

# Devotion and Disillusionment: The Catullus Persona in Carmen 63

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## I. Introduction

Catullus's *Carmen* 63 is one of his most interesting and surprising works and, in my opinion, a unique poem in the whole of his *libellus*. This uniqueness, however, does not indicate that the poem differs thematically from the other poems in the collection. Glenn W. Most published an article in which he claims that Catullus's *carmina maiora* are arranged "as a series of concentric rings balanced symmetrically around c. 64."<sup>1</sup> The large and thematically and structurally complex poems at the center of the book are no doubt connected, as Most correctly indicates. However, he does not examine any links outside their immediate neighbors, other than briefly mentioning in his concluding chart that the *carmina maiora* are preceded by "various lyric meters" and followed by "elegiac dystichs."<sup>2</sup> He explains this interpretive vagueness by writing that either scholars try to account for every poem, which results in a useless mess, or hand-pick a group of poems from the whole, but the patterns and connections thus achieved are limited to that narrow selection.<sup>3</sup> I disagree that every poem needs to be accounted for and believe that there are many different themes that connect the poems and unite the book.

Paul W. Harkins contributes an interesting layer to the argument specific to poem 63.<sup>4</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn W. Most, "On the Arrangement of Catullus' *Carmina Maiora*," *Philologus* 125 (1981): 109-225.

<sup>2</sup> Most, 124.

<sup>3</sup> "[E]ither an attempt is made to account for every poem, with the result that the patterns are of an arbitrary and artificial complexity of questionable interpretative utility; or else the arbitrariness is restricted to the prior selection of a small number of poems, which, if carefully chosen, can certainly be made to yield attractive patterns, but ones for which the very strategy precludes extension to other poems and begs the question of the organization of the corpus as a whole." Most, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Paul W. Harkins, "Autoallegory in Catullus 63 and 64," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 90 (1959): 102-116.

writes that c. 63 is an allegory for Catullus's love life, with Attis representing Catullus and Cybele representing Lesbia.<sup>5</sup> His argument is certainly attractive, but I disagree with two main points. First, Harkins is much too literal<sup>6</sup> with his interpretation of the poem and would like Attis to represent the historical Catullus, about whom we know next to nothing. His argument and evidence are not completely flawed, but he fails to recognize the poetic Catullus for what he is—a creation of the poet Catullus. Second, although Harkins' evidence is compelling, he uses it only to provide proof that Attis can be read as an allegory for the historical Catullus and fails to notice that his evidence provides useful thematic links between c. 63 and the rest of the book. For example, he identifies the conclusion of c. 63 as a prayer that links this poem to poem 76, but he does not examine the other thematic links between the two. Harkins' most compelling and relevant point is that Catullus associates the word *furor* with love in c. 50, a link I will make use of in this paper. I will expand on Most's and Harkins' arguments to show that c. 63 is not only thematically linked with the *carmina maiora*, but is also, in fact, a continuation of a consistent theme present in many other poems.

## II. Catullus's Persona

Catullus the character appears in several poems, many of which involve his feelings towards Lesbia. I will start by examining the poems in which both the character Catullus and Lesbia appear in order to construct the traits and themes of the persona. This thematic examination will allow for a comparison between the characters Attis and Catullus, which I will use to show that c. 63 indeed contains the same themes. Poems in which Catullus describes himself using feminine terms provide

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<sup>5</sup> "It is apposite to inquire, therefore, whether Catullus, essentially the lyricist, is not giving expression to his own life and experience in at least some of these longer poems, even if he may have veiled the expression in allegory. Specifically, the purpose of this inquiry is to re-examine *Carmina* 63 and 64 to see if it be a fact that these poems, allegorical in content, are indirectly referable to the poet's relations with Clodia and, in this sense, are autoallegoric." Harkins, 110.

<sup>6</sup> "Attis made a journey over the sea to Phrygia (vv. 1-2); Catullus did, too, on his way to Bithynia. Attis made the trip eagerly, goaded on by a madness which bewildered his mind (vs. 4); Catullus went off in a last effort to escape Lesbia's poisonous charms. Attis' madness had led him to destroy his manhood by his own hand (vs. 5); Catullus had cut himself off from Lesbia, his life." Harkins, 110.

more comparisons that I will briefly explore at the end of the paper. Specifically, I will focus on c. 50, c. 51, c. 64, c. 65, c. 68, c. 72, c. 75, c. 76, and c. 85, all poems in which I feel that there are important similarities. These comparisons will show that Attis is, in fact, an allegory for the Catullus lover persona.

### **Symptomatic Love**

Poem 50, in which Catullus describes his desire to meet again with his fellow poet Licinius Calvus, is an important part of Harkins' argument. He uses this poem to compare Catullus's use of the word *furor* with that of c. 63, a point of contention for some authors.<sup>7</sup>

*ut nec me miserum cibus iuaret  
nec somnus tegeter quiete ocellos,  
sed toto indomitus furore lecto  
versarer, cupiens videre lucem,  
ut tecum loquerer simulque ut essem.* (50.9-13)

so that neither food helps poor me,  
nor sleep covers my eyes with rest,  
but untamed I move about in my bed with complete fury  
desiring to see the light,  
so that I might speak with be together with you.

This description is remarkably similar to that of Attis in c. 63. Here, Catullus cannot eat or sleep and is described as *indomitus* (50.11), not unlike the way in which Attis and her companions are described as exhausted *nimio e labore...sine Cerere* (63.36), from too much labor without bread, and Attis is at one point compared to an *indomita* heifer (63.33). Both poems also end with a plea to avoid the wrath of a certain goddess: Nemesis in one (50.20-21) and Cybele in the other (63.91-93). There are enough links between the Catullus of c. 50 and Attis to suggest that both characters are a variation on the same theme: the overpowering nature of desire. Harkins writes that "these characteristics of loss of appetite

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<sup>7</sup> Ruurd R. Nauta, "Catullus 63 in a Roman Context," *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004): 598: "Now, although the conflict between irrational abandonment and rational control is certainly an important theme in Catullus' poetry, reading poem 63 as autobiographical allegory is problematic. Catullus does occasionally describe his infatuation as *vesanus* ('mad'), and once describes his love as an illness from which he prays to be cured, but he does not conceive of his love as a frenzy comparable to Attis' *furor* or *rabies*."

and sleep, exhaustion and unconquerable frenzy...give a picture of *furor* comparable to the famous description of frenzy in Sappho's *Ode to Anactoria* and in Catullus's no less famous adaption of it."

In the following poem, c. 51.9-12, Catullus uses a similar description to describe his love for Lesbia:

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

But my tongue goes numb, a thin flame  
flows down my limbs, my ears ring  
with their own sound, my eyes are covered  
with a twin night.

Here Catullus again employs the pathology of love and describes a list of symptoms that culminate in what one author refers to as a "physical blackout."<sup>8</sup> Thus, if Catullus uses the word *furor* to describe a desire that is accompanied with physical symptoms, then it does not seem too much of a stretch to link Attis's *furor* with that of the Catullus character in poems 50 and 51.

### ***The Beginning of the End***

Another important aspect of the same theme is found in c. 72. There, the Catullus persona briefly describes his affair with Lesbia so far, admitting that even though he now knows her true colors he will stay with her:

*Nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,  
multo mi tamen es vilior et levior.  
Qui potis est, inquis? Quod amantem iniuria talis  
cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus.*

Now I know you: therefore I burn more,  
Yet you are far less precious and important to me:  
How is this possible, you ask? Because such an injury  
Forces a lover to love more, but to be less well disposed.

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest A. Fredricksmeyer, "On the Unity of Catullus 51," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 96 (1965): 153-163.

Here we see Catullus beginning to explore his feelings as the relationship deteriorates. Attempting to find the right words for his feelings, he struggles towards the perfection of c. 85. Some important paradoxes appear: Catullus knows the real Lesbia now, yet he desires her more; he loves her more but at the same time is less happy toward her. The same feelings appear in the Attis poem, which I will compare later on in the paper. Catullus is trapped between two feelings, love and hate. Both Attis and the Catullus of c. 72 are in a situation which they should leave, but one in which they are forced to stay. This inter-spatial tension appears not only in c. 72 and c. 63, but also in several other poems, all of which involve the persona of Catullus.

Poem 75 is another poem which I will use to reconstruct the persona of Catullus. The themes of powerlessness and liminality are further developed:

*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.*

My mind has been dragged down here by your infidelity, my Lesbia  
and thus it has destroyed itself in such a way  
that it is now unable to feel fond of you, even if you become very good  
but is unable to stop loving you, even if you do everything.

The use of the passive voice (*est ... deducta*, line 1) and, more literally, the words *nec queat* (line 3) highlight Catullus's sense of helplessness and loss of power. His mind has been dragged down by Lesbia and he cannot feel fond of her, yet cannot stop loving her. In these four short lines, Catullus demonstrates that he is completely unable to control what happens to him.

So far, many main traits of the poems featuring the Catullus persona are *furor* in the form of a list of physical symptoms, the simultaneous feeling of two conflicting emotions, and the character's inability to remove himself from the situation. Poem 76 provides an example of Catullus, the poet, combining all of these themes together. Here, the Catullus persona briefly describes his "disease," along with more instances of inability, and his proposed solution to the problem (76.11-26).

*quin tu animo offirmas atque istinc teque reducis,  
 et dis invitis desinis esse miser?  
 Difficile est longum subito deponere amorem,  
 difficile est, verum hoc qua lubet efficias:  
 una salus haec est, hoc est tibi pervincendum,  
 hoc facias, sive id non pote sive pote.  
 O di, si vestrum est misereri, aut si quibus umquam  
 extremam iam ipsa in morte tulistis opem,  
 me miserum aspicate et, si vitam puriter egi,  
 eripite hanc pestem perniciemque mihi,  
 quae mihi subrepens imos ut torpor in artus  
 expulit ex omni pectore laetitias.  
 Non iam illud quaero, contra me ut diligat illa,  
 aut, quod non potis est, esse pudica velit:  
 ipse valere opto et taetrum hunc deponere morbum.  
 O di, reddite mi hoc pro pietate mea.*

Why do you not set your heart and lead yourself back from there  
 And stop being miserable, against the will of the gods  
 It is difficult to suddenly lay aside a long love,  
 it is difficult but manage this somehow:  
 This is your sole salvation, you must overcome this,  
 Do this, whether it is possible or not.  
 O gods, if it is your job to feel pity, or if ever you have brought  
 extreme help to those who are already in the throes of death,  
 Look at wretched me and, if I have lived a pure life,  
 take this curse and ruin from me,  
 which creeps like paralysis deep into my limbs and  
 drives out happiness from my entire heart.  
 I no longer ask for this, that she should feel affection for me,  
 or, something that is not possible, that she should wish to be chaste:  
 I wish that I myself am healthy and get rid of this foul disease.  
 O gods, give this to me in return for my piety.

Catullus begins by questioning his inability to remove himself from his despair and stop loving Lesbia. The problem, however, is that no longer loving her may be impossible. So, Catullus prays for divine intervention. Harkins notes that this poem is a prayer and compares it to the ending of c. 63.<sup>9</sup> I agree that this prayer for sanity provides a link between the poems, but it also presents similarities with several other persona poems I have previously mentioned. As in poems 50 and 51, Catullus's feelings are

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<sup>9</sup> "Carmen 76, therefore, is a prayer; in it Catullus makes in unveiled language the same petition for release from *furor* which is cloaked in the Attis allegory. It is not too far fetched to see an allegorical connection between the frenzy of a Cybele worshipper and the frenzy of a lover—a connection between Attis and Catullus himself." Harkins, 110.

described with symptoms (*indomitus*, 50.11, *lingua sed torpet*, (51.9)), although this time things have taken a turn for the worse. In c. 50 he is overcome with desire to see Licinius again, and in c. 51 he blacks out merely from being in the presence of his love. In c. 76 the symptoms are similar but described in completely different terms. This time love is a cancer creeping into his limbs “like paralysis” (76.21), driving all happiness from his heart. Catullus also admits that he cannot free himself from love on his own, a powerlessness similar to his inability in poem 72 to leave Lesbia even though she has scorned him. The prayer certainly has links with the end of c. 63 (63.91-93), but it is important to note that in poem 76 Catullus asks to be delivered from his current situation, whereas in poem 63 the narrator wishes to avoid ever being in the situation in the future. Poem 76 thus combines the cataloguing of the symptoms of love found in poems 50 and 51 with the sense of powerlessness found in poem 72.

### ***Unconditional Surrender***

The Lesbia poems leading up to this point have shown a Catullus struggling to define his feelings. He has described himself as torn between love and hatred and unable to make a decision either way, even to the point of asking for divine help. In poem 85, he is finally able to completely summarize his feelings in just two lines:

*Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris?  
Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.*

I hate and I love. Why do I do this, you might ask?  
I do not know, but I feel it happening and I am tortured.

These lines describe the Catullus persona, the character whom Catullus himself developed in poems 50, 51, 72, 75, and 76, in two brief lines. The character hates and loves simultaneously, a contradiction he cannot himself explain. Like the Catullus of poems 50, 51, and 76, he experiences a physical symptom, although this time it is reduced to a single feeling of torturous pain. He exhibits the same passive traits that Catullus describes in c. 75 and the powerlessness that the poetic Catullus feels in c. 72. It is

interesting to note that poem 85, although it nearly perfectly describes the same emotions Catullus portrays in poems 72, 75, 76, and the Attis poem, takes a step back from poem 76. In c. 76 Catullus is still fighting to remove himself from his painful relationship, even though he admits he needs the help of divine intervention. In c. 85, however, we see the Catullus character at his most resigned. Like Attis, he is a mere spectator trapped in the moment, no longer wishing to escape; he can be cognizant of his situation and nothing more. He can only remain passive, experiencing the physical and emotional consequences of loving Lesbia, but never having any direct control.

Up to this point, the emotions of the persona have progressed from a desire so great that it causes physical symptoms, to the confusion of love and hate, to a state of resigned and completely passive observation, and finally to pain. These six poems all include similar traits and add up to create a consistent theme: the story of a tragic lover named Catullus. He was madly in love, then realized the flaws of his beloved and his own mistakes, became unable to escape, and eventually gave up hope, submitting to resignation.

### III. The Mask of Attis

Next, I will examine poem 63 and compare its motifs with those of the Catullus persona theme in order to demonstrate that c. 63 should be taken as a part of the same theme running throughout the book. The Attis story follows a very similar plot to that of the Catullus character. John P. Elder provides a basic explanation: "The poem presents a study of two moods of [an emotionally torn] man. The first is one of wild and dominant fanaticism which culminates in a terrible self-sacrifice; the second is one of awakening and bleak despair when Attis realizes what he has done, what he now is, and recalls the world to which he may now never return. In brief, it is a study of fanatic devotion and subsequent disillusionment."<sup>10</sup> These stages, I would like to suggest, line up well with the experiences through which

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<sup>10</sup> John P. Elder, "Catullus' Attis," *The American Journal of Philology* 68, no. 4 (1947): 394-403.



the Catullus persona transitions. First, both begin with an extreme level of passion and devotion. They then both proceed to a brief moment of temporary sanity, as shown in c. 72. Finally, both characters make clear their regret and their desire to leave the situation, which inevitably proves impossible. Finally, each situation ends with the demise of each character into resigned submission.

### **Early Devotion**

A more detailed look into c. 63 will make the similarities immediately apparent. Much like the Catullus character's early passion for Lesbia, the Attis story begins with a fit of devotion. After arriving in Phrygia, Attis immediately commits self-castration without a second thought. David Wray notes the similarities between the *pondera* of Attis and the warp weights used while working on an ancient loom.<sup>11</sup> The matter-of-fact way in which Attis cuts off his *pondera* highlights the dispassionate nature of the castration and shows that he is already completely out of his mind. Attis's early frenzy of devotion, like Catullus, begins with physical symptoms as well. Not including the obvious physical changes, Attis is soon described as having white hands (*niveis...manibus*, 8), and tender fingers (*teneris...digitis*, 10), both physical traits commonly associated with women. Much later in the poem, in verse 74, s/he is described as having rosy lips (*roseis...labellis*). Along with the imagery of the warp weights, which was a traditionally feminine act, these other physical descriptions add up to paint a picture of a feminized, although not yet completely passivized, Attis. S/he retains enough agency to lead the group of frenzied followers up the mountain, where another physical feature is described.

Line 33, in which Catullus compares Attis to a heifer (*iuvenco*), is one of the most symbol-laden

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<sup>11</sup> David Wray, "Attis' Groin Weights," *Classical Philology*, 96, no. 2 (Apr. 2001): 122: "The word *pondera*, in the plural, in addition to meaning "weights" in general, had a specialized technical meaning that nearly every ancient reader would have known, and the act of cutting the testicles and letting them fall to the ground closely resembles an act within that technical sphere. The warp threads of an ancient loom hung loose from a crossbeam at the top, steadied only by weights attached to their lower ends... As the work progressed, the woven fabric was wound around the top crossbeam, which turned like a spool. By the end of the work, the warp weights were hanging near the top of the loom, and though no ancient author describes it explicitly, there was only one efficient way to remove the warp weights from the finished fabric: a blade was drawn across the hanging threads, and the weights, still tied to the cut ends, dropped to the ground."

verses in the poem:

*Veluti iuvenca vitans onus indomita iugi...*  
Like an untamed heifer, shunning the burden of the yoke...

K. M. W. Shipton writes a brief yet informative article on the simile.<sup>12</sup> He convincingly argues that the *iuvenca* simile does not depict a heifer fleeing the possibility of a yoke, but that it shows the animal's frantic and desperate movement to shake the yoke off after it has been put on. This movement, he argues, mirrors the violent head tossing of Maenads, which is described in line 23.<sup>13</sup> I also believe that this movement can be compared with Catullus's violent movement around his bed in poem 50 (*sed toto indomitus furore lecto*) and, in fact, the same word is used to describe both Catullus and Attis as "untamed" (*indomitus*, 50.11 and *indomita*, 63.33). Along with self-castration, white hands, and tender fingers, this sort of frenzied movement is another physical symptom that Catullus the poet uses to describe a fit of early devotion in poems 50, 51, and now 63.

### **Realization**

Finally, exhausted from lack of food and sleep, Attis falls asleep. He is soon awakened by the "golden-faced" sun that drives away the shadows of night while sleep removes the madness from Attis's mind. As Traill notes, this awakening marks the transition section and the center of the poem—the moment when Attis becomes aware of his/her actions.<sup>14</sup> Thus, along with providing a moment to which poem 72 can be compared, this section also provides some last physical symptoms.

I have already compared the Catullus persona's inability to eat or sleep in poem 50 with Attis's

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<sup>12</sup> K. M. W. Shipton, "The Iuvenca Image in Catullus 63," *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 36, no. 1 (1986): 268-70.

<sup>13</sup> "It is more likely, however, that we are to imagine such an attempt has been made and that the phrase 'vitans onus ... iugi' describes her wild efforts to throw off the yoke. Her action will then be a blind charging accompanied by vigorous tossing of the head and neck as she tries to shake off the yoke." Shipton, 268.

<sup>14</sup> David A. Traill, "Catullus 63: Rings around the Sun," *Classical Philology* 76, no. 3 (July 1981): 211-14; "In the center of the poem our attention is focused on the forces that temporarily release him from Cybele's power. Thus, the description of Sun and Sleep (39-43) lies at the thematic as well as the structural center of 63."

lack of food in 63.37, but there is one more comparison I would like to make. In poem 51, Catullus is so filled with desire that he momentarily blacks out, just as Attis collapses from exhaustion. The blackness that covers Catullus's eyes (*gemina teguntur lumina nocte*, 51.11-12) is mirrored in the shadows that the sun drives away (*noctis umbras*, 63.41). Furthermore, just as the moment of sensory blackout is immediately followed by a stern self-admonishment in c. 51.13 (*otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est*), Attis's collapse is followed by a painful moment of clarity and self-reflection. This tragic moment of awakening from madness is first described in three lines (63.44-46):

*ita de quiete molli rapida sine rabie  
simul ipsa pectore Attis sua facta recolvit  
liquidaque mente vidit sine quis ubique foret...*

Thus as soon as Attis, woken from soft rest without raging madness, went over in her mind what she had done, and saw with a clear mind without which things and where she was...

Just as Catullus in c. 72 now "knows" Lesbia, Attis now realizes his/her actions and "knows" the true Cybele. However, just like Catullus cannot bring himself to leave Lesbia, even though she behaves worse to him, Attis soon realizes that s/he will never be able to leave Cybele either.

### **Helplessness and Regret**

After Attis awakens and realizes what has happened, s/he immediately returns back to the beach (described as *vada*, the shallows) and makes her lament (63.47). This lament is a very important part of the poem and it is very similar to the way Catullus describes his persona. To begin, the Attis of the lament is torn between two states and helpless to make a decision. His/her in-between gender parallels this tense liminality. As Catullus is torn between love and hate, Attis is stuck between male and female and cannot decide who s/he is. Attis's description of his/her past and future life underscores this feeling (63.62-73):

*quod enim genus figuraest, ego non quod obierim?  
ego mulier, ego adulescens, ego ephebus, ego puer,*

*ego gymnasi fui flos, ego eram decus olei:  
 mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida,  
 mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat,  
 linquendum ubi esset orto mihi Sole cubiculum.  
 ego nunc deum ministra et Cybeles famula ferar?  
 ego Maenas, ego mei pars, ego vir sterilis ero?  
 ego viridis algida idea nive amicta loca colam?  
 ego vitam agam sub altis Phrygiae columinibus,  
 ubi verva silvicultrix, ubi aper nemorivagus?  
 iam iam dolet quod egi, iam iamque paenitet.*

What kind of shape is there which I might not assume?  
 I am a woman, I was an adolescent, an *ephebe*, a young boy,  
 I was the flower of the gymnasium, I was the glory of the palaestra:  
 My doors were crowded, my thresholds were warm,  
 My house was wreathed with flowery garlands,  
 As soon as I had to leave my room after the sunrise.  
 Now will I be carried as a slave of the gods and maid of Cybele?  
 Will I be a Maenad? A part of myself? A barren man?  
 Will I inhabit the cold regions of verdant Ida, wrapped in snow?  
 Will I live my life under the high peaks of Phrygia,  
 where the forest-dwelling doe and forest-roving boar dwell?  
 Already what I have done hurts, already I regret it.

In just enough detail that the audience can imagine itself in a similar situation, Attis describes his/her old life and then immediately goes on to describe his/her future life in the future tense. It is important to note that s/he offers hardly any description of his/her current state; apart from *ego mulier*, there is no way to describe what s/he is in the present. The fact that *adulescens*, *ephebus* and *puer* appear in the same sentence as *ego mulier* creates the same feeling of liminality as *notha mulier* did earlier. S/he used to be *flos gymnasi* and will soon be a *Cybeles famula*, but at this moment s/he is somewhere in-between. Like the Catullus persona, Attis is uncertain what s/he is and is trapped between two states of being. Furthermore, both Catullus and Attis cannot think of a word to describe their feelings; they can only describe the two stages they are between. Catullus contrasts, for example, "*odi et amo*," and Attis contrasts *flos gymnasi* and *Cybeles famula*. Also, to further highlight this sense of liminality, Catullus starts the lament in the middle of the poem (line 50 of 93) and places Attis at the beach, the space between the land and the sea. Catullus has placed Attis "in-between" in nearly every way possible:

gender, location, life stage, and a mental state between temporary and perpetual madness. In this way, Attis's lament is clearly a precursor to *odi et amo*.

### **Surrender**

By the end of the poem, Attis has given up any degree of agency and is chased back into the woods, where s/he will forever be a slave to Cybele. Like Catullus in poem 85, s/he has become completely passive and is at the mercy of a goddess. In the last moments of the poem, Attis is overpowered by Cybele and her lion, who become the main characters of the final twenty lines. Shipton correctly notes that Cybele's lion represents and mirrors the actions of the mad followers of Cybele, as seen in lines 19-34.<sup>15</sup> The lion scene, therefore, not only shows Cybele frightening Attis back into the woods and thus into madness, but also gives a second description of the type of *furor* Attis will exhibit for the rest of his/her life. It seems that the last twenty lines or so, along with the closing prayer, are meant to be taken as a possible future for the poem's speaker, the Catullus character. Harkins attempts to explain the apparent lack of connection, writing that the narrator is praying that his madness will not return lest he suffer the same fate as Attis.<sup>16</sup> I agree with his explanation and believe that this prayer resembles the one in c. 76, although it is slightly more hopeful. In c. 63 the narrator himself seems to be free, at least temporarily, from *furor*. Yet he still does not have complete control. Unlike c. 76, in which the narrator prays to be released from his turmoil, the speaker at the end of c. 63 prays in the hopes that the madness will not return.

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<sup>15</sup> "In view of these parallelisms between the behavior of Catullus' lion and that of initiates in the Cybele cult, we may reasonably claim that the lion's angry head tossing in 83 is a further allusion to the wild Cybele-inspired head-tossing described in line 23." Shipton, 270.

<sup>16</sup> "In fact Catullus fervently prays to Cybele that he may be spared such frenzy. Perhaps in the light of the allegory he may be said to pray that he be spared a *return* to frenzy such as Attis suffered." Harkins, 111.

### Catullus and Femininity

One final feature of the Catullus persona, which should now include Attis, is Catullus's tendency to compare or liken himself to female characters. To begin with, many of the characteristics previously described are feminine in nature. Catullus describes Lesbia's infidelity and his own inability to leave her, which seems to be the opposite of a "normal" Roman relationship. Lesbia represents the cool, uncaring, and unfaithful male half of the relationship, whereas Catullus represents the emotional, feminine half. His continuing loss of agency, culminating in c. 85, highlights his feminine role.

There are also four poems which highlight more literally Catullus's depiction of himself as feminine. Along with Attis, Harkins includes Ariadne in his investigation of possible auto-allegory. Her lament, he argues, mirrors Catullus's love life because both stories tell the tale of a faithless lover: Ariadne trusted her lover and he abandoned her, just as Catullus trusted Lesbia and was deserted by her.<sup>17</sup> Harkins further writes that both Theseus and Lesbia are faithless and worthless and both are tragically trusted by their lovers. As with Attis, the situation of Ariadne reflects the love life of the Catullus persona and, in both poems, the character who embodies the theme is a woman.

In poem 65 there is another brief comparison to a female character. Catullus uses an interesting simile to tell Hortalus that his promise has not slipped his mind like an apple rolling out from under a maiden's lap. The simile itself is strange and comes unexpectedly, taking up a full quarter of the poem. The apple is the secretive gift of a fiancée (*sponsi furtivo munere*, 18), and the maiden forgets she has hidden it in her lap as her mother approaches, causing it to roll out. This simile may or may not be related to Catullus and Lesbia's secret romance, but regardless, it is important because in this manner Catullus once again compares himself to a young girl.

In poem 68.135-140, Catullus again compares his situation to that of a woman:

*Quae tamen etsi uno non est contenta Catullo,*

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<sup>17</sup> "Just as in *Carmen* 63 the lament of Attis seemed possibly to be autobiographical, here again in *Carmen* 64 the lament of Ariadne finds application in Catullus' own experience." Harkins, 113-114.

*rara verecundae furta feremus erae,  
ne nimium simus stultorum more molesti.  
Saepe etiam Iuno, maxima caelicolum,  
coniugis in culpa flagrantem concoquit iram,  
noscens omnivoli plurima furta Iovis.*

Yet, even though she is not content with one Catullus,  
I bear the rare affairs of a modest mistress,  
Lest I become too annoying in the manner of foolish men.  
Often even Juno, greatest goddess of those in heaven,  
endures her burning anger at the faults of her husband,  
knowing the very many affairs of all-desiring Jove.

Harkins notes this comparison in the beginning of his article<sup>18</sup> and shows the similarities between Catullus and Juno. Like Juno, Catullus must endure the infidelity of his lover even though it hurts and angers him. Catullus explores these feelings in the many other poems that serve as examples, but they are especially present in c. 85. He loves his companion and will not and cannot leave her, even though he knows her faithlessness and is deeply hurt. In all of these poems, Catullus compares himself to a female character. The Attis poem is a more literal description, as s/he is transformed from a man into a character with feminine aspects in c. 63. Not only does Catullus dare to portray himself as an unsuccessful lover, but he also pushes the idea further by showing himself in the passive role in the relationship and even compares himself to women.

#### IV. Conclusion

The Attis poem is undoubtedly one of Catullus's most vivid and intense poems. At first glance, it seems to be unique in his body of work. It is, as Elder puts it, a "the sympathetic delineation of a mind undergoing a psychological experience of a most powerful sort."<sup>19</sup> Catullus certainly creates the feeling of madness and frenzy with amazing skill. The poem moves along with frantic speed inevitably towards Attis's demise, aided by the drum-like galliambic meter. Scholars have already realized that Catullus

<sup>18</sup> "Yet [Catullus] must keep his anger within bounds as Juno does, even though she knows the many amorous faults of *omnivolus* Jove (vs. 140)." Harkins, 103.

<sup>19</sup> Elder, 395.

thematically weaves together the *carmina maiora*, poem 63 included. These scholars have, however, failed to notice the links that poem 63 shares with the rest of the collection. I have shown that many different poems throughout the book feature a character named Catullus and that these poems can be taken together to reconstruct the poet Catullus's persona. Poems 50, 51, 72, 75, 76, and 85 show the development and evolution of this character from a devoted, desirous lover into a resigned, powerless man. After examining c. 63 in detail and comparing its traits with those of the Catullus persona, it becomes clear that c. 63 is carrying on the same theme. Also, there are several times when Catullus compares himself directly with a female character. These comparisons provide further evidence that the feminized Attis reflects the traits of Catullus's persona. Both the Catullus persona and Attis begin devoted to their lovers and soon realize their mistakes. They regret their decisions and try to escape, but eventually lose hope. The poems of Catullus are truly rich and wonderfully complex, and no poem of his exists in a vacuum. There are real and definite themes woven throughout every poem, and the Attis poem is no exception. Its seemingly strange protagonist and exotic narrative obscure the true nature of the poem, which represents a stage in the development of the Catullus persona from a blissful lover to disheartened shell of a man.



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