

CATULLUS AS.A

NATURE POET

by

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CATULLUS AS A NATURE POET

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## INTRODUCTION

By nature we mean the whole sum of appearances that reach us primarily thru the senses. In studying Catullus as a nature poet we shall consider him as the contemplator and nature as the thing contemplated. The outside world is made up of animate and inanimate objects; both of these produce their effect upon the poet and are included in the term "nature". The animate world consists of animal life and plant life: included in the former are the birds of the air, the beasts and insects on land, and the fish in the sea; in the latter, plants, trees, fruits, and flowers. In the inanimate world is the sky, the air, the earth, the sea and seashore, and the underworld. The sky has its sun, moon, and stars, its clouds and mists, its dew, rain, and snow; and the earth its mountains, valleys, plains, lakes, swamps, rivers, springs, caves, and rocks.

The method of procedure in this study of Catullus has been to examine each of the worlds above mentioned with a view to discovering their impression upon the poet. It was found that he views nature in six separate and distinct ways. They are:

1. The close photographic view.
2. The scientific versus the mythological point of view.



3. The view of simple unreflective delight.
4. The association with scenes.
5. The view of the infinite side of nature.
6. The using of nature as a means of illustrating human life.

Schiller, in "Ueber Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung", (1795) maintains that there is an externality and lack of heart in the classical attitude toward nature. He does not mention Catullus specifically; generally he means the Greeks as the exponents of this type of nature writing. He says:

"Wenn man sich der schönen Natur erinnert, welche die alten Griechen umgab; wenn man nachdenkt, wie vertraut dieses Volk unter seinem glücklichen Himmel mit der freien Natur leben konnte, wie sehr viel näher seine Vorstellung-  
art, seine Empfindungsweise, seine Sitten der einfältigen Natur lagen, und welch ein treuer Abdruck derselben seine Dichterwerke sind, so musz die Bemerkung befremden, dasz man so wenige Spuren von dem sentimentalischen Interesse, mit welchem wir Neuern an Naturzenen und an Naturcharakteren hangen können, bei demselben antrifft. Der Grieche ist zwar im höchsten Grade genau, treu, umständlich in Beschreibung derselben, aber doch gerade nicht mehr und mit keinem vorzüglichern Herzensanteil, als er es auch in Beschreibung eines Auzuges, eines Schildes, eines Rüstung, eines Hausgerätes oder irgend eines mechanischen Produktes ist. Er



scheint in seiner Liebe für das Objekt keinen Unterschied zwischen demjenigen zu machen, was durch sich selbst, und dem, was durch die Kunst und durch den menschlichen Willen ist. Die Natur scheint mehr seinen Verstand und seine Wiszbegierde als sein moralisches Gefühl zu interessieren; er hängt nicht mit Innigkeit, mit Empfindsamkeit, mit süßer Wehmut an derselben, wie wir Neuern."

Of the Latin poets whom he mentions by name,<sup>1</sup> he says that Horace might be termed the true founder of what he calls "sentimental poetry", the poetry of feeling. Traces of this are also to be found in Propertius, Vergil, and "others", and less of it in Ovid. Whether or not Schiller meant to include Catullus as one of "the others" we cannot say, but it shall be one of the purposes of this paper to prove that there is not altogether an externality and lack of feeling in Catullus' attitude toward nature. Not always does he make definite statements of his love of nature: sometimes his appreciation must be largely inferred. In this respect he is more of an artist than one who needs must label his works nature poems, so that the world at large may recognize them.

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1. "Horaz, der Dichter eines kultivierten und verdorbenen Weltalters, preist die ruhige Glückseligkeit in seinem Tibur, und ihm könnte man als den wahren Stifter dieser sentimentalischen Dichtungsart nennen, sowie er auch in derselben im noch nicht übertroffenen Muster ist. Auch in Properz, Virgil u. a. findet man Spuren dieser Empfindungsweise, weniger beim Ovid dem es dazu an Fülle des Herzens fehlte, und der in seinem Exil zu Tomi die Glückseligkeit schmerzlich vermiszte, die Horaz in seinem Tiber so gern entbehrte."



CATULLUS AS A NATURE POET

I. Close Photographic View

In dealing with natural facts Catullus does not show a narrow or an inaccurate observation. In many instances he gives a whole description in one epithet, but that epithet expresses a predominant feature. Tozer<sup>2</sup> calls attention to the fact that in mentioning the Vale of Tempe<sup>3</sup> the poet shows his usual felicity in seizing on "the one salient" feature of Tempe, its overhanging woods. Yet the overhanging forests are but one outstanding feature of Tempe, and Catullus devotes three lines to Tempe, bringing out the four striking features: (1) the great beautiful river, (2) the green trees (bays and planes) and vines of the vale, (3) the deep vale itself embowered in overhanging forests, i.e. the precipitous walls of the vale and the woods above their summits, (4) the many sparkling crystal springs that line the vale. Herodotus<sup>4</sup> says the whole of Thessaly was formerly a lake and mentions the formation of the Penens: Horace<sup>5</sup> mentions its breezes;

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2. Researches in the Highlands of Turkey, vol. II, p. 68.

3. Confestim Penios adest, viridantia Tempe,  
Tempe quae silvae cigunt super impedentes  
Naisin linquens Doris celebranda choris.  
64.285 ff.

4. Herod. VII, 129.

5. ....zephyris agitata Tempe. Hor. Od. III, 1.24.



Ovid<sup>6</sup>, the Peneus, Vergil seems to be the only other Latin writer who mentions the shade, and when he uses tempe, he uses it of valleys in general. Thus we see that while the Latin poets who mention Tempe speak of one or two prominent features, Catullus in his description includes four outstanding features.

A swamp is described as "lividissimus"<sup>7</sup>, which gives a clear idea of the bluish black color, "profundus"<sup>8</sup>, (deep), "cavus"<sup>9</sup>, (engulfing) and "putidus"<sup>10</sup>, (stinking). One epithet applied to rivers and brooks is "sonans"<sup>11</sup>, which expresses the roar of a full and rushing stream. Particular features are mentioned of various rivers. The Nile<sup>12</sup> has seven mouths and in its yearly overflow covers the plains with its muddy deposits. The Satrachus has waters that are deep-bedded; here cavus means more than deep, for it takes a photograph, as it were, of the whole channel; the water may be deep or shallow, but the river is always deep-bedded. The Triton is "rapidus"<sup>14</sup>, the Eurotas<sup>15</sup> nourishes the myrtle.

Plains are mentioned as colored by the inundations of the Nile<sup>16</sup>, and as the place where flowers grow<sup>17</sup>.

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6.	Ov. Met. I, 568.	14.	64.395.
7.	17.9.	15.	64.89.
8.	17.11.	16.	11.7-8.
9.	17.4.	17.	11.7.
10.	17.10.		
11.	34.12.		
12.	11.7.		
13.	95.5.		



In the festival hymn to Diana Catullus gives us a beautiful picture of forests, sequestered glades, and roaring rivers.<sup>18</sup>

The sea seems to have a particular fascination for him, as there are no less than fifty-seven references to the sea and the shore. The epithets are varied; no one is constantly repeated. Different words are used to denote various features and characteristics. Aequor usually refers to the level expanse, unda and fluctus to the waves, aestus to the billows, freta to the narrow sea, pelagus to the open sea, vada to the shoals and shallows, pontus, to the deep sea, turbo and gurges to the surge or swirl, and mare to the sea as opposed to the land. The epithets are of two classes, descriptive and musical: the former make their appeal to the eye, the latter to the ear. The first are: altus,<sup>19</sup> deep; caeruleus,<sup>20</sup> blue; candens,<sup>21</sup> white with foam; (the foam of the sea is also suggested by the verb incandunt,<sup>22</sup> meaning to turn white); canus,<sup>23</sup> silvery; horribile,<sup>24</sup> applying to the proverbially rough English channel; horridus,<sup>25</sup> ruffled; latus,<sup>26</sup> wide; liquidus,<sup>27</sup> clear flowing; placidus,<sup>28</sup> calm; proclivus,<sup>29</sup> describing

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18.	64.280.	25.	64.205.
19.	63.1 and 66.68.	26.	64.178.
20.	36.11.	27.	64.2.
21.	64.14.	28.	64.269.
22.	64.13.	29.	64.270.
23.	64.18 and 66.70.		
24.	11.11.		



the curved form of waves just beginning to rise on a hitherto smooth and windless sea; rapidus,<sup>30</sup> swift-moving; salsus, salis,<sup>31</sup> briny; spumans,<sup>32</sup> foaming; tremulus,<sup>33</sup> the rippling slight agitation of the sea under a gentle breeze; vastus,<sup>34</sup> boundless; ventosus,<sup>35</sup> breezy. The only epithets which describe sounds are trux,<sup>36</sup> wild and rough; and truculentus,<sup>37</sup> boisterous, and in each of these there is implied the wrath of a savage person; the poet personifies the waves and describes neither motion or sound, but the feelings with which he endows the waves. The only seas mentioned by the poet are the Adriatic,<sup>38</sup> the Hellespont,<sup>39</sup> the great northern ocean,<sup>40</sup> and the Propontis.<sup>41</sup> One particularly striking picture of the sea is "marmora pelagi."<sup>42</sup> This one word carries with it two ideas, that of the dazzling whiteness of the sea when it sparkles, and also the idea of a calm, smooth expanse.

The shore is described as moist where it is washed by the waves, and also whitened by the billows.<sup>43</sup> Particular shores are mentioned; that of the Hellespont is oyster-bearing;<sup>44</sup> Dia's shores are torrent-voiced, <sup>45</sup> and foam-fringed;<sup>46</sup> the harbor of the Piræus has winding shores.<sup>47</sup> The last mentioned well describes the formation of the

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30.	63.16, 64.358.	38.	4.6.
31.	64.6, 64.128.	39.	64.358. Frg. 1.4.
32.	64.155, 68.3.	40.	115.6.
33.	64.128.	41.	4.9.
34.	31.3, 63.48, 64.127.	42.	63.88.
35.	64.12.	43.	umidus 63.8. umida albicantis loca litoris
36.	4.9		63.87.
37.	63.16, 64.179.		



the formation of the Piraeus with its three distinct inlets. The Rhoetean shore is not described; in his brotherly love which shudders at the grave the poet can only think of that soil where his brother is buried as weighing heavily upon him.<sup>48</sup>

Some of the epithets used of mountains, besides *altus* which describes the Alps,<sup>49</sup> and *magnus*, are *aerius*,<sup>50</sup> *algidus*,<sup>51</sup> *gelidus*,<sup>52</sup> *niveus*,<sup>53</sup> *buxifer*,<sup>54</sup> *frondosus*,<sup>55</sup> *viridis*,<sup>56</sup> and *praeruptus*.<sup>57</sup> These describe height, cold, growth of plant life, and steepness. Two features of Mt. Ida are mentioned, its mantle of snow,<sup>58</sup> and its green growth.<sup>59</sup> Flowers grow upon the mighty mountains of Thessaly;<sup>60</sup> the oak and pine grow to great stature on Taurus,<sup>61</sup> and the pine upon Pelion,<sup>62</sup> and the box-wood upon Cytorus.<sup>63</sup>

No lake is mentioned specifically except the Lago di Garda, when the poet, contrasting the dark and turbulent sea over which he has taken his journey with the beautifully clear blue waters of the lake, calls them glancing<sup>64</sup>

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|-----|---|---------------------------|
| 44. | <i>Hellespontia ceteris otriosior oris.</i> Fragm. 2.4. |                           |
| 45. | <i>fluentisono litore Diae</i> 64.52.                   |                           |
| 46. | <i>spumosa ad litora Diae</i> 64.52.                    |                           |
| 47. | <i>curvus</i> 64.74.                                    | 57. 64.126 and 64.297.    |
| 48. | 65.7.   | 58. 63.53.                |
| 49. | 11.9.   | 59. 64.96.                |
| 50. | 68.57. 64.240.  | 60. 64.281.               |
| 51. | 63.70.  | 61. 64.105.               |
| 52. | 63.53.  | 62. 64.1.                 |
| 53. | 64.240.   | 63. 4.13.                 |
| 54. | 4.13.   | 64. <i>limpidus</i> 4.24. |
| 55. | 64.96.  |                           |
| 56. | 63.30, 70.  |                           |



and flowing.<sup>66</sup>

The rivers of Italy have one characteristic which Catullus mentions in his description of mountain streams. Owing to a central backbone of mountains with flatter tracts on either side, the earlier portions of the streams are rapid, but when the plains are reached the rapidity of motion speedily lessens. "As from the mossy rocks on some towering mountain crest, a glancing stream leaps out into the day and pours its headlong course adown its sloping vale."<sup>67</sup>

The sky, with its sun, moon, stars, clouds, rain and snow, receives a great deal of attention. In Catullus' sky there is no rainbow, nor twinkling of stars. The sun is glowing,<sup>68</sup> flaming,<sup>69</sup> bright,<sup>70</sup> swift moving,<sup>71</sup> and wandering.<sup>72</sup> The two latter epithets refer to its movements, the others to its color, warmth, and brightness. The moon is pale, for it shines with a borrowed light.<sup>73</sup> In the picture of the Mediterranean dawn the sky is described as clear white<sup>74</sup> at daybreak, after the gloom of night has dispersed.

The animate world as well as the inanimate makes it appeal to Catullus. At the marriage of Peleus and Thetis

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66. liquens 31.2.

67. 68. 57 - 61.

Qualis in aerei perlucens vertice montis  
rivus muscoso prosilit e lapide.

qui cum de prona praeceps est valle volutus.

68. ardens 64.354.

69. flammens 66.3



different trees<sup>75</sup> are brought as wedding gifts, the swaying plane-tree and the sky-springing cypress. The adjectives describing these are very exact; *nutanti*, suggesting the swaying of the luxuriant mass of foliage which forms the top of the oriental plane, *lenta*, suggesting the flexibility of the poplar, and *aëris*, the great height of the cypress. Other tall trees brought as wedding gifts are the laurels<sup>76</sup> straight of stem, and the beech trees.<sup>76</sup> The deep retreats of the forest are "*fers*".<sup>77</sup> The groves<sup>78</sup> on the summit of Mt. Ida are mentioned five times in poem 63, but there is no reference to their beauty. As is natural in the *Attis* it is their wildness or remoteness of which the poet would have his reader think.

Other plant life that receives mention is *silphium*,<sup>79</sup> which the poet tells us grows in sandy tracts and comes from Cyrenaica, and the reeds<sup>80</sup> in which *Cnidus* abounds. The many hues,<sup>81</sup> as well as the fragrance of flowers, make their appeal to the poet: it is surprising, however, to find that only one flower, the *marjoram*<sup>82</sup> is called sweet-

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70. candidus 8.3.  
71. rapidus 66.3.  
72. vagus 64.271.  
73. notho ----- lumine 34.15.  
74. albus 63.40.  
75. 64.290-291.  
76. fagos --- lauros 64.289.  
77. 63.89.  
78. 11.2, 12, 52, 79, 89.  
79. 7.4.  
80. 36.13---*Cnidum* que *harundinosam*.  
81. colores 64.90.  
82. Suave olentis amaraci 61.7.



smelling.

There are shown only a few close observations of the habits of animals. Bugs and spiders are typical of desertion.<sup>83</sup> The lion is green-eyes,<sup>84</sup> and Cybele's lion goaded to fury is made to lash his tail.<sup>85</sup> Two original epithets are used to describe the boar and deer, in the two words coined by the poet, thicket-ranging boar<sup>86</sup> and forest-feeding hind.<sup>87</sup> No preference is shown for wild or domestic animals as there are thirteen references to the former and fourteen to the latter. All references to animals not mentioned specifically above either are figures of speech which compare some human being to them, or state directly the relation of man to the beasts, and these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VI.

In his treatment of bird life, too, the poet falls far short of the modern nature lover. In only one place<sup>88</sup> is the song of a bird mentioned -- the wailing of the night-ingale. The poet refers to some birds as being carrion,<sup>89</sup> and notes the mating instinct of the dove;<sup>90</sup> but the general habits of birds, their food, migration, manner of flight, building of nests and protection of their young,

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83. 23.2. Nec cimex neque araneus.  
84. 45.7. Caesio-----leoni.  
85. 63.81. Age caede terga cauda.  
86. aper nemorivagus, 63.72.  
87. cervia silvicultrix 63.73.  
88. 65.14. Danlias ----- gemens.  
89. Corvus 108.5. Ales 64.152. vulturium 108.4.



receive no attention at all. In only two places/<sup>is</sup> the color of the bird/<sup>noted</sup> once, when he speaks of the black-throated crow;<sup>91</sup> and again, when he mentions the dainty white dove.<sup>92</sup> (His treatment of the sparrow will be discussed later in another connection.)

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90. 68.125-128.

Nec tantum nives gavisa est ulla columbo  
compar, quae multo dicitur improbius  
oscula mordenti semper decerpere rostro  
quam quae praecipue multivola est mulier.

91. atro gutture corvus 108.5.

92. albulus columbus 29.7.

niveo ----- columbo 68.125.



## II. Scientific Versus Mythological

### Point of View

It is inevitable that a Roman's view of nature should be closely linked with his religious views; hence we find many mythological references and allusions. Although modern science had not yet come to explain causes in the natural world, the ancients had Empedocles, Epicurus, Democritus, Pythagorus, and other "scientists". But science was prosy; mythology was poetical. Therefore poets, both ancient and modern, prefer to speak the language of mythology. Catullus made use of mythology to explain the phenomena of the world. While the explanation of conditions is sure to change with time, the phenomena are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and the poet of two thousand years ago looked upon the same beauties in nature that we do. The Romans in some respects were a practical and prosaic people; it is not possible, however, that anyone could dwell in such a land as Italy without being impressed by the natural charms around him.

Catullus must have had some knowledge of scientific facts about the stars and constellations, for he notices both the daily and yearly motions in their risings and and settings. The Coma Berenices shows that he knew the



exact relative positions of several different stars. Coma Berenices shines brightly;<sup>1</sup> most of the stars in this group actually are visible to the human eye and are perfectly distinguished in the sky. This clearness is partly due to the fact that there is no very brilliant star in the vicinity to efface their light. This constellation, according to Catullus, is situated between the Virgin and the savage Lion,<sup>2</sup> and in setting follows Callisto and precedes Boötes who is the last to dip into the deep. It is a fact that the group known as Berevice's hair is just above the tail of Leo and adjoining the right arm of Virgo.

Since mythology is the most poetic way of interpreting the world, and the poet personalized its various phenomena, he is not always scrupulously scientific; but he is accurate in describing the relative positions of stars. Although he speaks of the stars as a company<sup>3</sup> just as the Bible speaks of the heavenly host,<sup>4</sup> he is entirely right in his idea of the position of Boötes in the heavens. It is a tardily setting<sup>5</sup> constellation, for it is in a

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1. fulgentem clare, 66.9.
  2. Virginis et saevi contingens namque Leonis lumina, Callisto iuxta Lycaoniam, uertor in occasum, tardum dux ante Boöten, qui vix sero alto mergitur Oceano. 66.65.
  3. Coetus, 66.37.
  4. Luke, 2.14.
  5. 66.67-68. cf. note 2.



perpendicular position, while its rising is rapid, being effected in a horizontal position.

In saying that he knows of no more pitiless fire that rides the heavens than that of Hesperus,<sup>6</sup> the evening star, the poet shows that he thought of the stars as watching and controlling the actions of men. This star, according to his fancy, takes a maiden forcibly from her mother's embrace as she clings to it, and surrenders her in her maidenhood to her eager lover. This same star is attacked by the maidens in the Epithalamium<sup>7</sup> as the thief who takes the maiden from her companions and as a foe of virginity. The youths, however, declare<sup>8</sup> that Hesperus is the lover's friend, for it ushers in the night, the kind concealer of love's stolen delights. The poet is mistaken in his idea that the evening star was at the same time and on the same day the morning star, which Ellis<sup>9</sup> says is a natural confusion caused by the fact that Venus is seen at different

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6. 62.20-25.  
Hespere qui caelo fertur crudelior ignis?  
Qui natam possis complexu avellere matris,  
complexu matris retinentem avellere natam,  
et iuveni ardenti castam donare puellam.
7. 62.32 ff.                    *aequales*  
Hesperus e nobis, / *abstulit* unam.  
.....  
Namque tuo adventu vigilat custodia semper,  
nocte latent fures, quos idem saepe revertens,  
hespere, mutato comprehendis nomine eosdem.
8. 62.35.
9. Ellis, Robinson: A Commentary on Catullus,  
(Second Edition, p. 246.)



times both at sunset and at dawn. Friedrich<sup>10</sup> explains this clearly. "Tatsächlich wird sie, wenn sie Abendstern ist, erst nach Monaten Morgenstern: sie ist Monate hindurch nur Abendstern und dann wieder Monate hindurch nur Morgenstern. So war die Venus 1902 im April zuerst unsichtbar und wurde dann Abendstern. Im Mai war sie Abendstern. Im Juni wurde sie lichtschwächer und verkleinerte sich. Mitte Juli wurde sie Morgenstern. Im September, Oktober, November war sie Morgenstern. Im Dezember nahm sie an Lichtstärke ab. Im Januar 1903 verschwand sie ganz. Im Februar und März blieb sie unsichtbar, im April wurde sie wieder Abendstern." Catullus seems to have shared this idea of the identity of morning and evening star with several ancient writers.<sup>11</sup> Catullus calls the evening star Noctifer, the star that ushers in the night.<sup>12</sup>

Some knowledge of the position of stars is shown when Coma Berenices says that to be once more a lock on Berenice's head, she would gladly see all stars thrown into confusion

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10. Friedrich, Gustav: *Catulli Veronensis Liber*,  
(p. 289 of 1908 Edition).
11. (1) *Cinna Zmyrna* fr. 8 B.  
"te matutinus flentem conspexit Eous et  
flentem paulo vidit post Hesperus idem."  
(2) *Seneca Phaedr.* 750.  
"nuntius noctis, modo lotus undis Hesperus;  
pulsis iterum tenebris Lucifer idem."
12. 62.7 ----- noctifer ignes.



even letting Orion shine next to Aquarius.<sup>13</sup> This would be an impossibility as Orion is a southern sign near the Bull and Dog, while Aquarius is between Capricorn and the Fish. Merrill says, "Catullus noticed the yearly motion of the stars with reference to the apparent position of the sun, due to the revolution of the earth about the sun," for he speaks of how the planets in their ordered sequence disappear.<sup>14</sup> He also refers to the apparent daily motion of the stars due to the revolution of the earth on its axis, when he speaks of Conon's calculating the rising and the setting of the stars.<sup>15</sup> Yet the appearance of Venus, the evening star, although in the west, is by analogy spoken of as rising.<sup>16</sup>

The sky is recognized as a place where order reigns; the moon has a definite orbit, a circling course in the heavens.<sup>17</sup> Yet in this very passage the moon is personified, called Trivia, and again mythology is bound up with scientific fact. The sun rises and sets.<sup>18</sup> It is described as a wanderer in contrast with the fixed heavenly lights.<sup>19</sup>

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13. 66.94.  
14. Ut cedant certis sidera temporibus 66.4.  
15. Qui stellarum ortus comperit atque  
obitus, 66.2.  
16. 62.1.  
17. 66.6.  
18. 64.376 -- 5.4.  
19. ----- vagi ----- solis, 64.271.



The fact that the light of the moon is not so bright as that of the sun is suggested when the poet described her as shining with a borrowed light.<sup>20</sup> The moon measures off the months of the year.<sup>21</sup> In the Endymion story<sup>22</sup> the visit of Selene is the falling of the moon's rays upon the steep eastern face of Latmus, when the sun is in the constellation of Cancer. Night is always her attendant, and she moves away from Latmus nightly before the approaching dawn. Love made her an exile from the sky when she went to be with Endymion.

No phenomena in nature are more familiar and at the same time inexplicable than the various movements of the air. The different names for the individual winds are more or less personified. Boreas, for example, is saevus.<sup>23</sup> Other winds specifically mentioned are Apeliotes,<sup>24</sup> the east wind; Favonus<sup>25</sup> and Zephyrus.<sup>26</sup> Due to the fact that the winds are personified, several epithets are such

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20. .... notho es.  
dicta lumine Luna, 34.15-16.  
21. .... cursu, dea, menstruo  
metiens iter annum, 34.17-18.  
22. 66.5.  
23. 26.3.  
24. 26.3.  
25. 26.2, 64.282.  
26. 46.3, 64.270.



as might be applied to people,<sup>27</sup> as gentle, genial, raging, boisterous, and roving; other epithets<sup>28</sup> are fertilizing, light, and warm. The west wind is warm<sup>29</sup> and makes the flowers grow; its genial breezes cause heaven's aequinoctial roar to sink into stillness.<sup>30</sup>

Once<sup>31</sup> Catullus puns on the word *ventus* (draft, draught) when he calls the mortgage<sup>31</sup> on *Furius'* small villa a dreadful and fatal draught. The word *pestilens* seems to imply that the winds carry disease.

In the sea are *Amphitrite*,<sup>32</sup> *Neptune*,<sup>33</sup> ruler of both lakes and seas, the *Nereides*,<sup>34</sup> and *Tithys*.<sup>35</sup> These are sometimes personified and sometimes used for the sea itself (cf. *Amphitrite*). No sharp line of distinction is drawn in case of the sun, which is called "*progenies Thiae*" once<sup>36</sup> and *sol* ten times.<sup>37</sup> When he is personified<sup>38</sup> he is golden visaged, with flashing eyes, which survey the clear white sky, dull earth, and the restless sea, and driving away the shades of night with his new risen noisy-footed

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27. *Clemens* 64.272, *incundus* 46.3, *lenis* 68.64.  
*saevus* 26.3, *turbidus* 25.4, *vagus* 65.17.  
28. *fecundus* 113.4, *levis* 64.9, *tepidus* 64.282.  
29. *Aura parit flores tepidi fecunda Favona* 64.282.  
30. *Iam ver egelidos refert tepores,*  
*Iam caeli furor aequinoctialis*  
*Incundis Zephyri silesceit aureis.* 46.2-5.  
31. 26.5.  
32. 64.11.  
33. 31.3.  
34. 64.15.  
35. 88.5, 66.70, 64.29.  
36. 66.44.  
37. 62.41, 63.39, 64.271, 66.3, 23.14, 63.67,  
64.354, 5.4, 8.3, 8.8.  
38. 63.39 ff.



steeds.

only once is the dew mentioned; according to the poet's fancy the Hamadryads love to feed the myrtle with dew drops.<sup>39</sup>

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39. 61.23-25.



III. Simple Unreflecting Pleasure.

At times Catullus expresses a simple, spontaneous joy in nature; a joy which is merely physical, a thing of the nerves and animal spirits, very similar to that of Burns. Sometimes it is the result of rest from toil, and again relaxation after a strain. Just such an irresistible joy was his after a year of absence with Memmius in Bithynia when he rejoiced to get back to his country home, his beloved Sirmio;<sup>1</sup> here is the joy of one who may have traveled in many lands but likes his own land best. If anyone doubts Catullus' love for nature, he need only read this joyous outpouring of his heart and his extravagant praise affectionately bestowed upon his home on the lake. In this, one of the most spontaneous of all the poems, Sirmio is endowed with human qualities; she is called "venusta" and is considered capable of sympathizing and rejoicing with her master. Here the poet says he finds a sense of peace and rest. "Sirmio, brightest jewel of all forelands or islands that have been begotten, in pellucid mere or on the illimitable ocean,

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1. 31.



by either water-god, how willing and how pleased am I to come home to you. My senses scarcely persuade me that I have escaped from Thynia and the Bithymnian steppes; that all is safe and I am looking upon you. Can there be a greater blessing than when the cords of care are snapt, and the mind lets slip its burden when, spent with toil in far off places, we come to our home sanctuary and find rest on the long-dreamed-of couch? This moment is cheaply bought even by such costly pains. Welcome, lovely Sirmio. Make merry before your master; make merry too, ye waves of the water of Lydia, and let every jocund echo with which home is haunted, break into laughing." (Simpson)

The two pictures the poet gives us of dawn, one on Mt. Ida<sup>2</sup> and the other on the sea,<sup>3</sup> also reveal a love of nature for herself. How much more effective are the poet's words than a mere statement that it was morning. "When the golden-visaged sun with radiant eyes began his survey of clear white sky, solid lands, and the waste of ocean, and routed the shades of night before the rattling hoofs of his new-risen steeds." Ellis thinks that the unusual minuteness with which Catullus describes the transition from night to day seems to be connected with

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2. 63.39 ff.  
3. 64.269.



some phenomena of dawn peculiar to Ida, and mentions the fact that Diodorus XVII 7.6 and Lucretius V 663 mention a tradition that at daybreak fires were seen in different places on the top of Ida, which by degrees appeared to unite into a single orb. But this description fits a clear sunrise from any high mountain top in south Mediterranean lands.

The most beautiful of all the nature descriptions, is the picture of dawn on the sea, which is suggested by the departure of the guests from the wedding of Peleus and Thetis.<sup>4</sup> "At first as the waves move in slow procession at the command of the gentle breath of morning; they ring muffled chimes of laughter; but when the gale freshens they crowd faster and faster on, and fling back the splendor as they float far away in front of the crimsoning day."<sup>5</sup> In this instance the poet begins his figure of speech to describe the movements of a group of people, but he becomes so absorbed in his picture that he forgets some of the comparison. Movement is the essential thing in this description, but color and sound also add reality; and this time on the waves is seen not the

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4. 64.269 ff.  
Hic, qualis flatu placidum mare matutino  
horrificans zephyrus proclivas incitat undas  
Aurora exoriente vagi sub limina Solis:  
quae tarde primum clementi flamine pulsae  
procedunt, leni et resonant plangore cachinni,  
post vento crescente magis magis increbuscent,  
purpureaque procul nantes ab luce refulgent:  
sic tum vestibuli linquentis regia tecta  
ad se quisque vago passim pede discedebant.  
Simpson's translation.

5.



blue or white of the surface which has been mentioned in other places but the rosy-red of early morning, and the fading of the red light on the waves due to the fact that the more distant surface of the sea loses its own color in the gleam. The likening of the splash of the ripples to muffled laughter is very beautiful.

Another beautiful passage is the picture of the mountain stream<sup>6</sup> finding its way down through a valley, emerging from its solitudes upon the plains, to refresh the traveler tired and wayworn with his hot summer journey. Especially fitting is the word *perlucens*, which describes the thread-like sheen of a stream seen afar off on a mountain side. As Haupt remarks,<sup>7</sup> three distinct moments or phases may be traced in the comparison -- when the brook bursts forth from the top of the mountain, when it tumbles headlong down the slopes, and finally as it runs smoothly at the foot of the mountain, to quench the wayfarer's thirst.

Besides the four pictures above mentioned the poet sometimes expresses his love for nature by using a diminutive form of a word just as he uses it as a term of

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6. 68.57 ff.

Qualis in aerei perlucens vertice montis  
rius mucoso prosilit e lapide,  
qui cum de prona praeceps est valle volutus,  
per medium densi transit iter populi,  
dulce viatori lasso in sudore leuamen,  
cum gravis exustos aestus hiulcat agros:

7. Quaestt. p. 90.



endearment when speaking to people. A pleasure garden is "hortulus",<sup>8</sup> and while the form of the Latin word may refer to the size of the garden, it also expresses affection. "Ocelle" is also used of Sirmio.<sup>9</sup> Catullus can draw poetical imagery from such an unobtrusive object and one so apparently lacking in beauty as an untended vine in a neglected field.<sup>10</sup> Yet there is no decided preference expressed for farm life rather than city life as in Tibullus.

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8. 62.39.  
9. 31.2.  
10. 64.39, 62.49-50.



IV. Association With Scenes

The Greeks and Romans do not give a historic coloring to scenes as Walter Scott does in his fields of Flodden and Bannockburn, and Catullus leaves out the historic element altogether. Yet he does view nature in the light of human events and scenes which he has witnessed, and with which particular spots have become indelibly associated. His association is not patriotic nor religious; it deals with happy memories. The enthusiasm of poem 46 is from the joy the poet feels, not because spring is at hand, but because it is the time of home-coming at the thought of which the poet says his soul, surprised with joy, is impatient to be free and his feet quicken with glad enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> The very fact that he addresses himself indicates intense feeling and shows that his joy and eagerness are sincere.

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1. 46.7-8.  
Iam mens praetrepidans avet vagari,  
iam laeti studio pedes vigescunt.



V. Inhuman and Infinite

Side of Nature.

The infinite side of nature is sometimes expressed openly and again merely implied. When the poet contrasts the tiny ship (*minuta navis*) with the mighty deep (25.12) one infers that the ship is in the control of a power mightier than man. The ship described is the Argo which first set sail upon the deep, before man had learned to control the sea. Even the mountains, in all their might, are not beyond man's control,<sup>1</sup> for "by steel the mightiest mountain coursed over by Thia's mighty son, was cut asunder." Catullus' attitude is different from that of Lucretius, Shelley, and Wordsworth, to whom the great mountains seem so impassive and unchangeable, whose strength and permanence contrast with the short life of man.

Although the mountains do not suggest how brief is man's life, Catullus does read this lesson from the phenomena of light and darkness, of day and night. Lux and

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1. Ille quoque eversus mons est quem maximum in oris  
progenies Thiae clara supervehitur. 64.43-44.



nox are used in describing his own love, life and death even as Propertius uses nox in speaking of death.<sup>2</sup> To Lesbia the lover says, "Suns may set and rise again; but for us, once our little day has reached its setting there awaits a sheer night of sleep never to be broken."<sup>3</sup> Instead of philosophizing as other poets might have done in thinking of the vast unknown, Catullus, in the intoxication of passion says, "Lesbia, mine, let us live and love."

The days are contrasted with the transient nature of human life, for they pass away only to come again;<sup>4</sup> with men, however, there is no rising again when their light of life once is set.

The firmament is half personified and is described as mighty, but trembling before the omnipotence of Jove<sup>5</sup>. Yet the poet does not view it in the light of the moral and spiritual world; he does not use the visible world to get some tidings of the world invisible. He seems to doubt the existence of a world beyond the grave, for he bids his brother farewell "in perpetuum";<sup>6</sup> nowhere

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2. Prop. 15.24.  
Nox tibi longa venit, nec reditura dies.
  3. 5.5.  
Soles occidere et redire possunt;  
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux  
Nox est perpetua una dormienda.
  4. Soles occidere et redire possunt, 5.4.
  5. 66.1, 64.206.
  6. Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale,  
101.10.



are there intimations of immortality. Yet sometimes nature seems to have a purpose of her own, inaccessible to man and uncontrolled by him. This is suggested by the crash of the giant oak on Mt. Taurus when assailed by the winds.<sup>7</sup> The poet seems to recognize the infinite side of nature in this particular passage, but he does not go back of the present and restlessly strive after causes and origins. At times he feels no dread of wild mountain scenery as Dante, for example,<sup>8</sup> who makes Purgatorio, a mountain to be surmounted by the soul, rising so high that Dante's eyes could not see the top<sup>9</sup> and so steep that he had to go on hands and feet.<sup>10</sup> Catullus also differs from some Latin writers in his appreciation of mountain scenery. To him they are not inaccessible as to Pliny, Florus, or Silius;<sup>11</sup> in all their might they are not beyond man's control for by steel the highest mountain was cut asunder.<sup>12</sup> Yet the poet does not express pleasure in climbing airy heights, the exhilaration of pure mountain air, the enjoyment of mountain solitudes or of the wondrous views. In his

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7. 64.105 ff.  
8. Purg. 3.46-48.  
9. Purg. 4.40-41 and Purg. 4.87.  
10. Purg. 4.33.  
11. Pliny 6.28.32 ¶ 144.  
Pliny 10.12.16 ¶ 34.  
Flor. 3.1.14.  
Sil 3.516.  
12. Ille quoque eversus mons est, quem maximum in oris  
Progenies Thiae clara supervehitur. 66.43.



picture of the clouds passing over the mountain top,<sup>13</sup> he views them from a distance and lets them form the background of his landscape. It is not at all surprising that the poet with his home on the Lago di Garda, in view of the encircling mountain ridges, with the snowy Alps at no great distance beyond, could not fail to appreciate the beauty of mountain scenery; yet, while he places them as picturesque elements in his scene, they are not the most noticeable elements. Neither does he speak of them always as barren and repulsive, the natural home of wild beasts, places to be avoided as some Latin and Greek writers.<sup>14</sup>

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13. 64.239 ff.

14. Rara per ignaros errent animalia montis.

Verg. Ecl. VI, 40.

Θνπός ἰερὸν βῆτα Soph. An. 350.

Montivagae ferae Lucr. 1.404.



VI. Means of Illustrating  
Human Life.

Besides being used in association with scenes, nature is also used by Catullus as a means of illustrating human life, and particularly human emotions. It is natural that the poet who was given so much to emotion should use nature to illustrate life with its griefs and joys, its strength and weakness, its loves and hates. Sometimes the poet becomes so interested in his picture that he given more space to the figure than is consistent with artistic proportions. Allius' tears are like " a stream, which, sparkling in the mountain's airy height, leaps over mossgrown stones as it takes its downward course into the valley and sweeps thru the busy haunts of men, a sweet solace to the traveler, tired and wayworn, when the summer's sun makes crack the parching fields."<sup>1</sup>

In his treatment of the sea we find Catullus'

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1. 68.57 ff.  
Qualis in aerei perlucens vertice montis  
rivus muscoso prosilit e lapide,  
qui cum de prona praeceps est valle volutus,  
per medium densi transit iter populi,  
dulce viatori lasso in sudore levamen  
cum gravis exustos aestus hiulcat agros.



truest love of nature. Unlike many Roman poets he makes few complaints of the discomforts and perils of sea faring. The sea appeals to all his senses; more than this we can read further and see the mighty deep in harmony with his fiery, passionate, emotional life, and see directly the deeper life of his heart. The waters of the Lydian Lake laugh with him in his joy: when deeply mourning for the loss of his brother, he thinks of himself as tossed on a sea of troubles. (We shall notice other interpretations of the sea as typifying emotions.) The beauty of the sea is not a thing outside of himself, but the immediate and necessary expression of his own emotions. The range of tones in his farewell to his brother is well described by Mackail as extending from "the ocean roll of its opening hexameter to the sobbing wail of the *Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale.*"

(1) Joy and Grief

(a) The days when Catullus was happy in his love for Lesbia were "candidi soles,"<sup>2</sup> bright, happy, cloudless

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2. *Fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles, 8.3.*



days. Yet clouds are used to symbolize forgetfulness rather than grief or sorrow.

(b) The nightingale is a type of grief. Catullus' grief for his brother is so poignant that his sympathy goes into love for the nightingale, which is personified and given a personality.<sup>3</sup>

(c) The sea is twice used in symbolizing mental trouble. The poet was unable to write a poem for Ortalus because in his grief for his brother's death, his mind was tossed in such a sea of her own troubles.<sup>4</sup> Again when he apologizes to Manlius for not writing consoling verses, he asks him to hear in what a sea of woe he is plunged.<sup>5</sup>

(d) After his disillusionment, Catullus compares his love and its disappointing outcome as falling "as the flower on the skirt of a meadow falls when the passing plough has touched it."<sup>6</sup> As Mackail says,<sup>7</sup> "Though the old liquid note ever and again recurs, the freshness of these first lyrics, in which life and love

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3. Qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris  
aulias, absumptei fata gemens Itylei, 65.13.
  4. Tantis fluctuat ipsa malis, 65.4.
  5. Accipe, quis merser fortunae fluctibus ipse,  
68.13.
  6. Qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati  
ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam  
tactus aratro est. 11.23.
  7. Mackail, J. W.: Latin Literature, p. 54.



and poetry are all alike in their morning glory, was never to be wholly recaptured."

## 2. Pride and Humility

Julius Caesar with his vain struttings is compared to a dove.<sup>8</sup>

The animal used to denote humble position is the donkey. In his epigram on Aemilius the poet says he is to be relegated to the position of the rudest slaves sentenced to drive the donkey that turns the stone mill.<sup>9</sup>

## 3. Strength and Weakness

(a) The oak is one symbol of strength, "chosen warriors, the staunchest hearts of Argive chivalry."<sup>10</sup> This is by no means an unusual meaning of the word.<sup>11</sup>

(b) The most beautiful of all the figures of

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8. Perambulabit.....ut albulus columbus, 29.7.  
9. 97.10.  
10. Cum lecti invenes, Argivae robora pubis, 64.4.  
11. Omnia pariter crescunt et robora sumunt. Lucr.  
5.820:895.  
Solidaeque suo stant robore vires. Verg. Aen.  
2.639.  
Ille robur et aes triplex Circa pectus erat.  
Hor. C. 1.3.9.  
Quod fuit roboris, duobus proeliis interiit.  
Caes. B.C. 3.87.  
Cic. Or. 10.34.



plant life, excluding those of flowers, is the comparison of maidenhood to an unwedded vine, struggling on an unsheltered soil, never able to raise its head nor rear the mellow cluster, but bowing her delicate frame in drooping heaviness until the topmost tendril almost clasps the root.<sup>12</sup> How different this from the independence of the modern woman!

(c) When the poet wishes to find a fitting simile to show Theseus' strength in laying low the Minotaur he compares it to the effects of a wild hurricane,<sup>13</sup> wrenching with its blast the strong timbers and laying low the giant oak that waves its branches or a pine with its resinous bark, which, dislodged by the roots falls far from its seat and crushes all things round in its death agony.

#### 4. Effeminacy

Effeminacy is typified by the goose's filmy down

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12. Vt vidua in nudo vitis quae nascitur arvo,  
numquam se extollit, numquam mitem educat uvam,  
sed tenerum prono deflectens pondere corpus,  
iam iam contingit summum radice flagellum,  
hanc nulli agricolae, nulli coluere iuveni:  
at si forte eadem est ulmo coniuncta marito,  
multi illam agricolae, multi accoluere iuveni:  
62.49.

13. 64.105 ff.



and the rabbit's fur.<sup>14</sup> Catullus does not describe the rabbit any further than to say that it comes from Celtiberia.<sup>15</sup> He does not mention any habits of the animal as Martial does,<sup>16</sup> when he says it delights to dwell in burrows dug in the earth, or as Varro who says the name "cuniculus" was given because of the burrows (cuniculi) made underground.<sup>17</sup>

5

Doves are the patterns of conjugal affection and fidelity. "Less ardent are the transports of the snow-white dove for her mate, and yet she is said to snatch kisses with a pecking beak much more wantonly than any woman when a woman's fancy is the most wide-ranging of all things."<sup>18</sup> This idea of the affection and fidelity

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14. Cinaede Thalle, mollior cuniculi capillo vel anseris medullula, 25.1.
  15. Cuniculosae Celtiberiae, 37.18.
  16. 13.60.
  17. Cuniculi dicti ab eo (L. Aelius) quod sub terra cuniculos ipsi facere solent ubi lateant in agris.
  18. 68.125.



of the dove was shared by other Latin writers.<sup>19</sup>

• 6

The winds and waves are typical of inconstancy for "what a woman says to her eager lover may be written on the winds and running water."<sup>20</sup>

7

Forgetfulness is also symbolized by the winds when it is said that Theseus bequeaths his void vow to the blustering gale.<sup>21</sup> The mind also has clouds which cause one to forget. The mind of Theseus, when he forgot the signals which his father asked him to put on his ship on its return voyage was "beset with a cloud of darkness."<sup>22</sup>

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19. Prop. 3.15.27.  
extemplo iunctae tibi sint in amore columbae,  
masculus et totum femina coniugium.  
Plin. N.H. 10.104.  
columbae coniugi fidem non violant  
commumemque servant domum.  
Porph. on Hor. Epod. 16.32.  
Dicitur columba nulli alii concumbere  
quam cui se semel iunxit.
20. ....sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti  
Invento et rapida scribere oportet aqua, 70.3.
21. Irrita ventosae linqvens promissae procellae,  
64.59.
22. Caeca caligine consitus, 64.207.



Desertion is where the spider's web is spun.<sup>23</sup>

The poet tells Fabullus that his purse is full of cobwebs and therefore when he comes to dine he must furnish the dinner himself. Again,<sup>24</sup> Allius' deed of kindness shall never die. "May no spider, weaving her gossamer web aloft, spread her work over Allius' forgotten name." The spider web as a sign of human desertion is as old as Homer.<sup>25</sup> Propertius and Ovid also use this figure.<sup>26</sup> Winter weather and snow<sup>27</sup> are also typical of desertion. Attis left his home for the chilly lairs of wild beasts and the land of snow.

Catullus gives us one good picture of a deserted farm.

"No man his acres tills, the bullock's throat  
From toil released, assumes a softer coat;  
The creeping vine knows not the weeder's care,  
No steers with gliding plow the furrows tear;

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23. 13.8.

24. 68.49.

25. Ὀδυσσεύης δὲ πού εὐρὴν χήτελ ἐνευναίων  
καὶ κ' ἀράχνηα κείταλ ἔχουσα Od. XVI, 34.

26. putris et in vacuo texetur aranea lecto,  
(Prop IV, 6.33.)  
vel pede quod gracili deducit aranea filum, cum  
leve deserta sub trabe nectit opus, (Ov.  
Am. I, 14.7.)

27. apud nivem et ferarum gelida stabula forem,  
(63.53).



No billhook thins the shade of leafy boughs,  
And red with rust, neglected lie the ploughs.<sup>28</sup>

(Martin)

For the deserted beach the one word "alga" is used.<sup>29</sup>  
Catullus gives us a beautiful picture in only two words  
when he tells of the deserted strand.<sup>30</sup> Instead of using  
the word litus he uses the word for the seaweed which is  
carried in by the sea and strewn -- dead and decaying --  
on the strand. A part of the beauty of the picture lies  
in the deadness and uselessness and hopelessness of the  
seaweed washed ashore by the storms. Other poets<sup>31</sup> have  
mentioned this.

Ariadne, when deserted,<sup>32</sup> in her wild emotions is  
like a marble statue of a Bacchante, speechless and tear-  
less -- such a Bacchante as Scopas' -- wild, raving,  
furious, turned to stone in the height of her orgiastic  
delirium.

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28. Rura colit nemo, mollescunt colla iuvenis,  
non humilis curvis purgatur vinea rastris,  
non glebam pronò convellit vomere taurus,  
non falx attenuat frondatorum arboris umbram,  
squalida desertis rubigo infertur aratris.  
64.38.

29. 64.60.

30. Nec quisquam adparet vasua mortalis in alga,  
64.168.

31. ....cras foliis nemus  
multus et alga litus inutili, Hor.C.III, 17.9-13.  
horridior rusco, proiecta vilior alga,  
Virg. Ecl. VII, 42.  
et genus et virtus nisi cum re vilior alga est,  
Hor. Sat. II, 5.8.

32. Saxea ut effigies bacchantis prospicit, 64.61.



(9) Indifference and Lack of Feeling

An indifferent old Veronese is compared to an alder lying in a ditch hamstrung by the Ligurian axe, just as little awake to everything as if the world did not contain it.<sup>33</sup> To Catullus the breezes are not sympathetic for they are unconscious and heedless of his sorrow, "brute breezes, endowed with no faculties that can neither hear spoken words nor speak them back."<sup>34</sup>

When the poet does not want Hortalus to think his exhortations cast to the winds he also thinks of the winds as hearing nothing.<sup>35</sup> Yet they are characterized as gentle<sup>36</sup> where the indications of a swift and prosperous voyage are contrasted with the shrinking horror and dread in the hearts of passengers on board a ship.

10

Closely allied to this idea of lack of feeling

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33. ....sed velut alnus  
In fossa Liguri iacet supernata securi  
Tantundem omnia sentiens quam si nulla sit usquam,  
17.18.

34. Sed quid ego ignaris nequiquam conqueror auris  
Exoternata malo, quae nullis sensibus auctae  
Nec missas audire quent nec reddere vocas, 84.164.  
65.17.

35. ....lenibus auris, 64.84.



is that of hard-heartedness and cruelty. Ariadne,<sup>37</sup>  
deserted by Theseus, says to him, "What lioness laired  
beneath a lonely rock bore thee?" Ovid uses the tiger,  
flint, iron, adamant, and the lion to typify hard-  
heartedness.<sup>38</sup> He also uses the lioness to typify frenzy.<sup>39</sup>

11

The frenzy of Attis and his companions going to  
Ida is like that of a restive heifer that spurns the yoke,  
crazed, furious, panting.<sup>40</sup>

12

The greed of a presumptive heir awaiting the death  
of an old man is compared to that of a vulture<sup>41</sup> which  
circles above his expected prey. The inanimate world as

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37. 64.154.  
38. ....neque enim est de tigride natus  
nec rigidas silices solidum in pectore ferrum  
aut adamantam gerit nec lac bibit ille leaenae  
vincetur, (Ov. M. 9.615).  
39. Utque furit catulo lactente orbata leaena  
.....  
Sic Hecuba postquam cum luctu miscuit iram,  
(Ov. M. 13.547).  
40. Veluti invenca vitans onus indomita iugi, 63.33.  
41. 68.124.



well as the animate suggests the idea of greed to the poet; in *Thallus* the thief he sees greed worse than that of the wind.<sup>42</sup>

13

The winds are also symbolical of speed.<sup>43</sup> Latin writers often use the deer to symbolize speed,<sup>44</sup> and Catullus says that Achilles is to be so swift-footed that he will outstrip the deer.<sup>45</sup>

14

The winds and clouds symbolize the futility of human endeavor. Theseus' words are of no avail, "dispersed like vapor."<sup>46</sup> The poet speaks of Alfenus who

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42. 25.4.  
cf. also, *Plautus Trin.* I, 2.64. *Sunt alii qui te volurium vocant.*  
*Cic. Pis.*, 16.38. *Vulturius illius provinciae imperator.*
43. 58<sup>b</sup>6.
44. *Verg. A.* 4.69 -- *Ov. M.* 7.546; 11.772 -- *Tib.* 4.3.13.
45. *Flammea praevertit celeris vestigia cervae,*  
64.341.
46. ....pulsae ventorum flamine nubes  
*Aerium nivei montis liquere cacumen,* 64.239.



has forsaken him in the time of trouble as "suffering wind and airy rack to sweep into nothingness" all he had said and done.<sup>47</sup> Ariadne in her despair says Theseus' promises have been shred into nothing by the winds of the air.<sup>48</sup> Futility of effort is well described in Mentula's attempts at poetry which the poet calls his efforts to scale the Piplean heights from which the Muses with their pitch forks drive him down.<sup>49</sup>

15

Breezes also symbolize relief as well as the futility of human endeavor. Allius has been to Catullus "as a favoring breeze that comes in gentle wafts to the sailor who has been tossed by the blackest storms."<sup>49</sup>

16

A maiden is described as "livelier than a playful

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47. Idem nunc retrahis te ac tua dicta omnia factaque  
 Ventos irrita ferre ac nebulas aereas sinis, 30.10.  
 48. Quae cuncta aeri discerpunt irrita venti, 64.142.  
 49. Hic, velut in nigro iactatus turbine nautis  
 lenius aspirans aura secunda venit  
 .....  
 tale fuit nobis Allius auxilium.



little kid.<sup>50</sup> Theocritus<sup>51</sup> uses it to illustrate childish interest and affection; in Horace and Ovid<sup>52</sup> it is a figure for wantonness; in Lucretius<sup>53</sup> for weakness.

17

The dog is used as a term of reproach to denote a shameless vile person.<sup>54</sup> The unknown woman who refused to return Catullus' tablets has the open mouth and grin of a puppy. This is by no means an unusual attribute. It has been used by Homer and several Latin writers<sup>55</sup>.

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50. Et puella tenellulo delicatior aedo 17.15.  
51. ἀπαλωτέρα ἀρσός, Μόσχῳ χαμροτέρα  
βιαρωτέρα ὄμφακος ὠμᾶς Theoc. XI, 20.21.  
52. Lascivi suboles gregis. Hor.C. III, 13.7.  
.....tenero lascivior haedo, Ov.M.,  
13.791.  
53. Aut quid nam tremulis facere artubus haedei  
Consimile in cursu possint, et fortis equi vis?  
54. Ridentem catuli ore gallicani, 42.9.  
55. Homer: Helen of herself, Il. VI, 344, 356.  
of Athena, Il. VIII, 423.  
Hera of Artemis, Il. XXI, 481.  
of the handmaids of Odysseus, Od.  
XVIII, 338.  
Od. XIX, 19.91.  
Latin Writers. Plant. Most. 1.1.  
Ter. Eun. 4.7.33.  
Hor. Epod. 6.1.  
Hor. S. 2.2.56.  
Petr. 74.9.  
Suet. Vesp. 13.



Youth and Beauty. The spring is used figuratively for youth -- it is "incundus", genial, a delightful season, the time of flowers.<sup>56</sup> The adjective "florens" is applied to Bacchus, referring to his youth and to the freshness of his complexion and look.<sup>57</sup> "Floridus" describes the bride's tender youthful bloom.<sup>58</sup> Not only the bride in the Epithalamium, but also the bride of the old Veronese who provoked Catullus' wrath was a maid in her freshest bloom.<sup>59</sup> Strictly, it is the plant not the flower that is green; but in this passage flos lost some of its precision from its constant use as an equivalent of youthful bloom. Caelius and Quintus are the flower of the youth of Verona;<sup>60</sup> Juventius, the tender flower of his family;<sup>61</sup> Attis the flower of the gymnasium.<sup>62</sup> The poet has given us pictures of several individual flowers. In the Epithalamium the

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56. 68.16.  
57. 64.251.  
58. 61.57.  
59. viridissimo flore, 17.14.  
60. 100.2.  
61. 24.1.  
62. 63.64.



bride is compared to the larkspur, which ever stands forth pre-eminent in a rich master's many-colored garden of flowers.<sup>63</sup> The bride is also compared to the Lydian myrtle with its blossoming sprays.<sup>64</sup> Ariadne, too, is like the myrtle, a delicate flower growing near the Eurotas.<sup>65</sup> The blush of the bride is like the flame-colored poppy and her complexion (a sort of olive) like the pale convolvulus.<sup>66</sup>

One of the most beautiful of the flower similes is the comparison of maidenhood to a flowering plant,<sup>67</sup> "As a flower that grows in a nook, within garden walls, never discovered by flocks, never bruised by the plow, to which the breezes add sweetness and the sun strength and the rains stature, so it is with a maiden as long as she **remains** untouched, endeared to her kindred; but the flower of pure maidenhood once fallen from her soiled

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63. Talis in vario solet  
divitis domini hortulo  
stare flos hyacinthinus, 61.91 ff.

64. 61.21.

65. 64.89.

66. 61.188.

67. Ut flos in saeptis secretus nascitur hortis,  
Ignotus pecori, nullo contusus aratro,  
Quem mulcent aurae, firmat sol, educat imber;  
Multi illum pueri, multae optavere puellae;  
Idem cum tenui carptus defloruit ungui,  
Nulli illum pueri, nullae optavere puellae:  
Sic virgo, dum intacta manet, dum cara suis est;  
Cum castum amisit polluto corpore florem  
Nec pueris iucunda manet, nec cara puellis. 61.39.



form, she impassions youths and is dear to maidens no more fore .

Nature, for Catullus is the picturesque background against which love silhouettes its joy and rapture. The beauteous virtues of fair womanhood are drawn on a background of flowers and plants and all earth's lovely things, so that the poet under stress of his strong emotion colors all nature with his own feelings, and sees all things in sympathy with his own mood. Life itself is light,<sup>68</sup> and death is night.<sup>69</sup> When his brother died, Catullus says, his light was taken away.<sup>70</sup>

In one of the poems to Juventius, the poet says that he will never be satisfied unless their crop of kisses is thicker than the ears of grain in a field;<sup>71</sup> Catullus asks of Lesbia as many kisses as there are stars in the heavens, or sands in the desert;<sup>72</sup> in the Epithalamium, the chorus sings to the groom, "Let him who wills to reckon up your joys, first take the task of counting the sands and stars."<sup>73</sup> Besides this figure of

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68. 64.409, 5.5.  
69. 5.6.  
70. ~~9.9.~~  
Ei misero fratri iocundum lumen ademptum, 68.93.  
71. 48.5.  
72. 7.7.  
73. 61.199.



countless number used in dealing with love the poet says the slain in battle fall before Achilles' sword as the grain beneath the reaper's hand.<sup>74</sup>

The very beginning of the poet's love for Lesbia is expressed in a nature simile. Allius, in finding a way for Catullus to meet Lesbia, opened up a broad path through a fenced field.<sup>75</sup> The poet's love for Lesbia is so great that he has dedicated two of his most charming lyrics to her "passer".<sup>76</sup> In one he envies the sparrow the attentions it receives from its mistress, and in the other he grieves for its death. The simplicity and pathos of these poems are in contrast with Ovid's elegy on the death of Corrina's parrot,<sup>77</sup> where all birds invited to the burial of the parrot are bidden to beat their breasts with their wings and to scratch their cheeks with their sharp claws.

Love is like many things in the natural world. Its passions are like the boiling water of the mineral springs of Thermopylae.<sup>78</sup> The love of Laodamia for Protesilans was as deep as a chasm.<sup>79</sup> The lover is often tossed upon billows of unrest.<sup>80</sup> Love may be binding like the ivy;<sup>81</sup>

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74. 61.353.  
75. 68.67.  
76. 2 and 3.  
77. Ov. Am. 2.6.  
78. 68.54.  
79. ....tanto te absorbens vertice amoris  
Aestus in abruptum detulerat barathrum.68.105-6.  
80. Qualibus incensam iactastis mente puellam  
Fluctibus in flavo saepe hospite suspirantem.  
81. Mentem amore revincens  
Ut tenax edera huc et huc  
Arborem implicat errans. 61.34-5.



"tenax" meaning clinging and "huc et huc errans" describing the struggling irregularity of the ivy are very expressive. In this figure Catullus applies a common simile in an uncommon way: generally the ivy is the person who clasps; here it is Hymen that clasps the soul.

Catullus found to his own sorrow that the love which Venus plants in the breast can be thorny;<sup>82</sup> so it was to Ariadne, and if we but read between the lines we can see expressed there some of the bitter experiences of the poet's own love. Catullus' love for flowers is made sweet by the human love we see revealed in his similes; some flowers are pathetic emblems of human sorrow. When broken-hearted at the faithlessness of Lesbia, the image that seemed most fitly to symbolize his own blighted affection was that of a flower crushed beneath the weight of a plow.<sup>83</sup> His garden is not cosmopolitan; he mentions only a few flowers. His admiration is sentimental rather than scientific, yet his exactness shows clearly that his pictures are based on observation, not imagination. The fact that of his nineteen references to flowers, only seven are to specific kinds would seem to indicate that he loved flowers in a vague pleasant way, but had no intimate knowledge of individual flowers; sometimes, however, he describes minute details, as in the case of the Lydian myrtle,<sup>84</sup> the beauty of which lies much in the contrast of the white buds or

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82. Spinosas Erycina serens in pectore curas, 64.72.  
83. 11.21 ff.  
84. 61.22.



blossoms which grow all the way up the sprays with the green and glossy (enitens) leaves. Although the myrtle is not thought of as a blossoming plant, Catullus notices its tiny blossoms, inconspicuous as they are.

We have seen that plants in general exemplify human attributes and characteristics; in the treatment of trees there is this same tendency toward simile. A personal friendship for trees is lacking; the poet seldom penetrates beyond the external artistic qualities. He observes trees in a mass,<sup>85</sup> when he speaks of mountain tops as green or forests as dark;<sup>86</sup> he observes them as individuals, as the oak, beech, laurel. No mention is made of the quiet of the woods, or of its sounds, except when the trees are said to whisper; there is no minute observation as to the color of the trunk, the spread of the branches, and roots, or the color of the leaves. Fruits are used figuratively for profits<sup>87</sup> in the case of Mentual the land-poor property owner.

Two physical characteristics are represented by the snow; the limbs of the body are as white as snow,<sup>88</sup> and Gellius' lips become whiter than snow.<sup>89</sup>

Besides being used to illustrate human emotions and actions, nature also is mentioned for its service to man. When Catullus speaks of sultry Nicaea's teeming tith,<sup>86</sup> he is not thinking of the beauty of the land,

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85. 66.30.  
86. 63.3.  
87. 114.4.

88. 64.364.  
89. 80.2.  
90. 46.5.



but of its fertility, that is, its use for man. The Tagus has a reputation like that of the Poctolus; it is gold-bearing;<sup>91</sup> here there is no appreciation for the beauty of the stream. Diana fills the farmers' barns to the brim with good fruit.<sup>92</sup> The fish of the sea make no appeal to Catullus except as they are used by man. The purple-shell fish is valuable because from it are produced the costly dyes;<sup>93</sup> the mullet is used in punishing adulterers.<sup>94</sup> These instances of nature mentioned for her services to man are very few.

### Conclusion

The Romans may have been a practical, or even a prosaic people; but this cannot be said of Catullus. He was a poet of moods with a strongly developed love of nature. If we should take from the poems of Catullus all the inspiration he drew from the natural world around him, the Passer poems, The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis, with its wealth of nature references, the Attis, the Farewell to Bithynia, and the lovely Sirmio, little of

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91. aurifer 29.19.  
92. 34.20.  
93. 64.49.  
94. 15.19.



real beauty would remain. Catullus is essentially a poet of the human emotions, but without a love of nature to give color and expression to feeling, the beauty of the lyrics would have been lost to the world.



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