NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THE "TERCE MUSE" OF CATULLUS 101*

The paradox of Catullus 101 is central to the entire body of that poet's work: namely, how does the poet express his emotions—be they of joy or grief, love or hate—so effectively in what is such apparently simple verse? "Apparently" is used here with reservations, for, though the surface and meaning of the poetry are neither intricate nor complex, the stylistic construction is. Moreover, there is the further problem of looking at this particular poem afresh, of forgetting one's past impressions of it, not in order to arrive at a new interpretation, but rather to appreciate its polished craft. Of all Catullus' poetry, 101 is perhaps second only to *Odi et amo* in familiarity and, hence, is too often dismissed as simple and unrewarding for repeated study. Yet it has a balance which is the product of an intense effort and vision.[1]

Since the poem is an elegy to his dead brother, Catullus' use of *frater* provides a useful starting point. As a nominative or vocative form, this noun occurs three times in the poem (in lines 2, 6, and 10), in each case in the second line of its respective couplet. In each instance, *frater* begins the dactyl that follows immediately after the spondaic half-foot, which is nothing more than a single, isolated, long syllable. Each time Catullus invokes his brother, it follows this abrupt and harsh variation in the rhythm. This metrical technique is highly appropriate to the elegiac form generally, and to this poem specifically, for just as his brother's life was incomplete with its sudden end, so is the foot which immediately preceeds *frater*.

This highly architectural placement of *frater* is confined not to lines spaced at exact intervals, but to the same foot in each line. There is another arresting aspect: in each dactyl, *frater* makes up the first two morae and the rhythmic unit is completed by the second short syllable whose vowel is, in each instance, *a*. Furthermore, in two of the three instances of this, the syllable making up the final foot is the preposition *ad*, appearing once alone and once as the prefix to the participle *adempte*. It is appropriate that after each use of *frater*, an *a* with its softness of tone should follow, just as each time the noun is preceded by the incomplete foot.

In short, the movement here is from the half-foot with its abrupt and unfinished quality to the noun *frater* which begins the dactyl. This, in turn, is followed by the final syllable in the dactyl, *a* or *ad* with their tonal softness which is warranted by memories of his brother. A quick comparison of *ad* with a harsher sounding preposition such as *ex* makes this point clear. It would seem that Catullus' first emotion on invoking his *frater* is not anger or bitterness at his untimely death, but, more fundamentally, love. Catullus' purpose in the studied and precise use of the noun, *frater*, is not merely the sort of poetic virtuosity that, say, Alexander Pope indulges in on occasion. This studied placement creates an effect much like the refrain of the chorus in ancient tragedy, in that this exact repetition provides the balance so important in such a strictly formal genre as the elegy. This device also creates a rhythm which adds an element of

1. E. A. Havelock in his intelligent and graceful book, *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (New York, 1967), writes: "Catullan lyric, with its apparent directness, bareness, spontaneity, on examination turns out to be no exception to the law that what we call spontaneous emotion is powerful only when compressed into exact form, and that the elements of form are handed down from age to age and from culture to culture" (p. 133).

force and movement. To the attentive reader, *frater* is a cue that marks the poem off into three distinct sections.

Another example of symmetry in 101 occurs in the first couplet of the poem, in which Catullus tells of his journey to his brother's tomb. In the first line of the poem he creates a balance by beginning the first and last halves of the line with the syllable *mul-* in *multas* and *multa*. Conversely, in the second line, he ends each half with the syllable *-as* in *inferias* and *miseras*. By doing so, Catullus adds a measured solemnity to the rhythm, for each line is divided into two distinct phrases which retard the meter.

T. S. Eliot in his essay, "Johnson as Critic and Poet,"[2] describes this stylistic device as the unity of diction and rhythm. He writes further: "They imply each other: for the diction—the vocabulary and construction—will determine the rhythm, and the rhythms which a poet finds congenial will determine his diction." In other words, the use of the same syllable, be it *mul-* or *-as*, is more than a means of creating a structural balance or symmetry; it is the synthesis of the elements of rhythm, diction, and meaning which creates this balance. Catullus' use of this construction in the early lines is important because it opens the poem on a particularly somber note.

This unity of diction and rhythm is also carried well by alliteration, a device of which Catullus makes full use in 101. In ten lines, there are four instances of alliteration based on words beginning with *m*: *multas / multa* (1); *munere / mortis* (3); *miser / mihi* (6); and *multam / manantia* (9), all of which, once again, are equidistant from each other. There is, in general, an emphatic and deliberate use of the *m*-sound; in fact, almost twenty percent of the words in the poem begin with it. This emphasis adds strength to the poem, not only because

of the subtle, yet strong, subrhythm it creates, which is separate from the formal hexameter, but also because of the gravity of tone it adds. It is curious that Catullus never employs the word *mors*, except for an oblique reference in *munere / mortis* in line three. This constant use of the *m*-sound, however, certainly does more than hint in that direction.

The elegy, because of its occasion, demands this concern with craft more than does any other form of short poetry.[3] The poem is moving, not only because of Catullus' "craft or sullen art," to borrow a phrase from Dylan Thomas, but also because of the central conceit of his brother's tomb. There is, to Catullus, something profoundly missing from his brother's funeral, namely, the paying of his own fraternal respects. The surviving brother has not ritually consecrated his dead brother's grave; he has not thrown his three handfuls of earth with the words, *vale. vale. vale.*

In pursuing further this conceit of the grave, there are several important lines which should be quoted: "ut te postremo donarem munere mortis / et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem" (3–4); and ". . . prisco quae more parentum / tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias" (7–8).[4] There is a gradual build-up of symbols and images of death until the poem threatens to disintegrate into a form of self-indulgent catharsis. Catullus is too consummate an artist, however, to allow that to happen. Instead he breaks off; he must turn away. He begins to weep and then he knows he must leave.

The monument, the mute ashes, and the ritual are all integral parts of his need to fulfill his fraternal duty. And when the poet ends his elegy with the phrase, *ave atque vale*, he has satisfied this need. There is a tendency among translators to render this simply as "good-bye, good-bye."[5] This is to miss the

2. T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), pp. 162–92, esp. p. 167.

3. A comparison with Swinburne's elegy for Baudelaire, "Ave Atque Vale," illustrates the basic principle about this type of poem: that it is most successful when direct and economical rather than excessively long and rhetorical. I am indebted to Professor R. K. Biswas, formerly of York University, for calling my attention to Swinburne's poem; the critical opinion of it expressed in this note is, of course, my own. See Sir Edmund Gosse, C.B. and T. J. Wise (eds.),

The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne (New York, 1968), III, 44.

4. C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 77–78.

5. See, e.g.: R. A. Swanson (trans.), *Odi et Amo: The Complete Poetry of Catullus* (New York, 1959), who renders this passage, "Good-bye for now: farewell for all the years" (p. 106); and H. Gregory (trans.), *The Poems of Catullus* (New York, 1956), who translates it as "good-bye, good-bye" (p. 167).

point. Catullus is not using the traditional farewell to the dead as his model here, so much as he is saying, "Hail and farewell." While it is true that Lewis and Short under the entry for *aveo* render *ave* to mean "hail" as well as "farewell" and go so far as to cite the final line of 101 as an example of the latter meaning, a problem remains. The reader must try to resolve the question, why does the poet use this phrase rather than some other which would avoid the confusion which appears to be the result of carelessness. The argument that Catullus uses the phrases for metrical considerations implies that he is a second-rate technician, something which only the most insensitive of readers could believe. The solution to this difficulty can be arrived at by considering *ave* as an example of Empsonian ambiguity, by which is meant "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language."[6] In other words, *ave* carries the dual meanings of "hail" and "farewell" and combines them to create a bitter irony.

This phrase serves as the summation to the poem, for Catullus has journeyed to the grave, performed the rites, and must leave, all within a brutally short time. Hence he must say, and not without a touch of tragic irony, "Hail and

farewell." The use of "good-bye, good-bye" here would be too formulaic, not for what Catullus, the brother, must do, but for what Catullus, the poet, must write.

Catullus 101 is an elegy of the highest order. It is taut and compact without being barren. This is accomplished through the poet's use of the central conceit and through his poetic economy, which here is turned to brilliant advantage. As a result, the reader's attention is focused on the poet's feelings for his brother. However, the poet's emotions alone would not be sufficient to create a poem of this quality; there must be craftsmanship. It is Catullus' great triumph that he is possessed of craftsmanship in such abundance that he is able to write with this great felicity. As a result, the pyrotechnics of the poem assume their proper, secondary, position.

Let the final words, however, be those of Robert Herrick, that seventeenth-century poetic brother of Catullus:

> Then this immensive cup
> Of *Aromatike* wine,
> *Catullus*, I quaffe up
> To that Terce Muse of thine.[7]

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6. W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*[3] (New York, 1966), p. 1.
7. "To Live Merrily, and to Trust to Good Verses," in

L. C. Martin (ed.), *The Poetry of Robert Herrick* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 80–81.

SUETONIUS AND SWIMMING: A NOTE ON *DIV. AUG.* 64. 3

Describing the way in which Augustus brought up Gaius and Lucius Caesar, Suetonius states that the emperor "nepotes et litteras et natare aliaque rudimenta per se plerumque docuit, ac nihil aeque elaborauit quam ut imitarentur chirographum suum" (*Div. Aug.* 64. 3): "he taught his grandsons reading, swimming, and other basic lessons, for the most part instructing them personally, and he

took especial care to see that they could imitate his own handwriting." Although all the manuscripts undoubtedly read *natare* in this passage,[1] a majority of scholars prefer Lipsius' conjecture *notare*.[2] For it has been argued not only that some form of writing is far more appropriate to the context,[3] but also that it "is difficult to imagine the aging princeps in the role of swimming instructor."[4]

1. See the editions of M. Ihm (ed. maior, Leipzig, 1907; ed. minor, Leipzig, 1908), J. C. Rolfe ("Loeb," 1914), and H. Ailloud ("Budé," 1932). The reading is accepted without comment only by M. Adams, *Suetoni Divus Augustus* (London, 1939), E. R. Parker, *AJP*, LXVII (1946), 36, and H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (London, 1972), p. 117.
2. Thus Ihm in the app. crit. to both editions notices the conjecture with the comment *fort. recte*. See also J. Geel

(ed.), *Ruhnkenii scholia in Suetoni Vitas Caesarum* (Leyden, 1828), p. 179; E. S. Shuckburgh, *Suetoni Divus Augustus* (Cambridge, 1896); M. A. Levi, *Suetoni Divus Augustus*[2] (Florence, 1958). The conjecture is printed without more ado by C. L. Roth, *Suetoni Opera omnia* (Leipzig, 1886), by Ailloud, and by M. Rat ("Garnier," Paris, 1931).
3. Cf. Shuckburgh and Levi *ad loc.*
4. M. L. Clarke, *CP*, LXIII (1968), 44; cf. Geel, *loc. cit.*