

THE YOKE OF ATTIS

Furibunda simul anhelans uaga uadit animam
agens

comitata tympano Attis per opaca nemora dux,
ueluti iuuenca uitans onus indomita iugi

[Catullus 63. 31–33].

This brief but important Catullan simile has a long history of neglect. Most commentators have ignored it completely (so C. J. Fordyce and G. Friedrich) or dismissed it with a single perfunctory sentence (W. Kroll, M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis, E. Baehrens). Only R. Ellis and K. Quinn seem to have given it serious thought. The former noted: "The point of the comparison lies mainly in the free bearing of the neck, as a restive heifer might be called *δύσλοφος*; its propriety in the fact that it was customary to sacrifice to Cybele *sine labe iuuenecam...operum coniugiiue rudem* Ovid *F.* iv. 335–36."¹ This may be philologically sound, but it makes no attempt to relate the simile to the rest of the poem, and we must relate it unless we are to dismiss it as an irrelevant ornament. Quinn, who also cites the parallel in Ovid, otherwise limits himself to a brief comment on the irony of the simile: "[it] ironically underlines the contrast between Attis' actions and his state of mind (he is rushing to *accept* the yoke, not to avoid it)."² While Catullus' Attis poem has received considerable attention in recent years,³ the heifer simile has evoked little comment. J. P. Elder mentioned it in passing, saying only that it implies "eventual mastery and enslavement under Cybele."⁴ E. Schäfer observed that *ueluti iuuenca* (like *uaga pecora* in verse 13) emphasizes the dehumanized state to which Cybele has reduced Attis and his companions.⁵ These observations of Quinn, Elder, and Schäfer are undoubtedly correct, but none, I suspect, grasps the main function of this simile.

In 1968, G. N. Sandy finally provided us with a close analysis of this simile and its

possible function in the poem.⁶ Attis' shunning the yoke, he argues, ironically anticipates the later appearance of the yoke image in lines 76–84. In this latter passage, Cybele removes the yoke (*iuga*) from her lions and unleashes them against Attis. In Sandy's words, "It seems clear enough that Cybele removes the yoke from the lion only to attempt to place it upon the shoulders of the heifer (that is, Attis) which has just attempted to avoid it. The yoke taken off the lion represents the forced or imposed onslaught of *ἐνθουσιασμός*, that is, *μανία*, which Attis had earlier accepted willingly..."⁷ Later, Sandy quotes Cybele's command to the lion (78–80): "fac ut hunc furor agitet, / fac uti furoris ictu reditum in nemora ferat, / mea libere nimis qui fugere imperia cupit." This he attempts to relate directly to the earlier heifer simile: "*Fugere* in verse 80 corresponds to *uitans* in the heifer simile. In verse 80 Attis is represented as desiring to escape Cybele's impositions, as the heifer in 33 tried to get out from under the yoke. The yoke of madness which the unbroken heifer had momentarily avoided must be reimposed."⁸

Much of Sandy's interpretation is attractive and helpful. We may easily agree that the heifer simile has a strong element of irony, stemming from the ignorance of Attis at this juncture: what he mistakes for freedom is, as he later learns, an inescapable slavery in the service of Cybele.⁹ Attis' mistake and its tragic consequences are effectively dramatized, as Sandy implies, when Catullus revives the image of the yoke and depicts Cybele as removing the *iuga* from her lions (76 ff.) and transferring it, in effect, to Attis. My objection to Sandy's analysis is that it fails to explain satisfactorily the nature of the yoke at 33. What is the *iugum* which Attis shuns here? Sandy describes it as "the yoke of madness," but this will not do. Attis at this point is just reaching the climax

1. R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus*² (Oxford, 1889), ad 63. 33.

2. K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London, 1970), ad 63. 33.

3. For bibliography, see G. N. Sandy, "The Imagery of Catullus 63," *TAPA*, XCIX (1968), 389, n. 1; add T. Oksala, "Catullus Attis-Ballade," *Arctos*, N.S. III (1962), 199–213.

4. J. P. Elder, "Catullus' Attis," *AJP*, LXVIII (1947), 398.

5. E. Schäfer, *Das Verhältnis von Erlebnis und Kunst-gestalt bei Catull*, *Hermes Einzelschr.* XVIII (1966), 97.

6. Sandy, *op. cit.*, pp. 395–96.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

9. Cf. the comment of Quinn cited above, n. 2.

of his (or "her") madness: "furibunda simul anhelans uaga uadit animam agens / comitata tympano Attis per opaca nemora dux, / ueluti iuuenca uitans onus indomita iugi; / rapidae ducem sequuntur Gallae properipedem." How can Attis, at the height of his ecstatic frenzy, be described as "shunning the yoke of madness"? Such an interpretation is not "ironic"; it is incomprehensible.

Whereas Sandy argued that this simile looks ahead to a later scene in the poem, I suggest that it looks back to an earlier line, the description of Attis' castration ("deuolsit ili acuto sibi pondera silice," 5). This terrible act, which comes suddenly at the very outset, is crucial to the poem: it epitomizes Attis' complete, irreversible servitude to Cybele. Catullus keeps this castration ever before our minds with the glaring change to the feminine gender which is used hereafter to describe "her." The simile of the heifer and the yoke is still another device to focus our attention on the castration of Attis, and it does this with powerful irony.

In attempting to connect this simile with the earlier castration, I should point out especially the three words which appear emphatically at the end of verse 33: "ueluti iuuenca uitans *onus indomita iugi*." In isolation, there is nothing particularly notable about Catullus' use of *onus*. His earlier use of its synonym *pondus* in *ili... pondera* (5), however, is striking in this terrible context and is apt to have made a strong impression on the reader. When we reach *onus* in the heifer simile, we might well link the two synonyms. This possible connection is strengthened by the facts (1) that *pondera* occurs in a peculiarly sexual context, and (2) that *onus* is

immediately followed by two words heavily laden with sexual overtones, *indomita* and *iugi*. The taming and yoking of heifers (and mares) is an extremely common erotic metaphor in ancient literature,¹⁰ and is closely connected with the frequent metaphor of the "untamed virgin."¹¹ In this context, of course, *indomita* means free from sexual experience, and is applied by Latin elegists to men and women alike.¹² A Roman, we may suppose, would be much more sensitive to such nuances than we, and would be alerted to this connotation by the following word *iugi*. The ease with which these two words acquire erotic overtones is obvious from another Catullan passage (68. 117-18), where they are juxtaposed once again: "sed tuus altus amor barathro fuit altior illo, / qui tamen *indomitam ferre iugum* docuit." Some scholars are under the false impression that *iugum* in this metaphorical sense refers only to the "yoke of marriage."¹³ Actually, *iugum* is frequently applied to sexual experience in general, without necessarily entailing marriage.¹⁴ Thus, W. S. Barrett's comment on ζυγόν—"the common metaphor of yoke = marriage or other sexual union"¹⁵—is equally applicable to its Latin cognate *iugum*. It is this erotic metaphor, rather than the yoke of madness or anything else, which probably lies at the root of this Catullan simile.

In the image of the heifer and her yoke, then, Catullus presents us with a vivid, symbolic restatement of the earlier castration of Attis. At the outset of the poem, Attis dramatically and irrevocably renounces all sexual experience. The importance of this act is emphasized repeatedly in the sudden and glaring change to the feminine gender for describing him. The castration begins a mood

10. Cf., e.g., Anacreon 75B; *Anth. Pal.* 5. 22. 1-4; *Hor. Sat.* 2. 7. 91-92; *Ov. Her.* 4. 19-24; and *Anth. Lat.* 439. For a full bibliography on this metaphor, see V. Buchheit, *Studien Zum Corpus Priapeorum* (Munich, 1962), p. 104, n. 6.

11. Cf. Homer's δέμης παρθένος (*Od.* 6. 109, 6. 228) and *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 145.

12. For its application to men, cf. *Prop.* 1. 1. 15 and *Anth. Lat.* 439.

13. Cf. G. Vorberg, *Glossarium eroticum* (Hanau, 1965), s.v. "iugum," and Lewis and Short, s.v. "jugum."

14. Cf., e.g., *Tib.* 1. 4. 16: "paulatim sub iuga colla dabit." The reference here is to homosexual love; Priapus is telling Tibullus how he will win the favors of a youth named Titius. The *iuga* obviously means the yoke of sexual submission; to

attempt to explain it as a "yoke of marriage" is absurd and grotesque. Another good example of *iugum* in this more general sense is *Hor. Sat.* 2. 7. 91-92: "eripe turpi / colla iugo." The poet here is addressing an *exclusus amator* who is forced by his mistress to suffer many indignities. The *iugum* here is obviously not the yoke of marriage (which would be quite out of place in this paraclausithyron), nor is it a vague "yoke of servitude"; rather, Horace makes it quite clear that he means the yoke of sexual passion: "eripe turpi / colla iugo; 'liber, liber sum' dic age. non quis; / urget enim dominus mentem non lenis et acris / subiectat lasso stimulos versatque negantem" (91-94).

15. W. S. Barrett, ed., *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964), ad 545-46.

of ecstatic frenzy, which ends with lines 31–34 (quoted above). Thus, at the end of this first movement, the poet includes a simile borrowed largely from erotic poetry; it suggests the interpretation that Attis is shunning the yoke of sexual experience. This focuses our attention once again on the terrible mutilation which began this first act of the tragedy of Attis. He is abandoning forever the yoke of and capacity for sexual love, and, as the audience already suspects, he unwittingly takes upon himself

Cybele's cruel yoke of madness and slavery. The simile vividly reflects Attis' own experience of his castration—a vision blinded by delirium, in which he has no more capacity for reason or foresight than the dumb animal to which he is compared—a masterful stroke which in no small way contributes to the final, crushing *peripeteia*.

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SOPHOCLES *PHILOCTETES* 849–54

ἀλλ' ὃ τι δύνῃ μάκιστον,
κεῖνο <δῆ> μοι, κείνῳ <μοι> λαθραίως 850
ἐξιδού ὅπως πράξεις.
οἶσθα γὰρ ὃν αὐδῶμαι,
εἰ ταῦτ' αὐτῷ γινώμην ἴσχεις,
μᾶλα τοι ἄπορα πυκνοῖς ἐνδεῖν πάθῃ.

852 ὃν L^a A rec: ὦν L rec 853 εἰ ταῦτ' Dobree: εἰ ταῦτ' (ταυτὰν A Ven c: ταῖτ' Ven Γ: τὴν αὐτὰν Ven b) L A rec: εἴτ' αὐτὰν B.

I here print Pearson's OCT and make no comment on 850 save to say that Miss Dale's suggestion¹ to omit δέ both times at 834 and read κείνῳ μοι, κείνῳ δὲ λάθρῃ in the antistrophe is perhaps metrically preferable. The sense is not materially affected by either reading.

My concern here is solely with the readings and interpretation of 851–52; and my contention is that previous editors have been unable to explain this passage satisfactorily because it has always² been assumed that the reference to the (apparently) parenthetical οἶσθα ὃν αὐδῶμαι is forward rather than backward. I would maintain that a more natural sequence is for γὰρ to link, in an explanatory capacity, 852 to what *precedes*. I would thus punctuate with a semicolon at πράξεις and a full stop at αὐδῶμαι. 853 then begins with a

strongly marked adversative asyndeton; cf. *Antigone* 1334–35: μέλλοντα ταῦτα. τῶν προκειμένων τι χρὴ πράσσειν; and *Ajax* 470–71: οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα. πείρ' αὖτις ζητητέα τοιάδ' κτλ.

This punctuation accepted, there remain two points. (1) At 852 the MSS vary between ὃν and ὦν. Dain reads ὃν, punctuating with full stops after both πράξεις and αὐδῶμαι. Mazon translates: "Tu sais de qui je parle." But what is the point of this oblique reference to the sleeping Philoctetes? The chorus are certainly at pains to insure that Philoctetes does not hear what they propose to do with him, but at no point do they (or Neoptolemus) attempt to conceal the fact that Philoctetes is the subject of their discussion.

My choice, therefore, would be for ὦν,³ interpreted as a genitive of connection (cf. 439, ἀναξίου μὲν φωτὸς ἐξερήσομαι),⁴ referring back to the vague κείνῳ of 850. In the strophe the chorus have implicitly recommended seizing the moment and making off with the bow while Philoctetes is asleep, a recommendation bluntly rejected by Neoptolemus (839–42), who there maintains that the meaning of the oracle is that it is useless to sail without Philoctetes himself.⁵ In the antistrophe the chorus suggest that God will decide whether

1. A. M. Dale, *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama*² (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 117–18.

2. A. Dain in his Budé edition is an exception to this generalization.

3. With this reading we must retain the MSS text μενούμεν at 836. The scansion of 836 and 852 is then — — — — —, choriamb plus molossus, a quite acceptable rhythm in this passage: see Dale, *loc. cit.*

4. For the genitive of connection see also R. C. Jebb on Soph. *OC* 307 and W. Rennie on Ar. *Ach.* 306.

5. I deliberately use the word "maintains" to avoid any suggestion that Neoptolemus' words are a literal quotation of the oracle. D. B. Robinson in his excellent article on *Philoctetes* (*CQ*, N.S. XIX [1969], 34–56) makes it quite clear (p. 48) that by this stage of the play Neoptolemus' "human feelings for Philoctetes are already sufficient to make him refuse to abandon him."