

linked by inherited bonds of guest-friendship. How should he have Diomedes react to this situation? Clearly, for Diomedes to show any sign of annoyance would be unthinkable, for this would imply disrespect for the ties of guest-friendship. Homer has Diomedes respond in the only way a hero of his caliber can—with unfeigned joy at meeting a ξένοϛ. This in no way diminishes the need to compensate him for being deprived of a significant victory. Rather, Diomedes' admirable behavior increases his merit, particularly in the eyes of Zeus. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that his merit should be recognized in the exchange of gifts and that Zeus should intervene to bring this about.

It remains true, nevertheless, that Glaucus seems unfairly slighted by the incident. I doubt that this would have troubled Homer and his audience as much as it does the modern reader. Homer has no qualms about protecting the heroic standing of the major Greek warriors even at the cost of slighting—often unfairly, to our way of thinking—the ability of the Trojans in general and of Hector in particular. At times he will do this even to the detriment of the plot. For instance, the plot requires that only Achilles should be able to defeat Hector. Otherwise, what is all the fuss about when Achilles withdraws? Yet at different points Homer indicates that Ajax, Diomedes, and Agamemnon are all superior to Hector in battle.¹³ On the other hand, in Book 11, when various major Greek heroes are wounded, including Agamemnon, Diomedes, Odysseus, and Machaon, Homer does not allow Hector to inflict any of these wounds. We find Homer's treatment of Hector and Glaucus problematic because we do not share the Greek-centered viewpoint of Homer and his audience. Modern readers can scarcely avoid seeing the Glaucus-Diomedes episode as a unique demonstration of the importance of guest-friendship, charming for the most part but marred by the shabby treatment meted out to Glaucus at the end. For Homer and his audience, it was, first and foremost, another victory for Diomedes.

DAVID A. TRAILL
*University of California,
 Davis*

13. Hector is presented as inferior to Ajax at 7.244–312, to Diomedes at 11.349–60, and, apparently, to Agamemnon at 11.186–213; see M. Willcock, *A Companion to the "Iliad"* (Chicago, 1976), p. 128.

ASCONIUS 14–15 CLARK AND THE DATE OF Q. MUCIUS SCAEVOLA'S COMMAND IN ASIA

As is well known, Q. Mucius Scaevola (cos. 95) alienated the *publicani* by his strict supervision of their activities in Asia when he was proconsul there at some point in the 90s. This offense was at least partially avenged by the prosecution and conviction of his legate and adviser, P. Rutilius Rufus, at a date generally assumed to be 92. The date of Scaevola's tenure of Asia is an old controversy, for we are nowhere told whether he proceeded to the province during (or immediately after) his consulship or his praetorship: if he went out as consul, the

date of his sojourn in Asia would be 95–94; if as praetor, 98–97 or slightly earlier (assuming—as we are entitled to do in the case of a highly respected member of a prominent family—approximately the minimum interval between praetorship and consulship). As is the case with all good chronological cruces, more than mere dates is at issue: Scaevola's Asian proconsulship has a major bearing not only on the history of Roman administration in the region on the eve of the Mithridatic Wars, but also on Roman domestic political history, especially through its connection with the trial of Rutilius.

The crucial item of evidence is a maddening passage in Asconius' commentary on Cicero *In Pisonem* (14–15 Clark):

L. autem Crasso collega fuit Q. Scaevola pontifex qui cum animadverteret Crasso propter summam eius in re publica potentiam ac dignitatem senatum in decernendo triumpho gratificari, non dubitavit rei publicae magis quam collegae habere rationem ac ne fieret S.C. intercessit. Idem provinciam cuius cupiditate plerique etiam boni viri deliquerant, deposuerat ne sumptui esset oratio.

The comment is occasioned by Cicero's mention (*Pis.* 62) of L. Licinius Crassus' dubious claim to a triumph for supposed successes in Gaul, which was his consular province in 95 (Cic. *De inv.* 2. 111; Val. Max. 3. 7. 6). We learn from Asconius that Q. Scaevola, his colleague in the consulship, prevented the senate from passing the necessary decree of authorization. The final sentence bears upon the date of Scaevola's Asian command, but its meaning and its relationship to what precedes it are highly problematic.

There are two key questions on which a solution depends. First, does the phrase *provinciam deponere* in this instance mean (a) to decline a province before one has proceeded to it (as Cicero did in 63) or (b) to depart before the legal term from a province that one has already occupied?¹ Second, was the province to which Asconius alludes (c) Scaevola's praetorian province or (d) his consular province?² The final four words of the passage (*ne sumptui esset oratio*) are too corrupt to enter usefully into the argument; proposed emendations depend too much on assumptions about the meaning of the main clause to assist us in its interpretation.³

Proponents of the early date for Scaevola's Asian command accept either the combination of (a) and (d)—which would mean that Scaevola resigned his consular province before proceeding to it and, consequently, that his visit to Asia took place during or following his praetorship (so Balsdon)—or the combination of (b) and (c), which would mean that Scaevola departed prematurely

1. For the first interpretation, see J. P. V. D. Balsdon, "Q. Mucius Scaevola the Pontifex and *Oratio Provinciae*," *CR* 51 (1937): 8–10; for the second, E. Badian, "Q. Mucius Scaevola and the Province of Asia," *Athenaeum* 34 (1956): 108–9. Acceptance of Badian's view is central to the argument of B. A. Marshall, "The Date of Q. Mucius Scaevola's Governorship of Asia," *Athenaeum* 54 (1976): 117–30 (esp. p. 130; cf. pp. 123–25); but Marshall apparently returns to the alternative interpretation in his *Historical Commentary on Asconius* (Columbia, Mo., 1985), p. 110.

2. Praetorian: Marshall, "Scaevola's Governorship," pp. 123–26. That the province was consular is assumed from the context by others, although Badian notes the possibility that Asconius was thinking of a praetorian province ("Scaevola and Asia," p. 107).

3. For possible emendations, none of them persuasive, see Balsdon, "Scaevola and *Oratio Provinciae*," p. 9, and Badian, "Scaevola and Asia," pp. 109–10. *Sumptui* has suggested emendations that give as a motive Scaevola's public-spirited frugality; but it is by no means clear that *sumptui* is not corrupt as well as, or even instead of, *oratio*.

from his praetorian province; and since we know that he was in Asia for only nine months before handing the province over to his legate, Rutilius Rufus (Cic. *Att.* 5. 17. 5), it is tempting to identify this province as Asia, especially if the words “cuius cupiditate plerique etiam boni viri deliquerant” are taken as an allusion to Asia (so Marshall). On the other hand, the combination of (b) and (d) would mean that Scaevola left his consular province early and would suggest (for the same reasons as in the last case) that that province was Asia (so Badian). No one has advocated the combination of (a) and (c), which would also lead to the conclusion that Asia was Scaevola’s consular province.⁴

I believe that the first of these interpretations is correct and that it can be substantially strengthened by an examination of the text on which Asconius is commenting. But first, a critique of the other two views espoused thus far.

Marshall made an important contribution to our understanding of this passage by noting that whatever *provinciam* . . . *deposuerat* means, Scaevola must have performed this action before the end of his consular year, 95: he could have vetoed (*intercessit*) Crassus’ triumph only while he was still consul, and the pluperfect tense of *deposuerat* indicates an action prior to that denoted by the perfect tense of *intercessit*.⁵ Scaevola could hardly have been away in Asia for nine months (Cic. *Att.* 5. 17. 5) of his consular year; and (to add a point that Marshall does not make) we know that Scaevola was in Asia after completing whatever magistracy he had held, for he is given the title *proconsul* (ἀνθύπατος) in inscriptions.⁶ Accordingly, Badian’s interpretation of the phrase *provinciam deponere* here (i.e., to depart from one’s province before the legal term) cannot be combined with the assumption, which he makes, that Asconius is speaking of a consular province. One line of interpretation is thus eliminated.

Another can quickly follow. In his article of 1976 Marshall argued that the passage refers to Scaevola’s early departure from Asia, which would have been his praetorian province. Although he apparently no longer holds this position,⁷ it will be useful to clear the ground by showing why it too is unpersuasive.

First, nothing in the passage implies that Asconius is speaking of Asia. There is no reason why Asconius “must” be thinking of Scaevola’s famous Asian command rather than some other event;⁸ and (*pace* Marshall) there is no assurance that Asconius is alluding to Asia with the words “*provinciam cuius cupiditate plerique etiam boni viri deliquerant*.” In his article Marshall assumed that this clause refers to a specific province, and therefore that it is a “periphrastic description” of Asia that “must have been obvious.”⁹ But there is no reason for Asconius to be allusive or coy—why not *Asiam provinciam*, or at least *eam provinciam*? (Marshall himself has subsequently acknowledged that the words “could apply to almost any province!”)¹⁰ We shall consider this matter

4. Noted first by Badian, “Scaevola and Asia,” p. 107.

5. “Scaevola’s Governorship,” pp. 123–26.

6. See G. V. Sumner, “Governors of Asia in the Nineties B.C.,” *GRBS* 19 (1978): 147. Cf. *OGIS* 437 = *IGRR* 4. 297 = Sherck, *RDGE* 47, line 27 (col. 2), *OGIS* 439; see also Livy *Per.* 70 (*pro cos.*). In other sources Scaevola is called variously *praetor* ([Asc.] 202 Stangl) or στρατηγός (Diod. 37. 5. 1, 5. 6), but in view of these sources’ imprecise use of titles, this evidence is of little value.

7. See his *Commentary*, pp. 110–12.

8. Cf. Badian, “Scaevola and Asia,” p. 107.

9. “Scaevola’s Governorship,” p. 127; cf. pp. 121, 129–30.

10. *Commentary*, pp. 110–11.

again a little further on. For now it is sufficient to note that if Asconius is not referring to the Asian command in this passage, he could be alluding to Scaevola's early departure from another province following his praetorship, and it would still be open to us to assume that Asia was his consular command.

The second major difficulty for Marshall's earlier argument results from his acceptance of the interpretation that Badian proposed for the phrase *provinciam deponere*. As Balsdon pointed out, our parallels all suggest that *provinciam deponere* means to decline a province or command before one has formally taken it up: the phrase most commonly appears in connection with Cicero's action in 63, when, while still in Rome, he resigned the province assigned to him.¹¹ Despite Badian's attempt to undermine this interpretation,¹² we cannot postulate an unparalleled meaning for the phrase when it is unnecessary to do so. The lack of parallels for Badian's interpretation is particularly damaging in light of the fact that in Cicero's single allusion to Scaevola's early return from Asia, he chooses a form of the phrase *cito decedere* (sc. *de provincia*) rather than *provinciam deponere*.¹³ To the possible objection that our parallels are exclusively Ciceronian, the obvious response is that Ciceronian usage is surely relevant to our interpretation of his commentator's diction. Given the evidence available, we must understand Asconius to mean that at some point before the end of 95, Scaevola had refused to take up a province that had been assigned to him. We shall see shortly that the context of the passage strengthens this conclusion.

There is a final objection to Marshall's earlier argument: he had to assume that Asconius is referring back—obscurely, without warning or relevance—to Scaevola's declining a province during his praetorship. Since this assumption lies at the root of the only remaining alternative to Balsdon's view, it needs to be considered at greater length. If we can establish that Scaevola's actions as consul in 95—and only those actions—are relevant to the passage on which Asconius is commenting, we are left with the conclusion that Scaevola's tenure of Asia followed his praetorship, not his consulship. To pursue this point, and to illuminate some other obscurities, we should turn our attention to the section of the *In Pisonem* (56–63) in which Cicero ridicules Piso's professed indifference to the honor of a triumph for his activities in Macedonia.

The specific occasion for Asconius' exegesis is Cicero's elliptical reference to L. Crassus' failure to win a triumph for his Gallic campaign of 95: *alteri* [sc. *Crasso*] *illum honorem conlega . . . peremit* (62). But the larger context is important. In 56–63 Cicero is arguing that Piso, with his Epicurean affectations, is depreciating one of Rome's great institutions, which spurred all great men on to glory. The desire for a triumph drove even the likes of L. Crassus and C. Cotta to somewhat ridiculous lengths in their attempts to find enemies to defeat in their provinces (62): does Piso think himself wiser than they? Does he dare to despise what they cherished most dearly? The theme of the whole

11. "Scaevola and *Ornatio Provinciae*," pp. 8–10; cf., e.g., Cic. *Att.* 2. 1. 3, *Fam.* 5. 2. 3, and *Pis.* 5 (with reference to Cicero in 63), and (with reference to a different case) *Pis.* 50.

12. "Scaevola and Asia," pp. 108–9.

13. *Att.* 5. 17. 5. Cicero applies the phrase primarily to his own case but strongly implies equal application to Scaevola's.

passage is *cupiditas triumphi*, which is of course closely linked with *cupiditas provinciae*, as Cicero notes at the very outset (56): the former is at least a morally and politically acceptable pretext for the latter.

In this wider context, then, Asconius thought it pertinent not only to explain the reference to Crassus' failure—by identifying his colleague, Scaevola, and by giving a brief account of the occasion—but also to note that Scaevola himself was a striking exception to the rule: for he had declined even to hold a province—"the desire for which had led many men, even good ones [sc. like L. Crassus], to err" ("provinciam cuius cupiditate plerique etiam boni viri deliquerant")—and had thereby forfeited his own chance for a triumph. The relative clause *cuius . . . deliquerant* should have been problematic for those who think that Asconius was referring here to Scaevola's famous Asian command: for what possible reason could he have had to allude so obscurely to *Asia provincia*? But now we see further that Asia is wholly foreign to this context, for it was a province lacking in opportunities for triumph-hunting. It is evident that the clause must concern the mere act of holding a province, and that far from being "irrelevant and vaguely expressed,"¹⁴ the comment about Scaevola supports Asconius' view that he had the *res publica* in mind ("non dubitavit rei publicae magis quam collegae habere rationem") and was not indulging petty jealousy in blocking Crassus' triumph. And since the notion of returning prematurely from a province is irrelevant to this point (unlike the act of declining a province in advance), it also becomes clear that the meaning that Badian attributed to the phrase *provinciam deponere* is not merely unlikely but impossible.

In this light, we should understand Asconius to be speaking of Scaevola's consular province, not his praetorian province. As I have demonstrated, the comment about Scaevola is directly relevant to the mention of Crassus' failure to gain a triumph in 95; it therefore becomes awkward to assume that Asconius is abruptly looking back to Scaevola's praetorship without using some sign such as *in praetura* to give a warning. Moreover, if Scaevola had resigned a praetorian province a few years before, that act would scarcely have supported Asconius' contention that his veto of Crassus' triumph was not inspired by petty jealousy: what, then, about the *provincia* he would have held as consul, at the very moment that he blocked Crassus' triumph? Praetorian triumphs in this period were few, whereas the consulship and a consular province were the best field for triumph-hunting.¹⁵ Passing up such an opportunity—most likely one's last—to win military glory would certainly be a memorable gesture, given the *mentalité* of the Roman nobility. The passage becomes clear, coherent, and pertinent only if Asconius is speaking of Scaevola's consular province.

To summarize our argument thus far: Asconius 14–15 makes good sense only if we take the last sentence to refer to Scaevola's resignation of his consular province, and therefore conclude that his tenure of Asia followed his praetorship. If there were any external evidence to support one of the other readings of the passage, reasonable doubt about the matter might remain. But in fact the external evidence weighs in favor of the present argument, not against it.

14. Badian, "Scaevola and Asia," p. 107.

15. According to A. Degraffi's list of triumphs in *Ill.* 13. 1, of the 31 known triumphs between 140 and 90 B.C., only 6 were celebrated by men of praetorian rank.

Marshall hesitated to argue from the little we know about the proconsuls of Asia,¹⁶ but it is surely of no small significance that not one man of consular rank is found among the governors known between Aquillius and Sulla.¹⁷ This argument from silence is not weak, for we know a good number of the governors in this period,¹⁸ and other things being equal we tend to hear more about consuls' activities than about praetors'. It is obvious why *Asia provincia* was regularly assigned to a praetor: it did not involve serious military activity. No one is likely to argue that the situation was different in 95, even if Sulla's command in Cilicia should be put around this time;¹⁹ there is no evidence of a military threat to Roman Asia from Mithridates in 95, of military activity by Scaevola or Rutilius, or of the mobilization of a consular army for the East. Badian, of course, did not suppose that there was a direct military threat in 95. Rather, he suggested that the demoralized condition of the province demanded someone of consular rank in 95, and that accordingly Scaevola was sent with the mission of "systematising the judicial administration of the province and setting the precedent of actually enforcing the new law."²⁰ This suggestion, though intended to explain what would otherwise be an anomaly, is an unconvincing hypothesis, without parallel and unsupported by any evidence that Scaevola was sent out with a special brief. A special mission sent to set the province in order should have appeared in our not inconsiderable evidence for Scaevola's proconsulship. That his sojourn in Asia became famous (or notorious) is irrelevant. Badian's interpretation of M. Aemilius Scaurus' embassy, which he placed in 96 and supposed to have made clear the need to take Asian affairs firmly in hand, is only one further step in the string of hypotheses. In the present state of the evidence, Scaurus' *legatio Asiatica* appears to be undatable.²¹ That *Asia provincia*, so far as we know, received only praetors in this period strongly suggests that Scaevola went out to Asia during or immediately after his praetorship of (ca.) 98.

We come now to the two points that, according to Badian, make the later date a priori more likely: a date of 94 for Scaevola's governorship better suits the date of Rutilius' trial on his return (92); and a consular legate under a praetorian proconsul "can scarcely be explained."²²

To take the latter point first: it is indeed remarkable, if one opts for the earlier date, that Scaevola, a man of merely praetorian rank, brought to Asia as his

16. "Scaevola's Governorship," p. 127.

17. See Broughton, *MRR*, 3:145.

18. We have the names of 10 men, some of whom will have been in the province for more than one year, over the 37 years between Aquillius and Sulla; and for the two decades between 110 and 90 we have at least 8 names: see the lists in D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1950), p. 1579, Badian, "Scaevola and Asia," p. 112, n. 7, and (for the 90s) Sumner, "Governors of Asia," pp. 147-53.

19. So E. Badian, *Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 157-78, whose arguments for 96 still stand, *pace* (esp.) A. N. Sherwin-White, "Ariobarzanes, Mithridates, and Sulla," *CQ* 27 (1977): 173-83 (proposing 94); see also A. Keaveney, "Deux dates contestées de la carrière de Sylla," *LEC* 48 (1980): 149-57, in favor of Badian's date.

20. "Scaevola and Asia," pp. 115-16.

21. See M. C. Alexander, "The *Legatio Asiatica* of Scaurus: Did It Take Place?" *TAPA* 111 (1981): 1-9, on the hopeless obscurity (to us) of the allusion in Asc. 21C. His positive conclusion, that the passage refers to Rutilius' *legatio* under Scaevola, need not be accepted for the sake of the present argument.

22. "Scaevola and Asia," p. 105, following F. Münzer, "P. Rutilius Rufus (34)," *RE* 1A (1920): 1274.

legate the consular Rutilius. Badian points to the lack of precedent for such a team; but the novelty of Scaevola's method of selecting his staff is precisely the detail stressed by Diodorus, who points out that Scaevola "selected the best of his friends to act as his advisor," and who goes on to say that the two men saw to all provincial business together (37. 5. 1-2). Not content with calling this much attention to the matter, Diodorus goes on to note that this feature of Scaevola's governorship was adopted by L. (Sempronius?) Asellio in Sicily shortly thereafter (37. 8. 1). The lack of precedent has no force as an objection, since Diodorus makes clear that these were special and noteworthy cases of governors who sought out expert advice for their tenure of a province. Rutilius' consular status, therefore, is explicable even if Scaevola was only of praetorian rank in Asia.²³

The greater stumbling block for the earlier date has been the traditionally accepted date of Rutilius' trial for extortion as Scaevola's legate. If Rutilius was tried in 92 for activities that began with Scaevola's departure from Asia no later than 97, a surprisingly long time intervened between the alleged crimes and the trial.²⁴ Yet Broughton—citing the trial of Norbanus some eight years after his offense—has remarked that political trials may have awaited a favorable climate for prosecution:²⁵ this is apt, and it could suffice for our purposes. But we can say more. Scholars have confused the more with the less certain datum: the view, hitherto unquestioned, that Rutilius' trial took place in 92 has outlasted the props that supported it. The traditional date depends on the trial's appearance in the *Periochae* of Livy's seventieth book between two events that had both been dated to 92: Sulla's Cappadocian expedition, and C. Sentius' defeat in Macedonia. But it has been clear since Badian reexamined Sulla's Cappadocian expedition a generation ago that the earlier of these termini should be brought back to around the middle of the decade.²⁶ Full argumentation dating the trial to (ca.) 94 must be reserved for another occasion;²⁷ for the purposes of this paper, we may simply note that nothing requires a date later than 94, when L. Crassus was a consular (Cic. *Brut.* 115). Scattered evidence that seems to associate Rutilius' trial with Drusus' judicial proposal in 91 is either too compressed or too vague to imply a close chronological association.²⁸ The date of Rutilius' trial, therefore, is no hindrance to the early date for Scaevola's Asian command.

The date of 98-97, if it now be accepted, has the advantage of providing a ready explanation for Scaevola's short tenure of the province (nine months).²⁹ He presumably hoped to gain the consulship at the earliest possible date (95). To tarry in Asia beyond the time necessary to establish a brilliant example of

23. See also Broughton, *MRR* Suppl., p. 42.

24. Cf. Badian, "Scaevola and Asia," pp. 105, 110. Note *Studies*, pp. 74-80, where Badian links a trial for *repetundae* with the tenure of a province almost twenty years before.

25. *MRR*, 2:5-6; cf. 3:145.

26. See above, n. 19.

27. A brief version of the argument that will be published elsewhere was presented at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association on 8 January 1989, in Baltimore, Maryland; an abstract is available in *American Philological Association: One Hundred and Twentieth Annual Meeting. Abstracts* (Atlanta, 1989), p. 142.

28. See Livy *Per.* 70, Vell. 2. 13. 2, Flor. 2. 5. 3; cf. Asc. 21C., Cic. *De or.* 1. 230.

29. Balsdon, "Scaevola and *Ornatio Provinciae*," p. 10, suggested that Scaevola was no more enamored of "the life of provincial administration" than was Cicero.

provincial administration served little purpose. Even if we assume that Scaevola departed for Asia during the sailing season of his praetorian year (98), he would have done well to return as soon as possible (i.e., early summer in 97), to stand for the consular elections in 96 and to exploit to best effect the *gloria iustitiae et abstinentiae* he had won in Asia (Cic. *Att.* 5.17.5). His timing was most effective, for he thus invited comparison with Marius' supporter M'. Aquilius (cos. 101), at this very time under threat of prosecution for gross maladministration in Sicily, *multis avaritiae criminibus testimoniisque convictum*.³⁰ Clearly, good provincial administration had recently become something of a political issue, as the law found at Delphi and Cnidus and some other evidence clustered around the turn of the century show.³¹ Among the many rewards that Diodorus (37.5.6) says Scaevola received for his fine work in Asia might be counted the consulship.³²

The Asian proconsulship of Scaevola, therefore, is not to be seen as an important change of Roman policy toward Asia, as Badian urged. It implies no general senatorial commitment to reorganize the province and to clean up administration in order to bolster the loyalty of the natives against Mithridates; rather, Scaevola's efforts should be attributed simply to his own ideals of good administration. But though we cannot retain the intriguing suggestion of a change in Roman policy toward Asia Minor, the earlier date gives us a better picture of Scaevola's path to the consulship; and if it is finally accepted, it will provide a useful chronological datum for the reconstruction of Roman politics in the 90s.³³

ROBERT M. KALLET-MARX
Brandeis University

30. Cic. *Flac.* 98; cf. other sources in A. H. J. Greenidge and A. M. Clay, *Sources for Roman History, 133–70 B.C.*², rev. E. W. Gray (Oxford, 1960), p. 116. For the date of Aquilius' trial (95), see E. Badian, "The Death of Saturninus," *Chiron* 14 (1984): 123, n. 50, 142; but, as he notes, "this [date] does not exclude the possibility that his behavior in the province was known to have been such that prosecution was likely to follow" (p. 142).

31. See M. Hassall, M. Crawford, and J. Reynolds, "Rome and the Eastern Provinces at the End of the Second Century B.C.," *JRS* 64 (1974): 218.

32. So Marshall, "Scaevola's Governorship," p. 129 (adopting a suggestion of E. W. Gray).

33. I wish to thank E. S. Gruen, A. M. Ward, and the Editor and referees of *CP* for many suggestions and criticisms that have improved this paper.

FORMS OF LITERARY CRITICISM IN CATULLUS: POLYMETRIC VS. EPIGRAM

A good number of Catullus' poems, as readers have commonly recognized, deal in some way with poetry itself—with its creation, its effects upon the poet himself and his friends, its evaluation. In discussing here three poems of literary criticism, 35, 36, and 95, I am interested less in interpreting the individual poems than in demonstrating that the polymetrics present their literary criticism in a way utterly different from the epigram. I dwell on 35 in particular because it continues to be misunderstood and because the misunderstanding signals one of the qualities—a certain air of casualness—that define the polymetric poems.