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(*Non*) *bona dicta*: Intertextuality between Catullus 11.16 and Cicero *De oratore* 2.222

Catullus' eleventh poem has presented its readers with many puzzling questions regarding the work's tone and unity. When Catullus calls upon Furius and Aurelius as trusted comrades, figures he treats elsewhere in the collection with the utmost scorn, is he being serious or ironical? Is his reference to Caesar's accomplishments (*Caesaris uisens monimenta magni* [10]) sarcastic or sincerely admiring? How does the poem's apparent celebration of Roman imperial expansion not conflict with other poems in the collection that are so skeptical of such values?[1] What connects the poem's catalogue of notional destinations with the scathing message to Lesbia in the fifth stanza and the lyrical coda that concludes the poem?

Problems such as these have polarized the critical reception of the poem into essentially two camps, ironists and anti-ironists.[2] This essay attempts to break free from this interpretive stalemate through an intertextual reading of the crucial sixteenth line, *non bona dicta*. This approach will, I hope, avoid the pitfall

I hope that this paper will be an appropriate contribution to this celebration of Gordon's teaching at Yale. Gordon and I read the Catullan corpus in preparation for my special area examinations. Under his guidance, I began to learn how to read canonical texts with fresh eyes and in a spirit of adventurous inquisitiveness. I look back to that tutorial as a milestone in my scholarly development, and I have sought to emulate in my own teaching the pedagogical generosity that Gordon showed me then. For that wonderful opportunity, and for his invaluable guidance since, I will remain forever grateful.

[1] Catullus addresses Furius in poems 23 and 26, Aurelius in 15 and 21, and the pair in 16; the poet's tone, at its warmest, is unfriendly, at its coldest, supremely abusive. Fordyce's suggestion (1961, 125) that Roman social convention would have licensed such verbal assaults among friends strains credibility: see Sweet 1987, 523–6. Catullus attacks Caesar, directly or indirectly, in poems 29, 54, 57, and 93. Fredricksmeyer's suggestion (1993, 96f.) that Catullus experienced a change of attitude towards Caesar between poem 29 (datable to 55) and poem 11 (buttressed by Suetonius's account of Catullus' reconciliation with the general [*Iul.* 73]), while certainly possible, does not erase the fact that 11 is the only Catullus poem with a flattering reference to Caesar. Catull. 28, whose opening (*Pisonis comites*) echoes that of poem 11 (*Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli*) paints a decidedly non-romantic portrait of service in a provincial post.

[2] For accounts of the critical reception of the poem see Sweet 1987, 510–4 and Fredricksmeyer 1993, 102–5.

of seeing the poem as either wholly sincere or wholly ironical, and sidestep the reductive readings of the poem's rich ambiguities that such restrictive perspectives entail.[3] My interpretation of poem 11 has as its basis an examination of the relationship between Catullus' *non bona dicta* and Cicero's discussion of *bona dicta* in the discourse on humor in *De oratore*. The specific goals of this investigation are first to show how this pivotal phrase in Catullus' poem is related to performative and rhetorical negotiations that Cicero's text articulates, and then to explore how a fuller appreciation of the range of the meanings governed by *non bona dicta* can aid in interpreting the poem as a whole. A more general objective is to explore an instance on the margins of intertextuality.

After the poem's address to Furius and Aurelius and its evocative list of potential destinations on the boundaries of the empire (India, Britain, the Middle East, and Egypt), the fourth stanza both acts as a summary and prepares a transition:

> omnia haec, quaecumque feret uoluntas
> caelitum, temptare simul parati,
> pauca nuntiate meae puellae
> non bona dicta.
>
> Friends ready to join me in attempting all these
> things, whatever the will of the gods will bring,
> deliver this brief message to my girl,
> not good words.

Coming at the end of the long and elaborate invocation with which the poem commences, *non bona dicta* has an especially prominent and emphatic position: it is the keystone that bears the load of the poem's two parts. It signifies the surprising shift from the work's high-flown beginnings to Catullus' abusive message to Lesbia in the stanza that follows. As a "moment of ironic detachment,"[4] the expression marks the liminal space that separates the opening's catalogue of exotic places from the bitter words of its close. The litotic ambiguity of *non bona dicta* both anticipates Catullus' hostile "valediction" and sets it in contrast with the poetic beauty (the "*bona dicta*") of the picturesque, epic-style travelogue.[5]

Not only does *non bona dicta* play an essential role in the structure and movement of this poem, it is also a point of intertextual connections with other poems in the collection that meditate on the love affair. *Non bona dicta* recalls Catullus' protest in poem 76 that he has done and said all that anyone could, only

[3] I am sympathetic with Sweet 1987, 513 who "hope[s] it will be possible to 'save the phenomena' of criticism on the poem, that is, to preserve views of it which are contradictory to one another."

[4] Sweet 1987, 521.

[5] As Sweet 1987, 519 argues. On the epic style of the poem's beginning see Scott 1983, 39–42; Ross 1969, 95–98; Putnam 1974, 70–3.

to find that these benefactions and benedictions have come to nothing.[6] The allusion sets in stark distinction Catullus' past and future relations to Lesbia, and makes more emphatic the poet's claim that there has been a sea change in his attitude towards her. The phrase also recalls the epigram in which Catullus claims not to be able to curse his beloved, while adding the ominous proviso that were he able to do so it would guarantee that he no longer loved her so desperately.[7] These cross-references that converge in *non bona dicta* greatly heighten poem 11's emotional and rhetorical force.

The vital, and yet unobtrusive, role that *non bona dicta* plays in the poem is, therefore, clear from the many simultaneous tasks it performs: it ties together the two parts of the poem; it alludes to other poems in the collection; and it economically encapsulates the narrative of the affair with Lesbia by summoning in its litotic expression the disintegration of praise into blame. This resonant phrase, with its emblematic status highlighted by its self-containment in the fourth line in the Sapphic stanza, is essential to the structure of the poem and at the same time invites interpretation on broader levels of signification.

In determining the precise meaning for *non bona dicta*, commentators face the difficulty that the expression *bona dicta* is quite rare: Plautus *Amphitruo* 24f. (*petere ... a vobis iussit leniter dictis bonis*, meaning "kind words") seems to be the only close parallel usage.[8] *TLL* classifies the phrase by analogy with others that involve messages of either good or bad tidings.[9] While these parallels suggest some of the range of the meaning governed by *bona dicta*, they by no means cover all of the words' potential significance.

Cicero's *De oratore* offers a glimpse into another domain of meaning governed by *bona dicta*; this text has the additional interest of being almost precisely contemporary with Catullus 11.[10] Towards the beginning of the dialogue's discourse on wit and humor (*sal, facetiae, ridicula, urbanitas*), Cicero's interlocutor, Julius Caesar Strabo, describes the difficulty that many humorous

[6] 76.7–9: *nam quaecumque homines bene cuiquam aut dicere possunt / aut facere, haec a te dictaque factaque sunt. / omnia quae ingratae perierunt credita menti* ("For whatever good words or deeds people can say or do for anyone, these have been said and done by you. All these have perished once entrusted to her thankless heart").

[7] 104: *credis me potuisse meae maledicere vitae / ambobus mihi quae carior est oculis? / non potui, nec, si possem, tam perdite amarem* ("Do you believe that I could have cursed my girl—my life—she who is dearer to me than both my eyes? I could not. And if I could, I would not love her so desperately").

[8] See Fordyce 1961 and Quinn 1973 ad loc.

[9] *TLL*, s.v. "*bonus*," col. 2093 l. 71ff. ("*boni nuntii, bona dicta, verba, sim.*"). Placing Catullus' *non bona dicta* within this semantic context fits well with Mayer's suggestion (1983) that Catullus is imitating a divorce decree *per nuntium*, using Furius and Aurelius as his emissaries.

[10] In a letter to Atticus dating from November of 55 (4.13.2) Cicero refers to the *De oratore* as completed, while in a letter to Lentulus from September of 54 Cicero suggests that the *De oratore* would be profitable reading for Lentulus's son. The reference to Caesar's accomplishments in Gaul and Britain guarantee a date of composition for Catull. 11 of not before 55 (see Fordyce 1961, 124).

people face in refraining from making witty remarks amid inappropriate circumstances. Strabo illustrates this point by referring to a humorous misreading of a passage from Ennius (*De or.* 2.222 [Kumaniecki's text]):

> quod est hominibus facetis et dicacibus difficillimum, habere hominum rationem et temporum et ea quae occurrant, cum salsissime dici possunt, tenere. itaque nonnulli ridiculi homines hoc ipsum non insulse interpretantur. dicere enim aiunt Ennium, flammam a sapienti facilius ore in ardente opprimi, quam bona dicta teneat; haec scilicet bona dicta quae salsa sint; nam ea dicta appellantur proprio iam nomine.
>
> This is a very difficult thing for humorous and clever people to do, namely, to take account of people and occasions, and to resist saying those things which occur to them, although they could be said very wittily. And so not a few comics interpret Ennius to mean this very thing (and do so not without wit). For they claim that when he says, "it is easier for a wise man to snuff out a flame in his burning mouth than for him to withhold good words," these "good words" are of course "witty remarks;" for such sayings are now called by a name of their own.

The humor of Strabo's anecdote hinges upon the semantic instability of *bona dicta*: for Ennius they are "worthy words;" for his witty parodists, "witty words."[11] Aiding the parodists in their burlesque of Ennian tragedy is the scope of meanings of *sapiens*, signifying both "wise" and "witty" (from *sapere*, "to taste" or, more generally, "to have discernment"). *Sal* ("salt" or "wit") and *sapientia* work well together on account of the gastronomic meanings that they share: a *sapiens* person would naturally have a taste for *salsa*.[12]

At first glance, Cicero's *bona dicta* appears to have little to do with Catullus' use of the term. Notwithstanding the chronological proximity of the works, the domains within which the phrases operate seem too far apart for there to be any significant connection between the two passages. Catullus does not allude or refer to Cicero specifically, nor do the two texts seem to coexist on the level of a lexicographic parallel. However, attention to the functions *bona dicta* performs in each context reveals that Cicero's text participates in cultural and rhetorical negotiations that are similar to those enacted in Catullus' poem.

[11] *Trag.* 398–9 Ribbeck (= *Scaen.* 412 Vahlen [1903] = *Incerta* 167 Jocelyn [1967]). From Cicero's incomplete quotation, Ribbeck (1871, 73) attempts to reconstruct the Ennian original as trochaic septenarii in direct discourse: *<nam> flammam sapiens facilius ore in ardente opprimit / quam bona dicta teneat.* Cf. Leeman, Pinkster, and Rabbie 1989 ad loc.

[12] Cf. Terence *Ad.* 425–7 (where the slave Syrus speaks in *double entendres* shifting between cookery and proper child rearing): *hoc salsumst, hoc adustumst, hoc lautumst parum; / illud recte: iterum sic memento. sedulo / moneo quae possum pro mea sapientia* ("this is salty, this is burnt, this is dirty / that's right: remember to do it that way again. I busily / give the advice I can according to my good-sense"). See Martin 1976 ad loc. who, to illustrate how *salsus* and *sapientia* can refer literally to the sense of taste or figuratively to "discernment," refers to Dontatus' gloss of *insulsus* in *Eun.* 1079: *sine sale et sapientia*. Cf. Catull. 43.8: *o saeclum insapiens et infacetum!* On gastronomy and the Catullan aesthetic vocabulary, see Gowers 1993, 229–44.

Before proceeding to the details of my argument, I should first articulate the theoretical framework of my investigation. I follow Stephen Hinds's "basic insight of the semiotic intertextualist," namely,

> the fact that language renders us always already acculturated guarantees that there is no such thing as a wholly non-negotiable confluence, no such thing as zero-interpretability.[13]

Hinds advances the discussion of intertextuality in Roman poetry by calling into question the notion that there can be a tidy separation between legitimate "allusions" and mere "accidental confluences." And yet it is one thing to claim that there is *some* connection between Catullus' and Cicero's *bona dicta*, that they somehow coexist in "that indefinite and generic fluid of literary *langue*,"[14] and it is another to show that these texts relate to each other in a meaningful and operative fashion. To establish this connection I will first explore various linguistic markers that link these two texts, and then investigate the performative dynamics that they both share.

Cicero's presentation of *bona dicta* establishes general points of contiguity with Catullan poetics. Besides the fact that the neoterics adapted and appropriated the language of contemporary rhetorical theory,[15] Cicero's discussion of *bona dicta* is part of his investigation of *sal* and *urbanitas*. These terms, so essential to Catullan values, place Cicero's discussion close to the cultural landscape inhabited by Catullus and his circle.[16] Cicero's claim that this usage of *bona dicta* belonged to a general linguistic community (*nonnulli ridiculi*) suggests that it may have enjoyed a level of currency necessary to have exercised some influence upon Catullus' use of the expression. Also, his account of these wits as a group who engage in an ironic troping of Ennian seriousness implies that they were a community which had values parallel to those of Catullus and the neoterics, whose Callimachean aesthetics can be seen as an ironic troping of, and reaction against, high-style epic bombast.[17] Moreover, Cicero's gloss of *bona dicta* as *salsa* places the phrase squarely within the domain of Catullus' social and critical vocabulary.[18] These shared frames of reference suggest that these otherwise-lost

[13] 1998, 34. I have particularly profited from the second chapter, "Interpretability: beyond philological fundamentalism" (17–51).

[14] I here borrow Conte's memorable phrase (1986, 29), which also appears as an epigraph to Hinds's second chapter (1998, 17).

[15] For a valuable recent discussion of this question, see Batstone 1998.

[16] Proximity should not, of course, be mistaken for equivalence. Although Cicero and Catullus existed within the same *general* literary culture, there was much that divided them. For a reading of poem 49 as a text in which Catullus fashions a self in distinction from his oratorical counterpart, see Batstone 1993.

[17] As a touch-stone passage for neoteric Callimacheanism see 95b: *parva mei mihi sint cordi monimenta <sodalis> / at populus tumido gaudeat Antimacho* ("dear to my heart are the slight monuments of my comrade / but let the crowd delight in bulging Antimachus"). See Lyne 1978.

[18] For Catullan uses of *sal* and its cognates within the vocabulary of taste, see poems 10.33, 12.4, 13.5, 14.16, 16.7, 17.12, 37.6, 86.4. Cf. Seager 1974.

ridiculi were a group which had general points of proximity with Catullus and his social and literary world. Other, more precise connections between Catullus' and Cicero's *bona dicta* may be seen in the performative domain.[19]

The performative is a pronounced aspect of Cicero's use of *bona dicta*. His *ridiculi* play with the semantic instability of *bona dicta*, and, in a self-referential gesture, their quip simultaneously defines *bona dicta* as irresistible wit and provides an example of just such humor, as Cicero's parenthetical comment about the joke (*non insulse*) calls to his readers' attention. The shift, which transfers the meaning of *bona dicta* from the domain of Ennian seriousness to witty parody, is based on a performative dynamic that both morally serious and humorous words share: the irresistible impulse for them to be said regardless of the consequences. The joke is both itself a performance and a commentary on the dynamics of that performance.

The cultural rubric within which the *ridiculi* make their joke, that of *sal* and *urbanitas*, is not a static but a performative realm of social operations and negotiations. *Urbanitas*, as William Fitzgerald has argued, is best seen as a *praxis* of social inclusions and exclusions, a contested space whose indefinability is essential to the operations performed in its name.[20] *Urbanitas*, along with the constellation of terms associated with it (*sal, lepos, venustas*), has no existence apart from actions that demonstrate either its presence or absence. Cicero illustrates the indefinability of *urbanitas* when he makes Julius Caesar Strabo reluctant to deliver a theoretical discourse on *sal*, claiming that the subject does not lend itself to generalization and quantification. Greek manuals on the subject, he points out, are singularly lacking in that quality which they undertake to describe.[21] *Sal* cannot be described because it is perceptible only in its performance.

Catullus' *non bona dicta*, like Cicero's *bona dicta*, is similarly implicated in performative discourses. In a literal sense, the line refers to the message which the poet intends to perform the final schism between Lesbia and himself. In a more general sense, it simultaneously evokes the performative domains of praise and blame. Within the context of the poem itself, as I have noted, *non bona dicta* performs the transition from the epic-toned beginning to the cursing message to Lesbia. The litotic expression's ability to summon both benediction and malediction at once makes the line particularly appropriate in this Janus-like poem which at once contemplates Catullus' past life with Lesbia and a future without her:[22] *non bona dicta* mirrors the double perspective of the poem as a

[19] On speech-act theory, to which my reading of performative aspects of these text is indebted, see the ground-breaking and still useful Austin 1975.
[20] Fitzgerald 1995. The whole study presents a performative view of Catullan poetics; the fourth chapter, "Urbanity: the Poetry of Exclusion" (87–113), is a detailed analysis of *urbanitas* in Catullus which draws on parallels in Cicero. Cf. Gowers 1993, 242: "Like the rhetorical writers, Catullus can only define his own ineffable qualities through their opposites."
[21] *De or.* 2.216f.
[22] Cf. Ducloss 1976, 78.

whole. *Non bona dicta* is the overdetermined heart of the poem, which exemplifies its precipitous stylistic shift, and enacts the descent from praise to blame that attests to the disintegration of Catullus' love for Lesbia.

Cicero's discussion of *bona dicta* provides a precious glimpse into the phrase's range of meanings and performative connotations, and allows us to appreciate an aspect of the significance that the phrase acquired in the countless negotiations it underwent before Catullus included it in his poem. Awareness of these semantic resonances enriches our lamentably imperfect access to the tone of Catullus' words. By recovering these lost textures of signification we can more fully appreciate the poet's subtle uses of language. While the relationship between these two texts is not one of precise lexicographical parallelism, much less direct allusion, still, by temporarily suspending the criteria for determining "authentic" allusions, and by focusing on the dynamics that animate both of these seemingly unrelated texts, the cultural and rhetorical practices and negotiations that are shared by these two texts come to light.

Both Catullus' and Cicero's use of the phrase follow a rhetorical trajectory from high to low: Cicero's *ridiculi*, in their troping of the ambiguous meaning of the phrase, transfer *bona dicta* from heroic Ennian seriousness to light, ironic witticism; Catullus' *non bona dicta* both looks back to epic grandeur and forward to low-style malediction. In each case, the linguistic negotiation is accomplished by an ironic play on semantic doubleness: Cicero's *bona dicta* tropes its two-fold meaning of both "noble words" and "witty remarks;" Catullus' litotic *non bona dicta* asserts a quality through its negation, summoning both one meaning and its opposite simultaneously. In both texts, *bona dicta* are simultaneously present and absent: in Cicero this ambiguity springs from the phrase's double meaning, and in Catullus from its litotic expression.

These general performative similarities set the stage for more specific resonances between these texts. The dynamic involved in the Cicero anecdote, and that which forms the bridge that enables the *ridiculi*'s joke, is the perceived similarity between a tragic hero's irresistible compulsion to utter noble sentiments regardless of consequences, and a comic's equally compelling necessity to utter witticisms. An associated meaning of "irresistible utterance" for *bona dicta* is corroborated by a passage from Ennius' *Annales* (273–5 Skutsch):

> quoi res audacter magnas paruasque iocumque
> eloqueretur †et cuncta† malaque et bona dictu
> euomeret si qui vellet tutoque locaret.

to whom he would confidently speak of affairs both large and small, and share a joke as well ... and would blurt out things bad and good to say if he so wished, and store them in his safe-keeping.

Skutsch comments (1985, ad loc.) that the metaphorical use of *euomeret* ("unrestained or emotional utterance" [*TLL*, s.v. 1072f.]) fits *mala* better than *bona dictu*. This apparent incongruity disappears if the phrase *bona dicta* carried with it the notion of words that are difficult to repress.

If *bona dicta* had the connotation of "irresistible utterance," then Catullus' use of the phrase would be particularly appropriate to the rhetoric of poem 11. The epic-toned prelude sets a mood of self-mastery and control that presents the poem in stark contrast with other poems in the collection that present the poet as a confused jumble of conflicting emotions, impulses and purposes.[23] In poem 8, the poet's bitter eruption against Lesbia completely undercuts his self-addressed advice to accept the loss of his beloved, and to remain resolute (*quod vides perisse perditum ducas* [2]; *obstinata mente perfer, obdura* [11]). The failure of Catullus' composure is the more glaring since it directly follows the poet's claim to have achieved self-control (8.12–9):

> vale, puella. iam Catullus obdurat,
> nec te requiret nec rogabit invitam.
> at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
> scelesta, vae te, quae tibi manet vita?
> quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?
> quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
> quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
> at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.
>
> Good-bye, girl. Now Catullus stands firm.
> He'll not seek you out or ask you against your will.
> But you'll ache when you are not asked.
> Bitch, damn you! what's left of your life?
> Who'll come to you now? Who'll think you're beautiful?
> Whom now will you love? Whose will you be said to be?
> Whom will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite?
> But you, Catullus, stubbornly stand firm.

The bitter outburst against Lesbia, and the final line in which the poet tells himself to remain firm, show how far the poet is from attaining a fixed resolve regarding Lesbia. This passionate eruption, with its vivid personal details, polyptoton, and emotive rhetorical questions, contrasts markedly with the *non bona dicta* of poem 11 (17–24):

> cum suis vivat valeatque moechis,
> quos simul complexa tenet trecentos,
> nullum amans vere, sed identidem omnium
> ilia rumpens;
>
> nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
> qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
> ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
> tactus aratro est.
>
> Let her live and be well with her adulterers,
> whom she holds in her embrace three hundred at a time,

[23] For recent discussion of this issue see Greene 1995.

> loving not one in truth, but again and again
> bursting the loins of them all;
>
> let her not look, as she did in the past, to my love
> which has fallen—she is to blame—just like
> a flower on the edge of a meadow, after it is grazed
> by a passing plow.

These lines are far from emotional ebullitions, but are instead measured and deliberate words whose combination of utter simplicity and brutally vivid, if exaggerated, detail contributes to an impression of both self-control and, if not detachment, resignation.[24] Catullus' voice throughout the poem, from epic prelude, to cursing message, to the lyrical coda at the conclusion, maintains a controlled tone of one who has painfully achieved perspective on his life. These words are the very antithesis of a thoughtlessly blurted outburst, but are instead a careful and considered message that does not permit revision or retraction. They are, in short, *non bona dicta* (i.e., *not* irresistible utterances).

Cicero's parallel usage suggests not only the connotation of a performative dynamic in Catullus' *non bona dicta*, but also a more directly semantic connotation. If Catullus' *non bona dicta* carries with it some hint of "*non salsa*," that is, an implicit denial of irony or wit, such a significance would correspond with the performative coding hypothesized thus far. Catullus' choice of expression would suggest then that these are not words that admit to a doubleness of intent: they are as they seem to be, a statement of unambiguous rejection and severance.[25] *Non bona dicta* would then have two related implications: a denial that the message to Lesbia is a thoughtless verbal eruption, and a disavowal of irony. Such resonances of meaning fit the poem's general rhetorical structures that seem designed to give the impression of a singularity of meaning and of feeling which is in clear contrast to the fragmentation and polyphony of the other Lesbia poems.

Thus far my investigation has focused upon the implications of intertextual connections between Cicero and Catullus for the poet's message to Lesbia, that is, how *non bona dicta* may carry with it resonances both for the tone and mode of this message. As I have suggested earlier, however, *non bona dicta*'s field of reference is not limited to Catullus' farewell. Rather, its cardinal position in the poem allows it to hinge together the poem's two parts, and to summarize the content of the entire poem in its ambiguous expression. The structural and emblematic significance of *non bona dicta* sets the stage for the possibility of reading the phrase as a more general denial of irony that radiates beyond its

[24] Williams 1980, 46 offers illuminating commentary on the paradox of Catullus' simile: "The deliberate objectivity of the viewpoint and language of the simile entails the exclusion of emotion, and is paradoxically the most effective vehicle of the poet's complex feelings."
[25] There seems a particular appropriateness to a Catullan denial of irony just before the beginning of the message to Lesbia, since the wording of the message plays with the reader's expectations: *cum suis vivat valeatque moechis* is not clearly a curse until the final word is read. See Sweet 1987, 515.

immediate context and spills across the entire poem. By reading *non bona dicta* in this way, it is possible to engage with the problem of irony that is imbedded within the very texture of the poem, to seek out a middle ground between the ironist and anti-ironist camps, and so to propose answers to the questions with which I began.

The ironic posture that Catullus assumes in the poem's prelude is such that it simultaneously invites and resists an ironic reading. The prelude is saturated with references that call for an ironical interpretation. In a poem whose meaning is so predicated upon an awareness of its intertextual connections with poem 51, it is untenable to propose that the reader should ignore what are manifest connections with, and discontinuities from, other poems in the collection.[26] As Catullus' poem 11 calls for comparison with poem 51,[27] so too the invocation to Furius and Aurelius, the reference to great Caesar and his accomplishments, and the celebration of Roman imperial expansion make connections with other poems in the collection that cannot be easily overlooked. Moreover, the sheer number of the apparent contradictions between poem 11 and other poems in the collection suggests that these discrepancies must somehow be related to the significance of the poem as a whole. It is tempting to see in Catullus' *non bona dicta* a two-fold reference suggesting that the opening is *bona dicta* not only in its epic tone ("fine words") but also in its ironical mode ("witty words").

And yet, while it seems clear that some sort of irony must be involved in the poem's reversals of attitudes expressed in previous poems, it is very difficult to see what sort of irony this might be.[28] The text of the poem provides no indisputable hint of an ironical intent. Consequently, one is hard pressed to read the irony as an attitude of blunt sarcasm, such as would imply contempt for Caesar's accomplishments, that Furius and Aurelius are appropriate messengers befitting the depths to which Lesbia has fallen, or the like.[29] The combination of these individual instances of apparent irony into an unbroken whole creates a paradox: the accumulations of discrepancies between the Catullus of poem 11 and the Catullus who viciously lampooned Caesar, threatened Furius and Aurelius with sexual violence, and mordantly satirized service in far-flung corners of the empire[30] establishes a texture of irony that envelopes the surface of the poem. Yet this seamless ironical tone does not allow the reader to imagine how, in specific

[26] Fredricksmeyer 1993 provides an exhaustive defense of reading poem 11 in isolation from the rest of the collection and may be taken an a paradigmatic example of both the possibilities and the limitations of the New Criticism's insistence on the autonomy of the individual poem.

[27] The fact that these are the only poems in the collection in the Sapphic meter, and Catullus' use of the relatively rare *identidem* in each shows that the poems are intended to be contrasted: the one dramatizing the beginning, and the other the end of Catullus' love for Lesbia. See Quinn 1973, 125.

[28] Cf. Fordyce 1961, 125: "But if these lines are ironical, they are a very complicated kind of irony."

[29] For a catalogue that presents a chronological survey of such readings of the poem, cf. Fredricksmeyer 1993, 102–5.

[30] See note 1.

terms, any particular element might be ironical. Moreover, the seriousness of the operation that the poem is enacting, the poet's final severance from Lesbia, sets a tone of gravity that mitigates against a completely and unproblematically ironical reading of the prelude.

The mood of the prelude has a particular appropriateness for the rhetoric of the poem as a whole. The poem's presentation of the possibility of irony, only to have that possibility thrown into question, creates a mood of both defeated expectations and personal transformation that suits a poem designed to show that the poet is breaking free from, or has been broken by, his past. Comparison with poem 51 reveals the new tone achieved in poem 11. In the scene of the genesis of Catullus' love for Lesbia that 51 presents, the poet shows himself on the verge of personal collapse. The sight of Lesbia in the presence of another man wages a systematic assault on his senses, which one after another fail or become impaired (51.9–12):

> lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
> flamma demanat, sonitu suopte
> tintinant aures, gemina teguntur
> lumina nocte.
>
> But my tongue is paralyzed, under my limbs a subtle
> flame drips, my ears ring
> and my eyes are covered by a
> twin night.

While poem 51 dramatizes the intimate moment in which Catullus catches sight of Lesbia's sitting in the company of another man, poem 11 takes a markedly broader perspective: the poet envisions himself on the very boundaries of the Roman world. In these apparently chaotic and dangerous landscapes Catullus achieves a measure of sensory equilibrium: the poem catalogues the senses confronting exotic phenomena—hearing (*resonante Eoa* [3]), touch (*Arabasve molles* [5] and *temptare* [14; with its sense of "try, test, touch"]), sight (*colorat aequora Nilus* [7–8] and *visens monimenta* [10])—and, unlike poem 51, he is not overwhelmed. Catullus' notional travels seem to have a therapeutic effect on the poet who, paradoxically, achieves composure in the face of hazardous physical phenomena.[31]

Rather than a source of critical embarrassment that needs to be explained away, the incongruities between poem 11 and the rest of the corpus in fact work well within the rhetoric of the poem: Catullus' apparently favorable presentation of themes and people that he elsewhere treats dismissively defamiliarizes the reading process, and sends the reader the clear message that the poet has

[31] Cf. Propertius 1.1.29f.: *ferte per extremas gentis et ferte per undas, / qua non ulla meum femina norit iter* ("take me through far-off peoples and through the seas / where no woman knows my path"). Duclos 1976, 89 n. 10 compares Putnam 1961, 172: "As always, in Catullus, the voyage means more than geographical wandering. It symbolizes change through departure, the leaving of one life for another."

experienced a transformation. Catullus' dispassionate attitude towards Furius, Aurelius, and Caesar sets the stage for the poet's claim to have also reversed his attitudes towards Lesbia. Within poem 11 Catullus' voice is remarkably consistent and composed, especially when compared with the vacillations of poem 8. It is as if Catullus achieves a univocality that contrasts both with his inability to speak at all in poem 51, and with his incapacity, in others of the Lesbia poems, to speak with one consistent voice. Catullus seems to be using a new voice that is fortified by the rhetoric of empire and the company of Furius and Aurelius, new "comrades," former enemies, who, acting as emissaries to Lesbia, also lend their services as conveyers of that voice. But this vocal composure comes at a price: Catullus has bought his resolve at the cost of abandoning aspects of his past self. His embrace of the very things that are giving him composure (empire, former enemies, and an epic tone) has as an inevitable corollary: the rejection of the world of *otium*. Poem 51 concludes with the poet's diagnosing *otium* as the source of his difficulties (13–6):

> otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
> otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
> otium et reges prius et beatas
> perdidit urbes.
>
> Leisure, Catullus, is your problem:
> in your leisure you run riot and exult to excess:
> leisure has been the ruin of kings
> and prosperous cities.

The poet shifts his focus away from the particular and personal symptoms of his suffering (his impaired speech, ringing ears, blindness) and directs his attention to the most general possible cause of his suffering: Catullus does not present *otium* simply as the source of individual downfall, but as a universal force that has destroyed kings and prosperous civilizations. This reflection on the pernicious effects of *otium* is one of the springs from which poem 11 flows. As poem 51 concludes with a general reflection on the dangerous effects of *otium* across a global landscape, so poem 11 begins with an embrace of the world of the *negotium* of empire. Catullus inverts the paradigm by subsuming *otium*, the dominant paradigm of poem 51, within the imperial landscapes of the opening of poem 11.

The rejection of *otium* that the prologue of poem 11 implies sets the stage for the rejection of Lesbia in the second half of the poem: Catullus first must embrace the world of Caesar to break free from Lesbia and her world. Poem 11 enacts a rejection of the ludic domain of *otium* and a flight into the traditional Roman realm of service, reliability, and constancy. To accomplish this transformation Catullus must also transform his voice and self-presentation. By presenting what would seem to be ironical themes in such a fashion that their potential irony is left undeveloped, the prologue resists polysemy and aspires to achieve a tone of

univocality.[32] Poem 11's refusal to engage the potentially ironical themes in the prologue in effect critiques the ludic aspects of Catullus' persona, whose defining characteristics are an awareness of his own emotional ambivalences and a voice charged with resonant ironies. The poem's presentation of people and themes familiar from other poems authorizes the poet's voice as that of Catullus, while the refusal to assume an unproblematically ironic tone prepares readers for the poem's surprising renunciation of Lesbia at its end.

Within this frame of undeveloped irony, a reading of *non bona dicta* that recognizes *non salsa* as a connotation gives the phrase a comprehensive significance for the entire poem. Charged with a subtextual connotation of "not ironical," *non bona dicta* stands as an allegory for the experience of reading the poem, wherein irony is presented only to be left dormant. Seen from an even broader perspective, *non bona dicta* can stand as a more general palinode: a critique of the ironic mode that explores the problematics of linguistic play, irony, vacillation, ambiguity. Mercurial, indefinable, and unreliable *sal*, that quality which Catullus pin-points as an essential factor in what distinguishes Lesbia from other women,[33] must be effaced from the poem that will drive Lesbia from his life. Catullus' calling his message to Lesbia *non bona dicta* stands as a refusal to use the linguistic coin of the realm of *urbanitas*: Catullus' rejection of *salsa* is a refusal to engage in the social and linguistic negotiations that first ensnared the poet in Lesbia's web.

Yet poem 11's exploration of the boundary between irony and sincerity has broader implications than simply its rejection of Lesbia's social and linguistic world. By placing its readers in the position of not being able to determine with certainty the tone of the prelude, the poem heightens our hermeneutical alertness. It fosters an awareness of the deeper irony, namely that Catullus has chosen *not* to adopt an explicitly ironic tone, and thus it spurs its readers to contemplate the bitterly paradoxical loss of self that Catullus' loss of Lesbia has precipitated. From this perspective, Catullus' choice to address the poem to Furius and Aurelius takes on greater significance. Poem 16 presents the pair as paradigmatic of readers who are unable to interpret Catullus' *sal* and *lusus*, and incapable of distinguishing between the poet's words and his self.[34] We the readers are placed in Furius and Aurelius' position of being inadequate interpreters of Catullus: the poem's conclusion provides us with a brutally simple message whose immediate significance we can be trusted to understand, but the

[32] The prologue's resistance to polysemy does not, of course, hold true for the entire poem. The image that Catullus uses to represent the death of his love, the flower on the edge of a field clipped by a passing plow, is a figure of extraordinarily rich resonances.

[33] Poem 86.4 (describing what Quintia lacks in contrast to Lesbia): *nulla in tam magno est corpore mica salis* ("there is no speck of life in her so impressive body").

[34] Cf. esp. 16.3f.: *qui me ex uersiculis meis putastis, / quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum* ("you who have considered me to be immoral because my little verses are somewhat delicate") and 12f.: *uos, quod milia multa basiorum / legistis, male me marem putatis* ("do you, because you have read my 'many thousands of kisses' [cf. poems 5, 7, and 48], think that I am not enough of a man?").

prelude leaves hints of psychological complexities whose full import we are not capable of grasping. By figuring us as Furius and Aurelius, the poem places us on our guard against too facile an interpretation of the poet's suffering.[35]

[35] I would like to thank my colleague Martha Malamud for helpful criticisms of this article. However, I alone am responsible for its failings. All translations of the Latin are my own.

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