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# 15

# Queering Catullus in the Classroom
## The Ethics of Teaching Poem 63[1]

MAXINE LEWIS

"BUT IN THIS LINE is Attis a man, or a woman?!"
So asked my student angrily, one of many in the classroom who were frustrated and confused by the gender—and grammatical—vagaries of Catullus' poem 63. The text is a harrowing tale of Attis' self-castration, divine *furor,* and all-too-late repentance. When Attis wakes up after near-Bacchic revelry (post-castration) and *uidet sine quis* "sees what s/he is without" (v. 46), s/he laments and asks,

> ego nunc deum ministra et Cybeles famula ferar?
> ego Maenas, ego mei pars, ego uir sterilis ero?

> Shall I now be called slave-girl of the gods and hand-maiden of Cybele?
> Will I be a Maenad, a part of myself, will I be a barren man? (vv. 68–69)

The poem confronts the reader with the specter of gender identity in crisis,[2] and confronts instructor and student alike with a set of grammatical and political problems.[3] The difficulties with teaching poem 63 in an English speaking classroom arise because while Catullus depicts Attis moving between and beyond the binary poles of "male" and "female," standard English has no vocabulary to describe gender identities outside of these two supposed opposites. As the quote with which I began this paper suggests, Catullus' grammatical maneuver causes practical issues when teaching this poem, whether it is to Latinists who will nevertheless need to discuss the poem in English, or to students reading the material solely in English translation. It also poses an ethical dilemma. When discussing this poem, is the instructor making the classroom a safe and inclusive space for students who themselves possess gender or sex identities outside the limits of "male" and "female," because they are intersex, transgender, or genderqueer?[4] I consider this one of my responsibilities as an instructor.[5] Teaching poem 63 requires me to pursue this goal vigilantly because transphobia and intersex-phobia are more likely to be voiced in a classroom where students are learning about a character who castrates himself.

Because this poem thrusts the notion of gender instability in our very faces at the deepest linguistic level (the level of gendered terminations), and because (as I will show) our own language cannot render that gender instability accurately, it has pushed me into trying new approaches in the classroom. There are radical ways to express identity in English without defining a person's gender—this poem can push us to seek them out. There are ways to get students thinking outside the box of "he" versus "she," and this poem invites us to use them. In this chapter, I offer four strategies that I have used with students, to combat the various difficulties caused by Catullus' depiction of Attis.

2. On poem 63 as a text that challenges modern—and ancient—expectations of gender, see especially Skinner (1993), Nauta (2004) and Harrison (2004).

3. This is not the only Catullan poem to cause difficulty in the classroom; see Ancona and Hallett (2007) on the politics and practicalities of teaching a poet whose oeuvre includes graphic invective and homoerotic themes. See Garrison (2007) for practical strategies to teach Catullus' oeuvre.

4. On terms used in the various communities (e.g., intersex, transgender, genderqueer, transsexual, trans) see "Transgender Terminology" (2009) on the National Center for Transgender Equality website, accessed April 28, 2012, http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_TransTerminology.pdf. I use transgender in its inclusive sense as an umbrella term to include both people who are in transition from one gender to another and those who do not wish to transition but who possess a non-gendered or bi-gendered identity and/or gender expression; see Ekins and King (2006: 13–30).

5. Transphobia and gender discrimination in the Western world lead to legal, social and economic discrimination and disadvantage, violence, and even death; see Wilchins (2004: 153–54); Kailey (2005: 77–79). For those living beyond the gender binary, the issue of how gender is perceived, described, and named is not merely an academic matter, but is one of survival.

## THE STRATEGIES

1. I initiate a classroom discussion about English's gendered language and pronouns. I provide background on historical attempts to replace "he" and "she" and invite students to try alternatives "they," "one" and "she" or "s/he" when translating and discussing poem 63.
2. I provide students with gender-neutral pronouns used by some trans-gendered people. I explain the history, background and purpose of such pronouns. I invite the students to use them when discussing Attis, discussing as a class where such pronouns might be relevant and where they might contradict the Latin.
3. I invite students to write about poem 63 and translate it using visual symbols of male and female gender. I initiate a discussion asking at what point gender manifests in our thought and whether symbols convey gender differently to the various pronouns we have used.
4. I ask students to interrogate the scholarship on this poem, identifying points where scholars' gender ideologies have shaped their textual, editorial, and translation choices.

In this chapter I explain how these strategies can work as tools that turn poem 63 from a problem into an opportunity. They can help students to think outside the linguistic constraints of their own language, and to better see how gender is constructed both in language and society, not only in antiquity but also in their own lives.

## WHY POEM 63 IS TRICKY—THE PROBLEM WITH ENGLISH

Poem 63 describes the Greek youth Attis' journey from an unnamed *patria,* complete with *gymnasium,* wrestling, and hordes of admirers (vv. 64–67), to the wilds of Phrygia, where he castrates himself and becomes a *Gallus,* a priest of Cybele. The key event of poem 63 is the protracted gender trans-formation of the protagonist, a transformation which challenges readers' understanding of what it means to be male and female.[6] The transforma-

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6. Skinner (1993: 109). There are obviously other events occurring in the text and other themes in operation, many of which have received scholarly attention. See especially: Panoussi (2003) on the thematic relationship between cc.63–64; Takács (1996) on how c.63 relates to the worship of Cybele in antiquity; Nauta (2004) for the reception of the poem in its Roman socio-political context; Harrison (2004) on the relationship between Rome, Greece, and "The East" in c.63; Rubino (1974) which treats polarities in Roman thought reflected in the poem; and Oliensis (2009) on c.63 in terms of castration anxiety.

tion begins at line 5, where the hitherto masculine Attis (clearly defined as such by grammatical terminations) slices off his testicles, described rather coyly as "*pondera.*" In the following line the narrator explains that Attis sensed that the "members" remaining were *sine uiro,* without manhood or manliness. After this act, which will later be revealed as a monumental slip-up, Attis, frenzied, rushes into the woods to worship Cybele. During these introductory lines, Catullus uses the gender terminations of the participles to show Attis' gender shifting:[7]

> super alta uectus *[masc.]* Attis celeri rate maria,
> Phrygium ut nemus citato cupide pede tetigit *[masc.],*
> adiitque *[masc. implied]* opaca siluis redimita loca deae,
> stimulatus *[masc.]* ibi furenti rabie, uagus *[masc.]* animis,
> deuolsit *[masc. implied]* ili acuto sibi pondera silice,                5
> itaque ut relicta sensit *[gender?]* sibi *[gender?]* membra sine uiro,
> etiam recente terrae sola sanguine maculans *[gender?],*
> niueis citata *[fem.]* cepit *[fem.]* manibus leue typanum,
> typanum tuum, Cybebe, tua, mater initia,
> quatiensque *[gender?]* terga tauri teneris caua digitis                10
> canere haec suis adorta est *[fem.]* tremebunda *[fem.]* comitibus.

> Conveyed over the high seas, Attis, in a swift craft,
> as he eagerly arrived at the Phrygian grove with speedy foot
> and entered the shady places of the goddess wreathed with forests,
> goaded there by raging madness, he, bewildered in spirits,
> tore from himself the weights of his loins with the sharp flint.                5
> And so, as he/she sensed the members left for him/her were without
>      manhood,
> still he/she spattering the soil of the earth with fresh blood,
> with snow-white hands she seized quickly the light timbrel,
> timbrel of yours, Cybebe, your initiation-rites, mother,
> and he/she shaking the hollow hide of the bull with slender fingers                10
> she tremulously began to sing these words to her companions.

The gendered adjectives *uectus, stimulatus,* and *uagus* in the masculine, followed by *citata, adorta* and *tremebunda,* in the feminine, are strewn among finite verbs. In an English rendering these finite verbs would nor-

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7. Oliensis (2009: 111–12) notes how provocative this gender change would have been to Roman audiences; Romans did not consider eunuchs to be female.

mally be rendered by a third-person personal pronoun in the masculine or feminine gender, "he" or "she." In other Latin texts, the reader can take the gender of the protagonist as static and thus consistently translate finite verbs with either "he" or "she." Aeneas is always a man, Dido is always a woman.

Not so Attis, because in poem 63, the adjectives, pronouns, and relative pronouns applied to Attis are inconsistent, thus leading to our difficulty in translating the finite verbs. Further on in the poem we see the narrator apply feminine forms to Attis: *furibunda* (v. 31), *uaga* (v. 31), *ipsa* (v. 45), *allocuta* (v.49), *illa* (v. 90); but Cybele will refer to Attis as male in *hunc* (v. 78) and *qui* (v. 80).[8] The narrator also uses participial forms throughout that are ambiguous and could be masculine, feminine or neuter, such as *anhelans* (v. 31), *agens* (v. 31), and *uisens* (v. 48). Attis refers to him/herself as *miser* (v. 51) in the masculine but possibly *furibunda* (v. 54) in the feminine (more on *furibunda* later in the chapter). Catullus constructs Attis' gender through grammatical terminations as being fluid and even contestable—Cybele's determination that Attis is still male contradicts the narrator's use of feminine forms, while Attis' perspective on his/her own gender shifts back and forth. The unstable nature of Attis' gender suggested by the gender of the words is verified by the narrator's statement that Attis is *notha mulier* (v. 27), and Attis' own concern that s/he might be either a (female) maenad or a barren man—or perhaps both (vv. 68–69, above).

The matter of how to render—and even to understand—the finite verbs is made more complex by Catullus' inclusion of the paradoxes *notha mulier* and *uir sterilis,* and it was while discussing lines 68–9 that my student had her outburst. Her frustration was understandable in a society that is based on a binary gender system. Catullus confronts the reader with an Attis who moves between and beyond gender binaries, and at some points cannot be defined simply as either male or female (grammatically and conceptually).

The complexity of Catullus' play with gender here, usually observed by my students within minutes of first reading the poem, is belied by the technical vocabulary which English-speakers possess to describe an animate being in the third-person. In general, English is a less "gendered" language than say French or German, or Latin, for that matter.[9] English does not have gendered terminations for adjectives or verbs, gendered nouns such as "stewardess" or "actress" are less common than they used to be, and English

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8. And as Skinner (1993: 127 n.47) notes, some of the poem's feminine forms such as *allocuta* and *adorta* are "metrically guaranteed" and could not have been masculine forms, while others (e.g., *ipsa* v.45, *excitam* v.42, *teneram* v.88 and *illa* v.89) have been emended to the feminine gender by later editors.

9. Wittig (1985: 3).

does not apply "the mark of gender" to its non-animate beings.[10] Yet, English *is* gendered as regards third-person personal pronouns, using "he," "she" or "it."[11] Indeed, Corbeill notes that "in English the only significant expression of gender that survives is in the third-person personal pronouns."[12] It is nearly impossible *not* to use gendered pronouns and possessive adjectives to describe an animate being in the third-person, as *either* "he" or "she." Thus at points in the poem where Attis is described with a mixture of masculine and feminine grammatical forms, or when forms that could be either gender are used, it becomes difficult to translate it into English, to discuss it in an English-speaking classroom, and for students to write their papers in English referring to Attis. How are they to refer to *her* (or is that *him?*) without obscuring the fluidity which is the subject of the work?

## STRATEGY 1. PROBLEMATIZING ENGLISH'S GENDERED THIRD-PERSON PRONOUNS: "HE," "SHE," "IT"

When I teach poem 63, I take the opportunity to ask my students what alternatives to "he" or "she" they might use to describe Attis, to capture Attis' gender ambiguity. I ask my students to try out the following options, "they," "one," and "s/he." This generally generates a productive discussion.

As one recent style guide details, "they" is sometimes used as a gender-neutral substitute for "he" or "she" (gender-neutral words being "free of explicit or implicit reference to biological gender or sexual identity"[13]). My students, however, have usually agreed that "they" is unsatisfactory. Using a plural for a singular is ungrammatical and the problem is not just one of technical nicety. "They" is awkward because it can confuse the issue at hand, introducing the specter of a plural subject where there is none. This is relevant in poem 63, which features a singular leader of shifting grammatical gender and a plural band of female followers (her *comites,* the *Gallae*). It is thematically significant that Catullus calls Attis' comrades *Gallae,* using the feminine termination to denote male eunuchs (where usually the masculine is used).[14] Using "they" in English to describe Catullus' Galli obscures

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10. Ibid.

11. *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style,* s.v. "pronoun," accessed April 22, 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmcontempusage/pronouns_personal.

12. Corbeill (2008: 78).

13. *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style,* s.v. "gender neutral," accessed April 22, 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmcontempusage/gender_neutral.

14. Always noted by commentators but Ellis (1889: 263); Fordyce (1961: 262, 264–5), and Kroll (1968: 132) are best on the history of the word in both Greek and Latin.

his play with gendered terminations, while simultaneously using "they" to describe Attis confuses the issue of who "they" is (or are)! "They," then, does not help. Likewise, "one" is not particularly useful, because in common usage it does duty as an impersonal first person pronoun ("one needs to go to the bathroom," she said archly). It is confusing in a poem that moves between direct speech and reported action.

For the sake of providing some political context for students, I raise the issue that gendered pronouns have come under attack from feminists and their allies in recent history. The use of the "generic he," that is, the use of the male pronoun to stand in for all people, can be considered sexist, akin to the use of "man" to stand for "human."[15] Hence some second-wave feminists fought for "she" to be used instead as the generic subject. The "generic she" foregrounds woman rather than man, thus redressing the former sexist imbalance inherent in language that assumes maleness for generic human subjects.[16] Arising somewhat later from the movement for political correctness is the substitution "s/he" for "he" and "him/her" for "him," etc. "S/he" and "him/her" allow for the possibility that the generic subject might be either woman or man. These examples are now in relatively common usage, and do indeed mitigate some of the effects of sexist language.[17] My students' attitudes to these terms tend to range widely, from whole-hearted acceptance of the language and the need for it, to rejection that such substitutions are necessary or desirable in a "post-feminist" world. Many are indifferent. Thus far in my experience, the spread of attitudes has not cut clearly across age, class, or sex lines.

Generating a discussion about these common alternatives to sexist language is useful because it allows me to point out (if none of the students do it themselves) that none of these politically-conscious and -motivated options are *gender-neutral*. Rather, they each presume a binary opposition between two genders. The substitution of "she" for "he" is a type of linguistic affirmative action designed to combat sexism, while "s/he" avoids sexism in that it does not preclude the subject being of either sex. Yet by using these alternatives to "he," whether by replacing man with woman ("she" for the "generic he") or by allowing woman to stand alongside man ("s/he" for "he"), we actually solidify the conviction that there are *two* genders/sexes. This is an example of a trap that the queer theorist Riki Wilchins

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15. *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style,* s.v. "he/she," accessed April 22, 2012 http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmcontempusage/he_she.

16. See Wittig (1985: 5) on this imbalance.

17. As a woman I can testify that I notice (with pleasant surprise) when Classical scholars use "she" to represent the generic "reader"; see for example Skinner (2003).

has observed in feminism; by attempting to redress inequalities faced by women, it defines women as an ontological category and thus reifies the binary structures of "male/female and masculine/feminine.[18]

Substituting "she" for "he" is not really an adequate option for poem 63, where Catullus names a specific, not a generic subject. I do, however, ask the students to try it on for ideological "size," so to speak, that is, to "read" Attis as female throughout the poem. I do this because it emphasizes that Catullus is not in fact casting Attis simply as female (or male). In the context of a Latin class, the students generally become very uncomfortable with depicting Attis as "she" when they know that grammatically in that line, Attis is masculine. This reflects their concern with accurately capturing the sense of Catullus' Latin, in thought and then in word. Generally I find that students want to follow Catullus' often ambiguous lead, and are frustrated by their inability to do so when using English. Once I have explained Latin grammatical gender to students seeing the poem in translation, I find that they too are confused about whether they ought to talk about Attis as "he" or "she," and at what point—if any—"he" becomes "she."

## DIGRESSION—
## THE LINGUISTIC IS THE POLITICAL IS THE PERSONAL

Before outlining my second strategy (providing students with gender-neutral pronouns used in some sections of transgender communities), I need to emphasize the dually problematic nature of using "he" and "she" to refer to Catullus' Attis. So far, I have been stressing the practical questions generated in the classroom by the limitations of English, such as: how are our students to correctly describe Attis, in an essay, or an exam translation? How are they to convey that they understand Catullus' subtle play with gendered language—and gender expression—when "he" and "she" erase that very subtlety?

This practical problem, though important for grading and for the pure philology of it all, is academic in both senses of the word. There is a bigger issue. When we render Attis as he *or* she in a classroom setting, we—instructors and students alike—perpetuate a core Western assumption that there is an innate binary opposition between male/masculine and female/feminine. This idea, that humans are dimorphic, that there are only two

18. Wilchins (2004: 126). S/he would be more useful for the purpose of teaching poem 63 as it at least includes two genders—it cannot however be verbally expressed which makes it difficult in verbal discussions.

sexes, male and female, and only two genders which correspond to the two sexes—masculine and feminine, respectively—can be traced back to Plato, while its effect on our medical understanding of terminology is rooted in the Victorian era.[19] It is deeply pervasive.[20] It is also false, according to certain scientists, feminists, queer theorists and sociologists, and most importantly, according to many intersex, transgendered, and genderqueer people.[21]

It is a truism that when a baby is born, the first question asked by parents after "is it healthy?" is "is it a boy or a girl?" Yet the Intersex Society of North America estimates that one in approximately one thousand, six hundred and sixty-six babies are born intersex, that is, with chromosomes that are neither XX or XY.[22] That is, in every two thousand people, there is at least one who is neither exactly male or female. In its literature, the Intersex Society makes the point that "intersex" is a term that covers a multitude of conditions, a multiplicity of difference from the norm of male and female. Yet, in the Western world today, lack of belief in the multiplicity of biological sexes that exists among humans, in concert with societal expectation that there be only two sexes, still lead to genital surgery being performed without consent on infants, so that an intersex baby who is neither "he" or "she" can be made to fit the model of binary sex and gender.[23] Such operations have garnered recent media attention, thanks in large part to activism conducted by the intersex people themselves who have experienced such surgery and argue against it.[24] The existence of intersex people who bear a wide variety of different chromosomal conditions belies Western society's own notion that there are only two biological sexes.

Meanwhile, the existence of transsexual and transgendered people, as well as those who identify as genderqueer or gender outlaws, calls into question the related notion that along with the two sexes, female and male, come

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19. Fausto-Sterling (2000: 19–20, 22).

20. Wilchins (2004: 145–46).

21. For the science, see Fausto-Sterling (1993: 19–21); Dreger (1998: 26); Ekins and King (2006: 24–27). Cf. the narratives—both political and personal—in Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins (2002); Bloom (2003: 3–47); Wilchins (2004); Kailey (2005).

22. "How common is intersex?" at http://www.isna.org/, accessed April 28, 2012. Fausto-Sterling (2000: 20) estimates even higher, at 17 in 1000.

23. Wilchins (2004: 72–78). The formerly widespread practice of performing such operations currently seems to be gradually diminishing, thanks in large part to pressure from intersex people who have had their gender assigned at birth via "corrective" surgery. See Dreger (1998); Fausto-Sterling (2000: 19–21).

24. See for instance the stated agenda of the Intersex Society of North America on their homepage http://www.isna.org.

two genders, feminine and masculine.[25] The National Centre for Transgender Equality in the United States, estimates that between 0.25 and 1% of the population is transgender.[26] Of these people, many will have medical treatments, including surgery, to alter their biological sex characteristics so as to better match their perceived gender.[27] However, not all transgender people choose to transition fully into the "opposite" sex,[28] while some are not able to for legal, social, or economic reasons.[29] Some trans-identifying people choose to (and are able to) "pass" as a natural or "cis" born member of the opposite sex, while others choose to occupy a liminal gender identity, between masculine and feminine.[30] As recent accounts by transgendered people themselves show, there is no single "transgender" experience, since culture, ethnicity, and class play determining roles in any individual's experience of his or her gender, legal, and social position, and access to medical, social, and legal support.[31] Transgendered people in our community thus undermine the very notion that there are only two genders.

In short, there is a wide array of evidence that there are *more* than two sexes, and more than two genders. Yet in the Western world, there remains the widely-held belief that a binary opposition between man and woman reflects the only possible options of sex and gender presentation.[32] Our use of the gendered third person personal pronouns "he" and "she" reflects (and is shaped by) this notion.

25. "Transsexual" and "transgender" are terms applied with some fluidity; "transgender" can be an umbrella term that overlaps with "genderqueer" and "gender outlaw" which both have radical political connotations; See Ekins and King (2006: 13–30) on the development of the terms "transsexual," "transgender," and "trans" and the range of possible meanings of each term; Kailey (2005: 3–5) explains why it is so difficult to define the boundaries between transsexual, transgender, and genderqueer experiences.

26. "Understanding Transgender" (2009) on the National Center for Transgender Equality website, accessed April 28, 2012, http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_UnderstandingTrans. pdf. The figures must be estimated because, as the authors of this resource note, no official agency currently collects data on how many people in the United States identify as transgender; cf. Bloom (2003: 33).

27. "Understanding Transgender" (2009: 3–5).

28. See Ekins and King (2006: 97–142) on stories of those who "oscillate" between genders, and (2006: 143–80) of those who "negate" some of their biological sex characteristics but do not adopt those of another sex.

29. Kailey (2005: 3–5). See the personal stories of transgender experiences in a variety of manifestations in: Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins (2002: 67–129); Bloom (2003: 10–11, 29–32).

30. Fausto-Sterling (2000: 22); Ekins and King (2006: 28–29); Kailey (2005: 3–5).

31. Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins (2002: 67–129, 238–62); Bloom (2003: 3–47); Kailey (2005); Ekins and King (2006: 43–220); and see the report "Injustice at every turn: a look at Black respondents in the national transgender discrimination survey" (2011) National Center for Transgender Equality website, accessed April 28, 2012, http://transequality.org/PDFs/BlackTransFactsheetFINAL _090811.pdf on discrimination against African-American transgendered people in the United States.

32. Fausto-Sterling (1993), Kailey (2005: 5–6).

How does this relate to the classroom, and to the teaching of poem 63 in particular?

As teachers who speak English in the classroom, we gender our students every day by using linguistic structures that define them as *either* male *or* female. We talk—and think—about our students in terms of a gender binary. "Did Hyun-Jin hand in his essay?" "Why isn't Rosa here—is she ill?" The process is not one-way—our students gender us, too. "I want to take that class. His lectures are so interesting!" Our language creates an educational environment and a classroom situation wherein everyone is identified as either he or she.

Yet given the statistics (a possible 1.7% of the population being intersex; between 0.25% and 1% of the population being transgendered), it is possible that trans-identifying or intersex students are in our courses. Thus in any classroom situation, our everyday use of gendered pronouns can silence and marginalize the identities and experience of transgender or intersex students. In a classroom where Catullus' poem 63 is being taught, discussed, and possibly translated, the silencing and marginalization can take on another dimension. The protagonist, Attis, is a man whose gender identity becomes de-stabilized, and whose existence thus admits the possibility (albeit one that Skinner shows is seen as horrific by the poet himself[33]) of a world beyond the gender binary. Yet in using "he" and/or "she" to label Attis, as English-speakers we may be undermining Attis' fluidity and thus (likely unwittingly or even unwillingly) further marginalizing any student who is not simply he or she. It is partly due to my desire to avoid marginalizing such students that I developed my second strategy, the use of gender-neutral pronouns commonly used within genderqueer communities. While the medical community has "yet to adopt a language that is capable of reflecting" the full scope and permutations of biological sex and gender,[34] many transgender people are already doing so.[35]

## STRATEGY 2. MOVING BEYOND GENDER—ZIE, NU, AND HIR

In the classroom, I introduce the pronouns "zie," "nu," and "hir" after some discussion of the poem has already occurred. I find it useful to have already

33. Skinner (1993: 113–15).
34. Fausto-Sterling (2000: 22).
35. See for instance Ekins and King (2006: 158–61) on Christie Elan-Cane's use of "per" to describe per ungendered self; Kailey (2005: 165–66, 168); and Gibson (2010) who covered the transperson Norrie's fight to have hir sex defined as "not specified" on Australian legal documents.

initiated the discussion about "they," "one," and "s/he," and to have allowed the students to discover for themselves, by reading the poem, that there *is* a difficulty expressing Attis' gender in English. Then, I present the students with the information that there *are* pronouns in existence that have been created to combat the bi-gendered perspective embodied within the words "he" and "she." There are various pronouns created for use within some transgender communities such as "per," "nu," and "zie" (also spelt "ze") for the nominative and accusative cases, and "hir" and "per" for the possessive adjective.[36] In introducing these words to my students, I make sure to distinguish between non-*sexist* language like the use of "she" for "he," which aims to combat sexism (but not to eradicate the idea of two sexes) and non-*generist* language, which aims to do away with the polarity between two distinct genders/sexes and to express an experience of the self that is neither male nor female.

The existence of pronouns such as "nu," "zie," "ze," and "hir" comes as a shock to most students. I have not yet encountered a student who was familiar with any of the words. Even the concept of non-gendrist language is surprising to many, as it highlights the pervasive but often un-stated reality that our language *is* gendered. However, the introduction of "zie," "nu," and "hir" flows on somewhat naturally from our earlier discussions of alternatives to our common use of gendered pronouns. It also generally strikes a chord with the students, who by this point have mostly recognized that Attis' gender is subject to continual slippage and change.

Having named the pronouns and provided some background on their use in transgender communities, I ask students to apply them to Catullus' Attis. In my experience, the students are very hesitant at first. The words seem strange, "not natural," as one student of mine put it. They are aurally unfamiliar. They are also instantiations of an extremely unfamiliar concept, that it is possible for a person to be neither simply he nor she.

To make the terms more familiar, I use them when I speak about Attis to my classes, shifting between gendered and non-gendered pronouns. This felt strange at first, but I can now use zie and hir without pause in class, which I suspect normalizes things for the students. I ask them to "play" with these terms as we progress through our readings of and discussion about the poem, using the words when they feel appropriate. The bolder students will experiment with saying "zie" or "hir"; others indicate shyness or confusion. This holds true whether the students are discussing the poem broadly in a class taught in translation, or working through a line-by-line

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36. Kailey (2005: 165–66, 168); Ekins and King (2006: 158–61).

reading in a Latin class. In the latter situation, I will ask a student to translate a given line that refers to Attis with all the possible options available for personal pronouns, re-reading the line for the class multiple times and switching between "they," "one," "he," "she," "zie," and "nu" each time. This can become tedious but ultimately proves fruitful, since we then discuss as a class which particular pronoun makes more sense. Often the grammar and context of the Latin will make it clear that some options are less preferable. An adjective like *quatiens* in line 10 can be more readily understood as "zie, shaking" than as either "he, shaking" or "she, shaking," since it can grammatically be either. In the opposite situation, where a Latin adjective or pronoun is clearly one gender or the other, students will argue that it ought to be translated with the corresponding gendered pronoun in English (and I agree, despite often playing devil's advocate). Yet, this seems to be a product of their desire to accurately translate the Latin rather than a hangover of bi-gendered ideology, since quite a few students do choose to use "zie," "ze," "nu," or "hir" in lines where Catullus has left Attis' gender ambiguous.

At these points in the discussion when a student uses gender-neutral language in the classroom, I am sometimes reminded of the French feminist critic Monique Wittig, who in her staunch attacks on gendered language argued that it is crucial "to consider how gender works in language, how gender works upon language, before considering *how it works from there upon its users.*"[37] It is this last phrase that I think of in the moments when my students and I deconstruct Attis' gender and sex as a counterfeit woman and a barren man, as a he, a she, and sometimes a zie. We are working gender back onto language, and questioning both as we go. Through self-consciously interrogating our own gendered language and through using new alternatives, we can become conscious that our role in naming Attis does more than name zie/her/him, it constructs nu/him/her.

What is Attis' identity here? And can it be said to be that of a trans-identifying or intersex person? These questions have been asked of me in class. The answer to the first, I think, is that Attis is, in the end, simply and only Attis. She is not a woman, and he is not a man. Zie is Catullus' warning to his readers that it is a tragedy for a man to stray outside his socially and biologically assigned gender role (in Roman terms, it is a tragedy when a boy does not become a man, with a man's position in society).[38]

The answer to the second question is, I think, a resounding "no." I feel compelled to stress to students that intersex conditions are biological;

37. Wittig (1985: 4); italics added.
38. Quinn (1972: 249–51); Skinner (1993: 113–15).

Attis' situation is not. Transgender people are often motivated to have surgery to realign their sex characteristics with their gender; Attis had no such desire. It is implied that like his companions, Attis too castrated himself "out of excessive hatred of Venus," *Veneris nimio odio* (v. 17), while other lines (such as vv. 64–7) suggest that his adolescent reluctance to fully take on the role of active, adult male led him to reject all the trappings of civilization by abandoning his urban homeland.[39] As Skinner puts it, in the Roman world Attis is a "psychosexual oxymoron," a sign of Roman anxiety about gender transgression.[40] If Attis could have fully become a woman, there would have been no tragedy in this story, or, in the Roman world, less of a tragedy. The point of the poem, the reason for Attis' lament and the narrator's fear-filled conclusion, is that gender *fluidity,* not gender transition, is terrifying in a world composed of a binary gender opposition.[41] Catullus did not cast Attis as an ancient transgendered or intersex person—those are modern epistemological categories (and indeed, in modern terms Attis seems like a trans-phobe stuck in a genderqueer body; zie is devastated that zie is now semi-female rather than all male). Thus, it may seem anachronistic to discuss Attis through the lens of contemporary queer theory.

However, the student feedback I have received from teaching this text with some context of modern gender theory has been positive. Students have indicated that they appreciated the greater sense of flexibility that knowing these pronouns gave them, and some have displayed interest in learning more about transgender and intersex experiences. Thus far, I have had no negative response to the strategy. I am aware that drawing students' attention to the existence of transgendered and intersex people could precipitate a trans- or intersex-phobic discussion or outburst which I would then have to mediate and moderate (compare Endres and Penrose on homophobia in the classroom, in this volume). As a cis-born woman-identifying-woman (that is, I am neither intersexed nor transgendered), I hesitate sometimes about raising this issue with a class for fear of precipitating such an outburst which might render a classroom unsafe.[42] However, on balance I believe

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39. Skinner (1993: 115).

40. Skinner (1993: 114).

41. Cf. Skinner (1993: 114).

42. It is partly in anticipation of such an event that I have investigated local support centers for genderqueer, trans, and intersex people in an effort to gather information and resources, both to educate myself and to provide them to students if necessary. Some LGBTI organizations provide education workshops and/or web-based resources for nontranspeople who work with transgendered people, such as the Sydney-based organization Twenty10 which provides resources through its webpage http://www.twenty10.org.au/resources/gender, and the Gender Identity Project run through

that this strategy has three important benefits that make it worth persisting with.

At the most basic level, these tools are practical aids that allow students to use language in new ways. This can allow students to get closer to the sense of Catullus' text, whether they are working in Latin or in translation. At the next level, making such options available to all students may ease the marginalization experienced in the classroom by transgender, intersex, or genderqueer students. It allows them to use and to hear language in the classroom which might better reflect their non-binary experience of sex and gender and which is not generally known of outside a small community. Finally, ideally the process of experimenting with gender-neutral language allows all students in the room to expand their understanding of gender and sex, combating trans-, queer-, and intersex-phobia.

## STRATEGY 3—BYPASSING LANGUAGE THROUGH SYMBOLS FOR GENDER ♂ ♀

In a classroom, the second strategy flows naturally from the first, and so too does the third follow easily on. The third strategy is to suggest that when writing about the poem, students can dispense with pronouns and use visual symbols. They can insert various visual symbols for gender, for instance next to Attis' name, an adjective, or the finite verb. This strategy was first suggested by a student in class[43] when we were discussing the difficulty of rendering in English the lines where Catullus has left Attis' gender ambiguous, such as v. 74. The visual device draws the reader's attention to the ambiguity of Attis' gender at these points. Indeed, using such symbols instead of pronouns throughout the piece could allow a visual representation of Attis' movement between and beyond gender binaries. To demonstrate that fluidity and ambiguity of Attis' gender at specific points, the male and female symbols could be placed next to each other, so that a translation of the opening lines would look something like this:

> Conveyed over the high seas, Attis ♂, in a swift craft,
> ♂ eagerly arrived at the Phrygian grove with speedy foot

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The Center—The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Center at http://www.gaycenter.org/gip. I have found it harder to find specific information on local support for people with intersex conditions in Australia and New Zealand. However, the website of the Intersex Society of North American at http://www.isna.org/ provides fairly comprehensive information and online resources.

43. I am indebted to Mr Anthony Gibbons for his extremely useful idea.

and entered the shady places of the goddess wreathed with forests,
goaded there by raging madness, bewildered in spirits,
tore from ♂ the weights of his loins with the sharp flint.                    5
And so, as ♀♂ sensed the members left ♀♂ were without manhood,
still spattering the soil of the earth with fresh blood,
with snow-white hands ♀ seized quickly the light timbrel,
the timbrel of yours, Cybebe, your initiation-rites, mother,
and, ♀♂ shaking the hollow hide of the bull with slender fingers,          10
♀ tremulously ♀ began to sing these [words] to her companions.

The idea is that these visual cues, not generally being seen in text trans-
lation, jar the reader into consciously engaging with Attis' gender at a pre-
verbal cognitive state. The visual image of both male and female symbols
together suggest the complexity of Attis' gender, reminding us that it is
fluid and not determined before we have a chance to formulate our normal
verbal pattern of "he" *or* "she." This strategy is effective for working at the
whiteboard and I encourage students to experiment with it in their written
work; like "s/he" it is not, obviously, useful during a verbal discussion.

## STRATEGY 4—DECONSTRUCTING THE SCHOLARSHIP

My final strategy has been to draw my students' attention to the way that
their resources on this text—their commentaries, scholarly articles, and
translations—reflect the constraints of English's gender pronouns and West-
ern ideas of a simple gender binary. I invite the students to reflect on which
scholars refer to Attis as "he" or "she" and at what points in the text. At the
same time, I ask the students to consider whether the scholars' textual or
interpretative decisions might be shaped by their society's ideas on gender,
or whether their interpretations of the text do in fact extend beyond a false
binary of male *or* female, but the limitations of our language have prevented
them from fully expressing that interpretation. This can be done either in
class as a group discussion, or as a research-based piece of assessment.

There are a number of points in the text where one can perform this
analysis along with students. I have found line 54 to be extremely useful.[44]

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44. V. 58 is another important example where what one decides the line means depends in part
on how one reads Attis' gender, with the scholarship providing evidence of changing views. Briefly,
in v.58 *remota* can be feminine singular agreeing with *ego* (thus indicating Attis' self-conception of
hir future gender to be feminine) or neuter plural with *nemora* (which leaves Attis' gender ambigu-
ous in the line). Fordyce (1961), Kroll (1968), and Thomson (1997) provide differing arguments

It has generated discussion in a series of commentaries over the last century and a half, so it provides a good representative sample on views on gendered language, and thus gender itself.

The difficulty in line 54 is in deciding what to do with *furibunda*, "raging," given the context of the surrounding lines:

> 'patria o mei creatrix, patria o mea genetrix,                                    50
> ego quam miser *[masc.]* relinquens, dominos ut erifugae
> famuli solent, ad Idae tetuli nemora pedem,
> ut aput niuem et ferarum gelida stabula forem,
> et earum omnia adirem furibunda *[fem. sg. nom. OR neut. pl. nom. acc.]*
>     latibula'

Grammatically, it can be feminine nominative, singular, agreeing with the here unnamed subject, Attis, meaning "raging" or "wild." Or, it can be neuter accusative plural, agreeing with *latibula*, "dens." Comments by critics as diverse in space and time as Ellis (1889), Fordyce (1961), Skinner (1993), and Thomson (1997), show that the grammatical role of *furibunda* depends not on objective lexical criteria, but on how one is already "reading" Attis' gender.

In the late 1800s, Ellis (1889) took *furibunda* as neuter plural with *latibula*, writing "the dens are *furibunda* as sheltering lions and other fierce beasts of prey."[45] His reasoning was that Catullus had called Attis *miser*, "wretched" in line 51, using the masculine form of the adjective and thus rendering him male once more. Ellis thought that a shift back to the feminine form in line 54 would be "impossible" and thus took *furibunda* as neuter plural.[46] This decision suppressed the possibly feminine, nominative identification of *furibunda* because the critic had already "read" Attis' gender here as masculine, stable, static. The implication is that Attis was never really the "she" that the feminine adjectives of earlier lines suggested. The textual decision reflects Ellis's beliefs about gender, as well as grammar.

which Latin students can—and must—dissect to decide what their own interpretation of the grammar will be. The different views can also be seen by comparing published translations. Green (2005: 131) gives "Ah, am I doomed to these alien forests, far from what's home, what's familiar" which suggests to me that he has taken *remota* with *ego;* Godwin (1995: 49) has "am I to take myself into these glades, far removed from my home?" where in English "far from" could refer either to the "I" or the "glades" and thus maintains the semantic uncertainty present in the Latin. Lee (1990: 79) writes of "these forests far distant from my home" which indicates that he takes *remota* with *nemora.* Encouraging students of Latin to widely consult English translations has proved useful in my teaching of this particular poem, as it demonstrates how one's reading of Attis' gender effects what one actually makes the poem "mean" in English.

45. Ellis (1889: 270).
46. Ibid.

In the 1990s Thomson was comfortable instead taking *furibunda* to refer to a female Attis, following Fordyce's tentative suggestion three decades before, that the grammatical form was "probably feminine singular as in [line] 31."[47] Here we have an alternative interpretation of the line based on an alternative reading of Attis' gender. Thomson notes that *miser,* "wretched," had appeared in line 51 in the masculine form. But, he argues that there is no contradiction with a feminine nominative reading of *furibunda,* because with *miser* Attis was referring to hir prior, and hence male, self. It seems that for Thomson, once Attis has been castrated and referred to with *some* feminine adjectives, zie must remain both grammatically and conceptually female.

Ellis's, Fordyce's, and Thomson's readings of the grammar in line 54 were each based at least in part on a conviction that movement between the binary poles of male/masculine and female/feminine, can only go one-way. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Skinner took *furibunda* as feminine, seeing the shift from the masculine *miser* as an indication of how Attis' self-castration destabilized the "conceptual category of the masculine."[48] In her interpretation, Catullus was inviting us to read Attis, who is referring to hirself in these lines, as confused in hir own mind about hir gender. Skinner's reading is based in a modern feminist ideology that sees gender as more fluid, constructable, shifting, allowing her to see the same beliefs at work in Catullus' text.

In my experience, when students analyze the scholarly reception of this line, they develop a sense of how gendered language is inextricably linked with gender ideology in the modern world. This then allows them to reflect back on Catullus' own play with gender from a more sophisticated perspective. It also gives them a sense of the fluidity of scholarship itself—how our readings of another language are contingent on our own historical setting and our mother-tongue.[49]

## CONCLUSIONS

I believe that this exercise, combined with giving students verbal and iconographic alternatives to translating the gendered English pronouns "he" and "she," has encouraged my students to move beyond the limitations of our gendered language. At a practical level, I have found that these strategies

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47. Fordyce (1961: 268); Thomson (1997: 382).
48. Skinner (1993: 114).
49. In connection with this idea it is useful to point out that some feminine forms in the poem are the result of emendations; see Skinner (1993: 127 n. 47).

help my students to understand the poem better. They enable Latin students to better grasp the subtleties of Catullus' usage, and they allow students reading the poet in translation better access to the original's "flavor." They allow the student asking "what *is* Attis here?" to consider conceptual as well as grammatical manifestations of gender, and to interrogate how they themselves construct gender through language. At an ethical level, I believe that these strategies have made my classroom a more inclusive space for intersex, transgender, and genderqueer students, in part by challenging and expanding the entire class's understanding of gender and sex in our own society.