

INTRODUCTION

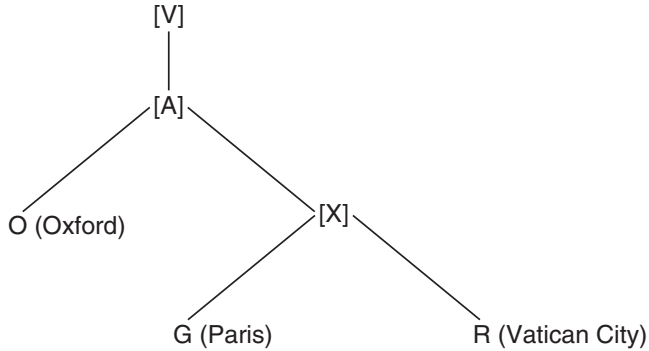
THE SURVIVAL OF CATULLUS' POEMS

IN HIS FIRST poem, Catullus asks his Muse to let his works survive for more than one age. In fact, they were well known from the time of their creation, in the first century B.C., until the end of the first century A.D. In the second century, however, when scribes began transferring classical literature from papyrus scrolls to more capacious “codices” (books in our sense of the word), Catullus’ works seem to have been neglected, perhaps because they were not suitable for use by young students. Apparently, only one book of his verses made the journey from antiquity to the Renaissance. Appropriately enough, it seems to have been kept for some time in Verona, Catullus’ hometown. The evidence consists of echoes of Catullus’ poetry in verses by a monk, Hildemar, who lived in nearby Brescia from 841–845, and in a sermon in 966 by one Bishop Rather of Verona, who mentions the study of the “previously unread Catullus” as an example of frivolous, ungodly behavior. This Veronese manuscript might also have been the ultimate source of the copy of Catullus’ Poem 62, a wedding song that was included in an anthology compiled in France in the ninth century and thus nearly became the only poem by Catullus to reach modernity.

Our ability to make such statements about the Catullan manuscript tradition is the result of the painstaking research of a series of scholars, most recently Julia Gaisser of Bryn Mawr College and Douglas F. S. Thomson of the University of Toronto. An ironic possibility mentioned by Gaisser is that Bishop Rather took Catullus’ ungodly book with him when he moved to the Belgian Abbey of Lobbes, as he is said to have done, in 968. In any event, for the next three hundred years, there is no evidence of knowledge of Catullus in Verona and hardly any elsewhere.

Starting around 1290, scholars in the region of Padua and Verona are suddenly familiar with Catullus’ poems again. Textual criticism has shown that the text first consulted by them (“V”) was soon lost, but not before a copy was made (“A”). A was also lost after spawning at least two more copies: “O,” an extant manuscript written around 1370 and preserved at

Oxford, and the lost “X,” which belonged to Petrarch and was itself the source of two extant copies made shortly after his death in 1374. Of X’s two offspring, “G” is now in Paris, in the Bibliothèque Nationale; “R” resides in the Vatican Library. The stemma of Catullan manuscripts of independent authority looks like this:



G and R contain an enigmatic epigram by one Benvenuto Campesani that seems to commemorate the recovery of Catullus’ text.

To my fatherland I come from distant exile,
restored by a fellow citizen.
France bestowed his name from reeds. He notes
the route of the passing crowd.
Praise your Catullus with all of your talent. His scroll
lay hidden beneath a barrel.¹

Apparently, a Veronese native, whose name resembled a French word for reeds, found Catullus’ book in a foreign land, languishing in obscurity, and restored it to the scholars of Verona—at a time of renewed interest in secular literature. This probably refers to the arrival of V in Verona around 1290. If so, Catullus’ manuscript experienced the same kind of happy return to Verona from perilous journeys that Catullus himself celebrates in two of his best known works, Poems 4 and 31; and Catullus’ Muse answered his prayer in dramatic fashion.

Catullus’ poems as transmitted by V contain over two thousand lines of verse. This is more than was usually found in a single papyrus scroll or “book” in the ancient sense of the word. It is therefore likely that V contained a compilation of Catullus’ work from several different scrolls. The

poems' superficial characteristics suggest a threefold division. Poems 1 to 60 are short poems in a variety of meters. Poems 61 to 64, also in various meters, are much longer. Poems 65 to 116 are all written in the elegiac meter, which does not appear elsewhere in the collection. Thomson summarizes the strong evidence that these three groups of poems were originally published on separate scrolls.² Briefly, in manuscript O, Poem 60 ends five lines from the bottom of the page. Rather than beginning immediately, as is usually the case, Poem 61 starts at the top of the next page. Then starting with Poem 65, the first letter of each poem is illuminated, the second capitalized.

There is disagreement on how to interpret the order of the poems within each original book. The first few poems concerning Catullus' mistress, "Lesbia" (i.e., Poems 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 11), are obviously sequential, with expressions of timid infatuation yielding to outspoken passion and then bitter disillusionment. The obvious ordering of these six poems is exceptional. There is no agreement among scholars on whether there is any rationale behind the order of the other poems. If there is, it is not readily apparent.

CATULLUS' LIFE

What do we know about Catullus' life? The question cannot be answered without glancing at a long-standing debate among classical scholars. Happily, all sides do agree on some basics. St. Jerome's *Chronicle*, a source of much ancient chronology, reports that Catullus was born in Verona in 87 B.C. and died in Rome during his thirtieth year in 58 B.C. Catullus' own poems confirm his connection with Verona. His datable works, however, all belong to 56 B.C. or later. So Jerome was apparently right about Catullus' birthplace, but mistaken on the date of his death and his age at death or the date of his birth. Another source, the poet Ovid (*Amores* 3.9.61–62), confirms that Catullus died young. Looking at all this, scholars are generally content with the conclusion that Catullus was born in Verona, flourished in Rome around 55 B.C., and died a few years later. From what he tells us about himself, it seems likely that he was an *eques* or "knight." In other words, he was like Cicero: he came from a family of wealthy businessmen who had not held high political office in Rome. He was upper-class but not a "noble."

Most of Catullus' poems are ostensibly autobiographical. At the heart of his autobiography is a love affair with a woman whom he calls Lesbia.

An ancient author, Apuleius (*Apologia* 10), says that Lesbia was a pseudonym for a woman whose real name was Clodia. Scholars are inclined to accept this assertion. Although Apuleius lived in the second century A.D., his statement is probably based on a lost biography of Catullus written shortly after the poet's death.³ Moreover, Catullus' own poems confirm the identity of "Lesbia" with a Clodia, as we shall see.

We know of three women in Catullus' Rome who were called Clodia. They were sisters of a flamboyant aristocrat, Publius Clodius Pulcher. Clodius is most often remembered as the young man who sneaked into an all-female religious festival, disguised as a flute girl, for an illicit meeting with Julius Caesar's wife in 62 B.C. Clodius was tried for sacrilege but acquitted, despite Cicero's hostile testimony.⁴

The third element of Clodius' name, Pulcher, is a cognomen meaning "beautiful." Catullus' Poem 79 begins, "Lesbius est pulcher." *Lesbius* is the masculine form of Lesbia, the name that would be borne by Lesbia's brother. Hence the beginning of Poem 79 seems to be a pun meaning both "Lesbius is beautiful" and "Lesbia's brother is (Clodius) Pulcher." This textual evidence persuades most scholars that Apuleius was right about "Lesbia" being a Clodia. But do we know which of the three Clodias she was?

At first glance, it seems to be an easy choice. The most famous of the sisters was Clodia Metelli, Clodia the wife of Metellus, who was a consul in 60 B.C. and died the following year. Clodia Metelli is frequently mentioned in Cicero's correspondence and is a central figure in one of his speeches, the *Pro Caelio*, delivered in 56 B.C. In this speech, Cicero defends a young orator, Caelius Rufus, against charges instigated by Clodia Metelli, including her own attempted murder. Cicero defends Caelius by taking the offensive, wittily smearing Clodia's character. He makes constant allusions to rumors that she and Clodius were incestuous lovers. At one point, Cicero refers to Clodius as Clodia's husband, then apologizes for his "slip" saying, "I always make that mistake."⁵ In general, he depicts Clodia as a merry widow with an insatiable appetite for young men. He acknowledges that Caelius was her lover and claims that her charges really stem from the fact that he jilted her. Thus we know for certain that Clodia Metelli was linked romantically with Marcus Caelius Rufus, Cicero's client.

A number of Catullus' poems are directed against men who were evidently rivals for "Lesbia's" affections. These include one poem addressed to a "Caelius" (Poem 58) and three others concerning a "Rufus" (Poems 69, 71, and 77).⁶ The evidence that Catullus' "Lesbia" was really named

Clodia, combined with his allusions to a rival or rivals called variously Caelius and Rufus, lends credence to the hypothesis that Lesbia was Clodia Metelli. Nevertheless some scholars deny that this connection should be made or that much significance should be attached to it. The argument is not that a stronger case can be made for either of Clodia Metelli's less famous sisters.⁷ Instead, it is said that difficulties arising from the identification of Clodia Metelli with Lesbia and Catullus' Caelius and Rufus with M. Caelius Rufus cast doubt over the whole question. Since 1969, T. P. Wiseman of Exeter University, a distinguished British classicist, has been the leading skeptic on this issue. Other modern Catullan scholars, though not entirely convinced by Wiseman's arguments, generally take the position that we cannot be sure of Lesbia's identity and add that one should not give the question too much thought. The statement by Guy Lee in his translation of Catullus' poems is typical: "The question of Lesbia's identity is not of great importance to Catullus' readers. Its answer leaves his poetry unaffected. He has not wished his readers to identify Lesbia and that is why he has given her a pseudonym."⁸

For years, I was satisfied with formulations like these. While working on this translation, however, I became persuaded that the identification of Lesbia with Clodia Metelli is more likely to be accurate than is generally realized or than statements like Lee's imply. What led me to this belief was the discovery that two of the principal arguments against accepting the identification not only collapsed when probed but actually provided additional evidence in favor of it. I would not go so far as to say that the truth of the identification has been established beyond a reasonable doubt, but it does seem to me to meet a standard that is not very much lower. It is certainly the most likely of possible scenarios.

The first imploding argument may seem like a minor matter. Catullus' best-known Rufus poem is 69, in which Catullus ridicules Rufus for smelling bad. A wild goat, he says, inhabits the valley of Rufus' arms. In Poem 71, in which he is apparently talking to himself, Catullus says that a rival in love is suffering a double penalty. In intercourse, he torments himself with gout (*podagra*) and his lover with the odor of the goat of his arms.

If Lesbia is Clodia Metelli, this Rufus is almost certainly Marcus Caelius Rufus, Clodia's sometime lover and a vigorous young man at the time. In these poems, however, it appears that "Rufus" suffered from gout, which we do not associate with vigorous young men. Wiseman mentions these facts, letting the implication speak for itself: "The elegant Caelius Rufus was a histrionic orator, a good man in a rough-house, and

one of the best dancers of his generation; the malodorous Rufus of the poems suffered from gout.”⁹

It never struck me as unlikely that an individual might be described as elegant in friendly sources and smelly in hostile ones, but the gout did seem to be a stumbling block. It was, I thought, a condition associated with the elderly and infirm, like arthritis. The assertion that a young man was afflicted by it would seem to call for some explanation. It did not seem like a normal insult.

Troubled by this, I looked into the status of gout in classical antiquity. I found that it was a common affliction, attacking young and old alike, possibly because so much wine was drunk from lead-lined containers.¹⁰ Gout was associated with overindulgence and was for that reason a source of embarrassment. The works of Lucian (second century A.D.) include a brief parody, of uncertain authorship, entitled *Ocypus* (“Swift-foot,” a play on *Oedipus* [“Swollen-foot”]), in which the mock tragic hero, a vigorous young man who prides himself on his athleticism, complains of severe foot pain, supposedly the result of injuries sustained in exercising (lines 85–86). The doctor learns from the hero’s tutor, however, that the youth came home uninjured from the wrestling ground and was attacked by foot pain in his sleep after heavy eating and drinking (lines 105–7). The doctor declares that *Ocypus* has fallen prey to the terrible “Foot-huntress,” podagra or gout (lines 137–39). Clearly, in this case, modern associations are misleading. All the indications are that young Caelius Rufus was a bon vivant. The statement that he suffered from attacks of gout is exactly the sort of thing that we should expect from a jealous rival. It may even have been true.

The second collapsing argument is actually the mainstay of Wiseman’s case against equating Lesbia with Clodia Metelli. It revolves around chronology. The essential facts are these. Whereas in Poem 68 (line 146), Catullus refers to Lesbia as having been married at the beginning of their relationship, Clodia Metelli became a widow in 59 B.C. and is not known to have remarried. Catullus spent a year abroad on the staff of the governor of the province of Bithynia in 57 B.C. and returned to Rome in 56.¹¹ The affair between Clodia Metelli and Caelius blew up in Caelius’ sensational trial early in 56 B.C. Caesar invaded Britain in 55 B.C.

59: Death of Metellus

57: Catullus in Bithynia

56: *Pro Caelio*; Catullus returns from Bithynia

55: Invasion of Britain

Wiseman stresses that all of Catullus' datable poems belong to the years 56 or later. Some are dated by reference to his Bithynian journey and others to unique events such as Caesar's invasion of Britain. If, however, Lesbia is Clodia Metelli, her relationship with Catullus must have begun in 59 B.C. or earlier, when she was still married. According to Wiseman, this is inconsistent with the evidence: "The love affair between Catullus and Clodia took place, so far as the evidence allows us to know, in the period after Catullus' return from Bithynia in 56 B.C."¹²

Wiseman begins his survey of the chronological evidence with an ingenious analysis of Poem 36, on the *Annals* of Volusius. In this poem, Catullus celebrates a reconciliation with Lesbia. It is couched in a complicated joke. Lesbia has sworn to Venus that she would sacrifice select writings of "the worst poet" to the flames, if Catullus should be "restored to her and stop brandishing fierce iambs" (i.e., abusive verses).¹³ Although Lesbia's vow clearly referred to Catullus' poems, he offers to fulfill it by burning the works of one Volusius, his own candidate for the world's worst poet. In asking Venus to accept this offering, he invokes her in a traditional way as the goddess of various places, mostly sites of her famous temples. Among the places mentioned, however, three have no special association with Venus: Urii, Ancona, and Dyrrachium, "inn of the Adriatic." Wiseman discovers in these names a reference to Catullus' return to northern Italy from Asia Minor. These three towns are, he says, "the only likely ports of call for a ship . . . sailing up the Adriatic, and I think Catullus' readers were meant to recognize them as such. The allusion to the poet's journey would make Lesbia's vow look, in retrospect, like a *votum pro reditu Catulli* (a vow on behalf of Catullus' safe return)."¹⁴

The import of this observation for Wiseman was that Poem 36, like all the datable poems, was written after Catullus' return from Bithynia in 56 B.C. By implication, however, his analysis undermines his view of the chronological extent of the affair. If Lesbia prayed for Catullus' safe return from Bithynia, she must have had a relationship with him *before* he went to Bithynia. Furthermore, if her prayer was connected with the hope that he would "stop brandishing fierce iambs," it is obvious that their relationship had run into stormy weather before Catullus set sail. Wiseman argues against this. "Nobody knows," he says, "whether Lesbia really prayed for

Catullus' safe return; the poet was quite at liberty to invent the details of his relationship, and in any case, the ambiguity in this poem between the ideas of a journey's end and a reconciliation makes any precise biographical inference very hazardous."¹⁵

In fact, Wiseman has argued the first part of his case too well. After reading his analysis, it is difficult to view Poem 36 as anything other than a reference to Catullus' return from Bithynia and his simultaneous reconciliation with Lesbia. He was restored to her both physically, after his foreign travels, and emotionally, after a quarrel. The statement that the poet was "quite at liberty to invent the details of his relationship" begs the question of what possible motive he would have for inventing this particular detail. If his return from Bithynia had nothing to do with Lesbia and, in fact, antedated their whole relationship, why would he subtly merge the two themes? The more probable hypothesis is that the events were connected in reality. If so, Wiseman's own analysis of Poem 36 provides evidence of the critical fact for which he felt there was no evidence, that the affair started before Catullus left for Bithynia.

The identification of Lesbia with Clodia Metelli thus seems to me to acquire the status of high probability by the way circumstantial evidence, even the pieces emphasized by skeptical scholars, falls into place around it. I do not recommend using this probability as the foundation for detailed biographical speculation. It does, however, add a dimension to the Lesbia poems to know that they too, like the ones addressed to Caesar, Calvus, and Cicero, were probably inspired by an actual relationship with a historical figure of some importance. We also gain a very general chronological framework. Specifically, it follows from the identification that Catullus was first involved with Lesbia/Clodia Metelli in 60 or early 59 B.C., while she was still married. Poem 83, in which Catullus refers to Lesbia's husband as being alive, the very similar Poem 92, and Poem 71, in which "Rufus" is described as having intercourse with Catullus' love, all seem to have been written before Bithynia.¹⁶ Poems 2 and 3, on Lesbia's sparrow, are also strong candidates. As mentioned above, Poems 2 through 11 seem to be in chronological order. Poem 4, about Catullus' boat, is generally read as an evocation of his return journey from Bithynia. The order of the poems thus confirms the idea that the affair with Lesbia began before the journey and was resumed afterwards. By their position in the collection and by their content, Poems 2 and 3 seem to belong to the earliest, pre-Bithynian stage of the affair.¹⁷

Catullus' rival, Caelius Rufus, gained prominence in 58 B.C. by lead-

ing the successful prosecution of a corrupt governor of Macedonia, Antony Hybrida, who was defended by none other than Cicero. Cicero tells us that in the wake of this success Caelius took up residence on the fashionable Palatine hill and had a love affair with Clodia, which would be the obvious cause of Catullus' hostility. We know that Catullus left for Bithynia shortly thereafter and surmise from Poem 36 that he and Lesbia were not on good terms when he left. When he returned to Rome in 56, however, the affair between Clodia and Caelius had ended in a spectacular trial and, as Poem 36 implies, Catullus and Lesbia resumed theirs.

It is not possible to trace the ups and downs of Catullus' sentimental history after his return from Bithynia. As Catullus tells it, Clodia had numerous other lovers. His poems include denunciations that sound final (Poems 11 and 58) and others (Poems 68 and 104) in which he seems to have forgiven everything in the end. One of the great charms of the collection is that it leaves the readers to answer for themselves the question of how the affair ended, whether love or hate was the ultimate winner. One of the collection's ironies is that poor, wounded Catullus was no saint in the sexual realm himself. His poems imply unseemly extra-Lesbia entanglements with girls named Ipsithilla (Poem 32), Ameana (Poem 41), and Aufilena (Poem 110). In addition to this, he was infatuated with a boy named Juventius (Poems 21, 24, 48, 99).

At some point in the later stages of his relationship with Lesbia, Catullus' brother died. In his long Poem 68, he claims that the trauma of this event has made it impossible for him to write love poems and has given him a new perspective on Venus' "games." These he associates with his youth, when he first donned the pure white toga of adulthood. He is obviously speaking of his relationship with Lesbia from the perspective of several years at least. This fits in neatly with the assumption that the affair was begun by 59 B.C. and resumed in 56.

POETRY AND POLITICS IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

It seems safe to say that poetry has little impact on any segment of our society, least of all politics. Personally, I have only one acquaintance who seasons his conversation with quotations from his favorite contemporary poets, and this makes him a bit of an oddity. He would have been right at home in Catullus' Rome, however. In that still largely oral culture, short poems seem to have had an impact on public discourse similar to that of

our electronic media with their commercial jingles, theme songs, and standing jokes. Because of the centrality of literature in education, and the influence of poetry in particular, politicians often wrote poetry. Of the people in Catullus' circle who are well known for other reasons, attested poets include Licinius Calvus (a prominent orator and Catullus' best friend), Cicero and his brother Quintus, Memmius (Catullus' governor in Bithynia), the orator Hortensius, and Julius Caesar. To be sure, some of their poems were just intellectual exercises. The description of constellations provided a favorite theme for that sort of enterprise. Others were designed to affect public opinion. These were often personal attacks on adversaries and could be appallingly obscene by our standards.

A vivid example dates from fifteen years after Catullus flourished. It is a poem written in 41 B.C. by Octavian, the later Augustus, when his control of Italy was being challenged by Antony's wife, Fulvia, and his brother, Lucius. The formidable Fulvia was also the widow of Clodius Pulcher, murdered by a political rival in 52 B.C. Glaphyra is the name of one of Antony's alleged mistresses, while Manius is Glaphyra's husband.

Since Antony's fucking Glaphyra, Fulvia wants
me to fuck *her* in revenge.
Me to fuck *her*? And supposing Manius wants
 a piece of my ass? Unlikely.
 "Fuck or we'll fight," she proclaims. "Is your penis dearer
 than life?" Let trumpets blare!¹⁸

As my translation suggests, Octavian's language is as crude as possible. On the other hand, it is written in the demanding elegiac meter. What was the purpose of this bizarre blend of barbarity and verbal finesse?

In 41 B.C., Fulvia and Lucius Antonius had seized the town of Perugia. Lead sling bullets from battles around Perugia between their partisans and Octavian's have been recovered by archeologists. They are inscribed with exactly the same kind of vulgar abuse aimed, literally and figuratively, at Fulvia and Lucius and, from the other side, at Octavian:

I'm looking for Fulvia's frying pan (?).
 I'm looking for Octavian's ass.
 Bald Lucius and Fulvia, spread your ass.¹⁹

The similarity in spirit between Octavian's epigram and the inscriptions does not look like a coincidence. Presumably, the epigram was as prag-

matic and as political as the bullets: its purpose was to rouse hatred and contempt for Fulvia as widely as possible. The obscenity can be understood in this context. It was then, as it remains today, a way of demanding attention, a device to which Romans evidently resorted without restraint when they were seeking maximum effect on public opinion.

It is important to keep Octavian's epigram and those bullets in mind when one imagines Catullus' life in Rome in the previous decade. Judging by his later fame, he achieved some prominence as a poet during his lifetime. He was thus in a position to affect political events through his verse. A number of his surviving poems clearly represent efforts in that direction. Like Octavian, he uses obscenity to make himself heard.

We do not know anything about Catullus' politics until we get to the years of his datable poems, 55–54 B.C. We can, however, trace the earlier activities of two intimate associates. The first of these is Clodia Metelli herself. She lived at the epicenter of Roman politics when she began her relationship with Catullus. Her husband, Metellus, was Rome's most influential and outspoken *optimatus* or "aristocrat"—an oppressor of the poor in the eyes of his critics. In contrast, her brother, Clodius, was a leading *popularis* or "man of the people"—a reckless demagogue to his enemies. Though Clodia had a foot in each camp, Cicero's letters and his speech, the *Pro Caelio*, make it clear that her loyalties (if nothing else) lay with her brother. She was a *popularis*.

The one person who seems to have rivaled Clodia in Catullus' affection was the poet and orator Licinius Calvus. The four poems to or about Calvus (14, 50, 53, and 96) are intensely and unambivalently affectionate. (In fact, Poem 50 deserves to be recognized as one of the great love poems of antiquity, if that term can be used where sex is not overtly involved.) Calvus was a vociferous *optimatus*. Hence, friendship with Clodia and Calvus would have tugged Catullus in opposite directions on most political issues.

Three of the controversies that exercised Catullus' circle in the early fifties will provide a sense of the politics of the day and lead naturally into a consideration of the surprisingly important role that poetry played. First, in 60 B.C., the year in which Clodia's husband was consul, Julius Caesar, a *popularis*, crafted the alliance known as the first triumvirate with Rome's foremost military commander, Pompey, who was more of an *optimatus*, and the wealthy, elusive Crassus. Caesar was then elected to the consulship for 59 B.C.

The senate gave outgoing magistrates commands over foreign provinces. Caesar hoped to be given the command of Gaul after his consular year. The senate, however, planned to confer this honor on Metellus,

Clodia's husband. Before this situation was quite resolved, sometime early in 59 B.C., Metellus died. In the *Pro Caelio* (59–60), Cicero insinuates that Clodia poisoned him. In the wake of Metellus' sudden demise, the Gallic command was given to Caesar.²⁰ Now, he crudely exclaimed, he could “come down on the heads of his enemies.”²¹ The magistrate who sponsored the legislation giving Gaul to Caesar was named Vatinius. Much of Calvus' fame as an orator stemmed from his repeated attempts to convict this same Vatinius of various crimes. Vatinius' legislation of 59 B.C. probably marked the beginning of this feud. Catullus was probably in the middle of these momentous events, as Clodia's lover and Calvus' best friend—or soon to be so. We have no information on his immediate reactions, but it is safe to assume that he was interested. When he finally does speak, it is to denounce the triumvirate.

A second controversy galvanized opposition to the triumvirate soon afterward. It concerned the throne of Egypt, a kingdom governed since the days of Alexander the Great by a Macedonian family, the Ptolemies. They had accumulated the greatest amount of wealth known to the western world at the time. In 60 B.C., one of several rival claimants to the throne paid the newly formed triumvirate six thousand talents, a great fortune, in return for a senatorial decree recognizing the legitimacy of his claim. This was Ptolemy Auletes (“The Flute Player”), who quickly alienated his subjects by raising taxes to recover the cost of bribing the Romans. In 59 B.C., he was forcibly ejected from Egypt and came to Rome hoping that the senate would instruct Pompey to restore him. Ptolemy took up residence in Pompey's villa to lobby for his restoration.

Pompey's apparent desire to intervene in Egypt excited resentment on both sides of the political spectrum. He was suspected of wanting dictatorial powers. Calvus' one fully preserved political epigram was most likely composed at this juncture. It makes light of the cognomen that Pompey affected, *Magnus* (“The Great”), in imitation of Alexander; it refers to speculation about his long-term goals; and it reflects the odd belief that scratching one's head with a single finger is effeminate.²²

All fear the Great as he scratches his head with a finger.
You know what he wants? A man.

Opposition to Ptolemy on this issue brought *optimates* like Calvus into temporary alliance with Clodius and Clodia. The individuals who supported the restoration were those who were attached to the triumvirs by

political expediency. Caelius Rufus belonged to this category. The prosecution that had catapulted him into prominence in 59 was engineered by the triumvirs.²³

Thus Clodia and Caelius were on opposite sides of the Ptolemy issue, and their relationship foundered on it. In 58 B.C., an Egyptian faction sent an elderly philosopher named Dio to Rome to urge the senate not to restore Ptolemy. Before he could address the senate, Dio was murdered, presumably by people acting on behalf of Ptolemy and Pompey. Clodia's principal charge against Caelius was that he took money from her on false pretenses and used it to arrange Dio's murder. (She added that after she discovered this, Caelius tried to have her poisoned, too, to silence her.) Thanks to Cicero's eloquence and to his own status as a protégé of the triumvirate, Caelius was acquitted. As Calvus' friend and Clodia's sometime lover, Catullus could not have liked the verdict at all.

The third controversy that permeated the politics of the day concerned Cicero himself. His inveterate enemy, Clodius, had succeeded in having him exiled by popular decree in 58. Cicero left Italy but campaigned by long distance to be restored. Eventually, Pompey weighed in on the orator's side. As a result he was welcomed back to Rome in September of 57 B.C. In 56 B.C., keeping the issue alive, Clodius tried in vain to convict several of the politicians, Pompey's allies, who had roused support for Cicero's restoration. He charged them with "violence" (*vis*), that is, with starting violent, pro-Cicero demonstrations. One has to wonder how Catullus felt about Cicero. On the one hand, Calvus and the other *optimates* supported Cicero's restoration and defended the politicians who had worked for it; on the other hand, Cicero had proceeded to save the despised Caelius and abuse Clodia. Catullus' Poem 49 seems crafted precisely to fuel speculation or perhaps as an expression of mixed feelings. It is ostensibly an expression of gratitude to Cicero for an unnamed favor, but it may be ironic. In it, Catullus says that Cicero is the best of all patrons—to the same degree that Catullus is the worst of all poets.

A surviving remark by Cicero and a vivid incident connected with his exile illustrate the role that poetry played in these political squabbles. The remark occurs in a letter from Cicero in exile to his brother, Quintus, back in Rome (*Ad Quintum fratrem* 1.3.8). Cicero asks Quintus to intervene on his behalf with various people including the orator Hortensius:

You should be careful about one thing, and this is the reason that I think you must cultivate Hortensius. . . . Make sure that your authorship of that verse about the

Aurelian law that was attributed to you when you ran for aedileship not be confirmed through false testimony. My worst fear is that when people realize how much sympathy for me your vigor and prayers are going to arouse, they will attack you quite vehemently.

We do not know the details of the case to which Cicero refers. The Aurelian law of 70 B.C. concerned the composition of juries. Evidently a single line of verse on that topic was attributed to Quintus when he was running for the office of aedile in 66 B.C., and it excited so much resentment that eight years later Cicero still fears its repercussions. This shows what a serious matter poetry could be in the political sphere.

The incident is recounted by Plutarch (*Pompey* 48.7). We learn from him that when Pompey spoke at an assembly on behalf of Milo, one of the politicians indicted by Clodius in 56, Clodius and his supporters tried to drown him out. Clodius stirred up his supporters by shouting, “What man wants a man?” and “Who scratches his head with a finger?” On cue, his supporters answered “Pompey!” In other words, Calvus’ epigram had gained such currency that allusions to it could be used to rouse the Roman mob.

Plutarch’s description is particularly credible because Cicero transmits an eyewitness account of the same event in another letter to his brother (*Ad Quintum fratrem* 2.3.2). Although he does not specifically mention Calvus’ epigram, his description is consistent with Plutarch’s. Cicero adds the information that Milo’s friends counterattacked:

When Pompey rose, Clodius’ gangs raised a shout, and so throughout his entire oration he was impeded not just by noise but by abuse and curses. He finished his speech, since he was rather brave. He was not frightened off. He delivered his entire speech, sometimes even in silence, and prevailed by his authority. But when he finished, Clodius stood. Such a clamor arose on our side, since we wanted to return the favor, that he was unsteady of mind, tongue, and face. This continued from the sixth hour, when Pompey finished, until the eighth, during which time all kinds of insults, and finally most obscene verses, were recited against Clodius and Clodia.

As we have seen, Poem 36 implies that Catullus wrote abusive poetry about Clodia before he went to Bithynia. Although those verses were not necessarily involved in this particular incident, they might have been. If Clodia asked Catullus to stop brandishing fierce iambs, she surely had scenes like the one described by Cicero in mind.

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Catullus was in Bithynia from the spring of 57 until the spring of 56. This means that he probably returned to Rome shortly after Caelius' trial, when relations between Caelius and Clodia were certainly hostile. Poem 69, which has been cited several times already, gives every appearance of having been written at this juncture:

Rufus, stop wondering why no woman will slide
her tender thigh beneath you,
not though you weaken her will with gifts of fine
apparel and sparkling gems.
An injurious rumor has spread that a savage goat
inhabits the vale of your arms,
a terrible beast and not the sort with whom
a beautiful girl would lie.
So murder the pest or, left alone in your room,
cease to wonder why.

As we have seen, it is probable that this was directed at M. Caelius Rufus. In fact, John Noonan, a classicist at the University of Florida, has pointed out that the fourth couplet contains a clever topical allusion that confirms Rufus' identity.²⁴ In February of 56, M. Caelius Rufus had prosecuted a former political ally named Calpurnius Bestia. According to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 27.4), Caelius accused Bestia of killing his wives—it is not stated how many—by smearing a fast-acting poison, aconite, on their vaginas as they slept. Hence Catullus' description of Caelius' goatish odor as a "terrible Bestia/beast" (*mala valde . . . bestia*) and not the sort with whom a beautiful girl would lie" is apparently a pun referring to this trial. If so, it was written after February of 56, and probably while the memory of the trial was still fresh, that is, about the same time as Poem 36, when Clodia's prayer for a reconciliation with Catullus had just been answered. Poem 69 seems to have been Catullus' gallant contribution to a war of words between Clodia and Caelius. Though the poem has this personal dimension, Caelius was a prominent politician and supporter of the triumvirate. Catullus' evident purpose is to make him the object of public ridicule. Hence the poem may also have been the first of Catullus' extant political works, his opening salvo.

For the next few years, poetic attacks against the triumvirate became a staple of Catullus' repertoire. Possible motives include his friendship with their inveterate foe, Calvus, and his resentment of their protégé, Caelius.

However motivated, Catullus' attacks could not have come at a worse time, since these same years also represent the height of the triumvirate's powers. The issue of Cicero's exile had been one of several that revealed fissures in the triumvirate's solidarity. In April of 56, at the same time as Caelius' trial, Caesar addressed this problem at a conference at Luca in northern Italy during which he, Crassus, and Pompey settled their differences. The efficacy of the settlement is illustrated by Cicero's subsequent actions. Up to this point, he had acted with some independence. After Luca, he bowed to expediency and became a spokesman for the triumvirate and a eulogist of Caesar. This is most apparent in connection with Vatinius. He was elected to the office of praetor in 55, defeating the prominent *optimatus*, Cato, with the support of the triumvirate. When Vatinius left office, he was charged with bribery and prosecuted by the unwavering Calvus. At Caesar's request, Cicero conducted the defense, even though he had delivered a long denunciation of Vatinius at one of the trials of 56 B.C. Though he gained Vatinius' acquittal, Cicero's about-face was one of the low points of his career.²⁵ On the other hand, the vigor of Calvus' prosecution of Vatinius became proverbial. Seneca (*Controversiae* 7.4.6) preserves the story that Vatinius interrupted Calvus' speech to ask the presiding judge whether it was fair for him to be convicted just because his prosecutor was so eloquent.

Catullus' Poem 53 may commemorate Calvus' speech too. In any event, he joined forces with Calvus, deploying his talent for ridicule in several poems directed against the triumvirate, especially Caesar and a man named Mamurra, the commander of Caesar's engineers. A reference to the invasion of Britain in the first of these poems (Poem 29) date them to 55 B.C. or later.

Who can see and accept the fact
 (except for a lowlife scumbucket pig)
 that Mamurra possesses what used to belong
 to forested Gaul and faraway Britain?
 Will you actually see and accept the fact,
 Romulus fairy? . . .

"Romulus fairy," Catullus' phrase for Caesar, is *cinaede Romule* in Latin. *Cinaedus* denotes a man who plays the passive role in homosexual intercourse. Other poems that seem to have been written around the same time are 52, lamenting Vatinius' advancing career; 54, abusing several sup-

porters of the triumvirate; 57, abusing Caesar and Mamurra in terms very similar to 29; 93, expressing indifference to Caesar; and 114 and 115, ridiculing Mamurra under the pseudonym *Mentula* (Penis). According to the historian Suetonius, as we will see, Caesar acknowledged that these poems had permanently tarnished his reputation.

The composition of poems denouncing Caesar at this juncture was a reckless activity. Recall that Cicero was worried about the repercussions for his brother of a single, controversial verse written eight years earlier. And Catullus produced his controversial verses at exactly the time when the leaders of the triumvirate began defying all legal and ethical restraints in their respective quests for power, as a few examples will show.

One of the agreements reached at Luca was that Crassus and Pompey would be consuls in 55 B.C. As the election neared, however, there was a danger that an *optimatus* candidate, Domitius Ahenobarbus, would win one of the two spots. The triumvirs managed to postpone the elections until the beginning of 55. When they were finally held, troops from Caesar's Gallic legions flooded into the city. En route to the election assembly, Ahenobarbus' party was attacked and a servant was killed. Ahenobarbus decided to stay at home, and Crassus and Pompey were duly elected.²⁶

Arrangements for Ptolemy's restoration were apparently agreed upon at Luca. Ptolemy was restored by a representative of the triumvirate for a bribe of ten thousand talents.²⁷

In the fall of 55, Pompey presided at the opening of a huge new temple and theater complex on the banks of the Tiber. The entertainments that he sponsored climaxed in animal hunts. First five hundred lions, and a few of the hunters, were killed to the delight of the crowd, but then the grand finale backfired. The hunted were African elephants. Some of these did not fight but strode around the arena with trunks raised, making pathetic noises and winning the sympathy of the crowd. The general reaction was disgust at the cruelty of the spectacle.²⁸

As for Caesar, in 55 B.C. two Germanic tribes, approximately four hundred thousand strong, were forced to migrate across the Rhine into France by powerful neighbors. When Caesar ordered them to go back, they tried to negotiate. As messages were being exchanged between camps, a skirmish broke out between Roman and German cavalry forces. Though outnumbered, the Germans prevailed. This angered Caesar, who unleashed his legions against the unwary German camp. We have his own description of the sequel. The German men resisted among their carts and wagons. Their entire tribe was migrating, however. Women and children were

in the camp and fled when the fighting started. Caesar dispatched his cavalry after them. When the German men heard the screams of their women and children being slaughtered, they lost heart, broke ranks, and fled back to the banks of the Rhine, where they were overtaken and massacred too. When the Romans regrouped, they found that none of their own soldiers had been killed. A handful of German survivors were given permission to be camp followers, since they had nowhere else to go.²⁹

It was in the wake of this victory that Caesar stunned the Roman world by building a bridge across the Rhine in ten days and raiding Germany. He then assembled a fleet and invaded Britain at the end of the summer. That winter, the senate decreed twenty days of prayers and celebrations in gratitude to the gods for Caesar's accomplishments, the longest such "thanksgiving" in Roman history.³⁰ Only the *optimatus* Cato is known to have objected. He argued that Caesar's massacre of the German tribes violated divine law and proposed that the commander be handed over to the survivors for punishment.³¹

Inspired by Caesar's example, Crassus was preparing a great expedition against the Parthians on the eastern boundaries of the empire. (This was to end in disaster a year later when the Romans were routed in Mesopotamia. Crassus and his son were among those killed.)

There is evidence that Catullus and Calvus were eventually reconciled with Caesar. We are told as much by Suetonius (*Divus Julius* 73), a historian sympathetic to Caesar, as an example of his forgiving nature. (This passage is also used as evidence of Catullus' family wealth. Northern Italy was part of Caesar's Gallic command. Evidently, he often stayed at the Catullan villa at Sirmio, outside Verona.)

[Caesar] never got involved in such bitter rivalries that he would not gladly set them aside when the opportunity arose. . . . When Gaius Calvus began to try to arrange a reconciliation through friends after composing some notorious epigrams, Caesar wrote to him first of his own free will. Caesar did not deny that Valerius Catullus inflicted a lasting stain on him with his verses about Mamurra, but when Catullus apologized, Caesar invited him to dinner on the same day and continued to frequent his father's home just as he had done in the past.

In Catullus' poems, however, the only evidence of a reconciliation is found in the reference in Poem 11 to the achievements of "Caesar the great," and this is open to interpretation. Pompey's assumption of the cognomen, "The Great," in imitation of Alexander, was a source of derision. Catullus' line could be interpreted as sarcastic. Moreover, a brief, mutilated poem (54) sounds like the resumption of his attacks on Caesar after

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an intermission. Catullus insults several minor supporters of the triumvirate, then poses a rhetorical question:

About to explode at my undeserving
iambs again, unique commander?

For whatever reason, the voices of Catullus and Calvus suddenly fell silent. In a letter dated to 46 B.C., Cicero speaks of Calvus in terms that suggest that he has been dead for a while.³² The next we hear of them is a reference in a poem by the poet Ovid written some forty years later. He imagines Catullus in Hades with garlands on his “youthful temples,” accompanied by Calvus.³³ More might have been made of the timing of their disappearance if it were not for the Suetonian tradition that they had both made peace with Caesar. To balance this, however, we have the observation by a Greek historian, another Dio, that Caesar eliminated numerous enemies but always moved secretly and when least expected, both to catch his victims off guard and to avoid incurring the hostility of others.³⁴ So there is room for speculation. Catullus’ relationship with Caesar resembles that with Clodia in that we cannot be entirely sure how the story ended.

CATULLUS’ SINCERITY

Over the years Catullus has impressed most readers as being remarkably “sincere.” He often sounds like a poet who was compelled to write by the force of his feelings, a situation that he dramatizes in Poem 50. In recent decades, however, Catullan scholars have tended to cast doubt on the importance of this impression.³⁵ They point out quite correctly that Catullus’ poems are the products of calculated verbal artistry, deeply indebted to literary antecedents, and that the value of a poem *qua* poem depends on its aesthetic qualities, not its sincerity. They add that Catullus’ poems are often deliberately ambiguous and that it is, in any event, very perilous to make inferences from what is said in a poem to the facts of a poet’s life or his actual feelings. Godwin cites with approval the comparison of Catullus with a “pop-singer, who appears to be voicing his deepest feelings but who is in fact performing for an audience an artificial piece which may have no relation to his own life.”³⁶

Despite all this, I would like to venture the opinion that Catullus’ sincerity is not entirely illusory or insignificant. The comparison with a “pop singer” cuts both ways. Some popular songs, even love songs, are inspired by real relationships. In fact, friends who know more about contempo-

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Cricket, my passions' distraction, enticer of sleep,
the countryside's winged Muse
and the lyre's natural rival, play me a love song,
beating your wings with your feet.
Rescue me, cricket, from struggles with sleepless care,
weave an escape from desires.
Your gifts I will give in the morning, a juicy leek
and dewy drops from my mouth.

Whereas there is no clear connection between Meleager's sleepless care and the cricket, every line and virtually every word in Catullus' poem leads via the image of the sparrow to his desire for his girl. This is the kind of focus that gives his poetry the appearance of genuine emotion. It is difficult to resist thinking that he really was smitten when he wrote it. The bird might be a figment, but Catullus' sexual desire is palpable.

Many of Catullus' compositions lend themselves to similar comment. For one more example, consider Poem 70:

My woman says that she would prefer none other
to me though Jupiter sought her.
She says, but a woman's words to a lover belong
on wind and rapid water.

The image of writing women's oaths on water did not originate with Catullus; it is a Greek proverb first occurring in a line attributed to Sophocles (*Fragment* 742). That a lover's promises are unreliable was also a cliché. Catullus' epigram is possibly an imitation of one by Callimachus (*Palatine Anthology* 5.9):

Callinotus swore to Ionis never to hold
any man or woman more dear.
He swore, but lovers' oaths are truly unable
to reach immortal ears.
Now he burns for a man. Of the girl, as Megarians say:
no account or number.

Catullus puts himself into the poem as the betrayed lover, and everything in it illuminates his own feeling of disillusion. In contrast, Callimachus is detached and amused. He complicates the issue of personal loyalty by

stressing that Callignotus changed the gender as well as the identity of his lover. The reference to a Megarian proverb, a learned allusion, introduces yet another topic of uncertain relevance. Of course, earlier biographical critics went too far in inferring from texts like Poem 70 that Clodia was at the time of composition holding out the prospect of marriage to Catullus. Though the specific circumstances that inspired the poem are unrecoverable, nevertheless it can at least be said that the poem is an excellent representation of heartfelt disillusionment, whereas Callimachus' poem does not even attempt to be.

As the examples cited show, Catullus' emotional urgency is compatible with literary allusiveness and the use of other rhetorical devices. In fact, Catullus' peculiar charm could be described as a combination of the characteristics of a literary scholar and a teenager in love. This combination is illustrated by his longest surviving work, Poem 64. This represents a genre that was nameless in antiquity and has come to be called an epyllion or miniature epic. The only other fully extant example is *Europa* by one Moschus. Callimachus' *Hecale*, inspired by the legends of Theseus, was much more influential, but only fragments survive.

Eschewing epic grandeur and straightforward narrative lines, the epyllia wove together curious episodes from myths in novel ways. Apparently, a common device was the ecphrasis. This is the description of a work of art so detailed and vivid that it becomes a story within the story. The archetypal ecphrasis is Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in Book 18 of the *Iliad*. To judge by Catullus' Poem 64 and *Europa*, the ecphrasis was a central feature of epyllia. In Moschus' poem, the narrator digresses from the story of Europa to tell the rather similar story of Io, which happens to be depicted on the basket that Europa is using to gather flowers.

In the same way, Catullus' Poem 64 combines the myth of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis with the story of Ariadne and Theseus, which is depicted on a tapestry on Peleus' bed. Catullus' treatment of the two myths is itself a fabric of literary allusions. The opening lines are reminiscent of Euripides' *Medea*. The influences of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the *Iliad*, and even Hesiod's myth of the Golden Age are obvious. Catullus' vivid evocation of the sacrifice of Polyxena seems indebted to the sacrifice of Iphigenia in the *De Rerum Natura* by his contemporary Lucretius.

On the other hand, there are striking similarities between Catullus' characters and the feelings that he ascribes to himself in his shorter works. To pick just two examples, in Poem 64, Catullus describes Ariadne in love with Theseus as the victim of the boy (Cupid) "who mixes people's joys

with cares” (95, translated here as “blends the joys of men with sorrow”). In Poem 68, he says that in his youth he himself was no stranger to the goddess (Venus) “who mixes sweet bitterness with cares” (17, translated here as “the goddess of bittersweet cares”). At 64.335–36, the Fates say that no love has ever joined lovers in such a compact as that which has joined Peleus and Thetis; in Poem 87, Catullus says that no trust was ever found in any compact like that in his love for Lesbia. Such echoes suggest that in describing mythical situations Catullus drew not only from literary predecessors but also from his own feelings.³⁸ When he composed Ariadne’s words, it seems obvious that he was thinking about his feelings when Lesbia abandoned him.

By way of contrast, the emotional peak of Moschus’ *Europa* occurs when the heroine finds herself in the middle of the sea on the back of a bull (Zeus in disguise) who is loping over the water without getting his hooves wet. She exclaims:

Who are you, bull divine, and where are you taking me?
How travel these difficult roads with hooves, not fearing
the sea? For the sea is meant to be traveled by speedy
ships, and bulls are afraid of the salty way.
What pleasing food or drink will the brine produce?
You are surely a god. Your actions suit the gods.
The seafaring dolphins spend no time on earth,
nor bulls on the deep, but you dauntlessly race across
the land and sea, and use your hooves as oars. (135–43)

The appeal of the passage is the thoroughly bizarre nature of the situation. Unlike Ariadne’s abandonment, it is hard to imagine that it had any obvious parallels in the poet’s experience.

To the extent that only his poem’s formal qualities are involved, Catullus’ apparent emotional urgency could be entirely factitious. There are, however, other indications that it was genuine. One is that Catullus was a wealthy amateur. He did not produce poems to please a wealthy patron. Then too, as we have seen, there is evidence that his political verse was serious business. One might suppose that the political poems had real occasions while his love songs were fictional, just as some musicians in our Vietnam era produced serious protest songs alongside conventional love lyrics. The problem with this formulation when applied to Catullus is that a number of his poems straddle both worlds. Poems 79 (*Lesbius est pulcher*)

and 43, in which Mamurra's mistress is compared with Lesbia, are examples.

The most compelling pieces of evidence for the genuinely autobiographical nature of much of Catullus' poetry, however, are his explicit statements in Poem 68. This is ostensibly a letter to a friend, probably Manlius Torquatus, who has requested a gift of love poetry from Catullus because he has been separated from his wife or lover. Catullus says that he cannot comply because his brother's death has made it impossible for him to take love affairs seriously. He goes on to reminisce, however, about a great favor that a certain "Allius" once performed: he lent his house to Lesbia and Catullus for a romantic rendezvous. A series of passages that sound like Catullus' stream of consciousness ensues. Allusions to the myths of Troy, where Catullus' brother happened to die, are interwoven with expressions of grief at his brother's death and attempts to come to terms with his ambivalent feelings about Lesbia.

No one has ever doubted that the death of Catullus' brother was a real event that was more or less directly reflected in Poems 65 and 101 as well as in 68. It is striking that in Poem 68, Catullus treats his stormy relationship with Lesbia as being just as real as, though ultimately less important than, his brother's death. And he makes it clear that his love poetry flowed from this experience. When his brother's death cast a pallor over his love life, the love poetry stopped. Again, I am not suggesting that Catullus' poems are a direct transcription of his experiences, an encoded diary. I do share the sense with many readers of past generations that his poetry has a comparatively close and immediate connection with real feelings, persons, and events.

In a major, recent work on Catullus, John Newman makes this excellent point about the relationship between Hellenistic and Roman literature: "Because Roman society was more primitive than that of the contemporary Greek world, when Hellenistic genres entered this new ambience, they tended to retrace their development, to revert to type. They underwent what biologists call recapitulation of the evolutionary process."³⁹ Presumably, personal poetry originated in a time before literary scholars and critics, when people discovered that they could use artful language to please their friends and lovers, hurt their enemies, and soothe their own feelings. In my opinion, the processes that Catullus recapitulated included that discovery. In other words, he revisited poetry's ultimate source. To me that is an essential part of his interest and appeal.

A NOTE ON RHYTHM AND DICATION

Although there is little agreement on the exact sound of ancient Greek and Roman poems, it is clear that they had regular rhythms. They were divided into lines that took determinate amounts of time to pronounce as measured by points of emphasis falling at regular intervals. To put it another way, the Greeks and Romans thought that the difference between poetry and prose was that you could tap your feet or snap your fingers in time with the former, but not the latter. As Quintilian (9.3.55) says, *oratio non descendet ad crepitem digitorum et pedum* (“Prose will not stoop to being measured by the beat of fingers and feet.”).

By this definition, of course, modern free verse is a form of prose. Only more traditional poems would qualify as poetry, for example, lines like these by Robert Frost:

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.⁴⁰

In a recent book, Amittai Aviram argues that it is precisely the absence of audible rhythm that explains how little popularity literate poetry enjoys in our society.⁴¹ In any event, the stark contrast between the regular rhythms of ancient poetry and the lawlessness of much modern verse is certainly significant and perhaps worthy of more attention than it has received.

Rhythm in English is based on word stress. In words of two or more syllables, one (or more) is pronounced with greater tension than the others. Similarly, in a string of monosyllables, some are stressed more than others, depending upon the semantic and rhythmic context.

In contrast, ancient Greek words did not have stress accents. Ancient Greek poetry was based on the length of syllables, that is, the amount of time taken to pronounce them, rather than on word stress. Although Latin words had stress accents, Latin poetry imitated Greek in being based on patterns of long and short syllables. In such patterns, in both languages, there are places where either a long or a short syllable is required and other places that admit of variation, where the length of the syllable is not prescribed at all or where one can have either one long syllable or two short ones. For example, the pattern for Homer’s meter, dactylic hexameter, is as follows:

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— ◡◡ / — ◡◡ / — ◡◡ / — ◡◡ / — ◡◡ / — x

In the first five feet, a long syllable must be followed by one more long or by two shorts. In the last foot, a long syllable is followed by one that may be either long or short. Oxford Classicist Martin West uses the term *principes* (plural: *principes*) for positions in Greek and Latin meters where long syllables are required. Although there are exceptions, in Greek and Latin meters generally *principes* are separated from each other either by one long or short syllable or by two short ones.

One encounters different views on how Greek and Latin poetry should be read. For English speakers the issue boils down to whether *principes* should be artificially stressed, so that the lines sound obviously rhythmic to us, or whether a sufficient sense of rhythm can be conveyed by the length of the Greek and Latin words carefully pronounced. In one way or another, however, it was the regular intervals between *principes* that made Greek and Latin verse rhythmic. As West writes: “The recurrence of [*principes*] at every second or third position in most metres gives a clear sense of rhythm, a rhythm which often continues smoothly from one period into the next. Verse which is to be delivered in procession or with dancing cannot be too unrhythmical. And the ancients were well acquainted with the practice of beating time to music or to recited verse by clapping, snapping the fingers, or tapping the foot.”⁴²

In my translations of Catullus, I have attempted to capture the general effect of such rhythm in a way that is perceptible to English speakers, for whom it is all a matter of word stress. As a general rule, I intend that a fixed number of syllables be stressed in each line. Such syllables are separated by one or two unstressed syllables, for example,

/ / / /
 Whom do I give my debonair, new
 / / / /
 pumice-polished booklet to?
 / / / /
 You, Cornelius! You were inclined
 / / / /
 To think that my banter amounted to something
 (Poem 1.1–4)

Most of Catullus’ first 60 poems are written in the Phalaecean or hendecasyllabic meter, whose pattern in Greek and Latin was x x / — ◡◡ / — ◡◡ /

– ∼ / – x. I have translated these into lines with four stressed syllables, as illustrated by the four lines above. Catullus' Phalaecean poems are: 1–3, 5–7, 9, 10, 12–16, 21, 23, 24, 26–28, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 40–43, 45–50, 53–58b.

A few poems in 1–60 are in different meters whose lines are approximately the same length as the hendecasyllables, for example, Poems 4, 29, and 52 in iambic trimeter, with twelve syllables per line, instead of eleven. I have translated these in the same way as the Phalaeceans.

Eight of Catullus' poems (8, 22, 31, 37, 39, 44, 59, 60) are in the interesting choliambic (limping iambic) meter. In Greek and Latin, this begins with five iambs, but concludes with a trochee. The meter is thus distinctive in that it violates the general rule by which *principes* are separated by one or two syllables. In choliambic lines, the last two *principes* are adjacent to each other. In my translations, I have tried to capture this effect by juxtaposing an iamb and a trochee in the third and fourth positions respectively of lines with five stresses:

/ / / / /
 Poor Catullus, stop playing the fool!
 / / / / /
 Seeing that something has died, deem it dead.
 / / / / /
 Bright were the suns that shone once for you
 (Poem 8.1–3)

Two of Catullus' poems (11 and 51) are written in Sapphic stanzas: three lines consisting of four trochees with a dactyl in the middle and a fourth line consisting of a dactyl and a spondee. I have rendered these with three four-beat lines followed by a two-beat line:

/ / / /
 Catullus' comrades, wherever he goes,
 / / / /
 whether he reaches the Indians' realm,
 / / / /
 where the far-resounding eastern wave
 / /
 pummels the shore
 (Poem 11.1–4)

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Poems 34 and 61 are composed in somewhat similar stanzas in Latin. In my version, the former is translated into stanzas of three three-beat lines followed by a two-beat line:

/ / /
In Diana's strength secure,
/ / /
we'll sing our song to her,
/ / /
as becomes a chorus of pure
/ /
youths and maidens.
(Poem 34.1–4)

The latter I have rendered into stanzas with four lines of three beats and one with two:

/ / /
Inhabiting Helicon's height,
/ / /
O child of Urania's race,
/ / /
who takes the tender slip
/ / /
of a girl for a man's embrace,
/ /
O Hymen Hymenaeus.
(Poem 61.1–5)

In the case of these two stanzaic compositions, I have used regular patterns of end rhymes to reinforce their rhythms. There is no such pattern of end rhymes in the Latin original. Indeed, classical Roman poets in general seem to have been indifferent to end rhyme, perhaps because the freedom of Latin word order and the presence of inflectional endings would have made such patterns too easy to create. On the other hand, there are a few instances of end rhyme in Catullus that may not be entirely coincidental. For example, the first four and last two lines of Poem 1 end with the following words respectively: *libellum*; *expolitum*; *solebas*; *nugas*; *Virgo*; *saeclo*. Similarly, the first two and last two lines of Poem 28 end: *inanis*; *ex-*

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peditis; Deaeque; Remique. From time to time in the non-stanzaic poems, I have imitated this occasional use of end rhyme to reinforce the idea that the translations are meant to be read rhythmically.

Poem 17 is written in the Priapean meter, which was associated with hymns to the fertility god, Priapus. This is a rapid meter with relatively long lines. I have translated it into five-beat lines with four or five dactyls apiece:

/ / / / /
 Colony, anxious to frolic the length of your bridge,
 / / / / /
 ready to hop but afraid of the wobbly legs
 / / / / /
 of your little old bridgey erected on second-hand splinters,
 / / / / /
 which threatens to fall on its back and to sink in the swamp, etc.
 (Poem 17.1–4)

The meter of Poem 63, the most unusual in Catullus' collection, is even more rapid. It is in the galliambic meter, which was meant to capture the frantic singing and dancing of the priests of Cybele. In the middle of the line there is a mandatory spondee followed by a word division and two shorts. It is as though in each line the speaker must stop to catch his breath and start over. I have tried to get something of this flavor with six-beat lines consisting of dactyls but having two adjacent stressed syllables in each line, for the halting effect.

/ / / / / /
 Attis had hastened across towering seas on a raft.
 / / / / / /
 Eagerly setting his swift foot in the Phrygian grove,
 / / / / / /
 he entered the goddess's dark, forest-encircled domain
 / / / / / /
 and there was attacked by insanity's goad. Blinded by passion,
 / / / / / /
 he lightened the weight of his loins with a sharp fragment of flint.
 (Poem 63.1–5)

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Poems 62 and 64 are in dactylic hexameters, the heroic meter of Homer and Vergil. I have rendered these with five-beat lines:

/ / / / /
 Pines descended from Pelion's peak, they say,
 / / / / /
 anciently swam through Neptune's surging waters
 / / / / /
 to the land the Phasis lapped and Aetes ruled,
 (Poem 64.1–3)

I have also used five-beat lines in translating Poems 25 and 30, which are metrically unique in Catullus. Their Latin meters (iambic tetrameter and “greater Asclepiads” respectively) have relatively long lines.

Poems 65 through 116 are all in elegiac couplets. These consist of lines of dactylic hexameter followed by shorter lines, which resemble the beginning of a hexameter repeated. Couplets generally express complete thoughts, and conciseness is one of their chief virtues. I have tried to capture these qualities with couplets consisting of a five-beat line followed by a three-beat line:

 / / / / /
 Though sorrow, care, and exhaustion call me away
 / / /
 from the learned maidens, Ortales,
 / / / / /
 and my mind, awash in troubles, cannot deliver
 / / /
 the Muses' sweet conceptions.
 (Poem 65.1–4)

There is a wide range of styles in Catullus' brief collection, making his poems a great challenge for any translator. Some of his most memorable works are written in what seems to me to be quite ordinary language. My view is that these works rise to the level of poetry—great poetry, sometimes—by the power of the thought that they convey and the fact that they fit, as though by happy coincidence, into one or another of his rigid metrical patterns. In contrast, diction that called attention to itself would

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detract from the effect of the rhythm by making it seem contrived. I think that Poem 85 is the best illustration of Catullus’ transformation of ordinary language into great poetry.

Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris.
Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

Literally: “I hate and I love. Why I do this perhaps you inquire. I do not know, but I feel it happen and I am crucified/tortured.” The last word, *excrucior*, refers etymologically to crucifixion. In translating it, one is tempted to incorporate the image of a cross, either to exploit the later associations of the word or to reinforce the notion that Catullus is torn in opposite directions. Passages in which other Latin authors use *excrucio*, however, suggest that it was a faded metaphor, having about the same impact as “torment” or “torture” in English. Lucretius, for example, speaks of cold weather “crucifying” primitive humans before they discovered the use of animal-skin garments (5.1426). In cases like this, where Catullus’ language seems ordinary in Latin, I have adhered to ordinary English diction, while going to great lengths to obey my own metrical rules, thus:

/ / / / /
I hate and I love. You ask me why? Who knows?
/ / /
But I feel it occur and I’m tortured.

In my opinion, for what it is worth, this approach comes closest to capturing the effect of reading Catullus’ best epigrams in the original Latin.

NOTES

1. For the Latin text, see Julia H. Gaisser, *Catullus and His Renaissance Readers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 18.
2. Douglas F. S. Thomson, *Catullus: Edited with a Textual and Interpretative Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 7–8.
3. Timothy P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), 51–52, identifies Apuleius’ likely source as *De vita rebusque illustrium virorum* by C. Julius Hyginus. According to Wiseman, Hyginus probably arrived in Rome in 47 B.C.
4. For this author’s account of what may have happened in reality, see David Mulroy, “The Early Career of P. Clodius Pulcher: A Re-Examination of the Charges of Mutiny and Sacrilege,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 118 (1988), 155–78.

5. Cicero *Pro Caelio* 32.
6. Poem 100 is addressed to a Caelius who is said to be from Verona and is described as Catullus' faithful friend. We know from the *Pro Caelio* that Caelius Rufus was from the central Italian town of Teramo. Hence the Caelius of Poem 100 is not Caelius Rufus. It seems to me that in Poem 100 Catullus emphasizes his addressee's association with Verona precisely to distinguish him from his more famous namesake. Compare R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets: From Catullus to Horace* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 290, note 71: "[Wiseman] points out that the Caelius of Catullus, poem 100 is hardly likely to be M. Caelius Rufus; but this does not determine the fate of the Caelius of 58, nor of the Rufus of 69 and 77."
7. One sister was known as Clodia Luculli from her marriage to the general Lucullus, which ended in divorce in 66 B.C. Another known as Tertia was married to one Q. Marcius Rex and widowed by 61 B.C. In Clodius' trial for sacrilege in 61 B.C., Lucullus testified that Clodius and his former wife had been guilty of incestuous relations. This is reported by Cicero in the *Pro Milone* (73).
8. Guy Lee, *The Poems of Catullus, Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Brief Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), xxii.
9. Timothy P. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet and Other Roman Essays*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974), 107. Rufus' gout is also cited as evidence against his identification with M. Caelius Rufus by J. Godwin, *Catullus: The Shorter Poems, Edited with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 3; Lee, *Poems of Catullus*, xxi; and Charles Martin, *Catullus* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press), 64.
10. Evidence of the link between ancient Roman gout and lead-lined drinking vessels is discussed by Tri Giang Phan et al. "Lead Poisoning from Drinking Kombucha Tea Brewed in a Ceramic Pot," *Medical Journal of Australia* 169 (1998), 644–46, available at <http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/xmas98/phan/phan.html> (27 October 2001).
11. By combining Poems 10 and 28, we know that Catullus served in Bithynia under a propraetor named Memmius. It is a well-attested fact that one Gaius Memmius was a praetor in 58 B.C. In the normal course of events, he would govern a foreign province during the following year. Hence the assertion that Catullus spent most of 57 B.C. in Bithynia is taken to be one of the most certain facts in his biography. In Poem 46, Catullus speaks of preparing to leave Asia Minor at the beginning of a spring, which must be the spring of 56. Poems 31 and 36 both imply that he went first to Verona. It seems unlikely that he was back in Rome for Caelius' trial, which occurred early in April of 56.
12. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions*, 60.
13. J. K. Newman, *Roman Catullus and the Modification of Alexandrian Sensibility* (Hildesheim: Weidman, 1990), 49, points out that Catullus uses the term "iambic" to mean abusive verse in general, not just poems in iambic meters narrowly defined.
14. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions*, 45.
15. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
16. This means that Poem 71 was written *before* Poem 69. The manuscript order of the poems does not argue against this assumption. There are several striking instances of apparently reversed chronology in the order of Catullus' poems in the manuscripts, especially in the elegiac collection, 65 to 116. In Poem 116, for example, Catullus declares his intention to attack Gellius in verse, something he does in Poems 80, 88, 89, 90, and

91. In Poem 68, Catullus refers to the emotional conflicts stirred by Lesbia as being in the past, while these constitute a principal subject of the subsequent poems. Poem 83, in which Lesbia's husband is still alive, and the similar 92 seem to refer to a very early stage of the relationship between Catullus and Lesbia, before they had made explicit declarations.

17. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet*, 109, fortified his position with a metrical argument. Of Catullus' hendecasyllabic poems, some have lines beginning only with spondees; some have one or two non-spondaic beginnings; still others have many. The exclusively spondaic openings are concentrated in the poems earlier in the collection, but the very first poem (presumably written last) has four non-spondees in ten lines. From this, some have inferred that Catullus' metrical practice evolved from an early state in which he used only spondees in opening lines to the relatively free use of trochees and iambs found in his late, introductory poem. Poem 46, which speaks of his return from Bithynia, is written in the early, spondaic style. Of the Lesbia poems, only Poem 5 is written in this style. Poems 2, 3, and 7 have occasional non-spondees; Poem 36 has many. Hence the indication of Catullus' metrical practice is said to be that all the Lesbia poems, with the possible exception of Poem 5, were written after Bithynia.

The argument is based on the assumption that Catullus' metrical practice evolved in a mechanical way from an absolute exclusion of initial non-spondees to their occasional use to their free use. The Lesbia poems 2, 3, and 7 have only four non-spondaic openings in forty-three lines. They may be as early as any of the poems in the collection if one merely assumes that Catullus permitted occasional exceptions to his spondaic opening rule even in his earliest work. The only Lesbia poem with a large number of non-spondaic openings is Poem 36, on the *Annals* of Volusius. Catullus' metrical practice here may have been affected by the content of the poem, in which Lesbia refers to him as the "worst of poets." Non-spondaic openings may have sounded metrically careless. Another poem with a high percentage of non-spondaic openings is Poem 49, the address to Cicero, in which Catullus again refers to himself as the worst of poets. The line in which the phrase occurs (5) begins with an iamb: *agit pessimus omnium poeta*. In general, it does not seem convincing to use the details of Catullus' metrical practice in this regard to date his poems when the sample is so small and other variables are involved.

18. F. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1993), 282–83.
 19. A. Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae II* (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1963), 303–4.
 20. We learn from Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 1.19.2, that Metellus was given the proconsulship of one of the Gauls. *Ad Atticum* 2.20.5 clearly implies that he received Transalpine Gaul; Cicero says that Metellus is disappointed about peaceful conditions there since he was hoping for a triumph. R. T. Broughton, "More Notes on Roman Magistrates: 3. Metellus Celer's Gallic Province," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 79 (1948), 73–76, argues that Metellus had probably already resigned from the command of Transalpine Gaul when he died, but the evidence for this conclusion is not compelling. Dio (37.50.4) reports that in 60 a tribune threatened to veto Metellus' command if Metellus did not relent in his opposition to a bill assigning land to Pompey's veterans. Broughton feels that the threat was carried out, but Dio does not say that it was, even though that fact would have been relevant to his theme, namely, that Metel-

- lus was fanatical in his opposition to Pompey's legislation. Other considerations are similarly indecisive. Even if Metellus' death did not pave the way for Caesar's command, it eliminated one of the *populares'* most active opponents. It is extremely unfortunate that none of Cicero's extant letters contain any discussion of it.
21. Suetonius *Divus Julius* 22. According to Suetonius, Caesar made this statement in the senate. When someone quipped that it would be hard for a woman (like Caesar) to do this, Caesar mildly replied that Semiramis ruled Assyria and that Amazons once controlled much of Asia Minor.
 22. Most of the couplet is quoted by Seneca in *Controversiae* 7.4.7, where it is attributed to Calvus. The complete couplet appears in the scholia to Lucan (7.726), where it is mistakenly attributed to Martial, who flourished a hundred years after Pompey.
 23. Erich S. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 288.
 24. John Noonan, "Mala Bestia in Catullus 69.7–8," *Classical World* 73 (1979), 155–64.
 25. Gruen, *Last Generation*, 317.
 26. *Ibid.*, 147.
 27. Cicero describes the restoration of Ptolemy by the triumvirs' representative Gabinius in *In Pisonem* 41. The assertion that Gabinius received ten thousand talents from Ptolemy is contained in the scholia Bobsiensia to Cicero's *Pro Plancio* 86.
 28. A letter from Cicero to a sickly friend who missed the games (*Ad familiares* 7.1.3) provides the only contemporary account of the event: "The last day was devoted to elephants. They filled the crowd and the mob with great admiration but no pleasure. In fact, they aroused a certain pity and the feeling that there is some sort of fellowship between that beast and the human race." Writing before A.D. 79, Pliny the Elder (8.20–21) provides a fuller description: "In Pompey's second consulship, at the dedication of the temple of Venus Victrix, twenty elephants (or seventeen as some report) fought against African warriors armed with javelins. One put up a wonderful struggle. Since his feet were wounded, he crawled on his knees towards the enemies' line. Grabbing their shields, he threw them in the air. These delighted the spectators by whirling in circles as they fell, as though they were thrown by an artist rather than a mad beast. There was another astonishing sight when an elephant was killed by a single blow. A spear struck him under the eye and reached the vital organs of the head. The elephants as a group tried to escape through the iron gates that surrounded them, which disturbed the audience. (For this reason when Caesar was dictator and planned a similar spectacle, he surrounded the arena with a moat, which the emperor Nero removed when he was adding seats for the knights.) When Pompey's elephants had lost hope of escape, they sought mercy from the crowd through incredible behavior. They begged for mercy, grieving for themselves with a kind of wailing. So great was the sorrow of the people that they forgot the general [Pompey] and the generosity that he had displayed in their honor. They rose as one, weeping and calling down curses on Pompey's head—which were soon fulfilled." Compare Dio 39.28.1.
 29. Caesar *De bello gallico* 4.4–16. Caesar does not play down the one-sided nature of the final battle. He reports that the Germans were panic-stricken by the Romans' unexpected assault: "Those who were able to seize their arms in a hurry resisted our troops for a short time and battled among the carts and wagons. The rest of the multitude of children and women (since they had left home and crossed the Rhine with all their

- people) began to flee in various directions. Caesar dispatched his cavalry in pursuit of them. When the German men heard their cries and saw their people being slaughtered, they threw down their arms, abandoned their standards, and fled from the camp. When they reached the confluence of the Meuse and the Rhine, they despaired of salvation. With a great number slain, the others cast themselves into the river and died, overcome by panic, fatigue, and the force of the river. All of our men were safe except for a very small number of wounded.”
30. Dio 39.53.2.
31. Plutarch mentions Cato’s resolution (*Caesar* 12.3), citing one Tanusius as his source: “Tanusius says that when the senate was voting in favor of processions and sacrifices, Cato expressed the opinion that Caesar should be surrendered to the barbarians so that they could purge the city for the violation of a truce by Caesar and turn the curse against the guilty man.” Tanusius may be the real name of Catullus’ Volusius, whose *Annals* are ridiculed in Poem 36. Tanusius’ *ponderosi Annales* are mentioned by Seneca (*Epistles* 93.11) with the comment *scis . . . quid vocarentur* (“You know what they were called”), possibly a reference to Catullus’ phrase *cacata carta*, “shat-upon scroll.”
32. *Ad familiares* 15.21.4. Cicero is explaining to his correspondent why he once sent Calvus a highly flattering letter. He refers to Calvus’ devotion to the sparse “Atticist” style of oratory that was very different from Cicero’s own: “I extolled [Calvus’] talent with greater praise than you judge could possibly have been accurate. In the first place, that was my real assessment. He was mentally sharp. He followed a certain style, which was a mistake in his judgment—which was generally one of his strong points. Still he followed the style that he liked. He had much esoteric learning but lacked force. Therefore I urged him to acquire that.”
33. Ovid *Amores* 3.9.61–62, speaking of the recently deceased poet Tibullus: “Meet him, O learned Catullus, with ivy on youthful / temples, you and your Calvus.”
34. Dio 38.11.4: “[Caesar] waited for a good opportunity and usually attacked in such a way that his victims were unaware of what was happening. He did not want to seem to be protecting himself against anyone but only to arrange affairs to suit himself, while arousing the least hostility. For that reason he inflicted revenge secretly and in places where one would least expect it.”
35. Compare Godwin, *Catullus*, 13: “Catullus in fact explicitly denies that his ‘art’ has anything to do with his private life in poem 16 where he comically threatens his detractors who draw conclusions about the man from his works”; Newman, *Roman Catullus*, 66: “Scholars speak sympathetically of Catullus the victim of the aristocratic harpy, Clodia. But, in literary terms, Catullus ‘needs’ Lesbia, or his domina, to be unfaithful. . . . In Catullus’ own world, why could Septimius find an Acme, or Manlius Torquatus a Vinia, but not the poet? Those others are needed as foil. It has nothing to do with ‘real life,’ and everything to do with genre, and the persona assumed as part of that genre by the poet.” Godwin exaggerates the implications of Poem 16. There Catullus says that poets are entitled to be softer in their verse than in real life. The general principle is that certain kinds of hyperbole are characteristic of poetry. This is different from saying that it has nothing to do with real life.
36. Godwin, *Catullus*, 15.
37. This interpretation is not merely a product of the modern compulsion to find hidden meanings in literature. Martial (11.15) promises to give a slave “Catullus’ sparrow” in a

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- context that leaves no doubt about its sexual double meaning. The interpretation was first explicitly defended by the Renaissance scholar Angelo Poliziano (see Gaisser, *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers*, 75–78). Disputes about it have continued to the present day.
38. The same kind of comment can be made about Catullus' unique Poem 63, a hymn to the goddess Cybele. The hero Attis castrates himself in an excess of madness sent by his goddess. There are some obvious analogies. In Poem 75, for example, Catullus asserts that Lesbia has destroyed his mind.
39. Newman, *Roman Catullus*, 66.
40. Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."
41. Amittai F. Aviram, *Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
42. Martin L. West, *Greek Metre* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 22.