

Catullus 68A: *Veronae Turpe, Catulle, Esse*

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Catullus 68A remains a volatile forum for critical discussion. Two rival camps of interpretation can currently be identified, the one centring its theories around a Mallius who is considered to be seriously distressed and emotionally committed; the other around a Mallius assumed to be playful and humorous. The work of scholars such as Woodman and Ferguson<sup>1</sup> seems to have been moving us towards a "humorous" orthodoxy, but the most recent critical study of the poem<sup>2</sup> has taken a stance that is unequivocally "serious." Naturally the conclusions of these rival groups have resulted in quite disparate interpretations of the poem. The aim of this paper is a re-examination of the evidence through a close reading of the poem and in particular through a re-assessment of the problematic lines 27–30. We must now turn to the poem's opening (1–10):

Quod mihi fortuna casuque oppressus acerbo conscriptum hoc lacrimis mittis epistolium naufragum ut eiectum spumantibus aequoris undis sublevem et a mortis limine restituum,	
quem neque sancta Venus molli requiescere somno desertum in lecto caelibe perpetitur,	5
nec veterum dulci scriptorum carmine Musae oblectant, cum mens anxia pervigilat:	
id gratum est mihi, me quoniam tibi dicis amicum, muneraque et Musarum hinc petis et Veneris.	10

Taken at face value the language naturally indicates a disaster of some magnitude: "fortuna casuque oppressus acerbo," "conscriptum hoc lacrimis mittis epistolium," "sublevem et a mortis limine restituum." But if Mallius is genuinely upset and there is a reference to some real loss, the reader is forced to pass a rather unfavourable judgement on the nature of Catullus' response. For, as we shall see, Catullus not only declines to provide the *munera* but also expresses his refusal by reapplying to himself

<sup>1</sup> A. J. Woodman, "A Reading of Catullus 68A," *PCPS* 209 (1983) 100–06, J. Ferguson, *Catullus* (Lawrence, KS 1985) 225–35.

<sup>2</sup> J. G. F. Powell, "Two Notes on Catullus," *CQ* 40 (1990) 199–206.

the substance and imagery of Mallius' complaints. In this way he seeks to demonstrate the more radical nature of his own suffering. It would be unforgivable to treat in this way a friend who had suffered a genuine loss. Even if we can modify our opinion by accepting Wiseman's suggestion that Mallius was "not one of the poet's intimate friends,"<sup>3</sup> the effect is still one of egocentric and heartless brutality, a brutality in marked contrast to Catullus' expression of grief at his brother's death.

Given the improbability of this scenario, a closer reading of the opening lines is required. The lines are in fact carefully constructed to move the reader from a response of sympathy to one of humorous complicity. Lines 1-3 resound with an air of tragic melancholy. Within the terms of this portentous language (and consequent to the association of shipwreck with death), Catullus is requested to perform an appropriate act of compassion: "sublevem et a mortis limine restituam" (4). The specific nature of Mallius' discomfort remains unstated, but the reader is clearly drawn into the anticipation of an explanation suited to the gravity of the language.

In lines 5-8 the reader is introduced to Mallius' specific grievances. Although the register of language remains at a suitably lofty level ("sancta Venus," "veterum dulci scriptorum carmine Musae"), nevertheless the reader senses some distance between the effect of these lines and lines 1-4. Finding no pleasure ("nec . . . oblectant") in the writings of the *veteres scriptores* seems to be out of step with a request to be rescued "a mortis limine" (4), and "fortuna casuque oppressus acerbo" (1) is a rather overstated way of describing the condition of "desertum in lecto caelibe" (6). Mallius is in fact presented as using the conventional and exaggerated imagery of the abandoned lover but in a frivolous rather than seriously intentioned manner.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> T. P. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet* (Leicester 1974) 102.

<sup>4</sup> The imagery of shipwreck and death is frequently associated with the abandoned lover:

...? heu quotiens fidem  
mutatosque deos flebit et *aspera*  
*nigris aequora ventis*  
emirabitur insolens,

qui nunc te fruitur credulus aurea,  
qui semper vacuum, semper amabilem  
sperat, *nescius aurae*  
*fallacis*. miseri quibus

intemptata nites. me tabula sacer  
votiva paries indicat *uvida*  
*suspendisse potenti*  
*vestimenta maris deo.* (Horace, C. 1. 5. 5-16)

Propertius uses the imagery of death with typical obsessiveness:

sic igitur *prima moriere aetate*, Properti?

Again, if Mallius had faced a serious amatory setback (such as the death of his wife or the end of a longstanding relationship) his complaint of finding no pleasure in poetry appears a trifle frivolous. Though poetry is certainly possible as a form of consolation,<sup>5</sup> it surely is inadequate for an event as grave as the death of one's wife. Mallius' very use of "oblectant" ("delight in") clearly indicates that he foresees the *munus Musarum* as providing entertainment and not consolation. Similarly his request for a *munus Veneris*, in a context of serious misfortune, would appear to be somewhat disreputable.

The progression, then, from the intense and tragic imagery of the opening four lines to the more mundane nature of the complaints in lines 5–8 must indicate that the former are merely an exaggerated and humorous analogy of the latter.<sup>6</sup> Such humour and exaggeration are surely indicated in the apparent simplicity of the remedy that Mallius requires, "muneraque et Musarum . . . et Veneris."<sup>7</sup>

The nature of the gifts themselves has caused endless argument. This problem cannot be sidestepped by appeal to the poem's epistolary form. "After all, presumably Mallius' request itself was clear enough and Catullus would not need to report it back to him."<sup>8</sup> For this misses the point that

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*sed morere; interitu gaudeat illa tuo!* (2. 8. 17–18)

Death as a consequence of erotic desertion is also detailed in *Eclogues* 2 and 10:

O crudelis, Alexis, nihil mea carmina curas?  
nil nostri miserere? *mori* me denique coges. (*Ecl.* 2. 6–7)

Quae nemora aut qui vos saltus habuere, puellae  
Naides, *indigno* cum Gallus *amore peribat*? (*Ecl.* 10. 9–10).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Ellis, *Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1889) 404.

<sup>6</sup> It may also be noted that Catullus' initial response to Mallius, "id *gratum* est mihi" (9), is hardly a tactful or appropriate remark to describe the receipt of a letter solely concerned with the exposition of tragic circumstance.

<sup>7</sup> F. Cairns, *Tibullus: A Hellenistic Poet at Rome* (Cambridge 1979) 163, similarly interprets the effect of these lines: "If these lines [1 to 4] alone had survived and the question were asked what misfortune Catullus' addressee had suffered, the unhesitating answer would be that he had lost a loved one through death. This is implied by *fortuna* and *casuque* . . . *acerbo* (1) and by *a mortis limine* (4). But the next few lines dispel this illusion. Allius is said to be kept awake in an empty bed by Venus (5 f.); he gains no satisfaction from old poetry (7 f.) and he asks Catullus for new love-poetry (10). Through this anticlimax the reader realises that Allius has not lost a beloved to death but has been abandoned by a living mistress." We should perhaps feel a little reservation about Cairns' "unhesitating," for the imagery of death may simply be activated by the shipwreck metaphor of line 3. It will become clear that I cannot agree with Cairns on several other substantive points.

<sup>8</sup> Powell (above, note 2) 206.

68A is *both* a letter *and* a poem. Its publication<sup>9</sup> presupposes that it should be intelligible both to its general audience (the reading public) and to its specific audience (Mallius). This principle must be equally applicable to the nature of the *munera*, for they are an integral part of the poem/letter.

The correct identification of the *munera* has also been hindered by a continuing desire to read "muneraque et Musarum . . . et Veneris" as a hendiadys. Though the insuperable difficulties of this approach were pointed out long ago by Prescott,<sup>10</sup> nevertheless the idea has not been finally buried. But the idea of hendiadys is simply untenable. It ignores the formal relationship between "neque . . . nec" (5-8) and the "et . . . et" of line 10; it plainly contradicts the "utriusque" of line 39 (which informs us quite specifically that Catullus, at least, believed he had been asked for two separate items<sup>11</sup>) and obliterates the elaborate chiasmic structure of the poem.<sup>12</sup>

That scholars are reluctant to abandon the idea of hendiadys derives from a similar reluctance to accept the obvious meaning of the *munus Veneris*. It is consequently necessary to state quite unequivocally that the only possible meaning is an object of sexual gratification.<sup>13</sup> It is irresponsible of the

<sup>9</sup> There can be no conclusive evidence that Catullus envisaged 68A as a published poem rather than a private verse letter for Mallius. Nevertheless its comprehensibility as a "finished" work of art must raise doubts as to whether its effect was intended to be limited solely to Mallius. Moreover, the recognition of 68A (by some scholars) as part of the deliberate arrangement of Poems 65-68 (G. W. Most, "On The Arrangement of Catullus' *Carmina Maiora*," *Philol.* 125 [1981] 109-25, T. P. Wiseman, *Catullus and his World* [Cambridge 1985] 159-64, J. Ferguson, "The Arrangement of Catullus' Poems," *LCM* 11 [1986] 18-20) obviously presupposes an intention to publish the poem.

<sup>10</sup> "The Unity of Catullus LXVIII," *TAPA* 71 (1940) 473-500, at 478-79.

<sup>11</sup> Nisbet's emendation ("Notes to the Text of Catullus," *PCPS* 204 [1978] 105), *quod tibi non hucusque petenti exempla paravi*, can surely only be acceptable if the idea of hendiadys is unquestionably correct.

<sup>12</sup> For more detailed analysis, cf. Prescott (above, note 10) 478-79.

<sup>13</sup> A position accepted by Wiseman (above, note 3) 94 ("What Manlius wanted besides poetry . . . was a girl.") and Woodman (above, note 1) 101. T. E. Kinsey, "Some Problems in Catullus 68," *Latomus* 26 (1967) 35-53, at 41-42, introduces a variant to this position: ". . . it would seem that Manlius is trying to open, or perhaps reopen, a homosexual affair with Catullus." This interpretation is also accepted by J. Ferguson (above, note 1) 226: "His friend is making two requests: one for a poem, the other for the renewal of a homosexual affair with Catullus: there is no other explanation of *munera Veneris*. There is a chiasmus—empty bed : old poets :: Catullus's poetry : Catullus in the empty bed."

A homosexual interpretation cannot be lightly dismissed. However, though reference to the *munera Veneris* need not exclude a homosexual context (cf. Sappho fr. 1 etc.), there is no clear indication either that the reader should be led in this direction. "Tempore quo primum vestis mihi tradita pura est, / iucundum cum aetas florida ver ageret, / multa satis lusi" (15-17) evidently refers to sexual activity in general; it need not exclude homosexual involvement, but it clearly does not stress it. Likewise Kinsey's reference to "amicum" (9) and "hospitis" (12) to support this meaning is unconvincing. In "id gratum est mihi, me quoniam tibi dicis amicum" (9) what "gratum est mihi" is that Mallius is treating Catullus

critic to shy away from this meaning through personal aesthetic and moral criteria. The evidence of both Greek and Latin literature demands this meaning and has been widely quoted.<sup>14</sup> The specific meaning of the *munus Veneris* is an integral part of the poem and cannot be left undefined.<sup>15</sup> For it both explains the content of lines 15–26, with their air of sexual renunciation, and points to the likelihood of an erotic reference in the critical lines 27–30.

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as an "amicum" by placing confidence in him. "Hospitis officium" is also unlikely to have "an obscene sense." It is much more likely to be a response to Mallius' use of the shipwreck metaphor, as noted by Woodman (above, note 1) 101–02. It is also noted by Woodman (104 n. 12) that a homosexual reference loses point if the reader does not believe that the reference to *munera Musarum* is a request for poems written by Catullus: "There is some attractiveness in this thesis [that Mallius had requested Catullus as a homosexual partner] if the *munera* are taken to mean Catullus' own poetry, for then the poet would be asked to be personally responsible for both requests. But if the request is not for Catullus' own poetry, as I believe, the theory of homosexuality becomes in my opinion less plausible."

<sup>14</sup> [Hesiod] *Aspis* 46–47:

παννύχιος δ' ἄρ' ἔλεκτο σὺν αἰδοίῃ παρακοίτι  
τερπόμενος δώροισι πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης.

[Homer] *Hymn. Cer.* 101–02:

γρηὶ παλαιγενεὶ ἐναλίγκιος ἢ τε τόκοιο  
εἴργηται δῶρων τε φιλοστεφάνου Ἀφροδίτης.

Catullus 61. 224–28:

claudite ostia, virgines:  
lusimus satis. at boni  
coniuges, bene vivite et  
munere assiduo valentem  
exercete iuventam.

Catullus 68. 145: *sed furtiva dedit mira munuscula nocte.*

These references are quoted variously by Ellis (above, note 5) 404–05; Kroll, *Catull* (Berlin 1923) 221; Prescott (above, note 10) 499. A further passage referred to by both the proponents and opponents of hendiadys is Anacreon 96 D:

οὐ φιλέω ὃς κρητῆρι παρὰ πλέω οἰνοποτάζων  
νεῖκα καὶ πόλεμον δακρυόεντα λέγει,  
ἀλλ' ὅστις Μουσέων τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ δῶρ' Ἀφροδίτης  
συμμίσγων ἐρατῆς μνήσεται εὐφροσύνης.

C. J. Tuplin, "Catullus 68," *CQ* 31 (1981) 113–39, cites this poem to support his point that line 10, in isolation, could plausibly mean, "you ask for gifts consisting in love poetry." Kinsey (previous note) 41 n. 6 has, however, already dealt with this argument by rightly stressing *συμμίσγων*, which not only indicates that the two items are separate but is also itself representative of sexual activity.

<sup>15</sup> "I assume that the *munera Musarum* meant poetry of some sort, and that the *munera Veneris* meant something different," Powell (above, note 2) 205–06.

It should also be noted that the very nature of the *munus Veneris* must imply humour.<sup>16</sup> At this point we might consider the possibility that “epistolium” (2) should have already alerted the reader to the introduction of such humour. The diminutive is frequently used in Catullus to suggest irony and a sense of mock-seriousness. This is certainly the case in Poems 3 and 50. In the third poem the forms “miselle,” “ocelli” and “turgiduli” all occur in the last three lines (3. 16–18):

o factum male! o *miselle* passer!  
tua nunc opera meae puellae  
flendo *turgiduli* rubent *ocelli*.

Here the diminutives serve both to emphasise the absurdity of Lesbia’s grief over such an issue and to put in perspective Catullus’ apparently “tragic” treatment of the incident. Similarly in Poem 50 the diminutive is used to emphasise the frivolity and humour behind the apparently serious façade of physical discomfort: “nec somnus tegeter quiete *ocellos*” (10), “at defessa labore membra postquam / semimortua *lectulo* iacebant” (14–15), “oramus, cave despuas, *ocelle*” (19). The loss of literary activity and intellectual stimulus is jokingly referred to in terms of love-sickness.

The use of the diminutive should alert the reader to the potential for irony and humour in “epistolium.” Parallels can be provided for “epistolium” as a term designating frivolity: This is the case in Apuleius, *Apologia* 6: “Primo igitur legerunt *e ludicris meis epistolium* de dentificio versibus scriptum.” Two related examples, which also emphasise the erotic associations of “epistolium,” are found in Plutarch:

τὸν δ' ἀναγνόντα Σερβιλίας τῆς ἀδελφῆς ἐπιστόλιον ἀκόλαστον πρὸς τὸν Καίσαρα γεγραμμένον, ἐρώσης καὶ διεφθαρμένης ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. (Plut. *Cato minor* 24. 3)

καὶ τοῦ Καίσαρος τὸ δελτάριον, ὡς εἶχε, τῷ Κάτωνι προσδόντος, ἀναγνόντα Σερβιλίας τῆς ἀδελφῆς ἀκόλαστον ἐπιστόλιον. (Plut. *Brutus* 5. 4)

That it is the diminutive form which suggests frivolity in these two passages is made clear from reference to the same ἐπιστόλιον as τὸ δελτάριον, γραμματιδίου μικροῦ and τι μικρόν. When the diminutive is

<sup>16</sup> This point is the basis for Woodman’s (above, note 1) 101 perception of humour in the poem: “Manlius cannot have suffered a serious crisis if he expected that a new girl would immediately solve his problems; and asking a friend to send a girl from one area of Italy to another is in itself a humorous notion and presumably not to be taken seriously.”

combined, as in our poem, with a grandiose phrase, "conscriptum hoc lacrimis,"<sup>17</sup> it surely can only have a humorous effect.<sup>18</sup>

With the humour and frivolity of Mallius' self-description and his request for a *munus Veneris* (a woman) established, it is time to consider the nature of Catullus' response in lines 15–26. These lines have two basic objectives: first to reveal to Mallius the precise nature of Catullus' "incommoda" (11) and second to demonstrate how Catullus' current position makes him unable to comply with a request for a *munus Veneris*.

Line 15 immediately places us in an erotic context, as the "vestis . . . pura" is defined by erotic rather than political meaning; the assumption of the *toga virilis* symbolically marking the inception of sexual interest. (Line 16, "iucundum cum aetas florida ver ageret," clearly indicates that this particular stage in Catullus' life is intended to show the beginning of pleasurable rather than "serious" pursuits.) This context already establishes the probability of "multa satis lusi" as a specific reference to "love-affairs," and this inference is further confirmed by the appearance of Venus in lines 17–18, "non est dea nescia nostri/ quae dulcem curis miscet amaritiem."

Though it is tempting to see a possible literary reference in "lusi,"<sup>19</sup> there are nevertheless good reasons for the exclusion of such a reference. An examination of the use of *ludere* in Catullus reveals that the only place where this verb implies poetic composition is in Poem 50. But, as we have already seen, this poem humorously equates literary and erotic experience. As Wiseman notes, "the imagery is deliberately *erotic*,"<sup>20</sup> and therefore the use of *ludere* in this poem cannot be cited as support for a general meaning of the verb, "to compose poetry." Even though it may be argued that "non est dea nescia nostri/ quae dulcem curis miscet amaritiem" (17–18) need not emphasise the lover at the expense of the poet,<sup>21</sup> there is nevertheless a clinching argument in the careful structuring of lines 31–33:

ignoscet igitur si, quae mihi luctus ademit,  
haec tibi non tribuo munera, cum nequeo.  
nam, quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me, . . .

<sup>17</sup> A phrase which, as Ellis (above, note 5) 403 rightly stresses, means "not tear-stained but written in tears instead of ink."

<sup>18</sup> Thus Powell's assertion (above, note 2) 204 that non-serious interpretations of Mallius' letter must be excluded as being "too frivolous" to be consistent with the tone of "conscriptum hoc lacrimis" is quite invalid.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. C. W. Macleod, "A Use of Myth in Ancient Poetry," *CQ* 24 (1974) 82–93, at 84 n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Wiseman (above, note 3) 92 n. 27.

<sup>21</sup> So Prescott (above, note 10) 480: "Even the immediately following allusion to the goddess of bitter-sweet love with whom Catullus is not unacquainted may seem to our opponents [supporters of hendiadys] ambiguous and applicable to a composer of love-poetry as easily as to a lover."

The effect of these lines is to polarise the content of lines 15–30 (27–30 being attached to 15–26 by the consequential force of “quare” in line 27) from that of 33–36. “Igitur” (31) looks backwards to the content of 15–26; line 32, “haec tibi non tribuo munera, cum nequeo,” summarizes the total effect of the whole of 15–36; and “nam” (35) looks forward to the content of 33–35, Catullus’ reason for refusing to provide the *munus Musarum*. The precision of this structure makes the idea of any literary reference in “lusi” misplaced.

Although Catullus’ emphasis on the sexual aspect of his life may appear to be leading him towards compliance with Mallius’ request, this impression is simultaneously countered by the poet’s specific reference to past situations that are no longer applicable. Catullus certainly would have been the right person to approach in this matter, but he is no longer. The sense is clear and concisely expressed; so “tempore quo primum” (15) signifies the beginning of a past preoccupation, “satis lusi” (17) establishes that this past is finished with, and “sed” (19) points forward to a new reality. Catullus quickly introduces the reason for this new situation: “sed totum hoc studium luctu fraterna mihi mors / abstulit” (19–20). The death of his brother has removed his capacity to enjoy relations with the opposite sex, “totum hoc studium” referring back to “tempore quo primum . . . multa satis lusi” (15–17).

The introduction of “death” as the basis for Catullus’ position is significant. For it is by the use of this imagery that he will demonstrate to Mallius the disparity of their respective situations.<sup>22</sup> Mallius has expressed the nature of his own insignificant erotic desertion in the terms of death imagery (dependant on “nafragum” in line 3); hence his request to be rescued “a mortis limine” (4) and his enforced stay in a “lecto caelibe” (6, where “caelibe” is potentially not only “bachelor” but also “widowed”). For Catullus, however, the imagery of death is not a form of frivolous exaggeration but an expression of harsh reality. Restatement and intensification of this imagery would be ruinously inappropriate if Mallius’ complaint had been seriously expressed. But, faced with a Mallius who communicates in this humorous and exaggerated manner, this same technique becomes a necessary and effective means of both explaining his own situation and pointing out the incongruity of Mallius’ request.

<sup>22</sup> Contra Tuplin (above, note 14) 115, who argues that, “The loss of the brother is thus deliberately made to seem of the same sort as the loss that Mallius has sustained,” and, “In short, Catullus is showing Mallius that his own position was exactly like Mallius’—only very much worse.” But this argument seems to be based on a striking contradiction, for Catullus’ situation cannot be “exactly like” and “very much worse” than Mallius’.



To this end Catullus emphasises the intensity and reality of his loss by repeated apostrophe, "*o misero frater adempte mihi, / tu mea tu moriens fregisti commoda, frater*" (20–21), and by a stress on the completeness of his loss and the causal link between his brother's death and the misery of his present situation (21–26):

tu mea tu moriens *fregisti commoda*,<sup>23</sup> frater,  
 tecum *una tota* est nostra sepulta domus,  
*omnia* tecum *una* perierunt *gaudia* nostra  
 quae tuus in vita dulcis alebat amor.  
 cuius ego interitu *tota* de mente fugavi  
 haec studia atque omnes *delicias* animi. 25

Although the reader may sense a movement away from the specifically erotic reference of "totum hoc studium" (19) to a wider area of influence, "omnia . . . gaudia" (23) and "haec studia atque omnes delicias animi," this should not be seen as a confirmation of deliberate ambiguity in "multa satis lusi." Such expansion is simply necessary to indicate the generality of misery that has descended on Catullus. "Haec studia" and "omnes delicias animi" are expressive of pleasure in general. Obviously Catullus cannot realistically limit the effect of his brother's death simply to the removal of his love-life. It has to have a more generally depressive effect but at the same time he is forced to emphasise one particular aspect, as the one that specifically prevents him from providing a *munus Veneris*. The possibility of the expansiveness of "haec studia" and "omnes delicias animi" having a literary, rather than an emotional, basis is further precluded by the structure of 31–33 (see above).

So certain basic parameters have been established: Mallius' description of his own state is deliberately exaggerated (and his request for *munera* is inevitably implicated in this frivolity); Mallius has misjudged, or is, rather, unaware of Catullus' true situation (i.e. he knows that Catullus is in Verona but he does not know why) and consequently seeks the impossible, "a

<sup>23</sup> "Fregisti commoda" forms an obvious rhetorical link back to line 11, "sed tibi ne mea sint ignota *incommoda*, Malli." This link does rather more than merely establish the dependance of Catullus' "incommoda" upon his brother's death. It may, in fact, be possible, given the likely proximity of lines 1–10 to the actual words of Mallius' letter, that Mallius had himself used the phrase "mea incommoda" to describe the consequences of his situation and to explain his specific requests from Catullus ("muneraque et Musarum . . . et Veneris"). Catullus then initiates his refusal of Mallius' requests by informing him that he has in fact "incommoda" of his own. The effectiveness of "sed tibi ne mea sint ignota *incommoda*, Malli" would naturally be considerably enhanced by the reapplication of Mallius' own words. Moreover the essential difference between Mallius' and Catullus' "incommoda" is more poignantly expressed by the existence of an apparent point of similarity. For the "incommoda" of both men force them into a celibate state, but their reasons for this enforced celibacy are quite disparate.

misero dona beata" (14); the basis of the poem is Catullus' attempt to demonstrate the reality of his own distress and the extent of Mallius' misconception; and finally lines 15–26 state his inability to provide a *munus Veneris* and establish the reason for his refusal, the death of his brother.

These considerations have to be borne in mind as the reader approaches the much-debated lines 27–30:

quare, quod scribis "Veronae turpe, Catulle,  
esse," quod hic quisquis de meliore nota  
frigida deserto tepefactat membra cubili.  
id, Malli, non est turpe, magis miserum est.<sup>24</sup>

"Quare," as shown above, indicates a close thematic link with the content of lines 15–26. In the light of the consequential force of "quare" it is justifiable to make two assumptions: first that 27–30 deal with the same subject matter as 15–26, the *munus Veneris*; second that they are further designed to display and emphasise the disparity of Catullus' and Mallius' respective positions (which has been the central point of the preceding section).

Before analysing the effect of 27–30 it is necessary to establish the correctness of the punctuated version of these lines shown above. The problem of whether "hic" (28) refers to Catullus' or Mallius' current location is of fundamental importance, for it not only defines the extent of Mallius' direct speech but also has a radical effect on the reader's entire perception of the poem. (The meaning of 27–30 must alter drastically<sup>25</sup> according to whether "hic" is a reference to Catullus in Verona or to Mallius in Rome.)

A detailed reading of the poem will reveal an elegant tripartite use of "hic," as a means of reference to Catullus in Verona, and an explicit contrast between the use of "hic" in this sense and the use of "illic" in line 35. The first reference is in line 10, "muneraque et Musarum *hinc* petis et Veneris," where "hinc" is an explicit reference to Catullus in Verona, from where Mallius seeks his *munera*. Similarly in line 36, "*huc* una ex multis capsula me sequitur," "huc" refers to Verona, the place to which Catullus has gone. "Hic" (28) would naturally stand within this pattern as a reference to Verona, the place where Catullus currently is. Each of these positional references is also accompanied by a different temporal aspect: "Hinc" (10) is defined by the future, the place Mallius envisions his gifts will come from; "hic" is

<sup>24</sup> The punctuation indicates what I believe is the correct reading.

<sup>25</sup> It is surely inadvisable therefore to leave the resolution of the meaning of "hic" to simply a matter of personal preference: "There are linguistic arguments, but not decisive ones, on both sides . . . Accordingly, which text we adopt depends primarily on whether we think it is at Verona, or at the place where Mallius is writing from, that all the best people are warming their cold limbs in a deserted bed," Powell (above, note 2) 203.

rooted in the present, referring to Catullus' current emotional condition; and "huc" (36) is detailed by past action,<sup>26</sup> Catullus' initial move to Verona. "Hic" then is the pivotal point of this structure, defining both Catullus' spatial and emotional position.

This use of "hic" stands in explicit contrast to the meaning of "illa . . . illa . . . illic" in lines 34–35,

hoc fit, quod Romae vivimus: *illa domus,*  
*illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas,*

where "illa . . . illa . . . illic" are all defined by the locative "Romae," the place where Catullus is not. The reader is then left to conclude that the extent of Mallius' direct speech must be limited to "Veronae turpe, Catulle, esse," for if "hic" has to be a reference to Verona it cannot be part of Mallius' direct speech, since Mallius, wherever he may be, is clearly not himself in Verona. Direct speech ends after "esse" (28), and "quod" (28) then introduces Mallius' speech as reported by Catullus, "quod hic . . . cubili" (28–29). The portions of direct and reported speech combine to indicate *what* precisely Mallius believes to be shameful, Catullus' very presence in Verona ("Veronae turpe, Catulle, esse"), and *why* he thinks it is shameful ("quod hic quisquis de meliore nota / frigida deserto tepefactat membra cubili"). "Id" (30) then initiates Catullus' judgement of Mallius' reproach.

The basis of Catullus' statement, "id, Malli, non est turpe, magis miserum est" (30), is plain enough: The reason his stay at Verona is not "turpe" but "miserum" is the death of his brother. This still leaves us with the problem, however, why Mallius should believe Catullus' stay in Verona to be "turpe." Catullus, of course has already stated Mallius' reason in lines 28–29 (quoted above), but this has only served to further diversify critical opinion.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Although Mallius made his request in the past and "petis" (10) is a present tense, nevertheless the question of whether or not Catullus will provide the *munera* is clearly rooted in the future. Likewise in line 36 the verb which accompanies "huc" is a present tense, "sequitur," but must indicate a past action since Catullus is already in Verona: "Verona turpe, Catulle, esse."

<sup>27</sup> Ellis (above, note 5) 406–07 suggests two basic possibilities: (i) "It is disgraceful for Catullus to be at Verona, because here (i.e. at Rome, or perhaps Baiae) everyone of any fashion has been warming the limbs that lie cold on a forsaken bed,' i.e. has consoled Lesbia for Catullus' absence by becoming in turns her paramour." (ii) "It is disgraceful to Catullus to be at Verona, because in Verona every man of fashion is condemned to freeze on a solitary bed,' i.e. is unable to follow the pursuits of a man of pleasure." Powell (above, note 2) 205 proposes a speculative rift between Lesbia and Catullus: "It is a shame for you to rush off to Verona (just because you have been deserted by Lesbia). Don't you realise that, here, everybody who is anybody (including, of course myself) has been deserted by his lady friend, and is at this very moment trying to warm his frozen limbs in a deserted bed." Kinsey (above, note 13) 41 opts for a homosexual explanation: "Or does 'hic' refer

It is helpful to approach this problem within the context of the poem's structure. The poem is built around various expositions of disparity. Mallius himself has assumed a disparity, but this is one of a "miser" Mallius and a "beatus" Catullus. This impression has to be removed, even reversed, by Catullus. He has to show himself as the one who is "miser" in a real rather than superficial way. This has already been achieved in part by the revelation of his brother's death. Catullus, however, can most effectively expose Mallius' frivolous humour as incongruous by forcing Mallius' words back upon him.

As lines 27–30 are linked (by "quare") to the content of 15–26, with their focus on the *munus Veneris*, "turpe" must also be explicable within this context. Mallius in Rome<sup>28</sup> states that he is abandoned and sleeping on his own ("desertum in lecto caelibe," 6). The identification of the *munus Veneris* as a woman and his request for the same from Catullus must emphasise two things: first that he believes Catullus is in a position to comply with this request (i.e. he believes Catullus has no shortage of women to sleep with in Verona) and second that it is the general condition of being "desertus" that is problematic and *not* the loss of one specific partner. The application of "turpe" in this sense must imply that Mallius regards it as "shameful" that he is forced to sleep on his own when Catullus is not. Indeed, Mallius' request for a *munus Veneris* (a woman) not only assumes that Catullus is not sleeping on his own but (within the general tone of Mallius' exaggerated humour) hints at a belief that Catullus has in fact his own personal harem in Verona.

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to Rome and is Manlius suggesting that Catullus should return to Rome and help him to attain the *munera Veneris*?" Wiseman (above, note 3) 100 prefers to see "turpe" (as defined by Mallius) as a reference to Catullus' inability to indulge himself in Verona: "Therefore (*quare*), his stay in a town where the élite did not sleep around with the same freedom as in Rome (or so at least he makes out for the sake of his argument), was not a disgraceful abdication of his normal way of life, as Manlius had implied, but proof of his genuine misery." Woodman (above, note 1) 101 on the other hand takes it that Mallius' "turpe" signifies that he believes Catullus is having more luck with his love-life in Verona than Mallius is in Rome: "The sense of these notoriously difficult lines seems to me to be: 'As for your writing "How shocking it is, Catullus, <for you> to be in Verona," the fact that here all the best people can still warm their limbs even when their beds have been deserted is, Manlius, not shocking but sad.' In other words, I take it that Manlius had employed a humorous and ironical way of saying that there was a surplus of girls in Verona."

<sup>28</sup> In fact there is no specific evidence that Mallius is in Rome. But Catullus' emphasis on the disparity between his present situation at Verona (where he is mourning his brother's death) and his former life at Rome, "quod Romae vivimus" (where "vivimus" symbolises life's pleasures and contrasts with the oppressiveness and inactivity of Verona), suggests that Catullus may well be reversing an image that Mallius has projected, an image of himself miserable in Rome and Catullus having a good time in Verona.

When "turpe" is applied in this sense it gains a suitable sense of mock moral indignation. Mallius berates Catullus for doing precisely what he himself wants to do. This argument presupposes that the effect of "deserto" (29) is quite different from that of "desertum" in line 6. The structure of the poem makes this a valid assumption: "Desertum" (6) is Mallius' reference to his own situation whereas "deserto" is his reported reference to Catullus' situation. Given that Mallius has assumed a disparity between their respective positions, the effect of the word in each instance must be different. So far from this "clear rhetorical link" being used to emphasise the parallel nature of their suffering<sup>29</sup> it rather demonstrates the extent of Mallius' misconception.

None of this argument will stand, however, if there is no possibility of an active sexual meaning in lines 28–29:

... quod hic quisquis de meliore nota  
frigida deserto tepefactat membra cubili.

This possibility is vigorously denied by Powell: "If you are warming cold limbs in a deserted bed, it means that you are sleeping alone." But, as shown above, the basic theme of contrast throughout the poem (Mallius' misconception of Catullus' position and Catullus' attempt to reverse this impression) must alert the reader to the probability of a different point of reference in "deserto" (29) from "desertum" in line 6.

The hypothesis that "tepefactat" is an allusion to sexual activity<sup>30</sup> may be supported by reference to Ovid, *Heroides* 1. 7, where Penelope complains that, if Ulysses had not departed, "non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto." Two things are made clear here, first that she is "frigida" precisely because Ulysses is not with her and second that she envisions her limbs being returned to a more temperate state by his return.

It may, however, be argued that a state of being "tepidus" represents a degree of heat that is warm rather than hot.<sup>31</sup> But "tepidus" indicates an intermediary stage between the extremes of "frigidus" and "calidus." So

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Powell (above, note 2) 205.

<sup>30</sup> A possibility that Powell (above, note 2) 205, in accordance with a serious interpretation, will not allow: "Mallius is not warming his limbs with the assistance of a second party, but by wrapping the blankets around them; it is surprising that scholars should be unwilling to accept this as a legitimate way of warming the limbs." The reader may, however, note that although the warming properties of blankets cannot be denied, nevertheless, their desirability as a heating agent is surely rather circumscribed within an erotic context. Moreover, it is inherently unlikely that Mallius is complaining about the superior quality of Veronese blankets.

<sup>31</sup> So Ellis (above, note 5) 407, on the benefits of a "celibate" reading of lines 28–29: "This has the advantage of giving *tepefacere* its proper meaning of slightly, as opposed to thoroughly, warming."

although it can be used to indicate a decline in erotic feeling ("Fac timeat de te, tepidamque recalface mentem"<sup>32</sup>), it may also display an intermediate stage in the ascent, a progressive state, moving from "frigidus" towards "calidus." "Frigidus" is naturally applied to two "erotic" conditions, virginity and widowhood:

nec tenerum Lycidam mirabere, quo calet iuventus  
nunc omnis et mox *virgines tepebunt*.<sup>33</sup>

"Tepebunt" is not, I believe, contrasted with "calet" to demonstrate the relative intensity of male and female sexuality. Rather, it indicates the inception of female sexual awareness that will be consequent upon Lycidas' arrival at manhood. In this sense "tepebunt" is contrasted with the already developed homosexual interest, "calet," that accompanies Lycidas' pubescent state.<sup>34</sup> A movement away from a state of being "frigidus" is also a natural consequence of remarriage:

ipsam iam cedere sensi  
inque vicem tepuisse viro.<sup>35</sup>

Widowhood is a form (albeit enforced) of erotic desertion and consequently returns the sufferer to a state of being "frigidus." The reactivation of a love-life, the movement away from "frigidus," is here implicit in the infinitive "tepuisse."

Less permanent forms of desertion, such as separation or simple lack of sexual activity, will also result in "frigida membra":

frigidus in viduo destituere toro.<sup>36</sup>  
frigida deserto nocte iacebis anus.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ovid, *Ars* 2. 445, quoted by Kroll (above, note 14) 223 and restated by Wiseman (above, note 3) 100.

<sup>33</sup> Horace, *C.* 1. 4. 19-20.

<sup>34</sup> This gives point to Nisbet and Hubbard's remark (*A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* [Oxford 1970] 72), "*tepebunt*: less strong than *calet*" and to their explanation: "He illustrates the lapse of years by remarking that Lycidas will soon be loved by women instead of men." Stinton's objection to this point ("Horatian Echoes," *Phoenix* 31 [1977] 162), "But if this is the only point, why did Horace write *tepebunt* not *calebunt*?" does not take account of the "temporal" aspect of the poem or the progressive status of "tepebunt." The verb thus represents something that presently ("mox") will begin to happen and is depicted in its initial stages so as to contrast with the fully-developed (but precarious) nature of present events.

<sup>35</sup> Statius, *Silv.* 1. 2. 139-40, quoted by Nisbet and Hubbard (previous note) 72.

<sup>36</sup> Ovid, *Am.* 3. 5. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Ovid, *Ars* 3. 70; this and the previous example are both quoted by Powell (above, note 2) 205.

"Tepebunt," then, in connection with "frigida . . . membra," in a specifically erotic context, must be an indication of sexual activity. In particular it indicates sexual activity for someone who, for whatever reason, has been recently inactive in this department. The point that Mallius must be making is that, if he were in Catullus' position (i.e. in Verona), he would have no problem in finding suitable female company; his limbs need not remain "frigida deserto . . . cubili."

The use of the frequentative verb need not, as Wiseman says, "suggest that the warming was not very successful, and that 'everyone of quality' was in bed alone" ([above, note 3] 100). Rather, the frequentative verb indicates that "everyone of quality"<sup>38</sup> could successfully warm their limbs, even when deserted, anytime that they pleased. *Tepefactare* with its idea of repeated action thus links explicitly to the idea of "copia" (39-40)<sup>39</sup> and its association of fruitful abundance. Mallius has suggested that there is an abundance ("copia") of suitable girls in Verona. This must be what Mallius is alleging is "turpe": that Catullus should be surrounded by sexual opportunity when he himself is forced to sleep "in lecto caelibe" (6).

But is this reconstruction tenable? Why should Mallius assume that women were more readily available in Verona?<sup>40</sup> Can we possibly credit the idea that Mallius is asking Catullus to send him a girl from Verona? To be drawn into the question of Veronese morality (whether one believes "tepefactat" has a sexual point of reference or not) is to miss the point at issue.<sup>41</sup> Verona simply represents where Catullus is and Mallius is not. Catullus' exact location is relatively unimportant (at least to Mallius): Mallius merely wants to point out that he believes Catullus is having a

<sup>38</sup> The approbatory nature of "quisquis de meliore nota" may in itself lead the reader to expect some positive rather than negative action taking place in "frigida deserto tepefactat membra cubili."

<sup>39</sup> The reference to "copia" (33, 40) makes Tuplin's idea (above, note 14) 115, that the *munus Veneris* is a request "for help in getting back the girl he loves," unlikely. (Powell is presumably alluding to Tuplin's argument when he writes, "Perhaps Mallius asked Catullus to intervene and try to persuade his errant mistress to return.") "Copia" in this sense would have to mean, "much influence," which goes ill with the sense of plurality and abundance that is inherent in "copia" in lines 33 and 40 ("nam, quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me").

<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps possible to see this improbable assumption as yet another attempt to establish the wretchedness of his position. He may in effect be saying, "Here I am in Rome (all alone), where you might expect it would be easy for a deserted man to find another woman and there you are, Catullus, in Verona (that provincial backwater) and still having a good time."

<sup>41</sup> The reference of Poem 67 to Veronese immorality (though surely not in an entirely serious or generally applicable sense) may be seen as leading the reader into the expectation of some form of sexual misconduct in lines 27-30 of 68A. However this draws us into the contentious questions of whether and by whom the Catullan collection was deliberately arranged.

good time when he himself is not. Mallius' point would presumably have been similarly phrased wherever Catullus may have been. That Mallius' censure is essentially humorous is stressed by the extravagance of his claim: the generality of "quisquis de meliore nota" and the exaggeration of the frequentative verb "tepefactat." Catullus and not Verona is the target of Mallius' humour.

Mallius' expression, then, in 27-30 is perfectly in keeping with the frivolity of the opening ten lines. His request for a *munus Veneris* is in itself deliberately humorous. He cannot seriously expect Catullus to send him a woman from Verona. But such an improbable request is certainly compatible with the polarity of their respective positions that Mallius has created: a wretchedly miserable, sex-starved Mallius in Rome and a wildly fortunate Catullus, sitting amidst his harem in Verona. This use of humour and the obvious frivolity of Mallius' tone combine to exclude the need to defend the concepts of *communio amicae* or the free movement of women for erotic purposes around the Roman world.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> These ideas are not, however, necessarily untenable. *Communio amicae* cannot be rejected on the grounds of "emotional involvement," as Powell (above, note 2) 206 insists: "It is not squeamishness about the idea of such trafficking that leads one to reject the hypothesis, but the fact that it presupposes a cynical and commercial attitude which is totally at odds with the emotional involvement of both Catullus and Mallius as displayed in the poem." This assumes a similarity between the emotional states of Mallius and Catullus that the poem clearly does not display. Similarly, Powell's statement, "Roman convention appears to have been that such things could have been offered, but not asked for without breach of propriety," is unconvincing. For the account of Pompey and Flora in Plutarch (*Pomp.* 2. 3) clearly indicates that it is not Geminus who is acting in a peculiar fashion by asking for a share in Flora's favours but Pompey in refusing to have anything to do with her thereafter and Flora herself for being upset about this state of affairs. (Cf. Wiseman [above, note 3] 95, "the surprising fact which made the story worth telling was that one of the principals involved was not prepared to co-operate.") The activities of another lady, Cytheris, are also interesting in this context, and in particular her movement between M. Antonius and Volumnius: "She first appears in Antony's retinue in May 49 ... greeted as Volumnia ... When late in 46 Cicero saw Cytheris at the dinner-table of her patronus Volumnius ... she may have gone back to her old lover: the ingratiating Volumnius appears later as a protégé of Antony (*RE IX A*, 878 f.), and presumably had lent him the lady in the first place" (R. D. Anderson, P. J. Parsons and R. G. M. Nisbet, "Elegiacs by Gallus from Qaşr İbrim," *JRS* 69 [1979] 125-55, at 152-53).

Neither can the notion of a courtesan travelling from a man at point A to a man at point B be simply dismissed. This idea may be present in *Eclogue* 10. 22-23, in connection with Gallus, Lycoris and another: "'Galle, quid insanis?' inquit, 'tua cura Lycoris / perque nives alium perque horrida castra secuta est.'" The sense of "secuta est" is unclear: "followed" or "accompanied." Possible clarification is available in lines 46-47: "Alpinas a, dura, nives et frigora Rheni / me sine sola vides." But again it is uncertain whether "sola" has a general (on her own) or a specific (without Gallus) point of reference. Of course none of this evidence is conclusive, but it does at least raise some interesting possibilities.



Lines 27–30 form a natural progression from the preceding section. In 15–26 Catullus deals with his brother's death in elaborate and expressive depth. So, when he quotes and reports Mallius' words back to him in 27–30, the ruinously inappropriate nature of his frivolous humour is readily apparent (both to Mallius and to us). Catullus need not do more than state the obvious: "id, Malli, non est turpe, magis miserum est." The point is achieved with devastating economy.

This effect of pregnant brevity is continued in lines 31–32:

*ignosces igitur si, quae mihi luctus ademit,  
haec tibi non tribuo munera, cum nequeo.*

"Ignosces igitur" is a piece of studied politeness, for there can now be little doubt about the propriety of Catullus' refusal. This point is further emphasised by "quae mihi luctus ademit," forcibly reminding the reader (again the effect is the same for us as it is for Mallius) of the emotional intensity of 19–26: "sed totum hoc studium luctu fraterna mihi mors / abstulit. o misero frater adempte mihi" (19–20).

This conciseness of expression<sup>43</sup> appears to continue into Catullus' basic excuse for the non-provision of the *munus Musarum*: "nam, quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me, / hoc fit, quod Romae vivimus:

<sup>43</sup> The emphatic repetition (34–35) of "*illa domus, illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas*" appears, however, to conflict with the matter-of-fact expression of the rest of lines 33–36. This may lead the reader to suspect that its reference is not merely confined to Catullus' shortage of books in Verona. Further examination will suggest that the intensity of its expression (especially "*illic mea carpitur aetas*") helps to emphasise the fuller implications of "Romae vivimus." The meaning of this phrase is expanded outside of its immediate context (lines 33–36, where it simply applies to Catullus being separated from his library in Rome), and becomes, instead, indicative of the habitual pleasures of Catullus' life at Rome. This inevitably contrasts with the depression and misery of his current situation in Verona. This change of emphasis once more suggests to Mallius the unsuitability of his simplistic dichotomy: good times for Catullus in Verona, hard times for Mallius in Rome. The effect of "*illa domus, illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas*" is however more wide-ranging. For it effectively compresses and summarises the whole content of the poem within the space of nine words. "Domus" is a reference to Catullus' house in Rome and more specifically in this context to his library in that house. His separation from that house and his library makes the provision of a *munus Musarum* impossible. "*Illa mihi sedes*" is a reactivation of the *hospes*-theme and provides an explanation as to why Catullus is unable to comply with either request. By not being in his normal *sedes* (the link between *sedes* and the role of *hospes* is demonstrated at 64. 176, "*consilia in nostris requiesset sedibus hospes!*") Catullus is effectively excused from being precluded to perform the "hospitis officium" (12) that would normally be due to a "naufragum" (3). "*Illic mea carpitur aetas*" links back to line 16, "*iucundum cum aetas florida ver ageret,*" and its context of erotic pleasure. However, the enjoyment of these pleasures, which are a habitual part of Catullus' life in Rome ("Romae vivimus") is precluded from Verona by circumstance (the death of his brother) and so there is no possibility of Catullus' providing a *munus Veneris* from Verona.

... / ... huc una ex multis<sup>44</sup> capsula me sequitur" (33–36). He lives at Rome, he hasn't brought many books<sup>45</sup> with him and so isn't in a position to send any to Mallius.

That the *munus Veneris* should be dealt with so fully in lines 15–30 and the *munus Musarum* so briefly (33–36) is not in itself surprising. For it is the *munus Veneris* which affords Catullus the best opportunity to demonstrate the true nature of his own position. Conversely the act of lending a book does not suppose or depend upon any particular emotional state.

The final four lines of the poem are once more affecting in their restraint:

quod cum ita sit, nolim statuas nos mente maligna  
 id facere aut animo non satis ingenuo,  
 quod tibi non utriusque petenti copia posta est:  
 ultro ego deferrem, copia siqua foret. 40

It is perfectly clear by now that Catullus' refusal can hardly be due to "mente maligna" or "animo non satis ingenuo." But, in spite of the unfortunate blunder that Mallius has made and circumstances that might dictate a rather brusque reply (or no reply at all), Catullus handles himself with remarkable composure. Mallius is informed, not rebuked.

The reference in the final line to the possibility of Catullus' complying with Mallius' requests, "ultro ego deferrem, copia siqua foret," should not be seen to invalidate the frivolous nature of the *munus Veneris* that has been suggested in this paper. Catullus is merely responding to Mallius within the terms of the latter's humour. It is Mallius who has suggested that a "copia" of books and a "copia" of women are concepts that are on the same level and are both something that can be transported with equal facility.

Catullus exploits Mallius' humour to the full. Mallius' request for a *munus Veneris*, with its attendant emotional emphasis (albeit frivolous in this instance), provides Catullus with the perfect opportunity to inform Mallius of his own situation: The harshness of Catullus' real misery is

<sup>44</sup> Again an obvious rhetorical link exists between "una ex multis capsula" (36) and "multa satis lusi" in line 17. Both link to the idea of Catullus' usual abundance of these items in contrast to his current shortage in the present circumstances. The affirmation of a lack of books is specifically stated in line 33, "nam, quod scriptorum non magna est copia apud me," and the shortage of both commodities is covered in the final two lines of the poem, "quod tibi non utriusque petenti copia posta est: / ultro ego deferrem, copia siqua foret." The link between a shortage of reading material and the lack of someone to sleep with is of course a product of Mallius' humour. Catullus is able, however, to respond to this equation because his own radical suffering has ironically produced exactly the same circumstances (a lack of books and enforced celibacy).

<sup>45</sup> For my belief that the *munus Musarum* must be a reference to books rather than poetry written by Catullus, compare these lines with Kinsey (above, note 13) 38–40 and Woodman (above, note 1) 100.

expressed all the more effectively against the backdrop of Mallius' humorously exaggerated problems.

The whole poem, then, is built around an effective contrast between Mallius' misfortunes, which are superficial and exaggerated for humorous effect, and the very real nature of Catullus' distress at the death of his brother. Catullus does not treat Mallius dismissively (for his blunder is unintentional), but he nevertheless makes his situation perfectly clear and emphasises the inappropriateness of Mallius' overstated imagery at this particular moment. This emphasis is achieved by the reapplication of Mallius' imagery to himself (the shipwreck metaphor, the closeness to death and enforced sexual inactivity), and by quoting Mallius' words back at him. This latter technique is especially effective after Catullus has created a context in lines 15–26 which forces Mallius into recognition of his error.

As a letter, 68A conforms to its generic parameters by conveying information that is unknown to the recipient (the death of Catullus' brother) and by being (or at least seeming to be) specifically tailored to the nature of the addressee (a friend who through unavoidable ignorance uses humour, which at other times would have been appreciated, in a wholly inappropriate situation). As a poem, 68A does not exclude the general reader from its meaning. All the information that is needed is there and is perfectly explicable.<sup>46</sup> Its success "as a poem" depends both on this accessibility to a wider audience and on its particular and personal expression reaching a more universal level. This is achieved not only by the reader's being able to identify with the emotional intensity of bereavement and the unpredictability of life, but also, as this poem's particular expression shows, by recognition of the inadequate and unreliable medium of human communication.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> One of the most regrettable aspects of Powell's article (above, note 2) is the reintroduction of *Lesbia* (the King Charles' Head of Catullan interpretation) as a basis for interpretation. The fallacy of *Lesbia*'s presence in this poem is perhaps one of the few major areas of agreement in the recent critical tradition. The idea is rejected explicitly or implicitly excluded by all of Kinsey, Wiseman, Tuplin and Woodman. For those who believe in the division of Catullus 68 into two quite separate poems the reintroduction of *Lesbia* into 68A can only be a regressive step in the analysis of the poem.

<sup>47</sup> I should like to thank Dr. J. L. Moles and Professor A. J. Woodman of the University of Durham for their invaluable assistance in the production of this article.