

express his overall conviction that traditional patterns of political behaviour fall short of success under the pressures of the Peloponnesian war. *Éthopoeia* was, generally, the universal genre where history and poetry met (cf. Quint. 3.8.53). It emerges as a 'borderline' mode of writing that allows for moral sensitivity, intertextual depth, and factual accuracy alike, thus offering the chance to enjoy Thucydides-as-literature without jeopardizing Thucydides-as-history.

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*NAM UNGUENTUM DABO: CATULLUS 13 AND SERVIUS' NOTE ON
PHAON (AENEID 3.279)¹*

Catullus' cunning dinner invitation to Fabullus continues to generate a rich variety of interpretations of its memorable central image, the promised gift of a certain *unguentum Veneris* (13.12). Three *Latomus* articles, by Littman, Hallett, and Case, have explored possible origins of and uses for that mysterious substance, suggesting, for example, that it might even contain female secretions with powerful aphrodisiac properties, or some other unmentionable sexual lubricant.²

Interpretations of Catullus 13 seem to oscillate between the 'Dr Ruth' school of criticism and more restrained readings of light, friendly humour at both Fabullus' expense and the poet's, spicing a delicate compliment made to his mistress' eyebrow (*suae puellae*), whether she is Lesbia or not.³ The following is offered as a contribution to the debate, in the hope of shedding further light on Catullus' *unguentum* within the poetic context of an elegant, refined, and deftly erotic compliment from her lover.

To make up for his admittedly meagre fare, Catullus rounds off this invitation to Fabullus with two special incentives (13.10–15):

sed contra accipies meros⁴ amores
seu quid suavius elegantiusve est:
nam unguentum dabo, quod meae puellae

¹ I would like to thank my former teacher and long-time friend, Professor D. F. S. Thomson, for citing this suggested Servius-parallel to Catullus' *unguentum Veneris* in his splendid and long-awaited new commentary: *Catullus. Edited with a Textual and Interpretative Commentary* (*Phoenix* Supplementary Volume 34; Toronto, 1997).

² R. J. Littman, 'The unguent of Venus: Catullus 13', *Latomus* 36 (1977), 123–38; J. P. Hallett, 'Divine unction: some further thoughts on Catullus 13', *Latomus* 37 (1978), 747–8; B. D. Case, 'Guess who's coming to dinner: a note on Catullus 13', *Latomus* 54 (1995), 875–6. For further comment on the literary aspects of Catullus 13, see G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 122, 127, 463. K. Quinn, *Catullus. An Interpretation* (New York, 1973), pp. 231–2, sees 13 as an invitation to meet Lesbia; G. P. Goold, *Catullus* (London, 1983), p. 239, reads *cenabis bene* (1) as a reply to Fabullus' invitation of himself to Catullus' house (comparing Cic. *de Or.* 2.246 for the formula): '“My sweetheart” must be the Lesbia of happier days . . .'; D. W. T. C. Vessey, 'Thoughts on two poems of Catullus, 13 and 20', *Latomus* 30 (1971), 45–55, at 48, saw the poem as a 'compliment to Lesbia and her divine beauty'.

³ E. T. Merrill, *Catullus* (Cambridge, MA, 1893), p. 59: Merrill's view of the tone of 13 is 'dignity and condescension. . . . The lack of anything but happy feeling in the memory indicates that the poem was written while the love for Lesbia was still untroubled by disagreement of suspicion,—therefore about 60 B.C.' C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus. A Commentary* (Oxford, 1961), p. 133. R. Ellis's support for Lesbia as the *puella* of 13 (*A Commentary on Catullus* [2nd edn, Oxford, 1889], p. 48) seems generally accepted. For Clodia Metelli, see now R. D. Griffith, 'The eyes of Clodia Metelli', *Latomus* 55 (1996), 381–3.

⁴ The choice of MSS readings at 13.10 between *meros* (O: e.g. Kroll, Mynors, Quinn, Fordyce, Goold, Thomson) and *meos* (X: e.g. Littman) seems to vary with the interpretation of *unguentum* as either divine or profane.

donarunt Veneres Cupidinesque,
quod tu cum olfacies, deos rogabis,
totum ut te faciant, Fabulle, nasum.

But what you'll get instead is some
neat affection or, sweeter, choicer yet,
I'll give an oil the Venuses and Cupids
gave to my girl: Fabullus,
when you smell it, you will ask
the gods to make you all *nose*!

Venus' magical unguent cries out for an allusion to poetry or myth. In his commentary, Kenneth Quinn reconsidered two previously proposed parallels: *Odyssey* 18.190–6 and Propertius 2.29.15–18. He discounted Homer's ambrosia of Aphrodite since it was intended for goddesses (and as a cleanser, not a perfume), but was rather attracted by the Propertius passage, which 'probably provides the clue we need':

quae cum Sidoniae nocturna ligamina mitrae
solverit atque oculos moverit illa graves,
afflabunt tibi non Arabum de gramine odores,
sed quos ipse suis fecit Amor manibus.

Quinn correctly infers here 'a reference to the idea that a lovely woman, like a goddess, emitted a special characteristic fragrance which was her aura'.⁵ (The charming motif of *Amores* making perfumes is familiar from Pompeiian wall paintings.)

There is yet another possible interpretation of the *unguentum Veneris*, however, which seems both more exact and more poetic, suggested by Pliny the Elder (12.18) and Vergil's commentator Servius. The latter's note at *Aeneid* 3.279 gives two versions of the foundation-myth for the temple of Venus at Leucas, site of the famous 'lovers' leap' where Sappho ended the pain of her rejection by Phaon. Varro (cited here by Servius) had attributed the foundation of that cult to Aeneas, while Menander and his Roman adapter Turpilius (d. 103 B.C.) favoured Phaon of Lesbos.⁶ Cicero cites Turpilius' dramatic adaptation of the story, *Leucadia* ('The Girl from Leucas') in the *Tusculans* (4.72), as an example of *furor amatorius* approaching tragic pathos. Everyone else was false to him, protested Phaon the lover, except Venus (*Venerem unam excludit ut iniquam*, 4.34.73). Servius' version of the tale of Phaon and the unguent of Venus runs as follows:

Qui [Phaon] cum esset navicularius, solitus a Lesbo in continentem proximos quosque mercede transvehere, Venerem mutata in anvis formam gratis transvexit. Quapropter ab ea donatus unguenti alabastro, cum se indies inditum ungeret, feminas in suum amorem trahebat, in quis fuit una, quae de monte Leucate, cum potiri eius nequiret, abiecit se dicitur: unde nunc auctorare se quotannis solent qui de eo monte iaciuntur in pelagus.

Pliny's account tells how Venus had hidden Phaon in a lettuce patch (!) because of his

⁵ K. Quinn, *Catullus. The Poems* (London and Basingstoke, 1970); see also his *Latin Explorations* (London, 1986), p. 176. Quinn cites Vergil, *Aen.* 1.403–4, and also Baudelaire's *Le Chat*: 'Was the scent, in other words, not one presented to Catullus by his mistress, but the alluring fragrance of her person?' (135).

⁶ *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Verilii Carmina Commentarii*, recens. G. Thilo, H. Hagen (Leipzig, 1881), I, p. 390. For the fragments of Turpilius' *Leucadia*, see O. Ribbeck, *Comicorum Romanorum Praeter Plautum et Syri Quae Feruntur Sententiae Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1898), II, 113–18. The story of Phaon and Aphrodite is also told by Aelian (12.18) and Lucian (*Dial. Mort.*) without reference to the *unguentum*.

good looks, and that the *unguentum*, used as a skin-soap, inflamed the women of Lesbos with passion for him. Phaon's legendary sex appeal may have been comic invention.⁷ Plautus (*Miles* 1246–7) used that without reference to *unguentum*:

nam nulli mortali scio obtigisse hoc, nisi duobus,
tibi et Phaoni Lesbio, tam mulier ut amaret.

Pliny the Elder recounts one tradition in which Phaon used the pale variety of the herb *eryngion* as an aphrodisiac to fire Sappho's passion for him (22.20). Her subsequent leap from the famous rock is referred to by Ovid (*Her.* 15) and by Statius (*Silv.* 5.3.154), and it appears in the stuccoes in the apse of the Underground Basilica at the Porta Maggiore in Rome.⁸

In accepting this allusion as central to the poem's interpretation, one would conclude that Catullus' *puella* has simply come into the possession of a wondrous new aphrodisiac perfume or mixer, his own extravagant claims for which are put forward with amusing and delicate sophistication in allusions to Sappho and comedy. Perhaps it serves also as an invitation to Fabullus to try it on his own *candida puella*, as well as a pretty compliment—a gift from 'VENUS & SONS PERFUMERS'. Sapphic echoes in Catullus can provide a lyric filtre for his deepest feelings, both *for* (Poem 51 is a delicate and tender translation of Sappho)⁹ and *against* (11) Lesbia.

The introduction of Phaon's *unguentum Veneris* into the invitation to Fabullus produces two rhetorical effects: (1) enticing Fabullus to the otherwise scanty fare at Catullus' party with the promise of sensory delights, and (2) complimenting his *puella* on her own irresistible charm, sophistication, and allure—her *venustas*. Like the *puella* of Caecilius in poem 35, Lesbia too could be *Sappica puella doctior musa* (35.16–17). If Catullus' pomade is presented in an alabaster box like Phaon's (it must be in *something*), Fabullus would be even more likely to catch the allusion.¹⁰ A phallic *double entendre* in *totum . . . nasum* (15) would add an epigrammatic sting to the poem.

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⁷ Also a theme on Etruscan mirrors: E. Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, bearb. A. Klügmann und G. Koerte (Berlin, 1884–97), III, Taf. CDVII; IV, Taf. CCCXXIII; V, 5, 40–2, Taf. 32.

⁸ See *inter alios* G. Lugli, *Itinerario di Roma Antica* (Milan, 1970), p. 525 (fig. 365).

⁹ Sappho, frag. 31L–P.

¹⁰ Cf. the *onyx* in Cat. 66.83 and Horace *Carm.* 4.12. Pliny the Elder (36.20) refers to the use of this stone: 'quem cavant et ad vasa unguentaria, quoniam optime servare incorrupta dicitur'.

HEBDOMADES (BINAE)?¹

Varro's *Hebdomades vel de imaginibus*² contained 700 pictures of illustres³ accompanied by short descriptions in verse and prose,⁴ all arranged by the number seven: Gellius provides a detailed excerpt from the first book on the significance of this

¹ I am greatly indebted to the Editor and the anonymous referee of CQ for their helpful suggestions.

² Exact title in Gell. 3.10.1.

³ Plin. *N.H.* 35.11.

⁴ Epigrams: Gell. 3.11.7; Symm. *ep.* 1.4.2; Non. Marc. p. 528M; for prose texts see F. Ritschl, *Opuscula Philologica* (Lipsiae, 1877), vol. iii, p. 453. For a recent short discussion of the verse and prose inscriptions of the *Imagines* see H. I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 182–3, 207.