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Cura in Classical Latin and Early Medieval Latin

Cura means more than enough to complicate its interpretation even in classical Latin, to say nothing of the medieval Latin of the *Waltharius*. The oldest sense of the word in classical Latin, from roots which suggest "perception," is watchfulness: a continuous care, concern, or worry—in general or in particular.[1] When *cura* is for or about something in particular, the object of care as well as care itself can be called a *cura*. In keeping with a *continuous* anxiety, one often finds the plural in such cases: *curae*.

These anxious origins give rise to a river of many tributaries: *cura* as the charge over a particular sphere of administration, *cura* as a guardianship (Lat. *curator*, Fr. *curatelle*), *cura* as a medical treatment or medical attention in general. Sometimes, as with an administrative "charge," the tone of the word can be neutral or positive. More commonly, a sense of anxiety persists, as in that very common use of the word: *cura* as the anxious emotion behind human love: *At regina graui iamdudum saucia cura / uulnus alit uenis et caeco carpitur igni* (Virgil, *Aen.*, 4.1). It was with the turbulent breed of *curae* in mind, good and bad, distracting and all-consuming, that the Latin Stoics advised *securitas* for the man in search of *tranquillitas animi*.[2]

There is, then, an ambiguity of tone at the heart of the word in classical Latin. *Cura* is positive, because it is well to take care against danger. *Cura* is negative, because danger persists through and beyond care. From this tonal ambiguity arises a great and productive ambiguity of meaning, shown best for our purposes in that great meditation on erotic *cura*, the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas's *cura* to fulfil his divine destiny tragically clashes with Dido's *cura* for Aeneas. An effort to combat *cura*'s tonal ambiguity, or to guide it to worse or better things, is attested in forms modified by a negative prefix: *incuria*, *incuriosus*,

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[1] A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Latine: Histoire des Mots*, 4th edn., ed. Jacques André (Paris, 1979), p. 159.
[2] E.g. Seneca, *De tranquillitate animi*, 8.4. Though, underscoring the term's polysemy, he will also recommend a *cura corporis* (*Ibid.*, 3.1).

for the *bad* lack of care: neglect; *securitas, securus* for the *good*: freedom from care, security.[3] Poets, unlike prose writers, have generally preferred to emphasize the ambiguity.

Late and medieval Latin did observe some changes in the meaning of the word *cura*, and one of the most striking was a restriction of the word's tonal ambiguity. As with so many words in Latin, *cura* found itself bound up with the new religion.[4] The aforementioned classical tributaries were rechristened; pastoral administration (*cura pastoralis*; the guidance of a see or parish), Christian guardianship (*cura animarum*, the "cure of souls," German *Seelsorge*), and spiritual health emerged from their counterparts.[5] In the sphere of love (and let us speak only of the early middle ages), Christian *amor* and *caritas* lost much of their anxious itch, regaining it only in the high middle ages with Bernard of Clairvaux and his mystic ilk. In other words, we may discern a general shift toward positive (or neutral) connotations, as in Gerald's preface to the *Waltharius* itself: *quae tibi decreuit de larga promere cura* (l. 10). Erkembald's *cura* hardly wounds the good bishop with a hidden flame. This connotative shift, it may be added, parallels a shift in the meaning of the word *securitas*, which in the early middle ages became the name for a legal document protecting recipients from violence or customs dues (as the case may be), whence our own "surety"—a meaning secure, as it were, from the Stoic anxieties that invented *securitas*.[6]

On the other hand, since lines and phrases from Virgil and other classical authors continued to be used *verbatim* in early medieval poetry, and more generally since classical authors continued to be read, the Roman sense of *cura*'s Janus faces echoed on (if sometimes dissonantly) in early medieval Latin. It is indeed with this sense of *cura* as anxious, two-faced, and problematic that the *Waltharius* poet uses the term. What had changed, as we shall see, was that there were new sorts of *curae*: matters both positive and negative, but equally all-

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[3] Which does involve a sort of ignoring. E.g. in the twelfth-century *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, I.C: "*Securitas est incomoditates imminentes et rei incoate affines non formidare.*"

[4] Dag Norberg, *Manuel pratique de latin médiéval* (Paris, 1968), pp. 19-20.

[5] J. F. Niermeyer and C. van de Kieft, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, revised by J.W.J. Burgers (Leiden, 2002), p. 377.

[6] Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon*, pp. 1241-2. The early medieval papal formulary *Liber Diurnius* preserves a few examples of *securitates*. One begins "*Iustitiae consentaneum esse dinoscitur, ut ea quae ecclesiasticis fideliter serviunt, perfecta debeant securitate muniri, quatenus nullam in posterum a quoquam patiantur iacturam.*" The same document uses *cura* in the (neutral) sense of an administrative charge: speaking of the *patrimonium* which is *curae tuae commissum* (Theodore E. von Sickel, *Liber Diurnius Romanorum pontificum*, Vienna 1889, reprinted 1966, p. 136, no. CIII).

consuming, to which medieval poets could address their poetic attentions, outside of the cares of classical authors and audiences.

Cura in the Waltharius

The *Waltharius* poet is not only aware of the two-sided sense of *cura*, but anxious to play with it. This is clearest in the scenes following Hagan's flight from Pannonia, when Ospirin and Attila conspire to secure Walther's loyalty by offering him a rich wife and bountiful possessions. Walter refuses, saying that such *curae* would distract him from his accustomed *cura*, service to the kingdom (ll. 123-169). Ospirin, who comes up with the plan, presents it to her husband with a set of interesting metaphors likening Walther's potential departure to the collapse of columns supporting the kingdom: *provideat...ne vestri imperii labatur forte columna, / hoc est, Waltharius vester discedat amicus* (ll. 127-8). She gives Attila a brief spiel to wind in Walther's direction: promise him a wife and lands to take care of his financial troubles, or as she puts it (as if to Walther), using the verb *curare* which is derived from *cura*: *et non pauperiem propriam perpendere cures* (l. 137). Her plan, in other words, is to stabilize (l. 140, *stabilire*) Walther, the column of the kingdom, by decreasing his *curae*. For the poet, then, *curae* make one less secure, more likely to totter. Or, to be exact, the *curae* of a *fidelis regni* make the *regnum* itself less stable. But when Attila presents this offer, Walther weasels away with the following chain of reasoning:

> *si nuptam accipiam domini praecepta secundum,*
> *vinciar in* **primis curis** *et amore puellae*
> *atque a servitio regis plerumque retardor:*
> *aedificare domos cultumque intendere ruris*
> *cogor, et hoc oculis senioris adesse moratur*
> *et* **solitam** *regno Hunorum impendere* **curam** (ll. 150-55)

Walther continues by saying that now, even if Attila calls him in the middle of the night, *securus et ibo paratus* (ll. 161-2), a usage which preserves the original sense of *securus*: without *cura*.[7] Likewise, Walther promises Attila that in the midst of battle, *nullae persuadent cedere curae*,

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[7] It is interesting, given what Walther says, that *he* is *securus*, suggesting an etymological attention on the part of the author.

since neither children nor a wife will call him to flight (ll. 163-4). He is ready for duty and fearless in battle because he is without *curae*.

Of course, Walther is speaking ironically. Walther is already betrothed to Hiltgund, and so has already put his love of the girl far above his service to the king; he is also already planning his escape (ll. 144: *Iam tum praemeditans, quod post compleverat actis*); furthermore, as Ospirin rightly gleans, Walther is worried about his *pauperies*, but he already intends to *inpendere* those *curae* by robbing his king blind. What is so interesting is that this passage, with Walther's almost academic discussion of the way competing *curae* function, is that it is in the context of Attila's and Walther's own competing *curae*. The poet's suggestion, *vis-à-vis* Attila, is the same as Virgil's *vis-à-vis* Dido in the famous *omnia tuta timens* tag (*Aen.* 4, 298): just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you.

What has changed in the equation is the sphere in which *cura* functions. In the *Aeneid*, the hero is deciding between his destined home and his love of a woman. In the *Waltharius*, it is between flight and the loyalty owed to a man: Attila. One suspects from some choice borrowings at key spots that the poet switched the gender with his usual sense of irony. When Walther reveals his plans to Hiltgund, for instance (ll. 221-86), the poet interestingly implies that Hiltgund shares Dido's anxieties about her beloved leaving her (ll. 235-39). *Curae* are not mentioned by name, but a set of verbal echoes to book four of the *Aeneid* appear in these passages: most importantly when Walther says *Noris me nihilum simulata mente locutum* (l. 242), which is how Juno spoke when she was first arranging what would result in Dido's heartbreaking demise. Walther thus persuades his girl that he is not, as he certainly is at ll. 150-55, speaking *per hyroniam* (l. 235), and then rather unceremonially lumps a great deal of travel prep into her lap. Rather, this poem's Dido is played by Attila, and he, like his Virgilian counterpart, will be tortured by his *cura*. The movement of *cura* from Romance to Bromance is made clearest when, after Walther's and Hiltgund's flight, the king roams the streets in the place of Dido (or in another gender-bender, like the female beloved in the *Song of Songs*), and, just like the broken-hearted Carthaginian queen, *nec placidam membris potuit dare cura quietem* (l. 390; *Aen.* 4.5: *nec placidam membris dat cura quietem*). It might be thought that *curae* in this context simply means something like strong emotion: *sic intestinis rex fluctuat undique curis* (l. 385). But it seems that the king's *curae* are about the stability of his *regnum* after the loss of Walther (concerning which his wife is now pretty pessimistic: ll. 376-

8), and that he has in mind Walther's now ominous earlier request that Attila swear *per invictam* **nunc** *gentem Pannoniarum* (l. 166).

Social bonds between men—a king and his servant, a hostage-taker and his hostage, a lord and his *fidelis*, and, later in the poem, between two comrades in arms—have taken the place of love between a man and a woman as the main stage on which *cura*'s ambiguities tragically resolve themselves. What is the significance of this transformation? On a simple level, this might be a more convincing account of emotions to a very masculine society—the sport team vibe of an audience of warriors or an audience of monks, "athletes of Christ." Perhaps, as has been argued, the poet wants to mock Germanic or warrior (or masculine) culture for its *curae* which fall apart in internal contradiction.[8] Or perhaps the poet juxtaposes the sacred and secular spheres—one governed by Christian *caritas* and the calm *curae* of a Christian society (*cura* like Erkembald's, in fact), the other by the anxious, fluctuating *curae* of an unordered *saeculum*.[9] Whatever the case, what is clear is that the use of this single word is complicated, and cannot be explained by evoking simple definitions. Here as elsewhere the poet maintains a balance between the *curae* of a contemporary social and moral world, and those opened up to him by he Latin language itself, connected by ancient poetry to ancient meanings.

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[8] Dennis Kratz, M*ocking Epic: Waltharius, Alexandreis and the Problem of Christian Heroism* (Madrid, 1980), pp. 15-59.

[9] More the theme in Ford Parkes, "Irony in Waltharius." *Modern Language Notes* 89 (1974), pp. 459-65.