

Menander and Catullus 8

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla. 5
ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,
quae tu volebas nec puella nolebat,
fulsere vere candidi tibi soles.
nunc iam illa non volt: tu quoque inpote(ns noli),
nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser vive, 10
sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.
vale, puella. iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit invitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelesta, vae te, quae tibi manet vita? 15
quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

Another article on Catullus 8?¹⁾ Since 1909, when E. P. Morris demonstrated that the poem contains dictional and thematic features which are commonplace to lovers' soliloquies in Roman comedy²⁾, the debate has raged: either we are reminded of the fact (somehow presumed a key to interpreting Poem 8) that MacCaulay could not read it without tears (the implication being that it is therefore spontaneous, with no specific tradition consciously motivating its author), or we are told that Catullus "takes a typical situation from Greek erotic and applies it with imagination and humor to his own case"³⁾. While disagreeing with the claim that the overall effect is humorous, I would like to suggest in support of Wheeler's general view that Catullus, in writing this poem, was

1) The extensive bibliography of this poem need not be recorded here; for a fairly complete list see P. J. Connor, "Catullus 8: The Lover's Conflict," *Antichthon* 8 (1974) 93-96. For a summary of critical opinion see M. B. Skinner, "Catullus 8: the comic *amator* as *ieron*," *CJ* 66 (1971) 298-305.

2) "An Interpretation of Catullus VIII," *Conn. Acad. of Arts and Sciences* 15 (1909) 137-51.

3) A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley 1934) 230.

guided not only by broad literary motifs, but also by a single, specific model. This can, I think, be shown on the levels of diction, structure and content. This will in turn lead to some new observations on the artistry of the poem.

Menander provides the model, and this in itself may require a slight digression. Familiar as we are with the neoteric and Augustan poets' acknowledgement of the new poetic ideals held by the Alexandrians, we may easily underrate the influence of Menander; outside the period of great archaic and classical Greek literature, but not quite a part of the Hellenistic revival, he is too often seen as an author who will merely help in elucidating the more extensively surviving Roman comic playwrights. Yet his appeal in his own right to the Roman world was enormous, as a glance at the extent of preserved non-papyrological fragments demonstrates. If further evidence is needed, we need only look to Quintilian, who allots him four paragraphs (*Inst. Or.* 10.1.69–72) – second only to Homer⁴). In considering Catullus 8 it will be particularly significant that Quintilian commended Menander for his control of character.

So much for background. Wheeler, after reporting the features which Catullus 8 shares with Roman comedy and elegy, concluded: “No close parallel from the original Greek has happened to survive, but the frequent recurrence of the motive in both Roman comedy and Roman elegy prove beyond a doubt that it occurred in Greek comedy (p. 229)”. But there is a close parallel; it is to be found, however, not in the lament of the comic *amator* (and this is perhaps the reason it has escaped the notice of critics), but in the soliloquy delivered by the old man Demeas in Menander's *Samia*:

λάβ' αὐτόν. ὦ πόλισμα Κεκροπίας χθονός,	325
ὦ ταναὸς αἰθήρ, ὦ-τί, Δημέα, βοᾷς;	
τί βοᾷς, ἀνόητε; κάτεχε σαυτόν, καρτέρει.	
οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀδικεῖ Μοσχίων σε. παράβολος	
ὁ λόγος ἴσως ἐστ', ἄνδρες, ἀλλ' ἀληθινός.	
εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἢ βουλόμενος ἢ κεκνισμένος	330
ἔρωτι τοῦτ' ἔπραξεν ἢ μισῶν ἐμέ,	

4) For this see A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1973) 2; they also note that in advising his grandson on suitable authors Ausonius (*Epist.* 22.46–47) recommends, from Greek literature, only Homer and Menander.

ἦν ἂν ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς διανοίας ἔτι θρασὺς
 ἔμοι τε παρατεταγμένος. νυνὶ δέ μοι
 ἀπολελόγηται τὸν φανέντ' αὐτῶι γάμον
 ἄσμενος ἀκούσας. οὐκ ἔρῶν γάρ, ὡς ἐγὼ
 335 τὸτ' ὠϊόμην, ἔσπευδεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐμὴν
 Ἑλένην φυγεῖν βουλόμενος ἔνδοθεν ποτε
 αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν αἰτία τοῦ γεγονότος
 παρέλαβεν αὐτόν που μεθύοντα δηλαδὴ,
 οὐκ ὄντ' ἐν ἑαυτοῦ πολλά δ' ἐξεργάζεται
 340 ἀνόητ' ἄκρατος καὶ νεότης, ὅταν λάβῃ
 τὸν συνεπιβουλεύσαντα τούτοις πλησίον.
 οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ γὰρ πιθανὸν εἶναι μοι δοκεῖ
 τὸν εἰς ἅπαντας κόσμον καὶ σώφρονα
 345 τοὺς ἄλλοτριούς εἰς ἐμὲ τοιοῦτον γεγονέναι,
 οὐδ' εἰ δεκάκις ποητός ἐστι, μὴ γόνωι
 ἐμὸς ὕσ' οὐ γὰρ τοῦτο, τὸν τρόπον δ' ὀρῶ.
 χαμαιτύπη δ' ἄνθρωπος, ὄλεθρος. ἀλλὰ τί;
 οὐ γὰρ περιέσται. Δημέα, νῦν ἄνδρα χρῆ
 350 εἶναι σ' ἐπιλαθοῦ τοῦ πόθου, πέπανσ' ἔρῶν,
 καὶ τἀτύχημα μὲν τὸ γεγονὸς κρύφθ' ὅσον
 ἔνεστι διὰ τὸν ὕον, ἐκ τῆς δ' οἰκίας
 ἐπὶ κεφαλῆν ἐς κόρακας ὥσον τὴν καλὴν
 Σαμίαν. ἔχεις δὲ πρόφασιν ὅτι τὸ παιδίον
 355 ἀνείλετ' ἐμφανίσης γὰρ ἄλλο μηδὲ ἐν,
 δακῶν δ' ἀνάσχου, καρτέρησον εὐγενῶς.

(Men. Sam. 325–56)

Demeas, after an absence in Pontus, has returned to Athens, where he gains the mistaken impression that his son Moschion and his hetaira Chrysis have been carrying on an affair behind his back. The chief evidence is a child, in reality that of Moschion and the daughter of Niceratus (friend and neighbour of Demeas), who are about to be married. Demeas here delivers an emotional speech, vacillating between the despair of filial betrayal and the desire to believe that his son has been unwillingly seduced by Chrysis, whose ejection from his house will restore the relationship with his son. The piece is without a doubt the finest character portrayal surviving from Menander, and was surely highly regarded in antiquity⁵).

5) For the position of this soliloquy in relation to those of Attic tragedy (particularly Euripides') see F. Leo, *Der Monolog im Drama* (Berlin 1908) 79–81;

Purely on a general level, it is quite plausible that Catullus saw in this monologue the possibilities of applying the fluctuations of emotion and reason, as presented by Menander, to his own amatory situation. Demeas moves from despair (325–26) to an attempt at reaching a reasoned decision (326–47), back to passionate anger (348–49), and finally returns to rational firmness (349–56). The very similar fluctuations Catullus presents in Poem 8 have been well documented⁶, and need not be repeated here. This broad similarity of structure must now be tested against closer and more substantial parallels. Before doing this, we should perhaps note that Leo treated both Demeas' soliloquy and Catullus 8 in his study of dramatic monologues⁷, although he treated them separately, and noticed no deliberate connection between the two passages.

Halfway through Catullus' poem⁸), we find the famous self-hortatory line, *sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura* (11). This is in many ways the crux of the poem, since after allowing his emotions to slide from angry and resolved rejection into a more ambivalent state of mind as he seems to be recalling his own past situation with Lesbia (*cui labella mordebis?*, 18), he would recover his resolve with a final command, closely recalling his earlier one: *at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura* (19). The two lines are clearly a deliberate frame – determination at both ends of a section marked by fluctuating emotions (12–18). I suggest that Catullus found a model for this in the soliloquy from the *Samia*; for there Menander had framed the entire passage in precisely the same manner:

κάτεχε σαυτόν, καρτέρει. (327)
δακῶν δ' ἀνάσχου, καρτέρησον εὐγενῶς. (356)⁹

The most obvious parallel, of course, is in the repeated imperatives occurring in both passages: *καρτέρει . . . καρτέρησον*;

also W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch, Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte der griechischen Tragödie*, Neue Philologische Untersuchungen 2 (1926) 245, n. 1; 248, n. 1.

6) Best by R. L. Rowland, "Miser Catulle: An Interpretation of the Eighth Poem of Catullus," *GR* 13 (1966) 15–21.

7) Above, n. 5, 81 (Menander), 109–10 (Catullus).

8) This line clearly ends one movement of the poem; so E. Fraenkel, "Two Poems of Catullus," *JRS* 51 (1961) 51–53.

9) W. Kroll (*C. Valerius Catullus* 3rd ed. [Stuttgart 1959] only at 8.11) gives a bare reference to *Sam.* 356; symmetrically, C. Austin (*Menandri Aspis et Samia II, Subsidia Interpretationis* [Berlin 1970] only at 327) cites *Cat.* 8.11.

obdura . . . *obdura*. But there is a further detail which appears to remove the similarities from the realm of coincidence. Menander had introduced variety by altering not only the prepositional prefixes (*κάτεχε σαντόν* . . . *ἀνάσχου*), but also the tenses of his imperatives (present to aorist in all cases, with the aorists in the final line perhaps giving a sense of greater immediacy). While the Latin language did not allow emulation of this latter feature, Catullus was free to alter the verbs enforcing *obdura*; this he did in precisely the same manner observed in Menander (*obstinata* . . . *destinatus*). Moreover, so important was it for Catullus to reproduce this effect, that he used the compound *destinatus* in a sense (= *obstinatus*) not attested before, and subsequently found only three times, all in Ammianus¹⁰). A further observation can be made; it has been claimed for Catullus that “*obstinatus* stresses the beginning of the process, *destinatus* its continuance”¹¹). If this is so, we can perhaps see in Catullus’ variation a somewhat similar attempt (although there are qualitative differences) to achieve what Menander was able to accomplish by altering the aspect of his imperatives.

This, then, is the framework which Catullus seems to have adapted in Poem 8; further parallels can be observed:

τί Δημέα, βοᾶς;/
τί βοᾶς, ἀνόητε;
(326–27)

Miser Catulle,
desinas ineptire
(1)

Both Demeas and Catullus address themselves by name¹²); each, moreover, chides himself for his own stupidity (*ἀνόητε*; *ineptire*) in being unable to master his emotions.

Δημέα, νῦν ἄνδρα
χρηῆ/ εἶναι σ’ ἐπι-
λαθοῦ τοῦ πόθου,
πέπαυσ’ ἐρῶν.
(349–50)

iam Catullus obdurat,/
nec te requiret nec
rogabit invitam.
(12–13)

¹⁰) *ThLL* 5.761.31–33; C. J. Fordyce (*Catullus: A Commentary* [Oxford 1961] 113) notes that it is also the only time the word is used of a personal subject in this sense. The predilection of Ammianus is curious; he eight times uses *destinatio* with the same meaning (it appears otherwise only once in the *Codex Gregorius*) – cf. *ThLL* 5.755.19–25.

¹¹) K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London and Basingstoke 1970) 119.

¹²) Noted by Leo (above, n. 5), separately for both Menander and Catullus, as a feature of monologues.

Now we have the call for immediate control (*vñv*; *iam*). For Catullus, however, there has been a slight advance; the firmness has taken hold (*obdurat*). This, of course, lends greater impact to his subsequent reversion (17–18). Demeas, on the other hand, is still struggling (*χρή*). The movement is also the same in both passages, as Demeas and Catullus shift from a general statement of resolve to the specific action which is called for (*ἐπιλαθοῦ τοῦ πόθου . . .*; *nec te requiret . . .*).

<p>χαμαιτύπη δ' ἄνθρωπος ὄλεθρος. ἀλλὰ τί;/ οὐ γὰρ περιέσται. (348–49)</p>	<p>scelesta, vae te, quae tibi manet vita? (15)</p>
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Catullus, in some of the strongest language he was to use in addressing Lesbia, predicts an empty future for her: “You’re done for, wretch, what sort of life is left for you¹³)?” He derives at least some satisfaction from the fact that his own loss will be matched by the desolation of the woman who has turned against him¹⁴).

13) Some justification of this reading may be necessary, since the line has been roughly handled over the last century, with the result that it is largely misunderstood. Haupt had decided (*Opuscula* I [Leipzig 1875] 78–79) that Catullus 8 could not possibly contain an actual attack upon Lesbia: “atqui ab execratione hoc carmen prorsus abhorret.” Accordingly he formulated the following rule: “non de nihilo est quod accusativum casum [*vae te*] Catullus posuit, cum liceret ei dativo uti: nam in accusativo casu de execratione cogitari non potest, potest in dativo” (79). Therefore it is an expression of commiseration. Now of the two other attested examples of *vae* followed by the accusative, the first (*vae te!*/ *tibi quidem supplicium, carnufex, de nobis detur?* Plaut. *Asin.* 481–82) can only be execratory. Haupt had, in fact, assigned *vae te!* to the previous speaker (*dabitur pol supplicium mihi de tergo vestro. vae te!*), in which case it would express sympathy. In doing so, he claimed: “sed . . . omnes libri cum vetere codice Camerarii in his verbis conspirant” (78). I find not a single edition of Plautus supporting this collocation, which is in any case patently incorrect; *vae te!* belongs to the defiant Leonidas (cf. *carnufex*, 482). The second example (*vae me, puto, me concacavi*, Sen. *Apoc.* 4.3) occupies a greyer area – “dear me!” or even “silly me!” in the sense.

Baehrens (*Catulli Veronensis Liber* [Leipzig 1876] ad loc.) cheerfully accepted Haupt’s dictum: “cum accusativo iuncta . . . miserationem exprimit (non execrationem, ut fit in dativo ‘vae tibi’).” From this point on, acceptance of sympathetic connotations for *vae te* has led most commentators (A. Riese and E. T. Merrill seem to be the only exceptions in the last hundred years) to translate *scelesta* as “unfortunate,” a meaning which it can have, although more rarely than its standard sense “abominated, wretched.” In short, there are no philological grounds for seeing *scelesta, vae te* as an expression of sympathy – indeed common usage works against such a reading.

14) Baehrens admitted this to be the normal meaning (“licet sensu proprio utpote iniuriam sibi inlatam respiciens adhibere potuerit poeta,” on 8.15), but

Thus the line is in accord with his farewell of line 12, *vale puella*, which, considering its position in the poem, can only have the pejorative force of the Greek *χαίρε* – “off with you¹⁵!”

The outburst at Cat. 8.15 finds a close parallel in *Samia* 348–49. It is noteworthy that even critics who have acknowledged the anger in line 15 have played down its traditional nature: “The language of comedy remains, but it is not as relaxed as before, and with

scelesta, vae te, quae tibi vita manet [sic]? (15) the former gentleness is lost completely¹⁶”. Perhaps, but the language and tone are straight from comedy, and the content is virtually identical to that in the corresponding passage from Demeas’ soliloquy. Both curse the woman in similar terms (*ὄλεθρος*; *scelesta*) and each alludes, not without some satisfaction, to her future circumstances (*οὐ γὰρ περιέσται*, she won’t win out¹⁷); *quae tibi manet vita?*).

In connection with this final point, we should leave the actual monologue of Demeas and look to a passage 35 lines later, where the old man has his final say (this time to Chrysis’ face):

ἐν τῇ πόλει 390

ὄψει σεαυτὴν νῦν ἀκριβῶς ἥτις εἶ.
οὐ κατὰ σε, Χρυσί, πραπτόμεναι δραχμὰς δέκα
μόνας ἔτεροι τρέχουσιν ἐπὶ τὰ δεῖπνα καὶ
πίνουσ’ ἀκρατον ἄχρι ἂν ἀποθάνωσιν, ἧ
πεινώσιν ἂν μὴ τοῦθ’ ἐτοίμως καὶ ταχὺ 395
ποῶσιν. εἴσει δ’ οὐδενὸς τοῦτ’, οἶδ’ ὅτι,
ἧττον σύ, καὶ γνώσει τίς οὐσ’ ἡμάρτανες.
(*Sam.* 390–97)

dismissed it, presumably because he believed *vae te!* could only express commiseration.

15) Cf. Doeringer-Naudet, *C. Valerius Catullus* (Paris 1826) on 8.15: “abi in malam rem. Sic *χαίρε* apud Graecos . . . Non imprecatur amans, sed valedicit infidae.” Again, after Haupt and Bachrens, recognition of this force for *vale* seems to disappear.

16) P. J. Connor (above, n. 1) 95–96.

17) Gomme and Sandbach suggest “she will not survive this” (ad loc.); LSJ imply “she shall not get the better of me.” Either would refer to the future desolation, and would therefore find a parallel in Cat. 8.15. Capps’ and van Leeuwen’s “I’ll get nothing by it” does not give the required sense, and is in any case rejected by Gomme and Sandbach on grammatical grounds.

Chrysis, joining the ranks of the common hetairai, where she will have to scrape out a degrading living, will realise what a mistake she made in betraying Demeas. And what of Lesbia?

at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla
 scelesta, vae te, quae tibi manet vita?
 quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?

(14–16)

The tone of the two passages is, once again, similar; the woman will be desolate in her new position, and at that point she will regret her past actions (*γνώσει τίς οὖσ' ἡμάρτανες*; *at tu dolebis*). Of course there is a major difference in the actual projected fate of the two¹⁸), and Catullus developed the idea by artfully changing emphasis so as to dwell on his own loss:

quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
 quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?

(17–18)

But such development within a traditional framework is precisely what we look for in Catullus.

To summarize, then, the first line and the second half of the eighth poem of Catullus show remarkable similarities of diction and tone to the soliloquy of Menander's Demeas – similarities whose closeness appears to rule out mere coincidence. Beyond this, the thematic hallmark of both pieces is emotional fluctuation – control lost and regained. Catullus does develop the Menandrian sequence to suit his own situation: lines 2–8 find no parallel in Menander; nor do lines 17–18, where his resolve is lost as he drifts into reminiscence. The impulse comes from Menander, but Poem 8 is no less Catullus' own product.

It is particularly significant that Catullus drew from a situation qualitatively different from his own. For while Demeas rejected a lover of sorts, his main anguish arose not from a sense of betrayal by that lover, but rather from the supposed betrayal committed by his son. Another poet had perhaps seen the potential in Menander's soliloquy for a purely amatory context; the *amator* of the Alexandrian Erotic Fragment, a paraclausithyron (*Lyrice Ade-*

18) Lesbia will be in a worse situation, in that she will be completely without lovers, although outside Poem 8 she does end up much like the future Chrysis:

nunc in quadriviis et angiportis
 glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes.

(58.4–5)

spota pp. 177–80 Powell), also impressed on herself the need to control her emotions, and in terms which recall *Samia* 327 and 356:

ξηλοτυπεῖν γὰρ δεῖ, στέγειν, καρτερεῖν
(p. 178 Powell, line 30)¹⁹

Catullus, in adapting the speech to his own purely amatory situation, in a far more extensive manner, has shown his awareness of the possibilities of neotericism – traditional elements can be transformed to suit a new context. We will see these elements and recognise them as traditional, but the effect will be derived from poem into which the traditional matter has been incorporated.

None of this means that the pathos of Catullus 8 is false, or that the poet is insincere. It is quite simply that a poem, if it is to endure, will be a work of art, not an emotional outburst. As a work of art, it is produced with regard to the literary tradition that precedes it. We may detect emotion behind it, and we may weep when we read it; if so, that will merely be additional testimony to the poem's artistry. And much of the artistry of Catullus 8 lies in the successful appropriation, development and unification of traditional poetic elements.

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19) Elsewhere this poem shows the influence of New Comedy; for instance, cf. line 11 and Men. *Misoum.* A1–A2. On this see my article, "New Comedy, Callimachus and Roman Poetry," *HSCP* 83 (1979) 198, n. 63.