

*Amor and Amicitia: Catullan Subtexts in De Amicitia*

*De Amicitia* begins not with friendship but with death. Laelius is known as “the wise” (*sapiens*); the term functions as his *cognomen* (6). He is said by Fannius to have both the practical wisdom of the Romans and the learned wisdom of the Greeks (7). Given this reputation, people are asking Fannius and Scaevola, how Laelius is bearing up under the death of Scipio. Laelius says that if he were to deny being moved by the death of Scipio he would be lying. His wisdom is not to be unmoved by his friend’s death, but to recognize that nothing bad has happened to Scipio. If anything bad has happened to anyone it has been to Laelius. He reminds us, to be grieved by one’s own pains is the province of the lover (*amantis*), calling to mind the *exclusus amator* before the beloved’s locked door, not the friend (*amicum* 10).

Laelius seeks to draw a distinction between the friend and the lover, but in doing so, he invites us to think more carefully about the passions ignited by our affections. Indeed, he acknowledges that *amor* and *amicitia* spring from a common root (26, 29). Moreover, he signals this commonality in the very terms he uses to describe his loss, “Moveor enim, tali amico orbatus, qualis, ut arbitror, nemo umquam erit, ut confirmare possum, nemo certe fuit” [“For I am moved, having lost such a friend, as I judge, no one ever will be and, as I am able to confirm, certainly no one was”] (10). This passage calls to mind a formula Catullus used for Lesbia on several occasions. In poem 8, she was “amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla” [“loved by us as no one will be loved”] (5). This line is echoed almost word for word in 37.12, and it is used again in expanded form at 87.1-2. There the focus switches from the future to the past, but at the same time the poem emphasizes the love relationship as a *foedus* (“a pact or an agreement”) founded on *fides* (“good faith, trust”), which was the traditional foundation of *amicitia*

(Hellegouarc'h 1963: 17, 23-25; Ross 1975: 10). In each case, in Catullus as well as Cicero, the essential point is that the emotional commitment of the speaker, who has suffered a loss, is so great that it will never be equaled, nor has it been equaled in the past. If Cicero's Laelius uses an analogous formula immediately before his declaration that he consoles himself with the knowledge that Scipio suffers no ill and that only the lover, not the friend, is pained by his own discomfiture, then the separation of love from friendship posited here is problematized for anyone who perceives the echo.

Catullus 49, moreover, indicates that the two men had some familiarity, and indeed in the persons of Caelius Rufus and Cornelius Nepos, we know they shared common acquaintances (Clodia Pulcher as well). So, while we cannot definitively establish Cicero's knowledge of any single Catullan poem, they certainly knew of each other and their respective literary output. It is doubtful, then, that this echo in a context where the relationship between *amor* and *amicitia* is directly in question would be accidental (Stroup 2010: 226-27; Tatum 1988; Grilli 1997 ad loc).

In Catullus's case, his loss is the loss of betrayal, not the death of a friend. Love and hate in Catullus are two sides of the same coin (85). And though *amicitia* may be proposed as the ideal towards which true love aspires (109.6; Ross 1975: 10), nonetheless the *benevolentia* that springs into flame (*exardescit*) in Ciceronian friendship (*De Amicitia* 29) in Catullan *amor* is directly contrasted with the desire by which one burns more intensely (72.5). The friendship that moves Laelius, as none has even been moved, moreover, is the same passion that ignites Blossius's devotion to Gracchus and only too easily becomes Sulpicius's hatred for Pompeius. Love, in both *De Amicitia* and Catullus, is always on the cusp of turning into hate. Friendship is both the other of love in its irrational self-centered passion and its mirror image (Derrida 1994: 287).

## Bibliography

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