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## REASSESSING ROMAN PEDERASTY IN RELATION TO ROMAN SLAVERY: THE PORTRAYAL OF *PUERI DELICATI* IN THE LOVE-POETRY OF CATULLUS, TIBULLUS, AND HORACE

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### Abstract

This paper responds positively to the call issued within the past decade by other classicists that it is incumbent on scholars who study Greco-Roman civilization to foster and contribute to informed debate of an urgent and sensitive social problem of our times, i.e. the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. A close reading of the homoerotic poetry of Catullus, Tibullus, and Horace reveals that slave status should not be invariably assumed for the *pueri delicati* celebrated here. Catullus' Juventius is most certainly a freeborn Roman youth, while Tibullus' Marathus and the *pueri delicati* in the *Odes* of Horace, Ligurinus in particular, are best understood and appreciated when they are at least imagined, within the fantasy-world created in this poetry, as freeborn Roman boys rather than slaves.

**Key Words:** Roman Pederasty, Roman Slavery, Roman Homoerotic Poetry, Catullus, Tibullus, Horace, *Puer Delicatus* (pl. *pueri delicati*).

### I. Introduction

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a serious worldwide social problem which has come into the foreground of public attention over the past few decades and is now addressed much more vigorously by the law and the legal authorities than a generation ago, including on the international level, as with the so-called sex tourism. However, the tackling of a deeply sensitive social problem where sexual acts and proclivities are concerned poses the danger of emotively generated overreaction and non-factually based judgments and generalizations. This situation inevitably leads in many cases to grievous miscarriages of justice, not only through the agency of the law but also through the role played by the media and public opinion. Fundamental issues, such as that of informed consent fixed by law in a rationally and pragmatically defensible age of consent, deserve vigorous, knowledgeable public debate.

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Classics who study the ancient societies and cultures which are referred to collectively as Greco-Roman civilization are in an especially favorable position to lend both historical and moral-ethical perspective to such debate, students as they are of a civilization which practiced and institutionalized slavery on a wide scale and at the same time—the Greeks in particular—not only accepted but even esteemed the pederastic form of male homosexuality, i.e. the erotic attraction of adult males to adolescent boys and the sexual encounters and relationships ensuing from this. (“Pederasty” is, of course the English form of the Greek *paiderastia*, literally, “love of boys”, of which the German *Knabenliebe* is a literal translation.)

Three scholars, Martha Nussbaum, R. Vattuone, and Christian Laes, are worthy of notice for the important contribution they have made to this debate. Nussbaum, the distinguished American philosopher and ethicist, draws generously on her profound knowledge of the influential philosophers and philosophical schools of the Greco-Roman world. In her 2002 article, “Eros and Ethical Norms: Philosophers Respond to a Cultural Dilemma,” she does not believe the Greek and Roman thinkers really solved the difficult psychological and moral issues arising from pederasty and indeed from all forms of intergenerational erotic attraction and sexual contact. Even so, Nussbaum rightly stresses that we moderns should value the ancient philosophers for posing “the right questions about generosity and restraint, about kindness and education, about the proper balance between passion and other concerns of life” (Nussbaum, 87).

The Italian classicist R. Vattuone published in 2004 a major study of Greek pederasty in which he argued that the Greek example shows that erotic attraction and sexual relationships of this type are not necessarily injurious to the younger person. The greatly intensified reprobation over the past few decades of what is now almost invariably called pedophilia—the word underlining the supposed child-status of the younger person—is blamed by him on a concatenation of social transformations in the Western world since the 1960’s and 1970’s, especially radical feminism and its call for a strict egalitarianism between the sexes and in sexual relationships, and the steep decline in the educative and mentoring role played by the older generation towards the young. This demonization is vividly reflected in the title of his work, in English translation, “The Monster and the Sage: Studies in Greek Erotic Life”—“the Monster” being today’s reviled pedophile as contrasted with the esteemed pederast-philosopher of Greek antiquity. Vattuone’s book, hailed as “courageous” by a solitary American reviewer (Montiglio, 2007), was met by an almost universal silence, almost certainly because of its provocative diagnosis of the child-abuse problem.

Most recently, the torch has been picked up by the Belgian classicist Christian Laes. In his 2010 article based on a 2009 conference paper, he draws on his extensive published scholarship on Roman childhood and youth to argue for a nuanced, historically contextualized understanding of Greco-Roman pederasty. Although fully recognizing Vattuone’s theses as “courageous” and finding it “deplorable that this book has not been included in the present-day discussion” (Laes, 51), he stays clear of that classicist’s “aversion towards feminism and emancipation” (Laes, 51), and, unlike Vattuone, engages with the complicating factor of slavery in the ancient world. The title of the concluding part of his paper, “Conclusion: Classics as an Emancipatory and Liberating Subject” (52), encapsulates his call for classicists to share their knowledge and insights by stepping into the forum of public discussion beyond academe. My paper is offered in response to this call. It offers a large number close readings of classical Latin poetic texts, as is fitting since I am primarily a literary scholar, but it is directed mainly to non-classicists who are interested in exploring the ambiguous relationship between the harsh realities of Roman slavery and the idealization, indeed idolization of adolescent boys—many, if not most, of whom may very well have been slaves—in Roman love-poetry of the first century BCE.

In classical-literary studies, the heuristic reward that ensues when one stays clear of facile overgeneralizations regarding Greek or Roman pederasty, such as the supposed feminization of the beautiful beloved boy, the *pais kalos* or *puer delicatus*, is well demonstrated by the late James Butrica in section D, "Philetos, the Manly Delicatus," of the lengthy article on Roman homosexuality he contributed to a 2006 collection of papers, *Same-Sex Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity and in the Classical Tradition of the West*, where he underlines the fact that *Silvae* 2.6, a poem of consolation Statius (late 1<sup>st</sup> century CE) composed for his friend Ursus on the death of the latter's fourteen-year old beloved male slave Philetos, eschews any conventional eulogizing of the boy's physical, quasi-feminine beauty (Butrica, 231-236); instead, as Butrica puts it, Statius' "emphasis on [Philetos'] physical maturity and outright manliness is unique" (Butrica, 233).<sup>1</sup> In my article on the so-called Marathus-elegies in the same collection (Verstraete 2006), I likewise stress the original and even unconventional elements in Tibullus' portrayal of his *puer delicatus*.

This article will briefly review my earlier discussion of the homoerotic poetry of Tibullus in which I also looked back to the Juventius-poems of Catullus, the great lyric and elegiac poet of the Late Roman Republic who preceded Tibullus by almost two generations. Then my focus will be on Horace, Tibullus' older contemporary (who, however, outlived him). In my close readings of Horace's homoerotic poetry, especially the Ligurinus-Odes (*Odes* 4.1 and 4.10), the idealizing portrayal of the beloved youth will receive conspicuous foregrounding, suggesting that Roman relationships built on pederasty (and indeed on male homosexuality in general) were not necessarily as physically exploitative and psychologically degrading as they are usually thought to. My conclusion will, therefore, take issue with the sharp position taken by Amy Richlin in *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. I should finally emphasize that this paper is not intended as a venture into Roman social history in the strict methodological sense of the word, but as a study of poetic representation which may have some bearing on our understanding of how some Roman men of the elite classes negotiated, both in practice and in thought and feeling, the pederastic side of their sexuality.

## II. Main Discussion

In my 1980 paper on male Roman homosexuality as viewed in the context of the Roman institution of slavery, I opined that "[u]nlike the classical Greeks, the Romans never utilized the homoerotic bond between men to build and sustain their culture but treated homosexuality solely as a source of sexual gratification. The taint of slavery or service continued to cling to homosexuality, and the idealizing homoeroticism of a Catullus, Vergil, or Hadrian were eccentric exceptions" (Verstraete 1980, 235). I later recognized that this was a generalization that required considerable qualification, as can be seen in my 1987 conference paper (Verstraete 1987) and even more in my aforementioned 2006 article. Not only in Catullus' desire for Juventius, but also in Tibullus' feelings for Marathus and Horace's for Ligurinus, it would be mistaken to see and to reprobate the lust of a Roman master visited upon a hapless slave boy.

It is appropriate at this point that I should lay out very briefly my own hermeneutics in the reading of classical Roman love-poetry. Over the past several decades, there has been an increasing tendency among classical scholars and literary critics to accentuate the fictive nature of the ostensibly personal relationships portrayed therein, especially in the elegies of Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid, and thus to discount any autobiographical value in this respect the poetry might otherwise possess: the beloved *puella* or *puer* is little more than an imaginative construction, perhaps even a total invention, on the part of the author. Whether one engages with the feminist but non-biographical approach of Sharon James in her 2003 study, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion: Gender and Reading in Roman Love Elegy*, or with the anti-ideological aesthetic formalism of Charles Martindale in his 2005 book, *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste*, and then compares their points of interpretative departure with the autobiographical assumptions underlying P.J.

Enk's 1946 edition of and commentary on book I of the elegies of Propertius (Propertius, ed. Enk), one can see the remarkable hermeneutical shift in this regard which has taken place in classical scholarship Still, while fully recognizing the omnipresence of poetic invention and artifice, I equally hold to a more traditional position stated simply and succinctly by R. Lyne in his 1980 book: "[a] personal poet suggests things about himself" (Lyne, viii). Thus, in any genre of poetry that the Greeks and Romans themselves recognized as personal and subjective, even the *eros / amor* expressed for an imaginary object of desire—combined with all the ups and downs recounted of an imaginary relationship—tells us something significant about the poet and how his or her poetry stands out against the background of social mores and expectations.

### Catullus' Juventius

Catullus' addressing of Juventius as *flosculus...Iuventiorum*, "flower of the Juventii," in 24.1 makes it certain that Juventius was an *ingenuus* (a free-born Roman male), the Juventii being an old and distinguished Roman family, either from Tusculum or Verona (Catullus, ed. Thomson, 264). No such firm certainty attaches to any other of the *pueri delicati* addressed or talked about in Roman love-poetry, although, as I will argue, the possibility of *ingenuus* status cannot be excluded from Tibullus' Marathus and Horace's Ligurinus. The question thus inevitably arises whether Catullus was taking a risk with the law in confessing his erotic desire for a Roman boy of high civic and social status: this question is predicated on the plausible assumption, shared by Craig Williams in his recent major book on Roman homosexuality that the much-debated *Lex Scantinia*, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., contained a clause prohibiting sexual acts between *ingenui* (Williams, 230-236). However, it should be noted, as I already did in my 1980 article (Verstraete 1980, 228), that in the four poems where Juventius is clearly identified by being addressed by name (24. 48, 81, and 99), there is no description of, or allusion to, acts of sexual or erotic intimacy beyond kissing. In 15 the situation is different: Catullus mock-seriously tells his friend Aurelius he is entrusting (*Commendo tibi*, 1) his beloved boy (*meos amores*, 1) to him, but is afraid of what Aurelius will do to the boy with his "aggressive cock" (*pene / infesto*, 9-10), and finally warns him he will be punished by having anal rape performed on him if he misbehaves. Here the sexual scenario, mock-seriously though it is drawn by the poet, is patent. The boy who may become the prey of Aurelius' lust is not identified by name, and therefore the Roman reader or listener is free to assume immediately that the boy is a slave—any sexual act with whom, whether coerced or not, committed by a Roman male was countenanced by the law.

The brief Juventius-cycle, consisting only of four poems, stands with its light tone in marked contrast to the much lengthier and much better known Lesbia-cycle, where Catullus runs the whole gamut of ecstasy, agony and recrimination over his ultimately doomed relationship with his unfaithful mistress. Ironically, it is in the Lesbia poems, especially where Catullus grieves for his broken relationship (8, 11, and 76 being the most prominent examples), that critics speak of what Marilyn Skinner calls "the male escape into the female subject position" (Skinner, 146), at least by way of emotion and fantasy. Catullus 24 and 81, where the poet upbraids Juventius for being unfaithful to him by consorting with a nobody, is light stuff indeed compared to the aforementioned Lesbia-poems. They have nothing comparable to the savage sexual insults Catullus hurls, in 11.17-20 and in the short epigram 58, at the—according to him—promiscuous Lesbia "hanging around at the crossroads and in the alleyways, / sucking off the descendants of stout-hearted Remus" (58. 4-5)—the reader will catch, even in my translation, the sarcastic incongruity between the coarsely sexual *glubit* and the mock-solemn, quasi-epic *magnamini Remi nepotes*. I observed in my 2006 article that Catullus 99, "the longest of the Juventius-pieces, offers an unusual emotional complexity in its depiction of the hurt feelings of the poet-lover, who has been punished for stealing a kiss by the young man's distaste for the act" (Verstraete 2006, 393), and so I agreed with David Konstan's observation that "Catullus has injected a large measure of role-reversal and

psychological surprise into the familiar motif of ‘boy rejects a man’s erotic advances’” (my summary of Konstan: Verstraete 2006, 303; Konstan, 367). Even so, the hyperbole of this poem’s emotional expressiveness is obvious and ironical, and thus, too, the gender-role inversion Catullus pretends to is an ironical mask. I do not wish to argue that Catullus’ Juventius’ poems are without feeling: passion is certainly expressed in 48, the kissing-poem addressed to Juventius which parallels the kissing poems 5 and 7 addressed to Lesbia, but its emotions run in a lighter key.

### Tibullus’ Marathus

In my 1980 paper, I took the position that Marathus, the *puer delicatus* of Tibullus 1.4, 1.8, and 1.9, was a slave, although a much favored one, a fact which explained the freedom of action which was permitted him and was in conformity with the “expectations of Roman society, which permitted its slaves, especially its better favored slaves, a great deal of practical and financial freedom” (Verstraete 1980, 228). In my 2006 article, I essentially restate that position, characterizing Marathus as “a thoroughly spoiled and willful young man,” who is “perhaps a privileged slave ...in a wealthy Roman household” (Verstraete 2006, 310), while noting that the name “Marathus, a pseudonym of course, appears to be servile” (Verstraete 2006, 310, 312 n. 1).<sup>2</sup> It was indeed common in Roman Italy to assign a Greek name to a slave, and such a name would be kept by the slave’s descendants. However, as Professor Christer Bruun demonstrated in a 2007 conference paper (the publication of which is forthcoming in the conference’s proceedings), this was by no means an invariable practice.<sup>3</sup> Catullus, Horace, and the three elegists of the Augustan period (Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid), bestowed Greek pseudonyms on the mistresses and courtesans they celebrated in their poetry, but there is nothing to indicate that all these women were slaves or of servile origin; in fact, Catullus’ Lesbia—his pseudonym for the historical Clodia Metelli, as we can infer from many different sources (Hejduk)—was most certainly a Roman *ingenua*.

The freedom of action Tibullus’ Marathus is portrayed as enjoying is remarkable: in 1.4 he is imagined as travelling to distant places, steering a small pleasure-boat (with the infatuated poet-lover doing the rowing!), and engaging in the hunt—and all of this with Tibullus in tow—in 1.8 as courting a young woman, and in 1.9 as shifting his favors from Tibullus to a wealthy, much older lover; these are liberties one could hardly suppose would be granted even to a favored slave *puer delicatus*, and thus it is difficult to see how a Roman reader could have taken him to be a slave. Creature of the imagination or not—and one must always make generous allowance for the factual license taken by the poet-lover’s fantasy—Marathus becomes most ‘real’ when he is imagined as an *ingenuus*. It is such a *puer delicatus* whom Tibullus invested with “a homoerotic love poetry that was dramatically more intricate and psychologically more complex and nuanced than that of his predecessors in extant Greek and Roman literature” (Verstraete 2006, 311).

### Horace’s Ligurinus (and other pueri delicati celebrated or mentioned in his poetry)

Horace never hesitated to call attention to the pederastically colored bisexuality of many Roman men, including his own, in his poetry. There is blunt talk about such sexuality in *Satires* 1.2.116-118, 1.4.27, and 2.3.325, where the genre of satire (which, together with the *Epodes*, represented Horace’s first publicly acclaimed venture into poetic composition) called for such Roman *simplicitas*. That slave girls and boys are meant here as the object of male desire is perfectly clear from the words in 1.2.116-118: “When your groin is swollen [by desire], and if a slave girl or boy is handy for you to straightway pounce on, surely you would not prefer to be tormented by the itch [of your lust]?” *tument tibi cum inguina, num, si / ancilla aut verna est praesto puer, impetus in quem / continuo fiat, malis tentigine rumpi?* Much more refined is the poet’s confession in *Epodes* 11.23-28 of his *amor* for Lyciscus, a boy of girlish beauty: “Now I am held captive by my love for Lyciscus, who prides himself on surpassing any girl in tenderness,” *nunc gloriantis quamlibet mulierculam / vincere mollitie amor Lycisci me tenet* (23-24). There is no reason to suppose, however, that this

adolescent with the Greek pseudonym is anything but a slave boy. Finally, in his reference to boy-love in the later composed *Epistles* (Ep. 18. 72-75), with its mention of the *dominus pueri pulchri caraeve puellae*, "the master of the beautiful boy or dear girl," (75), Horace, as in *Satires* 1.2.116-118, once more explicitly places pederasty within the institution of slavery.

Pederastic themes and imagery occur six times in Horace's *Odes* (1.4.19-20, 1.32.9-12, 2.5.20-24, 3.20, 4.1.33-40, and 4.10), the collection of his mature lyric poetry regarded for two millennia as one of the literary masterpieces of Greco-Roman antiquity. Here it is especially important to read contextually, with close attention to overall poetic texture, rather than to merely lift, as it were, pederastic snippets from the pages. Our ultimate focus will be on the two Ligurinus-poems of book 1V, 4.1 and 4.10, especially the complex 4.1, where Horace's deeply felt erotic attraction to Ligurinus as it emerges near the end retrospectively colors the entire poem. Whereas in the first three books of the *Odes* (issued as a collection in 23 B.C.) the poet restricts himself to being a spectator of, and commentator on, male adolescent beauty that evokes desire in other men, in 4.1 he makes the leap to an altogether personal and subjective plane. However, it is worth taking a look at 2.5. 20-24 and 3.20.

In 2.5, the speaker urges his unnamed addressee not to select for himself a wife who is still physically and emotionally immature, as unripe, as it were, as a cluster of unripe grapes (1-12)—here the poem is rich with animal and plant imagery. Very soon (*iam*, 13), the speaker says, the girl—named Lalage: a Greek name, it should be noted—will be ready for marriage, and will, in fact, pursue you aggressively as her prospective husband (13-16). She will be loved by you more than you loved your past mistresses, Pholoe and Chloris—note the Greek names—(17-20) or your past *puer delicatus*, Cnidian (i.e. associated with Venus) Gyges (again a Greek name), *quem si puellarum insereres choro, / mire sagaces falleret hospites / discrimen obscurum solitis / crinibus ambiguoque vultu*; “if you were to place him in a chorus composed of girls, the distinctions [of sex] blurred by his free-flowing locks and girl-boy face would astonishingly fool your keenly observant guests” (21-24). Kenneth Quinn may be right that Horace draws here upon a jocular and at all unconventional admonition which is sometimes addressed to the bridegroom in a wedding-song (as in Catullus 61.134-136): amidst all the other banter, the groom is told he must now give up his *puer delicatus* (a slave-boy, of course) and devote all his attention to his newly wedded young wife (Horace, ed. Quinn, 208). It is worthy of notice, however, that that *choro* (21) carries a sacral-ritual meaning or at least connotation which is paralleled elsewhere in Horatian lyric (*Odes* 1.4. 5 and *Carmen Saeculare*, line 75): Gyges has been imaginatively placed not in a troupe of slave-girls, but in a chorus of *puellae* (freeborn, of course) honoring a deity, as it were, with their song and dance. The dark shadow of slave exploitation has thus not been permitted to intrude upon the metaphorically and symbolically charged discourse of this poem.

In 3.20, the speaker piles the irony of mock-epic on top of his empathy with his addressee, the rather unheroic (*inaudax*, 3) Pyrrhus (a Greek name), who must rescue his beloved boy Nearchus (once more a Greek name) from the clutches of a fiercely possessive woman. Such an attempt is metaphorically compared to snatching “cubs from a Gaetulian lioness” (*Gaetulae catulos leaenae*, 2). The metaphor of the lioness protecting her cubs is a mock-epic inversion of the lion simile used in Greek and Roman epic poetry as a vivid picturing of a great warrior’s savage prowess in combat: e.g. Achilles in Homer, *Iliad* 20.164-174, and Mezentius in Vergil, *Aeneid* 10.721-728. Nearchus is the “prey / prize” (*praeda*, 7) of this “grandiose combat” (*grande certamen*, 7). In the meantime (*interim*, 9), however, while Pyrrhus is selecting arrows from his quiver—an archer always being a less heroic warrior, like Pandarus in *Iliad* 3 or like Paris, who, according to the myth, fatally wounded Achilles with his arrow—and the lioness-woman “is whetting her fearsome teeth” (*dentis acuit timendos*, 10), Nearchus, the “arbiter of this combat” (*arbiter pugnae*, 11), is said (*fertur*, 13) to be detached, even contemptuously so, from the contest fought over him,

metaphorically “trampling the palm [of victory] beneath his bare feet (*posuisse nudo / sub pede palmam*, 11-12), letting “the gentle breeze cool his shoulders strewn with the strands of his perfumed hair” (*et leni recreare vento / sparsum odoratis umerum capillis*, 13-14), and comparable to “Nireus”—the handsomest of the Greeks next to Achilles—“and [the boy] snatched from Mount Ida rich in streams” (*qualis et Nireus fuit aut aquosa / raptus ab Ida* (15-16). The indirectness of *fertur*, “is said” (13), removes any remaining suggestion of direct observation or reportage on the part of the speaker of 3.20 as he goes on to spin his fantasy of an erotically desirable but coolly disengaged and perhaps even snobbish Nearchus, whose beauty is measured against that of Nireus and Ganymede of Greek legend and myth. As in 2.5, the question of Nearchus’ status is not allowed to obtrude itself on the ironic and allusive poetic discourse of 3.20.

Although not of noticeably great length (40 lines in total), *Odes* 4.1 stands out for its rich allusiveness, imagery and verbal artistry as well as for the complexity of its movement of thought and feeling.<sup>4</sup> It has three such movements plus two transitional passages. Lines 1-6, and indeed most of what follows, might be called a “*recusatio* [declining, refusal] of the affections” by Horace (Commager, 292), and is cast in mythological terms as the poet asks Venus why she is again inflicting her “longtime broken-off warfare [of love]” on him: “*Intermissa, Venus, diu / rursus bella moves?*” (1-2). He begs her to put an end to it, for he is no longer the man he was when he enjoyed his mistress Cinara; he has reached the age of fifty and is “impervious now to [Venus’] sweet commands,” *mollibus / iam durum imperiis* (6-7). Then come the transitional words, still addressed to Venus: “depart [from me] to go where the coaxing entreaties of younger men summon you, “*abi / quo blanda iuvenum te revocant preces* (7-8). The ode’s second movement is by far the longest (9-28): Venus is told to establish her new abode with Horace’s friend, the much younger aristocrat Paulus Maximus, possessed of great talent in the courts and of fine personal character. Paulus is also a formidable as a lover: “and as a young man of a hundred arts he will carry the banners of your warfare far and wide,” *et centum puer artium / late signa feret militiae tuae* (15-16). *centum puer* [literally, “boy,” of course] *artium* suggests the wily and boyish love-god Cupid or Amor, the son of Venus: the metaphorical link thus hinted at between Paulus and Venus could not be closer than this. Paulus will best a wealthy rival in love (18-19) and will then erect a marble statue to Venus in a beautiful shrine near the Alban Lake (19-20). There the goddess will be honored with incense, music, and the singing and dancing performed by a chorus of boys and girls (21-28). In the second transitional passage (29-32), the poet-speaker returns to the theme of his hard-won, middle-aged freedom from the trials and tribulations of *amor*: of no longer being in love with a woman or boy; of having shed “the foolish hope for a responsive heart,” *spes animi credula mutui*, 30); and so of doing without lovers’ celebratory pleasures of wine and flowers—but now, even more than before, a distinct note of melancholy can be heard here.

Then comes the ode’s third and final movement, with the startling realization by the poet-speaker that, after all, he is still very much in love, namely with Ligurinus, a love, however, that is unrequited: *sed cur heu, Ligurine, cur / manat rara meas lacrima per genas? / cur facunda parum decoro / inter verba cadit lingua silentio? / nocturnis ego somniis / iam captum teneo, iam volucrem sequor / te per gramina Martii / campi, te per aquas, dure, volubilis* ( 33-40). I follow, with a few changes, Putnam’s excellent translation (Putnam, 34): “but, alas, why, Ligurinus, does a fitful tear trickle down my cheeks? Why does my eloquent tongue fall into a less than graceful silence? Now I clasp you, grasped [by me] in my dreams at night, now I pursue you, aflight through the grasses of Mars’ field, you, callous one, through swirling waters.”

Immediately striking is the name “Ligurinus” (“the Ligurian,” “from Liguria”)—not Greek but Italian, although, as Putnam has pointed out, the name is connected to a homoerotically colored Greco-Roman myth (Putnam, 43-46). This is the only time in the *Odes* we see the poet-speaker shed a tear over a frustrated love, whether heterosexual or pederastic. His being reduced to an of

awkward silence is reminiscent of the lover's paralysis of speech in Sappho, fragment 31, just as the invocation of Venus at the beginning recalls the invocation of Aphrodite in Sappho, fragment 1. The Roman reader or listener would have noted—probably with pleasant surprise—that Ligurinus is described as a Roman upper-class youth vigorously exercising in the field of Mars and swimming through “swirling waters”—perhaps of the Tiber: “the Ligurinus of Horace’s dreams is located in a Roman space...and is engaged in improving and approved Roman activities”(Oliensis, 230). As Quinn notes in his commentary, “[v]ain pursuit is one of the commonest of dream fantasies” (Quinn, 300). However, the particular image here of the poet-speaker in his dreams vainly pursuing on land and water his beloved boy is unparalleled in classical literature.<sup>5</sup> Quinn makes an acute observation regarding “the waters that swirl around the head of the swimmer; word and image are a carefully calculated expression of emotion (desire verging on despair)” (Quinn, 300). To sum up: as the poet-lover’s most iconic beloved *puer*, Ligurinus, one might say with Putnam, “is to Horace what Octavian is to the Marschallin or Tadziu to Aschenbach, at once real and symbolic”(Putnam, 41). Indeed, to quote Putnam once more, “he stands for the speaker’s lost...or vanishing youth... an emblem of the speaker himself, something he wants to be or remain, but cannot” (Putnam, 46).<sup>6</sup>

4.10, the other Ligurinus-ode is quite short (only 8 lines) but focused entirely on Ligurinus. The scenario and the sentiments expressed are paralleled in Greek homoerotic love-poetry from the Archaic Greek to the Roman Imperial Age, a time-span of more eight centuries (Putnam, 178 n.2): a handsome youth, preening himself on his boyish physical attractiveness and as such arrogant and rejecting of his older suitor, is reminded by the speaker (who is his *erastēs*), that his beauty is destined to fade and disappear (it is the arrival of heavy facial hair, above all, that marks the loss of youthful beauty); and with the bloom of his younger years gone, he will lament that no prospective lover will be interested in him anymore.

After the description in 4.1 of Ligurinus’ engagement in masculine athletic activities, the portrayal of the preening youth comes as a bit of a shock, and obviously will from now on qualify the reader’s or listener’s earlier mental image of him, but the two very different impressions left now of Ligurinus are not altogether mutually exclusive. The picture the speaker draws of the youth highlights his physical attractiveness, but there is no hint that he is enhancing this by artificial means (e.g. perfume or a certain style of clothing) that might be deemed effeminate—only his long, flowing locks might betoken the typical *puer delicatus*. Quinn comments that “[t]he ode is close in subject and manner to Hellenistic epigram, but the situation it explores is Roman” (Quinn, 318), but he does not elaborate, except, perhaps, in his preceding remark that Ligurinus will see himself sexually rejected when he is older and no longer physically attractive but will find “his own interest in homosexual interests quickening” (Quinn, 317-318), the implication being, if I infer correctly from Quinn, that androphile homosexuality, as opposed to pederasty, was far less marginal to the Romans than to the Greeks—a fact that is well brought out by Craig Williams throughout *Roman Homosexuality*. The Roman quality of 4.10 also arises from the recollection of Ligurinus’ pursuit of manly athletic activities in 4.1 which the reader or listener brings inevitably to this poem. More conventional and in the tradition of the Hellenistic epigram are the sentiments of remorse and despair expressed by the older Ligurinus at the end of the poem: “ ‘Alas...why, when I was a boy, was my thinking not the same as today, or why, with these feelings, do my unmarred cheeks not return’ ”; ‘heu.../ quae mens est hodie, cur eadam non puero fuit, / vel cur his animis incolumes non redeunt genae?’ (6-8). However, the fact that these feelings are rendered in Ligurinus’ own words is a dramatic technique reminiscent of Roman love elegy; we find it paralleled in the words spoken by Marathus in Tibullus 1.8. 55-66 (Verstraete, 2006, 310)

### Conclusion

I trust that I have shown that the poetry of boy-love of Catullus, Tibullus, and Horace, spanning less than 50 years in the Late Republic and the following Augustan Age, is animated by

erotic idealization of a quality which obscures the possibly servile status of the *puer delicatus* and intimates even its absence. Conclusion, therefore, takes issue with the sharp position taken by Amy Richlin in *The Garden of Priapus*: for her, the subjected, servile status of the boy or young man is unmistakeable, and poetry of this kind is marked by either "slavish adulation or fiery lust" (Richlin 34). However, the section in Richlin's study ("Pueri," in ch. 2) devoted to Roman pederastic poetry is focused almost exclusively on the homoerotic epigrams of Martial (late 1<sup>st</sup> century CE); these do indeed run the experiential gamut of "lust" versus "adulation," and in some the slave-status of the younger male is bluntly and even cruelly made explicit. It is very different on both counts in Catullus and Tibullus, and even Horace presents a far more complex picture than Martial.

It can be said with reasonable certainty that Catullus' Juventius was an *ingenuus*, a freeborn Roman boy; and although Tibullus' Marathus may be largely a creature of the poet's fantasy, he becomes 'real' only if he is imagined by the reader or listener to be an *ingenuus*. The pederasty of Horace's poetry spans extremes: on the one hand (as in the *Satires*), we see mere physical attraction to slave boys who obviously are not at liberty to resist their master's sexual advances; and on the other hand (as in the *Odes*), exquisite celebration of exceptionally handsome *pueri delicati*. The paradox and irony of Richlin's phrase "slavish adulation" perhaps fits the latter scenario admirably, although, in my judgment, they are too dismissive of the psychological subtlety and aesthetic merits of these poems of Roman *Knabenliebe*. But whether one aligns oneself with Professor's summation or my own appreciation, the idealization (or "idolization," if one prefers) which infuses these lyrics is such that it becomes virtually mandatory to assign, within the highly stylized fantasy-world these poems create, *ingenuus* status to the beloved boy. This psychological and aesthetic inevitability certainly impresses itself on myself as an informed early 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, and I doubt the ancient Roman reader would have responded much differently. Ligurinus is the most iconically beautiful and, at the same time, the most Roman of Horace's *pueri delicati*.

We cannot help but be struck by the extraordinariness of Roman men celebrating in their poetry their profound attraction to adolescent boys whom they idealize as exquisitely, even superhumanly beautiful but who may, in fact, be slaves, as in Tibullus' *Elegies* and Horace's *Odes*. One need only imagine a comparable anomaly in another slave-owning society, namely the antebellum American South, where it would be unthinkable to conceive of someone composing and, even more, actually openly circulating love poems celebrating his intimate relationship with a beautiful young black slave woman—although here race alone would have posed an impassable barrier. In Roman love-poetry, however, pederastic desire could trump the most extreme of social barriers, namely slavery, in startling ways.

#### NOTES

1. It is unfortunate that, throughout his paper, Butrica uses the words "pedophile" and "pedophilia" where most of the time "pederast" and "pederasty" would be more appropriate.
2. In his 2007 paper on the Marathus elegies, Konstantinos Nikoloutsos is critical of me for not referring in my 2006 article to my much earlier 1980 paper, the position of which on the status of *pueri delicati* contradicts, according to him, my views in 2006. (Nikoloutsos, 55 n. 1) However, from the quotations I have made here from both papers, the reader will see there is no real such discrepancy. Nikoloutsos "challenges the autobiographical mode in which the Marathus series have long been analyzed" and contends that 1.4 (with which his paper is primarily concerned) "cannot be read as an accurate reflection of pederastic traditions in Roman society." (Nikoloutsos, 55) As I have stated, my own position most certainly allows for a large measure of erotic fantasy on the part of Tibullus; however, I also fully subscribe to the position, well substantiated by Jasper Griffin in his 1985 book, *Latin Poets and Roman Life*, that the love poetry, both heterosexual and pederastic, of the Late Republic and the Augustan Age, does reflect the realities of Roman society and culture of that period. This position is also ably and vigorously defended, with reference to Roman homosexuality and pederasty, by the eminent Latin textual critic, D.R. Shackleton Bailey, in ch. 6, "Ligurinus," of his 1982 monograph, *Profile of Horace*.
3. In his paper, "Roman cognomina and the question of 'servile descent,'" delivered on September 28, 2007, at the conference, "Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture," held at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. In an e-mail dated July 14, 2008, Professor Bruun kindly responded to a query of mine, writing that he thinks, especially in the light of the fact that

the later Martial uses Greek names for favorite slave boys, that Marathus was, in fact, a slave—something I am quite ready to concede, but with the significant qualifications I am making in this paper. Dr Bruun's paper is to be published under the title, "Greek or Latin? The owner's choice of names for homeborn slaves in Rome," in Michelle George (ed.), *Roman Slavery and Material Culture* (Proceedings from the Sixth E. Togo Salmon Conference).

4. I am greatly indebted to Michael Putnam's superb discussion of 4.1 in his major study devoted to book IV of the *Odes*. (Putnam, 33-47)

5. A parallel (but not really a close one) that comes to mind is Ovid, *Heroides* 15. 123-134, where Sappho, in her imaginary epistle to the youth Phaon with whom she is totally infatuated, recounts how in her dreams she kisses and fondles him—and does even more, which modesty forbids her to describe. In classical Greek tragic drama there is also the love-sick Menelaus in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 410-426, longing in his dreams for his wife Helen who has eloped with Paris.

6. Ronnie Ancona's monograph, *Time and the Erotic in Horace's Odes*, while offering many poetically sensitive analyses and interpretations, inclines towards a rigid dichotomizing of the male lover's position of domination versus the beloved's (woman or boy) being dominated, and thus misses, in my judgment, much of the existential meaning of the Ligurinus-passage and its dream-sequence: "The dream is an ideal image of how such certainty [i.e. the speaker's certainty as to his own autonomous self-identity] might be restored, for in his dream the poet / lover can recover the privacy that time and mutuality threaten and can thus find a place where his desire can triumph over any self-doubt." (Ancona, 93) Surely the poet-lover's tears—which he mentions with almost stoic restraint rather than exhibits with theatrical outpouring and which have thus, for this very reason, all the more emotional impact (compare, by way of contrast, the pose of jealous rage in *Odes* 1.13)—make it clear that such "certainty" and "triumph" are now eluding him.

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