



Catullus Poem 71: Another Foot Pun

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Classical Philology*, Vol. 104, No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 376-384

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.uchicago.edu)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/650146>

Accessed: 02/04/2012 07:32

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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

CATULLUS POEM 71: ANOTHER FOOT PUN

Si cui iure bono sacer alarum obstitit hircus,
aut si quem merito tarda podagra secat,
aemulus iste tuus, qui vestrum exercet amorem,
mirifice est †a te nactus utrumque malum.
nam quotiens fuit, totiens ulciscitur ambos:
illam affligit odore, ipse perit podagra.¹

A literal reading of Catullus 71 renders the poem rather pointless: the superficial barbs alleging that the *aemulus* of the addressee suffers from gout and emits an unpleasant bodily odor seem to betray no hint of neoteric wit. Moreover, insulting someone for suffering from gout—unlike the complementary taunt of a goatish stench emanating from the armpits, which is ubiquitous²—would be without parallel in all of extant Latin literature.³ I therefore present a new interpretation for Catullus 71, which emerges from a re-evaluation of the word I consider the crux of the whole poem: *podagra*. I posit that the *aemulus*' chronic foot-problem is not literal, but figurative. The point, as Claudian was to see and commit to posterity in his invective *In podagricum* (*Carmina minora* 13 Hall), is not that the addressee's adversary limps, but rather that his verse does: the *aemulus*' metrical foot-affliction is representative of his lack of poetic talent. In light of this re-reading of *podagra*, I offer a new interpretation for Catullus 71 as a whole by examining and explicating in turn the roles of the *aemulus*, the *amor*, and the addressee.

Claudian plays in his poem much more explicitly than Catullus does in 71 on the ambiguities inherent in the word “foot,” and in doing so illuminates for readers of both poets the mechanisms by which their shared pun on *podagra* operates:

Special thanks go to Richard Thomas and to the anonymous reader at *CP*, both of whom offered incisive criticisms that led to a substantially improved final version of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge Christopher Krebs, who read an early draft of this paper, as well as my co-instructor and students in the spring 2006 Junior Tutorial on Catullus at Harvard University, where I first conceived the idea for this article.

1. I use R. A. B. Mynors' 1958 OCT of Catullus throughout (on the need to specify an edition, see n. 13 below). All translations are my own.

2. Within the Catullan corpus, cf. 69.5–6 (*tibi fertur / valle sub alarum trux habitare caper*) with, e.g., Merrill (1893, 192), who explains the goat as “a common figure for this particular odor.” Further examples include Hor. *Epist.* 1.5.29, *Epod.* 12.5, *Sat.* 1.2.27 = 1.4.92; and Ov. *Ars am.* 3.193.

3. This ailment is associated in Latin literature (outside the medical writers) particularly with old men, and is used not as an insult in itself, but rather as a way of further figuring the aged as decrepit (cf. Lucil. frag. 332–33). On occasion it is used for moralizing purposes, as at Sen. *Ep.* 78.9 (compare Horace's similar use of *cheragra* at *Sat.* 2.7.15–18), or satirically, for example, Mart. 7.39. In no instance outside Catullus 71, however, does *podagra* have the capacity to function as a straightforward object of ridicule in its own right, which should prompt us to question such a reading of it here.

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Quae tibi cum pedibus ratio? quid carmina culpas?
 scandere qui nescis, versiculos laceras?
 "claudicat hic versus, haec" inquis "syllaba nutat,"
 atque nihil prorsus stare putas, podager.

What's your problem with feet? Why do you condemn my poems? Are you who can't get up really abusing my little verses? "This verse limps," you snap, "this syllable falters." And so you think that nothing stands up straight, you gout-ridden man.

This retort to a literary critic opens with the theme of feet introduced already in the first line: *Quae tibi cum pedibus ratio?* There follows in the second and third lines extensive playing on the duality of *pes*: *scandere*, which refers to the man who cannot stand up straight, occurs in close proximity to *versiculos*, while the verbs *claudicat* and *nutat*, the primary lexical meanings of which are anatomical ("limp" and "nod," respectively), are applied instead to lines of poetry.⁴ When *podager* appears in the vocative as the last word in the fourth and final line, there can be no doubt by this point that a possible meaning for it—indeed, the dominant one—is, "O metrically inept one." Just as Martial's usage of *passer* at 11.6 suggested to Poliziano that this word in Catullus 2 and 3 might mean "penis" rather than (or, as well as) "sparrow,"⁵ so Claudian's invective indicates that Catullus' *podagra* meant "metrical incompetence."⁶

Catullus' poem, however, is significantly more cryptic than Claudian's—a parallelism that also holds true for the relationship between the former's second and third poems and Martial 11.6. The primary indicator that *podagra* might have connotations beyond its literal sense is that without reading into this word any further, the poem seems banal. Furthermore, as Stephen Hinds notes, "few word-plays are more familiar in Latin poetry than the one between the bodily and metrical senses of the word *pes*,"⁷ and Catullus especially exploits this double entendre with great enthusiasm throughout his book. In Poem 14, for example, the *pesimi poetae*, whose "horrible and accursed little book" has been sent on the Saturnalia to Catullus as a gift (intended in jest), are instructed, *abite illuc, unde malum pedem attulistis* (line 22). Here the coexistence of the senses "physical foot" and "poorly written poetry" is clear, and it is from this simultaneity that the humor of the piece derives.⁸ Particularly pertinent

4. *Claudico* is also applied to verse elsewhere in this sense (cf., e.g., Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 4.18.5).

5. For a good discussion of the mechanisms by which Martial 11.6 confirms the meaning "penis" for Catullus' *passer*, see Hooper 1985.

6. Certainly the occurrence of *podager* in Claudian reflects the capacity of this word, with its alternate vowel-grade *pod-*, to sustain the same punning metrical undertones as the root *ped-* and its nominative form *pes*.

7. Hinds 1987, 16. Such wordplays largely contain both the bodily and metrical senses simultaneously, e.g., Ov. *Pont.* 4.5.3, though sometimes the metrical meaning may predominate almost entirely over the physical, as happens most famously in the opening lines of the *Amores*. These two examples rely on the fact that they occur in elegiac couplets for much of their effect, as do Ov. *Am.* 3.1.8, *Tr.* 3.1.11–12; and Hor. *Epod.* 11.20. For further interesting examples, cf. Prop. 3.1.6; Tib. 2.6.14; Ov. *Tr.* 1.1.16; and Hor. *Ars P.* 80.

8. Garrison 1995, 201; Hinds 1987, 16; Quinn 1973, 139. Havelock (1967, 156–57) explains the joke with particular sensitivity, noting how the "pronunciation sets up a rhythm of perfect trochees in complete defiance of the eleven-syllable pattern," and adding that to Catullus "a 'bad foot' is not an actual slip in metre of the sort that a schoolboy might make, but a failure to combine metre with speech-ictus in a pleasing compromise" (see Verrall 1913, 249–67, for an earlier and very thorough discussion of this same idea). Heyworth (2001, 133, n. 46) notes further examples of Catullus' metrical plays in poems 46 and 65: in the former the phrase *iam laeti studio pedes vigescunt* (line 8) suggests a surge in both physical and poetic energy with the return of spring, and in the latter the description of the Lethean wave lapping at the foot of Catullus' brother in the underworld (5–6) seems to convey both physical and poetic death. Heyworth also

to the present discussion are several instances in which words for feet, as in the phrase *tarda podagra* in 71, are modified by an adjective denoting haste or slowness; pace being, of course, of great import in lines of verse. Poem 63 is especially striking in this regard: the *pes* of the fleet-footed Attis is repeatedly described as *citatus* or *properans*, frequently accompanied by the resolution of long syllables into a series of staccato short beats, with the manifest intention of calling attention to and heightening the already frenetic galliambic meter in which the poem is composed.⁹ A seldom-noted *pes*-pun from Poem 36, however, provides the closest parallels with Poem 71. Catullus' *puella* has vowed to the *tardipes deus* the choicest writings of the worst poet, a periphrasis by which she presumably intended to identify Catullus himself. Catullus seizes the opportunity afforded by the lack of specificity in this description to turn the insult onto one Volusius and the latter's *cacata carta*, that is, his unneoteric annalistic history. The slow-footed god who is to receive this choice offering is Vulcan, and so the writings of the *pessimus poeta* that limp along and drag their metrical feet in an ungainly manner are to be consecrated to the deity who literally does the same. Not only does this *tardipes deus* form a clear intratext with *tarda podagra* in the second line of Poem 71, but the shared adjective of slowness that connects them further acts as a signpost for the metrical interpretation of the disease.¹⁰ The notion that a line of poetry might limp is of more than superficial significance. Beyond referring simply to the halting gait of a particularly bad line of verse (and the resulting eons that the recitation of it would presumably seem to last), *tarda podagra* and *tardipes deus* may well also allude to the genre of poetry in question: invective, which is associated with the choliambic meter or scazon ("limping iambic").¹¹

Having established on the basis of Claudian's intertext and Catullus' predilection for foot-puns that *podagra* in Poem 71 could well mean "metrical ineptitude," I offer

argues (2001, 134) that the opening word of Poem 16, *pedicabo*, should be read as a metrical play meaning "I will bugger you with my verses," but this suggestion seems rather tenuous, as Catullus can hardly be supposed to be referring to either physical or metrical feet every time he employs this obscene verb, which is neither etymologically nor semantically related. Foot-puns may also be present in Poem 43, where the criticism of a girl as not having a pretty foot (*nec bello pede*) is likely to mean that she is not witty and lacks the capacity to appreciate refined verse (for the value accorded to *puellae* who understand poetry, cf. Poem 35); and at 68.70–72, where Clausen (1995, 243–44) rather ingeniously sees Hellenistic prescriptions for conciseness and clarity of expression in the description of the shoe of Catullus' mistress as *arguta*, a striking adjective that he connects to Callimachus' *cicada*.

9. Cf. Heyworth 2001, 133. The word *pes* appears six times in the course of Poem 63 (lines 2, 30, 34, 41, 52, and 86), and in the first four instances is clearly acting in this metrically self-referential manner.

10. Ellis (1889, 126) is one of the few commentators who raises the possibility that a metrical pun may be present in the epithet of Vulcan. The adjective *tardipes* is otherwise explained as mock-solemn (Quinn 1973, 199–200), as a translation of the Greek epithet of Hephaestus (Kroll 1959, 67), or as a neoteric coinage of the type frequently found in Catullus' poetry (Ross 1969, 21), while the *puella*'s choice of Vulcan as the recipient of her offering is universally attributed to his association with fire (the books are to be burned, *infelicitibus ustulanda lignis*). Kroll (1959, 243) explains the adjective as being used "in aktivem Sinne," a reading that suits both the physical and metrical senses of *podagra*: "gout that slows you down" or "metrical ineptitude that slows down the line of verse" (it is this active sense that also seems to be present when the same phrase is repeated at Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.31–32). Alternatively, in the passive sense, *tarda* could convey the creeping onset and gradually increasing severity of gout, or describe the resulting of line of poetry ("slow").

11. It is particularly difficult in the case of Catullus to make any definitive and consistently valid association between genre and meter, since one of the defining characteristics of the *poetae novi* was metrical experimentation. Catullus thus writes invective in a variety of meters, including hendecasyllables and elegiac couplets, as well as in the iambic trimeters and limping iambs (choliambics) that Archilochus and Hipponax pioneered as characteristic of this genre.

the following English rendering of the poem (with the translations of *podagra* in lines 2 and 6 underlined, and *aemulus* deliberately left in Latin for now):

If ever the armpits of any man deserved to be plagued by a horrible goatish stench,
 Or if halting metrical ineptitude ever justly caused anyone stabbing pain,
 That *aemulus* of yours, who is banging away at your common love-interest,
 Has amazingly contracted both of these ailments from you.
 For every time he screws her, he punishes them both:
 He demolishes her with his stench, while his lack of metrical talent is killing him.

It now remains for us to explicate the poem as a whole on the basis of this more nuanced reading of *podagra*; for the riddle of Poem 71 is as yet far from solved. A new set of problems has emerged pertaining to the relationship between addressee and *aemulus*, the method by which gout and smell could have been transmitted from the former to the latter, and the role played by the mysteriously anonymous¹² addressee.

The statement in line 4 that bodily odor and gout have somehow been transmitted from addressee to *aemulus* has greatly exercised commentators. Scholarly reaction to this puzzle has been twofold: either largely unsubstantiated and unsatisfactory emendations are proposed,¹³ or, with *a te* accepted as correct (or at least as meriting an explanation), it is posited that these ailments have been venereally passed on to the *aemulus* by the *amor*, who had herself contracted them from the addressee.¹⁴ The latter solution creates additional difficulties: there are no indications that the Romans believed, any more than we do, that gout and the pain associated with it could be transmitted through physical contact, either of a sexual nature or otherwise; and in the unlikely event that the *aemulus* has acquired the unpleasant bodily stench by which he is plagued from the addressee via the *amor*, it then becomes impossible to explain how he could torture her with it, since if she herself was the source of his infection, surely she must also have continued to be afflicted by it, and therefore been unaffected by further exposure to the same.¹⁵

The answers to these further problems raised by a rereading of the term *podagra* can be found by re-interpreting what is meant by *aemulus*. This word (whether in the form of the abstract noun *aemulatio*, the agent noun *aemulus*, or the verb *aemulor*) is notoriously slippery in its nuances: “envy,” “rival,” “equal,” “excel,” and “vie with” are all translations used to capture the range of positive and negative activities it can convey. It is universally assumed, presumably on the basis of the presence of an

12. This is an anomaly in Catullus; cf. Thomson 1997, 493.

13. Mynors prints the putative reading of V (the only archetype, now lost), *a te*, marking it with an asterisk as corrupt (see opening of this article). The unconvincing emendations proposed by other editors include: *fato* (Westphal, who suggests that the line began *mirifico est fato*), *certe* (Peiper), *poena* (Baehrens), *apte* (Thomson, citing *Dres.*), and several proper names in the vocative, such as *Quinti* (Goold, whose line begins *mirificest, Quinti*) and *Alli* (Kroll, who nevertheless prints *a te*, and adds that Heyse suggests the name *Atei*). Not only do I follow Mynors in printing *a te*, but I furthermore hope to demonstrate that 71.4 no longer requires an asterisk: the phrase *a te* has, I believe, eluded interpretation simply because the word on which it relies for its sense, *podagra*, has until now not been properly understood. Note that the textual problems of Poem 71 are not limited to the fourth line: there are also variant readings for line 1 (*si quia viro bono sacrorum / sacratorem obstitit hircus*), though these are less vital to the overall sense of the poem.

14. Cf. Nappa 1999, 271.

15. Nappa's suggestion (1999, 271) regarding the gout, namely, that “the *aemulus* acquires perhaps not the actual affliction, but the incidence of particular pain while he has intercourse with the addressee's mistress,” glosses over the issue of infection: it is clearly stated in line 4 that the *aemulus* did in fact contract the actual ailment.

amor in the poem, that *aemulus* in Poem 71 refers to a rival in love. But the use of this term with such a meaning is unparalleled in the rest of the Catullan corpus—a fact that should be particularly striking given the amount of text Catullus devotes to attacking his rivals for the affections of Lesbia. A secondary meaning of the word belongs to the sphere of literary criticism. Literary *aemulatio* is competitive imitation, equivalent to Greek ζήλωςις, and both the Latin and the Greek terms contain within them the closely related and inextricable senses of feuding rivalry and awe-inspired imitation.¹⁶ These new literary connotations of the term *aemulus*, which is further arresting for its line-initial position, reveal that Poem 71 is not about a rival in love suffering from an unusual venereal disease, but rather about a poetic imitator plagued by an acquired metrical affliction.

It now becomes possible to explain how the *aemulus* caught *podagra* and smell from the addressee without unnecessarily positing their shared *amor* as the vector.¹⁷ Instead, just as the fourth line of the poem states, the *aemulus* has contracted these ailments straight from the addressee himself, through direct imitation (*aemulatio*) of the latter's bad poetry. The smell, I believe, can be viewed as a corollary of poetic ineptitude: by imitating the literary output and general lifestyle of the addressee, the *aemulus* suffers from a similar inability to write poetry, as well as from a more general aura of failure and inelegance, figured as an *odor*.¹⁸ Simply put, the *aemulus* stinks—as a poet. This new understanding of the method of transmission also de-problematizes the final line of the poem. The *aemulus*' odor can torment the *amor* because he did not contract it from her: she herself does not possess it and never did.

Finally, a metaphorical function can also be posited for the *amor*. Traditionally, this figure is read as an actual girlfriend, who is possessed of few desirable qualities: she is neither faithful nor discerning in her choice of sexual partners, and is evidently willing to endure all manner of degrading treatments at the hands of rather repellent men. On the surface, then, Catullus would simply be ridiculing the inability of the addressee and his *aemulus* to do any better: these men are not sufficiently gifted to belong to the exclusive clique of the *poetae novi* and therefore to attract the sort of female company that we see portrayed as the ideal elsewhere in Catullus' poetry. The girl of Poem 71 is certainly no Lesbia, who in addition to being described overtly as charming and witty, is also implicitly figured as poetically gifted (or at least appreciative) through the association of her name with Sappho, and she also falls short of Caecilius' poetically discerning girlfriend, who fell in love with him upon reading his *Dindymi domina*. The *aemulus* and addressee, because of their shared metrical affliction, can never hope to achieve sexual success with such a *bella puella*: “the games of love which characterize Catullus and his set are out of the reach of [the addressee] and his rival.”¹⁹

16. For such usages, cf., e.g., [Longinus] *Subl.* 13.2; Hor. *Epist.* 1.19.15 and *Carm.* 4.2.1; Mart. *Spect.* 12.94.2; and Plin. *HN* 30.7.

17. I take *vestrum* to be the genuine second-person plural possessive adjective. Interpreting the word as the polite second person singular, however, produces no alteration in sense, since if the *aemulus* is “banging away at your [sg.] love-interest,” this love-interest is still necessarily shared by the addressee and *aemulus*.

18. This undertone to *odor* should not be a stretch in Latin: the word can be used figuratively to mean “whiff, hint, suggestion.” Its sense here may either be that the *aemulus* has actually developed a literal smell as the result of imitating the way of life and general inelegance of the addressee, or that a whiff of undesirability haunts him. Nappa (1999, 271) aptly summarizes the situation as follows: “Catullus' general point is clear enough: both men, addressee and *aemulus*, are disgusting.”

19. Nappa 1999, 271.

The notion of the poet's girlfriend-muse as the inspiration for and consequently the representation of his poetic output itself, however, is a literary commonplace. Tibullus' Delia and Horace's Lalage (*Carm.* 1.22) are classic examples of this device: the former name is derived from Delos, the island birthplace of Apollo, god of poetic inspiration, while the latter is from Greek λαλαγέω, "chatter." I propose that the *aemulus'* *amor* should similarly be read as this inept poet's literary production. The use of the obscene verb *futuo* to describe the act of writing might be unprecedented, but this is exactly the type of clever neoteric innovation we should expect from Catullus: it conveys well the image of a hopelessly untalented artist continuing to hammer away obstinately at his project, with the fact that this is a continuous or repeated action conveyed adeptly by *quotiens . . . totiens*.²⁰ The process is unpleasant not only for his page (the personified verse that feels tortured by her creator's aura of incompetence, *odor*), but also for the poet himself, whose metrical ineptitude causes him frustration and even physical pain.

Indeed, the verb *perire* is repeatedly associated with bad verse in Catullus. In Poem 14, Catullus teasingly accuses Calvus of trying to kill him with a Saturnalian gift of bad poetry (lines 5 and 12–14).²¹ Similarly, in Poem 44, Catullus describes the *mala tussis* he contracted after reading a terrible oration written by one Sestius at a dinner party thrown by the latter: the *venenum* and *pestilentia* contained in the book transfer themselves to Catullus' body in the form of *gravedo frigida et frequens tussis* through the process of reading. This final example is somewhat different from our *podagra*, in that the cough does not so much represent bad writing as stem from it; perhaps we should also understand the *podagra* in Poem 71, then, as the physical manifestation of a literary handicap. After all, it has hardly been my intention to fully exclude the physical sense of *podagra* in Poem 71: the poem works precisely because it appears to describe two smelly, gouty men fighting over a girl, while simultaneously mocking a poet's poor choice of model, which results in the production of more bad poetry ham-handedly bludgeoned²² into shape. Catullus derives much of his meaning and charm from the co-existence of multiple senses, rather than the dominance of one to the exclusion of the others.

Finally, it remains for the role of the addressee in Poem 71 to be explained. Attempts have been made to connect this figure with the Rufus at whom Poems 69 and 77 are aimed (Nappa 1999), and subsequently to identify this Rufus with the Caelius Rufus known to us from other sources (defended by Cicero in the *Pro Caelio*, and thought to have been one of the many lovers enjoyed by Catullus' Lesbia). Others (e.g.,

20. A possible comparandum may be found at Martial 1.35.1. This poem opens with the statement, *Versus scribere me parum severos / nec quos praelegat in schola magister, / Corneli, quereris*, evidently looking back to the offensive final word in the closing line of the immediately preceding poem, *deprendi veto te, Lesbia, non futui*. Although the verb *futuo* is not used here directly of the act of writing (though note that its grammatical subject, Lesbia, not only recalls Catullus, but also Sappho), a connection is certainly present between it and the idea of poetic composition.

21. Poem 14 contains certain further linguistic parallels that cement its connection to 71, and support aspects of the figurative reading proposed here for the latter. The cause of the pain in the former that is killing Catullus is a *sacer libellus*, just as a *sacer hircus* inhabits the *aemulus'* armpits in the latter. In addition, the well-established foot-pun of Poem 14 may well foreshadow the *podagra* of 71: the phrase *malum pedem*, rather than simply meaning "badness of foot," vividly evokes the idea of "foot-sickness" (cf. the English expression "I have a bad leg"), which would allude to a poor grasp of meter.

22. Note the possible derivation of *futuo* from **futo*, meaning "hit, beat," proposed by Adams (1990, 118).

Thomson 1997) have suggested that it is in fact the *aemulus* who is Rufus, and even that Catullus himself should consequently be understood as the addressee of the poem. What concerns me here is not the addressee's historicity or lack thereof, nor his possible appearances in other Catullan poems, for a definitive conclusion cannot at this point be reached in either of these matters. I instead wish to explicate the poem on internal grounds, and to articulate the mechanisms by which the characters of Catullus 71 interact with one another. It certainly seems at first glance that it is the *aemulus* who bears the brunt of Catullus' biting attack: it is he, after all, who is said to be gouty (however construed) and smelly, and who, we learn in the closing couplet, subjects his *amor* and in the process also himself to a grotesque sexual act that is pleasurable for neither. As Nappa points out, however, the logical extension of this is that the poem is "first and foremost an insult to the addressee":²³ since it is revealed that these two ailments were contracted from the addressee, the latter must also be poetically incompetent and socially doomed, perhaps even more so than the *aemulus*. In addition, without the force of the invective somehow returning to the addressee, he would remain a strangely extraneous figure. Poem 71, therefore, is not a poem about a smelly, lame rival in love, but rather a poem of invective hurled directly at a poetically incompetent addressee, somewhat elliptically via a third party.

With the re-reading of these two crucial words, *aemulus* and *podagra*, Poem 71 has been restored to its rightful place within a clearly-defined Catullan group: neoteric poems of social exclusion. This cycle consists of pieces in which the poet, as "arbiter of elegance," by positioning himself as the insider par excellence, defines desirable neoteric traits and enforces the social and poetic exclusion of those who fall short of his notions of *urbanitas*.²⁴ The formerly banal-seeming invective epigram is thus in fact a poem about poetry and, more importantly, one that is very much in the tradition of the *poetae novi*. The addressee and his *aemulus* are utterly inelegant and untalented, and these attributes are contagious in the sense that they are self-perpetuating: through constant association with each other (because the neoterics will have nothing to do with them) the members of this lower circle perpetually re-infect one another with grotesque lack of manners and propagate the creation of bad poetry through self-congratulatory mutual justification of their worthless output. A fundamental tenet of the poetry of exclusion is that the gulf separating the location in which the judge has positioned himself and the area occupied by those he excludes is untraversable. The paradox of this mode of evaluation is that the harder a rejected outsider struggles to enter the inner circle of the urbane, the more he proves his lack of urbanity. Just as Asinius in Poem 12 only brings further scorn upon himself through his insistent efforts to be granted the title of *lepidus* (the theft of the napkin is condemned utterly, line 4), so the *aemulus*, the more vigorously he attempts to enjoy himself, simply causes worse suffering for the *amor* and for himself, as well as for the world, through the publication of his bad poetry.

Finally, since the interpretation proposed here for Poem 71 hinges on a metrical pun, some type of metrical validation that this reading is sound might be expected.

23. Nappa 1999, 271. Quinn (1973, 400) concurs: "both rival and addressee are being got at."

24. For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Fitzgerald 1995, 87–113. "Arbiter of elegance" (p. 93) is his phrase (after Petronius, of course, and therefore applied to Catullus anachronistically).

This confirmation comes in the form of a variation in the quantity of the word *podagra* itself each of the two times it is mentioned in the course of the six-line poem. In the first incidence, it scans short-long-short, and in the second short-short-long.²⁵ This vacillating medial syllable not only gives rise to two separate and productive meanings for the word, but it is also metrically representative of the pun. The word in Latin is a transliteration of Greek ποδάγρα, meaning “a trap for the feet,” and ought therefore by all rights to have a short medial *-a-*.²⁶ In Latin, however, the word has resonances of *aeger* or *aegritudo* and could be given by false etymology the meaning “foot-sickness” (in which case the medial *-a-* would be taken as long). A further undertone, and one which is particularly apt in the Catullan context, can be extracted by associating the word with *ager/agrestis*, yielding the insult “foot-boorishness.” Catullus’ disdain for *rusticitas*, and its association with poetic inability, is evident in several places. In Poem 22, Suffenus is said to possess a patina of sophistication, but to become *infacetiior rure*, equated with a *caprimulgus* or a *fossor*, as soon as he lays his hand to poetry,²⁷ because of his insistence on writing *longe plurimos versus* on parchment of the highest quality and with the fanciest trimmings. At the conclusion of Poem 36 as well, smacking of the countryside is employed as a literary insult: the annals of Volusius are, in language almost identical to the insults in Poem 22, *pleni ruris et inficetiarum*. Similarly, we may now see in *podagra* in Poem 71 the multiple metrical insults of “foot-sickness” and “foot-rusticity,” senses imported into it in part from Poem 22.

The second effect of the variance in the quantity of *podagra*—metrical iconicity of a metrical pun—is not without parallel. At Vergil *Georgics* 1.350, for example, the crucial adjective *incompositos* extends awkwardly from the second to the fourth foot, annihilating the customary third-foot caesura, thus “emphasiz[ing] the uncouth nature of the rustic dance.”²⁸ This device is also exploited elsewhere within the Catullan corpus, notably in Poem 116. In this concluding poem of the collection, there appear several metrically awkward features, such as the entirely spondaic third line and the odd ecthipsis of final *-s* in the phrase *dabi’ supplicium*. These metrical infelicities (together with some peculiar turns of phrase such as *studioso animo venante requirens*, the archaic *qui* for *ut*, and the fact that the first sentence occupies six of the poem’s eight lines) can be read as a subtle dig at Gellius’ own shortcomings as a poet, and justify Catullus’ open statement in the poem that he does not consider Gellius worthy of a gift of verses. The joke is taken even further in Poem 71, for there it is the very word involving feet that scans unexpectedly. It seems particularly

25. The length of the final syllable (which is, of course, case-determined) is irrelevant here. Note also that a consonant followed by a liquid does not, as a rule, lengthen the preceding vowel by position in Latin, although it may sometimes have this effect in the way that a consonant-consonant combination would; this may go some way towards explaining the alternation in quantity of the medial *-a-*.

26. This variation is noted by most commentators, including Thomson (1997, 494), who agrees that the quantity of the vowel should be short.

27. Cicero (*Orat.* 161) confirms the abhorrence of *rusticitas* in the eyes of the neoterics. He explains that dropping the final *-s* of words ending in *-us* was once considered refined, but now seems *subrusticus*, and is strenuously avoided by the *poetae novi*. Cicero also reveals explicitly at *Cael.* 36 (in the course of a speech against the Clodia who is often equated with Catullus’ Lesbia) that attributes associated with the countryside stand in direct opposition to *urbanitas*: *sin autem urbanus me agere mavis, sic agam tecum; removebo illum senem durum ac paene agrestem*.

28. Thomas 1988, 126. For a similar implication of rusticity, though without the same metrical self-representation, see Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.1–2: *incomposito dixi pede currere versus / Lucili*.

appropriate, in a highly neoteric way, that in Catullus a lack of control of feet on the part of the *aemulus* should be substantivized as a feigned lack of control of feet on the part of the poet. In addition, the generic symbolism of a limping foot can hardly escape our notice: the vacillation in the quantity of *podagra*, even in a poem that is not written in limping iambs, trumpets the status of Catullus 71 as a poem of invective.²⁹

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29. As mentioned in n. 11 above, although iambs are the traditional invective meter of choice, Catullus' proclivity for metrical experimentation allows him to write invective in a variety of other meters as well. The deliberate casualness and unpracticed spontaneity of invective may also be alluded to in the association of metrical flexibility with the genre. The projection of this self-image is of central concern to Horace in the *Satires*, and may be alluded to in Ennius' cryptic statement, *numquam poeior nisi podager* (*Saturae* 20 Courtney). The reason for not writing poetry (satire, specifically, since the statement is made in the course of a satirical poem) unless afflicted by gout must allude to both the use of the iambic meter for satire at this stage in the development of the genre, and to its self-consciously casual (and thus metrically flexible or even careless) style, and not to some assertion by Ennius that he composes satire when his foot hurts to distract his mind from the pain of the disease (as this line is customarily interpreted).

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