

THE LUCKY CATO, AND HIS WIFE

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IN ONE OF THE MINOR ANECDOTES from his censorship of 184 BCE, M. Porcius Cato is remembered for having expelled a certain Manilius from the senate.¹ Although there were probably other reasons, only one is preserved for us, rendered particularly memorable as an illustration of Cato's fabled *severitas*:² Manilius had kissed his wife in broad daylight (μεθ' ἡμέραν) while his daughter was looking on.³ Plutarch went on (*Cat. Mai.* 17.7) to report a statement by Cato that has all the earmarks of a quip delivered at the time the man was stricken from the rolls of the senate:

αὐτῷ δ' ἔφη τὴν γυναῖκα μηδέποτε πλὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης γενομένης περιπλακῆναι, καὶ μετὰ παιδιᾶς εἰπεῖν αὐτὸν ὥς μακάριός ἐστι τοῦ Διὸς βροντῶντος.

Most recent translations of this sentence are based on an analysis of the syntax that bears reconsideration; they portray Cato as the one who did the hugging and the joking, when in fact it is almost certainly the case that Cato's wife did the hugging and authored the joke.

I. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Robin Waterfield has most recently translated the sentence at issue: "Cato claimed that for his part he never embraced his wife except after a loud clap of

I would like to thank John Gibert, Eckart Schütrumpf, two anonymous referees, and the Associate Editor, James B. Rives, for their help, suggestions, corrections, and encouragement. For any remaining faults I bear the sole responsibility. For the text of Plutarch's *Moralia*, I have relied on the Loeb edition prepared by Frank Babbitt. For the *Life of Cato*, I have used the 1960 Teubner edition of Konrat Ziegler (which numbers the sections of some chapters slightly differently from and, I think, more sensibly than the Loeb edition prepared by Bernadotte Perrin; I trust that the chapters are short enough not to pose too much difficulty for those readers who may refer to a different edition). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. All dates are BCE.

¹ There is controversy over the man's identity, and some think he may be identified with A. Manlius Vulso (*cos.* 178); see Astin 1978: 80–81 and n. 7; Scullard 1973: 158, n. 3; Fraccaro 1956: 433–434. For purposes of my argument I shall refer to him as Manilius without taking any position on the question of his identity, which does not concern me here.

² Cf. Astin 1978: 81; Kienast 1951: 74. For more detailed analysis of Plutarch's purpose with the anecdote, see below, 102–103.

³ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 17.7; cf. *Mor.* 139e; Amm. Marc. 28.4.9. The phrase μεθ' ἡμέραν can mean simply "during the day," but often, as it must here, carries the connotation of "in the daylight," contrasted either implicitly or explicitly with actions taking place at night, under cover of darkness, or in private: e.g., Plut. *Cam.* 23.6: ὅσοι δὲ νυκτὸς ἀπέδρασαν ἐκ τοῦ χάρακος οὐ πολλοί, τούτους μεθ' ἡμέραν σποράδας ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ διαφερομένους ἐπελαύνοντες ἱππεῖς διέφθειρον; Ar. *Pl.* 930: οἴμοι τάλας, ἀποδύομαι μεθ' ἡμέραν!; Pl. *Resp.* 516a–b: ἐκ δὲ τούτων τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν οὐρανὸν νύκτωρ ἂν ῥᾶον θεάσαιτο, προσβλέπων τὸ τῶν ἄστρον τε καὶ σελήνης φῶς, ἢ μεθ' ἡμέραν τὸν ἥλιόν τε καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου; cf. Plut. *Arist.* 10.8, *Marc.* 25.3, *Pyrrh.* 27.1, *Luc.* 3.3, 15.4, *Mor.* 100f–101a.

thunder, and he said as a joke that Jupiter's thunder made him a happy man."⁴ The thinking here is apparently that αὐτῷ is dative of relation or interest, that the object of περιπλακῆναι is τὴν γυναῖκα, and that, accordingly, Cato himself was the subject of both περιπλακῆναι and εἰπεῖν. I intend to show that it is preferable on both semantic and syntactical grounds to regard Cato's wife as the subject of both infinitives and to construe αὐτῷ as the object of περιπλακῆναι. This will affirm the correctness of this phrase in the recent Italian translation of Antonio Traglia (1992: 633), which echoes, without argument, the pre-twentieth-century translations I have been able to consult.⁵ Traglia, however, like all translations before or since, erred, if my argument holds, in concluding that Cato was the subject of εἰπεῖν and thus the author of the following joke.

The picture painted by recent English and French translators is of Cato, when it thundered, embracing his wife and considering himself lucky. The context, involving the accusation that Manilius had kissed his wife in daylight, suggests that this is what Cato meant—that he never embraced his wife *during the day* except when it thundered. It would be remarkable if, even at night, when private physical displays of affection were appropriate, Cato and his wife refused to share intimacy except when it thundered. This leaves open the crucial question, however, why Cato would embrace his wife during the day only when it thundered. *Prima facie* it might be the fear occasioned by thunder that would motivate a person to seek shelter in another's arms. But in a society with a traditional patriarchal division of gender roles, it would be unseemly for a man to show fear in this way, much less to seek shelter in a woman's embrace. Certainly it was not the sort of thing a man was likely to boast about, and thereby expose himself to ridicule.

As an alternative, some have reasonably sought a religious explanation. Perhaps it was either permissible or positively required after a peal of thunder to embrace. David Sansone (1989: 221) cited A. B. Cook (1925: 827) for the ancient ritual practice of smacking the lips upon seeing lightning strike; this parallel does not go very far in explaining an embrace in response to thunder (not lightning!). Otto Schönberger (1969) suggested that a religious basis for Cato's action was obvious. He cited several cultic and ritualistic elements connecting thunder to marriage and sexuality: the *hieros gamos*, Zeus and Gaia, and the Earth Mother. However, any connection to the situation of two mortals embracing after thunder is either tenuous or entirely absent from these general references. Schönberger also found in Chinese culture an example wherein the first thunder of the first month of spring was the cue for the emperor's wife to sleep with her husband. These parallels hardly demonstrate a religious basis for Cato's action under the prevailing interpretation.

⁴Waterfield 1999: 25; cf. Sansone 1989: 132 ("As far as Cato himself is concerned, he claimed that he never embraced his wife except after a loud thunderclap, adding that he made the facetious comment that he considered himself blessed whenever Jupiter thundered"); Flacelière and Chambry 1969: 95; Perrin 1914: 353; Scott-Kilvert 1965: 139; Astin 1978: 81; Della Corte 1969: 56.

⁵For example, Clough 1932: 424 (reprint of a revised nineteenth-century edition of a centuries-old translation attributed spuriously to John Dryden); Langhorne and Langhorne 1795: 323.

In the absence of a convincing religious explanation, we should explore further the otherwise obvious possibility that the only social force at work in the anecdote was the alarm that naturally follows a loud peal of thunder. The grammatical evidence needs to be revisited to show that in all likelihood, contrary to all recent translations other than Traglia's, Cato's wife—not Cato himself—was the one alleged in the anecdote to have done the embracing. This removes the last socio-cultural obstacle to the mundane explanation, since Cato did not, then, suggest that he responded with excessive alarm to the sound of thunder.

We should regard τὴν γυναῖκα as the subject of περιπλακῆναι. The infinitive περιπλακῆναι, in the meaning “embrace,” was not used with an accusative direct object, as the recent interpretation requires; it was by all accounts deponent in the passive voice and took a dative of the personal object. This was the rule in the earliest occurrences, in Homer. So in Book 23 of the *Odyssey*, when the old nurse Eurycleia told Penelope that Odysseus was home, Penelope leapt up and “embraced the old woman” in the dative case (*Od.* 23.33): γρηῖ περιπλέχθη.⁶ The usage was at first, apparently, restricted to poetry, but came into use in later prose.⁷ Plutarch himself was among those who took up its use, and his extant works yield two other examples of the same construction. Once, paraphrasing or quoting a response of Epicurus to Colotes, who had just prostrated himself and embraced Epicurus' knees, Plutarch wrote:⁸

ὡς σεβομένῳ γάρ σοι τὰ τόθ' ὕφ' ἡμῶν λεγόμενα προσέπεσεν ἐπιθύμημα ἀφυσιολόγητον τοῦ περιπλακῆναι ἡμῖν γονάτων ἐφαπτόμενον καὶ πάσης τῆς εἰθισμένης ἐπιλήψεως γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὰς σεβάσεις θεῶν καὶ λιτάς.

As if you were worshipping the words I was saying then, the irrational impulse came over you to take hold of my knees and embrace me and take part in the whole customary knee-clasping as in the reverences and entreaties of gods.

He also used the verb earlier in the text of the *Cato Maior* (14.2), where the consul M.' Acilius Glabrio is said to have embraced Cato after the battle of Thermopylae in 191:

... αὐτὸν τε Μάνιον τὸν ὕπατον θερμὸν ἀπὸ τῆς νίκης ἔτι θερμῷ περιπλακέντα πολὺν χρόνον ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ βοᾶν ὑπὸ χαρᾶς, ὡς οὗτ' ἂν αὐτὸς οὐδ' ὁ σύμπαξ δῆμος ἐξισώσειε τὰς ἀμοιβὰς ταῖς Κάτωνος εὐεργεσίαις.

... and Manius the consul, hot from the victory, embraced him while he, too, was still hot, and clung to him for a long time and cried out with joy that neither he nor the whole people could adequately pay back the good turns Cato had done them.

⁶ The first aorist is found in epic (twice in Homer, many times in Nonnus) apparently because the second, with its three short syllables in sequence (περιπλακ-), will not fit hexametric verse.

⁷ E.g., Eur. fr. 930 Nauck; Lucian *Dial. Meret.* 4.2; Chariton 2.9.6 and 8.3.6; Longus 2.30.1. The aorist passive is absent from prose literature of the classical period.

⁸ Plut. *Mor.* 1117b = Epicurus fr. 141 Usener.

The general trend, therefore, and the specific usage attested in Plutarch's own words, indicates that when it was used in the aorist to mean "to embrace," the verb was deponent and took a dative object.

Clearly, the subject of περιπλακῆναι is τὴν γυναῖκα and its object αὐτῷ. Thus Traglia's translation is, to that point, the best of the recent attempts (1992: 633): "Egli diceva che sua moglie non l'abbracciava mai se non quando scoppiava qualche forte tuono" ("He said that his wife never embraced him except when some heavy thunder rolled"). With this translation, we have restored the interpretation that prevailed before this century.⁹

This is not all. Given that τὴν γυναῖκα was the subject of the preceding infinitive, it is almost certain that it is the subject also of εἶπεῖν.¹⁰ The pronoun αὐτόν is in an unusual form and position to identify itself as the subject of εἶπεῖν. If the pronoun were intended to pick up the subject of the main verb, we should typically have expected the nominative, αὐτός. The accusative, while perhaps not impossible, is exceptional.¹¹ We might offer the reflexive αὐτόν as an alternative reading, but in either case we should also have expected the new subject to precede the infinitive.¹² The usual interpretation makes the sentence atypical in two respects, which is enough to engender some healthy skepticism.

There is a better solution: αὐτόν is perfectly intelligible in its position and context as a case of prolepsis or displacement, where a component of a subordinate clause has been anticipated as the object of the subordinating verb.¹³ This might seem *prima facie* less likely with a verb of speaking, which is not typically construed with a single accusative direct object, but we may compare Euripides' wording at *Medea* 248–249: λέγουσι δ' ἡμᾶς ὥς ἀκίνδυνον βίον / ζῶμεν κατ' οἴκους ("They say that we live a risk-free life in our homes"). There is simply no obstacle to our regarding our passage as another case of prolepsis, and the interpretation yields a perfectly intelligible meaning in context. Since αὐτόν is the object, there

⁹ See above, n. 5.

¹⁰ Despite all previous translations I have consulted: Waterfield 1999: 25; Traglia 1992: 633; Sansone 1989: 132; Flacelière and Chambry 1969: 95; Scott-Kilvert 1965: 139; Clough 1932: 424; Perrin 1914: 353; Langhorne and Langhorne 1795: 323.

¹¹ Kühner and Gerth 1904: 31.

¹² Cf. examples quoted by Kühner and Gerth (1904: 31).

¹³ The structure of the sentence at issue conforms perfectly to the usual pattern of this phenomenon as employed, for example, by Xenophon, who wrote of Cyrus (*An.* 1.8.21): καὶ γὰρ ᾔδει αὐτόν [*sc.* τὸν βασιλέα] ὅτι μέσον ἔχει τοῦ Περσικοῦ στρατεύματος ("After all, he knew that [the king] held the middle of the Persian army"). The phenomenon of prolepsis has been thoroughly examined in recent research, recapitulated and improved by Slings (1992), who treats it as a special case of displacement. Slings argues that displacement in Greek was first and foremost a phenomenon of the spoken language, used to mark the flow of information more clearly to help listeners follow the argument. It came to be used somewhat differently in the formal written language, where the displaced constituent tended to gravitate to the beginning of the sentence rather than to an intermediate position following the verb. The displacement here is, therefore, generic—like that of the spoken language—which may not be surprising since it purports to represent what was originally a spontaneous utterance.

is no change of subject, so it follows that the subject, τὴν γυναῖκα, of the previous infinitive remains in force. We should, therefore, translate as follows: "He said that his wife never embraced him except when there was a great peal of thunder, and that she joked that he was a lucky man when Jupiter thundered." The gist of Cato's words, as Plutarch represents them, was as follows: "My wife never embraces me except when there is a great peal of thunder, and jokes that I am a lucky man when Jupiter thunders."¹⁴

II. AUTHENTICITY AND CONTEXT

If I have established the more likely meaning for the words in the anecdote, it remains to be determined whether the anecdote is genuine and to account for Plutarch's intentions in using it. To take the latter issue first, the anecdote fits neatly into Plutarch's discussion of Cato's harsh measures in the censorship. Cato's uncompromising principles have just been illustrated in the narrative of the more famous (or infamous) expulsion of L. Quinctius Flamininus, the elder brother of the "liberator of Greece," T. Quinctius Flamininus, for allegedly holding an execution at dinner to amuse his lover during his consulship of 192. The case of Manilius' expulsion for an apparently lesser cause provides the transition to the account of Cato's decision to strip L. Cornelius Scipio Asiagenes, brother of P. Scipio Africanus, of his public horse, which Plutarch says many viewed as an attack on the dead Africanus (who, however, was likely not yet deceased).¹⁵ This leads in turn to Plutarch's discussion (*Cat. Mai.* 18.2–19.3) of Cato's increased taxation of luxuries and other domestic policies designed to curb extravagance, by which he annoyed the rich, but, as Plutarch goes on to report (*Cat. Mai.* 19.4), endeared himself to the people as a whole, who rewarded him for his "healing touch" with a statue in the temple of Salus.

The theme of that portion of the narrative in which we find this anecdote, then, is the strictness of Cato's censorial measures against what could be seen as elements of moral decline. Plutarch's choice of this anecdote adds to that impression by implying on Cato's part an uncompromising expectation of pure moral uprightness in the members of the Roman senate. Plutarch viewed Cato's action as a bit severe for the cause alleged, and so the anecdote, like the two immediately surrounding it, may be taken to imply, if anything, an excess of severity.¹⁶ Plutarch certainly shared the common Greek view—not so different

¹⁴ Displacement is natural also in Latin: e.g., Cic. *Att.* 14.21.2: *nosti virum quam tectus; Fam.* 8.10.3; Plaut. *Men.* 420–421; Ter. *Eun.* 855. Plutarch or his translator may have had before him words to this effect: *me uxor numquam amplectitur nisi ingenti tonitru, atque me ridet quam siem felix Iove tonante.*

¹⁵ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 17.1–18.1. On the date of Africanus' death, see Scullard 1973: 152, n. 1; Kienast 1951: 148, n. 61. Polybius (23.14) dates it to a period between early 183 and early 182, and we know that it happened during the censorship of Cato and L. Valerius Flaccus, which lasted until early 183. The best conclusion, then, is that his death took place in early 183, while Lucius would have been deprived of his horse in 184.

¹⁶ Plut. *Mor.* 139e: τοῦτο [*sc.* the action taken against Manilius] μὲν οὖν ἴσως σφοδρότερον.

from the Roman—that public displays of intimacy exhibited an almost animalistic lack of self-control.¹⁷ But on this and other occasions, he emphasized the Romans' higher standards of modesty: it was remarkable to him that Roman bridegrooms approached their new brides only in the dark, and he noted that Cato and the Romans of his day were so modest as not even to bathe in front of their own sons or sons-in-law, although later Romans adopted from the Greeks a less modest attitude in such matters.¹⁸ The anecdote about the expulsion of a senator for a conspicuous lack of modesty was thus of interest and, in context, entirely relevant and useful for Plutarch's immediate purpose to illustrate Cato's attacks on moral standards that seemed to be slipping.

The authenticity of the anecdote cannot be guaranteed, but there is no overriding reason to dismiss it as spurious. We can only speculate about its source, since Plutarch vouchsafes us no direct information. We know that he had a list of Cato's *dicta* either collected by Cato or culled later from his works, or perhaps both.¹⁹ Whether such a list preserved this particular anecdote we cannot say, nor, if we could, would that provenance guarantee its authenticity.

Somewhat more can be said about Plutarch's treatment of the anecdote. He had a penchant, to be sure, for reinterpreting evidence and drawing inferences which turn out in the judgment of modern scholars to have been false, and even perhaps for inventing circumstantial detail to make a narrative more interesting.²⁰ There is no indication, however, that any of the details in this case has been invented. From Cato we have only the alleged quotation, but no details, for example, about the occasion on which it was delivered. Neither the anecdote nor Cato's utterance would have been missed had they been omitted (unless they were well known and/or preserved elsewhere).²¹ There was little incentive for a wholesale invention to fill a nonexistent gap, and little reason to spare more salient details if the whole thing was invented. It is much more likely that Plutarch had the anecdote from whatever source and regarded it as genuine. If so, then what Plutarch did by leaving the bare details as they are was to foster the impression that this was *the* reason (not simply one among many) for Cato's action. While not impossible, this has been regarded as unlikely by scholars who have confronted

¹⁷ Plut. *Mor.* 139e: εἰ δ' αἰσχρόν ἐστιν, ὥσπερ ἐστίν, ἐτέρων παρόντων ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ φιλεῖν καὶ περιβάλλειν ἀλλήλους . . . ; for Plutarch's view in the context of the general Greek and Roman view of public displays of affection, see Walcot 1998: esp. 171–172.

¹⁸ Plut. *Mor.* 279e–f; *Cat. Mai.* 20.7–8.

¹⁹ See Astin 1978: 186–188, but he is perhaps too confident in his assertion (187–188) that the putative list of sayings of Cato was segregated from the putative list of sayings compiled by Cato; the concluding comments of Rossi (1924: 182) seem to me still *à propos*: “Quamvis igitur fere omnia quae Plutarchus praesertim in [*Cato Maior*] c. 8 et c. 9 tradidit atque ea quae in apophthegmatis regum et imperatorum inveniuntur [*Mor.* 198d–199f], digna Censore sint . . . , facete dictorum congeries quae usque ad nos pervenit valde dubia et incerta est.”

²⁰ Cf. Pelling 1990: esp. 35–43.

²¹ The anecdote was told again by Ammianus Marcellinus (28.4.9). This offers no independent corroboration of the anecdote or of Cato's utterance.

the question.²² This is the kind of oversimplification that often infects Plutarch's rhetoric.²³ In this case, as often, we can see past the oversimplification and be relatively confident that the details are genuine. We will never have certainty, but I see no reason to doubt that the anecdote stemmed from real events and was remembered because it was memorable.

Finally, if we are persuaded that Cato made the statements Plutarch reported, we may wonder whether or not they were true. It will not be possible to refute the assumption, in view of the usual cynical attitude toward politicians in general and Roman politicians in particular, that Cato fabricated this anecdote. There is, however, no evidence that would substantiate the claim that he did so. Attempts have been made to impugn Cato's honesty, but they rest on speculation, unnecessary assumptions, and misuse of evidence.²⁴ On the other hand, there is evidence that establishes the plausibility of the anecdote as it stands.

Cato was, if we can believe anything Plutarch tells us, a supportive and respectful husband.²⁵ He made a point, most notably, of being with his wife when she cared for their infant son.²⁶ He had selected her in hopes of her compliance with his honorable expectations.²⁷ There is no indication that any of the problems he might have feared from a different kind of wife—the kind who sometimes

²² See above, n. 2.

²³ Cf. the examples in Pelling 1990: esp. 38–39, discussing Plutarch's suppression in the life of Antony of Antony's service with Caesar in Gaul, because his narrative centered on the influence of Curio on Antony. Plutarch never said that Antony was not close to Caesar, just as in the case at issue he never said that the reason given was the only one advanced against Manilius.

²⁴ Carawan (1990: 328–329 and n. 31), in a larger article devoted to a hypothetical case of Cato's dishonesty, claimed that there were "indications, in Plutarch and Livy, that Cato shamelessly glorified his own achievements and viciously slandered his opponents." Livy (34.15.9) wrote of Cato that he was "hardly one to miss an opportunity to praise himself (*haud detractor laudum suarum*)," and Plutarch (*Cat. Mai.* 14.2, 19.5) echoed the sentiment. Neither source implies that he was "shameless," but both give a sense that Cato's self-praise was entirely accurate. Livy (39.40.4–12) by himself praising Cato to the stars, and Plutarch by writing explicitly mere moments after the cited statement (*Cat. Mai.* 19.7–8) that Cato's self-praise was, by all accounts, justified.

²⁵ The counter-argument is obvious but again facile: these details come from Plutarch, and might ultimately stem from Cato's public self-presentation. His life might have been altogether different from the picture he painted. This is always possible, but Cato would have had almost unprecedented success, for a public man, at suppressing a truth that many men (he was prosecuted forty-four times, and never convicted) were highly motivated to reveal, both during his life and after. This argument from silence has some credibility and renders the purely cynical interpretation less than convincing.

²⁶ *Plut. Cat. Mai.* 20.4.

²⁷ *Plut. Cat. Mai.* 20.2, 3–4: "He married a woman more for her high birth than for her great wealth, reasoning that both kinds of women had the same measure of dignity and intelligence, but that well-born women, because of their sense of shame, were more amenable to their spouses in view of what was honorable. . . . He said that a man who hit his wife or child was putting his hands on the holiest of holies. He put more stock in being a good husband than a great senator; and moreover he said that he admired nothing else about the ancient Socrates except that he dealt kindly and easily with a difficult wife and afflicted children. And when his child was born there was no business so pressing, except public business, as to keep him from being with his wife when she was bathing and swaddling the baby."

earned his implicit or explicit condemnation in fragments here or there—were present in his own.²⁸ He seems to have chosen his wife well, according to his own personal standards.

Furthermore, the picture painted by the anecdote about Cato's attitude to sexuality jibes with other aspects of the tradition about his sexual life. When his wife died, Plutarch reports (*Cat. Mai.* 24.2–7) that he took up with a slave, who offended his son and daughter-in-law (the daughter of L. Aemilius Paullus and sister of P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus, the younger) by flaunting the relationship. Cato decided to marry again and took to wife the daughter of one of his clients, who bore the son who was the grandfather of M. Porcius Cato Uticensis or “the younger.” At the very least, it is undeniable that Cato married for the second time and had a son when he was more than eighty years old, if, as seems most likely, his second son was born and named “Marcus” only after the death of his first son Marcus in 152.²⁹ There is hardly any reason to doubt the rest of the details supplied by Plutarch to convince us that Cato was no puritan. A similar conclusion can be drawn from Horace's anecdote about the young man Cato saw coming out of a brothel, whom he called over and congratulated for exercising his lusts in a brothel rather than with some man's wife.³⁰ Cato was remembered for recognizing and experiencing the power of sexual desire, and at the same time for

²⁸For example, in a speech supporting the passage of the *lex Voconia* (Cato *Orat.* 158–159 Malcovati) he outlined a nightmarish scenario for the senatorial aristocracy, where a wife who owned a vast amount of property might hold her husband hostage to her whims.

²⁹Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 27.7; Gel. 13.20; Plin. *Nat.* 7.61; *Vir. Ill.* 47.9. On the authority of Pliny (*octogesimo exacto*) and the author of the *De viris illustribus* (*post octoginta annos*) Drumann (in Drumann and Groebe 1919: 159) and Astin (1978: 105) conclude that Cato married Salonia in 155 and that the second Marcus was born in 154 and thus named “Marcus” while his brother Marcus still lived. Groebe (in Drumann and Groebe 1919: 159, n. 8) doubted that, but Miltner (1953) upheld Drumann's reasoning. It should not be upheld. Pliny's words indicate only that it was *after* Cato's eightieth birthday, not, as Drumann and Astin each wrote, that it was *during* his eightieth year that the son was born (Cato's eightieth year started at some point in 154 and ended on his eightieth birthday in 153; for the evidence identifying 234 as the year of his birth, see Astin 1978: 1, n. 1). Furthermore, it may well be that the source of that information had put a date not on the birth of the son, but on the marriage; Gellius (13.20.8) wrote: *ipse quoque [Cato censorius] iam multum senex Saloni clientis sui filiam virginem duxit in matrimonium, ex qua natus est ei M. Cato Salonianus* (“he himself, already a very old man, married the maiden daughter of his client Salonius, from whom was born to him Marcus Cato Salonianus”). Pliny's statement was that Cato had had a son *octogesimo exacto ex filia Salonii clientis sui* (“after his eightieth year from a daughter of his client Salonius”). It is hardly far-fetched to imagine a common source that indicated that it was in or after his eightieth year that he married Salonius' daughter, who subsequently gave birth to Cato's second son Marcus. Someone quoting from memory about the birth of the son and the age of Cato at the time might easily have glossed over the distinction. At any rate, if Cato's second son was born in 152 or later, both statements are accurate as they stand. There is no reason to conclude that Cato's second son was born before the death of the first. It seems unlikely, at any rate, that the second son was named “Marcus” before the death of his half brother of the same name (so Groebe in Drumann and Groebe 1919: 159, n. 8).

³⁰Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.31–5; but the scholia report (ps.-Acro *ad loc.*, p. 20 Keller) that there was a punch line to this anecdote: when he found the man coming out of the brothel rather more often, he told him he had praised him for an occasional visit, not for moving in. Moderation was in order.

condoning only careful and moderate indulgence that avoided devastating social pitfalls. That such a man would savor the opportunity for a little stolen intimacy with his wife during the daytime, when an arguably appropriate excuse presented itself in the form of her alarm at a sudden peal of thunder, is entirely plausible.

For us it is equally important that this interpretation at long last gives a probable voice to Licinia, who, like so many women in the ancient world, has had little opportunity to speak to posterity despite her intimate association with one of the most important men of the day. I have no doubt that her husband consulted her and conversed with her about many issues, and that she had more than a little influence on the development of his public persona. But of Licinia's words, if the anecdote is genuine, we have only this paraphrase.

If these words reflect those that she actually spoke, they shed light, if dimly, on her character and her relationship to her husband. The fact that she joked with him points to a healthy mutual respect and comfort. Her gentle teasing about the fact that he apparently craved more intimacy than he ordinarily received suggests that she had some power to decide when and how they were intimate, and that only when it thundered did her guard fall during the daytime. If so, this was not the only time when Cato's own desires were constrained somewhat more tightly by others than by his own well-publicized sense of propriety; as has been mentioned, the stated reason for Cato's second marriage was to avoid scandalizing his family by continued relations with a slave.³¹ That Cato would respect his wife's personal boundaries is, at least, consonant with the rest of the evidence.

Finally, even if we assume that Cato fabricated the quip, as he might have, we nevertheless gain insight into the character of Cato and his times. At the very least, we can add this early example to the evidence surveyed by Susan Treggiari (1991: 245–259) to show that the ideal Roman marriage was a loving and harmonious partnership. With this anecdote Cato put his wife in a more prominent and respected position than has previously been recognized. It might once have been possible to view this passage as evidence of Cato's quasi-puritanical or religious control over his wife's sexuality. It now serves, instead, as strong evidence that the censor wanted the senate, at least, to view his wife as a powerful and respected woman in her own right who could withhold her affections and tease him when she relaxed her usual inhibitions.³² Certainly this will have to be considered

³¹ Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 24.2–7; but Plutarch (*Cat. Mai.* 24.7) added that Cato's son asked if it was because of some wrongdoing on his part that Cato was giving him a stepmother, and Cato responded that he was proud of everything Marcus had done and had no complaints, but wanted to bless himself and the state with more sons just like him. Plutarch likened this response to a similar anecdote about Peisistratos, the tyrant of Athens.

³² If it was used as Plutarch's narrative suggests, the anecdote was intended to point up a subtle, but nonetheless black, mark on Manilius' character, while putting a human face on Cato's strict application of standards of conduct by affirming, or reaffirming, that his views on physical intimacy were more balanced than his allegation against Manilius might otherwise have made it seem, and that his wife was perhaps stricter than he in some respects.

among the salient facts whenever anyone sets about assessing Cato's social and political orientation *vis à vis* womanhood.

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