasses") and Philoxenus (fr. 514) κήλων· ὁ θερμὸς εἰς συνουσίαν ("*kēlōn*: a man who is hot for sexual commerce") both claim. This is thus figurative language, but not a phallic implement.

26. κοντός, "ship's pole" (§55). Epicrates fr. 9 (10 K.) is a complicated jumble of nautical and symposiastic language, which apparently refers to an old woman and a younger one (prostitutes?) as if they were sails in vv. 3–4 ἄνελκε τὴν γραῦν, τὴν νέαν τ' ἐπουρίσας / πλήρωσον (literally "Haul up the old woman, and fill the young one up and sail onward!"); see below the section on *Nautical language*. Verse 4 εὐτρεπῆ τε τὸν κοντὸν ποιοῦ ("stow the ship's pole") may therefore be intended to suggest "bury the penis (in someone's flesh)!" *vel sim*. Cf. **24**, **63**. As this is the only example of κοντός supposedly ~ "penis", however, and as it is embedded in a larger metaphorical context, this looks more like a one-off pun than established usage. *MM* cites as comparisons Ar. *Eq*. 1391 κατατριακοντουτίζω and Eup. fr. 364 (334 K.) αὐτοῦ δ' ὄπισθεν κατέλαβεν τὸν κόντιλον ("but behind him/it he/she seized the *kontilos*"). The former word is not from κοντός and is thus irrelevant (**61**). Nor is there any reason to take Eupolis' κόντιλος as having a sexual sense, particularly since — as *MM* itself notes — the word ought probably to be accented κοντίλος and understood as the name of a bird or animal.

27. λαβή, "handle, hold" (§56). *MM* identifies the use of the word at Ar. *Lys*. 672 εἰ γὰρ ἐνδώσει τις ἡμῶν ταῖσδε κἂν σμικρὰν λαβήν ("for if one of us gives them a small *labê*"; the male semi-chorus describe the danger of yielding to the female semi-chorus) as "an *ad hoc* double entendre" from the "common sexual sense" of λαμβάνω.[22] The suggestion is tacitly withdrawn in Henderson's commentary on the play, where he notes *ad loc*. that the metaphor is actually drawn from wrestling (cf. Ar. *Eq*. 841, 847; *Nub*. 551; Nicochares fr. 21.2; Pl. *Resp*. 544b).[23]

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22 The evidence for this claim is laid out at §236, where *MM* identifies the expression "to grab someone μέσος" as a euphemism for rape at Ar. *Ach*. 274; *Lys*. 437; *Eccl*. 260. In fact, (1) *Ach*. 274 is part of a description of a rape of a slave-girl, but is not the sexual portion of it, the "grabbing around the middle" being merely the preliminary wrestling that makes what follows possible. (2) At *Lys*. 437, the Probulus orders one of the bowmen to seize Lysistrata around the waist (οὐ ξυναρπάσει μέσην;) and bind her hands; this is violence — and indeed violence against a woman — but with no hint of rape. (3) At Ar. *Eccl*. 259–260, one of the women proposing to visit the Assembly disguised as a man says that if the bowmen try to pull her (*sc*. away from the *bema* or off the Pnyx), ἐξαγκωνιῶ / ὠδί· μέση γὰρ οὐδέποτε ληφθήσομαι ("I'll elbow them away like this; because I'll never be caught around the middle"). This too is not obviously sexual.

23 Eur. *Andr*. 965 λάβεσθέ μοι τῆσδ', ἀμφελίξαντες χέρας (also cited by Henderson on *Lys*. 672–673) is irrelevant.

28. μοχλός, "bar, pry-bar" (§57). Although the assault by the men in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* on the women's fortified Acropolis can be read on some level as a sexual metaphor, nothing suggests that the μοχλοί they bring at 246 to force the citadel's doors open are to be taken as punningly suggesting that they want to knock the gates open with their penises.[24]

29. ξίφος, "sword" (§58). Nothing except an arbitrary decision to read the passage this way makes the male semi-chorus' quotation of the Harmodius-song at Ar. *Lys*. 632 καὶ φορήσω τὸ ξίφος τὸ λοιπὸν ἐν μύρτου κλαδί "an obscene parody" of the original (*PMG* 893.1 = 895.1 ἐν μύρτου κλαδὶ τὸ ξίφος φορήσω), with ξίφος to be understood as suggesting "penis". In the traditional story alluded to at Ar. *Lys*. 156 (*MM*'s second example of the supposed usage), Menelaus intended to kill Helen when he found her after Troy was taken, but failed to do so. That he ἐξέβαλ(ε) ("threw away", i.e. "dropped") his ξίφος at the sight of her μᾶλα (literally "apples", but in context clearly "breasts"; cf. §202) is thus comprehensible on its own and does not require that the word be understood as a double entendre for "penis". Nor is it clear why Menelaus would throw away/drop his penis in such a situation in any case, the point being that he was sexually attracted to Helen, not the opposite.

30. ὀβελός, "spit" (§59). The word is used in a leering double entendre at Ar. *Ach*. 796, as the Megarian describes how χοῖροι ("piglets/cunts") might be sacrificed to Aphrodite. There seem to be no other examples of the usage.

31. ὅπλα, "equipment" (§60). At Ar. *Ach*. 592, Dicaeopolis describes his adversary Lamachus as εὔοπλος (literally "well-equipped"), which appears to mean "well-hung" *vel sim*. Cf. Ar. *Vesp*. 27, where Cleonymus is mocked for having thrown away his ὅπλα (i.e. in the first instance his shield); Nic. fr. 74.30 (Athen. 15.683e) (a flower's pistil described as a "donkey-ὅπλον", apparently because it is taken to resemble an erect donkey-penis).[25]

32. πάτταλος, "peg" (§61). At Ar. *Eccl*. 1020 ἕλκειν … λαβομένας τοῦ παττάλου (literally "to grab him and drag him by his peg"), πάτταλος is certainly a euphemism for "penis".[26] The only other secure use of the word in this sense is in the Roman-era epigram poet Automedon (*Anth. Pal*. 5.129.5–6), who praises a dancing-girl not for how she moves, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ τρίβακον περὶ πάσσαλον ὀρχήσασθαι / οἶδε καὶ οὐ φεύγει γηραλέας ῥυτίδας ("but because she knows how to dance

24 Note also that the κορμός ("tree-trunk") the male semi-chorus refer to at *Lys*. 255 is not a "phallic battering ram" but wood to be burnt as a different means of assaulting the doors that protect the Acropolis.

25 *MM* also cites Hesychius, who offers no relevant lemma for either εὔοπλος or ὅπλον.

26 Despite *MM*, not necessarily erect.

around a worn-out 'peg' and does not flee an old man's wrinkles").[27] Of the other passages from comedy *MM* cites as examples of this sense of the word:

- At Ar. *Eccl*. 284 ὑπαποτρέχειν ἔχουσι μηδὲ πάτταλον (individuals who fail to arrive at the Assembly-place early enough are forced "to scuttle off without even a peg", *sc*. because they will fail to get any pay), there is no reason to detect a double sense for the word.
- At Ar. *Vesp*. 808, where Bdelycleon tells Philocleon that if he needs a piss-pot when he is serving in his new, private law-court, παρά σοι κρεμήσετ' ἐγγὺς ἐπὶ τοῦ παττάλου ("it will be hanging at your side nearby, upon the peg"), it is easier to take this as a reference to an actual wall-peg than as a punning reference to the old man's penis.
- Although *MM* asserts that at Ar. *Eq*. 371 διαπατταλευθήσει χαμαί ("you'll be stretched out on pegs on the ground") διαπατταλεύω "seems … to mean 'bugger'", the threat merely follows up on *Eq*. 369 ἡ βύρσα σου θρανεύσεται ("your hide will go on a tanning-board"); cf. **58**. Sexual violence is not in question.
- At Timocles fr. 19.2 (fr. 2.2 Dem.), καμίνῳ προσπεπατταλευμένον ("pegged to a kiln") refers to the punishment of a man who is to be hung up like an apotropaic device protecting the firing process. Sexual violence once again does not appear to be in question.

33. πέλεκυς, "ax" (§62). The Antiatticist (π 27) cites Araros fr. 5 (5 K.) ἡ σὴ θυγάτηρ, ὅτ' ἐκεῖνος αὐτὴν ἐπελέκα (literally "your daughter, when that guy axed her") as evidence that πελεκάω could be used καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ κακεμφάτου ("also in an ugly sense"), i.e. as a sexual metaphor. *MM* takes this to mean that πέλεκυς itself has the double sense "penis", which it may, although the speaker in Araros might just as easily be building on a metaphor established in the preceding lines (the girl as a young tree, for example, or as the main beam supporting the addressee's house). There appears to be no other evidence for an obscene sense of either the noun or the cognate verb.

34. πέλτη (§65). Despite *MM*, this is not a "spearshaft" used by cavalry, but a small shield associated with Thracian infantrymen. A straightforward phallic interpretation of the word is thus ruled out, including at Ar. *Ach*. 160, where a double sense is unnecessary in any case; see **60**.

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27 *Hipp. Ber*. 115 (ninth century CE), cited by *MM* as an example of πάτταλος in this sense in medical prose, in fact refers to τοῖς ὀρθοκώλοις ἢ πασσάλοις λεγομένοις ("the straight-legged horses known as 'pegs'") and lacks any obvious obscene undertones.

35. πηδάλιον, "rudder, steering oar" (§63). At Thgn. 458, the claim that a young woman ought not to be married to an old man, οὐ γὰρ πηδαλίῳ πείθεται ὡς ἄκατος, / οὐδ' ἄγκυραι ἔχουσιν· ἀπορρήξασα δὲ δεσμὰ / πολλάκις ἐκ νυκτῶν ἄλλον ἔχει λιμένα ("because she doesn't obey a steering oar like a skiff, and she lacks anchors; and she often breaks her mooring-cables at night and goes off to another harbour"), uses nautical imagery to refer to sexuality, although not in a simple one-on-one manner that would allow πηδάλιον to be ascribed the meaning "penis". Theophilus fr. 6.2–4 (6.2–4 K.) ὥσπερ γὰρ ἄκατος οὐδὲ μικρὸν πείθεται / ἑνὶ πηδαλίῳ, τὸ πεῖσμ' ἀπορρήξασα δὲ / ἐκ νυκτὸς ἕτερον λιμέν' ἔχουσ' ἐξευρέθη ("because just like a skiff, she doesn't obey a single oar even a bit, but she breaks her mooring-cable and is found occupying a different harbour at night"), adapting the lines from Theognis, is slightly more explicit, but does not lend much support to the notion that πηδάλιον could be taken to have an obscene double sense outside of a fully developed context such as this. Ar. *Pax* 142–143 is similarly complicated: when Trygaeus is asked by his slave how he will cope, if he and his dung-beetle fall into the sea, he seemingly points to his comic phallus and says ἐπίτηδες εἶχον πηδάλιον, ᾧ χρήσομαι· / τὸ δὲ πλοῖον ἔσται Ναξιουργὴς κάνθαρος ("I deliberately got a rudder, which I will use; and my ship will be a Naxian beetle-boat"). But this is again different from claiming that πηδάλιον had an established secondary sense.

36. ῥοπαλισμός, "clubbing" (§64). At Ar. *Lys*. 553, this appears to be a one-off coinage < ῥοπαλίζω ("wield a ῥόπαλον") with the sense "erection". ῥόπαλον has an obscene sense at Leonidas, *Anth. Pal.* 16.261.2 (Priapus has ἰθυτενὲς μηρῶν … ῥόπαλον, "a straight-stretched thigh-club"; third century BCE), as Hsch. ρ 449 καὶ τὸ αἰδοῖον ("also the genitals") notes. There is no other evidence that the word or any of its cognates had an established obscene secondary meaning.

37. σαυνίον, "javelin" (§67). Poll. 10.143 καὶ ξυστὰ δ' εἴποις ἂν καὶ κάμακας καὶ παλτὰ καὶ σαρίσσας καὶ σαυνία· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὄνομα ἐπ' ἀνδρείου αἰδοίου ἐστὶ παρὰ Κρατίνῳ ("And you could also call spears *kamakes*, *palta*, *sarissai*, and *saunia*; for the latter word is used to refer to the male genitalia in Cratinus") establishes that σαυνίον (or σαννίον?; cf. Hsch. σ 172) was used metaphorically by Cratinus (fr. 490 (443 K.)) to mean "penis". Hsch. σ 273 = Phot. σ 99 σαύνιον· κόντιον βαρβαρικόν. καὶ σαθρόν, χαῦνον, ἀσθενές, παρὰ Κρατίνῳ ("*saunion*: a barbarian javelin. Also (one that is) unsound, loose, weak, in Cratinus"; Marzullo proposed emending to read "Also male genitalia that are unsound etc.") suggests that the specific sense was "a flaccid penis".

38. σκυτάλα, "message-baton" (§66). At Ar. *Lys*. 991, the Spartan ambassador attempts to explain that his prominent erection is actually a σκυτάλα. This does not suggest that the word had the established secondary sense "erect penis".

39. στρόβιλος, "ball", "top", "whirlwind" (§68). Whatever the meaning of the word at Pherecrates fr. 155.14 (145.14 K.) Φρῦνις δ' ἴδιον στρόβιλον ἐμβαλών τινα ("and Phrynis, imposing (on me) some private whirlwind"; Music describes the bad behaviour of one of her musician lovers), there seems to be no evidence that it anywhere means "shaft", as *MM* suggests, or has an obviously sexualised sense.

40. σφραγίς, "seal", and **σύμβολον, "token"** (§69–70). At Ar. *Av*. 1213–1215, Peisetaerus leeringly asks Iris whether she has a σφραγίς from the *pelargoi* or has had a σύμβολον impressed upon her by one of the ornitharchs, *sc*. as she crossed the border into Cloudcuckooland. As Iris' shocked response in 1216, echoing Peisetaerus' use of ἐπιβάλλω (see **21**) in 1215, makes clear, the latter word in particular takes on sexual overtones from the way he uses it. But nothing suggests that either term has a similar sense outside this context, nor does 1213 σφραγῖδ' ἔχεις παρὰ τῶν πελαργῶν; ("Do you have a token from the *pelargoi*?") square neatly with the claim that that σφραγίς "is clearly a sexual double entendre for phallus". *MM* cites as evidence in favour of the latter hypothesis σφραγῖδας at Ar. fr. 332.12 (320.12 K.), in a long list of women's accessories, which it takes to mean ὄλισβοι ("dildos") rather than "seals, signet rings". No positive evidence or parallels support this interpretation of the word.

41. τόρος, "drill" (§71). *MM* takes the word to have a veiled sexual significance in Philyllius fr. *17 (18 K.) προὔδωκεν αὐτὸν ὁ τόρος· ἦν γὰρ ἀσθενής (literally "his drill betrayed him; because it was weak"; probably from a play entitled *The Well-Digger*), so that the sense of the second clause is "because he was impotent" *vel sim*. There is no positive support for this interpretation in the fragment and no ancient parallels for the supposed double sense of τόρος.

42. φλέψ, "vein" (§72). At Xenarchus fr. 1.8 (1.8 K.), octopus is described in riddling dithyrambic language as φλεβὸς τροπωτήρ ("an oar-strap of a vein"). Octopus was supposedly an aphrodisiac, and the point is apparently that it serves to drive a φλέψ (i.e. during sexual intercourse) in something approximating the way an oar is driven when a man is rowing; cf. **22**. φλέψ thus patently has the allusive sense "penis" here, as also seemingly at adesp. trag. fr. 667a.85, *TrGF* V.2 p. 1140 (Neophron? *PLond*. *Lit*. 77 fr. 2.7) εὐτόνωι φλεβί̣, cf. 97 ε̣ὐφλεβὲς κέρας (satyr play?), and later Alcaeus, *Anth*. *Pal*. 6.218.1 (but with the specifying adjective γονίμη, perhaps suggesting that the word alone would not automatically be taken to have this sense); Leonidas, *Anth*. *Pal*. 16.261.4 (both cited by *MM* from LSJ *s.v*. 1). The citation contexts suggest that this is a high-style euphemism rather than a crude obscenity, and it is in any case not an "implement".

This group is thus again much smaller and less diverse than *MM*'s presentation makes it appear to be. There seem to be five examples of established figurative terms of this sort for a penis: ἔμβολος, ἐπιβολή, ὅπλα, πάτταλος, φλέψ. Six additional terms (ἐρετμόν, κοντός, ὀβελός, πηδάλιον, σφραγίς, σύμβολον) may take on a leering tone in context, but are not obviously endowed with one independently. That "phallic implements" is a useful general organising rubric for these items is unclear. The dominant images in fact appear to be "pole" or "impression", with ὅπλα as a more general "equipment", and the high-style euphemism φλέψ as an outlier. "Piercing" might be taken to be an additional underlying idea with κοντός and ὀβελός; but given the lack of related vocabulary in Group D (discussed below), it is tempting to think that it is not.

C. Nautical language

This is another seemingly substantial and nominally traditional figurative field, although of the references *MM* §258 supplies as background, Alcm. *PMG* 125 (109 D.) has no sexual or nautical content, while in Sophron fr. 47 (48 Olivieri) the word in question is not ἄγκυρα ("anchor"; used euphemistically for "penis" at Epicharm. fr. 189 (182 Olivieri), according to Hesychius), but ἐγκίρκα (i.e. ἐγκίρνα, "mix (wine)!"). For Epicrates fr. 9 (10 K.; fourth century BCE), see **26**. Much of *MM*'s detailed discussion of the fragment is problematic,[28] but the more

28 For ἐπουρίσας (< οὐρίζω, "carry with a fair wind"), *MM* §258 n. 49 compares Ar. *Ran*. 95 προσουρήσαντα, which is however < οὐρέω ("urinate") and thus irrelevant. *MM* §258 n. 49 further suggests that "πλήρωσον plays on the meaning 'fill up (sexually) (LSJ s.v. III.2)'", although LSJ actually reports only that Aristotle used πληρόω in the sense "impregnate" a handful of times in his biological works, and compares πίμπλησι at Xenarchus fr. 1.10 (1.10 K.) and κατεμέστωσε at Pherecrates fr. 155.28 (145.28 K.). πίμπλησι in Xenarchus fr. 1.10, however, is used in reference to baked octopus filling a casserole dish (described in mock high-style language as a girl, but with no obvious sexual overtones), while κατεμέστωσε in Pherecrates fr. 155.28 is from the personified Music's description of how one of her lovers "filled (her) up" with modulations (καμπῶν < καμπή, but punning on κάμπη "caterpillar", hence her comment "just like cabbages"), but again has no obvious sexual sense. *MM* does not say explicitly that it regards τοὺς κάλως ἔκλυε ("loose the reefs!") in Epicrates fr. 9.5 as another veiled obscenity, but the citations of Ar. *Eq*. 756 (the Chorus tell the Sausage-Seller that σε πάντα δεῖ κάλων ἐξιέναι σεαυτοῦ, "you need to let go all your reefs", i.e. "go full speed ahead") with scholia and Eur. *Med*. 278 (Medea complains that her enemies ἐξιᾶσι πάντα δὴ κάλων, "are in fact letting every sheet go", i.e. "sparing no effort" in their attempts to ruin her) do not support one. For κοντός (literally "pole") in Epicrates fr. 9.4, see **26**.

significant point is that it is again unclear whether images located in a context of this sort can be taken to have been generally available elsewhere.

43. δικωπεῖν, "double-scull" (§259). At Ar. *Eccl.* 1091, the Young Man being dragged offstage to do sexual service for the Hags wonders how he will be able to δικωπεῖν them both. *MM* describes the metaphor (set up by the reference to the Hags as ferrymen in 1086–1087) as seemingly "an Aristophanic invention". It might be more usefully regarded as a one-off variant of the slightly more common use of ἐλαύνω (**44**), but there is in any case no evidence for use of it elsewhere.

44. ἐλαύνω, "row" (§260). As LSJ *s.v.* I.5 notes, ἐλαύνω (literally "drive, strike"; often of moving a boat forward with oars) is patently used as a verb of sexual congress at Ar. *Eccl.* 37–39 ὁ γὰρ ἀνήρ… — / Σαλαμίνιος γάρ ἐστιν ᾧ ξύνειμ' ἐγώ — / τὴν νύχθ' ὅλην ἤλαυνέ μ' ἐν τοῖς στρώμασιν ("for my husband — because I'm married to a man from Salamis — was driving me all night long in the sheets") and Plato Com. fr. 3.4 (3.4 K.) ἡ μὲν ἐλαυνομένη λαθρίοις ἐρετμοῖς, ὁ δ' ἐλαύνων ("the woman being driven by secret oars,[29] the man doing the driving"; see **22**). In both cases, the metaphor is expressly marked as nautical, which may mean that it would otherwise be taken to mean simply "pound (sexually)", like κατελαύνω (**62**). *MM* tentatively suggests that Ar. *Eccl.* 109 νῦν μὲν γὰρ οὔτε θέομεν οὔτ' ἐλαύνομεν ("for as it is, we neither run with the wind nor row") "*may* contain another such double entendre". But there is no reason to believe that it does, particularly since the opposition "θέω vs. ἐλαύνω" would then make no sense. Despite *MM*, there is no reason to take the simplex at Ar. *Ach.* 995 as sexualised; see **62**.

45. ἔμβολος, "ship's ram" (§272). See **20**.

46. ἐπιβατεύω (§262). At Ar. *Ran.* 45–48, Heracles mocks Dionysus for his mixed costume (a heroic lionskin over an effeminate *krokōtos*, a club but also high boots), and asks where he has been. Dionysus responds (48) ἐπεβάτευον Κλεισθένει ("I was serving as a marine for Cleisthenes"). Cleisthenes was a notorious effeminate, and *MM* takes this to be a "pederastic joke", apparently adopting the suggestion at LSJ *s.v.* II that ἐπιβατεύω suggests ἐπιβαίνω ("mount (sexually)" = LSJ *s.v.* A.III.1).[30] But the word-play is not obvious, and the joke is perhaps simpler than this: if Dionysus was "a member of Cleisthenes' crew", he must share his commander's dubious tastes.

47. κελητίζω, "ride" (§275). A κέλης is both a riding horse (LSJ *s.v.* I) and a fast yacht (LSJ *s.v.* II), and κελητίζω is "ride", including "ride (sexually)" (Ar. *Vesp.*

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29 *MM* §258 n. 50 compares Hsch. ε 5741 ἐρετμόν· … καὶ τὸ ἀνδρεῖον αἰδοῖον ("oar: … also the male genitals").

30 Thus also Dover *ad loc.*

501; *Lys*. 773).[31] What is less clear is whether κέλης II contributes to the use of κελητίζω as a sexual euphemism. The crucial text in this connection is Ar. *Lys*. 59–60 ἀλλ' ἐκεῖναί γ' οἶδ' ὅτι / ἐπὶ τῶν κελήτων διαβεβήκασ' ὄρθριαι ("Well, I know that *they've* come across at dawn on their *kelētes*"; Calonice attempts to make sense of the failure of the Salaminian women to arrive on time), which *MM* translates "these women came early, *mounted* on their *yachts*". This is the only point at which κέλης II appears to be used as a sexual euphemism, κέλης I elsewhere always being in question. Ar. *Ran*. 203–205 makes it clear that the inhabitants of Salamis were regarded as good rowers (presumably because they had to be, since they lived on an island), and the same idea appears to lie behind the speaker's observation at Ar. *Eccl*. 38 that her Salaminian husband was "rowing" her — i.e. having sex with her — all night long; cf. **44**. It thus seems likely that at Ar. *Lys*. 59–60 the crucial image is "rowing ~ sex", and that κέλης II is brought in only because it is appropriate in context and because κέλης I often has a euphemistic sense,[32] which κέλης II, by contrast, lacks.[33]

48. ναυμαχέω, "fight a naval battle" (§263–268). At Ar. *Ran*. 430 (the end of an iambic abuse song), the Chorus say of Callias that κύσθῳ λεοντῆν ναυμαχεῖν ἐνημμένον ("he fights his naval battles wearing a lion-skin of pussy-hair"). This is patently a sexualised insult: Callias does not wear a heroic lion-skin, but something that suggests a taste for prostitutes or the like. But requiring ναυμαχεῖν to have a veiled sexual sense as well (~ "he has intercourse wearing a lion-skin of pussy-hair"), as on *MM*'s reading of the passage, renders the humour incoherent, since the contrast ought to be between Callias' heroic posture (fighting a naval battle while wearing something resembling a lion-skin) and what he actually wears. *MM* similarly alleges a euphemistic sexual sense for ναυμαχέω at Ar. *Lys*. 674–675, where the male semi-chorus complain that the

31 See *MM* §274, although note that the anger with which the prostitute responds in *Wasps* has to do not with the content of the request itself, but with the supposed implication that it betrays a longing for the tyranny of Hippias (cognate with ἵππος, "horse"). At *Thesm*. 153 οὐκοῦν κελητίζεις, ὅταν Φαίδραν ποιῇς; ("So do you 'ride', when you write about Phaedra?"), the reference is in the first instance to Agathon (implicitly accused of wanting to be mounted as a woman would be) and only secondarily to Phaedra. The comparanda in *MM* §274 n. 59 (Ar. *Thesm*. 497, 547; *Ran*. 1043) are simply additional references to Phaedra and do not touch specifically on her sexuality.

32 Thus seemingly LSJ *s.v*. III.

33 *MM* further maintains that the sexual euphemisms in the passage are reinforced by the use of διαβεβήκασ(ι) in 60 in place of the expected βεβήκασ(ι). But this is a standard use of the compound (LSJ *s.v*. 2 "abs. (θάλασσαν or πόταμον being omitted) *cross over*"), here in reference to the passage from Salamis to the mainland. Despite *MM*, Ar. *Av*. 1204 (a reference to the state trireme, the Salaminia) and *Lys*. 411 have no obvious sexual content and are irrelevant.

city's women ἐπιχειρήσουσ' ἔτι / ναυμαχεῖν καὶ πλεῖν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς, ὥσπερ Ἀρτεμισία ("will undertake as well to fight naval battles and sail against us, like Artemisia"). But here once again there is no reason to take the verbs as having anything other than their obvious superficial sense. Cf. **50** on πλέω. *MM* also cites:

– Anaxilas fr. 22.18–19 (22.18–19 K.; part of a long list of "monstrous" *hetairai* and the male customers they have ruined), where Phryne in the guise of Charybdis is said τὸν … ναύκληρον λαβοῦσα καταπέπωκ' αὐτῷ σκάφει ("to have caught the merchant-shipper and swallowed him down, vessel and all"). Although the designation of the man's occupation is crucial to the humour of presenting Phryne as Charybdis, it is not obviously put to work of the sort *MM* imagines: "merchant-shipper" in itself does not suggest "individual having sex".
– Eubulus fr. 67.10–11 (67.10–11 K.) Ἑλλάδος ἔγωγε τῆς ταλαιπώρου στένω, / ἣ Κυδίαν ναύαρχον ἐξεπέμψατο ("I for my part groan for wretched Greece, which sent Cydias out as a naval commander"), with Pl. *Chrm*. 155d (where a man by the same name is said to have commented on the dangerous attractiveness of a beautiful boy). Even if this is the same person, the reference to Cydias' fondness for boys in Plato does not make his sexuality the point of the Eubulus fragment. Nor — an even more unlikely argumentative step — can the mention of Cydias' sexuality in Plato colour the use of ναύαρχος in Eubulus.
– The otherwise unknown Nausimache (literally "Naval Battle") at Ar. *Thesm*. 804 Ναυσιμάχης μέν <γ'> ἥττων ἐστὶν Χαρμῖνος ("Charminus is worse than Nausimache"), whom *MM* identifies as a *hetaira*, asserting that she "battered" the Athenian naval commander Charminus. The verse comes from a section of the parabasis in which the Chorus are comparing individual Athenian women with individual Athenian men, arguing that the former are superior. In 805, the "radical democratic" politician Cleophon is said to be even worse than the notorious prostitute Salabakcho, so perhaps Nausimache too was a well-known *hetaira*. If so, this shows that "Naval Battle" could be regarded as a clever "working name" for such a woman, but nothing more.[34]
– Ar. fr. 558 (544 K.), which Kassel/Austin print in the form † τίς δὲ εἶς ὁ λοιπὸς ἐγγύτατα τὰς ὀσφύας / ἐπὶ τῶν κοχωνῶν ἀργοναύτης οὑτοσί; ("† Who are you the remaining close to the flanks upon the ass-cheeks this Argonaut?"). The text is obscure, although the point is likely either homosexual or pederastic; why the individual addressed is called an Argonaut, is impossible to say.

34 Note also that Nausimache is not said to have "battered" Charminus, but is merely better than him.

– The claim that Artemisia (the name of a queen of Halicarnassus who fought on Xerxes' side at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE) "is a sea-fighter" not only at Ar. *Lys*. 675 (quoted above) but also at *Thesm*. 1200, the implication being that the name has a euphemistic sexual significance in both passages. In fact, there is no reference to naval warfare in the second text, where "Artemisia" is merely a name adopted by Euripides (for reasons that remain unclear; see Austin/Olson *ad loc*.) as part of his disguise as an old woman managing a dancing-girl/prostitute. Nor is the logic on which *MM*'s interpretation seems to depend — "'naval battle' means 'sex'; Artemisia fought in a naval battle; therefore any mention of Artemisia is a reference to sex" — easy to follow.
– Ar. *Eq*. 1300–1315, where Athens' triremes are personified as women and declare their unwillingness to be ruled (οὐ δῆτ' ἐμοῦ γ' ἄρξει ποτ', 1307) by Hyperbolus, although not "their fear that Hyperbolus will soon 'board' them", as *MM* would have it. *MM* goes on to identify the supposed "boarding" as "an act of sexual aggression often associated in this play with Cleon". But the Paphlagonian — Cleon's stand-in in the play — never threatens sexual violence against women in the play, and metaphorical language of ships and sailing surfaces in the text repeatedly with no obvious sexual implications.

49. πίττα, "pitch" (§273). At Ar. *Plut*. 1093, the Young Man who has grown rich and is thus free to abandon his older lover tells Chremylus ἱκανὸν ... αὐτὴν πρότερον ὑπεπίττουν χρόνον ("previously I pitched her bottom for quite a while"), an image drawn from the production and maintenance of boats, whose hulls had to be pitched to keep them waterproof. *MM* claims that "the reference is to the female secreta". The image is certainly nautical, although what the young man is saying euphemistically is something more like "I applied semen to her underparts".

50. πλέω, "sail" (§270). *MM* maintains that the verb "usually = βινέω and thus is used of the male sailing the female", although at fr. 144 (142 K.) the subject is the woman. In fact, πλέω is normally used in Aristophanes in its standard sense "sail" (e.g. *Eq*. 1314; *Av*. 597, 1459; *Lys*. 392; *Ran*. 197), and the same is true of all the passages *MM* cites in support of the claim that it routinely has the euphemistic sense "have sexual intercourse":

– Ar. *Pax* 341 (when peace comes, the Chorus will be able πλεῖν, μένειν, κινεῖν, καθεύδειν, "to sail (elsewhere), to stay (at home), to screw, to sleep")
– Ar. *Lys*. 411 (a careless husband tells the goldsmith he asks to come fix his wife's necklace when he is away ἐμοὶ ... ἐστ' εἰς Σαλαμῖνα πλευστέα, "I have to sail to Salamis")

- Ar. Lys. 674–675 (the city's women ἐπιχειρήσουσ' ἔτι / ναυμαχεῖν καὶ πλεῖν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς, "will undertake as well to fight naval battles and sail against us"; cf. **48**)
- Ar. *Eccl*. 1087 (discussed in **51**)
- Ar. *Eccl*. 1106 (the Young Man being dragged into the stage-house by the Hags anticipates dying δεῦρ' εἰσπλέων, "when I sail in here", the house being momentarily imagined as a harbour, as 1088 makes clear)
- At Ar. fr. 144 (142 K.) (A.) ἀποπλεῖς ἐτεόν; (B.) ἐπὶ τὸν νυμφίον / ᾧ γαμοῦμαι τήμερον ("(A.) Are you actually sailing off? (B.) (Yes), to the bridegroom I'm marrying today"), the scholion to Nicander that cites the fragment makes it clear that "sail off" is a way of saying "go away", with no necessary reference to a boat; sexual euphemism is not in question.

51. πλωτήρ, "passenger" (§269). At Ar. *Eccl*. 1087, the Young Man, having just described the Hags who are pulling him in different directions as "bad ferry-women" (1086), justifies his choice of image by explaining ἕλκοντε τοὺς πλωτῆρας ἂν ἀπεκναίετε ("you would wear out your passengers with your hauling"). *MM* takes this to make πλωτήρ a sexual euphemism ("passenger on a (sexual) voyage"), which is not the point.

52. συννήξομαι, "swim along with" (§271). The manuscripts at Ar. *Eccl*. 1104 (the Young Man, overpowered by the Hags, laments his fate) offer the corrupt συνείξομαι, for which editors generally print Dobree's ὅστις τοιούτοις θηρίοις συνείρξομαι ("I who will be shut up with such beasts"). *MM* opts instead for συννήξομαι ("I who will swim along with such beasts"), which it glosses "συννήχεσθαι refers to coital motion and appears to be an Aristophanic invention".

53. σκάφη, "skiff" (§278). A scholion identifies Ar. *Lys*. 139 οὐδὲν γάρ ἐσμεν πλὴν Ποσειδῶν καὶ σκάφη ("for we're nothing but Poseidon and a skiff"; Lysistrata expresses frustration at the unwillingness of the other women to give up sex as the price for ending the war) as a reference to Sophocles' *Tyro* (fr. 657), and glosses the remark οὐδέν ἐσμεν, εἰ μὴ συνουσιάζειν καὶ τίκτειν ("we're nothing but having sex and giving birth"). The skiff in question is the one on which Pelias and Neleus, the sons of Tyro by Poseidon, were exposed, so that the passage is only vaguely relevant here.

Despite *MM*, therefore, with the exception of ἐλαύνω (probably better included in Section D on the "Language of hitting, piercing and the like") and the elaborate one-off bundle of imagery at Epicrates fr. 9, nautical language does not appear to be a productive locus of sexual imagery in Attic Comedy.

D. Language of hitting, piercing and the like

This category includes a mix of simple, straightforward verbs meaning ~ "apply physical force to" *vel sim*. and a number of sometimes elaborate euphemisms.

54. ἀναπείρω, "spit" (§298). Ar. *Ach*. 1007 ἵν' ἀναπείρω τὰς κίχλας ("in order that I can spit the thrushes") is a reference to culinary preparations and — despite *MM* — has no obvious sexual overtones.

55. ἀναπήγνυμι, "spit" (§299). Ar. *Eccl*. 843 λαγῷ' ἀναπηγνύασι (literally "they are putting hare-meat on spits") again refers to banquet preparations and has no obvious secondary meaning (allegedly "penetrate sexually").

56. βαλανεύω (§300). At Ar. *Lys*. 337, the verb means "play the bathman", i.e. "heat water", and has no euphemistic sexual sense; cf. **13**.

57. -βάλλω compounds (§301). Of the various -βάλλω compounds *MM* discusses:

a) ἐπιβάλλω (literally "fall upon, attack") likely has the extended sense "assault (sexually)", given its use at Ar. *Av*. 1214–1216 (discussed in **21**).
b) ἐμβάλλω at Pherecrates fr. 155.14 (145.14 K.) Φρῦνις δ' ἴδιον στρόβιλον ἐμβαλών τινα ("and Phrynis, imposing (on me) some private whirlwind"; Music describes the bad behaviour of one of her musician lovers), by contrast, is made no clearer by assuming a euphemistic sense.
c) καταβάλλω at Ar. *Ach*. 275 and *Pax* 896a (the latter generally expelled from the text) merely means "throw down to the ground", even if the context in both cases is a sexual encounter (rape in the first case, a wild orgy in the second).
d) *MM* translates προσβαλεῖν at Ar. *Ach*. 994 ἀλλά σε λαβὼν τρία δοκῶ μ' ἂν ἔτι προσβαλεῖν (the Chorus address Reconciliation, whom they imagine as a woman) as "to assault violently" and characterises this as a description of a "predicted gang-rape". This distorts both the tone and content of the passage, which refers to a single man's wish to establish a long-term relationship with a woman (esp. 999); the verse is better translated "but I think that after I got hold of you, I would add three items more" (i.e. the various plantings listed in what follows).

58. διαπατταλεύω, "stretch out on pegs" (§302). At Ar. *Eq*. 371, this is a mocking threat to treat the Sausage-Seller like a hide being tanned, and lacks an obvious extended sexual sense; cf. **32**.

59. ἐρείδω, "press hard" (§303). The verb patently has an extended sense referring to vigorous sexual intercourse at Ar. *Eccl*. 616; fr. 715.3 (695.3 K.) (active, of a man) and Ar. *Thesm*. 488 (passive, of a woman). Ar. fr. 76 (74 K.) μέσην ἔρειδε πρὸς τὸ σιμόν (literally "pound her/it in the middle towards the snub-nose!") is obscure; Fritzsche took an obscenity to be concealed in the line, but the sense

might just as easily be "Proceed along the middle (of the road) toward the height!" R's ἔργα νυκτερείσια at Ar. *Thesm*. 204, taken by *MM* for a pun on ἐρείδω, is a spelling error for ἔργα νυκτερήσια ("nocturnal activities"; thus Bothe).

60. καταπελτάζομαι (§316). The Thracian mercenaries introduced at the Athenian Assembly at the beginning of Aristophanes' *Acharnians* apparently have prominently displayed erections (*Ach*. 158), and *MM* takes the Ambassador's claim at 160 that they καταπελτάσονται τὴν Βοιωτίαν ὅλην (literally ~ "will *peltazein* the hell out of all of Boeotia") to mean metaphorically that they will rape the Boeotian plain. πέλτη is not "penis" (see **34**), but even if *MM*'s sexualised interpretation of the language is right, this is a one-off use of what is probably a nonce verb.

61. κατατριακοντουτίζω (§315). This is a nonce-word at Ar. *Eq*. 1391 punning on τριακοντούτιδας ("thirty-year", in reference to peace treaties personified as beautiful young women) in 1388–1389, with the prefix serving as an intensifier (LSJ *s.v*. κατά E.V); thus "thirty-year the hell out of them" *vel sim*. for the expected "fuck the hell out of them". LSJ *s.v*. offers a more complicated explanation of the verb, describing it as a pun on ἀκοντίζω. *MM* rightly rejects this on the ground that "ἀκοντίζω is never found with an obscene meaning" — a reasonable caution that cuts many of its own eccentric interpretations — but then offers the even less likely suggestion that it "puns on τρία and κοντός" (see **26**). This is in any case not a verb of hitting or piercing.

62. κατελαύνω, "pound" (§261).[35] LSJ *s.v*. 3 (followed by *MM*) notes that the compound is used with a sexual sense at Ar. *Pax* 711 τῆς Ὀπώρας κατελάσας ("after I pound Opora"; Trygaeus imagines having sex with one of the female attendants of Peace); *Eccl*. 1082 ποτέρας προτέρας οὖν κατελάσας ἀπαλλαγῶ; ("Which of them can I pound first and get away?"; the Young Man being dragged off by the Hags considers his options). *MM* takes Ar. *Ach*. 995 ἀμπελίδος ὄρχον ἐλάσαι μακρόν (literally "to drive a long row of grapevines") to be another example of a sexualised use of ἐλαύνω. But the interpretation this yields ("to have sex with a row of grapevines") is incoherent, and the verb must mean instead "drive (into the earth)", i.e. "plant" (LSJ *s.v*. III.2) here; see **44**. *MM* also notes Antiphanes fr. 293 (300 K.) οἴνῳ … τὸν οἶνον ἐξελαύνειν, / σάλπιγγι τὴν σάλπιγγα, τῷ κήρυκι τὸν βοῶντα / κτλ ("to drive out wine with wine, a trumpet with a trumpet, a man who shouts with a herald" etc.), which it identifies as "an obscene metaphor" that "probably derives from metallurgy (see LSJ s.v. III)". But no obscenity is in

35 *MM* includes κατελαύνω in "Nautical Terminology", but concedes that the compound has no such implications and seemingly places it there only as a matter of convenience in the context of its discussion of the simplex ἐλαύνω in §260.

question, and this is instead a straightforward use of ἐξελαύνω in its basic sense "expel" (LSJ *s.v.* I) on the quasi-scientific principle of driving out like with like.

63. κεντέω, "prick, stab, goad" (§304). That the verb has an extended sexual sense at Mnesimachus fr. 4.55 πίνει, σκιρτᾷ, λορδοῖ, κεντεῖ ("drinks, hops about, lies on his/her back, *kentei*"; among the activities engaged in by the guests at a great dinner party) is suggested both by the word that precedes, which routinely has allusive sexual sense, and by the intrusive gloss βινεῖ ("fucks") that follows — which nonetheless also suggests that this second sense of the verb was not immediately obvious.

64. κρούω, "strike, smite" (§305–6). As LSJ *s.v.* 8, following Antiatt. κ 15,[36] notes, at Ar. *Eccl.* 989–990 ὅταν γε κρούσῃς τὴν ἐμὴν πρῶτον θύραν (the Hag tells the Young Man that he can "knock" on the Young Girl's door "when you knock at my door first") the verb appears to be a euphemism for "have sex". Cf. the following parallels:

- προκρούω (literally "knock", i.e. "have sex (with someone) before (someone else)") at Ar. *Eccl.* 1017–1018
- the pun on the same compound in the reference to Προκρούστης at *Eccl.* 1021
- ὑποκρούω at *Eccl.* 618[37]
- κρούματα at *Eccl.* 257, where Praxagora proclaims herself οὐκ ἄπειρος οὖσα πολλῶν κρουμάτων ("not lacking experience of many blows") in anticipation of a potential physical encounter with the other Assemblymen, which seems more likely to be a joke than a claim that she is routinely beaten (*sc.* by her husband).[38]

Despite *MM*, Blepyrus' observation at Ar. *Eccl.* 316–317 that a man from Kopreus τὴν θύραν / ἐπεῖχε κρούων ("kept pounding on my door") has nothing to do with either pederasty or an extended sexualised use of κρούω, but merely means that Blepyrus felt a desperate urge to defecate and therefore left the house without his robe. κρουστικός as a characterisation of an orator at Ar. *Eq.* 1379 similarly has no obvious sexual content, but means "striking" (LSJ *s.v.* II.2) *vel sim.*[39]

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36 καὶ κατὰ τοῦ κακεμφάτου ἐν τῇ συνηθείᾳ τὸ κροῦσαι κεῖται ἀντὶ τοῦ συγγενέσθαι ("*krousai* is also customarily employed in vulgar usage in place of 'to have intercourse with someone'").

37 *MM* takes the prefix here to mean "below" (presumably in reference to the woman's genitals), whereas LSJ *s.v.* ὑποκρούω suggests "gently" (cf. LSJ *s.v.* ὑπό F.II).

38 Eup. fr. 197 (184 K.) κρούων γε μὴν αὐτὰς ἐωνούμην ἐγώ ("but I was knocking on them (fem.) as I purchased them"; cited by *MM* in § 305 n. 88) is obscure (of pots being checked for proper firing?), but does not obviously use κρούω in an extended sexualised sense.

39 *MM* also compares Eur. *Cyc.* 180 διεκροτήσατ' ἐν μέρει (the satyrs fantasise about the gang-rape of Helen), although rightly noting that this is a different verb and thus properly irrelevant.

65. κυκάω, "stir up" (§307). At Ar. *Eq*. 1286, Ariphrades the cunnilictor is accused of κυκῶν τὰς ἐσχάρας (literally "stirring up the hearths") in the brothels he visits. "Hearths" appears to be a double entendre for "vaginas" (cf. Ar. *Thesm*. 912), but κυκάω does not obviously gain or require an extended sense as a consequence.

66. παίω, "strike" (§308). The verb clearly has an extended sexual sense at Ar. *Pax* 874 (the slave asks his master if the beautiful Theoria is the one "we used to *paiein* at Brauron"), as well as at *Pax* 898 παίειν, ὀρύττειν, πὺξ ὁμοῦ καὶ τῷ πέει ("to strike, to gouge, with fist and one's penis alike"), although in the latter passage the issue is complicated by the fact that the entire passage is cast in agonistic imagery; cf. **8**. *MM* §12 suggests that παίω has a similar sense at Ar. *Ach*. 834–835 πειρῆσθε … / παίειν ἐφ' ἁλὶ τὰν μάδδαν (literally "Try to strike your barley-cake on salt!"; the Megarian's parting advice to the daughters he has sold to Dicaeopolis), with ἐφ' ἁλὶ punning on φαλλός.

67. πατάσσω, "strike" (§309). Adesp. com. fr. 465 (798 K.) αὐτὸ ἐπάταξεν (literally "he/she/it struck it", i.e. the thing that was aimed for) is quoted in a pederastic context at [Luc.] *Am*. 53 and apparently refers there to getting one's hand on a boy's ass or penis. How the phrase was used in its original context is unclear, but there is in any case no ground for claiming that πατάσσω was used euphemistically to refer to intercourse.

68. πελεκάω, "hew with an ax" (§312). See **33**.

69. ῥιπτάζω, "toss about" (§310). At Ar. *Lys*. 26–28, Lysistrata tells Calonice that she has something she has "sought out and tossed about" through many sleepless nights (πρᾶγμ' ἀνεζητημένον / πολλαῖσί τ' ἀγρυπνίαισιν ἐρριπτασμένον). Calonice responds by asking if the item in question is λεπτός ("thin, fine"; by extension "subtle"). *MM* takes this as a joke that has to do with manipulating a penis to make it erect;[40] this would follow up on the much more openly phallic humour in 21–24, where Calonice asks first whether the matter all the women have been summoned regarding is both large and thick, and then, when Lysistrata assures her that it is, expresses amazement that everyone has not arrived. But ῥιπτάζω is not an obvious image for "chafe", nor is the supposed humour followed up by either interlocutor, and the conversation in fact appears to be taking a serious turn at this point. Sexual euphemism thus appears unlikely.

70. σπαθάω, "strike the woof with the weaving blade" (§311). At Ar. *Nub*. 53, Strepsiades, after describing his aristocratic wife's expensive, sensual tastes (51–52), adds οὐ μὴν ἐρῶ γ' ὡς ἀργὸς ἦν, ἀλλ' ἐσπάθα ("I certainly won't say that she was lazy, but *espatha*"). He then explains that he would hold his *himation* up

40 Made more explicit in Henderson's note on *Lys*. 28 in his edition of the play.

and say (55) ὦ γύναι, λίαν σπαθᾷς ("Wife, you *spathais* too much"). Dover *ad loc*. notes that that σπαθάω might be "a slang word (not attested elsewhere) for sexual intercourse", but rejects this interpretation as spoiling "the joke of 54ff., to which 53 is only a lead", and takes 55 λίαν σπαθᾷς to have the extended sense "you're much too extravagant" (= LSJ *s.v*. σπαθάω II), as at Diphilus fr. 42.27 (43.27 K.). *MM* argues instead for understanding the verb as in LSJ *s.v*. I in 53 (Strepsiades' wife works hard at weaving), but with a euphemistic sexual sense in 55 (Strepsiades complained that she wore him out in bed). As this hypothetical euphemistic sense of σπαθάω is attested nowhere else (as Dover notes), whereas Dover's explanation of the lines depends on two well-established meanings of the word, with the humour in 55 created by the divergence between them, *MM*'s interpretation should be rejected; as a matter of methodological principle, one ought not to invent a meaning of a word to explain a difficult passage when a standard meaning will do.

71. σποδέω, "pound, smite, crush" (§313). That the verb is an established euphemism for intercourse (Ar. *Thesm*. 492; *Eccl*. 113, 908, 939, 942, 1016)[41] is acknowledged by the standard lexica (LSJ *s.v*. II).

72. τύπτω "beat" (§314). Although *MM* identifies this as a euphemism for intercourse, of the two passages it cites in favour of the thesis, at Ar. *Lys*. 162 ἐὰν δὲ τύπτωσιν; (Calonice considers potential reactions by the women's husbands, if they refuse to have sex) an actual beating is in question, as also at Ar. *Plut*. 1015 ἐτυπτόμην διὰ τοῦθ' ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ("I was beaten on this account all day long"; the old woman describes the Young Man's reaction if someone leered at her in public). The best evidence for τύπτω used this way are instead the terms χαμαιτύπη (literally "one who is beaten on the ground", but by extension "cheap prostitute": Timocles fr. 24.2 (22.2 K.); Men. *Sam*. 348; fr. 472.1 (879 K.)), μοιχοτύπη (literally "one who is beaten in an illicit sexual encounter", i.e. "victim of seduction": adesp. com. fr. 389 (1081 K.)), and σποδησιλαύρα (a term for a prostitute: adesp. com. fr. 223 (1377 K.)[42]). None of these is securely dated before the end of the fourth century BCE, which does not mean that the verb was not used this way earlier.[43]

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41 *MM* also cites Apollod. Car. fr. 5.13 (5.13 K.), where σποδεῖν is however merely a bad supplement.

42 Not fr. 1352 K.

43 The use of cognates of χαμαιτύπη in various authors of the Roman era cited by *MM* suggests that the word eventually came to be regarded as an Attic colloquialism, although this is problematic evidence for Classical usage.

"Pounding" or "striking" is clearly a well-established idiom for intercourse (ἐπιβάλλω, ἐρείδω, κατελαύνω, κρούω, παίω, σποδέω, τύπτω; cf. **44** ἐλαύνω), to the extent that it appears that almost any such verb could take on a sexual double sense. "Piercing", on the other hand, is a far less common image (the problematic κεντέω), and none of *MM*'s more figurative language holds up to close inspection.

Section II: Some larger methodological concerns

The first section of this paper evaluates the meaning and use of a number of individual lexical items treated in *MM* as having an obscene double sense by reference to *MM*'s own implicit standards of philological argument. Many of *MM*'s claims appear to be based on weak or defective evidence, or on problematic readings of the ancient texts. That observation in turn raises questions not only about the interpretation of the specific passages in which these words appear, but about the larger style of allusive humour *MM* alleges is active in Old Comedy and related genres. Old Comedy is certainly "dirty", and this "dirtiness" is among the means by which it generates humour. The genre nonetheless appears to be far less systematically obscene than *MM* argues; whatever makes — or made — it funny, this is only one small part of it.

These conclusions evoke larger questions that *MM* bravely if perhaps imperfectly confronts in regard to sexual (or sexualised) vocabulary and the humour dependent on it. The analysis of imagery is to a considerable extent a matter of judgement. The power of imagery lies precisely in the fact that tenor and vehicle are different, and this gap is part of what makes it powerful and sometimes amusing. But language one reader or listener takes to be figurative may not seem to have the same veiled significance to another, and such issues become even more acute when — as in the case of classical studies — the readers are from a different time and culture than the original texts, and native informants are few in number, often obscure and fragmentary, and not entirely reliable. Put more directly, there is no way to say definitively whether a particular Greek lexical item has a double sense, sexual or not, in any particular context. Instead, we are thrown back on methodology, i.e. on the need to articulate criteria that allow us to make informed consensus decisions for ourselves on such matters.

The strongest cases for recognition of a figurative second sense of a word would appear to be those in which we can identify multiple seeming uses of an image that are not dependent on and thus perhaps generated by context, and where support is provided for the interpretation by ancient lexicographic or scholastic authority. These can reasonably be regarded as examples of established

usage,[44] which then provokes the question of when and how such secondary senses are activated. If we believe — as appears to be the case — that ἐλαύνω, for example, had the established double sense "have intercourse with", is every use of the verb necessarily coloured that way?[45] Genre is a reasonable place to start with such questions: sexual imagery would seem to be inherently more likely in comedy than in historical or documentary texts. But unless it can be shown that a particular lexical item is always used in an unambiguously double sense in a particular text or set of texts, and unless that evidence is rich enough to be interpreted as a pattern rather than a chance phenomenon, this is not enough, and context (however defined or analysed) must seemingly be taken into account as well.

Falling into a different category are images that get their force only from context, for example the naval language of Epicrates fr. 9: when established double entendres or elaborate created metaphors are patently in play, otherwise straightforward vocabulary can be made to conform momentarily to the pattern. This is sexualised language, and potentially very amusing — in large part because these are *not* established secondary senses of the words in question, so that briefly understanding them as such is funny. It is nonetheless hazardous to assume that a contextually determined one-off of this kind can be taken to establish a double sense of a word that carries over into other texts or conversations.[46]

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44 Cf. "pussy" or "bang" in contemporary English; no adult native speaker can have any doubt that both words have a secondary sexual sense recognised even in dictionaries.

45 Translated into contemporary English: does the fact that "fooling around with my girlfriend" means colloquially "having sexual adventures" with her inevitably colour "Last weekend I fooled around with Bob and Jackie", where the idiom has the more common sense "happily wasted time"? In such cases, natural language competency suggests that contextual cues of some sort (here the words "my girlfriend") are required to activate the non-standard sense of the vocabulary. One can leeringly respond "So you 'fooled around' with Bob, huh?" But no native speaker acting on basic principles of communicative generosity would take the point of the original statement to be that the speaker had sex with Bob and Jackie on the weekend, unless required to do so by some other clue.

46 Thus, if Jill has been seen wearing a tank top, (A) might comment "Wow, Jill's got the nicest pair of melons I've seen in a long time", "melon" being an established colloquialism for a large breast, and (B) might respond "That's a fruit stand I'd like to do business with!" Context allows "doing business with a fruit stand" in (B)'s remark to take on a figurative sexual sense it does not otherwise have. The problem for the non-native speaker is that the difference is difficult to detect, except by (1) looking carefully at other contemporary uses of "fruit stand", which will show that this is an isolated image, and (2) noticing that (B)'s remark is a joke and thus quite possibly a one-off use of a neutral term. If the non-native speaker misunderstands the conversation and interprets every other reference to fruit stands he encounters as leering, sexualised humour, he will repeatedly detect "dirty jokes" where a native speaker would not, and will thus badly misinterpret his material.

Finally, there are passages — including a substantial portion of those treated in *MM* and discussed above — in which obscenity, and thus obscene humour, is purely conjectural. As noted above, any word can take on a second sense from context, and there is no simple, objective way to determine whether such a sense exists. If I insist that μοχλός at *Lys*. 246 means "penis", no one can prove me wrong, despite the lack of ancient parallels for this use of the word or of ancient authorities to support it, as well as the absence of a rich, allusive context that might facilitate the interpretation. What one might reasonably insist in response, however, is that I have advanced a very weak case for my alleged double sense, and one that fails to meet what would elsewhere be treated as basic criteria for philological decision-making. Arguments of this kind, in other words, can be described as arbitrary, and they have all the weaknesses of arbitrary arguments generally: that I find it productive to define something e.g. as an obscenity because it advances my own agenda with a text, is no basis for anyone else to believe me, unless of course they share that agenda. This does not mean that the supposed double sense or allusion is not there, for no one can tell. But it does mean that we are generally ill-advised both to advance such claims and to accept them from others. One might consider adopting a rule allowing an otherwise unattested double sense of a word to be hypothesised when it makes sense of an obscure line or passage, as with Blaydes' theory regarding Ar. fr. 561 (**18**). These are merely guesses and not deserving of much trust, since they inevitably reflect our own presuppositions and concerns rather than those of the original author or audience, which are unavailable to us. But accepting this approach in such situations in any case requires that we also accept its converse, which is that if a text is clear as it stands, we are not justified in imposing a double sense on the vocabulary: this is an exegetical technique appropriate for emergency situations only.

Analysing humour routinely tells us at least as much about what we find amusing as about what our sources did. Obscenity is by definition a uniquely charged phenomenon — that which one should not say or do, but nonetheless does — and is thus particularly useful for inciting laughter. Indeed, such jokes are so appealing on some level, that simply alleging the presence of one in an ancient text can be enough to make it seem to be there, particularly in a time like our own, when popular culture is openly suffused with sexuality. There is no easy way to escape this dilemma. But we can at least insist that the evidence offered in support of such claims hold up to normal standards of philological argumentation, and self-consciously consider the methodological principles on which we make and evaluate such claims.

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