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CATULLUS 61: EPITHALAMIUM AND COMPARISON

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Similes are a prominent feature of epithalamia, with poets comparing the bride and groom to characters from myth or to elements of the natural world. Catullus wrote two epithalamia (61 and 62), together with two other poems with marked epithalamian characteristics (64 and 68). This paper examines the question of why similes are so important to the genre of epithalamium, concentrating on Catullus 61, which is particularly rich in its deployment of comparison. The paper argues that comparison is crucial to the themes of Roman marriage: similes locate the human institution of marriage between the poles of myth and nature, and they afford a vehicle for considering the way marriage links together the disparate terms of male and female.

It has long been recognised that Catullus is an aficionado of the simile form: as Richard Hunter puts it, 'Catullus, more perhaps than any other Roman poet, seems to have seized the opportunities for self-conscious experimentation which the simile form offered.'[1] The important study of Svennung (1945) charted the corpus, pointing out in the process interesting patterns of clustering and absence. There are only three similes in the polymetrics (2b, 7.3–8, 17.18–21), and only two in the epigrams (72.3–4 and 97.7–8);[2] developed similes clump in the longer poems, specifically in 61, 62, 64, 65 and 68.[3] It is significant that all these simile-rich poems share an intense interest in the theme of marriage as focused through the moment of the wedding.[4] Svennung already remarked

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1 Hunter (2006) 89.

2 These are similes with a main verb and then a clause containing the comparison. If we include examples which pivot on a simple *uelut* or *ut* to introduce a comparison in a phrase, the net extends to include a handful of other examples (11.22–4, 17.26, 25.12–13).

3 Svennung (1945) 47–50. For a list of similes in Catullus, see Hutchinson (1988) 316 n. 78.

4 In the case of 65, the poem introduces 66, a translation from a Callimachean treatment of marriage, the 'Lock of Berenice' – a poem which is itself, interestingly, simile-free. First discussions of the crucial importance of the 'marriage-theme' in the longer poems in Lieberg (1958), esp. 47; Schäfer (1966) 73–7; Wiseman (1969) 20–5.

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that the density of simile in the two long poems which present themselves as wedding-songs, 61 and 62, is a function of the ubiquity of simile in the epithalamium tradition going back to Sappho,[5] while the remarkably high density of simile and analogy in 68 has likewise been referred to that poem's sustained engagement with the traditions of the wedding-song, in which comparison 'is the cardinal trope ..., with mythic, or divine, models proposed for bride and groom, and with analogies from the world of nature'.[6] Yet it is worth pursuing the question further, since pointing to this feature of the epithalamium does not explain why it is that comparison is the 'cardinal trope' of this kind of poem. Why is comparison of various kinds so important a part of the wedding-song? What is at stake in the great density of similes and analogies in poems about weddings? My argument will concentrate on Catullus 61, a poem which has recently been well described as 'a sort of *summa* of the different potentialities of the epithalamic genre'.[7] Like its peculiar twin, Poem 68, Poem 61 is a poem where the power and nature of comparison are a central concern.

Comparison in the epithalamium tradition

At the outset, we should document the claim that comparison is so integral to hymenaeal. At the head of the tradition stand the memorable similes surviving from or attested for Sappho's wedding-songs.[8] These are songs for which she was particularly famous, and which were of great importance to Catullus.[9] In surviving Sapphic fragments, comparisons with the natural world are attested. The bride (or her virginity) is compared to an apple which the apple-pickers could not reach (fr. 105 (a)), or to a hyacinth trodden underfoot (fr. 105 (c)), while the groom is compared to a slender sapling (fr. 115) – in this case with significantly self-referential language, which calls attention to the generic pressure to generate comparison: 'To what may I well compare you, dear bridegroom?'[10] Further, testimonia refer to Sappho's use of comparison as a well-known trope: Himerius speaks of Sappho comparing the girl to an apple or the groom to Achilles (*Or.* 9.16 = Sappho fr. 105 (b)), while in the Byzantine period Michael of Italy speaks of Sappho comparing the groom to prize-winning horses, and the maidens who are getting married to the tenderness of roses (*Or. ad Mich. Oxit.* = Sappho fr. 117A). The motif is so expected

5 Svennung (1945) 48; note his related finding (23–4) that 61 and 62 are simile-heavy and metaphor-light; cf. Thomsen (1992) 159 n. 20.

6 Feeney (1992) 33–4. Cf. Fedeli (1983) 34, on the first simile in Catullus 61 (16–20): 'The comparison between the bride and Venus belongs to the traditional motifs of wedding-songs, in which the *eikazein* is a fixed rule.'

7 Ferrari (2010) 128.

8 In general on comparison in Sappho's epithalamia, Mangelsdorff (1913) 17–18; Fedeli (1983) 34–6, 71–3; Seaford (1986) 52–3; Contiades-Tsitsoni (1990) 57, 82, 94–9; Syndikus (1990) 8–10. On the motifs of epithalamia in general, including comparison, there is much of value still in Wheeler (1930); cf. Hague (1983) 132–4.

9 Forcefully restated by Courtney (1985) 85–6 in the case of Poem 62.

10 Any translations I give for Sapphic fragments are from the Loeb edition of Campbell (1982).

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that it can provide the occasion for irony: in the third stasimon in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* the chorus uses 'epithalamic motifs' as Iphigenia's sacrifice is planned, including 'the comparison of the bride to a natural object (animal, plant, or flower)'.[11]

Theocritus' Idyll 18, the 'Epithalamion of Helen', has a packed section of comparison and outdoing, with Helen's pre-eminence among her peers compared to the fairness of the rising Dawn or of spring following winter (26–8), or to a tall cypress adorning a field or garden, or a Thessalian horse adorning its chariot (29–31). Dunbar puts this Theocritean image of Dawn's shining light together with the moment just before the epithalamium at the end of Aristophanes' *Birds*, where the herald announces that the groom is coming forth more dazzling than any meteor or than the rays of the sun (1709–12), in order to argue that the overlap makes it likely that Theocritus and Aristophanes are both going back to similes of pre-eminent light in earlier epithalamia.[12] Such would be an attractive context for Sappho fr. 34, which describes how the beautiful moon makes 'the stars hide away their shining form' (fr. 34). Similarly in fr. 96, where Arignota is described as outshining the Lydian women 'like the rosy-fingered moon after sunset, surpassing all the stars' (7–9), it has been argued that the most likely explanation for Arignota's presence in Lydia is that she is going to be married there.[13]

In addition to similes referring to the world of nature, comparison to figures or moments from myth is also well attested in Sapphic and later epithalamia.[14] We have already noted that, according to Himerius, Sappho compared the groom to Achilles 'and put the young man on a par with the hero in his achievements' (fr. 105 (b)). Sappho also compared the groom to Ares: 'The bridegroom is coming, the equal of Ares, much larger than a large man' (fr. 111). The wedding being celebrated is regularly compared to weddings from myth: in the hymenaeal at the end of Aristophanes' *Birds*, for example, the marriage of Peisetaerus and Basileia is compared to the marriage of Zeus and Hera (1731–5).[15] The marriage of Peleus and Thetis, which generates the epithalamium at the end of Catullus 64, is a particular favourite in art as well as in literature.[16]

11 Foley (1985) 82, referring to the comparison with a heifer at 1081–4.

12 Dunbar (1995) 745–6.

13 Hutchinson (2001) 145; cf. 178–9; Lardinois (2001) 86–8. A similar case has been made for the absence of Anactoria in fr. 16, as she outdoes the Lydian chariots and armed infantry (17–20): Lardinois (2001) 88–91; Morgan (2010) 207. The outdoing comparisons of this type in Alcman's *Louvre Partheneion* are a feature that one could adduce to assist the case made by Griffiths (1972) that the poem is a dawn wedding-song (Agido, the new bride according to Griffiths, is compared to the sun, and to a horse that is pre-eminent among all the others, 40–9). Contiades-Tsitsoni (1990) 54–9 dissents, although she stresses (58) that Griffiths is correct to perceive that 'Im Parthenion gibt es Motive, die indirekt mit einer Hochzeit verbunden sind'; cf. Bowie (2011) 62 on Alcman's chorus being composed of girls who are in 'the ultimate stage before adulthood …, an adulthood that would of course be marked by the τέλος of marriage'.

14 Lieberg (1962) 19; Burnett (1983) 219–20; Hague (1983) 131, 133–5; Seaford (1987) 109, with n. 38; Lyghounis (1991) 185; Oakley and Sinos (1993) 23–4; Lardinois (2001) 89; cf. Fedeli (1983) 140, on the recommendations of the rhetoricians.

15 See Dunbar (1995) *ad* 1731 for parallels for such analogies with mythological marriages in wedding-song contexts.

16 For the marriage of Peleus and Thetis in art, see *LIMC* VII.1 s.v. Peleus 265–7; in literature, Syndikus (1990) 113.

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As we shall see, both of Catullus' epithalamia – his glyconic 61 and his hexameter 62 – are deeply engaged with this epithalamial comparison tradition, as are Poems 64 and 68 in their different ways. It is striking that the exiguous surviving fragments of the two glyconic wedding-songs from Catullus' contemporaries, Calvus and Ticida, both contain examples of comparison and outdoing. Calvus appears to have compared the bride's virginity to a flower cut by the white fingernail of a wandering nymph (*uaga candido|nympha quod secet ungui*, fr. 29 Hollis (2007)),[17] while Ticida hailed the marriage-bed as 'preeminently blessed through such love-making' (*felix lectule talibus|sole amoribus*, fr. 102 Hollis (2007)), making a comparison with all other marriage-beds, and claiming uniqueness for this one, in a manner for which we shall soon see parallels in Poem 61.[18]

In traditions outside Greece and Rome we also find that the occasion of a wedding creates pressure to generate comparison. Already in the first chapter of the Song of Solomon, which is generally taken to be a wedding-song of some kind, the speaker is not only making comparisons but referring to the fact that she is making comparisons: 'I have compared thee, o my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots' (1.9); shortly thereafter we read, 'A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me . . .; my beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi' (1.13–14). The work as a whole is a cascade of similes.[19] The marriage-love songs of New Kingdom Egypt are likewise rich in comparison.[20]

The prominence of simile and comparison in hymenaeal is thrown into yet higher relief when we reflect that in the Greek and Roman traditions developed similes are generally rare outside the genre of epic.[21] Already in archaic Greek literature there is a generic awareness that extended similes are particularly at home in epic: Hunter, for example, cites the flurry of similes in the Hesiodic *Aspis* that sets in as Heracles and Cycnus start to fight.[22] Outside epic, we find short comparisons at home in the *eikasia* game, played in symposiums, where one drinker made fun of another by unflattering comparison;[23] in bucolic, too, the simile is at home, partly as a function of its 'close relationship' with epic.[24] But in lyric and elegy, for example, the developed simile is not common; according to Brunner, the

17 Cf. Catullus 61.87–9 and 62.39–44, with Sappho fr. 105 (c).

18 It may not be an accident that Ticida uses here 'apparently the one surviving instance of vocative "sole"', the reason why it is cited by our source, Priscian *GLK* II p.189 (Hollis (2007) 162); the uniqueness of the addressee calls for a unique form.

19 My thanks to Robert Wardy for the parallel with the Song of Solomon.

20 On these works, see Dornseiff-Greifswald (1936), who begins his discussion from the comparisons in Sappho's marriage songs; cf. Hague (1983) 138–9.

21 Brunner (1966) 354–5, with references to earlier literature in 354 n. 4 (we may now add the comparison in the 'new Simonides' of Achilles' death to the fall of a tree being chopped down by woodcutters (fr. 11.1–4 West); see now von Glinski (2012) 83.

22 Hunter (2006) 87, referring to vv. 374–9, 386–92, 402–12, 421–3, 426–32, 436–40.

23 Hague (1983) 132–3; cf. Dunbar (1995) 487–8, on one of the passages mentioned by Hague, Aristophanes *Birds* 804–6.

24 Rosenmeyer (1969) 251; see in general 251–7, with interesting remarks on the relative paucity of animal and plant similes, which tend to cluster in agonistic contexts (rather like that of the *eikasia*).

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only similes in Greek lyric and elegy which 'exceed three lines' are Solon fr. 13.18–24 and Simonides fr. 12 Bergk;[25] one should add the remarkable developed simile of 'calm after storm' in Bacchylides 13.124–32, itself part of a piece of heavily epicising narrative based closely on the *Iliad*. The surviving Sapphic epithalamic similes are indeed short (three hexameter lines survive in fr. 105 (a), two in fr. 105 (c)). In Catullus 62, however, we find similes of nine and ten hexameter lines (62. 39–47, 49–58), and it may be that he knew of extended Sapphic similes now lost to us. Sappho fr. 105 (a), (b) and (c) together provide the remains of a pair of hexameter similes of the bride's virginity, as an apple and as a hyacinth; Courtney's bold but attractive supplements, drawing on Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* (3.33–4) and Himerius' *Orations* 9.16, would easily give us a Sapphic simile, or pair of similes, approaching the length of the extended similes in Poem 62.[26]

The wedding-song tradition has an agonistic relationship with the epic tradition, and similes are part of this competitive rivalry, with the epithalamium marking off distinctive subject-matter for its own similes, as if to claim that this is the genre where simile is really at home.[27] Epithalamium has no similes of the sea, such as we find in epic, nor of rocks, or fields of wheat; wild animals are absent, with even domestic animals figuring rarely;[28] absent too are such favourite topics of Homeric simile as rivers, or storms. Epithalamium mobilises instead developed comparisons with gods or heroes, whom epic treats not by analogy but in diegesis. The one epic simile which colonises epithalamium is the drooping flower: the comparison of the dying Gorgythion to a poppy (*Il.* 8.306–8) makes its presence felt throughout the wedding-song tradition as a mark of the loss of virginity.[29] This simile is unique in Homer, who normally compares dying warriors to falling trees, not to flowers;[30] it looks as if epithalamium, as part of a demarcation strategy, in order to mark off similes as being especially distinctive for *this* genre, is seizing on a memorable Homeric *hapax* and developing it for its own ends. Catullus 64 is an interesting collision between the genres, for the epithalamium at the end of that poem quickly becomes an epic prophecy, and it therefore exhibits the characteristics of both genres, with a hymenaeal comparison of outdoing (no previous love measures up to that of Peleus and Thetis, 334–6), an epic reaping simile to illustrate Achilles' future killings

25 Brunner (1966) 355 n. 6. The tally will go up if one includes analogical expressions such as the sentence that opens Pindar *O.* 7, as suggested to me by Ronnie Shi.

26 Courtney (1985) 86.

27 Cf. the dynamic generic model of Conte (1994), for whom 'the really important games between author and reader are played out … [in the] relations, boundaries, conflicts, redistributions of territory' between the major genres (118).

28 Horses, Sappho fr. 117A (test.), Theoc. 18.30; heifer, E. *IA* 1082–4 (alluding to hymenaeal; cf. S. *Tr.* 144, unnamed young animal, alluding to hymenaeal: Seaford (1986) 50–3); sheep and goats, Sappho fr. 104 (a), where 'it seems clear that the separation of the bride from her mother is expressed in a comparison or contrast with animals', Seaford (1986) 52.

29 Fedeli (1983) 35–6. The poppy simile comes in to 'narrative' lyric too: Stesichorus *SLG* S 15 col. ii 12–17 (the death of Geryon).

30 For such tree-similes in Homer, see M. W. Edwards (1991) *ad Il.* 17.53–60.

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of Trojans (353–5), and a one-line *uelut* phrase comparing Polyxena's falling after decapitation to the collapse of a sacrificial victim (*uelut ancipiti succumbens uictima ferro*, 369).

There is a lot at stake for hymenaeal in its need to establish that this particular genre is the home territory for simile and comparison. In trying to assess the powerful appeal of comparison in a hymenaeal context, a very helpful initial context is provided by Zeitlin's observation that in Greek ideology wedlock is 'a major prerequisite of civilized life, one that, along with sacrifice and agriculture, defines the boundaries between nature and culture and establishes a mediate position for men between beasts and gods'.[31] As I shall argue in the first part of my analysis of Poem 61, the composers of wedding-songs use comparisons precisely to chart where human life falls between these realms, 'between nature and culture', and 'between beasts and gods': these are exactly the parameters of hymenaeal comparison.

Yet the power of comparison in epithalamium goes further than a quasi-anthropological need to plot how this union of man and woman should be situated within human frameworks. As I shall argue in the second part of my analysis of Poem 61, the language of comparison carries a great deal of freight in the context of a wedding, for a wedding is precisely the bringing together of two disparate terms: paradigm, comparison, simile, all of them have their powers put under new scrutiny from this perspective, and all of them themselves become metaphors for the experience under description, a way of concentrating our minds on the strangeness and the power of marriage as an institution. Here it is important to remind ourselves of what an extremely anomalous institution Greco-Roman monogamous marriage was within an ancient context, where polygyny was very much the norm.[32] In an environment where virtually everyone else allowed high-status males the right to have numerous wives, the Greeks – and following them, the Romans – were under pressure to investigate the strange nature of their own practice, the joining together of one man and one woman.

The opening of Poem 61 (1–35): the power of Hymenaeus

It is time to turn to Poem 61. This poem is written, as almost all scholars now agree, to celebrate the marriage of the patrician L. Manlius Torquatus (RE 80), to a woman whose name is unfortunately controversial. The manuscripts give her name as 'Vinia' or 'Iunia'

31 Zeitlin (1996) 123–4; cf. Seaford (1987) 106 on the wedding as 'the victory of culture over nature. The wild animal is tamed; sexual union is legitimised; the field is ploughed.'

32 Scheidel (2009) 282:

> Greco-Roman monogamy was highly unusual. Greeks and Romans were not only surrounded by polygynous cultures – from the Celts, Germans, Thracians, and Macedonians to the Persians, Egyptians, and various North African peoples – but eventually succumbed to the pressure of polygynous neighbors – the Macedonians in the case of classical Greece, the Germans in the case of the Western Roman empire, and the Arabs in the case of much of the Byzantine Empire.

Elite Greek and Roman males were, of course, able to be effectively polygynous even while sticking to the letter of the monogamous law: Scheidel (2009) 284–304 on the opportunities provided by chattel slavery and concubinage.

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in line 16, and as 'Aurunculeia' in lines 82–3. Since it is not otherwise attested at this early date for a woman to have two gentilician names, it is attractive to follow Syme's suggestion that the name hidden in line 16 is 'Vibia';[33] this would be an example of an Oscan *praenomen*, so that Manlius would then be marrying someone who is not a 'Romana di Roma' (just like his father, who we know married a woman from Asculum, in Picenum).[34] Let us call her, then, Vibia Aurunculeia.

The poem begins with an invocation to Hymenaeus, the god of the wedding, who will preside over this event.[35] The first sentence of the poem runs on with no strong punctuation until the end of line 35, providing one great sweep of action, under the power of the god, until his onrush and its effect are bound up in the closural entwining power of the simile of lines 34–5, *ut tenax hedera huc et huc|arborem implicat errans*, 'as the clinging ivy wandering there and there enwraps the tree'.[36] The forceful power of the god is very great. As the poem opens, the wedding is immediately presented to us as being an act of *raptus* by the god Hymenaeus: *qui rapis teneram ad uirum|uirginem* ('you who snatch off a tender virgin to the groom', 3–4). Here the violent verb *rapis* may activate the reader to perceive the favoured etymology of *uis* lurking behind the word for 'man', *uirum*: *uir nuncupatus … quod ui agat feminam* (Isid. *Orig.* 11.2.17).[37] The idea that marriage was a forcible removal of a young girl from her mother is not very deep beneath the surface in Roman wedding ritual:[38] after all, the first Roman wedding ceremony was the Rape of the Sabine Women.[39] The comparison is explicitly drawn by Festus: *rapi simulatur uirgo ex gremio matris, aut, si ea non est, ex proxima necessitudine, cum ad uirum traditur, quod uidelicet ea res feliciter Romulo cessit* ('they pretend that the virgin is being snatched from the bosom of her mother, or, if there is no mother, from her nearest female relative, when she is being handed over to the husband, because this procedure turned out favourably for Romulus', 364L).[40]

The allusion to *raptus* comes with some shock,[41] even if the allusion is not as developed or overt as in the words of the chorus of girls in Poem 62 (20–4, tr. Godwin (1995)):

33 Reported by Neudling (1955) 185; accepted by Wiseman (1985) 112 n. 70.

34 So Wiseman (1985) 112 n. 70, citing Cic. *Sull.* 25.

35 Although it is easy to fall in to calling Hymenaeus a 'god of marriage', it is important to follow Thomsen (1992) 93 and (2002) 268 in seeing that he is the god of the wedding, not of marriage. Further, 'Hymen' is a ritual cry, not the name of the god: Thomsen (2002) 268.

36 On the punctuation of 61.1–35, I agree strongly with Thomsen (1992) 26 n. 1.

37 As suggested to me by Stephen Hinds; cf. the other etymologies collected by Maltby (1991) s.v. *vir*: *uir nuncupatus est, quod maior in eo uis est quam in femina* (Lact. *Opif.* 12.16); *'uir' … uocatur a uiribus* (Cassiod *in psalm.* 1.1, 1.109).

38 Nor in Greek: see Oakley and Sinos (1993) 32 on 'the mock abduction ritual' that could be part of Athenian weddings, and Plutarch *Lyc.* 15.3 on Spartan wives being carried off by force.

39 Fedeli (1983) 53; Syndikus (1990) 3 n. 14; Panoussi (2007) 278–80; Hersch (2010) 144–8.

40 Cf. Macr. *Sat.* 1.15.21, on the days of religious observance which are to be avoided for weddings: *feriis autem uim cuiquam fieri piaculare est: ideo tunc uitantur nuptiae, in quibus uis fieri uirgini uidetur* ('and on all such days inflicting violence on anyone is a wrong demanding expiation: hence they are avoided as wedding days, when the maiden appears to suffer violence', tr. R. A. Kaster (2011)).

41 Thomsen (1992) 92: 'the content of lines 3–4 is one of shocking brutality and lust: *the bride is kidnapped*'.

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Hespere, quis caelo fertur crudelior ignis?
qui natam possis complexu auellere matris,
complexu matris retinentem auellere natam,
et iuueni ardenti castam donare puellam.
quid faciunt hostes capta crudelius urbe?

Evening star, what fire which moves in the sky is more heartless than you? You could rip a daughter from her mother's embrace, from her mother's embrace rip the daughter as she clings on, and hand over a pure girl to a youth burning with desire. What do enemies do which is more heartless than this, when they capture a city?

Fordyce (1961) wished to draw the sting of *rapis* in 61.3, commenting *ad loc.*: 'there is no need to see reference here to the marriage by violence or capture, the *raptus* which left (or was believed to have left) traces in the Roman marriage ceremony.' Similarly, on the epithet *ferus* which is applied to the bridegroom to whom Hymenaeus hands over the bride in 61.56, taking her from the lap of her mother (*a gremio suae matris*, 58–9), Fordyce comments: 'of the *ardor uiolentus* of love, as Ellis says. There is no need to accept his further suggestion that the word contains a reference to the survivals of primitive marriage by violence.'[42] Yet the references to marriage as an act of *raptus* are consistent with the poem's understanding of ancient reflections on the fear and reluctance of the bride. Aeschylus' Danaids, for example, 'view marriage as rape and enslavement, a predatory assault upon a tender animal, a brutal invasion of an untouched meadow, and an occasion for fear and resistance';[43] even if their plight makes them an extreme case, their reactions draw on a battery of earlier epithalamial preoccupations. A wedding is a foundational ritual, with connotations of the foundational ritual of sacrifice, as Foley points out in an important discussion of the homologies between sacrifice and marriage: 'Both rites involve a voluntary death, real or symbolic, designed to ensure social survival. Both seek to gain a propitious future through violence, loss and submission to a social order.'[44] Accordingly, female lament has a role to play in Greek marriage ritual as well as Roman;[45] and the young bride's anxiety and reluctance become part of the ritual, with staged moments of delay to interrupt and stall the progress of the proceedings.[46] These staged moments of stalling especially centre on the dramatically delayed emergence of the bride from her father's house.[47] Catullus plays on these moments, with the speaker

42 See rather Fedeli (1983) 52–3.

43 Zeitlin (1996) 127; cf. 164.

44 Foley (1985) 85.

45 Lardinois (2001) 82–8, with reference to Sappho frr. 16, 94, 96; Seaford (1987) 113–14; cf. Hersch (2010) 62–3 on the anxiety and lamenting of the young Roman girl before the wedding.

46 Seaford (1986) 51–2; Oakley and Sinos (1993) 13, 17, 34.

47 Fedeli (1983) 61; Syndikus (1990) 3, 27; Ready (2004) 161–2.

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repeatedly calling on the bride to stop her delay and come out of the house (61.79–81, 90: *sed moraris, abit dies*, 'but you are delaying, the day is going by').[48]

As Thomsen has shown, it is Hymenaeus' task to quell this anxiety of the bride and to transform it into desire.[49] The negotiation of this transformation gives hymenaeal much of its energy, for there is a great deal of ambivalence in 'hymenaeal's pictures of the sexual passion and attraction of the chaste, devout, virginal bride'.[50] We shall be following Catullus' tracing of this process of awakening the bride's desire, a process already underway by the end of the (long) first sentence; for now, it is worth noting that Catullus will later remind us that the desirous groom has his own anxieties also. The same groom who is 'rough' (*fero*) in line 56, is himself described, two lines before, as *timens*, 'afraid', as he listens out for Hymenaeus *cupida … aure*, 'with desirous ear' (54–5). The man has something to be frightened of too, if we switch the focalisation for a second, even in his desire – or perhaps especially in his desire.

The idea that the virgin's experience of transition might not be all sweetness is reinforced in the second stanza, where we are told that Hymenaeus' garland contains 'the flowers of the pleasant-smelling marjoram', *floribus|suave olentis amaraci* (7). This is the only time that *amaracus*, marjoram, is mentioned as one of the flowers in a bride's garland.[51] Catullus has obviously chosen it here for its evocation of the stem *amar-*, which evokes at once *amare*, 'love', and *amarum*, 'bitter', words which so often pun on each other in Latin poetry.[52] The collocation here of *suave* and *amaraci* calls to mind the age-old oxymoron of γλυκύπικρον, 'bitter-sweet': for Latin poets it was an added bonus that when they wanted to talk of the bitter-sweetness of love, their word for 'love', unlike the Greek word for love, actually evoked the word for 'bitter'.

Vibia and myth: Venus (16–20)

It will, then, take the forceful action of the god Hymenaeus to overcome the bride's reluctance and transform it into desire, and the bringing together of the new pair will carry bitter-sweet connotations of violence. The bride displays an inertial resistance to the force exerted upon her by the groom, and by the groom's surrogate, Hymenaeus. Such is the impetus that takes us into the poem's first similes. These arrive early on, as a doublet, beginning in line 16. As if to showcase the two favoured tropes of the genre,

48 The tag *abit dies* keeps being repeated (105, 112). When, after a long interval, the phrase recurs in connection with the delay of the groom, there is a lot of humour in the fact that, unlike the bride, the groom does not delay at all: *sed abit dies:|perge, ne remorare.|non diu remoratus es:|iam uenis* ('But the day is going by: on you go, do not delay. You have not delayed long: now you are coming', 192–5).

49 Thomsen (1992) 107.

50 Feeney (1992) 42, referring to Burnett (1983) 216–19 on the preparation for marriage in Sappho's circle: 'One had to be both pure and desirable, and the balance was not easy to keep, for chastity was provocative' (216).

51 Fedeli (1983) 27.

52 See Brown (1987) *ad* Lucr. 4.1134.

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Catullus gives us a binary pair, with a comparison from myth followed immediately by a comparison from nature (16–25):

namque Vibia Manlio,		for Vibia to Manlius
qualis Idalium colens		– just as the dweller on Idalium
uenit ad Phrygium Venus		came to the Phrygian judge, Venus –
iudicem, bona cum bona		will be wed, a good
nubet alite uirgo,	20	maiden with good omen,
floridis uelut enitens		like Asian myrtle shining
myrtus Asia ramulis		with flowery little branches
quos Hamadryades deae		which the Hamadryad goddesses
ludicrum sibi roscido		nourish as their plaything
nutriunt alimento;[53]	25	with dewy nutriment;

To begin with the first simile, where the bride is compared to Venus coming to Paris for him to judge the Mt Ida beauty competition. Now, what is the point of comparison here? Venus is certainly not about to marry Paris, in the way that Vibia is about to marry Manlius. Not even beauty is the point of comparison, at least explicitly, despite what many translations say, although we may certainly be prompted to remember that Venus was judged more beautiful than the other two contestants, so that we have here an oblique case of epithalamial 'outdoing', with Vibia being outstanding. The point of comparison, strictly, is the *arrival*, *qualis … uenit … Venus*. Here Catullus plays on the well-known etymology *Venus quia uenit*.[54] Venus is a goddess of epiphany, who has her impact on arrival. This comparison's energy is still felt much later in the poem, when the bride herself 'comes' (*flammeum uideo uenire*, 115), and even, unexpectedly, eighty lines after that, when it is the groom who 'comes', with Venus again invoked (*iam uenis. bona te Venus|iuuerit*, 195–6).

At this opening moment Vibia is compared to a goddess at the instant of arrival. This conceit is very much at home in hymenaeal, so much so that Catullus can turn it inside out in Poem 68, where the beloved *is* a goddess when she arrives (*mea … candida diua*, 70), with no simile marker, and is then compared to a bride, Laodamia (73–6). The association of Vibia with a goddess is also important later in the poem, with the vivid atmosphere of excited anticipation as the people wait outside the house for Vibia to emerge (76–8, 92–6): here the flashes of mimetic colour ('Come out!', 'Do you see how the torches shake their shining hair?') evoke the techniques used by Callimachus in his *Hymns* to capture the excitement of the people anticipating the emergence of the idol outside the temple of Athena ('Come out, Athena!', *Hymn* 5. 33, 43, 55), or to conjure the

53 Reading Postgate's *alimento* for V's *umore*; see Trappes-Lomax (2007) 142.

54 Cic. N. D. 3.62, with other examples in Maltby (1991) s.v.; discussion of a wide range of poetic examples in Hinds (2006) 183–8.

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illusion of presence as Apollo's arrival is felt by his worshippers ('Don't you see? The palm tree is nodding', *Hymn* 2. 4).[55]

In epithalamium, then, the bride has something divine about her on her wedding day, which becomes a moment touching transcendence.[56] The bride's association with the divine is an example of how epithalamium uses comparison to chart where human life and its institutions lie in the uneven continuum between beasts and gods:[57] the momentary transgression elevates the individual who is being celebrated even as it reminds us of the norm which is at issue. In this light Vibia's comparison to Venus is within the parameters,[58] but we still need to ask what the implications are of the particular occasion in myth that has been chosen here.

I suppose one could find a worse omen for a marriage than the judgement of Paris, but it is not immediately obvious what it would be. Even without the memory of Horace's later words in our minds, the idea of Paris as not just a *iudex* (61.19) but a *fatalis incestusque iudex* (Hor. *C.* 3.3.19) is very hard to shake off. Ready is quite right to say that 'the specific moment celebrated in Catullus' first comparison, Venus' appearance before Paris, heralds the adulterous disruption of a legitimate marriage'.[59] And this is before Vibia's marriage has even happened. In Poem 68 Paris is also mentioned, as 'rejoicing in his abducted adulteress' (*abducta gauisus ... moecha*, 103); in the inverted world of Poem 68, where hymenaeal is corrupted by being made to illustrate the adulterous meeting of Catullus and his beloved instead of a true wedding, the adultery of Paris and Helen comes out into the open, as the failed or fantasy bride arrives at the threshold 'like' a proper bride, like Laodamia (68.70–4), or like Vibia Aurunculeia.[60] In Poem 61, the fact that Venus' approach to Paris ought actually to be ill-omened is picked up later on, in lines 61–4, where we are told that Venus can get no benefit of which good fame would approve without Hymenaeus: in other words, Venus without Hymenaeus will produce only things which good fame cannot approve. As is the case with Paris.[61]

55 Kroll (1959) *ad* 61.76–120 and 95 (by his enumeration); Fedeli (1983) 6–7, 13–14, 70; Syndikus (1990) 13–14; Heyworth (1994) 51–2, (2001) 120. Cf. Fedeli (1983) 86 for links between 61.114–15 and Call. *Hymn* 5.137–9. Plautus hits this target as well as all the others in his mini-mock-epithalamium scene in the *Casina*: *sed crepuit ostium, exitur foras* (813).

56 Burnett (1983) 237 on this concept in Sappho. In Hindu ritual even now, according to Fuller (1992) 30, 'bride and groom are divine on their wedding day ... They are usually identified as particular deities – the groom as, say, Shiva or Rama ..., and his bride as their respective consorts, Parvati or Sita.'

57 Cf. Zeitlin (1996) 123–4, quoted above.

58 Even if a comparison to Venus is unique in extant hymenaeal: Ready (2004) 154.

59 Ready (2004) 155; cf. Heyworth (2001) 120: 'an alarmingly ominous allusion in this context, for who in myth poses a greater threat to the institution of marriage than Venus and Paris on this occasion?'

60 I thank one of the *CCJ* referees for this link with Poem 68, and for the phrase 'failed or fantasy bride'.

61 In lines 82–6 there is another flash of the judgement of Paris moment, with a fleeting hint that a more beautiful woman might have turned up on the day. The connotations of adultery activated by Paris and Helen do not disappear, for references to the possibility of adultery after the marriage of Vibia and Torquatus recur (it won't happen, 97–101; it might happen, 144–5).

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This might look like a bad gaffe on Catullus' part, as if he had read in the handbook that you were meant to compare the bride to a goddess but got it awfully wrong. In fact, the apparent incongruity of this *exemplum* is by no means an isolated case in epithalamia, where the inappositeness of mythical paradigms is frequent, and is regularly a matter of scholarly discussion. Sappho, for example, compares the groom to Ares (fr. 111). No doubt there is 'best man's humour' at work here, but the fact remains that Sappho could have tried harder to find a more auspicious deity for a wedding-song: Ares was never married, and his main job in myth is to be an adulterer, with Aphrodite. Sappho also compared the groom to Achilles (fr. 105(b)): Achilles too is hardly famous as a paradigm for happy marriage. A particularly discordant note appears to be struck in Sappho fr. 44, where Sappho describes the joyous reception of Andromache at Troy before her wedding to Hector. It is not certain that this fragment is from a wedding-song;[62] and Lesky for one declared that the eventual fate of Hector and Andromache was so catastrophic and so impossible for an audience to exclude from their reception of the song that the fragment could not have been part of an actual epithalamium.[63] Burnett, on the other hand, is content for the fragment to be part of a wedding-song (although according to her it need not be), on the grounds that importing our future knowledge of what happened in the end to Hector and Andromache is 'to misunderstand the proper use of such magical and exemplary scenes'.[64]

The problem of applicability in such epithalamial mythical paradigms is part of the larger problem of applicability in any use of exemplarity or paradigm, simile or comparison. Myth resembles metaphor, according to Burkert, in that '[t]he effect of metaphor is to widen the scope of the vocabulary, to keep the sign-system finite by a kind of generalization, to provide a context by analogy, while remaining conscious of the fact that this reference by metaphor is somewhat twisted, preliminary, tentative, one-sided'.[65] When Contiades-Tsitsoni, then, remarks of the Hector and Andromache paradigm in Sappho fr. 44 that 'the mythical situation is not identical in all points with the contemporary situation', her observation may be extended to cover all analogies.[66] This failure to be 'identical in all points' is

62 Fr. 44 is the last poem in the second book in the collection that Catullus will have been using (Page (1955) 126), while Book 8 or 9 was the book of epithalamia; but it is clear that there were epithalamia scattered elsewhere in the collection, grouped by metre, so that fr. 44 cannot be excluded from the wedding-songs: Page (1955) 71–4, 125–6; Contiades-Tsitsoni (1990) 71, 90–1.

63 Lesky (1966) 142. Schrenk (1994) acknowledges the foreboding inherent in the paradigm, using it to argue that '[m]arriage is never without an element of pain, and the implication of frag. 44 is that even the most auspicious marriage is bound to have darker consequences' (150). In discussing Theocritus 18, to which we turn below, Stern (1978) 31 well remarks that 'it is not at all uncommon for ancient marriage songs to be overshadowed by dramatic irony'.

64 Burnett (1983) 220 n. 26; cf. Ferrari (2010) 128–33, situating the song at a precise moment in the ceremonial (an overly occasional reading perhaps, but showing that the ethos of the poem is not inconceivable in a marriage context).

65 Burkert (1979) 28.

66 Contiades-Tsitsoni (1990) 108: 'Mythos und Realität sind jedoch bis zu einem gewissen Punkt verknüpft; die mythische Situation ist nicht in allen Punkten identisch mit der Situation der Gegenwart.'

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necessarily true of all applications of myth, and of all similes and comparisons, and the challenge in reading any such moment is that of judging how much (or how little) applicability to allow to leak over from the paradigm into the context of comparison.[67] Any comparison whatsoever is hard to control, a point Catullus demonstrates most exuberantly in Poem 68, which becomes almost a laboratory for testing simile to destruction: what are the limits of analogy or allusion?[68]

The exempla and the comparisons of wedding-songs in particular seem to foreground the problem of how far the paradigm is to be applied, what its limits of applicability are. How much knowledge are we supposed to bring to bear? Theocritus 18, the 'Epithalamium of Helen', has become a *cause célèbre* in this connection, and Hunter's nuanced discussion of the problem of irony in this poem confronts the fundamental question: is it possible to read a poem celebrating the marriage of Helen and Menelaus unironically?[69] What kind of reading community or reading practice can ignore everything that happened once the Trojan prince turned up in Sparta not long after the wedding?

Hunter suggests various ways in which readers of Theocritus 18 can play the game of 'Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain'. We certainly can imagine a Spartan community where, as he puts it, 'the marriage of Helen and Menelaus as an imitable model of marital perfection, even of only hoped-for perfection, is fine';[70] and we can imagine a Ptolemaic appropriation of such an imagined Spartan community.[71] After all, Menelaus and Helen were recipients of cult in Sparta;[72] and Helen was regularly referred to as the archetypal bride in literature and on wedding vases, with all the focus gathering onto her glamour and desirability.[73] We could, further, adopt a Homeric reading strategy, remembering the happy restoration of the marriage of Menelaus and Helen as portrayed in *Odyssey* 4 and 5, seeing their union as an example of the fact that marriages can and do survive great shocks and traumas.[74]

Still, the wider mythical and literary knowledge of any actual conceivable reader of Theocritus 18 is always liable to be running interference with an attempt to circumscribe the ironic resonances. Hunter's interpretation foregrounds the control exerted by readers. It opens up a way of reading this poem, and others too, as exercises in a way of thinking that we often label as Hellenistic, although we can imagine it already taking place in a

67 In general on the inherent lack of fit between 'tenor' and 'vehicle' in simile and analogy, see Feeney (1992) esp. 36–7, 40 (on these terms: if we say that 'Hector is like a lion', then 'Hector' is the tenor and 'lion' is the vehicle).

68 Feeney (1992).

69 Hunter (1996) 164–66, with reference to Effe (1978) and Stern (1978); cf. Horstmann (2004) 24–5; O'Hara (2007) 29–30.

70 Hunter (1996) 165.

71 Hunter (1996) 163–4.

72 Hunter (1996) 158; cf. Allan (2008) *ad* E. *Helen* 1465–77, with reference to many hymenaeal allusions in the play involving Menelaus and Helen.

73 Lardinois (2001) 84, with reference to Oakley and Sinos (1993) 13, 18, 132 n. 16. For a highly nuanced discussion of the subtle depictions of Helen in Athenian art, and of their changes over time, see now Shapiro (2005).

74 As Sheila Murnaghan suggested to me.

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poem such as Sappho 44, with Hector and Andromache. Theocritus can be seen as fantasising, knowingly, about a Spartan world where Menelaus and Helen are still 'fine'; or he can be seen as playing the priority game that belated poets enjoy, of fantasising about a prior time in a Spartan world, before the time when Menelaus and Helen were not just fine, before the events had happened that generated the knowledge that covers the wedding of Menelaus and Helen in a shroud of irony.[75] Sappho can well be imagined to be doing the same thing, mobilising her belated lyric power against the overpowering inertia of Homer, fantasising about a prior time at Troy, a time before the catastrophe, before the events had happened that generated the knowledge that covers the wedding of Hector and Andromache in a shroud of irony.

This imagining of a time before all the complication is, perhaps, always doomed to failure, but it plays its part in the frame of mind generated by a wedding, since in a sense any wedding is presenting itself, in a variety of deliberately iron-willed optimistic reading, as a time before complication, before the complications that everyone knows will come in one form or another.[76] This is one of the main reasons why the tradition likes to concentrate on the wedding of Peleus and Thetis as the prototypical wedding. In both art and literature, the wedding of Peleus and Thetis is the most famous wedding in myth, but Peleus and Thetis are also the most famous divorcees in myth. Oliensis has some very helpful remarks on the way that Catullus Poem 64 foregrounds the poet's wilfully one-sided reading techniques in his celebration of this particular wedding. As she says, 'in the framing narrative of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the narrator ... repeatedly insist[s] on the couple's happiness, when "everyone knows" that the union was foisted upon a furiously reluctant Thetis and did not last long'.[77]

If we return now to the first simile in Poem 61, we see that the use of myth to compare the bride to Venus arriving before Paris immediately introduces the themes of adultery and divorce which epithalamia so often seem to be acknowledging and ignoring at the same time. Indeed, the very first line of Poem 61 activates a disturbing allusion to the first line of Poem 17, a poem of impotence and adultery, via 'the opening line's metrical resemblance (indeed, not just metrical but syllabic or even cryptographic) to the opening of the scurrilous 17 (excoriating an inadequate husband): *Collis o Heliconii|O Colonia, quae cupis*. It is as if the successful marriage fabricated by 61 were haunted by the specter of marital failure.'[78] Catullus is accentuating these issues in Poem 61 as part of his goal of constructing a kind of meta-hymenaeal, a hymenaeal about hymenaeal, but it seems that epithalamia in general are liable to be 'haunted by the specter of marital failure': the mythical paradigms which look as if they will enlighten the occasion are all too likely to darken it.

75 On this technique in Theocritus' *Idyll* 11, imagining a 'pre-Odyssean' time for the Cyclops, see Goldhill (1991) 284, Hunter (1996) 165 (likewise on Theocritus 11), with reference to the 'future reflexive' of Barchiesi (1993).

76 Cf. Feeney (2007) 123.

77 Oliensis (2009) 46; cf. O'Hara (2007) 47–54.

78 Oliensis (2009) 41 n. 55, referring to the initial observation of the allusion in Thomsen (1992) 74.

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Something rather similar is also happening with the conventional wish for procreation and children at the end of the poem, where we could adapt Oliensis' words: 'it is as if the successful *childbearing* fabricated by 61 were haunted by the spectre of *procreative* failure'.[79]

ludite ut lubet, et breui		Play both of you as you please, and in a short
liberos date. non decet	205	time give children. It is not fitting
tam uetus sine liberis		that such an old name should be without
nomen esse, sed indidem		children, but it should always be
semper ingenerari.	<215>	engendered from the same source.
Torquatus uolo paruulus		I want a wee Torquatus
matris e gremio suae	210	stretching out his tender hands
porrigens teneras manus		from the bosom of his mother
dulce rideat ad patrem		to smile sweetly at his father
semihiante labello.	<220>	with little lips half-parted.
sit suo similis patri		May he be similar to his father
Manlio ut facile omnibus	215	Manlius, so that he may easily be recognised
noscitetur ab insciis,		by all the people who don't know him
et pudicitiam suae		and by his face reveal
matris indicet ore.	<225>	the chastity of his mother.
talis illius a bona		Let such praise confirm his birth
matre laus genus approbet,	220	from a good mother,
qualis unica ab optima		just like the unique reputation that
matre Telemacho manet		endures for Penelopean Telemachus
fama Penelopaeo.	<230>	from his excellent mother.

The last simile of the poem, in the second to last stanza, with Penelope and Telemachus from the last stages of the epic cycle, creates a ring-composition with the first simile, with the judgement of Paris at the beginning of the epic cycle: we go from the *Cypria* at the beginning of the poem to the *Telemachy* at the end.[80] Ready argues that the last simile, celebrating Penelope's loyalty and chastity, circles back to annul the disquieting effect of the first: 'Catullus closes the poem by displacing the negative connotations of the simile with which he inaugurated it.'[81] This is an attractive reading, but the Roman historical paradigm evoked here has its own negative connotations, part of the fabled history of the Manlii Torquati.[82]

79 I follow Trappes-Lomax (2007) 153 in the solutions to the various textual problems of 215–17, apart from the fact that I agree with Thomson (1998) *ad loc.* in reading *ut* for V's *et* in 215.

80 Heyworth (2001) 120; Ready (2004) 156.

81 Ready (2004) 156.

82 Here I condense the argument of Feeney (2010).

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It is an epithalamium topos to hope that the child will resemble the father,[83] and in Roman aristocratic ideology it is important that a son should emulate and live up to his father and his ancestors.[84] If we think of the traditions of this particular family, famous for exemplary episodes in which a father was responsible for the execution or death of his son, then lines 214–15, *sit suo similis patri|Manlio*, start to look distinctly eerie, as does the picture just before that, of the little Torquatus holding out his hands to his father and laughing sweetly (209–13).[85] The hoped-for baby, *similis* to his father, stands as a vehicle to the tenor of his father's family's historical traditions. For the Manlii Torquati, being *similis* to the father is a dangerous position to be in; it could be hard to perpetuate a family tradition if the tradition dictates that you have to be prepared to kill your inheritor. The poem ends with a vivid actualisation of the awareness that any family's fond dreams of continuity into the future are subject to contingent shock, and the destiny of the Manlii provides Catullus with an economically drastic way of catching this apprehension.

One could look to a social or ritual context for epithalamium's flirting through comparison with dangerous mythic or historical parallels, since these subliminally disturbing comparisons function somewhat like the Fescennine verses of Roman marriage ritual. Overt ribaldry is held to be apotropaic; one could think of the similes and their moments of danger as likewise apotropaic, confronting the threats in order to draw their sting. Yet the insights uncovered by these mythical similes are not to be brushed away; those celebrating a marriage are reminded of the threats that await the couple after this unique day, as they have awaited so many other couples in the past.[86]

83 Feeney (2010) 216; it is such a topos that Theocritus plays on it by having his chorus say that the child of the marriage between Menelaus and Helen will be wonderful if it is similar to the *mother* (18.21): Hunter (1996) 160. There is some intriguing modern research on the question of 'paternal resemblance', with studies finding that mothers are very prone to assert paternal resemblance: 'the results of the present study are consistent with the proposition that confidence of paternity is manipulable and that other interested parties, especially the mother, endeavour to manipulate it by allegations of paternal resemblance', Daly and Wilson (1982) 78. In other words, one of the reasons that mothers stress paternal resemblance so much is to allay their partners' potential misgivings about their paternity; for modern data on 'paternal discrepancy', 'i.e., the frequency with which children are not the genetic offspring of their putative fathers', see Scheidel (2009) 284.

84 Oakley (2005) 550–1; Richardson (2012) 38–47.

85 The crucial episode, in 340 BCE, is the execution of his son for violating military discipline ordered by T. Manlius Imperiosus Torquatus (*RE* 57, cos. 347, 344, 340); T. Manlius Torquatus (*RE* 83, cos. 165) carried on the family tradition, since his severity was indirectly responsible for his son's suicide in 140 BCE: Feeney (2010) 208–13. For a subtle study of the exemplary value of the *seueritas* of the Manlii in Valerius Maximus, see Langlands (2008) 170–8, a study that appeared too late for me to use in Feeney (2010).

86 I realise that I am postulating a certain view of Roman marriage here, in assuming that adultery and divorce are regarded as threatening evils which may cast a shadow over a wedding-celebration. It would certainly be anachronistic to foist upon the Romans modern ideas of marriage as a 'whole love' experience (to use the terminology of Lyne (1980) p. ix); still, Treggiari (1991) collects much evidence for idealised views of Roman marriage as a partnership which 'was expected by ordinary Romans to give scope for both love and sexual expression' (262) – enough evidence, at any rate, to allow us to envisage a marriage ceremony which could not afford to be blasé about future dangers to the partnership from outside.

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Vibia and nature: flowers and trees

Let us return to the opening pair of similes, and consider the second simile, comparing Vibia to the Asian myrtle (21–5). The second simile has a connection to the first, in that the myrtle is sacred to Venus, being the plant with which she was crowned after winning the judgement of Paris; it is the first of a number of similes from the world of nature, especially involving plants and flowers.[87] Scholars are agreed that these similes are ultimately part of a chain going back to the similes of Sappho's epithalamia which we examined at the outset, where the bride's virginity is compared to an inaccessible apple (fr. 105 (a) and (b)), or to a hyacinth in the mountains trodden underfoot by goatherds (fr. 105 (c)).[88]

There are two even more famous similes of this kind in Poem 62. In the first of the similes in Poem 62 (39–47), Catullus activates Sapphic imagery of innocence, vulnerability and seclusion.[89] The chorus of girls sings of the protected flower of the bride's virginity, growing in a fenced-off garden, which is eventually plucked to remove her as an object of desire. In the second simile (49–58), the boys respond with an agricultural simile, taken from the georgic world of organised labour and productivity: a vine growing all by itself is useless, but if it is joined up to an elm tree, a 'husband', as the Latin metaphor has it (*marito*, 54), then it becomes productive. In a sense, this dialogue between the girls and boys looks as if it is enacting the transition moment of marriage, as the bride leaves a state of nature, with ritual absorbing her into culture, making her part of a societal institution.[90] Yet Catullus knows that the virgin is never in a state of nature to begin with, which is why the flower in the girls' simile is not, like Sappho's hyacinth (fr. 105 (c)), growing wild in the mountains, or growing on the border with the ploughland, like the flower at the edge of the meadow in Poem 11 (22–3). Both in 62.39–47 and in the corresponding simile in 61 (87–9), Catullus' hymenaeal flowers are in a garden, like the apple in the garden or orchard in Sappho fr. 105 (a) and (b) – and a garden or an orchard is not a state of nature, but a site of cultivation and culture.[91] The male fantasy of an unformed bride, delivered fresh from a natural state, is revealed to be just that – a fantasy.

The second simile in Poem 61 compares the bride to the myrtle, 'shining with its flowery twigs' – in the Latin word order, the myrtle is mimetically clustered within the two-line bracket formed by the words 'flowery twigs', *floridis … ramulis*. This simile becomes a metaphor in line 57, when the bride is described as *floridam*, 'flowery'.[92] It is in fact as

87 Well observed by Ready (2004) 156: 'the similes that appear in between [these framing similes] all argue the same point: Junia is like some vegetal entity.'

88 e.g., Syndikus (1990) 19.

89 See Fraenkel (1955) 5–6 for the links with Sappho fr. 105 (c); cf. Svennung (1945) 73–7; Syndikus (1990) 72; M. J. Edwards (1992) 181–5.

90 On this theme, see Seaford (1987) 106.

91 Fraenkel (1955) 5; Stigers (1977) 86–7; Hague (1983) 142 n. 12.

92 As observed by Ready (2004) 157.

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strange to use *florida* to describe a girl in Latin as it is to use 'flowery' to describe a girl in English. After Catullus, no one uses *floridus* to describe a person until Polyphemus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (13.790). Polyphemus has a rush of pastoral images to describe Galatea as part of his wooing, telling her that she is *floridior pratis*, 'more flowery than meadows', but the effect there is clearly comical: Polyphemus is not only excessive in his desperate parade of pastoral terminology but also bone-headedly over-literal. It remains a very strange usage in Catullus, turning the flowers of simile into an actual epithet describing the bride.

Having described the bride as *florida* in line 57, Catullus moves back from metaphor to simile in lines 87–9, when she is compared to a hyacinth flower in a rich man's garden (*talis in uario solet|diuitis domini hortulo|stare flos hyacinthinus*). Metaphor and simile then meet in the lines describing the bride waiting in the bridal chamber (184–8):[93]

iam licet uenias, marite:		Now it is allowed for you to come, husband:
uxor in thalamo tibi est,	185	Your wife is in the bridal chamber,
ore floridulo nitens		shining with her flowery face
alba parthenice uelut		like the white camomile
luteumue papauer.	<195>	or the yellow poppy.

Vibia waiting in her secluded *thalamus* is like the bride as flower in her garden: her face is now 'flowery' (*floridulo*, 186), as she herself had been 'flowery' in line 57 (*florida*), and as had been the twigs of myrtle in the second simile (*floridis*, 21); and she is shining (*nitens*) as was the myrtle in line 21 (*enitens*).[94] It is as if she is now being identified with the similes that have been arrayed to capture her; she is now more of a vehicle than a tenor, identified with a flower through metaphor.[95]

The immediately following double flower simile collapses down into two lines the transition moment from virginity to marriage. In Poem 68 especially Catullus showcases his relish for the ricocheting power of the double simile,[96] but this very compressed example in Poem 61 is also extremely powerful. Here the bride is compared to a white camomile, *alba parthenice*, or a reddish-yellow poppy, *luteumue papauer*. The pun in *parthenice* is about as obvious as a pun can be: the white 'virgin' flower stands for her virginity.[97] The connotations of the poppy are very different, associated as it is with sleep and with death;[98] and its colour, *luteum*, is the colour of the bridal veil.[99] The only thing that separates white virginity and its sequel is the simile marker itself, *uelut*: the simile marker stands as a sign of transition between the two flowers, between virginity and marriage.

93 Godwin (1995) 111: 'The phrase begins as a metaphor and then becomes a simile.'

94 Ready (2004) 157.

95 Finely observed by Ready (2004) 160.

96 68.53–4, 57–66, 119–30: Feeney (1992) 37–9, 41–2.

97 Godwin (1995) *ad* 61.186–8; Panoussi (2007) 282.

98 For the association of the poppy with Hypnos and with the chthonic realm, see Pease (1935) *ad* Verg. *Aen.* 4.486.

99 On the veil, Treggiari (1991) 163; Hersch (2010) 94–106. In general, on the dress of the bride, Olson (2008), 21–5.

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The moment of transition for the bride, as she crosses over the threshold into the groom's house, catches this function of the bride as a vehicle for metaphor and comparison (159–60):

transfer omine cum bono		With a good omen take
limen aureolos pedes,	160	your wee golden feet across the threshold,
rasilemque subi forem.		and pass within the polished door.

In Poem 68, at the exact same moment of transition, Catullus activates a double-edged verb in order to capture the fact that his beloved simultaneously 'brings herself' and 'makes herself an object of comparison' through providing the occasion for multiple quasi-hymenaeal similes: the verb he uses there is *se . . . contulit* (68.132), from *se conferre*, so that she 'brought herself' and also 'compared herself'.[100] Here Vibia is commanded to *transfer*, and *transferre* is being used to mean literally 'carry across' and also, as with Greek μεταφέρειν, 'to apply (words) in a transferred or figurative sense', 'to express by metaphor'.[101] As Vibia performs this double 'transfer', the speaker asks that the movement should happen 'with a good omen' (*omine cum bono*), as if to restrict the open-ended moment of comparison to only good interpretations.[102]

The last stage in this trajectory would be for her to be actually turned into a flower, which is approximately what will happen to Helen in Theocritus' epithalamium. Helen is first of all compared to a tall cypress adorning a field or garden (18.29), but then she will become a goddess of a tree, a shady plane on whose bark girls will carve the words 'Adore me; I am the tree of Helen' (18.48). As Stern puts it, 'Helen has herself become part of the world of nature'.[103] Likeness has become so extreme it has collapsed into identification. This is not a fate that befalls Vibia. However strenuously the ritual and its poem push the idea that she is a natural object, pressing her beyond simile into metaphor, she halts within her human trajectory. In the end, the nature comparisons confirm her human status, as do the mythic comparisons.

Parity and comparison

The two remaining plant similes in Poem 61 do not focus exclusively on the bride, but work to link the bride and the groom. This is an especially important linked pair of similes, since in linking the bride and the groom they are performing the same work as the marriage.

They perform this linking in rather unexpected ways. In the first of the two 'joint' plant similes, Hymenaeus is asked to bind the mind of the bride with love (31–5):[104]

100 As in *OLD* s.v. 14: Feeney (1992) 43.

101 *OLD* s.v. 5 b) and c).

102 As suggested to me by one of the referees.

103 Stern (1978) 36.

104 Note that the concept of 'binding' with love activates the favoured etymology of *Venus* from *uincire* (e.g., Varro *L. L.* 5.61–2): Hinds (2006).

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ac domum dominam uoca		and call home the home's mistress
coniugis cupidam noui,		desirous of her new husband,
mentem amore reuinciens,		binding round her mind with love,
ut tenax hedera huc et huc		as the clinging ivy wandering here and there
arborem implicat errans.	35	enwraps the tree.

As commentators point out, the comparison is slightly off-key.[105] The ivy 'ought' to be the lover, and the tree 'ought' to be the man; but here the ivy is love,[106] and the tree is … Actually, on a first reading it is not absolutely certain who or what corresponds to the tree. These lines convey a fleeting uncertainty about who is desirous, in such a way as to suggest a momentary identity between the passion of the bride and of the groom.

In the punctuation that is conventionally printed, as here, *cupidam* agrees with *dominam*, 'the mistress who is desirous of her new husband'. Partly on prudish grounds, Wilamowitz and others, including Kroll, who were not keen on making the bride desirous, put a comma after *uoca* in line 31 instead of after *noui* in line 32.[107] Now we have *cupidam* agreeing not with *dominam* but with *mentem* in line 33, and this result is satisfying to the prudish because this mind belongs to the husband: 'call the mistress to her home, binding the desirous mind of her new husband with love'. Now, I agree with those who argue that the conventional modern punctuation is correct, so that the bride is the desirous one;[108] but especially for an ancient reader, without any editorially inserted commas as a guide, it is a genuine interpretative issue. The reader's slight dilemma at this point highlights the hymenaeal problem of what to do with the bride's desire, as the reader assesses who in fact is doing the desiring. The reader's task of trying to decide what exactly agrees with what in this maze of intermeshing feminine accusatives is then captured in the image of binding and entwining that follows. Bride and groom truly are entwined at this point – in word order too, with the tree (*arborem*) in the middle of the encircling word order of *tenax hedera … errans* (34–5).

The second 'joint' plant simile recalls the boys' simile of the vine and elm in 62.49–58, as the poet says that the husband will not stray into adultery (97–101), but rather remain faithful (102–5):

lenta sed uelut adsitas		but as the pliant vine
uitis implicat arbores,		enwraps the trees planted beside it,
implicabitur in tuum		he will be enwrapt into your
complexum.	105	embrace.

105 So Fordyce (1961) *ad* 61.34: 'Usually it is the lover that is the clinging ivy …: here it is love.'

106 Or else Hymenaeus: Thomsen (1992) 108.

107 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1924) 2.285; Kroll (1959) *ad loc.*

108 So Fraenkel (1955) 5 n.10; Fedeli (1983) 37–8; Thomsen (1982) 101–7. Lyne (2002) 288 well compares the burning desire of the bride Laodamia as she arrives at the groom's house (68.73–4) – another moment where Poem 68 brings out into an exposed open space the usually veiled conventions of hymenaeal.

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Here the tree is the husband, playing on the same metaphor as in 62.54, by which the tree that supports the vine is called the *maritus*.[109] As the commentators point out, however, in viticulture you plant your vines alongside the trees, not the other way around, as Catullus has it in Poem 61, with the trees planted alongside the vines.[110] Catullus seems to be varying a stock image in order to focalise through the vine, as it were, through the bride, making her the dominant and active partner in the simile, in the marriage.[111]

The slight confusion of roles and of power hierarchy which we see in these two 'joint' plant similes is part of a larger area of concern in both of Catullus' epithalamia about the equality of the bride and groom. This is an issue which Roman ideology encapsulates in the concept of the *par conubium*, the 'equal marriage', a concept explicitly held up as the ideal goal of the virgin by the chorus of boys in 62.57 (*cum par conubium maturo tempore adepta est*).[112] In the ideology of marriage, the comparability and equality in a match are an important question, and in the comparison-rich environment of the epithalamium, this brand of comparability and equality is put under pressure along with all the others. Both of Catullus' epithalamia are full of moments which focus on this question of parity – sometimes suggesting parity and even identity between the partners, sometimes suggesting the opposite.[113]

We have already seen that the parity of the two partners is interestingly called into question by the blurring of normal expression in the two joint plant similes (ivy and tree, 31–5; vine and tree, 102–5), with the woman's desire gaining prominence in the ivy simile, and with the possibility of her having some dominance hinted at in the vine simile. The question of the equality of their passion is at issue as the bride is urged to cross the threshold and to meet her husband (169–71):[114]

illi non minus ac tibi		For him not less than for you
pectore ardet in intimo	170	a flame burns in his inmost
flamma, sed penitus magis.		chest, but more profoundly.

109 On this Roman metaphor, see Fraenkel (1955) 8.

110 Thomson (1998) *ad* 61.102; cf. Fedeli (1983) 72–4, showing how the distinctively Roman image of the wedded elm and vine is added to the Greek plant analogies.

111 Cf. Thomsen (1992) 112 n. 80: 'Catullus' reversal . . . does not add to the grandeur of the trees!'

112 On *par conubium*, see Kroll (1959) *ad* 62.56 (citing Ov. *Her*. 9.32, *siqua uoles apte nubere, nube pari*); Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) *ad* Hor. *Carm*. 1.33.11; Thomsen (1992) 163 and nn. 198 and 199; Tosi (1991) #1442. A Greek ideal as well: see Griffith (1983) on [A.] *Pr*.890 for the important principle of 'like to like' in marriage. Note the way the neighbours of Romulus' new city joke bitterly on this ideal, according to Livy, when they reject the new people's request for intermarriage rights: 'they were sent away with most of them asking if the Romans had opened up an asylum for women too, for this would be their only way of getting equal marriage' (*ac plerisque rogitantibus dimissi ecquod feminis quoque asylum aperuissent; id enim demum compar conubium fore*, Liv. 1.9.5). Despite this ideal, of course, some marriages *obviously* are *impar*, such as the one between Menelaus and Helen, where, as Hunter (1996) 157 puts it in discussing Theocritus 18, 'the prominence of Helen over her husband. . .completely destroys any balance between the pair'.

113 Here I must acknowledge a paper on Poem 62 by Stephen Heyworth which I heard in March 2009, in which he brought out extremely vividly the power of the language of *par* in that poem.

114 I follow Trappes-Lomax (2007) 152 in reading *ardet in* (170), and Heyworth in Harrison and Heyworth (1998) 103 for *penitus* (171) rather than *penite* (*V*).

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At first the bride is told that a flame burns deep in the groom's chest no less than in hers, so that this comparison of male and female passion appears to be trying to establish parity. But then the comparison immediately slides into difference with *sed penitus magis*, 'but more profoundly': 'not less than for you' turns out to mean not 'the same as you' but 'more than you'. Twenty lines later another kind of parity is asserted with this same language of 'no less', when the groom is told that he is 'by no degree less beautiful' than the bride: *nihilo minus|pulcer es* (190–1). We seem to keep moving between the poles of sameness and difference along an axis of 'no less', 'much more'.

There is a powerful assertion of likeness or parity in the last stanza of the poem, with the startling vocative phrase *boni coniuges* (225–6). It is unparalleled in Classical Latin literature to use *coniunx* in the plural, as Catullus does here, to refer to a specific husband and wife couple.[115] The unity of the new pair is strikingly affirmed with this bold usage, as we see that Hymenaeus has in the end done his work of as the 'joiner-together of good love', *boni| coniugator amoris* (44–5), producing 'the joined-together pair', sharing the same yoke, *boni coniuges*. *coniugator* is likewise a bold usage, a *hapax legomenon* possibly coined by Catullus.[116]

The arresting closural address to *boni coniuges* reinforces the unsettling of normal expectations which we see in the immediately preceding stanzas, already quoted above. Here Catullus characteristically miscues our expectations slightly, as the mother nudges into a position of importance that equals or perhaps supplants that of the father (214–23):

sit suo similis patri		May he be similar to his father
Manlio ut facile omnibus	215	Manlius, so that he may easily be recognised
noscitetur ab insciis,		by all the people who don't know him
et pudicitiam suae		and by his face reveal
matris indicet ore.	<225>	the chastity of his mother.
talis illius a bona		Let such praise confirm his birth
matre laus genus approbet,	220	from a good mother,
qualis unica ab optima		just like the unique reputation that
matre Telemacho manet		endures for Penelopean Telemachus
fama Penelopaeo.	<230>	from his excellent mother.

115 *TLL* s.v. *coniux* 'III coniuges, –um *m. de viro et uxore*' cite two comparable cases in inscriptions of the early Empire (344.49–51). Valerius Maximus twice uses *coniuges* to mean 'husbands and wives' in general (2.1.7; 4.6 *praef.*). The other examples given in *TLL* under this heading do not hold. They cite a number of Ciceronian lists where *coniuges* occur beside *parentes, liberi*, and so on (*Inv.* 1.103; *Part. Or.* 56, 86, 88); Cicero does not, however, mean 'husbands and wives' or 'couples', for the lists are focalised through a male perspective, and the *Loeb Classical Library* translators very justifiably translate each instance of *coniuges* in these lists as 'wives'. This is especially clear in light of the finding reported in Treggiari (1991) 6 n. 25, that Cicero (along with Horace, Curtius, and the Younger Pliny) never uses *coniunx* to describe a husband, only a wife (in Catullus, on the other hand, not counting 61.226, ten of the fourteen occurrences of *coniunx* refer to the husband). Similarly, Sen. *Herc. O.* 407, also reported in *TLL* under this heading, does not bear the meaning 'man and wife' either: J. Fitch (*LCL*) is right to translate *conciliat animos coniugum partus fere* as 'Having children generally secures husbands' affections.'

116 Thomson (1998) *ad* 61.45.

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The first of these two stanzas gives us the 'normal' conceit, that the son will resemble the father, but by the end of the second stanza the praise of the mother's chastity, which guarantees the claimed paternity, has become so strong that Telemachus has a matronymic, and the mother's claim to responsibility for the child's fame has become preponderant. Here Catullus alludes systematically to the conversation between Telemachus and the disguised Athena in the first book of the *Odyssey* (1.207–23). In that conversation Athena/Mentes remarks that Telemachus resembles Odysseus so much that he must be his son (1.207–9; cf. Catullus 61.214–16). Telemachus replies, with his usual gracelessness, 'My mother says I am his, but I don't know; no one actually knows his own birth' (1.215–16, with γόνον, 'birth', echoed in Catullus' *genus*, 61.220). When Athena/Mentes replies, s/he bases the prediction that Telemachus' birth will be famous on the fact that Penelope gave birth to him: οὐ μέν τοι γενέην γε θεοὶ νώνυμον ὀπίσσω|θῆκαν, ἐπεὶ σέ γε τοῖον ἐγείνατο Πηνελόπεια (1.222–3). The balance between father and mother shifts in Catullus exactly as it does in Homer.

The issue of what is *par* about marriage is even more systematically explored in Poem 62.[117] There we have two competing choruses, one of boys, one of girls, and the girls say in their first stanza that their opponents will sing something which it would be *par* to beat (9). The crucial phrase *par conubium* occurs in line 57, where we see a mathematical play on the concept of parity, which is arrived at by making the husband a plus and the father a minus (*cum par conubium maturo tempore adepta est,|cara uiro magis et minus est inuisa parenti*, 56–7). The bride's share in her virginity is not equal to the shares held by her mother and her father (62–5); she is not *par* to them, nor to her husband, as Heyworth argues, even while he sees the poem as allowing for a possibility of equality, or at least of harmony, in Roman marriage.[118]

Yet another kind of parity is evoked in Poem 61, when the poet addresses the waiting virgins, telling them that a *par dies* is coming to them, that is, on the future day when they too will get married (*uirgines, quibus aduenit|par dies*, 37–8). In what sense will this be a *par dies*? At one level, the words mean that the *uirgines*' marriage day, when their time comes, will be comparable – *par* – to this one. We confront again the question of comparison, from yet another angle: in what ways will their wedding day be on a par with this one? To what extent is one wedding comparable with another? We have already seen how the marshalling of paradigms and exempla in epithalamia keeps running into this problem of the extent to which one wedding is comparable with another, because the analogies regularly do not seem to fit. In addition, Theocritus and Sappho both tell us that each bride is incomparable on her wedding day: 'Bridegroom, there was never another girl like this one', says Sappho (fr. 133); 'None of us,' say the chorus for Helen's epithalamium, 'is faultless compared with Helen' (Theoc. 18.25).[119] Catullus picks up this

117 Here I do no more than reproduce, with permission, the key points on this topic from Stephen Heyworth's paper (n. 113 above).

118 Heyworth sees further play on the word *par* in 61–3, with the words *parere, parte, pars* and *pars*.

119 On this motif, see Fedeli (1983), 66; Kroll (1959) *ad* 61.86 cites Sappho fr. 133 together with a fragment of the comic poet Titinius, *accede ad sponsum audacter: uirgo nulla est talis Setiae* (*Com. Fr.* 106 R.^{3}).

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point later in the poem, when he tells Aurunculeia that there is no 'danger that a more beautiful woman has seen the bright day coming from Ocean' (*non tibi, Au-|runculeia, periculum est,|ne qua femina pulcrior|clarum ab Oceano diem|uiderit uenientem*, 82–6).[120] Perhaps they are all comparable, inasmuch as they are all incomparable, on their day. Every wedding is different, every wedding is the same.

Par, then, is a word with a lot of energy in marriage contexts. It is the root for comparison words, as Catullus reminds us with the refrain in Poem 61, addressed to the god of the wedding, Hymenaeus (64–5, 69–70, 74–5): *quis huic|deo compararier ausit?*, 'Who would dare to be compared to this god?' This is a loaded question in a hymenaeal, of course, because, as Thomsen has shown in detail, the person who is being compared to Hymenaeus is the bride: they are wearing the same clothes, of the same colour, and Hymenaeus is wearing a garland, as is the bride.[121] When Catullus praises Hymenaeus, he twice makes him the focus of a 'more' comparison (46–9): *quis deus magis anxiis|est*[122] *petendus amantibus?|quem colent homines magis|caelitum?* ('Which god is *more* to be sought after by anxious lovers? Which of the heavenly gods shall men worship *more*?'). The god of marriage himself becomes the focus of hymenaeal-type outdoing comparison as it is claimed that he outdoes all the other gods; and it is fitting that he should be praised through language of comparison, for the ritual over which he presides is a comparative vehicle.

Conclusion: comparing marriage and comparison

An aphorism from Paul Ricoeur offers a starting-point for conclusion: 'in metaphor, resemblance can be construed as the site of the clash between sameness and difference'.[123] What he says of metaphor is likewise true of simile and comparison, and from this vantage-point a conclusion about the function of comparison in epithalamium comes into view: in Ricoeur's aphorism, for 'metaphor', along with 'simile' and 'comparison', we could read 'marriage', where it is also the case that 'resemblance can be construed as the site of the clash between sameness and difference'. Now we may see

120 As a perfect subjunctive, *uiderit* follows most naturally after *non periculum est ne* to mean 'there is no danger that a more beautiful woman has seen', and Godwin (1995) *ad* 61.85–6 is probably right to say that 'the rising day is that of the wedding itself': the poem's emphasis on the progress of *this day* is insistent (11, 85, 90, 105, 112, 192). Thomson (1998) *ad loc.* takes *uiderit* as 'past tense', but more generally: '"never in history" (including myth, no doubt)'. The perfect subjunctive can stand for an original future perfect indicative in conditional sentences in Oratio Obliqua or in indirect questions (Kühner and Stegmann (1955) II.2.181), so it is perhaps possible to take the sentence to mean 'there is no danger that a more beautiful woman will have seen (i.e., will see) the day'). The parallel with Sappho fr. 133, cited above, inclines me to follow Godwin.

121 Thomsen (1992) 98–100; cf. Panoussi (2007) 283; Hersch (2010) 242–59 on the liminal figure of Hymenaeus, a male in woman's clothing who is meant to win over the bride's mind to sexual desire, developing the insights of Thomsen (1992) 98, who observes that Hymenaeus 'overcomes the bride's fear and *pudor* by arousing her desire, as her virile sexual partner even'.

122 Following the emendation of Haupt (1837) 23 for the unmetrical *amatis|est* of V.

123 Ricoeur (1977) 232.

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that Peleus and Thetis occupy their archetypal roles in a wedding context precisely because of their radical incompatibility. Catullus' treatment of the meeting of Peleus and Thetis in Poem 64 highlights the drastic incompatibilities between the pair, as if to sharpen our awareness of the profound difference which any wedding is attempting to mask over as it brings together the unlike terms of a man and a woman. The mythical pair are the extreme case of unlikeness: Thetis is divine, and Peleus is mortal; Thetis is a sea-creature, Peleus is a human, born from the earth, the *humus*, from which the word 'human' comes; and their oxymoronic marriage is punningly described as *humanos hymenaeos* (64.20).

The problem of finding a balance between the terms of the marriage – the man and the woman – is a process that gets refracted out into the problem of finding balance in comparison in general, a process that capitalises systematically on the known conundrum of simile as a trope which can never establish identity. Can comparison be a balanced process? Do the numbers add up? Here we come back once more to the issue of the applicability of simile, since there is always an imbalance between the terms in a simile as well.[124] The tenor and the vehicle can never just equate: they are terms from disparate worlds of experience which are brought together in the ideal hope that they will create a new meaning, even as we acknowledge that the terms of comparison remain distinct.

If, then, we use the epithalamium to compare marriage and comparison, we see that they both involve the yoking together of like and unlike, terms from disparate worlds of experience which are brought together in the ideal hope that they will create a new meaning; this is what is happening in any comparison, and in any marriage.[125] The comparison is a site for juxtaposing difference, for adjudicating and comparing degrees of difference, while trying to pick out similarity. Just like a marriage.

If there are comparisons in the epithalamium operating laterally, so to speak, between the bride and groom, there are also comparisons operating vertically, as we have seen, in mythical and exemplary comparison between *this* event, *this* couple, and other events and couples of a – well – comparable nature. Here our poets appear to allow the risks attendant upon any new marriage to register themselves, even as they reenact the way that the witnesses of a new marriage want to fall in with the strategy of a unilaterally optimistic reading, arresting a mythical paradigm before it cycles around into disaster (Peleus and Thetis, Hector and Andromache, Helen and Menelaus). Hence Catullus' interest in how time works in epithalamium. The progress of the day's events is registered and the onward pressure of the day's passing makes itself constantly felt, while all the time we are made aware of the long diachronic connections between this one-off event and all the others 'like' it: the passage of ritual time is not unique to any one occasion, but repeated from an ancient past, deeply implicated in the society's habits of

124 Feeney (1992) 36–7, quoting Kerrigan (1986) 23: 'similitude depends on difference; for without difference, there is identity, not similitude'.

125 It is telling that the section on the *concubinus* (61.119–36), describing the groom's life before marriage, has no element of simile or comparison.

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acculturation and naturalisation, by which an unnatural yoking has to be made to appear natural.[126]

From this perspective we return to the insights of Zeitlin about how wedlock 'defines the boundaries between nature and culture and establishes a mediate position for men between beasts and gods'.[127] Comparison tests those boundaries in epithalamium, finding a space for the human between the worlds of nature and myth, as the celebrants watch the zones of nature and culture come together to produce the monogamous union which is the foundational institution of Greek and Roman society – an anomalous one by the standards of the polygynous wider environment.[128] Comparison also provides a way of plotting this particular event into a deep cultural history, generating apprehension of the odd sameness of all these unique moments, and the odd uniqueness of all these same moments. Finally, comparison uncovers for epithalamium's audience the strange procedure by which we yoke together like and unlike, finding a certain kind of resemblance in the clash between sameness and difference.

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126 The passage of time is explicitly signalled at 61.11, 85, 90, 105, 112, 192; 62.1–2, 7. This is of course not an issue of plotting the mimetic detail of the poem onto any 'real' time of an actual ritual: Syndikus (1990) 6. My thanks to James Ker and Emily Wilson for making me think harder about the movement of time here.

127 Zeitlin (1996) 123–4.

128 Again, Scheidel (2009) 282; cf. 294: 'it is monogamy, not polygamy, that requires explanation'.

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