

VII. Autoallegory in Catullus 63 and 64

PAUL W. HARKINS

XAVIER UNIVERSITY

The longer poems (61–68) of the *Liber Catulli* certainly differ from the shorter lyrics in their relatively greater dependence on Alexandrian originals for structure and content,¹ but Havelock is correct in maintaining that these longer poems cannot be partitioned off as representative of a separate aspect of the poet's genius.² It is apposite to inquire, therefore, whether Catullus, essentially the lyricist, is not giving expression to his own life and experience in at least some of these longer poems, even if he may have veiled the expression in allegory.

Specifically, the purpose of this inquiry is to re-examine *Carmina* 63 and 64 to see if it be a fact that these poems, allegorical in content, are indirectly referable to the poet's relations with Clodia³ and, in this sense, are autoallegoric. Since it is a fact that in *Carmen* 68 Catullus himself applies the myth of Laodamia to his own *liaison* with Lesbia, the re-examination of *Carmina* 63 and 64 is in order and the examiner may well be on the alert to sense therein the existence of allegory referable to the narrator—Catullus himself.

Carmen 68, the *Epistle to Allius*, begins to be of special interest when the entrance of Lesbia into the house furnished to Catullus by Allius is compared to Laodamia's crossing of the threshold of Protesilaus (vv. 70–76):

quo mea se molli candida diua pede
intulit et trito fulgentem in limine plantam
innixa arguta constituit solea,
coniugis ut quondam flagrans aduenit amore
Protesilaeam Laudamia domum
inceptam frustra, nondum cum sanguine sacro
hostia caelestis pacificasset eros.

¹ Georges Lafaye, *Catulle et ses modèles* (Paris 1894) especially chapters 4 and 5.

² E. A. Havelock, *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (Oxford 1939) 75 f.

³ There is no reason to doubt Ovid's statement (*Tristia* 2.427) that Lesbia was a *falsum nomen*. "Lesbia" has the proper number of syllables to represent "Clodia" according to the ancient rule for literary pseudonyms (see Acron on Horace, *Sat.* 1.2.64), and Apuleius (*Apol.* 10) tells us that "Lesbia" did in fact represent "Clodia."

These Lesbia-Laodamia and Catullus-Protesilaus allegories are reaffirmed in vv. 130-32:

ut semel es flauo conciliata viro.
aut nihil aut paulo cui tum concedere digna
lux mea se nostrum contulit in gremium.

Not only does Catullus select the Laodamia legend but also he adapts it somewhat—possibly to his own purposes.⁴ At least the Laodamia who emerges in 68 is more the poet's own than the traditional figure of legend⁵: Catullus' Laodamia came to Protesilaus before the lords of heaven had blessed their union (vv. 73-76), and by way of punishment she was separated from her loved one before her burning passion could be satisfied (vv. 79-84). This passion surpassed that of a dove which bites and snatches kisses from her mate more wantonly than a *multiuola mulier* (vv. 125-30).

It is difficult, to be sure, to admit the similarity between Lesbia and Laodamia. Laodamia loved one man with wholehearted devotion; any man Lesbia loved was loved with a worldly wisdom which Catullus, a practical poet, could not fail to notice. He does note the difference and, with consummate craftsmanship, weaves it into his allegory. Laodamia, who is *uniuola*, so to speak, loves more ardently than a *multiuola mulier*; Catullus chides *multiuola* Lesbia who is not content with him alone, but he will bear with her *rara furta* (vv. 135 f.). Yet he must keep his anger within bounds as Juno does, even though she knows the many amorous faults of *omniuolus* Jove (vs. 140).

Therefore, Catullus is like Juno in restraining his wrath at Lesbia's lapses. And Lesbia, who is *multiuola*, is like *omniuolus* Jove.⁶ And there is the further identification wherein both the

R. Ellis in his *Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1876) pages lv ff. has treated this much discussed question as also, more recently, did A. L. Wheeler in his *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley 1934) 91-3, 260, note 8. E. A. Havelock (above, note 2) 2 sees the identification of Lesbia with Clodia as almost certain.

⁴ Lafaye (above, note 1) 214 notices that the story as told by Catullus has no single source; he has borrowed from Euripides but less from him than from the Alexandrians.

⁵ See Homer, *Iliad* 2.695 ff.

⁶ See vv. 135 and 140. How well this tendency was borne out in Lesbia's case can be seen from such poems as 58 and 11. But at the time of writing 68, Catullus was willing to bear with Lesbia, even if he could not blind himself to her failings. Ellis (above, note 1) 341 remarks that Catullus, in comparing himself and Lesbia with Juno and Jupiter, "inverts the very profanity which caused Ceyx and Alcyone, who called each other Jupiter and Juno, to be metamorphosed into birds (Apollod. 1.7)."

lovers are like Laodamia: Lesbia, because she came to Catullus as Laodamia had come to Protesilaus; Catullus, insofar as he, too, is *uniuolus*. And being like the same third (Laodamia), Catullus and Lesbia are somewhat like each other.

The apparent confusion of these identities, which are partly the same and partly different, finds clarification in Catullus' quasi-mystical power of poetic conception—his capacity for identifying Lesbia with himself. Havelock, in discussing this poem, has this to say:

For example, in the *Epistle to Allius* . . . , looking back over his love's early days, and overcome by his yearning for her, in imagination he sees himself as she might be—as woman and wife—just as he sees her as he is himself—loving, faithful and patient. This is the secret of the twin poetic images of Laodamia and Juno as he used them in that poem. The tale of Laodamia forms an episode which has puzzled commentators, for it is the tale of a wife completely devoted to her husband as Lesbia never was to him—he confesses it in the same poem. The truth is that he has created her in the image of his own heart, because he cannot help it, and Laodamia is the embodiment of this illusion, half Lesbia, and half himself. Like Lesbia, she was a lovely and famous woman; like himself, she loved too well and found her love frustrated . . .⁷

Hence this autobiographic poem offers safe grounds for the autoallegorical hypothesis because it reveals Catullus so intimately, showing how he could idealize Lesbia and, without completely blinding himself to her frailties, still mystically could identify himself with her. And in this instance it is Catullus himself who points out the allegory of the myth.

Although Catullus is the narrator of *Carmina* 63 and 64, he does not expound the allegories of these poems as he did the myth of Laodamia in 68. Examination may make it clear, however, that the Attis and Ariadne allegories contained in 63 and 64 are closer to the poet's own experience than might at first be suspected.

Since in *Carmen* 68 Catullus not only chose to use the Laodamia myth but adapted it to his purpose, it seems apposite to raise these questions with regard to the myth of Attis in 63: why did Catullus choose this myth and how does he adapt it to his purpose? Of

⁷ Havelock (above, note 2) 118.

course, many factors may have combined to determine Catullus' choice; these two, however, seem the most deserving of consideration: first, he is here imitating Callimachus; second, it pleased him to write of Attis because the myth provided a mirror in which he saw himself.

Wilamowitz-Möllendorf proposes the rather unlikely theory that Catullus is here translating or imitating Callimachus,⁸ although he grants that the Latin poem may be only an abridgment of the original.⁹ Lafaye makes much of the poem's lack of continuity—for example, Attis' comrades appear and disappear conveniently but mysteriously. This he attributes to lacunae left by Catullus in the chain of events but which could readily be filled by the learned reader who was already familiar with the text of Callimachus.¹⁰ Although the conjectures of Wilamowitz and Lafaye fail to convince the reader, they leave little doubt that Catullus' poem shows a strong Alexandrian influence.¹¹

But even if Catullus is imitating Callimachus, why did he choose this poem of Callimachus as, at another time, he chose the *Coma Berenices*?¹² It is not unreasonable to suppose that he did so

⁸ U. v. Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, "Die Galliamben des Kallimachos und Catullus," *Hermes* 14 (1879) 194–201. He modified this view in his *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos* 2 (Berlin 1924) 291–95 to the extent that he would allow that the middle of the poem was Catullian. J. P. Elder in "Catullus' Attis," *AJP* 68 (1947) 394–403 finds unsupportable the suggestion that Catullus was translating or closely imitating an imaginary Alexandrian prototype (by Callimachus) and feels that Lafaye (above, note 1) 82–89 has herein only followed Wilamowitz and, therefore, his opinion has no independent value.

⁹ Wilamowitz in *Hermes* (above, note 8) 198; Lafaye (above, note 1) 86.

¹⁰ Lafaye (above, note 1) 86.

¹¹ Lafaye (above, note 1) 87–88.

¹² *Carmen* 66. See H. W. Prescott, "The New Fragment of Callimachus' *Coma Berenices*," *CP* 24 (1929) 290–92. J. P. Elder in "The Art of Catullus' Attis," *TAPA* 71 (1940) xxxiii–xxxiv feels that Catullus chose the Attis theme because he had seen in Bithynia the effects of religious frenzy on Cybele's worshippers. On page xxxiv he says, "As a sensitive person, he was awed by the complete control over reason which such ecstasy assumed. Before such a tremendous force, good or bad, man was helpless. . . it is the awesome effect on mankind of such a sweeping passion that attacks him." This may well be a valid reason, but it need not be the only one. In fact, Elder himself advances two others in *AJP* (above, note 8) 396. The topic—emasculatation—is, he says, a subject full of attraction and horror for all human beings, and cites as evidence S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (transl. W. Sprott, New York 1933) 122–23 and 170. Elder goes on to say that Catullus' knowledge of the Cybele rites scarcely explains why he chose "to picture with such vivid contrast the high enthusiasm and the deep disillusionment of a human being who entered into this inhuman practice." But he points out that there is another element in the composition of the *Attis* we should not overlook—the poet's desire to

because the myth provided him with a mirror in which he could see himself. Although perfect identity of detail is neither to be sought nor found in allegories, the Attis myth does appear to recapitulate the story of Catullus' love.

Attis was a boy so handsome that he deserved to be loved by Agdistis (according to Pausanias)¹³ or by Cybele herself (according to Ovid).¹⁴ Whichever of the two loved him, the result was the same—Attis was driven mad, and in his frenzy he mutilated himself. So, too, Catullus was astounded that Lesbia loved him but soon found that this love was a poison which was destroying him utterly. He, too, was driven to such a frenzy that he hated and loved simultaneously and knew not why. But he did know that he must have done with the cause of his disease and that he had need of the Great Mother's help to ward off its recurrence.

Did Catullus adapt the myth to suit his own purpose? Adapt it he certainly did, unless his treatment has been borrowed *in toto* from Callimachus. It is quite clear that he followed no detailed account found in extant literature; in fact his account is notably different from those given later by Pausanias and Ovid. Ellis maintains that Catullus has done no more than take the bare outline of the traditional story and then has "worked it up as his own imagination suggested."

His Attis is a youth, who surrounded by all the happiness of Greek life, the gymnasia with their group of applauding spectators, the crowd of admirers who hang garlands in his vestibule and wait his rising at day-break to escort him to the palaestra, is suddenly roused by a call which he cannot resist, to leave all and follow Cybele. With a band of companions ready to bind themselves by the same laws and share his exile, he sails to the Trojan Ida; there with the rest of the troop castrates himself; and amid the sound of tambourines and cymbals, the instruments of Cybele's worship, hurries with them to the sanctuary of the goddess on the top of Ida. Sleep dispels their frenzy, and at sunrise Attis, now repentant, returns to the shore, and looking across the sea to his country, declares his regret. Cybele, roused by his passionate

indulge his own virtuosity. The Attis theme offered Catullus a good opportunity to display his skill in composition. No doubt Elder is correct on all counts, but none of his reasons to explain Catullus' choice seems as cogent as the reasons advanced in this paper.

¹³ *Description of Greece* 7.17.9–12.

¹⁴ *Fasti* 4.223–46.

complaint, sends a lion to frighten him again into obedience; he returns into the forest and there remains all his life her votary. It will be seen from this that the main idea of the poem is the revolt against nature, or as it might more truly be called, the passion of unnaturalness. This is expressed partly in the description of the self-mutilating frenzy of Attis, partly in the agony of regret with which he recalls his life before it.¹⁵

The point of the poem, therefore, finds its expression in frenzy and regret. Here, too, may lie the basis for an autoallegoric interpretation. In fact the only clear clue that *Carmen* 63 contains an allegory applicable to Catullus himself comes in the short prayer to Cybele at the end of the poem (vv. 91–93):

dea, magna dea Cybebe, dea domina Dindymi
procul a mea tuos sit furor omnis, era, domo:
alios age incitatos, alios age rabidos.

This petition for release from *furor*, uttered in the poet's own person, clearly reveals that there is an undeniably subjective aspect to the poem and suggests that here again an analogy confronts the reader. The two terms are Attis and Catullus; the point of comparison is to be found in *furor* which belongs to the two in a manner that is partly the same and partly different.

Throughout *Carmen* 63 *furor* represents the state of soul wrought in a worshipper of Cybele. Attis, goaded to madness (*stimulatus furenti rabie*) makes the supreme dedication demanded of Cybele's votaries (vv. 4–5). Thereafter, a *notha mulier*, Attis wanders frenzied (*furibunda*), breathless and unsure at the head of a band of *Gallae* (vv. 31–34). Exhausted when they reached the home of Cybele, the delirious madness (*rabidus furor*) of their mind departs in soft slumber (vs. 38). But on awakening Attis looks back on his lost homeland and laments that his life will be lived on snowy Ida and that, in his frenzy (*furibunda*), he will visit the dens and

¹⁵ Ellis (above, note 3) 208–9. See also H. Graillot, *Le culte de Cybèle* (Paris 1912) 101–3. J. P. Elder in *TAPA* (above, note 12) xxxiii says, "I believe that Catullus' twist to the usual story is original." In *AJP* (above, note 8) 395 Elder holds that Catullus' purpose in this poem is to give "a sympathetic delineation of a mind undergoing a psychological experience of a most powerful sort." The poem presents two contrasting moods of Attis. "The first is one of wild and dominant fanaticism which culminates in a terrible self-sacrifice; the second is one of awakening and bleak despair when Attis realizes what he has done, what he now is, and recalls the world to which he may never now return. In brief, it is a study of fanatic devotion and subsequent disillusionment."

lurking places of wild beasts (vv. 50–73, especially vs. 54). Indeed, it seems that it is only during the short span of his lament that, *rabie fera carens* (vs. 57), he finds surcease from his frenzy. But for this lament, Cybele bids her lion drive him to frenzy again.¹⁶ Attis flees to the woodland, there to be a handmaid for the remainder of life (vv. 89–90).

Elsewhere in the *Liber Catulli* both *furor* and its cognates are chiefly used in an erotic sense,¹⁷ but one instance of this word might be held suspect because of the levity of the poem in which it occurs. In *Carmen* 50 Catullus is raging with the madness of desire to see Calvus again when he recalls how yesterday they had together exercised their penchant for verse composition and good wine. The poem is playful in tone and *furor* is caricatured, but the very exaggeration of its symptoms as herein presented offers a clear guide to its erotic connotation. In vv. 7–13, writing in a mock-heroic vein, Catullus describes this rage of desire:

atque illinc abii tuo lepore
incensus, Licini, facetiisque,
ut nec me miserum cibus iuuaret
nec somnus tegeret quiete ocellos,
sed toto indomitus furore lecto
uersarer, cupiens uidere lucem,
ut tecum loquerer simulque ut essem.

These characteristics of loss of appetite and sleep, exhaustion

¹⁶ 'agedum,' inquit 'age ferox <i>, fac ut hunc furor <agitet>,
fac uti furoris ictu reditum in nemora ferat,
mea libere nimis qui fugere imperia cupit.' (vv. 78–80)

Note the alliterative (and significant?) joining of *ferox* and *ferat* with the repeated forms of *furor*. Note, too, that Cybele metes out *furor* as a punishment.

¹⁷ The seven occurrences of *furor* or its cognates in *Carmen* 63 have already been mentioned (vv. 4, 31, 38, 54, 78, 79, 92). It occurs in ten other places in the *Liber Catulli*. The first three are less important but not without interest. In 15.14 *furor* is joined with *mala mens* and *uecors* to describe a state of infatuate frenzy. Catullus is warning Aurelius not to let *furor* drive him to so great a crime that he forget his pledge to Catullus and fall in love with Juventius. Hence, *furor* can have an erotic connotation. In 46.2 Spring and Zephyr are hushing the rage of the equinoctial sky, and this passage merely shows that *furor* may be analogically applied to nature's moods as well as to those of men. In 68.129 *furores* is used in a definitely erotic sense, being applied to Laodamia who, a few lines further on, is compared to Lesbia. Of the remaining seven occurrences of *furor* and its cognates, six are found in *Carmen* 64, and all of these in an erotic sense.

and unconquerable frenzy, when coupled with the *perdita mens* of Ariadne, whose *furores* also were *indomiti* and who (64.55)

necdum etiam sese quae uisit uisere credit,

and the infatuation of Attis, who (63.31)

furibunda simul anhelans uaga uadit animam agens,

give a picture of *furor* comparable to the famous description of frenzy in Sappho's *Ode to Anactoria* and in Catullus' no less famous adaptation of it (51.5-12):

misero quod omnis
eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suopte
tintinant aures, gemina teguntur
lumina nocte.

The ecstasy of Catullus' reaction to the sight of Lesbia in *Car-men* 51 stands in sharp contrast to the poet's mood in 76 where his resignation struggles with his despair. He has been faithful to Lesbia, but her vices are beyond cure and he must break from her. He cannot hope that she will change. Although he has said and done all things well, his words and deeds of love can never be requited in kind. Hence, he must end the affair, no matter how it hurts. Indeed, if he expects to be cured, he must expect to be hurt, for in this hurt lies his one means of safety (vv. 15-16):

una salus haec est, hoc est tibi peruincendum,
hoc facias, siue id non pote siue pote.

Therefore, he begs the gods, if it be within their power to take pity on him (vv. 19-22):

me miserum aspiciate et, si uitam puriter egi,
eripite hanc pestem perniciemque mihi,
quae mihi subrepens imos ut torpor in artus
expulit ex omni pectore laetitias.

They must tear from his being the love for Lesbia which has

plagued and destroyed him. He recognized well its joy-dispelling torpor. It is a symptom of the erotic frenzy in which he had once found deceitful hope; now his frenzy is gone but, as with Attis, it has left behind it the loss which is his despair (63.44-47).

However, with the gods' help, he must not succumb to despair; he must resign himself to his loss and resolve to be rid of his foul infection (76.25-26):

ipse ualere opto et taetrum hunc deponere morbum.
o di, reddite mi hoc pro pietate mea.

Carmen 76, therefore, is a prayer; in it Catullus makes in unveiled language the same petition for release from *furor* which is cloaked in the Attis allegory.

It is not too far-fetched to see an allegorical connection between the frenzy of a Cybele worshipper and the frenzy of a lover—a connection between Attis and Catullus himself. Attis made a journey over the sea to Phrygia (vv. 1-2); Catullus did, too, on his way to Bithynia. Attis made the trip eagerly, goaded on by a madness which bewildered his mind (vs. 4); Catullus went off in a last effort to escape Lesbia's poisonous charms. Attis' madness had led him to destroy his manhood by his own hand (vs. 5); Catullus had cut himself off from Lesbia, his life. That step irrevocably taken, Attis' lot was one of grief and regret (vv. 48-73); Catullus must surely have felt a like grief and regret for what was gone for ever. Cybele soon turned Attis' thoughts from regret for his action by bidding her lion drive him to the forest where madness might hunt him (vv. 76-80; cf. vs. 89).

Furor is definitely applicable to both states of mind and hence to both Attis and Catullus. But what is the allegorical connection? Attis' lament, a song of rash action followed by regrets, suggests two autobiographic explanations. Either Catullus was infatuated with Lesbia and had made some supreme dedication of devotion and now laments his action, or perhaps he had followed some inner voice bidding him flee from Lesbia and, having irretrievably cut himself off from her presence and power, now lives with his regrets. In either case the Attis incident would serve as allegory and hence lend weight to the autobiographic hypothesis, but the second explanation seems preferable. Furthermore, if the poem was influenced by Catullus' Bithynian journey

of 57 B.C., the second seems to be the more substantial.¹⁸ At least, such details in the poem as Attis' tearful gaze over the vast expanse of ocean (63.48), his lament to the homeland from which he had fled as a runaway slave (vv. 51-52), and his grief over the life he had changed for desolate days among the Phrygian forests (vv. 71-73) can be more readily applied to circumstances belonging to Catullus' state of soul after he had fled from Rome and Lesbia.

This explanation also seems more likely when it is recalled that there is no parallel in Catullus' experience to Attis' flight from Cybele's lion (63.89). In fact Catullus fervently prays Cybele that he may be spared such frenzy. Perhaps in the light of the allegory he may be said to pray that he be spared a *return* to frenzy such as Attis suffered. Let Cybele send her lion executioner (vs. 77) to drive others to wild frenzy as he had just driven Attis to flee madly into the wild forest (vs. 89). This prayer, too, can be better understood from comparison with the prayer of *Carmen* 76, wherein Catullus petitions for release from his love as from a destructive disease (76.25).

Hence, on account of the Phrygian background which may place the ode among the Bithynian poems and subsequent to Catullus' break from Lesbia, on account of the details which point to a complete separation from homeland and friends, on account of the likelihood of an erotic allegory in *furor*, and on account of the prayer which begs that *furor omnis* be far from him, the second explanation is preferable. Accordingly *Carmen* 63 may be interpreted as an allegory expressing a turmoil of soul which finds Catullus struggling between despair at his loss and the resolve never again to return to Lesbia and the frenzied love which had ruined his life.

The explanations thus far advanced undoubtedly have their weaknesses, but they do contribute to the hypothesis that Catullus, always the lyricist, cannot separate his poetic expression from his own life and experience, that is, from Lesbia. When *Carmen* 64 is considered in this same light, it offers both promise and problems.

¹⁸ The Phrygian background of the poem makes it probable that the ode was inspired, to some extent at least, by Catullus' Eastern travels with Memmius, which, if true, would date the poem after 57 B.C., the earliest year in which Catullus could have been in the East. This would help us to place *Carmen* 63, in the larger perspective of Catullus' relations with Lesbia, somewhat about or before the time when he gained not only mastery over himself but also the necessary moral courage to reject Lesbia utterly.

The poem, sometimes called the *Epithalamium of Peleus and Thetis*, is an epyllion or short epic and is universally accepted as an example of the Alexandrian influence on Roman letters. It shows "doctus Catullus" at his learned best. He has drawn freely from Greek literature and mythology, ancient and contemporary, for elements of thought, structure and style.¹⁹ According to most commentators the basis of the poem is the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, and wrought somewhat as a tale within a tale is found the story of Ariadne's desertion by Theseus.²⁰ This story is introduced cleverly by a device as old as Homer²¹: Catullus begins to describe the coverlet on the bridal bed (vv. 50–51) but immediately singles out the pictured scene of Ariadne standing forlorn on the shore as Theseus sails away (vv. 52 ff.).

Hence the poem is bipartite, offering two aspects of love: the happiness of Peleus and Thetis (vv. 1–49, 267–408) and the desolation of Ariadne (vv. 50–266). Many see an apparent lack of unity between the two tales, and Ellis finds a disproportion in the Ariadne digression which is without parallel in Callimachus or Theocritus.²² Indeed he feels the digression has nothing to do with the main subject of the poem, but he finds some slight merit in an explanation that the connecting link lies in the common theme of the two stories, the glory of marriage.²³

Episodic disproportion is a serious enough problem, but this study is more immediately concerned with tracing an autobiographical influence in the poem. Nor is it unlikely that such an influence should be at work, even where Catullus is imitating Greek originals, because he cannot fully suppress the subjective element, and his poetry is always in some measure a picture of his own state of soul.

In *Carmen* 64 this subjectivity is seen not only in his method of treatment but likewise in his choice of theme.²⁴ Just as in

¹⁹ Wheeler (above, note 3) 120–52 treats this matter at length and conclusively.

²⁰ For example, E. T. Merrill (ed.), *Catullus* (Boston 1893) 130. See Ellis (above, note 3) 224 ff. for his customary full treatment. Wheeler (above, note 3) 122 is correct in seeing that Catullus feels a deeper interest in the tale of abandoned Ariadne than he does in the ostensible theme.

²¹ See *Iliad* 18.478 ff., the description of Achilles' shield; Wheeler (above, note 3) 265–66, notes 14 and 15, cites a parallel from Hesiod and a later example from the *Palatine Anthology* (11.38).

²² Ellis (above, note 3) 227.

²³ Ellis (above, note 3) 227–28.

²⁴ See Wheeler (above, note 3) 123–28.

Carmen 63 Catullus was the narrator, here again in 64 he fulfills the same function. More than once in this poem he speaks in his own person (e.g. vv. 24, 116–17, 164), thus revealing a subjectivity which helps to bolster the hypothesis of autobiography. But it should be borne in mind that the connection between Catullus' mythological tales and his own life belongs to the realm of allegory; hence some details which are much better suited to the myth than to himself must be overlooked.

In *Carmen* 64 one can readily see an identification of the nymph Thetis with Lesbia. Catullus often thought of Lesbia as his beautiful *diua* (51; 68.70; 86.5–6). Thetis did not disdain mortal espousals, and Jupiter himself saw that the marriage must be (64.20–21); indeed Jupiter was less desirable as a spouse in Lesbia's eyes, too, than her mortal lover Catullus (70.1–2; 72.1–2). A comparison between Peleus and Catullus, however, cannot be pushed far without straining the similarity. Indeed Peleus is, for the most part, dimly in the background and mentioned not in his own character but only as being blessed by a fortunate marriage (vs. 25), to whom Jove has yielded his place as Thetis' lover (vv. 26–27). Catullus, at least on occasion,²⁵ considered himself blessed in the possession of Lesbia's love, and he, like Peleus, was preferred to Jove in his lady's eyes (70.1–2; 72.1–2). The paucity of points of comparison between Peleus and Catullus, however, may well indicate that the poet did not intend such a comparison or saw it as subordinate to some other allegoric relationship which was more important to his purpose.

But how does the autobiographic quest fare when it confronts the apparently unconnected Ariadne episode? Two possible explanations offer themselves: either Ariadne is an allegorized Lesbia or, *mutatis mutandis*, she represents Catullus himself. This latter seems the more solid, especially in the light of Catullus' treatment of the myth. Ariadne falls in love with Theseus (64.91 ff.) who has come to the abode of lordly Minos (vs. 85) to slay the Minotaur, and she flees with her lover to the foam-flecked shores of Dia (vv. 117–21). As she slept, Theseus deserted her (vs. 123) and, on awakening alone on the shore, she utters a long lament (vv. 132–201).

Just as in *Carmen* 63 the lament of Attis seemed possibly to be

²⁵ See e.g. 2, 3, 5, and 7. Also compare 107.1–4 and 109.1–2.

autobiographical, here again in *Carmen* 64 the lament of Ariadne finds application in Catullus' own experience. Ariadne's lament tells the tragic tale of a faithless lover. Theseus is faithless (vs. 132), forgetful of his word (vs. 135), merciless (vs. 137), ruthless (vs. 138). His promises are the playthings of the wind (vs. 142). Ariadne warns all women that a man's oath is worthless (vv. 143-44); she had believed Theseus and now her lot is sorrow and death (vv. 151-53). Even if he had not intended to marry her, he might have let her serve him as a slave (vv. 158-63). But now she is lost (vs. 177) and knows not where to turn (vv. 178-81). She prays the Eumenides (vs. 193) to lift from the very marrow of her bones the spirit of frenzy which is driving her on blindly (vv. 196-97). She would have them wreak vengeance on him who had left her desolate (vv. 199-201).

Lesbia was certainly faithless (e.g. 68.28-29), and her word worthless (72). Her promises, too, were the playthings of the wind; indeed whatever a woman says to her yearning lover should be inscribed in flowing water and the breeze (70.3-4). Catullus had believed Lesbia and had even welcomed her back (107) only to find her still faithless (72.5-8). His lot was torment because he both hates and loves and consequently is on the rack (85). Even if Lesbia could not be content with Catullus alone (68.135), he would be satisfied if she deemed her days with him her lucky ones (68.147-48). Just as Ariadne prays to the Eumenides, he lifts his voice to Cybele, begging for release from the frenzy of his infatuation (63.91-92). In return for his piety (76.26) the gods are, as it were, under contract to root out this dread disease which, palsy-like, is creeping into the very marrow of his bones (76.17-22). Difficult as it may be, he must by whatever means he can lay aside this long-cherished love (76.13-14).

These several points of likeness would seem to justify an identification of Ariadne's desolate soul with a similar state of soul in Catullus. Once again it must be borne in mind that such parallels cannot demand identity in every detail. That Ariadne is a woman and Catullus a man need not be a difficulty, since the similarity lies not in sex but in state of soul.

But why did Catullus choose this incident from mythology and, if it is autobiographic, how does it accord with what is commonly taken as the main theme of the poem, the marriage of Peleus and Thetis? The late Professor Clyde Murley in his article on the

structure and proportion of this poem²⁶ has given at least partial answers to these questions.

Professor Murley defends the unity of the poem by showing graphically that it possesses an elaborate, concentric, chiasmic structure like a periodic sentence.²⁷ Accordingly he finds a *petitio quaestionis* in the assumption that the Ariadne episode is a digression and considers that the general theme of the poem is a contrast of the golden age with the present. "If we take that as the general theme of the poem, with particular reference to love as properly the most idyllic human experience and Catullus' main interest in life, the so-called digression is rather an organic, though contrasting, part of the theme."²⁸ If either story may be termed the main theme, the Ariadne tale deserves to be called such. Pictorially speaking, the gods and men form the ornamented frame, Peleus and Thetis give a contrasting background, and the Theseus-Ariadne tale makes up the foreground of a painted picture.²⁹

This latter story, as we have seen, is admirably autobiographical—or better, autoallegorical—and Murley cites three authorities in support of this:

Perhaps, as Ramain and Wilamowitz suggest . . . Catullus' own unhappy love affair and other sorrows inclined his interest, and must therefore turn the reader's toward the sadder part of his double plot. The theme that interested him poignantly and was the artistic, emotional center of the poem is one thing; what is formally emphasized in the ostensible plot is quite another. Sell has collected impressive evidence that this poem has parallels

²⁶ Clyde Murley, "The Structure and Proportion of Catullus LXIV," *TAPA* 68 (1937) 305–17.

²⁷ His outline is as follows (p. 308):

1–18. Gods and men (optimistic).

19–46. Wedding after romantic meeting.

47–51. The drapery of the couch.

52–123. Ariadne's first shock and its setting.

124–237. Her curse in terms of Theseus' forgetfulness of her and Aegeus, climaxing her lament.

238–248. Nemesis in the same terms.

249–250. Ariadne's first shock.

251–266. The drapery of the couch.

267–383. Wedding and wedding song.

384–408. Gods and men (pessimistic).

²⁸ Murley (above, note 26) 309–10.

²⁹ Murley (above, note 26) 309.

throughout to passages of his other poems and was in part an expression of his own experience, the poet corresponding to Ariadne in suffering.³⁰

Furthermore, such an hypothesis lends weight to Murley's contention that the general theme of *Carmen* 64 is a contrast between the golden age and the present. This contrast is a commonplace in Latin and Greek poetry, and hence it is not surprising that Catullus should have made use of it. On this basis Catullus sings of Peleus and Thetis with a mind to what he would have wished between Lesbia and himself; he laments with Ariadne on things as they actually were. Between the two attitudes of mind there is a contrast but still a unity.

It will be well to recall the initial fact which gave foundation to the subsequent analysis: it is not conjecture but a certainty that Catullus does introduce a myth to represent his own life in *Carmen* 68. Since this is the case, the mythical narratives contained in *Carmina* 63 and 64 may well have been conceived with some reference to the poet's own circumstances. Examination of the Attis and Ariadne myths seems to have strengthened the possibility that Catullus' choice and treatment of these legends is auto-allegoric in the sense that he refers them, at least indirectly, to his own relations with Lesbia.

³⁰ Murley (above, note 26) 315-16.