

PRIAP. 32 RECONSIDERED

*uvis aridior puella passis,
buxo pallidior novaque cera,
collatas sibi quae suisque membris
formicas facit altiles videri;
cuius viscera non aperta Tuscus 5
per pellem poterit videre aruspex;
quae suco caret ut †putrisque† pumex
nemo viderit hanc ut expuentem;
quam pro sanguine pulverem scobemque 10
in venis medici putant habere:
ad me nocte solet venire et affert
pallorem maciemque laruaalem.
ductor ferreus insulariusque
lanternae videor fricare cornu¹).*

13 insulariusque *Burmans*: insularis aequae *codd.* insularis atque *coni.* *Annarantone* insularis aequae (et) *coni.* *Buchheit*¹ ducto ferrea singulariusque *coni.* *Ellis*

2) Die hier vorgeschlagenen Konjekturen wurden in Gesprächen mit meinem Kollegen W. W. Ehlers gemeinsam entwickelt. – Es kann noch darauf hingewiesen werden, daß die soeben erschienene Abhandlung von U. Schindel, Anonymus Ecksteinii, *Scemata dianoeas quae ad rhetores pertinent*, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, I. Phil.-hist. Kl., Jg. 1987, Nr. 7, durch Vergleich des überlieferten Quintilianextes mit den Quintilianexzerpten im Text des Anonymus Ecksteinii für das achte Buch der *Institutio* nachweisen kann, daß in der Spätantike ein von dem überlieferten Quintilianext erheblich abweichender, dem authentischen näherer Text als Vorlage für die Exzerpte benützt wurde.

1) Ed. R. E. Clairmont, *Carmina Priapea* (diss. Loyola Univ. 1983).

The general sense of this poem is clear enough: it can be classified as a skoptikon of an ugly and randy woman who importunes Priapus for sex²). To copulate with such a “dry” hag, the god laments, is like rubbing a lantern’s sheet of horn. The precise meaning of v. 13, however, has long puzzled the commentators. Various interpretations have been presented and, in spite of the simple and all but unanimous manuscript tradition, at least one radical conjecture proposed. The *traditio* may indeed be simple; but the line as written yields no satisfactory sense. Therefore, I offer in this note a new emendation of v. 13 based on a reappraisal of the poem as a whole.

I shall begin by highlighting the commentaries which have tried to make sense of v. 13 and to link it with the lantern-metaphor that occurs in the following line. *Ductor ferreus* has been interpreted traditionally as a “metal worker,” hence “blacksmith,” or else a “lantern holder,” who (depending on the MSS reading *insularis aequae* or Burmann’s conjecture *insularisusque*) is either a condemned criminal deported to an island or the attendant of an *insula* (i. e., tenement). So Scaliger: “*insularis*, quia in insulis multa metalla, ad quas deportabantur damnati ad opus in metallis faciendum,” and for *ductor ferreus*, “subaudi lanternarius, aut later-nae opifex”³). So F. Buecheler (reading *insularisusque*): “*praecipue videtur insulariis arcendi incendii officium et ne ignes neglegentius haberentur demandatum fuisse, ut fere eodem privatim et intra aedes munere fungerentur quo publice et in viis vigiles*”⁴). A. Maggi (restoring *insularis aequae*) conflates both blacksmith- and convict-metaphor in his version of vv. 13–14: “Mi sembra di essere un fabbro che maneggi ferro o piuttosto mi pare di essere come un ergastolano condannato alle miniere, che pulisca, stropicciandola, la sua lanterna di corno”⁵).

R. Ellis⁶) conjectural metaphor of a *singularis*, a member of the special cavalry attached to the praetorian guard, who carries a lantern (*ducto ferrea*), seems, on the whole, forced and strained. He is correct, however, to see a sexual innuendo in *ductor* (rather, in his variant *ducto*) and adduces the phrase *ductare scortum* (Pl. As. 863, Poen. 868).

V. Buchheit⁷) restores *ductor ferreus*; his emendation *insularis aequae* (*et*), a comparative construction, has Priapus saying: “Just like a *ductor ferreus insularis*, I . . .” But what does Priapus compare himself with? Buchheit interprets *ductor ferreus* as the (phallic) handle of a lantern⁸); *insularis*, as “belonging to an apartment house.” He follows Ellis in detecting a lubricious connotation in *ductor*. While Ellis, however, had interpreted *lanternae cornu* as *mentula* (a calque on the Greek κέρως⁹), Buchheit sees it as a metaphor for *cunnius* and compares ἐσχάρα and

2) The description of the woman here bears a close resemblance to Ovid’s portrayal of Fames (Met. 8. 800–808); cf. Mart. 12. 32. 7–8.

3) Ap. M. Hadrianis, ed. Titi Petronii Arbitri equitis Romani Satyricon, cum fragmento nuper Tragurii reperto. Accedunt diversorum poetarum lusus in Priapum, Pervigilium Veneris, Ausonii cento nuptialis, Cupido Crucifixus, epistolae de Cleopatra, et alia nonnulla (Amsterdam 1669), p. 30.

4) Vindiciae libri Priapeorum, RhM 18 (1863) 392–393.

5) I Priapea (Naples 1923), p. 35.

6) De codice Priapeorum Vaticano 2876, RhM 43 (1888) 262–263.

7) Studien zum Corpus Priapeorum (Munich 1962), pp. 139–142.

8) Cf. Mart. 14. 61 (*lanterna cornea*):

*dux lanterna viae clusis feror aurea flammis,
et tuta est gremio parva lucerna meo.*

9) See Eustath. (551. 52) ad Il. 11. 385.

κλιβανος (“hearth” and “oven,” respectively) which can indicate the *pudendum muliebre*¹⁰).

Some kind of lantern-image seems definitely to be intended here. Buchheit’s understanding of *lanternae cornu* is certainly right; also, the lamp-metaphor is far better suited to a tenement than to an island. Lanterns were in common use in the Imperial period and would have been placed on the outer walls of *insulae* and elsewhere to provide illumination¹¹); furthermore, fire from these lanterns or other sources of light or cooking stoves resulted in frequent conflagrations¹²). The whore who importunes Priapus is just the sort of low life who would inhabit such a firetrap. The girl’s extreme aridity, making her an unsuitable erotic partner, might suggest some more distant comparison between her sexual unwholesomeness and the susceptibility of *insulae* to burning.

Buchheit and others understand *ductor* as a noun; but might it not be the present passive of the verb *ductare*? Hence, “I am being drawn,” i.e., “handled or manipulated sexually.” An apt analogy can be provided by Juv. 6. 238: *praeputia ducit*. Moreover, Buchheit’s meaning for *insularis*, “belonging to an apartment house,” is not supported by the lexica. Such *insulae* are instead the province of an *insularius*.

I propose that *insulariusque* be emended to *insulariaequae*, making it agree with *lanternae* in the following line, and that *ductor* be understood as a verb. The adjective *ferreus* (lit. “made of iron,” hence “hard, unfeeling,” or even “shameless”¹³) can suggest Priapus’ own unenthusiastic reaction to the whore’s sexual advances. Therefore, “I am being diddled, though I can’t feel a thing, and I appear to be rubbing a tenement lantern’s sheet of horn.” The “lamp of horn,” as Buchheit has taken it, is indeed the woman’s dry *cunnius*.

I end with some additional thoughts about the image of the lantern. Not only does the phrase *lanternae cornu* denote the girl’s “dryness;” it might also provide a more oblique reference to an actual lantern brought by the girl, since the scene of the poem takes place at night. And, with all the emphasis in the poem on seeing (especially vv. 5–8), the metaphor of the lantern becomes even more appropriate: the girl has been described as so emaciated that she is all but transparent; a *baruspex* could examine her vitals without removing the skin¹⁴). Similarly the lamp, by being lit, makes its insides visible¹⁵).

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10) Cf. Mart. 3. 93, which denigrates the *osseus cunnius* of the aged Vetustilla who, despite her years and physical ugliness, takes a new husband. Vv. 26–27: *ustorque taedas praeferat novae nuptae: / intrare in istum sola fax potest cunnius*, suggest the idea of a “cold oven” (i.e., *cunnius*) that needs a firebrand to ignite it.

11) See, e.g., S. Ferri, *Esigenze archeologiche e ricostruzione del testo*, SCO 3 (1953) 103.

12) E.g. Juv. 3. 190–211.

13) L. Crass. or. frg. Suet. Nero 2. 2; Plin. Pan. 35.3.

14) Cf. Mart. 11. 101.

15) My thanks to Allan Kershaw and especially J. P. Sullivan for their insightful critiques of previous drafts of this paper.