

THE *IUVENCA* IMAGE IN CATULLUS 63

furibunda simul anhelans vaga vadit animam agens
comitata tympano Attis per opaca nemora dux,
veluti iuvenca vitans onus indomita iugi

Catullus 63.31–3

Most commentators apply the phrase 'vitans onus...iugi' not only to the heifer but to Attis himself.¹ When they ask what *iugum* Attis is avoiding, the immediate context provides no obvious answer.² They are therefore compelled to interpret the *iugum* either in the light of a much earlier passage or in the light of a much later one.³ Neither procedure is satisfactory.

On the other hand, at least one editor has proposed that the phrase 'vitans onus...iugi' does not apply to Attis himself but to the heifer alone.⁴ The comparison between Attis and the heifer then lies only in their frenzied speed; the yoke-avoiding action is external to the comparison and merely heightens the picture of the charging heifer. The obvious difficulty with this view is that the concept of a yoke, and more generally of avoiding servitude, plays an important role relevant to Attis later on in the poem. From line 50 onwards Attis sees himself as an *erifuga* anxious to escape from slavery to Cybele. And the account of Cybele's lion, sent to round him up, twice refers to the notion of freeing from a yoke (76 and 84).

Both these traditional approaches concentrate on the literal meaning of the phrase *vitans onus...iugi*: they assume that the yoke itself is important and that it either does or does not make sense when applied to Attis. But if we focus instead upon the action which the whole phrase *vitans onus...iugi* suggests, then the description of the heifer has an apt application to Attis within its own immediate context.

What is the *iuvenca* actually doing? Just conceivably she sees someone approaching with a yoke and charges off before an attempt to yoke her can be made. It is more likely, however, that we are to imagine such an attempt has been made and that the phrase 'vitans onus...iugi' describes her wild efforts to throw off the yoke. Her action will then be a blind charging accompanied by vigorous tossing of the head and neck as she tries to shake off the yoke.⁵ This is precisely the type of action which characterises the wild motion of the followers of Cybele.

There is ample evidence, both from other sources on the cult and from poem 63 itself, that violent head-tossing was one of the most typical features of Cybele worship. Greek epigram contains a number of descriptions of Cybele's devotees, most significantly those dedicatory epigrams in the Palatine Anthology where 'retiring' devotees dedicate their cult objects to Cybele. These epigrams constantly refer to the

¹ So G. Sandy, 'The imagery of Catullus 63', *TAPA* 99 (1968), 398ff.; J. Glenn, 'The yoke of Attis', *CPhil* 68 (1973), 59ff.; J. Basto, 'Caecilius Attis and Catullus 35', *LCVM* 7 (1982), 30ff.; K. Quinn (ed.), *Poems of Catullus* note *ad loc.*

² It has rightly been observed (e.g. by Quinn) that Attis is in fact willingly accepting the 'yoke' of servitude to Cybele.

³ Thus Glenn and Basto support their claim that the 'onus iugi' refers to the marriage yoke by seeing an allusion in line 33 to the much earlier line 5. On the other hand Sandy, who sees the 'onus iugi' as a reference to servitude, interprets line 33 in the light of the much later passage 76–84. So too does Quinn.

⁴ So Ellis in his note on 33. Ellis claims that the 'propriety' of the image lies in the custom of sacrificing to Cybele *sine labe iuvencam...operum coniugiiue rudem* (Ovid, *F.* 4.355–6).

⁵ Ellis comes close to recognising that the phrase 'iugum vitans' refers to movement of the neck in his observation that 'the point of the comparison lies mainly in the free-bearing of the neck, as a restive heifer might be called *δύσλοφος*'. But he makes no attempt to apply this remark about the attitude of the neck to Cybele's initiates.

tossing movement of the hair as the devotees shook their heads. We may in particular notice:

- (i) (On the behaviour of a lion converted to Cybele's cult)

χῶ μὲν ἐνέκλεισεν φονίαν γένυν, ἐκ δὲ τενόντων
ἐνθους ῥομβητὴν ἐστροφάλιξε φόβην
(Alcaeus 21.7–8, Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams*)

- (ii) (Imitation of (i) in describing an initiate of the cult)

Ἔκ ποτέ τις φρικτοῖο θεᾶς σεσοβημένος οὔστρω
ῥομβητοὺς δονέων λυσσομανεῖς πλοκάμους
and (Antipater 64.1–2, Gow and Page, *op. cit.*)

...ἐδίνησεν δ' εὐστροφάλιγγα κόμαν
(*loc. cit.* 18)

- (iii) (On an old priest who is retiring and who dedicates musical instruments...)

...ἐφ' οἷς ποτε
ἐπωλόλυξεν αὐχένα στροβιλίσας
(Gow and Page, *The Garland of Philip*, Philip 14.3–4)

- (iv) (On Alexis, who is retiring from the cult – Alexis dedicates his cymbals and)

...ξανθὰς τὰς πρὶν ἔσεισε κόμας
(Anon. 42.8, Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams*)

To these we may add a prayer to the Great Mother asking her to protect a young girl who deserves this help because of her worship of the Great Mother:

(v) ἀνθ' ὧν (sc. the goddess' protection) σοι κατὰ πολλὰ προνήια καὶ παρὰ βωμῷ
παρθενικὴν ἐτίναξ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα κόμην
(Leonidas 44.5–6, Gow and Page, *op. cit.*)

All of these passages describe the violent hair-tossing of the initiates as a characteristic feature of the cult. It is so essential an element in Cybele's worship that the devotee frequently dedicated his hair to Cybele when he ceased active service.

Catullus himself also describes violent head-tossing as a characteristic part of the cult in poem 63.⁶ This happens within his description of Cybele's forest: *ubi capita Maenades vi iaciunt hederigeræ* (23). This is the only explicit reference to ecstatic head-tossing in the poem, but it may well be possible to find another, indirect, allusion to this characteristic behaviour later on when Catullus describes the lion sent by Cybele to round up the run-away Attis (80–83).

Evidence from Greek epigram strongly suggests that the behaviour which Cybele urges the lion to adopt cleverly alludes not simply to actions typical of an angry lion (tail-waving, roaring and mane-tossing) but at the same time to actions typical of her frenzied devotees. Thus the tail-waving is described in terms of 'cutting' and 'beating': *caede terga cauda, tua verbera patere* (81). Such self-injuring was typical of Cybele's initiates, who habitually beat themselves and cut themselves with knives. We may compare Gow and Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams*, Anon. 42 lines 7–8 ...καὶ αἵματι φοινιχθέντα | φάσγανα or the passage from Luc. *de Syr. Dea* 50 quoted *ad loc.* by Gow and Page: *Γάλλοι...τάμνονταί τε τοὺς πῆχας καὶ τοῖσι νώτοισι πρὸς ἀλλήλους τύπτονται*. The loud roaring of Cybele's lion is also described in a way which is reminiscent of the loud noises of the cult's musical instruments. In 82 the lion is told: *fac cuncta mugienti fremitu loca retonent*. We may compare this with Catullus' earlier account of the initiates' musical instruments – in 21 *ubi cymbalum sonat vox*,

⁶ We may also compare Lucretius 2.632, where he describes the Phrygian Curetes: *terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas*.

ubi tympana reboant and 29 *leve tympanum remugit, cava cymbala recrepant*. Similarly, in Greek epigram the echoing roar of the *τύμπανον* is also alluded to, particularly in the series of epigrams describing how a lion is frightened off by a Gallus. Thus Simonides (Gow and Page, op. cit., Simonides 2.5–6) tells how the Gallus on meeting a lion ...μέγα τύμπανον ὃ σκέθε χειρί | ἤραξεν, καναχῇ δ' ἴαχεν ἄντρον ἅπαν. Finally, the mane-tossing of line 83 may be compared with Alcaeus (Gow and Page, op. cit. 21.7–8), where a lion which has been converted to Cybele worship ...ἐκ δὲ τενόντων | ἔνθους ῥομβητὴν ἐστροφάλιξε φόβην. The mane-tossing of Alcaeus' lion is part of that lion's behaviour as an initiate of the Cybele cult (cf. above).

In view of these parallelisms between the behaviour of Catullus' lion and that of initiates in the Cybele cult, we may reasonably claim that the lion's angry head-tossing in 83 is a further allusion to the wild Cybele-inspired head-tossing described in line 23.

We may now return to the picture of the charging heifer in 31–3. Are we justified in seeing here yet another allusion to this characteristic action of head-tossing? The arrangement of ideas in the immediately preceding context of the heifer image strongly suggests that we are. The explicit allusion to head-tossing which we have already noted in 23 is part of a detailed description of the Cybele cult which Attis himself relates just before his wild heifer-like charge (21–5). Attis singles out four characteristic activities: the noisy playing of musical instruments (21–2); the wild shrieking of the devotees (24); the rushing movement of the band of followers (25) and, most significantly for our purposes, the violent head-tossing (23).

Immediately after this description of the cult Catullus tells how Attis and his companions approach Cybele's house as devotees (27–34). All their actions closely correspond to the characteristic cult activities which Attis has just described. We find again the noisy playing of instruments (29 and 32), the wild shrieking (28) and the rushing movement (30 and 31). In view of this close correspondence between the actions of Attis with his companions in 27–34 and those of the devotees in 21–5 we might *prima facie* expect that the remaining description of Attis' behaviour – the comparison with the heifer – is somehow connected with the only activity in 21–5 which has not so far reappeared – the violent head-tossing of Cybele's followers.

Such a connexion is indeed found if we interpret the yoke-avoiding behaviour of the heifer in the way that I have earlier suggested. If the animal is to be thought of as violently shaking its head and neck so as to throw off the yoke, then it is at the same time acting in a manner which we have found, both from Greek epigram and from Catullus himself, to be characteristic of Cybele's followers. We then get the precise parallel between Attis' behaviour and that of Cybele's devotees which the similarities between 21–5 and 27–34 have led us to expect.

We may still of course claim (I think legitimately) that Catullus has chosen to use the yoke image rather than an overt statement of head-tossing (such as we find in line 23) because of the reappearance of a yoke and the associated notion of slavery in an important way later on in the poem.⁷ It may well be that some ironical contrast is intended between the enthusiastic 'yoke-avoiding' action of line 33 and the desperate slavery-avoiding action of Attis in the later part of the poem. But this is not the main point of the heifer image. Its function lies, as we have seen, within the immediate context of Cybele worship.

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⁷ Similarly, Ellis may be right to suggest that Catullus chose for his image a heifer, rather than any other animal, because of the customary sacrifice of a heifer to Cybele. Cf. note 4 above.