

CATULLUS 16

GERALD N. SANDY

I

BEFORE DISCUSSING the place of this famous poem in the tradition of literary criticism in classical antiquity, I should like, in the absence of anything like universal agreement on the line-by-line meaning of the poem, to offer a brief *explication de texte*.¹

I take the phrase *milia multa basiorum* in line 12 to refer to poem 48, where Catullus expresses his insatiable desire to kiss Juventius, and not to poems 5 and 7, where he tallies the kisses he would like to give to Lesbia. My reason for doing so rests largely on the appropriateness of forms of the adjective *mollis* to homosexual themes (cf. 25.1) and on the similarity of the language of poem 16 to that of poem 15, which also develops a homosexual theme.²

Lines 10 and 11 have been the subject of the most diverse interpreta-

¹The only extensive published studies of the poem are T. E. Kinsey, "Catullus 16," *Latomus* 25 (1966) 101-106, E. Schäfer, "Das Verhältnis von Erlebnis und Kunstgestalt bei Catull," *Hermes*, Einzelschriften, Heft 18 (1966) 4-14, and L. Ferrero, *Un'introduzione a Catullo* (Turin 1955) 95-117. G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford 1968) 549-556, links the homosexual subject of the poem to literary conventions of Greek epigram. E. S. de Angeli, "Some Aspects of Catullan Poetic Theory and Practice" (unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania 1965) 52-64, makes useful observations on the subject of the second part of this paper.

²E. Baehrens, *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Leipzig 1885), writes that lines 10 and 12 *spectant ad* poem 48 and on line 4 adduces several instances of forms of *mollis* in contexts of homosexuality; see, too, Schäfer, *op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 12. R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1876), seems inconsistent; he criticizes (47, n. 1) Bruner and Westphal for connecting poem 16 with poem 48, arguing that "XLVIII is too slight in itself to be thus alluded to; whereas V and VII would recur at once to the memory of every reader of Catullus in connexion with the words *milia multa basiorum*." But he acknowledges that the phrase *parum pudicum* in line 4 is paralleled at 29.2, where "*impudicus = cinaedus*," and he cites *Catalepton* 13.9: *quid, impudice et improbande Caesari?*, "where the meaning [of *impudicus*] is fixed by the rest of the poem." The proximity of forms of *mollis* and *parum pudicus* in lines 4 and 8 and the wording of Martial's allusion to the poem in 2.36 make it almost certain that *parum pudicum* means something like "pathic" or "homosexual." See M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis, *Il libro di Catullo* (Turin 1966) *ad loc.* See, too, Catullus 29.2 and 10, Plaut. *Pseud.* 360, and H. Usener's remarks on this line, *RhM* 56 (1901) 25, n. 48, and *Priapea* 59, and Baehrens on 15.5, "Dicitur mas 'pudicus,' qui muliebria non patitur; XVI 4, XXI 12, Priap. 59.2." The two most recent writers on the subject, T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester 1969) 9-13, especially 12, n. 2, and H. D. Rankin, *Latomus* 29 (1970) 119-121, connect the poem with 5 and 7. Wiseman's statement in his next footnote that the *mollitia* of Thallus (25.1) is reminiscent of 16.4 and 8 contradicts his earlier interpretation.

tions.³ Those referred to as *his pilosis* are Aurelius and Furius. Now what is meant by *his pilosis*? I should translate the phrase freely as "these [you] paragons of hirsute virility." The point is that Aurelius and Furius give every indication of being virile, hairy-chested he-men; but they are, in fact, *pathici*, who, to use a polite Latin paraphrase, are *ad patiēda muliebria parati*. There are several parallels in classical literature for the paradox, mostly in Juvenal and Martial (cf. poem 112). Because the commentators, with the exception, to a limited extent, of Baehrens, do not provide apposite parallels to what I think the meaning of the phrase is, it is appropriate to include here a few analogous passages in their entirety: *nunc sunt crura pilis et sunt tibi pectora saetis/horrida, sed mens est, Pannyche, volsa tibi* (Mart. 2.36.5–6); *barbatus rigido nupsit Callistratus Afro* (*idem* 12.42.1); *hispida membra quidem et durae per brachia saetae/promittunt atrocem animum, sed podice levi/caeduntur tumidae medico ridente mariscae* (Juv. 2.11–13); *haec . . . hirsuto spirant opobalsama collo* (*idem* 2.41).⁴

Thus Catullus has shown that appearances can be deceiving; the subject of some of his poetry is not a true reflection of his character, nor does Aurelius' and Furius' masculine veneer accurately mirror their hidden, inner nature. Not only has Catullus exposed their true proclivities; as he does elsewhere to Aurelius alone (poems 15 and 21), he has turned the tables on them; he threatens them with the very act they have accused him of performing.⁵

Their hypocrisy has infuriated him; they have censured *him*, but they are reprobates: *qui Curios simulant et Bacchanalia vivunt* (Juv. 2.3). Their Pharisaism explains why Catullus has cast an important statement of literary doctrine in the form of a scabrous *flagitatio*, for he regularly encloses even the most serious and cherished topics within a framework of scurrility when reacting to the pretensions of frauds and Tartufes. An obvious example is poem 37, where he is outraged, not because the *boni beatique* are contending for the favours of his inamorata, but because (*quod indignum est*) the *pusilli et semitarii moechi* are; the *parvenu* Mamurra offends by gauchely squandering his ill-deserved wealth, all the

³See, for instance, Kinsey, *op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 104.

⁴See, too, Catullus 33; Mart. 6.56, 7.58, 9.27, 9.47 and 1.24; Juv. 8.13–18 and 113–116; Pers. 3.77 and 4.35–40; Pliny *HN* 11.230; *Priapea* 13 and 74.

⁵Schäfer, *op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 12. G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford 1954) 249, n. 1, provides references to attacks in classical literature on "hypocrites who pretended to be strict moralists but secretly gave way to [homosexual] lust." A. E. Housman in "Praefanda," *Hermes* 66 (1931) 408 demonstrates that *irrumare* has the metaphorical meaning *aliquem defraudare*. Perhaps Catullus has exploited the double meaning of the word in the first line of the poem: "I'll prove my masculinity to you and I'll beat you at your own game (of discrediting character)." See, also, Baehrens (above, n. 2) on 28.9–10 and 28.12 and below n. 13. Note the comparable figurative use of a "four-letter" word in a scurrilous verse directed against Caesar, *Aurum in Gallia effutuisti, hic sumpsisti mutuum* (Morel, *FPL*, p. 92).

while swaggering and acting haughtily (poem 29); Vatinius perjures himself, swearing by the consulship that he arrogantly anticipates (poem 52); Arrius euphuistically misuses aspirates, deluding himself that his speech is elegant (poem 84). Moreover, to anticipate a point to be developed more fully in the second part of the paper, Catullus frequently combines literary criticism with *aspera et maledicta*, as in poems 14, 36, 44, and 105.⁶

Several commentators and translators and Schäfer⁷ take *movere lumbos* to mean *movere penem*. I interpret the clause to mean to wiggle the buttocks, an action characteristic of *pathici* like Aurelius and Furius.⁸ Again, there are several parallels, mainly, as one would expect, in Martial and the Priapean poems. The closest analogy is, however, in Virgil, *Catalepton* 13: *nec deinde te movere lumbos in ratulam* (21). *Priapea* 51 is worth recording here, too: *quisquis in nos incidit, luat poenas/et usque curvos excavetur ad lumbos* (3–4).⁹

There remains one question of interpretation in line 11. Instead of taking *duros . . . movere lumbos* to mean *movere penem tumidum*, i.e., *pedicare* or *irrumare*, I think that the phrase means “to wiggle [your] bristling buttocks.” Juvenal provides convincing support for my understanding of the adjective. I have already quoted line 11 of the second satire. Equally pertinent are a few lines from the sixth: *dormiat ille/cum domina, sed tu iam durum, Postume, iamque/tondendum eunucho Bromium committere noli* (376–378).¹⁰ One instance of *durus* in Ovid also substan-

⁶See V. Buchheit, “Catulls Dichterkritik in C. 36,” *Hermes* 87 (1959) 315.

⁷*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 12.

⁸So Baehrens, *op. cit.* (above, n. 2) *ad loc.* On the desired motion of *pathici* see Juv. 2.21 and Mart. 3.95.13. P. Brandt, *Beiträge zur antiken Erotik* (Dresden 1924) 218, attributes to Antonius Panormita an epigram that expresses clearly the difference between skilful *pathici* and incompetent ones (I have not been able to discover anything about the provenience of the epigram and cannot vouch for its authenticity):

*Lupius indoctum dum paedicaret ephebum,
dixit: io clunes, dulcis ephebe, move.
hic ait: id faciam, verbo si dixeris uno;
ille refert: ceve, diximus, ergo move.*

Aurelius and Furius are failures both as literary critics and as catamites.

⁹See, too, Mart. 9.47.6 and 14.19; *Priapea* 22; 77.7 and 9; 83. 21–23; Petron. 21.2 and 23.3; Juv. 2.20–21.

¹⁰On the second of the passages L. Friedländer, *D. Junii Juvenalis Saturarum Libri V* (Leipzig 1895), remarks: “*Bromius* ist ein puer delicatus, der sich schon der Mannbarkeit nähert und daher nicht mehr zart, sondern bereits *durus* ist (Arnob. V 25 p. 197, 2 et in speciem levigari nondum duri et hystriculi pusionis), und dem die bisher getragenen Locken nun abgeschoren werden müssen.” Ellis, *op. cit.* (above, n. 2), comments on *duros*, “Perhaps ‘shaggy,’ as in Arnob. v. 25 . . . , which Orelli explains to mean ‘still without hair and with nothing of the porcupine about him,’ comparing Juvenal ii.11, Sidon. i.2.” I have collected a few other passages where *durus* seems to mean “bristling,” or “shaggy,” or perhaps “coarse”: Cic. *Fin.* 4.78 (metaphorically); Hor. *Epodes* 17.15; Pliny *HN* 13.43; Suet. *Aug.* 94.11; Prop. 4.4.54; Lucan 6.672; Sen. *Ep.* 18.5; Virgil *Catalepton* 10.11.

tiates my interpretation: *quam paene admonui . . . / ne . . . forent duris aspera crura pilis* (*Ars Am.* 3.193–194).

II

All the commentators dutifully record that, in poem 16, Catullus is the first writer of classical antiquity to claim that the character of the poet and that of his poetry are not necessarily the same thing;¹¹ they also remark that several subsequent writers appropriate the defence (e.g., Ovid, Pliny, and Martial); but no one, as far as I know, has remarked that, in poem 16, Catullus makes the claim with the serious intention of debunking what had been and was to a large extent to remain a principal tenet of literary criticism in classical antiquity: *non potest alius esse ingenio, alius animo color* (Sen. *Ep.* 114.3). The doctrine is attributed to Socrates in a passage collected in Walz's *Rhetores Graeci* (6, p. 395). Cicero, too, credits Socrates with the principle (*Tusc.* 5.16.47). Plato apparently approves of Socrates' doctrine (*Resp.* 3.400d). Menander expresses a similar theory (143K), which Terence renders: *nam mihi quale ingenium haberes fuit indicio oratio* (*Heaut.* 384). In the fifth century Critias finds fault with Archilochus on moral grounds for writing that he threw his shield away (Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokr.* 88B 44).

It is certain, then, that what may be called biographical literary criticism was widespread and significant at least four centuries before the time of Catullus. It remained an influential doctrine long after his death; Seneca and Quintilian (10.1.100) record the principle with approval. Seneca, in fact, in the 114th epistle, which is about Maecenas' foppishness and the corresponding effeminacy of his speech, provides the fullest application of the biographical critical method. St. Augustine expresses what must be the most extreme instance of equating writer and narrative; he seems uncertain whether his compatriot Apuleius was actually changed into an ass or only pretended to become the ass-Lucius (*De Civ. D.* 18.18).¹²

¹¹J. Granarolo, *L'oeuvre de Catulle* (Paris 1967) 221, repeats without qualification the statement of E. Castorina, *GIF* 5 (1952) 82, that the conjunction of *vita verecunda* and *Musa iocosa* originated at least as early as the sophist Euenos of Paros, a contemporary of Socrates. I have searched Euenos' extant poems but have not been able to find anything remotely resembling Catullus' declaration.

¹²For additional instances of the biographical approach to literature subsequent to Catullus see A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig 1890) s.v. "oratio," and W. C. Summers' notes in his annotated edition of Seneca's letters in the Macmillan series. In more recent times, the principle has been applied to readers and even to editors; a fifteenth-century editor of Tibullus attributed his reluctance to publish a commentary on the Priapean poems to the *rigiditas* of his

Viewed against an old, influential and continuing tradition of biographical literary criticism, poem 16 may be interpreted as part of Catullus' poetic manifesto, a strong statement of the futility of such an approach to literature, as Aurelius' and Furius' mistaken inference about the character of the poet proves. Catullus wrote much personal poetry, autobiographical in form, and would therefore be concerned that conclusions might be drawn from his poetry about himself. We cannot be sure whether he was homosexual; his poetry should not be used as evidence, for, as Gordon Williams has recently written, the poems that treat homosexual themes belong to the literary world of Greek epigram.¹³ In a sense, poem 16 is designed to foster a climate in which neoteric *nugae* can be appreciated. Catullus declares that the poetry of a *pius poeta*, a dedicated poet, must be judged on its purely literary merits, not by criteria that are appropriate to evaluating autobiography. The only moral consideration involved in literary criticism is taste, to the extent that taste is a concomitant of the standards by which one lives.¹⁴

The scurrilous, "occasional" character of the poem has tended to obscure the clear lines of its literary doctrine. Close study will show, however, that its affinities with other poems in the corpus expressive of Catullus' literary convictions strongly suggest that the poem is more than a vituperative pasquinade. I have already explained why scurrility in

severiorum amicorum (quoted by V. Buchheit, *Zetemata* 28 [1962] 1, n. 1), and, in the seventeenth century, Gaspar Schoppe claimed that Scaliger must be a homosexual because he enjoyed the *Satyricon*; Scaliger could only reply that he had not read it for thirty-seven years, and even then had only glanced at it for purely academic reasons (mentioned by K. F. C. Rose, *Arion* 5 [1966] 337). The doctrine is best known today in the words of Buffon, on the occasion of his admission to the French Academy in 1753, "Le style est l'homme même." Gibbon knew and admired Buffon and this is probably why he writes in the opening paragraph of his *Memoirs of My Life*, "But style is the image of character." Catullus' defence has not lacked modern adherents; Buchheit, *Zetemata* 28 (1962) 1, quotes Schiller, "Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst." E. T. Merrill, in his annotated edition of Catullus, records the words of Herrick, "To his book's end this last line he'd have placed, /Jocund his Muse was, but his life was chaste." For a discussion of the distinction between the writer and the *persona* of his writings by a modern, practising poet see P. Valéry, *Poésie et pensée abstraite* (Oxford 1939) 3-12. Both points of view have been defended recently in amusing articles, H. F. Cherniss, "Me ex Versiculis Meis Parum Pudicum," in *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric*, ed. J. P. Sullivan (Cambridge, Mass. 1962) 15-30, and N. Rudd, "The Style and the Man," *Phoenix* 18 (1964) 216-231.

¹³*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1), 549-556. Kinsey's view (above, n. 1) that Catullus wrote poems now lost in the role of pathic homosexual is weakened considerably by Housman's findings (above, n. 5).

¹⁴This is precisely Matthew Arnold's attitude to literary criticism, as J. Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (New York 1969) 47, has written. On Catullus' use of *lepidus*, *salsus*, *venustus*, *facetus* and their opposites to express the literary and social ideals of his circle see T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester 1969) 9-13.

poem 16 forms a part of Catullus' heated defence of his literary ideals. Equally diverting and obfuscating is his tendency to interlace literary declarations with seemingly highly personal, topical anecdotes. As Buchheit has shown, this intertwining is a feature of all the poems in which Catullus formulates an *ars poetica*, e.g. 14, 36, and 44.¹⁵ Furthermore, the three poems adduced as examples conclude with scurrility or malediction (14.12 and 21–23, 36.18–20, 44.18–21; cf. also 95.7–8). Thus the interdigitation and abrasive language of poem 16 link it closely with these poems of more obvious literary purport. Its anecdotal character associates it with the complete cluster of poems about poetry.¹⁶

Another feature connecting poem 16 with at least one, possibly a second, acknowledged expression of literary doctrine in the *liber Catulli* is the sacerdotal language of the poem. Catullus claims to be nothing less than a *pius poeta*, which I, following Thomson's lead (above, n. 16), should translate as "dedicated poet," one who, to adapt Baehrens' paraphrase, *sacra Musarum rite beneque colit*. In spite of Fordyce's arbitrary depreciation of the significance of the phrase [*poetarum*] *impiorum* (14.7), the epithet applied to the Caesii and Aquini and Suffenus means that they have profaned the rites of Catullus' Muse, that is, they are poetasters.¹⁷ Unfortunately, no detailed information independent of Catullus is available about the Caesii and Aquini, but from poem 22 it is clear that Suffenus' *nefas* is to transgress the requirement of brevity in poetry. The ritual language continues, *di magni, horribilem et sacrum libellum* (14.12; cf. the double meaning of *suppliciis*, 14.20), and, as Fordyce explains at 43.8 (*o saeculum insapiens et infacetum!*), the expletive *saeculi incommoda* (14.23) has moral and ethical connotations. Sacerdotal metaphor as a vehicle of literary criticism is a feature of another poem about canons of literary style. Sestius' "frigid" speeches are *nefaria scripta* (44.18; cf. also *plenam veneni* [12] with *omnia . . . venena* [14.19]).¹⁸

Poem 22 corroborates my interpretation of poem 16.¹⁹ The poetaster

¹⁵V. Buchheit, *op. cit.* (above, n. 6), 309–327.

¹⁶de Angeli, *op. cit.* (above, n. 1), 13 and 74, cites poems 1, 14, 16, 22, 35, 36, 44, 49?, 50, 95, 95b, and 105. On the place of poem 1 in Catullus' *ars poetica* see J. P. Elder, "Catullus I, His Poetic Creed, and Nepos," *HSCP* 71 (1966) 143–149, and F. Cairns, "Catullus I," *Mnemosyne* 22 (1969) 153–158, both of whom emphasize its Callimachean affinities. On poems 49 and 50 see D. F. S. Thomson, "Catullus and Cicero: Poetry and the Criticism of Poetry," *CW* 60 (1967) 225–230. On poems 50 and 51 see C. Segal, "Catullan *Otiosi*: The Lover and the Poet," *G&R* 17 (1970) 25–31.

¹⁷C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford 1961) *ad loc.*

¹⁸On *frigidus* as a technical term of literary criticism see Fordyce, *op. cit.* (above, n. 17), 197–198, Buchheit, *op. cit.* (above, n. 6), 313–315, and E. S. de Angeli, *CW* 62 (1969) 354–356.

¹⁹Fordyce, *op. cit.* (above, n. 17), 146, describes the poem as literary criticism disguised as a "letter to a friend," which "is a piece of hellenistic technique." Is it too far-fetched to suppose that "Mentula" is thrust by pitchforks (*furcillis*) from the Muses'

Suffenus is *venustus et dicax et urbanus*, all terms of approval in Catullus' parlance. If the traditional doctrine—*qualis vir, talis oratio*—was valid, one would expect the qualities of *venustas*, *dicacitas* and *urbanitas* to be impressed upon the character of his poetry. Instead, Catullus notes with feigned amazement (*hoc quid putemus esse?*): when you read Suffenus' poetry, it seems to have been written by a goatherd, a country bumpkin. Poem 22 is, then, the exception that disproves the rule.

Suffenus is judged inept because he writes too much (*plurimos facit versus*). The judgment is truly Callimachean (cf. 95b, where the mob is invited to delight in fustian Antimachus). Also Callimachean is Catullus' view that taste really means taste acceptable to himself. Thus Suffenus and that "crowd of scribblers," the Caesii and Aquini, are *impii* (14.7); Catullus is *pius* (16.5), because he is true to his artistic convictions; other writers are accorded literary *pietas* only to the degree that they adhere to Catullan poetic doctrine.

In closing, I want to make a few general remarks about Catullan poetic theory. First, there are only a few explicit statements of literary principles in Catullus, parts of at most ten or eleven poems (see above, n. 16); in several of these, he simply states what or whom he dislikes. Second, we generally have to rely on inference to determine his *ars poetica*; about all this process tells us is that, as in poem 16, Catullus commends his *nugae* for their *lepos*, *sal*, *risus*, *ioci*, *venustas*, and so on.²⁰ Finally, a mixture of a particular occasion or situation with literary doctrine seems to be a feature peculiar to Catullus, as in poems 14, 16, 36 and 44, for instance; Callimachus provides no real parallels.²¹ Kenneth Quinn had good reasons for entitling his little book *The Catullan Revolution*. Many of Catullus' practices and declarations are truly revolutionary.²² Poem 16 certainly is.

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domain because his belletristic efforts are full of "rusticity" (105; cf. 57.7)? The urbane Suffenus is dismissed as a country bumpkin as soon as he sets his hand to writing poetry (22.9–15); the *annales Volusi* are *pleni ruris* (36.19); see, too, Buchheit, *op. cit.* (above, n. 6) 318–319, for other examples of *rusticitas* and *rusticus* used in literary criticism.

²⁰U. Knoche, "Erlebnis und dichterischer Ausdruck in der lateinischen Poesie," *Gymnasium* 65 (1958) 156, on the basis of poems 1, 13, 16 and 50; see, too, Buchheit, *op. cit.* (above, n. 6), 321–322.

²¹See Buchheit, *op. cit.* (above, n. 6), 327.

²²Fordyce, *op. cit.* (above, n. 17), 385, writes that "Catullus ends [poem 95] with a defiant challenge to literary tradition and conventional criticism."