CP 10. Priapus’ Humorous Doctrina*

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SUMMARY

This paper re-examines CP 10 where the phallic god Priapus vigorously apologises for his roughly carved form to some anonymous girl, who comes in his garden and laughs at him. The investigation is based on the most common humour theories of the antiquity (i.e. superiority and incongruity theory), which are used in order to trace further humorous elements other than the sexual humour which runs through the CP and especially CP 10. These elements show that the country god Priapus is not only the funny hortorum custos but also an erudite character whose doctrina can cause further laugh and humour, reflecting thereby the doctrina that characterises the entire collection.

KEY WORDS

Priapus, Humour, Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory, Sexual Humour, Doctrina.

The Corpus Priapeorum is a collection of eighty literary pieces (i.e. epigrams1) which are attributed to some anonymous single author2 of the first century A.D.3. This author employs various subjects concerning Priapus such as the god’s sexual threats to the interlopers in his garden (CP 11, 13, 15, 22, 23, 28, 35 and 44)4, his comparison to the Olympians (CP 9, 20, 36, 39, 53 and 75), his complaints concerning the weather or other problems (CP 26, 33, 47, 48, 51, 64, 66 and 73).

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1 I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the anonymous readers of Minerva for their constructive suggestions, comments and criticisms which significantly improved the first draft of this paper.

2 Cf. Buchheit (1962) who rightly argued that the epigrams of the CP were created and artfully arranged by a single author. See also Kloss (2003) and Holzberg (2005).


4 The list is not exhaustive, given that there are also epigrams which deal with characters, either male or female, who intentionally come to the garden in order to be raped by the god (CP 25, 40, 45, 48, 51, 64, 66 and 73).
55, 61 and 63) and finally his humble wooden origin (CP 6, 10, 25 and 56)\(^5\). These subjects stress the humorous side of Priapus, since they deal with a god who is a fun figure that causes laugh and humour not only to the reader but also to the characters of the text. CP 10 is a notable example, given that here Priapus vigorously apologises for his roughly carved form, thereby causing laugh not only to the reader but also to a girl who comes to laugh at him:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Insulsissima quid puella rides?} \\
\text{non me Praxiteles Scopasve fecit,} \\
\text{non sum Phidiaca manu politus;} \\
\text{sed lignum rude vilicus dolavit} \\
\text{et dixit mihi 'tu Priapus esto'.} \\
\text{spectas me tamen et subinde rides:} \\
\text{nimirum tibi salsa res videtur} \\
\text{adstans inguinibus columna nostris.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{[CP 10]}\]

The laugh which is caused by the humble and wooden form of Priapus is a conventional subject which has an eminent place in Greek and Roman Priapic poetry\(^6\). However, while laugh and sexual humour are more than obvious in the collection, the verb *ridere* is found only twice throughout the *Corpus Priapeorum*; and these two cases are emphatically found in CP 10 (cf. *rides*? 10,1 and *rides* 10,6)\(^7\), something which can show that humour has an eminent role in this epigram, which in that sense should also have a much more significant humorous tone that is not only related to the sexual humour on which scholars usually concentrate their interest\(^8\).

Before examining the verses under consideration in order to trace humorous elements, we should first refer briefly to the humour theories on which my

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1 For the subject of the wooden statue of Priapus in Latin poetry, cf. e.g. Hor. Sat. 1,8. See also O’CONNOR (1989) 182-185.
2 Cf. BUCHHEIT (1962) 61. See also GOLDBERG (1992) 96-97 with examples.
3 Here, it should be mentioned that the verb *ridere* is also found with the preposition *de-* (*deridere*) in CP 56 (cf. *Derides quoque, fur, et impudicum / ostendis digitum mihi minanti? CP 56,1-2*) which also begins with Priapus’ angry apostrophe and direct question towards some character (*i.e.* thief) who entered his garden. However, here the meaning of the verb *deridere* is “to mock” rather than “to laugh” at someone (*i.e.* Priapus). Cf. TLL s.v. *derideo* 5,1,629,63-65. See also CALLEBAT (2012) 242.
interpretation is based. My intention is not to give here an exhaustive survey on all the humour theories which are currently more than one hundred in several research areas⁹. However, these various theories tend to overlap each other and they can be divided into three main categories: superiority theory, relief/release theory and incongruity theory¹⁰. All the humour theories which have come down to us from antiquity belong to the superiority category, according to which laugh comes from what is ugly and/or bad¹¹. Plato first argues that the ridiculous is a vice (for instance, the lack of self-knowledge) while the amusement is malice, given that laugh is caused by the faults of the others¹², stressing that the pleasure caused by laugh is combined with the pain caused by malice¹³. Moreover, Aristotle suggests that the laughable is something ugly but not painful¹⁴ stressing that humour should not be a feature of the vulgar clowns but of the educated men¹⁵. Aristotle’s views on humour are followed by Cicero¹⁶ who argues that the laughable is something ugly which is censored in no ugly way¹⁷. The relief/release theory underlines the physiological and psychological features found in laughter and humour¹⁸ by regarding something humorous as a source of psychic energy which is released through the laughter and is focused mostly on the recipient of humour¹⁹; and in that sense, it is closely associ-

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⁹ E.g. biology, psychology, cognitive science, anthropology, linguistics and literary criticism. See Plaza (2006) 6-7, n. 10, with bibliography on the humour theories, and more recently Michalopoulos (2014) 36-37, n. 4, with further bibliography on humour.


¹² Plat. Phlb. 48-50.

¹³ Cf. also Plat. Phlb. 388e: Ἀλλὰ μὴν συνεχείς ραιλοχάλατας γε δεῖ εἶναι. σχεδὸν γὰρ ὅταν τις ἕχῃ ἰσχυρὰ γέλωτι, ἰσχυρὰν καὶ μεταβολὴν ζητεῖ τὸ τοιοῦτον, where the philosopher claims that the guards of the state should avoid humour, because of its tendency to cause violent reactions, something which again stresses the ambivalent nature of humour.

¹⁴ Arist. Po. 5,1449a.

¹⁵ Arist. En. 4,8.

¹⁶ Cic. De orat. 2,235-290. See also Orat. 87-89.


¹⁸ Here, it should be mentioned that laugh (i.e. a physical action) and humour (i.e. a psychological feature) tend to be examined together and sometimes even unfortunately to be treated synonymously. Yet, this paper is only a literary study and for that reason it will also treat those terms synonymously. See also Plaza (2006) 6.

¹⁹ Cf. Plaza (2006) 9-10 with n. 18, who nicely observes that the sexual humour, which is found in the Corpus Priapeorum and is conventionally associated with the superiority theory, has also fea-
ated with psychology and is mostly used by psychologists (namely the Freudi-
ans)\textsuperscript{20} who also use this theory in literary criticism, something that can explain
why the relief/release theory is entirely excluded from this investigation of CP
10. Finally, the incongruity theory is based on a mismatch (\textit{i.e.} incongruity) be-
tween two or more constituent elements regarding an event, idea, object, social
expectation etc.\textsuperscript{21}. This theory is also traced in Aristotle who argues that a char-
acter can violate the expectations that he created to the audience causing in
that way laugh and humour\textsuperscript{22}; and similarly Cicero also claims that a character’s
sayings constitute the most common humorous source when they go against
the expectations of the audience\textsuperscript{23}. Therefore, it is clear that these three hu-
mour theories were congruent to each other, something which also shows that
the blending between them can significantly reinforce the humorous effect
within a literary text.

\textit{CP 10} begins with Priapus’ angry apostrophe and direct question towards a
girl who is characterised as “stupid”\textsuperscript{24}, since she is laughing at him (\textit{Insulsissima quid puella rides?}). This characterisation is further reinforced through the
superlative degree of the adjective \textit{insulsa} which is intentionally used by the god
to lay special emphasis on his invective\textsuperscript{25}. It is quite clear that the girl first
laughs at the ugly/bad figure of Priapus given that the answer of the god is
actually an explanation of his roughly carved form. The god emphatically
replies that he is not created by Praxiteles, Scopas or Phidias; instead he is only
a wooden figure that has been carved by some anonymous \textit{vilicus}. In other
words, Priapus explains to the laughing girl that he is not an elegant marble (\textit{i.e.}
Praxiteles and Scopas\textsuperscript{26}) or a golden (\textit{i.e.} Phidias\textsuperscript{27}) statue but a rude wooden

\textsuperscript{20} The relief/release theory received its most famous formulation by \textsc{Freud} (1905) who has possibly
influenced by \textsc{Spencer} (1860) 395–402. See also \textsc{Plaza} (2006) 9.

\textsuperscript{21} \textsc{Plaza} (2006) 10. See also \textsc{Michaelopoulos} (2014) 37–38.

\textsuperscript{22} \textsc{Arist.}, \textit{Rh.} 3,2.

\textsuperscript{23} \textsc{Cic.}, \textit{De Or.} 2,255: \textit{Sed scitis esse notissimum ridiculi genus, cum aliud exspectamus, aliud dicitur.}

\textsuperscript{24} \textsc{Old s.v. Insulsus} 2a.

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. also \textit{CP} 51,25–26: \textit{quibus relictis in mihi laboratum / locum venitis, improbissimi fures}, with \textsc{Callebat}

\textsuperscript{26} Praxiteles and Scopas were among the most celebrated sculptors in antiquity that sculpted most-
ly marble, although they were also skilled in other materials. Cf. \textsc{Plin. Nat.} 54,69: \textit{Praxiteles quoque, qui marmore felicior, idee et clarior fuit, facit tanen et ex aere pulcherrima opera}, with \textsc{CORSO} (2004) 114
and 159–160 (for Praxiteles) and \textsc{OCD s.v. Scopas} (for Scopas) with further bibliography.
figure, something which shows *doctrina* on the statuary that is incongruously uttered by an uneducated and uncultivated god28 causing in that way laugh and humour29. The explanation concludes with the rude material used for the creation of Priapus (*lignum rude*) which is only mentioned through the entirely unknown rustic “sculptor” (*vilicus*), who is famous neither for his art nor for the material he uses in order to create his sculptures.

Nonetheless, *vilicus* is the only crucial character (given that he is the creator of the wooden statue of Priapus)30 in the collection (after Priapus)31 whose words are in direct speech, although they are actually quoted by the phallic god (*et dixit mihi ‘tu Priapus esto’*)32. Scholars have already noticed the verbal echo between *tu Priapus esto* and *tu aureus esto* which may recall Vergil’s *Eclogue* 7 where Corydon’s and Thyrsis’ contest occurs; and especially it may also recall Thyrsis’ overambitious effort to rival Corydon’s earlier promise for a marble statue to Diana by stressing that the statue of Priapus is already made by marble and it

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27 Phidias was also a famous sculptor whose recognition in the ancient world was based mostly on the two enormous chryselephantine (gold and ivory) sculptures (Athena Parthenos and Zeus Olympios). Cf. PLIN. Nat. 54,49: *Minordibus simulacris signisque innumera prope artificum multitudo nobilitata est, ante omnes tamen Phidias Atheniensis love Olympio facto ex e bore quidem et auro, sed et ex aere signa fecit*. See also SOUPIOS (2013) 77 with n. 18.

28 Cf. also *CP* 53,5-6: *tu quoque, dive minor, maiorum exempla secutus, / quamvis pausca damus, consule poma boni; CP 63,9-12: *huc addae, quod me terribilem fiste / manus sine arte rusticae dolaverunt, / interque cunctos ultimum deos numen / cucurbitarum ligneus vocor custos*; and *CP* 68,1-2: *Rusticus indocte si quid dixisse videbor, / da veniam: libros non lego, poma lego*. In the Greek and Roman literature, Priapus is conventionally described as a minor country god who is similar in status to Pan and is worshipped by sailors, fishermen and mostly countrymen, having as main duty to guard gardens, orchards and vineyards where his wooden statue (which is often carved by cheap fig wood) is usually found. See e.g. LLOYD-JONES (1991) 63 and HOOPER (1999) 1-2. In view of that, this country god is regularly far from cultivated and sophisticated gods such as Apollo or Athena except for the *CP*, where Priapus is indeed an erudite character in emphatic contrast to his announcements about his *rusticitas* (cf. *CP* 63,9-12 and 68,1-2).

29 See also STEWART (2003) 75-76 who nicely observes that Priapus is conventionally associated with obscenity that constitutes a feature which is in emphatic contrast to fine art statues and especially to sculptors such as the famous Phidias.

30 Furthermore, there is the Homeric Penelope, whose words are also quoted in direct speech (cf. *CP* 68,33-36). For Penelope’s ‘female’/female speech in the *CP* see MICHALOPOULOS (2014) 193-218.

31 Priapus speaks in direct speech in *CP* 3,1-8 [pace PLANTADE-VALLAT (2005) 286 who argue that the narrative voice of this epigram belongs to some polyphonic narrator rather than to Priapus], 5,3-4, 45,5-8 and 72,3-4.

32 Priapus puts words into the mouth of other characters in *CP* 15,4-6 (a thief), 24,3-4 (a thief), 30,1-2 (an interloper), 37,8-12 (a worshiper who has dedicated a votive tablet to Priapus), 43,3-4 (a girl) and 72,1-2 (the owner or manager of the garden).
will later become golden\textsuperscript{33}, given that the fertility of the flock will increase\textsuperscript{34}. However, this intertextual verbal echo is inconsistently uttered by the uneducated \textit{vilicus} and is also incongruously reproduced by the uncultivated phallic god, something which can confirm that the \textit{vilicus} (at least\textsuperscript{35}) and the god are familiar with the Vergilian collection. Furthermore, Priapus’ explanation constitutes a short catalogue with proper names (\textit{Praxiteles, Scopas, Phidiaca manu \[synecdochically given\]} and \textit{vilicus} in descending mode\textsuperscript{36} to stress the rustic “sculptor” of the last verse\textsuperscript{37}, which is a conventional feature first found in oral, epic (mostly Homeric) and later in written poetry\textsuperscript{38} whose use shows great erudition that is humorously incongruous with the unsophisticated phallic god.

Furthermore, the god’s explanation of his roughly carved form is actually useless, given that the girl continues laughing (\textit{spectas me tamen et subinde rides}). Priapus understands that the \textit{insulsissima puella} is not laughing at his wooden form, but on his rigid phallus (cf. \textit{columna})\textsuperscript{39}, something which is also confirmed by him (\textit{nimiram tibi salsa res uidetur \[adstans inguinibus columna nostris\]}). In other words, the joke is once again associated with the girl (cf. CP 10,1), who laughs at Priapus’ genitals either in humorous sense which shows that she is prudish, or in lecherous sense which shows that she is lascivious\textsuperscript{40} and eager for sex\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{33} For the golden statues of Priapus see \textsc{Hétert} (1932) 166.
\textsuperscript{34} Cf. \textsc{Goldberg} (1992) 99 and \textsc{Callebat} (2012) 101. See also \textsc{Michalopoulos} (2014) 138 with n. 111. \textsc{Pace Pöschl} (1964) 117 n. 29 who mentions the observation made by one of his class students according to which Thyrsis’ ‘tu … aureus esto’ could not refer to the statue of Priapus but rather only to his phallus, something which is in emphatic contrast with the earlier vocative \textit{Priape} (cf. Ecl. 7,33) which clearly refers to the statue of Priapus and with ‘Thyrsis’ reply which is used in order to rival the earlier quatrain that deals with Corydon’s promise for a marble statue to Diana.
\textsuperscript{35} Here, it should be mentioned that Priapus could only reproduced \textit{vilicus’} words (\textit{tu Priapus esto}). However, the phallic god’s explanation of his wooden origin to some girl who comes to laugh at him (\textit{Praxiteles Scopase [marble], Phidiaca manu [gold] and lignum rude [wood]}) could also be an altered order of the material used for the creation of Priapus in the Vergilian verses under consideration. Cf. \textsc{Verg. Ecl. 7,33-36}: \textit{Sinum lactis et haec te liba, Priape, quotannis / exspectare sat est: custos es pauperis horti \[wood\]: / Nunc te marmoreum \[marble\] pro tempore fecimus; at tu, / si feta gregem supplerit, aureus \[gold\] esto}. Cf. \textsc{Coleman} (1977) 216-217, \textsc{Claussen} (1994) 225-226 and \textsc{Cucchiarelli} (2012) 392 who suggest that the statue of Priapus in a humble garden (cf. \textit{custos es pauperis horti}) should be a roughly carved figure made by wood.
\textsuperscript{36} For the descending mode in catalogues see \textsc{Kyriakidis} (2007) 25-28 and 41-44.
\textsuperscript{37} Cf. \textsc{Michalopoulos} (2014) 135ff. For catalogues in the \textsc{CP} see \textsc{Michalopoulos} (2014) 103-191.
\textsuperscript{38} \textsc{Kyriakidis} (2007) XI.
\textsuperscript{39} OLD s.v. \textit{columna} 6.
\textsuperscript{40} \textsc{O’Connor} (1989) 111-112.
res [i.e. “salty and tasty thing”] may be an oblique reference to fellatio or irrumation42. The laugh which is caused by the sexual organs, in the sense that they are unclean and especially that the oral-genital contact is actually a filthy action which causes a bad-smelling (os impurum), constitutes a typical feature in Roman sexual humour43; but, it is also a feature that is entirely related to male and not to female humourists44 such as the insulsissima puella, something that creates yet another humorous incongruity.

Moreover, it has been noticed that CP 10 may contain poetological meta-language45. More specifically, the verbs fecit (CP 10,2) and dolavit (CP 10,4) are associated not only with the carving of the wooden statue but also figuratively with the creation of the poem. Furthermore, salsa res (CP 10,7) can mean a “notable thing”46 but also metaliterally a “notable material (of speech, writing etc.), matter or subject”47, since sal / salsus / insulsus are typical neoteric catchwords that are usually found in the Catullan collection48. Moreover, the epithet rudis (“roughly fashioned”)49 in the phrase lignum rude (CP 10,4), from which Priapus is made, is often used in literary criticism; and in that sense, the rudis material (i.e. statue/poem) with non sum ... manu politus (CP 10,3) that refers to a frivolous elaboration by the poet/sculptor recall similar poetological references in the

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41 This suggestion can further be reinforced with the term puella which can also be used pejoratively in order to denote a mistress or a prostitute (cf. OLD s.v. puella 3a and GOLDBERG [1992] 97 with further examples) who in that sense may enter the garden in order to be raped by the phallic god who in turn scornfully rejects her. Priapus’ scornful refusal to rape the characters who sexually desire him can recall the inventive against women which constitutes a significant subject that is also found into the Corpus Priapeorum (cf. RICHLIN [1992] 122). However, Priapus’ inventive is normally concerned with ugly young (cf. CP 32 and 46) and mostly old women (cf. CP 12 and 57) in contrast to the CP 10 where the puella (“a mistress or a prostitute”) should be beautiful something that can create yet another humorous incongruity.

42 Cf. GOLDBERG (1992) 100 and OBERMAYER (1998) 208-209 with n. 88. See also ADAMS (1982) 62 and 203-204 who nicely observes that res is used either for the sexual intercourse or for the male and female sexual organs.

43 See also RICHLIN (1992) 26-27.

44 RICHLIN (1992) 57.


46 OLD s.v. res 10.

47 OLD s.v. res 9.

48 CAT. 10,33: insula, 12,4: salsum, 13,5: et uino et sale et omnibus cachinnis, 14,16: salse, 16,7: sc. versus] habent salem et leporem, 37,6: insulsi, and 86,4: mica salis. For the neoteric catchwords sal / salsus see e.g. MICHALOPOULOS (2014) 140 n. 117 with further bibliography.

49 OLD s.v. rudis 2. See also GOLDBERG (1992) 99.
collection\textsuperscript{50}, confirming in that way that \textit{non sum \ldots politus} is also concerned with poetic elaboration\textsuperscript{51}. Therefore, the \textit{insulsissima puella} is not only a “stupid” girl but also an “ineducated” girl who cannot understand the metaliteraly character of the priapic collection; instead, the uncultivated and uneducated god Priapus is familiar with metaleraly poetics, something which creates yet another emphatic incongruity that causes laugh and humour.

To sum up, \textit{CP} \textit{10} begins entertainingly with a girl who is laughing at the humble and wooden statue of Priapus (\textit{i.e.} superiority theory); after that, Priapus’ explanation further reinforces the humorous tone of those lines, since the phallic god seems to be familiar with fine art artists (Praxiteles, Scopas, Phidias), earlier literary tradition (Vergil’s \textit{Eclogues}), short catalogues with proper names (\textit{Praxiteles, Scopas, Phidiaca manu, vilicus}) and poetological meta-language. These features should characterise a cultivated and erudite literary character with great \textit{doctrina} and therefore are emphatically incongruous with the unsophisticated phallic god, generating in that way more laugh and humour (\textit{i.e.} incongruity theory). Finally, the poem comes to its end amusingly with a sexual joke (\textit{i.e.} superiority theory) which is also incongruously come from a female character (\textit{i.e.} incongruity theory), reinforcing further its humorous effect.

In conclusion, \textit{CP} \textit{10} constitutes an entertaining literary creation whose humour is not only based on the typical sexual humour which runs through the entire collection. Instead, it is also based on the superiority and incongruity theory, which are combined with the sexual humour in order to stress that Priapus is not only the funny \textit{hortorum custos}; but, he is also an erudite character whose \textit{doctrina} that is characteristically evident in \textit{CP} \textit{10} can cause further laugh and humour. This can in turn explain also why the verb \textit{ridere} is found only here in the entire collection, thereby reflecting the \textit{doctrina} which characterises the \textit{Corpus Priapeorum}.

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. \textit{CP} \textit{1,1}: \textit{carminis incompti lusus lecture procaces}, and \textit{2,3}: \textit{scripsi non nimium laboriose} where the author of the collection informs the reader that his poetry is \textit{carminis incompti} and that his poems has been composed \textit{non nimium laboriose}.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. MICHALOPOULOS (2014) 141 with n. 124 who nicely observes that these references can also recall \textit{Cat. 1,1-2}: \textit{Cui dono lepidum novum labellum / arido modo pumice expolitum?}, where \textit{arida modo pumice expolitum?} refers both to actual and literary polishing.
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