

CATULLUS 8 AND 76

Two of the most moving personal poems of Catullus, 8 and 76, present the reader with difficulties of interpretation which highlight the inadequacy of a very widely-held view of the nature of Catullus' personal poetry. In this view the poet is regarded as handling his own actual experience directly, so that the poems present reality, perhaps not entirely, but certainly to a degree that is not the case with the elegiac poets or with the Horace of the *Odes*. Extreme forms of this view may be seen in the old idea that Catullus threw off the Lesbia poems as the *odi* or the *amo* of the moment constrained him, and in the more recent view that the poems can usefully be seen as either attempts to contain an overpowering wave of emotion or to state, and so get to grips with, a baffling personal problem. The first of these extreme forms has been long discredited, but the second still exerts a persuasive pressure, to judge by recent discussion of Catullus. Almost, though not entirely, universal is a milder version of the same conviction, namely a general feeling that the detail of these poems is, to a significant extent, autobiographical, and that it is critically useful to see the detail this way. This assumption I regard as dubious, and I wish to show, by examining the relevant sections of 8 and 76, the way in which autobiographical considerations are misleading. In order to do this it will be necessary to deal more directly than I would have liked with published views of scholars, at the risk of not doing full justice to their arguments, misrepresenting their statements, or appearing, perhaps, unappreciative and polemical. It is, however, unavoidable if some impression of the truly astonishing range of views is to be given, particularly in connection with 8, and if the autobiographical thread which runs through many of them is to be followed.¹

The problem of 8 centres, for present purposes, on the picture of the girl's future, 12-19,

uale, puella. iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit inuitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelestas, uae te, quae tibi manet uita?
quis nunc te adibit? cui uideberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

How is this to be taken? Does *cum rogaberis nulla*, 14, indicate that a time will come when no one at all will approach the girl, or that Catullus himself will not make any approaches to her at all, or is it open-ended, an ambiguity by

¹ This article is largely an expansion of parts of a paper entitled 'Some Ways of Looking at Catullus' which was read to the Australian Society for Classical Studies in Sydney, August 1971. I have benefited from comments made on that occasion and from discussion with Mr. K. W. Mills of Durham University. The theory of the constraint of immediate emotion is that of H. A. J. Munro,

Criticisms and Elucidations of Catullus (London, 1905); the problem-solving theory and derivatives have a host of exponents, notably E. Schäfer, 'Das Verhältnis von Erlebnis und Kunstgestalt bei Catull', *Hermes, Einzelschriften* Heft xviii (1966); the most prominent departure from autobiographical premisses is made by G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968).

which the poet creates one expectation in order to fulfil another? Does *scelestae, uae te*, 15, express bitterness or sympathy? Does the series of questions, *quae, quis, cui*, etc., 15–18 suggest a successful rival of unknown identity, or imply that no one will relieve her isolation, or convey Catullus' belief that no one could be an adequate substitute for himself? And is this picture in some sense a reliable forecast of the girl's future, or is it presented as a figment of the speaker's imagination, whether deliberately introduced as a threat or forced upon him by his own longing? Is the tone desperate, ironical, or whimsical? All these options have been tried, and many combinations have been offered, without, I think, a fully correct account being produced.

Let us look first at versions which take the pictured future as a reliable forecast. C. J. Fordyce¹ and H. Gugel² are agreed that *cum rogaberis nulla* refers only to Catullus and the girl, but then comes the parting of the ways. 'He thinks of what has happened as a disaster for both of them and pathetically turns from his own feelings to speak of what he has meant to her and what she has lost,' says the Oxford commentator in his introduction to the poem. The suggestion is that Catullus knows that they were so happy together that it could not happen again for either of them with anyone else. 'Who?', in the series of questions in 16 ff., will mean something like 'You won't have me and you could not have the same happiness with anyone else'.

There are two features of the poem which seem to me to fit uneasily into an account on these lines. The first is that Catullus, when speaking of his own feelings about the affair that is now over, uses expressions which, while not giving the affair an exalted or idealized colour, yet powerfully convey affection and happiness, cf. the refrain, *fulsere quondam | uere candidi tibi soles*, 3, 8, and *amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla*, 5. Here is the glow of a unique relationship. But when he turns to talk of what *she* has lost by forcing him to cut himself off from her, there is nothing to correspond. The erotic schedule of 16 ff. does not carry the same conviction of uniqueness of shared experience. If we take her loss seriously, it appears that what she has lost is precisely that which is replaceable, in sharp contrast to Catullus' view of his own loss. The loss of the relationship in 3–8 might indeed be irreparable, but the loss in 16–18 is irreparable only to one who is in love, and this, as the first part of the poem makes indubitably clear, is the case with Catullus but definitely not with the girl.

The second feature is the manner of representing the girl's loss by a series of six repeated questions, *quae?*, *quis?*, etc. This, especially when combined with activities which would not appear to require much uniqueness of any sort for the performance, goes on too long, insists too much on a person 'who?', for its required purpose of implying 'no one like me'. At least one could say that the form of the questions is very inert on this interpretation, and an

¹ Catullus, *A Commentary* (Oxford, 1961), introduction and notes to 8. Similar considerations to those in the text can be brought against the formulation of K. Quinn, *Catullus, The Poems* (Macmillan, 1970), p. 118: 'The questions are rhetorical in the sense that they do not expect the answer "nobody" or "half of Rome"; still less "a rival", who could be named; their purpose is to challenge Lesbia to admit that the

answer is "not Catullus".' But since Lesbia can accept this challenge with equanimity, cf. *nunc iam illa non uult*, one still may ask why Catullus threatens her with these consequences. And though Catullus is not asking 'who?' with a view to finding his rival's name, the series surely suggests growing realization of *some* rival in the offing.

² Catull, *Carmen* 8, *Athenaeum*, xlv (1967), 278–93.

account which brings it to life would be more attractive in this respect. We are, in fact, invited to consider the possibility of a replacement lover.

Gugel does consider this possibility, and with a vengeance. 'It is the speech of a man who is aware of the path to be trodden by the girl he loved, and who contrasts the relations of a common prostitute with an ideal love which is now over.' Catullus, it is suggested, aware of the uniqueness of their former happiness, sets before Lesbia's eyes, in concrete detail such as is not used to describe his own relationship with her, the cheap promiscuity which he knows the future has in store for her, and which we, the readers, know from other poems. The tone of the passage is set by *scelestā*, which is taken in a vituperative sense.¹

That this interpretation is possible is hardly to be denied; nor that, if so taken, the poem would be an impressive work of art. But, for a reader to find it convincing, assent must be given to assumptions of criticism which are by no means compelling. For it relies upon the presence in the poem of Lesbia herself, a person with given characteristics of sufficient distinction for a forecast as to her future behaviour to be based upon them, a forecast which is vindicated by the factual report on her performance in later poems. One might feel more confidence in relying on data given in one poem to support prognostication in another if the Lesbia poems formed a definite cycle—more confidence, but not much even so, in view of the inconsistencies of Cynthia and the charming vagueness of Delia. Were there a regular cycle a circular argument such as this might carry more weight, but with the order of the poems as we have them, it would tax the ingenuity of the Aristophanic Meton to make a full cycle of poems 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 11, while 51 and 58 are far away, and the epigrams lie beyond the great gulf of the *carmina maiora*. Lesbia *quadrantaria* has no passport to this poem; here Catullus can only envisage her in the arms of another lover, not in the arms of three hundred, and the alleged character into which Catullus has insight is non-existent. Nor can *scelestā* be allowed to determine the tone of the passage. In itself it is ambiguous; it certainly can carry a tone which suits the interpretation, but it cannot decisively provide one of itself, and the context Gugel offers is not controlled by the poem, but is a hypothesis not indeed arbitrary, but scarcely compelling.

Neither of these two ways of taking the picture of the girl's future to be serious and factual will do. They involve, I think, at least a slight but definite adjustment of the poem in the interests of a consistent presentation of a real-life situation. Some more oblique approach should be tried, taking the picture of the girl's future to be in some sense imaginary while recognizing that the energy generated by the series of 'Who?' questions derives from Catullus' own growing realization of his loss, which breaks in upon his superficially firm declaration of independence, *iam Catullus obdurat*, 12. How, on this approach, are we to take the assertion of 14, that she will suffer?

It can be taken most simply as an objectively groundless but natural attempt at compensation, a fantasy in which he protects himself by believing he has something irreplaceable to offer and hits back at her by cutting her off, as he imagines, from something she will miss. Or it may be an assertion made

¹ Op. cit., p. 287, 'Es ist die Sprache eines Mannes, der sich bewusst ist, welchen Weg das von ihm einzig geliebte Mädchen gehen wird und der idealen Liebe, die nun endgültig vorbei ist . . . das Verhältnis einer

ganz gewöhnliche Gassenhure gegenüberstellt'; 'über diesem Zukunftsbild aber steht Catulls Beschimpfung *scelestā*, die den Ton der folgenden Verse anstimmt'.

deliberately baseless by the poet in order that it can be recognized as such. Or it may be a traditional motif drawn from the antics of the lover in comedy, or another traditional theme, the frustrated lover's prayer that the person who now scorns him will in old age be subjected to a comparable frustration.

An account which regards the assertion *at tu dolebis* as a piece of calculated implausibility is offered by H. A. Khan.¹ He claims that both Catullus and Lesbia are aware that the ensuing picture of her desolation is a fiction and, for the reader 'the realisation of this fact is crucial to the understanding of the artistic complexity of the poem'. Being so blatantly implausible in view of the actual facts of their liaison, it is an 'invitation to Lesbia to play a game with Catullus'. Playfully she is visualized as an outcast, with the serious purpose of inviting her to return to Catullus. There is indeed an element of wish-fulfilment in the picture of Lesbia forlorn, but this, a product of emotional stress, is really only the raw material out of which the work of art is constructed, and the poem is meant as 'an efficacious weapon in the armoury of love'.

For this subtle account to be acceptable we must suppose the poem to be written for and read by Lesbia at the time she has begun to discard Catullus. That is, the love-affair is not an episode in a possible biography, but actually figures as a component in the poem. The poem does not remain what it appears to be, a soliloquy, but becomes an epistle; or rather it does not remain a piece of writing on a page, but gets another dimension: it now includes Lesbia reacting to a piece of writing on a page. But surely this, though of course always possible, is highly dubious. About the real-life situation we simply do not have sufficient evidence for a reconstruction in the detail required to make it viable for the present purpose. The supposition of Lesbia's response to the picture of her desolation does provide a context to define the way in which 14 ff. can be taken, but it is not a context provided from within the poem. It is imported from outside, without any clear pointer in that direction. The tone of the reading and the subtleties of the interpretation are gratuitous without this necessary smile of Lesbia, which is strictly uncontrollable.

In the three versions so far considered the real-life situation figures directly—Catullus explains to Lesbia what she has lost, invites her to return to him by a playful threat, foresees the onset of her unsavoury promiscuity. The next to be considered also rely on a real-life situation, but do so less directly.

The problem-solving theory of poetry has been applied often to Catullus, but by no one more thoroughly than by S. Commager.² The theory regards

¹ 'Style and Meaning in Catullus' Eighth Poem', *Latomus*, xxviii (1968), 555-74.

² 'Notes on Some Poems of Catullus', *H.S.C.Ph.* lxx (1965), 83-110. See also F. O. Copley, 'Emotional Conflict and its Significance in the Lesbia-poems of Catullus', *A.J.Ph.* lxx (1949), 22-40, and, for a more moderate version, K. Quinn, *The Catullan Revolution* (Melbourne, 1959), pp. 91-5, and *Catullus, The Poems*, p. 398: 'Poem 70 is the first of a series of fragments in which we see Catullus struggling to win more complete awareness of what went wrong between him and Lesbia by repeated, increasingly precise formulation in verse.' The favoured modern statement of the theory is that of

R. Graves, *The Crowning Privilege* (Cassell, 1955), p. 188, where it is said that a poem written with the appropriate care is one in which 'the problem troubling him [i.e. the poet] is stated as truly and economically and detachedly as possible'. The problem is regarded as personal: the poet 'finds himself caught up in some baffling emotional problem', p. 187. Commager also quotes from T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (Methuen, 1920), p. 58: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion.' The context, however, is Eliot's 'Impersonal Theory of Poetry', which is completely irrelevant to Commager's view, and is much closer to the view I shall put forward.

an essential element in poetic composition to be an attempt by the poet to state for himself, and thereby get to grips with, a baffling emotional problem. Commager sees the Lesbia poems as in part the poet's attempt to control overwhelming feelings by distancing himself from them and presenting them objectively. Thus, in 7, the oblique and apparently ornamental expansion of a basic 'as many as the sands in the desert' into a circumstantial travel brochure of Cyrene, and of 'as many as the stars in the sky' into an aetherial theatre for furtive love, is not to be taken as Alexandrian *doctrina* or romantic evocation of the faraway and mysterious, but is an ironical avoidance of direct expression, a steadying of the emotion that threatens to sweep over the poet. Similarly in 8, the refrain *fulsere quondam / uere candidi tibi soles*, 3, 8, is deliberately oblique, not merely evoking the past, but setting it in universal perspective—all good and fair things, one's own happiness as well as golden days, have their term. A second application of the distancing manoeuvre is found in the second half of the poem, for it becomes clear that the whole situation is adapted to a stock predicament in which the frustrated lover cannot tear himself away. Catullus is held to have adopted this posture so as to distance himself from the figure in the poem, and thus to force upon himself, even while speaking most passionately, an admission of the almost comic triteness of a common situation.

Related to this account, in that it sees the relationship of the poet to the material of the poem as critically important—almost another factor that the reader has to take into account, like a title or a prefatory quotation—is the version of R. L. Rowland,¹ who sees neither of the two 'voices', that of the irrational lover and that of reason, as reflecting the poet's attitude towards the experience at the time of writing. Because of the association of reason and irrational desire in 3–8 the emphatic language of the assertion of independence in 12–13 carries no conviction, and we half expect the pose to collapse, as it does. The poet is looking back on his own futile behaviour in a common enough dilemma, and his wry observations give a touch of urbane irony, detectable in the hackneyed, useless recipe for escape no less than in the expected collapse of the speaker's pose of firmness.

Of those two accounts I would say that the lurking presence of the real-life Catullus in the poem is unjustified and indeed damaging. Commager's concentration on the emotional dynamic behind the poem seems to produce an odd effect on the work of art. It may be that, in order to grapple with his feelings, Catullus was driven to see his love as governed by the laws of nature, and maybe he adapted his own predicament to the stock situation of a lover in comedy. Either is possible, but surely it is rather odd to have both together. For if the second course is adopted then any utterance in the monologue belongs to the stock figure in whom the poet objectifies his feelings, in which case it is hard to see how *fulsere quondam* etc. can be properly said to have an emotion-steadying purpose which is at all relevant to our understanding of the poem. If the second course is an attempt at emotional control then the first looks like a deliberate imitation of an attempt at emotional control, and to allow the possibility of such an imitation rather takes the wind out of the sails of the whole approach. But to keep both alternatives is to accept an unattractive break in styles, the poem being in part a direct articulation of the threatening emotion and in part a distancing of it by dramatization.

¹ 'Miser Catulle: an Interpretation of the Eighth Poem of Catullus', *Greece and Rome*, xiii (1966), 15–21.

These may seem slight grounds on which to criticize an approach which is in many ways attractive, but this is due at least in part not to its invulnerability but to the fact that, dealing as it does with submerged features, it so rarely offers a target. Catullus' poetry is robust enough to survive the inconsistencies which I believe Commager's treatment introduces, but that is not an argument in support of the treatment. Whatever use it may be in other poems, in 8 it either conflicts with aesthetic considerations which must have critical priority, or disappears beneath them, in which case it can be discarded as irrelevant. The account given by Rowland seems to me to go too far in the other direction; the distinction between Catullus the poet and Catullus the dramatic figure is very properly observed, but having properly removed the poet from the poem he then quite improperly employs this distance as a factor which determines the tone of the poem. The poet, it is said, 'smiles wryly at his own behaviour'. But the mere fact that the speaker finishes up where he began, despite his suspect though emphatic proclamation of self-control, prompts no smile. It is only the assumption that the poet, now no longer involved, looks back dispassionately on his own behaviour, that can lure us into a search for irony of this sort. Nor can the fact that the situation is typical and the advice the speaker gives himself proverbial and futile invite us to find the slightest flicker of the poet's smile. If there were the least sign in the poem that this was the poet's attitude we would gather it gratefully and feel assured. But there is no sign; the irony is a product of the supposed distance between poet and experience, which is arbitrary. Catullus' wry smile, like Lesbia's appreciative smile of another account, figures like an extra line or two in the poem.

These five accounts of 8 are all very different, even quite fundamentally incompatible in many respects, and none of them appears entirely satisfactory. What they have in common is an attempt, variously applied, to understand the poem by relating it to the real-life situation of the poet, either immediately or by detecting some dynamic in a tension between what is felt and what is said. The critic relies on the poem's capacity to provide access to areas of the poet's actual experience, but none of the ways of substantiating this privileged insight is convincing. Claims to such an insight must, in the nature of things, be largely arbitrary and optional. The fact that a really startling variety of interpretations is produced, coupled with the injustice done to the text to a greater or lesser degree, is enough to indicate that the whole approach is basically misconceived. There are evident differences between the personal poetry of Catullus and the conventional world of Roman love elegy, but, as far as 8 is concerned at least, the attempt to pin down the peculiar Catullan vividness by relating it to the poet's own experience or feelings must eventually tread on emptiness where much is possible and nothing is reliable.

It may seem rather late in the day to be doubting the usefulness of an autobiographical approach to Catullus, yet, if the interpretations I have mentioned are at all representative, then neither is there one generally accepted view to replace it, nor have the recent versions entirely freed themselves from a tendency which better accords with the old picture, the tendency to suppose that what the poet *really* thought or felt is important and accessible. The problem is no doubt perennial, and it is not easy to accept without reservations accounts which stress the use by Catullus of traditional themes. For instance, it seems certain that the theme of the spurned lover hovering indecisively and threatening to get his own back on the girl who has rejected him was traditional in

Hellenistic poetry, yet none of the parallels to the situation in 8 is sufficiently close for us to feel certain that Catullus is re-enacting a standard scene with his own name superimposed, or for the tone of the poem to be determined from that of its supposed source. The traditional lover often asserts or prays that the girl who spurns him will suffer: he will reduce her to penury, Plautus, *Bacchides* 500 ff., accuse her publicly of various crimes, *Truculentus* 758 ff.; she will suffer the pangs of unrequited love in old age, Propertius 3. 25. 11 ff., Horace, *Odes* 4. 13. 1 ff.; he will write abusive poems about her, Propertius 2. 5. 27 ff.; he will lampoon her and find another girl, Philodemus 5 (Gow and Page), Horace, *Epodes* 15. 11 ff. The general situations resemble Catullus 8, but what is the force of *at tu dolebis cum rogaberis nulla*? The context suggests that *cum rogaberis nulla* means 'when I make no advances to you at all', the form of the expression suggests 'when no advances at all are made to you'. If the latter is the meaning intended, it can only be a reference to her old age, when she will keep her lust but will have lost her looks—*audiuere Lyce di mea uota . . . fis anus et tamen uis formosa uideri*. However, perhaps the requisite note of anger is lacking (*scelestas*, *uae te* may be as much sympathetic as vituperative);¹ certainly one feels the lack of a clear reference to old age, such as is found in the poems of Propertius and Horace on this theme; and *quae tibi manet uita? quis nunc te adibit . . . quem nunc amabis?* clearly indicates that Catullus is thinking of the girl's immediate future, not her old age. The first *nunc* at least appears to me to occur too soon for a transition from a traditional topic, which 'should now go on to picture her dreadful old age', to a 'dangerous recollection of all the characteristics of their love', as is held by G. Williams.² The case is perhaps rather that the situation is cast generally in the traditional mould, but is modified too closely to an emotionally genuine personal expression for any specific reference to a particular theme, such as abuse of old age, to be appreciated. Catullus does create an expectation in the reader and then, by allowing the speaker's own desire to come to the fore, deliberately avoid satisfying that expectation, but there is no extra pleasure to be gained by the connoisseur of literature in recognizing the variation. Nor is there the slightest note of humour to be derived from recognizing the similarity between this situation and that of the lover in comedy.³ Modern readers must struggle to recover the traditional background, but the procedure must have been typical and virtually inevitable in the eyes of ancient writers and readers, so that the

¹ For *scelestus* in the sense of 'unfortunate' see Fordyce ad loc.; for *uae* as an expression of sorrow cf. e.g. Terence, *Heaut.* 250 *uae misero mi, quanta de spe decidi*; Plaut. *Capt.* 650 *uae illis uirgis miseris quae hodie in tergo morientur meo*; Virgil, *Ecl.* 9. 28 *Mantua uae miserae nimium uicina Cremonae*. Possibly in Catullus 8 *quae tibi manet uita* should be printed (without a question mark), as giving the reason for the expression of sympathy.

² *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), p. 406. Comparison with Tibullus 1. 9 is instructive. Tibullus twice asserts that the youth who has betrayed him will suffer, once as an immediate consequence of the mercenary traits revealed by his taking a rich lover (he will be afflicted

by the discomforts of *uia longa*) 13–16, and once as a consequence of Tibullus eventually finding a replacement, 79–81. These two 'punishments' are fixed serially: *iam mihi persoluet poenas*, 13, but *tum flebis, cum me uinctum puer alter habebit . . . at tua tum me poena uiuet*, 79–81. By contrast Catullus' series *iam . . . cum rogaberis nulla . . . quae tibi manet uita . . . quis nunc . . . quem nunc* looks at her future as all of one piece starting from now. The first six lines of Tibullus' poems are also useful as an illustration of a mingling of resentment and sympathy such as Catullus puts into *scelestas uae te*.

³ Cf. A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Tradition of Ancient Poetry* (University of California, 1934), etc.

ancient reader, I suspect, would have had no more than a general sense of the sort of thing Catullus could be expected to say in 8, and within this loose frame the utterance in the poem is entirely accommodated without having to or (without more definite signs) being able to lean on traditional motifs for its effect. A lover in the situation envisaged in 8 could be expected to respond to his rejection with a struggle for self-control and an indignant rejoinder, but no prejudgement on the form which the latter would take would be available without a lead from the poet clearer than is given by Catullus. The situation is typical but also psychologically plausible and vividly personal, and there is danger in overemphasizing the typical no less than there is in hypostatizing the personal into reality. Catullus does not invite appreciation of this poem as literature, not life, in the way, for instance, that Tibullus does with his *servitium amoris* stance or Horace with his constant refusal to avoid 'poeticisms', cf. e.g. *Odes* 4. 13. 11-12 *quia rugae turpant et capitis niues*. Catullus wants, as far as possible, to make it true and particular, and the reader should respond sympathetically. Hence the peculiar openness of *cum rogaberis nulla*, and the ambiguity of tone of *scelesta*; the movement from a decision of independence to a vindictive contemplation of the girl's punishment is in accord with the traditional theme, but, to be acceptable as a genuine personal reaction, which I take to be Catullus' aim, *scelesta* must mingle pity with abuse, and *cum rogaberis nulla* must refer to Catullus' avoidance of her. For while the sequence 'you don't want me, so I won't want you, and you'll be sorry when you find I don't; you poor thing, what sort of a life will that be?' is convincing on a personal level, the sequence 'you don't want me, so I won't want you, and you'll be sorry when you find no one wants you, you slut' is impressive only as traditional posturing, for there is none but a conventional bridge from his decision of firmness to her total isolation. There is, for instance, no sign that she has broken faith nor any note of animosity in the first part of the poem. Catullus' way is not to present such a convention and then apply it for whatever purpose, as in comedy or elegy, but to obliterate the convention in the interests of apparent spontaneity and reality.

Determined therefore to keep both autobiography and convention out of sight, I would suggest that a stolid approach to the poem and its mood is soundest. The poem on the face of it is a sombre monologue, and one should start with the supposition that it presents an expression of unhappiness in a dilemma which one is invited to share, and the reader should not allow himself to feel he is having a literary experience or to feel cheered up unless some very clear indication comes from within the poem. It might also be sounder to refer to the Catullus of the poem as 'the speaker', in order to avoid the chance of slipping into autobiographical assumptions, for I maintain that the poem would remain essentially unchanged in content could the word Catullus be replaced by Fabullus or Furius Spurius or even, if it is to your taste, Metellus. Beyond this, there are only three points I would make to fill out a description of the poem as a monologue in which the speaker faces his dilemma, argues himself into a decision of self-control, and finds his new strength broken at the very next onset of desire. The first point is that the main direction of the monologue in 3-8 is not a wistful relapse into contemplation of the happy past, but is a basic element in the argument by which the speaker brings himself to his assertion of freedom. The fact that the relationship was so happy, that he has had something so complete, is not primarily

a matter of regret or of nostalgic recollection, but is used to fortify himself against the future. To put it vulgarly, he is persuading himself that it was great while it lasted, but one has to face facts. The goodness of the past is just as important as the impossibility of the girl's continued co-operation. The past is not sentimentalized or exalted, it is, if anything, played down, *illa multa iocosa*, 6. The expression, traditional as it is in lovers' language, may well be restrained and tender, but it smacks of appreciation. There is an overwhelming simplicity in *amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla*, 5, but the speaker is not primarily defining the quality of his affection; rather he wants himself to realize how lucky he has been in his once-in-a-lifetime experience. There is pathos in 3-8, but it is generated by tension between his line of thought and his feelings towards the events he refers to. Emotion threatens to get control, but, at this stage of the poem, does not do so.¹

The second point is the function of the picture of the girl's future. 'Unhappy Catullus', says the deserted lover, turning to himself at the start. 'From now on Catullus can hold out', he asserts after consideration and decision, turning now an undaunted self towards the world. At the end of the poem the strong, outward-turning self is snapped, and once again he turns in on himself: 'But you, Catullus, hold out.' Within this main outline the picture of the girl's future serves as the means by which the strong resolve is shown to be illusory. Prior to line 14 there is no indication given to suggest that the speaker has any grounds for supposing that his refusal to approach the girl will involve her in any suffering; the happiness of 3-8 was his, and nothing was said of hers beyond what was cancelled by *nunc iam illa non uolt*. The very absence of any reason obliges us to see that it is objectively groundless, and if Catullus' use of a conventional situation is as suggested above, then we should recognize in *at tu dolebis* etc. a natural emotional compensation. It would be hard to find a better word than *scelestus* to suit the attitude of a man who believes he is in a position to pity the girl who has hurt him. And so he embarks on his fantasy, which is not a supposition that because he is not her lover she will have no lovers at all, but that *she* will suffer from the separation *he* has now made conclusive. This fantasy is easily exploded—the sequence of questions, *quae, quis*, etc. starts with the implication that he is irreplaceable to her, but the repetition of the word 'who?', combined with a sharpening of emotion, focuses attention not only on the action referred to, but on the person involved. 'You won't have me to give you that' gives way to 'It won't be me and I wish it were', an idea which is realized only by suggesting another lover. Notice how, in timing and by linguistic reference, the fantasy is bound up with the assertion of independence produced by his struggle—*obdura, obdurat, nec rogabit, cum rogaberis nulla*. There is no hint, at 13, that the bold declaration of success is vulnerable, but because it is tied so closely to the fantasy, whose vulnerability is so effectively demonstrated, we see that the one struggle produced both the conviction of success and the fantasy, both of which are illusory. Down comes the fantasy, and topples with it the conviction. The last line of the poem retreats to the stage of struggle, the stage before *iam Catullus obdurat*.

¹ I think R. L. Rowland, *op. cit.*, quite overstates a basically correct point in claiming that reason comes so close to desire at this stage that the reader is prepared for the collapse of reason under the onslaught of

desire at the end of the poem. In general interpreters have overemphasized the nostalgic elements in 3-8 at the expense of the argumentative function, thus doing less than justice to the taut structure of the whole.

The third point is the tone of the poem. An expression of unhappiness leads, through a process of reasoning in which suppressed emotion almost breaks out, to a demand for self-control and a proclamation of victory. The state of mind that so declares itself produces also a bolstering fantasy which—for here by contrast suppressed emotion does break out—is exploded by increasing sexual passion sharpened by jealousy, and the sense of deprivation rules. A final demand for self-control repeats the earlier and, through the self-apostrophe *Catulle*, recalls the initial situation. The scheme is complete, balanced, and consistent. There is nothing here to prompt a search for anything more sophisticated and less overwhelming than a verbal enactment of a crisis approaching in its intensity anguish.

Although I do not claim that this reading is *right*, from time to time I am inclined to think that it is, and in general I find it preferable to others. Catullus has taken a scheme already to a considerable degree shaped by tradition, and has made it personal in two ways, first by making it a psychologically plausible expression of an agonizing dilemma, and, second, by treating it autobiographically. I am not denying that the intensity of feeling and the general situation may correspond to the poet's own experience and in part derive from it, but I do deny that this assumption can be critically useful, since the nature of the evidence leaves open too many uncontrollable options, none of which quite fits the given poem. The genuine involvement I believe comes through, but it is something extra, imprecise. And while there is undoubted use of a traditional theme, this is an instrument of composition, not part of the finished effect, being obliterated and incorporated in a personal utterance. Finally, all that the reader can see of autobiography is due to a deliberately applied autobiographical colouring. In ordering to substantiate this last contention I shall next discuss 76.

This poem has not been subjected to quite such a variation of treatment as has 8. It has the air of an explicit statement of the situation and attitudes found less fully worked out in other poems and in particular the epigrams, and since the latter are regularly and plausibly taken as 'fragments of a confession' it seems natural to see in 76 a personal expression of the poet's profound convictions about his experience with Lesbia. So that when Catullus makes certain claims to *pietas* in 76 one would like to find that this *pietas* refers only to the situation primarily envisaged in the poem, i.e. the affair with Lesbia, and to find that it can be explained in terms of the related concepts of the epigrams. However, I think it can be shown that these two expectations are frustrated, or rather that they ought to be but too often are not. If this is so then the poem is much more of an independent unit than is often thought, and the autobiographic element appears not to be central, certainly, and probably, from the way it is related to what *is* central, to be a deliberate attempt to foster an impression of autobiography.

The key expression is *si uitam puriter egi*, 19. I do not wish to isolate this expression from the poem, for it has a context defined by the references to *pietas* in lines 1-9 and 26, but because of the words *uitam egi* it does present the problem in its sharpest form. As a preliminary I would dismiss out of hand views which regard 19 as a stereotype formula containing nothing more significant than a conventional mouthing of a claim upon the attention of the gods, for even if it did have the rigidity of a prayer unchanged at each repeat, which is not the case, even so its presence in a poem 26 lines long, of which the first 9 are con-

cerned with *pietas*, would suggest that the poet wanted later occurrences to be seen in the light of the initial passage. Nor is there much profit to be derived from seeing in this *pietas* the fruits of self-deception: 'We saw how (in poem 68) by his total absorption in self he could regard himself, the paramour, as an innocent bridegroom, and her, the faithless wife, as a pure and virgin bride. Just so in our present poem (76) he can picture himself to his own heart as the virtuous and outraged husband, and Lesbia as the well-beloved and traitorous wife of his bosom: "Such tricks hath strong imagination"—when it belongs to a Catullus.'¹ This is the non-Alexandrian half of the two-Catulluses doctrine at its most impressive. Nothing here is calculated, all is genuine, sincere, and totally autobiographical. And unacceptable too, for the sharp distinction between the two Catulluses, on which this interpretation rests, cannot be maintained, as has been shown in many studies.

Let us look at line 19 with reference to the first point, the alleged restriction of *pietas* to Catullus' love for Lesbia. On the face of it the words *uitam egi* constitute a general claim covering at least a wide range of activities and a large portion of the speaker's life. It is not an obvious way of talking of loyalty in love and can only be regarded as an equivalent for impeccable behaviour in *one* relationship if the face value is discounted. Leaving aside a conventional formula and the tricks of strong imagination what are the alternatives to accepting that Catullus intended to extend the area beyond the one relationship? There are two main ways of taking it. The first is to find some way in which *uita* can be significantly used of the love affair, and the 'love is life' convention, well worn in Latin poetry, is to hand. However, the results of taking this line here are momentous, giving a Catullus well on the road that leads to *uixi puellis nuper idoneus* without a sign that he is handling clichés in the Horatian manner. To save the poet's integrity on this line we must assume that we are witnessing the genesis of the 'love is life' convention out of a real-life dilemma. This is problem-solving again, which can be shown on other grounds to be inapplicable to this poem. The second way is to give the verb aoristic force and limit its application to the context of the *longus amor*, implying 'while I loved her my loyalty was unblemished'. Certainly the words can be used of a definite limited period, cf. Terence, *Andria* 74 ff., *primo haec pudice uitam parce ac duriter agebat lana ac tela uictum quaeritans, sed postquam amans accessit . . .*, and since Catullus has no other context in mind except his love there is no question of *uitam egi* applying to anything else. Against this I would say that it is less than certain that Catullus has no other context in mind, for the first six lines of the poem are about general *pietas*, as I shall argue, so that even if he is thinking only of his love there is a slight but real confusion produced by his using a general expression *uitam puriter egi* in a particular context of *longus amor* when his behaviour in this has already been compared to general *pietas*. Assuming that the poet had full consciousness and full control of language this seems an odd procedure and an invitation to look for a context which will bring out the general sense in *uitam egi*, which it surely has at face value.

I shall return to line 19, for it does not stand on its own, but let us now take the second point, the natural and indeed necessary attempt to elucidate the *pietas* of 76 from typical attitudes and values found in other poems. It is my contention that this method, although it goes a long way towards its objective, does not go far enough, and that this *pietas* remains peculiar to this poem

¹ Munro, op. cit., p. 208.

in such a way that it is best regarded as a construct for this poem alone. That the similarities between 76 and other poems in this respect have been over-elaborated at the price of failure to determine the differences is largely a tribute to the hold of the concept of a confessional or problem-solving Catullus.

First, an extreme form of this approach. It is open to anyone to accept or reject the identification of Lesbia with Clodia Metelli and much scorn has been poured on unhappy souls who have essayed detailed biographies. But still there remains a conviction that, since Lesbia is said in two poems to be married, Catullus is writing of a technically adulterous relationship. What then is to be made of the loud claim to *pietas* in 76 (a poem in which have been found, not entirely incidentally, pre-echoes of the Christian loving God and Christian married love)? The question becomes particularly pressing for those who see in the *fides-foedus* pattern of the epigrams a persistent struggle by Catullus to define for himself the spiritual aspects of his love by means of terminology applicable to marriage. One might surely expect Lesbia's marriage to cross the horizons of the poems in which he states his predicament.

The argument traces the use of the *fides-foedus* pattern in poems expressing an attitude towards friendship or marriage and then in those referring to Lesbia. It is held that, by using the same terminology, he is in fact claiming that his relationship with Lesbia is, despite the lack of a licence, marriage. The *pietas* of 76, in which the process culminates, is thus explained as a product of Catullus' obsessive analysis of his own situation, combined with a characteristic tendency to exaggerate the importance of his own feelings even to the extent of universalizing a particular reaction.¹

Now whether the terms Catullus uses do actually reflect marriage is disputable. An old alternative, *amicitia* as political alliance, has recently been reaffirmed as the source of Catullus' imagery, and in any case it is likely that similar language was in ordinary use applied to love affairs.² But even assuming that Catullus' terminology does suggest marriage, the whole approach which sees Catullus struggling to define his love in this way is misconceived. For one factor in the situation for which he must find a satisfactory statement would be

¹ For the *fides-foedus-pietas* complex in connection with 76 see Copley, Commager, Schäfer, opp. cit., and P. McGushin, 'Catullus' *sanctae foedus amicitiae*', *C.P.* lxii (1967), 85-93. A clear statement of the position I regard as indefensible is given by R. Freis, 'Form and Thought in Catullus 76', *Agon*, i (1968), 39-58. 'Catullus insists that his relationship with Lesbia, although flagrantly and even aggressively unlawful by any conventional definition, has through its fullness and depth inwardly created its own civility.'

For the process of universalizing a particular reaction see H. A. Khan, 'Catullus 76: The Summing Up', *Athenaeum*, xlvii (1968), 54-71, with whose description of Catullan *pietas* as 'a logical and rhetorical fiction having no real place in the context of his overall behaviour', p. 56, I would agree.

² For imagery drawn from political alliance, see D. O. Ross, *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Harvard, 1969), pp. 82 ff. with

reference to R. Reitzenstein. However, it seems cramping thus to restrict the imagery, e.g. *pudicitia* would derive more naturally from marriage. Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 34 contrasts Clodia's appointments with her ancestor's disruption of the peace with a foreign king, *ideone ego pacem Pyrrhi diremi ut tu amorum turpissimorum cotidie foedera ferires*, where neither marriage nor political alliance in this sense seems an obvious source for *foedera*. And *amica* does not have to be a political metaphor for Cicero's pun, *Pro Caelio* 32, about avoiding *muliebris inimicitias*, especially *cum ea quam omnes semper amicam omnium potius quam cuiusquam inimicam putauerunt*. The Romans tended to see social relations as more widely fiduciary and contractual than we do, so that Catullus makes his poetry not out of any one particular area, but out of the common ground in marriage, business, *amor*, political and personal *amicitia*.

Lesbia's marriage. Thus we are invited to hold in mind simultaneously a regard of the highest quality and a technically adulterous liaison, a combination of which, however, there is not one word in the poems. In only two poems is it clear that Lesbia is married. One is the epigram, 83, in which Catullus sneers at the husband's complacency: *mule, nihil sentis?*—not, perhaps, a very promising the start for someone held to spend the best of his poetic endeavour on defining essential purity of an illicit love. In the elegy 68 things are different, but hardly better. She is *diua, domina, mea uita, era*—terms suspiciously close to those of Roman love elegy—and she is married. If Catullus were really struggling to define the essence surely he would do more here than express appreciation of the *furtiva munuscula* she brought him from her husband's embrace, surely his observation that she did not come to him as a bride might prompt some comment on his *fides* and not merely, as is the case, a realistic remark that he will not complain of her *rara furta*, provided they remain decently *rara*. But there is no suggestion of *fides* or *foedus* here—though some pretend that there is.

Conversely, in the Lesbia poems where the *fides-foedus* pattern is found (and it is restricted to the epigrams), there is not one clear indication that Lesbia is married. The terms are used either to contrast Catullus' feelings for her with those of the man in the street for his *amica*, or, more regularly, with the way Lesbia treats him. It is incredible that, if the critics who see the *aeternum sanctae foedus amicitiae* against the background of an informal relationship are right, Catullus did not give a clear statement of the contrast. And since he did not use this contrast as a theme of any of his poems, the attempt to read the poems in the light of the contrast is suspect. In most of the epigrams the question of Lesbia's marriage is strictly irrelevant; in some, e.g. 109, it would be a distracting notion to entertain. In others where the necessary combination seems to be approached, what is given by one hand is taken away by the other: she is *mulier mea* in the first line of 70, but at line 3 he is only *cupido amanti*, cf. 72, *solum nosse Catullum*, 1, but *amantem*, 7. In 76, with its special insistence on *pietas in toto*, it would be ruinous. The absence of the pattern from the polymetrics, the way it is used in the epigrams, and the absolute contrast between 76 and 68, show that the marital status of the lovers is not a consistent factor and is, for the most part, irrelevant. Despite the appearance of particularity these poems have a high degree of abstraction, and at the expense of elements which might well be central if the poet were giving a direct articulation of actual experience. These considerations seem to me quite to rule out any prospect of giving an adequate account of these poems based directly on autobiographical assumptions or on any whole-hearted version of the problem-solving theory, and as far as 76 is concerned, the problem of *pietas* in adultery has been invented by an approach which then obligingly produces a solution.

Of course not everyone who sees this *pietas* as explicable in terms of the *fides-foedus* pattern is committed to attaching importance to Lesbia's marriage. Elsewhere Catullus insists on the *pietas* of his treatment of Lesbia, 72, 75, 87, 109; loyalty is given a high value in any friendship and treachery is *impia facta*, 30. 4, cf. 68. 41–50, 77, 102; there is a striking instance of total disillusion—if his friend has let him down no one in the world is *pius*, 73. 2; and the passion of his involvement in personal relationships is everywhere apparent, e.g. 9, 50. Do not these passages provide us with a characteristic Catullan attitude within which 76 can be accommodated?

Almost, but not quite, I believe. Consider the argument with which the poem starts:

Siqua recordanti benefacta priora uoluptas
 est homini, cum se cogitat esse pium,
 nec sanctam uiolasse fidem, nec foedere nullo
 diuum ad fallendos numine abusum homines,
 5 multa parata manent in longa aetate, Catulle,
 ex hoc ingrato gaudia amore tibi.
 nam quaecumque homines bene cuiquam aut dicere possunt
 aut facere, haec a te dictaque factaque sunt.
 omnia quae ingratae perierunt credita menti.
 10 quare iam te cur amplius excrucies?

This approach to *pietas* differs from that found in other poems in a subtle but crucial way. Catullus does not compare his own performance and expectations with those of a man who has been *pious* in any one relationship, but with those of a man who has been *pious* in general. The detail enforces this conclusion: the man reflects that he is *pious*, *cum se cogitat esse pium*, 2; still clearer is *foedere nullo*, 3—such a man has struck many *foedera* and has broken his word in none; likewise with *ad fallendos homines*, to deceive ‘people’, not ‘someone’. It is not the degree of *fides* displayed in one *foedus* that forms the basis of the comparison, but the display of *fides* in every *foedus*. Catullus is comparing himself with a man who might not perhaps say *nulla fides ullo fuit umquam foedere tanta quanta in amore tuo ex parte reperta mea est*, 87, but who certainly could say *uitam puriter egi*. Thus when Catullus introduces himself in the other term of the comparison he is really being illogical, all his *benefacta* having been committed to the one venture.¹ Since there is no word as to his performance in other relationships, the point of the comparison is at least blunted. Though this may be due to confusion there are signs that it is deliberate. Notice how his own performance gains a touch of generality: ‘for *whatever men* can do for *anyone*, *this* has been done by you. *All of which* has been wasted . . .’ The reader is being led unsuspectingly from one class of universals to another. Even the phrases *ex hoc amore* and *ingratae credita menti* judiciously avoid specifying Lesbia as the only beneficiary, for there is a saving vagueness in *credita*. And if this process is deliberate then the blending of general *pietas* with that shown in the affair with Lesbia is a calculated result. Catullus is still presented in the role of loyal lover betrayed, familiar from other poems, yet he has acquired a more general colour. We noted above that *si uitam puriter egi* appeared in a context defined by the start of the poem; surely the extension of the range of *pietas* in both passages is not fortuitous. The combination of the generalizations in 1–4 with the subtle transition of 7–9 and the striking formulation *uitam egi* must create in the reader the impression that Catullus has been *pious* in general. The purpose for which this is done will have to be considered, but at this point it should be recognized that, though the Catullus of 76 bears a general similarity to the

¹ Cf. D. O. Ross, op. cit., pp. 89–90. ‘The most difficult question concerning 76 is . . . what do the first five lines have to do with the sixth? What in fact does a man’s piety, in his relations with others, have to do with Catullus’ own love affair?’ He finds the introduction at first sight unsatisfactory but

believes that if the metaphor of the epigrams is recognized here the lines become ‘not only direct and fitting, but personal as well’. I agree with the analysis, but I think the answer insufficient because everything in 1–5 insists on the generality of the *pietas*.

Catullus who mocks Lesbia's husband or tolerates her *furta* with resignation, he is possessed of a *pietas* that is unthought of in those poems. Likewise, and more importantly, for all his concentration on *fides* and *pietas* and his total involvement in personal relationships, there is no way of crossing from the *aeternum foedus* of the epigrams to this form of *pietas* without the subtle adjustment of these lines. This *pietas* is operative in this poem and in this poem only.

If these conclusions are acceptable and this *pietas* is unaccountable in terms of the *fides-foedus* pattern and is not entirely interchangeable with *pietas* in the one relationship with Lesbia, what becomes of the supposed autobiographical unity that the poems handle? There is very little left of importance for 76. The most one could say is that Catullus appears to be the sort of person who might well argue himself into a conviction of this sort about his own behaviour. But if one holds this view it should be noted that 76 is not to be taken as proof that Catullus actually did think that way and interpreted accordingly, for that would be to close the gap again. Or one might take the extension of *pietas* from *amor* to life as a whole as Catullus' way of expressing the supreme significance this *amor* has had for him. However, this might be thought rather oblique for Catullus, who tends to directness in such matters, e.g. 104. 1-2, (*meae uitae*) *ambobus mihi quae carior est oculis*, and in any case it simply is not what the poem says. It may well be suggested, but only as a by-product. Let us grant the poem the degree of independence that its unique formulation of Catullan *pietas* demands and read it first and foremost as a poetic idea. If it works well this way and details like *uitam egi* contribute to the effect instead of having to be explained away, then, in view of the difficulties encountered by approaches which regard an autobiographical element as central and in view of the related problems that have arisen in connection with 8, the simplest hypothesis will be to take the appearance of autobiography as a calculated effect.

What is peculiar to 76 is that the cries of the betrayed lover ring with all the more urgency because a moral universe is at stake. This is the idea in the service of which the Catullus of this poem has been reborn with subtly different characteristics. The main force is still a lover's despair, but deepened now with touches of tragedy. These are undertones, and to isolate them is to overemphasize, but what must be felt as subordinate in the poem may be put more emphatically in discussion. Accordingly I would say that Catullus is here presented as one who has committed himself to a course of action from which, according to the moral vision of his society, he ought at least to have the satisfaction of knowing he has acted rightly, 1-6, even if, as is the case, he has got no tangible returns, 7-9. His continued suffering is therefore a contradiction of moral sense and the values that underpin society. The gods sanction this scheme and so in suffering he suffers *dis invitis*. This phrase could mean 'since the gods do not wish you to continue loving her', but contributes more if taken to mean 'since the gods do not wish you to be unhappy', the gods being the guarantors of the satisfaction due to a clear conscience. This sense is brought out by the implication of 3-4 that his behaviour has been of the type to earn divine favour, cf. *sanctam, nec . . . diuum numine abusum*, as well as by the prayer of 17-26 which, for all its amplification, rests upon the same point expressed with bitter terseness in 11-12. Thus all the references to the gods are interconnected and organic. In the prayer he discards all expectation of the reciprocity which, in the contractual Roman view of social intercourse, would have made her *grata*, 23-4, and in his declaration that joy has been driven

entirely from his breast are included the pleasures of a satisfied conscience. For while *laetitia*s, 22, is general, the principal references established in the poem are *uoluptas*, 1, and *gaudia*, 6. The connection is reinforced by the exclusion of any explicit reference to other joys in order that the joys of the reflective *pius* might come first in the reader's associations. Thus the prayer repeats in its own mode the argument of 1-10; he will not expect *gratia* from an *ingratus amor* but longs for a minimum peace of mind. Earlier this contentment was bitterly overstated as *uoluptas* and *gaudia*, now the lack of it is correspondingly presented in a horrifying distortion as *taeter morbus*. And since he feels that his very life is in danger, the prayer is that of a man whose plight touches on ultimate moral questions; unless he is restored there is moral chaos. Catullus of course does not give the poem this slant in order to question the justice of the world *more Aeschyleo*, but there is no doubt that the situation is moralized and equally no doubt that for this to be effective the speaker must be able to lay claim to *pietas* in all his dealings with men and gods, not just in one connection. Accordingly Catullus has 'invented a fact' in order to bring this scheme into the orbit of a personal poem on unhappy love, the 'fact' being *si uitam puriter egi*. It is only because the Catullus of this poem has been identified too closely with the Catullus of other poems and with the poet himself that the moralizing tone has been found self-centred and distasteful. *pius Aeneas* is hard enough to recover, and *pius Catullus* is even harder, but only because he is presented in a smaller compass and under autobiographical disguise.

The general conclusion to be drawn from consideration of poems 8 and 76 and recent critical discussion on them is that an autobiographical approach is unsatisfactory and that they are best understood as poetic ideas made vivid by an appearance of autobiography. No doubt some profound experience lies behind the Lesbia poems and contributes to their peculiar power, but the apparently factual and personal detail of the poems is mostly a deliberate façade. Even the most winning instances of apparent sincerity are deceptive: in 8. 5 *amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla* carries conviction, and, with the change of *tantum* for *nobis*, occurs in 37. 12. But 37 is bellicose, and the next line is *pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata*, where *magna bella* is a typically exaggerated motif of love poetry. Catullus has been less careful than usual here in giving a consistent air of reality, and his lapse (which in 37 is an aesthetic flaw if *amata tantum* etc. is meant to be simple and sincere) is a token of his success elsewhere.

W. B. Yeats made a distinction between the bundle of incoherences that sits down to breakfast and the poet of a personal poem reborn in the service of an idea. Still more drastic, and all the more reassuring, are some remarks by Robert Lowell on his 'Life Studies': 'They're not always factually true. There's a good deal of tinkering with fact. I've invented facts . . . Yet there's this thing: if a poem is autobiographical . . . you want the reader to say, this is true . . . And so there was always that standard of truth which you wouldn't ordinarily have in poetry—the reader was to believe he was getting the *real* Robert Lowell.'¹ These remarks are of utmost importance to counter the strong current suppositions about Catullus. For much of Catullus' poetry is very close to the *odi* and the *amo* of Munro's doctrine; poems like 104 seem hardly extricable from an actual situation. In others he may have felt that this was himself

¹ The quotation from R. Lowell is taken from an interview printed in *Modern Poets on* *Modern Poetry*, ed. Scully (Fontana, 1966), p. 251.

speaking, and wanted others to know that this was so—hence the development of a conscious technique of self-projection; poems like 31, 46, 50 and many epigrams may be like this. In yet others he appears to be using this technique to give an indisputable stamp of reality to anecdote, incident, and conceit, and I would instance 4, 10, 13, 17. But at the height of his powers he had at his disposal a method centred on a fictitious Catullus which enabled him to fuse his own insights and feelings with a traditional scheme, as in 8, and so produce personal poetry of the highest excellence, or even, as perhaps Plato found with his Socrates, to extend his necessary medium to the limit in the service of a new idea, as in 76. Whatever be the truth about Catullus' development as a poet, which must remain indeterminable in the face of complete absence of chronological data, it is clear that some poems which present a late stage of the Lesbia affair, 11 as well as 8 and 76, exhibit such unmatched intensity of feeling as to overwhelm the reader with a sense of personal involvement, and at the same time show in structure and content features which are irreconcilable with strict autobiography. It is partly because the output is limited and varied and not concentrated in an established genre, as the elegists were able to concentrate their work, that it is not so easy to recognize the extent to which the personal poems have been given a deceptive look of particularity because Catullus wanted his readers to believe that they were looking at the real Catullus. Increasing attention has been given of late to the questions of defining the tradition within which Catullus worked, and we are rightly reminded that the virtually total loss of the *neoterici* may have obliterated a well-defined genre. Too much weight cannot be put on such possibilities, but at least it is highly probable that the isolation in which Catullus appears to stand is deceptive and may unnaturally enhance the atmosphere of personal involvement. And when on top of this we find poems of great passion and power presenting a fairly consistent range of attitudes expressed under the poet's own name, it is easy to forget that *miser Catulle* can have no more than the usual status of the lyric *ego*, that is a fictional, dramatic 'I'.

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