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CATULLUS 35

J. M. FISHER

SOME years ago, Professor F. O. Copley published a detailed discussion of this poem,¹ which provides us with our only information concerning Caecilius of Comum. We learn from it that he was a poet, engaged on a work celebrating the Magna Mater (vss. 14 and 18), written presumably in the neoteric manner, to judge from Catullus' description of him as *meus sodalis* (vs. 1).²

Professor Copley's purpose was to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of the poem, and this he attempted to do by reconstructing the background, known to Caecilius and Catullus and indicated to the reader by the poem itself, in the light of which the piece can be understood. That such an attempt was necessary can be seen by glancing at the remarks on this poem made by the various commentators, who fail to agree on one common way of explaining the poem's purpose. Is it a compliment to Caecilius' unfinished poem? Or to his *puella*?³ Or is it a true invitation to Caecilius to visit Verona?⁴ These explanations share a common flaw: they each

explain only part of the Catullan poem—if this is a compliment to Caecilius or his *puella*, what of verses 1–6? If a true invitation, what of verses 7–18?—and so, by implication, the poem stands convicted of lack of unity. Copley finds this unsatisfactory, and rightly so. The myth of Catullus, the romantic lyric genius, giving forth his song in spontaneous outpouring, no longer persists:⁵ instead, we now better appreciate the qualities of artifice which Catullus brought to his writing, including the polymetric pieces,⁶ and these qualities certainly include an awareness of structural sophistication. Rarely is a poem as simple and direct in its organization as c. 10 in which the poet speaks directly to his audience. Contrast with this c. 50, aimed ostensibly at Calvus, in reality at a wider audience, including Calvus;⁷ or 17, which uses an apparent duality of subject—town and bridge, girl and husband—to criticize indirectly that *homo insulsissimus* for neglecting his duties as a husband.⁸ Both of these pieces show a kind of obliqueness which is characteristic of Catullus: thus,

1. F. O. Copley, "Catullus 35," *AJP*, LXXIV (1953), 149–60.

2. Cf. the expressions of affection in other poems addressed to known neoterics, e.g., 14, 50, and 95.

3. W. Kroll, *C. Valerius Catullus* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1929), p. 65.

4. R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford, 1876), p. 96.

5. On this, see K. Quinn, *The Catullan Revolution* (Melbourne, 1959), pp. 29 ff.

6. Here we may cite, among other studies, H. Bardon,

L'Art de la composition chez Catulle (Paris, 1943); J. P. Elder, "Notes on Some Conscious and Subconscious Elements in Catullus' Poetry," *HSCP*, LX (1951), 101–36; W. M. A. Grimaldi, "The Lesbia Love Lyrics," *CP*, LX (1965), 87–95; and S. Commager, "Notes on Some Poems of Catullus," *HSCP*, LXX (1965), 83–110.

7. See E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), p. 314.

8. The best discussion of this poem is by N. Rudd, "Colonia and Her Bridge: A Note on the Structure of Catullus 17," *TAPA*, XC (1959), 238–42.

c. 11 presents Catullus' expression of disillusionment in the form of a message addressed to Lesbia through Furius and Aurelius. Or again, and rather differently but very relevant to our discussion, in 6 Catullus asks Flavius about his love: he tells us he wishes to write a poem to celebrate the happy couple. In reality, the lines which make up c. 6 are themselves the *lepidi versus* he claims to propose to write. Generalization is hazardous concerning so diverse a collection as the works of Catullus, but we should hesitate a good deal before deciding that a Catullan poem displays a lack of unity or is loosely organized.

Copley's approach, therefore, quite justifiably seeks to do two things: to explain the poem in a way which satisfactorily relates beginning to end; and to see in the poem itself the content of the *cogitationes* (vs. 5) that are to be communicated to Caecilius. The soundness of this approach should lead us to accept his solution to two problems of detail. Here is a poem about two poets and the writings of one of them: therefore, *cogitationes* surely cannot be taken in any way which directs the mind of the reader away from that central situation: "the *cogitationes*, are, as they ought to be, 'thoughts.' What thoughts? What thoughts indeed, if not, as Baehrens again suggested, in a very hesitant way, the thoughts of someone about Caecilius' poem, someone's criticisms of that poem" (p. 158). Secondly, again seeking to preserve rather than disrupt unity, the phrase *amicus suus meusque* cannot have an outward reference, to some unspecified and mysterious third person, but can only refer to Catullus himself (p. 159).

The conclusion which Copley eventually

reaches (too long to give here—the final paragraph of his article provides his own summary) claims to enable the reader to "reconstruct the occasion for the poem, and tell its whole story" (p. 159). Unfortunately, this involves postulating several hypotheses, for example, that this is Catullus' second invitation to Caecilius, for which the evidence in the poem itself is at the very least scanty. Professor Eduard Fraenkel has some excellent remarks on the qualities of a good occasional poem: "a *Gelegenheitsgedicht* deserves to be included in a published book only if it is self-contained, that is to say if its meaning is made as clear to the general reader as it will have been to the person for whom it was originally conceived."⁹ Now, if Copley's reconstruction is correct, can 35 be described as truly self-contained? Does it really contain within itself enough information, unambiguous information, to enable an imaginative¹⁰ reader to understand fully the factual background? I would suggest that the answer to this must be in the negative, that the poem does not adequately indicate Copley's hypothetical situation. Perhaps this is simply not a good occasional poem, is, in fact, a failure, but before reaching this conclusion we must satisfy ourselves no alternative explanation exists which does present it as self-contained, and tightly organized. I believe such an explanation is possible.

To begin at the beginning. Why does Catullus open with the words *poetae tenero*? The commentators all remark on this phrase, quoting a number of passages which show that these words can be used with a particular connotation, that is, to indicate "a poet of love."¹¹ But what is

9. E. Fraenkel, *op. cit.*, p. 313; cf. his comments on c. 42 in *JRS*, LI (1961), 49.

10. Copley, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

11. The adjective is used of Catullus himself (Mart. 4. 14. 13 and 7. 14. 3); of Ovid (Sid. Ap. 23. 18); of Propertius (Ov. *Ars* 3. 333); of *poetae* (Ov. *RA* 757); with *carmen* (Ov. *Am.* 3.

8. 2); with *modi* (Ov. *Am.* 2. 1. 4); with *versus* (Ov. *Ars.* 2. 273 and Hor. *AP* 246); it may also qualify Venus (Ov. *Am.* 1. 6. 11) or *Amor/Amores* (Ov. *Am.* 2. 18. 4 and 19. 3. 15. 1; *Ars* 1. 7; *Tr.* 3. 3. 73, 4. 10. 1; *Tib.* 2. 6. 1), all in contexts which discuss literary composition.

the significance of the words in this emphatic position within this particular poem? I would suggest that the words *tener poeta*, drawing the reader's attention at the outset to Caecilius' activities in this branch of composition, act as a pointer to what is to come, putting the reader's mind on the right interpretative track, so to speak.

The first seven lines of the poem are concerned with the invitation to Verona, then Catullus turns to Caecilius' relationship with his *puella*:

quamvis candida milies puella
euntem revocet, manusque collo
ambas iniciens roget morari [vss. 8–10].

These lines call to mind a passage from one of Ovid's *Amores*: "implicuitque suos circum mea colla lacertos / et, quae me perdund, oscula mille dedit" (Ov. *Am.* 2. 18. 9–10).¹² This Ovidian poem is, like Propertius 1. 7, concerned with the contrast between epic and love poetry: "while you, Macer, compose your epic on the Trojan War, I continue to write on the subject of love, despite my desire to attempt more lofty themes" (vss. 1–4). Then:

saepe meae "tandem" dixi "discede" puellae:
in gremio sedit protinus illa meo.
saepe "pudet" dixi: lacrimis vix illa retentis
"me miseram, iam te" dixit "amare pudet?"
[vss. 5–8].

Then follow the lines quoted above.

Thus, despite his revelation elsewhere that the subjects of his *Amores* are fictitious,¹³ Ovid here presents his amatory writings as the straightforward record of experience: in other words, he describes his literary activities in real-life terms. This

is, of course, a common procedure on Ovid's part, as it is of the other Augustan elegists. Tibullus, for example, describes the same Macer's¹⁴ change in literary interest from erotic verse to epic, thus: "castra Macer sequitur; tenero quid fiet Amori? / sit comes et collo fortiter arma gerat?" (Tib. 2. 6. 1–2). Propertius, too, consistently chooses not to distinguish between his literary activities and his real or imagined life with Cynthia. This can be seen, for example, from the attempt to define the nature of his inspiration which opens Book 2: his *puella* is his poetic talent:¹⁵

quaeritis, unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,
unde meus veniat mollis in ora liber.
non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo.
ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit [Prop. 2. 1. 1–4].

Or from the renunciation poems which conclude Book 3, where the decision to cease to write love poetry is presented in the form of a farewell to Cynthia herself.¹⁶ Or, more briefly, from the poem mentioned above, in which he contrasts his own writing with the epic of Ponticus: "nos, ut consuemus, nostros agitamus amores" (1. 7. 5). As Fontenrose remarks,¹⁷ "verse 5 refers at once to his passion and to his poetry."

Here then is a common practice of the Latin poets: to present the poet as actually engaged in those pursuits he is in fact writing about. With this in mind, and remembering the hint given in verse 1, I would suggest that in Catullus 35 verses 8 ff. are to be taken in a similar way: they refer to Caecilius' activities as a love poet by presenting him as engaged in a love

12. A. Zingerle, *Ovidius und sein Verhältnis zu den Vorgängern und gleichzeitigen römischen Dichtern* (Innsbruck, 1869–71), I, 49; J. Ferguson, "Catullus and Ovid," *AJP*, LXXXI (1960) 355–56. Ferguson draws attention to the repetition of *mille*; note also *revocet* (Cat. 35. 9) and *revocatur* (Ov. *Am.* 2. 18. 11).

13. *Tr.* 2. 355.

14. E. N. O'Neil, "Tibullus 2. 6: A New Interpretation," *CP*, LXII (1967), 163–68.

15. J. Fontenrose, "Propertius and the Roman Career," *CPCP*, XIII (1949), 383.

16. E. Burck, "Abschied von der Liebesdichtung," *Hermes*, LXXXVII (1959), 191–211.

17. Fontenrose, *loc. cit.*

affair.¹⁸ Thus, Catullus is consistently concerned only with Caecilius as a writer.

If this is so, what of verses 11–15? The striking thing here is the extent to which these lines draw on the conventional vocabulary of amatory verse—*deperit, impotente amore, misellae, ignes, medullam*: what Catullus is doing here is to extend his comment on Caecilius, *tener poeta*, by presenting, in oblique fashion, a sample of the kind of thing Caecilius has been writing. Thus, the whole passage (vss. 7–15) tells us that Caecilius has been writing love poetry, using the kind of language and situation typical of that *genre*. Further, we learn from verses 16–17 that the poetry his *puella* inspires is as talented as¹⁹ Sappho's verse: perhaps, like Catullus himself in several of his poems,²⁰ Caecilius has chosen the Lesbian poetess as the model for his own writing.

How, then, does this amatory section link up with the other literary activity of Caecilius, his *Magna Mater*, in particular with Catullus' description of this work as *incohata*? It is surely not true to say, as does Copley (p. 153), that his two alternative ways of interpreting the verb are the only possible ways: *incohata* in itself indicates simply that Caecilius has a work in train and that this work is incomplete. (Vss. 17–18 show that Catullus has first-hand knowledge of this unfinished work.) It is the repetition of the verb (vss. 13 and 18) which is important, as Copley sees (p. 154). Why the emphasis on the fact of the poem's incomplete state? The most likely explanation of this is that offered by Baehrens:²¹ Catullus is criticizing his friend; instead of completing his task, so

charmingly begun (*venuste*, vs. 17), he has been sidetracked into attempting another kind of poetic composition. Support is given to this view by the verb *morari* (vs. 10). This verb has a place in the vocabulary of the love poets, and therefore occurs here appropriately enough, for example, Prop. 1. 1. 35–36: *sua quemque moretur / cura*, where Passerat glosses, *detineat cum voluptate*.²² But the verb can sometimes have reproving overtones, meaning something like, “to delay unnecessarily,”²³ or “to distract from one's proper occupation,” sometimes, but not always,²⁴ in an amatory context, as when Dido distracts Aeneas from his divine mission: “hunc Phoenissa tenet Dido, blandisque moratur / vocibus” (Verg. *Aen.* 1. 670–71), or when Deidamia delays Achilles' departure for war: “quid blanda voce moraris / auctorem stupri . . . tui?” (Ov. *Ars* 1. 703–4). Particularly instructive for our purposes is a passage in which Propertius, expressing himself in Callimachan terms, declares his aversion to the writing of epic: “a valeat Phoebum quicunque moratur in armis” (Prop. 3. 1. 7). Similarly in our Catullan poem, the verb shows that Catullus thinks of the *puella* (i.e., in reality, the writing of love poetry) as distracting Caecilius from his unfinished *Magna Mater*.

We are now in a position to explain the poem. As *c.* 6 declares an intention to write *lepidi versus*, while in fact presenting us with those lines, so here, the *cogitationes* Catullus claims to be about to communicate to his friend are placed before us. Caecilius has commenced an epyllion on Cybele²⁵ which Catullus knows to be promising. This he has interrupted to

Catullo e i poeti greci (Messina and Florence, 1950), pp. 45–79.

21. E. Baehrens, *Catulli Veronensis liber* (Leipzig, 1885), p. 205.

22. Cf. Sen. *Dial.* 9. 1. 7.

23. E.g., Hor. *Epist.* 1. 7. 83 and Ov. *Met.* 7. 520.

24. E.g., Sen. *Epist.* 77. 16.

25. See A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1934), pp. 80 and 259, n. 51.

18. This is not to imply that the affair was necessarily fictitious: whether real or not, it is his writing about it which is at issue here.

19. C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford, 1961), p. 178, notes that “Latin often uses a comparative, ‘more . . . than,’ where our idiom is content with ‘as . . . as.’”

20. For the influence of Sappho on Catullus, see G. Lafaye, *Catulle et ses modèles* (Paris, 1894), pp. 43–93, and D. Braga,

write love poetry, and Catullus in a light and friendly tone offers the advice that he should return to that promising and as yet unfulfilled task.

Is this, then, a true occasional poem? The natural assumption is that it was sent to Caecilius before being published, that the invitation to Caecilius to hear Catullus' views at greater length than expressed here, was seriously meant, but these are things we cannot know. What matters is that the occasion, whether actual or not, is presented in a way that is intelligible to the reader. Similarly, in verses 8–17, what matters is that these lines are cast in an imaginative form which enables Catullus to make the points he wishes—Caecilius' writing of love poetry and something of the quality of that poetry, something of its language and situation. Thus, 35 has characteristics in common with the poem which follows it in the collection of Catul-

lus' works as we have it. This, too, is concerned with Catullus' literary views, this, too, voices those views obliquely, in this case using the device of Lesbia's *votum* as the situation, real or not, which is the vehicle for expressing those views.²⁶ The problem of how the Catullan poems were collected and published remains insoluble, but it may be, as some have claimed,²⁷ that traces of significant order in the polymetric section can still be seen. If this is so, and if the above interpretation of 35 is right, we have here, in 35 and 36, two poems placed side by side, both of which deal with a literary topic, and which contribute to our understanding of the views and activities of the group of neoterics who did so much to change the direction in which Roman literature developed in the last century of the Republic.

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26. For the interpretation of Cat. 36, see V. Buchheit, "Catullus Dichterkritik in c. 36," *Hermes*, LXXXVII (1959), 309–27.

27. E.g., C. Segal, "The Order of Catullus 2–11," *Latomus*, XXVII (1968), 305–21.