

genialis, concubitus (Italie), a sense in which it is used in the play at 1193 and 1626 (see also *Eum.* 217; *Supp.* 141, 151 where the Danaids vehemently deny any intention of marriage; *Sept.* 364 [although the text is corrupt]; and *Pers.* 543 [where it may refer back to the *πόθος φιλόνωρ* of 136, but cf. Broadhead on *Pers.* 541–45]). If this reading is accepted, the sense of the sequence not only is clarified but also becomes much more forceful. Clytemnestra's pattern of thought and expression would be as follows: the pair of them have got what they deserved; Agamemnon in this way, Cassandra *etc.*, "and for me their 'marriage' has brought an added relish to my feast of luxury." Clytemnestra's ironic use of *ἐννή* as "marriage," an irony which is compounded by the fact that the word may also be used for "grave" (cf. *Cho.* 318), would thus echo the force and implication of the dual in 1443, the *κοινόλεκτρος* of 1441, and the *πιστὴ ἔννευος* of 1442. (It might, perhaps, even shed some light on the problematic *ἰστοτρίβης* of 1443 for which Pauw's *ἰστοριβής* has been so frequently substituted.) Beginning with her acid

commentary on Agamemnon's amours before Troy in 1438–39, the sexual innuendo and sarcasm of Clytemnestra's remarks have been obvious. Headlam, commenting on Clytemnestra's use of *φιλήτωρ* to describe Cassandra, suggested that "perhaps by the active word she wishes to imply that the woman was the seducer" (cf. *Sen. Ag.* 1001–3); and the double-entendre of *παροψώνημα*, especially in its collocation with *ἐννή* in whatever case, has long been recognized (cf. *Ar. Frag.* 187, *Eccl.* 225–26). Clearly Clytemnestra has been incensed by the presence of Agamemnon's concubine, and the use of *ἐμοί* and *τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς* in the closing lines indicates her strong personal satisfaction at the present state of affairs. Reading *ἐννή* as the subject of the clause makes the irony of her remarks all the more pointed. The corruption may have occurred because a copyist felt, as so many editors and commentators have felt since, that either Cassandra or Agamemnon was the subject of the verb.

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A NOTE ON CATULLUS' FIRST POEM

Catullus' first poem has received distinguished attention within the last twenty years from two American scholars¹ both of whom have deserved well of students of Catullus. The justification for a third paper is not that these scholars have "misunderstood" the poem in question but that they have said something about the poem which is true—that it is not merely a dedicatory poem but genuinely introductory—without, perhaps, explaining adequately why it is true. It will be my contention that the poem is not only both a dedication and a genuine introduction but that it combines these two functions in such a way that each assists the fulfillment of the other.

Catullus begins with a question: "Cui dono lepidum novum libellum / arida modo pumice expoliturum?" Simple enough, we think, but

containing, in fact, a number of ambiguities. The tone of the question is apparently self-depreciatory; we get a picture of the poet with his nice little book, hot off the press, looking for someone to give it to. The use of the diminutive, at first sight, reinforces this impression, but we ought not to forget that basically the diminutive conveys the idea of smallness. If Catullus does merely want to impress upon us the fact that his book is small, he may possibly be hinting at his Callimachean literary ancestry.²

But *libellus* is ambiguous in another sense too; it has a double reference to the book as an actual concrete object and to the book as a collection of poems. An obvious point but nevertheless important, since, if *libellus* has this double reference, it must follow that the adjectives and the adjectival phrase qualifying

1. F. O. Copley, "Catullus C. 1," *TAPA*, LXXXII (1951), 200–206; and J. P. Elder, "Catullus 1, His Poetic Creed, and Nepos," *HSCP*, LXXI (1966), 143–49.

2. Cf. Elder, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–47.

libellus share it. *Lepidus*, *novus*, and *arida modo pumice expolitus* must refer both to the book and to the poetry contained in it.

Copley tells us that *lepidus* is especially appropriate in this context: “*lepidus* refers primarily to qualities of character and personality, and to external appearances only insofar as these reflect character. Thus when Catullus calls his book *lepidus*, he is thinking of the fact that its looks reflect its character, not merely of its handsome appearance.”³

What, then, does *lepidus* mean? Strictly speaking, as little or as much as our “charming.” Its meaning, that is, depends almost entirely on the context; what constitutes the *lepos*, therefore, of Catullus’ little book we shall have to discover when we know more about the context.

Let us examine the other adjective and the adjectival phrase qualifying *libellus*. *Novus* is self-explanatory: as the book itself is new, so the poetry it contains is new. But what about *arida modo pumice expolitus*? Primarily, the phrase refers to one of the processes involved in the publication of the book, namely that of smoothing the ends of the *volumen* with pumice stone,⁴ but is this not a perfectly natural and obvious metaphor for the painstaking artistry with which the poet has “smoothed away the rough edges” of his work? In other words, as the *libellus* is “polished” in appearance, so the poetry it contains is “polished” (for much the same metaphor exists in English) in character.

It is now possible to say what constitutes the *lepos* of Catullus’ *libellus* (in both senses). It is obvious that *lepidus*, as it applies to the external appearance of the book, is explained by *novus* and *arida modo pumice expolitus*; the book is attractive because it is new and well produced. It must follow that *lepidus*, as it applies to the internal quality of the work, is also explained by *novus* and *arida modo*

pumice expolitus. The “charm” of the poetry is constituted by its novelty and by the “polish” given to it by the poet’s painstaking craftsmanship. (The smallness of scale implied in *libellus* may also contribute.)

The poet has, therefore, established an ambiguity in these opening lines, one which, however, is speedily resolved into irony as Catullus “forgets” about the physical appearance of the book and concentrates on the quality of the poetry in it. In lines 3–4, he begins to answer his own question. The book is to be dedicated to the historian Cornelius Nepos, and we are told why: “Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas / meas esse aliquid putare nugae.” The irony of *nugae*⁵ is made immediately obvious by the contrast with *aliquid* which represents Nepos’ estimate of Catullus’ poems. Apparently of little worth, they are (Nepos thinks) actually deserving of serious attention. We can guess why Nepos thinks so—it is because they have the *lepos* that is constituted by their novelty and high polish. Is Nepos right, however, in his assessment of Catullus’ *nugae*? Lines 5–7 suggest at least that Nepos is the sort of man who, in intellectual matters, is likely to be right: “iam tum, cum ausus es unus Itolorum / omne aevum tribus explicare cartis / doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis.” These lines are crucial to our understanding of the poem; their purpose is not solely to praise Nepos, though that is part of their purpose. He emerges as a scholar of intellectual daring (“ausus es unus Itolorum”)⁶ who has composed a universal history (“omne aevum tribus explicare cartis”). Elder⁷ points to a series of contrasts in the poem but misses the most important one, that between *omne aevum* and *tribus . . . cartis*. Nepos has compressed the whole of history into three papyrus rolls. Considering the vast field it covers, it would not be going too far to suggest that, in proportion to the immensity of its subject, Nepos’ work is a *libellus*, with all that that implies.

3. Copley, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

4. Fordyce, *ad loc.*

5. I agree with Copley (*op. cit.*, p. 203) that *nugae* must be taken to mean to Catullus what it meant to Plautus, namely “rubbish.” Editors (e.g., Baehrens, Merrill) have often explained the word as a technical term for light verse, but, as Copley says (p. 203, n. 10), there are no certain parallels for

this usage before Martial, the suggested Horatian ones (*Sat.* 1. 9. 2 and *Epist.* 1. 19. 42) being doubtful since in both cases *nugae* may refer to quality rather than form.

6. Hardly Copley’s “dull and pedantic scholar” (*op. cit.*, p. 205).

7. Elder, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

The *cartae*, moreover, are *doctae* and *laboriosae*. Copley's comment is that "pressed now to say something nice about the book of the man who had so graciously praised his poems, Catullus, who was constitutionally unable to be dishonest, could come up with nothing more than a *doctis* and a *laboriosis*."⁸ This is strangely misconceived. Copley implies that *doctus* and *laboriosus*, if not actually pejorative, are terms of faint praise. Yet if asked to compile a list of those qualities that figure most prominently in Catullus' scale of literary values, few students of his work would fail to include those implied by *doctus* and *laboriosus*.⁹

There is no need to labor this point; we may simply refer to Catullus' ninety-fifth poem. The praise of Cinna's *Zmyrna* is based on the fact that it is, as it were, *laboriosa* (which means, of course, "on which care has been expended") and *docta* to the *n*th degree, while the complaint against the poems of Hortensius and Volusius is that they lack precisely these qualities. At 65. 2, the Muses appear as *doctae virgines*, an indication, surely, of the absolute inseparability of poetry and *doctrina*, while at 35. 17–18, Caecilius' girl friend is addressed as "Sapphica puella / musa doctior." Most significant of all, though, is the point that both *labor* and *doctrina* are implied in the second line of the poem under discussion, for a poet's *pumex* is his intellectual equipment, more precisely, his learning, poetic skill, and refining *labor*.

The conclusion is that Nepos and his work are depicted in a way that, though lightly humorous (note the expletive *Iuppiter*), is wholly and extremely laudatory. To them are attributed the qualities that Catullus most values and, more importantly, that he hints in the first two lines are present in his own work, qualities of novelty (for Nepos is *unus Italorum*), relative smallness of scale, *labor*, and *doctrina*. Why are Nepos and his work described in precisely these terms? It is true that Catullus would naturally want to say "something nice" about the dedicatee. However, it is not only the malicious reader who

will observe that, in saying "something nice" about the dedicatee, Catullus also says "something nice" about his own work. There is, in other words, another ambiguity here. Nepos possesses, and exhibits in his history, all the most desirable qualities—and he approves of Catullus' poetry. The insinuation is that Nepos' approval springs from his finding in Catullus' poetry those qualities that he himself reveals in his history. In this way the nature of the dedicatee is used to reflect upon the nature and guarantee the quality of the work dedicated to him—and vice-versa. Thus the introductory function and the dedicatory function of the poem are combined in such a way that each assists the fulfillment of the other. Catullus uses his dedication to Cornelius Nepos to support the implicit claim he is making for his own poetry, while at the same time the claim he makes for his poetry—that it has *lepos* and is important (*aliquid*) but that both its *lepos* and its importance are discernible only to an acute intellect—reflects well on Nepos' capacity to appreciate it and thus serves the purpose of complimenting the dedicatee.

Having passed from ambiguity (1–2) to irony (4) and back to ambiguity, the poem returns, in lines 8–9, to irony ("quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli / qualecumque"), a modest and self-deprecatory expression, but not credibly so, since Catullus, by now, has succeeded in suggesting that he has nothing to be modest about.

We are now faced with the regrettable necessity of discussing the vexed question of the text of line 9. The interpretation of the poem proposed above, if valid, suggests very strongly that Bergk's emendation, "qualecumque quidem est, patroni ut ergo" ("so that by reason of its patron . . .")—or something like it—is much to be preferred to the reading of Mynors' Oxford text. The effect of the poem so far has been to induce us to accept a certain degree of identification between the dedicatee and the poetry dedicated to him. Nepos' approval of Catullus' poems in a sense guaran-

8. Copley, *op. cit.*, p. 204. Whether Catullus was "constitutionally unable to be dishonest" is more than I can say. His tenth poem does not suggest it.

9. K. Quinn, "Docte Catulle" in *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric* (London, 1962), ed. J. P. Sullivan, pp. 31–63.

tees the presence in them of the qualities displayed in his own work. An ending in which Nepos' patronage also guarantees the future survival of the poetry would be appropriate in this context. Indeed, it might almost be said that this is the ending Catullus ought to have written.

But a desire to "round the poem off" is not in itself sufficient justification for accepting so large a conjecture. We may say, however, in mitigation, that the text of V is, in any case, wrong since it lacks a syllable, supplied in the Oxford text by the addition of *o*. Furthermore, the text, even thus supplemented, still looks wrong. There are two reasons for suspecting it: first, the change of address from *tibi* (8) to *o patrona virgo* (9) is, as Fordyce rightly points out, immensely difficult; second, the phrase *patrona virgo* is incongruous. The poem up to now has been concerned to define in precisely what sense Nepos is the poet's patron (his intellectual standing is the guarantee of the value of the poetry of which he approves). The reader surely expects the poem to end with some explicit reference to Nepos as *patronus*; he does not expect the introduction of a rival patron to steal Nepos' thunder.

It may be worthwhile at this stage to compare the poem to other dedicatory and introductory poems. Not surprisingly, we find that whether the Muse, the patron, or the book is addressed, the addressee remains the same throughout the poem. This is true of the poem of Meleager with which the fourth book of the *Greek Anthology* begins:

Μοῦσα φίλα, τίνι τάνδε φέρεις πάγκαρπον αἰδάν;
ἦ τίς ὁ καὶ τεύξας ὕμνοθετῶν στέφανον;
ἄνυσσε μὲν Μελέαγρος· ἀριζάλῳ δὲ Διοκλεῖ
μναμόσυνον ταύταν ἐξεπόνθησε χάριν·

The Muse is addressed, the human patron referred to in the third person. The reverse is true of the Ode that opens Horace's first collection, which it may be relevant to examine, although it is not, strictly speaking, a dedicatory poem. Horace begins by addressing

his human patron ("Maecenas atavis edite regibus / o et praesidium et dulce decus meum" [1–2]), with whom he also ends, referring to the Muses in the third person:

me doctarum hederæ præmia frontium
dis miscent superis, me gelidum nemus
nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori
secernunt populo, si neque tibiās
Euterpe cohibet nec Polyhymnia
Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton.
quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres
sublimi feriam sidera vertice [29–36].

It is interesting that Horace ends his poem much as we would have Catullus end his: with the patron, and with a connection between the patron's approval and the poet's fame.¹⁰

But clearly the most relevant parallel is with the dedicatory epigram of Martial (3. 2) which begins with an address to the book ("Cuius vis fieri, libelle, munus?" [1]), brings in the patron in the third person, and (as one would expect) dispenses with any mention of a Muse. No one, to my knowledge, has ever doubted that Martial had Catullus' poem in mind when composing his epigram. The relationship between the two poems, however, is closer than it is usually thought to be.

Martial's patron (or *vindex*) is regarded as the guarantor of the book's prosperity:

Faustini fugis in sinum? sapisti.
cedro nunc licet ambules perunctus
et frontis gemino decens honore
pictis luxurieris umbilicis,
et te purpura delicata velet,
et cocco rubeat superbus index [6–11].

There is surely here something of the same ambiguity that I argued was present in the first two lines of Catullus' poem. The care that will be lavished upon the physical appearance of the book is symptomatic of the respect that Faustinus¹¹ may be expected to feel for its contents, and Faustinus' respect should be a guarantee of general critical approval so that "illo vindice nec Probum timeto."¹²

10. H. Musurillo, "The Poet's Apotheosis: Horace *Odes* 1. 1," *TAPA*, XCIII (1962), 230–39. Propertius 2. 1, an introduction in the form of an apology to Maecenas for not dealing with the conventional subjects of epic, is less relevant, but here too there is no question of a change of addressee.

11. A friend of Martial and himself probably a well-known writer (cf. 1. 25).

12. The well-known *grammaticus* M. Valerius Probus fl. ca. A.D. 56 (according to Jerome). See Friedländer's commentary, I, 284.

It is not, perhaps, altogether insignificant that this poem, based as it is on the one under discussion, should end much as Catullus' poem would end were we to adopt Bergk's emendation—with, that is, an affirmation that the patron's authority guarantees that the poetry will find a favorable critical response in the future.

The stock of possible comparisons is by no means exhausted, but these, perhaps, are enough for our purpose. We are justified in saying that the change of address (from *tibi* to *o patrona virgo*) is both virtually incomprehensible and abnormal—so much so that, if one were determined to preserve the Muse at all costs, one would almost be compelled to find a way to preserve her in the third person. Furthermore, if the Muse is to be kept, whether in the third person or not, it can hardly be as *patrona virgo* since, as we have seen, the phrase is utterly incongruous. I would go one stage further and say that the presence of the Muse is itself incongruous. Catullus calls his poems *nugae* while hinting that they are not *nugae* (rubbish) at all, but worth taking seriously. But their importance is not readily apparent except to the discerning intellect such as that of Nepos. In other words, Catullus' poetry is of an essentially nonpublic nature, and his claim for it is made in a way that harmonizes with that nature. The program, like the poems it introduces, is aimed at the Neposes of this world. For Catullus to enlist support, therefore, of even an unspecified Muse would be to put forward a more explicit claim—a more "public" claim—for his *nugae* than can, I think, have been his intention.

The conclusion, therefore, is not that Bergk's reading is the "true" one, but that it is probably closer to the truth than the more generally accepted version (*patroni ut ergo*, in particular, is extremely convincing). Such a conclusion prefers a reading which makes excellent sense in the context of the poem as here interpreted to one which makes almost no sense at all.

I must now return to my original point,

that the poem is genuinely introductory. Technically, it is easy to see that the poem is wholly typical of Catullus' serious manner (by which I mean to indicate those poems, such as 5, 7, 8, 45, and 64, in which Catullus' poetic resources are fully exploited). It can scarcely have escaped notice that many of the words in the poem are made to do several jobs, through the constant employment of irony and ambiguity. This is typical of Catullus (compare 7, 45, and 64); so too is the unusually precise use of apparently insignificant, even ugly, words and the daring emphasis placed upon them. Take, for instance, *iam tum* at the beginning of line 5; rather heavy emphasis, we may think, on mere temporal particles. But Catullus wants to impress on us the fact that Nepos' approval of his work is not only long standing, but that it was displayed at the very time when his history was in process of composition—at the time, that is, when those qualities of wide, precise, and imaginative scholarship were in daily employment. Much the same is true of *qualecumque* (9); it is a colorless word, placed in an emphatic position. Yet a moment's reflection tells us that it is a key word in which is contained the major tension of the poem: the tension between Catullus' apparently modest references to his poetry and his hints of its actual worth.

Thus, there are two senses in which this poem is introductory: it tells us what to expect in the *libellus* as a whole—poetry the value and careful composition of which are discernible only through alert, intelligent scrutiny—and it *is* what it tells us to expect. If we were to judge poetry according to Archibald MacLeish's famous dictum ("a poem should not mean / but be"), there would be no doubt as to how we should evaluate Catullus' first poem.¹³

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