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TWO NOTES ON CATULLUS

I

The beginning of the seventy-sixth poem of Catullus appears to cause some modern readers considerable dismay. One may instance the reactions of R. O. A. M. Lyne: 'Our first reaction to the beginning of this poem may be one of incredulity' (*The Latin Love Poets* [Oxford, 1980], p. 31); 'The effect of such language is to imply an outrageous and implausible self-righteousness' (ibid. 32); of K. Quinn: 'a self-righteousness that makes us feel a little uncomfortable' (*The Catullan Revolution* [Melbourne, 1959], p. 77); or of G. Williams: 'this is sheer melodrama, a deft and surprising reversal of "count your blessings"' (*Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* [Oxford, 1968], p. 410); and, further down, on 'si vitam puriter egi': 'This could be simply priggish or outrageous or both, but he does not mean it as a general statement' (ibid.)[1]

The idea that it is in order for a man to feel pleasure in the recollection of his past good deeds, and Catullus' own protestation that his past life (and particularly his behaviour towards Lesbia) has indeed been virtuous, together produce an impression of complacency – even of self-congratulation – which a modern reader may easily conceive to be out of tune with the rest of the poem, as well as, from some modern moralistic points of view, odious in itself. This adverse reaction is, in my view, subjective, and unhelpful for the understanding of the poem. To realise what Catullus is doing, we must be aware of a certain background of ideas, whose existence does not seem on the whole to be recognised by those who criticise the poem for its alleged complacency.

That the recollection of past good deeds is a source of pleasure is a philosophical commonplace. This may have been recognised by Kroll, who collects some of the relevant parallels in his commentary *ad loc*. However, I have not seen a discussion of this poem which fully brings out this point.

One of the chief problems in ancient moral philosophy was the need to show that virtue is profitable to those who practise it. One of the arguments employed to this end was that virtuous deeds are a source of pleasurable memories and that the enjoyment of a good conscience has a greater value than more mundane pleasures. The advantages of recalling one's own virtuous actions are appealed to particularly, as may be expected, in two contexts: either when one is oppressed by a reversal of fortune, or when one is approaching the end of one's life or even actually on the point of death.[2]

[1] These observations of Williams are particularly symptomatic of the subjective approach which I am here arguing against. What would Catullus be doing 'reversing' an English proverb, one without, as far as I know, any Roman equivalent? And on what grounds are we assured that 'si vitam puriter egi' is not meant as a general statement? True, it is not a general *statement*; it is not a statement at all, but a conditional clause; but *general* it certainly is, at least to all appearances.

[2] With this feature of the *topos* may perhaps be linked Catullus' reference to death at line 18. This is usually taken as highly exaggerated and rhetorical; after all, in line 5 Catullus is apparently looking forward to a long life ('in longa aetate'). But perhaps, in view of the suggested ironical tone of line 5, we should take 'in longa aetate' also as bitter and ironical: 'in a long life [if I ever have one].' It is hardly possible to escape the implication, in the appeal to the gods at the end of the poem, that Catullus is actually presenting himself as on the point of

The idea occurs a number of times in Cicero's philosophical works. First in order of composition is the passage of the *De Republica* (quoted by Macrobius, *In somn. Scip.* 1.4.2–3) which leads into the *Somnium Scipionis*, reflecting in its content the corresponding passage in the *Republic* of Plato: 'sed quamquam sapientibus conscientia ipsa factorum egregiorum amplissimum virtutis est praemium' (contrasted with the supposedly actual rewards in the life after death). Then, in *De Finibus* 2.105, Cicero attacks the Epicurean idea that we should remember past pleasures and forget pains, on three counts: (*a*) we cannot always control what we remember and what we forget; (*b*) the memory of past suffering may be in a way pleasant; (*c*) he would have no objection if the Epicureans said that one should remember past glories and triumphs, rather than pleasures, 'nec enim absolvi beata vita sapientis neque ad exitum perduci poterit, si prima quaeque bene ab eo consulta atque facta ipsius oblivione obruentur'. The pleasure of remembering past good deeds is here presented as an essential ingredient in the completion of a happy life, in addition to being a consolation for external ill fortune (as in the case of Marius which Cicero cites). In the first book of the *Tusculans* (1.109), in a consolatory passage on the approach of death, Cicero says that 'mors tum aequissimo animo oppetitur, cum suis se laudibus vita occidens consolari potest'. Lastly, in the *Cato Maior de Senectute*, we are informed (§9) that the best weapons for old age are the virtues, not only because one cannot lose them once one possesses them, but also 'quia conscientia bene actae vitae multorumque benefactorum recordatio iucundissima est'. The verbal similarity of Cicero's phrase 'benefactorum recordatio' with Catullus' 'recordanti benefacta' is striking, as I have already noted in my commentary on the *Cato Maior*. There is no need to assume direct influence; it suffices to postulate that the phrase was current in the language of moral philosophy. Imitation of Catullus by Cicero is naturally unlikely, and the reverse is excluded by chronology, since the *Cato Maior* was written in 44 B.C., some years after Catullus' death.

It is not only in Cicero that this idea is found. Greek antecedents may be seen in Aristotle (*NE* 1166a25) and in the speech of Virtue in Xenophon's narration of the Choice of Hercules (*Mem.* 2.1.33). The reverse side of the same sentiment is to be seen in an alleged saying of Caesar's, recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus (29.2.18), 'miserum esse instrumentum senectuti recordationem crudelitatis': note there *recordatio* again. Other relevant parallels are to be found in Epicurus ap. Diog. Laert. 10.22, Favorinus, *Περὶ γήρως* fr. 14 Barigazzi, and Seneca, *De beneficiis* 2.33.3.

There is surely little doubt that Catullus 76 should be seen against the background of these ideas. The Catullan version, however, is not necessarily a straight reproduction of the idea found in the moralists. It is more reasonably taken as a bitterly ironical allusion to the moralistic idea. The accusations of complacency or self-righteousness mentioned at the beginning would be more justly aimed at the philosophers who prescribed this neat moral medicine as a response to life's difficulties. Catullus is saying that it does not work: he *has* acted virtuously, he *has* kept faith with Lesbia, but the recollection of this does nothing to alleviate the pain caused by her ingratitude. A reader may still, even in view of this, choose to criticise

death and in the grip of a disease – even if that disease turns out to be the purely nervous malaise caused by disappointed love. There is of course a temptation to put this together with our knowledge, or supposed knowledge, that Catullus did not actually live very much longer; but perhaps, in attempting to read this poem on its own terms, the temptation should be resisted. The idea that *in longa aetate* refers to the afterlife need not detain us (M. Renard, *Latomus* 5 [1946], 357, followed by H. Akbar Khan, *Athenaeum* 46 [1968], 54ff. – an article which, despite its somewhat exuberant interpretations, shows more sympathy with Catullus' viewpoint than many other modern accounts).

Catullus for laying claim to the virtues of *pietas* and *fides*; but I fear that one who did so would show himself not only too fine a casuist for the ancient world, where it was always permissible to admit that one had done the right thing, but also intolerant of the ways of disappointed lovers, whose complaints naturally tend to include an element of self-justification.

It remains to say something about the train of thought in the poem as a whole. This has caused more problems than it should have done, partly because of a tendency to treat editorial punctuation as an immutable datum, and partly because critics of this poem seem often to have been less interested in following what Catullus has to say than in finding mathematical patterns of symmetry between the lines; the variety of such patterns that have been proposed seems sufficient to show that there is something wrong with the method.[3]

'If a man can obtain pleasure from the recollection of past good deeds, when he considers that he has been dutiful' (note that *esse* means 'that he has been [and still is]' rather than 'that he is'; the latter would indeed sound self-congratulatory in English, but *fuisse* could not have been used here, since it would mean 'that he has been and is no longer'); 'that he has not broken sacred faith, nor in any contract abused the power of the gods in order to deceive men, many joys await you, Catullus, in a long lifetime, acquired out of this thankless love; for whatever good deeds men can do to anyone, whatever good things they can say, these things have been done and said by you'. As implied above, the tone of lines 5–6 is ironical; of course Catullus does not really expect 'many joys' from the recollection of his dealings with Lesbia; he is just saying that if the philosophers are right, then he ought doubtless to be able to expect them. I take lines 7–8 as following closely on from the previous couplet, and explaining (*nam*) why Catullus can expect these pleasures of recollection: this is, as it were, the minor premise of the syllogism of which the major premise was expressed in lines 1–4, and the conclusion in lines 5–6.

The logic of the next two lines is debatable. *Quae* in line 9 may be taken two ways. Usually it is taken as a connecting relative, with some kind of adversative force. The thought would then be: 'But all these things have gone to waste, being entrusted to an ungrateful mind. Therefore why should you now torture yourself further?' *Quare* has to be taken as referring to the fact that all Catullus' good deeds have gone to waste; in other words, Catullus (on this reading) is saying that nothing more can now be done, and he must endure the situation as best he can. This makes sense as the outburst of a disappointed lover; but it entirely loses sight of the ideas which were insisted on so strongly at the beginning of the poem. It is at least worth considering a different approach.

The *quae* of line 9 could also be a subordinating relative, with *haec* of line 8 as its antecedent (and, naturally, a comma at the end of line 8). On this assumption, the paraphrase from line 5 onwards would read like this: 'many joys await you, Catullus, in a long lifetime, acquired out of this thankless love; for whatever good deeds men can do to anyone, whatever good things they can say, these things have been done and said by you – all these things which have gone to waste, being entrusted to an ungrateful mind. Therefore why should you now torture yourself further?' On this reading, *quare* does not refer to the immediately preceding comment that all Catullus' good deeds have gone to waste, or to a suppressed statement that nothing further can be done; line 9, a subordinate relative clause, becomes virtually parenthetic, a sigh (if one may so put it) rather than an outburst. The reason why Catullus ought not to torture himself any more is to be found not there, but further back, in the content of

[3] cf. Quinn's commentary *ad loc.*; L. A. Moritz, *G & R* 15 (1968), 53–8.

lines 5–8. He is to stop torturing himself, because he has done all that anyone can: he has kept faith (even though it has all gone to waste), and can therefore, according to the moralists' doctrine, expect many pleasures from the recollection of his past good conduct, even despite Lesbia's ingratitude. Why then does he not pull himself together (he continues in lines 11–12), and stop being unhappy?

This reading of lines 1–12 at least has the merit of making Catullus' self-admonition hang together coherently: the twelve lines become one continuous speech of gentle persuasion, not a succession of violent changes of mood, though at the same time the bitterness of Catullus' underlying attitude comes through in *ingrato* (line 6) and in line 9; it is made quite clear that the self-persuasion is either not working or not altogether seriously meant.

Line 13 I take to be an objection from Catullus' weaker nature, an answer to the rhetorical questions of lines 10–12. 'Why can't you stop being unhappy?–Because it is difficult to get rid of a long-standing love all at once.' This would be made clearer if the line were enclosed in inverted commas; it is surely wrong to print it as a question, as in Quinn's edition. In line 14, the self-persuasion takes over again: 'Yes, it is difficult, but you have got to do it.' The repetition of *difficile est* exemplifies the familiar technique of countering an objection by echoing the words of the opponent.

The rest of the poem is a straightforward appeal to the gods, and presents no problem as regards the train of thought. As regards its content, it ties up with the beginning of the poem, in that Catullus reiterates his claim to have observed the demands of *pietas* (line 26, cf. *pium* in line 2), and commends the purity of his life to the attention of the gods (19). This presumably alludes again to his good deeds and good faith, particularly in matters of love (but there is no reason why it should not have a general reference to the morality of Catullus' life as well). All this is well within the conventions of ancient piety: one has to remind the gods that one has not taken their name in vain, and that one is deserving of their mercy.

All in all, Catullus 76 is (as I have interpreted it) a more coherent poem than is often thought. Readers with romantic tendencies may cherish the idea of a slightly incoherent Catullus, who mirrors in his writing the emotional struggles within his mind. This is perhaps all very well, but it is often the same readers who are offended by the supposed self-righteousness at the beginning, and are not prepared to admit that Catullus may be to some extent simply playing with current ideas in an ironical fashion, rather than writing a direct and faithful record of his innermost feelings. The fact is, of course, that everybody's thoughts, even (perhaps particularly) about his innermost emotions, are affected by the contemporary mental climate; everyone thinks to some extent in terms provided for him by others, whether through literature, philosophy, or some other means. Unless we can recognise the influence of current modes of thought on a poet such as Catullus, we are in danger of misunderstanding him.

II

quare quod scribis Veronae turpe Catulle
esse quod hic quisquis de meliore nota
frigida deserto tepefacit membra cubili
id Mali non est turpe magis miserum est.

(Catullus 68a.27–30)

tepefacit: al. tepefactat *R*

So these lines run in the manuscripts. Something must be done about the

unmetrical *tepefacit* of the archetype, but the choice between the two effective possibilities, *tepefactat* (R, presumably a conjecture) and *tepefactet* (Bergk) is to be made according to our conception of the syntax of the rest of the passage, and cannot therefore figure in our argument as to how the passage is to be taken.

There are two traditional lines of interpretation. According to one, the manuscript reading *Catulle* is accepted. Inverted commas are placed round *Veronae...cubili*, on the assumption that it is a direct quotation from Mallius' letter. The word *hic* consequently refers to wherever Mallius[4] was writing from (usually supposed to be Rome). Also consequently, the indicative *tepefactat* is read in line 29.

The other alternative is to take *Veronae...cubili* as indirect speech, assuming an ellipse of a second *esse* ('*that it is* a shame for Catullus *to be* at Verona') and emending *Catulle* to *Catullo* (a change first made in the second half of the fifteenth century, according to Mynors's edition). On this view, naturally, the subjunctive *tepefactet* is preferred. This reading is the one favoured by the majority of editors. It may be observed that it involves two changes to the archetype, while the former involves only one. Further, if 'Veronae...cubili' is taken as indirect speech, *hic* must presumably refer to where Catullus is, i.e. Verona.

There are linguistic arguments, but not decisive ones, on both sides. Against the latter view it is argued that the ellipse of *esse* would be awkward, while that of *est* implied in the former interpretation would be much easier. Nevertheless, the indirect speech is intelligible even without the logically required second *esse*, which could not have been inserted without recasting the passage entirely. Against the former view, it is said that after the epistolary formula *quod scribis* we expect indirect speech, not direct quotation. However, Wiseman[5] has adduced parallels for direct speech from Cicero's letters; and if the letter of Mallius was, like Catullus' reply, in verse, this may have been the only convenient way to refer to its content.

The most substantial difference between the two interpretations consists in the reference of *hic*. If it is in a direct quotation from Mallius' letter, it means where Mallius is. If it is outside the direct quotation, or if the whole phrase is in indirect speech, it means Verona, where Catullus is. (It should be noted that Wiseman takes only the words *Veronae turpe Catullo esse* as direct speech, and the rest as Catullus' paraphrase of Mallius' words; this is a third possible alternative to the two already mentioned.) Accordingly, which text we adopt depends primarily on whether we think it is at Verona, or at the place where Mallius is writing from, that all the best people are warming their cold limbs in a deserted bed.

Those who think that *hic* is Rome usually put forward an interpretation along the following lines. 'Deserto cubili' is taken to mean 'cubili quod a te desertum est'. This, we are assured, can only refer to Lesbia's bed, which Catullus has left only partly occupied by reason of his departure for Verona. While Catullus is absent, apparently, 'all the best people', namely the majority of the *jeunesse dorée* of Rome, are taking advantage of the situation in order to remedy the underpopulation of the said bed. What a shame, Mallius is alleged to be saying, that Catullus is away in Verona and cannot do anything about it. (Also in favour of Rome is Quinn, who however takes

[4] Or Manlius (if one accepts the reading of R in one of the two places where the name occurs): the two forms are probably interchangeable versions of the same name. Not necessarily the same as Manlius Torquatus, the recipient of Catullus 61; one should be cautious in building theories on the hypothesis of this identification, and the more romantic the theory, the more cautious one should be. Both the reading *Mani* (as if from the praenomen *Manius*), and any attempt to link this with the Allius of 68b, are in my view quite misguided. It will be clear that I exclude 68b from consideration when attempting to interpret 68a. The two poems are in my view quite separate.

[5] T. P. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet* (Leicester, 1974), p. 67.

deserto as referring not to Catullus' absence but to the death of Lesbia's husband: a hypothesis which involves considerable assumptions both of identity and of chronology.)

All this is quite incredible. If you are warming your cold limbs in a deserted bed, it means that you are sleeping alone, having yourself been deserted by someone else. It does not mean that you are enjoying nights of passion with Lesbia in the absence of her normal lover, or even of her deceased husband. Further, if one is gently warning an acquaintance that his lady friend is being unfaithful in his absence, supposing that one wishes to remain on good terms with him, it is hardly tactful to resort to highly coloured exaggeration like Mallius' alleged statement that 'all the best people' are sleeping with Lesbia. Perhaps Mallius was not tactful; but in any case it may be questioned whether such a warning, however expressed, would comfortably fit in with the remainder of the content of Mallius' letter. And Catullus' reply is hardly that of one who has received a warning to this effect.

Those who say that *hic* is Verona, on the other hand, interpret the lines as meaning that everyone in Verona (where Catullus is) sleeps alone. This phenomenon is put down to a lack of persons with whom the Veronese might share their beds, due to the stricter morality of the provinces. Mallius is saying, it is alleged, that it is a shame for Catullus to be in a town where the supply of bedfellows is thus restricted: he should return to Rome and have some fun.

This interpretation is equally open to the objection that it does not fit the tone of the rest of Mallius' letter: this time because it is too frivolous for the *conscriptum lacrimis epistolium*. A more serious objection, however, concerns the straining of the meaning of *deserto*. The word means 'deserted' or 'abandoned', not just 'empty'. If a bed is unshared because provincial morality restricts the availability of persons to share it, it does not qualify for the epithet 'deserted', for which it is necessary that it should once have been shared, but is no longer. In any case, it is to be suspected that this provincial morality (however creditable it may be to the ancient Veronese) is a mirage. There is not much of it in the equally Transpadane poem 67, as was long ago pointed out by Robinson Ellis.

G. P. Goold's edition (London, 1983) at this point contains an amazing example of trying to have it both ways. His general note on the poem says that 'Manlius...wrote him (Catullus) a letter urging him to return to Rome at once in view of Clodia's behaviour'. This is the former interpretation. However, on this passage in particular, Goold writes: 'Manlius (who wrote from Rome) is insisting that in Verona Catullus, like other young aristocrats, could not engage in amorous pursuits with the same freedom possible in the capital.' Whatever these lines mean, they cannot mean both of these things at once. I note also that Goold's translation gives 'empty' for *deserto*, and renders *tepefactet* as 'has to warm'; this clearly favours the second interpretation.

There are other interpretations as well as the two predominant ones. Considerable ingenuity is displayed, for example, by A. J. Woodman (*PCPS* 209 [1983], 101) who thinks that the lines mean 'the fact that here (in Verona) all the best people can still warm their limbs even when their beds have been deserted is, Manlius, not shocking but sad'. The footnote accompanying this rendering seems to imply some reservations; and this interpretation of these lines depends on a general view of the poem's meaning which I find difficult to share. According to Woodman's view, so far from there being a deficiency caused by high moral standards, there is actually a surplus of girls in Verona, who may be called upon for limb-warming purposes even by those who have been deserted. The deserted Mallius is supposed to be asking Catullus to send him one such. Why this state of affairs is 'not shocking but sad' I do not think I have grasped.

I pass now to my own suggestion for the interpretation of this passage. The only merit I claim for it is that it accounts for the actual words in the text better than those so far mentioned.

I believe that the words from *Veronae* to *cubili* are in direct speech, and that *hic* is where Mallius is, probably Rome (though nothing in particular hangs on this). Mallius evidently wants Catullus to come back and join him; that is the natural meaning of his statement that it is a shame for Catullus to be in Verona. He does not mean that there is anything more shameful about Verona than about Brixia or Placentia; what he means is that it is a shame for Catullus to be away from Rome (or wherever Mallius is).

It is reasonably assumed that the occasion of Catullus' departure for Verona was the death of his brother: there would be family business to put in order. Now sixteen lines of poem 68a (11–26) are devoted to explaining to Mallius that Catullus cannot help him, because of his brother's death. It is therefore a reasonable deduction that Mallius did not previously know about that event. At least, Catullus seems to have assumed not: in lines 11–13 he says 'sed tibi ne mea sint ignota incommoda...accipe'. Therefore, all Mallius knew was that Catullus had rushed off to Verona.

If Mallius did not know about the death of Catullus' brother, he could well have thought that Catullus had gone to Verona for some other reason. Perhaps Catullus had recently quarrelled with Lesbia, and perhaps Mallius saw in this the reason for departure. At any rate, under those circumstances it would make sense for him to write to Catullus in the following terms: 'It is a shame for you to rush off to Verona [just because you have been deserted by Lesbia]. Don't you realise that, here, everybody who is anybody [including, of course, myself] has been deserted by his lady friend, and is at this very moment trying to warm his frozen limbs in a deserted bed?'

We know that Mallius had been deserted: so much is clear from lines 5–6. Whoever else may or may not be warming his limbs in a deserted bed, Mallius certainly is. There should be a clear rhetorical link between *deserto* in 29 and *desertum* in 6: this interpretation requires it. In both places the word means what it says: 'deserted.' Strained or etiolated interpretations are unnecessary. Mallius is using his own deserted situation as encouragement to Catullus to return to Rome. Instead of just saying 'Don't worry: I'm in the same situation as well', he reinforces his point with a familiar type of exaggeration: 'Everybody who is anybody is in the same situation.' This is precisely the sort of context in which we expect phrases like 'quisquis de meliore nota' to be used. *Frigida*, too, retains its full meaning and point. Mallius (and everybody of the better sort!) is sleeping alone, having been deserted. The coldness of his limbs emphasises that fact. *Frigida membra* are characteristic of the deserted lover; they occur in comparable circumstances in Ovid, *Am.* 3.5.42, *Her.* 1.7 and *AA* 3.70 (the first two passages cited by Quinn in his commentary *ad loc.*). Mallius is not warming his limbs with the assistance of a second party, but by wrapping the blankets round them: it is surprising that scholars should be unwilling to accept that this is a legitimate way of warming the limbs. Finally, this interpretation makes better sense of Catullus' reply. He has explained about his brother's death, and made it clear that he had a good, though miserable, reason for going away to Verona. He has not gone for the inadequate and unmanly (hence *turpe*) reason which, as I suggest, Mallius has suspected. His departure was unavoidable, and the reason for it was lamentable (*miserum*).

'Now,' the reader will ask, 'what do you make of the whole poem?' I do not propose any new solution here (except in so far as what I have said above may cast light on the problem), and in particular I do not think that my interpretation of the

controversial lines 27–30 need presuppose any particular notion of what Mallius has asked for. I assume that the *munera Musarum* meant poetry of some sort, and that the *munera Veneris* meant something different (unless, as we may, we emend *utriusque* in line 39: cf. R. G. M. Nisbet, *PCPS* 204 [1978], 105). One can reasonably suspect that the *munera Veneris* are some sort of remedy for Mallius' troubles, which concern Venus (line 5). Perhaps Mallius asked Catullus to intervene and try to persuade his errant mistress to return. Perhaps he asked for an introduction to a new lady: it would be more civilised to put it this way, rather than in terms which make Catullus into a common *leno*.[6] However, perhaps Catullus deliberately chose a vague phrase, suggesting something to do with love, but nothing too specific. After all, presumably Mallius' request itself was clear enough, and Catullus would not need to repeat it back to him.

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[6] There is a surprising level of influential support for the idea that Catullus could simply provide Mallius with a new girl on request, and that this is what Mallius wanted. Doubtless Catullus had access to slave girls who could be disposed of in this way, but one does not imagine that what Mallius wanted was an ordinary slave girl. It is not squeamishness about the idea of such trafficking that leads one to reject the hypothesis, but the fact that it presupposes a cynical and commercial attitude which is totally at odds with the emotional involvement of both Catullus and Mallius as displayed in the poem. The alternative idea that Mallius had asked Catullus for a share in Lesbia's favours can scarcely be credited. Roman convention appears to have been that such things could be offered, but not asked for without breach of propriety; and this idea is of course excluded by my interpretation of the poem. For this and previous hypotheses see Wiseman ibid. (cited n. 5).