



Further Thoughts on Catullus 64

The Thematic Unity of the Poem

The meeting of Peleus and Thetis on the sea merges immediately into their wedding, only to stop with the description of the coverlet showing the tale of Ariadne and Theseus; the wedding is picked up again once Ariadne has met Bacchus. The poet's handling of time and ordering of material both strengthens thematic links and also encourages us to see the text as an artistic creation rather than a straight linear story. In the ecphrasis in particular, the poet begins and ends with Ariadne as depicted in the tapestry: apparently doomed to die and lamenting her fate but in fact about to be saved by a divine saviour whom she cannot see but we can, rather like some of the women in Ovid's *Heroides* who are similarly frozen in time and unable to look forward to their future but only to the past and to the present, even though (as with Penelope in *Heroides* 1 and Ariadne here) they are about to be saved. The background tales of Theseus and his father and the slaying of the Minotaur are brought in to explain how the central figure of Ariadne came to be where the artist has placed her and how her apparent impotence and vulnerability masks a powerful curse and imminent translation to divine company—the sort of union of god and human, in fact, which Peleus and Thetis exemplify (albeit briefly) and which the poet misses wistfully at the end of the poem. The viewer of the tapestry would of course see that Ariadne was about to be saved and so would know that her laments are needless, while the reader of the poem is not let into the full details of the picture until her despair has been fully indulged, bringing out the difference between the linear narrative and the spatial visual image. Thus the thematic coherence of the poem is easily seen: in both tales there is a human being married to a divine being, and the result of both unions is happiness at least for the moment, but whereas the 'frame' story of Peleus and Thetis shows happiness today but foresees suffering in the future (especially in the song of the Parcae), the central Ariadne ecphrasis shows suffering now with happiness in the future. The sea is the idyllic element on which Peleus first sees Thetis and is also the cruel force (*truculentum* 179) imprisoning Ariadne on the beach until Bacchus flies in; the poet's treatment of the sea to some extent mirrors the mood of the tale. The sacrifice of the young Polyxena at the tomb of Peleus' son foretold by the Parcae (362-70) recalls the sacrifice of Ariadne's 'brother' the Minotaur at the hands of Theseus and is in turn recalled by the massive sacrifice to Jupiter in 389. Theseus is *ferox* and able to slay monsters, while Achilles will exceed even Theseus in ferocity and carnage. The father of Theseus is a caring parent of a heroic son, and Peleus and Thetis will also go on to have a highly successful son, but they are all going to end up mourning; Peleus is most often seen (in Homer at least) as a sad old father whose son has abandoned him to fight in Troy, and Thetis is also often seen as a figure of mourning for her son, as in Homer (*Iliad* 18.94 etc). Even tiny details become themes and find parallels in the inner and the outer narrative: the Nereids' breasts are seen by the mariners (18), Ariadne bares her breasts in despair on the shore (64-5), while the mothers of



Achilles' victims will beat their breasts (351) in despair at the death of their sons. The trees are woven into a ship (10), the tale of Ariadne is told on a woven tapestry and features the life-saving power of the thread to bring Theseus safely out of the labyrinth (113-5), and the Parcae spin the thread of the future (320-2 etc) which even includes the prophecy that Thetis will pass the 'thread' test the morning after her wedding-night (376-80). Even the language strengthens the unity of the different tales: compare line 19 and line 253 describing the love of the mortal Peleus and the divine Bacchus respectively in very similar terms. What all these coherences establish is a feeling that it is a single world which this poem is describing, a world where both Peleus and Theseus are at home; the poet goes out of his way to confuse any sense of 'before and after' in the intertwining of the two tales, even foxing the reader's sense of chronology with the 'first ship' in the opening scene leading up to a tale which depends on a series of ships having been sailing between Athens and Crete for years (*solitam esse* 79). The past is all one, contrasted (ostensibly) at the end with the present.

The Intertextual Background

The poet also makes good use of a range of earlier literature. Catullus alludes to phrases, themes, and characters in Greek and Roman literature and so deepens the texture and the significance of the poem. The opening of the poem, for instance, relies heavily on the echoes of Euripides' (echoed by Ennius') *Medea* and also Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, texts which insist on the reader seeing the present poem as a narrative of the Voyage of the Argo with Peleus on board. This contrasts with the view of Apollonius (1.558) that Peleus married Thetis and fathered Achilles before the Argo sailed; and Catullus' account of the consequent idyllic courtship is astonishing both in chronology and content (Thetis was highly resistant to Peleus in earlier accounts). There are strong echoes of Lucretius in the poem, both of phrases (209), whole descriptions (e.g. the Bacchic noise at 251-64 recalls Lucretius 4. 545-8 and 2.618-20) and large themes (the human sacrifice of Polyxena owes a great deal to Lucretius' Iphigenia (1. 84-100): the wretchedness of Ariadne's love for Theseus is infused with Lucretius' scathing satire of romantic love at 4.1058-1287: for more recent analysis of the link between this poem and Lucretius see e.g. Abel Tamas 'Erroneous Gazes: Lucretian Poetics in Catullus 64' in *Journal of Roman Studies* 106 (2016) 1-20) with bibliography. Even the gloomy ending of the poem raises similar questions as the gloomy ending of the *de rerum natura*, and the final view of the gods out of contact with humans is Epicurean in effect if not in motivation (Epicurus' gods keep away to maintain their serenity, Catullus' gods do so out of abhorrence at man's behaviour). Echoes of Homer abound—the similes, the father-son sorrowing of Aegeus and Theseus recalling strongly that of Priam and Hector as well as the wistful words (*Iliad* 24.534-42) of Achilles about his old father Peleus, the heroic valour of Achilles. There are also echoes of tragedy (Prometheus, Polyxena), the wedding hymn (the Parcae song a sinister inversion of the traditional *epithalamium*—on which see introduction to poem 62), the Idyll of Peleus and Thetis falling instantly in love being a marine version of some Greek Pastoral poetry. Above all, the ecphrasis is a stylised but highly original version of a form of static description going back to Homer (the Shield of Achilles (Homer *Iliad* 18. 478-613)) and elsewhere (the mantle of Jason (Apollonius Rhodius *Argonautica* 1.730-767), and one which was to inspire the shield of Aeneas (Vergil *Aeneid* 8. 608-731)). What is obvious throughout is the self-conscious manner in which Catullus has



used the literature of the past to create a new poem, the echoes merging to form and also colour a new voice.

Optimist or Pessimist?

One predominant area of critical inquiry has been the poet's attitude towards his subject matter, and especially whether the poem is 'optimistic' or 'pessimistic' in its view of human nature and the heroic age. The classic statement of the 'pessimistic' viewpoint is still that of Bramble (Structure and Ambiguity in Catullus 64' *PCPS* 16 (1970), 22-41) who sees disquiet in the poet's elaborate description of the idleness in the countryside, unease at the luxury in the opulent wealth in the palace and positive repugnance in the grisly prophecies of the Fates. The happy wedding of Peleus and Thetis is offset and undermined by the wretched state of the abandoned Ariadne, who thus gives the lie to the heroism and self-sacrifice declared as being the ethos of the past. The narrative itself is full of negative remarks and unhappy echoes—and to make the point inescapably clear the poet appends a gratuitous epilogue full of contemporary *Kulturpessimismus* to leave the reader in a mood of deep disillusion with the degeneration of the human race. The *heroum virtutes* are ironically and bitterly 'corrected' by the poem's assertion that 'the Heroic Age was not so very different from contemporary times. It might have been happier in some ways than the present, yet still it contained the germs of future decline.' (Bramble (1970) 41). This powerful view is still with us in a large amount of the scholarly writing on the poem and deserves further critical examination. The assumption, for example, that the future brutality of the child renders the wedding unhappy is questionable, especially when the 'child' is without doubt the greatest warrior in the world of Greek myth. The depiction of the luxury in the palace would be viewed, says Bramble, by the 'normal Roman', with 'disapproval' (Bramble (1970) 39); but this is contested by Jenkyns who sees the passage as one of sensuous delight in the colours, textures (and of course poetic sounds) of the gorgeous palace (Jenkyns, *Three Classical Poets* 90-91). Far from being a pejorative description, lines 43-9 are blazingly happy: 'Laughter as a metaphor for bright colour or sparkling light is conventional enough, but to make the house laugh at a scent, so that the visual picture is merged with an element of sheer fantasy, and to make the scent so gorgeous that it is like a caressing touch - this is indeed dazzling.' (Jenkyns 109). The familiar doom-laden reference to Euripides' (and Ennius') *Medea* at the beginning of the poem is seen as sinister by Bramble, but is well explained by Jenkyns as the poet's use of the 'colour' of an earlier poet without automatically assuming his 'intention' as well.

The seeds of the pessimistic view had already been planted, in Kinsey ((1965) 'Irony and Structure in C 64' *Latomus* 24: 911-31), who notes the ironic elements in the poet's depiction of the heroic age but draws a different conclusion from Bramble. 'Catullus does not take the grief of the mothers...seriously because neither he nor his audience take the stories of the heroic age seriously. His attitude is...that...of the realist ironically retelling a story found in some romantic novel which no one regards as anything except light entertainment.' ((Kinsey (1965) 'Irony and Structure in C 64' *Latomus* 24: 930). This jocular debunking of the heroic age is one interpretation of the text, but not one that has found much favour as it stands. Curran (Catullus and the Heroic Age' *Yale Classical Studies* 21 (1969): 169-92) agrees that the poet's depiction of the Heroic Age is ironic, but urges a more judicious judgement: 'Catullus' attitude is a combination of a nostalgia for the glamour of the



heroic world with an ironic realisation that it is only an irrelevant dream...Myth becomes a metaphor for the present, an unpleasant present but, as the poem as a whole declares, it was never any better.' (Curran (1969) 191-2).

Over against this is the argument of Putnam, who in an influential article ('The Art of Catullus 64' *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 65 (1961): 165-205) urged that Catullus was voicing his own anguish in his relationship with Lesbia in this poem: Putnam finds echoes of the poem in various of the 'autobiographical' shorter poems and concludes that the poem is a 'personal statement', a sort of *roman à clef* which allows the poet the disguise inside which he can indulge a moralising coda which he would have found difficult *in propria persona*. The difficulty with this, as with all such documentary interpretations, is simply that it restricts the 'meaning' of the poem to biographical data, and anyway it fails at the final hurdle. The epilogue was the ideal opportunity to grind personal axes, but instead the poet here brings out instances of misbehaviour which are not referenced in contemporary Rome, let alone in Catullus' own life. It is in this respect that Konstan's attempt (*Catullus' Indictment of Rome: the Meaning of Catullus 64* (1977)) to see the poem as an 'indictment of Rome' falls down. It is not that the 'negative voices' in the text are not there—simply that it reduces the text to a programme which would leave it a great deal less ambitious and less successful than it is. Furthermore, the moralist using the poem as a stick with which to beat contemporary society would have picked a more appropriate set of crimes to shame contemporary Rome than the farrago of sexual and familial misdemeanours we find here: surely the sort of critique which we find in Lucretius (who does attack luxury (2.20-36) and political ambition (3.995-1002) and corruption (3. 59-73)) would have been exactly the style and the material needed here, if that had been the poet's intention.

There is undoubtedly a case for the reductive 'pessimistic' view of the poem, then, but by itself it will not suffice. This poetry is marked by coherences (already noted) and contrasts, such as the use of tragedy in writing epyllion, or setting the happy wedding of Thetis against the backdrop of the unhappy amour of Ariadne: above all, this is a poem of surprises where readers are kept on their toes by the poet's refusal to supply the expected: the poem opens as if it is about the Argonauts but goes on to depict the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the wedding-song is sung by the grotesque Parcae and (while it begins happily enough) it ends up being fixed on the brutal future of their unborn son and not about their present happiness, the wedding-couch is decorated with a tapestry in dubious taste for the occasion, the coda of the poem is an unexpected account of why gods no longer consort with humans, full of sinister moral allusions, the indulgence of Ariadne's grief at enormous length deludes the audience out of expecting the depicted denouement in her salvation by Bacchus. Any interpretation of this text must take account of this constant shifting perspective, this self-conscious playing with the reader's expectations and sensitivities.

We must also be careful of judging the poem in anachronistic terms. The tale of Ariadne, for instance, is undoubtedly sad but has a happy ending which the viewer of the tapestry could see and the reader of the poem will soon be shown. The wrong done to her is real and her grief is genuine—but she gets ample revenge (albeit at the expense of the innocent Aegeus) and ends up married to a glorious god rather than to a fickle human. The pain is made bearable by the denouement. The result is something akin to the 'Lying Tale' told by Odysseus to his father in the final book of Homer's *Odyssey*, where the old man is



teased by his son with a deceitful tale suggesting that his son is dead, only to find that his son is there all the time in disguise telling the tale. This sort of teasing seems cruel to us, perhaps, but has the artistic effect of both dramatic irony (we and one character know something which another character does not) and also enhanced joy when the truth is told and the reunion is effected. The 'teasing' element in the tale of Ariadne is well-played out. Sure, she is unhappy and laments her human lover's faithlessness, but we can smile at her misfortune knowing that she (like Peleus) has a divine lover waiting for her who will put everything to rights. This must to some extent give the lie to the 'pessimistic' critics who see her as a dark cloud on the wedding, although the poet does not forecast the future happiness of Bacchus and Ariadne as such a view could hardly be portrayed on the tapestry. The grief will become joy, the solitude and silence (186-7) is swiftly to be shattered when the Bacchic troupe roars into view: and all through the magic of Art.

If Ariadne is a sad woman about to be made happy, Thetis is the opposite: Homer describes Thetis as 'extremely reluctant' to marry Peleus (*Iliad* 18.434) and had to be wrestled into it. Apollonius (4. 865-79) has her leave Peleus immediately after the birth of Achilles, who was brought up by a centaur but still 'longed for Thetis' milk' (Apollonius 4. 813) and even suggested that the name Achilles may be derived from the Greek *a-cheilos*, ('the one who did not bring his lips to his mother's breast'). In Homer's *Iliad* Achilles says of his father: 'he outshone all men for riches...the gods gave him, a mortal man, a goddess for a wife: but even on him did the god pile suffering, for he had no generation of strong sons, but only one doomed child, and I give him no thought as he grows old...' (24. 534-40; cf. 19. 334-7). Homer paints a very intimate picture of the relationship between Thetis and her son (e.g. *Iliad* 18.67-144), but the marriage of Peleus and Thetis was not harmonious in many ancient accounts of the tale except this one (Pindar for example praises Peleus' good fortune but recognises both the character of his wife (*Isthmian* 8.25-32), the struggle for her hand (*Nemean* 3.35f, 4.62ff) and the grief Peleus suffered in losing his only son (*Pythian* 3.87ff)). Catullus does not prophesy the future of the happy couple, contenting himself with the forecast of the deeds of their son Achilles, and the resulting texture of his comments about the wedding match itself sound oddly sentimental (19-21, 334-6) in their naive simplicity. Even the chronology of the myth is reversed: in most accounts, the wedding of Peleus and Thetis predates the voyage of the Argo by a long time. Catullus' conflation of the voyage of the Argo and the marriage of Peleus and Thetis allows him to play on the similarity between this couple and the tragic pairing of Jason and Medea—a similarity played on by the echoes of Euripides' and Ennius' *Medea* in the opening lines and by the resemblance between Catullus' Ariadne and Apollonius' Medea. It does however allow the idyll of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis to give way to the epic carnage of the Homeric hero Achilles and the tragic figure of Polyxena, the narrative enlivened by outpourings of highly charged rhetoric, the text challenging and moving the reader at every turn.

Catullus is using the clash between the brilliant pleasure of the poetry and the (at times) disagreeable details of the narrative to enhance the status of the text as a work of art. The poet paints a 'pessimistic' view of love (as depicted in the plight of Ariadne), of family life (as seen in Theseus and his father, in Ariadne and her 'brother' the Minotaur), and of religion (in the poet's assertion that the gods have now given up all contact with humanity because of our wickedness) and ends up with a gloomy conclusion. The only 'moral' inference from this which can be drawn is that none of these things are reliable as an ethical



ideal and that in fact the only ideals which could be entertained are aesthetic ones, and of poetry in particular. The 'epilogue' with which the poem ends is a familiar form of personal closure of a poetic text, bringing the mythical past firmly back into the present, putting the poet's signature on the narrative in a way which is self-referential and ironic. The sins which Catullus lists are difficult to pin down to specific sinners (as shown by the wildly divergent views of scholars on the respective culprits, some of whom see this as mythology and others as contemporary history: see below on the epilogue) and amount to a form of contrast between the heroic past and the unheroic present which however fails to convince the reader with respect to either the past or the present (fratricide, for instance, being the offence which Ariadne connived at to her cost but is named as a 'modern' vice). The very imperfection of the subject-matter casts a satisfying glow back upon the perfection of the means of its exposition and elevates the poet not as a moral Jeremiah casting abuse at his contemporaries but as an aesthetic who has found a way through the impure dross even of the 'heroic' age (let alone his own age) to produce out of it all a pearl of perfection.

The Epilogue (384-408)

The contrast is drawn in these final lines between the heroic past and the unheroic present; the days when gods mixed with men are now gone. The wistful longing for the old days of familiarity between gods and men is at least as old as Homer (*Odyssey* 7. 201-206), where King Alcinous says of Odysseus '...for in the past they have always appeared plain to see as gods when we sacrifice sumptuous hecatombs, and they feast sitting with us where we sit. Even when a lonely traveller meets them, they make no concealment, for we are close to them, like the Cyclopes and the wild tribes of the Giants.' Of even greater interest here is the manner in which the poet switches from an (apparently) impersonal narrative account of the past to a more involved personal assessment of the present. The epilogue divides into two sections: 13 lines of glorious description of the past followed by 12 lines explaining and decrying the present. The tone of the first half is rich in evocative proper names (*Liber Parnasi...Thyadas...Delphi* etc), in epic usages (*caelicolae...Mavors*) and epithets (*rapidi Tritonis era, letifero belli certamine*) and the poetic voice is unashamedly hyperbolic in its approval (the homes of these *heroum* were *castas*, the sacrifice was of a hundred oxen, the worshippers 'ran' out of the 'entire' city 'racing' each other to receive the god). The tone of the second half is equally hyperbolic, the wickedness of the present being every bit as extreme as the piety of the past: the earth is now 'soaked' with 'evil crime', the hands 'wet' with brothers' blood (the 'wetness' image of *imbuta* being both reinforced and made specific), parents and children wish each other dead (the reciprocity brought out by the chiasmic *gnatus...parentes...genitor...nati*, the pathos intensified by the adjective *primaevi*—the first child being the occasion of great rejoicing in 'normal' marriages as shown in the sentimental picture of 'little Manlius' in 61. 209-218), or even commit incest, lust (in all its forms) pushing aside all moral principles.

The two sections of the epilogue have a wry and ironic symmetry about them: just as the 'father of gods' was pleased with the death of a large number of animals (387-9), so also the modern father seeks the death of his son: the god Bacchus is called by his title *Liber* to point up the contrast with the wicked father who kills his son in order to be *liber* (402). The



last image of the first part is that of the god Mars and the goddesses Athena (Minerva) and Artemis (Diana) rousing the troops to do battle in the 'death-bringing struggle of war': the second section begins with the earth soaked in 'unspeakable crime'. The glorious war of the one and the unspeakable crime of the other, the hecatomb of Jupiter and the murder of a son all produce death as their end-product; but they are not judged in the same way. This is perhaps behind the rather odd phrase 'everything both speakable and unspeakable mingled together in wicked madness' (405): actions which in other contexts might be quite respectable are corrupted into wickedness by the 'madness' of the age. The gods are the guarantors of justice: when men put justice out of their minds the gods ceased to consort with them (398) and human wickedness turned 'the just-making mind of the gods' away from us, the household gods being 'adulterated' by the incestuous mother. The poet leaves the gods literally in obscurity, removed from contact with 'the clear light of day' and thinking it beneath them to visit 'such unions'—unions such as that of Peleus and Thetis which can no longer happen, unless the gods consent to marry us.

The ending of this poem has aroused acute interest. On the surface it is self-evidently the poet lamenting that the sort of events he has described do not occur any more and is one of several pessimistic endings in Roman poetry, arousing similar questions to those surrounding the ending of the *Aeneid* and the *de rerum natura*. Like those two poems, the ending has its roots in earlier texts in addition to personal comment: first of all Hesiod concludes his catalogue of the degenerating races of humankind with the following condemnatory account of his own times:

'Now is a race of iron, toil and grief all day and death by night...the father will not agree with his children, nor they with him, nor guest with host, nor friend with friend, nor will brothers be dear to other as they once were. They will be quick to dishonour their aging parents, they will censure them, carping with words of bitterness in their hardness of heart and ignorance of the fear of the gods....and then Shame and Nemesis, wrapping their fair skin in white garments, will leave the broad-pathed earth and abandon mankind to go to Olympos to join the gathering of the immortal gods. Painful grief will be left to mortal men, with no defence against evil.' (*Works and Days* 176-201)

The parallels with our text are obvious: the breakdown of relationships and the departure of the gods leaving us to suffer. It is inconceivable that Catullus could have composed the ending of this poem without being aware of Hesiod, and equally inconceivable that his readers would not recognise it also. Hesiod does not of course have all the gods departing, as does Catullus: the point Hesiod is stressing is that if Shame and Nemesis (personified forces which inhibit us from doing wrong) have left the earth, then there really will be no protection from a jungle mentality and we will be prey to evil of our own making, the verbs being decisively in the future tense. Catullus adapts this idea interestingly: the gods are the preservers of justice and right, but their departure is the result of our wrongdoing and not its cause as in Hesiod, and what is in the Greek poem an elegant anthropomorphic metaphor for human loss of respect for society's laws becomes in Catullus an aetiological myth explaining the observable fact that gods do not share our human lives although legend states that they once did. We rejected Right, and the gods have rejected our company as a result.



Closer still to Catullus' view of things is Aratus, who in his *Phaenomena* explained the departure of Justice from the earth to become the constellation Virgo on the grounds of our wickedness. Human history began with a Golden Age (something like the world evoked in the opening 49 lines of this poem) and for a while all was well:

'Justice...of old lived on earth and met men face to face, and did not despise (cf. *dignantur* 407) the races of men and women, but mingling with them sat down (cf. 303), although she was immortal...not yet did men have any knowledge of grievous fighting or insulting disagreement or the noise of battle (cf. 394-6), but they lived a simple life. The cruel sea was far from them, not yet did ships (cf. 1-13) bring their livelihood from miles away, but oxen, the plough (cf. 38-42) and Justice herself, giver of just things...plentifully supplied all their needs' (Aratus 100-113)

(The golden race gives way to the silver race: Justice still lives on the earth but less willingly so and she tends to stay high up on the hill away from the cities: from there she would address the assembled crowd and threaten them:)

'What a race your golden fathers produced - worse than themselves. You will produce even worse yourselves. Wars and savage bloodshed (such as that of Achilles in 338-360) will be the lot of men and painful suffering shall come upon them' (123-6)

The subsequent race of bronze were the first men 'to forge the brigand's sword, the first to eat the meat of the plough-ox' and so Justice flew up to the heavens where she is visible as a constellation.

Once again, it is likely that Catullus had these lines in mind when he composed this text. The literary reminiscence of Hesiod through Aratus places Catullus in a tradition of didacticism which he exploits, using the colour of the earlier poets in an archly allusive manner. On the one hand it is totally appropriate that the poem which has been narrating legendary deeds should finish off with this flourish of an aetiological myth to draw a terminal line under the tale with the explanation of why such tales can never be repeated, using one myth to close the others; on the other, it is surely oversimplistic to see the 'moral' criticism of society in lines 397-408 as straight-faced and sincere when their 'sources' are so clearly literary rather than sociological. The individual crimes referred to are suggestive of the world of tragedy (fratricide and incest occurring in the pages of Sophocles more often than on the Via Appia) or perhaps the psychologically contorted Love-romances of Catullus' contemporary Parthenius, rather than to the well-documented sources on the Roman vices of corruption and ambition.

The result of this 'borrowing' from earlier Greek poets is paradoxical and two-fold. On the one hand it allows the poet to append his own signature to the poem by bringing the tale of 'once upon a time' (**quondam** 1) right up to his own age (**nobis** 406): this form of closure reflects the poet's shifting of perspective from the past to the present, from the lofty to the degraded, from god's-eye to worm's-eye, and is echoed in poems such as Horace *Epode* 2, the ending of the ecphrasis on the Shield of Aeneas in Vergil *Aeneid* 8. 729-31 and Propertius 1.3. Somewhat similar is poem 68, except that Catullus here waits until the end before showing us what appears to be a personal standpoint, while in 68 the mythical and the personal are intertwined throughout. On the other hand, this closure is supremely 'literary' and is therefore unlike those of Vergil and Horace: the poet here masquerades as a moralist,



but the fact that his words are so close to earlier sources has the effect of putting them into inverted commas and casting ironic doubts on their 'sincerity'. Catullus does not lack moral convictions—poem 76 is full of moral feeling, for instance—but the allusive language in this epilogue does leave us with a disturbingly unclear picture of the poet's 'own' view. It shows a poet signing off his poem with an irony which both enhances its artificiality and distances our emotional involvement: it signals to the reader that the whole of the foregoing is artefact and not document:

Finally, the epilogue contains hints and echoes of earlier parts of the poem: the slaying of bulls for Jupiter and the spilling of brother's blood both remind us of the slaying of the Minotaur, (Ariadne's 'brother' 150, 181), the sacrifice for the gods recalling the sacrifice of Polyxena, the entrance of Bacchus with his entourage is a clear reminiscence of 251-64, the warfare of Mars recalls the battles of Achilles in 338-360 or the 'death or glory' of Theseus in 101-2, the expulsion of justice by lust recalls Ariadne's bitter account of male lust in 145-8, the death of parents reminds us of Theseus 'killing' Aegeus by his forgetfulness, while the man who kills family to secure his lover is a gender-reversed reminder of Ariadne who did exactly that. The poet's final instance of human wickedness (the mother deceiving her son into incest 403-4) is quite unlike anything in the poem and emerges hyperbolically out of the sexual desire of the previous line. The effect of the epilogue is, then, a recapitulation of key themes and events in the poem, a teasing adaptation of earlier material into an apparently new and contemporary piece of comment. Once again, we are pleased by the artistry of this but our sureness of the poet's intention is unsettled by it. It is the last of many paradoxes and ambiguities with which this poem leaves us.

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