II *LESBIA ILLA*

1. Lesbia, the 'Catullus-novel', and Catullan erotics

Caeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa,
illa Lesbia, quam Catullus unam
plus quam se atque suos amauit omnes,
nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis
glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes. (Catullus 58)

Our Lesbia, Caelius, *the* Lesbia, the famous Lesbia, whom Catullus once loved more than himself and all his own, now on street corners and in alleyways brings off the sons of mighty Remus.

Why does Catullus call his girl *Lesbia*, 'the woman of Lesbos'? Critics have answered this question in a variety of ways, reflecting changing fashions in literary interpretation and different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between poetry and life.

An important witness to Lesbia's identity (whose own views, we should recognize, are determined in part by *ancient* reading practices) is Apuleius. At *Apology* 10, responding to the allegation that he has attempted to disguise the identity of the boys addressed in his own love poems through the use of pseudonyms, he asserts that many earlier poets did the same: Catullus called his beloved Clodia by the name Lesbia; Propertius and Tibullus similarly wrote of Hostia and Plania under the names Cynthia and Delia; and so on. During the nineteenth century and the earlier part of the twentieth, Apuleius' claims were generally taken absolutely at face value. Read in conjunction with Cicero's damning portrayal in the *Pro Caelio* of Clodia Metelli, sister of the tribune Publius Clodius and widow of Q. Metellus Celer, whose promiscuity and dissolute lifestyle appear to coincide so neatly with those of Lesbia as depicted by Catullus in his angrier moods, Apuleius' identification was typically regarded as conclusive.

Several items of circumstantial evidence appear, indeed, to confirm the identification. It was observed by Richard Bentley in his 1711 commentary on Horace that the equation Lesbia = Clodia fits an apparent 'law' by which poetic pseudonyms are equivalent in number of

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syllables and metrical quantity to the real name that they stand in for (thus, the names Lesbia and Clodia are both dactylic, scanning —UU).[1] In this way, Bentley suggests, those 'in the know' could substitute the real name for the pseudonym without disrupting the metre. Further, four of Catullus' poems are addressed to a Caelius (58, 100) and a Rufus (69, 77): many scholars have regarded it as more or less self-evident that these two characters are one and the same, and should be identified with the M. Caelius Rufus of Cicero's speech.[2] According to Cicero, Caelius and Clodia had been lovers: this can be linked both to Catullus 77 (where the poet complains of Rufus' betrayal in depriving him of all his *bona*, 'joys' or 'property', possibly with reference to Lesbia / Clodia and her affections) and 58 (quoted above), where *Lesbia nostra*, 'our Lesbia', if taken literally, points to the conclusion that both speaker and addressee have had relations with her in the past. Finally, and most strikingly, poem 79 begins *Lesbius est pulcer. quid ni? quem Lesbia malit / quam te cum tota gente, Catulle, tua* ('Lesbius is *pulcer*. No doubt, since Lesbia prefers him to you and all your clan, Catullus'). If Lesbia is Clodia, it follows that Lesbius should be identified with her brother, P. Clodius Pulcer. So the opening line of the epigram has a double meaning: Lesbius is handsome (or 'a pretty boy', with implications of effeminacy, a dig often made by Cicero too);[3] Lesbius' (real) name is Pulcer. As Marilyn Skinner puts it, the poem can thus be read as 'unmasking' Lesbia as Clodia, sister of Clodius Pulcer, while also hinting at the incestuous sexual relations that the two were widely rumoured to enjoy.[4]

[1] Bentley 1711: 72–3.

[2] A problem for this argument is presented, however, by the characterization at 100.2 of Caelius and Quintius as *flos Veronensum iuuenum*, 'flower of Veronese youth': Cicero mentions Caelius' native city at *Cael.* 5 as Interamnia Praetuttiorum, modern Teramo in central Italy (though there is some uncertainty about the text).

[3] Cicero regularly uses the derisive diminutive *Pulchellus*, with connotations of effeminacy, in his correspondence with Atticus (*Att.* 1.16.10, 2.1.4, 2.18.3, 2.22.1).

[4] Famously, and wittily, alluded to by Cicero at *Cael.* 32: *istius mulieris uiro – fratrem uolui dicere; semper hic erro* ('that woman's husband – I mean brother; I always make that mistake'; see also *Cael.* 36); further references and discussion at Wiseman 1969: 52–5. As Wiseman points out, however, the incest rumours were also attached to Clodia's two sisters, especially the youngest of the three, the wife of L. Licinius Lucullus (divorced in 66 BC): poem 79 is thus not as decisive as sometimes suggested. In 1974, Wiseman himself favoured identification with Clodia Luculli (Wiseman 1974: 108–14); more recently, following an unpublished suggestion of J. T. Ramsay (for which see Hutchinson 2012: 56, n. 16), he has been inclined to find Claudia, daughter of App. Claudius Pulcher (cos. 54 BC) and wife of Pompey's elder son Cn. Pompeius, a more plausible candidate (Wiseman 2023: 8–12). For Catullus 79 as 'unmasking' Lesbius (and hence Lesbia), see Skinner 1982a: 197.

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Scholars such as Ludwig Schwabe, whose *Quaestiones Catullianae* appeared in 1862, believed that it was possible on the basis of these data to reconstruct a detailed history of the affair between Catullus and Lesbia/Clodia, inaugurating a form of biographical criticism that has become known as the *Catullroman* or 'Catullus-novel'. Schwabe's reconstruction is indeed novelistic, in the sense that it seeks to establish a clear narrative line and consistent characterization for both the poet and his beloved, and makes their romance central to the collection; other kinds of poem (particularly the invectives) are slotted in around this dominant narrative thread, and Catullus' friends and enemies become minor characters in the story. Schwabe's explanation for the pseudonym Lesbia is typically literal-minded: designed, of course, to protect Clodia's reputation by concealing her true identity, as well as indicating the poet's admiration for Sappho, the most celebrated 'woman of Lesbos', it is appropriate to Clodia as, putatively, a poet herself.[5]

Catullus is characterized by Schwabe as the stereotypical artistic genius, carried away by his fiery passions, but truly devoted to Lesbia and so ultimately blameless for his part in the affair; equally, the historical veracity of the poet's denunciation of his erstwhile beloved as a deceitful whore remains absolutely unquestioned. But despite the historicist and romantic assumptions that underlie Schwabe's narrative, versions of it continued to hold the field for some considerable time. Even in the late 1960s and '70s, critics such as Peter Wiseman, Kenneth Quinn, and Franz Stoessel were still preoccupied with issues of dating and the chronology of the affair,[6] while often disputing the details of Schwabe's account and seeking to nuance his methodology.[7] Quinn's elaborate hypothesis as to the origin of the name Lesbia is, if anything, more 'novelistic' than Schwabe's: he imagines a scenario in which poem 51, the famous translation of Sappho fr. 31 Voigt, was sent to Clodia as a coded declaration of love, or in Quinn's phrase a 'feeler', intended to probe the recipient's feelings for the poet. Since the Sappho fragment was, we assume, addressed to a 'woman of Lesbos' (though

[5] Cicero calls her *plurimarum fabularum poetria* ('poet of many plays' or 'author of many plots') at *Cael.* 64, though it is questionable how literally this should be taken: Cicero may mean no more than that she is an expert at concocting fabrications such as the present case against Caelius. *Pace* Schwabe, there is no clear indication anywhere in the Catullan corpus that Lesbia composed poetry.

[6] Wiseman 1969: 42–60; Quinn 1972: 54–203; Stoessl 1977.

[7] This is particularly true of Wiseman, whose conclusions, while not always persuasive, rest on meticulous prosopographical research: Quinn and Stoessl, in contrast, are largely reliant on intuition and guesswork. For the latter, see Wiseman's detailed review (Wiseman 1979b).

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the addressee is unnamed in the original), the name Lesbia could be understood to refer merely to Sappho's beloved, and the poem be received as nothing more than a translation; but Clodia could, if she chose, and if she did indeed welcome and perhaps reciprocate the passionate desire that the poem expresses, substitute her own name for the pseudonym.[8]

At the same time, however, other approaches to the collection, and to the Lesbia poems in particular, were gaining ground. The 'literariness' of all the poems, even those that adopt an apparently casual, anecdotal, or impassioned voice, and Catullus' engagement with and manipulation of literary models, attracted increasing attention from the 1960s onward. Earlier critics had often distinguished between 'two Catulluses': the passionate 'child of nature' (*Naturbursch*) and 'the Alexandrian, weighed down by the heavy burden of tradition' in Wilhelm Kroll's memorable formulation.[9] To the former were attributed the polymetrics and epigrams, understood as a more or less spontaneous and unmediated record of the poet's feelings and experiences; to the latter, the (excessively) cool, artistic polish of the longer poems, especially 64. In the last half-century or so, however, the careful and often minute artistry of all Catullus' poems, even those that are most aggressive and obscene in their language and sentiments, has become increasingly recognized, and few would now subscribe to Quinn's doctrine of 'levels of intent' (that is, the idea that some poems are inherently more serious, and display a greater commitment to poetic craftsmanship, than others) – itself an attempt to call the old dichotomy into question.[10]

Against this background, Catullus' engagement with tradition, and the workings of intertextuality, gain enormously in importance, and both Greek and Roman models come to be seen as enabling rather than constraining or even stultifying. No longer read as just a one-off tribute to Sappho, or an attempt to conceal the identity of the real addressee, poem 51 and the name Lesbia are now regularly understood as

[8] Quinn 1972: 56–60; see also Quinn 1973: 241. Quinn himself credits L. P. Wilkinson (in Bayet et al. 1956: 47) with originating the 'feeler' theory; Gaisser, however, points out that Wilkinson does not claim originality, and that a version of the same idea is already found in the essay accompanying Jack Lindsay's 1929 translation of the poems (see Gaisser 2009: 213–14).

[9] Kroll 1968: vii.

[10] Quinn 1969: 27–43 (first edition 1959). Other early challenges to the centrality of biography to Catullan criticism, and to the 'two Catulluses' model, include Wheeler 1934: esp. 1–3; Havelock 1939: esp. 75–86 and 122–44; and Cherniss 1943 (an influential attack on the 'biographical method' in the study of Classical poetry in general).

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indicating a strong literary affiliation, and thus as forming part of a broader artistic programme.[11] At the opposite extreme from Quinn's theory, on which Sappho provides the more or less convenient vehicle for a surreptitious declaration of passion, are readings of the poem as a translation for its own sake: it has been suggested, indeed, that the original recipient was not even Lesbia herself but Licinius Calvus, to whom Catullus writes at the end of poem 50 *hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci* ('for you, you charmer, I wrote this poem': is the reference to poem 50 itself, or does it serve as a 'covering note' for 51, on the analogy of poem 65 with its dedication of 66, the translation of Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice*, to Hortensius Hortalus?).[12]

Poetics can, indeed, be seen as closely enmeshed with erotics, and with Catullus' social values and treatment of his male friends. Poems such as 36 and 86 may be read as love poems or literary manifestos or both at once:[13] *sal* ('wit' or 'sparkle') and *uenustas* ('charm' or 'attractiveness') are – or can be interpreted as – qualities belonging alike to the admired literary work and the desired sexual partner. This is more obvious in the case of 36, which depicts a kind of battle of wits between the lovers, who have quarrelled and are now on the verge of making it up. Lesbia, Catullus tells us, has vowed the *electissima pessimi poetae scripta*, 'the choicest writings of the worst of poets', to Venus (via her husband, Vulcan) if her lover stops insulting her in his *truces iambi* or 'savage invectives'. Crucially, the vow is self-consciously clever and facetious: *hoc pessima se puella uidit / iocosis lepide uouere diuis* ('the wicked girl knew that this vow she was making to the playful gods was a charmingly witty one'; 36.9–10). By burning the poems ('giving' them to Vulcan), Lesbia simultaneously pays off her vow and destroys the offensive verses. But the poem's speaker displays a comical if somewhat acerbic ingenuity in turn by finding a loophole in Lesbia's wording: the 'worst of poets' is not himself, but Volusius, whose epic *Annales* is duly substituted at the poem's end for Catullus' own work. There is, then, a strong if implicit contrast between Catullus' (and Lesbia's) *lepos* and *uenustas*, embodied in witty vow and equally witty response (10, 17), and the inelegance of Volusius' epic, which lacks the urbane

[11] E. Greene 2007: 132 is representative: 'direct and indirect references to Lesbia in Catullus' poetry evoke the values represented in Sappho's work as well as her iconic status as a love poet'.

[12] So Wray 2001: 97–9, following Lavency 1965. Cf. Holzberg 2002: 85–6; Schafer 2020: 7–9, 107–16.

[13] For poem 36 as literary manifesto, see esp. Buchheit 1959; Forsyth 1984; Solodow 1989; Watson 2005. On poem 86, see esp. Papanghelis 1991.

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sophistication the poet prizes (*pleni ruris et inficetiarum*, 'full of rustic crudity and devoid of wit'; 19).

Poem 86 is more obviously concerned with erotic attractiveness:

> *Quintia formosa est multis. mihi candida, longa,*
> *recta est: haec ego sic singula confiteor;*
> *totum illud formosa nego: nam nulla uenustas,*
> *nulla in tam magno est corpore mica salis.*
> *Lesbia formosa est, quae cum pulcerrima tota est,*
> *tum omnibus una omnis surripuit ueneres.*

To many, Quintia is beautiful. To me, she is fair, tall, and straight-backed: I grant her these individual qualities, listed so; but I utterly deny her that word 'beautiful': for there is no charm, no speck of wit anywhere in that statuesque body. Lesbia is beautiful – Lesbia, who is both entirely lovely and has stolen all the charm from all other women.

But here, too, Lesbia's positive qualities can be read as a kind of metaphor for literary ideals. Papanghelis suggests that the contrast between the tall but bland Quintia and the incomparably sparkling Lesbia points us – yet again – to the prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*, where the poet unfavourably compares a 'large lady' (probably the *Lyde* of Antimachus) with the small-scale *Demeter* of Philetas.[14]

For critics such as Vinzens Buchheit, the implications of these poems are *primarily* literary.[15] Others, however, have laid more emphasis on the characterization of Lesbia, and understood Catullus as putting forward a radically new view of relations between the sexes. Oliver Lyne, notably, argued that the poet developed a conception of what he called 'whole love', in contrast to the traditionally pragmatic handling of sexual and marital relations among the Roman upper classes.[16] Briefly, elite marriages were typically arranged with a view to enhancing social standing and creating or strengthening connections between families (so, for example, Julius Caesar marries his daughter Julia to Pompey to cement the alliance known as the First Triumvirate: the two men can thus be satirically addressed as *socer generque*, 'father-in-law and son-in-law', at the end of poem 29). Ideally, emotional attachment was supposed to develop within marriage but was not a prerequisite for it:

[14] Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1.9–12 Pfeiffer; Papanghelis 1991.

[15] Buchheit 1959; contrast Krostenko 2001: 246–50, who takes Catullus' 'new poetics' to be complementary to – and, effectively, inseparable from – his 'new erotics' (234–41).

[16] Lyne 1980: 1–61, esp. 19–20 (for Catullus and 'whole love'). On the Roman marriage in theory and practice, see Treggiari 1991: 229–61; Dixon 1992: 61–97.

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the matrimonial ideals of which we hear most often are *concordia*, 'like-mindedness' or 'domestic harmony', and compliance or submissiveness on the part of the wife (who may be described as *morigera*, 'obliging' or 'compliant'). Sexual fidelity was not expected on the husband's part: extra-marital relations with slaves, prostitutes, or freedwomen were accepted as normal, though such affairs were expected to be casual, and were frowned on if indulged in to excess (thus, Marc Antony's devotion to the actress Cytheris is regarded by Cicero as an indication of his generally corrupt character).[17]

Catullus' innovation, for Lyne, was to seek a lasting relationship of mutual fidelity, conceived of as a kind of quasi-marriage based on love rather than social considerations: when the poet hopes in poem 109 for a *sanctae foedus amicitiae*, a 'pact of sacred friendship', he has in mind something like the *foedus amoris* ('pact of love') between the newly wed couple Peleus and Thetis in poem 64.[18] What Catullus values in Lesbia, moreover, is not only her physical attractions but also her personal and intellectual qualities, the 'wit' (*mica salis*) and 'charm' (*ueneres*) attributed to her in poem 86: in this sense, the name Lesbia pays tribute at once to Sappho and to Lesbia herself, whose allure (*lepos*, *uenustas*) is in some sense analogous to that of Sappho's poetry. Like Caecilius' girl, who at the end of poem 35 is complimented as 'more erudite than Sappho's Muse' (*Sapphica … / Musa doctior*; 35.16–17), Lesbia is prized for her sophistication and her ability to inspire and appreciate the refined art of her lover's poems, as much as for her beauty. Hallett, in an oft-cited article, went so far as to suggest that Catullus, and the elegists of the next generation who can be seen in this respect (as in others) as his literary heirs, were proto-feminists, who aspired to a relationship of intellectual and social equality with their lovers.[19]

The Lesbia poems taken as group, however, demonstrate the fallibility of Catullus' erotic ideal, which is clearly not fully shared by Lesbia. Whereas older critics were happy to attribute this failure to Lesbia's inveterately promiscuous character, or to her inability to

[17] Cic. *Phil.* 2.58; *Att.* 10.10.5.

[18] 64.334–6: *nulla domus tales umquam contexit amores,/nullus amor tali coniunxit* foedere *amantes,* / *qualis adest Thetidi, qualis concordia Peleo* ('no home has ever contained such love, no love has ever joined lovers in such a *pact* as the harmony that Thetis shares with Peleus'); Lyne 1980: 33–8. For Catullus' depiction of his relationship as a marriage, see also G. Williams 1968: 404–12.

[19] Hallett 1973. For the contrasting view that Catullus' moral stance is essentially conservative, see e.g. Arkins 1982: 1–45, esp. 12, 34; Wiseman 1985: 107–24. On Catullus and the Augustan elegists, see further Chapter 6, pp. 115–16, below.

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understand or appreciate Catullus' revolutionary erotics, the tendency since the later twentieth century – under the influence of feminist theories and reading practices – has been to approach the poet's depiction of both the ideal and the 'reality' with greater suspicion. Rubino, for example, argues that the Catullan lover inhabits a 'mad universe', in which – like the Attis of poem 63 – he has 'cut himself off . . . from the cultural system that defines him', simultaneously rejecting and appealing to the conceptual framework of *pietas* ('devotion to duty') and *fides* ('loyalty', 'trustworthiness'): there is at the very least a paradox in the demand that Lesbia should be faithful to him while *ipso facto* violating the marriage tie with her own husband.[20]

Marilyn Skinner seeks to rehabilitate the historical Clodia, discounting Cicero's highly partisan portrayal in the *Pro Caelio*, as well as that of Catullus (even assuming that Lesbia can in some sense be identified with her): scraps of evidence from other sources – particularly Cicero's letters – suggest a rather different woman from the pleasure-loving, promiscuous, and domineering virago of the speech. Similarly, Suzanne Dixon brings together Lesbia, Clodia, and the Sempronia of Sallust's *Catiline* with a view to demonstrating the three authors' exploitation of a common stereotype: similarities between the three characters arguably tell us nothing about their historical identity, but rather demonstrate similar categories of thought and ideology on the part of the writers.[21]

From a different perspective again, others have shifted the focus from Lesbia herself to the psychological drama of the speaking 'I', or what Eve Adler terms 'Catullan self-revelation'.[22] At the opposite extreme from Schwabe's attempt to find a consistent narrative line linking the Lesbia poems and the collection as a whole is a pervasive tendency in more recent criticism to detect tensions and fractures within Catullus' depiction of both himself and others. For Adler, the self-address of (especially) poems 8 and 76 and the final stanza of 51 is crucial: the poems' subject is split in this way into a detached, observing self and an active but impotent self. The opposed parts of this fragmented self cannot be reconciled; but the poems offer us a 'clear vision and full expression of the self-division that is the actual case' (41). The aim of the

[20] Uneasy recognition of this paradox is suggested at 68.135–48, where the speaker attempts to reconcile himself to *rara furta*, 'occasional affairs', on Lesbia's part, on the grounds that he is not, after all, her husband.

[21] Rubino 1975 (quoted phrase at 294); Skinner 1983 (and, in greater detail, 2011); Dixon 2001: 133–56.

[22] Adler 1981.

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collection is, ultimately, to reveal this 'true' self, both to the friends and lovers represented within the text and to the external audience, in the hope of achieving the 'perfect' friendship that (for Adler's Catullus) consists in complete mutual knowledge and understanding.

More theoretically sophisticated versions of this psychologizing approach to the collection have been advanced by Michaela Janan, Ellen Greene, Paul Allen Miller, and Ellen Oliensis.[23] For Janan, approaching the poems from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lesbia becomes a highly symbolic figure, the unattainable Other or object of desire: accordingly, the speaker's feelings for her oscillate between idealization and disgust, and the beloved is alternately viewed as goddess (most obviously in poem 68, where her arrival at the house where she is to meet her lover resembles a divine epiphany[24]) and whore (notably at the end of poem 58, quoted above, and in poem 11, where she is depicted in the loveless embrace of three hundred men at once). Greene and Miller, too, emphasize the fragmentation of the Catullan ego as a symptom of desire, which tends to drive a wedge between the disparate elements of selfhood, and/or of the crisis of Roman male subjectivity which Miller (in a striking attempt to combine psychoanalytic with New Historicist modes of interpretation) views as characteristic of the Late Republican and Augustan periods.

Oliensis, finally, sees traces of repressed guilt in what we might call the 'unconscious' of the text (as opposed to its author, whose psyche is irrecoverable): these are revealed, she argues, particularly in the complex imagery of poems 65 and 68, where similes repeatedly appear to escape the speaker's control, sliding between one point of comparison and another. The theme of forgetfulness is especially prominent in both poems: in 65, the speaker is afraid that Hortalus might think he has forgotten his promise of a poem, and this resonates with the striking image of the River Lethe lapping at his dead brother's foot (5–6); in 68, the poet promises to preserve from oblivion the name of the friend, Allius,[25] who made available a house in which he and Lesbia might meet. Oliensis argues that both the apple simile at the end of 65, where the poet likens himself to a young girl thoughtlessly letting fall the love token she has received from her suitor, and the exaggerated emphasis on

[23] Janan 1994; E. Greene 1995 = 1998: 1–17; Miller 2004: 31–59; Oliensis 2009: 25–54.

[24] She is a *candida diua*, 'a shining goddess', at 68.70, and her arrival is attended by Cupid (68.133).

[25] Or Mallius/Manlius: on the textual problems surrounding – ironically enough – the name of the *laudandus*, see Chapter 5, n. 16, below.

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the memorialization of Allius in 68 point to a repressed anxiety that the dead brother's memory will *not* be preserved. Similarly, the extended comparison between the lovers and the mythical couple Laodamia and Protesilaus in 68 may point to a subliminal sense of guilt: Laodamia's obsessive mourning for her husband is highly suggestive in the context of the brother's death, but – unlike his mythical analogue – Catullus does not remain true to his brother's memory, instead allowing Lesbia to displace him as the object of affection. For Oliensis, the notorious slipperiness of the simile facilitates the emergence of the 'textual unconscious', as the overt comparison between Laodamia and Lesbia slides into an implicit connection between (the bereaved) Laodamia and the speaker himself, and back again.[26] So, too, the ensuing references (87–8, 103–4) to the adulterous couple Paris and Helen as cause of the deaths at Troy, in combination with the speaker's subsequent admission (143–6) of the adulterous nature of his own relationship, once again reveal an implicit sense of culpability: it is as though the lovers' pleasure, like that of Paris and Helen, has not just effaced but actually caused the brother's death. 'For the mourner', as Oliensis puts it, 'forgetting is murder.'[27]

The transhistorical approach adopted by critics such as Janan and Oliensis, who draw on psychoanalytic models of interpretation,[28] has brought us a long way from the historicist assumptions of Schwabe and the *Catullroman*. Janan in particular makes much of the *impossibility* of constructing a coherent narrative of the affair: poem 107, which celebrates a reconciliation between the lovers, can be placed with equal plausibility at several different points in any putative reconstruction of their relationship. Similarly, Miller argues that the Lesbia poems constitute a discontinuous and fragmented narrative which can be arranged and rearranged by the reader at will: Catullus simultaneously invites us to make the attempt to construct a chronological sequence and frustrates our attempts to do so. This textual phenomenon is suggestively compared by Miller to *The Garden of Forking Paths*, an

[26] For further discussion of the Laodamia simile, with bibliography, see Chapter 5 below.

[27] Oliensis 2009: 25–54 (quoted phrase at 49), with 5–7 for the distinction between authorial and textual unconscious. On the similes and the theme of forgetfulness in poems 65 and 68, see further Chapter 5, pp. 91–8, below.

[28] An exception here is Miller 2004, who – as noted above – seeks to combine Lacanian psychoanalytic theory with a historically situated interpretation of Catullan subjectivity.

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imaginary novel (described by J. L. Borges in a short story of the same title) in which all possible narrative outcomes are realized.[29]

An alternative approach, perhaps equally popular in recent readings of the collection, has been to see the author as a more controlling, even manipulative presence in the text, which attempts to constrain the reactions of the reader. William Fitzgerald, in particular, shifts the focus from erotics to what he terms 'the erotics of reading': the relationship between poet, text, and reader, he argues, is consistently figured in sexual language. In particular the teasing quality of many of Catullus' poems, which simultaneously give and withhold meaning, has a more than superficial resemblance to erotic play. The relationship with Lesbia can similarly be understood in symbolic terms, and figures the shifting power relations between poet (or speaker) and reader, and the special nature of poetic or literary language. Crucial here are the failures of reciprocity, to be explored further in the next section: poetic discourse is inherently non-reciprocal (we cannot 'answer the poem back' or address questions to it), and this is equally true for the performing poet, who speaks to 'a silent audience of people who share, but do not exchange, that language [*sc.* of aristocratic obligation]' (115). In this sense, the poet parallels the betrayed lover in the one-sidedness of his declarations. At the same time, Catullus' text is, for Fitzgerald, highly rhetorical, and seeks in various ways to manipulate the reader: this is particularly evident in poems such as 11, where the poet adopts what Fitzgerald aptly terms 'the ruse of the victim'. By representing himself as victimized, by Lesbia and others, the speaker seeks to gain our sympathies and thus, paradoxically, to occupy the dominant position in relation to the reader.[30] If sexual acts are, in the Roman mind, vehicles for the expression and negotiation of hierarchies of power and control (see Chapter 4), the same is arguably true of the production and consumption of the literary text.

A somewhat different line is followed by those, such as Niklas Holzberg, who stand at the furthest extreme from historicizing readings of the collection, arguing that the text has nothing at all to tell us about historical events or persons. On the contrary, the poems' characters

[29] Miller 1994: 75–6; Gaisser 2009: 133 similarly describes the collection as 'a dynamic ensemble or system whose parts interact with each other' and compares the shifting patterns that form and re-form with changes in perspective on the reader's part to the changing images of a kaleidoscope. See also Lewis 2013.

[30] On audience roles and power relations in Catullus, see also Pedrick 1986, 1993; Selden 1992: esp. 487–8.

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(including not only Lesbia but also the speaker, 'Catullus') are on this view purely literary constructs.[31] For Holzberg, the identification of Lesbia with the aristocratic Clodia Metelli is not only methodologically suspect but misrepresents the way in which she is depicted in the text: we should associate her rather with the *meretrices* ('courtesans' or high-class prostitutes) to whom the elegists of the next generation seem more clearly to address their poetry.[32]

Ultimately, though, Lesbia's function in the text is in any case to serve as a vehicle for the characterization of the speaker, which is designed above all to amuse and to titillate: the 'hidden author', in Holzberg's phrase, holds up his disempowered and – both figuratively and literally – impotent persona to ridicule. Once again, the name Lesbia is invoked in support of this reading. Holzberg usefully draws attention to an aspect of the ancient reception of Sappho that is too often forgotten by modern readers: the biographical tradition that represented her as an embodiment of transgressive and uncontrolled desire. In this sense, the pseudonym can be understood not (just) as idealizing, but as verging on insult.[33] Moreover, the women of Lesbos in general were associated with sexual excess and more specifically with the practice of fellatio, which they were reputed to perform with particular skill or enthusiasm: the Greek verb *lesbiazein*, 'to fellate', testifies to this stereotype.

We need not fully accept the extreme position of Holzberg to see that these more negative connotations are always potentially present in the name Lesbia, alongside (or, at least in some poems, occluded by) the more flattering implications explored above. One way of answering the critical conundrum presented by the mysterious verb *glubit* (literally, 'peels' or 'skins')[34] that forms the climax to poem 58, with which we began, is to connect it with the name so plangently reiterated in the first

[31] Holzberg 2002: esp. 11–23; see also Holzberg 2000. Other critics who posit a radical dichotomy between poet and 'ego' or poet and persona include Veyne 1988: esp. 34–5, 174 on Catullus; and Nappa 2001: esp. 18–35. For critique of the persona approach, see Wray 2001: 161–4; Miller 2004: 50–2. See also D. Clay 1998; Mayer 2003 (both of whom stress the prevalence of biographical modes of reading in antiquity); McCarthy 2019: esp. 17–23.

[32] The social class of the elegiac *puella* is in itself a far from uncontroversial issue, however: for contrasting views, see e.g. Wyke 1989: 34–5 = 2002: 29–31; James 2003: 36–41.

[33] Holzberg 2000: 33–5, 2002: 33–9. See also Wirshbo 1980; Gram 2019: 104–13.

[34] The verb is a very rare one, and is found elsewhere in Latin literature mainly in agricultural contexts. For debate about its meaning here, see Lenz 1963: 63–4; Arkins 1979; Jocelyn 1979; Randall 1980; Skutsch 1980; Adams 1982: 168; Muse 2009: 310–11.

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two lines. Lesbia, the sparkling and irresistible object of desire, has become Lesbia the whore, who performs unspeakable sexual acts with all comers: just what those acts are may be inherent in the very name that the poet gives her, whose negative sexual connotations are activated by the context.[35] If Holzberg's reading of the collection tends to flatten out the complexities of Catullus' self-representation, it offers at the very least a useful corrective to the naïve historicism which takes the poet's statements about his lover at face value: the multiple connotations of the name Lesbia itself may remind us that there is always more than one way of reading.

2. Gender roles and gender inversion; the vocabulary of aristocratic obligation

I have already touched on several different interpretations of Catullus' translation of Sappho in poem 51. To these we may add the observation that, by superimposing his own speaking voice upon that of the Greek poet, Catullus can be seen to adopt a feminine (or feminized) role.[36] The speaker of this poem is wholly passive: the overwhelming presence of Lesbia acts upon him, and indeed deprives him of the capacity to act or even speak. The inversion of normative gender roles entailed by this self-subordination has been a major theme in recent criticism both of Catullus and of Roman love poetry in general, and has been seen as one of the most prominent and striking aspects of the relationship as Catullus depicts it. Lesbia is consistently portrayed, particularly in the polymetrics, as the active partner, while the speaker himself is content to follow her lead while the affair lasts, and struggles to free himself from his overmastering desire for her once it has come to an end. Poem 8, for example, dramatizes the clash between the 'hardness' and self-control which was a key element in Roman conceptions of masculinity, and the

[35] As Holzberg and others suggest, the name also seems in this sense eminently suitable for the Lesbius of poem 79, who – as we saw in Chapter 1, p. 18, above – is implied by the poet to have defiled himself by performing oral sex, as well as committing incest with his sister.

[36] Similarly, in poem 70 (a close imitation, as we noted in Chapter 1, of Callimachus, *Epigram* 25 Pfeiffer), the speaker adopts the role played in the Greek poem by the woman, Ionis, while it is now the female beloved – not the male lover, as in the original – who swears falsely. It seems pertinent, in this connection, that both Callimachus' poem and Catullus' version involve an explicit focus on gender (Callignotus switches his attentions from a female to a male love object; Catullus condemns female speech as untrustworthy).

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surrendered, feminized posture of the rapturous (or, here, helplessly nostalgic) lover:

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
et quod uides perisse perditum ducas.
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum uentitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.
ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,
quae tu uolebas nec puella nolebat,
fulsere uere candidi tibi soles.
nunc iam illa non uult: tu quoque impote<ns *noli*>,[37]
nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser uiue,
sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.
uale, puella. iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit inuitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelesta, uae te, quae tibi manet uita?
quis nunc te adibit? cui uideberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

Poor Catullus, stop being a jerk, and when you see something's gone, write it off as lost. Once the sun shone bright for you, *when you came and went at your girl's beck and call* – the girl loved by us as no other woman shall ever be loved. Then we had all that fun, which you wanted, nor was the girl averse – yes, for sure, the sun shone bright for you. Now she *is* averse, so you be unwilling too (since *there's nothing you can do about it*): don't chase after a girl who shuns you or live in misery, but be resolute, stand firm and *toughen up*. Goodbye, girl. Now Catullus *is tough*, and won't seek you out or ask for you if you're unwilling. But you'll be sorry when you're not asked at all. Woe betide you, wretch: what kind of life awaits you? Who will come to you now? To whom will you look beautiful? Whom will you love now? Whose girl will you be called? Whom will you kiss? Whose lips bite . . . ? But as for you, Catullus, stick to your resolution and *be tough*.

Here, Catullus represents himself as trying and failing to 'be a man', as the thrice-repeated verb *obdura(t)* – literally, to 'harden oneself' – particularly emphasizes. *Duritia*, or hardness, is the pre-eminently masculine quality, in contrast to feminine/effeminate softness, *mollitia*, such as is attributed to the sexually submissive Thallus in poem 25. But the circling movement of this poem strongly suggests that the speaker is unable to achieve the 'hardness' he seeks: after exhorting himself to

[37] The transmitted text of line 9 is defective: Girolamo Avanzi's restoration *impotens noli* is, however, universally accepted by modern editors.

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'stop being a jerk' (literally, 'being foolish' or 'behaving inappropriately': the related adjective *ineptus* is applied in poems 12 and 39 to those who 'don't get it' when it comes to the social style considered acceptable in Catullus' circle), he soon slips back into nostalgia (3–8) before pulling himself up again at 9–13, only to begin daydreaming once more, this time of a future in which his (former) girl will have no lover . . . or perhaps another lover (15–18). As the screed of rhetorical questions becomes more and more sensuous in its focus, we begin to wonder whether the appropriate answer to the repeated *quis/cui/quem/cuius?* ('who(m)?/whose?') is 'no one' or 'another man', and scorn seems to slide into anxiety. Finally, the speaker pulls himself up again, but there seems no good reason to believe that his resolution this time will prove any more effective or lasting. The impression of weakness and lack of self-mastery created by the poem's structure is strengthened by the phrases highlighted in the Latin text above: the speaker was 'at his girl's beck and call' (literally, 'kept coming and going where the girl led'; 4), and sees himself as 'powerless', *impotens* (9), lacking control either over the situation in which he finds himself or over his own emotions and behaviour.

Like several of the other Lesbia poems, as we saw in the previous chapter, this one is strongly evocative of comic models.[38] The speaker's vacillation is reminiscent of the hopelessly dithering lovers of Plautus and Terence (and/or Menander),[39] and some have seen a specifically comic inversion here. But echoes of this poem in other parts of the collection (especially poem 76, discussed below) suggest that such humour as is present here is of a very wry, self-mocking kind. A different kind of reading might link this poem, and its destabilizing of gender roles, with others, particularly in the epigrams, where Catullus seeks to 'promote' his relations with Lesbia to the status usually reserved for male *amici* (friends, family members, or the more formal connections of public life).[40] Such an inversion of normative values is, arguably, represented by Catullus as something both to desire and to fear: the dominant woman – perhaps inevitably, in the patriarchal culture of

[38] In this poem, as not infrequently elsewhere, the girl is not named; intratextual echoes, however, strongly suggest that the *puella* in question is to be identified with Lesbia. The love poems are particularly rich in verbal echoes which suggest a kind of cross-referencing among them: this in itself is one of the factors that has encouraged the kind of novelistic reading discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In the case of poem 8, the speaker's insistence in line 5 on the uniqueness of his love resonates with poems 58 (line 3) and 87 (lines 1–2), in both of which Lesbia is named.

[39] See Chapter 1, p. 27 and n. 84, above.

[40] For relations between Catullus and his male friends, and the range of social connections embraced by the term *amicitia*, see Chapter 1, pp. 17–19, above, and further discussion in Chapter 3.

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first-century Rome – ends up emasculating her man. Catullus both challenges and ultimately (?) reinforces the gender stereotypes of his age and class.

A similarly ambivalent stance towards traditional canons of masculinity can be observed in poem 11.[41] The poem opens with a lengthy catalogue of all the far-flung destinations to which Catullus' *comites* Furius and Aurelius would be prepared to accompany him, in token of their friendship,[42] before narrowing its focus in the last two stanzas to Lesbia (presumably) in Rome:

pauca nuntiate meae puellae
non bona dicta.
cum suis uiuat ualeatque moechis,
quos simul complexa tenet trecentos,
nullum amans uere, sed identidem omnium
ilia rumpens;
nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
qui illius culpa cecidit uelut prati
ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
tactus aratro est.

Take a short, discourteous message to my girl: goodbye and good luck to her, with all the adulterous lovers she holds in her embrace, three hundred at once, loving none truly but busting their balls over and over; let her not look to my love, as in the past, which by her fault has fallen like a flower at the meadow's edge, grazed by the plough as it passes.

Here again, Lesbia is represented as a dominating and emasculating force, and the poet as feminized: not only does the closing simile invert the traditional association of ploughing with male sexuality and the begetting of children, and of the flower with female virginity, but the effect is once again reinforced by the poem's Sapphic metre (used only here and in poem 51), and by a reminiscence of Sappho in the closing lines.[43]

[41] Bibliography on poem 11 is extensive: see especially Putnam 1974; Yardley 1981; Sweet 1987; J. R. Heath 1989; Celentano 1991; Skinner 1992; Janan 1994: 71–6; E. Greene 1998: 26–36 and 2006; Konstan 2000; Dugan 2001; Hawkins 2018.

[42] The nature of Catullus' relationship with his addressees has been much disputed, given that Furius and Aurelius appear elsewhere in the collection – both separately and together – as invective targets: for a convenient doxography, see Fredricksmeyer 1993: 102–5.

[43] Compare the image of the cut flower with Sappho fr. 105b Voigt: οἷαν τὰν ὐάκινθον ἐν ὤρεσι ποίμενες ἄνδρες/πόσσι καταστείβοισι, χάμαι δέ τε πόρφυρον ἄνθος, 'as shepherds in the mountains trample down a hyacinth, and on the ground the purple flower . . . '. The lines come probably from an epithalamium and refer to the loss of virginity, like the similar image at Catullus 62.39–47.

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The relation between these final stanzas and the opening has long puzzled critics, but can be understood in terms of gendered oppositions: between centre and periphery, conquest and submission, male ('homosocial') friendship and heterosexual desire. The destinations of Catullus' imaginary travels – from India in the south-east to Britain in the north-west – lie at the boundaries of the Roman world, and represent the places and peoples conquered (or ripe for conquest) by Roman might. The Alps, the Rhine, and the far-off Britons are 'monuments' to Caesar's victories (*Caesaris . . . monimenta magni*; 10); more subtly, the eastern leg of the journey is sexualized, as the 'penetration' of 'soft' Arabia, and of India which is 'pounded' by Ocean. The sexual connotations of all three words (*penetrabit*, 2; *molles*, 5; *tunditur*, 4) suggest the conventional contrast between tough, manly Romans and effeminate easterners which is omnipresent in Roman literature and thought.[44] Potentially, then, the hypothetical journey in all-male company offers the speaker a chance to recuperate his masculinity, both by separating himself from the castrating female and by acting the part of imperial conqueror. But there is something troubling in the logic of the poem's polar oppositions, which tend to associate the speaker (whose love is troped as a 'flower at the meadow's edge') with the distant imperial subjects, and – as a corollary – to make the heroic conqueror Caesar analogous to the man-eating Lesbia. Thus, the poem can once again be read as simultaneously interrogating and confirming traditional discourses of both gender and (in this case) imperialism, as the poet identifies with the subordinated Other and yet seeks to reassert his rightful role as dominating (Roman) male.

Still more challenging to conventional Roman values – as well as modern sensibilities – is the difficult poem 76. Here, as in poem 8, Catullus represents himself as striving, and failing, to free himself from his attachment to Lesbia: there are indeed some striking verbal echoes of the 'companion' poem.[45] New here, however, is the poet's insistence on his own virtuous conduct in his dealings with Lesbia: he knows that he has been *pius* ('dutiful', in the sense of having fulfilled his moral obligations), that he has not violated *fides* ('trust' or 'loyalty') or made

[44] For *penetrare* and *tundere*, cf. Lucretius 4.1111, 1246; and Catullus 32.11, 59.5; see also Adams 1982: 151 and 148. On *mollitia*, see especially Edwards 1993: 63–97.

[45] Compare esp. 76.9: *omnia quae . . . perierunt* ('all of which is lost') with 8.2: *quod uides perisse* ('what you see is lost'); and 76.11–12: *quin tu animo offirmas . . . /et . . . desinis esse miser?* ('why don't you strengthen your resolve and stop being miserable?') with 8.10–11: *nec miser uiue/sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura* ('don't live in misery, but be resolute, stand firm, and toughen up'). For the identification of the unnamed woman of this poem with Lesbia, see n. 38 above.

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deceitful promises (1–4); he has been good to his beloved, in word and deed (7–8). All this is apt to sound horribly self-righteous to the modern ear, and, certainly, Catullus' characterization of the relationship is undeniably one-sided. We also need to bear in mind, though, the provocativeness of the speaker's sentiments in the context of the traditional Roman value-system: *pietas* and *fides* are among the most hallowed virtues of the idealized Roman male, and for Catullus to apply these to his own behaviour in an avowedly adulterous relationship is, to say the least, startling.[46] Moreover, the complaint that Lesbia has failed to reciprocate his devotion invokes the system of mutual obligation (*officium*) and exchanges of 'good deeds' or favours (*beneficia*) that underpinned elite male social relations. Line 9 puts the case in financial terms: the lover has 'invested' (*credita*) his fidelity and affection in the beloved, but has received no return (*omnia quae perierunt*, 'all of which has come to nothing', 'been lost').

This emphasis on reciprocity, and the language of *officium* in which it is couched, is particularly prominent in the epigrams: whereas the Lesbia of the polymetrics is primarily an object of desire, and of rivalry with other men, the epigrams tend to suggest an ideal equivalence between homosocial and heterosexual relations. The betrayal of friendship for which the Rufus of poem 77 is condemned, for example, is represented in terms quite strikingly reminiscent of Lesbia's failure to respond to the poet's *beneficia* in the previous poem:

Rufe mihi frustra ac nequiquam credite amice
(frustra? immo magno cum pretio *atque malo),*
sicine subrepsti *mi, atque intestina perurens*
ei misero eripuisti omnia nostra bona?
eripuisti, heu heu nostrae crudele uenenum 5
uitae, heu heu nostrae pestis *amicitiae.*

Rufus, whom I trusted as my friend, in vain and for nothing (for nothing? No, rather *at great* and bitter *cost*), is this how *you have crept up* on me and stolen from me all that I held dear, searing me to the core? You have stolen from me, ah! cruel poison of our life, ah! you *plague* on our friendship.

The financial language of line 2, and the image of Rufus as a snake or a disease, insinuating himself into the speaker's affections only to scorch him with his 'poisonous' duplicity, picks up the metaphors of love as failed investment and as deadly plague from poem 76. There are

[46] For Lesbia's status as a married woman, see Chapter 1, p. 19, above.

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(at least) two ways of understanding these echoes: as noted above, many have taken the *bona* ('goods', in the sense both of 'joys' and of 'property') of line 4 as a reference to Lesbia herself, so that there is a direct relationship between the 'plagues' of poems 76 and 77 (Rufus has in effect exacerbated the painful emotions – the 'plague'– of 76 by 'stealing' Lesbia, and is thus denounced as a 'plague' in turn); equally, however, we could understand the link between the two poems as one of analogy, in so far as love is (or should be) itself a kind of *amicitia*.

This notion is most clearly developed in poem 109, where the speaker aspires to an ideal bond of 'sacred friendship' (*aeternum . . . sanctae foedus amicitiae*) with his girl. It is possible, as noted earlier, to understand *foedus* as a reference to the marriage tie; but the vocabulary may rather point to an equivalence in the poet's mind between social and erotic relationships. By referring to heterosexual love in terms of (usually male) friendship and of public social or political ties (*foedus*), by dignifying it with the adjectives 'everlasting' (*aeternum*) and 'sacred' (*sanctae*), Catullus provocatively inverts conventional hierarchies of values, according to which love affairs were a trivial pastime for the young, whereas male–male relationships, whether in the familial or the public sphere, were a serious matter.[47]

Elsewhere in the epigrams, Catullus deploys what has been called the 'language of aristocratic obligation'[48] to draw a more explicit contrast between his own exceptional feelings for Lesbia and the 'ordinary' experience of *amor*. In a sequence of epigrams (suggestively interlocking with the 'betrayal of friendship' sequence, 73, 77, and 91, discussed in Chapter 3), Catullus writes of his failing (or failed) love affair in terms of *beneuolentia* or 'goodwill' (72.8, 75.3; cf. 73.1), *officium* or 'obligation' (75.2; cf. 68.12, 150), *benefacta*, 'favours' or 'services' (76.1, 7), and *pietas* or 'dutifulness' (76.2, 26; cf. 73.2), all vocabulary very much at home in the sphere of *amicitia*,[49] but startlingly novel in this erotic context.

[47] A set of assumptions represented with particular clarity in Cicero's *Pro Caelio*; see also Cic. *Tusc.* 4.68–76 (erotic love as utterly trivial), and (for both philosophical and more traditional views of friendship) the *De Amicitia*. On Roman conceptions of *amor* and *amicitia* in general, see esp. R. D. Brown 1987: 122–7; Brunt 1988; C. A. Williams 2012 (esp. 174–85 on Catullus).

[48] D. O. Ross, in an important comparative study of the language of the polymetrics and the epigrams (Ross 1969), was the first to draw attention to this complex of vocabulary: though rightly criticized by Lyne (1980: 25–6) and others for linking it too narrowly with the political sphere, his discussion remains fundamental. See also Lyne 1980: 24–34 (whence the phrase 'language of aristocratic obligation' [26]); Fitzgerald 1995: 117–34.

[49] For examples and some (older) bibliography, see Lyne 1980: 291–2, n. 4.

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Perhaps most striking of all is the comparison in poem 72 between ideal love and intrafamilial affection:

> *dilexi tum te non tantum ut uulgus amicam,*
> *sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.* (72.3–4)

I loved you then not as ordinary men love their girlfriends, but as a father loves his sons and sons-in-law.

By limiting the comparison to love between *male* family members, Catullus underlines the distance between this non-physical (or not purely physical) affection and the sexual desire which he presumably seeks to convey through the reference to 'common men' (*uulgus*) and their girlfriends. But we should also note, once again, the challenge that the poet presents to traditional values by placing sexual love on a par with patriarchal and patrilineal bonds. The appeal here to the highly valorized male family line, underlined by the emphatically alliterative phrase *gnatos . . . et generos*, 'sons and sons-in-law', is complemented in the final couplet by an implicit gesture towards the equally male-dominated institution of *amicitia*: the poet comments that *iniuria*, which could refer to a violation or betrayal in the sphere of either love or friendship, actually stimulates physical desire, but compromises the goodwill (*beneuolentia*) which is regularly associated with the latter sphere:

> *amantem iniuria talis*
> *cogit amare magis, sed bene uelle minus.* (72.7–8)

Such a betrayal compels a lover to feel more desire, but less goodwill.

Lesbia's failure to reciprocate has made it impossible for *amicitia* to continue, though (as we have seen in relation to poem 8) the speaker finds it harder to resist the emasculating lures of desire. Once the attempt to set the lovers on the equal footing proper to male *amici* has definitively failed, hierarchy reasserts itself and the struggle to regain a properly masculine (self-)mastery begins.

3. Juventius and other objects of desire

In considering Catullus' ideal of mutual fidelity (*fides*) and devotion, we should not forget that the collection represents him as involved with several other erotic partners alongside Lesbia. Naturally, this reflects the double standard typical of Rome's patriarchal culture, according to

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which (as noted above) monogamy was not required of men, who were – on the contrary – typically assumed to desire both male and female sexual partners; that they should act on those desires, within acceptable limits, was regarded as normal.[50] Nevertheless, we should resist the temptation to elide the presence of Juventius, Ipsitilla, and others to which critics have too often fallen prey.[51]

The Ipsitilla poem, 32, initially offers a particularly striking contrast to the Lesbia cycle, presenting as it does a hyper-macho image of the speaker nursing a huge erection at siesta time, and promising the girl *nouem continuas fututiones*, 'nine fuckifications[52] in a row' (8). But the poem also plays ironically on the contrast between this phallic boast and the wheedling tone of the opening lines, where the girl is addressed as *mea dulcis Ipsitilla*, / *meae deliciae*, *mei lepores* ('my sweet Ipsitilla, my delight, my charmer'; 1–2), and politely requested to invite the speaker round to her place: moreover, the name Ipsitilla, though much debated,[53] is probably itself a diminutive of *ipsa*, 'herself', the slave's word for his mistress.

The Juventius poems, too, combine phallic threats with a degree of self-abasement comparable to that of the Lesbia poems. The Furius–Aurelius cycle[54] revolves in part around rivalry for the boy's favours: both addressees are presented as trying to encroach on Catullus' exclusive relationship with him (poems 15, 21, 24, and possibly 81).[55] While Furius gets off relatively lightly, Aurelius is threatened both with *irrumatio* or oral rape (21.8, 13) and with *rhaphanidosis* (15.18–19), a traditional, if perhaps rarely inflicted, penalty for adulterers, involving the insertion of radishes (and also, here, spiny fish) into the victim's anus.[56] The assimilation of the

[50] On Roman sexual protocols, see esp. C. A. Williams 1999: 15–61.

[51] In addition to Juventius and Ipsitilla, the Ameana of poem 41 and the Aufillena of 110 may be brought in under this heading. Both are represented as having asked or accepted gifts from Catullus in return – it is implied – for sexual services (the former, however, is scornfully rejected, and the latter is attacked for having reneged on the deal). The insulting insinuation, in both cases, is that the woman is no better than a common whore (worse, in Aufillena's case, since she 'keeps on taking, and does not put out'; 110.4), but it is worth noting that the speaker has no objection in principle to availing himself of their favours.

[52] The word *fututio* is probably a humorous Catullan coinage, formed from the primary obscenity *futuo*, 'to fuck'.

[53] This form is found as a variant in MS R; other manuscripts give *ipsi illa* (O) or *ipsithila* (G, R). The correct form is perhaps *Ipsicilla*: see Gratwick 1967, 1991; M. G. Morgan 1974; Wiseman 1987a.

[54] See Chapter 1, p. 5, above.

[55] The rival of poem 24 is identified as Furius by the repetition of the phrase 'neither slave nor strong-box' (5, 8, 10), a quotation from the first line of 23, to Furius. The 'visitor from Pisaurum' of 81 is variously identified by commentators with Furius (on the basis of echoes of poem 24, though these are less marked than the quotation of 23 in 24) or Aurelius (on the basis that the comparison with a gilded statue, *inaurata . . . statua*, at 81.4, is a pun on his name).

[56] Cf. Ar. *Nub.* 1083; Juv. 10.314–17; Adams 1982: 128; Richlin 1992: 215.

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speaker and the boy to a married couple implied by the association of *rhaphanidosis* with wronged husbands presents interesting parallels to the Lesbia epigrams: so, too, Catullus longs to give Juventius 300,000 kisses (poem 48), in a reprise of the 'counting kisses' theme of poems 5 and 7.

The gender inversion considered above in relation to the Lesbia poems has its reflex, finally, in poem 99, where the boy reacts to his lover's theft of a kiss with an exaggerated show of disgust. He washed his mouth, Catullus writes, 'so that nothing picked up from my lips should remain, as though it were the foul saliva of an abject[57] whore' (*ne quicquam nostro contractum ex ore maneret / tamquam commictae spurca saliua lupae*; 99.9–10). Now the speaker himself is on the receiving end – at the hands of a young boy, perhaps one of low social status[58] – of the kind of invective abuse aimed at Lesbius in poem 79,[59] and at other targets elsewhere: foul breath, and particularly the association with urine/semen implied by the verb *commictae*,[60] would undoubtedly have prompted the ancient reader to think of oral sex, which was commonly thought to 'pollute' the mouth of one who performed it. The speaker is doubly feminized: through the implicit allegation of having engaged in the most unmanly of sexual activities,[61] and through the comparison with a female prostitute. The tone of the poem is, certainly, humorous (it ends with the deflating bathos 'if that's how you punish my poor love, I won't steal any more kisses!'); but it nevertheless resonates with the ambiguous handling of gender stereotypes and power relations which we have traced in other, overtly more serious, poems.

[57] Literally 'pissed on'. For this verb as a slang term for the male orgasm, particularly in the context of 'squalid or humiliating sexual acts', see Adams 1982: 142. The prefix *con-*, with its suggestions of thoroughness, adds to the crudity of the expression.

[58] Juventius' social status has presented something of a problem for commentators: seduction of a freeborn boy or girl fell under the rubric of *stuprum* or illicit sexual activity, while for an adolescent to accept homoerotic advances was regarded as shaming, and incurred the risk of infamy in later life (C. A. Williams 1999: 97–112). Some have therefore argued that he must be assumed to be a freedman; others point to the well-established consular status of the Juventii, and depict him as a 'spoilt young aristocrat' (Wiseman 1985: 122), in which case Catullus' open use of his real name must be interpreted either as self-consciously risqué, or as a studied insult. A third possibility is to understand the name (approximately, 'youthful') as a pseudonym (for comparably pseudonymous use of a real Roman *nomen gentile*, cf. Porcius, 'Piggy', in poem 47, where – given the juxtaposition with *Socration*, 'little Socrates' – this seems very likely to be a derisive nickname). For a range of views, see (e.g.) Macleod 1973: 297, Stroh 1990: 137 and nn. 30, 31, Caratello 1995, C. A. Williams 1999: 65–6 and n. 17, Gaisser 2009: 61, Ingleheart 2014: 65–7, O'Hearn 2021b: 113–17, Polt 2021: 141.

[59] See Chapter 1, p. 18, above.

[60] See n. 57 above.

[61] For the categorization of sexual acts in relation to hierarchies of gender and power in ancient thought, see Chapter 4 below.

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The alternation between the poses of macho aggressor and self-abasing lover briefly surveyed in this section is useful placed by Amy Richlin under the sign of the phallic god Priapus, whose ithyphallic statue was traditionally set up in gardens as an apotropaic defence against thieves.[62] In literary texts, Priapus is commonly represented as a (usually comic) personification of inordinate desire and phallic aggression, who threatens transgressors with sexual punishment for their crimes. Richlin accordingly identifies the two central aspects of Catullus' literary persona as the 'Priapic' and the 'anti-Priapic': the victimized speaker of the Lesbia poems and of the attacks on Memmius, Piso, and other public figures[63] characteristically adopts an 'anti-Priapic' stance, stressing his own purity and condemning the sexual excesses and uncontrolled desires of others. On the other hand, the invective aggressor, and the hyper-masculine speaker of, say, poem 15 or 32, parades the very violence and immoderation that he condemns in others. The relation between these two stances – in the love poems, in the invectives, and throughout the collection – may be described as one of the most intriguing, and sometimes troubling, aspects of Catullus' poetry.

[62] Richlin 1992: 144–56. Others (Kloss 1998, Uden 2007) have suggested that certain poems – respectively, 17, and 16 and 56 – are to be understood as, more literally, spoken *by* Priapus, or by Catullus 'impersonating' Priapus; but Richlin's model seems, on the whole, the more convincing.

[63] See Chapter 1, pp. 15–16, above.

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