

Poetasters and Garlic: Catullus 14 and Horace *Epodes* 3

Horace's allusions to Catullus, although more numerous than formerly thought, are sly, indirect, often mocking, and not always easy to decipher (Putnam 2007). Accordingly, the Catullan antecedents of *Epode* 3, Horace's outraged complaint about an overdose of garlic administered by his host Maecenas, have not drawn much attention. Fraenkel (1957: 68) identified a likely predecessor in Catullus 44, wherein the speaker suffers a bad chill upon reading the "frigid" oration that was his admission ticket to Sestius' dinner. No one has remarked, however, that the situational parallel in Catullus 14 is even closer to that of *Epode* 3 and that the obvious programmatic stance of the former poem casts light on the operations of the latter.

In c. 14, Catullus berates his friend and fellow author Licinius Calvus for sending him as a Saturnalia gag a "monstrous and accursed" anthology of doggerel, presumably acquired by Calvus from a *cliens*, and threatens to assemble a collection of no less awful verse in retribution (*remunerabor*, 14.20). The elite institution of mutual textual exchange is thus perverted: while acknowledging Calvus as his peer in literary taste, Catullus denigrates the original presenter of the offending volume, disqualifying him from the poetic game (Stroup 2010: 78–82). Horace, picking up Catullus' description of current writers as "poison" (*omnia colligam venena*, 14.19), brands what is giving him indigestion an unknown poisonous substance (*quid hoc veneni saevit in praecordiis?*, 3.5), speculates upon the witch Canidia's involvement, and cites the *exempla* of Medea and Deianeira before unmasking Maecenas as the perpetrator. Addressing him as *iocose Maecenas* (3.20), an epithet reminiscent of Catullus' *iucundissime Calve* (14.2), Horace wishes garlic breath upon him should he ever consider such a trick again. Far from being a "toothless"

curse (Watson 2003: 129), this imprecation nicely conforms to the rules of textual reciprocity, since, like Catullus, Horace is repaying the malefactor in kind.

If Horace's garlic is meant to recall Catullus' *pessimi poetae*, does it too have metaliterary significance? Independently of any intertextual hints, several critics have posited figurative associations for the herb. Gowers (1993: 308) observes that it "shares the qualities of iambic *vis*" such as heat and pungency and physiologically replicates the wrathful abuse of the iambic poet. Fitzgerald (2009 [1988]: 149–50) thinks the effects of garlic mark a certain ambivalence in Horace's relations with his patron, and Johnson likewise believes its ingestion a "metaphor for the rewards and risks of working/writing for the powerful" (2012: 93). Inversely, the Catullan intertext confirms that last suggestion by reminding us that the relationship of Horace and Maecenas, unlike that of Catullus and Calvus, is intrinsically hierarchical. Good-natured teasing can only go so far.

Another situational inversion of Catullus may occur in the last two lines of the epode, *manum puella suavio opponat tuo / extrema et in sponda cubet* (3.21–22). Critics are now generally agreed that, whoever determined the overall order of the *liber Catulli*, the artfully arranged first fourteen or twenty-six poems show authorial planning and were probably part of the *libellus* presented to Cornelius Nepos. In the poem immediately preceding c. 14, Fabullus is invited to dinner in order to enjoy an unguent given to Catullus' own *puella* by *Veneres Cupidinesque* (13.12). That ointment too has metonymic aspects, standing in for Lesbia herself, and, by extension, for Catullus' love poetry. As Gowers remarks, "On any cultural scale in antiquity, garlic was at the opposite extreme from sweet perfumes" (1993: 290). Horace's iambs are likewise far removed from the witty elegance of the *passer* and *basia* poems. Supposing, finally, that Lesbia is the foil for the uncooperative *puella*, this closing distich might spoof

Maecenas' predilection for composing neoteric-style verse. Which makes his own parody of Catullus 14, addressed to Horace, all the more intriguing:

Ni te visceribus meis, Horati,

plus iam diligo, tu tuum sodalem

hinnulo videas strigiosiore. (Hollis fr. 186, *ap. Suet. Vit. Horati* 12–15)

Is it too fanciful to hear in *visceribus*, Maecenas' substitute for *oculis*, an echo of Horace's *praecordiis*, and see in this fragmentary burlesque another countermove in a poetic competition spanning two generations?

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