The latest datable allusions in Catullus’ poems are to events in the latter part of the year 54 BC. This does not mean, of course, that Catullus died in that year, or ceased composing poetry, or that there are no later poems in the surviving collection. Most of the poems give little or no clue as to when they might have been written. But the political poems can all be safely assigned to 54 or earlier, and this is a reasonable terminus for a discussion of their context.

Catullus’ family was from Verona, and he was undoubtedly born and educated there (cf. Ov. *Am. 3.15.7*). He must have been a Roman citizen, since he served on the staff of Memmius when the latter was provincial governor in Bithynia; but since Transpadane Gaul only acquired full Roman status in 49 BC – prior to this, it had only “Latin rights” – it is likely that his father had been a magistrate in Verona, and had thereby acquired citizenship for himself and his immediate family (see Wiseman 1969: 59–60, 1987: 331; Skinner 2003: xxii).

At some point, Catullus came to Rome, but it is hard to say just when. It was surely in Rome that he became friends with C. Licinius Calvus, the distinguished orator and poet, a relationship so loyal that Ovid (*Am. 3.9.61–2*) imagines them as bosom companions even in the underworld. In Rome, too, Catullus made other friends and enemies, or at least came to know people he could plausibly represent as such in his verses. These were among the most distinguished figures of his day, including Caesar and Pompey, Cato, Cicero, Cicero’s rival in oratory Hortensius, and the historian and biographer Cornelius Nepos, to whom the dedicatory poem (c. 1) is addressed. Rome, finally, was the locus of his passionate affair with the woman he calls Lesbia, possibly to be identified with Clodia (*Apul. Apol. 10*), the wife, as many scholars suppose, of Q. Metellus Celer, the scion of a prominent noble family.1

All this could have happened over a period of two or three years in the life of an intense young man (there is reason to think that Catullus died young, perhaps at the age of 30 or so). The earliest datable references in the poetry may be assigned to the year 56 or 57 BC (Wiseman 1969: 47), though of course he must have begun writing
poems earlier, perhaps even as a boy. Nevertheless, the political context of the poetry would appear to be determined by events in the early 50s, beginning more or less with the formation, in 59, of what is called the First Triumvirate, that is, the informal alliance between Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great, and Crassus, the wealthiest man in Rome, under the terms of which they reigned supreme in the state until 54 and beyond.

With hindsight, the triumvirate may seem to be the beginning of the end of the Republic, and thus a crucial moment in Roman history. And yet, despite the threat that the alliance might have posed to traditional aristocratic institutions and dominance in Rome, it appears that the last generation of the Republic, in Erich Gruen’s apt phrase (Gruen 1974), continued to practice politics as usual in this decade, whatever their private misgivings. In any case, to determine how Catullus responded to the dramatic events of this period, our evidence must be first and foremost the poems themselves. And these, I believe, reveal a complex and profound view of the contemporary political scene.

We may begin with the most obviously political statement in the corpus, Catullus’ ferocious attack on Pompey and Caesar in poem 29. One can infer the approximate date of this poem from several references. First there is the allusion to the conquest of Britain. Caesar mounted two invasions, the first of which took place in the summer of 55, the second in the summer of 54: the poem, then, is no earlier than 55, but may well have been composed in the following year. Second, we know that Julia, Caesar’s daughter and Pompey’s wife, died in September 54; while it is not impossible that Catullus should have referred to Caesar and Pompey as father-in-law and son-in-law after her death, it is perhaps unlikely, since the marital bond that had been so important in uniting the two rivals was now ended. It is reasonable, then, to assign the poem to some time between the autumn of 55 and the spring of 54.

The poem refers also to other recent military campaigns, in Gaul, in the area of the Black Sea, and in Spain. Caesar had, of course, been active in Gaul since 59, when he was assigned command of the province for five years. The wealth from Pontus was brought back to Rome by Pompey after the long war against Mithridates, which culminated in Mithridates’ suicide in 63 (Pompey arrived in Italy in December of 62). Finally, it was Caesar, again, who fought in Spain, when he was propraetor there in 61. Catullus is conjuring here, as he does again (as we shall see) in poem 11, with the geographical breadth of Rome’s reach: from Asia in the East, to Spain in the West, to Britain at the extreme North. All the inhabitable world, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean or by the African desert, must have seemed poised to fall under Rome’s dominion. The time had not yet come when Crassus would be defeated and slain in his expedition against the Parthians on June 9, 53, his head to be used in place of Pentheus’ in a performance of Euripides’ Bacchae (the Parthians were apparently thoroughly Hellenized). Indeed, the absence of any allusion to this event in the corpus of Catullus’ poetry goes some way to confirming, in my mind, the supposition that the collection as we have it ends prior to that date.

The Mamurra who so enriched himself through the campaigns of Caesar and Pompey was a Roman knight from the town of Formiae (cc. 41.4, 57.4), who had served with Pompey in the East and with Caesar in Spain; in Gaul, Caesar appointed him praefectus fabrum or head of the engineer corps (Plin. HN 26.48); he perhaps returned to Rome after Caesar’s first crossing into Britain. Catullus is not the only
contemporary who attests to the vast wealth that Mamurra amassed. Cicero, writing
to Atticus in 50 (7.7.6), speaks of his fortune, and comments in another epistle (Att.
13.52.1) on his self-indulgent and profligate pursuits, while the elder Pliny, a hun-
dred years later, still can mention his house on the Caelian hill as an example of luxury
(HN 36.48). That Catullus felt a profound disgust at the thought of this wastrel
cornering all the wealth accumulated through Rome’s military campaigns is obvious,
and he resents Caesar and Pompey equally for their condoning of it.

But what is it precisely that Catullus objects to in Mamurra’s behavior and the
connivance of Rome’s two greatest generals? More precisely, does his strident attack
on the three men amount to a condemnation of their politics? Kenneth Quinn
(1972b: 267) thinks not: “Catullus is not a political satirist. His verse expresses no
political ideas, no political attitudes as such, except perhaps a general disgust with
politics,” or at the most “disgust with the establishment and those who manipulate
the establishment for their own ends.” Quinn finds the ostensibly political poems
repulsive (p. 269): “For most readers of Catullus the poems of political invective
occupy one of the less attractive corners of the background. The attacks on Caesar are
probably the most interesting, because of their victim – and also because of the
anecdote preserved by Suetonius.”

In his Life of the Deified Julius (73), Suetonius observes that Caesar was always
ready to be reconciled with his opponents when the opportunity presented itself, no
matter how nasty the attack. Thus, he forgave Catullus’ friend Gaius Calvus, of whose
“famous epigrams,” as Suetonius calls them, there survive some fragments, and
“when Valerius Catullus, whose verses concerning Mamurra – as Caesar admitted –
had left an indelible stain on him, apologized, he invited him to dinner that very day,
and continued to accept the hospitality of Catullus’ father, as he always had done.”
With due caution, we may perhaps infer from this report “that Catullus’ invective
verse had been circulating widely enough in Rome to come to Caesar’s attention
while he campaigned in Gaul,” and that the apology, if it really happened, “must have
taken place while Catullus was at home in Cisalpine Gaul and Caesar was wintering
there, sometime between late 55 and early 52” (Skinner 2003: xxi), the winter of 54
being the most likely occasion.3

It is possible that c. 29 was the very poem that had so offended Caesar, although
there are, as we shall see, other candidates. The language is certainly calculated
to sting: Caesar is directly addressed as a cinaedus or receptive homosexual, one
who enjoys playing the female role in a homoerotic relationship – a grave insult in
macho Rome.4 In addition, he is called shameless and voracious.5 These are vile
epithets, but Mamurra himself comes off even worse; indeed, the chief offense with
which Caesar and Pompey are charged is that of letting Mamurra get away with
appropriating booty beyond measure and rampant adultery (cf. Asper 1997: 68). Is
Catullus expressing anything more than pique at the conspicuous wealth of a hench-
man of the generals, or, worse still, resentment that he and his circle are not getting
their share of the loot?

Catullus levels a stronger charge, in fact. He accuses Caesar and Pompey, the two
most powerful men in Rome, of having ruined everything for the sake of this greedy
underling. The plain meaning is that the wars they waged in remote parts of the
world, culminating in the invasion of Britain, were undertaken for the sake of
enriching Mamurra and people like him, lackeys, comrades, or even sexual partners
(hence the label *cin_addrus*) who stood to benefit from such predatory campaigns. For the rest, there was only destruction. But can this be intended seriously as a commentary on Roman imperial politics – that the wars to extend or reaffirm Rome’s control over Spain and the Pontus, Gaul and Britain, were launched in the service of a limitlessly avaricious and corrupt faction of knights and nobles, who found in them a source of endless wealth and opportunities for debauchery? Is this not hyperbole, the real point being merely that Mamurra and a few lieutenants like him should not be allowed to run riot?

I believe that Catullus’ critique of Roman imperial politics is serious and sophisticated, even if it does not fully coincide with modern interpretations of the causes of Rome’s wars. The motive for subduing Gaul and Britain may well have seemed to contemporaries to be personal enrichment on the part of the commanders, driven by a hollow lust for power, display, and sex. Epicureanism, one of the leading philosophical currents of the time, explicitly characterized political ambition and avarice as empty desires, motivated by an irrational fear of death; Lucretius, who dedicated his didactic poem *On the Nature of Things* to a Memmius who in all likelihood was the same man with whom Catullus served in Bithynia, brought the message of Epicurus home to Romans at the very moment when Catullus was composing his last poems (there is reason to believe that Lucretius died around the year 54, and there are signs that he knew Catullus’ verse, or Catullus his). There is nothing inherently absurd about explaining foreign wars as a consequence of the dissoluteness of a ruling caste.

In the next-to-last poem in the collection as we have it (115), Catullus again attacks Mamurra, here under the nickname Mentula, “Prick” or “Cock” (Catullus makes the equation clear in 29.13). On the surface, the epigram seems contradictory. On the one hand, Mamurra is said to own 70 acres or *iugera* of arable land plus an undetermined amount of marsh; this is hardly a huge domain by contemporary Roman standards, though doubtless it was a valuable piece of property. On the other hand, he is described as richer than Croesus, at least potentially, and his holdings are said to extend northwards to the mythical territory of the Hyperboreans and westward to the Atlantic Ocean. The whole thing is then capped by the claim that Mamurra himself is bigger than all his lands, since he is not a human being but rather, as Catullus dubs him, a giant penis – presumably stretching to the ends of the earth.

One way to understand the point of this puzzling poem is to take the comparison with Croesus and the exaggerated statement of Mamurra’s holdings not so much as ironic as metaphorical: such a property should be enough to satisfy any man’s wants, and its owner would be equal to Croesus, if riches are measured by normal needs. To a rational or moderate person, such an estate is as good as one that extends to the limits of the world. Mamurra, however, is not such an individual, but rather someone driven by limitless lusts. That is the implication of the name Mentula or “Cock,” and the allegation that this organ represents the whole of Mamurra’s identity. The cock is described as gigantic because it is insatiable: even if Mamurra’s lands did reach the boundaries of the Roman Empire, they would not be enough for a man whose essence was pure desire. Mamurra’s cupidity, symbolized by his sexual lust, surpasses all bounds – even those of the Roman Empire itself.

Once again, then, Catullus has associated Mamurra’s appetites with the need for territory as far away as Spain or Britain or the regions beyond Scythia, traditionally the
homeland of the Hyperboreans. The motif is not casual but considered, and can be
exploited with subtlety.

In the preceding poem (c. 114), Catullus once more homes in on Mamurra’s
greed. The property mentioned here is presumably the same as that in c. 115; but
in this poem, Catullus states in straightforward economic terms the reason why it
does not suffice for Mamurra’s needs. Rich as the estate itself is, Mamurra’s con-
spicuous consumption (sumptus) exhausts its profits.

There is a textual problem in the first line that bears on the interpretation of the
poem, and it is worth a brief notice. The renaissance scholar Avancius proposed the
reading Firmanus saltus non falsō, Mentula, dives, / legitur, that is, “Mentula, your
estate in Firmum is rightly called rich” (Mynors’s text follows the Aldine edition). On
this reading, which is adopted by Kroll, line 4 must be rendered: “for its costs outstrip
its yield” (so Kroll 1968: 285: “[a holding] der trotz aller möglichen guten
Eigenschaften doch mehr kostet als er einbringt”). But this can hardly be said of
a property that is truly fruitful, as Mamurra’s surely is. The point is not that Mamurra
has made a poor investment, despite the apparent value of the land. It is rather, as in
c. 115, that no amount of property, whatever its productivity, would cover Mamurra’s
expenditures (for full discussion, see Syndikus 1987: 136–8). Again, in line 5, it must
be Mentula, not his estate, that lacks everything, since he inevitably exceeds his
resources, however great they may be. Hence he is poor in the midst of plenty. Or so I understand it.

To meet his outlays, Mamurra must continually acquire more land, the chief
symbol and source of affluence in Roman culture. But because his appetites are
limitless, he can never have enough, even if he were to possess an estate the size of
Rome’s entire Empire. This is why he is not just a wastrel, but rapacious as well: he
must always be adding more to compensate for what he has squandered. The plunder
brought in by war is essential to him.

In poem 57, any distinction between the characters of Caesar and Mamurra is
erased, as Catullus brands them equally as pathic homosexuals and seducers. If Caesar
was referring to a single epigram of Catullus when he declared that his verses
concerning Mamurra had marked him with undying blots (perpetua stigmata imposita),
this one is a fair contender for the honor; apart from the directness of the
calumny, the reference to stains (maculae) imprinted (impressae) on the two repro-
bates might have motivated Caesar’s own turn of phrase.

Here again, Caesar, along with Mamurra, is labeled a cinaedus or pervert. There
is no doubt that this term, like pathicus, indicates the passive role in sex between men,
at least for Catullus (compare his use of the term in cc. 25.1–3, 16.1–2). At the same
time, they are both characterized as sexual predators, friendly rivals in the pursuit of
married women (adulter in classical Latin refers to a man who has sex with another
citizen’s wife) and young girls, presumably virgins. We have already seen that
Mamurra is attacked as being all phallus, and in c. 29 (lines 5 and 9) he was said to
be circulating among all the bedrooms in Rome. So too, in c. 94, Catullus quips:

Mentula moechatur. moechatur mentula? certe.
hoc est quod dicunt: ipsa olera olla legit.

It’s the old saying: the pot collects the greens.
For us, there is a certain tension, not to say outright contradiction, between the role of passive homosexual and that of hyperphallic womanizer. Thus, Thomson, in his recent commentary (1997: 340–1), remarks of poem 57:

This lampoon . . . perfectly illustrates the needlessness, and indeed the impossibility, of supposing that sexual slanders . . . are meant as anything more than an elaborate form of abuse . . . . If one wished to reproach someone for immoral behavior, one would of course take care not to seem implausible by accusing him simultaneously of passive homosexuality and the seduction of other men’s wives – both of which were standard topics of triumph verses. If, however, the real object was to express dislike of, or opposition to, a person in the public eye, Roman custom dictated that all kinds of bizarre charges might be added to the burden of the indictment.

Suetonius, indeed, reports, in his life of Julius Caesar (52.3), the quip of C. Curio to the effect that Caesar was “every woman’s husband and every man’s wife.” Now, it is true that classical Greek and Roman views of sexuality were predicated on a disjunction between the active lover (erastēs, amator) on the one hand, and the receptive beloved (erōmenos/ē, amatus/a) on the other. This opposition, moreover, was coordinate with status roles: as Marilyn Skinner (1979: 142) has put it, “the adult male who allows himself to be used as the passive partner automatically becomes womanish and despicable.”

But we must beware of projecting a Victorian conception of the sexes onto ancient Greeks and Romans. The passivity attributed to women was not impassiveness; on the contrary, men imagined women to be as vulnerable to sexual desire as they themselves were, if not more so, and at the same time less capable of self-control, which was a supremely masculine virtue. Seen this way, the phallic pursuit of women and the pathic submission to other males are two sides of the same coin: both are expressions of a sexual impulse run wild. The middle to which both extremes are opposed is sexual restraint or moderation.

Poem 57 appears to be a purely personal smear, void of political content. But in fact it picks up the theme of Catullus’ other poems about Caesar, Pompey, and Mamurra, in which unchecked licentiousness and greed are seen as ruinous to the Republic (in c. 113, probably composed in the year 55 when Pompey was embarking on his second consulship, Catullus attacks Pompey as an aging adulterer who has long shared his mistress with another man). The immensely powerful generals who controlled Rome’s fate were sexually and economically rapacious, and this in turn provided the motive for the campaigns that confirmed their supremacy. Moral corruption in the ruling caste was a political question.

We have no way of knowing the precise date of c. 57. Quinn (1973a: 256) speculated that it was written between 61 and 58, but it could well have been composed two or even three years later (see Wiseman 1969: 35–6). I do not wish to enter into the game of constructing a narrative of the quarrel between Catullus and Caesar and its aftermath, which is, in my view, as risky a business as tracing the story line of Catullus’ affair with Lesbia. What we can say is that around the same time that Catullus was composing c. 29 on Caesar and Mamurra, and very possibly c. 115 on Mamurra’s estate as well (with its reference to Ocean and the far North), he wrote his famous farewell poem to Lesbia (c. 11), which can be dated pretty securely on the basis of the reference to Caesar’s excursion – presumably the first, in the summer of
55 – into Britain. Structurally, the most extraordinary feature of the poem is the long preamble in which Catullus lauds, with apparent sincerity, the readiness of Furius and Aurelius to follow him as far as India, Arabia, Persia, Egypt, Gaul up to the border with Germany, and even Britain: four stanzas of geographical prelude before Catullus gets to the point, which is to deliver his bitter message to Lesbia – presumably: it is well to remind ourselves that she is not named in this poem. That the task has been assigned to Furius and Aurelius has seemed all the more odd, since in other poems by Catullus they are treated with suspicion or downright hostility. Rather than inquire into their function here, however, I should like to call attention to the fact that once again, as in cc. 29 and 115, Catullus conjures up the distant reach of Roman armies, which are here imagined as marching into Egypt, beyond Bactria or Afghanistan, and all the way to India – as far east as Alexander the Great himself had gone. Why should Catullus have introduced this dimension of Roman imperialist activity so emphatically into this poem, the ostensible purpose of which is to terminate an amorous relationship?

We have seen that, in his attacks on Caesar and Mamurra, Catullus associates the drive to territorial expansion with the exaggerated sexual impulses of the Roman elite. Caesar’s and Mamurra’s perversity takes the form both of phallic aggression against married matrons and young girls and of pathic receptivity: both are evidence of wantonness, even though the one may be seen as hypermasculine, while the other is a sign of feminization. Catullus is indifferent here to the distinction between behavior appropriate to men and to women.

In the penultimate stanza of c. 11, Catullus complains that Lesbia loves no one truly, but rather seizes and crushes her innumerable adulterous partners (moebis). Although she is a woman, her behavior resembles Caesar’s and Mamurra’s: like them, she is sexually predatory and violent. So too, in c. 58, Catullus describes Lesbia as “skinning” (glubit) Roman citizens – the descendants of Remus – in the back alleys of Rome. Despite the hopes Catullus had entertained of a bond of eternal friendship with Lesbia (c. 109), she is as bad as the men whom he attacks in his invectives, all of whom are compulsively driven by lust. She is an overly masculine woman, just as Caesar and Mamurra (and Furius and Aurelius in c. 16) are represented as rapacious and yet feminized men: common to both extremes is sexual voracity.

Caesar and Mamurra, according to Catullus, waged wars for the expansion of the Roman empire in order to feed their limitless appetites for wealth and sex. As one begins to read c. 11 one might imagine, for a moment, that Catullus intends to join one of these expeditions. In the final stanza, however, the perspective is suddenly reversed. In comparing himself to a flower at the edge of a field, Catullus locates himself at the periphery, like the populations that Roman armies will conquer. It is not he who will penetrate (penetrare) the soft (molles) Arabians; he is rather one more victim of the inexorable plow, which, like Rome’s legions, cuts down everything in its path. Here again, Catullus has subtly connected Roman imperialism with sexual excess and depravity. Although he does not intimate here, as he does in the poems concerning Mamurra, that the wars have been incited in order to finance the sexual license of Rome’s decadent leaders, Catullus nevertheless sees boundless military aggression and sexual dissipation as two manifestations of a single perverse drive. Like the more direct attacks on Caesar, Pompey, and their henchmen, c. 11 too is a poem about Roman politics, from which Catullus seems profoundly estranged.
There is in Catullus’ poetry-book, I believe, one more reference, albeit an oblique one, to Rome’s imperial ventures and to the toll they take on Rome’s victims, both abroad and at home. It is in a poem where few scholars have recognized a topical allusion, namely, the miniature epic known as the epithalamium for Peleus and Thetis (c. 64), although the wedding song proper is an inset piece of some 59 verses toward the end. The poem begins with the voyage of the Argo, in which Peleus participated. As Catullus tells it, Thetis and other sea nymphs emerged from the sea to gaze at the extraordinary vessel, and this was the occasion on which Peleus and Thetis fell in love (14–21). The context for their enamorment is thus a naval expedition to the far end of the Black Sea.21

In some versions of the myth, Jupiter obliges Thetis to marry a mortal because of a prophecy that her son will be greater than his father, and she is sometimes represented as abandoning her husband’s bed after the first night.22 In Catullus, however, Jupiter (if it is he who is identified as “father”) simply gives his sanction (tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit, 21). The wedding itself takes place in Peleus’ mansion in Pharsalus, which Catullus models on a Roman villa, complete with atrium and marriage chamber.23 The hero and his immortal bride assume the guise of Roman notables, joined in wedlock with the pomp of great aristocratic families. At the same time, Catullus expresses his surprise at Peleus’ good fortune in marrying the granddaughter of the world-encircling Ocean, whom Jupiter himself had desired (25–30). There may be an element of allegory here: Thetis’ union with the mortal Peleus seems analogous to the conquest of the oceans by mankind, which has just been achieved by the invention of seafaring.

The preparations for the marriage are interrupted by a long description of the coverlet on the wedding couch, on which are embroidered scenes from the story of Theseus and Ariadne, including his desertion of her on a barren island. The theme of abandonment is in apparent counterpoint to the happy nuptials of Peleus and Thetis, and Catullus signals the contrast between the frame story and the embedded tale in the transition to the ecphrasis (47–52). Although the lines are commonly rendered neutrally – the couch is “spread with woven purple dipped in rosy murex dye,” and the coverlet “reveals . . . the virtues of heroes,” in the version of Guy Lee (1990: 83) – the word indicat often has the significance “expose,” and is used, for example, of uncovering the truth behind the testimony of a witness or defendant in court.24 The tapestry is said to be tinged, moreover, with fucus, literally a purplish dye but very commonly used in the sense of “deceit.”25 Finally, while the word virtus in Catullus’ time connotated ethical goodness in addition to the older meaning of martial courage (OLD s.v., def. 3), the plural form virtutes retained the primary sense of valiant deeds or accomplishments, with an emphasis on success rather than on the morality of the means.26 A tapestry dyed in fraudulence that exposes the achievements of heroes is a good medium for the tale of Theseus’ thoughtless betrayal of Ariadne.27

The song of the Parcae predicts the achievements of Peleus and Thetis’ great son-to-be, Achilles (338–70), in the war that will devastate Troy (346). The hallmark of Achilles’ success is carnage, fields flowing with blood (344), bodies cut down like wheat (353–5), heaps of corpses choking the river Scamander (359–60).28 Bereaved mothers will bear witness to his glorious deeds (348–51). Here again, the collocation of virtutes with clara facta makes evident the martial reference of the word “virtues”: they are achievements on the battlefield, irrespective of the pain they bring to aged women.
The final witness to Achilles’ “great virtues” (magnis virtutibus, 357) is Polyxena, the Trojan princess who will be slain at his tomb as a sacrifice to his ghost (362–70) – an episode that might well seem a macabre travesty of a marriage union.29 “Come therefore [quare],” the Parcae continue, “and consort in long-imagined love” (trans. Lee 1990) – it takes a moment to realize that the Parcae have returned to Peleus and Thetis as their subject, and the juxtaposition of the brutal sacrifice with the joy of the wedding ceremony is jarring.30

Catullus concludes the epyllion with an epilogue contrasting the piety of bygone days with the perversity of present times, when brothers slay each other, sons do not mourn the death of fathers, a father looks forward to his son’s funeral so that he can enjoy his daughter-in-law, a mother deliberately seduces her son (399–404).31 This is clearly a commentary on the morality of the age, but what has it to do with politics?

In 1930, L. Herrmann proposed that Peleus and Thetis in the epyllion were in fact stand-ins for Pompey and Julia, the daughter of Julius Caesar whom Pompey married in 59. Herrmann imagined the occasion for the poem to be Julia’s pregnancy, and the song of the Parcae was intended to celebrate the child to come. Julia, as we have noted, died, either in childbirth or soon after the birth of a daughter, in September 54 (Vell. Pat. 2.47.2; Suet. Iul. 26; Plut. Caes. 23, Pomp. 53; Dio Cass. 39.64). There are no certain indications of when c. 64 was composed, though some scholars have taken apparent echoes of Lucretius to point to the year 54, when On the Nature of Things may have been published. It is conceivable that the address to Peleus as Emathiae tutamen, “bulwark of Emathia,” with which the Parcae begin their song, would have evoked Pompey to a contemporary audience (323–4).

Emathia was a poetic name for Macedon, the home of Alexander the Great, whose image Pompey imitated to the point of styling himself Magnus (cf. Sall. Hist. 2.88 M.; Plut. Pomp. 2.1–2; Syme 1958: 2.770). Krebs (unpublished) takes Caesaris . . . Magni in 11.10 as a sign that Caesar has now taken over from Alexander, the subject of the first stanza, and Pompey, the subject of the second, the title of “Great.” What is more, Catullus describes the bond between Peleus and Thetis in distinctly political language: no lovers were ever joined in such a pact (tali foedere, 335) as the alliance (concordia, 336) of these two. The conquest of the sea (think of Pompey’s clearing the Mediterranean of pirates), the expedition to far Pontus, the extraordinary opulence of Peleus’ villa, the reminiscence of a bygone age of valor already tainted by opportunism, the moral corruption of the present, and the evocation of a future war in Troy, with violence and destructiveness parading as heroism – might this not reflect Catullus’ feelings toward the father-in-law and son-in-law who had ruined the entire world in the pursuit of wealth and power?32

Among the supporters of Caesar was P. Vatinius, to whom Catullus alludes wittily in c. 53. Vatinius had been responsible for Caesar’s securing a five-year command in Gaul in 59, but the trial in which Calvus attacked him for illegitimately canvassing for office very likely took place in 54 (so Gruen 1966; 58 and 56 have also been proposed), when Vatinius was defended by none other than Cicero (Tac. Dial. 21.2; cf. Gruen 1974: 317). If so, the poem may take its place as a light-hearted outrider of the anti-Caesar invectives. The humor is in the coarse appreciation on the part of a bystander at the edge of the crowd for Calvus’ precise delineation of Vatinius’ crimes. Perhaps Catullus meant to suggest that Calvus was reaching the masses with his oratory; Vatinius is said to have remarked that he ought not to be
condemned simply because Calvus was such a fine speaker. A late date is perhaps confirmed by the parallel mention of Vatinius in c. 52. Vatinius had boasted he would be consul, and had achieved the praetorship in 55; perhaps that is the moment when his confidence would have run high. The formula, “why, Catullus, do you delay to pass away,” of course means, in effect, “Now you’ve seen the worst – why go on living,” but it is not impossible, I suppose, that Catullus really was, or believed himself to be, near the end of his life when he wrote these verses. If so, it is another reason to date them to 54, the year in which he may well have died. Conceivably, too, the ironic verses on Cicero’s eloquence (c. 49) were occasioned by this same trial, especially since Cicero had attacked Vatinius in 56 in his most personal and malicious manner – his rapid about-face might well have earned Catullus’ backhanded praise.

I have been suggesting that during the years 55 and 54, that is, the time of the latest poems in the surviving collection, Catullus saw Caesar and Pompey as driven by greed and lechery – their own and that of their underlings – to launch wars in Gaul and the East, spreading destruction abroad and corruption at home to satisfy their petty lusts. And yet, so high-minded a contempt for self-enrichment at the expense of the provinces seems inconsistent with Catullus’ own apparent disappointment with his year of service (57–6) in Bithynia on the staff of C. Memmius, who, on Catullus’ evidence, “screwed” his officers and left them unexpectedly impoverished at the end of their tour of duty. In c. 10, for example, Catullus recounts how he was embarrassed by a girlfriend of his pal Varus, when he pretended that, despite Memmius’ stinginess – “a bugger of a praetor who didn’t give a damn for his cohort” (12–13: *irrumator praetor, nec faceret pilis cohortem*) – he had at least acquired in Bithynia eight sturdy slaves to carry a sedan-chair, and was then forced to confess that he did not even make off with that much.

Catullus is still more explicit about his discontent in c. 28, where he commiserates with his friends Veranius and Fabullus, who are suffering hunger and cold on the staff of Piso – presumably the Piso who was Caesar’s father-in-law – while he was governor, in all likelihood, of Macedonia in 57–55; Catullus complains that he too has been “screwed over” by Memmius, and has not earned a penny. “Get lords for friends!” he petulantly exclaims, and concludes by cursing Piso and Memmius alike as a disgrace to Romulus and Remus. Catullus himself was, at this time, either still in Bithynia or recently returned to Rome.

It is, of course, possible that Catullus was the kind of person who is fiercely partisan toward his friends and antagonistic toward his enemies, and that his indignation at the excesses of Mamurra was, in the end, motivated more by a petty resentment that others were prospering while he and his friends were being left out in the cold than by a more properly political revulsion at the policies of Caesar and Pompey, which were leading to the ruin of the world. In c. 47, he attacks Piso simply for preferring two other men over Veranius and Fabullus, who have to scrounge for dinner invitations while their rivals enjoy sumptuous banquets. But the difference between Catullus’ expectations of profit and Mamurra’s extravagance may rather have been a matter of degree. Like others of his class, Catullus counted on being rewarded appropriately by the nobility, receiving preference and remuneration in exchange for service. It was one thing to entertain elegantly in Rome and treat your staff handsomely in the provinces, another to wage wars as far as Britain and Parthia for the sake of enriching one’s cronies beyond all measure. Catullus’ hostility to Caesar and Pompey was, after all, that of an aristocrat, not a modern egalitarian.
But I would like to suggest that there may have been a development or change in Catullus’ view of the triumvirs over the brief, three- or four-year period to which his political poems are plausibly dated. If we are right to believe that he served in Bithynia with Memmius in 57, returned to Rome in 56, and composed his most bitter attacks on Caesar and Pompey in 55 and 54, it may be because he came to perceive their policies and behavior in a different light in that final couple of years. It is easy – too easy – to invent reasons for such a shift. Relations among the triumvirs were always tense, but they patched up a particularly dangerous rift in 56, at a meeting in Luca; as a result of this deal, Caesar’s proconsulship in Gaul was extended for another five years in 55, while Pompey and Crassus also obtained proconsular commands, Pompey choosing Spain as his sphere of action, and Crassus Syria, with a view to a campaign in Parthia. All three had numerous legions at their disposal. Foreign wars might well have seemed to be motivated by the private ambitions of the generals. What is more, Vatinius, who had been responsible for the law that granted Caesar his first command in Gaul, was now being prosecuted by Catullus’ best friend, Calvus, who might have influenced his views. It was a likely moment for Catullus to lash out against Caesar’s and Pompey’s ambitions, even if the former had been his father’s guest.

The problem with the above argument is that it is circular: the supposition, based on a certain reading of Catullus’ poems, is that his intense opposition to the triumvirs was motivated by circumstances pertaining specifically to the years 55 and 54, and the events of those years are invoked in turn to confirm the reading. One could equally well adduce earlier misdeeds of Caesar and Pompey if one had reason to antedate Catullus’ antagonism to them. All depends on the chronology of Catullus’ verses, and this is both notoriously difficult to establish and based largely on inference from evidence internal to the poems themselves. It would seem safer, in respect to Catullus’ politics as in the affair with Lesbia, to abandon attempts to construct a historical narrative.

That said, and with all due hesitation, I should like to introduce one last bit of evidence for such an alteration in Catullus’ views – this the least secure of all, let the reader be warned. Poem 65 is a reply to a request by the great orator Hortensius Hortalus for some original verses of Catullus; Catullus explains that the recent death of his brother has paralyzed his creativity, but he offers instead to send him a translation he has made of Callimachus. There is no reason to doubt that the poem in question is precisely c. 66, a rendition into Latin of the Lock of Berenice, which Callimachus appended as the conclusion to the four books of his Aitia.

When did Catullus compose cc. 65 and 66? There is no way of knowing. If we suppose that c. 101 represents an actual visit on Catullus’ part to the grave of his brother near the region of ancient Troy, and that he made the voyage while he was serving in Bithynia, then his brother’s death will have occurred before the spring of 57, when Catullus set out for the province. He may well have written c. 65, then, while in Verona, as he did the first part of c. 68, where again he refers to a lapse in his poetic activity as a result of his brother’s death (68.19–40). By this time, at all events, Catullus considered his home to be in Rome, not Verona (Romae uiuimus: illa domus, illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas, 68.34–5). Catullus could have written these words in the year 58 (which would mean he had moved to Rome in that year or sooner); but the date might be earlier, conceivably much earlier, despite
the absence of reliable allusions in the poems to events of the time. Let us, merely for the sake of the argument, place the date of c. 65 in 58 or 59, and that of c. 66 – the translation of Callimachus – around the same time or a little before.

That Catullus should have studied Callimachus closely, and gone so far as to try his hand at rendering his verses into Latin, is no cause for surprise. Callimachus was the model of the learned, precisely crafted, and pithy style of poetry that Catullus and his circle affected. One must not forget, however, that Callimachus was not just a practitioner of a refined aesthetic technique, but also a court poet who, like Theocritus and other contemporaries, composed panegyrics to the royal family in Alexandria. No poem of his was more political than the Lock of Berenice, which he wrote in celebration of Berenice’s dedication of a lock of her hair which she had promised on condition that her husband, Ptolemy III (Euergetes), return safely from his military expedition against Syria – a campaign that had brought him all the way to the borders of Bactria in the East. Berenice fulfilled her vow in the summer or autumn of 245, and when the offering disappeared a short while afterwards, the court astronomer Conon purported to discover a new constellation in the heavens, which he identified with the shorn tress of the queen (details in Marinone 1997: 19–21).

Late in 62, as we have seen, Pompey returned from the East, where he had finally eliminated the threat of Mithridates and restored Roman control over the Seleucid kingdom of Syria. The analogy with the campaign of Ptolemy Euergetes in the same region is not far to seek. Within two years, moreover, Pompey would marry Caesar’s daughter Julia, thus securing an alliance between Rome’s most powerful leaders that might well remind one of the wedding of Berenice and Ptolemy: for with her ascent to the throne of Egypt on January 27, 246, Berenice, queen of Cyrene, had effected the union of two domains whose relations had been marked by rivalry and animosity. Of course, Julia had not made vows for Pompey’s return. But a Greek poem celebrating a dynastic marriage and the safe completion of military operations against a grave threat arising in Syria might well have had political resonance in the Rome of 60 or 59.37 And who would be a better recipient of the translation of this eulogy than Hortensius, who had vehemently opposed the Lex Gabinia in 67, by which Pompey was granted almost limitless powers to rid the Mediterranean of piracy? By way of a learnedly allusive poem, Catullus helps to reconcile a fellow poet to the new situation in Rome.

Fanciful? Absolutely. But if we are to imagine the political context in which Catullus may have written both his jibes against the leading figures in Rome and other kinds of topical verse, some such exercise of the historical imagination is required, and the one proposed may serve some heuristic function. What is more, there may be a clue in the poem itself that hints at this interpretation, much as Emathiae tutamen in poem 64 suggested the identification of Peleus with Pompey. I mean the use of the term caesaries to indicate the lock (8) – a term which elsewhere in Latin literature always and only refers to a complete head of hair: might this not have evoked the name Caesar, Julia’s own cognomen?38 The pun would not be unique to Catullus; in the Einsiedeln Eclogues (probably dating to the reign of Nero), we read (1.43–7): “His thick beard and white hair [caesaries] shone with full dignity . . . and he duly covered his Caesarian head [Caesareumque caput] with his cloak.”39

In c. 66.41–50 there is also a connection between the ruthlessness of imperial expansion and a cruel indifference to a lover’s sentiments that may, I am inclined to
believe, have inspired the similar association in c. 11. Just as steel cut a path through the promontory of Athos for Xerxes’ armies when they were invading Greece, so it divides the lock of hair from the beloved head of Berenice. Catullus may have found in Callimachus’ rather extravagant image something that resonated with his own sense that Rome’s violence in war was not unrelated to cruelty in love. 40

We have cited above the passage in which Suetonius reports that Catullus apologized for the slurs on Caesar’s reputation. Is there any evidence in the poems of a more conciliatory posture toward Caesar on Catullus’ part? One possible candidate is c. 93, consisting of a single distich – although everything depends on how one punctuates the first line:

`Nil nimium studeo, Caesar, tibi uelle placere, nec scire utrum sis albus an ater homo.`

On the traditional reading (with the above punctuation), the sense is:

> I don’t try very hard, Caesar, to wish to please you, 
> nor to know whether you’re a white person or a black.

While the meaning of the second verse is not altogether perspicuous – it is apparently a way of expressing Catullus’ indifference – the thrust is hardly amiable, and the poem might be read as a rejection of a friendly initiative by Caesar rather than as a gesture of contrition. S. Koster (1981: 131–2), however, has argued in favor of placing a full stop after `nimium`:

> “Nothing in excess.” I’m trying, Caesar to wish to please you, 
> and not to know whether you’re a white person or a black.

This sounds more like an effort at compromise, although Ernst Schmidt (1985: 65–6) has suggested that the second verse, in this case, means that only by ignoring whether Caesar is good or bad can Catullus refrain from criticizing him. There is one last poem – or rather, the very first in the collection – that has not usually been read as political in character, but which, nonetheless, may also express, however indirectly, a positive view of Rome’s imperial expansion. C. 1 is a dedicatory piece, whether or not the collection it introduced was precisely the one we have today. The book by Cornelius Nepos that Catullus mentions is his *Chronica*, a historical account of the world beginning at least as early as the time of Homer (cf. Gell. *NA* 17.21.3), with a special emphasis, apparently, on establishing a reliable comparative chronology of Greece and Rome. Nepos was also, incidentally, another member of Catullus’ circle who found Mamurra’s mansion outrageously luxurious for being the first to be lined entirely with marble (Plin. *NH* 36.48).

Whatever the personal relationship between Catullus and Nepos, who was also something of a poet, might have been, why did Catullus single out his historical work for special mention? It may, of course, be simply a matter of one writer complimenting another, and indicating by the way that the man who appreciated Catullus’ own early efforts himself had literary credentials. The compact and studied character of Nepos’ work may also have commended itself to a neoteric poet, who admired these qualities in Alexandrian scholar poets such as Callimachus (cf. W. J. Tatum 1997: 485;
Rauk 1997: 319–20; Wiseman 1979: 27–40). But Nepos’ work just may have had a further significance in its time. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1997) has described the process by which local knowledge, which is traditional and specific to particular communities, was replaced by a universal scientia in the period of the transition from the Republic to the Empire in Rome. Part of the reason for the change, according to Wallace-Hadrill, was the expansion of Rome and the corresponding responsibilities of administering a far-flung Empire. Fixing the date of a religious festival or other public event across the entire realm demanded an accurate year and a universal sense of time, as opposed to the random intercalations that had served the needs of a small city. It may be that the impulse to standardize world chronology, like that of establishing a consistent calendar, was a reflex of Rome’s new sense of itself as the center of a vast territory, and that, in paying homage to Nepos’ achievement, Catullus was subtly acknowledging Rome’s hegemonic place in the new world order. 41

Catullus was witness to a dramatic moment in Roman politics, when a few powerful rivals teamed up briefly and turned their energies to foreign wars and plunder. As Catullus saw it, their military and sexual lust for conquest was of a piece – not an eccentric view among Romans – and his poems testify, I believe, to an increasing awareness, during the course of the 50s, of how ruinous these passions were to the world he knew.

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My thanks to Regina Höschele for her perceptive comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, and to the editor of this volume for her helpful suggestions.

NOTES

1 Any biographical reports concerning Catullus – even those that seem confirmed by his own verses – must be taken with a large grain of salt; see Holzberg (2002a). Little of the discussion that follows depends on more than the assumption that some, at least, of the political poems were composed in, or not much before, the year 54. For thumbnail sketches of the figures to whom Catullus refers – or seems to refer – see Neudling (1955). For an ingenious but ultimately quixotic attempt to organize Catullus’ poetry into periods according to the vocabulary employed, see Stoessl (1977).

2 The text used throughout this chapter is Mynors’s 1958 OCT (revised 1960); departures from Mynors are noted. In c. 29, I read ante instead of uincti in v. 4, and urbis potentissimi instead of †urbs opulentissime† (obelized in Mynors) in v. 23. Badian (1977) proposes reading nunc Gallicae timetur et Britannicae (sc. praedae) in v. 20, i.e., “we now fear for the Gallic and British loot”; but would one fear for the loot, or for the province that will be looted?

3 Skinner notes too that, since his father was still alive, Catullus would have been in patria potestate, that is, legally a minor, at the time.

4 C. A. Williams (1999: 172–8) argues that cinaedus suggests any kind of sexual deviance, as opposed to pathicus, which refers specifically to the receptive adult male. Catullus, however, seems freely to equate the two; cf. poems 25.1–3 and 16.1–2.
5 I assume, with the majority of scholars, that these slurs are addressed to Caesar; Quinn (1973a: 176–7) and some others suppose that the first ten lines of the poem are directed to Pompey, the second ten to Caesar, while the final four speak to both. For discussion, see Syndikus (1984: 178–9); Asper (1997: 67–8).

6 W. J. Tatum (1997: 484) observes that Catullus’ poetry “is conspicuously unfurnished with straightforward and obvious political formulations. Yet . . . one can hardly fail to recognize Catullus’ invective against Caesar and Pompey . . . as a political attack.”

7 See Sall. Cat. 10–13, where dissoluteness is explicitly identified as the motive for war, and cf. Jug. 41–2, where Sallust retrojects the same motives into an earlier war. W. J. Tatum (1993: 37) notes, in connection with c. 79: “A Roman politician attacked his rivals as pervers not because they actually were depraved but because he hoped to persuade someone that they were actually depraved and consequently unworthy of credence or loyalty or honour. Such rhetoric was a supplement to, but not a substitute for, genuine political argument.” I am suggesting that certain kinds of personal excess were in fact perceived as having decidedly political consequences. Butrica (2002) argues that c. 79 need not refer to incest at all, but rather to decadent behavior generally and the feminized associations of the term pulcher = exoletus.

8 P. B. Harvey (1979) argues that such an estate would have constituted a large holding at the time; contra Thomson (1997: 552). Thomson suggests that “Pratum and arvum are well-known agricultural-sexual metaphors for the female pudenda,” but even if this is so, it fails to explain why Catullus should ascribe to Mentula a small estate rather than a large one.

9 In classical antiquity, a large sexual organ was commonly thought of as signifying a bestial excess of sexual appetite; thus Priapus was customarily depicted as macrophalic; cf. Dover (1978: 125–6); Winkler (1990: 28–9, 34); Fredrick (1995: fig. 15) on the statue of Priapus in the House of the Vettii in Pompeii.

10 Catullus’ mentula magna minax echoes Ennius Annales fr. 620 Skutsch = 621 Vahlens, machina multa minax minitatur maxima muris, and there may be some intertextual play between the image of Mamurra’s sexual organ and the battering ram that threatens city walls; there is no context for the Ennian fragment, however, and interpretation is hazardous.

11 Cf. Ellis (1889: 496): “the profits derived from it [i.e., the estate] were less than the necessary outlay.”

12 The idea is commonplace; cf. Democr. fr. 219 D-K: “The desire for money, if it is not limited by sufficiency [koros], is much worse than extreme poverty, for greater desires produce greater needs.”

13 This is one reason to suppose that the first part of c. 29 is addressed to him, although, as Quinn remarks (1973a: 177), “it is a word with which C[atullus] is pretty free.”

14 At least, this is the charge if we accept Pleitner’s emendation of Macelium to Mucillam, a diminutive of Mucia, Pompey’s third wife; but even if Maciliam is retained, the poem suggests an association between Pompey and the spread of adultery. Marmorale’s argument (1957: 60–1) that Pompey is named here only to identify the year renders the reference rather flat.

15 Reading horribilesque ulti- in v. 11, instead of horribile aequor ulti- with Haupt, followed by Mynors.

16 Fernández Corte (1995) argues that the offer by Furius and Aurelius is intended to be read as insincere, and that Catullus’ exposure of their false pretensions to friendship is analogous to his rejection of Lesbia’s dishonest love in the concluding stanzas. Holzberg (2002a: 38) suggests that both Furius and Aurelius are made-up names, and that it would be wrong to seek either historical personages behind them or a consistent representation of their characters. Maleuvre (1998: 161) suggests that Aurelius stands for Caesar, a view
only slightly less implausible than the same author’s claim that the brother whom Catullus laments in c. 65 is Calvus (75–86). For my own view of the relationship between c. 11 and the characterization of Furius and Aurelius in other poems of Catullus, see Konstan (2000); it is worth mentioning that both are treated as sexually rapacious, and that Aurelius is described as the father of all hungers, present, past, and future, in c. 21.

18 Fitzgerald (1995: 181) affirms that “Lesbia is seen as a threatening monster on the edge of the empire, that is, beyond the pale of civilization, and also, by association with the plough, as a manifestation of the ruthless indifference that characterizes Roman imperial might”; but if Lesbia is at the boundary, it is because she, like Furius and Aurelius, has arrived there from the center; Catullus, on the contrary, is located there from the beginning, a helpless figure on the fringe. Fitzgerald adds: “Bringing together the ‘friends’ and the lover, Catullus allows them to cancel each other out as they merge into a generalized and indifferent violence on whose periphery he locates, very precisely, himself” (p. 182).

19 E. Greene (1997: 153) observes that Catullus “casts both Caesar’s and Lesbia’s conquests in a similar light of moral degradation as against his own poetic rendering of himself as a delicate, fragile flower that is victimized by the brutality of the world.”

20 For Mamurra as a foil for or counter-image of Catullus himself, see Deuling (1999).

21 For Catullus’ Greek sources, see Braga (1950: esp. p. 160). In Apollonius’ account, Peleus and Thetis are married and Achilles is born prior to the voyage.


23 Vv. 43–6, with Kroll (1968) and Fordyce (1961).

24 See Konstan (1977: 40); *OLD* s.v., defs. 2, 3; Kinsey (1965: 916) takes *indicat* ironically.

25 Cf. Konstan (1977: 40); *OLD* s.v., def. 4.


27 This interpretation, which I have defended in Konstan (1977, 1993), has not won universal consent; for the contrary view, see, e.g., Syndikus (1990: 139 n. 162).


32 A Roman audience might expect to detect political allegory in mythological narratives; see Leach (2000) for discussion of such allusions in dramatic performances.

33 Weiss (1996) argues, perhaps rightly, that *salaputium* in fact refers to Calvus’ wit (“salt”), and is Catullus’ way of defending his friend’s effectiveness as a popular orator, against Cicero’s criticism (*Brutus* 283, 289) that his style went over the heads of the masses.

34 Nevertheless, there were limits; Braund (1996) suggests that Memmius might well have had reason to be scrupulous in administering the province, given his tense relationship with Caesar, who himself had connections in the area, and would be prepared to prosecute him for malfeasance. If so, Catullus’ snideness in respect of Memmius may be a sign that he was not yet, in 56, personally at odds with Caesar. Pizzone (1998: 284) suggests, on the contrary, that Memmius must have known of Catullus’ hostility to Caesar as early as 58 (cf. E. A. Schmidt 1985: 67–8), or he would never have taken along with him a young man whose family had such close ties with his arch-enemy; on this hypothesis, it is necessary to posit a break between Catullus and Memmius after the return from Bithynia (286–7).
35 Cf. Pizzone (1998: 288): “È dunque plausibile che una certa diversità di toni e di modi all’interno del gruppo di carmi contro Cesare e Mamurra sia da ricollegare a differenti momenti di composizione, a differenti contesti storico-cronologici.”

36 Catullus might have observed that Bithynia and Macedonia were both settled provinces, in which Roman military power was employed to maintain order, whereas Caesar’s and Pompey’s campaigns were plainly wars of aggression (I owe this observation to Marilyn Skinner).

37 I am indebted for this interpretation to a conversation with Susan Stephens; she must not be held responsible, however, for the view expressed here.

38 I am indebted to Regina Höschele for this idea. The term caesaries was imagined to derive from caedere, “cut” (Serv. on Aen. 1.590, 8.659), and hence was of course appropriate as a description of the shorn lock. For the connection between caesaries and Caesar, cf. Fest. p. 50 Lindsay DVS, and Nadeau (1982), who finds the same pun in Ov. Met. 1.180 and, indirectly, in Vergil by way of Catullus (I owe this last reference to Damien Nelis).

39 Cf. also Luc. 1.183–9 for a possible association of caesaries with Caesar.

40 There are other echoes in c. 66 of earlier motifs in the Catullan collection, e.g., the description of Berenice’s other locks as “sisters” in mourning (51) may evoke the mention of Catullus’ own brother’s death in c. 65, and the positioning of the lock in the heavens alongside Ariadne’s crown (59–61) may recall Ariadne’s apparent divinization in c. 64. It is possible that Catullus recognized a remarkable combination of themes in Callimachus’ poem, which he exploited in various works of his own; either he or a canny editor then arranged them in such a way that c. 66 appeared as a reprise or confluence of motifs that it may well have inspired in the first place. I owe these observations to Regina Höschele; we plan to discuss the question further in a future publication.

41 Contra Rauk (1997: 322), who describes Nepos’ Chronica as “traditional.”

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

On economic and other motives for Roman imperialism during the Republic, an excellent source is Harris (1985). A good overview of Roman value terms may be found in Earl (1967). Lintott (1999) gives a sense of the rough nature of Roman politics. For Roman social and political history, Crawford (1993) is balanced and clear; also useful is Brunt (1971). Caesar has his admirers as well as detractors; see Meyer (1995). For political interpretations of particular poems, see the articles by Braund (1996), Butrica (2002), and Tatum (1993, 1997); also Skinner (1989). For more general appraisals of Catullus in a political context, see Konstan (2000/2), Skinner (1979), and Wiseman (1985). The relationship between politics and desire, a complex topic in modern theory, is explored in Janan (2001).

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