PROPERTIUS, CATULLUS, AND THREE KINDS OF AMBIGUOUS EXPRESSION

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William Empson generously defines ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language."[1]   In my discussion of several passages from the elegies and lyrics of two of Rome's most celebrated poets, I shall likewise be generous in defining the ambiguous, but shall employ categories other than Empson's seven, founded as the latter are on exploration almost exclusively of verse written in English.

First of all I think it necessary to subdivide the Empsonian "fundamental situation," that in which "a word or a grammatical structure is effective in several ways at once."[2]   Save in such an instrument of thought-control as Orwell's "Newspeak," individual words of any language tend to acquire added meanings or overtones.[3]   Not always does the inclusion of a specific term in a specific context insure that one meaning and one only will be understood.   To situations in which distinct or even contradictory interpretations of the same word are possible—did the Hebrew utterance of Job's wife mean "*Bless* God and die" or "*Curse* God and die" rather?[4]—I should like to follow

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[1] Quoted from *Seven Types of Ambiguity*[3] (repr. New York 1955) 3.

[2] Empson (above, note 1) 5.

[3] On the effort of the rulers of Oceania both to restrict the number of words in the language which superseded "Oldspeak" (=English) and to purge Vocabulary A (everyday terminology) in particular of "all ambiguities and shades of meaning," see the Appendix, "Principles of Newspeak," printed with *1984* (New York 1949; repr. 1961) 246 ff.

[4] Such experts as Rashi and Ibn Ezra suggested that the pejorative use of the root ברך had come about as a sort of euphemism.   See the note on *Job* 1.5 in V. E. Reichert's annotated Soncino edition (Hindhead, Surrey 1946).   Could the same euphemistic urge have caused the Greeks and Romans to employ ἅγιος and *sacer*, normally =

the example of W. B. Stanford, among others, and apply the label "lexical ambiguity," a label supposedly equivalent to Aristotle's ὁμωνυμία.[5]

As for Aristotle's ἀμφιβολία, or ambiguous combination of two or more words, a phenomenon which arises in Latin not infrequently thanks to certain deficiencies in that language's inflectional makeup, it probably makes little difference whether we accept Stanford's "phrasal ambiguity" as an equivalent[6] or follow rather the example of A. W. Allen and Kenneth Quinn, both of whom prefer to speak of "syntactical ambiguity."[7]   At any rate, the phenomenon was readily recognized by one of Horace's commentators.   Having scrutinized lines 5–6 of the first Ode,

> palmaque nobilis
> terrarum dominos euehit ad deos,

Porphyrio then wrote *ambiguum, utrum nobilis deos an nobilis palma*.[8]

The third of the three categories with which this paper is concerned depends for its effect on the reader's first making an understandable error of interpretation, then correcting it as his knowledge is increased through further perusal of the passage.   I have invented the expression "psychological ambiguity" to fit instances of this sort.   Others will grant that the psyche of the reader is involved, but will object that his mental confusion results not from any true ambiguity in what he has been reading.   Rather the essential element, they would assert, is

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"holy," sometimes to indicate the exact opposite?   For an alternative explanation see A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine: histoire des mots*[3] (Paris 1951) 1034 *ad init.*

⁵ See especially Ch. 3 ("The Aristotelian Types of Lexical Ambiguity") of Stanford's *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1939).

⁶ Stanford (above, note 5) Ch. 4 ("The Aristotelian Types of Phrasal Ambiguity").

⁷ See respectively "Elegy and the Classical Attitude toward Love: Propertius I 1," *YCS* 11 (1950) 255–77, and "Syntactical Ambiguity in Horace and Virgil," *AUMLA* Number 14 (1960) 36–46.

⁸ Concerning both the Horatian passage and Porphyrio's analysis see Quinn (above, note 7) 38–39 and note 1.   Quinn recognizes too the kind of ambiguity which centers on a single word, but calls it "pun-ambiguity" rather.   I have followed Stanford instead (see above, note 5) because puns—here I intend to be more restrictive than usual in defining terms—are really a part, not the whole.   Moreover a pun, as I see it, is an intentional device, whereas some of what I would classify as "lexical ambiguity" may be intended as word-play, some not.

what the Greeks called παρὰ προσδοκίαν: the substitution of the unexpected for what the reader had been more or less conditioned to expect.

And, of course, cheating the reader's—or in this case the listener's—expectations is one of the mainstays of ancient comedy. In his *Rhetoric* Aristotle quotes something rather typical: ἔστειχε δ᾽ ἔχων ὑπὸ ποσσὶ χίμεθλα (3.11 1412A31). ὁ δ᾽ ᾤετο πέδιλα ἐρεῖν, the philosopher observes, then turns his attention to some outrageous, but clever, puns (1412A34 ff.).

The sudden substitution of the unexpected can occur in serious contexts also. Moreover, the three categories which I have now defined need not be thought to operate in isolation from one another. Syntactical and lexical ambiguity may be teamed in a single verse or stanza. Either or both may effectively collaborate with what I have rightly or wrongly chosen to call "psychological ambiguity."

Consider, for example, Propertius 2.28a.15 ff., a series of optimistic verses addressed to Cynthia. The poet assures his desperately ill beloved that present suffering will be succeeded ultimately by something better, just as the experience of many a mythological heroine teaches. Though the import of these assurances is straightforward enough, they are presented in such a way that some sort of ambiguity, intentional or no, may be discerned in practically every distich.

In the first (15–16),

> sed tibi uexatae per multa pericula uitae
> extremo ueniet mollior hora die,[9]

the perfect passive participle might as easily be dative, in agreement with the adjacent personal pronoun, as genitive, modifier of the more remote similarly terminating noun. At the same time the preposition *per* seems to be lexically ambiguous. In the present context does it denote agency or causation? Or does it have to do rather with duration or extent? Now if the hexameter is recognized as ambiguous

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[9] Is Passerat right in converting the "hour" into a "breeze" (*aura*) on the basis of what he found in the *codices deteriores*? D. R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Propertiana* (Cambridge 1956: repr. 1967) 119–20, would like to think so, whereas P. J. Enk (see the note *ad loc.* in the second fascicle of his edition of Propertius, Bk. 2, Leiden 1962) leans the other way. *Venit*, as it happens, appears in most mss.; but most editors opt for *ueniet*, a reading transmitted in Cod. Parmensis 140 and as a variant in Cod. Ottoboniano-Vaticanus 1514.

both as to vocabulary and as to arrangement, the most likely interpretations are "But to you, harassed by life's many perils" and "But to you, in the course of the many perils of an harassed life."

What of the pentameter, meanwhile? Only in theory would there be any doubt as to its syntax. We may quickly dismiss, it seems to me, the likelihood that *extremo* and *die* taken together constitute either an ablative absolute or an ablative of comparison necessitated by the proximity of the comparative adjective *mollior*. What could be more obviously a temporal ablative? Hence it is permissible to render the verse as "on the final day a gentler hour will come."

But once the distich is considered as a whole, certain possibilities which would not have been noticed in examination of the hexameter and pentameter separately begin to suggest themselves. "This sentence," observes W. A. Camps, "might theoretically be construed in a number of different ways."[10] As a matter of fact, there seems to be a discrepancy between Camps' tentative translation of the Latin, "But for you this troubled life of yours will reach a happier hour at its evening end," and his attempted explication of the underlying grammar. No one will fault his construing *uexatae* with *uitae* or his claim that *per multa pericula* "goes adverbially with *uexatae*." Yet it seems to me that, whereas in his analysis he takes the combination *uexatae per multa pericula uitae* as "a genitive depending on *hora*, possibly also on *die*,"[11] in his translation he leaves open the possibility that *uitae*, like *tibi*, is dative. In such a reordered scheme *tibi* could be understood as dative of possession, construed with *uexatae . . . uitae*, which latter pair of words would serve then as indirect object or rather, inasmuch as an intransitive verb of motion is involved, as substitute for accusative with preposition denoting "place to which." Blending all this with Camps' possibly correct interpretation of

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[10] Quoted, as are other remarks below, from p. 188 of Camps' annotated edition of Propertius, Bk. 2 (Cambridge 1967).

[11] Even in the linking of *die* with *extremo* Camps manages to detect ambiguity, lexical rather than phrasal or syntactical. Having acknowledged the more or less standard "at your last (i.e. dying) day" as an appropriate rendering of the same ablatives at 2.24b.50, "uix uenit *extremo* qui legat ossa *die*," he contends that at 2.28a.16 "it evidently continues the metaphor of *hora* and means 'at the end of the day,' just as *extremo anno* means 'at the end of the year' in Liv. II, lxiv, 1, etc." He could have invoked the analogy also of *summus*, *medius*, and *imus mons* = respectively the "top," "middle," and "bottom of the mountain."

extremo . . . die as a sort of analogue to *extremo anno*,[12] we may "English"
the Propertian original as follows: "But at the end of the day a gentler
hour will come to your life, beset as it is by many perils."

The next distich proves less fraught with ambiguity, though *Io
uersa caput* in the hexameter has aroused considerable controversy
among scholars.   Some argue that Propertius intended the transforma-
tion of the part to stand for the transformation of the whole, others
that the reference is only to the sprouting of horns, not to Io's having
become bovine in all particulars.[13]   It seems to me that the latter
interpretation comports well neither with *mugiuerat* in the hexameter
nor in the pentameter with *Nili flumina uacca bibit.*

Moving on to lines 19–20, we learn that Ino, later to be revered
by sailors under her new name, Leucothoë, *etiam prima terris aetate
uagata est.*   Do the ablatives singular feminine mean "in early youth,"
much as did the accusatives plural masculine *primos . . . annos* at line
17, where the reference was to Io rather?[14]   Or is "in ancient times"
all that they purport to convey?

In the distichs devoted successively to Andromeda's and to Callisto's
experience, ambiguous language occurs rather in the pentameter,
where the happy sequel is acknowledged, than in the hexameter with
its allusive reminders of tribulation.   The reference at line 24 to the
latter heroine and to her new-found rôle of celestial benefactress to
navigation,

<p style="text-align:center">haec nocturna suo sidere uela regit,</p>

leaves the second word in an equivocal situation.   It could function
either as accusative plural neuter, modifier of the neuter plural substan-
tive which occupies the penultimate position in the verse, or else as

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[12] Cf. note 11 above.

[13] Once again Shackleton-Bailey and Enk find themselves in disagreement.   See
their annotations *ad loc.*

[14] So Enk understands the latter combination in his note *ad loc.*   And his as well as
M. Rothstein's insistence (see *ad loc.* his annotated two-volume *Propertius*[2] [Berlin 1924])
on comparing 2.10.7, "*aetas prima* canat Veneres, *extrema* tumultus," would seem to
indicate a similar opinion regarding the former as well.   In their own commentary,
H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber (whose annotated edition was published at Oxford in
1933 and reprinted in 1964 at Hildesheim) recognize the possibility of two distinct
interpretations even of *uagata est*: "A reference to her wanderings as a bacchanal on
Parnassus (Hyg. *Fab.* 4) or to her running to and fro in her madness before she threw
herself into the sea."   Cf. the narrative in Bk. 4 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

nominative singular feminine in agreement with the preceding pronoun, yet translatable as if it were a temporal adverb.   As for the substantive, should it be taken literally?   Or are *uela* really metonymous for *naues*?   My own suspicion is that the latter alternative ought to be accepted and that "guides" as a rendering of the verb *regit* ought to be accepted likewise.   On the other hand, it seems to me quite possible that the poet intended *nocturna* not to do either one thing or the other, but to do both.   Hence I should essay a sort of double-barreled translation of the pentameter in question: "*At night* she guides *nocturnal* craft with her star."

My suspicions concerning line 22, the pentameter which acknowledges Andromeda's having become ultimately a bride,

haec eadem Persei nobilis uxor erat,

are rather similar.   Here too the adjective appears to be ambiguous lexically as well as syntactically.   As in the case of a number of Latin words capable of being taken both *in bonam* and *in malam partem*, the range of meaning for *nobilis* extends all the way from "famous" to "infamous."[15]   In the present context, fortunately, there is no hint of pejorative signification, whether the adjective be nominative singular feminine, agreeing with *uxor*, or genitive singular masculine, agreeing with *Persei*.   Were the former alternative accepted, *Persei* could as easily be dative as genitive.   I prefer, however, to understand *Persei* as genitive and to credit the author with having placed the adjective midway between the two nouns with the intention of tying it to both even as he plays on subtle semantic distinctions fostered thereby: "This same woman was the *celebrated* spouse of *high-born* Perseus."[16]

Let us turn to another Propertian elegy, the programmatic 1.1.   In his opening verses the poet from Umbria consciously borrows from *AP* 12.101, a pederastic epigram of Meleager,

Τόν με πόθοις ἄτρωτον ὑπὸ στέρνοισι Μυΐσκος
ὄμμασι τοξεύσας τοῦτ' ἐβόησεν ἔπος·

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[15] Concerning the comparable range of *sacer* see above, note 4.

[16] Perhaps a "double-barreled" translation would also suit the appearance of the same adjective in the syntactically ambiguous Horatian passage quoted above, p. 222. Concerning lexical ambiguities in the Ode in question see Quinn (above, note 8).

"Τὸν θρασὺν εἷλον ἐγώ· τὸ δ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ὀφρύσι κεῖνο φρύαγμα
σκηπτροφόρου σοφίας ἠνίδε ποσσὶ πατῶ."
τῶι δ᾽, ὅσον ἀμπνεύσας, τόδ᾽ ἔφην· "Φίλε κοῦρε, τί θαμβεῖς;
καὐτὸν ἀπ᾽ Οὐλύμπου Ζῆνα καθεῖλεν Ἔρως,"

and redirects this material to heterosexual contexts. Propertius too insists that he had been previously exempt from love (2),

> contactum nullis ante cupidinibus,

a situation drastically altered by the advent not of a *puer delicatus*, but of a girl named Cynthia, whose eyes, like those of Meleager's Myïscus, proved a most effective weapon (1):

> Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis.

Rather than discuss the special implications of the adjective *miser* in an erotic context such as this, a subject which has been ably treated by A. W. Allen,[17] I move ahead to consideration of Propertius' subsequent verses. Whereas Meleager creates paired speeches—the youth's boast that it is he who showers the hapless lover with disdainful glances and tramples on his dignity, the lover's reply that this is nothing novel, even Zeus having been so afflicted—Propertius does away with dialogue altogether and continues his first-person account. Still, his second distich introduces the same elements as Meleager's and sets them down in the same order:

> tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus[18]
> et caput impositis pressit . . . pedibus.

What is the penultimate word which I have chosen to suppress, to the detriment of the pentameter's rhythm? Had it been something like *mi*, a metrically suitable contraction of the pronoun which appeared more meaningfully at line 3, the reader could have continued in his misconception—a misconception which familiarity with the Meleagrian original would have conspired only to reinforce—that the purveyor of all this cruel disdain was the very same young lady who first aroused Propertius' desires.

[17] Allen (above, note 7) 258 ff. On the propensity of the elegists for investing common words with special love-oriented significance see particularly R. Pichon, *De sermone amatorio apud latinos elegiarum scriptores* (Diss. Paris 1902), part of which (pp. 77–303 = "Index uerborum amatorium") has recently been reprinted at Hildesheim.

[18] See below, note 43, concerning the last two words of this verse.

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As it turns out, however, what the elegist has placed quite late in the distich is no colorless and essentially redundant dative, but rather a distinct subject for the verbs *deiecit* and *pressit*. The subject is not *Cynthia*, which would have been inadmissible metrically in any event. Indeed, *Cynthia* could have operated as subject in the second distich without being repeated. A carryover from line 1 would have been quite possible, since the reader would simply have applied to *deiecit* and *pressit* what had already been clearly established as subject of *cepit*.

Actually such an impression, no doubt deliberately fostered by the poet himself, remains in the reader's mind until almost the last possible moment. The reader is taken completely by surprise, consequently, when he discovers that the cruelties described by Propertius are those of Amor, the love-god, the very same agent who under the Greek name Eros was responsible, according to Meleager, for Zeus' discomfiture. That love, not the beloved herself, is the dominant force in a Propertian third distich quite distinct from Meleager's closing conventionalities for the most part,

> donec me docuit castas odisse puellas
> improbus et nullo uiuere consilio,

ought to be quite obvious, even if scholars have disputed with one another the significance of the two kinds of instruction which Propertius purports thus to have received.[19]

Only in the second distich, therefore, is there any real possibility of confusion as to the subject of the perfect active indicatives, and even so only temporarily. Nevertheless Allen could be correct in declaring that *Amor* "seems rather a redefinition of the original subject than a new subject."[20] He may be correct too when he speaks of "the identification of Cynthia with Love" and of "a particular effect . . . gained" thereby.

On the other hand, it is somewhat misleading for Allen to state that this identification "is achieved by a deliberate ambiguity of syntax." Ambiguity there is, to be sure. That it was the product of deliberate

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[19] On this topic see particularly J. E. Fontenrose, "Propertius and the Roman Career," *CPCP* 13 (1949) 371–88. See also below, p. 229 and note 23.

[20] This and ensuing quotations are extracted from Allen's *YCS* article (above, note 7) 266.

intention I have already affirmed. It should be classified, however, not as "syntactical" or "phrasal," but as "psychological," relying as it does on surprise and the cheating of expectations.[21]

And yet—here, at least, Allen was on the right track—the influence of the original and quite intentionally fostered misconception persists in the reader's psyche even after he has been disabused of it. As he progresses through the poem the reader recognizes everywhere the agency of love—not love in the abstract, however, nor even Love writ large as Venus' playful and sometimes vicious son,[22] but love particularized as a relationship, however painful, between Propertius and Cynthia.

Is it not possible too that, whereas syntactically *Amor* dominates the elegy's third distich without equivocation, from the standpoint of actual experience it is Cynthia, or at least Cynthia in league with or even identifiable with the love-god, who has taught Propertius how to live and whom to shun? At any rate, such thoughts may have occurred to the anonymous Pompeian parodist who made the beloved herself the teacher of somewhat comparable doctrine (*CIL* 4.1520):

> Candida me docuit nigras odisse puellas.

Possibly too his setting of dark and light in opposition should be taken as a signal that he understood the Propertian Cynthia to be *not* one of the *castae puellae*, but quite the contrary.[23]

So far I have credited Propertius with having availed himself of all

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[21] Cf. the specifications offered above, pp. 222–23.

[22] Now it is true enough that the Romans had a penchant for endowing colorless abstractions with a personality and for making them the object of veneration. Consider the case, for example, of Fortuna—or rather FORTVNA. Typographical distinctions such as editors of Propertius make between *amor* and *Amor* are equally misguided, since they are designed to eliminate an ambiguity which ancient poets were less anxious then we to see eliminated. It might be well for us to go back to printing AMOR, VENVS, FORTVNA, and the like wherever such words appear in a text transmitted from antiquity.

[23] Fontenrose (above, note 19) 377, has drawn conclusions similar to mine from comparison of the parody with what Propertius himself wrote. Cf. pp. 111–12 of J. P. Sullivan's "*Castas odisse puellas*: A Reconsideration of Propertius 1.1," *WS* 74 (1961) 96–112. No one, to my knowledge, has looked into the possibility that the parodist intends CANDIDA (for the rationale behind using the upper case throughout see note 22 above) not only as a descriptive adjective ("a *light-skinned* girl taught me" etc.), but also as an actual name or—more likely—as a pseudonym aptly chosen like Horace's PYRRHA ("strawberry-blonde") or LALAGE ("chatterbox"). The masculine CANDIDVS is actually documented as a Roman cognomen. See *RE* 3.2.1473–74.

three kinds of ambiguity, but have said nothing about his predecessor
Catullus, the Roman poet whom he most resembles in temperament
and interests.[24]   Catullus too, as it happens, is capable both of utilizing
intentionally ambiguous vocabulary or syntax and of luring the
reader into making assumptions which are quickly proved false.
Close scrutiny of the fifth and sixth verses of c. 2, the earlier and more
cheerful of the "sparrow" poems,

> cum desiderio meo nitenti
> carum nescio quid lubet iocari,

has led Sheridan Baker to observe that *cum* could be either a preposition
with the ablative *desiderio* or a conjection introducing a clause governed
by the verb *lubet*; that *meo*, the modifier of *desiderio*, could be understood
as the counterpart either of a possessive genitive ("my desire for her")
or of an objective genitive ("her desire for me"); that even *nitenti* could
be either dative, referring to Lesbia and dependent on the verb *lubet*
or ablative in agreement with *desiderio* and *meo*.[25]   Worthy of atten-
tion too is Baker's concluding statement:

> By a play on three crucial words at the very center of his poem, I think,
> he gives its central implication—that he and his lady are longing equally
> for each other—but covers the implication with the courtly statement
> of the words which say, though they do not mean, that the longing
> is exclusively his.[26]

Comparable complexities are spaced out rather than crowded
together in cc. 66 and 67, a pair of longer pieces in elegiacs.   And
just as the psychologically ambiguous opening verses of Propertius'
first elegy can be compared with the unambiguous Meleagrian epigram
whence they are derived,[27] so portions, at least, of Callimachus' poem

[24] According to J. Ferguson (see p. 48 of his "Catullus and Propertius," *PACA* 1
[1958] 48–60)—with whom I am not inclined to disagree—"It seems that there was
some similarity between the mental processes of the two authors."

[25] Summarized from Baker's short article, "Catullus' *cum desiderio meo*," *CP* 53 (1958)
243–44.

[26] Baker's views are endorsed by J. D. Bishop (see p. 165 of his "Catullus 2 and its
Hellenistic Antecedents," *CP* 61 [1966] 158–67), who directs attention to additional
ambiguities throughout c. 2, ambiguities absent from two Meleagrian epigrams (*AP*
7.195 and 196: the one is addressed to a grasshopper, the other to a cicada) which Catullus
appears to have imitated.

[27] See the discussion above.

about the lock of Berenice are extant and available for comparison with the treatment of the same theme in Catullus 66. And comparison shows that the Roman poet introduced ambiguity where his Hellenistic predecessor did not.[28]

However, inasmuch as I have already looked into the matter in an article published a decade ago,[29] I prefer to pass on now to consideration of another Catullan work which may be set side by side with its original. In some ways, as a matter of fact, the relationship of c. 51 to the lyric of Sappho quoted in Ps.-Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime* (10.2) is strikingly analogous to the relationship of Propertius 1.1 to *AP* 12.101. Possibly Propertius' conversion of an epigram about Meleager and Myïscus into the opening segment of an elegy about himself and Cynthia was encouraged by the example of Catullus, who appropriated Sappho's description of the psychosomatic consequences of glimpsing a beloved of the same sex and similarly described how he himself had reacted heterosexually to the sight of Lesbia.[30]

Juxtaposition of the first three stanzas of the two poems will show, in fact, that the Roman poet, apart from introducing Lesbia's name, has produced not simply an imitation of what Sappho wrote, but a translation into Latin. The same conclusion may be drawn from

[28] Let it not be thought that Callimachus eschewed ambiguous expression altogether. On his capacity for introducing "leg-pulls, mystifications, and expressions à *double entente*" into the Hymns in particular, see K. J. McKay's *The Poet at Play* and *Erysichthon: A Callimachean Comedy* (= *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 6–7) (Leiden 1962).

[29] See my "Ambiguities of Expression in Catullus 66 and 67," *CP* 54 (1959) 109–11. I pause only to reclassify according to the present tripartite scheme the several passages discussed there:

1. Lexical: 67.8 (*ueterem*).

2. Syntactical: 66.29 ([sc. *tu* = Berenice] . . . *maesta* or *maesta uerba*); 51 (*abiunctae . . . comae* or *abiunctae . . . mea*); 77 (*ego . . . expers* or *uirgo . . . expers*); 67.8 (*in dominum ueterem* or *ueterem . . . fidem*).

3. Psychological: 66.30 (*tristi . . . manu* mistakenly assumed at first, *tristi* as contraction of *triuisti* [with *lumina* as direct object] recognized ultimately).

[30] A number of scholars have accepted the controversial suggestion of Wilamowitz, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin 1913) 58 ff., that the poem of Sappho was designed as a wedding-song and that the girl celebrated there and the happy male who sat opposite catching her pleasant speech and laughter were bride and groom respectively. While he maintains this thesis with regard to the Sapphic original, L. Amundsen (see p. 71 of his "Catulliana I," *SO* 12 [1933] 70–74) hesitates to assume that Catullus understood the poem to have been occasioned by a wedding. Perhaps Amundsen is overcautious. Still, the orientation of c. 51 is anything but that of a "Hochzeitslied." Contrast the undeniably epithalamic cc. 61 and 62.

juxtaposition of c. 66 with what has been salvaged from the Calli-
machean *Coma Berenices*. In neither instance, however, is Catullus a
slavish translator.[31] Had he been so, he might well have striven to
surmount the built-in inadequacies of Latin morphology so as to
produce language as unconfusing and unambiguous as that of his
Greek models.[32]

But let us start by comparing third stanzas only, juxtaposing initially
their first two verses:

> ἀλλὰ κὰμ μὲν γλῶσσα ἔαγε, λέπτον
> δ᾽ αὔτικα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμαικεν.[33]

> lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
> flamma demanat.

My own surmise is that Catullus has quite deliberately arranged his
borrowed word-picture in such a way that the reader will be offered
the opportunity to visualize not only a Sapphic "slender flame,"[34]
but Catullan "slender limbs" (Sappho supplies no limb at all, only
"skin" susceptible to inflammation[35]) as well. If Catullus can add
his own Lesbia's name in the previous stanza (7), for which there is,
of course, no precedent in Sappho's poem—unless the poet from
Verona is subtly reminding us that his predecessor in lyric composition
happens to be *Lesbia* by birthright, just as his own Clodia is pseudon-

[31] Hence I remain sceptical with regard to E. A. Barber's *tour de force*: a reconstruction
of the lost *Coma* on the basis of extant remains (considerably more extensive than what
was available to Scaliger when he attempted a similar feat in the 1550's) and the full
text of Catullus 66. See the introduction, texts, and commentary supplied in his
"The Lock of Berenice: Callimachus and Catullus," *Greek Poetry and Life: Essays
Presented to Gilbert Murray* . . . (Oxford 1936) 343–63. M. C. J. Putnam, "Catullus
66.75–88," *CP* 55 (1960) 223–28, suspects that portions of Catullus' poem were freely
invented without direct dependence on any Callimachean exemplar. The same may
well be true of the much discussed fourth stanza of c. 51, which in no way corresponds
to Sappho's fourth stanza (quoted below).
[32] But see note 28 above concerning Callimachus' propensity for utilizing the am-
biguous when it suits his purpose.
[33] In quoting from Sappho, I follow the text of E. Diehl (fr. 2) rather than of E.
Lobel and D. L. Page (fr. 31).
[34] This is all that Robinson Ellis sees fit to recognize. The same holds true for C. J.
Fordyce. See ad loc. their respective *A Commentary on Catullus*² (Oxford 1889) and
Catullus, A Commentary (Oxford 1961).
[35] Elsewhere the noun χρώς might prove ambiguous. "Skin" is its basic meaning;
but by extension it comes to signify "color of the skin" (i.e. complexion) or even
"color" generally. See *LSJ* s.v.

ymously *Lesbia*, perhaps thanks to her literary interests[36]—what is
to prevent him from subjoining other elements which may be purely
his own?[37]

Consider now the second half of the Sapphic and Catullan third
stanzas.   Whereas Sappho describes the effect of the beloved's prox-
imity successively on her own eyesight and on her own hearing,

> ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ-
> βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

Catullus not only reverses the order of presentation, but also strives
for enhanced dramatic impact:

> sonitu suopte
> tintinant aures, gemina teguntur
> lumina nocte.[38]

Syntactically the adjective introduced by Catullus without Sapphic
sanction ought to be quite unambiguous.   If the metrics of these
verses are clearly understood, it becomes clear likewise that *gemina*
can function here only as an ablative singular feminine in agreement
with *nocte*, which latter serves in turn as a figurative substitute for
tenebris or something of the sort.   But readers of Latin erotic poetry
even in Republican times must have become so inured to the lexical
ambivalence of *lumina*, interpretable both literally and as equivalent
to *oculi* or *ocelli*,[39] as to subvert in their own minds the grammatical

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[36] Cf. M. Schanz and C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* I⁴ (Munich 1927)
293: "Das Pseudonym ist wohl mit Rücksicht auf Sappho (vgl. c. 51) gewählt."   See
also A. H. Weston, "The Lesbia of Catullus," *CJ* 15 (1919–20) 501, who disputes the
notion (promoted by Baehrens and Schulze) that Catullus' beloved was herself oriented
toward literature.   He apparently ignores the possibility that *Sapphica puella Musa
doctior* (35.16–17) might be a clue.   Contrast C. Pascal, "Il carme XXXV di Catullo,"
Athenaeum 9 (1921) 213–19.

[37] Cf. note 31 above.

[38] On the effort of Catullus to make his verses more powerful and significant than
the original, cf. W. Kranz, "Catulls Sapphoübertragung," *Hermes* 65 (1930) 236–37.
See also C. Gallavotti, "Interpretando Saffo e poi Catullo," *A & R*, 3rd s., 11 (1943)
3–17 (p. 13 especially).

[39] Note that Propertius employs these nouns separately and comparatively unam-
biguously in the opening distichs of his first elegy (quoted and discussed above)—unless
lumina fastus at line 3 be interpretable both as "light of disdain" and, in defiance of gram-
mar, though not of tradition, as "disdainful eyes."   Whereas scholars generally take *fastus*
to be a descriptive genitive modified by *constantis* in the same verse, E. Pasoli, *In Properti*

legitimacy of the rather bold *gemina teguntur . . . nocte* in order to link up the doubling signaled by the adjective and the duality of organs of sight, which is normal and natural for most creatures.[40]

Thus syntactical ambiguity shows itself in one half of Catullus' third stanza, psychological and even lexical ambiguity in the other half.[41] No appreciable suggestion of the ambiguous is introduced, however, into Lucretius' more or less contemporaneous Latinization of the same Sapphic original within a medical, even psychiatric, rather than purely erotic context (3.152–58):

> uerum ubi uementi magis est commota metu mens,
> consentire animam totam per membra uidemus
> sudoresque ita palloremque exsistere toto
> corpore et infringi linguam uocemque aboriri,
> caligare oculos, sonere auris, succidere artus,
> denique concidere ex animi terrore uidemus
> saepe homines . . . .[42]

In so doing the author of the *De rerum natura* has availed himself not only of Sappho's third stanza, as did Catullus, but of the fourth as well:

*Monobiblon commentationes (= Studî pubblicati dall'Istituto di Filologia Classica 2) (Bologna 1957) 16–17, at least explores the possibility that *constantis* retains its original participial force and that *fastus* is not genitive singular at all, but (consider the anceps position of the final syllable in an hexameter) nominative singular, subject of *deiecit*, the direct object of which last would still be *lumina* in any event.

[40] W. Kroll in a note *ad loc.* (see p. 93 of his third annotated edition of Catullus' poems [Stuttgart 1959]) puts the matter quite succinctly: "*gemina*, das eigentlich auf *lumina* geht, ist durch Enallage zu *nocte* bezogen." So succinctly does he put it, in fact, that there appears to be no need for him to refer to ambiguity expressly. Still, transference of a modifier necessarily creates a sort of double focus, as does metaphor in general.

[41] In a separate paper, "Arrius and his Uncle" (to be presented in November 1970 at a meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, Southern Section, in Miami Beach, Florida), I discuss ambiguities in c. 84 much akin to those under consideration in note 23 above. Similar ambiguities in c. 79 will, hopefully, become the concern of yet another paper.

[42] I am indebted to Kroll for having called attention to the Lucretian parallel. See his note on Catullus 51.9. On the other hand, I cannot accept his claim that Catullus' *sonitu suopte* (10: quoted *in contextu* above), which he compares invidiously with *sonere auris* in the fifth of the Lucretian verses under consideration, should be dismissed as "ein müssiger Zusatz." In labeling Catullus' contribution rather "an sich eine brillante neoterische Lautmalerei," Amundsen (above, note 30) 74, may have gone to excess. Yet I find myself assenting in the main.

ἀ δέ μ᾽ ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δέ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ᾽ ὀλίγω ᾽πιδεύης
　　　φαίνομ᾽.

Had Catullus imitated the unambiguous verses which I have just quoted, would he, quite in constrast to Lucretius, have introduced ambiguities of his own? If the attitude of the former both toward Greek exemplars and toward the potentialities of his own language is what I think it is, there would be no error in offering an affirmative surmise.