



The Unity of Catullus 68: A Further View

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the line) to the total number of lines in the four plays is twenty-four.

These results are highly enlightening when compared with the number of intralinear changes of speakers in the writers of Greek tragedy and in Aristophanes. A cursory glance at the Greek tragedies will show that frequent change of speakers is the exception rather than the rule and seldom occurs except in stichomythic passages. Half-lines in dialogue are practically nonexistent in Euripides, Menander's model.

Aristophanes shows almost equal restraint in this respect. I find that few of his plays contain a higher percentage than 12 or 15 and the *Birds*, which contains the highest percentage of any of his plays, has only 20 per cent of the iambic and 13 per cent of the trochaic lines broken by change of speaker within the line. We must keep in mind, of course, the fact that the choral passages in Aristophanes account for a considerable number of lines and, also, that the trochaic meter is found more frequently in the choral passages than in the dialogue. Despite these differences the rise in the number of broken lines in the plays of Menander is surprising. The frequent change of speakers shows a sophistication of technique that is well-nigh modern. The frequent interjections, questions, catching up of another speaker's

word (often with ellipsis and quite out of grammatical context) creates a lively, fast-moving effect—a brilliant *pasticcio* of words that must have kept the ancient audience mentally alert. In fact, as Allinson notes in his Introduction to the Loeb edition, the frequent change of speakers within a single line is mechanically difficult in English verse.

Two metrical facts may be mentioned in this connection. The iambic meter predominates for ordinary conversation and exposition. It is occasionally smooth and effortless, but often it presents difficulties of scansion. Yet the objection of Norwood and other scholars that it is not poetry, while justified when we think of the metrical perfection of Terence, is also an involuntary compliment. His "poetry" reads like prose and for this type of comic drama that is perhaps a virtue and an element of Menander's naturalness, for πολλοὶ γοῦν μέτρα ἰαμβικά λαλοῦσιν οὐκ εἰδότες.⁴ The second fact to be noted is how the livelier trochaic measure which is intended to reflect greater excitement or emotion is enhanced by the fact that it contains a larger percentage of change of speakers within the line.⁵ Thus, by both internal and external means does Menander attain the effect for which he is striving.

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NOTES

1. Demetrius, *On Style*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (London, 1902).

2. For a study of the aside cf. O. Schaffner, *De aversum loquendi ratione in comoedia Graeca* (Diss., Darmstadt, 1911).

3. *Menander reliquiae*³, I, ed. A. Koerte (Leipzig, 1938).

4. Demetr. *De elocutione* 43. 2.

5. "Menander changes the speaker twice within a single tetrameter six times as often as Aristophanes. The general result is much greater variety in rendering and more frequent interruption of the flow of the rhythm in Menander than in Aristophanes" (J. W. White, *The Verse of Greek Comedy* [London, 1912], p. 106).

THE UNITY OF CATULLUS 68: A FURTHER VIEW

The problem of the unity of Catullus 68 is so vexing and tantalizing, and has been so often the subject of scholarly investigation, that one hesitates to add one more study to the already unwieldy mass of literature on the subject. However, an excellent article by Joseph Wohlberg¹ has

prompted me to make one further attempt to suggest a reasonable, if not definitive, solution to the puzzle.

It will be best to begin the discussion by a consideration of the general, over-all structure and pattern of 68, and with such facts about it as appear to be obvious.

The first and most obvious fact is that 68 is either two poems (68*a*, 1–40; 68*b*, 41–160), or one poem divided into two parts. The first poem, or the first part, depending on which view we take, is addressed to Manlius, the second poem, or second part, to Allius.² Not only have we two names; in addition, it is clear that a new subject and a new *modus operandi* begin at verse 41. Some have wanted to make further divisions; one frequently held view is that the poem consists of three parts, 61*a* (1–40), 61*b* (41–148) and 61*c* (149–60).³ But any such further division can be defended only on the basis of a detailed study of the poem; as we read it straight through from beginning to end, only the division into two parts is immediately obvious, and we are faced at once with this question: Do the two parts belong together, either as sections of a single poem or as two separate poems that were meant to be read together?

Della Corte, in his brief but very perceptive discussion of the poem, has taken the latter view.⁴ In effect he asserts that 68*a* and 68*b* are, or at least originally were, two entirely independent compositions, but that they do belong together and were meant to be read together—in other words, that 68*b* is indeed the poem which Catullus sent to Manlius, after protesting, in 68*a*, that he couldn't write anything for him. If it is true that, in 68*a*, Catullus has been estranged from Lesbia, while in 68*b* he is still on acceptable terms with her,⁵ then we may suggest that 68*b* was written earlier than 68*a*, and was now picked up by the poet and sent, as better than nothing, to the grief-stricken Manlius. There is a good parallel for this in 65 and 66, where Catullus seems to have sent the *Coma* as a substitute for some more original and more appropriate poem.⁶

On the face of it, this is an entirely sensible solution to the problem, since it takes care of all such obvious differences as the names, the differing states of mind of Manlius and Allius,⁷ and of Catullus himself,⁸ and even of Catullus' flat declaration, in 68*a*, that he cannot write verses:

he did not need to, since he found 68*b* ready at hand. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the matter, for we are bound still to ask why Catullus, out of all the verse he must have written, should have chosen this poem.⁹

We may explain the choice most simply by assuming that 68*b* was the best that Catullus could do at the moment. Manlius had asked him for a *consolatio*;¹⁰ Catullus did not feel able to write one.¹¹ In order not to appear thoughtless and unsympathetic,¹² he sent 68*b*, an imperfect and not entirely appropriate offering, but one that under the circumstances would do.

But what is the element which most seems to make 68*b* do? It is, of course, the one which it shares with 68*a*, the "brother passage." Yet is there not something incongruous here? When Catullus wrote 68*a*, he was so crushed by his brother's death that he could not write love poetry or anything similar to it, such as a *consolatio* for the loss of love. Now, in 68*b*, the very same sentiment, expressed in such a way that it sounds like a quotation of the passage in 68*a*, appears in the very middle, in the keystone position, of a poem about love, and about love that was, for the moment at least, reasonably happy and successful. If Catullus, in 68*a*, could *not* write love poetry, why, in 68*b*, *could* he do so, if at the time he wrote both poems he was equally oppressed by his brother's death? Was he just offering a polite but essentially hypocritical excuse to Manlius? Could the writer of 101 ever have been hypocritical, for the sake of mere social correctness, about his brother's death? The very fact that 68*b* is a love poem supports Della Corte's and Wohlberg's contention that it was written at a different time from 68*a*, at a time, I should now add, when Catullus was less disturbed by his grief. But could this have been earlier? Does time increase or assuage men's sorrow? If it was earlier, must it not have been before Catullus' brother died? But, since 68*b* contains this reference to his death, how could that be?

Suppose for the moment we lay 68*a*

aside and look at 68*b* by itself. It is a pyramidal poem, with a series of topics leading to a central passage, and then, in reverse order, leading away from it. Allius — Lesbia — Laodamia — Troy — Brother's death — Troy — Laodamia — Lesbia — Allius: this is the basic framework of the poem.¹³ The two passages about Allius (41–50, 149–60) serve as introduction and conclusion to Catullus' *poetisches Opfer*; the enclosed portion (51–148) is the *Opfer* itself. Within this portion, the transitions from topic to topic are mostly smooth and natural; Lesbia came to Catullus *flagrans amore*, as Laodamia came to Protesilaus. In the love of these two was an unsanctified element,¹⁴ as the result of which Protesilaus was fated to die at Troy. For Laodamia married Protesilaus just before he sailed, to Troy on the great military expedition that was to bring death to so many on both sides. "Troy! The very name means death: witness my brother, whose death there has destroyed all joy for me. All Greece went to Troy, and there Laodamia lost Protesilaus, for whom her love was so immeasurably profound. Lesbia's love for me was like that, even if now it has become a bit frayed and wilted." The only point at which the argument falters at all is in the very center, where the reference to Catullus' brother's death sounds like a bleak parenthesis. All the rest is written in a serious but rather placid vein; the poet calmly writes learned variations on the Laodamia exemplum, and amuses himself by retelling the story of Hercules in a style bordering on the grotesque; he tries his hand at a simile drawn from the complications of the Roman law of inheritance, and exercises his wit on the dove figure by turning it end for end. Is all this the work of a man who has been so devastated by his brother's death that "all his joys have perished"? What have his brother's death and his own grief to do with the rest of the tale? Carefully the poet leads us step by step to Troy. We arrive there full of the tale of Protesilaus and the other Greek and Trojan heroes,

and prepared to hear of their death. Then our poet stops short and says, "Oh, yes: incidentally, my brother died at Troy; as I have said elsewhere, 'his death has broken my heart.' And now let us resume. . . ." The very words with which he introduces the passage (*quaene etiam*) show that he meant it to be a parenthesis or afterthought, and this is further substantiated by the fact that the only abrupt transition in the poem occurs at the end of this passage, when after the words of mourning about his brother, he turns back to the theme of the Trojan War (97–100, 101 ff.). It may seem—in fact, it is—very odd to find the central section of a pyramidal poem occupied by a parenthesis instead of by the unifying *sententia* which is normal and virtually necessary at this point.¹⁵ From the points of view of form, content, logic, psychology, and even chronology, the brother passage as it stands in 68*b* is an anomaly. Suppose, now, we omit verses 91–100 from 68*b*.¹⁶ What have we then? By any reasonable literary criteria, we have a much better poem. Verse 90 passes on to 101 without the slightest hitch; the abrupt shift of subject between verse 100 and 101 is avoided. The key passage in our pyramidal poem now consists of vss. 87–90, 101–04, which is completely unified in thought. It begins and ends with Helen and Paris, mentioned first as *casus belli* and second as adulterous lovers. Between the two stands the key *sententia* for which we have been looking: *Troia virum et virtutum omnium acerba cinis* (90). Now 68*b* emerges as a poem written on two levels. On its first, or formal, level, it is a thank-offering to Allius; on its second, or conceptual level, it is a warning to Lesbia of the dangers of an unblessed union. Troy, "of all men and all goodness the bitter ash," should warn her that no depth of passion will compensate for the lack of divine blessing: witness Laodamia; witness Helen. If she will not heed his warning, he will take her on her own terms (135–40), but only in a spirit of resignation, not of joy (147–48). He will hope for the best (160), but his own prayer (77–78) will

always be in his ears.¹⁷ Finally, let us remember that if 68*b* in its original form did not have the brother passage, we are no longer faced with the very difficult, not to say quite insoluble problem of explaining why, when the poet wrote 68*a*, he could *not* write love poetry, and when he wrote 68*b*, he *could*. For, very clearly, by our hypothesis, 68*b* is anterior both to 68*a* and to the poet's brother's death.

How, then, did the brother passage get into 68*b*?¹⁸ Let us consider the circumstances of 68 once more. Manlius has asked Catullus for a *consolatio* in the form of love poetry or something of the kind; Catullus, for old friendship's sake, feels he must do what he can. He writes 68*a*, as a *recusatio*. It then occurs to him, perhaps as he composed the lines about his brother (19–26), that he did have an earlier poem, the general tenor of which might be of some help to Manlius. As he thought over these earlier lines, he saw that he could split the passage on Troy between our present verses 90 and 101, and insert

there a passage about his brother's death, similar to the one he had just written for 68*a*. The thought, *Troia . . . acerba cinis*, would lead very naturally to reflections on his brother's death, and if the transition from his brother's tomb (99–100) back to the Troy of Paris and Helen was a little harsh, it would still do. Now the apologia of 68*a* also becomes the apologia of 68*b*, standing in the same relative position in both poems, explaining in the first case why he can write nothing new, and in the second, why he is offering this verse at secondhand. And, since the brother passage, however "parenthetic" or "anomalous," now occupies the key position in 68*b*, the whole poem becomes an elaboration of the *recusatio* offered in 68*a*. As nearly as may be, the two have been brought into unity, the poetic package is complete, Manlius has his *munera*, and Catullus' obligations are satisfied.

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NOTES

1. "The Structure of the Laodamia Simile in Catullus 68*b*," *CP*, L (1955), 42–46. See also F. della Corte, *Due Studi Catulliani* (Genoa, n. d.), pp. 135–42, and H. W. Prescott, "The Unity of Catullus LXVIII," *TAPA*, LXXI (1940), 473–500. These three studies, which I shall have occasion to cite with some frequency, will be hereafter referred to as "Wohlberg," "Della Corte," and "Prescott."

2. I have adopted these forms of the names, which appear in garbled form in the MSS (see Prescott, p. 494), for the purposes of this discussion. The problem of the names, which is a very real one, will have to be left for later examination.

3. Prescott, pp. 473–77.

4. See especially pp. 138, 140.

5. Vss. 135–48. I do not see why Wohlberg (p. 45) should assert that this "puts the poem in the period which followed their reconciliation," rather than in a much earlier period, i. e., before the first serious break between them. Actually, if we omit the "brother passage" (91–100), as Wohlberg has suggested (*ibid.*), there is no evidence whatever of the date of composition of the poem, other than that it is anterior to or contemporary with 68*a*.

6. 65. 3–4 *nec potis est dulcis Musarum expromere fetus mens animi, tantis fluctuat ipsa malis*; 15–16 *sed tamen in tantis maeroribus, Ortale, mitto haec expressa tibi carmina Battidae*; cf. Della Corte, p. 138.

7. Manlius has lost his lady (5–6); Allius still has his and to all appearances is quite happy with her (155).

8. In 68*a*, Catullus is bitterly unhappy about Lesbia (27–30); in 68*b*, he is disappointed and wistful, but still on acceptable terms with her (135–48).

9. Della Corte suggests that it might have been one of

the few works which Catullus had in his *capsula*. See also Wohlberg, p. 45.

10. Vss. 3–4.

11. Vss. 13–26, 31–32.

12. 12: *neu me odisse putes hospitii officium*.

13. The scheme is of course much more elaborate than this, but no more detail is needed for the purposes of the present study. See Kroll's introductory note to 68, and Wohlberg, pp. 43–45.

14. Vss. 75–76: "nondum cum sanguine sacro/hostia caelestis pacificasset eros"; cf. Wohlberg, p. 43.

15. Wohlberg's comment (p. 45): "Why should he then deliberately destroy the symmetry he had so carefully built up?"

16. Wohlberg, p. 45: "One resolution of this dilemma would be to believe that 68*b* was written first without the lament, and that Catullus himself inserted the lament later. . ."

17. Am I suggesting that Catullus wants Lesbia to marry him? I see nothing fantastic about the suggestion, but consider it unnecessary: to Catullus, with his strange views of his love for Lesbia, formal marriage would probably have seemed superfluous; loyalty (*pietas*) alone would have supplied the needed blessing; cf. Copley, "Emotional Conflict, etc.," *AJP*, LXX (1949), 22–40.

18. Wohlberg (p. 45), following Kroll in his reference to Catullus' promise, 65. 12: *semper maesta tua carmina morte canam*, suggests that the poet might have intended "to attach some lament to any song he was going to write, or to any song he had already written, but which he had not yet published."