The fourth book of Nonius Marcellus’ *De compendiosa doctrina*, entitled *De uaria significatione sermonum*, treats of the diverse meanings of words. Nonius’ entry for *spurcum* in that book (p. 393.30), as printed in Lindsay’s edition, consists of four sub-entries illustrating the following meanings: (1) *saeuvm uel sanguinarium*, (2) *uehemens, asperum*, (3) *obscenum et inpurum et lutulentum*, and (4) *fetidum*. A significant textual corruption seems to affect the first quotation illustrating the meaning *saeuvm uel sanguinarium*; I quote the entire sub-entry, since its contents are relevant to my argument:

**SPVRCVM, saeuum uel sanguinarium.** Afranius Diuortio (57-58 Ribbeck):
mulier; nouercae nomen hac adde impium:
spurca gingi † uestigia aut dici potest.

Lucilius Satyrarum lib. IV (149-152 Marx):
Aeserninus fuit Flaccorum munere quidam
Samnis, spurcus homo, uita illa dignus locoque:
cum Pacedeiano conponitur, optimus multo
post homines natos gladiator qui fuit unus.

Afranius Fratriis (164 Ribbeck):
conmemorabo, ostendam illius facta et spurcitiam inprobi.

idem Diuortio (52 Ribbeck):
o dignum facinus! adulescentis optumas,
bene conuenientes, concordes cum uireis,
repente uiduas factas spurcitia patris!²

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1 I give the text of Nonius from Lindsay 1903, with Mercier page-numbers and with typographical corrections and updates to references.

2 For discussion of this fragment see Welsh 2015, 163.
Varro Rerum Humanarum lib. XX (fr. XIII Mirsch): ‘nequis lictorem spur- 
cum hominem liberumprehendere iussisse uelit.’

Considerable ingenuity has been expended on attempts to recover a sensi-
bile iambic senarius of Afranius from the words spurca gingi vestigia aut dici 
potest.3 However, I shall argue that such attempts are almost certainly misguid-
ed. A minor peculiarity in the arrangement of these quotations and a major 
problem in the logic of this sub-entry make it more likely that the corruption 
conceals words that belonged, at least in part, to Nonius and that began a new 
sub-entry. Although I cannot eliminate the corruption entirely, a clearer indi-
cation of what ought to be recovered from that text may point the way to a 
better solution.

First, the arrangement of the quotations requires more explanation than 
has been offered. Lindsay identified as the ‘primary’ quotations in the entry 
for spurcum that of Afranius 57-58 (in the sub-entry saeuum uel sanguinarium) 
and that of Plautus, As. 807 (in the sub-entry obscenum et inpurum et lutulen-
tum), assigning both quotations to Nonius’ ‘Plautus i’ (2) list.4 That analysis 
tacitly assumes that the quotation of Afranius appeared in a marginal anno-
tation in Nonius’ copy of the twenty-one ‘Varronian’ plays of Plautus. If the 
five quotations printed above belong to the same sub-entry, Lindsay’s analysis 
offers a sensible explanation of the source of that quotation.5 Nevertheless, it 
seems at least somewhat difficult to explain why Afranius 57-58 should have 
been quoted in the margins of Nonius’ copy of Plautus against an ordinary and 
unproblematic usage of the adjective. Furthermore, it is jarring, if not inexplic-
able, that the two quotations from Afranius’ Diuortium should be recorded 
at different points in this sub-entry.6 The minor peculiarity of arrangement, 
ultimately, is consistent with, rather than probative evidence for, the argument 
I advance below.

3 The best ideas on record can be traced in Ribbeck 1898 and Lindsay 1903 ad loc.
4 See Lindsay 1901 and White 1980 for Nonius’ methods of composition, and Lindsay 1901, 76, 
for these attributions. For the ‘added’ quotations of Lucilius, Afranius, and Varro assigned to 
lists 9, 19, and 35B see Lindsay 1905, 459.
5 The quotation could also have stood as a marginal annotation in Nonius’ text of Lucilius. In 
any case, Nonius necessarily would have taken it from the lists between ‘Plautus i’ (2) and 
‘Lucilius i’ (9), inclusive, since at this point Nonius had already used ‘Gloss. i’ (1) in the com-
position of the S-section of Book 4.
6 On many occasions in Book 4 quotations of, for example, Plautus or Lucilius occur at two 
points within an entry or sub-entry, since Nonius had access to two different physical copies 
of those texts. That the same should happen with Afranius’ Diuortium is rather more unusual.