

CATULLUS 49, CICERO, AND CAESAR

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Disertissime Romuli nepotum,
quot sunt quotque fuere, Marce Tulli,
quotque post aliis erunt in annis,
gratias tibi maximas Catullus
agit pessimus omnium poeta,
tanto pessimus omnium poeta,
quanto tu optimus omnium patronus.

THIS poem has long been the object of curiosity and speculation, for two reasons. One, it is the sole communication between these great men which has been preserved or even attested to us. Two, it presents a riddle. Catullus expresses to Cicero "profoundest thanks," and calls him "the best advocate (patron) of all" by as much as he himself is "the worst poet of all." Is this a sincere expression of gratitude and a generous compliment, or is it, as some have thought, ironic, and an insult to Cicero? Normally, we can expect the meaning of a poem to be sufficiently clarified by the poem itself. In this case, however, the exegetical efforts of more than a century have produced little illumination, and at present the claims for sincerity and for irony stand about equally divided. Since the arguments for irony are easily countered by those for sincerity,¹ and since the two views of the poem are mutually exclusive, the burden of proof lies with those who claim that the poet does not mean what he says. Obviously, we need to know *why* Catullus expresses his gratitude to Cicero, and this he does not tell us. Therefore, in order to make satisfactory sense of the poem, the reader is challenged

to provide a hypothetical reason, and interpret the poem accordingly.

But is this, and can the poet have intended it to be, a game that anyone can play? I think not. The test for a valid hypothesis should be, and I believe the poet would agree, that it be intrinsically, that is, biographically and psychologically, plausible, and, equally important, that it adequately account for all the details of the poem, and for the relation of these details to one another. When we apply these criteria to the various theories that have been proposed, we find none of them, and some less than others, entirely satisfactory. Let us consider the more noteworthy interpretations.²

E. Baehrens, developing an idea first put forth by L. Schwabe, proposed (on the premise that Catullus' Lesbia is Clodia Metelli and his Caelius is M. Caelius Rufus) that in the fall of 56 B.C. Cicero sent Catullus a copy of his *Pro Caelio*, in which he described the immoral life of Lesbia and, at the same time, refrained from mentioning the name of Catullus, her most notorious lover. For this Catullus had reason to be grateful, as he had reason to admire the eloquence of Cicero. He com-

1. See, e.g., E. Baehrens, *Catulli Veronensis Liber*² (Leipzig, 1893), pp. 250–53; C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 213–15; D. F. S. Thomson, "Catullus and Cicero: Poetry and the Criticism of Poetry," *CW*, LX (1967), 225–27.

2. For full bibliography, see D. F. S. Thomson, "Recent

Scholarship of Catullus (1960–69)," *CW*, LXV (1971), 120; H. Leon, "A Quarter-Century of Catullan Scholarship (1934–59)," *CW*, LIII (1960), 146; M. Schuster, s.v. "Valerius (Catullus)," *RE*, 2^a. Reihe, VII (1948), 2369 f.; Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*⁴, I (Munich, 1927), 300.

pared his own idolization of Lesbia in his poetry with Cicero's exposé of her in his speech and, overcome with shame at himself and loathing at the woman, characterized himself as the worst poet, detracting from himself in proportion as he conferred just praise and thanks on Cicero (*Catulli Veronensis Liber*² [Leipzig, 1893], 251–53).

Against this theory it suffices to quote C. J. Fordyce and K. Quinn. Fordyce writes (*Catullus: A Commentary* [Oxford, 1961], p. 213): "It seems poor psychology to suppose that Catullus would have gone out of his way to thank Cicero for defending his rival or that, though he could abuse Lesbia's morals himself, as he had a right to do (even in poem 11 she is still *mea puella*), he would have thanked an advocate for vilifying her professionally." Quinn says (*Catullus: The Poems* [New York, 1970], pp. 234 f.): "But would Catullus *really* feel grateful? Could the Lesbia poems survive Cicero's brilliant witty demonstration that falling in love with Clodia stamped you as the dupe of a worthless nymphomaniac?"

R. Westphal also connected the poem with Clodia, and found an occasion for it in 62. During Metellus' absence from Rome as proconsul in Cisalpine Gaul, Cicero had occasion to visit Clodia—perhaps only once, and on serious business, as he himself mentions in a letter to Metellus (*Fam.* 5. 2. 6). We learn from Plutarch (*Cic.* 29) that Cicero's wife Terentia suspected Clodia of wanting to marry Cicero, and of contriving this through a friend of Cicero, whose constant visits and attentions to her made Terentia suspicious. On this account Terentia hated Clodia's brother Clodius and, having a harsh disposition and lording it over Cicero, incited him to give evidence against Clodius in the Bona Dea scandal of 62/61. Cicero, it was thought (ἐδόκει), complied in order to allay her suspicions (πρὸς τὴν . . . Τερεντίαν ἀπολογούμενος).

On this information Westphal based a fanciful theory. Cicero was in love with Clodia, had an affair with her, wanted to marry her, but then broke off with her at the intervention of his wife. Meanwhile Catullus had met Clodia, had been invited to her house, and had fallen in love with her. When Cicero terminated his liaison with Clodia, he gave Catullus some kind of support in his courtship of her. Thereupon Catullus wrote his poem to thank Cicero for having ceded the field to him (*Catullus Gedichte in ihrem geschichtlichen Zusammenhange übersetzt und erklärt*² [Breslau, 1870], pp. 240–42).

This is not convincing. First, Plutarch does not say, and does not imply, that Cicero was in love with Clodia or had any sort of affair with her. In the light of what we know about Cicero, such an involvement is a priori improbable. Further, Catullus' presence in Clodia's house at this time is an unlikely assumption. But let us suppose that Catullus was there, and that Cicero was involved in some sort of affair with Clodia. For Catullus' poem, as understood by Westphal, to make sense, we have to assume that Cicero took Catullus into his confidence about his relationship with Clodia, or at least that he acted in such a way that Catullus became cognizant of it. Subsequently he even gave Catullus a leg up as Clodia's new suitor. Under the circumstances this was tantamount to abetting adultery. Would Cicero, only recently hailed as "father of his country," have conducted himself, at the cognizance of a virtual stranger many years his junior, with such thoughtless indiscretion as to risk a major scandal involving the wife of one of the most prominent men in the state? Not likely. That Cicero gave evidence against Clodia's brother for the purpose of allaying Terentia's suspicions (if we may believe Plutarch) is indicative of a man who goes to great lengths to

avoid a scandal, not of one who would foolishly invite one. But in any case, the details of the poem do not very well fit the occasion. What is the relevance of Catullus' poetry? Why does Catullus so emphatically (twice) call himself "the worst poet of all"?

W. Kroll suggested that the poem is the acknowledgment of a copy of one of Cicero's speeches, perhaps the one against Vatinius in 56 B.C. (*C. Valerius Catullus*⁵ [Stuttgart, 1968], p. 88). Cicero attacked Vatinius in February of 56 on the occasion of his defense of Sestius, which he shared with Crassus, Hortensius, and Catullus' friend Calvus.³ Vatinius was, at this time, a political enemy of Cicero, but also the *bête noire* of Calvus (who prosecuted him three times unsuccessfully) and, of course, one of Caesar's chief supporters. Although Cicero had shown signs that he might be willing to make his peace with Caesar, Calvus and Catullus were still Caesar's devoted enemies.⁴

But a speech, no matter how welcome, does not sufficiently explain, I believe, the elevated and hyperbolic language of the poem, the expression of *gratias maximas*, the relevance of *poeta*, the connection of Catullus as "worst poet" with the occasion for his gratitude ("gratias tibi maximas Catullus / agit pessimus omnium poeta"), and the point of the contrast (*tanto . . . quanto*) between the "worst poet" and the "best advocate."⁵

Others have taken the poem as ironic. The first to do so, apparently, was a certain Clumper of Amsterdam, in 1850. Baehrens in protest called him a *homo insigniter perversus* (*op. cit.*, p. 251), and

R. Ellis noted (*A Commentary on Catullus*² [Oxford, 1889], p. 170) that neither Petrarch in the fourteenth century, nor Balzac in the seventeenth, nor Lessing in the eighteenth, nor Wordsworth in the nineteenth, had detected any irony in the poem whatever. Nevertheless, Clumper's idea has found numerous advocates.

B. Schmidt, following Wölfflin, found an occasion in August 54, when Cicero successfully defended Vatinius against the prosecution of Calvus on a charge of bribery, after having attacked him in 56. This *volte-face*, Schmidt believed, offended Catullus and laid Cicero open to a charge of indiscriminate advocacy. Hence the ironic *double-entendre* of "the best of all advocates" and "the best advocate of all," that is, of both the innocent and the guilty. In addition, Cicero had probably on some occasion made a derogatory remark about Catullus' poetry. Poem 49 is his response ("Die Lebenszeit Catulls und die Herausgabe seiner Gedichte," *RhM*, LXIX [1914], 273 f.). J. H. Collins has advanced a similar argument, "Cicero and Catullus," *CJ*, XLVIII (1952), 17.

It is true that Cicero's defense of Vatinius drew much adverse criticism (M. Gelzer, *Cicero* [Wiesbaden, 1969], pp. 195 ff.). Cicero remarked in the fall of 55 in a letter to M. Marius: "I find myself obliged on occasion to defend men who have not deserved well of me at the request of those who *have* deserved well of me" (*Fam.* 7. 1. 4). In a letter to P. Lentulus in December 54 Cicero explained why he defended Vatinius. The decisive consideration was that, in June 56, he had become rec-

3. Perhaps Catullus and Hortensius were still friends at this time (cf. 65 and 66). But at some unknown time they appear to have had a falling-out (cf. 95. 3).

4. On Calvus' prosecutions, see G. Matthies, *De Licinii Calvi in P. Vatinius accusationibus* (Leipzig, 1874). Late in 57 B.C. Cicero proposed in the senate a special distinction to Caesar, a public thanksgiving of the unprecedented length of fifteen days in honor of his Gallic victories in 58 and 57: *Prov. cons.* 25-27; *Balb.* 61; *Caes. BG* 2. 35. In his harangue against Vatinius Cicero avoided any direct attack against Caesar.

5. T. Frank (*Catullus and Horace* [New York, 1928], p. 41) thought that "perhaps Cicero had written one of his generous letters of recommendation to his brother Quintus, the governor of Asia, in favor of Catullus' brother in Asia, or perhaps he had secured him that position on the staff, or passed on to Quintus instructions from Catullus at the death of his brother." Against these suggestions one can raise the same objections as against Kroll's.

onciled with Caesar, for various reasons, but primarily for the good of the state. Subsequently, early in 55, he had made his peace also with Vatinius, through the intervention of Pompey, and after this came "a remarkably urgent request from Caesar to undertake the defense" (*Fam.* 1. 9. 18–19).

I do not think it is very likely that Catullus would go out of his way to attack Cicero with such heavy sarcasm for defending Vatinius in the fall of 54, when he himself had made his peace with Caesar, in the spring of the same year (see below). Until late in 55, Catullus had vehemently attacked Caesar in his lampoons, but in a poem he wrote at about this time (in 54) he paid him a generous compliment (11. 10–12). So much for a *volte-face*. I agree with Kroll (*op. cit.*, p. 89) and others that the effect of the last three verses of poem 49 rests on the concordance of the three superlatives in their conjunction with *omnium*, *pessimus omnium*, *optimus omnium*, and therefore one should not in the last line attach *omnium* to *patronus*. Further, Schmidt's theory is uneconomical, we might say, in the sense that it attributes the poem to two separate provocations, the defense of Vatinius, and a criticism of Catullus' poetry. Would Cicero have understood the poem?

J. Ferguson considers the poem as, at least in part, an attack against Cicero as a lover of Lesbia (Clodia Metelli). "It has been curiously forgotten that Plutarch (*Cic.* 29, 2–3) says that Terentia was suspicious of Cicero's relations with Clodius's sister Clodia . . . ; that Cicero was certainly visiting her frequently and paying her close attention; and that Cicero's evidence in the Bona Dea business in 62–1 arose out of his need to justify himself before his wife . . . Now, Catullus [in poem 49]

describes Cicero as *disertissime Romuli nepotum*. The phrase recalls [poem 58] in which he tells Caelius that Lesbia, whom he had loved so much, *nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis / glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes* (58, 4–5). It seems unlikely that this is a further coincidence. We have (a) Catullus in love with Clodia (b) Cicero thought to be having an affair with Clodia. We have also (a) Catullus accusing Clodia of promiscuous sex with *magnanimi Remi nepotes* (b) Catullus describing Cicero . . . as *disertissime Romuli nepotum*. I conclude that the poem is ironic and bitter, and that the bitterness arises at least in part out of Cicero's relations with Lesbia" ("Catullus and Cicero," *Latomus*, XXV [1966], 872; cf. the theory of Westphal, above).

But, as we have already seen, Plutarch does *not* say that Terentia was suspicious of Cicero's "relations" with Clodia, nor that Cicero was "visiting her frequently and paying her close attention," and to say that Cicero's evidence against Clodius arose out of his "need" to justify himself before his wife is misleading. In short, there is no evidence that anybody, even Terentia herself, thought that Cicero was having an "affair" with Clodia. Furthermore, to connect poem 49 with poem 58 and suggest, as Ferguson does, that the *Remi nepotes* of poem 58 alludes to Cicero, is quite unconvincing. Surely, nobody could have thought of Cicero as conducting an affair with Clodia after his testimony against her brother, and his attacks against him immediately thereafter in the senate, in May 61 (*Att.* 1. 16). Indeed, from this time on, there are persistent indications of Cicero's dislike for Clodia.⁶ Therefore, poem 49, as interpreted by Ferguson, can hardly have been written after 61, while poem 58 was written at the end of Catullus'

6. *Att.* 1. 16. 5 (the reference of *noctes certarum mulierum* may be to Clodia); 2. 1. 5; *Dóm.* 92; *Cael. passim*; *Sest.* 16, 39; *Har. resp.* 38, 42, 59; *Q. fr.* 2. 3. 2; *Fam.* 1. 9. 15.

affair with Lesbia, almost certainly not before 56, and perhaps as late as 54. Meanwhile, Cicero had delivered his *Pro Caelio*. Finally, this interpretation does not satisfactorily explain the details of the poem, the *gratias maximas agit*, the *disertissimus* and *optimus patronus* for Cicero, the *pessimus poeta* for Catullus, and the relation to each other of the last two lines.

H. Gugel refers the poem to a literary occasion, and takes it as a sarcastic comment on one of Cicero's poems. He reminds us that, especially after his return from exile in 57, Cicero made sustained efforts to acquire fame as a poet, and not without success. Plutarch (*Cic.* 2) tells us that "he gained the reputation of being not only the best orator but also the best poet of the Romans." But Cicero's poetic creed as follower of Ennius was fundamentally opposed to that of Catullus and the "new poets." We can easily suppose that at some time one of Cicero's productions fell into the hands of Catullus. He then "dankt gleichsam darauf mit diesem ironiege-tränkten Billet, indem er sich scheinbar tief verbeugt vor dem Genius des anderen und sich selbst zum *pessimus omnium poeta* macht: vv. 6/7: *tanto pessimus omnium poeta / quanto tu optimus omnium* . . . —und da folgt nicht *poeta* . . . sondern *patronus*." The point of the poem is, "Schuster bleib bei deinem Leisten" ("Cicero und Catull," *Latomus*, XXVI [1967], 686–88).

It should be noted that Cicero's three remarks about the "new poets" were made

years after Catullus' death, and they are quite innocuous: *Att.* 7. 2. 1 (Nov. 50); *Or.* 161 (46); *Tusc.* 3. 45 (45/44).⁷ They indicate a difference of literary opinion, but not personal animosity or any sort of feud. Although this difference of opinion doubtless existed long before Catullus' death, it is rash to assume that Catullus disliked Cicero to the point of insulting him in this way. The evidence we do have suggests that the personal relations between Cicero and the *poetae novi* were amiable (T. Frank, "Cicero and the *Poetae Novi*," *AJP*, XL [1919], 369–415). We may add that the poem as understood by Gugel does not make intelligible its central statement, "*gratias tibi maximas Catullus / agit*" (5–6). One suspects that Cicero himself would not have known why the poem was written and what it meant to say.

D. F. S. Thomson also believes the poem is a response to a poem of Cicero, but to one which the latter sent in a spirit of friendship, with a request for criticism. The answer then is not sarcasm, as Gugel has it, but a mixture of genuine deference and irony. The lesson nevertheless is the same: Don't get out of your depths. "What Catullus says is: 'You, Cicero, with your notable *prosaic* gifts, have been gracious (in sending your verses to me), and I thank you very much indeed. You ask me for criticism. Now, I know I may be the worst of poets, while you, my dear sir (notice the emphatic *tu*), are quite the most distinguished of all—*advocates*'" ("Catullus and Cicero: Poetry and the

7. In *Att.* 7. 2. 1 Cicero says: "I arrived at Brundisium on Nov. 24 after enjoying your well-known good luck in traveling by sea; so fair for me 'blew from Epirus the most gentle of breezes, Onchesmites.' There, this spondaic verse you can pass off as your own to any of the new poets (*tōn neōtērōn*) you like." In *Or.* 161 he says apropos of the elision of final *s* in the older poets: "Therefore this was not considered objectionable in verse; now it is avoided by the new poets (*poetae novi*)." In *Tusc.* 3. 45 he says, in praise of his favorite Ennius: "O what an excellent poet! although he is despised by these admirers of Euphorion (*ab his cantoribus Euphorionis*)."

The first of these remarks is good-humored and suggests no disparagement. Cicero takes a whimsical satisfaction in his

verse and hints at the "new poets" as fastidious critics. The other two remarks were made almost a decade after Catullus' death, and some time after the death of two other prominent members of this first "modern" group, Calvus and Memmius, at a time when most of the others were either absent from Rome or unproductive. It is possible therefore that Cicero was referring not to the members of Catullus' circle, but to a new group of Alexandrians, the young Vergil, Cornelius Gallus, Valerius Cato, and perhaps Parthenius. C. Marchesi "I Cantores Euphorionis," *Atene e Roma*, IV (1901), 183–91. In any case, the remark in the *Orator* is an observation of fact, not a value judgment. The statement in the *Tusculans* indicates a difference of taste, not personal animosity.

Criticism of Poetry," *CW*, LX [1967], 225–30, at 227; cf. E. Laughton, "*Disertissime Romuli nepotum*," *CP*, LXV [1970], 1–7).

But is this what the poem says? Do not the phrases *pessimus omnium poeta* and *optimus omnium patronus* balance each other and are they not thus, whether ironic or not, equally affirmative? Would Cicero or any other reader be likely to ignore this balance by taking one phrase as merely hypothetical and rhetorical ("I *may* be the worst of poets," emphasis mine) and thus set it off against the other one ("you . . . *are* quite the most distinguished of all—advocates," emphasis mine)? And is not the balance of the last two lines reciprocal, that is, does not Catullus declare himself to be "*by as much* the worst poet" as Cicero is "the best advocate"? Since, on Thomson's interpretation, the professional poet is addressing the poetic dilettante and as a professional patently does not mean that he is "the worst poet of all," must not Cicero be less good an *advocate* (or prose writer) by as much as Catullus is not the worst poet? Would this not be a gratuitous insult? In short, one may wonder whether Cicero himself could have divined Thomson's meaning in the poem.⁸

In sum, all these interpretations, and all others not here mentioned, are subject to various, more or less serious reservations, and therefore none of them is entirely satisfactory. Let us review the elements of a satisfactory hypothesis. Cicero has performed some kind of outstanding good deed for Catullus, very possibly extricating him from some predicament or difficulty. For this favor Catullus wishes to express profound gratitude to Cicero. In performing this favor Cicero apparently has exercised

his powers of eloquence and persuasion (*disertissime*), and it justifies the complimentary designation of "advocate" or "patron" (*patronus*). There must be some connection between the "good deed" and whatever it served to remedy or effect, and Catullus' poetry, poetry which Catullus now has reason to regret or in some sense feel apologetic about. Specifically, there should be some explanation of the contrast between Catullus as the "worst poet" and Cicero as the "best patron." A scrutiny of what we know of Catullus and Cicero and their works reveals one occasion which provides a hypothesis for the poem that meets all the requirements. The occasion is Catullus' reconciliation with Caesar, after malicious attacks against him, and the hypothesis is that Cicero gave some help in effecting it. Poem 49 then is Catullus' expression of appreciation.

Catullus attacked Caesar and conspicuously also his protégé Mamurra in several insulting lampoons. Poem 29 flings insulting epithets at Caesar,⁹ reproaches him for his patronage of Mamurra, and complains about the latter's disgraceful behavior. 52 exclaims on the arrogance of a Nonius, perhaps a supporter of Pompey, and of Vatinius. 54, addressed to Caesar and an unknown Sufficius, ridicules several of Caesar's creatures and predicts further attacks. 57 is a vitriolic attack against Caesar and Mamurra accusing them of gross immorality and sexual perversion. 93 is addressed to Caesar and asserts total indifference to him. It is possible, but cannot be proven, that the unnamed adulterers of 113 are Caesar and Mamurra (see C. L. Neudling, *A Prosopography to Catullus* [Oxford, 1955], pp. 109 and 113). There are several epigrams against Ma-

8. Thomson appeals to poem 35 as the same "kind of diplomacy in the service of critical honesty" (p. 227). I fail to see this. Catullus' opinion of Caecilius' poem is quite clear. Poem 49, by Thomson's interpretation, is unintelligible.

9. I am at a loss as to whether the first ten lines are directed

at Caesar (so, e.g., Kroll, *ad loc.*, and the majority), or at Pompey (so Quinn, *ad loc.*), or perhaps at the Roman people (*cinaede Romule*, 9; so W. C. Scott, *CP*, LXVI [1971], 17 ff.). What remains is still an insult to Caesar.

murra, addressed by the insulting nickname *Mentula* (cf. 29. 13). 94 charges him as a congenital adulterer, 105 ridicules his literary efforts, 114 and 115 ridicule his pretensions as a landed proprietor. It is probable but not certain that the Piso of 28 and 47 is Caesar's father-in-law L. Calpurnius Piso Caesonius, the victim of Cicero's *In Pisonem* (see R. Syme, *C & M*, XVII [1956], 129–34). While neither poem contains an outright attack against Piso, they nevertheless register the poet's dislike. In contrast to all these poems, 11 contains a compliment to Caesar.

The chronology and biographical background of these pieces is obscure. We do know, however, that the *terminus post quem* for 29 and 11 is the late autumn of 55 B.C., since they allude to Caesar's expedition to Britain. Caesar invaded Britain in the summer of 55, and again in the summer of 54. The most likely date for 29 is late in 55, while Pompey was still consul ("eone nomine, urbis opulentissime† / socer generque, perdidistis omnia?" 23–24). 11 probably was written late in 54, after Caesar's second expedition. The first expedition was pretty much limited to the crossing of the Channel. The crossing as such is indicated by *horribile aequor* (line 11). The addition of *Britannos* (12) among Caesar's *monimenta* (10) then reasonably alludes to his first signal successes in Britain on his second expedition (cf. Ellis, *ad loc.*). Probably, then, some time, perhaps as much as a year, elapsed between poems 29 and 11. 29, like the other invectives, is openly hostile, while 11 is as openly complimentary. It appears that something had happened in the meantime to change Catullus' attitude, and this can only be the reconciliation with Caesar reported by Suetonius (*Iul.* 73): "Valerium Catullum, a quo sibi versiculis de Mamurra perpetua stigmata imposita non dissimulaverat, satis facientem eadem die adhibuit cenae hos-

pitioque patris eius, sicut consuerat, uti perseveravit."

It is commonly held that the meeting took place in the early part of 54, when Caesar was in winter quarters in Cisalpine Gaul, perhaps in Verona (M. Gelzer, *Caesar*⁶ [Eng. tr., Cambridge, Mass., 1968], p. 134). We infer that it was Catullus who initiated the reconciliation; that he sought out Caesar, made his apologies, and that Caesar accepted.

This action of Catullus may seem paradoxical after his earlier hostility to Caesar. But we should note that, except for poem 93, he always attacked Caesar along with one or several of his subordinates, especially Mamurra. We may surmise from poems 41 and 43 (perhaps also 42; cf. Kroll, *op. cit.*, p. 76) that Mamurra's girl friend once treated Catullus to a humiliating experience. At that time Mamurra seems to have been in financial difficulties, for in both poems Catullus calls her the "girl friend of the bankrupt from Formiae" (*decoctoris amica Formiani*), that is, Mamurra. The date is probably 58 B.C. (Neudling, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 f.). From 58 until 55, Mamurra served with Caesar in Gaul, and he returned a very wealthy man. Catullus now attacked him with renewed hostility, partly because of his new and ill-gotten wealth, partly because this wealth now insured an even greater success with the ladies. And Catullus blamed Mamurra's patron Caesar for his creature's grand fortune (29). Only the year before he himself had been bitterly disappointed in his own hopes for enrichment, when he served on Memmius' staff in Bithynia (10 and 28). It appears, then, that much of Catullus' animosity toward Caesar devolved on him from the envy and jealousy the poet felt toward his obnoxious underling, and to a lesser degree toward others of the same ilk. The phrase (*iambis*) *immerentibus* of 54. 7 perhaps suggests that Catullus' invectives

ought to displease (*displicere*, 4) but not necessarily to anger (*irascere*, 6) Caesar, since they were directed at his henchmen more than at himself. From the (probably) early date of Catullus' feud with Mamurra (41 and 43), it may be supposed that Catullus' hatred for him was the initial cause of his animosity toward Caesar, and it is perhaps significant that according to Suetonius (*loc. cit.*) Caesar felt branded by Catullus' epigrams, not "about himself," but "about Mamurra."

If, then, Catullus disliked Caesar primarily as the over-generous patron of undeserving underlings, there was not much serious substance in his opposition, and his decision to seek a reconciliation is not difficult to accept. In any case, the change of heart is attested by what can only be a sincere compliment in 11. 9–12: "sive trans altas gradietur Alpes, / Caesaris visens monumenta magni, / Gallicum Rhenum, horribile aequor ultri- / mosque Britannos."¹⁰

It has been suggested that the interview took place *ca.* Feb. 22, 54, when Catullus had come up from Rome to keep the traditional day of family reunion following the *Parentalia* (see T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* [Leicester, 1969], p. 36). It is unlikely that Catullus made the decision to seek the reconciliation on the spur of the moment, after arriving in the province. He must have given some thought before leaving Rome to the prospect of ugly

scenes and recriminations from his father, who was Caesar's friend and frequent host, and who doubtless felt deeply embarrassed by his son's bad behavior. Unless by now that behavior had resulted in alienating Caesar from his friend, Catullus even had to consider the risk of meeting Caesar in his father's house. These prospects must have seemed formidable. Not only had the latest attack been unquestionably nasty (29), but Caesar had already made it very clear that he felt deeply aggrieved by the poet's lampoons (Suet. *loc. cit.*). Moreover, there is reason to believe that Caesar himself at an earlier point had made some attempt, perhaps through Catullus' father, to come to terms with the poet, only to be rebuffed by another insulting billet (93; cf. Kroll, *op. cit.*, p. 265; M. Schuster, *RE*, 2^e. Reihe, VII [1948], 2371). The chances of finding Caesar in a magnanimous and conciliatory mood must indeed have seemed precarious.

Under these circumstances, it was common sense to look for someone to smooth the way, to write a letter to Caesar, to assure him of the sincerity of the poet's desire to come to terms and make amends. There was no one in Rome at this time so ideally suited to perform this favor as Cicero.¹¹

Cicero was now a friend of Caesar. But once he had been, like Catullus, his enemy. After close associations in their youth, the exigencies of politics had pulled

10. Catullus' sincerity in this rapprochement has occasionally been questioned, without good reasons, as I shall try to show elsewhere.

11. Note that when Catullus' best friend Calvus sought a reconciliation with Caesar, he approached him through intermediaries (*per amicos*; Suet. *Iul.* 73). Was Catullus one of them? In view of Calvus' prosecutions in 54 B.C. of Vatinius, of the triumvirate tribune C. Cato, and of Livius Drusus, who was probably a Caesarian (F. Münzer, *s.v.* "Livius (Drusus)," *RE*, XIII [1927], 882 f.), it is probable that his reconciliation did not take place before the end of that year, *per litteras*, since Caesar remained in Gaul during the winter of 54/53 B.C. (cf. also Suet. *loc. cit.*: "C. Calvo, post famosa epigrammata de reconciliatione per amicos agenti, ultro ac prior scripsit").

It was most likely some time in 54 B.C. that several other friends or acquaintances of Catullus made their peace with

Caesar: Furius Bibaculus, C. Memmius, and perhaps also Helvius Cinna and Q. Cornificius. On Bibaculus, see J. W. Spaeth, "Caesar's Friends and Enemies among the Poets," *CJ*, XXXII (1937), 550 ff. On Memmius, Suet. *Iul.* 23, 49, 73; *Cic. Att.* 4. 15. 7. If poem 113, which is addressed to Cinna, contains an allusion to Caesar as an adulterer, we may infer that at this time, in 55 B.C., Cinna shared Catullus' animosity toward him. Later he was one of Caesar's friends and supporters: Plut. *Caes.* 68. 2, *Brut.* 20. 5; Dio 44. 50. 4. Cornificius was a Caesarian at the latest by 48 B.C., when he was quaestor, but nothing is known about any earlier relations with Caesar: G. Wissowa, *s.v.* "Cornificius (8)." *RE*, IV (1901), 1624. Since there is no evidence that any of these men became reconciled with Caesar *before* Catullus did, there is no reason to suppose that any of them were intermediaries in his reconciliation.

the two men apart, and since his consulship in 63, Cicero had been one of Caesar's most prestigious and influential opponents. It has been suggested that, after the formation of the triumvirate in 60, most of the young aristocrats among the *poetae novi* moved close to Cicero to consolidate their opposition to Caesar and his fellow dynasts (T. Frank, *loc. cit.*). In any case, not only had Cicero been a political adversary of Caesar but, like Catullus and others, he had also, at least on one occasion, insulted him personally, as a sexual pervert (Suet. *Iul.* 49; cf. Plut. *Caes.* 4. 4). However, after the conference at Luca, in the spring of 56, Cicero had come to see, finally, the hopelessness of continued opposition to the triumvirs, as he had already realized the hopelessness of continued support of the fickle and ungrateful senatorial aristocrats. In June of 56, in his speech *De provinciis consularibus*, he publicly announced his reconciliation with Caesar, assured him of his friendship, and praised him as a great general and a great man.

We may believe that Cicero was sincere both in his praise and in the assurance of his personal friendship for Caesar, even if the decision to support him actively was motivated more by necessity and expediency. (For his own apologia to one of the patricians a few years later, see *Fam.* 1. 9.) But Caesar needed the support of Rome's greatest and most influential orator as much as Cicero needed the security which only an alliance with Caesar could give. Beyond this, there were genuine affinities of taste and temperament between the two men. They considered each other personally congenial and attractive. They became assiduous correspondents, and their rela-

tionship came to be marked by mutual respect, admiration, and even genuine affection.¹²

For Catullus, in view of Cicero's opposition to Caesar in the past, his reconciliation with him, and his friendship and influence with him in the present, there was no one in Rome at this time whose assistance in this matter could be considered more desirable and expected to be more efficacious. We need not doubt that Cicero was pleased to oblige the young poet. There are preserved in his correspondence numerous letters of recommendation which he wrote to a variety of people, including Caesar, on behalf of friends or mere acquaintances, in a variety of causes; and these letters provide "impressive evidence of Cicero's large-hearted *bonhomie*, and his unflinching readiness to do a friend, or even an acquaintance, a good turn" (W. G. Williams, *Cicero, Letters to his Friends*, III [Cambridge, Mass., 1954], 5).¹³ Cicero could expect Caesar to welcome a sincere change of heart in the acid-tongued lampoonist, who could be so loving and affectionate a friend. Whether a letter from Cicero was in the event necessary cannot be known and could not be predicted. Caesar accepted Catullus' apologies graciously, and Catullus with equal graciousness expressed his appreciation to the great advocate by the tribute of poem 49.

Disertissime Romuli nepotum: Cicero's reputation as Rome's greatest orator (*disertissime*) was universally acknowledged, and had been ever since his speeches against Verres. The compliment, then, was as justified as it was welcome to Cicero, who was always avid for praise. As a native of a municipal town and as a member of the equestrian order, he always felt self-

12. *Fam.* 1. 9. 12, 18; 7. 5. 1; 7. 6; 7. 7. 2; 7. 8. 1; 7. 9. 1; 7. 10. 3; 7. 17. 2. *Q. fr.* 2. 12. 4-5; 2. 13. 1; 2. 15a; 2. 15b. 2; 2. 16; 3. 1. 8-25; 3. 3. 1; 3. 5. 3-4; 3. 8. 1, 3; 3. 9. 6. *Att.* 4. 15. 10; 4. 16. 7-8; 4. 18. 5; 4. 19. 2. See also *Brut.* 253; Suet. *Iul.* 56; Plin. *HN* 7. 117 (dedication of the *De analogia* to Cicero,

spring 54 B.C.). Cf. F. Lossmann, *Cicero und Caesar im Jahre 54* (*Hermes Einzelschriften*, XVII [Wiesbaden, 1962]), pp. 106 ff., and *passim*.

13. *Fam.* 13 consists entirely of letters of recommendation, except for 13. 68.

conscious among the assured and often arrogant Roman aristocrats. With the stately phrase *Romuli nepotum* Catullus compliments him as pre-eminent among them all, as one of the most distinguished of the descendants of Rome's founder and first king, as a true Roman.¹⁴

Cicero is the "most eloquent" of the Romans "quot sunt quotque fuere, Marce Tulli, / quotque post aliis erunt in annis." These words magnify the compliment by raising the address to a formal, almost ceremonial, level. They had a venerable literary ancestry in the Hesiodic formula $\tau\acute{\alpha} \tau' \epsilon\acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\alpha \tau\acute{\alpha} \tau' \epsilon\sigma\acute{\sigma}\acute{\omicron}\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha \pi\rho\acute{\omicron} \tau' \epsilon\acute{\omicron}\nu\tau\alpha$ (*Theog.* 38).¹⁵ The unusual double appellation by both *praenomen* and *nomen* is in character with the deferential tone of the address and suitable to a formal expression of thanks to a *patronus*.¹⁶

"Gratias tibi maximas Catullus / agit pessimus omnium poeta." The words *gratias . . . Catullus* form the center of the poem and express its central point, Catullus' gratitude. The statement is completed in the following line with *agit . . . poeta*. The direct attachment to the *gratiarum actio* of the words *pessimus omnium poeta* indicates a close connection between Catullus' self-disparagement and the occasion for his gratitude, the good deed which Cicero had rendered him. And this notion is reinforced in the following and final two lines, "tanto pessimus omnium poeta, / quanto tu optimus omnium patronus."

The first word of the poem, *disertissime*,

now attaches itself as attribute, along with *optimus*, to the last word of the poem, *patronus*. Cicero is contrasted as a most eloquent and excellent advocate and patron to Catullus as a very bad poet. More precisely, Catullus is "the worst poet of all" *in proportion* as Cicero is "the best advocate of all," and it is in terms of this relationship and contrast that Catullus expresses "warmest thanks" to him. The application of the poem to the occasion for which it was written may now be stated.

Cicero has been most eloquent and persuasive (*disertissimus*), and generous and successful (*optimus*), in his intercession (*patronus*) for Catullus with Caesar. For this Catullus expresses his "warmest thanks" (*gratias maximas*), and with particularly good reason, because through his vitriolic epigrams (*pessimus poeta*) he himself had caused the state of affairs, the enmity of Caesar, in which Cicero has now so graciously interceded for him. Catullus, then, does not regard himself as an inept or inferior poet. He calls himself "by as much the worst poet" as Cicero is "the best patron and advocate," in the sense that the more ill-considered and infelicitous his poems were in causing Caesar's chagrin (*pessimus poeta*), the more deserving of appreciation was Cicero's intercession to bring about his reconciliation (*optimus patronus*).¹⁷

To be sure, there is poetic exaggeration both in the praise of Cicero and in the self-disparagement of the poet, but this we may attribute to Catullus' desire to pay the

14. Lucretius (4. 683) and Vergil (8. 638) call the Romans *Romulidae*, perhaps after Ennius. In 34. 22-24 Catullus prays to Diana for continued blessings on *Romuli gentem*. In 28. 15 he chides Piso and Memmius as *opprobria Romulei Remique*. In 58. 5 he uses *magnanimi Remi nepotes* sarcastically, as an indictment of contemporary Romans. Catiline insulted Cicero as *inquinus civis Romae*, Sall. *Cat.* 31. 7. In *Sull.* 22-25 Cicero had to defend himself against the charge of being a *peregrinus*.

15. Cf. Cic. *Red. Quir.* 16: "Cn. Pompeius vir omnium qui sunt fuerunt erunt virtute sapientia gloria princeps." Catullus' use of the formula in 21. 2-3 and 24. 2-3 in a jocular context is irrelevant to this poem.

16. Cf. Cic. *Mil.* 94: "ubi denique tua illa, M. Tulli, quae plurimis fuit auxilio, vox atque defensio?"; In *Cat.* 1. 27: "si mecum patria . . . sic loquatur 'M. Tulli, quid agis?'"; Pliny's apostrophe to Cicero (*HN* 7. 116), "facundiae Latinarumque litterarum parens," with the question "sed quo te, M. Tulli, piaculo taceam?"

17. This answers O. Weinreich's assertion (*Die Distichen des Catull* [Tübingen, 1926], p. 19) that those who regard the poem as sincere must also believe that Catullus seriously thought that he was *pessimus omnium poeta*.

older man a gracious compliment and express sincere gratitude. Enthusiasm, graciousness, and the capacity for gratitude are among Catullus' best attested qualities. Doubtless Cicero appreciated the poem, and so, we may suppose, did Caesar, for it gave discreet testimony to the sincerity of the poet's change of attitude toward him (cf. "Caesaris visens monimenta magni," 11. 10). Finally, we can understand why Catullus chose not to state *expressis verbis* the occasion of the poem. The whole story of his enmity to Caesar, Cicero's intercession for him, and his apology and reconciliation was delicate enough not to be broadcast for public consumption.

This interpretation cannot be proven any more than any of the others. But it is bio-

graphically and psychologically as plausible as any of them, and more plausible than some. What recommends it above the others, I believe, is that it accounts fully not only for the occasion of the poem but for all of its details. Since certainty is impossible, this is perhaps the best that can be hoped for or expected. At the very least the hypothesis which I have proposed demonstrates the feasibility of a literal interpretation of the poem; and whether we regard it as a sincere and gracious expression of gratitude to Cicero, or as an underhanded, sarcastic insult, does make a difference for our conception of Catullus as a human being as well as a poet.

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