

## I

Introduction:  
from Catullus to Gallus

This book is a somewhat specialized history of Augustan poetry. It is specialized in that it does not attempt to cover or present a synopsis of the most important questions concerning the poets of the period or to provide a comprehensive guide to the interpretation of their poetry; only a few questions are discussed, and only a few works are considered, with the result, inevitably, that the argument may seem to some one-sided or even distorted.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is a history in that it presents a literary background for the Augustan poets. Attempts to write biography, both in antiquity and by modern scholars, by abstracting biographical information from the poems themselves, are now generally considered dangerous and futile; this book is essentially an attempt to write poetic biography and, while there is nothing new in its method or approach, may be considered equally futile on similar grounds. It can be argued, however, that the Augustan poets were not primarily concerned with presenting autobiographical details in their work (the opposite, in fact, is more often clear – that they purposely constructed poetic *personae* having no relation to their real lives), but that they *were* concerned in what they wrote with the work of previous poets and of their contemporaries. Augustan poetry, like Alexandrian, was intensely self-conscious.

There are three major concerns in these pages. The first is the figure of Cornelius Gallus, an important poet in his own right and time and still important now: he alone supplies us with the transition from the generation of Catullus to the Augustans, a necessary link lost with his poetry. He stands as the first Latin elegist, without whose four books of *Amores* we are at a serious disadvantage when we read the elegists who wrote as they did largely because he had written as he had. He had been as well a friend of Virgil, with whom, as a reading of *Eclogues* VI and X suggests, he had discussed and shaped many of the ideas that were to set the course of subsequent poetry. I have assumed for Gallus, therefore, an importance

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Virgil's *Georgics*, perhaps the most Augustan poem of all, is referred to only in passing in these pages, and Ovid's *Amores* likewise plays a very small part in my discussions of elegy; but I hope my view of such poems will be apparent from the passages and works treated in more detail.

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far greater than that indicated by most of our literary histories and have tried to find traces of and clues about him where they are most likely to exist – admittedly a hazardous occupation – and then from such evidence to reconstruct in outline not so much *what* he wrote, but *why* he wrote. Again, I have not tried to include here all that might be said or imagined about Gallus' poetry, but rather only that which contributes with some degree of probability to an understanding of extant Latin poetry.

My second concern has been with the origin and development of elegy, a question debated and discussed largely with the same assumptions and on the same terms for over three-quarters of a century. My assumptions about Gallus' poetry have provided certain premises for thinking about Propertius' start and development as an elegist, and for questioning the validity of considering elegy essentially as love poetry, in which subjectivity is the necessary ingredient. The origin of Latin elegy is of far more than scholarly or historical interest, for on our view of the question depends our approach to and reading of Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid.

My third concern has been to sketch a historical unity that I have come to see in Augustan poetry. There is an opposition or conflict between the professed poetics of the Augustan poets and what most of them (at least) came eventually to write about. In the case of their forerunner Catullus this opposition (now, perhaps, largely resolved) has been seen as that between the learned Alexandrian poet and the poet of passionate personal experience. Virgil began his career as a 'neoteric' but finally produced the national epic. Propertius wrote at first as the subjective lover moved to personal expression but ended as the *Romanus Callimachus* writing on patriotic themes; what then of Horace, who rejected neoteric nonsense (we are led to understand) and became Augustus' poet laureate? From Catullus on, poets professed themselves on artistic grounds unable or unwilling to sing of *reges et proelia*; and modern readers have seen a similar conflict between love and art. Much of what follows here is an attempt to sort out the real from the illusory in such oppositions, to observe the inevitable but unintended contradictions that appear when inherited poetic creeds are used for new purposes.

This book views Augustan poetry as a natural growth in the soil prepared by Catullus. We need, I think, a clearer conception of 'neoteric' poetry, what the term (or the idea, as he may never have heard the term) meant to Catullus, what the poetry and poetic ideals of Catullus, Calvus, and Cinna meant to Gallus and Virgil in, say, 45 B.C. and again to Virgil

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and Horace twenty years later. We need to consider carefully the development of poetry in a period when so much was happening so rapidly and in which poets were so aware of the innovations of their immediate predecessors and knew the work of their contemporaries so intimately. These poets saw themselves not as isolated innovators, but as the latest representatives of a purposefully selected succession of antecedents, giving new life and purpose to an established inheritance. It is with this genealogy that we are primarily concerned.

The question ‘Who were the neoterics?’ naturally demands an answer, but none can be given. It was Cicero who supplied the name ‘new poets’, but what poets he may have had in mind cannot be known.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Catullus, no poet of the period is represented by more than a handful of fragments that afford little idea of the nature of their work,<sup>2</sup> and if there was some sort of school centered around Valerius Cato, there is no good indication that Catullus was any part of it.<sup>3</sup> Only one thing is clear, that Catullus, Calvus, and Cinna were poets of importance, knew each other well, and read each other’s work – not necessarily a school, but certainly a group of friends sharing interests and the excitement of discovery. Rather than to speculate further on the relationships of other names we happen to know, it is more productive to assess the nature and purpose of this new movement, to which the term ‘neoteric’ will be applied largely as a convenience to designate what we can know of the new poetry from Catullus.

Certain characteristics of the new poetry have been singled out but often are misleadingly applied to poets who had no real share in the new

<sup>1</sup> In 50 B.C. he concocted a one-line parody, a spondaic and learned hexameter, for the amusement of Atticus, granting him permission to sell it as his own ‘si cui voles τῶν νεωτέρων’ (*Ad Att.* 7.2.1); in 46 B.C. (*Orat.* 161) he mentioned that the ‘*poetae novi*’ regard suppression of final -s as inelegant (*subrusticum*); and in the next year (*Tusc.* 3.45) he defended Ennius against the scorn of the ‘*cantores Euphorionis*’. It seems to me likely that the term ‘neoterics’ is Cicero’s own: the context of the letter to Atticus, with its Greek, suggests a man pleased with his own verbal cleverness rather than one using an accepted designation for a new school of poets, nor need his other two remarks suggest the existence of any school.

<sup>2</sup> See the useful collection of A. Traglia, *Poetae Novi, Poetarum Latinorum Reliquiae* vol. 8 (Rome, 1962), with basic bibliography for each poet and a balanced introduction.

<sup>3</sup> The assumption of a school rests with the figure of Valerius Cato, whom Furius Bibaculus (probably, at least – see Traglia, *Poetae Novi*, 64–5) referred to as *Cato grammaticus*, *Latina Siren*, | *qui solus legit ac facit poetas*, and again as . . . *unicum magistrum*, | *summum grammaticum, optimum poetam*. (Cf. Suet. *De Gramm.* 11.2, *docuit multos et nobiles visusque est peridoneus praeceptor maxime ad poeticam tendentibus, ut quidem apparere vel his versiculis potest*, citing then the lines quoted here first; but Suetonius’ tentative deduction – indicated as such by the phrases *visusque est* and *ut quidem apparere vel his versiculis potest* – is obviously of little value.) Inevitably Catullus has been sent to Cato’s school, but all (including the identity of the Cato in poem 56) is pure speculation.

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movement:<sup>1</sup> characteristics of meter, language and diction, form, and content are illuminating but generally can be used only to exclude, when they are absent, a poem or poet from a movement, group, or tradition. Consideration of external characteristics has often led scholars to consider Laevius, for instance, as an important forerunner of the neoterics, or even as a neoteric.<sup>2</sup> Laevius experimented with language and meter, wrote with erudition, seems to have been concerned with the psychology of his heroines, and used a number of novel shorter forms of verse; and even Cicero – and not just in his translation of Aratus – can be shown to have qualified as a neoteric as early as 86 B.C. according to definitions of neoteric meter, language, forms, and content. Then, too, the variety of Catullus' poetry presents us with such a diversity of such characteristics as to make strict definition impossible or valueless. Catullus and almost certainly Calvus and Cinna were not altogether innovative, but they did put recent innovations to new purposes that were to lead directly to the achievement of the Augustans. Their real contribution cannot perhaps be defined, but it can be described.

What the neoterics discovered was the poet's place in poetry. There are two aspects of this discovery: the individuality of the poet in his own poems, and his place in the poetry of the past. In the one case the poet was now audible in his own poetry; I do not mean simply that Catullus discovered subjective love poetry, but rather that the personality of the poet finds expression in, or is an important part of, whatever he writes. The epigrams of Aedituus, Licinus, or Catulus could have been written by anyone; a poem of Catullus can be the work of no one else. On a different but related level, the neoterics saw in an entirely new light the position of the poet in relation to the poetry of the past. The Roman poet was no longer a translator or an imitator, but a new, and again individual, voice within an established succession.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Fordyce, for instance, in his article 'Alexandrianism, Latin' in the recent revision of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1970), lists four 'outstanding characteristics' of neoteric verse: '(1) the development of new genres, especially "epyllion", elegy, and epigram, all miniature forms replacing the large-scale epic and drama; (2) a regard for form, for concinnity and symmetry in language and metre. . . ; (3) the cult of erudition, seen in the vogue of didactic verse, in wealth of mythological allusion, and in the search for novelty in story-telling; (4) the emergence of a subjective and personal way of writing – in elegiac and lyric a new individualism, in narrative a sentimental treatment and a psychological interest.'

<sup>2</sup> E.g. most recently, J. Granarolo, *D'Ennius à Catulle* (Paris, 1971). I have argued against such a view in *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 155–60. This first chapter is based for the most part on arguments and evidence presented in my monograph, to which, in fact, it might stand as a conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> Ennius, for example, saw himself in his *Annales* as a second Homer, a view reflected in every detail of his verse; the neoterics, however, and later the Augustan poets, never

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What this two-fold discovery meant can be seen better by looking at three reasons for it. First, of course, is the matter of individual genius, the sudden appearance of poets capable of poetry and not merely of verse. Second, the neoterics saw in Alexandrian poetry, and especially in Callimachus, what had not been seen before – not simply form or content to be reproduced or imitated, but rather the expression of certain poetic principles that were strikingly relevant and applicable. Finally, these poets had at their disposal, for the first time, a poetic technique which they could adapt and develop further to turn the resources of Latin to new ends. We should go further into these reasons before turning to the results of the discovery.

The first poets at Rome were in effect professional writers – Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, the dramatists – and professionals continued to find support in the first century B.C. (Archias is a good example). Paid writers may or may not be men of genius (Ennius was), but they are always subject to the demands of their audience and to the necessity of selling what they produce: what this must have meant for the beginnings of Latin literature can be gathered by comparing Terence's audience with that which attended the productions at the festival of Dionysus at Athens or listened to Pindar's Odes; and the difficulties which patronage often brings with it can be seen from the career of Naevius. At the end of the second century we find another recognizable group of poets – amateurs, such as Lutatius Catulus, consul with Marius in 102 B.C., who not only supported professional writers but dabbled in verse themselves. Roman society was changing rapidly, and it is partly due to social change that an entirely different sort of poet emerged toward the middle of the first century. Catullus was a full-time poet of independent means: it is highly unlikely that even a few decades earlier a man of good social standing and ambition would have come to Rome with any intention other than to enter upon the legal and military ladder to political prominence; yet Catullus, as far as we know, never argued a case in a court of law, never ran for office, and only half-heartedly joined the retinue of a provincial governor. It had become possible for such a man to consider poetry a career. Others who had more of a stake in public life, such as Calvus and perhaps Cinna, could also regard poetry as something more than an

imagined themselves becoming their exemplars, but rather were independent individuals following in a tradition established by their models. Ennius was engaged in the same task as Homer had been, and in this respect can be said to be an imitator; but Propertius, for instance, even as the *Romanus Callimachus*, never saw his relation to Callimachus in such a way. The implications of this essential difference between the neoterics and their Roman predecessors (one which they perhaps never formulated, but which the Augustans did) will I hope become clearer in what follows.

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evening's entertainment. When Catullus came to Rome, poetry was no longer the preserve of the professional and could be viewed by anyone of inclination, talent, and means as a serious calling.

A change in social conditions and expectations, however, will not in itself explain the emergence of the new poets: something not available before provided a definite reason why men like Catullus and Calvus could devote themselves seriously to poetry and regard composition as more than a pastime. Callimachus, suddenly appreciated and understood as he had not been previously at Rome, supplied that reason.<sup>1</sup> Parallels can be seen between the circumstances of Callimachus and the Alexandrians and the situation of the neoterics: what had led Callimachus to formulate poetic principles describing and governing the work of a small group of Alexandrian poets was precisely what appealed to Catullus and others. Alexandrian poetry rediscovered human scale: Hesiod replaced Homer as a model, shorter forms of verse replaced epic. We are inclined to misunderstand Callimachus' scholarship and even to resent his learning, but what is significant about it is that in such a way the poet assumed complete control of his poetry, receiving the past not with passive awe but actively manipulating his inheritance so as to make it his own. The Alexandrian poet thus found his identity, both within a literary tradition and in his own poetry: no longer a faceless producer of endless imitative lines, he became the initiated priest of Apollo, proud of his own personality, fully in control of his own work, a small craftsman rather than a laborer in a machine shop. The significance of such a poet was suddenly recognized at Rome, and so apt were the terms Callimachus had devised that many of them could be taken over with little change. But there is one striking aspect of the neoteric discovery of Callimachus that supplies the key to his sudden and lasting importance at Rome and which has not, I think, been recognized clearly enough. Actual parallels to Callimachus (lines or passages closely imitated or even translated, forms copied, poems adapted) are surprisingly few in the Latin poets. Catullus, for instance, refers to Callimachus as *Battiades* twice (65.16, 116.2), with a similar suggestion in poem 7 (*et Batti veteris sacrum sepulcrum*, 6), translates the *Lock of Berenice* (poem 66), and refers to a Callimachean poetic topic in poem 95 (with 95<sup>b</sup>): otherwise there are only scattered suggestions of Callimachus.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Augustan

<sup>1</sup> On Callimachus and the *poetae novi*, and on the role Parthenius must have played after 73–65 B.C., see W. V. Clausen, 'Callimachus and Latin Poetry', *GRBS* 5 (1964), 181–96.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for instance Cat. 80 and Call. *Epigram* 30 (Pfeiffer), or Cat. 70 and Call. *Epigram* 25; in both examples it is important to note that Catullus is making free use of, rather than translating or even imitating, the Callimachean epigrams.



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poets make use of a strictly limited number of Callimachean passages in their own poetry, mostly those of a programmatic content. What is surprising and novel is that a model no longer meant imitation but rather was a justification of individual and personal expression: the importance of Callimachus for the neoterics lies in the fact that he supplied a set of precepts that not only allowed but demanded such expression.

A third fundamental reason for the sudden emergence of the new poetry is the discovery of a style capable of the range of expression required by the new poets, and here again Callimachus' precedent must have seemed singularly appropriate and fortunate. Modern criticism has been too ready to regard certain stylistic innovations in Catullus merely as affected mannerisms, but consideration of different aspects of Catullus' style soon leads to the conclusion that he had a clear idea of what he wanted to achieve and how best he could do it. Callimachus had available the infinitely rich resources of Greek poetry, upon which he drew with the interests of a scholar: the natural evolution of the Greek literary language from Homer to his own contemporaries, the diversity of poetic dialects, the variety of myth and allusion developed during a long literary history, furnished him in a retrospective age with the raw material for the density and intricacy of his poetry. No such background was available to the neoterics, who had to supply what was lacking. Ennius had shown in his exuberant way how the language and meter of Homer could be reproduced in Latin, and such experiments in various genres continued, reaching a particular peak of frenzy with Laevius' attempts to reproduce certain trends in Hellenistic poetry. But it was the task of the neoteric poets, as we can see from Catullus, to refine and purify previous excesses, to shape and form existing poetic diction while adding new elements as appropriate: for instance, urbane Latin was eminently suited to the subjects and tone of Catullus' polymetrics, just as in his formal epyllion (64) certain Alexandrian features of language and meter were exploited so as to fit neatly into the modified structure of Latin hexameter verse devised originally by Ennius. What made this process something new, and what gave it a significance that was to continue in importance far beyond this first generation of new poets, was the fact that it supplied what Callimachus had inherited, a rich diversity of poetic expression. Suddenly Latin poets had learned how to write whatever they wanted to express.

The common element in these three reasons is the individuality of the poet, how he appeared at Rome, what model showed him the place and

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function of an individual within an inherited literary tradition, and how individual expression was possible. The discovery of the neoterics – the poet's place in poetry – involves far more than the discovery of subjective love poetry on the one hand, or on the other the awareness of, and the ability to recreate, abstract and artificial poetic conventions. As an illustration of what the discovery meant, I would like now to discuss briefly Catullus' Lesbia.

There has been universal agreement concerning one point about Lesbia: she did exist, whoever she may have been.<sup>1</sup> I see no reason to question this assumption, or that Catullus had an affair with her, but I do wonder whether she is fairly represented in his poems, whether he wrote his love poems simply about his own experiences, and even whether he always wrote love poems about love. Our concern with the actual identity of Lesbia is similar to the attention that has been devoted to unraveling the strands of autobiography which we imagine make up the fabric of Catullus' poetry. A good case can be presented that Lesbia is a poetic fiction, and though I cannot argue it in detail here, I would like to suggest at least that we have been missing a great deal by reading the Lesbia poems simply as the record of an affair.<sup>2</sup>

If we think for a moment of the Lesbia of the polymetrics, we think first perhaps of her incomparable sophistication and wit: the girl of the reprobate of Formiae cannot be compared with her, at least by anyone with taste and discrimination: . . . *decoctoris amica Formiani*. | *ten provincia narrat esse bellam?* | *tecum Lesbia nostra comparatur?* | *o saeculum insapiens et infacetum!* (43.5–8). The Lesbia of the sparrow poems, the recipient of the *basiationes* of poems 5 and 7 who is so pointed a contrast to the *senes severiores*, or the object of the elaborate literary joke of poem 36, this Lesbia seems to us so real and immediate a figure of fashionable Rome that it is something of a surprise, when we begin to look for specific characteristics, physical or otherwise, to find actually very little. We know, for instance, that the *decoctoris amica Formiani* had a big nose, ugly feet, eyes that were not black, squat fingers, wet lips, and a coarse tongue, but we have no descriptive physical details of Lesbia. I do not mean to imply, of course, that we can therefore conclude that Lesbia is an entirely

<sup>1</sup> For the latest review of Lesbia's identity, see T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester, 1969), who after sensible discussion ultimately suspends judgement.

<sup>2</sup> The following pages are based mainly on two sections of my monograph *Style and Tradition*, 'Urbanitas and the Vocabulary of the Polymetrics', 104–12, and 'Lesbia and the Vocabulary of Political Alliance', 80–95, to which the reader is referred for particulars, background, and references to scholarly discussion of the topics.



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fictional character – fictional characters need, and are normally granted, considerable characterizing detail, whereas figures of personal biography may neither require nor allow such description, particularly if they are publicly well-known.

My point is simply that our picture of the Lesbia of the polymetrics seems the consummation of a style, the representation of an idea rather than of an individual. What this idea was is not hard to discover, for the provenance of those terms with which Lesbia *is* characterized (though often by implication rather than directly) is clear. In the poems I have just referred to she is a representation of *urbanitas*, that quality Catullus valued so highly in his friends, in life, and in poetry. So pervasively do the characteristics of *urbanitas* color the world of the polymetrics that it is impossible to distinguish any sphere to which the terms naturally belong from any other to which they are applied metaphorically. We know from Cicero, for instance, that Clodia's smart set did consider themselves *faceti, delicati, dicaces, venusti*, just as the same set appears in Catullus; but much of the actual language of the polymetrics is demonstrably that of the new circle of bright young men, and Catullus characterizes his *nugae* (meaning his polymetrics) in the same way. We have only to think of poem 50, which equates the writing of this poetry with the sensations and mental state of being in love, to realize how thoroughly the values of this new circle of society pervade all aspects of Catullus' world. When we read of Lesbia in these poems, then, we may not be reading about an individual, nor necessarily of personal experiences which led immediately to the expression of the poems, but rather of yet another figure, and yet another situation, exemplifying the ideal of *urbanitas*.

The diversity of Catullus' character, both as poet and person, has long impressed critics and scholars. Sophistication and wit, as he found them in society and expressed them in his poetry, may have fascinated his poetic imagination, but he was no intellectual playboy, by nature or circumstances, and we can see another very different side of his genius – more serious, traditional, and Roman. Here too Lesbia plays an important role.

In the epigrams 69–116 Catullus uses a very different set of terms to present his relation with Lesbia – the terminology of political alliance. That this is so should immediately alert us to an intriguing possibility. If the polymetrics 1–60 and the epigrams belong, as I believe, to two very different poetic traditions and are distinct in tone, expression, and purpose, then the different Lesbias presented in each group of poems may suggest that the poetic conception of his mistress preceded and controlled

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any real experience Catullus may have lived through with the real Lesbia; and if this suggestion can plausibly be entertained, we may get a somewhat better idea of what his poetry was really about. To do this a quick review of the *amicitia* metaphor in the Lesbia epigrams is necessary.

It is difficult to know to what extent we are at liberty to recreate the affair chronologically, as has been done for so long as a matter of course and with such varying results. We are confronted with a series of poems on the affair, not as we have them arranged by Catullus as a cycle, but obviously representing different stages of a single experience: we may, then, describe the changing function of this particular terminology at such different stages without implying that any cycle or story was intended by the poet.

In poem 109 Catullus clearly presents his relationship with Lesbia in terms of a Roman *amicitia* – that is, a political alliance between equals: *ut liceat nobis tota perducere vita | aeternum hoc sanctae foedus amicitiae* (5–6). But here his doubts about the practicality of such an arrangement are all too evident: *di magni, facite ut vere promittere possit | atque id sincerè dicat et ex animo...* (3–4). In a political alliance, a Roman statesman would have admitted, expediency is the most powerful element, that and cold obligation: sincerity has no place. Poem 87 too presents the metaphor: ‘No woman can say that she is loved as much as is my Lesbia,’ says Catullus simply in the first couplet, but in the second he substitutes for *amor* the terms of an *amicitia*: *nulla fides ullo fuit unquam foedere tanta* (3). The metaphor is both novel and real: the terms so common in an actual *amicitia* – *fides, officium, benevolentia, gratia* – seem eminently applicable and, on a certain level, expressive, when applied to an idealized relationship between lovers.

The metaphor, so apt at first, assumes, at a later stage, an aspect of impossibility. *Odi et amo: quare id faciam, fortasse requiris? | nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior* (85.1–2). When one party in a political *amicitia* had done dirt to another, had committed an *iniuria* – when, that is, political necessities had changed and it became expedient to sever the connection – nothing was easier than to break it off, more often than not coolly and with perfect composure. Lesbia’s *iniuria*, her *culpa*, whatever it may have been, did not lead to any similar painless solution: the flaw in the metaphor of *amor* as an *amicitia* suddenly becomes all too apparent.

nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,  
multo mi tamen es vilior et levior.  
qui potis est, inquis? quod amantem iniuria talis  
cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus.

(72.5–8)