

Criso and Ceueo

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Scholars have long regarded these verbs as somehow comparable or even parallel. According to a current standard reference work (which repeats a view that goes back at least to Jahn's 1843 commentary on Persius), "*Criso* indicated the motions of the female in intercourse *Ceueo* was used of the corresponding movements of the male pathic" (Adams 1982: 136). Craig Williams has taken this supposed parallelism further, accommodating them within a chart of Roman sexual terms as representing the "receptive" role in intercourse by women and men respectively, so that *criso* in effect = *futuor* and *ceueo* = *pedicor* (Williams 1999: 161-2). In addition, in the accompanying n. 3 (p. 326), Williams follows Adams in wondering why *criso* and *ceueo*, though they supposedly refer to sexual intercourse, seem not to have been regarded as obscene in the way that *futuo* and *pedico* clearly were; and he also speculates that both verbs might have been applicable to both sexes, and to either vaginal or anal penetration in the case of women. But there is a logical difficulty in these generally accepted definitions of *criso* and *ceueo*, which assume that the penetrated partner always moves and moves in only one way. In fact, in both vaginal and anal intercourse, it is only the penetrator who needs to move: his partner may lie perfectly still. And if that partner does move, she or he may move only as a result of the penetrator's thrusts, or may purposefully execute a variety of movements according to the position adopted or the pleasure imparted. This imprecision in the definition suggests that a fresh examination of these verbs is in order, and to this end this paper will apply the neglected evidence of glosses and bilingual glossaries as well as the occurrences in ancient literature, arguing that each verb has a distinct and specific meaning that does not refer to a sexual act (thus explaining why

neither was a primary obscenity), that their alleged parallelism is an illusion, and that each *might* have had a limited applicability to persons of both sexes.

*I. Criso*¹

Despite Adams' claim that "*criso* and *ceueo* were not used of movements other than sexual" (137), Latin literature in fact applies *criso* to dancing more often than to intercourse, though always to sexually suggestive dancing by a woman.

Whether it refers to dancing or to sex in its earliest literary occurrence – a line of the satirist Lucilius (fr. 349 Terzaghi), *crisabit ut si frumentum clunibus uannat* ("she will crisate² as though she's winnowing grain with her buttocks") – is uncertain. However, if it refers to coitus, it cannot refer to all possible positions, since ordinary "missionary-position" intercourse (for example) could hardly allow a woman who is lying on her back, with a man on top, to mimic the movements of a winnowing fan, which is tossed in a circular fashion as well as up and down. In Juvenal, *Satires* 6.322 crisation is associated with erotic dancing, not with coitus:

*lenonum ancillas posita Saufeia corona
prouocat et tollit pendentis praemia coxae,
ipsa Medullinae fluctum crisantis adorat.*

With a crown at stake, Saufeia challenges the pimps' slave-girls and takes the prize for her dangling tailbone, [but] she herself adores the wavy motion of crising Medullina.

It is again associated with erotic dancing at *Priapea* 19.4, where

¹ The mss of the ancient works that use this word sometimes spell it with one *s*, sometimes with two; the former is adopted here as being standard in current scholarship.

² The line is preserved in the grammarian Nonius Marcellus, where the mss give *cursauit*; earlier scholars conjectured *crissauit*, *crissabitque*, and *crisabit*, which Terzaghi adopts and which I have translated.

the crisation of Telethusa is said to be capable of arousing even the notoriously chaste Hippolytus:

*Hic quando Telethusa circulatrix
(quae clunem tunica tegente nulla
†extis satius altiusue† motat)
crisabit tibi fluctuante lumbo,
haec sic non modo te, Priape, possit
priuignum quoque sed mouere Phaedrae.*

When the dancer Telethusa (who with no tunic covering them moves her buttocks † ... †³) crisates for you here with waving haunch, she could move thereby not only you, Priapus, but Phaedra's stepson too.

Here too *criso* cannot refer to intercourse, since the crisation is only the means to arouse Hippolytus, who shunned sex with women; thus coitus will occur, if at all, only *after* the crisation, not during it. Martial 14.203 applies the same conceit to a slave-girl from Cadiz, and again crisation is a means of arousal, not a concomitant of intercourse:

*Tam tremulum crisat, tam blandum prurit, ut ipsum
Masturbatorem fecerit Hippolytum.*

She crisates so vibrantly, makes so appealing an itch, that she has turned Hippolytus himself into a masturbator.

In fact, there is only one passage in Latin literature where crisation unquestionably accompanies coitus, Martial 10.68.10. Humorously chiding a Roman woman for calling out Greek endearments during sex, the poet asks ironically, *numquid cum crisas blandior esse potes?* ("Surely you couldn't be sexier when you're crisating?"). I doubt that Martial meant that every woman becomes *blanda* by the mere fact of being a partner in intercourse; instead, he seems to imply that coitus accompanied

³ The text of l.3 is corrupt beyond convincing remedy and I have therefore left most of it untranslated (for a list of some 16 proposed emendations, see Parker 1988: 201), but the difficulties are not relevant to the understanding of *criso*; for a discussion, see Buchheit 1962: 136f.

by crisation is sexy enough to require no verbal garnish, surely with the further implication that crisation is not always present during coitus. Martial does not indicate the nature of this crisation in 10.68, but the *Priapea*, Martial 14.203, and Juvenal suggest fluid undulations of the upper body, while the winnowing action mentioned in Lucilius could suggest a vaguely circular movement of the buttocks and haunches.

Two passages in ancient scholarly literature show precisely how these motions could occur during intercourse.

The commentary of Tiberius Donatus on the comedies of Terence gives the following alternative etymology of *scortum* (“whore”) when discussing *Eunuchus* 424:

Vel ἀπὸ τοῦ σκαίρειν, quod Graece palpitare intellegitur, quod illae faciunt saltando assidue uel potius crissando, ut Lucretius ait, ob eam causam ut concinnioerem exhibeant uiris aut sibi abigant conceptum, quod in uulua feminae in ipso coitu non se mouentis incidit.

Or else from σκαίρειν, which is Greek for *palpitare* [i.e., “pulsate”], which those women do by leaping constantly or rather by crising, as Lucretius says, in order to provide men with more agreeable love-making or to prevent conception, which happens to the vulva of a woman who does not move during the intercourse itself.

Though Lucretius does not use *criso*, this reference nevertheless allows us to see how Donatus defined it. The words *ut concinnioerem exhibeant uiris* show that he is thinking of Lucretius, *de Rerum Natura* 4.1276 (*et simul ipsa uiris uenus ut concinnior esset*), where this altruistic purpose and avoiding conception are said to be the reasons why prostitutes move (*moueri*, 4.1274) during sex in the ways that Lucretius has specified earlier (4.1269-1271), namely manipulating the penis between their buttocks while making wave-like movements as if they hadn’t a bone in their bodies (*clunibus ipsa uiri Venerem si laeta retractat | atque exossato ciet omni pectore fluctus*). We have already encountered these “waves” in Juvenal and the *Priapea* in reference to dancing, and the only way for a woman

to move in this manner during sexual intercourse while also manipulating the man's penis with her buttocks – which would simply lie flat on a bed during “missionary-position” intercourse – is in the *schema* known as the *mulier superior* or *mulier equitans* position, where the man lies on his back and the woman mounts and “rides” his penis, facing either his feet or, more commonly, his head.⁴

This connection with the *mulier superior* position is confirmed by the commentary of pseudo-Acro on Horace, *Satires* 2.7.49-50. Horace's words *quaecumque exceptit turgentis uerbera caudae, | clunibus aut agitauit equum lasciuia supinum* (“whatever woman has taken the lashes of my swelling tail [i.e., penis], or has lasciviously ridden the supine horse with her buttocks”) describe intercourse first in the “missionary” position, then in the *mulier superior* position. Pseudo-Acro glosses the “riding” with *id est, dum ego iaceo supinus et ipsa supra me crisat* (“That is, when I lie on my back and she crisates over me”). Adams quotes this passage, declaring that it “should not be taken as implying that *criso* was appropriate only to the *schema* with the woman astride,” but surely this is the only *schema* in which crisation is possible – certainly it is the only one that allows the woman to crisate *over* her partner. This understanding is reflected by the bilingual glossaries cited in the *ThLL* s.v. *criso*; these equate *crisat* with κελητίζει, which refers to the *mulier superior* position (cf. Henderson 1991: 164-5), though *criso*, strictly speaking, appears to refer not to the intercourse itself but to the way the woman moves during it.

In its primary sense, then, *criso* refers to undulation or vibration effected with the torso in particular; one could suggest as an English equivalent the colloquial “shimmy,” which also

⁴ For the position, see also Ov. *Ars* 3.777f., 785f., with Gibson 2003 *ad loc.* Lucretius is probably wrong about the reason why women adopt this position; instead, it gives them more pleasure because it allows stimulation of both the “G-spot” and the clitoris according to their movements, and enhances the partner's pleasure (cf. Martial 10.68.10) chiefly by allowing a view of their chest and face.

indicates a fluid and suggestive form of dancing (“a kind of fox-trot accompanied by tremulous motions of the body” [*OED*]). This appears to be confirmed by etymology: Walde-Hofmann derives *criso* from IE **greit-s-o* or **qrit-s-o*, reflected also in Middle Irish *cress* (“zittern” = “shudder; quiver; vibrate”), Middle Welsh *cryssio* (“eilen” = “hurry”), and Breton *crisein* (“kräuseln” = “curl; crisp”), of which the first and third seem especially applicable to the movements that Latin writers associate with crisation.

Criso, therefore, does not mean “to move the haunches as in coitus” (*OLD*) but identifies physical undulations; our sources mention these in connection with suggestive dancing or with actively “riding” the penis of a supine male, but there is no reason that it could not have been used in other contexts as well. There is no sexual association apart from the fact that crisation can occur in one particular sexual position. *Criso* is not a passive equivalent of *futuo*, and it is not intrinsically obscene because it does not refer to a sexual act. If it was ever applied to men, it could perhaps have been used of a *cinaedus* or some other feminized male who performed a sexually suggestive dance, or of one who had assumed the male equivalent of the *mulier superior* position in anal intercourse.

2. *Ceueo*

As observed earlier, most scholars regard *ceueo* as denoting the movements made by the penetrated male during anal intercourse; sometimes, however, a more general, non-sexual motion characteristic of “pathics” seems to be implied, parallel perhaps to the “swish” attributed to the modern effeminate male: cf. the *OLD* s.v., “(of a pathic) To move the haunches in a lewd or effeminate manner; to practise such behaviour.”

The occurrences in ancient literature are somewhat less revealing than those of *criso*:

Persius 1.87

... "*bellum hoc.*" *hoc bellum? an, Romule, ceues?*
 "Pretty, this." This, pretty? Romulus, do you cevit⁵?

Martial 3.95.13-14

Sed pedicaris, sed pulchre, Naeuole, ceues:

Iam iam tu prior es. Naeuole, uincis: aue.

But you are buggered, Naevolus, but you cevit prettily: now at last you're first. Hail, Naevolus: you win!

Juvenal, *Satires* 2.19-22

... *sed peiores, qui talia uerbis*

Herculis inuadunt et de uirtute locuti

Clunem agitant. "Ego te ceuentem, Sexte, uerebor?,"

Infamis Varillus ait: "Quo deterior te?"

But worse are those who attack such things with the words of a Hercules, and talk about virtue, then move their bottom. The disgraced Varillus says "Sextus, shall I honour you who cevit? How [am I] worse than you?"

Juvenal, *Satires* 9.38-40

Quod tamen ulterius monstrum quam mollis auarus?

"Haec tribui, deinde illa dedi, mox plura tulisti,"

Computat et ceuet.

What further monstrosity could there be than an effeminate miser? He does his accounting – "I assigned this, then gave that, next you took more" – and cevits.

The verb also appears in a *graffito* from Pompeii, *CIL* 4.4977
Quintio hic futuit ceuentes et uidit qui doluit.

Adams bases his definition on Juvenal 2.21 and Martial 3.95.13, arguing that *ceueo* in these passages is equivalent to another action described in them, namely "to move the backside" and "to be buggered" respectively. That is at least a defensible interpretation of this evidence, though it would surely be more effective rhetorically if, instead of merely repeating

⁵ While *criso* easily forms the English derivatives "crisate" and "crisation," *ceueo* is awkward; I have used "cevit" and "ceuition," derived from what would probably be the past participle of *ceueo* if it were attested – the derivation is easier, however, from the 3rd-conjugation *ceuo*, *-ere* alleged by Probus (*GLK* 4.37).

something already mentioned, *ceueo* were to identify an *additional* characteristic of the person being attacked (that the targets are effeminate males is abundantly confirmed by the recurrence of words like *bellus*, *pulcher*, and *mollis*). However, there is no explicit indication in any of these passages that the word identifies a sexual act, not even in the *graffito*, which led to Williams' speculations about the applicability of *ceueo* and *criso* to persons of either sex.⁶ On the other hand, *ceueo* surely did have embarrassing connotations, to judge by the way that *ceuet* in Juvenal 9.40 sarcastically caps the picture of the effeminate miser.

The ancient grammatical and scholarly traditions appear to equate *ceueo* with two different kinds of movement, neither of which corresponds exactly to the claims of Adams and Williams. On the one hand, some scholia and grammarians appear to support definitions like that in the *OLD* by mentioning movements of the buttocks made by effeminate men, without reference to coitus. Thus a scholion to Persius 1.87 confirms an association with "softness" or effeminacy in the words *molles et obscaenos clunium motus significat* ("it signifies effeminate and obscene movements of the buttocks"), but it does not indicate that these movements are made during intercourse. Similarly, Williams (326, n. 3) quotes Probus from *GLK* 4.37.8 to the effect that *ceuere est clunes mouere, ut in canibus uidere est, qui clunes agitando blandiuntur* ("*ceuere* is to move the buttocks in the way that can be seen in dogs, which fawn by shaking the buttocks"). A gloss *est clunes agito* ("it is, 'I move my buttocks'") might point in the same direction if it is not simply an inference from *clunem agitant* in Juvenal 2.21.

The other kind of motion indicated in these sources is an invitation to intercourse rather than its execution. A scholion to

⁶ Those speculations were of course inspired by the fact that *futuo* is normally taken to refer exclusively to vaginal penetration of female bodies, but perhaps a better explanation for its occurrence in the *graffito* is that *futuo* was extended colloquially to anal intercourse with males precisely because such penetration was imagined in some way to "feminize" the passive partner.

Juvenal 2.21 may refer to literal or to metaphorical “inclination” when it glosses *ceuentem* with *inclinatum ad stuprum et sustinentem* (“inclined/bent toward indecency and enduring [it]”). Literal “bending over,” however, is certainly involved in some of the Latin glosses cited in the *ThLL* s.v. *ceueo*: *ceuet*: *inclinat se uel insidiat* (“*ceuet*: he bends over, or lies in wait”⁷), *ceue*: *inclina te* (“*ceue*: bend over”), and *ceue*: *panda* (“*ceue*: bend”; cf. *OLD* s.v. *pando*, “to cause ... to bend or sag,” “to become curved, sag”). According to Probus (*GLK* 4.37.8), the word means *cum turpitudine cedere, uel turpiter incuruari* (“to yield with disgracefulness, or to be bent over disgracefully”). While the exact meaning of the derivative *ceuentinabiliter*, attested in *CIL* 4.4126 and 5406, still defies interpretation, its association with *inclinabilite*<*r*> in the latter evidently supports the definition “bend over” for *ceue*.⁸ Similarly, the *ThLL* records another derivative *ceulus*, glossed (in various spellings) as κυφός and *inclinatus*.⁹

This second meaning is also supported by the bilingual glossaries cited in the *ThLL*, which equate *ceueo* with Greek κύπτω or its synonym κύφω. The former is at heart a perfectly innocent word meaning “stoop,” “bend over,” or the like, but it also has a sexual association, and indeed is described in Henderson 1991 as defining “the natural position of the homo-sexual pathic” (180), because it means “to bend forward for penetration ... from behind” (179). If *ceueo* is a synonym of κύπτω, it

⁷ The sense seems inappropriate to the context; perhaps *insidiat* is a corruption of *insedit* or some similar word, which can mean “crouch.”

⁸ The scholion on Juvenal, *Satires* 9.40 that glosses *ceuet* with *crisat* can surely be ignored as an early example of “scholarly” confusion regarding these terms; even modern scholars who regard the verbs as parallel do not consider them synonyms.

⁹ It is worth adding that transitive *inclinare* is sometimes used of men penetrating other men, most notably at Juvenal, *Satires* 9.26, *ipsos etiam inclinare maritos* (Naevolus boasts that he penetrates not only wives but their husbands too), and 10.224, *quot discipulos inclinet Hamillus* (“how many pupils Hamillus makes bend over”).

means to “bend over,” thrusting out the buttocks in an invitation to anal intercourse in a standing position; this distinguishes it from *pedicari*, which refers to the intercourse itself, and also suggests the nature of its deflating effect in *Satires* 9.40: however disgraceful it was to be penetrated anally, to invite such penetration was even more disgraceful, and a little ridiculous in that undignified posture.

Further evidence for this sense can be drawn from the appearance of *ceueo* in Plautus, *Pseudolus* 864 as cited by Nonius Marcellus (*si conquiniscet istic, ceueto simul*, “if he crouches, cevit along with him”), though editors generally follow the mss and print *si conquiniscet istic, conquiniscito* (“if he crouches, crouch”), regarding *ceueto simul* as a gloss. Such a gloss would imply that *ceueo* and *conquinisco* were synonyms (the *ThLL* s.v. *ceueo* adduces the line with Nonius’ reading, but asks naively “*cacandi causa?*”). Plautus certainly used *conquinisco* with this sexual sense of “bend over/crouch to be buggered” at *Cistellaria* 657, *faciundum est puerile officium: conquiniscam ad cistulam* (“I must do the slave-boy’s duty: I shall crouch by the chest”), and so perhaps did another comic poet, Pomponius (171, *in terram, ut cubabat, nudam ad eum ut conquinexi*, “as I crouched towards him onto the bare ground as he lay there”). Another compound of the same verb, *ocquinisco*, was also a synonym of *ceueo* in early Latin. The *OLD* defines it innocently (“To bend over before someone”), but the context of its only certain occurrence, again in Pomponius (126), leaves no doubt as to its real meaning: *nullum ciuem pedicaui ... nisi ... ultro qui ocquinisceret* (“I buggered no citizen but such as willingly bent over”).

The sense “bend over” for anal penetration is applicable in all of the word’s literary occurrences. The ancient authorities who claim that it means “wagging” the rump have either misunderstood its primary meaning or extrapolated incorrectly from its literary occurrences, perhaps under the influence of Juvenal’s *clunem agitant* (which need indicate only motion, not side-to-side motion). Etymologically, *ceueo* is generally associated with

words such as Old Bulgarian *po-kyvati*, defined in Lysaght 1983 as “shake, nod, wag (one’s head).” This might seem to support the claim that the primary reference is to an effeminate wiggling of the rump, though it could be argued that that wiggling is only a comical extension of the notion of thrusting out the buttocks.

In any case, no evidence supports the claim that *ceueo* defines movements made by a man during anal intercourse; the movement it does define is “obscene” (to borrow a term from the scholion to Persius 1.83) because it is made by a man who could be described as *obscenus*, and to achieve an end that could be described the same way. *Ceueo* is not an obscenity, because it describes an invitation to sex rather than a sexual act, nor is it in any way parallel to *criso*. (However, the gesture can be added to “scratching the head with one finger” as a characteristic of the effeminate male in Roman society.) If *ceueo* was ever applied to women, it would surely have been to those who seek anal in preference to vaginal intercourse, the *puellae pathicae* mentioned in the *Priapea* (cf. 25.3, 40.4, 48.5, 73.1).*

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