

NUM TE LEAENA: CATULLUS 60

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*Num te leaena montibus Libystinis
aut Scylla latrans infima inguinum parte
tam mente dura procreauit ac taetra,
ut supplicis vocem in novissimo casu
contemptam haberes, a nimis fero corde?*

Did a lioness in the Libyan mountains, or
Scylla barking from her groin bear you with
so hard and foul a mind that you would scorn
the voice of a suppliant in his latest misfortune
because of—ah!—too bestial a heart?

RECENT WORK ON CATULLUS HAS SOUGHT TO EXPAND our critical understanding of his poetry both by drawing on new approaches and also by incorporating more individual poems into the critical picture. In particular, greater concentration on the realia of Roman society and fuller appreciation of the dynamics of Catullan language have allowed us to map out meaningful connections between once neglected and frequently opaque texts and the best known poems in the Catullan corpus. At the same time, scholarship has been exploring the importance of the audience as a factor in the interpretation of Latin poetry; indeed, awareness of the complicated interactions between text and audience has opened up new possibilities for reading even the most opaque texts of Catullus.¹

In this paper, I will suggest how such approaches can lead to a greater appreciation of *Carmen* 60, which, like many of the very short poems of Catullus, has not excited much scholarly comment.² The reasons for this neglect are more or

I would like to thank James Rives and the anonymous readers of this journal for their helpful comments and suggestions. The text of Catullus cited here is Mynors's Oxford text of 1958; all translations are my own.

¹Interaction between the Catullan text and the reader/audience has now been explored in numerous places: see especially Fitzgerald 1995; Pedrick 1986 and 1993; Selden 1992. None of these authors deals with *C.* 60 itself, but Pedrick's explanation (particularly in her 1993 article) of the hostile addressee as a means of manipulating the audience has been especially useful to me in formulating my ideas about Catullus.

²While commentators are divided over various details, there is substantial agreement on most of the poem, and I record the views of particular commentators only where they are unique and/or especially helpful. The fullest discussions are those by Lieberg (1962) and Weinreich (1959); these scholars are also the two most sympathetic to reading *C.* 60 as a complete poem in its own right. While Weinreich's conclusion that it is ultimately a Lesbia poem differs from that presented here, his article (esp. 75–78) provides a useful detailed comparison of *C.* 60 with 64.154–157. Weinreich also discusses detailed connections between *C.* 60 and other earlier and later examples (see esp. 78–83). Lieberg (1962: 275–283) is very helpful on the literary background of the poem, though I do not think the sources he cites support his identification of the poem as an address to Lesbia.

less obvious: vigorous as the poem is, it has no context, no identifiable addressee, and, it would seem, little point besides colorfully venting rage at betrayal. Yet, as often in Catullus' work, seemingly isolated expressions of emotion emerge out of nowhere to generate their own contexts, and while they are impossible to place within the narratives that Catullan scholars have often tried to generate from his poems, they nevertheless explore the same themes and potentials as his longer and more dramatically complex poems.³ *C.* 60 says little explicitly but, by its very existence, it illustrates a fundamental practice of Catullan composition: the use of literary *topoi*, as well as *topoi* from non-literary genres such as graffiti and *flagitatio*, in surprising contexts that activate different and sometimes new potentials in those forms of speech.⁴

In *C.* 60 the context may be mysterious, but the *topos* is not. The accusation that hardhearted people come from bestial, monstrous, or unnatural mothers was very old by the time of Catullus.⁵ The two most famous Greek examples are clearly closely connected to our poem:

νηλέες, οὐκ ἄρα σοί γε πατήρ ἦν ἱππότη Πηλεΐς,
οὐδὲ Θέτις μήτηρ· γλαυκὴ δέ σε τίκετ θάλασσα
πέτραι τ' ἠλίβατοι, ὅτι τοι νόος ἐστὶν ἀπηνής.

(Hom. *Il.* 16.33–35)

Hard of heart, so the horseman Peleus was not
your father after all, nor Thetis your mother.
The gray sea bore you, and the towering rocks,
because your mind is unfeeling.

λέαιναν, οὐ γυναιῖκα, τῆς Τυρσηνίδος
Σκύλλης ἔχουσιν ἀγριωτέραν φύσιν.

(Eur. *Med.* 1342–43)

a lioness, not a woman, whose nature is
more bestial than Etruscan Scylla.⁶

³The usual critical method for integrating *C.* 60 more fully into the Catullan corpus as a whole involves reading it very much as a Lesbia poem; see further below, n. 9. That is obviously not my approach here, but it is certainly a valid way of reading the poem. For a good recent example of a reading that accepts that the addressee is Lesbia, but which establishes other connections between the themes and images of the rest of the corpus as well, see Holzberg 2002: 99–100.

⁴*C.* 42 was long ago identified as an example of *flagitatio*: see Usener 1901: 20–21. For an examination of the semiotic possibilities of the graffiti-like *C.* 59, as well as its history in Catullan interpretation, see Nappa 1999.

⁵In addition to the Greek examples quoted in the text below, see also Verg. *Aen.* 4.365–367 and Ov. *Met.* 8.120–125. For a Theocritean analogue, as well as the possible history of the *topos* in Hellenistic poetry, see Lieberg 1966, discussing ps.-Theocritus 23. While this poem does not provide a particularly close parallel, it certainly suggests, as Lieberg notes, that the *topos* must have had a presence in Hellenistic literature as well.

⁶It should perhaps be pointed out in this context that φύσιν automatically suggests that which one has by birth.

In the first of these passages, Patroclus chides Achilles for refusing to help the Greeks; in the second, Jason rebukes Medea for her un-Greek and unnatural revenge.

Indeed, Catullus himself uses the topos elsewhere, and our poem has itself been described, and dismissed, as merely a draft of Ariadne's similar accusation of Theseus (64.154–157):⁷

*quaenam te genuit sola sub rupe leaena,
quod mare conceptum spumantibus exspuit undis,
quae Syrtis, quae Scylla rapax, quae vasta Carybdis,
talìa qui reddis pro dulci praemia vita?*

What lioness bore you under some lonely cliff?
What sea spit you up conceived amid foaming waves?
What Syrtis, what ravenous Scylla, what vast Charybdis
[bore you] who give back rewards like these in exchange
for sweet life?

Clearly the structure is the same as that of *C.* 60, as are the lioness and Scylla. Yet even detached from its context the passage from *C.* 64 has a specificity missing from *C.* 60: both poems link the idea of the unnatural or brutal birth to the hardheartedness of the addressee, but 64.156–157 do not charge the addressee with an abstract or vague betrayal, but specifically with giving betrayal in exchange for “sweet life.” That is, Ariadne has saved Theseus' life, and he has rewarded her with betrayal. In addition, Ariadne has given up the life she had known for Theseus, and even if we did not know for certain that this was the pair involved, the lines evoke the famous mythic princesses who sacrificed their families and the lives they had known in order to save heroes who would discard them later. *C.* 60, on the other hand, does not suggest this kind of abandonment specifically, and simply indicates that the speaker has been abandoned in time of need.⁸

These three examples make it clear that the topos' traditional speaker is the abandoned lover or the friend whose expectations have been gravely disappointed.⁹

⁷For instance by Merrill (1893: 95); see also Ellis 1889: 207 for Scaliger's attempt to attach *C.* 60 to *C.* 59. A signal, perhaps, that *C.* 60 is less an unpolished draft than a finished and independent poem is the unusual acrostic, noted by Goold (1983: 248), *natu ceu aes* (“like bronze by nature”), which is formed by the first letters of each line (first to last) and then the last letter of each (last to first). The acrostic seems unlikely to be a coincidence. Weinreich (1959: 78) also argues that the poem is complete in itself: “ich es nicht für einen Entwurf oder ein Fragment halten kann: es weist eine solche Geschlossenheit und Durchgeformtheit auf, dass als ein ausgereiftes Gebilde seiner Kunst und als Ausdruck schweren Leidens zu den lyrischen Choliamben wie c. 8 und manchen andern Gedichten zu stellen ist, die von Catulls Passion zeugen.” Klingner 1964: 217–220 is a useful discussion of the two Catullan uses of this topos.

⁸In fact this difference militates against the idea that *C.* 60 is a kind of discarded rough draft for Ariadne's lament. It is difficult to see why she should charge Theseus with ignoring her suppliant voice “in this latest crisis.” Like Klingner (1964: 217–220), Weinreich (1959: 77–78) sees the poem not as a draft for the *C.* 64 passage, but in fact as an independent poem itself inspired by 64.

⁹There is some division of opinion about whether the addressee must be a lover (Lesbia is the usual choice) or may be a friend like Alfenus in *C.* 30, Cornificius in 38, or Rufus in 77. The poet's

What is striking in *C.* 60, and what accounts for much of the poem's power, is that this one-sentence poem consists entirely of this topos. While there is not a context immediately obvious, the topos' usual one supplies itself: the speaker has been abandoned by a lover or mistreated by a friend. By scrutinizing the language of the text carefully, we can see how the poem generates such a context and how doing so allows the poet to comment on the nature of the unique personal experiences he appears to describe in his poetry.

We turn now from the literary history of *C.* 60 to the details of the text itself. *Novissimo* in 60.4 is a more significant word than commentators have sometimes thought: is this merely the most recent catastrophe, or the most outrageous, or the least expected, or the weirdest? Commentators are united in citing Tacitus *Annales* 12.33 and the use there of *novissimus* meaning "most extreme."¹⁰ It seems to me, however, that the more common uses of *novus* must not be ruled out, particularly "newest" or "most recent": if we are constructing a narrative from Catullus' poems, then *novissimo* in this last meaning would indicate that these emotional crises are routine, or at least not unexpected. This fits particularly well with the relationship described in the Lesbia poems, but equally well with other Catullan relationships, such as those with Alfenus (*C.* 30), Cornificius (38), Rufus (77), Quintius (82), and perhaps even Juventius (24, 81, 99, *et al.*). I would suggest, however, that *novissimo* is also a kind of self-referential nod to the very fact that *C.* 60 itself is the latest in the series of these outcries. That is, by using the word *novissimo*, Catullus creates a context in which the addressee's supposed cruelty is habitual. *Novissimo* gives speaker and addressee a history.

That history is one of crises (*casus*), but it is also a history of the speaker's voice (*supplicis vocem*). This is not only the newest in a series of crises, but specifically the most recent example of the speaker's words being rejected or ignored. This emphasis on the *vox* links *C.* 60 to the themes of the Catullan corpus in several ways. First, it evokes the important Catullan theme of speech and silence. In

reticence seems to me to be of a piece with his refusal to provide any details here. Bachrens (1893: 290–291), Fordyce (1961: 234), Kroll (1989: 106), and Merrill (1893: 95) do not assume that *C.* 60 is necessarily a love poem. Syndikus (1984: 287–288) agrees that the identification as a love poem is not ironclad, but he ultimately feels the possibility is stronger than the alternative. Kroll (*ad* 4: *novissimo*) is worth quoting: "Hier kann es schwere Krankheit, den Verlust des Bruders, Liebeslied u. dgl. bezeichnen." Both Lieberg (1962) and Weinreich (1959), whose studies remain the most comprehensive, interpret the poem very much as an address to Lesbia, as do Dettmer (1997: 96–97), Holzberg (2002: 99–100), Thomson (1997: 346), and Wiseman (1985: 156–167). Goold (1983: 248) and Quinn (1973: 263) are more tentative, but lean in that direction as well. Weinreich (1959: 78–83) does not sufficiently establish that *C.* 60 must be read as, and only as, an address to Lesbia. He himself (84) suggests that the post-Catullan examples of this topos are based primarily on Cat. 64.154–157; if that is the case, as seems likely, then those passages do not tell us how Augustan authors read *C.* 60 and the relationship it describes.

¹⁰For further citations of *novissimus* in the sense of *extremus*, see Thomson 1997: 347 *ad* 60.4. Merrill (1893: 95), looking to Catullus' life for answers, suggests that *novissimo* means "final" in a more precise sense: "Perhaps it was the last verse penned by Catullus as his strength failed him and death came on."

Catullan poetry, silencing is depicted both as an incidental effect of a disparity in power (as in *C.* 51) and a conscious strategy for asserting power over others (Gellius in *C.* 74). Catullan poetry itself may be represented as a way to produce speech, to bring out into the open what has been kept silent (as in *C.* 6 and 55). Accordingly, those who resist Catullus sometimes do so by forestalling or distorting speech.

More importantly, the emphasis on *vox* alerts us that the nature of this new crisis—romantic or not—is one of communication. In ignoring the suppliant voice of Catullus, the addressee becomes one of those who ignore, misread, or scorn the words of the speaker. Yet poem 60 does not require that its speaker be Catullus at all. It allows the reader to share with the Catullan persona the experience of social and communicative isolation—and like so much of Catullan poetry it invites the reader to share the Catullan experience at the same time as it positions the reader as one of those hostile and uncomprehending others, like Furius and Aurelius (*C.* 16), the *contubemales* of the *salax taberna* (*C.* 37), and Lesbia herself.¹¹ For when we come to *C.* 60 we find that we—since no name is mentioned—are the addressee, that we have chosen not to hear the suppliant voice of this speaker. If, as most readers now do, we come to it later in our reading of Catullan poetry, for example, we may well find ourselves unreceptive to yet another emotional outburst. *C.* 60 thus uses what may first apply to a limited situation—for example, but only for example, Catullus and Lesbia—to implicate the reader in the same relationship. We can be either the scorned and desperate speaker or the addressee who can no longer be bothered to listen; we can even be both.

It is significant too that the poem conceals the sex of the addressee, and for that matter that of the speaker as well. This vagueness of the genders involved is perhaps the key to its effectiveness, both intended and actual: inasmuch as we cannot discern identity or even sex, the situation in the poem is universal. That is, what pretends to be a spontaneous *cri de coeur*, wrenched from a tortured heart, is repeatable and transferable. Anyone can use this poem, because it is a generic example of the topos it celebrates. At the same time, the poem also participates in the same scrutiny of gender as other Catullan poems. Here again the idea of the scorned voice is significant: the silence that threatens the Catullan speaker is often generated or imposed by women.¹² *C.* 51 represents Catullus as falling silent (apoplectic may be a better word) in the presence of Lesbia; *C.* 42 represents a woman attempting to steal Catullus' written words; and in *C.* 63, the

¹¹ The fullest exploration of this strategy is Pedrick 1993.

¹² Though somewhat different in emphasis from mine, Holzberg 2002: 99–100 is another reading of *C.* 60 that takes issues of gender seriously—in particular, he uses the gendered associations of various intertexts to show that the speaker of the poem is being represented as feminine. Since he reads this poem as an address by Catullus to Lesbia, he can argue that it is another example of the representation of Catullus as a woman and of Lesbia as a man—something nowhere more evident than at the end of *C.* 11.

overwhelming Cybele reduces the now genderless Attis to an inarticulate beast (*demens . . . fera*, 63.89).¹³ In using the topos of the bestial or monstrous mother, *C.* 60 emphasizes that this addressee's hardheartedness is intimately related to the distinctively feminine world that produced it.¹⁴ Whether we envision a male or female addressee, we have a resistant, almost hostile nature, produced by female ferocity. Perhaps significantly, the suppliant voice in this poem is balanced by only one other kind of sound: the barking of the dogs that grow from Scylla's groin. Male or female, Catullus posits the addressee as a product of a bestial feminine world; the barking of the dogs reinforces the fact that the children of beasts do not speak and presumably cannot understand.

The interplay between masculinity and the brutal female landscape is further emphasized by the word *dura* (3). In *C.* 8, Catullus tries to become *durus* himself but ultimately fails. In other poems, like 16 and 37, he fears the imputation of *mollitia*, "softness." Thus the hard-minded addressee of *C.* 60 possesses an attribute which eludes Catullus himself. Once again the reader is invited to identify with either side of the equation: the soft Catullus afraid of being silenced by those who are *duri*, and the *duri* themselves, who can resist a suppliant's voice. It is typical of Catullus that "hardness" is identified with a feminine landscape.

Perhaps more important than the specific features of *C.* 60 is what it can tell us about the poet's technique and about the function of such poems within the poet's *oeuvre*. By employing a well-known topos, the poet has been able to evoke its typical context and dramatic situation; by refusing to specify the addressee or indeed anything else, the poet has complicated the context his audience would supply from the history of the topos. This one-sentence poem stands on its own as both anguished cry and poet's comment; it reveals the ability of literary artifacts such as topoi to exist apart from a dramatic situation as well as from real life. Just as *C.* 59 made the genre of obscene graffiti function as poetry, *C.* 60 draws attention to the literary nature of the betrayal and abandonment of either lover or friend. Here no particular speaker attacks no particular lover for an unspecified mistreatment. What is important is the hardheartedness of the addressee, the indignation of the speaker, and the fact that such a relationship has become its own context.

By demonstrating that so personal a response to betrayal is in fact generic, repeatable, and universal, Catullus once again gives notice that he wrote with full awareness of, and delight in, the separation between art and life. Scholars once

¹³For an interpretation of *C.* 42 that deals with the issue of the woman's attempt to gain control of Catullan speech, see Nappa 2001: 142–147; for the play of gender in *C.* 63, see Skinner 1993.

¹⁴The feminine quality of the landscape in *C.* 60 may be highlighted by the inordinate number of words in the feminine gender (five of nine nouns, with four obviously feminine adjectives/participles) and more pointedly by the word *leena*, which seems to become the classical feminine of *leo* only around the time of Catullus, who has probably taken it from Eur. *Med.* 1342 (see Ellis 1889: 208 *ad* 60.1).

regularly assumed that Catullus represented the raw material of his emotional life as transparently as possible, but *C.* 60 makes it clear that some of that raw material itself was already long since generic. We cannot know who these characters are, nor do we need to: they are generated by the situation in the text. Thus *C.* 60 recasts some of the same themes explored in *C.* 16: if Catullus there tries to make it clear that character in literature can be fictional, here he makes the broader point that life's seemingly individual passions and crises have behind them a tradition, that they are in fact as generic as any literary form.¹⁵

So too does *C.* 60 differ from Ariadne's lament in poem 64. Her very personal response to abandonment and betrayal takes its unique character from the context and above all from the audience's knowledge of the identity of both speaker and addressee. *C.* 60 denies its audience all of those familiar signposts and forces us to realize that, however immediately poignant, neither the sentiment nor the situation that occasions it is unique.¹⁶

This poem is not only an example of outraged recrimination; it is an example of the way literary tradition creates and transmits experiences within itself that evoke the experience of real events while simultaneously announcing their distance from that reality. The speaker here has been betrayed by a lover or perhaps by a friend; the universality of the poem makes the speaker all betrayed individuals, male and female. The addressee is every hardhearted individual in every generation. The poem emphasizes that human experience, like literary tradition, has its own *topoi*. Catullan poetry is not a transparent medium for revealing "real" life and authentic emotions: in poems like this, it is an exploration of life and art as parallel systems which are equally artificial and equally real. That this poem fits well with the themes elaborated elsewhere in the Catullan corpus need not mean that its dramatic situation is limited to the better known characters in that corpus—instead, *C.* 60 can help us realize that even the apparently great specificity of other Catullan poems is a way of talking about the dynamics of human relationships generally and about our usually predictable reactions to them.

Poems like this one exploit the audience's awareness of generic expectations and of literary tradition not only to generate an immediate dramatic context but, more importantly, to direct the reader's own understanding of genre and literary history to elaborate and animate the bare script provided by the author's work. Put more simply, the poet forces his reader not only to follow passively the narrative the poet provides, but to create his own narrative by considering the possible contexts poems such as 60 might fit into. In fact, the very questions scholars ask about such texts are the reason for their existence: the reader is forced to ask who speaks, who is addressed, what has happened, when it happened, and what may

¹⁵ For this interpretation of *Cat.* 16, see Nappa 2001: 45–57, esp. 46–50.

¹⁶ Though he does not treat *C.* 60 at length, and though he views it as a possible "rehearsal for 64.154 ff.," Newman (1990: 198) sees that the poem constitutes "another proof that the art of this love poet would find its supreme expression, not in autobiographical pieces, but in a universalizing genre that would quite metamorphose his personal life."

yet come. *C.* 60 points out that the details of the dramatic situation are just as much the byproducts of the text as they are its inspiration.

Finally, the reading of *C.* 60 presented here may have implications for the thorniest problem in Catullan criticism: the arrangement of the corpus. Many believe that the transmitted text of the poems received its current arrangement from the author himself, while others take the more moderate position that the transmitted text preserves only traces of authorial arrangement.¹⁷ Others see no role for the poet himself at all. The matter is not subject to entirely scientific proof, but I would like to use my reading of poem 60 to speculate on the fitness of this text to stand at the end of the polymetric poems.¹⁸ If I am right that a Roman reader would take *novissimo* to mean, *inter alia*, “most recent” (and by extension “last”), then *novissimo* will also be a reference to the position of *C.* 60 at the end of the collection of polymetrics.¹⁹ If this could be established securely, then the *novissimus casus* would be the poet’s last emotional outburst, and the addressee would be the reader now abandoning the poet’s work. *C.* 14b may be a good parallel for this sort of manoeuvre, since it seems to be addressed directly to the reader *qua* reader and also foregrounds the reader’s physical contact with the scroll:

*Si qui forte mearum ineptiarum
lectores eritis manusque vestras
non horrebitis admovere nobis . . .*

If by chance any of you will
be readers of my triflings and
not shrink from putting your
hands on us . . .

Thus poem 60 too would ultimately address the reader who, of necessity, is now leaving the poet behind. For even if the papyrus roll continues, *C.* 60 ends the first part of the lyric collection. We are the ones who finally refuse to listen further, as we too at last abandon Catullus.²⁰ On this reading, poem 60 becomes

¹⁷ The secondary literature on this aspect of Catullan scholarship is too abundant to catalogue here; the interested reader is directed to the articles by Dettmer, Minyard, Richlin, Skinner, and Traill in *CW* 81.5 (1988); Beck 1996: 9–40; Dettmer 1997: 1–12 and *passim*. Holzberg (2000) usefully situates these two books in relation to earlier scholarship on the so-called Catullan Question.

¹⁸ Despite Skinner (1981: 70–75), who categorically denies that *C.* 60 could be a formal end to the collection.

¹⁹ Especially relevant here is Weinreich (1959: 84–90), who does not cite *novissimo* in his argument that *C.* 60 is an intended conclusion to the collection, but who argues instead from perceived connections between this poem and those immediately preceding it in the collection. Following Weinreich, Dettmer (1997) also defends the position of *Cat.* 60 by examining thematic parallels elsewhere in the corpus. See most recently Holzberg (2002: 99–100), whose arguments on the suitability of *C.* 60 as the final polymetric anticipate mine.

²⁰ Even if the original collection extends on one papyrus roll all the way to *Cat.* 116, as some suggest, the presence of *C.* 61 immediately after 60 will perhaps strengthen the effect I describe, since

an especially poignant ending to the polymetric collection, because it would not only evoke numerous themes of the collection that preceded it, but it would also—with delicious irony—allow Catullus the last word. For even as we try to figure out this most recent *casus*, the collection ends, and we are left irrevocably validating Catullus' many complaints.²¹

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the Catullus who experiences and tries to draw us into multiple *casus* is not easily evoked by the first long poem. Holzberg (2002: 100) notes a possible connection between C. 60 and C. 2 and 3.

²¹Yet more speculatively, I might add that Cat. 60 makes a nice bookend with Cat. 1: the first poem is a dedication to someone who is explicitly said to value Catullus' poetry, while the last polymetric posits an addressee (and perhaps also a reader) who decidedly does not.

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