Emotional Conflict and Its Significance in the Lesbia-Poems of Catullus

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EMOTIONAL CONFLICT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE LESBIA-POEMS OF CATULLUS

Students of Catullus have long been aware of the fact that Catullus' love for Lesbia did not run true to the usual pattern of the ancient love-affair. Even its very circumstances stamp it as unusual, for it is the love of a gentleman for a Roman *matrona*, not the conventional passion of the young man for a *meretrix*. It is, in other words, a love between social equals; more than that, it is, baldly stated, a case of adultery, and stands therefore in open violation of the accepted moral code.[1] This fact has led some commentators to accuse Catullus of blindness and of self-deception when he declares himself *pius*, speaks of his *fides*, and reveals his expectation that Lesbia could reciprocate his own exalted feelings.[2]

It is not, however, my purpose here to deal with these criticisms, which in the end are scarcely more than moral strictures. With Catullus, the fact of adultery must be accepted. To defend it on moral grounds is worse than useless; to attack it on those grounds is to disseminate prejudice and misunderstanding. In the end, Catullus is not the first nor the last man in the world to fall in love with a married woman; it is a common, and tragic, experience, in this day as in that. That Catullus felt himself privileged to carry that love to the point of actual liaison is a condemnation not so much of the man as of the age in which he lived.

Rather, laying aside the moral issue, and laying aside, too, any speculation as to the reasoning, perverted or otherwise, by which Catullus may have justified his pursuit of an adulterous affair, I should like to examine the nature of his love for Lesbia as he himself describes it, with a view to resolving some of the problems it presents and to revealing those of its characteristics which set it apart from the usual Roman or Greek love-affair and give it a special character of its own.

[1] Cf. Plautus, *Curc.*, 37-38: *dum ted abstineas nupta, vidua, virgine, iuventute et pueris liberis, ama quidlubet.*

[2] E. g. E. T. Merrill, *Catullus* (Boston, 1893), Introd., pp. xx-xxi; Gustav Friedrich, *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Leipzig, 1908), p. 492 (on *c.* 76, 1).

As a general rule, the ancient love-affair as we find it in erotic poetry had two outstanding characteristics: it was ephemeral, and it lay almost wholly in the physical sphere. It was not a prelude to marriage, and in fact had nothing whatever to do with marriage.[3] In every case it was coterminous with the physical attractions of the beloved, as a host of passages warning of the ravages of time amply attest.[4] This is not to say that the ancient lover had no interest in the intellectual or spiritual charms of his lady, but only that any such interest as he possessed was distinctly of secondary importance, and played no real part in his passion. From beginning to end, his love is a glorification of his desire; any spiritual, non-physical elements which may have been in it are no more than incidentals. His attention never focuses upon them long enough to enable him to make of love the mutually interdependent complex of the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual which today we call by that name.

It is precisely an absorption in the non-physical aspects of love that sets Catullus' love for Lesbia apart from the common run of ancient affairs and gives to it its special character. It is notable from the very start that nowhere in the Lesbia-poems does Catullus dwell on the joys of physical intimacy—this in the face of his complete lack of reserve in such poems as 32 and 56. Kisses he mentions, of course, but beyond that there is nothing more immodest in the Lesbia-poems than the almost bashful *multa iocosa* of *c.* 8.[5] This is not to suggest that he practiced any restraint in such matters, or to claim for him a delicacy of feeling that would not merely have set him apart from his

[3] Cf. E. Rohde, *Der Griechische Roman* (Leipzig, 1900), pp. 63-77. The fact that many of the love-affairs of the New Comedy end in marriage is beside the point. Such ending is quite accidental in nearly every case: in the beginning the young man's intentions were merely to win a mistress, not a wife. This fact is clearly signalized by Terence's *Phormio*, in which Antipho finds the marriage which he underwent in order to satisfy his passion highly embarrassing: cf. 173-176, and compare *Andria*, 438-442.

[4] E. g. *Anth. Pal.*, V, 21, 27, 23, 28, 74, 79, 85, 112; Theocritus, VII, 120-121; XXIII, 27-34; Horace, *Od.*, I, 25; Tibullus, I, 1, 69-74; VIII, 41-48; Propertius, II, 18, 19-20; Ovid, *Ars Am.*, III, 69-72.

[5] Contrast e. g. Propertius, I, 3; II, 15. Even the relatively modest Tibullus thinks fondly of the joys of the couch in his idyllic picture of love-in-a-cottage: I, 1, 45-46.

contemporaries but would have marked him as abnormal. It is rather to be taken as *prima facie* evidence that his interest in Lesbia lay elsewhere, that his love, while it had its overpowering physical side, had an even more compelling aspect that was not physical in its nature.[6]

Curiously enough, the earlier Lesbia-poems show no demonstrable evidence of this aspect. They are tender and affectionate (3, 5, 7), full of amatory gayety and enthusiasm (36, 43, 83, 86, 92, 107), occasionally touched with melancholy (2, 70), or with awe (51). Apart from their unique sweetness—a reflection of the man himself rather than of his love—and their surpassing poetic art, they are almost conventional in character. It would appear that as long as Catullus and Lesbia were happy together, as long as he felt that his feelings were reciprocated, he either was unaware that his love for her possessed any special or unusual characteristics, or felt no need to attempt an expression of them. Lesbia apparently was accepting him as he was, and was understanding and appreciating the affection he bore her.

It is only when he began to perceive that Lesbia was not viewing their love in the same way as he was that there began for him the long struggle, never successfully concluded, to give adequate expression to his feelings, to explain the nature of the non-physical side of his love—the very side that had made it significant and worth while to him. Only after we have clearly understood this struggle can we fully understand the Lesbia-poems themselves.

The first hint of the struggle is to be found in *c.* 109, and lies in the contrast between the first and last distichs of the poem.[7] The experience lying behind it would appear to be

[6] In point of fact we do not even learn from Catullus' poems anything about Lesbia's appearance. Not a single one of her physical characteristics is ever mentioned. She is *pulcherrima tota* (86, 5); she is *candida diva* (68, 70), both conventional and colorless phrases. Even in *c.* 51, where the overpowering effect of her beauty and charm is described, there is no hint of a single physical trait: cf. E. A. Havelock, *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (Oxford, 1939), p. 11.

[7] In the following discussion I am laying aside considerations of chronology, and am not suggesting that the poems discussed were written in the order in which I have taken them up. It is convenient to study the development of Catullus' concept of love in a step-by-step fashion;

something of this sort: Lesbia and Catullus have had a discussion of the nature of their mutual feelings; Lesbia has protested undying love on her side, and has offered to Catullus an *amor iucundus perpetuusque*. As Catullus reflects on this discussion, it occurs to him that the phrase Lesbia has used is too hackneyed and ordinary. It does not ring true; more important than that, it does not at all express the feeling that he himself possesses, nor does it describe the kind of love in which he is interested. In legal language, he does not like the terms of the contract she proposes. After, therefore, expressing (vv. 3-4) the hope that, whatever she meant by *amor iucundus perpetuusque*, she meant it sincerely, he goes on to attempt an expression of what he himself desired. What he wants is not *amor*, for that to him means primarily the standard brand of erotic interest. He does not want something merely *iucundus*, for he sees clearly enough that such a feeling is *perpetuus* only as long as it remains *iucundus*. Rather, he wants a love which is not mere physical attraction, but rather has its basis in a harmony of body, intellect, emotion, and spirit. Unfortunately, no word exists in the Latin language which will adequately express this idea. He tries, therefore, to analyze the feeling itself, to break it up into its component parts, and in that way to find expression for it. It is, first of all, something that lasts throughout life, and does not disappear with youth and beauty. It is no mere casual connection; it is a bond, covenant, *foedus*. Perhaps *amicitia* is the right word. But *amicitia* has two faults: it is not normally used of relations between men and women,[8] and it is essentially a cold and formal term.[9] It is adequate only in that it expresses a feeling based on elements that are not physical in nature. To lift it out of its usual formal sphere, Catullus adds to it the epithet *sancta*; this, he hopes, will show that he does not mean the ordinary feeling of friendship, but something more exalted in character.[10] In the end, Catullus' attempt at expression is not

needless to say, his ideas may not have developed in any such orderly way, but may well have undergone periods of regression, as the poet groped for words to express his feelings.

[8] Cf. Kroll on v. 6 (Wilhelm Kroll, *C. Valerius Catullus* [Leipzig, 1929]).

[9] Cf. Oskar Hezel, *Catull u. das griechische Epigramm* (Stuttgart, 1932 [*Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft*, XVII]), pp. 67-68.

[10] Kroll, *ibid.*: "die Stärke seiner Empfindung hebt C. ganz über die

successful; he succeeds only in indicating that his love is no ordinary love, and that *amor* is not the proper term for it. To the average ancient, as to the modern reader, his *aeternum sanctae foedus amicitiae* must have remained something of a puzzle.

One idea which this phrase does suggest rather clearly is that of loyalty, *fides*. This is implied not only by *foedus*, with its hint of contractual obligations,[11] but also by *amicitia*, and by *sancta*, with its connotation of inviolability.[12] As if seizing upon this idea of *fides* as the one phase of his love which he can express with clarity, Catullus, in *c.* 87, tries once again to formulate his concept of the affection he bore Lesbia. Leaving aside the term *amicitia* as essentially unsuccessful, he combines *fides* with a quantitative rather than a qualitative expression, perhaps in the hope that the two together will more nearly express his meaning.

He tells us in the first distich that no woman can truly say that she has been loved *as much as* Lesbia has been by him; then, to show that his love was not merely greater in quantity—or intensity—he adds in the second distich:

> nulla *fides* ullo fuit umquam in foedere tanta
> quanta in amore tuo ex parte reperta mea est.

He bore for her, in other words, not merely a passion (*amor*) that surpassed all others; in addition, his feeling was possessed of a constancy, a trustworthiness, a *loyalty* (*fides*) such as no other had ever known.[13] In this poem, as in *c.* 109, we gain the impression that Catullus first expresses the nature of his love

gewöhnliche Auffassung der Liebe hinaus und lässt sie als *sancta* . . . erscheinen . . ."; cf. Ellis, *op. cit., ad loc.*

[11] Cf. Cicero, *De Off.*, I, 7, 23: *fundamentum autem est iustitiae fides, id est dictorum conventorumque constantia et veritas.*

[12] Cf. Marcian, *Dig.*, I, 8, 8: *sanctum est, quod ab iniuria hominum defensum atque munitum est.*

[13] Propertius also protests his *fides*, and says that it will last to the grave: *ossa tibi iuro per matris et ossa parentis . . . me tibi ad extremas mansurum, vita, tenebras: ambos una fides auferet, una dies* (II, 20, 15-18; cf. *ibid.*, 4 and 34; II, 24b, 26b). But as III, 25 shows, his *fides* proved of much shorter duration. Further, both he and Ovid (*Am.*, I, 3) "protest too much"; their sentiments have a conventional ring, and completely lack the simple intensity of feeling which characterizes Catullus.

in more or less conventional terms, and then, finding that expression inadequate, attempts to correct it by adding some element which is unmistakably non-physical—in this case, *fides*. Again, just as in *c.* 109, the amended declaration is unsatisfactory and incomplete: it does not say what Catullus wanted to say. It is no more than a thrust in the right direction, but a thrust that does not reach its goal. *Amor* and *fides* together do not completely define his love.

It is of course possible that in neither *c.* 109 nor *c.* 87 was Catullus attempting to define his love in its entirety. The thought of *fides* may have been uppermost in his mind at the time he wrote both poems, possibly because of some incident, now lost, in which Lesbia had signally indicated her lack of the very quality of loyalty which to Catullus was so important. In spite of this possibility, both poems give the impression of a basic dissatisfaction with the standard erotic vocabulary, of a realization that, for Catullus, *amor*, *amare*, and the other terms regularly associated with love did not express his own feelings.

This struggle with terms, with a language which as yet possessed no adequate expression of the concept of love as he knew it, becomes more obvious in *c.* 72.[14] He begins, as in *c.* 109, by contrasting Lesbia's words with his own: she had said *solum nosse Catullum, velle tenere*, using phrases both of which lay wholly in the physical sphere and conveyed no hint of anything but the most conventional of carnal passion. To this he offers his own contrasting term, *dilexi*, a word which can refer to the affection of friends as well as to that of lovers. But he realizes at once that *diligere* does not by itself express his meaning, even when he adds *non tantum ut vulgus amicam*, for this could be interpreted as meaning no more than that his love was greater, or more intense, than the ordinary.[15] In the pentameter, there-

[14] Cf. Kroll, introd. note: "Er versucht, das Besondere seiner Empfindung für sie in Worte zu fassen und einer Empfindungsweise Ausdruck zu geben, die für die Antike neu war. Dabei ist völlige Klarheit nicht erreicht und konnte nicht erreicht werden, weil die Empfindung selbst unklar war; aber das Ringen mit dem Ausdruck hat hier wie in c. 75. 76 etwas Ergreifendes. Die im Inhalt ähnliche Ausführung bei Ovid *Am.* 3. 11. 33 wirkt konventionell." Cf. also Hezel, *op. cit.* (see note 9), p. 65.

[15] Kroll, *ad loc.*: "*dilexi* kann auch von sinnlicher Liebe gesagt werden (wie *amare* von Freundschaft) vgl. 6, 4. 81, 2; dass es hier um etwas Höheres handelt, ergibt sich erst aus dem Folgenden."

fore, he tries to clarify his meaning by adding the simile *sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.* This line has only a superficial and accidental resemblance to the well-known words of Andromache to Hector,[16] or of Chrysis to Pamphilus,[17] or to any of the imitations of these passages.[18] All of these latter express primarily, or perhaps exclusively, the idea of helplessness and dependence; they impose upon the one party to the relationship a special responsibility for the welfare of the other.

It is at once apparent that Catullus had no such idea in mind; he is not assuming the rôle of a Hector, much less suggesting that Lesbia might have felt toward him the helpless dependence of a child upon its father. Nor is the line to be interpreted as evidence of naive bewilderment on Catullus' part, as a kind of extravagant expression engendered by hurt and confusion.[19] Rather, it is to be taken as one more attempt to express the non-physical aspect of his love. It is a line deliberately thought out and devised toward this end. In order to convey the idea that his love for Lesbia had a different quality, one completely dissociated from the carnal, different even from the sincere passion which many of his contemporaries must have known, Catullus compares it to the clearest example he can find of love which has no share in physical interest, the love of a father for his sons. Then, as if even that were not sufficiently divorced from the physical—for father and child are, after all, bound by the physical tie of blood-relationship—he adds "sons-in-law." The love which a paterfamilias bore the men who had married his daughters could not by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as having a physical basis: it must have been based exclusively on a feeling of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual sympathy, coupled with that intense community of interest which characterized the Roman family.[20] The *paternal* aspect of such affection is entirely irrelevant; Catullus does not mean that he

[16] *Iliad*, VI, 429-30: *Ἕκτορ, ἀτὰρ σύ μοί ἐσσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, σὺ δέ μοι θαλερὸς παρακοίτης.*

[17] Terence, *Andria*, 295: *te isti virum do, amicum tutorem patrem.*

[18] E. g. Propertius, I, 11, 23: *tu mihi sola domus, tu, Cynthia, sola parentes*; II, 18b, 33-34: *cum tibi nec frater nec sit tibi filius ullus, frater ego et tibi sim filius unus ego.*

[19] Havelock, *op. cit.* (see note 6), p. 85, has correctly pointed out the error in this view.

[20] Havelock, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

felt as a father feels, *qua* father. He means only that his love had the same spiritual, non-physical quality that a father's love possesses.

In the end, the expression is fumbling. It could scarcely be expected that Catullus' contemporaries would make the correct equation of ideas. The line probably produced some wise nodding of heads and quoting of the Andromache passage, and probably, too, became the occasion for cynical jibes at the poet's naiveté. It is fair to doubt that Catullus was understood—possibly because he himself did not clearly understand his own feelings.[21]

It is as if in realization of these facts that in this same poem, Catullus goes on to attempt an expression of his love in still other terms. In the last two distichs he proclaims that his affection for Lesbia had two aspects, and that these aspects were totally different in character, one from the other. So different were they that they were capable of being completely separated, in such a way that the one could continue and grow stronger while the other grew ever weaker. In vv. 5-6, he describes the emotional experience which has accompanied this separation:

nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,
multo mi tamen es vilior et levior.

In other words the flame of passion, representing the physical side of his love, has grown ever hotter, while his spiritual esteem, the non-physical side, has fallen lower and lower: Lesbia is ever "cheaper" and "of less moment (*levior*)" in his eyes.

The contrast in ideas is immediately apparent in these lines; no less apparent is the fact that while Catullus finds no difficulty in expressing the carnal side of his love, for which *impensius uror* is a perfectly clear and understandable expression, he is not so capable of defining its other aspect. In vv. 3-4, he attempted a definition in positive terms; now he tries to phrase one in a negative way, by showing what he has lost now that this side of his love has become weakened. His sense of Lesbia's *value* and *importance* to him, he says, is diminishing. But "value" and "importance" do not suggest love; at best, they suggest the personal esteem which accompanies friendship.[22]

[21] Cf. Kroll, above, note 14.

[22] The meaning of the phrase *vilior et levior* is well illustrated by Tacitus, *Hist.*, IV, 80 (of Antonius Primus and Domitian): *Neque ipse*

This may be part of love, just as is the *fides* of which he made such point in *cc.* 109 and 87, but it is by no means the whole story. Standing alone, the definition is quite inadequate, and may have stirred his readers to the same sort of incredulity as did his use of *amicitia* in *c.* 109.

In the light of this fact, one may well imagine that the abrupt question "qui potis est?" expresses the reader's wonder not only at how such a paradox of sentiment was possible, but also at how there could truly be any element of this second kind in a love-affair. What have such colorless concepts as "value" and "importance" to do with love, unless they are associated with the usual, basically physical, interpretation of that passion? And if these concepts do properly belong to this enigmatic "other side" of love, how can they be expressed positively?

Catullus' answer to the question again consists in an attempt to point up a contrast between the two aspects of his love:

quod amantem iniuria talis
cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus.

What the *iniuria* was need not concern us at the moment, since it has no bearing on the question in hand.[23] Significant only is the fact that it is forcing (*cogit*) him into a position which must have seemed paradoxical to his readers, but was not so to him. To them, a man "esteemed" (*bene velle*) his mistress only in proportion as he "loved" (*amare*) her; to Catullus, these are two separate emotional phenomena, and only if he can explain the nature of them both can he reveal the nature of his love. Once more, as in vv. 5-6, he finds no difficulty in expressing the carnal side: for this purpose *amare* serves very well. But for the non-physical side he is thrown back on a flat and almost insipid phrase, *bene velle.* It expresses nothing more than a rather vague feeling of good will, a sort of warm friendliness.[24]

(*sc.* Antonius) *deerat adrogantia vocare offensas, nimius commemorandis quae meruisset. Alios ut imbelles, Caecinam ut captivom ac dediticium increpat. Unde paulatim levior viliorque haberi, manente tamen in speciem amicitia.* (Referred to by Kroll, *ad loc.*).

[23] I shall revert to it later. Ellis (on v. 8) says that it was "doubtless a preference shown by Lesbia to some rival of Catullus." I doubt if it was as trivial a matter as this.

[24] Its meaning is excellently shown by Plautus, *Truc.*, 434-442:

pro di immortales! non amantis mulieris
sed sociai unanimantis, fidentis fuit

But the sentiment is at least non-physical in character, and Catullus hopes that by placing it in juxtaposition to *amare*, and thus implying that it was equivalent to *amare* in intensity and importance, he may be able to give some indication of its special meaning to him. Had he been a modern writer, with centuries of romantic tradition behind him, he could have stated his case very simply and clearly: "The hurt she has done me compels me to *desire* her more, but to *love* her less." To us, familiar as we are with the concept of romantic love, it is no paradox to desire without loving; to Catullus' contemporaries "desire" and "love" were scarcely to be dissociated from each other; to Catullus himself they were indeed dissociated, but he had no adequate means of expressing the dichotomy.

This poem also raises another question, which must be answered if the nature of Catullus' love for Lesbia is to be fully understood: why should a "hurt" cause his physical passion to increase, even as it caused his love—to use the modern term—to diminish? The answer is given at least partly by *c.* 75:

> Huc est mens deducta tua, mea Lesbia, culpa,
> atque ita se officio perdidit ipsa suo,
> ut iam nec bene velle queat tibi, si optima fias,
> nec desistere amare, omnia si facias.

In this poem we see the same contrast of ideas as in *c.* 72, and in the same terms: *bene velle* and *amare* once more are used to express the twofold nature of his love. The sole difference is that now the "hurt" has gone so deep that love—again in the modern sense—has been completely destroyed, and only passion, desire, remains. Moreover, his passion has reached such a degree that it can never be satisfied. The "hurt" then, must have been of such character that it could enflame desire at the same time that it destroyed spiritual affection; more than that, it must have caused desire to reach its apogee when all spiritual affection was irrevocably dead. It can have been no mere matter

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officium facere quod modo haec fecit mihi,
suppositionem pueri quae mihi credidit,
germanae quod sorori non credit soror.
ostendit sese iam mihi medullitus:
se mihi infidelem numquam, dum vivat, fore.
egone illam ut non amem? egone illi ut non bene velim?
me potius non amabo quam huic desit amor.

of feminine coquetry or of ordinary *amantium irae*,[25] for Catullus has already shown his willingness—albeit not without some grief—to overlook the occasional deviations of Lesbia from the straight path that he had set for himself,[26] and such incidents, even if they had weakened his feeling of *bene velle*, could scarcely have roused his passions to such an unbearable pitch.

Only one thing, it seems to me, can account for the violence of Catullus' reaction, and this is the realization, brought home to him at long last, of Lesbia's utter profligacy and complete promiscuity. This is what hurt him so deeply, not of course because it convicted her of immorality, but because it made clear to him the fact that she had never really understood or appreciated the quality of the love he bore her. Always dissatisfied with her own interpretations of their love, he has now seen that she was not even honestly attempting to understand what he meant. In brief, she did not care that he felt for her as no other man had ever felt for any woman; if she had, she would not, with such complete disregard for his feelings, have slipped from the *rara furta*, which he could tolerate, to the sexual orgies in which she was now indulging. In *c.* 75, these escapades are only hinted at in the phrases *si optima fias* and *omnia si facias*; the lines *glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes* (*c.* 58), *puella nam mi . . . consedit istic* (*c.* 37), and *cum suis vivat valeatque moechis quos simul complexa tenet trecentos* (*c.* 11) give the true picture of her depravity, and their sorrowful bitterness shows the true depth of the hurt she had inflicted upon him. Not with the best of wills could his *amicitia—fides—bene velle—diligere* survive such an attack. And conversely, her conduct served only to heighten his desire to possess her,

[25] Ellis appears to accept this inadequate explanation (on 72, 8) and follows the younger Dousa in quoting *Anth. Pal.*, V, 256, 3-4: *ὕβρις ἔρωτας ἔλυσε· μάτην ὅδε μῦθος ἀλᾶται. ὕβρις ἐμὴν ἐρέθει μᾶλλον ἐρωμανίην.* On 75, he quotes Theognis, 1091-1094: *ἀργαλέως μοι θυμὸς ἔχει περὶ σῆς φιλότητος· οὔτε γὰρ ἐχθαίρειν οὔτε φιλεῖν δύναμαι, γιγνώσκων χαλεπὸν μέν, ὅταν φίλος ἀνδρὶ γένηται, ἐχθαίρειν, χαλεπὸν δ' οὐκ ἐθέλοντα φιλεῖν.* Kroll also uses this latter quotation, but presumably only as a parallel for the mechanical juxtaposition of ideas. Neither passage shows anything approaching Catullus' intensity of feeling.

[26] The lines are almost tearful, and yet resigned: *quae tamen etsi uno non est contenta Catullo, rara verecundae furta feremus erae, ne nimium simus stultorum more molesti* (68, 135-137).

for it showed to what lengths she could go to arouse, enjoy, and satisfy the sexual impulses of men. Catullus knew no squeamishness on this score; her knowledge, openly displayed, of the arts of love tempted and tormented him. As the full extent of her libidinous skill is made clear to him, he feels an insatiable desire to share in it. Thus it is that he can say *ut iam nec bene velle queat tibi, si optima fias, nec desistere amare, omnia si facias.*

Thus far we have dealt only with Catullus' struggle for adequate expression of the nature of his love. Even though he never attained complete clarity of terms, he did succeed in presenting a clear picture of the psychological conflict which that love occasioned. On the one side, Lesbia's physical attractions impel him toward an ever-increasing desire for possession; on the other, his loss of respect, spiritual affection, intellectual and emotional sympathy, drive him ever more to despise her. The emotional conflict itself is evidence of the power and significance that resided in the non-physical side of his love, for if this side had had less power and significance, no such conflict would have resulted. Instead, Catullus would have fallen resignedly into that attitude of mock despair which was canonical for ill-starred lovers among his predecessors and followers.[27] The very fact that he experiences no such shallow emotion, but is instead driven half-mad with heartbreak proves that he had attained to a concept of love unfamiliar to the other erotic poets of ancient times, and far more akin to our modern conception of romantic love.

In spite, then, of the terminological difficulties experienced by the poet, the conflict and the nature and intensity of the feelings that brought it about are clear to see and to understand. But even as Catullus reveals this conflict, a further idea begins to manifest itself, an idea which gives greater point and meaning not only to *cc.* 72 and 75, but even more to *cc.* 85 and 76. This is the idea of guilt, a feeling which arises in Catullus' mind not from any sense of wrong-doing in having participated in an immoral affair [28] but from the very emotional conflict itself.

[27] Cf. e. g. *Anth. Pal.*, V, 256 (above, note 25); Theognis, 1091-1094 (*ibid.*), Anacreon, 89: ἐρῶ τε δηὖτε κοὐκ ἐρῶ καὶ μαίνομαι κοὐ μαίνομαι; Ovid, *Am.*, III, 11b, 14.

[28] The simple innocence of 68, 143-146 shows how far he was from any feeling of guilt in this connection.

Not only is Catullus torn by two opposing, and to him antipathetic, emotions, and thereby subjected to unbearable tension; he seems to sense, too, that there is something fundamentally unsound in the conflict itself. Nebulously at first, but with increasing clarity, the idea arises in his mind that he ought not to continue to desire the woman for whom he has lost all sense of spiritual and intellectual sympathy. In other words, *amare* and *bene velle* belong together; the one without the other is wrong. In making this association he has set up for himself a moral ideal which has much in common with the modern, romantic ideal of love. And in continuing to desire Lesbia, as he does, he finds himself standing in open violation of his ideal.

The feeling of guilt which results from this violation of his self-conceived moral principle shows itself at first only in a sort of vague wonder: in *c.* 72 he is not only describing the emotional conflict which he is experiencing and trying, by describing it, to understand it; in addition, he hints that he is aware that he is allowing himself to be involved in an unhealthy situation. The question "qui potis est?" is half addressed to himself; it is as if he were a trifle concerned at his own feelings and were not entirely satisfied that he is doing right in feeling toward Lesbia as he does. And if, in *c.* 72, this inchoate sense of guilt can only be read between the lines, it becomes much clearer in *c.* 75, where in the face of the same basic conflict Catullus remarks that his heart "has destroyed itself in the performance of its native office": *ita se officio perdidit ipsa suo.* Its "office" is to love; in loving Lesbia it has been led by her wrong-doing to a form of loving which consists wholly of physical desire, unaccompanied by spiritual and intellectual esteem. In so doing, his heart has "destroyed itself"; the poet's concepts of right and wrong are in confusion, and he is caught up in a situation in which willy-nilly he is pursuing a course which he knows is wrong. It is this feeling of guilt, of wrong-doing, which gives the poem its tragic overtones. Catullus is not merely frustrated or stubborn;[29] he is afflicted by a realization that he has not been true to his own ideal. It is not only that Lesbia has not been true to him: he has not been true to himself. Yet he persists in his course; he goes on desiring her when he knows

[29] This is Ellis' view (*ad loc.*), which strikes me as essentially shallow.

he should not; he is now even convinced that he can never cease to desire her. This is the guilt which oppresses him and throws him into despair.

The conflict and the guilt which it occasioned are rendered somewhat clearer in *c.* 85. The phrase *odi et amo* is usually translated, "I hate and I love," and it is thereby implied that Catullus meant *odisse* to be the opposite of *amare*. But in the light of *cc.* 72 and 75 it should be clear that this is not the case: *odisse* is not the opposite of *amare*, but of *bene velle*, and the conflict of feeling here is precisely the same as that which is expressed in the *amare magis . . . bene velle minus* of *c.* 72, and the *nec bene velle queat . . . nec desistere amare* of *c.* 75. The emotion expressed by *odisse* is the final revulsion which has filled the gap, so to speak, that was left when all the poet's spiritual and intellectual affection was gone; expressed negatively, it is *bene velle desiisse*.[30] But *odisse* is clear in meaning as *bene velle*, and the various synonyms attempted for it, never could be. It could never be confused with physical passion: one does not "hate" a woman for her physical qualities, nor does "hatred" have a physical basis. "Hatred" is antipathy (as opposed to sympathy), ill-will (as opposed to esteem), revulsion (as opposed to affection). It is thus not the opposite of *amare*, which to Catullus expresses physical desire, but of *bene velle* and its synonyms, by which he tried to express the nature of the non-physical side of his love.[31] If Catullus could have found a word which would adequately express the opposite of *odisse*, he would have been able to say clearly what he tried to say by means of such inadequate terms as *bene velle, diligere, fides*, and *amicitia*.

As for the "torment" of which the distich speaks, this is not occasioned merely by the stress and strain of conflicting feelings, nor is it expressive solely of mental confusion. If it were, we should find Catullus here in no greater danger of real unhappiness than is Terence's Phaedria in the *Eunuchus*.[32] The very

[30] Cf. Hezel, *op. cit.* (see note 9), p. 55: "An die Stelle von 'non bene velle' ist 'odisse' getreten."

[31] Ovid has expressed the same conflict of feeling *Am.*, III, 11, 38: *aversor morum crimina, corpus amo*. This comes much closer to Catullus' meaning than do most of the other parallels cited by the editors (e. g. Kroll, Ellis).

[32] 70-73: *nunc ego et illam scelestam esse et me miserum sentio:*

simplicity of the distich, the sharp black and white of its emotions, are enough to prove that no such shallow interpretation may be given it. Catullus' *excrucior* is not to be ascribed to the conventional lover's despair. The distich becomes much clearer in meaning and reveals the true depth of the poet's feeling if we realize that the thing which causes his torment is his sense of guilt, his perception that the desire he feels is wrong. It is wrong because it is accompanied by hatred rather than by sympathy, esteem, and good-will. He sees that under the circumstances he ought not to desire Lesbia, yet in spite of that, he does. At the risk of over-simplification and importing into an ancient author concepts strictly modern, one might say that it is not so much his heart as his conscience which is here putting him on the rack. He is violating his self-imposed and self-conceived moral code; he knows it, yet he cannot help it. It is this which is the cause of his torment. Well might his contemporaries ask "quare id facis?" for they could have had no conception of his feelings. For that matter, Catullus himself does not understand why he suffers so—witness the despairing "nescio" which he offers in reply. He senses only that he is possessed at once by two emotions which he knows, perhaps only by a sort of cloudy intuition, ought to be mutually exclusive. The modern, backed by his tradition of romantic love, can understand Catullus better than could the poet himself, for it is now commonly accepted, at least as an ideal, that desire is right only if it is accompanied by love—using the word again in its modern sense. Unaccompanied by spiritual and intellectual sympathy, physical desire is, if not morally wrong, at least unworthy or improper. Whatever may be modern practice in this respect, the accepted moral code condemns such unrelieved animal feelings, and our ideal of love assumes the justice of this condemnation. Catullus, alone of the ancient erotic poets, has a prevision of this ideal, and *c.* 85 shows that he was scarcely the happier for his deviation from the norm of his times. The modern, at least, could understand the reason for his sense of wrong-doing; Catullus senses only the wrong-doing; the reason is beyond his grasp. To be conscious of doing wrong, but not to know why the wrong *is* wrong—this is indeed *excruciari.*

et taedet et amore ardeo, et prudens sciens, vivos videnque pereo, nec quid agam scio.

The conflict of feeling and the guilt consequent upon it reach their final and much-expanded statement in *c.* 76. The poem may be divided into three parts: *vv.* 1-8 constitute an attempted definition of the poet's love in terms of actions and thoughts; vv. 9-16 describe the destruction of that love, the resulting torment, and the resolution of the poet to rid himself of it; vv. 17-26 are a prayer to the gods to assist him in that resolution. This division has no special significance, but arises naturally from the succession of Catullus' thoughts, which pass in orderly progression from one idea to the next.[33]

In the first eight lines, Catullus returns again to the attempt to define the nature of his love by a process of analysis, by a description of the various types of thought and action which made it up. Very prominent is the idea of *fides,* which is expressed here in much the same terms as those which appear in *cc.* 109 and 87.[34] To this concept, he now adds that of *pietas,* that peculiarly ancient virtue, the definition of which rather escapes any modern tongue, but which means basically the quality of doing the right thing in the right way at the right time. If these two ideas may be classed as feelings or psychological states, Catullus goes on to describe what he *did* in the name of his love. Here he limits himself to rather general terms; he speaks of *benefacta, quaecumque homines bene dicere aut facere possunt,* thus leaving the reader to assume that in response to his love he left no kind or thoughtful word unspoken or act unperformed.

His love, then, was characterized by *fides, pietas, bene dicere,* and *bene facere,* all of them either spiritual qualities or outgrowths of spiritual qualities. In the end, they represent only an expansion of the concept which Catullus had expressed by *bene velle* in the earlier poems, and it is obvious that he has been no more successful here than there in making clear the nature of his feelings. For while all the qualities he mentions are indubitably parts of the non-physical aspect of love, they do not completely describe it. An essential element, which might best be called spiritual and intellectual sympathy, has been omitted—for the reason, of course, that although Catullus felt this sympathy, he did not know how to put it into words. That he did

[33] Cf. Kroll, introd. note.

[34] Cf. especially 76, 3-4 and 87, 3-4; 109, 6.

indeed feel it is revealed by vs. 9: *omnia quae ingratae perierunt credita menti*: his love perished, he says, when it became clear that the heart to which it was entrusted lacked the power or will to respond to it—lacked, in other words, the very sympathy which alone could have answered and complemented his own. He offered to Lesbia loyalty, constancy, rightness and kindness of thought and deed, and sympathy, that mutual understanding of thought, emotion, and purpose which is the *sine qua non* of love. She scorned them all, either because she was incapable of understanding such a love, or because she did not find it of interest. To Catullus' love she consistently offered nothing but kisses, embraces, the *iocosa* and *iucunda* of the conventional passion of the day. Even her protestations of fidelity were couched in these terms.[35] And when Catullus protests her defection from even this relatively trivial kind of fidelity, she tells him not to be a nuisance and a fool.[36] In the end, her utter lack of appreciation and understanding, demonstrated by her shameless conduct, sends the structure of his love crashing to ruin.

With the loss of his spiritual love, Catullus is left with nothing but a steadily mounting physical desire, and we have already seen the torment to which this passion subjected him, not because it was unrequited—for there is nothing in the Lesbia-poems to indicate that Lesbia was unwilling to continue to entertain Catullus as a lover, and some evidence that she was anxious to do so[37]—but because of his conviction that his desire was wrong. This torturing sense of wrong-doing is the fearful state from which he wishes, in *c.* 76, now to free himself. It should be easy, he thinks: *quare cur tu te iam amplius excrucies?* But it is not. The gods seem to be against him.[38] And his love has lasted a long time; one cannot simply shrug off an emotion so deeply implanted. Yet it must be done, for he can know no

[35] Cf. 109, 1-2; 72, 1-2.

[36] Cf. 68, 137: *ne nimium simus stultorum more molesti.* I feel certain that Catullus is here "quoting" from a passage-at-arms between himself and Lesbia.

[37] E. g. the mission of Furius and Aurelius, *c.* 11.

[38] I interpret *dis invitis* as a concessive: "even though the gods are unwilling" (i. e. to let you cease to be *miser*), in spite of Kroll's note *ad loc.* For if the gods were unwilling that he should *continue* in his misery, why should he feel it necessary, in his prayer, to ask for their mercy (vv. 17-18) and to remind them of his deserts (vv. 25-26)?

peace of mind until he is rid of the oppressing sensation of guilt which his continuing passion occasions.

The last part of the poem, the prayer to the gods, makes it clear that it is indeed from guilt, from a sense of wrong-doing, that Catullus wishes to be freed. If it were merely from the unhappiness consequent upon unrequited love, he would scarcely have described his state of mind as a disease. Unhappiness and disappointment may be bitter, but they are normal feelings, and can hardly be characterized as *pestis perniciesque, torpor, taeter morbus,* all of which suggest that Catullus is convinced of the abnormality, or in moral terms, of the wrongness of his feelings. Nor is the problem solved if we explain his suffering as arising not from disappointment but from the fact that he persists in loving when his love is unanswered. If this were so, then Lesbia's reform, and return to his arms should satisfy him. But he says emphatically that he does not want her now, not even if she could learn to love him as he had once loved her, or could learn to be "chaste" (*pudica*), i. e. could show toward him the loyalty and constancy that he had shown toward her. The poem becomes clear in meaning only if we understand that it is not from love itself that Catullus wishes release, but from the sense of wrong, of guilt, of unworthiness that has arisen from the persistence of his physical passion after his spiritual and intellectual affection has been destroyed. As his thought progresses, he thinks with ever-increasing loathing of the moral wrong of which he finds himself guilty. Starting as *pestis perniciesque* it is next *torpor,* and finally ends as *taeter morbus,* "foul disease," a phrase which can describe only a hideously ugly state of mind. Neither disappointment nor persistence in unrequited love could well be so described; the phrase is apt only if it denotes a sense of wrong, of obliquity, and of shame. Catullus' feeling here shows his conviction that love, to be good and right, must be composed of two mutually necessary parts, desire on the one hand and spiritual sympathy on the other. He does not say what spiritual sympathy alone might be; such a "Platonic" relationship between man and woman would have been quite beyond his comprehension. But he is clear that physical desire alone is not merely empty and meaningless, but—if I may venture to use the anachronistic term—sinful.[39]

[39] A word of caution is needed here, lest I be accused of making a

It is this concept of love as a dual entity made up of aspects one of which is not only incomplete but wrong without the other, that sets Catullus' love for Lesbia apart from the ordinary ancient love-affair and gives it a character approaching more nearly to that of the romantic tradition of later times. Only in the light of this concept do the poems of conflict—*cc.* 109, 87, 72, 75, and 76—become clear in meaning; without it they remain either a puzzle or fall into the class of poetry represented by such poems as Ovid, *Amores*, III, 11 b and 14, pieces the frivolity of which is utterly out of harmony with the passionate sincerity of Catullus. That Catullus himself did not clearly understand the nature of his own feelings, and that, for all his struggle for expression, he never succeeded in formulating them in unequivocal terms, is due to the fact that his concept of love was not only new to him, but was equally new to the world in which he lived and to the language which he spoke. Many centuries before the advent of the poets of romantic love, Catullus foreshadowed the ideal to which they, and the Western European world after them, at least in theory subscribed.

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Puritan of Catullus. I do not mean to imply that he felt this same guilt in his—doubtless countless—casual relations with *meretrices* or other women of easy virtue. It is only when he has *loved* that he can feel as he does here, and he would have been the last to characterize as "love" the fly-by-night joys of the *lupanar* or the *convivium*.