

passion had on Catullus. The last stanza, moreover, indicates that the experience of meeting and falling in love with Lesbia brought on him a personal crisis, a traumatic break with his earlier life, and we note in particular the idea of ruination which is conveyed by the word *perdidit* (16). During this time, Catullus was consumed by the ardor of his love, *cum tantum arderem* . . . (68. 53–54). Poem 51 documents this ardor. In particular, we note again in the central two stanzas the effect on Catullus of the vision of the adored woman, which caused him virtually to lose consciousness. This experience is then generalized and reinforced by the words *otio exsultas nimiumque gestis*, an acknowledgment of an excess of passion. And, finally, at this time Catullus was wretchedly unhappy, *maesta neque assiduo tabescere lumina fletu / cessarent tristisque* . . . (68. 55–56). In poem 51 a sense of this unhappiness is conveyed by the thematic word *misero* (5) and enlarged by the final stanza.

In sum, the statement of poem 68. 51–56 alludes to an earlier poem, or poetry, of Catullus. It presents a characterization of this poetry, or poem, which in the corpus of Catullus' work fits only poem 51. It fits poem 51 as a four-stanza unit and supports my particular interpretation of it.⁷

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7. I wish to anticipate a possible objection, namely, that there are in 68. 51–56 no close verbal echoes of poem 51. This is true, but the primary function of the passage is not to make reference to poem 51 but to serve as an integral part of poem 68. One of its purposes here, it appears, is to provide a foil to its corresponding section of lines 135–40, pointing up the incipience of Lesbia's infidelity. Cf. O. Weinreich, *Liebesgedichte*, pp. 98–99.

MARTIAL 4. 17

facere in Lyciscam, Paule, me iubes versus
quibus illa lectis rubeat et sit irata.
o Paule, malus es; irrumare vis solus.

This simple little poem has been curiously misunderstood. Housman's interpretation was based on his well-known thesis that *irrumare* was often used in the weakened sense "insult."¹ According to Housman, Paulus was insulting Martial, because to try to make a shameless woman like Lycisca blush was a waste of time. Shackleton Bailey rightly objects to this as "forced and implausible": "How was the reader to know that Lycisca was incapable of shame or anger?"²

But Shackleton Bailey agreed with Housman in rejecting the usual explanation that Paulus simply wanted to get rid of a rival. Arguing that "the poet would hardly present himself literally as *irrumator*" and assuming the same weakened sense as Housman, he proposes the admittedly neat and easy emendation: *irrumaberis*. "Paulus craftily hopes to escape exposure by urging the poet to attack his partner, but no; *he* will be lampooned, Lycisca will go free."

1. "Praefanda," *Hermes* 66 (1931): 407–10 = *Collected Papers*, vol. 3 (London, 1972), pp. 1179–81.
2. "Corrections and Explanations of Martial," *CP* 73 (1978): 277.

To this suggestion two objections must be raised. In the first place, Amy Richlin has recently reexamined the passages in which Housman detected this “weakened” sense of *irrumare* and shown that in all of them the original meaning “force to fellate” works perfectly well.³ Although the threat (or fiction) of “irrumating” a man *against his will* is frequently represented by Roman writers as the ultimate form of insult, the word itself never seems to *mean* “insult.” Indeed, as Richlin rightly emphasizes, it is precisely the literal connotations that make the threat so insulting. She further points out that any such weakened sense would in any case inevitably “yield before the original sense, were the word to be used in a context which naturally invites the sexual meaning.”⁴ Now any use of the word in the context of embarrassing a lady makes the sexual reference inescapable. Shackleton Bailey’s text seems to require both meanings, since Paulus is to be “exposed,” apparently for allowing Lycisca, who will “go free,” to fellate him. Yet elsewhere it is invariably the party who performs fellatio who is demeaned (hence the threat of *irrumatio* and the *os impurum* jokes discussed by Richlin).

According to Richlin (who rightly leaves the text alone), “Martial and Paulus are rivals; Paulus asks Martial to insult Lycisca, thereby giving himself a clear field. Martial then writes a poem implying that Paulus customarily enjoys Lycisca only through irrumation . . . a sign of lack of virility . . . and . . . a sign that Lycisca is cheap and sluttish.” That is to say, she too sees the poem as an attack on Paulus’ sexual habits. Yet though Martial occasionally makes fun of old men whose near impotence can only be stimulated by fellatio (11. 46, 4. 50), this scarcely justifies the conclusion that “a penchant for being fellated was somewhat laughable.”⁵ The very reverse is implied not just by the many *irrumatio* threats but by the mere fact that the Latin language (uniquely, so far as I know) offers the active verb *irrumare*, in common (and aggressive) use in place of the passive of *fellare*. Furthermore, Martial does not say that Paulus enjoys Lycisca “only through irrumation,” but that Paulus *alone* so enjoyed her—that is, without a rival (*pace* Shackleton Bailey the only plausible interpretation of the emphatic final *solus*). Nothing else in the poem suggests that Paulus is lacking in virility. It is *malice* for which Martial reproaches him (*o Paule, malus es*).

This malice was twofold. It was bad enough of Paulus to try to trick Martial into wrecking his chances with Lycisca. Worse still, it was a trick that could only work at the cost of Lycisca’s reputation. So Martial wrote a lampoon that would not only ruin Lycisca’s reputation but also Paulus’ chances as well. Lycisca would naturally “blush” to be exposed as a fellatrix. But what would really “make her angry” was the discovery that it was Paulus, for his own callous ends, who was the cause of her exposure.

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3. “The Meaning of *Irrumare* in Catullus and Martial,” *CP* 76 (1981): 40–46, culminating in a certain correction and reinterpretation of Mart. 2. 83. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 44.