

Comitibus talibus, quis hostibus caret?
(With Friends Like these, Who Needs Enemies)

In poem 11 Catullus opens with not unusual, but problematic vocative address. His addressees are Furius and Aurelius whom he describes as “*comites Catulli*”. The problem here is in other poems they occur with a very different disposition. This paper explores the interrelationship between the narrator and the characters of this series. Catullus is not always sincere, but neither is all of his praise sarcasm. This combined with the varied treatment creates tension around the relationship between the narrator and Furius and Aurelius. While Furius and Aurelius have likely connections to historical persons, their exact relationship with Catullus is known primarily through the poems. They may have had some connection with Lesbia and they are both apparently poetic rivals, beyond that nothing can be said definitively about their relationship without subjecting one or more of the poems to interpretation or explanation.

Some of the difficulty of how to read the poems arises out of the uncertainty of their chronology. The proposed chronology changes the way the story is to be read. This paper will consider a chronology based on pairs for poems number 11 and 16 in which he addresses Furius and Aurelius, 23 and 26, in which he addresses Furius, 15 and 21 in which he addresses Aurelius, and 48 and 99 in which he speaks of Juventius.

This framing structure is seen in other poems of Catullus such 4 and 5 with the beginning and end of the sparrow’s influence. Each of these pairs of poems considered in the paper is interconnected with the others in the set as well as with its partner. While these pairings do not exhaust all of the ostensibly biographical poems that deal with this period of his development, they do provide some markers from which many others of this period might be gauged, giving an eventual chronology of the poems and creating a consistent if not seamless story arc.

The pair of poems that address both Furius and Aurelius are 11 and 69. One that seems to be conciliatory and the other that is infamous as some of his most scurrilous invective. They seem to be related to the Lesbia arc as well as the Juventius story and may provide the limits for sorting the rest of the chronology. The pair of 23 and 26 address Furius solely and seem to follow one another but don't seem to provide any framing in the way the other pairs do, nor do they provide much help in the broader chronology. Poems 15 and 21 addresses Aurelius alone. They start with a conciliatory tone and then move to revile Aurelius. This pair seems to be frame the affair or attempted affair with Juventius. The last pair, 48 and 99, focus on Juventius, an apparent love interest for Catullus. Poem 48 recalls Catullus's optimism early in a relationship such as the one with Lesbia and prefigures the failure in poem 99. These pairings produce the following order.

51*-16-23-26-15-48-21-99-11

51* and 11 are the Sapphic Stanzas that open and close the entire affair with Lesbia. Poem 16 opens the attack on Furius and Aurelius, that is also closed by poem 11. Here *comites* is meant to show some reconciliation upon his departure. 23 and 26 fall outside of the framing but logic places them in the midst of the enmity with the man. 48 and 99 show the hope and failure of the pursuit of Juventius and interlock with poems 12 and 21. It all ends with 11, no longer hostile to Furius and Aurelius, nor foolishly pursuing Juventius, nor *miser Catulli*, distraught over the rejection of Lesbia. Now he sarcastically wishes them well as he seems to finally be through with them in his life or at least in his poems. His farewell marks the close of those relationships and this particular arc and explains how Catullus can sincerely call these men *comites* at last.

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