THE THEMATIC UNITY OF CATULLUS 11

Catullus 11, the poet's so-called "final renunciation" of Lesbia, has been the object of much critical scrutiny directed at such matters as: the correct reading in line 11;[1] the implications of lines 10-12 for the date of the poem;[2] the significance of the poem as marking the end of the Catullus-Lesbia affair;[3] the participation of the poem in an extended "Lesbia cycle";[4] or, finally, the poem as a supposed response to an appeal from Lesbia for reconciliation with the poet.[5] While all of these are valid matters of concern, pre-occupation with them has resulted in relatively few attempts to examine poem 11 as a unique poetic creation with a life and movement of its own.[6]

Moreover, critics who have directed their attention to the poem itself have too often judged it to be technically faulty. The basis for this judgment lies in an alleged lack of thematic unity between the first three stanzas and the rest of the poem. In addition to Kenneth Quinn's somewhat plaintive "what has the romantic travelogue of lines 2-14 to do with the 'brief, harsh' message Furius and Aurelius are asked to take to C.'s mistress?",[7] T. E. Kinsey has passed a remarkably harsh judgment on the poem: "Catullus' object in addressing Furius and Aurelius at all is to give them the message of stanzas 5 and 6, and it seems unlikely that anyone with such a

[1] *E.g.*, F. A. Todd, "Passages of Catullus, Martial, and Plautus," *CR* 55 (1941) 70-73; A. Hudson-Williams, "Catullus 11, 9-12," *CQ* 46 (1952) 186; A. Allen, "Catullus' English Channel," *CW* 66 (1972) 146-47; A. Ronconi, "Postilla Catulliana," *SIFC* 29 (1957) 264; D. McKie, "The Horrible and Ultimate Britons. Catullus 11.11," *PCPS* 210 (1984) 74-78. Haupt's emendation of *horribilesque* to *horribile aequor* is still popular; *cf.* D.F.S. Thomson, *Catullus: A Critical Edition* (Chapel Hill 1978) 82.

[2] *E.g.*, L. Richardson, Jr., "Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli," *CP* 58 (1963) 93-106; K. Quinn, *Catullus: An Interpretation* (London 1972) 166-79; E. Romano, "Catullo, c. 11. Note di Lettura," *Pan* 7 (1981) 5-10.

[3] *E.g.*, T. E. Kinsey, "Catullus 11," *Latomus* 24 (1965) 537-44; Quinn (note 2, above) 160-79.

[4] *E.g.*, K. Barwick, "Zyklen bei Martial und in der kleinen Gedichten des Catulls," *Philologus* 102 (1958) 284-318; E. A. Schmidt, "Catulls Anordnung seiner Gedichte," *Philologus* 117 (1973) 215-42; C. P. Segal, "The Order of Catullus, Poems 2-11," *Latomus* 27 (1968) 305-21.

[5] *E.g.*, E. T. Merrill, *Catullus* (Cambridge, MA 1893) 25-27; A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) 94; Kinsey (note 3, above).

[6] Some attempts to so treat the poem are: F. Bellandi, "Meae Puellae. Struttura e Destinatario del c. 11 di Catullo," *Quaderni del Dipart. di Lingue e Lett. Neolatine* 1 (1985) 17-33; D. F. Bright, "*Non Bona Dicta*: Catullus' Poetry of Separation," *QUCC* 21 (1976) 105-19; A. S. Fotiou, "Catullus 11: A New Approach," *GB* 3 (1975) 151-58; D. Mulroy, "An Interpretation of Catullus 11," *CW* 71 (1978) 237-47; M.C.J. Putnam, "Catullus 11: The Ironies of Integrity," *Ramus* 3 (1974) 70-86; D. R. Sweet, "Catullus 11: A Study in Perspective," *Latomus* 46 (1987) 510-26; and J. C. Yardley, "Catullus 11: The End of a Friendship," *SO* 56 (1981) 63-69. These critics offer conflicting interpretations of the poem.

[7] K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London 1970) 125-26.

message in mind would indulge in the elaboration of the opening stanzas. . .The poem is insincere or untrue in the only important sense in which it can be; the movement of thought or feeling seems unnatural."[8] A comparable judgment has also been expressed by G. S. Duclos: "Contrary to Catullus' tendency to state his 'theme' in the opening lines of a poem, there is no hint of this poem's real import until the end of the fourth stanza, in the ominous *non bona dicta* (16)."[9]

Evaluations of this type have misrepresented poem 11 too long, and it is the purpose of this paper to argue that there is greater thematic unity in the poem than hitherto perceived. In fact, there is a very clear "hint" (to use Duclos' word) in the early stanzas of the poem's "real import"; this involves a theme of sexual aggression which has generally been ignored in examinations of the poem.[10]

The first indication of this theme comes, as is typical for Catullus, in the opening stanza of the poem:

> Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli,
> sive in extremos penetrabit Indos,
> litus ut longe resonante Eoa
> tunditur unda. . .

The word *comites* has well known political overtones, as it commonly refers to members "of the staff of a Roman magistrate, provincial governor, or other official" (*OLD*: *comes*); indeed Catullus also employs the term in this political sense at 28.1 and at 46.9, where Catullus himself has served as a *comes* in the train of Memmius. In poem 11, however, it is the poet himself who is to play the role of "provincial governor" and Furius and Aurelius who are to be his followers.

The poet's choice of Furius and Aurelius as his *comites* must be meaningful for the poem as a whole, and a great deal has already been written about Catullus' attitude towards these men. On the one hand, it is possible to see in Catullus' address to them here a sincere reflection of a mutually strong friendship; on the other hand, it is also possible to argue that the poet is being ironic here and actually harbors no love for these two men.[11] While it is appropriate to bear in mind Duclos' warning that the poem is not *about* Furius and Aurelius,[12] their presence in poem 11 and the associations which

[8] T. E. Kinsey, "Catullus Today: Some Suggestions for a Criticism," *Philos. Journal* 6 (1969) 71.

[9] G. S. Duclos, "Catullus 11: Atque in Perpetuum, Lesbia, Ave atque Vale," *Arethusa* 9 (1976) 77.

[10] Sweet (note 6, above) does recognize erotic imagery in the poem, but offers a very different interpretation of it (520-23).

[11] *Cf.* Quinn, *Interpretation* (note 2, above) 164-65; Sweet (note 6, above); Yardley (note 6, above); Fotiou (note 6, above); Richardson (note 2, above); and G. Pennisi, "Catullo e il Carme dei 'Non Bona Dicta'," *Helikon* 1 (1961) 127-38.

[12] Duclos (note 9, above) 83.

surround them in the rest of the Catullan corpus are not irrelevant.

Whether Furius and Aurelius were at any time true friends of the poet or not, elsewhere Catullus tends to associate both of them with aggressive sexual behavior. In poem 15, for example, Aurelius is given a warning: keep away from the poet's love (probably Juventius) or suffer unpleasant public punishment. The language of the poem is explicitly sexual: *verum a te metuo tuoque pene/ infesto pueris bonis malisque* (9-10). Whether the poet is being playful or deadly serious here has been open to debate; his association of Aurelius with aggressive sexual conduct, however, is definite.

Poem 16 also continues this association, but adds Furius to the picture. Apparently Furius and Aurelius had made accusations about Catullus' sexuality (*vos, quod milia multa basiorum/legistis, male me marem putatis?*, 12-13); in a contemptuous response[13] Catullus threatens to prove his manhood in an obscene manner: *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo* (1 and 14). To add to the sexual nature of the situation, the poet refers in line 2 to *Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi.* As in the preceding poem, Catullus concerns himself with an aggressive display of sexual behavior, but now, in poem 16, he takes the role of the aggressor.[14]

Aurelius appears again in poem 21, and once more in a sexual setting: *pedicare cupis meos amores* (4). To the aggressive behavior of Aurelius, Catullus offers his own equally aggressive response: *nam insidias mihi instruentem/ tangam te prior irrumatione* (7-8). . .*quare desine, dum licet pudico,/ ne finem facias, sed irrumatus* (12-13).[15]

Thus, aside from poem 11, Aurelius appears only in three *carmina*; in all three (15, 16, 21) he is associated with a display of aggressive sexual behavior. It is therefore reasonable to state that, at least as far as the poet was concerned, the name of Aurelius conjured up a sexual frame of reference.

The same is true of Furius: in addition to his appearance (already noted) in poem 16, Furius comes under attack in poems 23 and 24. In the former, Catullus apparently rejects a request for a loan from Furius while launching biting invective about the man's "dryness".[16] In the latter, Juventius is reproached for his liaison with a man who, although not openly named in the poem, must be Furius from the description provided (*cui neque servus est neque arca*, 24.5, refers to *cui neque servus est neque arca* in 23.1). Thus, these two poems taken together present a Furius who, despite his apparent poverty, is

[13] Richardson (note 2, above) 99 speaks of "searing contempt" here.

[14] *Cf.* A. Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus* (New Haven 1983) 146, who sees a humorous intent in this poem.

[15] On *irrumare*, *cf.* A. Richlin, "The Meaning of *Irrumare* in Catullus and Martial," *CP* 76 (1981) 40-46.

[16] Richardson (note 2, above) 98 calls poem 23 a "broadside assault on Furius, at once quieter in tone and more savage than Catullus is except with his bitterest enemies."

indulging in sexual activity with Juventius (*te sineres ab illo amari*, 24.6).[17]

If elsewhere both Furius and Aurelius are consistently associated by Catullus with sexual aggression, it seems likely that poem 11 also follows that pattern. This is indeed signalled by the first verb to appear in the poem, *penetrabit* (line 2), a word with sexual overtones.[18] Catullus, as would-be governor, accompanied by Furius and Aurelius, will, in M.C.J. Putnam's appropriate translation,[19] "make his way into the farthest Indi"; this particular verb's association here with a people (*Indos*) rather than a place seems to hint at more than a simple *populus pro loco* device.

The resultant image is in harmony with the poet's general view of provincial governors: ambitious men who are expected to "rape" the provincials in order to benefit themselves and their *comites*. Indeed, poem 10 (whose placement before poem 11 is significant) expresses the poet's frustration with a governor who falls short of such expectations. Thus, in poem 11, Catullus himself will carry out the "rape", fittingly accompanied by two acknowledged experts in the field.

This picture is further enhanced by the phrase *tunditur unda* in line 4. *Tundo* is the second aggressive verb of the poem, and in some forms can have sexual overtones: compare poem 32, where Catullus, in a state of sexual agitation, says *pertundo tunicamque palliumque* (line 11). Thus, just as Catullus is on the active attack (*penetrabit*), the shore of the farthest Indi becomes the passive victim (*tunditur*). The first stanza in this way introduces a theme of rape that becomes basic to the poem as a whole.

Catullus maintains this motif in his second stanza:

> sive in Hyrcanos Arabasve molles,
> seu Sagas sagittiferosve Parthos,
> sive quae septemgeminus colorat
> aequora Nilus. . .

Once again the poet emphasizes people rather than places as the objects of *penetrabit* (still the operative verb): *Hyrcanos*, *Arabas*, *Sagas*, *Parthos*. Moreover, the adjective *molles*, applied technically to *Arabas* but pertaining perhaps to both *Hyrcanos* and *Arabas*,[20] has the well known meaning of "soft" or "effeminate"—a meaning most appropriate to those who receive the sexual aggression implied by *penetrabit*.

The verb *colorat* also seems to participate in the developing theme.

[17] Furius also appears in poem 26, again in the context of poverty.

[18] *Cf.* Putnam (note 6, above) 72; Sweet (note 6, above) 518; see also Lucretius 4. 1246. For a general treatment of the concept of "penetration" within Roman sexual *mores* as a whole, *cf.* T. P. Wiseman's *Catullus and His World* (Cambridge 1985) 10-14.

[19] Putnam (note 6, above) 70.

[20] *Cf.* Quinn, *Poems* (note 7, above) 127.

While some interpret *aequora* to mean the flat areas flooded by the Nile,[21] it is more likely that the poet is referring to the fact that silt from the Nile discolors the Mediterranean where it enters the sea.[22] The *aequora* (i.e., the waters) are also the object of *penetrabit* and thus of Catullus' would-be rape; that these waters are "stained" where something enters them would be in keeping with the general image.[23]

The motif of rape as developed so far clearly involves the poet in would-be acts of aggression, and so it is not surprising to find the next stanza directly concerned with specific Roman conquests already achieved:

> sive trans altas gradietur Alpes,
> Caesaris visens monimenta magni,
> Gallicum Rhenum horribilesque ulti-
> mosque Britannos. . .

Disregarding the traditional questions of the date implied by these lines and of the correct reading in the third line, it is obvious that Catullus is making reference here to actual places and peoples of current interest to the Romans. The deeds of Julius Caesar involved the subjugation of nature (*Alpes*, *Rhenum*) as well as peoples (*Britannos*); Caesar thus becomes the "exemplary" Roman aggressor, and the poet builds an identification between himself and Caesar based on the image of both as rapists. It may thus be significant that Catullus refers to Caesar as *magnus*; in Greek comedy the term *megas* can be used as the equivalent of the Latin *tumidus*, with clear sexual overtones.[24]

Catullus' view of Caesar's sexual (as opposed to military) prowess is relevant here, and is well illustrated by poem 57:

> Pulcre convenit improbis cinaedis,
> Mamurrae pathicoque Caesarique.
> nec mirum: maculae pares utrisque,
> urbana altera et illa Formiana,
> impressae resident nec eluentur:
> morbosi pariter, gemelli utrique,
> uno in lecticulo erudituli ambo,
> non hic quam ille magis vorax adulter,
> rivales socii et puellularum.
> pulcre convenit improbis cinaedis.

"The most libellous of C.'s attacks on Julius Caesar,"[25] this poem

[21] R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1889) 42; C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford 1961) 126.

[22] *Cf.* Quinn, *Poems* (note 7, above) 127; Sweet (note 6, above) 520 observes that "septemgeminus, as an epithet, seems more appropriate to the efflux of the Nile into the Mediterranean than to the river's inundation of Egypt with silt."

[23] The verb *coloro* can in fact mean "to color reddish".

[24] On this point, I would like to thank the anonymous reader of this paper.

[25] Quinn, *Poems* (note 7, above) 255.

portrays a general no less active in the bedroom than on the battlefield. Significantly, the terms *cinaedus* and *pathicus* appear together in the same poem only here and in poem 16, the earlier mentioned attack on none other than Furius and Aurelius. Thus the sexually aggressive Caesar fits in nicely with the other *personae* of poem 11.

Poem 11 is now at its halfway mark, having set forth an aggressive image of Catullus on the verge of raping the entire known world. In the fourth stanza, however, the poet begins to shift his attention from the outer macrocosm to the inner microcosm, from the imagined rape of exotic foreigners to his own very real rape by Lesbia:omnia haec,

> quaecumque feret voluntas
> caelitum, temptare simul parati,
> pauca nuntiate meae puellae
> non bona dicta. . .

Furius and Aurelius are *temptare simul parati*, that is, ready to attack or assail whatever the gods may bring their way.[26] They have been led to believe, up to this point in the poem, that their aggression will take the form of a lucrative rape of exotic distant peoples, akin to that achieved by Julius Caesar; now, however, their aggression is channelled into an unexpected task: delivering a malediction (*non bona dicta*—a kind of "verbal rape" in fact) to a single unnamed girl.

The fifth stanza then depicts a graphic scene of sexual violence, but with the focus of attention no longer on Catullus or Caesar or Furius or Aurelius, but on the unnamed girl (presumably Lesbia) of the preceding stanza:

> cum suis vivat valeatque moechis,
> quos simul complexa tenet trecentos,
> nullum amans vere, sed identidem omnium
> ilia rumpens. . .

Here, at the emotional climax of the poem, the power of the male to rape has become transferred, against normal expectations, to the female: it is she who embraces all at once, in a violent grip, some *trecenti* lovers—loving not one of them but violating them all. Her male *moechi* are the passive victims of her rape, exploited by Lesbia for her own benefit, just as provincial magistrates exploit their helpless subjects.

Moreover, the language employed by the poet in this critical stanza also explains why Furius and Aurelius are the chosen messengers of the poet. In the preceding stanza, it was Furius and Aurelius who were *omnia. . .temptare simul parati*; in the fifth stanza, the repetition of the words *simul* and *omnium*, now in reference to Lesbia, makes it clear that all three characters are "birds of a feather", who can perform their "duties" with the cruel ruthlessness that Catullus, for

[26] *Cf.* Fotiou (note 6, above) 156. Putnam (note 6, above) 86 notes the erotic implications of the verb *temptare*; *cf.* Tibullus 1.2.17 and 1.3.73.

all his posturing, cannot.[27]

The dénouement of the poem then comes in the final stanza:

> nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
> qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
> ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
> tactus aratro est.

Now the poet shifts his attention from the anonymous *trecenti* to the solitary figure of himself, from Lesbia's many victims to one particular fatality of her lust. Once again the language employed reinforces the theme of sexual violence: as Duclos has noted, "the word *culpa* as used in the poems of Catullus (with one exception: 67.10 and 14) seems always to refer to sexual activity of some kind (so in 15.15, 91.10 and 68.139)."[28] Even more suggestive, however, is the final (and much praised: "one of the finest passages in all of Catullus"[29]) image of the poem: the flower cut and killed by a passing plough.

The *flos*, commonly associated in ancient literature with the female (as in 62.39-40), is here instead associated with the male, i.e., Catullus; the plough, commonly associated with the male, now becomes a symbol of the female, i.e., Lesbia.[30] The poem has come full circle: the man who threatened to rape the extensive outside world at the start of the poem ends up "deflowered" by a mere *puella*.[31] The irony of a man who could once talk of facing the *ultimos Britannos* being transformed into a fallen flower of the *prati ultimi* is both poignant and poetically masterful.

This irony is well underlined by the concluding verbs of the poem, *cecidit* and *tactus est*. Whereas Catullus began the poem about to ravage (*penetrabit*), he (or, more properly, the *flos* which is his *amor*) finishes the poem in a passive, fallen state which reflects his own rape by Lesbia. *Cecidit* clearly responds to *penetrabit*, while *tactus est* recalls both *penetrabit* and *tunditur* in the first stanza. Indeed, the verb *tango* is often associated with sexual activity,[32] as at 21.8 and 89.5. Thus, even in the final line of poem 11 Catullus maintains the theme of sexual violence which has run through the entire piece.

[27] As Wilamowitz said of Furius and Aurelius, "sie gehören in die Sphäre, in die jetzt Lesbia gesunken ist." (*Hellenistische Dichtung* [Berlin 1924] I. 307).

[28] Duclos (note 9, above) 81; it can be argued that *culpa* at 67.10 and 14 also has a sexual meaning.

[29] Bright (note 6, above) 110.

[30] Much has been written about this imagery: *cf.* Putnam (note 6, above) 79-82; Duclos (note 9, above) 86; Fotiou (note 6, above) 157; and Richlin (note 14, above) 145. The reversal of sex roles here can be paralleled elsewhere in Catullus; *cf.* P. Y. Forsyth, "Catullus: The Mythic Persona," *Latomus* 35 (1976) 555-66.

[31] Mulroy (note 6, above) 244-45 sees here an image of castration.

[32] *Cf.* Putnam (note 6, above) 81; Fotiou (note 6, above) 157. I would like to thank here the readers of this paper, who offered much valuable advice.

Poem 11 should thus no longer be castigated for a lack of connection between its opening and closing scenes. There is in fact a steady movement in the poem—one that takes shape around the theme of rape. Sexual violence is imagined in the first stanza, and explicitly realized by the last. But the irony of the situation lies in the unexpected reversal: the would-be rapist turns out to be the victim of a rape that utterly destroys him. The poem moves from aggression to passivity, from male to female, from glorious pretensions to ugly reality, from remotest Britain to the remotest meadow. It is, in every way, a Catullan *tour de force.*

University of Waterloo PHYLLIS YOUNG FORSYTH
CW 84.6 (1991)