W. S. Watt

Notes on Catullus


© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn
NOTES ON CATULLUS*

passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
cui primum digitum dare appetenti
et acris solet incitare morsus

cum desiderio meo nitenti
carum nescio quid lubet iocari
ut solaciolum sui doloris,
credo tum gravis acquiescet ardor,
tecum ludere sicut ipsa possim

et tristis animi leuare curas.

This is how I should read and punctuate this poem. In line 8, as Fordyce remarks, *ut cum* ‘could easily have arisen from an adscript *vel cum*’; and *credo* with a future indicative (so V) is a completely natural and convincing construction (cf. *ThLL* IV 1136,42ff.). Whereas the *dolor* of line 7 is Lesbia’s, the *gravis ardor* of line 8 is the poet’s; thus 8 corresponds to 7, and 9 to 6 (abba arrangement). Lines 8 and 9 are a paratactic conditional sentence; usually in such a sentence the protasis comes first (e.g. *Mart.* VIII 55,5 *sint Maecenates, non derunt . . . Marones*), but the other order is found (e.g. *Stat.* Theb. XII,342 *uincam volucris, sit adire potestas*); *tum* is prospective, linking the two clauses together and thus to some extent compensating for the absence of *meus* or *mihi* with *gravis acquiescet ardor*.

6,15–17

quare, quicquid habes boni malique,
dic nobis; uolo te ac tuos amores
ad caelum lepido uocare uersu.

Catullus asks Flavius to divulge the name of his girl-friend, so that he can eulogize (or immortalize) them both in his poetry.

Nisbet queries *uocare* on the ground that ‘Catullus cannot “call” anybody to the sky unless he is already there himself’; he would replace it with *leuare*, which gives good sense but is not very close to *uocare*. Among other passages he adduces Pindar *Isthm.* 1,64f., where the poet prays that his hero may be ‘borne aloft on the bright wings of the sweet-voiced Pierides’; this suggests *uolare* as a possibility in our passage. The ablative with *uolare* is found at 4,4f. *siue palmulis / opus foret uolare siue linteo*, and in such usages as *curru uolare* (*Sil.* II, 263).

14,4–15

quam feci ego quidue sum locutus

Nisbet asks Flavius to divulge the name of his girl-friend, so that he can eulogize (or immortalize) them both in his poetry.

Nisbet queries *uocare* on the ground that ‘Catullus cannot “call” anybody to the sky unless he is already there himself’; he would replace it with *leuare*, which gives good sense but is not very close to *uocare*. Among other passages he adduces Pindar *Isthm.* 1,64f., where the poet prays that his hero may be ‘borne aloft on the bright wings of the sweet-voiced Pierides’; this suggests *uolare* as a possibility in our passage. The ablative with *uolare* is found at 4,4f. *siue palmulis / opus foret uolare siue linteo*, and in such usages as *curru uolare* (*Sil.* II, 263).

---

Catullus reproaches Calvus for having sent him at the Saturnalia a book of bad poems by various authors which he suspects of being a present made to Calvus by a grateful client.

In line 8 no one has made credible sense of *repertum*, and its combination with *nouum* is so awkward that Harrison proposes to delete *ac* as an intrusion from line 10, where it occupies the same metrical position. Few changes could be easier than that which I propose, of *repertum* to *refertum* (reinforcing *tantum* in line 7); in place of the intrusive *ac* I should write *his*, i.e. *impiis*, these bad poets, with the same identification of the poets and their works as we have in line 7 (where Nisbet in his note on 64,403–4 may well be right in changing *impiorum* to *improbiorum*).

In line 14 I have inserted the word which (I believe) clears up all the difficulties of this sentence. All attempts to make *continuo* an epithet of *die* are doomed to failure; it must be the adverb, construed with what follows. Then *optimo dierum*, construed with *die* but separated from it by *Saturnalibus* in apposition to it, is quite unacceptable unless *die* is given a qualifier; and *hoc* is the easiest and most satisfactory word to insert. It is not surprising, in view of the existence of *hodie*, that temporal *hoc die* is very rare, and used only for emphasis; it occurs at Liv. XXXI 38,1, and one occasionally finds phrases like *ex hoc die*, *hoc ipso die*, *hoc praeertim die*. In our passage the two appositional phrases give it all the legitimacy it needs.

---

37,11–14  
puella nam *me‡*, quae *meo* sinu fugit,  
amata *tantum* quantum amabitur nulla,  
pro *qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata*,  
consedit istic.

Harrison sets out the objections to Heinsius’s *nam mi*, which is usually adopted by editors, and would read either Avantius’s *namque* or his own conjecture *nam illa*. But *illa* has no palaeographical plausibility. I would merely change *me* to *nc*, i.e. *nunc*, construed with the main verb *consedit*. I note that at Prop. IV 3,51, according to Housman (Classical Papers 253), *nunc* has been corrupted first to *tunc* (i.e. *tc*) and then to *te*.

64,110–111  
sic domito saeuum prostruit corpore Theseus  
nequiquam uanis iactantem cornua uentis.

Theseus lays low the minotaur.

Editors remark on the unusual substantival use of *saeuum*, but little attempt has been made to address the problem. Nisbet (Collected Papers 203, n. 5) has suggested <ob>*saepturn*, but I do not think that this is a case for us to be guided by the ‘ductus litterarum’. I believe that *saeuum* is due to a scribe’s untimely recollection of *saeuum monstrum* in 101 above; what has been displaced is a synonym of that phrase, viz. *taurum*, a humanist conjecture last reported by Schwabe (1886); cf. 173 below, *indomito . . . tauro*.

66,11–17  
qua rex tempestate nouo auctus hymenaeo  
wastatum finis iterat Assyrios,  
dulcia nocturnae portans uestigia rixae  
quam de uirgineis gesserat exuuis.  
estne nous nuptis odio Venus? anne parentum  
frustrantur falsis gaudia lacrimulis  
ubertim thalami quas intra limina fundunt?
Editors continue to print, and defend, parentum in line 15 as though it were not quite clear (especially as this line comes immediately after 13–14) that Venus (or uenus) means ‘sex’, gaudia are the pleasures of sex, and intra limina thalami means ‘within the bridal chamber’; there is no place there for parents of the brides, only for their husbands. B. Schmidt’s maritum gives what must be the right sense, but is open to two objections: it is not a very easy change, and the short genitive plural in this word would be both unexampled and improbable. Viorum also would give the right sense, but it would be very hard to explain how it came to be replaced by parentum. That objection, however, would not apply to suorum, erroneously glossed, and later ousted, by parentum; substantival sui, ‘loved ones’, occurs at 58,3; 61,51; 62,45; 64,201.

66,75–78

non his tam laetor rebus quam me afore semper,
afore me a dominae uertice discrucior,
quicum ego, dum uirgo quondam fuit, omnibus expers
unguentis nunc iam, milia nulla bibi.

The Greek original of these lines (known to us from Ox. Pap. 2258), Callimachus, Coma Berenices, fr. 110 Pf., is as follows:

οὐ τάδε μοι τοσσύνθες φερει χάριν ὁσσον ἔκεινης
ἀληθάλω κορυφής οὐκέτι θεξύμενοι
ής ὑπὸ, παρθενιὶ μὲν ὢτ’ ἦν ἔτι, πολλὰ πέποκα
λιτά, γυναικεῖων δ’ ὥσκ ἀπέλαυςα μύρων.

Berenice’s lock, and the hair-oil which it has, or has not, enjoyed. The text which I have given above is the transmitted text with one change: I have substituted nunc iam for una.

Much has been written about the second couplet; of the discussions which I know I have found the most helpful to be that of B. Axelson in Studi in onore di L. Castiglioni (Florence 1960) 13–21 (= Kleine Schriften, Stockholm 1987, 310–314). He rightly retains omnibus, instead of rewriting the line to obtain a reference to Berenice’s womanhood (e.g. uirgo quidem erat muliebribus expers, O. Skutsch), and equally rightly retains milia, instead of adopting, as most people nowadays do, Lobel’s utilia; the Callimachean contrast between the ‘plain’ oils of maidenhood and the unguents of womanhood is thus (I believe) just not reproduced by Catullus. I also agree with Axelson that una, separated as it is from quicum, cannot be right, but I would not follow him in emending it (with Morel) to nuptae; this is due to his desire to reproduce the Callimachean contrast between maidenhood and womanhood; nuptae is not an easy change, and its syntax is opaque (is it a possessive genitive?). With my conjecture the whole contrast between different sorts of oils or unguents disappears, and there remains only the contrast between the abundance of them which the lock used to enjoy and the total lack of them now that it is in the sky, a lack which in lines 91f. it prays Berenice to make good. (For the reluctance of interpreters to admit that Catullus sometimes recedes far from his Greek original see S. West, CQ 35, 1985, 64, n. 24.) Catullus has nunc iam (of the present as opposed to the past) twice elsewhere, both times in a negative sentence: 8,9 nunc iam illa non uolt; 64,143 nunc [nym V] iam nulla uiro iuranti femina credat; for other authors see ThLL. VII.1 114,42ff. I do not think that my conjecture is ruled out by the fact to which O. Skutsch (BICS 16, 1969, 41) drew attention, that in the 58 other pentameters of poems 65 and 66 there is no example of a clause ending at the diaeresis; he himself points out that there are two examples elsewhere (67,14 and 68,40), and to prefer on this account the drastic rewriting of the hexameter which he proposed (see above) is surely to strain at a gnat while swallowing a camel.

84,5–6

credo, sic mater, sic liber auunculus eius,
sic maternus auus dixerat atque auia.
Arrius’s habit of aspirating the wrong words is presumably shared by his mother and other members of her family.

Nisbet makes a convincing case not only against *liber* but against the other adjectives (like *gibber, Cimber, Umber*) which have been suggested to replace it. Less convincingly he argues that the only part of speech which can be considered is an adverb (he suggests *semper*). But it is not difficult to think of possible solutions other than an adverb, e.g. a verb. I do not see why Nisbet dismisses *dixit* as ‘fatuous’; it is palaeographically unconvincing, but otherwise unobjectionable. A verb in the present or aorist tense here would contrast with the pluperfect *dixerat* (referring to a previous generation) in the pentameter. A word of the same meaning as *dixit* and of the same general shape as *liber* is *fatur* (*f* and *l* are easily confused), and that, I suggest, is what Catullus wrote.

89,1–4

\[ Gellius est tenuis: quid ni? cui tam bona mater tamque ualens uiuat tamque uenusta soror tamque bonus patruus tamque omnia plena puellis cognatis, quare is desinat esse macer? \]

*Omnia plena* is indeed a ‘sollemnis dictio’ (Baehrens) combined with such nouns as *miseriae, lacrimae, luctus, laetitia, timor*; occasionally with a personal noun, as at Cicero, *Fam.* IX 22,4 *stultorum plena sunt omnia*, ‘the world is full of fools’. But the world is not full of girls related to Gellius. *Omnia* has apparently never been questioned, but I think that it should be *otia*; for the sexual connotations of this word see 68,103f. *ne Paris abducta gausus libera moecha / otia pacato degeret in thalamo* and the passages of other authors listed in *ThLL* IX 1176,66–81.

Aberdeen

W. S. Watt