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Juventius and the Summer of Youth in Catullus 48

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Abstract

Catullus' poem 48 has barely been studied, except as the "less interesting" sibling of the family of kiss poems. It continues the characterisation of Juventius as an aristocratic young man in the flower of his youth (*flosculus … Iuventiorum*, 24.1), but it complicates this image with agricultural imagery which suggests that the boy is on the cusp of manhood, making a transition from smooth-cheeked spring to bristly summer. Juventius' honey-sweet eyes and kisses like thick crops of the dry beards of grain evoke the 'young man with the first down', a figure with a long and conflicting literary pedigree. A better understanding of the literary background of this imagery illuminates poem 48 as a complex and passionate celebration of the fragility of youthful beauty, but it also reveals more clearly just how the poem participates in the persuasive rhetoric of the kiss poems.

Keywords

Catullus 48 – youth – seasons – aging – pederasty – harvest

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Mellitos oculos tuos, Iuventi,
si quis me sinat usque basiare,
usque ad milia basiem trecenta;
nec mi umquam videar satur futurus,
non si densior aridis aristis
sit nostrae seges osculationis.[1]

Your honey-sweet eyes, Juventius,
if anyone allowed me to go on kissing,
I would kiss up to 300,000 times,
nor would I ever seem even about to be sated,
not if the crop of our kissing
were thicker than dry grain-beards.

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Of the handful of poems securely connected with the Juventius cycle, poem 48 has been the least studied. An expression of passionate insatiability, the poem describes the youth's honey-sweet eyes as something akin to a foodstuff, which could never sate Catullus' appetite. Catullus compares the act of kissing these sweet eyes to the grain crop and its harvest, and thereby draws upon a long and varied Greek tradition of thinking about youth, age, beauty, and sex through imagery from agriculture. Behind the seemingly opaque references to honey and grain is the ephemeral bloom of a boy's late spring when the summer heat is about to scorch the crops and young men are on the cusp of fully bearded manhood. Catullus imagines Juventius as a beautiful ἐρώμενος, the younger partner in a distinctly Greek erotic relationship, as the boy approaches this new bristling state. He represents the span of youth, like the seasons, as brief and changeable, and uses these notions of seasonal impermanence as well as the threat of the timely harvest to persuade the young man to submit to thousands of kisses before it is too late.

It is telling that one of the most recent editions of the text, that of D.F.S. Thomson, does not suggest any bibliography on poem 48 at the end of

1 Catul. 48. I use the text of Thomson 1997. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

his entry; there is simply nothing much to cite. Catullus' poem 48 has mostly been studied in relation to its generic affiliation with the other kiss poems, 5 and 7, a series sometimes extended to include either poem 32 or 99.[2] In that vein, Richardson considered poem 48 to be structurally superior to poem 7 because of its "carefully ordered figures of honey, eating to satiety, the harvested grain, and the growing crop", while Khan similarly admired the "concentration" of the piece, characterising the poem as the "simple and forceful working out of a single artistic motif,—the food/kiss idea".[3] Both slender analyses emphasise the intricate workmanship of the poem, but little is done to investigate it in its own right.

1 Juventius, the Seasons, and the Aging ἐρώμενος

Throughout the poems dedicated to the Juventius affair, Catullus portrays his beloved as the personification of aristocratic youth.[4] The *puer* is named for the first time in poem 24, where Catullus ascribes an illustrious family background to Juventius, calling him the 'little flower of the Juventii' (*flosculus … Iuventiorum*, 24.1). The *gens Iuventia*—whose cognomen *Thalna* apparently derived from an eponymous Etruscan goddess of youth—were an old Roman family of consular *nobilitas*,[5] though the name is attested elsewhere, including at Verona.[6] Although we may count 'Juventius' among the attested names of real Roman *gentes*, we must also understand it, as we do 'Lesbia', as a meaningful signifier of the character of his beloved.[7] The phrase *flosculus … Iuventiorum* plays on the proverbial *flos iuventae*, the *flos aetatis* or ἄνθος ἥβης ('flower of youth'), a metaphor which evokes the time when a young person was blossoming and full of promise but not yet at his or her physical nor indeed mental

2 Cairns 1973 set poems 5, 7, and 48 (plus the ribald poem 32) within an Alexandrian genre of kiss-counting, but poem 48 receives short shrift; Carratello 1995, 30, counters that the *Palatine Anthology* poems that Cairns considers are later than Catullus.

3 Richardson 1963, 97; Khan 1967, 613-614.

4 I include cc. 15, 16, 21, 23, 24, 26, 48, 81, and 99, but I think 14b introduces the themes of the cycle. The arguments for poem 40 being a Juventius poem are persuasive (see Richardson 1963, 101-102 and Thomson 1997, *ad loc.*). Some critics add poems 56 and 106 to the cycle: arguments for the former are unlikely; Neudling 1955, 20-21 suggests that the mss.' *obel(l)io* after *puero* (106.1) should read *Aureli*, an intriguing suggestion but the resulting line seems clunky.

5 Wiseman 1985, 130.

6 Neudling 1955, 94-96, discusses the evidence and varying opinions regarding Juventius' identity and regional background. He cites imperial-period inscriptions referring to Iuventii in and near Verona: *CIL* 5.3316, 3480, 4349, 4488, 4626.

7 Gaisser 2009, 60-63, on Juventius as 'Youth'; see also Ingleheart 2014, 65-67.

peak.[8] As a description of physical appearance, it suggests the 'luminous ruddiness of youth,'[9] but the metaphor also fits into a conception of age and aging as a phenomenon much like the seasons.

Greek and Roman culture shared a conception of age as a bundle of behaviours and physical traits rather than a point on a calendar. Solon divided the life of man according to cycles of seven years: the third such hebdomad was the period when the chin grew downy and the skin began changing hue, while the fourth, 'youth' (νεανίσκος), was when man reached the peak of his strength and exhibited all the signs of manliness (fr.27 W). Frequently, the 'ages of man,' each with their attendant list of character traits and qualities, were correlated with the seasons. According to Diogenes Laertius, Pythagoras divided the life of man into four blocks of twenty years, each corresponding to one of the four seasons: 'the boy [corresponds to] spring, the youth to summer, the young man to autumn, the old man to winter' (παῖς ἔαρ, νεηνίσκος θέρος, νεηνίης φθινόπωρον, γέρων χειμών, D.L. 8.10). An expanded version of this can be found in the final book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Pythagoras outlines the seasons of man in a grand speech which figures boyhood as a playful springtime of tender blooms and florid colour ('then everything is flourishing, and with the colours of flowers the bountiful field frolics', *omnia tunc florent, florumque coloribus almus | ludit ager*, *Met*. 15.204-205). The energy, brightness, and delicacy of the boy as spring passes into a youthful summer, the defining qualities of which are strength, fertility, and heat (*Met*. 15.206-208).

Catullus forges this metaphorical association between man and the seasons in other poems. Poem 46 strikes a relationship between spring and the very nature of man:[10]

8 The metaphor can be traced to Homer: Aeneas is described as having ἥβης ἄνθος in Hom. *Il*. 13.484. For archaic uses of the metaphor in erotic contexts, compare: 'so long as he loves a boy in the desirable flower of youth, desiring his thighs and sweet mouth' (ἔσθ' ἥβης ἐρατοῖσιν ἐπ' ἄνθεσι παιδοφιλήσῃ, | μηρῶν ἱμείρων καὶ γλυκεροῦ στόματος, Sol. fr. 25 W); Mimnermus speaks of 'flowers of youth' (ἥβης ἄνθεα, Mimn. fr. 1.4 W) attractive to men and women (cf. frr. 2 and 3 which also link aging with the seasons).

9 I take the phrase from Konstan 2000, 14, who examines the 'prepubescent lover', an erotically attractive figure to both adult men and women.

10 Critics often read poem 46 in connection with Catullus' Bithynian experience (see, e.g., Skinner 1981, 77-80) or metapoetically (see Simpson and Simpson 1989). Silzer 1985 argues that the poem comments upon human mortality by participating in a Hellenistic tradition of spring poems, e.g. [Mel.] *AP* 9.363; Theoc. *Ep*. 20 G.-P. = *AP* 9.437; cf. Lucr. 1.1-20.

iam ver egelidos refert tepores,
iam caeli furor aequinoctialis
iucundis Zephyri silescit auris.
liquantur Phrygii, Catulle, campi
Nicaeaeque ager uber aestuosae
…
iam mens praetrepidans avet vagari,
iam laeti studio pedes vigescunt.[11]

Now spring returns the lukewarm warmth,
now the madness of the equinoctial sky
grows calm at the pleasant breezes of the Zephyr.
Let the Phrygian plains be left behind, Catullus,
and the rich field of sweltering Nicaea
…
Now this impatient mind desires to wander,
now these happy feet grow lively with enthusiasm.

The changing sky of lines 1-2 corresponds to the restless mind of lines 7-8 through the pointed repetition of 'now … now' (*iam … iam*), and where the breezes 'grow calmer' (*silescit*), the feet 'grow livelier' (*vigescunt*). The changing seasons reflect changing emotions as spring returns a sense of youthful vigour and excitement to the poet. By contrast, in poem 68a, Catullus characterises the springtime of his life as an irretrievable time of 'play' that has now passed:

tempore quo primum vestis mihi tradita pura est,
  iucundum cum aetas florida ver ageret,
multa satis lusi.[12]

From which time I first took up the *toga pura*,
  when my flowering age passed a pleasant spring,
I have played a lot, enough.

11 Catul. 46.1-5 and 7-8.
12 Catul. 68a.15-17.

The similarity of the floral imagery used to describe Juventius suggests that, like Catullus at 68a.15, the youth has or is about to assume the *toga virilis*, a garment which boys adopted at puberty around the age of 15.[13]

Catullus' erotic pursuit of a noble young man brings him into direct conflict with Roman sexual and social ethics, transgressing cultural boundaries. As Catullus implies with his elliptical *multa satis lusi*, the time when a boy became a man was considered ethically dangerous: he was in need of careful guidance.[14] The young man took up not only the toga, but his full citizen rights. Roman citizen males were off limits as love objects in any case, but upon taking up his *toga virilis*, the young man assumed complete control of his body. A relationship such as that between Catullus and Juventius would have been regarded as *stuprum*, which we might gloss as 'sexual dishonour,' because it entailed corrupting the sexual integrity of a freeborn Roman citizen.[15] In a classical Athenian context, however, παιδεραστία ('love of boys') was largely figured as an aristocratic phenomenon, a practice of the symposium and the gymnasium geared towards the socialisation of noble young men and their induction into the hegemonic fabric of the *polis*.[16] Attis in Catullus' poem 63 is a pertinent example of a Greek youth courted for his noble birth and physical beauty as the 'flower of the gymnasium' (*gymnasi … flos*, 63.64) and 'glory of the olive oil' (*decus olei*, 63.64). An erotic relationship, such as those Attis recalls, took place ideally between an adult citizen male, an ἐραστής, and an ἐρώμενος, an adolescent aged between 12 and 18, between the first down of puberty and the development of a full, heavy beard and body hair.[17] Catullus Hellenises his

13 For the usual age and the meaning of the rite, see Dolansky 2008; Laes and Strubbe 2014, 55 and 57.

14 Cicero describes his own assumption of the *toga virilis*, when he went to learn from Scaevola (*Amic.* 1). Compare his description of Marc Antony, who, he alleges, assumes the *toga virilis* only to be corrupted by Curio (*Phil.* 2.44-45). Langlands 2006, 305-307 discusses the latter passage as an example of the trope of the corrupted youth.

15 Williams 2010, 103-136 discusses the concept in detail.

16 Lear 2014 and 2015 shows the wide range of evidence for the links between education and pederasty. Percy 1996 focuses on these educative aspects of the relationship but problematically forges a link between pederasty and the 'Greek miracle'. General studies on Greek pederasty include Dover 1989, especially 81-109 and 149-151, Halperin 1990, Cantarella 1992, esp. chapters 2 and 3. Hubbard 1998 argues that homosexuality (*in toto* irrespective of sex role) was derided in classical Athens as an elite phenomenon, a product of soft living. On the symposium and gymnasium, see Skinner 2013, 16, 62, and 75.

17 Though, as Price 2002, 184-186 makes clear, philosophers disagreed about the relationship between the 'flower of youth' and the 'flower of virtue'. Socrates refutes a friend's disparaging comment about Alcibiades' burgeoning facial hair making him unfit to be an ἐρώμενος by quoting Homer 'who said that youth is most graceful in one who is getting his beard' (ὃς ἔφη χαριεστάτην ἥβην εἶναι τοῦ ὑπηνήτου, Pl. *Prt.* 309b, referring to Hom. *Il.* 24.347-348 or

relationship by erotically pursuing a beloved who is clearly characterised as an aristocratic youth on the ethically fraught cusp of physical change.

2 Summer Harvests in Poem 48

Honey had a rich variety of associations in antiquity, evoking the pleasure of poetry[18] and, as one side of the proverbial coin, hinting at the 'bitter-sweet' nature of love.[19] Honey often metaphorically describes the desirability of young people and the bodily beauty of the beloved. The phrase 'honey-sweet eyes' (*mellitos oculos*, 48.1) has its closest parallel in Sappho's description of a bride's ὄππατα <δ' ... > | μέλλιχ' ('eyes ... honey-sweet', fr. 112.3-4 V).[20] In Catullus' own work too, the epithet *mellitus* could signify something small, delicate, and playful like Lesbia's pet *passer* (*nam mellitus erat*, 3.6) or the playful boy himself (*dum ludis, mellite Iuventi*, 99.1). Poem 48 begins with an epithet which evokes the feminine world of lyric poetry and suggests that the beloved is effeminate and childlike, a figure on the point of transition to adulthood.

There are also many examples from Hellenistic pederastic epigram where the beloved's attractions are described as like honey, and often colour is the point of comparison. Meleager compares Cleobulus and Sopolis in terms of skin colour, the former is λευκανθής ('white-blossoming') while the latter is μελίχρους ('honey-sweet', *Steph.* 98.1 G.-P. = *AP* 12.165.1). An epigram by Dioscorides similarly celebrates the 'honey-coloured' hue (μελίχρως, *Steph.* 12.3 G.-P. = *AP* 12.170.3) of the boy Athenaeus.[21] This use of the adjective 'honey-sweet' to describe colour in pederastic discourse suggests that we should

Od. 10.279 where Hermes takes on the guise of a young man); cf. Pl. *Smp.* 181d where the noble ἐραστής chooses an ἐρώμενος who has the first down on his chin. See Dover 1989, 85-87 on distinctions between the παῖς, νεάνισκος, and μειράκιον. On the problem of timing the relationship with an ἐρώμενος, see Foucault 1985, 199-201.

18 Liebert 2017, 38 n. 14 reviews previous scholarship on the connection between honey and poetry and (33-48) outlines how poetry's honeyed sweetness structures the appetitive desire for poetry along the same lines as hunger, thirst, and sexual desire.

19 MacLachlan 1989 demonstrates Sappho's paradigmatic characterisation of Eros as a bee in fr. 130 V (Ἔρος δηὖτέ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει, | γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον) and further argues that Sappho rejects both the pleasure of love (honey) and its pains (the bee) in fr. 146 V (μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα). The bittersweet pains of love become a common trope in Hellenistic poetry: MacLachlan 1989, 97-98; Carson 1998.

20 See Ellis 1889, *ad loc.* It is likely, but not certain, that Sappho describes the bride's eyes, see most recently Meister 2017.

21 Cf. Dioscorides regarding a boy's honey-sweet thighs (10.4 G.-P. = *AP* 12.37.4) and an anonymous epigram (30.4 G.-P. = *AP* 12.123.4) extolling a boy's honey-sweet blood!

imagine a certain tawny brilliance in Juventius' appearance, an image which will be supported later in the poem.

Honey also functions as an early suggestion of the summer harvest, an image which is picked up later in the poem where Catullus uses more explicitly agricultural imagery. Alcman famously called honey κηρίνα ὀπώρα ('waxen harvest' or 'waxen fruit', fr. 96 *PMG*), with ὀπώρα evoking both the part of the year between the rising of Sirius and of Arcturus—very late summer and the beginning of autumn—and the fruits produced therein. Honey begins to be produced in spring, but the sweet liquid was, and is, best harvested in the summer months. In the Northern Hemisphere this correlates roughly to the period between the rising and setting of the Pleiades, from the end of May to November.[22]

At the end of the poem Catullus mingles imagery of kissing with another agricultural product, but this unusual idea of crops of kisses closer packed even than *aridis aristis* has generally been understood as an expression that simply indicates great number.[23] The reading has also been doubted by some who question how dried out ears of grain could convey thickness.[24] In fact, the dryness of the crop, that is, its ripeness and its readiness for harvest as it lies beneath the sun, is a fraught question which aptly describes the 'time-sensitive' state of the ἐρώμενος. The *arista* is, furthermore, a more complicated product than simply a 'crop of grain.'

Wheat and barley were the major Roman cereal crops and their similarity in appearance, composition, and lifecycle means that some general remarks can suffice.[25] According to Varro, the head of grains like barley and wheat has three parts (*R.* 1.48): the kernel (*granum*), the husk (*gluma*), and the beard or awn (*arista*). Thus, *arista* refers properly not to an ear of grain—though it can

22 Verg. *G.* 4.231-235 identifies two seasons for harvesting honey within this period of late spring to early autumn, but Varro distinguishes three, at the rising of the Pleiades, at the end of summer before Arcturus has completely risen, and at the setting of the Pleiades (*R.* 3.16.34).

23 Kroll 1929 and Syndikus 1984, *ad loc.* particularly emphasise the epic use of the phrase (comparing Verg. *G.* 2.142, Verg. *A.* 7.720, and Ov. *Met.* 2.213) where it indicates great number; but Syndikus also suggests that other associations (the sun, happiness) come into the Catullan image.

24 Markland 1723, 154-156 rejected *aridis aristis* for *Africis aristis*; he was followed by Baehrens 1876. Kroll 1929, Syndikus 1984, and Thomson 1997, *ad loc.* rightly compare Catullus' *aridae aristae* to a remark by Augustine who questioned the enormous number of Roman gods: why, Augustine asks, cannot Segetia rule over the crops 'from their grassy beginnings all the way to dry ears' (*ab initiis herbidis usque ad aridas aristas*, *C.D.* 4.8) clearly implying that the latter represents the end of the lifecycle.

25 Semple 1928, 72.

stand metonymically for the whole—but to a specific part of it, the bristles that rise out of the kernels and protect them. Varro reasons that the term *arista* is related to *arescere* because the beard of grain is the first part to dry (*R.* 1.48).[26] As grain ripens, the green plant loses moisture and steadily changes colour.[27] The grain has matured and is ready for harvest when the kernels have lost most of their moisture and turned a brilliant yellow gold.[28] This maturation process obviously depends upon the climate, but Varro says that most farmers harvested in the period between the summer solstice in late June and the dawn rising of the Dog Star, which began in late July.[29]

The grain harvest took place as the days grew warmer and the crops dried out beneath the hot summer sun. There was such a strong association between summer, sun, and abundant grain crops that Ovid has many *aristae* make a summer: 'truly, you will count the flowers, the ears of grain in the heat, fruits throughout the autumn and snow in the cold, before …' (*vere prius flores, aestu numerabis aristas, | poma per autumnum frigoribusque nives*, *Tr.* 4.1.57-58). Virgil counsels that 'a great threshing will come with a great heat' (*magnaque cum magno veniet tritura calore*, *G.* 1.190), but a good farmer would not leave his crops too long under the sun. A grain crop left in the fields when the Dog Star rises could be damaged: the grain kernels—maybe even entire ears—could scatter to the ground as the stalks and beards dried up and withered.[30] Pliny

26 Ross 1987, 35-36 argues that Catullus plays on Varro's etymology of *arista*.

27 Ovid describes the ear (*arista* seems to refer to the whole ear here) becoming white as it matures: 'is it because the harvest whitens when the ears are ripe?' (*an quia maturis albescit messis aristis …*, *Fast.* 5.357); Virgil alters the crop's age by adding the adjective *maturus* or *primus* at *G.* 1.348 and 2.253 respectively.

28 Rickman 1980, 265. Columella describes the colourful sign that a crop should be gathered: 'as [the crop] reaches an even yellow, before the kernels harden completely, when they have drawn out their ruddy colour' (*aequaliter flaventibus iam satis, ante quam ex toto grana indurescant, cum rubicundum colorem traxerunt …*, 2.20.2).

29 'Most carry out the harvest in the fourth period between the solstice and the Dog Star, because they say that the grain is in the sheath for 15 days, flowers for 15 days, dries out for 15 days, and then it is ripe' (*quarto intervallo inter solstitium et caniculam plerique messem faciunt, quod frumentum dicunt quindecim diebus esse in vaginis, quindecim florere, quindecim exarescere, cum sit maturum*, Var. *R.* 1.32). Hesiod suggests an earlier schedule, where the harvest is begun in mid-May (*Op.* 383-384) and completed by the time Orion rises at dawn, around the time of the summer solstice (*Op.* 597-598). Hannah 2005, 20-25 has a clear discussion of the links between the agricultural calendar and the stars in Homer and Hesiod; Semple 1928, 71 and 73 suggests that winter wheat (crops sown in autumn) was harvested in May and June, while spring wheat (sown in March) was harvested three months later around June/July.

30 According to Columella: 'when the crop is ripe, before it is scorched by the blasts of the summer sun, which are most prodigious at the rising of the Dog Star, it should be harvested quickly: for delay is costly …, because the grains and the ears themselves fall

the Elder offers a simple rule: 'reap it before the kernel hardens and when it has drawn out its colour,' but he adds for good measure that an oracle advises 'it is better to reap the harvest two days too soon than two days too late' (*lex apertissima, "antequam granum indurescat et cum iam traxerit colorem", oraculum vero "biduo celerius messem facere potius quam biduo serius"*, *Nat*. 18.72). The phrase *aridae aristae* thus evokes the blazing summer sun, the harvest, and the precarity of this precious crop, which must be carefully watched to ascertain the right time for harvest.

3 Grainy Beards: a Hellenistic Pun?

Grain has a long literary history as a metaphor for facial hair. The term ἴουλος most often refers to a boy's first facial hair, but it had a secondary application to a 'sheaf of grain', cuttings from the entire grain stalk bound together.[31] Homer uses the term to describe Otus and Ephialtes, killed by Apollo before their cheeks developed the first down,[32] but ἴουλος comes into its own in Hellenistic literature. Callimachus connects the two meanings of the term in the *Hymn to Delos*, where the Hyperboreans were the 'first to bring the grain stalk and holy sheaves of grain in the ear' (οἱ μέν τοι καλάμην τε καὶ ἱερὰ δράγματα πρῶτοι | ἀσταχύων φορέουσιν, *Del*. 283-284), a moment surely foreshadowing the point when the boys of Delos offer unmarried young men the 'first summer harvest of down' (θέρος τὸ πρῶτον ἰούλων, 4.298) from their cheeks. In his *Hecale* too, the eponymous protagonist describes how she was watching her threshing floor when a glamorous blond driver from Aphidnae arrived (*Hec*. fr. 42=253.7 [=255], 253.8-12 Pf.). With a possible nod back to the threshing floor in the punning notion of the 'threshed sheaf of grain/delicate beard' (λεπτὸς ἴουλος), she compares the hero Theseus to this man because 'a delicate down like the blossom of the goldflower was just spreading over that one too' (ἁρμοῖ που

quickly when the stalks and beards wither' (*cum matura fuerit seges, ante quam torreatur vaporibus aestivi sideris, qui sunt vastissimi per exortum Caniculae, celeriter demetatur; nam dispendiosa est cunctatio … quod grana et ipsae spicae culmis arentibus et aristis celeriter decidunt*, Col. 2.20.1-2).

31 For the cultic meanings of ἴουλος, see Fitton 1975, 228-231, who argues that the term meant 'dark coloured beard' and required some other qualifier like 'first', 'fine', or 'yellowish-red' to describe the lighter coloured 'first down'.

32 'Before facial hair blossomed beneath their temples and covered their cheeks with flowery down' (πρίν σφωϊν ὑπὸ κροτάφοισιν ἰούλους | ἀνθῆσαι πυκάσαι τε γένυς εὐανθέϊ λάχνῃ, Hom. *Od*. 11.319-320). I will return to this passage below. Tarán 1985, 90, comments on Asclep. 46 G.-P. = *AP* 12.36: "The motif is established from the start with the almost formulaic ὑπὸ κροτάφοισιν ἴουλος. ἴουλος is particularly pointed in an epigram ending with a metaphor of ears of corn because of its second meaning of 'cornsheaf'."

κἀκείνῳ ἐπέτρεχε λεπτὸς ἴουλος | ἄνθει ἑλιχρύσῳ ἐναλίγκιος, *Hec*. fr. 45=274 Pf.).[33] Theocritus describes the image of the beautiful, young Adonis 'letting fall the first down beneath his temples' (πρᾶτον ἴουλον ἀπὸ κροτάφων καταβάλλων, Theoc. 15.85). In these examples, the first down is attractive and poignant; in the *Hecale* and *Idyll* 15, the first down is attractive to female viewers of young male beauty.[34]

However, a pederastic epigram ascribed to an Asclepiades of Adramyttium—sometimes identified as Asclepiades of Samos, but possibly another pre-Meleagrian author[35]—rejects a young man who offers himself as an ἐρώμενος after getting the 'fine down' (λεπτὸς … ἴουλος) beneath his temples:

> νῦν αἰτεῖς, ὅτε λεπτὸς ὑπὸ κροτάφοισιν ἴουλος
> ἔρπει καὶ μηροῖς ὀξὺς ἔπεστι χνόος·
> εἶτα λέγεις· "ἥδιον ἐμοὶ τόδε"; καὶ τίς ἂν εἴποι
> κρείσσονας αὐχμηρὰς ἀσταχύων καλάμας;[36]
>
> Now you ask, when the fine facial hair beneath your temples
> creeps and the sharp chaff is upon your thighs!
> Do you therefore say "this is more pleasing to me"? Who would say
> that dry stubble is better than ears of grain?

The author draws upon the full semantic range of several agricultural terms for grain, mercilessly playing with the idea of harvest in order to remind the young man that his golden bloom is gone.[37] Besides the multivalence of ἴουλος,

33 'I was keeping watch over my threshing floor being trodden by the bulls' (δινομένην ὑπὸ βουσὶν ἐμὴν ἐφύλασσον ἅλωα, Call. *Hec*. fr. 42.1=255 Pf.). My interpretation depends upon the reconstruction of the fragments by Hollis 1990, who, however, favours the reading from the Suda (ἐπέτρεχεν ἁβρὸς ἴουλος) at fr. 45.1=274.1 Pf. Simaetha's beloved Delphis and his friend Eudamippus also had 'beards blonder than the goldflower' (τοῖς δ' ἦς ξανθοτέρα μὲν ἑλιχρύσοιο γενειάς, Theoc. 2.78). The straw- or goldflower (*Helichrysum siculum*) was yellow, spiky, and, one could argue, quite beardlike.

34 Cf. τοὺς ἴουλον ἀνθεῦντας, Herod. 1.52, where a bawd attempts to excite Metriche's interest in the handsome Gryllos by describing his athletic prowess from boyhood through youth and manhood. Stern 1981 situates the mime's constant references to aging against the religious festival celebrating the seasonal return of Kore to Demeter.

35 Gow and Page 1965, 150 favour a namesake from Adramyttium, while Gutzwiller 1998, 122 n. 21 thinks the epigram is closer in style to those in the later *Garland of Philip*. Sens 2010, *ad loc.* argues it may just as well belong in a Meleagrian sequence.

36 Asclep. 46 G.-P. = *AP* 12.36. Text from Sens 2010.

37 Sens 2010, *ad loc.* notes that the poem "resonates against the motif in which *erastai* urge *eromenoi* to concede sexual favours while they are still young and attractive", comparing Thgn. 1327-1331. He further notes, 324, "the sexual harvest is over and the boy has missed his season".

the literal meaning of the adjective λεπτός (from λέπω) is 'peeled', 'husked', or 'threshed', and καλάμη literally refers to the grain 'stalk', but 'stubble' captures the punning imagery well. The grain shorn of its ear could resemble coarse human hair, and thus the hairy ἐρώμενος past his prime has become like a dry stalk of grain, shorn of its brilliant golden ear. The first beard may not be ugly in itself here, but the imagery continues in order to evoke the bristling, even unpleasantly sharp (ὀξύς), prickliness of a body covered in hair.[38] This epigram may have inspired a poem by the epigrammatist and grammarian Rhianus, which offers the closest precedent for Catullus' *aridae aristae* phrase.[39] Praising the attractions of the boy Cleonicus, Rhianus reveals that he can only admire the boy from afar because 'it is not safe for a dry grain-beard to draw nearer to a fire' (πυρὸς δ' οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς ἆσσον | ἕρπειν αὐηρήν … ἀνθερίκην, Rhian. 4.5-6 G.-P. = *AP* 12.121.5-6). The sharp καλάμη of the Asclepiadean epigram has become the prickly beard on an ear of grain (ἀνθέριξ),[40] but Rhianus uses the image to describe himself rather than the beloved.

Greek pederastic epigram cements the erotic topos of the aging ἐρώμενος who develops a beard and ceases to be attractive.[41] The threat of his burgeoning beard is described with a variety of imagery from the natural world including brambles (Anon. *AP* 11.53),[42] becoming a goat (Anon. *AP* 11.51; Mel. *Steph.* 94.3-4 G.-P. = *AP* 12.41 3-4)[43] and the night-time (Strat. *AP* 12.178)—but Greek pederastic epigram in the period contemporary to and after Catullus retained

38 Sens 2010, *ad loc.* notes that the reference to sharpness reveals that the speaker is concerned with the sensation of coming into physical contact with the hair. He compares the unpleasantness of kissing facial hair at Theoc. 15.129-130: ὀκτωκαιδεκετὴς ἢ ἐννεακαίδεχ' ὁ γαμβρός· | οὐ κεντεῖ τὸ φίλημ'· ἔτι οἱ περὶ χείλεα πυρρά.

39 Tarán 1985, 91 n. 9 also suggests as much.

40 See LSJ s.v. ἀνθέριξ, meaning I. I disagree with Gow and Page 1965, 505, who suggest that the meaning is 'asphodel stalk'.

41 The beautiful youth is also beardless in archaic lyric and elegaic poetry: Pindar remarks that the athletic young Pytheas does not yet show on his cheeks 'late summer, mother of the grape's soft flowering' (τερείνας | ματέρ' οἰνάνθας ὀπώραν, *N.* 5.6-7); Pi. *O.* 8.54 and 9.89 refers to ἀγένειοι ('beardless youths'); Previously the ἐρώμενος of Poseidon, Pelops begins to think of marriage as he reaches his 'blossoming flower' (εὐάνθεμον … φυάν, Pi. *O.* 1.67) and a 'woolly down wreathed his dark chin' (λάχναι νιν μέλαν γένειον ἔρεφον, Pi. *O.* 1.68); Alcman repeatedly describes the young Hagesidamos as beardless in fr. 10; finally, in an erotic context the poet of the *Theognidea* reminds a boy that he will not stop praising him as long as his chin is smooth: ὦ παῖ, ἕως ἂν ἔχῃς λείαν γένυν, οὔποτέ σ' αἰνῶν | παύσομαι, οὐδ' εἴ μοι μόρσιμόν ἐστι θανεῖν (1327-1328). See Tarán 1985 for more examples of the topos in Greek pederastic epigram.

42 The lines are also transmitted in Sylloge S attached to a poem by Alcaeus of Messene (7= *AP* 12.29): see Tarán 1985, 91-92 for discussion.

43 *AP* 11.51 also connects the boy's burgeoning hairiness with the seasons.

these grain harvest metaphors for the hairy, aging ἐρώμενος. Tullius Laurea, a freedman of Cicero, wrote an epigram absolving himself of repaying Apollo with a sacrifice for the safe return of his beloved Polemo as the boy 'came with a beard' (ἦλθε δὲ σὺν πώγωνι, Tull. Laur. 3.7 G.-P. = *AP* 12.24.7). Statilius Flaccus wrote three epigrams in response, all of which use different imagery to complain about the now bristly Polemo: in one he chides the god not to cheat him, 'paying me for an ear of grain with blunt stubble' (κωφήν μοι σταχύων ἀντιδιδοὺς καλάμην, Stat. Flacc. 11.6 G.-P. = *AP* 12.25.6). Later, Philip complains that Archestratus decides to be 'friends' with him only now that the young man is darkening with hair. He likens this behaviour to giving him stubble, after giving the harvest to others (τὴν καλάμην δωρῇ, δοὺς ἑτέροις τὸ θέρος, Phil. 59.6 G.-P. = *AP* 11.36.6).[44] Strato asks Cyris, 'now you are spring, afterwards summer: what will you be next, Cyris? Think about it, for you will be stubble too' (νῦν ἔαρ εἶ, μετέπειτα θέρος· κἄπειτα τί μέλλεις | Κῦρις; βούλευσαι, καὶ καλάμη γὰρ ἔσῃ, Strat. *AP* 12.215).[45] Catullus' direct contemporary Philodemus twists the imagery in order to anticipate the coming of age of the young girl Lysidice, observing to her, 'your summer crop is not yet naked of its husks' (Οὔπω σοι καλύκων γυμνὸν θέρος, Phld. *AP* 5.124.1=16.1 Sider).[46] Where pederastic epigram figures the dehusked grain or the grain stalk shorn of its ear as a metaphor for the ἐρώμενος who has grown too old, Philodemus uses the imagery to convey lascivious anticipation of a young girl's physical development.

Catullus is clearly engaging then with this Hellenistic trope, in which the spiky grain (whether stalk, ear, beard, or the plant in its entirety) evokes a boy's growing hairiness as he transitions from the metaphorical spring to summer. In place of the more generally metaphorical ἴουλος or the Asclepiadean καλάμη, Catullus repurposes Rhianus' precise image of the grain awn, the slender blond bristles rising out of a mature head of grain, to subtly evoke Juventius' burgeoning prickly beard. In this scheme, the harvest can symbolise the sexual act as well as the onset of maturity. Like the Asclepiadean author, Catullus uses the notion of harvest in an attempt to persuade Juventius to submit to kisses before he is 'damaged goods', the prickly stubble after the valuable ear has been shorn. The boy is entreated to seize the day and submit to the advances of his lover before it is too late.[47] Given that this poem is part of a wider story of

44 Tarán 1985, 93-94 suggests that Philip alludes to Asclep. 46 G.-P. = *AP* 12.36.

45 Maxwell-Stuart 1972, 224 suggests that καλάμη recalls κάλαμος ('reed') and thus the impotent penis, but it is more likely that Strato is engaging with the motif of the grain as beard.

46 Sider 1997, 120-121 has argued that this line refers to Lysidice's "forthcoming pubic hair" because κάλυξ refers not to the bud of a flower but to the sheath of grain.

47 Fountoulakis 2013, 302 and Maxwell-Stuart 1972, 220 discuss how the onset of the beard feeds into a *carpe diem* theme in the epigrams of Strato's *Musa puerilis*.

Catullus' rivalry with Furius and Aurelius, we can perceive the threat of the young man's 'deflowering' by this pair—like the epigrammatist Philip complaining that Archestratus offers only stubble after giving his harvest to others, Catullus wants to harvest his crop of kissing before anyone else gets to it.

4 The Smooth-Cheeked *puer delicatus*

The grainy beard is not an artificially Hellenising trope either in terms of contemporary Roman attitudes to facial hair. Although adult Roman males in the late republic and early imperial periods were generally clean-shaven and though there is even evidence to suggest that it was fashionable for young men to sport sculpted little beards in the late republic (see Cicero's remarks at, for example, *Att*. 1.14.5 and *Cael*. 33), men seem to have retained their attraction to smooth-cheeked *pueri delicati*.[48] In a wedding poem for Manlius and Junia, Catullus addresses the groom's *concubinus*, a young male slave used as a sexual partner, and urges him to take part in the festivities despite the fact that they mark the end of his sexual relationship with his master. The youth is encouraged to put away childish things and to take an interest in women (61.124-130). His reluctant transition into manhood is underscored when Catullus reminds him that 'the hairdresser now shaves your face' (*nunc tuum cinerarius* | *tondet os*, 61.131-132).[49] He is too old to continue to play the role of the fresh-faced, coiffured *puer delicatus*. Catullus then offers joking Fescennine advice to Manlius that he should—though he will find it difficult—hold off from his *glabri* (61.135), slaves who were 'hairless' by nature or artifice.[50]

48 As Murgatroyd 1977, 105 comments: "Exact age in the 'puer delicatus' is hard to pin down … Rather than a pedantic reckoning of years, the poets were more concerned with the absence of hair on the face." On the complicated semiotics of facial hair in Cicero's *Pro Caelio*, see Christenson 2004. On the *depositio barbae*, a rite of passage of the imperial period in which young men, usually in their twenties, dedicate their first beard, see Laes and Strubbe 2014, 58. For epigrams about the rite, e.g. Antip. Thess. *AP* 6.198, Crin. 9 and 10 G.-P. = *AP* 6.242 and 161: Gow and Page 1968, 219-220 discuss the latter two.

49 See Ellis 1889, *ad loc.* for discussion of the *cinerarius* and hair on the face and head of the *puer delicatus*.

50 On the figure of the *glaber* and the Roman pederastic preference for smooth young bodies, see Williams 2010, 78-84. Cf. other youths in Catullus: Attis is *tener* (63.88) with *teneris … digitis* (63.10); boys are set in explicit contrast to the presumably older 'hairy' men, whom Catullus targets as his readers (*non … pueris, sed his pilosis*, 16.10); Vibennius Junior, part of a dynamic father-son duo who plague the baths, has 'hairy buttocks' (*natis pilosas*, 33.7)—he is too old and too ugly to be selling himself as a *puer delicatus*. Uden (forthcoming) argues that Egnatius' beard (*Egnati, opaca quem bonum facit barba*, 37.19) signals his Epicurean beliefs.

Writers on pederastic themes in Latin directly after Catullus retain this attraction to the 'smooth' boy. Horace warns that Ligurinus' rosy complexion will be replaced by a 'bristly face' (*faciem … hispidam*, *Carm*. 4.10.5) and he will wish he once more had 'unharmed cheeks' (*incolumes … genae*, 4.10.8), once 'the down, unexpected by his arrogance, has come' (*insperata … cum veniet †pluma† superbiae*, 4.10.2).[51] In the Nisus and Euryalus episode of the *Aeneid*, Virgil describes Euryalus as 'a boy adorning his unshaven cheeks with first youth' (*ora puer prima signans intonsa iuventa*, *A*. 9.181).[52] Tibullus has Priapus as erotodidact warn of the 'smooth bands of boys' (*tenerae puerorum … turbae*, 1.4.9), who may attract the hapless lover: one kind is pleasing because of the 'virginal shame' which 'bristles before his soft cheeks' (*at illi | virgineus teneras stat pudor ante genas*, 1.4.13-14).[53] Tibullus attempts to convince Pholoe of Marathus' worth by drawing her attention to the fact that 'his smooth face shines nor does a rough beard wear away embraces' (*cui levia fulgent | ora nec amplexus aspera barba terit*, 1.8.31-32). Finally, Ovid connects youth, springtime, and the smooth cheeks of boys in his description of Orpheus as the 'author' of pederasty, described as the act of

> amorem
> in teneros transferre mares citraque iuventam
> aetatis breve ver et primos carpere flores.[54]
>
> transferring love to smooth males and plucking
> the brief spring and first flowers before youth's end.

The grain harvest metaphors of poem 48 correspond with a larger pattern of agricultural terminology in Catullus' representations of the beloved as well as

51 The conjecture by Bentley 1711, *ad loc.* of *bruma* ('winter', at Hor. *Carm*. 4.10.2) would also support my interpretation of Catul. 48 as a pederastic poem dependent upon the association of the seasons with hair and aging. Asztalos 2008 discusses the many conjectures for Hor. *Carm*. 4.10.2 and interprets the poem as a self-address about the aging Ligurinus *and* the aging Horace.

52 Cf. Verg. *A*. 8.160-161. On Euryalus' youth and burgeoning beard as a mark of heroic promise, see Petrini 1997, 21-22.

53 Given that *stare* can be used of hairs 'standing on end' (e.g. *stabantque comae*, Ov. *Met*. 7.631), *pudor* may 'stand' on this boy's smooth cheeks somewhat ironically. Compare these smooth boys to the idealised ἐραστής figure with the glossy beard when Tibullus asks how, without this feature, Priapus still manages to attract boys: *quae tua formosos cepit sollertia? certe | non tibi barba nitet, non tibi culta coma est* (1.4.3-4).

54 Ov. *Met*. 10.83-85. My thanks to Peter Davis for reminding me of the importance of this passage.

a wider use of agricultural imagery in Latin literature to describe the human body and sexual acts.[55] Lesbia's 'dehusking' of her other lovers at the crossroads stands as a fellow Catullan example of the complex imagery that these precise terms from the farm and field can convey;[56] as does Catullus' farewell to Lesbia in poem 11, where just as a flower on the edge of the field, his love falls at the touch of the inexorably plough-like Lesbia (11.21-24). Finally, other Latin authors make the connection between the bristly *aristae* on grain and human hair: Varro explains the verb *tremo*, 'I tremble', as a shivering body whose hairs bristle like the beard on an ear of barley (*in corpore pili, ut arista in spica hordei, horrent*, *L*. 6.45).[57] Much later than Catullus, the satirist Persius also represents body hairs standing on end as *aristae* ('you shiver, when white fear rouses the bristles on your limbs', *alges, cum excussit membris timor albus aristas*, 3.115). Most revealingly, Claudian's description of the eunuch consul Eutropius' grub-eaten pate imagines that horrible worms have so eaten away at his head that numerous bald patches have appeared: 'just as a dry crop of meagre awns patchily covers the thirsty fields' (*qualis sitientibus arvis | arida ieiunae seges interlucet aristae*, *In Eut.* 1.115-116). Claudian realises the always present potential of the golden crop to stay too long in the soil in this satiric reworking of the grain as hair motif applied to a classic portrait of the aging, effeminate male.[58]

55 Other agricultural terms are used in sexual contexts: see Adams 1992, 24-25, for agricultural terms for the *mentula*, e.g. *vomer* ('ploughshare') and *falcula* ('little sickle'); 113-114, on the many agricultural metaphors for the *culus*; and 152-155, on grinding, ploughing, sowing etc.

56 Lesbia 'dehusks the descendants of great Remus' (*glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes*, 58.5). As we saw above, Varro explains that *glubere* comes from *gluma* ('husk') at *R*. 1.48. For an overview of scholarship on this poem and an interpretation which takes full account of the agricultural dimension of *glubere*, see Weiner 2018. Cyrino 1995, 95 n. 15, links the dehusking in Catul. 58 to the λέπτοι δ' ἄνδρες (Alc. fr. 347.5), whom the lyric poet Alcaeus describes: these men are dehusked, weakened by sex-crazed women during the dog days of summer. An anonymous reviewer alerts me to another likely example of agri-sexual punning: in Catullus' poem 56, *trusantem* (6) suggests the provocative back-and-forth motions made by the kneeling operator of the 'hand-mill' (*mola trusatilis*, see Cato *Agr*. 10.4, 11.4, and Eichholz 1960, 74) while *protelo* evokes a line of oxen harnessed in tandem to draw along the plough (e.g. Cato *ap*. Non. 363). More work is certainly needed on this poem.

57 Varro also says that the term *arista* (like *granum*) is well-known compared to the more unusual *gluma* (*R*. 1.48).

58 Markland 1723, 154-156 took this passage as evidence that Catul. 48.5 could not read *aridis aristis*: he questions how a dry, patchy crop could indicate density and number. Claudian deftly exploits the associations of this crop imagery with hair and age (perhaps even drawing upon Catul. 48), and his creativity should not be used to emend a fairly secure reading of *aridis aristis* at Catul. 48.5—it is in mss. OGR.

5 The Grain Harvest and the Death of Youth in Epic

However, the connection between harvested grain and the aging male face and body has other important antecedents in the altogether different genre of epic, and this offers Catullus another context for persuading Juventius to submit to love. Upon his return to Ithaca, Odysseus is disguised as a beggar by Athena and advised to go to the swineherd's hut. There, he assures the swineherd that Odysseus will return by spinning a tale about a warrior past which brought him, now this aged beggar, into contact with the great hero. Describing his youthful prowess, he concedes:

> νῦν δ' ἤδη πάντα λέλοιπεν·
> ἀλλ' ἔμπης καλάμην γέ σ' ὀΐομαι εἰσορόωντα
> γιγνώσκειν.[59]
>
> Now all [my past *aretē*] has left me; but I think that in looking upon the stubble at any rate, you may recognise it.

The beggar Odysseus imagines himself as a stalk of grain shorn of its youthful glory.[60] Beggar Odysseus has been mown down, not by another warrior but by old age. The metaphor taps into a wider epic motif, which represents death on the battlefield as a harvest of men. Armies meet across a field, like 'reapers … driving a swathe through a rich man's field of wheat or barley' (ἀμητῆρες … | ὄγμον ἐλαύνωσιν ἀνδρὸς μάκαρος κατ' ἄρουραν | πυρῶν ἢ κριθῶν, Hom. *Il.* 11.67-69); their 'handfuls fall thick' (τὰ δὲ δράγματα ταρφέα πίπτει, *Il.* 11.69). In a far bloodier image, Achilles and his horse trample on the dead bodies of the Trojans and their shields like a farmer yoking a bull to tread on white barley and dehusk it (*Il.* 20.495-502). Odysseus attempts to persuade Achilles to let his men eat before they go out to fight, aptly describing battle as a harvest of which men quickly have their fill: 'the bronze scatters a lot of stubble on the ground, but the harvest is very small' (πλείστην μὲν καλάμην χθονὶ χαλκὸς ἔχευεν, | ἄμητος δ' ὀλίγιστος, *Il.* 19.222-223). While interpretation of this metaphor has long been divided, when read against the other Homeric imagery we have seen, there seems little doubt that the 'stubble' of this battle is the warriors who have been

59 Hom. *Od.* 14.213-215.

60 Aristotle describes how Homer's metaphor figures Odysseus as an old man who has 'lost his bloom': ὅταν γὰρ εἴπῃ τὸ γῆρας καλάμην, ἐποίησε μάθησιν καὶ γνῶσιν διὰ τοῦ γένους· ἄμφω γὰρ ἀπηνθηκότα, Arist. *Rh.* 10.2, 1410b14.

killed.[61] In the Hellenistic period, Apollonius of Rhodes extends the Homeric metaphor to create the faintly ludicrous image of Jason harvesting the earth-born men as they literally sprout up out of the soil. Jason takes up his sharpened sickle like a farmer, who spitefully harvests his fields to avoid them falling into the hands of a neighbouring people during wartime: 'hurrying, he crops the unripe ears of grain, and does not wait for harvest time to dry them out with the rays of the sun' (ὠμὸν ἐπισπεύδων κείρει στάχυν, οὐδὲ βολῇσιν | μίμνει ἐς ὡραίην τερσήμεναι ἠελίοιο, 3.1389-1390).

Apollonius strips the Homeric simile of its pathos, but this sense of the young warrior as a grain crop 'harvested' before his time—'before the first down grew upon his cheeks'—is already present in Homer and features more widely in the *Argonautica*. The first down on the cheeks marked the burgeoning of noble, masculine beauty,[62] and sometimes it heralded a young warrior's immanent death with poignant pathos.[63] Odysseus narrates that he saw Iphimedia in the underworld and that she spoke about her giant sons Otus and Ephialtes, whom Apollo killed 'before facial hair blossomed beneath their temples and covered their cheeks with flowery down' (πρίν σφωϊν ὑπὸ κροτάφοισιν ἰούλους | ἀνθῆσαι πυκάσαι τε γένυς εὐανθέϊ λάχνῃ, *Od.* 11.319-320). Apollonius often makes a point of mentioning that a young warrior is growing his first beard as he prepares to face death or injury: Polydeuces 'still growing the first down of his beard' (ἔτι χνοάοντας ἰούλους | ἀντέλλων, 2.43-44) squares up to fight and kill Amycus; Lycus describes himself as 'a young man blooming with his first down' (νέον χνοάοντα ἰούλους, 2.779) when Hercules first met him and the thought is closely connected with the death of his brother in the following lines 780-782; finally, the beards of Jason and Cyzicus are described as 'just sprouting' (ἐπισταχύεσκον ἴουλοι, 1.972) not long before the young hero kills the equally young king. The *hapax legomenon* ἐπισταχύω is derived from στάχυς ('ear of grain'), making this another example of the Hellenistic punning on the 'grain beard'.[64]

61 Combellack 1984 argues that the situation in the metaphor is a rout. Zeus has tipped the balance on his scales and decided on an outcome; thus, this stage of battle will be short and fierce, and the army will require sustenance before going out. For the stubble as bodies of the dead, see Moulton 1979, 286.

62 Hermes disguises himself as a young man with the first down at Hom. *Il.* 24.347-348 and *Od.* 10.279, but the emphasis is upon his nobility ('in the likeness of a regal youth', κούρῳ αἰσυμνητῆρι ἐοικώς), cf. the disreputable Thersites, who grows only a 'scanty down' (ψεδνὴ … λάχνη, Hom. *Il.* 2.219).

63 The epic tradition describes the deaths of many noble youths in terms which emphasise the beautiful young body cut down in or before its prime, comparing them to stars, flowers, and other plants, see Lovatt 2013, 278-280.

64 Mooney 1912, *ad loc.* notes that this is a *hapax legomenon*. The alternate reading ὑποσταχύεσκον also supports my interpretation. Meleager is counted among the men

Catullus explicitly draws upon this imagery of young men harvested too soon on the epic battlefield in poem 64, an important final intertext with poem 48. Achilles cuts down Trojan youths:

> namque velut densas praecerpens messor aristas
> sole sub ardenti flaventia demetit arva,
> Troiugenum infesto prosternet corpora ferro.[65]
>
> For just as a reaper gathers the thick ears of grain early
> harvesting the blond fields under the blazing sun,
> he lays out the bodies of the Trojan-born with menacing iron.

These Trojan youths, as yellow (*flaventia*) fields and golden ears of grain, are implicitly figured as beautiful, blond heroes like Achilles himself in the *Iliad* (ξανθῆς … κόμης, *Il.* 1.197), Theseus in poem 64 (*flavo … hospite*, Catul. 64.98), or Protesilaus in poem 68b (*flavo … viro*, 68b.130).[66] Drawing upon the motif we have traced throughout Greek literature, these youths are perhaps also to be imagined either on the cusp of or in the process of growing their first beards. There is a tension at the heart of this passage which has given rise to a reading of *praecerpens* as 'mowing down before him' rather than the more common meaning 'reaping before time'. The tawny yellow gold of the ears of grain indicates strength and ripeness, the state of being in one's physical and mental prime. Yet, these young men may only be on the cusp of manhood and they are cut down too soon.[67]

The densely clustered ears or beards of grain in poem 48 and poem 64 thus share not only a sense of great number, but a conception of the young man as something as fragile, impermanent, and precious as grain. Catullus associates

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although he does not yet have the first down of a beard (οὐδέ περ ὅσσον ἐπανθιόωντας | ἰούλους | ἀντέλλων, A.R. 3.519-520): Jason has informed his crew of his impossible task and Meleager, despite his youth, is one of the few who stand ready to help and possibly to die.

65 Catul. 64.353-355. The passage is often compared (e.g. by Thomson, Ellis, and Baehrens, *ad loc.*) to Hom. *Il.* 11.67-69.

66 See Achilles again at Hom. *Il.* 23.141; Odysseus has ξανθὰς … τρίχας at *Od.* 13.399 and 431. Mythical women in Catullus' long poems are also frequently blonde: Ariadne (*flavo … vertice*, 64.63); Berenice and her lock (*flavi verticis*, 66.62).

67 The idea that *praecerpens* refers to "mowing down before him" as Thomson 1997, *ad loc.* puts it, derives from Friedrich 1908, *ad loc.*, who argued that the prefix *prae-* has locatival force here rather than temporal (the more common meaning, according to the *TLL*). Ellis 1889, *ad loc.* rejects both, suggesting that the term means "mowing the heads off, *lopping*". Ov. *Ep.* 20.143 (*quis tibi permisit nostras praecerpere messes?*) offers an example of the meaning 'to reap before time'.

his beloved Juventius with the virile strength and beauty of the noble young heroes of the epic tradition, but the idea of death advancing across the epic battlefield to reap his harvest lurks behind the agricultural imagery. The poem thus echoes its fellow kiss poems 5 and 7, which seek to persuade Lesbia to give kisses by evoking vast natural antitheses against which the 'rumours of the rather strict old men' (*rumoresque senum severiorum*, 5.2) may be discounted. The profundity of one fatal night (*nox est perpetua una dormienda*, 5.6) and the cold silence of the tomb of old Battus (*Batti veteris sacrum sepulcrum*, 7.6) should easily outweigh any hesitations she has about giving hundreds upon thousands of nugatory kisses. In poem 48 too, fatalistic imagery from nature serves as a reminder of the precious brevity of life.

6 Conclusion

Catullus plots a subtle movement in Juventius' characterisation within the poem from feminine to masculine, from his playful 'honey-sweet eyes' to his masculine grain-beard, but poem 48 imagines a relationship on the threshold in a variety of ways. This young Roman aristocrat is courted as though he were a Greek *ephebus*, a participant in a socially recognised relationship rather than an act of *stuprum*. Between the blossoming of spring and the harvest of summer, Juventius stands at the ill-bordered period in which a young man attains full masculine autonomy and power. In addition to being on the cusp of cultures and the seasons of life, he also stands between literary genres. Hellenistic and later epigrammatists typically frame the onset of the unattractive beard as a reason why young men should 'seize the day' and submit to love before their beauty fades. By contrast, Homeric and Hellenistic epic limn the developing down upon a young man's face as a marker of his growing strength, virility, and masculine beauty. Nevertheless, these conflicting discourses can both be utilised as a tool of persuasion. Juventius is entreated to submit to Catullus' insatiable appetite for kisses on two grounds in poem 48: that he will soon grow hairy and ugly; and that, as for the beautiful warrior on the battleground and the grain in the field alike, death is coming like a grim harvest.[68]

68 A draft of this paper was presented at the Pacific Rim Roman Literature Seminar 33 (University of Newcastle, 10-12 July 2019). I would like to thank the participants for their comments and questions, which helped me to clarify several points. I am also indebted to Rhiannon Evans for her ongoing support and insight, and to the anonymous readers at *Mnemosyne* for their ingenious suggestions and generous comments.

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