

*AT FIXUS NOSTRIS TU DABIS SUPPLICIUM:*  
CATULLUS 116 AS AN 'INVERTED DEDICATION' \*

One of the most impressive achievements of the late Colin Macleod was his demonstration<sup>1</sup> that poem 116 of Catullus, far from being an immature, ill-thought-out, or hastily composed thing, is an extremely apposite close to the collection, one "to be imagined as earlier in time than the other Gellius poems", but still "in substance an apt conclusion"<sup>2</sup>. Like the composition it illuminates, Macleod's article is difficult, allusive, but ultimately rewarding. Later contributions<sup>3</sup>, especially when they dissent from his, have not notably brought much advance. But building on Macleod's findings it is still possible to add to our understanding of the poem, and that in surprisingly simple and unabstruse terms.

Catullus 116, then, is an inverse or "inverted dedication"<sup>4</sup>, one which 'inverts' the motifs to be expected in poetic dedications in general<sup>5</sup> and which are present in the first poem of the collection in particular. Catullus 1 exploits εἰρῶνεῖα to compare in a slighting manner the poet's own literary

\* Dr. S.J. Harrison kindly read and improved an earlier draft of this note.

<sup>1</sup> "CQ" 23, 1973, 304-9 = *Collected Essays* pp. 181-6. Henceforth cited as 'Macleod'. D. Gagliardi, "PP" 39, 1984, p. 36 n. 14 denounces the article as "uno specioso tentativo d'interpretare 116 alla stregua d'un componimento letterario... incentrato sul contrasto drammatico tra 'le diverse ambizioni o fonti di ispirazione del poeta e il proposito di chiudere il libro con una nota di addio o seria o finta' (dove anche la nebulosità del linguaggio palesa la lambiccata sforzatura concettuale)". In fact, the article (especially on repeated reading) exhibits that "capacity for association" by which a "fact or idea evoke[s] other hitherto unrelated facts or ideas" which Gordon Williams praised in Macleod's teacher Eduard Fraenkel (see "PBA" 56, 1970, 437).

<sup>2</sup> Macleod pp. 308f. = pp. 185f. The other Gellius poems (74, 80, 88-91) precede, in the collection as it now stands, the composition which explains why they came to be written. But a similar sequence obtains in the case of the polymetrics, where several poems addressed to Lesbia precede 51, providing the solution to the riddle of her name. Cfr. n. 19 below.

<sup>3</sup> P.Y. Forsyth, "CQ" 27, 1977, 352-3, H.P. Syndikus, *Catull. Eine Interpretation. 3 Die Epigramme* (Darmstadt 1987), 142-8. These are cited below by their authors' names. Further bibliography (of very little value) in D.F.S. Thomson's commentary ("Phoenix" Suppl. 34 [1997]) p. 556, which itself has nothing worthwhile to add.

<sup>4</sup> Macleod p. 308 = p. 185. (On the technique of 'inversion' cfr. F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry*, Edinburgh 1972, pp. 127ff.).

<sup>5</sup> Macleod as cited in the previous note exemplifies the general motifs of dedication and observes that "the poem thus has, like Cat. 1, a programmatic quality", but says little or nothing of the further comparisons and contrasts between poems 1 and 116 which I note below.

output with that of Cornelius Nepos, the dedicatee. Catullus 116, by contrast, compares the poet's own abusive verse favourably with that of the inverted 'dedicatee' Gellius.

To be more specific: *tibi... mittere* in vv. 1-2 of our poem means 'to dedicate to you'<sup>6</sup>, and it may be that Catullus has used the dative construction rather than the more usual *ad te mittere* in order to remind us of the datives at the start of poem 1: *cui dono... libellum* | ...? | *Corneli, tibi*. This would be the first of an extensive series of comparisons and contrasts between the two works. For instance, Catullus' εἰρωνεία in poem 1 characterises his poems as mere *nugae* (v. 4), whereas, in the more aggressive style of 116, the poems with which he had vainly tried to appease Gellius in the past are rated 'worthy of Callimachus' (*carmina... Battidae*, v. 2)<sup>7</sup>. The *nugae* of 1.4 are contrasted slightly with Nepos' own literary output (*tribus... cartis* | *doctis... et laboriosis*, vv. 6-7), whereas Gellius' own poetic invective ranks as useless when set beside that of Catullus (116.7-8). Nepos has always taken a friendly and positive attitude towards Catullus and his works (*namque tu solebas* | *meas esse aliquid putare nugas*, 1.3-4), while Gellius' attitude has been consistently hostile, requiring a (fruitless) attempt at appeasement from Catullus (*lenirem*, 116.3). Nepos' literary products exhibit precisely those qualities of industry and learning (*doctis... et laboriosis*, 1.7) which characterise Catullus' own attempts (*carmina... Battidae*, 116.2); but Nepos' labours have produced a successful composition,

<sup>6</sup> See Fordyce's commentary *ad loc.* A. Palmer ("Hermathena" 5, 1885, 305-6) conjectured *vertere* ('translate') for *mittere*: see the next note. I should prefer to suppose *mittere* in v. 4 (the repetition after v. 2's instance is clumsy) to be corrupt.

<sup>7</sup> Macleod p. 305 = p. 182 observes that "*carmina... Battidae* might mean simply 'poems by Callimachus', in other words a translation" (cfr. 65.16: but there *expressa* makes all the difference) "but equally it could be used of poems in the manner of Callimachus, just as *cantores Euphorionis* (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.45) are 'Euphorionists', writers who work in his style". Forsyth pp. 352f., followed by Syndikus p. 144 n. 10, thinks that because the first of the passages referred to by Macleod uses the same phrase as 116.2 (65.16: *haec expressa tibi carmina Battidae*) of what is certainly a translation of Callimachus (66, Catullus' rendering of the *Lock of Berenice*), our phrase must bear the same meaning, not least because of the "thematic connection" between poems 65 and 116, "the beginning and concluding pieces of" what may have originally been "a single book of Catullan elegies". But the same phrase does not have to bear the same meaning everywhere, and 116 lacks an accompanying translation to point the way to that particular meaning (Palmer's *vertere* for *mittere* in v. 2 (see the preceding note) is by no means compelling). Apart from Cicero's *cantores Euphorionis*, there is the Greek expression typified by 'Ἡσιόδου τό τ' ἄρισμα καὶ ὁ τρόπος in Callimachus AP 9.507 = *epigr.* 27.1 Pf. = HE 1297 Gow-Page (cited in the *Addenda* and *Corrigenda* of Macleod's *Collected Essays* (p. 341), published in 1983 and therefore unknown to Forsyth; not known, seemingly, to Syndikus either). It may not be irrelevant that the phrase opens an epigram by Callimachus.

while Catullus' have been in vain (116.5: *hunc video mihi nunc frustra sumptum esse laborem*). Catullus' dedication proper 'gives' his own poems to Nepos (*dono... libellum*, 1.1; *habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli*, 1.8); the 'inverse' dedication envisages the inverse dedicatee 'giving' or paying to Catullus a penalty (*tu dabis supplicium*, 116.8). The dedication proper ends with a prayer that Catullus' collected poems may enjoy due immortality (*plus uno maneat perenne saeclo*, 1.10), and it is clearly hoped that the prayer will be successful. In 116 the past prayers of Catullus for a poetic appeasing of Gellius are specifically stated to have been *unsuccessful* (v. 6: *nec nostras hinc valuisse preces*).

This elaborate tissue of comparisons and contrasts aptly leads up to the climactic couplet of 116:

*contra nos tela ista tua evitabimus acta*<sup>8</sup>:

*at fixus nostris tu dabis supplicium.*

Here the threads of all the preceding implications meet together. As observed above, the poet's closing couplet compares his own poetic invective favourably with Gellius'. That Catullus' expression of this has hitherto more often seemed an anticlimax than a climax is perhaps due to a failure to appreciate fully the resonances of *fixus* at the start of the final line. Given, however, the ambiguity of the second element of *fixus nostris* (sc. *telis*), we should surely expect the past principle passive to operate on more than one level. Literally, of course, the phrase means 'transfixed by my weapons'. But since *telis* in this poem, after v. 4's *tela infesta <meum> mittere in usque caput*, also means 'invective verse'<sup>9</sup>, one looks for a further nuance to *fixus*. The verb *figo* can elsewhere be used to mean 'hang up, expose to public view in a public place', as at Cic. *pro Sest.* 128 *quis est Italiae locus in quo non fixum sit in publicis monumentis studium salutis meae*, or *Phil.* 1.23f. *leges... quas post mortem Caesaris prolatas esse et fixas videtis* or (figuratively) *Verr.* 5.53 *ut hoc beneficium, quem ad modum dicitur, trabali clavo figeret*<sup>10</sup> and this notion of the public exposure would well fit the

<sup>8</sup> In favour of Baehrens' emendation (*prob.* e.g. Goold in his text [London 1983]) of *evitabimus amitha* (and against the 'old conjecture' *evitamus amictu* hesitatingly accepted by Macleod p. 304 = p. 181 n. 3) see Syndikus p. 143, arguing that the future tense is guaranteed by the consequent parallelism with the next line's *dabis*. The final couplet is indeed very symmetrically balanced, with the pattern *a b bc d: ab c d* (*nos . tela . ista tua . evitamus : nostris . tu . dabis*). On the futures *evitabimus* and *dabis* see further below, n. 15.

<sup>9</sup> For parallels to "the poetry of insult or imprecation... indicated... by the metaphor of weapons and battle" see Macleod p. 305 = p. 182 and n. 4, Syndikus pp. 145f. and nn. 16-18.

<sup>10</sup> See further *OLD* s.v. *figo* 3 (a) "to fasten up, fix, nail (on a wall, etc.)"... (b) "to hang up (dedicatory offerings in a temple)"... (c) "to post up for public information". Note

close of our passage: as a result of Catullus' invective poems, Gellius will be fastened forever for public inspection, lampooned in perpetuity. For the underlying thought, independent of the image, see 78b.3-4 (also at the end of a poem) *verum id non impune feres: nam te omnia saecula | noscent et, qui sis, fama loquetur anus*. For a lyric instance cfr. poem 40.

In other words, we have here poem 116's final witty 'inversion' of dedicatory themes, the motif in question being the *laudator's* ability to confer poetic immortality upon the *laudandus*<sup>11</sup>. And, as with all the preceding dedicatory 'inversions' considered above, this one too expresses itself in contrast with poem 1. That, as we have seen, ended with a prayer that Catullus' verse might survive (v. 10):

*plus uno maneat perenne saeclo.*

If the verse survives, so must the *dedicatio*, and if that survives, so must Catullus' praise of Nepos. At first it may have seemed that 116's concluding couplet intended a contrasting point of a slightly different kind from that sketched above, to wit: 'your scurrilous verses will bounce harmlessly off me, but you shall be pilloried by mine for ever'. That would constitute another poetic *topos*: 'my poetry will live forever, yours shall not'<sup>12</sup>. But in fact, over that motif, Catullus superimposes the conceit turning on the double sense of *fixus*. Unlike Nepos, immortalised, according to Catullus' εἰρῶνεία, both by his own genius and Catullus' poetry, Gellius' poetic squibs will not suffice to secure him poetic immortality. But poetic immortality of a much less enviable sort he *will* 'enjoy', as the victim of Catullus'

also *ib.* 7 (b) "to make *permanent* [my italics], fix, make a fixture of". There would be an (admittedly obscene) parallel for what is proposed for the end of Catullus 116 – i.e. the final and climactic couplet of an elegy attacking Gellius dependent upon the humorous ambiguity of a verb – in Catullus 74.5f. *quod voluit fecit: nam quamvis irrumet ipsum | nunc patrum, verbum non faciet patruus*. Here there is an ambiguity involving the two senses of *irrumare*: its derivative and more general signification ('show contempt for', vel sim.); and its original, narrower, sexual meaning ('to cause to fellate'). On these two senses and the 'subtle joke' produced by such ambiguity see J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London 1982), pp. 126f. (cfr. D. Fehling, *Ethologische Überlegungen aus dem Gebiet der Altertumskunde* (Zetemata 61 [1974]), p. 28 n. 117).

<sup>11</sup> For the terms *laudator* and *laudandus* see e.g. E.L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* (1962; repr. 1986) Subject Index s. vv. (p. 130). Note especially pp. 77f. on prayers for the future at the end of *epinicia* as they relate to *laudator* and *laudandus*. A good example of these from Latin poetry is to be found at the end of Cat. 68 (vv. 155-6): *sitis felices et tu simul et tua vita, | et domus in qua olim lusimus et domina*, etc.

<sup>12</sup> For which see, for instance, Sappho fr. 55: κατθανοῖσα δὲ κείσῃ οὐδέ ποτα μῆγμοσύνα σέθεν | ἔσσει' οὐδ' ἴα τοῖς ὕστερον· οὐ γὰρ πεδέχῃς βρόδων | τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας κτλ. and, from Catullus himself, *Zmyrna cavae Satrachi penitus mittetur ad undas, | Zmyrnam cana diu saecula pervoluent. | at Volusi annales Paduam morientur ad ipsam | et laxas scombris saepe dabunt tunicas* (95.5-8).

invective. And with that poetic boast, echoing or rather 'inverting' the example of the *topos* at the close of poem 1, the collection<sup>13</sup> aptly ends.

Poems of praise in antiquity often closed by conspicuously juxtaposing the figures of poet and patron, *laudator* and *laudandus*, in the context of the promise of poetic immortality<sup>14</sup>. Thus, for instance, Ibycus fr. 282.47f. καὶ σύ, Πουλύκρατες, κλέος ἄφθιτον ἐξεῖς,<sup>15</sup> | ὥς κατ' ἀοιδᾶν καὶ ἐμὸν κλέος, Pindar *Ol.* 1.115ff. εἴη σέ τε τοῦτον ὕψου χρόνον πατεῖν, | ἐμέ τε τοσσάδε νικαφόροις | ὁμιλεῖν πρόφαντον σοφία καθ' Ἑλλανας ἑόντα παντῶ, Vergil *Georg.* 4.560ff. *Caesar dum magnus ad altum | fulminat Euphraten... | ... | illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat | Parthenope...* A particularly elaborate instance occurs at the end of Catullus' greatest poem (68.149ff.): *hoc tibi, quod potui, confectum carmine munus | pro multis, Alii, redditur officiis, | ne vestrum scabra tangat rubigine nomen | haec atque illa dies atque alia atque alia. | huc addent divi quam plurima, quae Themis olim | antiquis solita est munera ferre piis. | sitis felices et tu simul et tua vita, | et domus in qua olim lusimus et domina, | et qui principio nobis te tradidit Afer, | a quo sunt primo mi omnia nata bona...*<sup>16</sup>. The

<sup>13</sup> The much-discussed question of whether the poems of Catullus as they have come down to represent us a collection artistically ordered and conceived by the author himself is obviously too complex and controversial to be dealt with in a footnote. And one should begin the investigation of this thesis by reference to the *internal* evidence of the poems themselves (including the evidence cited in this article) rather than allow *external* evidence (or alleged evidence) to determine one's view from the start. But perhaps I may be allowed a dogmatic statement of the conclusions I draw from the internal evidence: I believe that the poems were originally arranged by Catullus in a single book, fittable on a single papyrus roll (so recently J.D. Minyard, "CW" 81, 1987/8, 343ff. and J. Scherf, *Untersuchungen zur antiken Veröffentlichung der Catullgedichte* (Spudasmata 61 [1996])). For further bibliography see Scherf as cited (cfr. S.J. Heyworth, *Dividing Poems*, in *Formative Stages of Classical Traditions* (edd. O. Pecere and M.D. Reeve, Spoleto 1995, pp. 131-3).

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, D.E. Gerber's commentary on Pind. *Ol.* 1.115 and 116 (Toronto 1982, pp. 176f.).

<sup>15</sup> The future tense here (and in other such positive contexts as Cat. 68.153 *huc addent divi quam plurima*), and, even more, the futures in the negative context at Cat. 78b.3-4 (*verum id non impune feres: nam te omnia saecula | noscent et, qui sis, fama loquetur anus*) remind us that *dabis* in Catullus 116.8 is idiomatic within its context of an (inverted) promise of poetic immortality. We may dispense, therefore, with T.P. Wiseman's suggestion (*Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 183ff.) that "the conspicuous future tenses in the last two lines" (p. 186) constitute a promise of no longer extant *mimi* which once followed 116 at the end of the collection. The suggestion is on other grounds wholly implausible: see Syndikus pp. 147f.

<sup>16</sup> Bergk's emendation of *qualecumque; quod <o> patrona virgo to qualecumque quidem est patroni ut ergo* (cfr. Goold, "LCM" 6, 1981, 235ff.) would supply another instance of the motif in our poet.

last two lines of Catullus 116 represent an inversion *in malam partem*<sup>17</sup> of precisely this device.

Whoever, at the end of the twentieth century, puts forward a new interpretation of an ancient text, should always ask, at least privately, why that interpretation should have been overlooked for the intervening two millennia. The answer may not be either easy or particularly enlightening – or worth publishing. But in the present case, I think one may assert that a correct reading of Catullus 116 can be associated with a general feature of the century now ending. As we are reminded by an important *aperçu* of John Bayley<sup>18</sup>, this period has witnessed a significant change ‘in theoretical criticism of the arts... The change could be defined quite simply as a move away from the idea of the transcendence of art to an awareness of it as the manipulation of conventions, codes, and illusions. As consumers of art we are now expected to ask not what it is but how it has been put together’. Certainly, a move<sup>19</sup> to “awareness of” poetry “as the manipulation of convention, codes, and illusions” is the likeliest background and source for the new approach to Catullus 116 heralded near the start of this century's last quarter by Macleod's article. That the ancient poem which emerges from this approach is seen to contain so much more wit and point than was realised before is one reason to salute the outgoing century as we reach the millennium.

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<sup>17</sup> For “the train of thought in the whole poem” as corresponding “*in malam partem*, to a kind of *recusatio* common in dedications” see Macleod p. 308 = p. 185.

<sup>18</sup> In his introduction to the third edition of Edgar Wind's *Art and Anarchy* (London 1985), p. xii.

<sup>19</sup> A good example of the older approach to poetry which took insufficient account of its “manipulation, codes, and illusions” is provided by Kroll's 1929 commentary on Catullus, which observes, in connection with *preces* in 116.6, “von denen wir nicht wissen, in welcher Form sie ausgesprochen wurden; C. konnte etwa durch gemeinsame Freunde dem Gellius sagen lassen, wenn er schweige, so werde C. ihn durch Widmung einer Übersetzung aus Kallimachos auszeichnen”. Even now there can be relapses into such earlier inappropriateness. For instance, because (cfr. n. 2 above) Catullus 116 looks in a sense like a preface to the other Gellius poems, it has been put to me that the poem may have been displaced from an original, earlier, position before them. But bear in mind poetry's “manipulation of conventions, codes, and illusions” and there seems no reason why a poem purporting to account for the origins of the poet's antipathy to Gellius should not stand last in the collection if Catullus (for the reasons I have given) wanted to place it there.