

## CATULLUS 51: OTIUM VERSUS VIRTUS

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In a recent volume of *TAPA*, Professor Fredricksmeyer published a valuable paper on Catullus 51 and, in particular, on the old problem of its final strophe. He argued that, while the final strophe marks an abrupt change in thought, this change is psychologically understandable, and that therefore the strophe is and always was an integral part of the poem.<sup>1</sup> I agree with Professor Fredricksmeyer's conclusion, but not entirely with the psychology in his argument. The problem is an important one, bearing as it does on Catullus' inner conflicts in the Lesbia affair and the poetry he wrote about it, and I therefore propose to take it up again in a somewhat larger context.

Carmen 51 is a declaration of admiration and love. The first question to ask, therefore, is how did Romans of Catullus' age and class regard love? What was their psychological explanation of the phenomenon? Cicero has much on this which is highly instructive.

In the *Tusculan Disputations*, for example, he discusses what happens when the mind is not controlled by reason (*ratio*). The result, he says, is that the mind becomes dominated either by an idea of good or by an idea of evil, and so is afflicted by the impulses of *cupido*, *libido*, *metus*, and *aegritudo*. These he defines as *perturbationes animi*, the basic types of mental illness.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere he says that the origin of all *perturbationes* is *intemperantia*,

which is a revolt from all guidance of the mind and right reason, so completely alien from the control of reason that the cravings of the soul cannot be guided or curbed. Therefore just as temperance allays the cravings and causes them to obey right reason, and maintains the well-considered judgements of the mind, so intemperance its enemy kindles,

<sup>1</sup> E. Fredricksmeyer, "On the Unity of Catullus 51," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 153-63.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.10.23-11.25.

confounds and agitates the whole condition of the soul, with the result that from it come distress and fear and all other disorders.<sup>3</sup>

In short, *cupido* and *libido* lead to mental illness, and love of women (*mulierositas*) is as much an affliction as love of money (*avaritia*).<sup>4</sup> Such is Cicero's cool appraisal of the various desires which direct most men's lives. When he comes to consider love in particular, however, he waxes warm and eloquent. Love is demeaning, a *contractio animi*:

Close attention is sufficient to give anyone complete insight into the degradation of such delight. And just as those who are transported with delight at the enjoyment of sexual pleasures are degraded, so those who covet them with feverish soul are criminal. In fact the whole fashion ordinarily termed love (*amor*)—and heaven help me if I can think of any other term to apply to it—is of such exceeding triviality that I see nothing that I think comparable with it.<sup>5</sup>

This contempt Cicero justifies by the argument that *perturbationes* render a man miserable, whereas tranquility and freedom from passion bring happiness: "those are happy whom no fears alarm, no distresses corrode, no lusts (*libidines*) inflame, no vain transports of delight dissolve in the melting lassitude of pleasure."<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, however, the emphasis he gives to those duties each man owes his family and state gives us a Roman and more traditional basis for his attitude.<sup>7</sup> The important point for present purposes, however, is that Cicero regards any form of *amor* as a form of mental illness, sure to bring disorder

<sup>3</sup> *Tusc.* 4.9.22: quae est a tota mente et a recta ratione defectio sic aversa a praescriptione rationis, ut nullo modo appetitiones animi nec regi nec contineri queant. Quem ad modum igitur temperantia sedat appetitiones et efficit ut eae rectae rationi pareant conservatque considerata iudicia mentis, sic huic inimica intemperantia omnem animi statum inflamat, conturbat, incitat; itaque et aegritudines et metus et reliquae perturbationes omnes gignuntur ex ea. Translation from J. King (*LCL*, 1927).

<sup>4</sup> *Tusc.* 4.11.26.

<sup>5</sup> *Tusc.* 4.31.67 (*contractio animi*) and 4.32.68: Haec laetitia quam turpis sit satis est diligenter attendentem penitus videre. Et ut turpes sunt qui efferunt se laetitia tum, cum fruuntur Veneris voluptatibus, sic flagitiosi, qui eas inflammato animo concupiscunt. Totus vero iste, qui vulgo appellatur amor—nec hercule invenio quo nomine alio possit appellari—tantae levitatis est, ut nihil videam quod putem conferendum. Translation from J. King (above, note 3).

<sup>6</sup> *Tusc.* 5.6.16.

<sup>7</sup> Cicero, *Off.* 1.4.12; cf. W. Fowler, *Social Life at Rome in the Age of Cicero* (New York 1909) 97–101, on the traditional ideal of public service, especially 101: "The individual had been kept in strict subordination to the State, and . . . personal idiosyncrasies and ambitions only excited suspicion."

and misery. How typically Roman was this? Let us consider the ideas of three contemporaries.

The Epicureans, says Cicero reprovingly, veil the sordid truth about love—even praising *amor amicitiae*—and find their *summum bonum* in delights of the body.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Epicurus' Roman disciple Lucretius wrote the most sustained denunciation of love in *De rerum natura*, 4.1058–1287. The essence of Lucretius' attack is his contempt for *amor*, romantic love as opposed to simple lust. The wise man will avoid all emotional entanglement, and so be able to enjoy physical gratification (*voluptas*) more fully:

Nor is he who shuns love bereft of the fruits of Venus, but rather he chooses joys which bring no pain. For surely the pleasure from these things is more untainted for the heart-whole than for the love-sick.<sup>9</sup>

Cyril Bailey has summed up Lucretius' message in words worth repeating: "Lust can be satisfied calmly by casual intercourse, but the passion of love causes every kind of disturbance."<sup>10</sup>

A verbal point deserves emphasis here. Lucretius, in the passage quoted, contrasts *sani* with *miseri*. The loveless are "healthy, whole, sound"; the loving are "wretched." This corresponds with Catullus' usage in many passages.<sup>11</sup>

Lucretius also condemns *amor* on more traditionally Roman grounds. Love, he says, causes a man to fall under another's rule (*alterius sub nutu degitur aetas*); the result is that he squanders his money, neglects his duties, and loses his reputation.<sup>12</sup> To a Roman anything destructive of *res*, *officia*, and *fama* must have seemed dangerous indeed.

Vergil, a younger contemporary of Cicero's, also offers valuable testimony. In the *Georgics* he discusses love as a madness which affects men and beasts alike:

in furias ignemque ruunt; amor omnibus idem.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Tusc.* 4.33.70 (*amor amicitiae*); 3.21.50 (*summum bonum*).

<sup>9</sup> Lucretius 4.1073–76: *Nec Veneris fructu caret is qui vitat amorem, / sed potius quae sunt sine poena commoda sumit. / Nam certe purast sanis magis inde voluptas, / quam miseris.* Translation from C. Bailey, *Lucretius* (3 vols., Oxford 1947) 1.417.

<sup>10</sup> Bailey (above, note 9) 3.1305.

<sup>11</sup> cf. 8.1, *miser Catulle*; 76.12, *desinis esse miser*; 83.4, *sana*; 100.6, *vesana . . . flamma*; 45.16, *ignis mollibus ardet in medullis*; 72.5, *impensius uror*; 76.20, *pestem perniciemque*; 76.25, *taetrum . . . morbum*.

<sup>12</sup> 4.1121–24: *labitur res . . . languent officia . . . aegrotat fama vacillans.*

<sup>13</sup> G. 3.244; cf. V. Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil* (tr. G. Seligson, Ann Arbor 1962) 72.

About the role of love in the *Aeneid*, let it suffice here to quote a modern critic's summary: "Lavinia's charm, doubled by her grief (XII. 64 f.), is one more reason for Turnus to fight. His love for Lavinia is treated with the same restraint as that of Aeneas for Dido. Love, unless halloed through *pietas* into marriage and family, is less glorious than reprehensible for a Roman."<sup>14</sup>

A third contemporary, Cato the Younger, provides corroboration through deeds rather than words. Cato had a friend Hortensius who wanted more children; he therefore asked to have Marcia, Cato's wife, because she had already borne children and was clearly "good soil." Cato agreed, and Marcia was given in marriage to Hortensius by Cato himself. Nothing could make clearer the unromantic nature of marriage among traditional Romans. The fact that a modern scholar can say that "the story is partly repulsive, partly comic," simply shows how much views on these matters have changed.<sup>15</sup>

Cicero's contempt for *amor* was, therefore, shared by at least three distinguished and representative contemporaries. Was it shared by Catullus?

Originality contributed much to the anguish of Catullus' life and to the genius of his poetry. He developed an ideal of love so novel that neither Lesbia nor his friends could understand or respect it. So much has been firmly established.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Catullus' background was clearly traditional, and in developing his new ideal he began with old concepts. Especially important to him, for example, was *pietas*, "that peculiarly ancient virtue . . . which means basically the quality of doing the right thing in the right way at the right time."<sup>17</sup> A careful reading of the poems will show the importance of many other traditional conceptions. Poem 76 alone, for example, has a number of other terms which show that Catullus instinctively turned to traditional Roman concepts. These include *fides*, *benefacta*, *foedus*, *vitam puriter agere*, *pudica*, and *pietas*. Even more significant is the passage

<sup>14</sup> Pöschl (above, note 13) 201, note 43; cf. 44 and 184, note 15, on the use of *cura* for love.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch, *Cato minor* 25; cf. J. Balsdon, *Roman Women* (New York 1963) 190.

<sup>16</sup> F. Copley, "Emotional Conflict and Its Significance in the Lesbia-Poems of Catullus," *AJP* 70 (1949) 22-40; I. Horvath, "Amor und Amicitia bei Catull," *AA* 9 (1961) 71-97.

<sup>17</sup> Copley (above, note 16) 37.

in poem 66 (lines 79–86) in which Catullus praises marriage of *unanimi coniuges* and condemns *impurum adulterium*. The poem is an early one, probably written before the Bithynian trip, and shows that the young Catullus was quite conventional, in principles at least.<sup>18</sup> Nor is this really surprising, for his successors in the elegiac tradition all subscribed to the traditional denigration of *amor* even while they indulged in it.<sup>19</sup>

If, then, it be accepted that Catullus thought about love in conventional Roman terms, then we have a clue to the context and the meaning of the last strophe of 51. After declaring his love and after describing its emotional intensity and its physical effects, Catullus in the last strophe warns himself of the dangers of *amor*. The last strophe contrasts what he has been taught with what he feels. It represents, perhaps, what he imagines the *senes severi* of poem 5 would say to him.

First, they would warn Catullus that because of idleness he has strayed from the rule of *ratio* and has fallen prey to an emotional disorder. Catullus' words *exsultas nimiumque gestis* have an extraordinarily close parallel in Cicero's description of a man swayed by emotions: *exsultans et temere gestiens*.<sup>20</sup> In short, idleness is dangerous: *otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est*.

Second, they would remind Catullus that in pursuing private interests and desires he was neglecting his duties to the community, his *officia*. *Otium* meant, not idleness, but rather living for oneself, free from the burdens of public responsibilities.<sup>21</sup> Here again Cicero gives valuable testimony on Roman traditions of propriety.

Men of extraordinary genius, says Cicero, or those afflicted with ill-health, may be excused from the duty of public service.

<sup>18</sup> Horvath (above, note 16) 92–93.

<sup>19</sup> Thus Propertius regrets that he has been kept from glorious deeds by a *dura puella* (2.1.78), and Ovid speaks of the *servitium* that cannot be resisted (*Am.* 1.2.17–18); cf. B. Otis, "Ovid and the Augustans," *TAPA* 69 (1938) 188–229, especially 199.

<sup>20</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.6.16; the parallel is particularly close because Cicero is here describing "illum quem libidinibus inflammatum et furem videmus."

<sup>21</sup> Cicero contrasts his own political career (*honorum studium*) with his friend's life of *honestum otium* (*Att.* 1.17.5). D. Shackleton Bailey, *The Letters of Cicero to Atticus* 1 (Cambridge 1965) 327, comments on the meaning of *otium* as follows: "'Ease' or 'leisure' does not quite match this word, for Atticus was anything but an idler. It is rather freedom to live as one pleases, without the ties of public office or employment." Cf. J. André, *L'Otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine* (Paris 1966) 281–86.

But if those who have no such excuse profess a scorn for civil and military offices, which most people admire, I think that this should be set down not to their credit, but to their discredit. . . . Those whom Nature has endowed with the capacity for administering public affairs should put aside all hesitation, enter the race for public office, and take a hand in directing the government; for in no other way can a government be administered or greatness of spirit be made manifest.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the community depends on the public spirit of its citizens. Those who prefer private pleasures to public service deprive the State of needed support and so weaken it, and may in fact contribute to its downfall. That is the lesson of experience. *Otium et reges prius et beatas perdidit urbes*. "The magnitude of the *exemplum* . . . serves to intensify the heaviness of the preceding self-reproach and to invest it with greater seriousness than it would have if it were expressed merely in the conventional terms of a lover's complaint and remorse."<sup>23</sup>

If this interpretation be correct, then we have in 51 an expression of inner doubt and conflict. It takes its place with the other poems which Jean Bayet has described as "debates of Catullus with himself."<sup>24</sup> But what precisely is the debate in 51 about? What are the alternatives? The question is worth asking, because it takes us to the core of Roman aristocratic values. When Catullus refers to the baleful effects of *otium* he is alluding to a cluster of ideas familiar to every member of his class. For them there was an opposition between *otium* on the one hand, and on the other all the rewards which accrued to him who served the State—*honores, auctoritas, gloria, dignitas*. But the key to this complex of values is the concept of *virtus*, "manliness." Cicero sums it up in military terms, "scorn of death and pain."<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere he makes the explicit contrast: "*mihi omnis oratio est cum*

<sup>22</sup> Cicero, *Off.* 1.21.71–72: Quibus autem talis nulla sit causa, si despiciere se dicant ea, quae plerique mirentur, imperia et magistratus, iis non modo non laudi, verum etiam vitium dandum puto. . . . Sed iis, qui habent a natura adiumenta rerum gerendarum, abiecta omni cunctatione adipiscendi magistratus et gerenda res publica est; nec enim aliter aut regi civitas aut declarari animi magnitudo potest. Translation from W. Miller (*LCL*, 1913).

<sup>23</sup> E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 213.

<sup>24</sup> J. Bayet, *Entretiens Hardt* 2 (Geneva 1953) 35. An exactly opposite view was maintained on this occasion by L. Wilkinson, p. 35: "the 'Otium, Catulle' stanza would defeat its purpose, turning his declaration of love to a self-mockery."

<sup>25</sup> *Tusc.* 2.18.43: "munera duo sunt maxima mortis dolorisque contemptio."

virtute non cum desidia, cum dignitate non cum voluptate.”<sup>26</sup> That gives the key to the values of the Roman aristocracy. One served the community as soldier, legislator, and priest, and in so doing demonstrated one’s manliness, one’s *virtus*. The thesis has been ably argued recently by D. C. Earl in his study of Sallust.<sup>27</sup>

The point worth emphasizing in the present connection is that the ideal of *virtus* was developed among warriors, and never lost its military connotations. *Otium*, on the other hand, meant rejection of war and all the military virtues. This is the tension inherent in the work of the elegists, as when Ovid defiantly claims that “every lover is a soldier.”<sup>28</sup> And this is the tension expressed in Catullus 51.

<sup>26</sup> Cicero, *Sest.* 66.138.

<sup>27</sup> D. C. Earl, *The Political Thought of Sallust* (Cambridge 1961) 18–27: “Virtus as an Aristocratic Ideal.”

<sup>28</sup> Ovid, *Am.* 1.9.1: “Militat omnis amans, et habet sua castra Cupido”; cf. Otis (above, note 19) 200, and H. Fränkel, *Ovid* (Berkeley 1956) 28 and 186, note 53.