Callimachus in Verona: Catullus and Alexandrian poetry

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Damien P. Nelis

The first poem of Catullus begins with emphasis on smallness (*libellum*, *libelli*), craftmanship (*expolitum*, *doctis*, *laboriosis*) and literary value (*nugas*). Readers have not failed to appreciate that these are also crucially important themes in one of the most influential of all Greek literary texts, the prologue to the *Aetia* of Callimachus, a passage which poses many problems of interpretation but which certainly deals with questions of poetic craft and merit and the use of size as an aesthetic criterion in the evaluation of literature. There is agreement among most scholars that when in addition Catullus' 'little book' is presented as *lepidus*, it is crying out to be judged quite specifically in terms of the Callimachean 'slender Muse' (Μοῦσαν . . . λεπταλέην, *Aetia* fr. 1.23).[1] It seems difficult, therefore, to go against the now well-established and generally accepted idea that Callimachus must play an important role in any attempt to investigate Catullus' poetic art.[2] But how precisely can we define the term 'Callimachean'? And how useful is this term for readers who want to try to appreciate the poetry of Catullus and make sense of its relationship to both Greek and Latin literary traditions? These are difficult questions, but they must be posed.

Poem 65 in the Catullan corpus contains these words (15–16):

> sed tamen in tantis maeroribus, Hortale, mitto
> haec expressa **tibi carmina Battiadae**.

> But despite such great pain, Hortalus, I am sending
> these poems of Callimachus, translated for you.

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[1] See, for example, Syndikus (1984) 72, Wiseman (1985) 183, Holzberg (2002) 12, Batstone (2007) 236, Knox (2007) 157–8. More generally, see Wheeler (1934) 80–6. On the text of Callimachus, fr. 1.11 and the problematic reading αἱ κατὰ λεπτόν, see Lehnus (2006). On the slender Muse of line 23 see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 66–76.

[2] For an excellent survey of the whole question see Knox (2007).

Poem 116 begins thus:

> Saepe **tibi** studioso animo uenante requirens
> **carmina** uti possem mittere **Battiadae** . . .
>
> Often I have sought, like a keen hunter, poems of
> Callimachus that I could send to you . . .

There can be little doubt that the attentive reader is expected to appreciate that there is a connection between these two couplets. In each, and in the same metrical position, Catullus mentions poems of Callimachus, identified as a descendant of Battus.[3] Furthermore, the former poem acts as the introduction to a translation of a section of the *Aetia* in Poem 66, while the first word of the latter poem, *saepe*, translates the first word of the *Aetia*, πολλάκι.[4] The connection will have been even more obvious if Poems 65 and 116 did indeed open and close a Catullan *libellus* of elegiac poems.[5] Whatever one's opinion of that idea, if one accepts that there is a meaningful connection between the two couplets, then it must be obvious that in turn they create a highly marked and obviously very important recollection of the explicitly introductory Poem 1 and its Callimachean credentials.[6]

A great deal of work has gone into investigating these and many other moments of intertextual and intratextual engagement in Catullus and their overall importance for attempts to grasp the structure and thematic coherence of his oeuvre.[7] But once again, difficult questions abound. Was our collection organized by the poet himself or is it the result of editorial work done after his death? Can we be sure that the corpus as we have it can be divided up into three separate books? If we believe we can, what was in each book? Was one of those books entitled *Passer*? Given such uncertainty, is it really possible to establish the significance of intratextual patterns both within each of the *libelli* and between them? Amidst

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[3] The *Suda* states that Battus was the name of Callimachus' father, but the better known figure of that name is the mythical founder of Cyrene: Pind. *Pyth.* 5.55, Hdt. 4.151. The poet himself uses the patronymic at *Ep.* 30.1: 'You are passing by the tomb of Battiades . . .'. For discussion see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 297–9, 464.

[4] See Pontani (1999), Knox (2007) 164. For additional Callimachean elements in 116 see Macleod (1973) = (1983) 181–6, Barchiesi (2005) 334–6.

[5] See Skinner (2003) for a full-scale defence of the thesis that Poems 65–116 form an elegiac *libellus*; note also Hutchinson (2003) = (2008) ch. 5. See Butrica (2007) and Skinner (2007b) for useful surveys of the history of the transmission of the text and the whole question of the arrangement of the collection as a whole; see also Claes (2002), and Gutzwiller and Hutchinson in this volume.

[6] On Callimachean influence and the mention of Battus at 7.6 see Cairns (1973) 19–20.

[7] Since the fundamental study of Wiseman (1985) see, for example, Beck (1996), Claes (2002), Hutchinson (2003) = (2008) 109–30, Hubbard (2005).

the debates surrounding these matters Callimachean poetry and poetics are often invoked as a key part of the argument. In 1985, for example, T. P. Wiseman wrote: 'We can see now . . . how Catullus exploited his readers' knowledge of the *Aetia* at the beginning of all three books of his collection.'[8] At this point it becomes important to emphasize that in recent years research on Hellenistic poetry has brought about some radical changes in the appreciation of Callimachus and of his profoundly influential *Aetia*.

  In 1995, Alan Cameron challenged established and cherished certainties about Callimachus and opened up new ways of thinking about his poetry and its reception. His revisionist interpretations offered new perspectives on a number of much debated issues. Cameron attaches great importance to orality, performance culture and social function in reaction to approaches based on the culture of the book and preconceptions based on the image of the ivory tower and ideas about *l'art pour l'art*. In addition, his radical reinterpretation of the *Aetia* prologue as a text which has little or nothing to do with epic poetry has strongly challenged many traditional readings of many Hellenistic and Roman texts.[9] More recently, S. Stephens has argued that Hellenistic poetry has suffered from being read in terms of purely Greek cultural patterns and that it requires careful study from an Egyptian perspective as well.[10] Her approach depends on a profound process of historicization in relation to Callimachus and his contemporaries, especially Theocritus and Apollonius Rhodius. Concerning the latter, in 1993 R. Hunter had already offered a ground-breaking reading of the *Argonautica* from a Ptolemaic perspective. He draws attention to the central position in the Alexandrian court which the post of Librarian of the Royal Library accorded Apollonius and emphasizes the importance of those aspects of the story which celebrate the successes of Greeks overseas. He also draws attention to contemporary political links between Egypt and the Black Sea and such episodes as that in Book 4 which looks forward to the foundation of Cyrene. As a result, Hunter is able to show how Apollonius' poem can be read as an exploration of the relationship between Alexandria and its Greek past, in both literary and historical terms, and also as relating to the history of the Ptolemaic presence both in North Africa and in the wider Greek world.[11] Along similar lines, M. A. Harder has argued that

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[8] Wiseman (1985) 183.
[9] Cameron (1995); for an excellent discussion of the main issues see Harder (2002). See also Weber (1993), Hose (1997), Strootman (2010) on the social setting and function of Hellenistic poets.
[10] Stephens (2003); note also Koenen (1983), Weber (1993), Selden (1998). Goldhill (2005) is an important review of Stephens, generally sceptical but setting out the issues clearly.
[11] Hunter (1993a) 152–69. His approach has now been extended by Mori (2008).

in his *Aetia* Callimachus engages in complex and profound ways with Greek culture and history viewed from a specifically Ptolemaic perspective. Her approach results in seeing the poem as a serious text whose ideology and function align it with many of the concerns more usually associated with epic and historiography.[12] In addition, M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter have published an excellent general study of Hellenistic poetry which marks a watershed, bringing together the results of the explosion of research which has taken place in the field since the 1980s and setting out the paths which scholars are likely to follow in the decades to come.[13] Their work is remarkable for its highly nuanced readings of generic and intertextual strategies within an overall approach which takes into account the broader cultural context, both in terms of Greek literary history and the Alexandrian setting. Finally, R. Hunter has published a short study devoted entirely to the reception of Callimachus in Latin poetry, one striking feature of which is his discussion of the idea that Latinists have gone too far in their construction of a modernist Hellenistic poetics and that for the late Republican and Augustan poets Callimachus was a classical Greek poet to be studied and imitated in much the same way as any other.[14]

But what does all this work on Callimachus and Alexandrian poetry mean for the study of Catullus? It is the aim of this chapter to outline the issues involved in answering this question by looking in particular at one influential feature prevalent in the research just summarized: the tendency to historicize Hellenistic poetry more firmly than ever before. Fortunately, in recent years, Catullus has been the focus of several general studies and attempts to survey the critical *status quo*, thus facilitating any attempt to get some kind of grip on the scholarly trends of the last sixty years, particularly since the publication in 1959 of K. Quinn's epoch-making *The Catullan Revolution*.[15]

In her recent survey of major themes in Catullan criticism from c. 1950 to 2000, J. H. Gaisser outlines and contextualizes the contribution made by Quinn's study in the light of both earlier and subsequent trends in interpretation. Of particular interest is the connection she makes between

[12] Harder (2003).
[13] Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004); the original Italian version was published in 2002.
[14] Hunter (2006) 1–6, 141–6. A collection of his other work on Hellenistic poetry and its reception may be found in Hunter (2008). Acosta-Hughes (2010a) also calls into question some commonly held assumptions about the originality of Hellenistic poetics.
[15] See, for example, Martindale (1999), Holzberg (2002), Gaisser (2007) and (2009), Skinner (2007a). A second edition of Quinn's book appeared in 1969, reprinted in 1971 and again in 1999 with a new introduction by C. Martindale.

Quinn's use of the idea of 'revolution' and research into the influence of Callimacheanism on Catullus undertaken by Clausen and Ross.[16] For Quinn, the poetry of Catullus marks a real 'change of course' in the history of Latin literature.[17] He is well aware of the difficulties involved in evaluating the precise nature of this change, given the relative paucity of knowledge concerning both earlier and contemporary poetry, but he goes on to attempt to situate it in relation to both the Hellenistic and the Roman background.[18] As for the latter, which is treated in much more detail, he divides it into three strands: the 'epic-tragic' tradition, the 'comic-satiric tradition' and a third 'made up from epigram and the polymetric fragments' of Q. Lutatius Catulus, Porcius Licinus, Valerius Aedituus and Laevius. Subsequently, the whole thrust of Quinn's argument is to emphasize the size of the gap between Catullus and his predecessors. When he turns his attention to Hellenistic poetry, Quinn initially refers to it as a 'great fresh wave' and as 'the new poetry' and 'the new movement'.[19] But his profoundly negative appreciation of the art and style of Hellenistic poetry soon becomes apparent. He refers to a 'disease' in Hellenistic composition, one which came from 'making poetry in a kind of literary laboratory', while an essential element in the Catullan achievement is his simple and direct mode of expression, which is favoured over Alexandrian poetic diction, characterized as 'an odd jumble of worn, pretentious literary archaism'.[20] In the end, Quinn's approach leads him into stating that 'the term Alexandrian, once we become reluctant to accept it as simply pejorative, loses a good deal of its critical significance'.[21] One of the reasons for his adoption of this critical position is his desire to counter the approach which tended to argue that all that was successful in Latin poetry could be put down to the fact that it was based on translation or close imitation of Greek models. While his approach was somewhat novel in the 1950s and was highly promising in opening up new ways of looking at Latin poetry, it led to a failure on Quinn's part to attempt to investigate in any detail the connections between the Greek poetry of the third century and the new Roman poetry of the first century BC. For him, the novelty of the neoterics had to be understood in mainly Roman terms. But this approach was soon to be modified.

In 1964 W. Clausen published his famous paper 'Callimachus and Latin Poetry'. For Clausen, even if his main interest is in Virgil, the idea of some

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[16] Gaisser (2007) 6–15.   [17] Quinn (1959) 4.
[18] Quinn of course owes a very considerable debt to the important study of Wheeler (1934). In turn, Granarolo (1971) builds on Quinn.
[19] Quinn (1959) 5.   [20] Quinn (1959) 59–60.   [21] Quinn (1959) 31.

kind of Catullan revolution in Latin poetry is a given, but he criticizes Quinn for failing to appreciate its fully Callimachean inspiration. And in the bringing of Callimachus to Rome, Clausen gives a key role to Parthenius, about whom he says, 'I do not understand why those who have written recently about the New Poetry make so little of him.'[22] For Clausen, no Latin poet was seriously or inventively interested in Callimachus before the middle of the first century. As a result, the essential element in the evolution of the New Poetry, and so of Catullus, becomes the discovery of Callimachus and his poetics, and that discovery is due to Parthenius, who acts as a teacher and mediator. His main contribution is taken to lie in his detailed explanation of the complexities of Hellenistic poetry, knowledge which could then be applied to the handling of new kinds of subject matter, such as provided in his own *Erotica Pathemata*, addressed to Gallus for use in either his elegies or his *'epos'*, i.e. epyllia. In *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* of 1982, Clausen reworked his earlier study and enshrined its conclusions in two terse statements: 'Of Hellenistic poets the one who meant most to the New Poets was Callimachus . . . ' and 'Callimachus' poetry was brought to Rome by Parthenius of Nicaea, a zealous Callimachean.'[23] The title of the chapter in which these statements appear is 'The new direction in poetry'.

Clausen's brief paper, beautifully written in his own typically elegant and profoundly learned style, and bolstered as it was by the then recent and exhaustive work of Wimmel on the reception of Callimachus in Rome, exercised enormous influence on Latinists.[24] Doubts were expressed about the exact role of Parthenius, but for thirty years no serious objection was mounted against his picture of a Callimachean watershed in Latin literary history.[25] But what exactly did Latinists mean when they said that Catullus was in some sense a Callimachean? And how did the identification of Callimachean elements in Catullus affect interpretation of his poetry? For Clausen himself, poets such as Catullus and his like-minded contemporaries Cinna, Calvus, Cornificius and others were linked to Callimachus by objections to epic poetry and by a kinship which meant they could appreciate 'his experiments with language, his technical refinements, his passion for elegance'.[26] Clausen also identifies as Callimachean those interests pursued

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[22] Clausen (1964) 188. In fact, as has been noted often, Rostagni (1932–33) = (1956) 49–99 had already argued for the importance of Parthenius as a key intermediary between Hellenistic and mid-first-century Roman poetry. On Parthenius see Hinds (1998) 74–83, Lightfoot (1999), Francese (2001).

[23] Clausen (1982) 180 and 184.   [24] Wimmel (1960).

[25] On the role of Parthenius see the doubts expressed by Crowther (1976). His scepticism concerning much of what was becoming established opinion about the new poets in the 1960s had aready been expressed in Crowther (1970).

[26] Clausen (1964) 192–3.

in turn by Euphorion and Parthenius: local legends, aetiology, geography, mythology and the poetic form of the epyllion, which is characterized by interest in obscure mythological allusion, concentration on feminine emotions, the morbid and erotic, and the avoidance of traditional forms of epic narrative.[27] There can be little doubt that work in this vein made a rich contribution to the understanding of the literary texture of Catullan poetry and Latin literary history. However, it quickly became clear to some scholars that use of a critical vocabulary in which the repeated use of such adjectives as 'learned', 'refined', and 'exquisite' to define certain aspects of Catullan style which were taken to be quintessentially Callimachean was of limited critical use, and certain modifications to the broad picture so briefly outlined by Clausen began to appear.

In 1969, D. O. Ross attempted to provide a precise analysis of certain aspects of Catullan language and style in order to try to identify those elements which could be defined as broadly Alexandrian and neoteric. After looking in great detail at such features as the use of compounds and diminutives, the postposition of particles, exclamatory '*A!*' and adjectives in *-osus* and *-eus*, Ross arrived at the conclusion that the collection of epigrams which forms the third group of poems in the Catullan corpus was not indebted to these traditions at all, but was instead to be situated within an entirely Roman poetic tradition. Given the generally accepted idea that the epigram is one of the most characteristic of all Hellenistic genres and the one most quintessentially associated with the ideal of poetic λεπτότης, this is a remarkably surprising proposition. What are we to make of an argument that Catullan epigrams are best read in relation to a Roman poetic tradition when some of them are close imitations of Callimachean models? Whether one agrees with him or not,[28] the material Ross gathered and the unexpected conclusions he reached illustrate perfectly the difficulty of situating Catullus within the traditions of Greek and Roman literary history and deciding exactly what may be usefully described as Callimachean, Hellenistic, Alexandrian or neoteric.[29]

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[27] Clausen (1964) 191.
[28] But note the remarks of Hinds (1998) 78–80, Morelli (2007) 534–41.
[29] Clausen (1964) 187 had already remarked: 'It is a mistake, not uncommon in our literary histories, to employ the terms "Hellenistic", "Alexandrian", "Callimachean" interchangeably'. For Clausen, Roman neoteric poetry is essentially Callimachean. The point is made again in an important contribution by Thomas (1993a) 198–9, emphasizing the pervasive influence of Callimachus in late Republican and Augustan Latin poetry and attempting to define Callimacheanism (specifically in relation to Virgil) in terms of a liking for certain kinds of poetic structure, tropes and word-play, learning, tone, metapoetics, intertextuality, ambiguity and ideology. On the last of these elements and the tendency to accord more importance to Callimachus' poetics than to his politics see Heyworth (1994), Nelis (2005).

Subsequently, in 1978, in an important and influential contribution, R. O. A. M. Lyne attempted to identify precisely a coterie of neoteric poets and their shared poetic interests, producing strong arguments against those who refused to believe in the existence of a group of poets who could be associated with Cicero's reference to the *neōteroi* in a letter to Atticus in 50 BC (*Att.* 7.2.1).[30] Despite the arguments of some sceptics, it is indeed very hard to believe that, when Cicero on three different occasions refers to *neōteroi*, *poetae noui* and *cantores Euphorionis*, he does not have in mind a group of poets active in the middle of the first century BC who could be characterized by certain shared stylistic traits and tastes in Greek models.[31] For Lyne it is not epigrams or short polymetric poems of an erotic or satiric nature but rather the epyllion, as exemplified by Catullus 64, which is the defining element of their originality in Roman terms and of their debt to Hellenistic traditions. Lyne goes on to argue that Poems 61–66 are a distinctly Callimachean group, since they are all, in one way or another, experiments in narrative form. He sees them as reactions to the way in which Callimachus developed alternatives to epic, alternative ways of structuring narrative forms and retelling mythic stories. It is, then, Callimachean experimentation with the epyllion, a form of 'perversely ingenious alternative epos', that becomes the crucial element in the definition of Catullan and neoteric Callimacheanism.

More recently, M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter have considered anew the longer poems of Catullus in relation to Callimachean and other Hellenistic models.[32] Situating Catullus within a survey of Roman strategies of engagement with Hellenistic poetry, their reading demonstrates the sophistication of Catullan techniques. For them, Poem 66 is not simply a translation of the *Coma Berenices*; it is also a poem which reflects on the act of translating Callimachus as just one approach among others to the whole project of creating in the Latin literary tradition texts to rival the Greek classics. And some of these other approaches are in fact tried out by Catullus in other poems. As such, the famous translation of Sappho in Poem 51 should be set alongside Poem 66, but without putting any emphasis on periodization: Catullus is not imitating first an archaic model and then a Hellenistic exemplar; instead he is thinking about Greek literature as a continuum by tracing Hellenistic poetry back to its Archaic and Classical roots. In turn, he is also reflecting on the various ways in which Roman poets react to the

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[30] See Lyne (1978) against (e.g.) Crowther (1970).
[31] See Hollis (2007) 1–2; for a more sceptical position see Tuplin (1979), Courtney (1993/2003) 189–91.
[32] Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 467–85.

Greek literary classics.[33] One of the most telling features of the approach of Fantuzzi and Hunter is the way in which they offer elucidation of precise moments of intertextual engagement while also paying close attention to matters of genre, literary history and the wider cultural context. Their rich interpretations lead to the realization that the term 'Callimachean' is most useful only when one can show beyond reasonable doubt that Catullus was actually writing with a specific Callimachean text in mind. Furthermore, the ways in which they elucidate intertextual patterns, for example the presence of Apollonius Rhodius in Poem 63 as well as in Poem 64,[34] provide an excellent illustration of the limitations involved in use of the more general term 'Hellenistic' and of how over the years it may even have hindered the appreciation of the influence of specific models.

One thing above all should be clear from the above discussion: in the period during which Callimachus became a central name in Catullan studies, Callimacheanism was defined in terms of the choice of certain kinds of subject matter and certain technical and stylistic features. Little attention was devoted to Callimachus as a court poet or to the many ways in which his poetry is quintessentially Ptolemaic in outlook. But these are exactly the aspects of Callimachean studies which have come to the fore in recent years. Today, Callimachus is no longer read purely as a poet who wrote only for a small and learned intellectual elite within the Museum, nor as a poet worth reading only for a small number of influential texts marked by polemical opinions about literature. Instead, he is seen as a poet who also engaged in many different ways with the political and cultural milieu in which he lived and worked. The fact that significant sections of his output contain poems addressed to the Ptolemies is now allowed its full significance in the interpretation of his poetry as a whole. The question then has to be asked: did Catullus read Callimachean poetry with an eye to its political aspects as well as to its poetics? It will be useful to begin by looking at the political nature of Catullan poetry.[35]

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The Catullan corpus as a whole contains a significant number of poems which may be described as broadly political. The brilliant work of T. P. Wiseman, culminating in his 1985 study *Catullus and his World*,

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[33] Cf. Farrell (1991) ch. 7, esp. 276–8, Hinds (1998) 74–83 for important discussions of the ways in which the idea of a clear-cut neoteric revolution in Roman literary history must be carefully deconstructed. On the multi-layered intertextual relationship involving Sappho, Callimachus and Catullus see Acosta-Hughes (2010b) 62–104.

[34] Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 480–5.

[35] For an excellent survey of this question see Konstan (2007); important too for the broader intellectual and social context are Feldherr (2007) and Tatum (2007).

both put an end to the simplistic characterization of Catullus as just a love poet and allowed subsequent research to investigate through various approaches the relationship between the erotic poems and the rest of the corpus, the socio-historical setting the poems create and the ways in which elite Roman audiences are likely to have encountered and interpreted his work.[36] No matter how we divide up the surviving poems, the fact remains that a reading of the Catullan corpus as a whole, in whatever order, offers readers a picture of Roman society from a number of perspectives. Detailed study of Catullan language has demonstrated that his choice of vocabulary is often double-edged, with key words having both a literary and a more broadly social significance. As is well known, Catullus speaks of his erotic relationship with Lesbia as a *foedus* and employs the vocabulary of *amicitia* and *urbanitas* in describing its course and the social milieu in which it evolves. In doing so he is exploiting in highly insightful and complex ways the language and ideology of social performance employed by the Roman elite.[37] As a result, the reader of the corpus as a whole is drawn into the reconstruction of a love affair in a particular cultural moment, i.e. mid-first-century Italy. It is this period, with the evocation of its protagonists, its codes of behaviour and its historical problems and discourses, which is set up in the poems as the background for Catullus' acts of social performance as a lover, poet, satirist, friend, enemy, man or brother. To read Catullus is to bring vividly to life the image of a young Transpadane provincial making his way in Rome and its empire while offering caustic comment on the behaviour of its elite in many spheres of activity. This act of reading also brings to life the voice of a profoundly Hellenized commentator on Roman poetry. Just as the social or political vocabulary can shed a particular light on the poetics of this new voice and in particular of its erotic narratives, so the unfolding erotic plots are also to be related on different levels and in different ways to the political setting and the representation of social *mores* as a whole. As a result, words and actions which on their first usage seem to belong to a particular sphere or register subsequently turn out to be much more complex. To take a very well known example, the adjective *lepidus* applied to the new book in the first line of the opening poem is subsequently used of kinds of behaviour (e.g. 36.10), thus converting the apparently purely poetic term into one with a social force and making it

[36] Cf., for example, Fitzgerald (1995), Tatum (1997), Krostenko (2001), Nappa (2001), Wray (2001), Tatum (2007) and the helpful survey of Skinner (2007a) 1–4.
[37] This approach has now culminated in the work of Krostenko (2001), which is summarized in Krostenko (2007).

necessary to link the two registers and to think about their interactions.[38] As a result of this use of language, the evocation of a literary heritage, via allusion to Callimachus, and the use of contemporary Roman discourses about acceptable forms of social behaviour go hand in hand.[39] And so, in the end, it is not always possible to separate entirely engagement with Callimachus and engagement with the contemporary political scene. It thus becomes necessary to contextualize the literary-historical and the erotic elements in Catullan poetry by relating them to the intense, politically engaged reflection on Roman society of the mid-first century BC which his work as a whole also provides. Overall, the erotic strain in Catullus' work should be seen as subservient to his broader social and political concerns and the vision of the Roman world he constructs.

Like the poetic output of the Alexandrian poets, therefore, the Roman new poetry cannot be reduced to the simple idea of *l'art pour l'art*; it is not the product of poets sealed in an ivory tower cut off from the sordid realities of power and violence. Rome's engagement with Alexandrian Greek poetry and her encounters with the real world of Greek politics are both part of the same complex process, and so neotericism has to be considered within a long and ongoing Roman debate about the processes of the Hellenization of Rome and indeed also of the Romanization of Italy.[40] Furthermore, it must never be forgotten that Alexandrian poetics evolve not in a vacuum but in a world in which Rome and Alexandria were involved in a complex political relationship.[41] Therefore, if the epyllion is indeed the key feature in the definition of Roman Alexandrianism or neotericism, as argued by R. O. A. M. Lyne, then it is not surprising that it may be in Poem 64 that Catullus offers his readers a most ambitious and profound meditation about contemporary Roman politics. Is it in the quintessentially idiosyncratic experiment in epic narrative form offered by this remarkable poem that he invites his readers to think about the relationship between the Roman west and the Greek east, within the wider context of Roman imperialism and the crisis engulfing the Republic during the turbulent decade of the 50s BC?[42]

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[38] It is of course recognized that via the dedication to Cornelius Nepos the first poem in its own right enacts a shift from the poetic to the historical and creates a parallel between the two, and indeed to historiography also: see, for example, Cairns (1969), Rauk (1997), Tatum (1997), Woodman (2003), Konstan (2007) 84–5.

[39] See in general Krostenko (2001) 246–57.   [40] Hinds (1998) 74–83.

[41] See Heilporn (2010).

[42] Poem 63 is also highly relevant to this approach, but the focus here will be on Poem 64. For a Roman reading of Poem 63 see Nauta (2005) and for discussion of the links between the two poems see

As is well known, Catullus 64 is remarkable for its complex handling
of narrative structure. It opens with the departure of Jason and the Argo
for Colchis before abruptly turning to focus on the wedding of Peleus and
Thetis and then going on to concentrate on the description of a cover-
let placed on their wedding couch. On this *uestis* was depicted Ariadne,
watching Theseus sailing away from the island of Naxos. The description
of the actual decoration leads on to the evocation of the whole background
story involving Athens, Theseus, Ariadne, the Minotaur and Aegeus, before
returning to the situation on Naxos and the arrival of Bacchus. Finally, the
narrator returns to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and looks forward
to the birth and career of their son, Achilles, before ending with a reflec-
tion on the relationship between the age of heroes, in which the narrative
action of the poem is set, and the contemporary Roman world. The full
meaning of this closing shift has caused a great deal of discussion and
provoked much disagreement, but most scholars are now at least agreed
that appreciation of the poem as a whole depends on the interpretation of
its closing lines and their evocation of the contemporary scene.[43] There is
also general agreement that this is a work of astounding formal complexity
in its handing of narration, ecphrasis and speech and that in its concen-
trated appropriation of many features of Hellenistic narrative modes and
experiments, particularly in its use of Callimachus' *Hecale* and *Aetia* and
Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, it is a highly self-conscious declaration
of literary kinship.[44] But while all these aspects of the poem have received
a huge amount of attention, another possible layer of the poem's meaning
requires further study.

D. Konstan has recently written the following in relation to Poem 64,
as part of an attempt to situate Catullan poetry as a whole in its wider
political context:[45]

> The conquest of the sea . . . , the expedition to far Pontus, the extraordinary
> opulence of Peleus' villa, the reminiscence of a bygone age of valor already
> tainted by opportunism, the moral corruption of the present, and the evo-
> cation of a future war in Troy, with violence and destructiveness parading as
> heroism – might this not reflect Catullus' feelings toward the father-in-law
> and son-in-law who had ruined the entire world in the pursuit of wealth
> and power?

Fantuzzi-Hunter (2004) 477–85. For political readings of the decision to offer a translation of the
Coma Berenices to Hortensius in Poem 66 see Konstan (2007) 82–3 and Du Quesnay in this volume.

[43] Putnam (1961), Curran (1969), Bramble (1970), Konstan (1977), Fitzgerald (1995) and Schmale
(2004) are landmarks in the study of the poem.

[44] On Poem 64 as a translation or close adaptation of a Greek model or models, see Nuzzo (2003)
24–5.

[45] Konstan (2007) 80.

Konstan is perfectly aware that by reading the poem as a political allegory and bringing Pompey and Caesar into the picture, he is indulging in speculation and he admits to expecting that many will find his ideas fanciful.[46] Nevertheless, he has proposed a fascinating way of looking at the text, and put forward attractive arguments in support of it.[47] The key question, then, is this: if recent research has successfully historicized the work of the great literary masters of the Hellenistic period, especially Callimachus and Apollonius Rhodius, how does this approach fit with current approaches to interpreting the influence of these same poets on Catullus? Is it still possible to concentrate only on attempting to delineate the history of particular poetic strategies, while ignoring the historical context? When Catullus read Callimachus and Apollonius, did he appreciate in their poetry only the experiments in narrative form, obedience to certain metrical rules, their artful choice of erudite vocabulary, attention to questions of euphony and structure, the use of obscure myths and complex intertextual allusion to earlier poetry? Or did he also see that their poetry, even when it seemed only to recount stories from the distant world of Greek myth, actually dealt in various ways with the realities of contemporary Ptolemaic power in Egypt, with questions of patronage and influence, of politics and morality, of national identity and, in the broadest sense, of the course of Greek history and of the place of Greeks in the wider Mediterranean world?

   Some approaches to this question have failed to win wide assent. Although there is no doubt that Roman readers were perfectly capable of spotting allegorical allusion to contemporary events in mythical narratives,[48] few scholars have believed L. Herrmann's suggestion that Peleus and Thetis at the opening of Poem 64 represent Pompey and Julia and that Poem 64 was written to celebrate the imminent birth of their child (represented in the poem by Achilles) in 54 BC. Similarly, few have accepted his idea that the description of Peleus as *Thessaliae columen* at 64.26 and *Emathiae tutamen* at 64.324 could also be seen as referring to Pompey.[49] Certainly, no allegorical reading can be applied to the text as a whole, and many of Herrmann's arguments are, by any standards, wildly

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[46] Pompey and Caesar became related when the former married the latter's daughter Julia in 59 BC; see Seager (1994) 96.

[47] Konstan (2007) elegantly summarizes the viewpoint that the political context evoked by the poems is that of 59–54 BC and that Catullus' poetry as a whole, including the erotic texts, offers a complex and profound reflection on Roman imperialism and morality in these years.

[48] See McNelis (2007) 2–5 on 'Greek myth and Roman realities'.

[49] See Herrmann (1930) and also the discussion of his arguments by Konstan (1977) 101–3. Konstan (2007) 79–80 is the most up-to-date statement of this position; see now also Hardie in this volume.

speculative.[50] But there are other ways of approaching the text which may perhaps help to set these issues in a wider perspective and at least promote further discussion of an approach which, if there is anything to it, is obviously of primordial importance for the understanding of the nature of Catullan poetry.

As already noted, Poem 64 begins with the Argonauts, before veering off in quite striking fashion to recount other stories. Recent scholarship has gone a long way toward elucidating the central importance of the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius as a key model of Catullus, both in relation to the opening description of the Argo and to the stories of Peleus and Thetis and Ariadne and Theseus which follow. There can be little doubt that Catullus composed 64 with the *Argonautica* constantly in mind.[51] But did he read the *Argonautica* as a political poem which uses the story of the Argonauts to think about the situation of Greeks in Egypt and explore the cultural relationship between Ptolemaic Alexandria and the Greek past? Certainly, important aspects of the influence of Apollonius on Virgil's *Aeneid* can be put down to this political or cultural interpretation of the Hellenistic epic.[52] And since Catullus 64 is also a model in sections of the *Aeneid* in which Apollonius is a central model, especially the Dido episode, it seems worth asking whether Apollonius may have been read by Catullus in much the same way as by R. Hunter and Virgil.[53] This approach has in fact already been applied to another version of the Argonautic saga written (on traditional datings) several years after Poem 64. Both A. Arcellaschi and D. Braund have independently connected Varro Atacinus' translation of Apollonius Rhodius to Rome's eastern policies in the mid-40s BC, the essential point in the argument being that the period in which Julius Caesar was planning a massive military campaign against Parthia must have seemed a suitable one in which to indulge in a Latin translation of a famous poem recounting the successful adventures of Greek heroes in the eastern Mediterranean.[54]

As far as the thematic coherence of Catullus 64 is concerned, several scholars have in fact already pointed out that there are important

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[50] He argues, for example, that Daphnis in Virgil's ninth *Eclogue* represents Catullus, whom Virgil, as Menalcas, is exhorting to write about the Caesar and the *sidus Iulium*. He even suggests that the wedding couch of Julia and Pompey was decorated with the story of Ariadne and that the regal treasure of Peleus (*regali . . . gaza*, 64.46) corresponds to the royal treasure of Mithridates.

[51] See DeBrohun (2007) for an excellent survey, with full bibliography. Nuzzo (2003) is admirably alive to the importance of Apollonius throughout.

[52] Hunter (1993a) 170–89, Nelis (2001) 393–402.

[53] See Hardie in this volume. On Virgil's Dido and Catullus 64 see Cairns (1989) 146–7.

[54] See Arcellaschi (1990) 212–19, Braund (1993). On the fragmentary remains of the *Argonautae* see Hollis (2007) 196–211; note that he down-dates the poem from the mid-40s, to which it is traditionally assigned, to 'soon after 40 BC'.

connections between the poem's Argonautic opening and its closing move-
ment in which the mythical world is brought into direct relation to the
Roman present.[55] The complexity of the poem as a whole has, however,
provoked considerable disagreement over the precise nature of the relation-
ship between the heroic past and the corrupt and violent picture of the
present. While there is on one level an obvious overall trajectory tracing
moral decline, Catullus simultaneously seems to see the past both in ide-
alized terms as a time when true harmony reigned on earth and as a time
when the world was already corrupt.[56] As has been pointed out repeatedly,
lines 50–1, which declare that the artwork on the coverlet represents the
heroum . . . uirtutes, must provoke a strong sense of irony, given that the
uestis in question depicts Theseus' desertion of Ariadne, which is hardly an
obvious example of heroic *uirtus*, whatever his other achievements.

One obvious parallel between the opening of the poem and its close
helps to explain in part why Catullus chose to begin with the Argo and
how this beginning fits into the thematic unity of the text as a whole. At
line 381 the song of the Parcae ends and, as the narrator moves into his
finale, we read (382–5):

> talia praefantes **quondam** felicia Pelei
> carmina diuino cecinerunt pectore Parcae.
> praesentes namque **ante** domos inuisere castas
> heroum . . .

> foretelling such things long ago, for Peleus
> the fates sang joyous songs with all-seeing mind.
> For in earlier times the gods in person came to visit
> the holy homes of heroes . . .

Catullus goes on to contrast this period, in which gods and mankind
mingled freely on earth, with the corruption of a subsequent period of
estrangement (398):

> sed **postquam** tellus scelere est imbuta **nefando** . . .

> but after the earth was stained with frightful crime . . .

And finally he relates this *nefas* directly to 'us', i.e. to contemporary Romans
(405–6):

> omnia fanda **nefanda** malo permixta furore
> iustificam **nobis** mentem auertere deorum.

> all right and wrong caught up in mad folly
> turned away from us the just attention of the gods.

Just as the *quondam* of line 382 recalls the poem's opening line (*Peliaco quondam prognatae uertice pinus*), this evocation of the fall of humanity from an earlier state of bliss is in fact a reworking of a central theme of the whole opening section of the poem. The launch of the Argo in antiquity was frequently represented as a key moment in the breaking down of natural barriers leading to humanity's loss of the peace and security of the Golden Age.[57] Right from the beginning, therefore, Catullus' narrative deals with the theme of moral decline, thus establishing a direct connection between the description of the first sailing of the Argo and the grim depiction of both heroic and human violence and terror which brings the poem to a close. Of itself this thematic and structural connection need not invite any more precise allegorical reading of the Argonautic section, but it does create a link within the poem's narrative logic between the myth of the Argo and the contemporary Roman scene, a parallel which suggests that some further aspects of the myth must also be considered before a fully informed interpretation of its role in the poem is possible.

<div align="center">*</div>

The myth of the Argonauts came to Catullus with a rich literary history going all the way back to Homer. At *Odyssey* 12.70 the story is already famous and the Argo well known to everyone (Ἀργὼ πᾶσι μέλουσα).[58] The epic tales of both Jason and Odysseus, whatever their mythic origins in earlier substrata of Indo-European story-telling, became involved in patterns of Greek thinking about colonization.[59] One result of this process is that the myth came to be used to deal with narratives of cultural origins, history and identity.[60] Admittedly, the highly fragmentary remains of the earliest Greek versions of the Argonautic saga make interpretation of the cultural and political use of the myth difficult, but some points can be made.[61]

   Among the meagre and scattered fragments of early versions of the Argonautic saga, Eumelus' *Corinthiaca* stands out as an example of Corinthian myth-making using aspects of the story in order to fill in the origins of the city and the history of its kingship. Corinth was of little importance in traditonal epic myth and is hardly mentioned in Homer (only *Il.* 2.572 and 23.299). Therefore, a mythical history having to be

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[57] See Bramble (1970) 35, Feeney (2007) 123–7. On Argo as the first ship see Jackson (1997) = (2004) 57–65, O'Hara (2007) 34–41.

[58] See West (2005). He argues that Homer's Laestrygonians, Sirens, Helios, Circe, the Clashing Rocks and the descent to Hades are all borrowed from the Argonautic saga.

[59] See in general Malkin (1998).

[60] See Dougherty (1993), Calame (2003), Stephens (2003) ch. 4.

[61] For surveys of the early Argonautic tradition see Braswell (1988) 6–23, Dräger (1993) ch. 1.

constructed, Eumelus has Aeetes as first King of Corinth and afterwards of Colchis. The Corinthians subsequently invite Jason and Medea to Corinth from Iolcus, marking a return of the original ruling family. Whatever the historical details involved, it is easy to see how travelling heroes were extremely useful for myth-makers seeking to trace in poetic form their city's origins back to a heroic past and in doing so to provide justification for contemporary power structures.[62]

It is Pindar who provides our first example of the telling of the myth of the Argonauts in a complete surviving poem. The myth occurs in the Fourth Pythian, a poem for Arkesilas of Cyrene, victor in the chariot race in 462 BC. The real motive for the composition of the poem is to be found in contemporary political conditions in Cyrene. Herodotus (4.172–7) records challenges to Battiad rule in the 520s BC and in lines 270–6 Pindar clearly reveals the serious threats faced by Arkesilas, before going on to support the recall of the exiled Demophilus. The essential link between the political situation and the myth comes from the fact that the Battiadai claimed the Argonaut Euphemus as one of their ancestors. Medea explains in the opening section of the poem how Euphemus had received a clod of earth from Triton near Lake Tritonis in Libya. This clod is brought to Thera, from where Cyrene was much later colonized. Pindar's plea for the monarchy runs thus: by divine will, the Euphemids were chosen to become kings of Cyrene and by divine will their rule has continued. The basis for this approach is to be found in the myth of the Argonauts, their adventures in North Africa and specifically the presence of Euphemus among them.

As told by Apollonius Rhodius, in direct and consistent interaction with Pindar's version, the same story occurs near the end of the *Argonautica* (4.1731–64). Once again, a mythical narrative about Greeks in Cyrenaica obviously interacts with contemporary concerns, the context on this occasion being relations between Cyrene and Alexandria and Magas and the Ptolemies. So close is the connection between the two poems in dealing with the Argonauts and the founding of Cyrene that for Pindar and Arkesilas we can read Apollonius and Ptolemy Philadelphus, as the story of Euphemus and the clod is used in both poems to provide the mythic background to current political contexts involving the presence of Greeks in North Africa.[63] Subsequently, in different ways and with different emphases, Susan Stephens and Anatole Mori have both argued persuasively for the obvious contemporary relevance of the Argonautic saga

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[62] For discussion see West (2002), with down-dating to the sixth century and a *terminus post quem* of 582 BC.

[63] See Hunter (1993a) 152–3, 167–8.

in Ptolemaic Alexandria.[64] Overall, the remarkable popularity of the story of the Argonauts in the Hellenistic period (Callimachus and Theocritus also deal with various parts of the story, for example) can be put down to the fact that it clearly spoke on several levels to Greeks living in Alexandria and it thus became a central element in the ways in which a series of poets depicted the Greek past from a contemporary Ptolemaic perspective.

Most frustratingly, we are not in a position to appreciate fully the role the myth played in the *Aetia* of Callimachus. Apollonius' version is influenced to an unknowable extent by that of Callimachus, and the wider issue of how the Argo story operated within the *Aetia* as a whole is an interesting question which merits more detailed study than it has received. As far as we can tell from the fragmentary remains, Argonautic episodes appeared near the beginning and end of the four-book version of the poem, and the myth, strongly marked as a pre-Homeric story in terms of mythical chronology, may well have played an important role in Callimachus' handling of history and geography in the poem as a whole.[65] As an example of the kind of connection we could possibly make if we knew more about the *Aetia*, one need only reflect on Feeney's observation that the status of King Minos as 'the first thalassocrat' is an important issue in Catullus 64 and that it is 'not casually introduced: the penalty of human sacrifice that Theseus sails to halt is one that was imposed on Athens by Minos during an imperial punitive expedition'.[66] In his very first aetiological story, Callimachus dealt with the career of Minos. One early fragment (6 Massimilla = 4 Pf.) informs us that Minos 'stretched a heavy yoke on the neck of the islands' and the Florentine scholia inform us that Callimachus also mentioned the death of Androgeos. In introducing the story of Theseus in Poem 64 did Catullus allude to the Callimachean use of the myth of Minos in the first book of the *Aetia*? We will probably never know, but the possibility is intriguing. If Minos played an important role in the poem's construction of historical narratives and its handling of past, present and future time seen from a Ptolemaic perspective, then Catullus' opening of Poem 64 with first the Argonauts and then Theseus may perhaps be seen in a new light.[67] Could its opening scene also be seen as conveying contemporary political significance for Rome's role in, and relations with, the wider Mediterranean world?

Consistently, therefore, Greek writers from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period use the story of the Argonauts to reflect on politics and history, on the links between present and past, on the questions of origins, traditions

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[64] See Stephens (2003) ch. 4, Mori (2008).   [65] On which aspects see Harder (2003).
[66] Feeney (2007) 125.   [67] On Minos in the *Aetia* see Harder (2003) 296–7.

and cultural change.[68] When we encounter the Argonauts in Latin litera-
ture, it is not surprising, as we have seen, that scholars have suggested the
presence of similar resonances in the *Argonautae* of Varro Atacinus.[69] Those
looking for the possible relevance of the Argonautic opening of Catullus
64 to the contemporary Roman world should take into account, therefore,
that Catullus has chosen a myth which was already heavily politicized in
both Greek and Roman authors.[70] As we have observed, every writer who
uses it seems in one way or another to see in it a story that can convey reflec-
tions on cultural origins and identities, the processes of historical change
and political power. To write about the Argonauts is to engage inevitably
with ideas about history and culture and so the myth frequently became a
medium for reflecting on particular moments in history, be it in Corinth,
Cyrene, Alexandria or Rome.

One obvious problem confronts any attempt to probe further in search
of more precise topical allusion in the use of the Argo myth in Catullus
64, and that is the question of the dating of the composition of the poem.
There seems to be general agreement that the situation Catullus evokes in
his poems as a whole fits well with the period following the formation in
59 BC of what is often called the First Triumvirate. Certainly, the famous
and vicious attack on Caesar and Pompey in Poem 29 is usually dated
to late 55 or early 54.[71] As already mentioned, Konstan has gone on from
such indications to argue that the corpus as a whole evokes the politics of
the 50s BC, during which the appetites of Caesar and Pompey for military
conquest and political power in Rome came to dominate the political
scene.[72] If this is indeed the case, is there anything in Poem 64 which could
invite the contemporary reader to connect the mythic elements to current
events?

One piece of evidence may be provided by the possibility that a near-
contemporary Roman reader may have sensed the presence of connections.
It is well known that Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* is a poem that deals explicitly
with a precise historical moment in Rome's history, the year of Pollio's
consulship in 40 BC and, in all probability, with the marriage of Antony
and Octavia.[73] Scholars have frequently noted that *Eclogue* 4 owes much
to Poem 64.[74] In general terms, where Catullus depicts humanity's loss of

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[68] In general on Rome and the myth of the Argonauts see Fabre-Serris (2008) 163–223.
[69] See p. 14 above. Cf. Leigh (2004) for historicizing readings of Roman Comedy.
[70] For a detailed allegorical reading of Valerius Flaccus' epic in relation to Flavian Rome see Taylor
(1994).
[71] Note however Newman (1990) 181, who is tempted by a date c. 46 BC.
[72] Konstan (2007).   [73] See Clausen (1994) 121–2.
[74] See for example Fabre-Serris (2008) 177–9, Hardie in this volume and Trimble (forthcoming).

conditions which are associated with the Golden Age, Virgil offers glimpses of their possible return. And, quite specifically, he refers to the voyage of the Argonauts in charting the stages of that return, doing so by borrowing Catullan language (*Ecl.* 4.26–35):[75]

> at simul **heroum** laudes et facta parentis
> iam legere et quae sit poteris cognoscere **uirtus**,
>
> . . .
>
> pauca tamen suberunt priscae uestigia fraudis,
> quae temptare **Thetin** ratibus, quae cingere muris
> oppida, quae iubeant telluri infindere sulcos.
> alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae uehat **Argo
> delectos heroas**.
>
> But as soon as you learn to read the praiseworthy
> deeds of heroes and the achievements of your
> father and understand what virtue is
>
> . . .
>
> however, a few traces of former deceit will remain,
> which may drive mankind to risk sailing the sea
> in ships, encircle cities with walls and plough the
> earth. Then there will be another Tiphys and a
> new Argo to carry chosen heroes.

In these lines, the period during which the Argo sailed is associated explicitly with *fraus*, while the subsequent disappearance of the art of sailing will mark the return of peace and security, thus inverting the Catullan evocation of the association between the sailing of Argo and the end of the Golden Age. It is of course possible to read Virgil's use of Poem 64 in purely literary terms, but it is worth considering whether Virgil may have seen in Catullus the trace of a political subtext. The similarities in detail between the two poems may make sense only when it is realized that each evokes an important dynastic marriage intended to bring stability to Roman politics – that between Pompey and Julia in 59 BC and that between Antony and Octavia in 40 BC. In a similar vein, it could also be pointed out that a parallel relationship may exist between another famous Virgilian episode, the Aristaeus story in *Georgics* 4, and Poem 64. It is clear that Virgil's account of the story of Aristaeus and Orpheus, often characterized as an epyllion, is in many ways indebted to Poem 64.[76] This being the case, it should be noted that some scholars have seen in this section of *Georgics* 4 a political allegory, within which the Virgilian *fabula* can be read as commenting on the political situation involving Octavian, Antony and Cleopatra in the

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[75] Cf. *lecti*, 64.4; *heroes*, 64.23; *uirtutes*, 64.51; *Thetis*, 64.19–21.   [76] See Crabbe (1977).

late 30s BC.[77] Once more, Greek myth and Roman realities have been con-
nected, and once again Catullus 64 seems to be an important element in the
intertextual mix. Yet further passages of Virgil, in which less attention has
been paid to the use of Catullus, may provide further evidence. And once
again, in the two passages in question Virgil is dealing with contemporary
history.

Scholars have often pointed out the parallels between the two remark-
able passages which close the first and second books of the *Georgics*.
In each, Virgil reflects on the horrors of Roman civil war. At the end
of Book 2 the reference is of a general nature, when he contrasts the
peace and simplicity of Rome's origins (2.532–5) with its contemporary
chaos (2.539–40):

> **necdum** etiam audierant inflari classica, **necdum**
> impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis.
>
> not yet had they heard trumpets sound, not yet
> the clang of swords hammered on hard anvils.

This image recalls directly the end of the first book, where Virgil had
mentioned the horrors of Philippi and perhaps also those of Pharsalia
(1.489–90):

> ergo inter sese paribus concurrere telis
> Romanas acies iterum uidere Philippi
>
> therefore Philippi again saw Roman forces
> with the same weapons clash with each other

before going on to lament world-wide strife (505–8):

> quippe ubi fas uersum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem,
> tam multae scelerum facies, non ullus aratro
> dignus honos, squalent abductis arua colonis,
> et curuae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem.
>
> when right and wrong are confused: so many wars all over
> the world, so many kinds of crime, no respect paid to
> the plough, the fields rot, emptied of farmers,
> curved sickles are melted down into hard swords.

Virgil here depicts the 40s and early 30s BC as a catastrophic period in
Roman history and one which seems to have set the state on the road
to imminent disaster, as illustrated by the famous simile of the chariot

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[77] See Nadeau (1984) and (1989).

careering out of control which brings the opening book to a close (1.511–4). It is intriguing, therefore, that the closing movements of both *Georgics* 1 and 2 contain clear echoes of the closing section of Catullus 64. The verbal parallels may be set out as follows (Catullus first):

> 388 festis . . . diebus ∼ 2.527 dies . . . festos
> 394 Mauors ∼ 1.511 Mars
> 397 scelere ∼ 1.506 scelerum
> 398 Iustitiamque ∼ 2.474 Iustitia
> 399 perfudere manus fraterno sanguine fratres |∼ 2.510 perfusi sanguine fratres |
> 405 omnia fanda nefanda malo permixta furore ∼ 1.505 fas uersum atque nefas

This stark list helps to render visible the broader similarities between Virgil and Catullus in the passages in question.[78]

Virgil's text brings into focus a central theme, that of civil war. At *Georgics* 2.496 he uses the word *discordia*, a term which in mid-first-century Rome had become synonymous with the cycle of civil conflict which was destroying the Republic.[79] At the same time, Virgil sets his vision of Roman chaos within a passage devoted to expressing his desire as a poet to understand the workings of the cosmos (*G.* 2.475–82). In his famous *makarismos* of those capable of understanding the nature of things, *felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, he evokes the idea of *concordia*, by alluding to the conception of cosmic harmony.[80] As a result, the close of the second book of the *Georgics* oscillates between *concordia* and *discordia* as it presents the Roman world, within the setting offered by the broad cosmic vision of the natural order, in terms of both an idealized past and the corrupt and violent present. And in describing the latter Virgil sends his reader back to the account of civil strife with which he had closed the first book of the poem, where he had portrayed in grim terms the period from the death of Julius Caesar to Philippi.

At the end of Poem 64, the Catullan song of the Fates also introduces the contrast between concord and discord. At 64.334–6 they hymn the *concordia* of the union between Thetis and Peleus:

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[78] See also Myers on Ovid in this volume (below, p. 250).
[79] Osgood (2006) 152–201, Nelis (2009) 267.
[80] On concord and discord at the end of *Georgics* 2 see A. Hardie (2002), Nelis (2004). Cairns (1989) 85–108 is of fundamental importance for the wider picture.

> nulla domus tales umquam **con**texit amores,
> nullus amor tali **con**iunxit foedere amantes,
> qualis adest Thetidi, qualis **concordia** Peleo.

> no house ever sheltered such love,
> no love joined lovers in a compact
> like the harmony between Thetis and Peleus.

But subsequently Catullus creates a striking contrast between this happy image and the martial brutality it will help engender in the figure of Achilles (64.343–70).[81] And the wedding song actually ends with the mention of discord in relation to the wedding (64.379–80): *anxia nec mater **discordis** maesta puellae | secubitu caros mittet sperare nepotes*.[82] Catullus thus has the Fates present the marriage as a shift from *discordia* to *concordia*, but when the narrating voice resumes at verse 382 and laments the end of the age in which humans enjoyed interaction with the divine realm, it is precisely the image of disordered marriages and families that is used to illustrate the corruption of the contemporary world (64.397–406). Hence Catullus invites the reader to see parallels between the heroic past and the present and makes it possible to see the mythical content of the Fates' song as reflecting on Roman affairs. Given that their song celebrates the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, does the poem's ending permit a reading of the whole in relation to Roman historical events? And is that how Virgil was reading Poem 64 when he imitated it while writing his own meditation on recent history in the *Georgics*? Certainly, after Virgil, another Roman poet seems to have made similar connections.[83] When Ovid refers to the slaughter of Pharsalia and Philippi at *Metamorphoses* 15.823–4, he is both picking up on Virgil's apparent assimilation of the two battles at *Georgics* 1.490 and using Catullan language to do so. Compare:

> Pharsalia sentiet illum,
> Emathiique iterum **madefient caede** Philippi

> Pharsalia will feel his power,
> and Macedonian Philippi will again be soaked in blood

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[81] On the tension between the celebration of the couple's happy union and the depiction of the violence associated with the career of Achilles see Bramble (1970) 22–34.

[82] On the meaning of this sentence see Konstan (1977) 81–2. I assume that the *discordia* and the fact that the girl sleeps alone refer to the period before the wedding, in which case the actual marriage creates concord out of discord. Those who see an allusion to the idea that Peleus and Thetis shared only one night together see instead a shift in the opposite direction.

[83] See Newman (1990) 181, 221, 407.

and Poem 64.368, where Catullus, referring to the killing of Polyxena, writes, in the same metrical position, of her blood-soaked tomb, ***madefient caede*** *sepulcra*. It is of course possible that Ovid is simply picking up a memorable Catullan expression. But it is surely more likely that he hit on this line in this particular context because he saw a connection already present in Poem 64 between the prophetic vision of the blood to be shed by Achilles and the violent chaos of the Roman world. In other words, Ovid may have made the connection between Pharsalia and Catullus because he read Poem 64 as a poem which through the medium of myth was reflecting on contemporary Rome. With this perspective he was able to find in its allusion to current affairs (Peleus and Thetis recalling Pompey and Julia) and its depictions of moral decline (the voyage of Argo and the end of the heroic age), of deception (the desertion of Ariadne) and of violence (the career of Achilles) a ghastly prefiguration of the horrors of the civil war between Pompey and Caesar.[84] Catullus of course was writing in the 50s, but with the benefit of hindsight both Virgil and Ovid could use his reflections on the political pacts and rivalries between Pompey and Caesar to show how they would lead to civil discord in the end.[85]

Virgil returns to this nexus of themes in *Aeneid* 6. In the Underworld, when Anchises presents to Aeneas the souls of the future generations of Romans, he introduces Pompey and Caesar as father-in-law and son-in-law (*socer . . . gener*, 6.830–1). Furthermore, when he describes them as being 'in harmony now' (*concordes animae nunc*, 829), he alludes to the fact that the marriage between Pompey and Julia, which should have been a symbol of unity and *concordia*, did not in the end prevent conflict between them (*bellum*, 828, *bella*, 832), thus implicitly evoking the *discordia* of civil war. Virgil here clearly recalls Catullus 29, a poem which famously criticizes Caesar and Pompey and which ends thus (24):[86]

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[84] Some verbal parallels between Lucan and Catullus are equally suggestive: see Newman (1990) 407 and note especially Luc. 2.715–19 where Pompey's departure from Brundisium is compared to the departure of the Argo. See also Herrmann (1930) 218–19 for interesting similarities between Lucan and Poem 64, suggesting that he may have read it as a poem about Pompey and Caesar.

[85] Newman (1990) 181 goes so far as to propose a post-civil-war date *c*. 46 BC for Poem 29 in order to make full sense of its final line, *soter generque, perdidistis omnia?* Alluding to the fact that Catullus places the wedding of Peleus and Thetis at Pharsalia, he also asks of Virgil's use of Catullus 64: 'How, *post euentum*, did he read *Pharsalia* in 64.37?' (407). For similar down-dating of Lucretius in order to make sense of apparent allusions to contemporary Roman politics see Hutchinson (2001b), with the response of Volk (2010).

[86] Cairns (1989) 107 n. 60 notes the Catullan connection between *concordia* and marriage as a precedent for Virgil.

> **socer generque**, perdidistis omnia?
>
> father-in-law and son-in-law, have you destroyed everything?

Furthermore, Virgil's evocation of the Catullan themes of concord and discord and the wedding of Julia and Pompey helps to reveal just how closely the marital concord between Peleus and Thetis sung by the Parcae at 64.334–6 corresponds to the political harmony which the wedding was intended to ensure.[87] The lines in question have already been quoted, but it is worth repeating them, given their importance for the appreciation of the thematic unity between the song of the Parcae and the final section of the poem and its reflections on the contemporary Roman world:[88]

> nulla domus tales umquam **con**texit amores,
> nullus amor tali **con**iunxit **foedere** amantes,
> qualis adest Thetidi, qualis **concordia** Peleo.

This celebration of love, marriage and concord at the beginning of the song of the Parcae is picked up at its very end (372–4):

> quare agite optatos animi **coniungite amores**.
> accipiat **coniunx** felici **foedere** diuam,
> dedatur cupido iam dudum nupta marito.
>
> therefore go and join in the union of love you crave.
> Let the husband receive his divine one in a happy compact
> and let the bride be given to the husband who has long desired her.

The repetition of *nulla domus* and *nullus amor* at 64.334–5 establishes a comparison with all other wedding days, but the description of this particular day as one characterized by a perfect *foedus* and *concordia* between the two people and the two houses involved could surely not have failed to evoke contemporary political resonances and hinted at the peace which a recent dynastic marriage was intended to ensure. And that there is indeed a connection between the world of myth and the Roman scene is confirmed for the reader when Catullus ends his poem, as we have already seen, with a series of grim reflections on the realities of the human condition once all communion with the gods came to an end, in lines already quoted (405–6):[89]

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[87] When Virgil writes *concordes animae* **nunc** at 827 he implies the future *discordia* of civil war between them.

[88] See Konstan (1977) 102–3.

[89] Note also 64.401–2, where the mention of fathers killing sons in order to be free to marry has been taken (see Quinn (1973) on 64.402) as a reference to Catiline's marriage with Orestilla, thus providing another example of this poem's interest in contemporary Roman weddings.

omnia fanda nefanda malo permixta furore
iustificam **nobis** mentem auertere deorum.

*

It has already been mentioned above, and has been often remarked by scholars, how Catullus uses the language of Roman social dynamics (*urbanitas*, *amicitia* etc.) in describing his erotic relationship with Lesbia. In this regard, his use of the term *foedus* has received particular attention and many scholars have accepted the proposition that it is possible to see connections between Poem 64 (and the other longer poems also) and the rest of the collection. Most obviously, this approach has led to discussions of possible links between the erotic relationships described in the mythical narrative (Peleus and Thetis, Theseus and Ariadne) and that which is prominent in the corpus as a whole, Catullus and Lesbia.[90] In this way, Catullus has been seen as reflecting on his personal situation as evoked in the shorter poems through the lens of the mythical narratives recounted in the longer poems. Given the fact that this approach is a generally accepted way of reading Catullus, it is difficult to resist the temptation to search for further types of meaningful correspondence between the mythological narrative and the rest of the corpus. One obvious example of this approach has just been alluded to in passing. Given that some scholars have sensed the presence of Pompey and Julia in the description of Peleus and Thetis, it is noteworthy that they figure elsewhere. As we have just seen, in Poem 29, Catullus launches an attack on Mamurra in a poem addressed to Caesar and Pompey which ends by referring to them as father-in-law and son-in-law (*socer generque*, 24). This text is of extreme importance for the overall appreciation of the political element in Catullus' poetry. As such, it has come to play an important role in those interpretations which have sought to contextualize Catullan love poetry within as broad a social vision as possible, consisting not only of Roman society but also of Rome's position as imperial power in the Mediterranean world.[91] A reading of the corpus as a whole from this point of view brings out the various ways in which Catullus takes great care to present himself as a lover of Lesbia within a series of other relationships, contexts and discourses – for example, by hinting at the identity of Lesbia,[92] by evoking his family, his Transpadane origins and the death of his brother, by referring to many personal friends and enemies, by referring to many of the provinces ruled by Rome and in particular to his own time

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[90] See Putnam (1961), Wiseman (1985) 175–82.   [91] See Konstan (2007) 73–4.
[92] Although the commonest modern assumption has been that she is Clodia Metelli or perhaps a sister of hers, for an alternative view see below, p. 56 n. 16.

spent in Bithynia and overall by depicting the age as one characterized by immorality and violence. Given, then, that the corpus as a whole can be read as offering an overall vision of the Roman world at a particular moment in its history and that many readers are thus prepared to see the life of Catullus (fictional or otherwise) behind the adventures of Peleus and Thetis and Theseus and Ariadne, what is to prevent us seeing in Poem 64 Peleus as Pompey or Julia as Thetis, especially when we can see that Catullus refers explicitly to these historical characters in other poems and it is now standard critical practice to search for meaningful correspondences between Poem 64 and rest of the corpus?[93]

One final point must be made before bringing this discussion to a conclusion. Sceptics will refuse to be swayed, and in the end they may be right to do so, as this paper has not presented a single clinching argument likely to overcome their doubts. But since this paper is intended to relate the interpretation of Catullus to a major recent trend in the study of Hellenistic poetry, i.e. various kinds of historicizing approaches, one recent study is highly relevant and a final point may be made. An important element in A. Mori's attempts to extend R. Hunter's reading of Apollonius' *Argonautica* with reference to the Ptolemaic context lies in her study of the sexual politics of the epic.[94] Her strategy involves reading the roles played by Hypsipyle, Medea and Arete in the Lemnian, Colchian and Phaeacian episodes of the poem against the background of the lives of royal women in Macedonia and Egypt. Suggesting that the cultural prominence of the historical queens is figured in the three mythical characters and their roles in the poem, she argues that marriage is presented as a stabilizing force in politics and that marital concord is set up as a counterpart to the erotic chaos with which the myth of Medea in particular is more usually associated. Considerations of space preclude a detailed analysis of Mori's arguments, but it should be immediately obvious that her approach is highly relevant to attempts to make sense of Poem 64 as a political poem. If Catullus read the female element in Apollonius' *Argonautica* in the light of Ptolemaic marriage and dynastic politics (and here we should remember that in the 50s BC the stability of the Ptolemaic royal house was of close political concern in Rome),[95] then surely contemporary readers would

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[93] It is worth noting also in relation to possible links between the story of the Argonauts and the rest of the corpus that Catullus' adventures in Bithynia, on which see Cairns (2003), and those of Pompey in Pontus (29.18) very much bring the reader into the geographical world of the myth. See now Massaro (2010) on the *phaselus* of Poem 4 and the Argo.

[94] Mori (2008) 91–139.

[95] See Wiseman (1985) on Alexandria and the trial of Marcus Caelius and also Du Quesnay in this volume.

have been capable of taking his lead and appreciating that among the many fascinating features of this extraordinary poem was a thinly veiled political allegory referring to contemporary Rome, including a dynastic wedding and a military campaign on the eastern frontiers. Accepting this approach in no way implies that we have found a key to the poem's ultimate meaning or that this way of reading it invalidates other approaches to the poem, but it surely does contribute to deepening our appreciation of the profundity and complexity of Catullus' poetic art and of both its Roman and its Alexandrian background.[96]