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A Latin Lover in Ancient Rome

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CHAPTER I

THE D/EVOLUTION
OF LOVE

Love is a god and marriage is but a word.

—*Arden of Feversham*

This ‘affective contagion,’ this induction proceeds from others, from the language of books, from friends: no love is original. (Mass culture is a machine for showing desire: here is what must interest you, it says, as if it guessed that men are incapable of finding what to desire by themselves.)

—Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, 136–37



SOME EIGHTY YEARS ago a book called *The Legacy of Rome*, edited by Cyril Bailey, was published by Oxford University Press. It contains fourteen essays whose topics range from the origins of empire to agriculture; from law, architecture, and engineering to literature, religion, and philosophy—to every aspect of the culture and civilization of ancient Rome that had, century after century, exercised a pronounced influence on Western thought and life. The topic that concerns us here, however—how the idea of love came to be altered in ancient Rome in the last years of the Republic—finds only in this volume what I take to be a strongly judgmental silence. The closest Love comes to inclusion among Rome’s legacies to later ages occurs when Hugh Last, while commenting on the status and character of women in the late Republic, remarks that the Greek ideal of womanhood (wife as “silent servant” and “far too inferior to share” her husband’s life) was disastrously imported into Rome:

When this ideal was brought to Rome, where such effacement of the women was impossible, the result was that they clung to the care-free life

of the house that was not a home sanctioned by Greek tradition, without surrendering the claim to equality with their husbands justified by Rome. So there arose a race of unlovely woman who bulk large in the history of the early empire—all unattractive, some repulsive for their attainments as intriguers, poisoners, adulteresses, and even worse—the destroyers of the Roman home, who taught every one with whom they came into contact to live for themselves alone. In the sordid picture which the age presents the only feature of encouragement is the promise of extinction which their selfishness contains. Already by the end of the Republic race-suicide had shown itself to be a threat full of danger, and social legislation aimed at an increase in the birth-rate was at once among the most important and least successful of the undertakings of Augustus. (231–32)

In emphasizing this important yet futile undertaking (the Augustan sex and marriage laws), Last appears to be in the grip of a grim foreboding mixed with a poignant nostalgia (the year is 1923, and he seems to have a powerful presentiment that Miss Tallulah Bankhead and her *Fallen Angels* will presently be invading a Britain no longer protected by Victoria's ghostly benevolence). Last's anxiety here matters less than the silence with which he attempts to mask it. Why can't he bring himself to say something about the body of poetry that accompanies the derangement of 'family values' and 'female duties' he complains of? Why ignore, why try to erase, the existence of a fashion for extravagant passion in ancient Rome, one that briefly yet memorably challenged the conventions which had shaped Rome's ideology of 'docile bodies'—that venerable cluster of moral prescriptions and proscriptions, of taboos and superstitions—and which Augustus and his advisers labored to revive and enlarge? In attempting to compensate for Last's silence here, I am hardly claiming that Rome's reformulation of erotic experience was its greatest contribution to Western civilization, but I do think it was an important one, and one whose nature is as often misunderstood as its importance is underestimated.

CAESAR ENTERS GAUL, CATULLUS
EXITS VERONA

Let me begin the story of Rome's devolution/evolution of Love *in medias res*. In 58 BCE, Julius Caesar headed off to Gaul to pacify its

natives and in the bargain train that crack army with whose help he would extinguish those of his fellow oligarchs who resented and feared his astonishing talents, the ones that would eventually and briefly make him the dictator of Rome and its empire. At exactly the same time, back home in Rome, the poets Catullus and Calvus and some of their friends were experimenting with new styles of feeling and form that, to the dismay of Cicero and *his* friends, were beginning to revolutionize the contents, the styles, and the boundaries of Latin poetry.¹ These two activities, in conjunction with the mentalities they gave rise to, disconnected though they might seem, were both symptoms of a slow and often imperceptible process of transformation in which the political systems and social patterns of the Roman people were altered for the worse or for the better, devolved or evolved, depending on who you were and what perspective you happened to have. Our chief interest here is the poets and their poems, but to understand them we need to consider the changed and changing society in which and for which they wrote their poems. And it is the career and achievements of Julius Caesar that best define the transformation of that society.

Caesar was, to put it with blunt economy, a megalomaniac with enormous talents in warfare, politics, and public relations. (For a different version of Caesar, sympathetic, plausible, and engaging, see Parenti.) Like some of his other gifted contemporaries, and like his immediate predecessors (Marius and Sulla, for instance), Caesar felt himself painfully constrained, he found his ambitions cruelly thwarted, by the decrepit, crumbling mechanisms of government that he was called upon to serve. One doubts that, when Caesar galloped off to Gaul, he knew that nine years later, on his return, he would be crossing the Rubicon with those loyal, victorious, indomitable troops in order to put his finishing touches to the destruction of what little was left of the Roman Republic and thereby make himself master of the known world. But he did know, as he headed off to Gaul and the legions there, that, merely to survive in the style of survival he was becoming accustomed to, he would need to get much more power (that is to say, brute force and money and popular support) than any of his rivals could get and keep. He probably guessed, moreover, that eventually he would have to fight his enemies to the death. He probably did not know—he had yet to meet Cleopatra—that he would end his career and life trying to become something like a

1. For recent perspectives on this generation of poets, the Neoterics, see Knox, 129–37; Johnson 2007.

king, but he did know—by that time perhaps only Cicero did not—that the Republic was on its last legs. The elaborate system of checks and balances that had worked for a pugnacious and hungry city-state, that had sustained it throughout the centuries in which its boundaries and appetites increased, all those cunning mechanisms devised piecemeal by citizen-farmer-soldiers, could no longer cope with the complex malfunctioning that, increasingly, incompatible goods and unintended consequences combined to inflict on it.

By the time Caesar went to Gaul, indeed, long before he arrived there, Roman politicians and the Roman people whom they served and made use of, no longer understood themselves or their city, could no longer figure out the disconnection between what they were doing (in and with the world, in and with their lives) and what they were supposed to be doing, what their inherited values required them to do and not to do. For brevity's sake, let me reduce the complex elements of this intractable phenomenon by recalling the old song from the last century's World War I: "How You Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm After They've Seen Patee."² Increasingly, Romans who returned from their victorious wars, generals and common soldiers alike, came back to their cities and their families, still Romans to be sure, but no longer exactly the men who had marched off to protect family and country, to enlarge the common good, and, in the process, to win for themselves some share of profit and glory. They had eaten, these returning veterans, new kinds of food, they had drunk different vintages, and they had kissed new women and new boys. They also came back with more money than they'd left with and with a sharper sense of their importance in the scheme of things, having seen for themselves how big a world it was and having begun to guess how crucial was their role in mastering it. These were Rome's soldiers, of course, but they also were or could become the soldiers of the generals who commanded them (a Marius, a Sulla, a Pompey, a Caesar). They were and they remained Romans, but they were also becoming men of that new and wider world that their weapons and their courage had helped to create; they didn't stop being Romans, but their loyalties, like their worldviews and their identities, were becoming divided. From the end of the First Punic War down to the assassination of Julius Caesar and beyond even that, the world

2. For ancient observations on this shift in manners and morals, see Livy 39.6.8; Polybius 31.25.4; Aulus Gellius 4.14. For good modern descriptions of it, see Balsdon, 32–37; Lyne 1980, 8–10.

these soldier-citizens fought and lived in grew ever more complex than the worlds their ancestors had inhabited. Increasingly, imperceptibly, often bewilderingly, as regards its manners and morals no less than its boundaries, the nature of the expanding city-state that these Romans fought for and voted in, kept being transformed. The world of course is always changing, but some changes are more massive than others, and for imperial cities, which are the natural repository for new wealth, new customs, new fads, new ideas, the changes tend to be as huge as they are frequent.³

Catullus, Calvus, and their friends were part of this pattern of change just in the years that it was gathering momentum for its final collisions and implosions. This generation of poets was not unfamiliar with the ordinary masculine repertoire of the Roman citizen-soldier (Calvus, for one, would achieve some distinction both as orator and as soldier), but their activities (that is, how they spent their days and nights) and their identities (that is, who they thought they were, how they wished to appear to be) were hardly limited to and by no means governed by that repertoire. For one thing, nearly half a century of civil wars had left the mechanics of the Roman masculine identity in some disrepair. Even if they had wanted to behave like and to be normal Roman citizen-soldiers (we are talking here, obviously, of upper-class young men with good prospects for traditional careers as officers and officials), these poets, with their good educations and independent means, were well aware that opportunities for putting their feet on the ladder had dwindled considerably, had become as few and far between as they were perilous (you did not, naturally, want to find yourselves on the fatally wrong team when a civil war began). Then, as their luck would have it, these poetic Roman males discovered for themselves new subjects of utterance and new styles of shaping and ornamenting those subjects. They became attracted to, and would soon be fascinated by, a new style of identity, that of a strange figure, a lover, a charming erotic monster, a creature whose passions dismantle what he wants and who he is and then help to fashion, force him to fashion, from himself, for himself, a new identity, a new me.⁴

The Catullan generation became infatuated with the figure of the erotic madman, with the obsessed, abject, un-Roman lover, because he,

3. For useful speculations about the origins of the new eroticism, see Clarke, 59–61, 83–85.

4. For a fascinating formulation of the nature of erotic selfhood, see Gregory.

or rather it, provided them and their audiences with ideal forms for their new contents, their new feelings. What made the crazy lover so suitable for the Catullan generation (and so repulsive to some of their immediate elders, the generation of Cicero) was his utter lack of the qualities that best define the Roman citizen-soldier: he does not want to follow in the footsteps of the paterfamilias, he does not (as Propertius would blithely and famously admit; 2.7.13–14) want to father a new crop of Roman citizen-soldiers; he does not want to serve in the military or make speeches in the forum or increase the wealth of his clan or run for public office or even support the candidacies of those who choose to run for public office; he does not want to relax from the exertions of performing his civic duties, balancing business with leisure, *negotium* with *otium*. What he wants, instead, is a life of total leisure, one he can squander on what—only—matters to him now and forever more: being in love with HER. This person, this poetic figure, this poetically rhetorical figure, is the ideal writerly mold for what this generation has to say about who they are and who they are not. They are, yes, Romans, but they are not the kind of Romans, Roman males, that their fathers and grandfathers were, they are a new (confused, ambiguous, ironic) kind of anti-Roman Roman; they belong to a losing, becoming-lost generation. This lover's pathological idleness, his utter self-absorption and glazed-eyed derelictions, perfectly accord with a new awareness of “the world we have lost” and of “the world that has lost us.” The public world has no use for us, no place for us. We will make our own world, out of outrageous poetry and outrageous erotic adventure. That is the main reason the Catullan generation found this ridiculous (and gorgeous) creature so attractive, so apt to their new needs and new purposes.

But where did the creature come from? Catullus and his friends may have costumed him appropriately (given him a suitable makeover, so to speak), but they did not invent him out of nothing. Poems are made of words (as Mallarmé told Degas after perusing the painter's sonnets); that is to say, they are made in part from other poets' poems, and there had existed, in literature, distraught and even insane lovers long before the generation of Catullus made such a lover their own and gave him what would be, for a long time, until the Arabs and the Provençals and Petrarch got hold of him, his final form—until, that is, Heine and Baudelaire gave him his modern makeover. But poems are also made out of life, or at least out of what human beings, and not just poets, think and say about the lives they lead. Life does indeed imitate art, but art

also imitates life, and it is out of this messy and inescapable cross-pollination of art and life that both poems and styles of living (and loving) are generated.

LOVE'S FOUNDING FATHERS

No need to play here the game of Chicken-Or-Egg-First. Instead I offer two converging lines of descent of the Erotic Madman in his Roman incarnation. The first from art, the second from life. Just twenty years before the birth of Catullus, there was elected to the consulship (102 BCE) an aristocrat whose achievements in warfare and politics were matched by his literary gifts and his mastery of the language, literature, and philosophy of Greece. Q. Lutatius Catulus, who had in his entourage two Greek poets of some distinction (Archias and Antipater of Sidon), seems to have taken a liking to the epigrams of Callimachus and perhaps to the great and recently published anthology of erotic epigrams, the *Garland of Meleager*. All that remains of Catulus' verse are two charming epigrams in the Alexandrian manner that our good luck caused first Cicero (*De natura deorum* 1.79) and then Gellius (19.9.10) to quote and so preserve. Here are the verses Gellius saved for us:

aufugit mi animus; credo, ut solet, ad Theotimum
 devenit. sic est; perfugium illud habet.
 quid si non interdixem ne illunc fugitivum
 mitteret ad se intro, sed magis eiceret?
 ibimus quaesitum. verum, ne ipsi teneamur,
 formido. quid ago? da, Venus, consilium.

That no-good slave, my soul, vile runaway,
 Has fled for refuge—where? To Theotimus,
 Of course. It's not as if I'd not decreed
 He must not give the creature shelter, no—
 I told him: Send the bastard back! Yet now,
 Yet now—I guess I must myself go claim it,
 My slave, my soul. But if I do, I fear
 I will myself be snared. Ah, Venus, now
 If ever give your servant aid and counsel.

And here is the poem that Cicero preserved for us:

constiteram exorientem Auroram forte salutans
 cum subito a laeva Roscius exoritur,
 pace mihi liceat, caelestes, dicere vestra,
 mortalis visus pulchrior esse deo.

I rose from bed and saw the rising sun
 With prayers of joy, but suddenly, no less
 Propitiously, my Roscius then arose.
 Permit me, Heaven, to speak my impious truth:
 More lovely glowed the mortal than the god.

It is also Gellius who happens to quote, in the same passage, three more erotic epigrams, glittering fragments of early Roman Alexandrianism, two of them, by Valerius Aedituus, the other by Porcius Licinius, neither of whom are otherwise known to us. Here is Aedituus:

dicere cum conor curam tibi, Pamphila, cordis,
 quid mi abs te quaeram, verba labris abeunt,
 per pectus manat subito <subido> mihi sudor;
 sic tacitus, subidus, dum pudeo, pereo.

When I, Pamphilia, struggle to express
 To you my heart's unease or tell you what
 I'm asking, begging, of you, my tongue thickens,
 All at once my chest with sweat is moist,
 Mute as a stone, crazed as a bitch in heat,
 Amazed, ashamed, I perish where I stand.

(The free translation of the final two verses is perhaps justified in part, given a text troubled with its dubious repetition of the rare word, *subidus*.) Here is the second poem by Valerius Aedituus:

quid faculam praefers, Phileros, qua est nil opus nobis?
 ibimus sic, lucet pectore flamma satis.
 istanc aut potis est vis saeva extinguere venti
 aut imber caelo concitus praecipitans;
 at contra hunc ignem Veneris, nisi si Venus ipsa,
 nullast quae possit vis alia opprimere.

Why bother with your torch, Phileros? See—
 We need no torch to light us on our way

Through darkness, for my heart is filled with fire.
 That light you hold aloft a gust of wind
 Could snuff or a sudden shower from heaven douse.
 But this, the stubborn blaze that Venus kindles,
 Her power alone, no power but hers, can quench.

And here is Licinius:

custodes ovium teneraeque propaginis, agnum,
 quaeritis ignem? ite huc; totus hic ignis homost.
 si digito attigero, incendam silvam simul omnem,
 omne pecus; flammast omnia quae video.

You who guard your gentle lambs, you search,
 It seems, for embers for your fires. Stop here:
 For I who stand before you, I am fire,
 And should I touch my finger to this tree
 All this forest, all your flock, would blaze—
 Everything I gaze on bursts in flame!

It won't do, of course, to make much of a mere five poems, but it's not stretching things too far to suggest that this less than a handful of amorous warblings indicates an audience (however small as yet) for subtle, elegant fashionings of erotic experience.⁵ These brief poems are not, so far as we can tell, representations of the Latin poets' own "memories of emotion"; rather, they clearly mark a moment of literary transfusion, one in which what the Roman poets borrow from Greek form and feeling they offer to their Roman readers as a new pattern for what is likely to be to them a new or at least somewhat unfamiliar way of feeling about sexual desire. Though many of his readers will not know as much Greek as Catullus or possess his knowledge of Alexandrian epigram, they will have heard Greek singers perform both Greek golden oldies (Anacreon, for instance) and new hits. Much of the erotic themes and vocabularies of Greek love songs, their clichés, their erotic signs, words, and pictures that Barthes has christened the "Image-Repertoire" will have been familiar to them. What was new—and perhaps a bit unsettling—was to hear these sentiments in Latin, in the Latin they speak on the street and in their homes, in the language that their Roman identities are rooted

5. For these poets, see Bardon; Wheeler, 69–70. The most recent, now definitive, comments are those by Courtney, 70–78.

in. Suddenly, when these poems were read (and remember, they were mostly read aloud and in groups, with friends), the Roman male, any Roman male who heard them, may well have had a fleeting glimpse of another self, not just of the self that lets itself be diverted by Greek song in an evening of recreation after a day in the forum or on the parade ground, but an unfamiliar self, a divided Roman self, one that finds itself exposed to a different erotic register; one that requires of it a delicacy and a tenderness and perhaps a sort of surrender that are alien to everything that it, that he, the Roman male, has been taught to be and worked hard to become. One can only barely imagine what one of Catullus' first auditors (think of the least cultivated among them) may have thought or felt when he heard, in the Latin language, a Roman male (like himself) express his powerful desire (not merely lustful, indeed romantic) for a youth (who may or may not be a slave), or his awed admiration of (and, apparently, his yearning to possess) the masculine beauty of an adult Roman male, the actor Roscius.⁶

The same-sex sexuality of these poems is not without consequence for our topic, but, in the long run, it matters less than the shameless abjection, the intensity and exaltation that mark the voices of these speakers. Though it adds to the frisson, forget for the moment that it is a Roman general who is here adapting Greek themes and tones in Latin verse. At point here is this: the speakers of these poems are Latin males, and they are saying things that Hellenistic Greeks, echoing archaic Greeks, say without compunction, almost by rote; namely, I abandon what control I have over myself and the world. I am powerless in the hands of Eros; I whine my prayers to the divine spirit of lust to come to my aid, I am consumed by the beauty of the creature I see before me. I have become enslaved by a mere mortal, by one who is in fact my inferior. Greeks could say those things. Romans hadn't, couldn't, shouldn't. But in these poems, a Roman male speaking in his native Latin tongue, a Roman male, master of many slaves, one of the masters of the world, confesses that he has become the slave of someone who is very possibly *his* slave. Or, blaspheming, in a moment of high erotic inspiration, he shouts to the world that the beauty of his lover (a mere actor, by the way) is more divine than the sun god himself. Three decades later, after Catullus and his friends have got busy with these borrowed forms and feelings, these sentiments will not (*pace* Cicero) sound quite so surprising in Latin. But when Catullus composed these poems, what in Greek sounded utterly ordinary, in Latin sounded, at best, bizarre.

6. For a recent discussion of him, see Gruener, 19–20.

It is true that those first audiences of Catulus, Aedituus, and Licinius had encountered plenty of foolish young lovers in the theater where they had heard swarms of amorous youngsters squeal and whimper when they found themselves thwarted in the acquisition of the objects of their lust or (perhaps) their love. These comic whippersnappers, having dared to face their comic fathers' wrathful opposition to the satisfaction of their desires, managed, with the help of a cunning slave, to outwit, more often than not, their sires and so accomplish their aims. The Roman males in Catulus' first audience had laughed for years at these antics, had been entertained by this droll fantasy (in real life Roman sons were unlikely to outwit Roman fathers, and cunning slaves were likely to find themselves being brutally whipped when they showed excessive ingenuity). As likely as not, they recognized, with rueful pleasure, something of their own young voices (and vices) in the voices (and vices) of Plautus' or Terence's young lovers as they attempted to sow their wild oats before their fathers succeeded in transforming them into chips off the old block. Not a little of the speech and sentiment of the classic Roman elegiac lover does, in fact, derive from the lovers of Roman Comedy, and when that comedic form fuses with the psychological template of Alexandrian elegy, the chief poetic materials of Catullus and Calvus and their heirs are ready for them.⁷

What matters most to us here, however, in these early erotic epigrams is the transvaluation of values that occurs in this moment when an Alexandrian refinement of the erotic imagination is first seeded in alien ground, in the Latin language and in the Roman identity that the language fosters and preserves. Catulus was a soldier-citizen with the best of them, but by the time he wrote the two poems in question he had been touched by—some would say tainted with—something quite foreign to everything he had been taught to be and to honor. Something that paid too much attention to shades of feeling, to beauty that had no sense of purpose (to ornament for ornament's own sake), to the charms of, the absolute thirst for, leisure and imagination and “sensuous enjoyment of every kind” (as Cavafy, the last of the Hellenistic poets, would put it). It's hard here not to call to mind the splendid polemics of Oscar Wilde against duty, discipline, purpose, against the entire ideology of Victorian manhood and its empire; hard not to conjure up his brave and witty elaborations of the gospel of radical hedonism or what one might call an enlightened egoism. That anti-civic, aesthetic individualism is what is what is beginning to breathe its first breath when Catulus puts down his stylus.

7. For a precise description of what was involved here, see Konstan, 141–42.

AN AMOROUS DICTATOR

An extreme and telling example of this incipient identity is one that Pliny the Younger (5.3.5) mentions in a list of distinguished statesmen who, like him, happen to have been in the habit of writing light verse (most likely amatory in nature). The name that stands next to Catulus' in this list belongs to none other than Sulla, brilliant general, ferocious and successful dictator, and indefatigable bon vivant with a special interest in exotic erotics. His Latin nickname (Felix, Sulla the Lucky) got the Greek translation, Epaphroditus, favorite of Aphrodite, Venus' darling, lucky at cards (or, Romanly speaking, at dice), and so in life; but one wonders if there isn't here another connotation that pleased him no less: lucky in love, divinely loving and lovable. If that's the case, and even if it isn't, he certainly devoted much of his spare time (and had done so before he got or took the epithet) to carnal diversions. Even after we make generous allowance for Plutarch's puritan fascination with Sulla's sexuality and the elaborate surmises that it doubtless inspired, what's left over is enough to slightly raise an eyebrow. But try as he may to paint his subject as as a priapic freak, what glimmers just beneath of the surface of Plutarch's finished portrait of Sulla is something rather different. Whether the germs of that version come from mere gossip that Plutarch romanticizes or from bits of truth that he embroiders, what matters here is that Plutarch, though he wants to reduce Sulla's erotic behavior to sheer brute carnality, keeps discovering that Sulla, beneath his lecher's skin, is a lover at his heart's core.

From early manhood onward, Sulla was a party-animal who, says Plutarch sourly,

used to spend his time with ballet dancers and comedians and shared their dissolute way of life; and when he had won supreme power he was always organizing parties of the most impudently outspoken characters from the stage with whom he used to drink and exchange witticisms, with the result that people thought that he was acting in a manner ill-suited to his age; and he not only cheapened the reputation of his high office [that of dictator] but actually neglected much business which required attention. (2; Warner, 67)

Well, actually, as Plutarch immediately admits, Sulla worked hard and regularly at being and remaining a dictator; but when he let loose he did so with gusto, and the fierce countenance he showed the world when

on the job, being Roman dictator, quickly dissolved when he relaxed with his chums, “comedians and professional dancers” (2; Warner, 67). Plutarch, who seems really annoyed when he encounters people who are bent on trying to enjoy themselves, suggests that “because of this habit of relaxation Sulla seems to have been almost pathologically prone to sexual indulgence, being quite without restraint in his passion for pleasure.” Then comes something odd:

It was a passion which he continued to gratify even in old age. He remained attached from his early youth to an actor called Metrobius [of whom we will hear more in a minute]. Another experience of his was with Nicopolis, a woman rather easily accessible, but well off. He began by falling in love with her, but as she got used to his society and to the charm he had in his youth it ended in her falling in love with him, and making him her heir when she died. (2; Warner, 67⁸)

This is an extraordinary paragraph. This ne'er-do-well lecher, vile when he was young and more vile still in his decrepitude, this bosom-buddy of actors and other gutter trash, manages both to become master of the known world (until he decides, under no compulsion to do so, to take early retirement from the job) and also, contrary to Plutarch's expectations and ours, to win and keep and reciprocate the love of two people. In his desire to resolve the complexity of his subject, the biographer finds himself having recourse to a baffling antimony: on the one hand, this strange man keeps a firm, capable hand on the rudder of government, and, on the other, he squanders his time, wealth, and energies on frivolous, nay, on decadent diversions; on the one hand, ready to bed whoever chances his way, he consorts almost automatically with the vilest of the vile; on the other, he has more than a penchant for examining sustained romantic attachment, for, in addition to Metrobius and Nicopolis, there is another love, one whose sweet and sentimental tale the biographer saves for a place near the close of his portrait of Sulla.

Toward the end of his life, on the death of his wife Metella, Sulla tries to assuage his profound grief in his usual way, “by indulging in drinking bouts and expensive parties with vulgar entertainers,” but “a few months later, there was a show of gladiators . . .” and “there happened to be sitting near Sulla a very beautiful woman . . .” who, “when she

8. Keaveney, 10–11 notices his charm and good looks but minimizes the dictator's amative virtues.

passed behind him, pulled off a piece of wool from his toga and then went on to her seat. When Sulla looked around at her in surprise, she said, ‘There’s no reason to be surprised, Dictator. I only want to have a little bit of your good luck for myself’” (35; Warner, 109). This woman was Valeria, recently divorced (the institution is increasingly fashionable at this time and after it, and it is very much a part of our story). “The daughter of Messalla and a sister of the orator, Hortensius,” this woman’s charming remark immediately stirs, we are told, the Dictator’s “amatory propensities.” He and the lady begin, instantly, to flirt. Plutarch insists that her behavior is wholly innocent, for she is “chaste and worthy”; as for the Dictator, he is only lusting for her, “carried away, like a boy might have been, by a good-looking face and a saucy manner—just what naturally excites the most disgraceful and shameless sort of passion.”

That is one way of reading this wonderful meet-cute anecdote, but other readings might be possible. In one of them, this witty, aristocrat divorcée is a little less innocent than Plutarch seems to believe her to be (I have no notion of what her motive might have been for her clever stratagem and her clever remark—maybe she desired him, maybe she was ambitious); as for Sulla, maybe he was carried away with a quite ordinary emotion (not with the bad, sad cravings of a geriatric satyr). In any case, the interesting thing here is that Sulla didn’t just whisk Valeria off and have his way with her (as the young Octavian was later to do when the mood struck him, whenever, wherever) and then toss her out into the street; instead he married her (and she bore him, after his death, a daughter, Postuma, as such daughters were commonly named). Which may just mean that Sulla ‘loved’ Valeria in the good old-fashioned way that the Roman paterfamilias may very often have ‘loved’ the woman or women he found himself, for various reasons, married to. Or maybe this last love was more ardent than the norm set for conventional conjugal affection would allow. This story, in short, may be (and may not be) a love story. Plutarch tells it because, despite himself, he is fond of love stories⁹; but he immediately untells it, because Sulla and the age that Sulla lived and loved in baffle him. Sulla is both a good Roman husband and he is also, at the same time, incarnate, the forerunner of the Mad Lover who will presently come to furnish Latin poetry with the core of its matter and manner.

Plutarch skips from the flirtation scene and what he regards as its

9. For interesting observations on Plutarch’s handling of such material, see Walcot, 177 and *passim*.

childish salacities to Valeria as wife in the dictator's home thusly: "Nevertheless, even though he had her as a wife at home, he still kept company with women who were ballet dancers or harpists and with people from the theatre. They used to lie drinking together on couches all day long. Those who at this time were most influential with him were the following: Roscius the comedian" (who, interestingly enough, turns up also in that erotic epigram by Lutatius Catulus), "Sorex the leading ballet dancer, and Metrobius, the female impersonator." Metrobius (whom we found at the beginning of the story as one of Sulla's amours and who may have been the love of his life) "was now past his prime, but Sulla throughout everything continued to insist that he was in love with him" (36; Warner, 109–10). In another man, in another story, with a switch of genders, such constancy and devotion might be unobjectionable even without the blessings of matrimony, but in Plutarch's eyes, coupled with all the evil companions and wanton convivia, they bring down upon Sulla a dreadful and merited doom. "By living in this way he aggravated a disease which had not been serious in its early stages, and for a long time he was not aware he had ulcers in the intestines. Soon, his flesh is turned into worms that devour him" (36; Warner, 110). Plutarch admits that Sulla was, within ten days of his end, still occupying himself successfully with public affairs, but this display of civic devotion does not rescue him from Plutarch's condemnation or keep Plutarch from fashioning the contradictions of Sulla's erotic life into a cautionary tale whose central purpose is to condemn the figure of the Mad Lover which he has encountered fully embodied in the figure of Sulla, and which he is soon to meet in what is its most perfect real-life, not literary, incarnation.

LOVE'S PARADIGM IN FLESH AND BLOOD

Sulla died in 79 BCE, three years after the birth of Marc Antony, who would turn out to be his most zealous successor, not so much in the forum as in the bedroom. I will here sketch Antony's claim to the title of the definitive Mad Roman Lover briefly since Jasper Griffin has already provided an excellent argument for that claim (32–42). Suffice it now to recall a couple of scandalous anecdotes whose veracity hardly matters, since what concerns us here is plausible gossip that gestures to what

Antony's contemporaries would be able and willing to accept as feasible not only in respect of Antony's amative reputation but also as consistent with fashionable erotic behavior. The stories come to us chiefly and most vividly by way of Cicero in his *Second Philippic*.¹⁰ Cicero's purpose in telling them, of course, is to finish blackening his victim's character. In the first story (76–78), having been absent from Rome for a while, Antony dashes back there on both public and private business. To delude his adversaries, he hides himself in a louche bar in a suburb, drinks there steadily (*perpotavit*) until dusk, and then, his head wrapped in a cloak, goes directly to his own house, knocks on his own door, answers his own doorman's query by saying that he has a message from Marcus (*a Marco tabellarius*), and, having been ushered into the presence of Fulvia, his wife, he gives her the letter he has been clutching. He watches her, peering out from his disguise, as she reads it and begins to weep. The epistle is written *amatorie*, in the style of a love letter, amatively, maybe even elegiacally. In the letter Antony promises to dump—forever—the actress he has been famously infatuated with and promises to restore all his affections to her, his wife. *Cum mulier fletet uberius, homo misericors ferre non potuit, caput aperuit, in collum invasit*. “And when his wife began weeping uncontrollably, that tenderhearted man, he could stand it no longer. He threw off his disguise and hurled himself into her arms.” Fulvia may have been fooled by Antony's cruel charade, but Cicero is not. *O hominem nequam!* he cries. “You worthless rotten bastard” (2.77). He also, for reasons we will presently learn, calls Antony a catamite and insists that this elegiac moment was in fact a subterfuge—Antony had sneaked into Rome not to save his marriage, not for the sake of love, but for the sake of money, to clinch a shady deal.

It would not astonish me to learn—if learn we could—that such a scene was in fact enacted. But if it was, I doubt very much that it transpired exactly as Cicero represents it. From what little we know of Fulvia from elsewhere, she was not so much given to tears. When Antony threw back his cloak to reveal his face, she laughed—if she wasn't already laughing before he revealed himself, before, even, she finished the letter. Antony may have succeeded in disguising his handwriting and even his voice, but he could not disguise his style—I don't mean of his prose, but of his jokes and—quite possibly—of his lovemaking. It was a flamboyant way of saying, “I'm sorry, take me back, I'll never see that woman again”—flamboyant and possibly even sincere. Fulvia will have been used

10. For a shrewd recent discussion, see Langlands, 305–10.

to her husband's play-acting, as she doubtless was, though they had not been married very long, to his infidelities. She herself had previously been married to Clodius (notorious brother of the notorious Clodia, alias Catullus' Lesbia) and, her second trip to the altar was with Curio, who happened to be, along with Antony, Caesar's favorite henchman, and who, moreover, figures prominently in our next anecdote. Fulvia knows how, in this moment of its history, Roman aristocratic marriage works and how it doesn't work. She doesn't much care if her husband is temporarily involved in a dalliance with a vulgar performer who achieved stardom in soft-porn sit-coms (that is what Roman mimes, Augustus' own favorite art form, essentially were). Fulvia doesn't even care if her better half is besotted permanently with Volumnia (or Cytheris, the stage name of this ravishing celebrity). We don't know why Fulvia married Antony, but it very probably was not because she had any illusions about him or about her other husbands or about any Roman male or—not to put too fine a point on it—about herself. Antony may have been sincere in his dramatic palinode, but the sincerity would have interested her less than the imagination and silly bravado that mark the escapade. Like other people, she probably found Antony amusing and charming as well as handsome and virile (but that wouldn't be why she married him). Fulvia knew, in short, how the erotic game was now being played (whereas Cicero apparently, despite his satire on it, here and in the *pro Caelio*, did not quite understand it, from the inside). But however we read the story, however we interpret it, it is elegiac in spirit, and, even if it is mere gossip that Cicero shapes and embroiders, it represents an action, a style of behavior, that mirrors or wants to be taken as mirroring 'real life.' In any case, either Antony himself or the gossip-begotten Antony that represents Antony in the story seems to have read Catullus and Calvus (life imitating art), and soon Gallus and, after him, Propertius, will be imitating him (art imitates life).

Our second anecdote is far from plausible; it belongs closest to the category of malicious slander and goes a long way toward explaining how Cicero's tongue ended up being nailed to the rostrum that had witnessed his greatest verbal triumphs. (See Appian's vivid representation, 4.20.) Long before he'd met Fulvia or Volumnia, when Antony had just turned teenager, his father went bankrupt: *Sumpsisti virilem, quam statim muliebrem togam reddidisti* (44). "You'd no sooner donned the toga of Roman manhood than you quickly changed it for the toga that we make our harlots wear." "At first you were a common streetwalker," says Cicero, "and you charged fixed fees for the services you rendered, and

you did not sell yourself cheap.” Luckily Curio (Fulvia’s second husband you recall) snatched this shameless hustler away from the squalors of the gutter, and, almost as if he’d dressed him up in the garb of an honest Roman wife (*tamquam stolam dedisset*), he married him (*in matrimonio stabili et certo collocavit*)—and the language here recalls vividly one of Latin elegy’s most favored and most subversive themes, the blessings of a permanent (illegal) union. Cicero goes on to state that no slave boy purchased to satisfy his buyer’s lust was more in power of his master than was Antony when he found himself married, so to speak, to Curio.

The tale now shifts securely into the style of Roman comedy. The unspeakable lust of the crazy Son is vigorously opposed by his shamed and desperate Dad who throws the new bride out of the house and hires a guard to keep him out. To no avail. Antony is so driven by his lust and his greed (giving his all for lust and money) that he tears a hole in the roof and shimmyes down a rope to the starved embraces of his rich groom. Antony can’t be gotten rid of, Curio won’t give him up, and Dad, of course, is now going out of his mind. In fact, this nightmare is killing him; he takes to his bed; he seems to be dying of a broken heart. But Curio, though he loves his father dearly, cannot bring himself to give up his Antony; he would endure anything, even exile, rather than let his lover go. It is all a hopeless mess. But Cicero, ever wise and patient, manages to resolve these difficulties—or rather, to cure them (*sedavi vel potius curavi*). He gets Dad to buy the whore-bride off; he gets Curio to divorce, as it were, his boyfriend, thus bowing to fatherly authority (*patrio iure et potestate*, 46) and thus refusing to waste on the wretched hoodlum the talents that belonged to his family’s glory and his nation’s needs. A wonder to behold—how Cicero here restores the now vanished morality of the good old days, how he reconciles father with son, putting the misguided youth back on the path that will take him to fatherhood and responsibility and away from Antony and rotten eros.

The anecdote is, as I said, utterly fabricated from traditional homophobic materials. What it reveals, aside from its author’s personal animosities, are the now firm outlines of the new Roman fantasmatic, the new romantic Roman script for a new erotic ideology. On its surface, the story may read like the scenario for an unwritten Plautine comedy, with Antony perversely cast as the whore with the heart of a cash register. But in its deeper structure, under the sordid tale of the hustler and his john, we glimpse something else: wildly caricatured though they are, the degree and fidelity of Antony’s passion are matched by Curio’s willingness, indeed his utter need, to defy the law of the father and risk

all for love. From the fusion of these two mock lovers there gleams the outline of the Mad Lover in his new Roman incarnation. But Antony's performance in this role is not complete, and will not be until he falls on his sword in Alexandria.

I have no need to rehearse here the glorious and messy jumble of fact and fiction that was to furnish Shakespeare with perhaps his greatest love story. Propertius for his own purposes, and the Augustan propaganda machine for its, would transform Antony from Roman statesman and soldier to a pathetic misfit who, falling into the cruel hands of an oriental dominatrix, woke from his stupor only to find himself a contemptible degenerate, ruined by wine and lust and blind ambition—and by the fatal charms and machination of Egypt's monstrous queen. Here the Mad Lover achieves his final perfection: this shadow of a man had come to desire that his old (patriarchal) identity be destroyed so a new one could be fashioned for him. He had wanted to die for love, to die into love, and when Octavian and his army arrived in Egypt, his wish was granted. In a transport of self-abnegation and abjection, Antony traded empire for kisses and Roman manhood for effete humiliation. Appian was not fooled by this version; he allows him a touch of fine romantic coloring and not a little sympathy as he introduces Antony into his last amour (5.8): “The moment he saw her, Antonius lost his head to her like a young man, although he was forty years old. He is reported to have been always prone to such behavior, and also in the case of Cleopatra to have been provoked by the sight of her a long time previously when she was still a girl and he was a young captain of cavalry.” But Appian's sketch of the faithful, tender lover did not prevail, and only Shakespeare's imagination could rescue him from his long opprobrium.

MISSING GALLUS

It was a hard act to follow, this epiphany of the Mad Lover in his splendid and miserable self-immolation, but C. Cornelius Gallus gave it his best shot. Born thirteen years after Antony and Catullus, Gallus may be regarded as belonging to, or better personifying, what I take to be the third generation of those involved in the devolution or evolution of Roman love. First generation: Lutatius Catulus and his fellow writers of Alexandrian epigram at the beginning of the century; then, roughly twenty years later, Catullus and Calvus and Antony; then Gallus, whose

heyday as Mad Lover overlaps that of Antony (who was still going strong long after first Catullus, then Calvus, had dropped by the wayside). In the person of Gallus, even more so than in the case of Calvus, two personae, the Mad Lover as Failed Roman Citizen and the Poet who imagines and represents the Mad Lover, were perfectly fused. Gallus combined the career of soldier/statesman with that of elegiac poet, he inherited Volumnia/Cytheris from Antony in real life (she became the Lycoris of his poems) and, in his collection of love poems, named the *Amores*, he seems finally to have given all but the finishing touches to what we now call the genre of Latin love elegy. Unfortunately, here as often in Roman literature, a crucial piece is missing from the puzzle. We don't have nearly enough sense of what he did with elegy and therefore of how he influenced the fourth generation of Roman elegists, that of Propertius and Tibullus or the fourth-and-a-half (call it the fifth), that of Ovid, nor do we know precisely in what way these poems centered around the woman they addressed (or praised or blamed or both).¹¹ This is, alas, a blank wall that brings our story of the devolution and evolution of Love to its close, until we turn to the poems of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid and see how they went about recording the transformation of Roman Eros in the Roman world just before the birth of Christ, how they contrived to elaborate and deepen its meanings, and, in Ovid's case, to exhaust them and witness their demise.

In order to fabricate a useful history of Roman love elegy, what we would need to know about the work of Gallus are the following: to what degree did he make his Lycoris the fixed center of his poems and of his collected volumes as a whole? How wide was the spectrum of his responses to her favor and disfavor? Did he range from bliss through anxiety to rage to grief, reveling in the full Propertian gamut? Or, as Vergil's tenth eclogue seems to hint, was the erotic subject that spoke his poems overwhelmingly tender, bemused, querulous? Did the poems show much in the way of the poet's sense of being opposed to the doctrine of docile bodies that their own erotic imperative called into question? Or were they relatively unconcerned both with the imperative and its Catullan origins and with any hint of the ideology that would eventually try to crush it? Another way of stating these questions more succinctly would be to ask, How Propertian were the poems of Gallus, how tinged were they with some of his irony and satiric bent? Was Gallus' fatal break

11. For the tantalizing and incomprehensible fragments (nine rugged verses) discovered on a bit of papyrus in Nubia in 1978, see Courtney's cogent discussion, 263-68.

with Augustus entirely political or did his erotic perspective, whatever its shade and depth, contribute to their disengagement?

These questions are worth asking, not because they are capable of finding any definitive answer, but because, in failing to contemplate them, we tend to imagine that we can write (diachronically) a history of this genre in its Roman form or that we can construct (synchronically) a plausible picture of this genre's system. In neither case can we. Missing Gallus—and missing Calvus, too!—our knowledge of what Roman love elegy was remains fragmentary, illusory, frustrated.¹²

LAST'S LADIES

Before I sum up my story to that point where extant elegies continue it, I need to say a little more about a couple of the ladies whom Hugh Last vilified. Lycoris was the name Gallus gave his love object in the *Amores*. Behind this name there was probably a real woman, Volumnia, a freedwoman who was mistress to an actual Roman, Volumnius, and who took the stage name of Cytheris. She, Volumnia-Cytheris-Lycoris, was the torch, so to speak, that Antony passed on to Gallus; as such, she is, so to speak, the bridge not only between one elegiac generation and another but also between elegy's actualities and its fictions, and she, this fact who is fiction and this fiction who is fact, reminds us that women and what they signify are central to Roman love elegy.¹³ Her name, moreover, her names, her triple name, gestures us toward the ambiguities that shape both the genre of Roman love elegy and the milieu and moment that engendered it. As Cytheris (the Cytherian, Venus), a performer suited to and famous for the sexy characters she portrayed on stage (think of Zola's incomparable Nana), she attracted the attention of Antony. He, like Sulla before him, had a passion for theater and especially for actors and singers and dancers, those radiant creatures who manipulated the machinery of illusion that, then as now, nourished the erotic imagination, furnishing it with its imperative of liberation from convention and its promise of new identity, new modes

12. For the most recent attempt to fill in these blanks, see the intricate speculations of Cairns 2006, 104–45.

13. For an excellent survey of this complex figure, both as fact and as fiction, see Traina; for a subtle, judicious discussion of the ways that reality and imagination seem to collide, or mesh, in Latin love elegy, see Hemelrijk, 175–78.

of being. Finally, as Lycoris (the wolf? the hook? lustful?, see Propertius 4.1.141), in those volumes of Gallus that suffered barbaric triage in the pious scriptoria of Christendom, she rivals Catullus' Lesbia as the founding mother of her genre, even as she adumbrates the figure that perfects elegy's erotic object, the Cynthia of Propertius.

But our interest in Cytheris does not stop there. According to the gossip that Cicero's funny sketch of Antony set in amber, the reason that Cytheris passed from the hands of Antony to those of Gallus was Fulvia's jealousy. And once we have firmly fixed in mind the polarity designed by this pair, Cytheris and Fulvia, *meretrix* and *matrona*, whore and wife, the dynamic of Latin love elegy emerges from its complexities. Fact or fiction, fiction trying to explain fact, or fact trying to explain fiction, the conflict between the hooker and the honest helpmeet over who will possess the Roman male, body, mind, and soul, captures in small the crisis in the masculine Roman identity that the poetry in question reflects, magnifies, and distorts. Like Hercules at the crossroad where Vice and Virtue branch off on their separate ways, Antony (in this pretty story) was faced with the choice between decadent hedonism and the Roman Way: Think like a Roman, not like a filthy Greek.¹⁴

And now, a few words about Fulvia. In the interests of brevity, I pass over Plutarch's charming conceit: how Fulvia, once she had managed to rescue Antony from the wicked entertainer, surrendered him, tamed and meekly obedient, to the tender mercies of Cleopatra (*Life of Antony*, 10.3).¹⁵ Unlike Cato's Porcia or Augustus' Livia (at least as she appears in her photo-ops), Fulvia does seem to have loathed spinning and house-keeping. She married, in succession, you remember, Clodius, Curio, and Antony, and she joined Antony's brother Lucius in fighting the forces, led by Octavian, that were threatening the power of her husband in Italy (he was off in the East, busily defending his interests there). I doubt Fulvia spent much time reading Catullus or Calvus, and I doubt that, had she survived long enough, she would have taken much interest, despite her accidentally close connection with Volumnia-Cytheris-Lycoris, in the poems of Gallus or the materials (legends of lovers as glamorous as they were crazed and luckless) that Parthenius had assembled to help him write them.¹⁶ But she belonged to, and very well represents, that class

14. For interesting speculations on this erotic antithesis, see Ancona's "(Un)constrained Male Desire."

15. See Baldson's sympathetic version of her, 49–50; Fischer provides an extensive, helpful discussion of Fulvia's character and significance, 7–63, 221–23.

16. For a recent and thorough discussion, see Lightfoot, 50–76.

of women who are as crucial to devolution/evolution of love as their menfolk. Because, like their menfolk, Fulvia and women like her found themselves in a process of transformation, a process that later, Augustus' sex and marriage laws were designed to call a halt to.¹⁷ These women, some of them at any rate, also wanted new identities, ones far different than those that their mothers and grandmothers had endured.

These patrician women had, for decades, lost their fathers, uncles, brothers, sons, and husbands on countless battlefields of civil war, or seen them assassinated or murdered in proscriptions. The institutions, the system of government they were part of and contributed to, by being daughters and nieces, sisters and mothers and wives, became ever more fragile as the Republic careened toward its collapse upon itself. They were as likely to be widows or divorcées as they were to be wives. Some of them, like Fulvia, were ambitious (not just for their men) and wanted to stroll the corridors of power or to help dismantle them; some, like Clodia, wanted mostly to make use of the new forms of freedom that the absence of their menfolk had occasioned. For many of these women, adultery became a sort of entertainment, and the new love poetry that celebrated that entertainment must have been delightful, engrossing, amusing; it reflected and at the same time it helped refine a new fashion in erotic imagining, in erotic identities. If the men who managed to escape from the dangers of the Republic's death rattle could experiment with trying to remake themselves by means of new fantasies, of new 'Image-repertoires,' why shouldn't there be new Roman women as well as new Roman men? Erotically speaking, in life as in art, patrician women joined high-class hookers and actresses in becoming, for a few decades, the partners of Roman aristocratic males in pleasure, in illusions, in love. These lovers and their loves, like the poetry that represented them and offered them models for their loving, were, to be sure, engaged in playing a fashionable game. However, that game was, beneath its gaudy surfaces, at least for some of its players, a serious game, one that seemed to promise escape from defunct conventions into fresh selves and fresh freedoms, into a sort of erotic utopia where the self's sense of its core-self, of its individual, unique powers and liberties and creativities, was no longer subject to being squandered by the city or crushed by the Voice of the Father.

17. For a recent reliable account of his efforts to curb sexual behavior and promote marriage, see Langlands, 20–21, 218–24, 329–33, 362.

For a few decades, along with their men, they were the children of Antony and Cytheris, of Lesbia and Catullus, the playmates of the Mad Lover, the Grecianized Dandy, the *Sonnenkind*, the Good-time Charley, the Fond and Abject Swain. They became, these women, and Fulvia among them, his slave, his paradise, his dominatrix, his doom. Though it was mostly not very real perhaps, it was a lot of fun while it lasted. But it didn't last that long. To quote from Browning's "A Toccata of Galuppi's," "What became of soul, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?" There isn't much soul left and the kissing is definitely coming to a stop in the poems that reflect those terminations, Ovid's *Amores*, his *Heroides*, his *Ars Amatoria*. Adultery, affairs, liaisons, all that continues, of course, after the Julian laws have been promulgated and after Ovid has gone into exile, but the peculiar, the essential, the unique moment in the Roman Love Story has come and gone.¹⁸

CATO VERSUS AMOR: A DIALECTIC

To recapitulate: That moment consists in the confrontation between the traditional Roman erotic ideology and a hedonistic, libertarian erotic ideology that sought to replace it; between sexual instinct viewed as procreative and sexual instinct viewed as amusement or as a form of self-fashioning, one in which the peculiar intensity that Aristotle finds in classical Greek pederasty has been transferred to the love between men and women who are not married to each other (*Nichomachean Ethics* 9.10.5, 1171a). This brief and temporary upheaval occurred along with and was abetted by other, larger upheavals that were shaking Roman society and the Roman state. When it ended, it left behind it, almost by accident, only a few rolls of poetry books, ones that would have, almost by accident, considerable impacts on other poetries, at other times, in other places, when there arose a need for refashioning the dominant erotic identity and its ideologies and when a culture of personality replaced, for a while, a culture of character.

If you could ask Cato the Elder or Cato the Younger if he loved his wife, after some quibbling over nuance and considerable debate over primary definition, he (either of them) would doubtless finally admit

18. For the aftermath of the Augustan legislation, see Langlands, 319–63.

that, yes, indeed, he loved her. She had brought him money and some influence; she gave him children; she attended to the running of his house and farm; she gave him her counsel when he asked for it; and she was, as Aristotle had suggested was the case, his partner, his partner in ways that his male relatives and male friends could never be. In this sense, she helped to confer on him some of his identity, and he was grateful for that, and that gratitude expressed itself in tenderness for her, in concern for her, in his profound desire for her happiness. But she was not, probably, at most times and at most levels, the center of his life. That center was an image (he could see it daily in the faces of the masks of dead ancestors hanging up on his walls), an image of the kind of man his father had taught him to become. Anything that altered that image, anything that disrupted its erotic components—anything, that is, that shifted the meaning of what we call love, would seem to him a scandal, a degeneration, a devolution.

When the rot began to set in (as Cato saw the matter), when young men began to like Greek food and Greek women and Greek poetry too much, bad things inevitably began happening to them and to the world they were being called on to conquer and govern. Cato (I'm talking now of one of Cato's grandsons, a contemporary of Lutatius Catulus), wouldn't have objected to Meleager, he might even have whiled away an evening listening to some pretty Greek (boy or girl) intone the poet's verses (about pretty boys or girls), but he wouldn't have liked hearing that some Romans were actually engaged in translating or imitating him. There was nothing wrong if a Greek warbled some analogue of "The Very Thought Of You and I Forget to Do the Little Ordinary Things That Everyone Ought To Do." But when a Roman says or sings the same or similar things in Latin, something starts to stink—it's like somebody trying to piss against the wind—because, for a Roman, love is certainly not all that matters. What matters, all that matters, is the Public Thing, everyone's Duty to do the big and little things that everyone ought to do. Hearing these new Latin poems that Catulus serves up, Cato has the queasy feeling that, to quote Emerson, "the coming age is the age of the first person singular."¹⁹

What distinguishes Meleager and Alexandrians from Catulus and Catullus and Gallus and Propertius is that in their world (the world of the Graeculi, the Greeklings) there can be no real conflict between

19. For an excellent decription of the 'hegemonic masculinity' that the new erotics contests, see McDonnell, 165–205.

passion and duty because those Greeks have no duties worth talking about (which is why they have ended up being colonized and why Romans have not); their identities are not shredded when they scream and whimper and sob because some loose woman or heartless boy has done them wrong. Their eros is not incompatible with their (unburden-some) civic duties, their selves are not split between what they desire and what (little) their society demands of them. But with Romans the case is altered. About the time that Catulus penned his adoration of Theotimus and Roscius, Rome enters a new phase, its focus and its values begin to shift. For various reasons, because some of the brightest and the best young men (and women) had too much money and too much spare time, because their fathers were busy killing each other, because of who and where they were, these Romans (accidentally) caught a glimpse of Love of an un-Roman kind, of a love that transfigures, that takes away the identity you were born with and into only to confer on you the possibility of a new and better and richer one, the priceless maddening gift from the woman or boy you love. For these Romans, men and women alike, this transformation will have seemed all but miraculous, a radical, inexplicable shift from the confinement and monotony of prescribed erotic identities to (through and beyond eroticism) possibilities of variety, beauty, imagination, liberty. Looked at from that unexpected and astonishing perspective, in its unfolding over decades and generations, this transformation most likely looked not like the ruin of love but rather as its evolution, one that promised to end always in hours of bliss and perhaps in years of happiness.