

## THE UNWED STEPMOTHER: CATULLUS 64. 400–402

sed postquam tellus scelere est imbuta nefando  
iustitiamque omnes cupida de mente fugarunt,  
perfundere manus fraterno sanguine fratres,  
destitit extinctos gnatus lugere parentes, 400  
optavit genitor primaevi funera nati,  
liber ut innuptae poteretur flore novercae,  
ignaro mater substernens se impia nato  
impia non verita est divos scelerare penates.  
omnia fanda nefanda malo permixta furore 405  
iustificam nobis mentem avertere deorum.

As the climax of Catullus' peroration on the corruption of contemporary morals in *Carmen* 64, a paradigmatic series of family rivalries is presented to us. Among these is the case of the father who desired his young son's death, "that he might freely enjoy the flower of the unwed stepmother." One is immediately confronted by the problem that a stepmother cannot be "unwed";<sup>1</sup> a woman can become a stepmother only through marriage. And further, a woman cannot be a stepmother if her husband's son by a previous marriage is now dead.

Critics have proposed numerous detours around this crux. The most widely favored approach is to postulate that the woman about to be wed *would be* a stepmother *after* the marriage, *if* the son were still alive. These contingencies initiate a chain of suppositions and reconstructions: either the father desired his son's death because he wanted to marry his son's bride (and thus make her the son's stepmother rather than wife),<sup>2</sup> or he considered the son to be a burden and potentially a rival for his new wife's bed.<sup>3</sup> Many critics have seen here an allusion to Catiline's desire for his son's death (cf. Sall. *Cat.* 15) to make more convenient his marriage to Aurelia Orestilla.<sup>4</sup>

But the problem remains that a woman cannot simultaneously be called *innupta* and *noverca*. The "would be" explanation, although rather convoluted, might pass if we merely read *novercae*; but the contingency is complicated further by a temporal split which makes the hypothetical stepmother only "about to be wed." It is not at all clear why the father wants to enjoy her while still *innupta*. Recognizing these difficulties, several critics have proposed emending *ut innuptae*

Acknowledgment is made to the journal's anonymous referees for their many constructive suggestions, which have resulted in substantial improvement of this paper on a number of points.

1. The difficulty is not removed by interpreting *innupta* as "virgin," as suggested by R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford, 1889), p. 285. Any woman who is a virgin must be unwed, unless we imagine the unlikely scenario of the father abstaining from his new bride's bed until his son is safely dead.

2. Cf. E. T. Merrill, *Catullus* (Boston, 1904), pp. 162–63.

3. Cf. Ellis, *Commentary*, p. 284.

4. In addition to Ellis, cf. W. Kroll, *C. Valerius Catullus*<sup>5</sup> (Stuttgart, 1968), p. 195; K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London, 1970), p. 350. But this was likely just one tidbit of gossip among many in the first century B.C. It would not leap to a reader's mind nearly as quickly as the myth of Theseus, Hippolytus, and Phaedra. Catiline does not elsewhere figure in Catullus' poetry; nor do any of the other crimes listed in lines 399–404 allude to events of contemporary notoriety: the parallels are, if anything, mythological.

to *uti nuptae*.<sup>5</sup> Even so, the adjective still seems otiose. Others have sought to remove the problem by emending *novercae*, but they have failed to produce a convincing alternative.<sup>6</sup>

The vexing problems of this line can all be resolved through the transposition of the two preceding verses (400–401).<sup>7</sup> It is not the father who wishes to take advantage of the stepmother, but the son.<sup>8</sup> If her husband is dead, the woman can, from a certain standpoint, be considered *innupta*; and since her late husband's son is still alive, she is still a stepmother. Of course, *innupta* is not normally used of widows, but of maidens.<sup>9</sup> This irony may in fact be the very point of the line: the son is making his stepmother the object of sexual attentions, as if she were a potential bride.<sup>10</sup>

The transposition of lines 400 and 401 improves the logic of the entire passage. It is not immediately clear why a man should require his son's death before he can remarry, but it is quite obvious that a son must stop mourning his deceased parents<sup>11</sup> before he can turn his attention to the sexual conquest of his late father's second wife. The aging father's envy of his young son and active desire for the son's death (401) can readily stand by itself as a moral abomination, and does

5. Cf. J. Mähly, "Zu Catullus," *Neue Jahrbücher für classische Philologie* 103 (1871): 353; L. Müller, "Zu Catullus (64, 401, 2)," *RhM* 31 (1876): 476–77; C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford, 1961), p. 324. The *uti*-form elsewhere occurs only in 116. 2 (a poem known for its stylistic eccentricities) and 63. 79 (which is itself an emendation). E. Baehrens, *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Leipzig, 1876), p. 80, emends to *ut hinc nuptae*. R. A. B. Mynors, *C. Valerii Catulli "Carmina"* (Oxford, 1958), p. 74, is forced in his apparatus to call the present reading *vix sanum*.

6. Baehrens, *Catulli Veronensis Liber*, p. 80, proposes *novellae* (a suggestion supported by A. Riese, *Die Gedichte des Catullus* [Leipzig, 1884], p. 197); J. P. Postgate, "Emendations of Catullus LXIII 54 and LXIV 402," *JP* 21 (1893): 241–42, proposes *nuriclae*, a form not elsewhere found in Latin.

7. The transposition was first proposed by A. Rossbach, *Q. Valerii Catulli Veronensis Liber*<sup>2</sup> (Leipzig, 1863), p. xviii. It was noted in the apparatus by L. Schwabe, *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Giessen, 1866), p. 116, but has subsequently been ignored by editors.

8. By itself there is hardly anything culpable in the father's desire for free access to the stepmother. Even with the old reading, the real crime seems to be the son's. But with my reading, the son's culpability is striking and direct rather than contingent and hypothetical.

9. However, its use is not confined to maidens, as evidenced by the expression *innuptis nuptiis* (cf. *Trag. inc. frag.* 80 Ribbeck = Cic. *De. or.* 3. 219, of Paris and Helen), which is modeled on the Greek γάμος ἄγαμος (cf. Soph. *OT* 1214; Eur. *Hel.* 690). Although there are no certain cases of *innupta* referring to widows, we do find the negative *non nupta* with reference to the widowed Clodia Metelli in Cic. *Cael.* 49 (cf. R. G. Austin, *M. Tulli Ciceronis "Pro M. Caelio" Oratio*<sup>3</sup> [Oxford, 1960], p. 110), paralleled by the even more striking *non nupserit* in reference to a widow in Apul. *Apol.* 27. The Greek ἄγαμος which *innuptus* often translates can also refer to surviving spouses (cf. LSJ, s.v.). These parallels would strongly suggest that *innupta* can refer to a widow. This is much less difficult than Wilamowitz's construction of *innuptae* as a usage based on the Greek ἐνγαμηθεῖς (*Hellenistische Dichtung*, vol. 2 [Berlin, 1924], p. 303, n. 3), which would require the prefix *in-* to have an otherwise unattested meaning. As I have noted above, even the traditional interpretation of this line requires us to take *innuptae* in the sense of "about to be wed," which is not strictly the word's meaning. In fact, no one has offered an interpretation of *innuptae* which does not involve some extension of the word's normal meaning.

10. This and similar puns on *liberi* are common in Roman comedy: cf. Ter. *Ad.* 57, 77; Plaut. *Capt.* 310, 394, *Cas.* 316, *Pseud.* 23, and perhaps *Rud.* 748 (cf. 736–39).

11. It may be objected that the poet would not refer to both *parentes*, if only the father's death were recent. But if he had used the singular *extinctum parentem*, this would imply that only one parent was dead (and thus that the mother was still alive). Mention of both parents is not irrelevant here: the son's pursuit of his stepmother dishonors the memory not only of his late father, but also of his previously deceased mother (who has been supplanted by the stepmother in both the father's and son's affections). Use of the plural *parentes* with primary reference to one parent (and only secondary reference to the other) is a synecdoche not radically different from the occasional use of the plural *liberi* with primary reference to only one child (on which, cf. J. Köhm, *Allateinische Forschungen* [Leipzig, 1905], pp. 117–18).

not need line 402 to complete it. But a son's premature cessation of mourning (400), although perhaps repugnant, does not by itself stand on the same level of monstrosity as the other crimes enumerated in 399–404. If, however, line 402 is appended as an explanation of this circumstance, the son's act is certainly as nefarious as the rest.

The sequence of crimes listed in 399–404 is also improved by this arrangement. The fraternal slaughter of line 399 exemplifies rivalry within a generation, even as the father's wish for his son's death in the transposed 401 illustrates jealousy between generations. This same tension is carried into line 400; yet 400 together with 402 implies an illicit union of the generations. The son's culpable pursuit of his stepmother in 400 and 402 is reversed in 403–4 by a mother's incestuous exploitation of her unknowing son. The first two crimes involve forbidden conflict between family members of the same sex, while the last two involve forbidden union between family members of the opposite sex. This carefully wrought symmetry may have been obscured by the manuscripts' confusion.

Of course, certainty is impossible here. But no one can doubt the existence of misplaced or transposed lines in the Catullan corpus.<sup>12</sup> Considering the end-stopped self-containment and parallel grammatical structure of lines 399–401, and especially the paleographical similarities of 400 and 401,<sup>13</sup> it is not difficult to see how a copyist might confound their order by misreading 400 as 401, and then reinsert 401 after looking back at his exemplar and discovering the omission.

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12. Among the indisputable cases of misplaced lines are 50. 16–17 (which the MSS repeat after 54. 1), 67. 21 (which is repeated after 64. 386), and 68. 16 (which the MSS give after 68. 49). Most editors since Muretus transpose 58b. 2 and 3 (which is probably the most apt parallel for the present transposition); indeed, the whole of 58b may be a segment of 55 (as some of the *recentiores* conjecture). See also the crux of 68. 157–58, which some recent critics have wanted to place after 68. 154 (i.e., a transposition of one couplet); cf. G. Pennisi, "Il carme 68 di Catullo," *Emerita* 27 (1959): 225–28. On transpositions in the Catullan MSS, see the general account of F. della Corte, *Due Studi Catulliani* (Genova, 1951), pp. 91–100.

13. The first word of each line ends in *-it*. The *-tor* and *-tos* of the second word look similar in most minuscule hands. The *lUGERe* of line 400 resembles the *fUnERa* of 401. And, of course, the *nati* of 401 is repeated by the *natus* of 400. A. E. Housman, *Lucanus* (Oxford, 1926), pp. xix–xx, calls this phenomenon "homoeomeson," and identifies it as a frequent paleographical cause of omitted or transposed lines.

## SERVIVS AND TRIUMVIRAL HISTORY IN THE *ECLOGUES*

In his recent discussion of the date of *Eclogue* 8, G. W. Bowersock rightly castigated those who accept as true the historical fictions of the ancient commentators on Virgil.<sup>1</sup> As he showed, the chronology of the *Eclogues* found in Servius and others is based on the weakest of historical foundations, and the story that Virgil's farm was returned by a land commission consisting of Pollio, Varus, and Gallus is a totally unwarranted inference from the fact that these are the

1. "A Date in the Eighth Eclogue," *HSCP* 75 (1971): 73–80.