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PRETTY LESBIUS*

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Lesbius est pulcher. quid ni? quem Lesbia malit
quam te cum tota gente, Catulle, tua.
sed tamen hic pulcher vendat cum gente Catullum,
si tria notorum suavia reppererit.

In poem 79 Catullus introduces us to yet another in the parade of Lesbia's lovers, one who seems to have the inside track by virtue of his special relationship to her. "Lesbius" shares her name; he may be a close relative. The first thing we learn about him is that he is *pulcher*. This obvious play on words unmasks him as the radical demagogue P. Clodius Pulcher, while Lesbia stands revealed as one of his three sisters, most likely that controversial Clodia once wed to Q. Caecilius Metellus Celer.[1]

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 77th annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in Saint Louis, Missouri, on April 2, 1981. I wish to thank everyone who offered comments upon the paper on that occasion. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to the *TAPA* referee whose marked expertise in the fields of Roman literature and Roman family relations produced many valuable suggestions for strengthening my argument.

[1] The testimony of Apuleius, *Apol.* 10, corroborates the evidence of poem 79: *accusent C. Catullum, quod Lesbiam pro Clodia nominarit.* An alternative hypothesis that "Lesbius" was not Clodius himself but a henchman with the same *cognomen* proved false when the man's name turned out to be Sex. Cloelius; see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, "Sex. Clodius—Sex. Cloelius," *CQ* 10 (1960) 41–42. Earlier, G. Giri, "Se Lesbia di Catullo sia Clodia, la sorella di P. Clodio," *RIGI* 6 (1922) 1–16 [161–76], attempted to show that poem 79 does not contain a pun on the name "Pulcher," and that Lesbia is consequently not a sister of the tribune of 58 B.C.; he presented additional arguments for that position in *Athenaeum* 6 (1928) 183–89 and 215–19. Giri's skepticism has generally been regarded as far too harsh. In this paper I assume that Lesbius is indeed P. Clodius Pulcher; furthermore, I take for granted the traditional identification of Lesbia with Clodia Metelli, despite T. P. Wiseman's recent doubts (*Catullan Questions* [Leicester 1969] 50–60 and *Cinna the Poet* [Leicester 1974] 108–14). His objections, which rest entirely upon a tenuous supposition about the date of composition of the Lesbia poems, have not convinced me. C. Deroux, "L'identité de Lesbie," in *ANRW* I.3 (Berlin 1973) 390–416, adduces strong circumstantial grounds for keeping the old identification. Altogether I am in aggreement with K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London and Basingstoke 1970) 414, when he suggests that one purpose of 79 may have been "to put the pseudonym in a context that left no doubt who Lesbia was."

Thus poem 79 plays an essential role in Catullan prosopography, and scholars have been careful to accord it due value as a historical document; in the process, however, they have totally neglected its implications as a work of literature.[2] Which is a pity, because literary analysis can readily take its departure from the facts established by prosopography and, applying its own methods, arrive at a much fuller understanding of the poetic meaning of the Lesbia affair. That is the purpose of the following essay. I hope to show that in 79 Catullus has integrated several invective *topoi* into a caustic denunciation of the values of Clodius and his sister—a denunciation which also demonstrates the widespread moral corruption within contemporary Roman society.

To appreciate the part Lesbia plays in the epigram, we must first observe how Lesbius functions as its primary target. That, in turn, demands some consideration of the manner in which Catullus has fashioned a novel invective statement out of extremely conventional literary material. Let us begin on the most basic level by discovering the exact implications of the sexual insults contained in the poem. These lines have usually been interpreted as a blunt accusation of perversion. Lesbius is a Pulcher: and so Lesbia prefers him to Catullus and Catullus' whole clan. This Pulcher is nevertheless perfectly welcome to sell Catullus and his clan into slavery, provided he has first obtained three kisses of greeting from his acquaintances.[3] *Vendat* (3) is construed as a jussive subjunctive, and *reppererit* (4) as a future perfect indicative: the last sentence is therefore a future more vivid condition whose likelihood of fulfillment is ironically qualified by an *adynaton* implicit in the protasis.[4] No acquaintance, we infer, will ever bring himself to kiss Lesbius on the mouth—for the man's foul breath indicates that he practices *cunnilingus*, and upon his own sister, at that. Since oral-genital sex is conventionally regarded as the last resort of males unable to pleasure women through penile erection, Lesbia's brother is condemned as sexually inadequate, while Catullus'

[2] See the discussions of the historical background in C. L. Neudling, *A Prosopography to Catullus*, Iowa Studies in Classical Philology 12 (Oxford 1955) 99–101, and in Deroux (above, note 1) 394–403. The sole literary treatment is H. D. Rankin, "Catullus and Incest," *Eranos* 74 (1976) 113–21, who considers it the key epigram in a series dealing with that theme.

[3] All modern commentators prefer *notorum*, the reading of *O*, to the *natorum* of *G* and lesser MSS. W. Kroll dismisses the latter reading with a brusque "unmöglich" (*Catull* [1922; 3rd ed., Stuttgart 1959] 254, while M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis argues cogently against it (*Il libro di Catullo* [Turin 1928; rpt. 1976] 239).

[4] So Kroll (above, note 3) 253, citing as parallels Plautus, *Mil.* 21–23, and Seneca, *Apocol.* 11. The interpretation proposed below does not exclude this traditional reading. Since Catullus is probably making use of a proverbial expression in lines 3 and 4, as Lenchantin de Gubernatis (above, note 3) 239 has suggested, he may have expected his readers to read the epigram first in that way; they would discover its broader meanings only after perceiving the ambiguity contained in the verbs *vendat* and *reppererit*.

boldness in challenging his rival to try and get rid of him radiates his underlying confidence in his own superior virility.[5] If Lesbia still blindly fancies such a wretched specimen of manhood as Lesbius, to hell with her: the two of them deserve each other.

These significances are undeniably present in the concluding couplet of poem 79. But there we also discover a striking syntactical ambiguity, an ambiguity that adds a new dimension of meaning to the entire epigram. *Reppererit* can be taken as a perfect subjunctive. So construed, it turns the *vendat* clause into the apodosis of a less vivid conditional: Lesbius would sell Catullus and Catullus' kindred, if he should have found his three kisses.[6] The conditional situation thus becomes a possibility (albeit remote) and both the selling of Catullus and the obtaining of kisses are now part of Lesbius' express intentions. But why should he crave kisses? In punning upon his name, the repeated *pulcher . . . hic pulcher* hints at his motive. *Pulcher*, "pretty," is a standard term for describing the appearance of a boy who arouses male desire.[7] The *suavia*, then, are not

[5] The Roman revulsion at a male who engages in oral-genital sex is expressed in some of Martial's most graphic imagery: 3.17, Sabidius' breath turns pastries into dung; 6.81, Charidemus' mouth pollutes the public bath water. Disgust at kissing someone who practices *cunnilingus* and *fellatio* is made explicit at 7.95.14–15 and 12.59.10. In Roman invective, the mere mention of greeting friends with a kiss becomes an oblique charge of perversion, e.g., Cicero, *Sest.* 111. For *cunnilingus* as the final resort of impotent men, see Suetonius, *Tib.* 45, and Martial 11.25 and 12.38. A full discussion of Roman jokes about oral sex may be found in A. E. Richlin, *Sexual Terms and Themes in Roman Satire and Related Genres* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University 1978) 310–23. As a cliché of Ciceronian polemic, brother-sister incest will be considered below; elsewhere it is categorized as *nefas* by Nepos, *Pref.* 4, and treated romantically but no less disapprovingly by Ovid, *Met.* 9.454–665. Finally, the assumption of a brash and defiant stance, accompanied by assertions of *machismo*, is characteristic of the Catullan *persona*: cf. poems 15, 16, 21, 40. The comments of the *TAPA* referee were invaluable for helping me spell out and illustrate the full implications of the insults to Lesbius' manhood: several of the above references are owed to him or her.

[6] Quinn (above, note 1) 414–15 understands the last couplet in this way. He translates *vendat* as "would put up for sale as slaves," adding "Lesbius is the man to commit a major crime, just to get a few friendly greetings. It is not hard to feel all sorts of *innuendo* implied." D. N. Levin; "Propertius, Catullus, and Three Kinds of Ambiguous Expression," *TAPA* 100 (1969) 230, remarks "Catullus . . . is capable both of utilizing intentionally ambiguous vocabulary or syntax and of luring the reader into making assumptions which are quickly proved false." He finds syntactical ambiguities quite similar to those under discussion in poems 2 and 51. Cf. his earlier study, "Ambiguities of Expression in Catullus 66 and 67," *CP* 54 (1959) 109–11.

[7] At Cicero, *Off.* 1.144, for example, Sophocles is made to exclaim "*O puerum pulchrum*!" upon catching sight of a handsome youngster. For the tradition of kissing the *puer delicatus*, note Plautus' parody of a love scene at *Cas.* 452–66 and cf. Catullus 48 and 99. Late lexicographers and scholiasts (e.g., Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.256) distinguish between the three words for kiss *osculum*, *basium* and *suavium*, restricting *suavium* to erotic situations. But P. Moreau, "*Osculum, Basium, Savium*," *RPh* 52 (1978) 87–97, demonstrates that actual Latin literary usage makes virtually no distinction between the three words; soon

only kisses of greeting exchanged by friends, but also tokens of love bestowed upon a beautiful *puer delicatus*. The attractive boy whom all yearn to kiss is a romantic stereotype. Here the stereotype is viciously inverted. Though Lesbius is fair of face (at least in his sister's eyes), none of the suitors he longs for would dream of touching his filthy mouth, for they are all well acquainted with his habits.[8] The squeamishness of outsiders is counterposed to the unnatural attraction felt by his blood relative, making the charge of incest convey the additional, and paradoxically even more damning, notion of an utter lack of fastidiousness.[9] In showing her preference for Lesbius, Lesbia degrades herself. By participating in his perversions, she has become as corrupt as he. And while our speaker still affects the righteous indignation of the sexually orthodox, his earlier scorn for these two vile creatures is tempered by the reflection that they do represent a potential threat to his own civic status. Corrupt they may be; but Lesbius is determined upon his goals, and his sister has chosen to support him at the expense of Catullus.

If literary analysis were to stop there, poem 79 might seem an ephemeral squib, prompted by jealousy and serving only to vent the author's spite. Its scope becomes broader, however, and its artistic concerns more complex, once we recognize that the allegations it makes are really political metaphors. In a recent study, I have argued that the sexual imagery prominent in Catullan invective is a creative modification of ordinary

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after its introduction into the Latin language, *suavium* lost its original sexual overtones and came to be used of both erotic kisses and kisses of friendship. Catullus' use of the word and its cognates bears out Moreau's thesis: the kiss stolen from Juventius is a *suaviolum* (99.2 and 14), but *suaviabor* (9.9) expresses his intention to welcome his friend Veranius home with kisses. Thus *suavia* in 79.4 contains yet another ambiguity: these are both the kisses with which Romans of the elite class saluted one another (on the practice, see Moreau 94–96) and the kisses that are a familiar convention of pederastic love poetry. On the colloquial nature of the noun, see D. O. Ross, Jr., *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) 104–105.

[8] With *notorum*, Catullus is punning upon two primary meanings: (1) "acquaintances of his"; (2) "men aware of his character and reputation." A close parallel for the second meaning exists at Plautus, *Pseud.* 996. Some further significances of this word are analyzed in note 19, below. In a pederastic context, mention of the *os impurum* of course suggests that Lesbius has been performing *fellatio* upon his male lovers, as well as *cunnilingus* upon his sister. But such services would not ordinarily be demanded of a boy of surpassing beauty; it is the physically unattractive who must arouse their partners in this way (note Horace, *Epod.* 8.19–20, and cf. Martial 2.61.1–2, where a boy whose beard has already sprouted engages in the practice). There is a clear implication that Lesbius is a youth past his boyhood prime, already of an age to interest women: he is consequently forced to extreme measures in order to keep his clientele.

[9] The man of taste and breeding will reject sexual objects that do not conform to his high standards; cf. Catullus 41 and Martial 10.75. It is possible to invert the *topos* and apply it to a woman who is not choosy enough, as in Catullus 97.11–12: *quem siqua attingit, non illam posse putemus / aegroti culum lingere carnificis*?

rhetorical formulas.[10] Roman politicians commonly resorted to stylized defamation of opponents, touching particularly upon real or alleged sexual misconduct. But in lampoons like 28 and 57 Catullus characterizes the subtle operations of patronage and class privilege as symbolic instances of rape and perversion, transforming commonplaces of polemic into a device for criticizing the established system. Here the same technique is employed. We find certain defamatory remarks directed against P. Clodius Pulcher, charges long familiar from other contemporary sources, repeated yet again—but for a different end. Those tired gibes now encode a statement of apprehension over the current crisis of the Roman state, focusing upon the breakdown of traditional standards of fair dealing among friends and allies.

That Clodius should be portrayed as a *puer delicatus* will surprise no one who has read the orations of his great enemy Cicero. Throughout a long series of attacks, Cicero blends fact and diabolic fancy into a gross caricature of the radical leader as a venal catamite. The unlucky associations of his *cognomen*, his invasion of the Bona Dea rites dressed in woman's garb, his questionable abrogation of patrician status, and his short-lived, unstable political friendships are consistently transmuted into the shameful conduct of an effete youth who has outraged his class and family by selling himself to the dregs of society.[11] The keynote was

[10] M. B. Skinner, "Parasites and Strange Bedfellows: A Study in Catullus' Political Imagery," *Ramus* 8 (1979) 137–52. A new article by A. Richlin, "The Meaning of *Irrumare* in Catullus and Martial," *CP* 76 (1981) 40–46, lays emphasis upon the literal content of that expression in Catullan invective. I agree that Catullus is not using the word strictly in the weakened sense of "cheat." Furthermore, I believe that the graphic language of 28.9–13 and similar passages is to be taken on two levels: the explicit description of oral sodomy is intended to shock and outrage the reader, and at the same time to serve as a vivid metaphor for the abuse of power. The use of sexual description to encode political messages is not infrequent elsewhere in Roman literature. For example, Cicero's representation of Antony as the paid "wife" of young Curio (*Phil.* 2.44–45) leads immediately into a pathetic description of Curio confessing his enormous debts to his father and begging forgiveness. The passage recalls those genre-scenes of New Comedy in which sons are taken to task for squandering fortunes upon harlots. By casting Antony as the evil bloodsucking whore, Cicero forcefully underlines his pernicious influence upon Curio, and the resulting damage to Curio's own political career. For Augustus' use of an obscene lampoon as a weapon of political propaganda, see further J. P. Hallett, "Perusinae Glandes and the Changing Image of Augustus," *AJAH* 2 (1977) 151–71.

[11] The political career of Clodius Pulcher has been the subject of much recent scholarly discussion. E. S. Gruen, "P. Clodius: Instrument or Independent Agent?," *Phoenix* 20 (1966) 120–30 (with an excellent summary of earlier scholarship) and A. W. Lintott, "P. Clodius Pulcher—*Felix Catilina*?" *G&R* 14 (1967) 157–69, cogently argue against assuming that he was a tool of one or more of the triumvirs. P. A. Brunt, "The Roman Mob," *Past and Present* 35 (1966) 3–27, analyzes the factors that allowed him to maintain control of the urban proletariat. The Bona Dea scandal and its consequences is the subject of J. P. V. D. Balsdon, "*Fabula Clodiana*," *Historia* 15 (1966) 65–73; see also W. K. Lacey, "Clodius and Cicero: A Question of *Dignitas*," *Antichthon* 8 (1974) 85–92. The confusing train of events

sounded in the *in Clodium et Curionem* of 61 B.C., in what must have been a delicious *tour de force*: Clodius depicted as a mincing queen in full drag, preparing to sneak into the Bona Dea celebration. Fragments 21 through 23 show him practicing a girlish voice and walk, tugging a long-sleeved tunic over his arms and fussing about the fit of a breastband; in fragment 24, he is made to confront his bizarre reflection with a pun that anticipates Catullus' wordplay: *sed, credo, postquam tibi speculum adlatum est, longe te a pulchris abesse sensisti.*[12] The witticism turns up again in a letter to Atticus written just after the oration may have been delivered, in which Clodius is designated as *pulchellus puer*; still later, the contemptuous diminutive is employed as a transparent nickname.[13] We may assume that such misuse of his *cognomen* to imply youthful unchastity had by then become a cliché in certain hostile circles.

Subsequent polemics add the charge of prostitution to that of being a catamite. At *Sest.* 39 Cicero's foe is the hired bedfellow of the rich wastrels Piso and Gabinius, *cum scurrarum locupletium scorto*, while *Dom.* 49 pictures him as a *scortum populare* soliciting in the Forum.[14] In the *de Haruspicum Responso* the accusation develops into a *leitmotiv*. The scoundrel has just sold himself to P. Tullio (*ei se . . . venditaret*, 1); as a

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leading up to Cicero's exile is studied by R. Seager, "Clodius, Pompeius and the Exile of Cicero," *Latomus* 24 (1965) 519–31, and by D. Stockton, *Cicero: A Political Biography* (Oxford 1971) 176–93, among others. W. M. F. Rundell, "Cicero and Clodius: The Question of Credibility," *Historia* 28 (1978) 301–28, points out the danger of taking Cicero's allegations against Clodius at face value and formulating theories about his methods and objectives on the basis of such biased material. Since the insinuations made about Clodius in poem 79 are borrowed from Ciceronian polemic, their value as historical evidence is likewise suspect. But for the purposes of this paper, I have treated them as poetically valid statements, expressions of the artist's personal concerns, without feeling it necessary to inquire into their historical truth or falsity.

[12] Note that the theme of effeminacy also surfaces in fragment 5, where Cicero plays games with the legal formula employed in the Bona Dea trial: *sin esset iudicatum non videri virum venisse, quo iste venisset.* As *Schol. Bob.* 86 (Stangl) observes, those who voted to acquit the defendant are said to have denied not his guilt but his masculinity. For a stimulating analysis of the comic techniques employed in this speech, see K. A. Geffcken, *Comedy in the Pro Caelio* (Leiden 1973) 57–89, especially 83–84 on the homosexual innuendoes. Geffcken adduces several parallels to Clodius' "robing scene": the two most striking are Arist. *Thesm.* 130–265, the characterization of Agathon, and Eur. *Bacch.* 912–76, Pentheus' disguise. In both situations, the assumption of women's dress is the outward manifestation of a real confusion of sexual identity (in contrast, say, to the pseudo-femininity of Euripides' relative in the comedy by Aristophanes).

[13] *Att.* 1.16.10; cf. *Att.* 2.1.4 and 2.22.1.

[14] I. Opelt, *Die lateinischen Schimpfwörter und verwandte sprachliche Erscheinungen* (Heidelberg 1965) 155, remarks that *scortum populare* is used in a twofold sense, "*effeminatus* und Prostitution an die Partei der Popularen." Even if the historiographical theme of Claudian contempt for the masses receives its full development only at a slightly later period, the Claudii are still the exemplar of the patrician *gens nobilis*. See T. P. Wiseman's study of the traditions associated with the family in *Clio's Cosmetics* (Leicester 1979) 57–139.

paid instigator of violence, he hawks sedition as a whore markets her body (*ea miscet ac turbat, ut modo se his, modo vendat illis*, 46); earlier, he had courted key figures in the Senate (*vobis se coepit subito fallacissime venditare*, 48); now he is flattering Pompey, and denouncing those to whom he had earlier traded his favors (*in eos invehitur, quibus se antea venditabat*, 52).[15] The recurrent libel becomes a succinct metaphor for base perfidy and flagrant disregard of the claims of *amicitia*: Clodius' self-serving hunt for powerful allies and his readiness to abandon old friends at the behest of new call into question the most fundamental assumptions of Roman political life, trust between associates and the reciprocal obligations of patron and client.[16] That is the subliminal message, the "deep smear" contained in the allegation *Clodius se vendit*.[17]

Adapting the Ciceronian metaphor to his own purposes, Catullus reveals that he is fully cognizant of its deeper meanings, for he gives it a new twist which stresses those underlying implications. In poem 79, blind opportunism and the need for strong backing are represented as a pursuit of potential lovers. Lesbius wishes to attract and retain a male following, but his personal habits make him offensive. Therefore we might well expect to find him prostituting himself in exchange for pledges of devotion. The author, however, surprises us: instead of the predictable and familiar *vendat se*, he has substituted *vendat cum gente Catullum*.[18] *Aliquem vendere* is a normal locution for betraying the interests of a client or partner; Cicero uses it of Clodius himself at *Har. Resp.* 58, *reges qui erant vendidit*. By employing this expression in an overtly sexual context, a context which must inevitably evoke remembrance of the closely related reflexive construction, Catullus skillfully brings to the surface the notion of bad faith latent in the metaphor. Prostitution and betrayal are now made synonymous: to earn the attentions of some unspecified companions, Lesbius is equally ready to sell himself or to sell out others. A deliberate and sinister vagueness is imparted to the last line by one final ambiguity contained in *noti*: those dispensing kisses are not

[15] J. O. Lenaghan, *A Commentary on Cicero's Oration de Haruspicum Responso* (The Hague and Paris 1969) 49, observes the analogy drawn between Clodius' "utterly unprincipled political opportunism," his outright venality, and physical prostitution. The orator may also have intended to give a sinister coloring to Clodius' practice of selling his services as a speaker, attested in Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.7.

[16] The latent political meaning of the metaphor is explicitly stated in Ovid, *Pont.* 2.3.19–20: *illud amicitiae quondam venerabile numen / prostat et in quaestu pro meretrice sedet.*

[17] A curious historical parallel may be observed in classical Athens. Athenian law forbade citizens who were male prostitutes to exercise their civic rights—because the legislator (according to Aeschines, *In Tim.* 29) saw a direct correlation between selling one's own body and betraying the interests of the state. On the social assumptions behind that law, see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London 1978) 19–39.

[18] A similar use of *para prosdokian* occurs in Catullus 44.19–20: *gravedinem et tussim / non mi, sed ipsi Sestio ferat frigus.*

only "men he knows" and "men who know his habits," but also "well-known, distinguished men."[19] For the high regard of such individuals, Catullus and his clan might seem a cheap price to pay.

The accusation of having fetid breath, with a parallel insinuation of unsavory erotic practices, is normally directed against the sexual reputation of the target; its defamatory force is therefore concentrated upon the primary level of meaning.[20] But there are passages in which the charge takes on secondary political overtones, becoming a metaphor for sowing scandal and dissension. At *Dom.* 25 Cicero attempts to drive a wedge between Clodius and his chief henchman Sex. Cloelius with a double-edged pun: Cloelius is described as [*is*] *qui sua lingua etiam sororem tuam a te abalienavit.* The "Victius" denounced for his filthy tongue in Catullus 98 is often identified with the notorious informer L. Vettius; an apparent *double-entendre* in lines 5–6, *si nos omnino vis omnes perdere, Victi, / hiscas*, provides good grounds for doing so.[21] If we interpret Lesbius' *infamia oris* as a second political metaphor, Catullus has added seditious pronouncements to the list of Clodius' crimes against society. His treacherous disposition further manifests itself in divisive tirades. In terms of the controlling sexual imagery, this trait keeps would-be lovers at bay and prevents him from ever enjoying the stability of a lasting association.[22]

Thus far we have been preoccupied with the significance of those charges brought against Lesbius-Clodius in the concluding couplet of poem 79. Now we must turn back to the opening verses and the slur aimed at his sister. Catullus initiates his attack by sounding the familiar chord of Clodia Metelli's incestuous fondness for her sibling. In the political arena, incest can be readily attributed to members of the ruling elite, for it is a vice with aristocratic overtones, implying as it does that no one

[19] Cf. Caesar, *BCiv.* 2.19, *civis Romanus paulo notior.* The *TAPA* referee suggests one additional pejorative nuance, "well-known for evil, notorious" (cf. Cicero, *Cael.* 31; see also *Fam.* 10.14.1, *notissimi latronum duces*). Given that implication, one is tempted to find in *tria . . . suavia* a meaning more pointed than the conventional use of *tres* for "a small number" (L&S II, adduced by Quinn [above, note 1] 414). Perhaps a veiled reference to the Triumvirate? Admittedly, this suggestion cannot be proved or disproved.

[20] This is certainly true for the numerous instances of its occurrence in the *Palatine Anthology* and in Martial, e.g., *AP* 11.219–21 inclusive and Martial 9.27 and 12.85.

[21] For the identification of "Victius" with Vettius see Neudling (above, note 2) 186 and R. Syme, "Missing Persons II," *Historia* 8 (1959) 210–11 [=*Roman Papers* I (Oxford 1979) 459]. Martial 2.61 presents us with a slanderer who was formerly a *fellator*: when he fellated, his mouth was purer. Similarly, 3.80 juxtaposes the literal and figurative meanings of the insult: *de nullo quereris, nulli maledicis, Apici; / rumor ait linguae te tamen esse malae.*

[22] This portrayal of Clodius has close parallels in Cicero's speeches and letters. At *QFr.* 2.3.2, for example, it is reported that Clodius and his supporters have publicly accused Pompey of prolonging the grain shortage and starving the people—a glaring instance of his use of inflammatory rhetoric.

outside the family is worthy of union.[23] Opponents therefore find this accusation an ideal tool to employ against the bonds of mutual interest linking the combined resources of any mighty house. Witness the manner in which it is used upon particular members of the *gens Claudia*. During the seventies and early sixties B.C., the cordial relations prevailing between L. Licinius Lucullus and the Claudii Pulchri were evidenced first by Lucullus' marriage to the youngest Clodia and then by Clodius' service abroad with his brother-in-law.[24] At the Bona Dea trial, however, a charge of incest proved a convenient means of blackening Clodius' reputation and at the same time justifying Lucullus' repudiation of the wife allegedly debauched by her brother, and "tainted," in any case, by the bitter enmity which had meantime erupted between her husband and her kinsman. When her elder sister Clodia Metelli began to play a role in her brother's career, Cicero cold-bloodedly transferred the slander to her.[25] It soon became the handiest weapon in his arsenal, adaptable for use against either one of the hated pair. In the *Post Reditum* speeches, for example, Clodius' merciless assault on his sister's chastity is proof of his crazed licentiousness; in the *pro Caelio*, on the other hand, Clodia herself is the instigator, taking advantage of a timorous boy as she would later attempt to take advantage of Caelius.[26] Even the older Claudii Pulchri are not exempt from calumny. The whole family had rallied to ensure Clodius' election to the aedileship in 56 B.C.; soon afterward, Cicero is accusing his *bête noire* of corrupting sisters—and brothers as well.[27] The smearing of Appius and Gaius is a telling indication of just how flexible, and how topical, the incest accusation can be. P. Clodius

[23] Rankin (above, note 2) 120.

[24] Plutarch's account of Clodius' intrigues against Lucullus in Asia (*Luc.* 34) and Lucullus' subsequent divorce of Clodia (*Luc.* 38.1), together with reports of the testimony produced at the Bona Dea trial (*Caes.* 10.5; cf. *Cic.* 29.3) have lately been examined by T. W. Hillard, *The Claudii Pulchri 76–48 B.C.: Studies in Their Political Cohesion* (Ph.D. dissertation, Macquarie University 1976) 168–70. Hillard tries to show that neither the quarrel between Clodius and Lucullus nor the actual divorce had any political overtones. His case, however, is highly conjectural and rests upon such flimsy evidence as Lucullus' reported liaison with Praecia (Plut. *Luc.* 6.2–4), which is adduced as proof of "patent domestic difficulties" with his wife. Such arguments are unpersuasive.

[25] Carefully demonstrated by Wiseman (above, note 1) 52–55.

[26] For Clodius' violation of his sister, see *Dom.* 92, *tu sororem tuam virginem esse non sisti*; cf. *Sest.* 16, 39, 116; *Har. Resp.* 39, 42, 59. The Clodia of *Cael.* 36, however, welcomes into her bed a *minimum fratrem . . . qui te amat plurimum, qui propter nescio quam, credo, timiditatem et nocturnos quosdam inanis metus tecum semper pusio cum maiore sorore cubitabat*. As Geffcken (above, note 12) 38–40 makes clear, the notion of Clodia as physically and sexually aggressive, even emasculating, is a central invective motif in the *pro Caelio*.

[27] *Sest.* 16, *hominis fraternis flagitiis . . . exsanguis*. Hillard (above, note 24) 125, note 114, observes the political implications of this vicious attack upon the three brothers as a group, taking it as implicit evidence of their continued political cooperation.

Pulcher stands at its center. At any given moment, the part that one of his siblings is made to play in his sexual life reflects the degree to which that person is currently associated with his political fortunes.

Once more Catullus subtly reworks a stale invective formula into a complex vehicle for expressing his private attitudes. He makes Lesbia reject and Lesbius betray both the speaker of the poem and his whole clan, *cum tota gente tua . . . cum gente.* Like the repetition of *pulcher*, this reiteration is meaningful: as a technical term of relationship, *gens* underscores the poet's connection, by blood or ancestral clientage, with the Valerii.[28] Later historiographic tradition paints that family as the hereditary rivals of the Claudii; Wiseman plausibly discovers the origin of this theme in the ongoing series of confrontations between Clodius and his two brothers and two members of the Valerii Messallae, the cousins M. Valerius Messalla Niger (*cos.* 61) and M. Valerius Messalla Rufus (*cos.* 53).[29] Far from being a mere hyperbolic flourish, the twofold mention of the *gens Valeria* is central to the poetic statement, for it links Lesbia's private infidelity to party hostilities and the constant struggle for power. In choosing her brother over her legitimate lover, she manifests a brutal indifference to all other claims upon her save those of birth, and all other considerations save political utility. Ambition and the privileges associated with nobility weigh more with her than the devotion of someone without rank and social consequence. Her emotional responses, such as they are, have been subordinated to her drive for domination—a drive which only her brother, equally ambitious and equally ruthless, will be allowed to satisfy.

Scholarship has generally regarded Catullus the lover as psychologically divorced from the Catullus who despairs of contemporary morality in the epilogue to his epyllion, or who indignantly protests the ruinous policies of the dynasts Pompey and Caesar.[30] But poem 79 integrates these two sides of his poetic personality. By drawing an impressive parallel between Lesbia's callousness and her brother's calculating opportunism, it raises questions about the individual cost of those destructive values instilled in

[28] Conjectures about Catullus' family background are weighed by M. Schuster, "Valerius (Catullus)," *RE* VII.2 (1948) 2353–55. See also J. Suolahti, "The Origin of the Poet Catullus," *Arctos* 1 (1954) 159–71, and L. Pepe, "I Valerii Catulli di Verona," *GIF* 16 (1963) 1–16; both scholars conclude that Catullus' family probably sprang from a collateral branch of the Valerii whose members had settled as colonists at Verona. Suolahti 171 even postulates a connection with the Messallae, since Valerii Catulli of the imperial period use the additional *cognomen* Messallinus (*RE* nos. 126 and 127).

[29] Wiseman (above, note 14) 131–35.

[30] Thus K. Quinn, *Catullus: An Interpretation* (London 1972) 49–50, divides the whole collection, apart from the long virtuoso pieces, into two groups, the "Lesbia poems" and the "poetry of social comment," and assumes that the chief function of the latter is to provide a backdrop for the former. On the seriousness of Catullus' preoccupation with public issues, particularly in poem 29, see Skinner (above, note 10) 144–48.

the aristocracy by their frenzied competition for power. Furthermore, it becomes a negative gloss upon the author's striking metaphor of love as a political alliance, a *sanctae foedus amicitiae*.[31] In an important discussion of the Lesbia poems, D. O. Ross, Jr., has lately suggested a governing purpose for that metaphor: Catullus may have chosen to depict his involvement with his mistress in political terms precisely because the disintegration of their relationship could then be fashioned into a paradigm for the widespread neglect of *fides* and *pietas* and, ultimately, for the collapse of the Roman value system.[32] The synthesis of political and emotional attitudes in this poem would seem to support Ross' hypothesis. This is not a jealous squib dashed off by someone whose girl friend has left him, but the cynical pronouncement of a man who believes, rightly or wrongly, that the moral structure of his world is falling apart.

As a result of our investigation, we can observe how topical material has been used to reinforce that implicit correlation between Catullus' private and public worlds. The *foedus amicitiae* had originally projected Lesbia into her brother's sphere of activities. Ironically, it had also set her apart from him by demanding of her a degree of commitment not to be expected from any adherent of his *factio*. The present epigram reflects upon the folly of such a demand. The joint pseudonym Lesbia/Lesbius recognizes an identity of purpose between the two siblings: the sister's treachery to her lover is made synonymous with her brother's readiness to sacrifice him to his own objectives.[33] Bad faith, it would seem, is a genetic

[31] R. Reitzenstein, "Zur Sprache der lateinischen Erotik," *Sitzungsber. der Heidelb. Ak. der Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl.*, Abh. 12 (Heidelberg 1912) 9–36, was the first to observe that Catullus' metaphor of *amicitia* is drawn from the sphere of party politics. Ross (above, note 7) 80–95 further explores the technical implications of this expression. However, R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets from Catullus to Horace* (Oxford 1980) 25–26, has recently denied that Catullus' use of such language has any overt political content. The poet, he contends, is merely adopting the aristocratic terminology of proper social conduct, which was also employed, on occasion, in the political sphere. But political activity was intrinsic to the life of aristocratic Roman society (as Lyne himself admits), and actually served as the regular theater for public manifestations of *amicitia*. Lyne's sharp distinction between public and private social conduct would not be likely to occur to a Roman of Catullus' time. And indeed Cicero's assertion that *amicitia* is fundamental to both domestic and civil stability (*Amic.* 23) seems to presuppose the integration of its functions in these two areas. Political implications therefore cannot be excluded from Catullus' "language of commitment and obligation": they are inherent in it.

[32] *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy and Rome* (Cambridge 1975) 8–15.

[33] The *TAPA* referee suggests that Catullus may be inverting the literary practice of characterizing a noblewoman as possessing precisely those positive traits that have conferred public distinction upon her menfolk. E.g., Cicero, *QFr.* 1.3.3., Tullia resembles her father in feature, speech, and mind; *Brut.* 211, Laelius' daughter displays her father's purity of diction; Valerius Maximus 8.3.3, Hortensia the heiress of her father's eloquence; Seneca, *Cons. Marc.* 16, the two Cornelias show courage like that of their sons; Tactitus, *Ann.* 1.4 and 3.4, the elder Agrippina evokes the memory of her grandfather Augustus; Pliny, *Ep.* 5.16, Fundanus' daughter resembles him; 7.19, Fannia a worthy wife to Helvidius and

trait in the great ruling families—as inescapable as the curses that once destroyed the princely houses of myth. Meanwhile, obscene images of sexual degradation hint at the perversity of that rampant lust for power which must finally threaten the stability of all alliances, the personal and erotic no less than the political.

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daughter to Thrasea. Here Catullus invests Lesbia with her brother's *negative* qualities. While the sister rejects him as an *amator*, the brother renounces him as an *amicus*; conversely, Catullus had once hoped for *amicitia* with Lesbia, even as Lesbius now seeks *amor* from other men. I concur in this suggestion, adding in support that *amor* and *amicitia* are of course cognate and, indeed, strongly associated; note Cicero's remark at *Amic.* 26 and cf. the discussion in J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la République* (Paris 1972²) 146–47.