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Catullus as Love Poet

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Contents

Preface	7
Catullus as Poet of Love	9
Index	48

Preface

This study resumes certain themes developed more largely in my *Roman Catullus* (Hildesheim 1990) which the leisured, inquiring reader here may wish to consult. The text used is eclectic, but depends mainly on W. Eisenhut (Teubner 1983). J. M. Trappes-Lomax, *Catullus. A Textual Reappraisal* (Classical Press of Wales 2007), rightly warns of the thin ice on which too many interpretations skate. Cf. more generally W. Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations* (California 1995).

Europeans live in an age which cannot find its rightful pattern. There is the effort to establish a European Union, challenged already by Britain and now perhaps to be challenged again by (of all countries) Italy. There is the constant assumption that Russia must always be a threat to Europe, and therefore always suspect. But Russia needs a profounder understanding. It sees itself as the heir of Constantinople. Its Czars were Caesars. Its double eagles are those of the Holy Roman Empire. Its most famous poet, in some stanzas at least, echoes Horace.

These tasks must be approached in the classroom. Classical studies are basic, and basic early. Nowadays they are diminished, if not dismissed, in favour of what one might call “gadgetry.” And if those gadgets are knives? *Inhumanior redeo quia inter homines fui*: “I return less of a human being because I have been among humans” (Seneca). Why don’t we study Latin and Greek? Study Seneca? Study Homer, Plato, Cicero, Virgil? That would enable us, from whatever country we come, to talk the same way, to accept the same values.

I remember that, when I was first introduced in 1941 by my schoolmaster, Mr. Harry Elgie, to Greek, to its Alphabet, to some of its beliefs, I knew that this would be my life. Perhaps in our efforts to restore Roman Europe we should first ask the Romans, and their patrons the Greeks, for their advice.

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“I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry
in driving away love.”

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), I. ch. 9.

Love poetry is not always as welcome to the women who are its objects, and readers, as men suppose. The reader and exegete should remember that.

The first and most important question (since the answer to it changes everything) is: how were Catullus' poems presented, and what was their audience? If they were individual *billets-doux*, meant for personal consumption—the impression reinforced when we sit reading (some of) them quietly in the study—that is one thing. We have found a box hidden long ago in the attic, and are trespassing with fascination on a romantic, private tale. Just such a tale has recently come to light in the rediscovered letters of Prince Albert Victor, grandson of Queen Victoria, and Héléne, Princesse d'Orléans. Héléne was duly allowed her say.

But if Catullus' poems were performed (sung?) to an audience (cf. Prop. II.34.87–88)? If many of them aimed to raise a laugh? Obviously there were poems which found an audience. How else could Catullus' attacks on Mamurra, for example, have so offended Caesar (Suet., *Jul.* 73)? What about his pieces in lyric metres? Were they not performed, sung? *Nec contentus ea* (sc. Lesbia) *multos vulgavit* (sc. Catullus) *amores*, writes Ovid (*Tristia* II.429). What becomes then of our picture of the solitary lover, sometimes happy, more often perhaps nursing the painful news of yet another rebuff?

Here the view is accepted that *all* the poems were performed, recited, in different ways and to different audiences (cf. Pliny, *Epp.* VII.4.9; IV.19.4), and that this feature must be taken into account in assessing their effect, their “level of intent” (Eliot).¹ Catullus did not write the “Tatyana's Letter” of Tchaikovsky's *Evgeny Onegin*. And yet is not even that heart-rending confession of love heard in the theatre?

Love then and now. *Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona* (Dante, *Inf.* 5.103). Love smiles and is serious, and all talk about love demands mature

¹ *Acmen Septimius suos amores* (45.1), with its *a s / s a* alliteration, is one example suggesting how much these pieces were meant for recitation. So too *passer mortuus est meae puellae*, 3.3; *solacium sui doloris*, 2.7. But the auditory is everywhere. Such music turns language into what the Formalists call заумный язык (за, “beyond,” ум, “mind”), adding to it not so much the irrational as the supra-rational.

interlocutors. In the case of Catullus, a recent exhibition at the British Museum inspires relevant reflections on what Greco-Romans regarded as sexually acceptable, what was encompassed in their range of attitudes to women.² The modern observer sees a world which includes comedy, cruelty, sensuality (cf. *CIL* IV.1863). If however, in its own time, this miscellany would have raised, at least on male lips, a smile, of amusement or anticipation or satisfaction, that is the atmosphere which Catullus and his audience inhaled. It is this contrast between sentimentality and reality which confronts the reader of his poetry at the outset.

In any case, love—and *a fortiori* poetry about love—is viewed by men and women quite differently. A man wants to live and win in an eternally frozen present: αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων (*Iliad* VI.208). Love for him is another field on which to conquer. There, his poetry may make him judge and master: and also, alas, he may, like Achilles, lose his Briseis, and soon after that die, pierced by Paris' arrow. Women, more realistic, more long-lived, less self-centered, are attuned not simply to the present, but to the past and future. They want to bear their children, the new generation, safely, and want to bring them up safely in inherited, tried, traditional ways.

For the most part then it is the men who write the love poetry.³ It is another weapon in their armoury. But, as Miss Austen implies, what similar relevance can that have to women? Is a poet necessarily a better husband and father? Later in the same chapter, she remarks that, when love is “thin,” one good sonnet will suffice to kill it. If we are then to assess Catullus by the light of *litterae humaniores*, we must ask not only what love poetry in general is, and what in particular was Catullus' aim in writing it, but also how the other half of humanity might have reacted to his efforts. Is it perhaps necessary for a great

² *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. See the official Catalogue, ed. Paul Roberts (British Museum Press, London 2013), especially “Cubiculum” (pp. 116 ff.). “The shock of the old,” by Alastair Sooke, published on the BBC website on May 2, 2013, extends the discussion to other well-known sculptures such as the Vatican Laocoon. But what about the “Farnese Bull” (Death of Dirce) in the Museum at Naples?

³ Yet, if Catullus admired the supreme ancient spokeswoman on the other side, Sappho (cf. 11.22–24; 35.16–17; 51; 61), so, unexpectedly, among his contemporaries, did Verres and others of his ilk (*istorum*, Cic., *Verr.* IV.57. §126). Perhaps she was becoming fashionable. To English readers Elizabeth Barrett Browning offers a splendid example of the feminine perspective: cf. her “How do I love thee?” (*Sonnets from the Portuguese*, no. 43, 1850).

love poet to share something of the woman's sensibilities? Do we not find that both in Virgil and Shakespeare? But what then about the Catullus who (51) makes one of Sappho's poems (31 L.-P.) speak for himself? This is a question to which we must return.

Part—a great part—of Roman sexual sensibility is focused on children. In Pompeii and Herculaneum children were “everywhere” (*Catalogue*, p. 37). The reader then who regards it as normal for “love” to remain barren is not likely to understand Latin *mores*—or Catullus—very well. *Iam iam non domus accipiet te laeta, neque uxor / optima, nec dulces occurrent oscula nati / praeripere ...* (Lucr. III.894–96); *nec dulcis natos ...* (*Aen.* IV.33); *dulcis liberos*, hypocritical Alfius (Hor., *Id.* 2.40). The negatives interest here. In his *Epithalamium* for Manlius (poem 61) Catullus' thoughts move in this traditional direction, for which children are so central. But the *Epithalamium* was composed for another's happiness. Negatives then affect Catullus too. All he can hope for is a stolen smile (216–220):

Torquatus volo parvulus
matris e gremio suae
porrigens teneras manus
dulce rideat ad patrem,
sed mihi ante labello.

I want a baby Torquatus from his mother's lap to stretch out his tender hands and smile sweetly with his little lip at his father—but, before that, to me!

He does not expect real happiness of this sort for himself or for his poetic career (*ingratum tremuli tolle parentis onus*, 68.142), even though his poems are the Muses' children (*dulces Musarum ... fetus*, 65.3).⁴ He had in fact begun his collection of poems with the tale of a sparrow, his mistress' solace in her grief, a substitute baby (*quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere...*, 2.2), which in any case soon dies and leaves her eyes red with weeping (3.18). One grief is reinforced by a second. These are unhappy auguries. “Love poetry” then is certainly a

⁴ A metaphor shared with Jane Austen: “I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child” (letter to her sister Cassandra, April 1811, referring to her novel *Sense and Sensibility*). As M. Bakhtin reminds us, the genre remembers, even if the author forgets: Проблемы Поэтики Достоевского (= *Problems of Dostoevsky's Style*), Moscow 1963, p. 162.

phrase flowing smoothly and elegantly enough from the lips of exegetes,⁵ but one must also be aware of the native / negative side of its biology and psychology. Roman Catullus' sorrow was that his only lasting love, and only lasting children, were created by his art.⁶

Love Poetry. "From the lips of exegetes," obviously moderns. The Greeks show us μέλος ... ἐρωτικόν (Bion, 2.1–2). Cicero has the half-Greek *poesis* ... *amatoria* (of Anacreon, *Tusc.* IV.71). The first time we hear of such poetry specifically and separately in Rome is in the works of Laevius, who even so gave to his collection of love poems the Greek title *Erotopaegnia* (80 B.C.?). He was certainly trying to be clear enough. Παίγνια (παίζω) were a particular kind of mime,⁷ and an *erotopaegnion* would presumably be a mime dealing with *eros*. The surviving fragments of his poems suggest however that they were libretti on fantastic themes. He presented then, not an autobiographical account of his own experiences, but quasi-comic (quasi-pantomimic?) scripts for stage performances, perhaps to be enacted in the mind's fancy. Among his *Erotopaegnia* he apparently included a *Protesilaodamia*, a tragic myth which in poem 68 interests Catullus. If Catullus' poem 63 is a pantomime libretto, as will be suggested later, we recognise another similarity. But Catullus was more serious. In the epigram from Palladas, partially quoted below, the continuation reads:

ἢ μάθε παίζειν
τὴν σπουδὴν μεταθείς, ἢ φέρε τὰς ὀδύνας.

Either turn your seriousness around and learn to act <as if you enjoyed life>, or put up with the pains.

This was the Roman poet's dilemma, and forms perhaps the intriguing charm of his poetry.

Unlike Horace (*Serm.* I.10.17–19), Ovid liked Catullus and, after borrowing a theme from him (*Amores* II.6), gave him a place, along with Calvus, in his *in*

⁵ E.g. *Classical Love Poetry*, edd. and trans. J. Williams and C. Cheesman (Los Angeles 2004), a charming anthology extending from Homer to the Middle Ages.

⁶ "Perfection of the life, or of the work," W. B. Yeats, "The Choice" (1933). Like Yeats after him, Catullus chose the work: cf. 68.33–36. *Poema feci* (50.16) is telling: compare *fecit* on the front of Agrippa's Pantheon.

⁷ Plut., *Quaest. conv.* 7. ἡ. 4, 712e. Cf. Σκηνὴ πᾶς ὁ βίος καὶ παίγνιον, "All life is a stage and a [lovers'?] skit," *A.P.* X.72, Palladas, 4th c.; *A.P.* XI.275 (cited *infra*).

memoriam for Tibullus (*Am.* III.9.62). He himself, usually regarded as the least engaged of the love poets of his day, describes his love poems as *Amores*, reserving *Ars Amatoria* for a different and more practical spoof. But *amores* is Ciceronian for a beloved object (*ad Att.* XVI.6.4); and, in the light of his and Catullus' use of *amores* (e.g. *Varus me meus ad suos amores*, 10.1), it looks as if for Ovid *Amores* simply meant "girl friend." Corinna, celebrated there, bears a name which in centuries past may have been that of a rival to Pindar, hardly a love poet therefore. In Ovid's day, was there really a new Corinna? Did she really have a parrot that died (*Am.* II.6), just like the *passer* in Catullus? Was all that too an *erotopaegnion* of sorts, a series of amusing, mimic episodes, a less exalted product of the same imagination which inspired the *Metamorphoses*? When disaster struck, did not Ovid show great devotion, not to Corinna, but to his third wife, and she to him?

To the noun "poetry" various epithets may indeed be attached. The most basic are those of language: Greek poetry, Latin poetry and so on. Then there is genre: epic, lyric, iambic poetry; heroic, tragic, comic poetry. Sappho, the most intense ancient poet of love, is simply described as a "Lesbian" poet (Ovid, *Tr.* III.7.20), since Lesbos was her island, although she shared it with Alcaeus. She wrote "sapphic" verses, a term which tells us very little, except perhaps that some of her metres were her own.⁸ The compound term "love poetry" must then be used by the Classicist with caution. It does not inform us of nationality, since there is alas no "land of love," nor of metre, nor even of genre, since love is treated in many different metres and genres. One thinks here of epic Apollonius' Medea. In Latin, Virgil appeals to Apollonius' Ἐρωτώ (*Arg.* III.1) as he begins (VII.37) the second, "Iliadic," half of his epic. But though, thanks to his Dido, Virgil has been called the greatest of the Augustan love poets, is either his or Homer's *Iliad* in the end a love poem? "Love poetry," it seems, defined more precisely, does not describe a genre, but a theme.

Love poetry. The autobiographical fallacy. Yet, for all its vagueness, the term "love poetry" tends, like no other, to pre-engage the minds of its readers, to play on sentiment. Sentimentality distorts. The interpreter must be on guard, for the appreciation of love poetry is in the end a challenge to the critic's maturity,

⁸ The poem on old age reconstructed by Martin West (*Times Literary Supplement*, June 21, 2005) appears to have lines made up of three *ionici a maiore* with a trochaic conclusion.

precisely because the fullest appreciation of love is manifestly a matter for an adult intelligence.

At the outset, a demand for “sincerity” often provides a great stumbling block. Certainly, in the love of real life, it is important for the woman in particular, as a potential mother, to know that her lover’s assurances are proof of sincere commitment. But, since *poetry* about love is not “real life,” there is no secure place in it for that kind of commitment at all. The poet sets up a situation. If his Lesbia, if he himself, eventually, *qua* poet, reneges on its implications, that does not mean that either she or he is “insincere,” only that he is identifying a development which occurs too often. Puccini however was not Lieutenant Pinkerton, and Virgil not Aeneas (*ille Paris*, IV.215). *Poetic* sincerity consists simply of telling the truth about human behaviour and its consequences.

First Persons. The notion that poets, or indeed any creative writers, using the first person must be talking about their own lives was already scouted in antiquity (see Martial III.11, quoted below). It is even refuted by Catullus himself, who insists that, whatever the impression created by his verses, he personally lives an irreproachable life (16.5–6; cf. *si vitam puriter egi*, 76.19). In more modern times, the point was particularly emphasised by the Russian Formalist critics of the early 20th century, who argued that, in the process of adaptation to the needs of genre, personal experience is inevitably modified. A more striking effect may be sought, for which different moments, different persons may be synthesised; elsewhere, the same persons and moments may be divided. Imagination inevitably comes to play its part. With what dramatic effect, for example, if one may resort to an analogy, Tolstoy (d. 1910) describes the experience of dying (Prince Andrei, Ivan Ilyich, even Anna Karenina). On what evidence? He had been an officer in the Caucasian campaigns and the Crimean War of the 1850’s. He had been an intent witness of his older brother’s death (1860). The rest was imagination.

First persons are misleading. What is the sincerity of an actor on life’s stage? On a real stage? Did Shakespeare fall in love with a Juliet, a Cleopatra? His μῦθος (οἶον ψυχῆ, Arist., *Poet.* 1450a 38) convinces his audience. Yet his private life, from what is known of it, was calculated, humdrum, hidden. Catullus certainly convinces his readers. But, if castrated Attis is an extreme fiction (poem 63), what else in his work is also a fiction, an enhancement, a matter of variations, *appoggiature*, “grace notes”?

A lesson from Titian. Where “love poetry” is concerned, perhaps it may be helpful to look at a famous painting. *Le concert champêtre* (Louvre), once thought to be by Giorgione, now attributed to Titian, shows two young men seated by a well in some grassy meadow. They are both fully clothed, even wearing hats. One is playing a lute, and perhaps, although he is partly concealed, the other. Both look serious, preoccupied, dedicated to their tasks. They have paused for a moment to exchange remarks. Attending them are two women, both nude, one seated, holding a musician’s pipe, one standing. The one standing is pouring water from a vessel she holds into the well.

For a long time it was thought that this represented a party, or the warm-up to a party, a celebration of love, sexuality, self-gratification: and this notion may have been in Manet’s mind when, in 1863, he painted his *Le déjeuner sur l’herbe* (Musée d’Orsay). But what robs this slick interpretation of plausibility is the utter detachment in Titian’s painting of the men from the women. And why on earth is one of the girls pouring water *into* the well? The answer is that the two young musicians, intent on their task, do not perceive the presence of anyone apart from themselves at all. The girls are Graces, goddesses therefore, not mortals; invisible beings, who have come to listen, and to judge (cf. Pindar, *Ol.* 14). Perhaps they were asked for aid at the start. Perhaps one of them is using her pipe to give a note. The well is a well of inspiration. The Grace pouring water into it is, in answer to some prayer, adding to, refreshing, its resources. Lyric Pindar knew this theme too, in his case invoking the Muses: πίσω σφε Δίρκας ἀγνὸν ὕδωρ τὸ ... κόραι ... Μναμοσύνας ἀνέτειλαν: “I will give him to drink of Dirce’s pure water, which Memory’s daughters have caused to flow” (*Isth.* 6.74–75).

The lute player and his comrade are young. They were, we guess, engaged in composing love poetry, perhaps pastoral (a shepherd and his flock are seen in the distance), in this instance to be sung: “If music be the food of love, play on” (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, I.1). They are not *undergoing* experience, but seeking to give whatever experience is already theirs a form which will transform it into art. The Graces like to hear from mortals a homage which alone, rewarded, can make the “real thing” real for others, real in a real sense. In Titian’s painting, generously, unseen, one of them helps by raising the lutenist’s art to new levels. Without help, πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβάς, ἄκρον ἄωτον, “some small draught from the sacred spring, the choice essence” (Call., *Hy.*

II.112), all the seriousness, all the experience in the world will to the artist, be useless.

It is becoming clearer that, in any poetry about love, the treasured details will not be the trivia of everyday existence. One thinks here of the Formalist who remarked with contempt on those critics of Pushkin's poetry who, before they could begin, felt it necessary to know what brand of cigarettes the poet smoked. The reality to which the *alta fantasia* of the poet / musician whose theme is love is ever more closely drawn is a reality which is divine.⁹ Love poetry which misses its larger dimension, *l'amor che move il sole et l'altre stelle*, which reduces love to sexual pleasure, is amusement, meant for men, vanishing after a laugh, and probably anyway the kind of thing no lady wants to hear. And yet who more aware of what love means than women? Has any man borne the unbearable pain of childbirth? Behind her humour, Miss Austen, cited in the epigraph above, who defended the woman's sensibility, whose Elizabeth Bennet admired commitment more than sonnets, was making this point. Avoidance of commitment on the part of their suitors is why so often the women celebrated by male poets largely vanish from the scene or even die prematurely (Beatrice, Laura, Wordsworth's Lucy). No lasting relationship was ever planned or possible. And Lesbia? Whatever he writes about her, could Catullus have realistically hoped for permanence? Do poems 107 and 109 really anticipate that?

Love a theme, not a genre. It is important to re-emphasise this distinction, since Catullus' poetry does have a genre (or genres?—see below), and confusion must be avoided. Perhaps, by "experts," though not apparently by the ancients, the term "love poetry" is thought in itself, without modification, to describe a special genre, though it would be a strange genre which united Sappho (Ἔρως, 47.1, L.–P.) with Apollonius¹⁰ (Ἐρσάτω, *Arg.* III.1) and Virgil (*Erato*, *Aen.* VII.37). Perhaps, for some, memories of the troubadours still persist. In the

⁹ Compare the end of Fray Luis de León's exquisite *Oda a Francisco Salinas*, professor of music at Salamanca: *por quien al bien divino / despiertan los sentidos* "by which the senses awake to the divine good": *The Oxford Book of Spanish Verse*, ed. James Fitzmaurice Kelly (2nd ed. by J. B. Trend, 1940), pp. 108–09, no. 78.

¹⁰ What does Καλλιμάχου ... τὸ παίγιον imply in *A.P.* XI.275.1, attributed to Apollonius Rhodius? With Καλλιμάχου here cf. Callimachus' own Ἡσιόδου, *Epigr.* 27.1. A mime could cause *political* offence, as, under Caesar, Laberius found out (*Macr., Sat.* II.7).

criticism of Catullus' poetry, the term too often excites a smile, sympathetic, perhaps even patronising. Young simpleton, he lacked the self-discipline to get his act together. This tallies with the answer given by one literary historian to the question when Catullus died: "In 54 B.C. or as soon as possible thereafter." The poor poet, whose chief fame apparently was that he had suffered so much at the hands of capricious Lesbia, was—paradoxically—given a posthumous deadline with which he had to comply. But the only legitimate answer to such a question, in the absence of other information, must be derived from the evidence which the corpus of Catullus' work offers. "There is no reference in that corpus of work to any historical event occurring after 54." But how can a poet who used the word *Pharsalia* twice in a single repetitive, emphatic line (64.37) have been dead before 49, when Pharsalia became generally known? Is that not a historical event? Later it was symbolic to Romans as the first instalment of Philippi, fit to be adopted in due course as his title by epic Lucan.¹¹ And, if Catullus did introduce that name into Latin poetry, altering the traditional venue of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis to do so, how can the tale of capricious Lesbia define the whole of his achievement?

For Aristotle, *il maestro di color che sanno* (*Inf.* 4.131), this "poor poet" approach—of course quite different from the Callimachean topos (*Ia.* 3) used by Catullus himself in poem 13—would have been utterly mistaken. His admirers¹² will remember how, in *Poetics* chapter 9, he explains, in a glorious moment of illumination, that poetry is "more philosophical and serious than history," φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποιήσις ιστορίας. Poetry seeks for τὰ καθόλου, universals. History pursues the detail of what actually happened, τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον. On this view, *poetry* about love would need to seek out and present the essence of that experience, common to all loves. Real-life lovers however distinguish themselves by the assertion that their particular love is

¹¹ *Iterum, bis*, already in Virgil, *Geo.* I.490–91. *Pharsalia sentiet illum* (sc. Augustum), Ovid, *Met.* XV.823–24 (for the ironic *sentiet* here cf. *sentio*, Catullus 85.2); my "Notes on Lucan's Epic" in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XVI*, ed. C. Deroux (Brussels 2012), pp. 493–99.

¹² Aristotle may actually have been mentioned by the influential Euphorion (454.5 in Lloyd-Jones / Parsons, *Supplementum Hellenisticum* [Berlin 1983], p. 233; on Euphorion cf. Cic., *T.D.* III. §45; Suet., *Tib.* 70). Aristotle's name is listed twice in their index. His importance persisted. Efforts to argue that his *Poetics*, for example, was lost for centuries after his death are quite unconvincing.

unique. “No one ever loved (or quarrelled!) as we loved.” And, since “all the world loves a lover,” some critics, confusing fact with fiction, heed them. But, if that uniqueness is the case, no one, not even the lovers, could write poetry about it. If love poetry is written, it is written not as a historian’s record of detail, of what actually happened, but as the evocation and interpretation of a universally encountered emotion, recurring in, and therefore relevant to, the experience of readers who may be of quite a different historical time and quite a different historical place. We exegetes should be careful therefore in describing Catullus too casually as a “failed” love poet, the unhappy fellow who missed getting the girl. He did after all write more. What about all those central poems (61–68), the heart of his achievement? What are we trying to do? To diminish Catullus’ appeal or to enhance it? The longer poems are love poems too.

A larger perspective will take us to Alexandria, whose importance for Latin poetry must never be underestimated. Even Ennius, a history poet, who trumpets his hostility to Hesiod (and therefore to Callimachus: cf. *Epigr.* 27.1; *Aet.*, fr. 2.2) by setting his Muses at the start of his *Annales* on Olympus rather than Helicon, shows evidence of that.¹³

And, for the Catullus who so disliked the *Annales Volusi* (36.1; 95.7), Alexandria was certainly important. He translated Callimachus’ *Coma Berenices* (66), a pretty tribute to the queen, later to inspire Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (1714). He makes much use of what has been elsewhere called “the Alexandrian code,”¹⁴ those casual professions of faith which reveal in him the *poeta novus*. We find *carmina Battiadae* both at 65.16 and at the end of the collection (116.2).

If Apollonius, Callimachus’ μαθητής, author of a “love epic,” had committed a *political* offence,¹⁵ did he bequeath that licence to Catullus, the enemy of autocracy (*nil nimium studeo*, 93)? Catullus had written both pantomime (poem 63) and epic (poem 64)—but an epic which is both

¹³ The scene at *Ann.* I.34–50, “Ilia’s Dream,” is very much in the Apollonian manner. Lucretius, writing an Aratean epic, makes Homer into a comrade of Muses who live on Helicon (*adde Heliconiadum comites, quorum unus Homerus* etc., III.1037). So much for the Roman Homer, Ennius (*Hor., Epp.* II.1.50–51), and his *magnum pulsatis Olympum*. Cf. also *Heliconis in umbra ... Ennius*, Prop. III.3.1, 6. He was the Roman Callimachus.

¹⁴ *At populus tumido gaudeat Antimacho* (95.10) is one example: see Eisenhut’s note. More generally, my *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison 1986), pp. 515–16.

¹⁵ So Wilamowitz, *Hellenistische Dichtung* I (Berlin repr. 1962), p. 207.

influenced by Apollonius' irony and concludes (323 ff.) with a prophetic, bloody *epithalamium*, put into the mouths of the *Parcae*, a reversal of the kind of praises Augustan Virgil in his fourth *Eclogue* would one day put into the mouths of his *Parcae* (47). Epic and pantomime are different genres, though a love of sorts may play its part in both. Are we to ignore Catullus' longer, central poems on the grounds that here he is no longer engaged with the themes most suited to his genius? What this means is that, in order to enjoy his "genius," we remove from his achievements exactly what makes him one of Rome's greatest poets.

"Love not a genre, but a theme." Yet, if we look at Catullus' love poetry with older eyes, we may begin to find genres which will accommodate it. Surprisingly perhaps for those enamoured of the "love poet," he himself refers at least twice to his *iambi* (40.2; 54.6; cf. also fr. 3). The second of these allusions refers to his quarrel with Caesar. When Horace in his own *Iambi* specifically quotes from Catullus (*perambulabis*, *Ia.* 17.41, *Canidia = perambulabit*, *Cat.* 29.7, *Mamurra*), he carefully redirects to a woman of no account his predecessor's rudeness to a man of great account. Iambics *per se* imply attack, and for that reason the Greek *inventor* of the *iambus*, Archilochus of Paros (*Hor.*, *Epp.* I.19.23 ff.; cf. *criminosus ... iambis*, *Carm.* I.16.2–3), was condemned by both Pindar (*Py.* 2.55–56) and Callimachus (μεθυπλήξ, fr. 544; cf. ἰόν in his Γραφεῖον, fr. 380). Archilochus had notoriously hounded Lycambes and his daughters to death. Some of the insults Catullus heaps on Lesbia are in this vein. But, if Archilochus had also (perhaps!) written love poetry,¹⁶ insults are not all the debt Catullus unexpectedly owes him.

Comedy, also noted in Catullus, is a more forgiving genre. *Materia tamen fere omnis est comica ut inferius demonstratur.*¹⁷ This verdict on Catullus' poetry recalls the comment by Servius on *Aeneid* IV *init.*: *paene comicus est stilus, nec mirum, ubi de amore tractatur*. The genre then to which the ancients tended to assign love poetry was comedy and, although no doubt love may have an element of tragedy, it would be well to bear comedy in mind when we are judging what was Catullus' level of intent. When, for example, he asks Flavius (poem 6) for the details of his affair, made obvious by the creaking and shifting

¹⁶ Cf. fr. 71 D, and Pap. Colon. inv. 7511: *Roman Catullus*, pp. 55–56.

¹⁷ Quoted from O^{rec} *marg.* by Eisenhut, ed. *Catullus*, p. 2.

of his bed (*argutatio inambulatioque*, 11), the humour is striking even to a modern. Then, *argutiae* was a term of praise for the orator whose skill rivalled that of his Attic predecessors (Cic., *Brutus*. 167), and *inambulatio* for a speaker's to and fro on the tribunal (cf. *ad Her.* III.27). Here again Catullus is *eforo otiosus*—and, more than *otiosus*, *ridiculus*.

Catullus wants these intimate details from Flavius for a poem matching modern demands (6.16–17):

volo te ac tuos amores
ad caelum lepido vocare versu.

My aim is to raise you and your love to heavenly heights in light verse.

Ad caelum makes no small claim.¹⁸ Catullus will lend to love's warfare the lofty distinction usually promised by the history poet to his conquering patron. And yet his verse will be *lepidus*, as indeed will be his whole book (1.1). This is a difficult term to translate by one word, but its associations with the theatre are noticeable. "Lepos," for example, is actually used by Horace for the name of a pantomime actor (*Serm.* II.6.72). Dracontius has *lepido ... theatro* (*Medea* 17).

Indeed, in 1.1, his very first line, Catullus had described his *libellus* as both *lepidus* and *novus*. *Novus* associates the poet with the new movement (Cic., *Or.* 48.161), attempting to correct some of the licences and ineptnesses (as they appeared) found in older Roman writing. We still hear the echo of this in Horace (e.g. *Epp.* II.1.50 ff.).

Lepidus embraces a more complex concept. Certainly, there is some sense in it of delicate art—and some sense of delicate artfulness. Horace's pantomimic Lepos was just noted. Martial, Catullus' admirer, is even more specific. Interestingly, his metre here is the hendecasyllable (II.41.15–18):

Mimos ridiculi Philistionis
et convivia nequiora vita,
et quidquid **lepida** procacitate
laxat perspicuo labella risu.

The mimes of laughable Philistio, his banquets more wanton than life, and whatever with artful boldness parts our lips with unmistakable laughter.

The reader will not then be inclined, on this evidence, to take Catullus' poetry too literally. His first persons do not signal experience, but his choice of

¹⁸ *In caelum huius proavus Cato tollitur* (sc. ab Ennio), Cic., *Pro Archia* 9. §22.

a stage medium. Perhaps we should begin then by thinking of Menander's lovers. At *Periceirromene* 504–07, Glycera appears in exactly the situation deplored by Catullus in poem 8. She has abandoned Polemon and he laments her disappearance loudly:

Οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι
λέγω, μὰ τὴν Δῆμητρα, πλὴν ἀπάγξομαι.
Γλυκέρα με καταλέλοιπε, καταλέλοιπέ με
Γλυκέρα, Πάταικ'

I have no words to say, by heaven, except 'I will go hang myself.' Glycera has le-left me, le-left me Glycera, Pataecus.

No one doubts that these things happen. Polemon's stammer amuses. Instead of shedding tears for Catullus, perhaps we should ask what was his debt to Menander, whose mistress Glycera was supposed to be. What was his skill on the stage he constructed for himself?¹⁹

In fact, satire, comedy and love poetry have long kept faithful company, sometimes lighter, sometimes more ominous. In the Renaissance one thinks, for example, of Shakespeare's "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" etc. (Sonnet 130). Among English Restoration authors, what about the lascivious Earl of Rochester (*Satyr against Mankind*, 1675)? There are lovers' quarrels, what comic Terence (*Andr.* 555) calls *amantium irae*. Sometimes, they may indeed be fearsome. Medea and Dido were already mentioned. At a lighter level, Shakespeare uses this ancient topos when his Antony and Cleopatra quarrel: "I found you as a morsel cold upon / Dead Caesar's trencher" (III.13.118–19). Later we find that, insulted or not, she cannot live without him. This heart-rending play about love, which also pays attention to Cleopatra's children, shares something with Catullus.

Catullus also a satirist. *Lepos* is more than theatrical. It is also the noun associated by Cicero with εἰρωνεία (*De Or.* II.67.270). Principally, this is illustrated for him by Socrates. In his generation of Augustan poets, Domitius

¹⁹ The question of the relationship between Greek New Comedy and Roman elegy was first broached by F. Leo (*Plautinische Forschungen*, Berlin 1895, pp. 126 ff.). It was then obscured by a fruitless search for Alexandrian "subjective" (confessional) elegy. But the mistake was to assume that Latin poetry's use of the first person implies subjectivity ("sincerity"). Is Ovid "subjective," "sincere"? The topic as a whole is too complex for an essay such as that offered here. Leo's brilliance however must not be obscured.

Marsus, who published a collection of poems under the title *Cicuta* (“Hemlock”), may well have sensed, in the oppression of the literary man living under a despot, a Socratean echo. But had not Catullus, who wrote such biting criticisms of Julius Caesar (cf. *irascere iterum*, 54.6) and his henchman Mamurra (57), been among the first to sense such oppression? And, if he had sensed it, if he was “political,” can he be any longer dismissed as a poor fellow unable to manage a love affair? As Cicero’s contemporary, did he not think of *lepos* in this larger sense?

Sexual, “romantic” love does not then exhaust Catullus’ repertoire. He was a Roman, viewing Nonius’ and Vatinius’ exaltation to high office with disgust (52), horrified by Mamurra’s fornications, his greed, his lack of taste. He hated the political and moral developments of his day as Republic moved steadily closer towards Empire. At Rome, this stance makes him the heir of Lucilius.²⁰ He too had written love poetry: about Hymnis, about Cretaea. But he had also been passionately interested in public morals, affecting the conduct of the *res publica* (cf. *populi salutem*, 688 M.). His *virtus* fragment is preserved by Lactantius (1326–38; cf. Hor., *Serm.* II.1.70), though already here (1334), in a civic context, we are startled to note *hostem*:

virtus, Albine, est pretium persolvere verum
 quis in versamur, quis vivimus rebus, potesse;
 virtus est homini scire id quod quaeque habeat res;
 virtus scire homini rectum, utile quid sit, honestum,
 quae bona, quae mala item, quid inutile, turpe, inhonestum; 1330
 virtus quaerendae finem re scire modumque;
 virtus divitiis pretium persolvere posse;
 virtus id dare quod re ipsa debetur honori,
 hostem esse atque inimicum hominum morumque malorum,
 contra defensorem hominum morumque bonorum, 1335
 hos magni facere, his bene velle, his vivere amicum,
 commoda praeterea patriai prima putare,
 deinde parentum, tertia iam postremaque nostra.

Manliness, Albinus, enables us to set the right value on our surroundings, on those things making our life. Manliness is for a human to size up each thing by its implications. Manliness is for a human to know what is right, advantageous, honourable, what things are good, and likewise what things are bad, what is disadvantageous, wrong, dishonourable. Manliness is to know the limit and bound of getting, to be able to pay their due to riches, to be able to grant to privilege what is

²⁰ Although it is true that Lucilius uses *lepide* critically, of the Asian style (84).