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**Michael C. J. Putnam: Poetic Interplay**

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## Introduction

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Horace's only mention of Catullus occurs in the final poem of his first collection, the initial book of *Satires*, published probably in 35 BCE. We come in on the narrator arguing that, for a great poet, particularly one writing in a genre like satire, whatever brings a smile (*ridiculum*) can often put across "mighty matters" better than what is bitter or sardonic (*acri*) (16–19):

illi scripta quibus comoedia prisca viris est  
hoc stabant, hoc sunt imitandi; quos neque pulcher  
Hermogenes umquam legit neque simius iste  
nil praeter Calvum et doctus cantare Catullum.

By this means those who wrote Old Comedy gained success, in this they are worthy of imitation—men whom pretty Hermogenes never reads nor that ape of yours whose skill lies in declaiming nothing except Calvus and Catullus.<sup>1</sup>

What is meant as a rebuke to the *simius*, who has no imagination and can only imitate others, serves equally as a compliment—as the saying has it, the sincerest form of flattery—to Calvus and Catullus, friends who are on occasion linked by later authors. Both were key figures in the group of neoteric poets, the so-called *poetae novi*, active in the middle decades of the first century BCE and writing fresh verse in a variety of meters, often after the manner of Callimachus. Their work set a standard for originality that challenged poets to come, whatever genre they embraced. Put another way, to Horace, publishing his first book of poetry some twenty years after Catullus's death, the earlier master has already become a paragon, worthy of emulation but, for the very reason of his excellence, easily showing up the mediocrity of imitators lacking individual talent.

When we survey the four books of odes that form Horace's lyric masterpiece, we find no immediate mention of Catullus, nor in fact of any earlier, non-epic Roman forebear (at *C.* 4.8.15–20 Horace pays vicarious attention to Ennius for the immortalizing power of his verse). By contrast, on several occasions Horace refers to the poets of archaic Greece as creative ancestors of obvious importance (he names Sappho and Alcaeus at *C.* 2.13.25–27, and the latter again at *C.* 4.9.7). This public bow is reinforced in two ways. First, the meters that bear their names are

the ones that Horace most favors (thirty-seven poems are written in alcaics, two-thirds that number in sapphics). Second, there are frequent instances where Horace begins an ode with a clear gesture toward a poem of Alcaeus via close rendering of the Greek original.<sup>2</sup> We presume that his contemporary readership would have had the privilege, as well as the enjoyment, of testing Horace's genius against the background of the model poems that we now lack nearly completely.

Perhaps the most surprising is the later poet's failure to mention Catullus in poems like *C.* 3.30, where "Horace" takes pride in his achievement, in the initial gathering of three books of odes, published in 23 BCE. In the opening poem of Book 1 he had concluded by mention of the Lesbian lyre (*Lesboum barbiton*, *C.* 1.1.34) as the instrument that Polyhymnia must tune for him, and of his own hoped-for position as one situated among "lyric bards" (*lyricis vatibus*, 35). In *C.* 3.30, the concluding *sphragis*, or "seal" poem, that stamps the poet's "I" on what had gone before, it is Aeolian song (*Aeolium carmen*, 13) that is his boast to have led in triumph to Italian beats. In *Epi.* 1.19, moreover, where he discusses his heritage and accomplishment in more detail, it is to Alcaeus that he specifically turns (*Epi.* 1.19.32–33):

hunc ego, non alio dictum prius ore, Latinus  
volgavi fidicen.

He is the one, not sung before by other lips, that I, the Latin  
lyre-player, have made known.

In the ode, Horace sidesteps the issue by using "chief" (*princeps*, *C.* 3.30.13) rather than "first" (*primus*) to describe his accomplishment, and in *Epi.* 1.19 he reserves the latter adjective to qualify his performance in the *Epodes*, not the *Carmina*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, in neither instance does he take note of Catullus, whether directly or indirectly.

One reason for this lack of public obeisance to Catullus on Horace's part, a reason that may seem superficial to the modern reader but was of importance to the literary world of classical antiquity, is purely technical. It is the question of meter. Because of the prominence of iambic meters among Catullus's so-called polymetric poems, numbers 1–60, Quintilian, the late-first-century CE writer on rhetoric, ranks him among writers of iambic verse. This literary type he distinguishes for its sharpness (*acerbitas*), an abstraction, also bestowed by him upon the satirist Lucilius, that has about it notions of vitriol and anger combined with acuity of wit. Horace alone among Roman authors, according to Quintilian, deserves to be singled out as a lyricist worthy of mention:

at lyricorum idem Horatius fere solus legi dignus; nam et insurgit aliquando et plenus est iucunditatis et gratiae et varius figuris et verbis felicissime audax.<sup>4</sup>

But of the writers of lyric, this same Horace [who also wrote iambic verse in his *Epodes*] is nearly alone worthy to be read. For he both reaches the sublime, at times, and is full of delight and charm, variegated in his figuration and most happily daring in his word choice.

It is as lyricist that we have seen Horace single himself out: he is the “Latin lyre-player” (*Latinus fidicen*) and, according to his later definition at C. 4.3.23, “player on the Roman lyre” (*Romanae fidicen lyrae*). In C. 1.32, a poem I will be looking at in detail, a speaker, whose self-presentation verges on what we would expect from Horace himself, can call on the Greek *barbitos* to sing a Latin song (*Latinum, barbite, carmen*, 3–4).

Therefore, in terms of antiquity’s regular complementarity between meter and genre, Horace is justified in proclaiming his primacy as Latin lyricist, and Quintilian is equally correct not only in singling out Horace as unique among Roman writers of lyric verse, but also in labeling Catullus primarily a writer of iambic poetry. If we look again at Catullus’s polymetric poems, by a large margin the majority of them are written in iambic verse forms. Chief among these are phalaecean (also known as hendecasyllabics), which he employs in some forty poems, followed numerically by choliambic (which also bears the title scazon), the meter of eight poems. There are also scattered compositions (poems 4, 25, 29, and 52) written in variations of straight iambs. Poems couched in meters technically associated with lyric verse make up only a handful of the corpus: two are written in sapphics (11 and 51), one in the so-called greater (or fifth) asclepiadean (30), and three (17 and 34, plus the long first epithalamium, 61) in varying combinations of pherecratean and glyconic lines, a mixture that the poets of archaic Greece also utilized.

If, however, we allow ourselves a broader, more comprehensive definition of lyric that transcends meter—which is to say, at least in part, if we extend our consideration beyond the particularities of a poem’s construction or manner of presentation so as to combine them, to whatever degree, with the matter and content of the poem itself—then the relationship between our two poets takes a different, more universal form. From the start of Greek literature, lyric poetry is indelibly associated with music, as an individual or chorus gives utterance to a combination

of words and sounds. Such a generality is useful in seeking a definition that leaves consideration of topics such as meter in a place of ancillary importance and looks to some combination of emotion and song, of personal sensitivity (often, but by no means always, the product of a speaking “I”) and what the poet makes it into during performance, with a melodic line that can vary from the highly structured, as in the case of classical lyric, to the far freer arrangements of *vers libre*. This is the poetic universe that Horace so brilliantly imagines in *C.* 1.22, his hymn to Lalage, the songstress of la-la, which is to say, to the origins and dynamism of lyric song itself.

Horace himself in the *Ars poetica* sets out the bounds of lyric not in terms of modes of exposition, but of content (83–85):

musa dedit fidibus divos puerosque deorum  
 et pugilem victorem et equum certamine primum  
 et iuvenum curas et libera vina referre.

The muse granted to the lyre to tell of gods and children of gods, of the victorious boxer and horse, first in his contest, and of the trials of youth and wine’s freedom.

If Horace is thinking of his own work and not just of Greek lyric from its beginnings to Pindar, then, unless we extend the range of the final two categories to an inordinate degree, he has unduly, perhaps deliberately, limited the breadth and depth of his own accomplishment.

In itself, a survey of the contents of the two lyric collections, which is to say *Carmina* 1–3, published in 23 BCE, and *Carmina* 4, issued most likely in 13, gives Horace’s summary the lie, if we apply it to his work. But we can also look at its intellectual expanse by another means germane to our topic, namely the ubiquity of Catullus as a presence in his work. We would expect that the lyric Horace, in the adjective’s restricted sense, would be deeply cognizant, and therefore show extensive reflection in his poetry, of the (technically) lyric Catullus. This is indeed the case. Not only the two poems in sapphics (11 and 51) but also the hymn to Diana (34) and the plaint addressed to Alfenus Varus (30) all appear as prominent influences in the *Carmina*. Poem 51, for instance, makes appearances in three of the following chapters.

Nevertheless, his lyric output forms only one segment of Catullus’s poems that Horace allows us to see as among the inspirations for his odes. To put the situation in terms of statistics, in the subsequent pages we will be looking at some thirty-five poems of Catullus and nearly forty-five works of Horace, only a few of which will be outside the lyric corpus. And in spite of what one might be led to conclude from such numbers, it

must be emphasized that neither this study, nor any parallel examination of the interaction between poets, can, or could, make any claims to comprehensiveness. Like the imaginations of the authors themselves, the detailing of what one poet absorbs from another, or of what form or forms this acceptance takes, is an inexhaustible topic.

In the light of what was said above about meter, we must look at these statistics in a more expansive way. As far as his larger influence on Horace is concerned, we will find ourselves tracing the presence of Catullus in all four books of Horace's *carmina*. Though his prominence has a slight edge in Book 1, nevertheless the force of the earlier poet is found exerted as strongly, proportionately, in the fourth book—a point to which I will return in a moment—as it is in any of the three that make up the earlier grouping of odes. Equally important, the types of poem to which Horace makes his references are as varied as the oeuvre itself. We will be watching the appearance of the long, central works of Catullus as well as that of the shorter pieces in diverse meters and of the poems in elegiac couplets that flank them in the larger gathering. Within the polymetric group, though, as we have seen, the poems in strictly lyric meters appropriately made considerable impact on the *Carmina*. Nevertheless, their sway over Horace's imagination in no way predominates over that of the iambic poetry in its several forms. And even within this group, the range is extensive, embracing long-cherished and imitated poems, such as 5 and 7, the addresses to Lesbia on her kisses; 46, on the coming of spring; or 31, on the speaker's return to his beloved Sirmio; as well as many others that have been less influential on later poetry or less subject to critical evaluation.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, whether we are dealing with matter or manner, with mode of presentation or with content, Horace seems to have set no limits on the aspects of Catullus to which he was drawn. Even if he makes no direct mention of him in his lyric work as he does of the poets of archaic Greece, nevertheless he pays him the enormous compliment of accepting into his own the work of his predecessor in its manifold aspects. Though time and again Horace exerts his magic, especially when turning what he has gleaned from Catullus's iambic and elegiac verse into lyric form, and claims for himself what would have seemed indelibly Catullan, it is to the Republican poet across the spectrum of his work, as much as to the singers of Lesbos, that he turned for inspiration.

Meter and genre will also play their part in the essays that follow, especially the final chapter, which opens with segments devoted to the hymn and to its subdivision, the epithalamium. Mostly, however, I have grouped poems within more spacious categories where they seemed naturally to fall. The first chapter, entitled "Time and Place," begins with a look at a poem of Catullus where one word, *angiportum* ("alleyway"),

which the poet uses to locate Lesbia's vulgarity, leads Horace to a meditation on the future effects of the passage of time upon the life of the courtesan Lydia. Catullus's most gripping précis of human life's passing, vis-à-vis external nature's steadiness, occurs in poem 5 and serves as background for several of Horace's masterly meditations on modes of appreciating time. The poems where Catullus most strikingly combines time and place, for example 46, on the arrival of spring in Bithynia, and its effects, as seen in poems 4 and 31, are absorbed by Horace into several odes that center on the idea of journey, whether literal or figurative, experiential or allegorical.

We also follow Catullus in the later poet's contemplation of Virgil's poetic itinerary, of the hazards that confront a youth embarked on love's treacherous seas, or of the ship of state. Likewise we watch how Catullus permeates C. 1.22, a poem ostensibly addressed to the girl Lalage, but in fact concerned with the lyric poet's creative course, embracing his Greco-Roman past and marking the outlines of his own imagination's enterprise. Finally, we turn to Catullus's moving elegy on his brother's death and examine how Horace's remembrances of it are absorbed into an assurance of poetry's power to immortalize.

The imagination and its varied potential is also a central theme of the second chapter, on "Speech and Silence." We begin with a look at *otium* ("leisure") and its variants as forceful presences in the work of both poets. C. 1.32 figures prominently here as a catalyst for a Horatian glimpse at his Alcaic past that also encloses strong allusions to several poems of Catullus. Common use of the greater asclepiadean, as well as another direct acknowledgment on Horace's part of Alcaeus, link Catullus 30 with C. 1.18. Their joint but idiosyncratic reflections on *Fides* form a transition to two poems, Catullus 6 and C. 1.27 respectively, where the need to speak out on one poet's part is answered by the other's witty narrative on the suppression of voice. Finally, we will look closely at a series of interconnected works that deal with wine-bibbing, inspiration, and the particular revelations that come from poems signaling the introductions and conclusions of books.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the figure of Helen, as she takes on various guises in three central odes of Book 1. The Catullan background leads us through a variety of poems, both lyric and invective, extensive and concise, and we return to Horace via a prime example of his own sally into iambic verse, epode 17. The abstraction *otium* is again a unifying presence, and we end once more on the common themes of poetry-making and of the interdependence of bards.

For the fourth chapter we return to Virgil for an examination of the poems specifically addressed to Horace's friend and fellow poet. Though C. 1.3, 1.24, and 4.12 are my primary focus, I also look at other odes

where Horace pursues kindred themes. Once again, Catullus's influence is regularly felt, and here, too, the types of poem on which Horace draws are manifold, and the transformations that he effects are as diverse as the poems themselves. The later poet again moves easily between long poems (61, 68, and especially 64 here make notable appearances), polymetrics, and elegiac verse.

The last chapter looks first at genres that we have not hitherto closely examined. We begin with Catullus's unique hymn, 34, and watch how it and other Catullan poems find presence in six odes of Horace, whether hymns in and of themselves or poems dealing with the performance of hymn, whether parodic of the hymnic form or, in the case of C. 3.13, acting to ennoble its subject through the use of the genre. We examine here more closely Catullus's two epithalamia and how Horace both absorbs and spoofs his predecessor's material. In conclusion, we look at two poems that are without parallel in the Catullan corpus and the collections of Horace. The comparison of Catullus 45 with C. 3.9 will lead us in turn to some general propositions about the relationship between the two masters, in particular about how Horace read Catullus, and therefore about how reading him through Horace's eyes helps us all the more be certain of his own originality.

We noted earlier the catholicity of Horace's borrowings. Our study will also confirm certain familiar themes in the criticism of each author and in the comparison of them. The persona that Catullus tends to present is one for whom intensity, projected by immediate reaction to the present, is paramount. He works often by a form of physical and spiritual metonymy whereby the self seeks to share in, or gain a share of, some other. The first seven poems of the corpus deal with the speaker's book and its dedicatee, with a sparrow and the complex relationship that it suggests with his girl, with a yacht that bore him from Bithynia to his clear lake, and with the arousal and quiescence of the emotion this journey represents. In poems 5 and 7 we watch an enormity of kisses shared between lover and beloved, put into the larger, more universal circumstances of time and space, and, in poem 6, the poet's voice serves as an emanation that unites Flavius and his scandalous girl, just as the sharing of the *libellus*, in the initial poem, wittily reveals both intimacy with, and distance from, the intellectual world of the historian Cornelius Nepos.

We cannot imagine Horace indulging in the interior conversation that is so frequent in Catullus and seems so strong a part of the same intellectual pattern we have been discussing: Catullus addresses his alter ego who is deeply, but more often than not ingenuously, involved in a situation whose portentousness the aloof narrator appears to comprehend and to attempt to explicate. His persona is ever reaching out, proving its

dependency, craving mutuality. However compressed the presentation, dialogue comes naturally to him. His is a world built on analogy, on definition by distinctions from or similarities with others, including a part of himself.

If Catullus works by metonymy, Horace, by contrast, is a poet of metaphor and allegory, in its comprehensive sense. Catullus lives by the actual and the concrete, Horace more in terms of the abstract and symbolic. If we view our two poets broadly by means of some traditional categories, Catullus would appear more the naïve, romantic poet, Horace more classic and sentimental.

The persona projected by Horace is of someone ever in the process of mastering feelings through art, as if writing were a means of gaining distance from emotionality rather than of presenting it and weighing its potential. This sublimation of sexuality, and again I paint with a wide brush, is an aspect of the Horatian impulse to control, in this case to ameliorate Catullus's emotional energy, to smooth over his graphic immediacy. The restraining especially of the destructive among human passions may have its artistic counterpart in the suppression of any direct mention of Catullus in Horace's lyric corpus. And, as if to underscore this propensity, failure to mention Catullus occurs in poems where Horace not only names his Greek predecessors, but also appropriates the earlier Latin poet, sometimes sedulously, for his own purposes.<sup>6</sup>

But none of these differences would be apparent unless Horace's constant references to Catullus helped engage his readers as they shaped their critical responses to his special genius. Indeed, if poetic creativity is a major theme in Horace's work, lyric or otherwise, poetic rivalry is a constant motif beneath its surface. Allusivity asks us to coopt one poetic context into another, so as, in part at least, to foster comparisons between their creators, in whatever direction this complementarity may lead us. The intellectual itineraries on which this act urges us to embark, in contemplating the poetry of Horace with Catullus at our side, are multifarious. Sometimes, as in the case of *C.* 1.22, we find many Catulluses in a single ode; on other occasions, notices of one Catullus poem—I think, for example, of his hymn to Diana (34)—are spread out over a series of adjacent poems in Horace. Catullus is a regular “third party” in a variety of Horatian situations. The later poet, for example, seems to enjoy poking fun at Catullus's apparent high seriousness. This sometimes is a question of genre (the hymn and the epithalamium), sometimes a question only of subject matter, such as the actions of gods and heroic mortals as related in a poem like *C.* 3.27.

Still, it is best to let the poems speak for themselves. But first I would like to point out one further phenomenon, namely the deepening influence of Catullus on the fourth book of odes. With this new invigoration

comes a richer personalizing on Horace's part, a more direct expression of response to emotional situations that draws him closer than ever to his predecessor. Horace offers a very gentle signpost of this heightened Catullan presence in the first poem of the book, as he describes the symptoms he feels in the presence of Ligurinus (C. 4.1.33–36):

sed cur, heu, Ligurine, cur  
 manat rara meas lacrima per genas?  
 cur facunda parum decoro  
 inter verba cadit lingua silentio?

But, alas, why, Ligurinus, why does an occasional tear trickle across my cheeks? Why does my eloquent tongue amid its words fall into a less-than-graceful silence?

Horace is thinking back to “Catullus's” sensations, which he absorbs and varies from his original in Sappho, upon watching Lesbia (51.9–12):

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus  
 flamma demanat, sonitu suoapte  
 tintinant aures, gemina teguntur  
 lumina nocte.

But my tongue grows numb and a slender flame drips under my limbs,  
 my ears ring with their own sound, my eyes are covered with  
 twin night.<sup>7</sup>

And Catullus's mention of “twin night” is picked up by Horace in the phrase *nocturnis . . . somniis* in his immediately subsequent line.

It is fitting that Horace make reference to a poem of Catullus in the programmatic first poem of his final book. For it is in the course of the fourth book, with its extraordinary meditations on the pressures of temporality and the diminution of desire, that Catullus's presence is felt with particular urgency. It is now “we” who are “setting” with a finality that does not pertain to celestial bodies with their rejuvenating powers (C. 4.7.14), just as, for Catullus, it is “we” who only have a brief existence, for life and love, until our light “sets” (5.5).

There would therefore seem to be a more pronounced circling back to his Catullan inheritance on the part of the older Horace, and a more ready willingness to admit his indebtedness to a poet so deeply committed to the moment and to responding to its importunities. Catullus says: seize the day, with its joys and sorrows, and, if you happen to be a poet, ask of your imagination to pose for itself as its primary task the framing of the hour's essence. Aging Horace now says: since time is passing, live

life to the full before it's too late, and capture that sensation, as a reminder of what is to come or as a weapon, enduring for a poem's brief moment, to keep death's inexorability at bay.

We as readers are following our own several forms of chronology. We survey the Catullan corpus (whether or not it was arranged by its author is a problem to which we may never know the answer) just as we follow the carefully constructed sequence of Horace's odes, in each case learning, comparing, and rethinking as we progress. We also move forward in historical time, from the world of Caesar and the late Republic to the Rome of Augustus's early years as *princeps* (*Carmina* 1–3 were published eight years after the decisive battle off Actium in 31 BCE). But, along with our reading forward from Catullus into Horace, as we duly acknowledge how one master surmounts the anxiety of influence his predecessor has provoked, we also work backward with new eyes, and with a deepened sense of admiration for Catullus and his accomplishment. It is this many-layered interaction that is the subject of the pages that follow.