

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THE BLINDED CYCLOPS: *LUMEN ADEPTUM* (AEN. 3. 658)

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui
lumen ademptum [Verg. *Aen.* 3. 658].

This masterful description of Polyphemus, often cited in introductions to the Vergilian hexameter, is among the most familiar lines in the *Aeneid*. Critics have unanimously admired the poet's adaptation of sound to sense in his staggering, ponderous description of the lumbering Cyclops. Not so evident, however, is another aspect of this famous line: a debate has long persisted over the interpretation of *lumen*. Three positions have been taken: (1) *lumen* means "eye";¹ (2) it means "light";² and (3) it is intentionally ambiguous.³ Those arguing that it must mean "eye" emphasize that in the surrounding lines the poet has consistently used *lumen* to refer to the giant's eye (3. 635, 3. 663, and 3. 677). For the opposing view that the word here means "light," perhaps the strongest argument is that Ovid, apparently paraphrasing Vergil, describes the blindness of Polyphemus as *damnum . . . lucis ademptae* (*Met.* 14. 197). In their discussion of this problem, commentators have accumulated long lists of parallels to the disputed phrase, but all of the commentators seem to have overlooked the only passage in pre-Vergilian Latin literature where we find these exact words, *lumen ademptum*.⁴ The oversight is all the more significant because the exact parallel

in question occurs in the same metrical position as in *Aen.* 3. 658, and it occurs in one of the authors most often imitated by Vergil in his *Aeneid*—Catullus. This unnoticed Catullan echo may well be the key to the problem.

In his lengthiest and most elaborate elegy, poem 68, Catullus apostrophizes his dead brother; here we find the identical *lumen ademptum* in the identical metrical position: "... ei misero frater adempte mihi, / ei misero fratri iucundum *lumen ademptum*" (68. 92–93). It is difficult to dismiss this parallel as mere coincidence, when we recognize that Catullus is one of the authors most frequently echoed in Vergil's poetry.⁵ Vergil was so deeply steeped in Catullus' poems that this echo is almost certainly a conscious imitation. By bringing this passage to bear on the disputed interpretation of Polyphemus' *lumen* (*Aen.* 3. 658), we may safely dismiss the suggestions that *lumen* means only "light" or only "sight." We see that Vergil intentionally chose a word which lent itself to ambiguities: not only has it been interpreted as both "eye" and "light," but it is borrowed from a Catullan passage in which it apparently means "life."⁶ Vergil is not attempting to constrict his imagery, but rather to enrich it with several nuances and associations. In losing his sight or the light of day (*lumen*), the giant

1. So, e.g., C. Heyne-G. Wagner, *P. Virgilius Maro, II* (Leipzig, 1832), *ad loc.*, and T. E. Page, *The Aeneid of Vergil, I* (London, 1894), *ad loc.* J. Conington and H. Nettleship (*P. Vergili Opera*⁴, II [London, 1884], *ad loc.*) are apparently divided on the question: Conington clearly favors "eye," while Nettleship in an addendum *ad loc.* seems to favor "light."

2. So J. Henry, *Aeneidea*, II (Dublin, 1878), pp. 507–13, and A. Sidgwick, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, II (Cambridge, 1890), *ad loc.*

3. Cf. R. D. Williams, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber tertius* (Oxford, 1962), *ad loc.*, and K. Quinn, *Vergil's Aeneid: A Critical Description* (London, 1968), p. 133.

4. A. Forbiger, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*⁴, II (Leipzig, 1873), *ad loc.*, cites six parallels (though his verdict on the interpretation of *lumen* seems to be *non liquet*), while Henry, *op. cit.*, provides no fewer than nineteen. In Henry's lengthy list of parallels, the exact words *lumen ademptum* are found in

only one, the post-Vergilian Ov. *Trist.* 4. 4. 45, where Ovid speaks of Augustus' mercy in sparing his life: "idque deus sentit: pro quo nec lumen ademptum est, / nec mihi detractas possidet alter opes."

5. To my knowledge, F. P. Simpson (*Select Poems of Catullus*² [London, 1879], pp. xxxviii–xxxix) has provided the most detailed list of Vergilian-Catullan parallels. He cites sixty-seven Vergilian passages which echo Catullus, impressive evidence of how deeply Vergil was steeped in the latter's poetry. By comparison, Simpson (p. xxxix) was able to produce only twenty-five Ovidian-Catullan parallels, excluding *Her.* 10 (Ariadne's letter to Theseus) with its constant borrowings from Catullus 64. Simpson emphasizes that his tables of parallels are not exhaustive; among the omissions, we may note, are the passages in question: Verg. *Aen.* 3. 658–Cat. 68. 93.

6. For *lumen* = "life," cf. Lucr. 3. 1033 and Ov. *Trist.* 4. 4. 45.

has been condemned to a living death (*lumen ademptum*).

K. Quinn recently described this Vergilian phrase as "curiously touching."⁷ He is correct in underscoring the pathos of *cui lumen ademptum*, but in no way is it "curious." The touch of pathos is quite explicable by a

7. Quinn, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

reference to the Catullan phrase echoed here. Vergil poignantly describes Polyphemus' loss of his eyesight with words recalling one of the most famous bereavements of Latin literature—Catullus' lament for his lost brother.

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ARISTOPHANES *FROGS* 788–90: A NEW LOOK AT AN OLD SOLUTION

"Where *καί* is used in anaphora, there is always a fairly marked contrast between the two ideas, whereas *δέ* in anaphora regularly conveys the emphasis of accumulation. Hence *ἐκεῖνος* . . . *κάκεῖνος* at Ar. *Ra.* 788–90 cannot both refer to Sophocles."¹ The passage of Aristophanes' *Frogs* of which Denniston so categorically speaks is perhaps one of the most vexed of the whole play. While there have been attempts to emend the text, most editors accept the reading of the MSS as follows:²

μὰ Δι' οὐκ ἐκεῖνος, ἀλλ' ἔκυσσε μὲν Αἴσχυλον,
 ὅτε δὴ κατήλθε, κἀνέβαλε τὴν δεξιάν,
 κἀκεῖνος ὑπεχώρησεν αὐτῷ τοῦ θρόνου.

Although I take issue with Denniston's assertion of the function of *καί* in our passage, he nonetheless performs a worthy service here in focusing on this deceptively important particle rather than strictly on the bugbear of the second *ἐκεῖνος*. For one thing, recent criticism shows that it is highly unlikely—and without exact parallel—that *ἐκεῖνος*, used twice in close succession by a single speaker in an unbroken speech, can refer to the same person.³ For another, attempts to prove that the subject of *ὑπεχώρησεν* is Aeschylus and

that the word means something other than "conceded" have not been convincing.⁴

The assertion has been made, and rightly, that for Aeschylus to offer Sophocles the throne of honor would be out of character.⁵ The case can be put more strongly, however. At the end of the play, when Aeschylus has been recruited to save Athens, he gives Pluto minute instructions, 1515–19:

σὺ δὲ τὸν θάκον
 τὸν ἐμὸν παράδος Σοφοκλεῖ τηρεῖν
 καὶ διασώζειν, ἦν ἄρ' ἐγὼ ποτε
 δεῦρ' ἀφίκωμαι. τοῦτον γὰρ ἐγὼ
 σοφία κρίνω δεύτερον εἶναι.

Sophocles is to keep Aeschylus' seat warm until such time as he returns from the upper world; Sophocles is to be accorded this privilege for being *next wisest* to Aeschylus. Aeschylus' language is fatal to the critics who believe that at 790 Aeschylus is "conceding a share of" his throne to an equal.⁶ Sophocles is merely second best, a seat-warmer and not a seat-sharer.

If the subject of 790 cannot be Aeschylus, then it must be Sophocles, a possibility denied by Denniston. What his note does not admit, however, is the suggestion, already proposed

emphatic contrast, Aristophanes does not; Stevens, p. 3, also denies Oliphant's parallel.

4. J. H. Kells, "Aristophanes, *Frogs* 788–792," *CR*, N.S. XIV (1964), 234, paraphrases the verb "got up from his chair for"; L. Radermacher, *Frösche* (Vienna, 1954), *ad loc.*, thinks it means "conceded a share of." Both believe the subject is Aeschylus.

5. Stevens, "Aristophanes, *Frogs* 788–794," *CR*, N.S. V (1955), 235.

6. Radermacher (n. 4) incorrectly holds that only *παραιχωρεῖν* can mean "to withdraw from"; Stevens (n. 5), p. 235, shows that *ὑποχωρεῖν* can mean "withdraw from" and notes, along with Oliphant (n. 3), p. 98, that the verb contains the military image of withdrawal. I would add that lines 792–93 continue the imagery.

1. J. D. Denniston, *Greek Particles*² (Oxford, 1954), p. 584.

2. So F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart, *Aristophanis Comoediae*², II (Oxford, 1907); W. B. Stanford, *Aristophanes: The Frogs* (London, 1958); and J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Ranae cum prolegomenis et commentariis* (Leyden, 1896), who prints καὶ ἐνέβαλε without crasis. V. Coulon, *Aristophane*, IV (Paris, 1954), emends *κάκεῖνος* to *κἀνεῖκος*.

3. Both S. G. Oliphant, "An Interpretation of *Ranae*, 788–790," *TAPA*, XL (1909), 97, and P. T. Stevens, "Aristophanes, *Frogs* 788–92," *CR*, N.S. XVI (1966), 3, assert that the second *ἐκεῖνος* is merely emphatic and refers to Sophocles. The former cites Soph. *Aj.* 271 and 275 as a parallel for the close repetition of *ἐκεῖνος* in a single speech. In each instance, however, the demonstrative is contrasted explicitly with forms of *ἡμεῖς*. While Sophocles has the justification of