

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

COPIA SCRIPTORVM IN CATULLUS 68.33

J. C. YARDLEY

*nam quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me,
hoc fit, quod Romae vivimus.*

IN HIS EDITION of Catullus, Kenneth Quinn accepts the interpretation of *scriptorum copia* propounded by certain earlier editors such as Doering-Naudet (1826) and Merrill (1893), arguing that Catullus "is rejecting Mallius' assumption that he must have lots of material on hand (just completed or nearing completion) which he can send, even if he isn't in the mood for writing fresh poetry."¹ According to this interpretation *scriptorum* is the genitive not of *scriptores*, as most editors have assumed, but of *scripta*, and refers not to other poets' work but to Catullus' own. Since this interpretation appears to be enjoying something of a renaissance (see now Gerald N. Sandy, *Phoenix* 32 [1978] 79, note 38, and 80)² it should be subjected to some scrutiny.

At first glance the suggestion is attractive. It certainly obviates the difficulty that an absence of books is a poor excuse for not writing poetry in Verona if Ovid was later able to manage in Tomi.³ It also enables us to avoid the problems inherent in the interpretation of Fordyce, who accepts *scriptorum* as the genitive of *scriptores* and believes Catullus is talking about literary models: "The excuse is revealing evidence of the methods and ideals of the *doctus poeta*; what is expected of him is Alexandrian poetry, translated from, or modelled on, Greek, and for that he needs a library."⁴ This suggests composition of two different types of poetry, learned Alexandrian on the one hand, and pure, spontaneous Catullan on the other, and this distinction, as T. P. Wiseman observes, "is not one which Catullus and his friends would have recognised."⁵

But the weight of the evidence is against the interpretation. One may point first to the usage of the other major Roman poets, Lucretius, Horace, Propertius, Ovid, Statius, and Martial. (I omit Virgil and Tibullus who use no parts of *scribere*, and Lucan who does so only once [2.343]). They all

I wish to thank the journal's anonymous referees whose comments improved this note at various points.

¹*Catullus: The Poems* (London 1970) 380.

²See also H. Bardon, *Catulli Carmina* (Brussels 1970 [Collection *Latomus* 112]) 178.

³T. E. Kinsey, "Some Problems in Catullus 68," *Latomus* 26 (1967) 39.

⁴*Catullus* ed. C. J. Fordyce (Oxford 1961) 348.

⁵*Cinna the Poet and other Roman Essays* (Leicester 1974) 93.

avoid the genitive plural of *scriptum* although they do, like Catullus (36.7, 44.18), use the other cases (Ovid on no fewer than fifty-six occasions). Horace alone uses the genitive plural, and he only once and in such a way as to make it clear that the genitive is of *scripta* and not *scriptores*: *membranam poscas, scriptorum quaeque retexens* (*Sat.* 2.3.2), where *quaeque* is a clear pointer. For *scriptorum* as the genitive of *scriptores*, cf. Lucretius 3.629, Prop. 3.1.12, Horace *Epist.* 1.19.39, 2.2.77. Secondly, Catullus uses the form *scriptorum* only twice, both times in this poem (7, 33). At line 7 it is clearly the genitive of *scriptores* (*veterum ... scriptorum*, "the classical authors"). It seems unlikely that he would expect his readers to see the same word as meaning something different twenty-six lines later.

But we can go further. *Copia* with the dependent genitive *librorum* seems to be almost a technical term for a library. Ovid, for instance, makes the complaint from exile that *non hic librorum, per quos inviter alarque, copia* (*Trist.* 3.14.37–38), and before him Horace, informing Lollius of his desire for the simple life, had already used the expression in a neat zeugma: *sit bona librorum et provisae frugis in annum copia* (*Ep.* 1.18.109–110).⁶ In a letter to Atticus, written during Catullus' lifetime in 59 B.C., Cicero apologises to Atticus for his inactivity at Antium; one of his pleasures there is his books, *quorum habeo Anti festivam copiam* (*Att.* 2.6.1). Some two centuries later Gellius uses the expression in telling of Xerxes' pillaging of an Athenian library: *omnem illam postea librorum copiam Xerxes, Athenarum potitus, urbe praeter arcem incensa, abstulit asportavitque in Persas* (*N.A.* 7.17). These examples make it unlikely that *scriptorum copia* is to be taken as anything but an equivalent to *copia librorum*. Indeed, even if *scriptorum* were to be construed as neuter, they suggest that the phrase will mean a "supply of books" and not a "supply of my writings." If a further argument were needed, one might add that the poet of Callimachean ideals who complains of Sufferus' prodigious output in 22 is hardly likely to tell his friend, and his readers, that he has brought only one boxful of his works to Verona, leaving the many other boxfuls at home (*huc una ex multis capsula me sequitur* [36])!

Catullus is saying that to write poetry (and not just "learned poetry") he needs books, and in his present location he does not have them. Nor is this a feeble excuse. Ovid did, indeed, manage to remain prolific in exile, but he continually complains that the quality of his poetry has declined—many scholars have believed him—and he does in fact attribute this to literary undernourishment (*Trist.* 3.14.37 ff.). Nor do Catullus and Ovid stand alone in their claim that models are necessary for the production of

⁶Oddly enough, Merrill quotes both these examples, but comments: "Catullus now returns to the first part of the letter of Manlius and explains why he cannot send *poems earlier composed*" (my italics).

poetry. The *locus classicus* is, of course, Horace *AP* 268–269 *vos exemplaria Graeca / nocturna versate manu, versata diurna*, but see also Petronius 118.3 and Kroll on Catullus 68.33.

As a postscript it might be added that if *copia librorum* is, indeed, a technical expression for a library, this could help to explain the peculiar repetition of *copia* at 39–40, where some play on the word is obviously intended. In 39 it seems to be used zeugmatically to refer both to the “supply” of poetry and to the girl requested by Mallius (the *munera ... et Musarum ... et Veneris* of line 10⁷); i.e., Catullus is using the word both in its “straight” and its erotic sense (on which see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* [Cambridge 1956] 26–27). The reader is also expected to remember the expression *scriptorum copia* in 33, and he will supply the genitive for himself in 40. Catullus is then saying to Mallius, playing yet again upon *copia* (but concentrating, as he has done in the previous lines, on the difficulty of supplying the poetry rather than the girl): “You would now have both the things you ask for if I had my library.”⁸

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

⁷See Wiseman (above note 5) 93.

⁸Wiseman (91 note 17) suggests that in 40 *copia* means “supply, abundance” or “opportunity” or “eloquence, fluency.” Only the last of these seems to me possible (for the “rhetorical” *copia*, see *OLD* s.v. *copia* 6), though naturally I should prefer to see a reference back to *copia scriptorum*.

OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES* 3.442 ff. AND THE PROLOGUE TO MENANDER'S *MISOUMENOS*

GREGSON DAVIS

OVID'S TALE OF NARCISSUS in *Metamorphoses* 3.339–510 contains an extended allusion, in 353–355, to Catullus 62.42–44.¹ May it contain another, in 442–445, to the prologue of Menander's *Misoumenos*, as now known in *POxy* inv. 5 B 46/D (2), fr. A i?²

¹Discussed by J-M Frécaut, *L'Esprit et l'Humour chez Ovide* (Grenoble 1972) 118–119. Cf. the commentary of Haupt-Korn-Müller-Ehwald-von Albrecht (Dublin/Zurich 1966 —hereafter Haupt-Ehwald) *ad Met.* 3.353.

²First edited and discussed by E. G. Turner, *The Papyrologist at Work* (Durham, N.C. 1973 [*Greek Roman and Byzantine Monographs* 6]) 48–50. All quotations of the *Misoumenos* prologue are from this text, which supplements that of Sandbach's 1972 OCT deriving from Pap. IFAO 89 (1) and also discussed by Turner, 15–21. Citations of the *Metamorphoses* follow the text of H. Magnus (Berlin 1914).