In 1489, Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466–1536) sent a copy of the comedies of Terence to one of his friends. In the accompanying letter, he explained why he gifted this ancient text to his (now unknown) acquaintance. He praised the Roman playwright for his pure, polished, and elegant style, his wit and charm, and advised his friend to learn Terence’s work by heart. To his recommendation Erasmus added a warning: his friend should ignore the ‘ignorant and malevolent dwarfs’ who argued that it was sinful for a Christian to study the work of this pagan writer because ‘these plays contain nothing but lechery and immoral love-affairs between young people, which cannot but corrupt the reader’s mind.’ He rebuked this denunciation by pointing out that those ‘fools and goats’ did not understand that ‘this kind of literature is entirely suitable – nay, was invented – for the purpose of showing up men’s vices. For what are comedies but the artful slave, the love-crazed youth, the suave and wanton harlot, the cross-grained, peevish, avaricious old man? These characters are depicted for us in plays, just as in a painting, so that we may first see what is seemly or unseemly in human behaviour and then distribute affection or rebuke accordingly.’

His contemporary Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) did not share Erasmus’ appreciation of Terence’s comedies. In his book on education, published in 1531, Vives discussed the problems presented by the writings of Ovid, Catullus, Martial, and other classical poets. He argued that ‘obscene passages should be wholly cut out from the text, as though they were dead, and would infect whatever they touched. Does the human race, forsooth, suffer an irreparable loss, if a man cast the noxious part out of an unclean poet, and if he does to a book, what he would not hesitate to do to his own body, if necessary?’


of the entire works of certain ancient poets, who were ‘slaves to evil passions and tainted with vice’, would be an even better solution, Vives concluded, not only for the benefit of young readers but also for the community as a whole: ‘So many writings of so many philosophers and holy writers have been lost, would it then be a crime if Tibullus or the Ars Amandi of Ovid perished? Whoever will undertake this expurgation will do a great service not only to his contemporaries and to posterity, but also to poets and poetry itself.’

The vulgar terms, obscene descriptions, and sexual poems that frequently featured in the works of ancient writers were often removed, altered, or, at the very least, firmly rejected by early modern humanists. These scholars engaged in what might be termed the expurgation of the classics: they deliberately got rid of words, passages, or whole works because of their pagan and/or sexual nature. How to use or edit the classics to fit into a Christian framework was the subject of ongoing debate in this period, with some arguing that scholars should only be inspired by classical thinkers, relying on their own Christian views to guide the content and style of their writings, while others promoted complete imitation of classical models, despite their pagan character. Regardless of their general perspective on how to approach the ideas and writings produced in the pagan past however, the majority of early modern humanists chose to excise or alter obscene passages in their editions, translations, and commentaries of classical writings. Scholars like Marc-Antoine Muret (1526–1585), Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), and Tanaquil Faber (1615–1672) ignored, toned down, or excused the parts of Greek and Roman texts that explicitly discussed sex, even when encountered in the works of well-respected writers.


4 Expurgation is defined here as the act of deliberately removing words, passages, or works because of their irrereligious or sexual content, style, or vocabulary. The term has been adopted from Expurgating the Classics: editing out in Greek and Latin, eds. Stephen J. Harrison and Christopher Stray (London, 2012). For more on the debate on how to edit the classics, see Charles Fantazzi, ‘Imitation, emulation, Ciceronianism, anti-Ciceronianism’, in Brill’s encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin world, eds. Philip Ford, Jan Bloemendal, and Charles Fantazzi (Leiden, 2014), 144–56; Laurel Carrington, ‘Impiety compounded: Scaliger’s double-edged critique of Erasmus’, in Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook 22 (2002), 57–67; Ciceronian controversies, ed. Joann Dellaneva, trans. Brian Duvick (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

5 For more on early modern expurgation, see Expurgating the Classics, eds. Harrison and Stray; Karen E. Hollewand, The Banishment of Beverland. Sex, Sin, and Scholarship in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic (Leiden, 2019), 124–44.
That early modern humanists were often troubled by the irreligious or explicitly sexual passages that featured in the works of certain ancient authors has not gone unnoticed. In studies on humanist scholarship, Renaissance erotica, and the reception of ancient ideas in the (early) modern period historians have commented on the different approaches to the sexual side of the classics.\(^6\) In publications on the reception of classical writers known for the obscene features of their works in particular the expurgation performed by teachers, translators, and editors, when dealing with for example Catullus, Martial, Ovid, Horace, Lucretius, or Virgil, has been a topic of discussion.\(^7\) However, only a handful of scholars have looked at the expurgation of obscenities from a broader point of view, outlining and connecting the methods and motivations adopted by various scholars at different times and places when confronted with the inappropriate elements of classical works. Paula Findlen's paper in Lynn Hunt's groundbreaking *The Invention of Pornography* highlighted the connection between humanism, politics, and pornography in Renaissance Italy and the topic is also touched upon in the landmark collection of papers on the expurgation of the classics edited by Stephen Harrison and Christopher Stray.\(^8\) Yet there are still many questions to be answered regarding the practice of expurgation in early modern Europe, especially when it concerns the removal of the vulgar, erotic, and pornographic features of ancient texts.

This paper aims to make contribution to the historiography of humanist scholarship by offering, first, a general outline of the early modern expurgation of the sexual; and second, by focusing on three extraordinary men who authored obscene works: Hadriaan Beverland (1650–1716), Antonio Vignali (1501–1559), and Antonio Beccadelli (1394–1471). In my book on the banishment of Beverland, I have argued that one of the main reasons why this young scholar was exiled from the relatively tolerant Dutch Republic in 1679 was his

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fascination with all things sexual. In his studies Beverland concentrated on the ancient past so as to demonstrate the universal power of lust in human nature; at the same time, he criticized the gross discrepancy between the official restriction of sex to marriage and the actual sexual behaviour of men and women in his contemporary society. His solution to the problem of lust was as simple as it was radical in the late seventeenth century: he advocated sexual liberty for the educated men of the higher ranks of society, who could responsibly enjoy the unavoidable sin. It is clear that Beverland stood out amongst his humanist colleagues, who favoured expurgation or, at the very least, did not approve of his daring studies. Nonetheless, I want to show here that while Beverland might have been a unique case, he was not the only humanist who adored the sexual side of the classics. Other learned men, such as Antonio Beccadelli, Giovanni Della Casa (1503–56), Niccolò Franco (1515–70), Ferrante Pallavicino (1615–44), Antonio Rocco (1586–1653), and Antonio Vignali were similarly inspired by the pagan past to discuss lust, sexual acts, and the outlook on all matters obscene in their own societies. While the texts they composed and the historical contexts which provoked them to write about sex varied greatly, this paper argues that, to better understand the expurgation of, as well as the singular focus on, the sexual side of the classics, it is valuable to proceed comparatively.

The reason for this is partly historiographical. The different approaches of early modern scholars to sex in the classics, from the expurgation of the sexual epigrams of Martial in a vernacular translation to the promotion of the sexual act with the support of classical references in a pornographic dialogue, have primarily been studied in isolation. These individual studies have revealed however that while early modern scholars dealt with this sensitive subject in different ways, their aims and approaches were often similar. By adopting a broader view, the alignment of these motives and methods towards sex in the classics can be explored further. Taking a step back allows us to recognize that there are interesting parallels between the perspectives of early modern classical scholars with regards to their subject, audience, and contemporary society.

The general expurgation of ancient texts will be contrasted here with the singular focus on sex in the publications of three scholars: Beverland, Vignali, and Beccadelli. Publishing their poetry, dialogues, and scientific treatises in Italy and the Dutch Republic in the early fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and late-seventeenth centuries, while residing at court, presiding over a newly founded literary academy, and studying at a renowned university, the dissimilarities

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between these learned men may seem to rule out a meaningful comparison. Yet their texts point to a familiar pattern, showing that when exposing the sexual side of the classical world, humanist scholars were inspired by the same aims and adopted similar approaches over a long period of time. Discussing the three men’s works side by side brings to light the striking similarities in the content and audience of their texts. All three authors were determined to expose the truth about the universal power of sexual lust and to challenge the ‘hypocrites’ who denied that sex dominated human nature. In all three cases, their intended audience was small: they were writing not for society at large but their own communities, which consisted exclusively of scholarly and elite men. In addition, they all got into great trouble after the publication of their sexual studies: their writings became well known far beyond the boundaries of their learned circles and they paid a high price for the fame of their obscene works. Comparing the exceptional texts composed by Vignali, Beverland, and Beccadelli will therefore not only shed a new light on early modern approaches to classical works, but will also provide us with a better understanding of normative attitudes to sex and obscenities outside the learned world in this period.

1 The Expurgation of the Classics

In early modern Europe sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage were prohibited on the basis of Christian doctrine. While not a small number of men and women did engage in premarital relations, adulterous affairs, or prostitution, the regulations of Protestant and Catholic churches and the laws of early modern states strictly forbade these sinful acts and held that transgressors should be prosecuted and punished. In line with the prohibition of all sexual acts that were extramarital and not directly aimed at procreation, obscene writings were often censured by secular and religious authorities.10 Included were the works of Roman and Greek authors, which were considered suspicious due to the liberal attitude to sex that generally characterized

ancient cultures and that had resulted in a great number of explicit texts. At the Council of Trent, for example, it was decided that ‘books which professedly treat of, relate, or teach lascivious or wanton subjects, since regard must be had not only of faith, but of morals also, which are wont readily to be corrupted by the reading of such books, are absolutely prohibited’. The Council made an exception for certain classical works, which could be permitted ‘by reason of the elegance and propriety of their language’, yet these texts needed to be adapted before they could be presented to a Christian audience.\footnote{For the guidelines of the Council of Trent, established in Session xxv ‘On the Index of Books, and the Catechism, Breviary, and Missal’ and in the ‘Ten Rules Concerning Prohibited Books Drawn Up By The Fathers Chosen By The Council Of Trent And Approved By Pope Pius’, see \textit{Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent}, ed. and transl. Theodore Alois Buckley (London, 1851) 253–4, 284–9, qu. 286.}

This raises the question how early modern scholars dealt with the obscene elements of the classical texts they studied, in accordance with the guidelines set by secular and religious authorities as well as their own moral compasses. The countless editions, commentaries, and translations of ancient writings published in the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries show that a large number of humanists, if not the majority, agreed that pagan obscenities should be adapted or avoided and thus opted for expurgation. Obscenity was of course not the only pagan characteristic of the classics: impious ideas on religion, the cosmos, and human nature needed to be dealt with as well. These features were likewise disregarded or reinterpreted by translators, editors, and commentators to appropriate the texts for the early modern Christian context.\footnote{Stephen J. Harrison and Christopher Stray, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Expurgating the Classics}, eds. Harrison and Stray, 1–8; Étienne Wolff, ‘La Censure’, in \textit{La collection Ad usum Delphini: l’Antiquité au miroir du Grand Siècle}, ed. Catherine Volpilhac-Auger (Grenoble, 2000), 163–71; Gaisser, \textit{Catullus}, 77, 109–45, 156–92, 273; René Veenman, ‘Martialis en het ‘Bataafse oor’, in \textit{Voortgang} 15 (1995), 7–37.}

\textit{Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura}, for example, was usually defined as dangerous since it presented irreligious views on the mortality of the soul, the materiality of the universe, and the intervention of the divine in human dealings.\footnote{For more on Lucretius, see: Philip R. Hardie, \textit{Lucretian receptions: history, the sublime, knowledge} (Cambridge, 2009); Brown, \textit{Return}.} The work was therefore often expurgated: classical scholar Tanaquil Faber, for example, stated in the preface of his edition of Lucretius published in 1675 that there were many things in the work which he ‘could not safely express’.\footnote{Tanaquil Faber, \textit{Titi Lucretii Cari. De rerum natura libri sex} (Cambridge, 1675), Ad Lectorem, v, General Comment 472.}

In addition to this, in his commentary Faber avoided the most obscene part of Lucretius’ work, the end of Chapter IV, and explained his choice in an
accompanying note: ‘if I have been a little briefer in expounding these matters I did so prudently and knowingly, since I realised that the whole business [of sex] is so constituted that no one has required a commentator to understand it.’

Faber did not need to explain these lines of the text since his readers would have no trouble understanding this part, as, apparently, sex had not changed. This naturalistic, transhistorical dimension made the expurgation of obscene texts of particular interest when discussing the general editing of the classics by early modern scholars. The rejection of the religious flaws of ancient texts created no real problems for expurgators: their audience was usually well aware of the pagan character of the writings in question and did not really need to be convinced of the superiority of the Christian faith. While Christian morality was often seen as an impediment to the study of the classics, many scholars argued that by editing these works the ideas of pagan writers could be made applicable and useful. Platonism, which became popular among early modern scholars in its Christianized Neo-Platonic form, is a prime example. Yet sex was different: the same urges, fantasies, and pleasures that had captured the minds of pagan writers also appealed to readers in early modern times. When it came to purely religious features it was possible to frame the classical authors as proto-Christians who had simply not yet been exposed to the Gospel, or their errors could be used to strengthen Christian ideas. Obscene fragments posed a different kind of threat and scholars therefore often opted for a different approach. They removed these parts of a work, altered the original text, or distanced themselves from the passage in question and refrained from discussing the sexual nature of human beings and the characterization of sex as a sin in the Christian religion altogether.

2 Motives and Methods

Taking the Christian framework as their starting point, early modern scholars who studied Greek and Roman material often did not feel the need to explain

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why they excised or altered sexual passages in their editions, translations, and commentaries. When they did state their motives for expurgation, those generally fell into three categories. First, some humanist scholars argued that certain classical writers were falsely accused of composing obscene texts, claiming that the supposed sexual passages misrepresented the writer to whom they were attributed. They stated, often in the preliminary paratexts of their publications, that previous editors of a manuscript had misunderstood the meaning of a passage and had therefore wrongly pointed out an obscene connotation. Alternatively, these scholars argued that certain predecessors had focused on texts which were uncharacteristic of an ancient writer's views and style, for instance because he had written them during his youth or in imitation of others. They legitimised their expurgation of the text by pointing out that the obscenities revealed in preceding editions of a work were based on a misunderstanding of the original text and context. These editors thus 'saved' the author in question from false accusations of perversity, underlined the true significance of the text in question, and upheld or restored the reputation of the writer and the work.17

Exemplary of this first category are the views of Italian humanist Pierio Valeriano Bolzani (1477–1558), who argued in his lectures on Catullus, given at the University of Rome in the early 1520s, that the writings of this Roman poet were anything but indecent. The poems of Catullus are infamous for their expressions of love and erotic feelings, yet Valeriano argued that Catullus was a model of literary and moral excellence. Catullus set 'a limit to pleasure, since emerging from the whirling depths of the passions at times he pulls himself together and prudently embraces fortitude, justice, and temperance…'.18 The poet also ‘chastises vice, criticizes evil ways, and attempts to alter mankind from imitating the wicked men he chastises in his poetry.’19 Commenting on Catullus’ poems 2 and 3 Valeriano refuted any obscene interpretation. These

17 For more on this subject see Gaisser, Catullus, 156–92, 273; Gail Trimble, ‘Catullus and ‘comment in English’: the tradition of the expurgated commentary before Fordyce’, in Expurgating the Classics, eds. Harrison and Stray, 143–62; James Morwood, ‘“From out the schoolboy’s vision”: expurgation and the young readers’, in Expurgating the Classics, eds. Harrison and Stray, 163–74.
18 Pierio Valeriano Bolzani, Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5215, fols 22r–23r: ‘quum modum voluptatibus statuit, quum e pertubationum voraginis emergens sese interdum colligit et fortitudinem, iustitiam, et temperantiam prudenter ampliexatur …’. For more on Valeriano and Catullus, see Gaisser, Catullus, 117, 134–6.
19 Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5215, fol. 18r: ‘Prodest dum vitia carpit, malos mores exsecratur, et mortales omnes a sceleratorum quos carminibus proscindit imitatione conatur avertere.’
two famous poems about Catullus’ girl and her sparrow had often been the topic of discussion, with scholars arguing that the sparrow in the poem indicated Catullus’ penis. Valeriano characterized this connotation as repellent, unnecessary, and impossible. For example, he pointed out that the death of the sparrow in poem 3 could not have referred to Catullus’ impotence since he was still a young man when he wrote these poems. Valeriano was not the only commentator on Catullus who discarded the obscenity of this Roman poet based on the perception of Catullus’ virtuous nature. Marc Antoine Muret, who published his edition of Catullus in 1554, stated in relation to poem 28, in which the sexual mistreatment of the poet by a certain Memmius is described, that Catullus did not speak about his own person in this verse but was merely imitating the voice of someone else. Catullus, who was a member of a good family and a man of decent character, would not have endured the obscenities described in the poem, Muret argued, and if he had, he would not have been so stupid as to record the events in his own verses.

The second and most important reason for the expurgation of classical writings from all things obscene was the adaptation of a pagan text to a Christian framework. With no grounds to deny the sexual nature of a text, many humanists agreed that profoundly explicit passages needed to be altered before they could be read by a chaste audience. Classical writers had lived in a pagan world, without God, the Bible, or Christian doctrine, and had therefore approached sexuality from a very different moral point of view. In order for their writings to be morally right, useful, and enjoyable to Christian readers, obscene words and sexual verses needed to be changed. A well-known example of this Christianization of classical texts is Erasmus’ reinterpretation of Virgil’s second Eclogue in the early sixteenth century. The text describes the love of shepherd Corydon for the boy Alexis, but as Erasmus was of the opinion that this description of homosexual passion could corrupt young readers, he argued that it was necessary to alter the content of the story to be fitting and useful in a Christian context. If teachers would explain to their students that the poem did not connote anything obscene and instead would argue that the great power of friendship between two men was the subject of the poem, the text would not provide a threat to the good virtues of the adolescent readers.

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20 For a good overview of debates on Catullus, his girl, and his sparrow, see Gaisser, *Catullus*, 305–42.
21 Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5215, fols 45r–46r.
By removing an imperfection from an otherwise perfect source, as Anthony Grafton has put it, Erasmus consciously altered the original meaning of the text.\(^{24}\)

The third reason for expurgation was a personal dislike for the obscenity of classical texts. Some scholars seemed to have only excised the obscenities of the classical writer of their choice to avoid prosecution and censorship or to please a particular patron, yet others censored their works with great gusto, underlining their strong aversion for the perversities of the ancient world. In his edition of Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius published in 1577, Joseph Justus Scaliger vehemently rejected the obscenities he encountered in the works of these three poets.\(^{25}\) He explained that he had skipped those passages which ‘chaste ears cannot endure. For it is neither for me to touch them nor anyone else who has any modicum of chastity.’\(^{26}\) His expurgation of the manuscript seems to have been primarily motivated by his personal distaste for explicit texts: he omitted whole poems, changed obscene words, and disputed the sexual connotation of certain passages. In the *Castigationes*, added to his edition, Scaliger shared his wish that editing these classical texts had not been necessary at all: if only ‘the ancients themselves had taken some account of chastity and not handed themselves down to mankind in so many disgraceful writings.’\(^{27}\)

Similar to the varied motivations for the expurgation of the classics, the methods of expurgation differed. Deselection was a first approach: scholars removed words, passages, and even whole sections of a text in their editions. This most drastic method completely ignored the presence of obscenities in the original manuscript(s) and presented the reader with a chaste and Christian edition. When editing the classics, scholars could not avoid selecting certain writers, manuscripts or texts, but in the case of the expurgation of the obscene they made a deliberate choice to avoid, ignore, or hide sexual passages that were part of the chosen writings. In the previously discussed commentaries of Catullus by Valeriano and Scaliger, words, verses, and sometimes

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whole fragments of the text were removed. Joseph de Jouvancy (1643–1719), who published an edition of the satires of Juvenal in 1685, also expurgated his work in this fashion. He made sure that there was no confusion regarding his approach: the title of his edition stated that he had ‘expurgated all obscenities’. For example, true to the caption, he cut out the majority of Satire 1.2 without any explanation, offering his reader only the first 27 lines of the text and leaving out the more explicit verses. Likewise Louis Desprez (fl. 1675–91), in the preliminary text of his Ad usum Delphini edition of Juvenal and Persius published in 1684, stressed that: ‘On the advice of a heavenly and divine oracle, and on the instruction and order of the wise men whom I have named by deference, we have separated what was precious from what was base, and expunged the obscenities.’

The second method that is prevalent in expurgated editions is alteration. In the preface of his 1660 translation of the satires of Juvenal, Robert Stapylton (c.1605–69) stated that ‘though the greatest scholars have made use of Juvenal’s authority... there [also] sprung up a Sect of formall Stoicks, that for a few wanton words (all they could make sense of) cast Juvenal out of their hands...’. Although Stapylton argued against the ‘Stoic’ denunciation of the Roman writer, he did distance himself from certain parts of Juvenal’s satires and carefully altered the obscene language of the original text. ‘I have added language so well-qualified, that (I am confident) the third sort of accusers will never inform against this Juvenal for Immodesty. And if, when I took off his obscenity, I could have set on the full perfections of his pen, my industry had been crowned to my wish.’ In an edition of Horace’s Satires, published by the aforementioned Desprez as part of the Ad usum Delphini series in 1691, sexual words

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28 For editions of the Ad Usum Delphini in which parts of the texts were expurgated, see e.g. those of Martial (Vincent Collesson, M. Valerii Martialis epigrammatum libros xv (Paris, 1680)), Lucretius (Michel Dufay, T. Lucretii Cari De rerum natura libri sex (Paris, 1680)), and Horace (Louis Desprez, Quinti Horatii Flacci Opera (Paris, 1691)). See also Wolff, ‘La Censure’, 163–71.

29 Joseph de Jouvancy, D. Junii Juvenalis Satyrae, omni obscoenitate expurgatae, cum annotationibus (Turin, 1685), 253–7. The Latin text of Horace’s Satire 1.2 is given up to the words nil medium est (lines 28–134).


were at times replaced by an asterisk. In Satire 1.2, in which Horace decried a woman with ‘depugis, nasuta, brevi latere ac pede longo est’, Desprez only noted her long nose, short waist and long feet, not her small behind.\footnote{Louis Desprez, \textit{Quinti Horatii Flacci Opera} (Paris, 1691), 526. See also Wolff, ‘La Censure’, 165.}

Rejection was the third method of expurgation: scholars published, commented on, or translated the text in its entirety but rejected its sexually explicit contents in the accompanying texts. A good example can be found in the preface of Achilles Statius’ (1524–81) edition of Catullus, printed in 1566. Since he was the secretary to the Pope, Statius felt he was required to justify his focus on Catullus. In his preface he strongly refuted the obscenity found in the poems, excused his edition by pointing out that Saint Jerome had approved of the writings of Catullus, and argued that he had only concentrated on this ancient model to support his studies of the style and metre of biblical poems and psalms.\footnote{For more on Statius see Gaisser, \textit{Catullus}, 169–77.} In 1615 English scholar Thomas Farnaby (c.1575–1647) published a complete translation of Martial’s epigrams from Latin to English, yet felt the need to point out to his readers that even though he did not expurgate his text, he had not immersed himself in, nor extensively commented upon, the sexual content of certain poems, since ‘the interpreter… must not add oil to the flames’.\footnote{Thomas Farnaby, \textit{Val. Martialis Epigrammatωn libri} (London, 1615), Ad lectores, sig. A4: ‘Interpretam certe: neque oleum flamae addere’.}

Classical scholar Denis Lambin (1520–72) would have agreed with him. In his commentary on Lucretius’ \textit{De Rerum Natura} he did not refrain from explaining the ideas of this pagan philosopher to his readers, yet he made sure to distance himself from his subject. In the preface of the work he stated that the \textit{De Rerum Natura} simply repeated Epicurus’ impious philosophy and, in the same way, he was merely a transmitter of Lucretius’ views.\footnote{Denis Lambin, \textit{Titi Lucretii Cari De rerum natura libri sex} (Paris, 1563), ‘Address to Charles IX’, A3’. See also, Butterfield, ‘\textit{Contempta relinquas}’, 99–104.}

3 \hspace{5pt} Vignali, Beccadelli, and Beverland

The expurgation of the classics from all obscenities was incorporated in early modern editions of ancient texts in a wide variety of ways. The prominence of sex in ancient literature was a public secret, as commonly known as it was hidden by most humanists. Yet the obscene features of Greek and Roman culture were not ignored across the board. Classical writings inspired the creators of obscene prints, paintings, and pornography, in which one encounters ancient
vocabulary and concepts, classical myths and characters. For example, in the erotic writings of Pietro Aretino (1492–1556) and Nicolas Chorier (1612–1692) there are many direct references and indirect allusions to classical customs and pagan writings. Throughout the early modern period humanist scholars were at times attacked because of their alleged adoration of explicit classical texts. It is possible that their expurgation of these writings was encouraged by the commonplace of the depraved humanist scholar, who hid his debauched desires behind the disguise of learning. However, a small group of humanists actually fit this description to a tee, since they concentrated on sex in the classics in particular. Antonio Beccadelli, Antonio Vignali, and Hadriaan Beverland are three examples of classical scholars who did not shy away from the topic but dealt with the prominence of sex in ancient culture and classical literature, as well as in their own contemporary societies, head on.

Antonio Beccadelli, also known as ‘Il Parmonita’, was born in Palermo. After studying and practicing law, he dedicated his life to classical literature and poetry, serving as a poet and scholar at the courts of different Italian rulers. Beccadelli composed his infamous *Hermaphroditus* in 1425–6. In direct imitation of the *Priapeia*, the work consists of seventy short poems that combine classical references with contemporary observations, written to entertain, ridicule, and excite its audience. The verses featured sodomy and prostitution, described male-female, male-male, and female-female sexual acts, and discussed the insatiable lust of women.

Jacopo Antonio Pietro Vignali di Buonaggionti was born in Siena. We know little about his personal life, except that he was one of the founders of the *Accademia degli Intronati*, the Academy of the Stunned or the Dunderheads, established in Siena in 1525, one of the oldest literary academies in Italy. Vignali criticised classical scholarship as well as present-day politics in his

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38 As well as the works in n. 36 above, see Daniella Coppini, ‘The comic and the obscene in the Latin epigrams of the early fifteenth century’, in *The Neo-Latin epigram: a learned and witty genre*, eds. Susanna de Beer, Karel A.E. Enenkel, David Rijser (Leuven, 2009), 83–102.

satirical *La Cazzaria* (*The Book of the Prick*), published in 1531. In this obscene dialogue, full of allusions to ancient works and ideas, two classical scholars discuss local government, humanist culture, and libertinism. Arsiccio, based on Vignali himself, tries to persuade his friend Sodo, modelled after Vignali’s friend Marcantonio Piccolomini, to study sex: not only was it a natural and necessary part of human nature, but women also preferred to share their bed with an informed scholar. The conversation continued along these lines, with Arsiccio teaching Sodo all about the act and the sexual body, but also touching on other topics. A large part of the dialogue is for example devoted to a story that touches on a political conflict between Big Cocks and Little Cocks, Ugly Cunts and Beautiful Cunts, Assholes and Balls: an allegory of Sienese politics at the time that discussed government, rebellion, and civil war in a ridiculous manner yet with a serious undertone.\[^{40}\]

Hadriaan Beverland was born in the Dutch Republic. He developed his humanist erudition as well as his obsession with sex at the universities of Franeker, Leiden, Utrecht, and Oxford. In 1679 he published his *De Peccato Originali* in which he defined sexual lust as the original sin. He argued that Adam and Eve had had sexual relations in the Garden of Eden and that due to the Fall, human nature became dominated by sexual lust. In *De Stolatae Virginitatis iure*, also published in 1679, he concentrated on the lust of women, advising his male readers on how to deal with the sexual urges of their daughters, wives, and mistresses. Both of these works were only previews of the larger thesis he was completing at the time: in his three-volume ‘*De Prostibulis Veterum*’ he planned to discuss his sexual argument in much greater detail.\[^{41}\]

The vast differences between these men are immediately apparent. First, their obscene writings were not printed years or decades but rather centuries apart: Beccadelli’s *Hermaphroditus* was printed in 1425, Vignali’s *La Cazzaria* was published in 1531 (after first circulating in manuscript), and the first and second editions of Beverland’s *De Peccato* came out in 1679. Thus, we can hardly compare the contexts of creation and the intellectual settings of the scholarship of these three men. When composing the *Hermaphroditus*, Beccadelli was a student of law and the classics in different Italian cities and his obscene


\[^{41}\] See Hadriaan Beverland, *De Peccato Originali* (Leiden, 1679); idem, *De Stolatae Virginitatis iure* (Leiden, 1679); idem, ‘De Prostibulis Veterum’, Library of the University of Leiden, BPL 204; Hollewand, *Banishment*, 20–42, 228–40.
poems can often be directly connected to his life at the time: he praised his friends, attacked his enemies, and, more generally, his familiarity with the different courts and academic life in Siena, Florence, and Bologna inspired him. And while the work is abundant with classical references, one can also discern clear traces of the influence of contemporary, comic-realistic Italian poetry in his lines.42

A different Italian context provoked Vignali to write his obscene and political dialogue in the 1520s: it was written for the learned men of his academy. As Moulton put it on the first page of his English translation, La Cazzaria was a ‘product of a hyper-intellectual, religiously sceptical, intensely masculine community’.43 In addition, the text is characterized by its connection to politics: it reflects on conflicts in Sienese politics and sketches the political instability at the time.44

Also Beverland’s De Peccato can be directly connected to his academic circle, yet the wider context of his work was, again, very different. Still a student at the University of Leiden at the time, the text is characterized by traditional sources, the classics and the Bible, but it also reflected on the contemporary scholarly and social setting. The intellectual context of the Dutch Republic was exceptional, as is also argued by Floris Verhaart’s contribution to this volume, and, as I have argued elsewhere, it inspired the study of the sexual, due to the relative freedom of publishing, the toleration of divergent ideas, and the advances in anatomical scholarship in the small state.45 The number of Dutch scholars choosing a sexual subject is conspicuous, from Reinier de Graaf (1641–1673), who published detailed studies of the male and female genitalia, to Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), who voiced his radical ideas on prostitution in philosophical treatises.46 In addition to the scholarly setting, the Dutch landscape was defined by urban societies that were, in turn, characterized by sexual freedom. Young men and women often engaged in premarital sex, pornographic novels became bestsellers, and prostitution was widespread.

44 Ibid., 6–12; Findlen, ‘Humanism’, 91–2.
especially in the second half of the seventeenth century. One can perceive a clear connection in Beverland’s writings to the relatively tolerant intellectual setting and the sexual liberty that characterized the Dutch Republic at this time.

A second significant difference between the writings of Beccadelli, Beverland, and Vignali was the type of work they published, and the genre they chose to express their views. One does not have to read beyond the first five pages of their texts or to discuss their styles in detail to note the dissimilarities. Vignali composed a Platonic dialogue in Italian, adopting a classical and humanist form but discussing contemporary figures and settings. Beverland published a scholarly treatise, written in difficult Latin and dominated by references to classical literature and the Bible, and presented his reader with a firm argument on sexual lust, original sin, and human nature. Beccadelli’s *Hermaphroditus* consists of seventy poems, written in Latin, that vary greatly in content and style: they are anecdotal, praise his friends, describe certain sexual acts, or consist of an epigraph.

4 The Dominance of Lust

Despite the significant differences between Beccadelli, Vignali, and Beverland and their publications, a meaningful comparison can be drawn between them and their writings: not only were these learned men experts in classical literature, but it is also the case that the three of them decided to apply their knowledge of ancient texts in works that were not primarily focused on the Greek and Roman past. Examining their use of the classics in relation to their singular focus on all things obscene, it becomes clear that Beverland, Beccadelli, and Vignali, and their *De Peccato, Hermaphroditus*, and *La Cazzaria*, are actually more similar than one might expect.

The first, and possibly most conspicuous, parallel in the writings of the three scholars is their portrayal of the importance, or even the dominance, of sexual lust in human nature. They used their knowledge of the classics, and filled their works with references to ancient myths, characters, writers, and texts, to demonstrate that sexual urges guided human behaviour in the past and the present. Regardless of the denial or rejection of this truth by Christian churches, secular leaders, or humanist scholars, sex ruled all. This insistence on

the overpowering influence of sexual feelings and the aim to expose the truth about the universal sexual nature of all persons are also common features of early modern pornographic writings. Yet the works of Beccadelli, Beverland, and Vignali stand out due to their learned point of view, their humanist character, and the continuous connection that exists in their texts between the classical past and the early modern present.

Pointing out both well-known and obscure sexual connotations in the Bible as well as classical literature, Beverland concentrated on human history in general, and the Greek and Roman past in particular, so as to display the universal power of sexual lust: ‘Nothing is therefore more ordinary among Greek and Latin authors, classical and vulgar, old and more recent, so that the rhetoricians of a later age – in fact even of modern times – do not disdain these statements in the highest tribunal’.48 From the naked depictions of emperors to the obscene works of poets, Beverland described the many sexual aspects of ancient and early Christian culture, concentrating on the obscene passages that his more responsible colleagues austerely tried to avoid. He stated in the dedication of his work on the lust of women that ‘no negligence of mine can any longer suffer the further belittling of a benefit, which tender years, so prone to obedience, have hidden from publication…’.49 Yet his approach to (ancient) sexuality also set him apart from the relatively small group of humanists who did not expurgate their editions of the classics. Beverland’s studies of sex and the obscene were bold, unapologetic, and developed in great detail: he did not distance himself from his subject matter but aimed to describe sex in all its shapes and forms. Societies, whether ancient or contemporary, pagan or Christian, should come to terms with the inevitable and dominant presence of sexual lust in human nature, he argued: ‘Since the real progeny of God and His true offspring could not remain chaste, then how could we miserable little people, conceived by the incentive of the flesh and stung by its intricate prickle, avoid so many Scyllas and Charybdes.’50

At the start of La Cazzaria, Arsiccio explained to his friend Sodo why he should start studying sex, since:

48 Hadriaan Beverland, De Peccato Originali (Leiden, 1679), 61: ‘Ita nihil tralatitius apud auctores Graecos & Latinos, classicos ac proletarios, veteres & recentiores, ita ut posterioris aevi dicta, etiamnum in sublimi tribunali non respuant Declamatores.’

49 Hadriaan Beverland, De Stolatae Virginitate Iure (Leiden, 1679 [1680]), Dedication to Ulrik Huber: ‘tandem beneficium, quod propalare dissimulat ad obedientiam prona teneri túdo, diutius detrectare negligentia non passa fuit...’

50 Beverland, De Peccato, 53–4: ‘Cum vera Dei progenies, sobolesque sincera non potuerit se castam servare, qui miselli nos homunciones, stimulo carnis concepti, & nodoso aculeo pisti, possimus tot Scyllas atque Carybdes effugere.’
besides law, you also profess knowledge of literature in the vernacular and in Latin, as well as philosophy – which is nothing other than the knowledge of natural things. Since the cock and cunt are both natural things, and fucking is the most natural thing in the world and necessary to our existence, it seems to me a great shame that you are ignorant of these things, especially since common, stupid people believe that students ought to know everything – no matter how trivial – whether it applies to their profession or not.\textsuperscript{51}

Like Beverland, Vignali emphasized that sex was an unavoidable and natural affair, an integral part of every society, something that should not be dismissed as sinful and dishonourable but should be openly discussed. ‘It may be shameful and disgraceful to start talking of indecent things like fucking and buggery and to fill your mouth with cocks, cunts, assholes, and such, but it still does not please me that if such things come up you don’t know how to discuss them.’ Arsiccio argued that ‘no matter how ugly and vulgar a thing is, it is more vulgar and ugly not to be knowledgeable about it.’\textsuperscript{52} Thus the main character of the book intended to devote all his studies to the sexual act in the future, since any scholar that wanted to understand the natural world should start by looking at the sexual body, reproduction, and carnal pleasure. In his argument on the importance of experience and observation in scholarship, turning against the power of age-old academic traditions and received opinions, Vignali similarly turned against the expurgation of the classics. He observed that the sexual act was not present ‘in the works of any ancient or modern authority, but nonetheless the cock, the cunt, and the asshole are things that are handled and used every day. It does not seem credible that anyone should be so foolish not to understand this for himself.’\textsuperscript{53} He even suggested that students should learn all about sex during their education, since learned men of the elite needed to be ready to ‘talk now of law, now of love, now of philosophy, now of buggery, now of fucking ...’\textsuperscript{54}

Beccadelli’s work likewise argued that the truth should be exposed. In his \textit{Hermaphroditus} he mixed allusions to and citations from classical sources with many contemporary references, not only to entertain his audience but also to make a point. He exposed the sexual foundation of classical scholarship and emphasized the inherent tension that plagued the humanist enterprise: the

\begin{thebibliography}{54}
\bibitem{52} Ibid., 75.
\bibitem{53} Ibid., 82.
\bibitem{54} Ibid., 81.
\end{thebibliography}
adoration of a pagan culture by Christian scholars, who risked their own morality and religion by studying the words and ideas of irreligious Greek and Roman authors. Beccadelli denounced contemporaries who ignored sex in their studies of the ancients. Addressing a friend, Oddo, who denounced his poems due to their obscenity, one of his verses stated: ‘What was fitting for the Marcuses, the Maruses, the Pedones, in short everyone, do you think is shameful for me? Let me make my mistakes in the company of these great poets and you believe what you like with the crown, Oddo.’ Beccadelli did not excuse his subject but invited readers to learn more about sex, using classical literature as a guide. This is part of the dedication of his book, the first verse of the *Hermaphroditus*:

I follow the example of the learned poets of old,  
who, it is clear, composed trifles  
and, it is evident, lived modest lives,  
even if their pages were full of obscene jokes.  
The lazy crowd fails to notice this, who have no care to look to the ancients  
but whose only care has been given to their belly.  
Their ignorance will pick at my trifles too:  
So be it – the learned will not reproach me.  
You read them, Cosimo, and don’t give a toss for the rude rabble.  
Follow with me the men who live forever.

When discussing the prominence of sexual lust in the classics, human nature, and their contemporary societies, Vignali, Beverland, and Beccadelli blamed the clergy in particular for attempting to hide, ignore, or reject this truth. In response to an attack on his *Hermaphroditus* by Franciscan and fellow-scholar Antonio da Rho (c.1398–c.1453), Beccadelli retorted by pointing out his opponent’s hypocrisy: ‘to return to you, most sacred priest, as rumour has it [you are] the one who recently circulated those foul and obscene verses against me, then how is it, I ask you, that you did not abstain from dirty words, you who are not a youth but of mature years, not a layman but a monk, not motivated by a spirit of playfulness but by malevolence?’ In his *La Cazzaria* Vignali disclosed his anti-clericalism on various occasions. Arsiccio hated clergymen with a

passion, since they pretended to be ignorant about sex. For example, he voiced his ideas on the dismissive stance of the Catholic Church when discussing sodomy, which was considered a sin of violence against God. Arsiccio denounced the clergy as hypocrites: in their all-male and supposedly chaste communities they knew all about sodomy, he argued, yet:

They want us to give up buggery, so that it may belong entirely to them, and make us take up again the cunts they have rejected and disdained. And they go on arguing that it is better to fuck your mother, your sisters, your nieces, and daughters – and fuck them in the most vicious way possible – as long as it is a cunt you are fucking and you are not buggering anyone. And they justify this by saying it is because when you fuck someone up the ass you waste human seed, and thus human generation may be diminished ... Stupid cows! They can't see that they themselves contradict it completely.58

Beverland blamed the clergy of the Dutch Reformed Church for founding and maintaining the deceitful attitude to sex that characterized his contemporary Dutch society. Even those clergymen who considered themselves part of the ‘community of the elect’, the most conservative members of the Dutch Reformed Church, were corrupted by lust, Beverland argued.59 ‘Even now traces of the corrupt flesh and of the first fall burgeon in the elect. For they are made of flesh and have members made of flesh and are to that extent also vexed by their titillation.60 He condemned the orthodox clergymen, whom he, like Beccadelli and Vignali, often referred to as

58 Vignali, La Cazzaria, trans. Moulton, 89.
59 Since the foundation of the Dutch Reformed Church in the second half of the sixteenth century debates about the nature of the church had divided the Dutch clergy, with some defining the Reformed Church as the ‘community of the elect’ and adopting strict doctrine and rigorous discipline, while others favored a more liberal and inclusive church. When Beverland published his De Peccato in 1679, the debate had flared up once again due to heated discussions between supporters and critics of the influential orthodox theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). See Andrew C. Fix, Fallen angels: Balthasar Bekker, spirit belief, and confessionalism in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic (Dordrecht, 1999), 16–22; W.J. van Asselt, Voetius (Kampen, 2007), 64–9; Cornelis Graafland, Van Calvijn tot Barth: oorsprong en ontwikkeling van de leer der verkiezing in het gereformeerd protestantisme (The Hague, 1987).
60 Beverland, De Peccato, 14–15: ‘Scintillae carnis corruptae primaque labis pullulant etiam cum in electis. sunt enim & σαρκικοὶ, habentque membra carnea adeoque eorum titilatione etiamque vexantur.’
hypocrites, for continuing to maintain that living a chaste life was actually possible.61

5 For the Learned

The second parallel between Beverland, Beccadelli, and Vignali can be found in the immediate context of the publication of their writings. Despite their emphasis on the universal power of sexual lust, they wrote their books for a particular audience: their own learned communities. While most pornographic publications in the early modern period could be characterized as popular and commercial, the works of Beccadelli, Vignali, and Beverland were written by and for the learned. As Paula Findlen described it: only men of wit, honour, and social prominence were thought capable of flirting with this type of dangerous subject without contributing to vice.62 Beccadelli’s disregard for the opinions of the common people is exhibited in the very first verse of his Hermaphroditus (quoted above). He dismissed the ‘lazy crowd’, who were ignorant and had no care for the ancients, and stated that he was certain that the learned would not reproach him.63 In a letter to his friend Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), he discussed his audience in a similar fashion:

[My book] has finally come into the hands of men of the greatest learning, who I am sure will by no means condemn its playfulness, especially since they know that many learned, serious, and venerable men, both Greek and our own Latins, have written such things ... there is a tradition that so many orators and men of the highest rank have enjoyed and practiced the cultivation of this type of literature that I swear I don’t know who hasn’t enjoyed and practiced it!64

Likewise, Vignali wrote La Cazzaria for private circulation in his own learned circle, describing events and characters that his close colleagues, members of the Accademia degli Intronati, should recognize immediately. La Cazzaria might have been obscene, crude, and ridiculous, but it was also sophisticated, witty, and intellectual. He commented satirically on contemporary politics,

61 For more on Beverland’s relationship with (Dutch) theologians, see Hollewand, Banishment, 68–79.
64 Beccadelli to Poggio, April 1426, in The Hermaphrodite, trans. Parker, 11.4–25.
turning against political authority and corruption, and painted a particular portrait of humanist culture, with classical scholars, obsessed with sexual lust, filling their libraries with sexual writings. Vignali had actually never intended for the work to be published and his text was characterized by inside jokes, nicknames, and sexual connotations that could only be understood by his learned friends.  

Beverland also published his studies to present his views on sex and sin to the educated men of the elite who could engage in a truthful discussion about sexuality. For possible other readers of his work, he obscured his argument under a thick blanket of complex Latin and vague references. As he stated himself: ‘I have decided to provide neither light for the blind, nor speech to the deaf or wisdom to the stupid. It only serves my purpose to please rare and civilised ears and be approved by them.’ Uncultured readers of his work might object to his views on sex, sin, and liberty but even if they would stir up a fuss, he was determined not to discuss his ideas with these inferior men: ‘And since a drunk man tends to recover through sleep, then why would not I endure this rage and insane madness with a tranquil mind, since I hardly tend to be hurt by speech full of abuse and I listen to the barking of little puppies untroubled.’

Despite their firm statements on their intended audience, the obscene writings of Vignali, Beverland, and Beccadelli quickly became infamous. A couple of years after its publication Beccadelli’s work was publicly burned, Vignali’s dialogue was well-known in and outside Italy by the late sixteenth century, and when Beverland was on trial, a Dutch summary of his work was printed. The authors at first seem, or at least feign to be, surprised by the notoriety of their writings and quickly point out, first of all, that they did not mean for this to happen: they did not write for the unlearned and uneducated. Secondly, they stressed that they did not write or print their works for financial gain. In a letter to his friend and fellow humanist Jacobus Gronovius, written just after the publication of his *De Peccato* but before his arrest, Beverland stated that: ‘The young printers wish this (book) to be forbidden, so that their profit

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66 Beverland, *De Peccato*, 155: ‘verum nec lumen coeco, nec sermonem surdo nec sapientiam bruto propinare constitui. Me tantum raris & quidem Atticis juvat auribus placere & probari.’
67 Ibid., 162: ‘Et cum homo ebriatus somno sanari soleat, nonne rabiem & phreniticum furorem aequo tollerem animo, cum maledicta oratione vulnerari vix soleam, latratusque minutorum catellorum securus exaudiam.’
might increase. “It is praised, if first it wrecks a ship.” I hate people who are only focused on profit.”⁶⁹ After his arrest, he became even more frustrated and stated in a letter to his friend Jacob de Goyer (1651–1689), that ‘the stupid herd believes in investing their strength not in their erudition but in their wealth. I resent how often I see that the learned beg for money and pieces of silver like beasts ... I do not doubt that if all honourable men became acquainted with supporting themselves with bread and polenta instead of the insult of wealth (like Dodwell in England), adorned with the scanty persistence of frugality, they would actually be able to debate with the gods themselves.’⁷⁰ Also Vignali expressed a clear distaste for scholarship driven by gain, stating in his La Cazzaria: ‘If anyone devotes himself to study because he needs to earn his bread, you know he will never achieve anything worthwhile because studying should be a delight and not a necessity...’.⁷¹

6 Exile and Apology

A third similarity between the three men concerns the aftermath of the publication of their studies: their obscene writings got them into great trouble. This is true for Beccadelli and Beverland, yet harder to determine with certainty in the case of Vignali. Not long after the publication of his book Vignali left Siena. Some scholars have argued that his departure was primarily connected to the changing political situation in the city, which was occupied by the Imperial troops of Charles V (1500–1558) in the mid-1530s.⁷² Other historians

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⁶⁹ Hadriaan Beverland to Jacobus Gronovius, 1 June 1679, Epistolae Tullianae Letter 3: ‘Optant τυπογράφων παιδες, ut eorum gliceret lucrum, illum interdictum iri. Si quid naufragio dedit, probatur. Syrtis, si quid naufragio dedit, probatur. Odi lucrpetas.’ The quotation in this letter was adopted from Petronius’ Satyricon (93). The Epistolae Tullianae collection consists of letters sent by Beverland to different friends between 1679 and 1685. It is preserved in the Library of the University of Leiden, bpl 204. Henceforth this collection will be referred to as ET. For more on the ET collection, see R. de Smet, ‘Epistolae Tullianae. Brieven van Hadriaan Beverland’, in De Gulden Passer, 64, 65, 68 (1986, 1987, 1990), 83–124, 70–101, 139–67.

⁷⁰ Hadriaan Beverland to Jacob de Goyer, November 1679, ET 21: ‘Quae assentatio effecit ut bruta illa Armenta putaverint virtutem non in eruditione sed in divitiis consistere. Indignor quoties video doctissimos a bestiis το χρυσιον και τ’ἀργύριον mendicare ... Certe si didicissent viri boni pane et polenta contra fortunae insultus se tueri (ut in Anglia Dodwellus) iam patientia parcae frugalitatis ornati, ipsis etiam diis controversiam facere potuissent.’


have concluded that Vignali did not flee for political reasons but went into exile due to the notoriety of his *La Cazzaria*.\(^{73}\) It is unclear if the publication of his obscene dialogue determined his life and career. All that we know is that Vignali worked as a secretary at different courts in Italy, Spain, France, and Germany until his death and that the small number of writings he published after his *La Cazzaria* were quite conventional.\(^{74}\)

In the case of Beccadelli it is clear that he soon started to regret printing his poems. In a letter to Archbishop Bartholomeo della Capra (1365–1433), written only a year after the publication of the poems, he confessed that it was ‘an indecent book to be sure’ but hurried to add that it contained ‘the sort of indecency in which the greatest orators, the most holy poets, the most serious philosophers, men of self-restraint, and indeed Christians have indulged themselves.’\(^{75}\) After initial success and praise, his work was increasingly attacked for its sexual nature: by the late 1420s the book itself and effigies of Beccadelli were burned in various Italian cities and he was berated by friends and foes. He responded to the commotion by defending himself in two different ways. First of all, he turned to the ancients, as we have already seen. He argued that like Martial, Virgil, Catullus, and Ovid he should not be judged for his poetry: just as in their cases, his life and his verses were separate entities. In the letter to Della Capra, he stated, quoting Catullus, that: ‘indeed, “It is right that a proper poet be pure himself. But there is no need for his verses to be.”, something that with your learning you must know full well.’\(^{76}\) Also in a letter to Antonio da Rho, he touched on the topic: ‘you in your erudition know full well that poetic license allows us to play around with jokes and witticisms...’.\(^{77}\) Secondly, Beccadelli dismissed his book as a ‘work of youth’, composed when he ‘was still of a tender age, when one has greater license to joke and sin’.\(^{78}\) In the end, after it had been denounced by many and he was threatened with excommunication, Beccadelli surrendered. In 1425, looking for an influential patron, he had dedicated the *Hermaphroditus* to his powerful contemporary Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464), praising Cosimo’s erudition and stating that he had composed the work as ‘something for you to read to a guest after lunch, Cosimo’.\(^{79}\)

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75 Beccadelli to Bartholomea della Capra, no date, in Beccadelli, *The Hermaphrodite*, trans. Parker, 139–42.
76 Ibid. The quotation comes from Catullus, Poem 16.
after the publication of his obscene book, he printed a recantation of the original dedication, in which he dismissed his work and asked for Cosimo’s pardon. ‘I am now ashamed that I taught various filthy acts and impious ways of Venus, which nature shuns’, he stated: ‘Forgive me. Alas, I myself now recognize my offense’. In the aforementioned letter to Da Rho, he had already admitted that: ‘No one dislikes the Hermaphroditus more than I do, and the author is the first to be bored by and regret both the publication and the reading of it – not because I did anything wrong by playing around at that age but because the age I am now instantly revolts against any indecency and sensuality and calls for serious habits and a serious manner of expression’. After his revocation, with the help of influential friends, Beccadelli secured places at different courts.

Almost immediately after their publication, Beverland’s studies on sex and sin were criticised by religious and secular authorities in the Dutch Republic. Like Beccadelli, Beverland pointed to his young age when he got in trouble. When he first appeared before the Academic Court in Leiden, on 15 November 1679, he asked the judges to treat him in a fatherly manner and to refrain from punishing him too harshly. He attempted to use his alleged youth to his advantage: the documents of his trial show that he lied about his age (he claimed to be 27 years old while at the time he was 29) in order to be judged more favourably. As he explained to a friend: ‘The only option left for me is the innocence of youth. If I cannot incite pity with this, the prospects are bad.’ It did not make a difference: after a short trial the Academic Court of the University of Leiden censored his publications and banished him from the provinces of Holland and Zeeland. At the time Beverland did not seem too bothered by his harsh punishment and shattered reputation, as he wrote on the day of his release that he was mostly ‘glad about the fame of my name now at last’.

But after almost two decades in England, he decided to print a large apology.

83 This is stated in the documents concerning Beverland’s trial by the Academische Vierschaar, which are kept in the National Archive of the Netherlands (Vierschaar der Universiteit te Leiden, Crimineele klachtboeken. 1631–1810, part 13, Litt. E, 1647–1695, fols 115r–116v).
84 Beverland to Bernard van Deynse, November 1679, ET 23: ‘Sola haec nostra aetas innocentiae esset patrocinium. Quod si haec mea innocentia eorum expugnare non possit misericordiam, submittam eorum vigori.’
85 Beverland to Dionysius Rechstood, December 1679, ET 33: ‘Gaudeo nunc demum celebritate nominis.’ The sentence is an adaptation of a passage from: Pliny the Younger, Epistulae, ix.i.23.
In the preface of his *De Fornicatione Cavenda Admonitio*, printed in different editions in London in 1697 and 1698, Beverland confessed that: ‘When after sixteen years a German showed me my little book *On Original Sin* and read it out to me, I could hardly express my shock that I had once presumed to put such calamities to paper... I abhor the obscenity of my style and the even more obscene contents.’\(^86\) In the work Beverland advised his readers to desist the pleasures of sex: ‘those who heed my words may proceed, not perhaps to entirely put aside the vices of nature, but at least to not cultivate them any further.’\(^87\) However, due to the detailed descriptions of sexual acts and the satirical style of the work, he did not manage to convince his contemporaries that he had truly had a change of heart. He spent the rest of his life in exile in England and died, poor and paranoid, in London in 1716.\(^88\)

### 7 Conclusion

The *Hermaphroditus*, *La Cazzaria*, and *De Peccato* represent three particular early modern genres and were published in different centuries. Yet the similarities between the obscene writings of Beccadelli, Vignali, and Beverland are conspicuous. First and foremost, the authors focused on the dominance of lust and aimed to expose the truth about sex: no one could avoid or deny the universal power of sexual desire. Secondly, their texts were written for a specific learned audience, their own academic circle of humanist scholars, and were therefore characterized by many references to classical works as well as inside jokes and other (in)direct links to their contemporary intellectual, social, and political contexts. Thirdly, all three writers got into trouble and were, in the end, driven into exile or felt obligated to recant or apologize for the sexual works they had published as young men.

Together with the texts of other humanist scholars, such as Giovanni Della Casa, Antonio Rocco, Niccolò Franco, Ferrante Pallavicino, who likewise chose sex as their primary subject, the notorious writings of Beverland, Beccadelli, and Vignali were exceptions to the rule. In line with secular laws and religious regulations, which restricted all sexual activity to marriage and procreation, defined sex as sinful and criminal, and censured obscene publications, the

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\(^{87}\) Beverland, *De Fornicatione*, Dedication, sig. A3v.

majority of humanist scholars made an effort to avoid the sexual side of the classics in their editions, commentaries, and translations. In their expurgation of classical literature, which was based on a genuine dislike of explicit writings, the aim to Christianize a pagan text, and/or the wish to safeguard the reputation of an ancient idol, they rejected the sexual interpretation of a certain work, altered words or sentences to make its obscenity disappear, or ignored sexual terms and passages altogether.

One of the aims of this paper has been to underline that attitudes to sexual passages in classical literature varied greatly: between full and ruthless expurgation and a very specific focus on all things sexual there existed a broad spectrum of approaches. There is much more to say about the early modern expurgation of the classics with regards to obscene texts; for example, it would be worthwhile to study and compare in which particular learned and historical contexts texts were either heavily expurgated or hardly touched at all or to look at the varieties in expurgation according to genre.

The life and works of Vignali, Beccadelli, and Beverland, and also other humanists who chose to focus on sex in the classics, deserve more attention. It would be interesting to study the tension in their writings between the goal to entertain and ridicule on the one hand and the aim to produce serious critiques and commentaries on their contemporary societies on the other. What sexual acts featured predominantly in their writings, did they print their texts to educate, amuse, or berate their humanist colleagues, and what was the connection, in style, content, and criticism, between these humanist works and their more literary, pornographic, and popular counterparts? What this paper has attempted to show is that by studying the works of expurgators like Scaliger, Desprez, and Faber on the one hand and the obscene writings of Beccadelli, Vignali, and Beverland on the other, we not only gain a better understanding of their contributions to humanist scholarship, but we also get a better sense of normative approaches to sex in the field of classical learning and in the early modern world as a whole.

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