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THE STRUCTURE OF CATULLUS 8: A HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
et quod uides perisse perditum ducas.
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum uentitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.
ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,
quae tu uolebas nec puella nolebat,
fulsere uere candidi tibi soles.
nunc iam illa non uolt: tu quoque inpote⟨ns noli⟩,
nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser uiue,
sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.
uale, puella, iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit inuitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelesta, uae te, quae tibi manet uita?
quis nunc te adibit? cui uideberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

The criticism of *Miser Catulle* makes a particularly interesting study in that it provides a kind of microcosmic history of the structural interpretation of classical poetry. The preconceptions of our scholarly ancestors are plain, and so, often, are their errors. But nineteenth-century attempts to understand the structure of classical poetry were more serious and on balance more successful than early twentieth-century attempts. Preconceptions changed, and one can mark the steps by which a better appreciation of the structure of classical poems was achieved. I shall survey the scholarship on the structure of C. 8 since 1863. At the end of the paper I shall present my own views on the structure of the poem.

The nineteenth-century students of poetic structure generally understood symmetry to mean "balanced proportion," not "exact correspondence in size and position of opposite parts; equable distribution of parts about a dividing line or center" as the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines it. Stichic poems were commonly divided into balanced strophes of equal length. But in his valuable survey of symmetrical structure in ancient poetry, Otto Ribbeck (1861) gives examples of what we now call ring composition, "true" symmetry with emphasis on the central element, and verbal repetition, as well as division into proportional strophes.

Two years later Ribbeck (1863) analyzed the structure of C. 8 which he divided into strophes: 2, 3 (str.), 3 (ant.), 3 (str.), 3 (ant.), 5. He noted verbal repetitions at lines 3 and 8, framing the first strophe and antistrophe, and at 11 and 12 (Franke 16, Ellis 282).

Richter (1865) achieved greater regularity by dividing the final five lines 3, 2 (i.e. 2 3 3 3 3 3 2), but, as Ellis saw, a division between lines 17 and 18 is arbitrary and intolerable (Franke 16, Ellis 282).

Franke (1866) divided the poems of Catullus into three categories by structure: *monostrophika, epodika* (subdivided into *epodika*, *proodika*, and *mesodika*) and *mikta kata schesin*, following Hephaestion, περὶ ποιημάτων 4. *Monostrophika* have two parts equal in number of verses (poems 70, 79, 92, 103, 104, 111, 82, 102, 87, 75, 72, 80, 88, 89, 41, 36) or more parts equal in length (30, 40, 28, 35). *Epodika* proper have two similar sections and a conclusion (4, 39, 13, 45, 58, 55, 69, etc.). *Mesodika* have the most important or significant passage in the center (31 [3 2 $\underline{7}$ 2 3], 44 [4+5 $\underline{3}$ 5+4]). *Proodika* (cf. *epodika*) are rare. *Mikta kata schesin* are a combination of the first two types (e.g. 12 [3: 2+4 $\underline{2}$ 2+4]). Franke classed C. 8 as mesodic (2+6 $\underline{3}$ 2+6), beginning a movement away from the division into short strophes. Lines 9–11 form the emphatic mesode; there is verbal repetition at lines 3 and 8, 14 and 19.

Ellis (1867) noted Westphal's views on the seven-part *nomos* of Terpander, gave examples of "true" symmetry and of strophic division in the Greek poets, and identified three kinds of symmetry in Catullus' poetry.

> Aut enim (1) summam sententiae in medio ponit, ceteras partes utrinque certo collocat ordine. Talia sunt VI, VIII, IX, XIV, XXV, XLIV, LXVIII, LXXVI, XCIX. Aut (2) ipsi carmini, aequabiliter distributo, prooemium vel epodon subnectit. Talia sunt IV, V, X, XXII, XXIII, XXIX, LXVI. Aut (3) carmen aequabiliter describit, sine prooemio vel epodo. (p. 254)

In order that the second strophe and antistrophe of C. 8 might be framed by verbal repetition, as Ribbeck had observed for the first (3–8), Ellis made 14–19 the second strophe and antistrophe, framed by *at tu*. Lines 9–11 are the mesode (2 3+3 3 2 3+3).

Prien (1867) applied the principles of "strophic responsion and symmetrical division" to Catullus' short poems and to Roman elegy alike. Although he did not categorize the poems according to three types as Franke and Ellis had done, he used similar terms: epode, mesode, and "Eingang." Strophic responsion was, however, the key, and Prien was prepared to use stern measures to make the strophes and "Zahlensymmetrie" come out right. In this instance, line 5 was deleted; Prien suggested that it had been borrowed from C. 37.12. (The removal of one line is, of course, trivial in comparison with the shambles Prien and others made of the texts of Horace and the elegists for the sake of "symmetry.")[1] The structure of C. 8 is: A 2 α, B 8 β + γ (5+3), B′ 8 γ′ + β′ (3+5) [or more simply, 2 5+3 3+5].

This surge of activity in the 1860s seems to have been followed by a period of rest, but in 1929 Friess produced a monograph on the composition of Catullus' poetry. Friess divides Catullus' shorter poems into: 1. mesodic ("mit tragendem Mittelstück" = omphalos), 2. framed ("mit tragendem Rahmen," emphasis on the frame sections), and 3. "ohne Rahmenkomposition," without frame (these poems are strophic). Unlike the earlier scholars, Friess recognized that poems need not be composed of equal parts (principle of asymmetry). C. 8 consists of an omphalos (9–11) framed by eight-line passages (8 3 8).[2]

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[1] For example, Prien reduces Horace, *Odes* 3.30 to two strophes (from Linker's three) composed of lines 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6–9 ("Der symmetrische Bau der Oden des Horaz," *RhM* 13 [1858] 340).

Rebert (1931) was more concerned with the emotion and dramatic effect of the poem than with its structure. He saw alternation between determination and weakness "with no assurance of victory." Rebert saw no overall symmetrical structure and made no mention of a center, let alone an omphalos (2 6 5 5 1).

Although Schnelle (1933) spoke mainly of Catullus' "giving way to emotion," she saw that the composition of the poem controlled the expression of feeling.

> Drei Klammern halten das Ganze in der Schärfe des gegenwärtigen Bewusstseins: v. 1–2, 9–11 und 19. Dazwischen jedesmal ein Gleiten des Gedankens, ein Schweifen in Vergangenheit und Zukunft, ein Weichwerden der Stimmung—und zweimal ein harsches Zurückrufen in die Gegenwart.

Line 9 is the pivot. Schnelle noted the frequent repeated words in addition to the nearly repeated lines 3 and 8, 12 and 19.

Bardon (1943) divided the polymetric poems into "énumérative" and "embrassée." "L'ordre de la première est celui où se présentent les faits dans la réalité ou les sentiments dans l'âme de Catulle. L'autre plus savente reprend à la fin du poème l'idée annoncée au début . . ." (p. 10). But Bardon considered C. 8 a unique example of "la composition ascendante" (2 6 11).[3]

Most scholars as far back as Franke, Ribbeck, and Ellis in the 1860s had noted some of the verbal repetitions in C. 8 and had used them to support their analyses of structure; Schnelle and Bardon had pointed out all or nearly all of the repetitions; but it was Swanson (1962/3) who first based his analysis of the poem on verbal repetitions:

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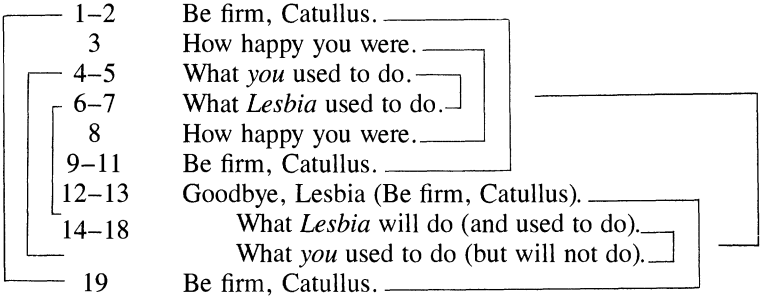
[2] Schmidt (1930) followed Franke and Friess (8 [2+6] 3 8 [2+6]).

[3] They did not deal with structure in detail, but Fraenkel (1961) and Commager (1965) divided the poem 2 6+3 3+4+1 and 2 6 6 4 1 respectively.

A	fulsere . . . soles			3
		puella ducebat		4
		puella nolebat		7
	fulsere . . . soles			8
B	nec . . . nec			10
		obdura		11
		obdurat		12
	nec . . . nec			13
C	at tu			14
		cui		16
			cuius	17
		cui		18
	at tu			19

Swanson saw that the resultant symmetry "directs our attention to the center (9–13)," but he did not draw what seems to me the obvious conclusion (8 5 6).

Rowland (1966) used a rather elaborate outline to show the symmetry of C. 8 and the inner relationships of its parts.


1–2 Be firm, Catullus.
3 How happy you were.
4–5 What *you* used to do.
6–7 What *Lesbia* used to do.
8 How happy you were.
9–11 Be firm, Catullus.
12–13 Goodbye, Lesbia (Be firm, Catullus).
14–18 What *Lesbia* will do (and used to do).
What *you* used to do (but will not do).
19 Be firm, Catullus.

"The balance and symmetry is not . . . purely formal; it is intimately connected with the meaning of the poem." Catullus' inability to overcome his passion is shown in the way the final line of the poem returns to the beginning. (This is surely correct as against Swanson's view that, since the poem ends with *obdura*, we can assume that Catullus has overcome his passion.) Rowland printed the text to show the division of the poem as 2 6 3 2 5 1.

In the same issue of *Greece & Rome* Moritz "corrected" Rowland's view that *Miser Catulle* divides into two halves between lines 11 and 12. For the sake of precise proportion Moritz insisted on making 9–11 the center of the poem—the dominant view for more than a century, but mistakenly, as I shall argue. Moritz did, however, point out that there is a pivot or peripety at the center of the poem. This notion was perhaps implicit in Swanson's views, or even earlier, but Moritz made it explicit.

Akbar Khan (1968) made the attractive observation that "the central or *omphalos*-section of the poem is connected to the preceding and subsequent sections by verbal links" (i.e. 7 to 9 and 13 to 14). Verse 11 "is the pivot and hub of the poem" (2 6 5 6).[4]

[4] Gugel (1967) had it 2 3+3 3 3+4 1 or 8 3 8; Quinn (1970) 2 9 3 4 1; Wiseman (1974) commented on the ring composition: "*miser* encloses lines 1–10, and *obdura* (with *obstinata* and *destinatus*) encloses 11–19" (i.e. 10 9).

Reisz de Rivarola (1977) was primarily concerned with repetitions of sound, word, and idea. She did not refer to Swanson, but noted the same repetitions as Swanson in lines 10–13 and pointed out the contrast in sense emphasized by central placement in a chiastic structure:

A *nec*, quae fugit, sectare *nec* miser vive, 10 (A = What Cat.
B sed *obstinata* mente prefer, *obdura*. 11 must not do.)
B vale, puella. iam Catullus *obdurat* 12 (B = What Cat.
A *nec* te requiret *nec* rogabit invitam. 13 must do.)

Thus Reisz de Rivarola, like Swanson, dissented from the *communis opinio* that lines 9–11 are the center of the poem.

In his generally perceptive reading Kresic (1981) called verses 9–11 the keystone, a pivot between past and future, noticed the verbal repetitions, and printed the text divided 2 6 3 2 5 1.

Gadamer (1981) took a refreshingly original position.

> Verses 1 through 12 [are] a completely unequivocal and unified statement. . . . But right in this build-up to the objective statement of fact, "Catullus obdurat," there *is* a signal in the text. . . . It points to the . . . turn . . . that begins with verse 14 and is set clearly in relief semantically by the word, "at." That is the hermeneutic point about which the poem as a whole revolves and which endows it with its unfading charm. At this point there begins an authentic multivalence of meaning.

I shall return to Gadamer's views.

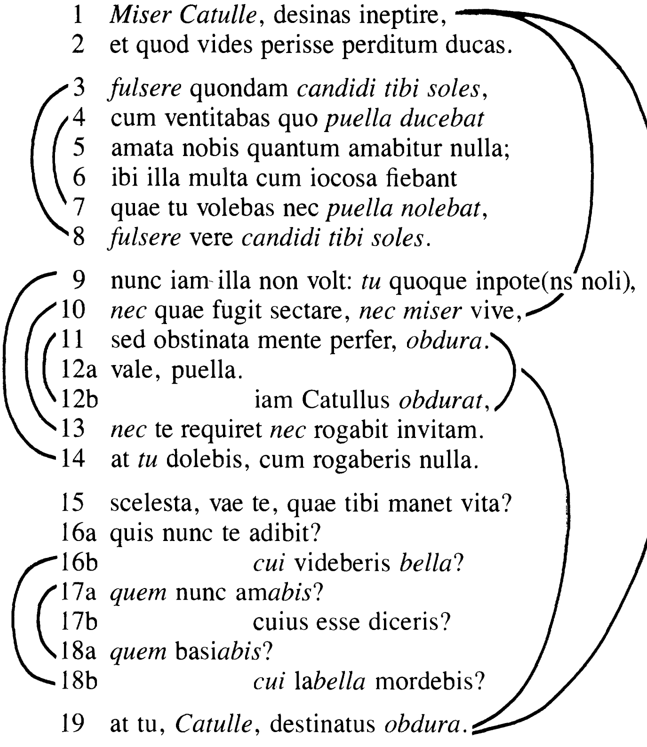
Burck (1983) termed lines 9–11 the nucleus (or omphalos) and center and observed the framing at 3 and 8, and 1 and 10 f., and 1 f. and 19. He described the division of the poem (2 3+3 3 3+4 1) as "almost strophic"—and so scholarship imitates art, as this survey ends with ring composition.

I think that there has been steady progress in the application of structural analysis to the poem. Specifically, insistence on strict proportion gave way to the recognition of true symmetry; the importance of verbal repetition was recognized from the beginning, but it came to be understood more fully, and was seen to have a function beyond the purely formal; the importance of the center of a symmetrical structure was recognized from the beginning, if not always, but it took a long time for scholars to recognize that the center keyed a reversal in the poem, that it was not a merely static structural feature. Admittedly, there has been occasional backsliding to the *radix malorum*, that is insistence on precise proportion, and the related errors of strophization (to give an ugly term to a nasty business) and the arbitrariness in making the center of the poem its mathematical center.

I believe that an order of precedence should be observed in the kinds of evidence that can establish symmetrical structure. Priority should be given to 1) thematic responsion, 2) verbal repetition, 3) stylistic, syntactic, or modal correspondence (e.g. use of similes, speeches in predominantly narrative passages, use of imperatives, etc.) and 4) equivalence in length of passages (i.e. proportion). These rules or guidelines should not, of course, be considered absolute or be applied mechanically. A precise and striking instance of verbal repetition or stylistic correspondence will take precedence over an approximate or trivial thematic responsion. Each case must be judged individually and on its merits.

There are still two major unresolved questions as regards the structure of Catullus 8: 1) Where is the center? 2) Does line 14 begin or end a section? I prefer to have 14 end the central section, but it might be preferable not to force the issue and simply call 14 transitional.[5]

More is at stake in the former question. Lines 9–11 in particular, or line 11 alone, have generally been taken as the center or the pivot of the poem. But if any one line or phrase stands out, it is *vale puella.* And on this phrase the poem turns. Rowland is probably right in saying that the poem does not cease to be a soliloquy at this one point, but *vale puella* is obviously addressed to *puella*, even if only in the poet's imagination, and the phrase does carry considerable weight by being a terse independent sentence, and by summing up the message (I had better say, apparent message) of the poem in a nutshell.



1 *Miser Catulle*, desinas ineptire,
2 et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.

3 *fulsere* quondam *candidi tibi soles*,
4 cum ventitabas quo *puella ducebat*
5 amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla;
6 ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant
7 quae tu volebas nec *puella nolebat*,
8 *fulsere* vere *candidi tibi soles*.

9 nunc iam illa non volt: *tu* quoque inpote(ns noli),
10 *nec* quae fugit sectare, *nec miser* vive,
11 sed obstinata mente perfer, *obdura*.
12a vale, puella.
12b iam Catullus *obdurat*,
13 *nec* te requiret *nec* rogabit invitam.
14 at *tu* dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.

15 scelesta, vae te, quae tibi manet vita?
16a quis nunc te adibit?
16b *cui* videberis *bella*?
17a *quem* nunc am*abis*?
17b cuius esse diceris?
18a *quem* basi*abis*?
18b *cui* la*bella* mordebis?

19 at tu, *Catulle*, destinatus *obdura*.

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[5] Scholarly opinion is evenly divided. The occurrence of futures in 14–18, and the repetition of *at tu* in 14 and 19 favor a division between 13 and 14. But the futures are already present in line 13, and line 19 is not of a piece with the preceding lines. One can just as easily consider 15–18 as framed by *at tu*. In support of a break after line 14 I would point out that *scelesta, vae te* is an apt beginning of a new section, and that *quae tibi manet vita*? gives a general heading to the list of *puella*'s prospective miseries, but is distinguished from the list itself in that *quae* is an interrogative adjective, not an interrogative pronoun like the interrogatives in the list proper.

Poems which are symmetrically composed around a significant center often show heightened symmetry at the center. In this case *vale puella* is surrounded by *obdura* and *obdurat*, that is, there is both lexical and thematic responsion. (Only Swanson and Reisz de Rivarola observed this symmetry at the center—it is of course obscured if you regard lines 9–11 as the center—but surprisingly neither reached the obvious conclusion that *vale puella* is the pivot.) Working outward from the center, we find a further parallel between self-admonition to stop pursuing the fugitive (10) and Catullus' determination not to seek the girl (13). This is reinforced by the repetition of *nec . . . nec*. Finally, there is a less obvious thematic responsion by contrast between the girl's unwillingness and Catullus' self-admonition not to want (9) and her not being asked or sought (which expresses Catullus' unwillingness, 14). There is also the minor repetition of the word *tu*. In fact, each of the three main sections of the poem is composed in rings. Rings also tie the beginning and end to one another and to the center.

As we have seen, several critics have pointed to a pivot or peripety at the center of the poem. But such terms indicate a marked change at a precise point. The change is not signalled in lines 9–11 but precisely in line 12a. And the responsions in my analysis of the poem's center point up that reversal as it radiates outward from the center. Before Catullus says "Goodby, girl" he says "You must be firm"; thereafter he says "Catullus is firm" (11 & 12b). His determination not to chase the girl that runs is answered by "He'll not run to ask an unwilling girl" (10 & 13). Her refusal is balanced by his not asking (9 & 14). Notice that lines 9 and 14 also effect a transition between lines 3–8, in which the *puella* is in control (as in 9), and lines 15–18, in which Catullus is seen as in control (as in 14). Recall also the general contrast between 3–8, which refer to the past and are unspecific, and 15–18, which refer to the future and are specific. In sum, there can be no doubt that the reversal takes place at line 12a precisely.

But has Catullus really taken charge of his life? Has he mastered his passion? Catullus protests too much, as most critics agree, while Swanson, Akbar Khan and Gugel represent the minority view.[6] The intimacies of 15–18, even though they are imagined *not* to be happening, have evidently broken the poet's resolve—notice the progression from looking pretty to lip-nibbling—and the poet needs a booster-shot of determination at line 19, which is related to line 1 by ring composition. The poet is back where he started, and thus the formal reversal at line 12a is only a false or failed peripety, and the real reversal, the emotional reversal, occurs somewhere between 15 and 19. In this

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[6] Against Rebert, Fraenkel, and Rowland specifically, Akbar Khan maintained that "the very polish and *regularity of the verse structure* in lines 16–18 undercut whatever urgency we may feel inclined to overstress here" (p. 571). But the regularity enhances the effect of the unmistakable increase in intensity, as does the relentless beat of the tympani at the beginning of Brahms' First Symphony. The support Akbar Khan hopes to find in Theocritus' Cyclops, who consoles himself "in a cooly rational and matter-of-fact manner" (p. 559) is feeble indeed. The Cyclops is a sad-sack who deceives only himself when he refers to the girls he could have, as I have argued previously (*CJ* 70 [1975] 32–36). See also A. E.-H. Horstmann, *Ironie und Humor bei Theokrit, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie*, Heft 67 (1976) 80–110. Horstmann speaks of "Illusion" and "Selbsttäuschung" and concludes (p. 104): "Die Liebe des Kyklopen ist nur aus dessen Bewusstsein verdrängt, insgeheim besteht sie unverändert fort."

Gadamer is essentially correct. Still, the formal reversal continues to the end and gives the poem its form. Analysis of structure reveals just what is going on in the poem. The formal reversal is a foil to the emotional reversal which makes it unexpected and thus more effective.

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