B. X. DE WET ESSAY

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This essay is named in honour of Emeritus Professor B. X. de Wet, who was Head of the Department of Classics at the University of Natal, Durban from 1975 to 1989.

THE ATTIS OF CATULLUS

Terrence Lockyer
3rd-year Classics major
University of Natal, Durban 4001

In 204 BC, as the long, but ultimately unsuccessful, invasion of Italy by Hannibal was nearing its end, another foreign force was entering Rome, the ecstatic cult of the Near Eastern mother-goddess Cybele, or Magna Mater, as the Romans called her.¹ She seems to have been regarded particularly as the patroness of Rome, and her worship was introduced probably to boost the spirits of a city beleaguered by a long and bitter war (although at this date Roman citizens were forbidden to officiate in the cult). With the consent of the Attalid king of Pergamon, a sacred black stone believed to be inhabited by the goddess was brought to Rome and set in a temple on the Palatine. With the stone and the cult came the usual attendant mythology, including the story of Attis (Agdistis), son of Nana, daughter of the Phrygian river-god Sangarius. Attis was conceived when his mother picked the blossoms of the almond tree, which had sprung from the severed male organs of Agdistis/Cybele, whom the gods had castrated. He died after castrating himself in a fit of madness caused by Cybele in revenge for his loving a mortal woman.²

¹ I wish to thank Dr. S. B. Jackson, Mrs A. P. Bevis and Professor W. J. Dominik for their assistance in editing this essay for publication.
² For the introduction of the cult, see M. Cary and H. H. Scullard, A History of Rome³ (London 1975) 198. For the myth, see N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (edd.), The
Roughly 150 years after the cult came to Rome, Catullus chose Attis as the central figure of what has been called ‘perhaps the most remarkable poem in Latin’; poem 63 of the Catullan corpus. He was not the first poet to write on the cult of Cybele, or on Attis himself; indeed, it has even been supposed (though the view seems now to be little regarded) that Catullus’ Attis is merely a translation or adaptation from a Greek original. In the absence of evidence, this can be no more than idle speculation. What is certain is that Catullus has left us a poem on Attis and Cybele, a poem, moreover, of great artistry and power. The purpose of this essay is to examine the story Catullus tells, and how he tells it, and then to attempt to explain why he tells it as he does. Catullus’ Attis is not the Attis of myth and cult ritual. He is Greek (59-67), not Phrygian; mortal, not half immortal. He castrates himself not in a frenzy resulting from love, but out of hatred for it (17). He does not die, but lives, the slave of Cybele. However, many of these details become apparent only relatively late in the poem, and their significance will be seen more clearly in the context of an analysis of the Attis as a whole.

The poem opens with a flurry of (literally) frenzied activity, plunging the reader into a story which has already begun. By the end of the sentence which occupies the first five lines, Attis has come to Phrygia, has set off, immediately upon landing, for the grove of Cybele, and has committed the mad act of self-mutilation which will bind him to the goddess forever. These events are related at a breathless pace in lines full of words of speed, motion and action. Attis’ ship is celeri rate (‘a swift vessel’, 1). His eagerness on reaching the shore is encapsulated in the clattering nemus citato cupide pede tettigit (‘the grove he eagerly reached on rapid feet’, 2), and he rushes off (aditique, 3) to Cybele’s domain. He is evidently under the power of a force greater than his own mind (stimulatus . . . furenti rabie, uagus animis, ‘urged on by a burning frenzy, his mind awhirl’, 4), and under its influence, deuolsit ilei acuto sibi pondera silice (‘he tore off with a sharpened flint the weight of his groin’, 5). The emphatic positioning of the verb, and of silice (‘flint’), tells of the violence of the act, and the fact that the instrument of Attis’ mutilation is a sharpened flint emphasises the primitive force behind the deed. The elision early in lines 2, 3 and 5 adds to the sense of relentless speed, as does the metre. The Attis is the only complete extant poem in Latin using


5 Though see above, n.2.

6 I use the text of Quinn [2] throughout. All translations are my own.
galliaimbs,7 the rhythm of hymns and music composed for Cybele,8 and an extremely demanding one for a Latin poet, for in its pure form the galliambic line requires strings of short syllables which are very hard to come by in Latin. The dominance of short syllables gives the rhythm great rapidity, and the wide variation of the syllabic composition of the first half of the line gives it a sense of wildness and abandon appropriate to ecstatic cult worship.

The opening lines also hint at what is to emerge later: Attis has come by sea (1), which suggests that Phrygia is not his home; and Catullus’ use of opaca (‘shadowy’, 3) to describe the darkness of Cybele’s world anticipates the use of darkness and light to symbolise madness and sanity later in the poem. Line 6 begins a new sentence, and signals a slight slackening in pace, but no relief from the frenzy of the opening lines. There is strong alliteration, with 25 ts in the six lines down to 11, but the explanation for it is delayed until Attis picks up the typanum (‘tambourine’, 8) and begins to beat out a rhythm on its surface. Once again metre enhances meaning, for this was the very rhythm to which worshippers of Cybele beat their tympana,9 instruments associated particularly with the cult; hence their description as initia (‘initiation rites’, 9): Attis’ picking up the tambourine symbolises his entering the service of the goddess. This is also the initium of his first speech, one of praise to Cybele and encouragement to the other devotees. At this point there is a subtle change in Attis’ grammatical gender, signalled by the feminines citata (‘swift’, 8), adorta and tremebunda (‘began’ and ‘trembling’, 11), marking Attis’ total immersion in the unity with the goddess that her worship provides. This initiates a swing back and forth between the genders which pervades the rest of the poem.

Nothing has yet been said of anyone but Attis, but suddenly she10 addresses her comites (‘companions’, 11). Her speech (12-26) opens with a remarkable pair of elisions, and a brief continuation of the alliteration which began in line 6, representing in sound Attis’ urgent exhortation to her companions11 to hasten, and indicating that she is speaking to the sound of the typanum she beats. She acknowledges the power of Cybele, and it is clear that the goddess is now in control: the Gallae are addressed as Dindymenae dominae uaga pecora (‘wandering beasts of the mistress of Dindymus [a mountain sacred to Cybele]’, 13). At the same time, in one of the few similes in the poem, they are compared to

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8 Its name is related to that of the Galli, male devotees of the goddess.
9 This is the more usual Latin form, which Catullus uses in line 29.
10 I use the gender of the words in the poem.
11 Addressed as Gallae (12), a rare feminine form of the more usual Gallus, supposed in ancient times to have been derived from the name of the River Gallus in Phrygia.
aliena...petentes...exules loca (‘exiles seeking foreign lands’, 14). Catullus has already suggested that Attis is foreign to Phrygia, and this simile reinforces that suggestion, especially by the emphatic initial position of aliena (‘foreign’) in this semi-chiasitic line. The use of exules (‘exiles’) may also suggest the irrevocable nature of Attis’ journey to Phrygia. He has left his homeland and now, because of his act of self-mutilation, may no longer return. Attis urges the Gallae to follow her: sectam meam executae duce me mihi comites (‘following my lead as my companions’, 15), and Catullus may well have chosen to express the idea this way because of the obvious similarity of secta (‘[my] lead’) to the perfect participle of secare (‘to cut’). Lines 16f. emphasise the abnormality of the situation, that the worshippers have come to a strange land across the wild sea (turculentaque pelagi, 16) and are emasculated.

Attis cries hilarate erae citatis erroribus animum (‘cheer the soul of your mistress with your rapid wanderings’, 18), emphasising that Cybele is in control, for she has now been called both domina (13) and era (18), both meaning ‘mistress’. The wildness of the goddess and of her cult is prominent in Attis’ speech, and the six clauses introduced by ubi (‘where’, 21-25) present every aspect of the worship of such a cult: music, ecstatic dancing and wild cries. Catullus’ use of Maenades (23) is interesting, as the term usually refers specifically to female devotees of Bacchus (Dionysos). It seems that the poet wishes simply to convey a lack of restraint and the orgiastic character of Cybele’s rites, and is not too concerned to provide a technically accurate account of her worship. The speech is neatly concluded with a final exhortation to the revellers to ascend Mount Ida. Attis’ instructions to hasten are, like the events of the opening lines of the poem, expressed in words of speed and motion. Ite (‘go!’) appears three times (12, 13, 19), citatis (‘swift’) occurs twice (18, 26), and petentes (‘seeking’, 14) and celerare (‘hurry’, 26) compound the effect. As the Gallae go on their way, the confusion of the cults of Cybele and Bacchus continues, for thiasus (28) is another word referring specifically to devotees of Bacchus. The cacophony accompanying Attis’ speech and the subsequent procession is effectively conveyed by the onomatopoeic ululat (‘ululates’, 28), and by line 29, in which the caesura falls neatly between the two clauses, and the rhythm of the line therefore gives the impression of instruments answering each other. The pace remains relentless (the diction of 30 again indicates speed), and Attis’ breathlessness comes across well in the long line 31, with the elision of animam agens (‘gasping for breath’) echoing her gulping breaths as she leads the Gallae to the grove of Cybele, which is once more called opaca (‘dark’, 32). Once more too are the revellers compared to beasts which have slipped free of their master’s control (33); ironically so, for it is precisely because they are under the sway of Cybele that they behave as they do. The procession moves on apace, until it comes to the sacred grove (35-38). There, tired from long exertion (note the wonderfully languid lassulae, ‘weary’, 35), and lacking the nourishment of food (the use of Ceres to symbolise her produce is a neat archaic touch), the
revellers finally succumb to sleep, and the extended expression of the chiastic lines 37f., together with the soft sounds of these lines (particularly the ls and ns of labante languore, ‘a languor falling’), suggests their slipping into slumber. This couplet clearly marks the end of the frenzied motion of the first part of the poem.

The second movement, as it were, opens with a beautiful description of dawn (39-43), and one can almost feel the warmth of the sun as it creeps through sky, land and sea. Lustravuit (40) is a particularly rich word, with connotations of observing (reinforced by oris, ‘face’, and oculis, ‘eyes’, in 39), of illuminating, and of purifying. The significance of the earlier emphasis on Cybele’s grove as opaca (‘shadowy’, 3 and 32) now emerges: darkness suited the orgiastic revels, but day brings light and purification. There is a strong suggestion that a change will occur in the atmosphere of the poem, and this change becomes evident in part when Attis’ gender reverts to the masculine (42), indicating a slight return to normality. The personification of sleep in Somnus (‘Sleep’, 42) and the mention of Pastithae (43) signal the return of a saner world of clearly defined Greek and Roman gods as opposed to the Oriental frenzy of Cybele, and trepidante . . . sinu (‘with trembling embrace’) seems to enfold line 43 just as Pastitheia welcomes her husband with open arms. As he\textsuperscript{13} awakes, Attis slowly realises what has happened. The diction suggests the reawakening of reason with pectore (‘breast’, 45), recoluit (‘recalled’, 45), and liquidaque mente uidit (‘saw with a clear mind’, 46), but, as Quinn\textsuperscript{14} suggests, the awakening is not without confusion, and the prominent position of animo aestuante (‘his spirit seething’, 47), coupled with a double elision, indicates Attis’ sudden horror upon seeing what has happened, and his stumbling rush back to the sea, which seems now to represent the barrier between the land from which he has come and that in which he now is. It is interesting to note that, while Attis went to sleep with a group of companions, they have not appeared since the coming of dawn in line 39, and the speech Attis now makes on the shore stresses his sudden isolation. In line 49, Attis is again feminine, as if to remind the reader of his situation and that day has opened his eyes but cannot change what he has done.

The opening line of Attis’ second speech (50-73) marks it as a formal lament as he addresses his now lost homeland. He compares himself to a runaway slave (51f.), recalling the earlier simile of the fugitive heifer (33), but again the comparison is ironically inappropriate, for Attis has left the freedom of his homeland to become the thrall of Cybele. No longer does he speak with joy of the orgiastic revels which once drew him to Ida (cf. 21-26): he sees only the snow and the cold of Cybele’s mountain groves (52f.). The wildness of the goddess’ home is

\textsuperscript{12} Excitam (‘aroused’) is printed in many modern editions, but the MSS have the masculine, which seems more in the spirit of the passage.

\textsuperscript{13} Ipsa (‘she’, 45) is another example of a modern emendation where the ipse (‘he’) of the MSS would seem adequate.

\textsuperscript{14} Quinn [2] 292 \textit{ad} 44-49.
no longer attractive but repulsive. Attis is no longer willing to compare himself to animals (as in 13) or to live among them. Line 55 expresses the loss he feels: he no longer knows where his homeland is; that is, he cannot return to it, and yet he longs to see it (56). *Pupula* (‘little eyes’) is a pathetic diminutive, and the double elision might represent a sob. He longs, that is, *rabie fera carens dum breue tempus animus est* (‘while [his] mind is free for a short while from wild frenzy’, 57), for he knows that his respite from the frenzy which has possessed him cannot last forever. There is a sense of the inevitability of Attis’ recapture, but at least he can see that he was driven by a *rabies fera* (‘wild frenzy’). The same sense of inevitability is evident in the three questions which occupy lines 58-60, questions that are pathetic in their simplicity, significant in their content:

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\begin{align*}
egone & \text{a mea remota haec ferar in nemora domo?} \\
patria, bonis, amicis, genitoribus abero? \\
aberro foro, palaestra, stadio et gymnasiasi? \\
\end{align*}
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(58-60)

Am I to rush into these groves far from my home?
Am I to live apart from homeland, property, friends and parents?
Am I to live apart from forum, palaestra, stadium and gymnasia?

The emphatic *egone a mea remota* (‘Am I ... far from my’, 58) underlines Attis’ isolation, and the first person singular verbs standing last in 59 and first in 60 reinforce the impression. The juxtaposition of *nemora* (‘groves’) and *domo* (‘home’) in 58 is also significant. *Nemus* (‘grove’) has already occurred in various forms five times in the poem (2, 12, 20, 32, 52), once in apposition to *domus Cybebes* (‘home of Cybele’, 20), which is also repeated (35). Apart from these two instances, Catullus has not used *domus* (‘home’) before Attis’ second speech, and *patria* (‘homeland’) also made its appearance only just before that speech (49), but has occurred four times since (49, twice in 50, 55), and appears again in 59. It seems that Catullus wishes to identify *nemus* as referring not just to any grove but specifically to that of Cybele which has become Attis’ new home, whereas *domus* (‘home’) and *patria* (‘homeland’) are identified with Attis’ old home. The juxtaposition in line 58, therefore, brings into sharp focus the struggle in Attis between the old home and the new: he longs to see again his *domus* (‘home’), his *patria* (‘homeland’), but he knows that he must inevitably return to the *nemus* (‘grove’) he has now accepted as his home by his irreversible dedication of himself to Cybele. Lines 59f. emphasise what that dedication has cost him: he can no more see his homeland, his possessions, his friends and family. He can no more go to the *forum, palaestra, stadium, or gymnasium*; and this provides the first indication of the origin of Catullus’ Attis; for these (with the exception of the *forum*, which must stand for the *agora*) are the traditional social institutions of Greece, so much so that, during the Hellenistic period, they became the instruments of Hellenisation.
wherever Greek culture spread. Attis is, then, a Greek, but a Greek now lost to Greece, who has given himself up to the savagery of Phrygia for ever. The realisation of all this is expressed in a single line of great emotion: *miser a miser, querendum est etiam atque etiam, anime* (‘Poor, poor heart, you must grieve for ever and ever’, 61), which, with its quadruple elision and mournful sequence of vowel sounds, as well as its pathetic repetitions, shows that the *lacrimantibus oculis* (‘tearful eyes’, 48) with which Attis saw the sea are now even more so. He goes on, in a further, more extended series of questions (62-72), to elaborate the theme of lines 58-60. First, he enumerates the many forms he has gone through (62f.), but reverses the order since it is as a [*notha* mulier (‘false woman’); cf. 27) that he now speaks. *Ephebus* (63), the term for a Greek boy undergoing military training, emphasises Attis’ origins. He then elaborates further: he was a fine youth who had many admirers:

> ego gymnasi fui flos; ego eram decus olei;  
> mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida,  
> mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat,  
> linquendum ubi esset orto mihi sole cubiculum.

(64-67)

I was the flower of the gymnasium; I used to be the glory of the oil;  
for me were doorways thronged, for me thresholds warmed,  
for me was the house garlanded with floral wreaths,  
when, at sunrise, it was time for me to leave my bedroom.

Once again there is a clear contrast between Attis as a member of civilised Greek society and Attis as the devotee of Cybele. No longer may he enjoy the attentions of the men who used to throng his doorstep hoping for his love. A striking feature of these lines, and indeed of lines 62-72 as a whole, is the frequency of the first personal pronoun. Of those eleven lines, eight begin with either *ego* (‘I’) or *mihi* (‘for me’), and the pronoun appears in various forms in eight further places. It has been observed how Catullus presents Attis as isolated from line 39 onward, but this concentration of pronouns leaves no room for doubt: Attis is standing alone, having left his home for the shores of Phrygia and having now become disillusioned with the cult he has come to serve. In 68f., he plays bitterly with the genders, but the answer to his questions is clear: he will be *deum ministra et Cybeles famula* (‘the slave-girl of the gods and handmaid of Cybele’, 68) and all the other things he now detests to be. *Maenas* is once again used as a generic term for a devotee of a cult, but it has an added sting in Attis’ case: it refers specifically to a woman. Attis’ final question reveals once again the now strong contrast between the civilised city he has left and the wild wastes to which he has come: he must live among the beasts, live even as the servant of their mistress. Once again a series of questions is asked to which the answers are all too clear; once again Attis follows them with a line of sorrowful intensity: *iam iam dolet quod egi, iam iamque paenitet* (‘Now, now I
regret what I’ve done. Now, now I’m sorry for it’, 73). The recurring long syllables in this, metrical the shortest line of the poem, together with the drawn-out, sorrowful ms and the mournful repetition of iam (‘now’), betray Attis’ emotions: he sobs no longer (there is no elision here), but accepts the horror of the inevitable with pathetic, but futile, penitence. Catullus has constructed for Attis a masterful soliloquy of mourning and repentance consisting of two structurally equivalent units of equal length (50-61, 62-73), each conveying Attis’ feelings in a series of rhetorical questions and statements of longing, concluding in a line of, in the first case, intense sorrow, in the second, sad resignation.

Catullus moves now into the third, and final, movement of the drama, for drama—tragedy, in fact—the Attis certainly is. There is a very brief passage of transition; only two lines, in fact (74f.), in which Attis’ words fly up to the gods. Clearly, his noua nuntia (‘new prayers’, 75) are not to their liking, for there follows at once a passage of rapid and violent action recalling the first section of the poem, as Cybele sweeps onto the stage, drawn by lions, one of whom she sets upon Attis to bring him back under her power. Her introduction is suitably brief, and the action begins immediately as she looses the lion (76). Laeumque (77) means literally that it is the lion on the left which is set upon Attis, but at the same time contains all the connotations of malice appropriate to the scene. The goddess briefly addresses her minister, and I think Lee is right to print ferox (‘fierce’, 78, 83) with an initial capital, for it emphasises the violence inherent in the beast. It is a servant of Cybele, just as Attis is, but dreads to be: his fear of being the fellow of wild beasts has been realised. Cybele’s instructions are full of words of action and of violence. The lion is goaded on with terse imperatives (78f.), his task to drive Attis back into the grove, nemus, the apparent symbolism of which is now confirmed. Cybele describes her power as imperia (80), a word the Roman understood to mean complete power, such as was occasionally given to a military commander in times of crisis. The violence of both goddess and lion is evident as Cybele orders her beast to beat its own back in the frenzy of the hunt (81), and then to fill the place with its roars (82). Her words occupy only six lines (78-83), but they are full of power. Four of those lines open with terse imperatives, and there is a harsh, grating alliteration of r throughout the speech, which also abounds in fs and ts, producing a distinctly martial sound. As the goddess releases the lion (84), it works itself into a rage (85), and then springs, its rapid, frenzied and destructive motion described in three brief clauses (86), two of which have no more than a verb. The effect is enhanced by a clattering alliteration of t (84-87). Finally, in three lines (87-89), the beast finds Attis, now called teneram (or tenerum if one follows the MSS)—‘delicate’ indeed before the lion’s vicious charge—and the description of the whiteness of the sea and its shore (albicantis, ‘white’, in 87, and marmora, ‘foam’, in 88) throws into even higher relief the metaphorical darkness of the beast. As the

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lión attacks, Attis, now certainly feminine, rushes off into the nemora fera (‘wild groves’, 89) to be forever a slave. The Phrygian nemus (‘grove’) has triumphed over the Greek domus (‘home’) once and for all. It is significant that in extant Greek poetry, it is usually the priest of Cybele who dominates the lion, not, as here, the other way round. Lines 90-93 are the poet’s final plea to the goddess—a plea clearly acknowledging her power—that she will keep her madness from him and his home (domo, 92). Catullus thus concludes a masterfully constructed poem telling the story of a Greek Attis, at first eagerly joining in the frenzy of Cybele’s cult, then deeply disillusioned with his new life, but finally forced by power greater than his own to accept it, not from his initial love, but from fear.

That Catullus 63 is a remarkable and skillful poem which presents a new version of the myth of Attis is clear, and it is this very uniqueness which compels one to ask why Catullus wrote the Attis, and why he chose to write it as he did. On one level, the Attis is simply a finely-crafted mythological tragedy. Attis is a handsome youth from a civilised Greek city who enjoys the attentions of many, but who has no taste for love, and chooses instead the wild life of a priest of Cybele. Caught up in the ecstasy of cult worship, he comes to Phrygia, to the grove of Cybele, the very heart of her cult and her power, and, in a frenzy of devotion, he dedicates himself to the goddess by castrating himself and so casts off forever the role of an ordinary man. This first frenzy passes, however, and only then can Attis see the emptiness of the life he has chosen, and the magnitude of his loss. His earlier enthusiasm is matched by his despair at this, but he has made his choice and it is too late for regrets. His self-mutilation has ensured that he can no more return to Greece and his former place in society, and Cybele soon forces him to give up all thoughts of home and return to her grove and to her service. The tragedy is concluded when, in the manner of a chorus, the poet adds his prayer that he may be free of the madness which drove Attis to his ruin.

Given this reading, one may agree, at least in part, with Elder’s interpretation of the poem as ‘a study of fanatic devotion and subsequent disillusionment’. Attis certainly experiences both, as analysis of his speeches has shown. Nor does such an interpretation force one to see lines 74-90 as ‘a sort of coda to a sonata which has already been played ... a mere external depiction of what has already happened within Attis’ psyche’, as Rubino argues against Elder. Rather, one may see this section of the poem as a graphic description of the power of the religious fanaticism which brought Attis to Phrygia and which will not let him leave, and so as an emphatic warning of the danger of succumbing to the enticements of Cybele, that is, of falling prey to the ‘fanatic devotion’ of which Elder speaks; for from such

devotion there is no escape. The *Attis*, then, may be seen as ‘a study of fanatic devotion’ which describes the initial ecstasy it brings and the bitter disillusionment which often follows, and which warns of the trap such devotion may prove to be.

This conclusion is both interesting in itself and useful for another, broader interpretation of the poem. In the Catullan corpus, the *Attis* falls within a group of four long poems (61-64) in which there is a recurrent theme of love and of marriage, which the members of a civilised society see as the natural consequence of love. Catullus’ *Attis* is from Greece (or at least from a Greek city), whose society in ancient times both Greeks and Romans considered the epitome of civilisation. *Attis* describes (59-67) how he attended all the social institutions of the Greek city—the *agora*, the *palaestra*, and so on—and how he grew from child (*puer*) to youth (the distinctly Greek *ephebus*) to young man (*adolescens*), a young man much admired, and, in the Greek fashion, much pursued by his (male) admirers. But youth is not eternal, and soon *Attis* must take the next step expected of him by society, that of marriage, his duty to conventional love. The *Attis* contains only one reference to love, but it is a telling one: in his first speech *Attis* says that he and his companions have come to Phrygia and emasculated themselves ‘out of excessive hatred of Venus’ (*Veneris nimio odio*, 17). *Attis* has shirked his duty to love, has refused to take the step society demands of him, has chosen to devote himself not to the Greek (and Roman, since the word used is *Venus*) goddess of love, but rather to the Phrygian goddess of nature, Cybele. Implicit in this act is the rejection of society (represented by the *domus*, ‘home’, and the *patria*, ‘homeland’) for savagery (represented by the *nemus*, ‘grove’). Moreover, the decision is irreversible, as is symbolised by *Attis*’ castration: once he has rejected society, it can receive him back no more. Instead of observance of the ways of Venus, he has chosen ‘fanatic devotion’ to Cybele, and his punishment is disillusionment and lifelong servitude. Quinn19 observes how *Attis* is described as having hands as white as snow (*nuueis manibus*, 8), delicate fingers (*teneris . . . digitis*, 10) and rose-coloured lips (*roseis labellis*, 74). He takes this to indicate that *Attis* is somewhat effeminate, rather than ‘to suggest some miraculous change in *Attis*’ appearance following his self-emasculating’. The two interpretations are not really all that different: *Attis*’ self-emasculating is the result of the dominance of the feminine element in him. It is his inability to control this element that brings him to Phrygia and drives him to dedicate himself to Cybele, that inability which makes him, in the words of Rubino, ‘come under the power of the divine woman and accept her dangerous offer’,20 that inability which is rewarded only with slavery. The poet’s prayer at the end of the *Attis* is his plea to himself and to men at large to heed the poem’s warning, to accept their part in society and so be free of the destructive madness of *Attis*. On this interpretation, the poem becomes a

mythological tale with a social moral.

Finally, a possible biographical interpretation of poem 63 may be considered, for, while it is always dangerous to try to fit a work of art to what is known of the life of the artist (in Catullus’ case not very much, nor very certainly), the highly personal quality of much of Catullus’ work should not be forgotten even when he turns to a mythological subject. Catullus may well have read earlier poems on the subjects of Attis and of Cybele, and poem 35 would suggest that one of his friends wrote on Cybele, but his own Attis was almost certainly also inspired by the impression made upon him by what he saw of the worship of Cybele at Rome, and also during his sojourn in Bithynia on the staff of a Roman praetor.\textsuperscript{21} If poem 63 does indeed post-date Catullus’ trip to Asia Minor,\textsuperscript{22} then it was written fairly late in his life, and one may suppose that it represents, at least in part, Catullus’ feelings about his affair with Lesbia. It is not very likely that Catullus would have chosen to go to Bithynia if the affair were still going well, for during so long an absence, Lesbia might well tire of waiting for him. It may justifiably be supposed, then, that the relationship had ended, or was at least in trouble, by 57, and that Catullus’ journey to Bithynia was motivated in part by a desire to leave Rome for a while and rid his mind of the disastrous affair. Against this can be quoted poem 11, generally taken as a final farewell to Lesbia, and datable to at least 55 BC, since it refers to Caesar’s campaigns of that year (11.9f.). However, it must be remembered that poem 11 as we have it is a literary expression of the bitterness of a lover scorned, and may well have been composed, or at least put into its final form, some time after the end of the actual relationship to which it probably refers. If Catullus’ trip to Bithynia was subsequent to the end of his affair with Lesbia, or coincident with a rough patch in it, it is possible that he wrote of Attis’ flight to Phrygia with his own escape to Bithynia in mind, that Attis’ initial frenzy and subsequent disillusionment correspond to his own initial passion and subsequent despair, Attis’ bondage to Cybele to his own inability to break with Lesbia once and for all, and that his final prayer is a plea to his own sanity to prevail over his infatuation. Such a biographical interpretation is, however, at best highly speculative, and must be subordinate to more artistic and literary readings of the poem.

Whatever fruit Catullus’ Attis may bear for the historian or biographer, its sheer artistry and power cannot fail to recommend it to the reader as a literary \textit{tour de force} sprung from the mind and pen of a highly talented poet at the very peak of his creative powers.

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Cat. 10. The date of his trip was probably 57/6 BC.