Catullus' *Otium*: A Transgressive Translation?

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Abstract

The majority of the discussion surrounding Catullus 51 has centered on the function or fit of the poem's last stanza. For, while the first three stanzas of the poem describe what the sound and sight of Lesbia physically does to Catullus, the poem's concluding discussion of *otium* seems to abruptly change the topic, tone, narrative voice, and addressee from what preceded. However, what tends to be ignored in the discussion is the context of the entire poem, both in relation to the rest of the Catullan corpus and to the Sappho poem it is a translation of. Indeed, Catullus' multi-layered poem refers to the Lesbia narrative of Catullus' corpus, it concludes and directly responds to Catullus 50, and, most importantly, it is a close translation of Sappho 31, a poem from a genre that had largely remained untouched before Catullus' time, and of a poet who inspired the name of Catullus' literary mistress. Furthermore, the prefacing nature of poem 50 and the deliberate insertion of Catullus into poem 51 together allude to the uneasy attitude that the Romans held in regards to translation, specifically the translation of a genre that had little in common with Roman culture. Therefore, when the poem is compared to and read alongside other Catullan poems, the last stanza does not seem to be as jarring as it has been purported to be, and is, in fact, informed by the poem that directly precedes it; when Catullus 51 is read as a translation, namely one that is conscious of its status as a translation, the *otium* stanza is seen as an integral part of a very Catullan poem, and of a very Roman translation.

Catullus 51 has caused much ink to be spilled, particularly because its last stanza appears to be a jarring departure from the rest of the poem. For, while the first three stanzas of the poem describe what the sound and sight of Lesbia physically do to Catullus, the poem's concluding discussion of *otium* seems to abruptly change the topic, tone, narrative voice, and addressee from what preceded. This apparent discrepancy has resulted in the question of how to reconcile the stanza with the rest of the poem; the majority of scholarship on this poem tends to center around whether Catullus even intended for the stanza to be part of poem 51. However, such a question

ignores both the rest of the Catullan corpus and Sappho 31, of which Catullus 51 is a translation. Indeed, when compared to and read alongside other Catullan poems, the 'discrepancy' is not as jarring as it has been purported to be, and is, in fact, informed by the poem that directly precedes it. Furthermore, when Catullus 51 is read as a translation, namely one that is conscious of its status as a translation, Catullus' last stanza can be read as an essential part of his cohesive translation.

Poem 51 is considered one of Catullus' love poems to Lesbia, and is even regarded by some as a record of Catullus' first encounter with Lesbia, whether such an event was biographical or purely literary.[1] It is perhaps this romantic setting that creates expectations in the reader for what the poem will or should be like, for, indeed, the presumably abrupt change in tone from the first three stanzas of poem 51 to the last stanza has caused many a reader to baulk:

> *Ille mi par esse deo videtur,*
> *ille, si fas est, superare divos,*
> *qui sedens adversus identidem te*
> *spectat et audit*
> *dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis*
> *eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,*
> *Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi*
> *vocis in ore*
> *lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus*
> *flamma demanat, sonitu suopte*
> *tintinant aures, gemina teguntur*
> *lumina nocte.*
> *Otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:*
> *otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:*
> *otium et reges prius et beatas*

[1] For example: Daniel H. Garrison, ed., *The Student's Catullus*, 4th ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012); E. A. Fredricksmeyer, "Catullus 51 and 68.51-56: An Observation," *Classical Philology* 78, no. 1 (1983); L. P. Wilkinson cited in Christina A. Clark, "The Poetics of Manhood? Nonverbal Behavior in Catullus 51," *Classical Philology* 103 (2008), 263n26; David Wray, *Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89-90.

perdidit urbes.[2]

That man to me seems equal to a god,
that man, if it is allowed, passes the gods,
who, sitting opposite again and again
observes and listens to you
laughing sweetly, which takes away all my
senses from pathetic me: for whenever I see you,
Lesbia, I have no voice left
in my mouth
but my tongue is numb, a tender flame drips down
under my limbs, my ears buzz
with their own sound, my eyes are covered
by the twin night.
Leisure, Catullus, is troublesome for you:
out of leisure you run riot and desire too much:
leisure previously both kings and blessed
cities has ruined.

Those scholars who regard the shift from a romantic catalogue of physical symptoms in stanzas two and three to the chastising discussion of *otium* in stanza four as irreconcilably drastic generally consider the last stanza to be either a case of poetic self-sabotage or a fragment of another poem altogether.[3] W. Kroll, for example, stated that, "poetically, Catullus surely damaged the poem by his change of mood."[4] C. J. Fordyce, on the other hand, refuses to believe that the last stanza was ever meant to be part of poem 51, as it is "completely different in tone

[2] All Latin text of Catullus is taken from Garrison. All translations of Catullus are my own. Note that Garrison's text of poem 51 differs from Mynors' OCT text in the acceptance of *vocis in ore* as line 8, which is Doering's restoration of the missing line. Otherwise, Garrison differs from the OCT only in punctuation.

[3] According to Fredricksmeyer, the majority of 19th-century scholars tended to assume a lacuna or an error in the stanza being attached to poem 51, while the majority of 20th-century scholars (up until 1965) assumed unity, but artistic failings on Catullus' part. E. A. Fredricksmeyer, "On the Unity of Catullus 51," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 96 (1965), 153. Fredricksmeyer takes issue with Fordyce's view in part because "Fordyce resorts to the nineteenth century solution." *Ibid*., 154.

[4] Quoted (and presumably translated) by Fredricksmeyer. *Ibid*., 153.

from what precedes it.... It is hardly conceivable that to his version of so famous a poem...he should have appended a self-admonitory quatrain which threw cold water on his passion."[5]

However, such views indicate that the poem is being read in isolation. For when the rest of the corpus is considered, it can be seen that a change in tone is not a rare occurrence within Catullus' corpus, and is perhaps to be expected from Catullus' penchant for witty poetics. Poem 10, for example, which relates a discussion about Catullus' experience in Bithynia (e.g. lines 5-7: *incidere nobis / sermones varii, in quibus quid esset / iam Bithynia*), ends with Catullus suddenly yelling at Varus' girlfriend, whom he had just met (lines 33-4: *Sed tu insulsa male et molesta vivis, / per quam non licet esse neglegentem!*). Poem 11 begins with an epic-like catalogue of the places to which Furius and Aurelius would accompany Catullus (e.g. lines 9-10: *sive trans altas gradietur Alpes, / Caesaris visens monimenta magni*), but then ends with a rather quiet and effeminate description of what Catullus' girl has done to him (lines 22-4: *qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati / ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam / tactus aratro est*). Similarly, all but the last two lines of poem 23 are a description of Furius' health and bodily functions (e.g. lines 16-17: *A te sudor abest, abest saliva, / mucusque et mala pituita nasi*), but then Catullus ends the poem with a firm admonition to Furius to stop asking for a loan (lines 26-7: *et sestertia quae soles precari / centum desine*). Therefore, in relation to the rest of the corpus, the change in tone at the end of poem 51 does not seem so out of place in a Catullan poem.

The same can be said in regards to the change in the poem's narrative voice and addressee, that is, the change from Catullus speaking in the first person to his audience, to Catullus speaking in the second person to himself. Judith Hallett, for example, though actually

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[5] C. J. Fordyce quoted in Fredricksmeyer. *Ibid*., 154. Fordyce also states, as do others, that there is no equivalent to Catullus' last stanza in Sappho's original. I will be discussing this issue later on in the paper.

arguing for the unity of the poem, assumes that the change in the narrative voice and addressee is so interruptive, that it actually indicates a change in the speaker or *persona* of the last stanza. Specifically, Hallett's interpretation of the last stanza is that, instead of Catullus addressing the reader, '*Catulle, tibi*' indicates that suddenly Catullus himself is being addressed by someone else, namely Lesbia; after hearing Catullus' three-stanza translation of Sappho's poem (about herself), Lesbia is now criticizing Catullus for it.[6] However, Hallett is biased by her motivation to find female speakers in ancient texts, and her study is, again, too isolated an analysis, as Catullus addresses himself numerous times throughout his corpus (e.g. poems 6, 7, 8, 11, 46, and 52). Indeed, as Ellen Greene states, "in the Lesbia poems, the speaker, typically, either addresses himself as 'Catullus' in the second person or refers to himself in the third person."[7] Furthermore, in the poems where Catullus has characters other than him speak, he either rephrases what was said (e.g. by using *quaeris*, or "you ask," in 7.1), or sets it up to be understood as a quotation (e.g. by using *inquiunt*, *inquit*, and *inquies*, or "they/she/you said," in 10.14, 10.25, and 24.7, respectively). Therefore, when compared to the rest of the corpus, even the change from a first person monologue to a second person address should not be used as sole evidence for (any degree of) the last stanza's disjointedness.

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[6] Judith P. Hallett, "Women's Voices and Catullus' Poetry," *The Classical World* 95, no. 4 (2002), 424. Hallett's view is unsurprising, given her tendency to read female speakers and poets in texts where there are not explicitly stated (see, for example, Judith P. Hallett, "Ovid's Sappho and Roman Women Love Poets," *Dictynna* 6 [2009], where Hallett argues that Ovid is directly addressing Sulpicia in *Amores* 3.14, even in the absence of a name or indication that the female addressee is a poet). However, it is interesting that Hallett does not mention that this idea of the last stanza being Lesbia's words was already suggested by Ernst Kalinka in 1909 (Ernst Kalinka, "Catulls LI. Gedicht und sein Sapphisches Vorbild" in *Wiener Eranos: zur fünfzigsten Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner in Graz* [Wien: A. Hölder, 1909], 157-63, as mentioned by Richmond Lattimore, "Sappho 2 and Catullus 51," *Classical Philology* 39, no. 3 [1944], 186n10). Perhaps it is due to the fact that Kalinka's idea was not well received and thus has not been frequently cited (e.g. Lattimore, "Sappho 2," 186n10: "Kalinka's suggestion that Lesbia is speaking here is not a happy one.").

[7] Ellen Greene, "Re-Figuring the Feminine Voice: Catullus Translating Sappho," *Arethusa* 32, no. 1 (1999), 12.

Though changes in tone and in narrative voice and addressee are not unusual in Catullus' poetic style, and thus are not adequate arguments for the (figurative or literal) disconnect between poem 51's last stanza and the rest of the poem, a third issue is often used to separate the last stanza from the rest of the poem, namely that of the seemingly abrupt change in *subject* from the physical effects of love to *otium*.[8] When subjected to a close reading, however, is this stanza really all that unexpected? In previous research, those who hold that the stanza is unexpected do not provide detailed arguments other than one- or two- sentence, blunt interpretations, as seen in Kroll and Fordyce above. However, interestingly enough, the arguments from those who believe that the stanza *is* an integral component are often no better, even if such arguments are more elaborate. Some have attempted to explain the function of the *otium* stanza by placing the burden of proof solely on the poem itself. E. A. Fredricksmeyer, for example, interprets the last stanza as Catullus "recovering...from his blackout" that resulted from seeing and hearing Lesbia.[9] Furthermore, Fredricksmeyer argues that the poem is framed by *otium*, with the first stanza describing the *otium* of the poem's initial subject, *ille* (without using the word *otium*), and the last stanza "contrast[ing] the *otium* of the poet with that of *ille*."[10] The physical recovery argument, however, is simply Fredricksmeyer's own insupportable interpretation; there are no

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[8] Others may add a fourth element that separates stanza four from the rest of the poem, namely the potentially odd image of *otium* causing the destruction of kings and cities. However, in this paper I am regarding the last stanza as a whole and discussing how it relates to the rest of the poem in general. Having said that, I myself do not see this as a problematic image, as a king excessively involved in *otium* presumably is not doing his duties and is thus susceptible to being overthrown/destroyed; the same could be said for a city, if it is understood as the personified collection of its citizens/military/king, and their (in)activities. Furthermore, as discussed by Elizabeth Marie Young, the idea of poetry in general having the ability to destroy is seen elsewhere in Catullus' corpus, such as with the book of horrid poems that Calvus sends Catullus in poem 14, and with the speech of Sestius that gives Catullus a cold and cough just by reading it in poem 44. Elizabeth Marie Young, "The Mediated Muse: Catullan Lyricism and Roman Translation" (PhD diss., University of California [Berkley], 2008), 208-9, ProQuest (UMI 3353368). Therefore it does not seem odd to have Catullus speaking of *otium* being able to destroy, if *otium* is referring to his leisurely activity of writing poetry. This is discussed further below.

[9] Fredricksmeyer, "On the Unity," 160.

[10] *Ibid*., 162.

descriptions of physical recovery in the last stanza. Also, his reading of an *otium*-frame simply shifts the discussion from why Catullus changes the subject to *otium* to why Catullus focuses on *ille* instead of on Lesbia. Similarly, R. J. Baker discusses the last stanza only by relating it to potentially similar uses of *otium* in Propertius, Ennius, and Ovid;[11] while finding parallels in other texts is interesting, Baker has only succeeded in creating an extended lexical entry for *otium*, and does not provide a supposed claim for Catullus' own usage.

To this point, all objections and supports for the subject change to *otium* have focused only on poem 51, but, again, it does a disservice to a close analysis of the poem if Catullus' other work is not considered a factor. And, indeed, looking at just the poem that precedes poem 51 multiplies the possible meanings of the last stanza. For, when poem 50 is read in relation to poem 51, it immediately strikes the reader that poem 50 is the opposite of poem 51, in that it begins with *otium* (in adjectival form), and discusses it in a positive manner, i.e. that Catullus and his friend Licinius had an enjoyable day writing poetry:

Hesterno, Licini, die otiosi
multum lusimus in meis tabellis,
ut convenerat esse delicatos:
scribens versiculos uterque nostrum
ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc,
reddens mutua per iocum atque vinum.
Atque illinc abii tuo lepore
incensus, Licini, facetiisque,
ut nec me miserum cibus iuvaret
nec somnus tegeret quiete ocellos,
sed toto indomitus furore lecto
versarer, cupiens videre lucem,
ut tecum loquerer simulque ut essem.

[11] Specifically Propertius 1.1, Ennius' *Iphigenia* (preserved in Gellius 19.10.12), and Ovid's *Amores* 1.9.41-46. R. J. Baker, "'Well Begun, Half Done': 'Otium' at Catullus 51 and Ennius, 'Iphigenia'," *Mnemosyne* (Fourth Series) 42 (1989). Baker's point in general is vague. It would be odd to say that Catullus translated a Greek poem and then ended it with a reference to a Roman play, and, if anything, the article only serves for a model for Ovid's use of *otium*. To add to the confusion, Baker does not once mention Sappho.

At defessa labore membra postquam
semimortua lectulo iacebant,
hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci,
ex quo perspiceres meum dolorem.
Nunc audax cave sis, precesque nostras,
oramus, cave despuas, ocelle,
ne poenas Nemesis reposcat a te;
est vemens dea: laedere hanc caveto.

Licinius, on yesterday's day of leisure
we played around a lot in my notebooks,
as it had been agreed that they were frivolous:
writing little verses both of us
played with meter in this way and that way,
giving back mutually through joke and wine.
And indeed from there I departed fired up
by your charm, Licinius, and witticism,
so that neither food helped miserable me
nor sleep quietly covered my eyes,
but, unmanageable with madness, on the whole bed
I writhed, desiring to see light,
so that I could talk with you and be with you.
But after my limbs, weary with labour,
were laying half-dead on the couch,
this poem, delightful one, I made for you,
so that you could discern my pain from it.
Now don't be bold, and our prayers,
we pray, don't reject, darling,
so that Nemesis does not require a penalty from you;
the goddess is severe: take care not to offend her.

As Charles Segal states, poems 50 and 51 can be read as presenting two different views of *otium* through two different narratives:

> 50 deals primarily with the literary or 'poetic' side of *otium*; 51 with the amatory side; but the two strands of *otium* are intertwined. Thus 50 uses the language of amorous passion to describe a literary experience, while 51 uses a literary

> experience – a creative encounter with a poem half a millennium in the past – to describe an amorous passion.[12]

In fact, in addition to both addressing *otium*, poems 50 and 51 are structurally linked. On the one hand, according to John Finamore and similar to Segal's view, the pair could be seen as parallels that simply differ in tone and addressee: poem 50 is addressed to Licinius, documents the physical effects Catullus experiences when separated from him, and ends with a discussion of destruction personified in Nemesis; poem 51 is addressed to Lesbia, documents the physical effects Catullus experiences when seeing and hearing her, and ends with a discussion of *otium*'s destruction of kings and cities.[13] Also, the last four lines of poem 50 are parallel to the last stanza of poem 51 in the change in tone *and* subject from a romantic description of Catullus' physical and mental ailments to an admonishment directed at Licinius; 50.17's *meum dolorem*, in fact, is directly juxtaposed to 50.18's *Nunc audax cave sis*, as 51.12's *lumina nocte* is to 51.13's *otium*. On the other hand, as Helena Dettmer argues, poems 50 and 51 can be seen as structural opposites.[14] For example, in addition to poem 50's beginning and poem 51's ending *otiosi* and *otium, respectively*, poem 50 ends with a mention of a goddess (*est...dea*), and poem 51 begins with a mention of a god (*esse deo*). Furthermore, 50.8's *incensus* is mirrored by 51.10's *flamma*, as is 50.10's *somnus tegeret quiete ocellos* by 51.11-12's *gemina teguntur / lumina nocte*.

Both arguments (for parallelism or a ring structure) either implicitly or explicitly assume that the order of the poems in Catullus' corpus is the work of Catullus himself, rather than of a

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[12] Charles Segal, "Catullan 'Otiosi': The Lover and the Poet," *Greece & Rome* (Second Series) 17, no. 1 (1970), 31. Also quoted by Helena Dettmer, "Design in the Catullan Corpus: A Preliminary Study," *The Classical World* 81, no. 5 (1988), 380. As will be seen in the rest of the paper, I do not think that Catullus 51 is a poem about a literal or figurative "amorous passion," but I agree with Segal that poems 50 and 51 approach *otium* from two different sides.

[13] John F. Finamore, "Catullus 50 and 51: Friendship, Love, and 'Otium'," *The Classical World* 78, no. 1 (1984).

[14] See Figure 2, 'Ring-composition Structure of *C*. 50 ~ 51', Dettmer, "Design," 379.

post-classical editor, which has been a matter of contention in the past. However, as Dettmer exhibits in her study, in the order they are now, "the poems are organized in a comprehensive and meaningful pattern."[15] While presumably a post-classical editor could have imposed such a pattern on the corpus, it does seem more likely the style-conscious Catullus would have had a hand in the structuring of his *libellus*; indeed, it is now generally agreed that Catullus himself at least partially if not completely ordered his poems deliberately in the order that we have them today.[16] In any event, even if the current order of the entire corpus is not identical to what Catullus would have wanted, the parallels between poem 50 and 51 seem too much of a coincidence to not be regarded as intentional, and thus it is quite possible that these two poems were placed in succession by Catullus himself. As such, many describe poem 50 as a 'cover letter' to poem 51, in that *hoc poema* that Catullus writes for Licinius *is* poem 51.[17] Such a structural pairing is actually seen elsewhere in Catullus' corpus, namely poems 65 and 66, with poem 65 being the cover letter to poem 66,[18] which, perhaps not coincidentally, is the only other translation in Catullus' corpus.

The similarity of poems 50 and 51 to poems 65 and 66 brings the most important feature of poem 51 into view that has thus far not been discussed, namely the fact that poem 51 is quite

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[15] *Ibid*., 371. Dettmer specifically argues that "Catullus organized the collection in nine consecutive cycles of thematically related poems," in a pattern "similar to that in later Latin poetry-books of the first century B.C., where ring patterns based on thematic reciprocity function as the chief unifying principle." Dettmer also uses the three metrical sections (polymetrics, poems 61-68, and the elegiac epigrams) to support her argument. As seen in Figure 1 of Dettmer's article, poems 50 and 51 are part of a cycle (the fifth cycle, specifically) that is comprised of poems 45-60. *Ibid*., 373-75.

[16] See Marilyn B. Skinner, "Aesthetic Patterning in Catullus: Textual Structures, Systems of Imagery and Book Arrangements: Introduction," *The Classical World* 81, no. 5 (1988).

[17] See Wray, *Catullus*, 97-99; and Young, "The Mediated Muse," 191-92.

[18] As Wray discusses, *mitto / haec expressa tibi carmina Battiadae* (65.15-16) directly refers to the translation of Callimachus' *Aetia*, and in a "wheedling, delicately petulant" tone, "very close, in other words, to the tone adopted by Catullus in poem 50 to Calvus." Wray, *Catullus*, 99.

obviously a translation of Sappho 31. And, rather surprisingly, in the discussion of the last stanza of poem 51, some scholars have opted to either largely or completely disregard the fact that poem 51 is a translation. Fredricksmeyer, for example, in the same article discussed above, begins his argument by stating that his concern "will be with the poem not as an imitation or version of Sappho's poem, but as an autonomous structure."[19] Even though both of his points (i.e. of the last stanza narrating Catullus' physical recovery from a blackout, and the poem being framed by the *otium* of *ille* and of Catullus) could benefit from a comparison to Sappho's original, he refuses to address its relation to the original.[20] To not consider its relation to Sappho's original does a great disservice to a comprehensive interpretation; to completely disregard the fact that the poem is a translation is, simply put, absurd. Indeed, even though a discussion of the function of the *otium* stanza is more informed when evidence is used not just from the poem itself but from the rest of the corpus (specifically, poem 51), the most important question that must be asked is what its actual relation to Sappho's original poem is.

That is not to say, of course, that it is impossible to read Catullus 51 without knowledge of Sappho 31. However, Catullus obviously knew Sappho's poem very well, and he chose to produce a fairly close translation of it, as can be seen from reading Sappho's poem below:

φαίνεταί μοι κῆνος ἴσος θέοισιν
ἔμμεν' ὤνηρ, ὄττις ἐνάντιός τοι
ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἆδυ φωνεί-
σας ὐπακούει
καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν·

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[19] Fredricksmeyer, "Unity of 51," 157n13.

[20] For example, Fredricksmeyer's argument would be more convincing at least to some degree if he had argued that Catullus as a Roman male was not as affected by Lesbia as Sappho as a Greek female was by her unnamed woman, and thus he recovered rather than nearly dying, and that Catullus was more interested in *ille* than Sappho was in κῆνος.

ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ᾽ ἴδω βρόχε᾽, ὤς με φώναι-
          σ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ἒν ἔτ᾽ εἴκει,
ἀλλ᾽ ἄκαν μὲν γλῶσσα †ἔαγε†, λέπτον
δ᾽ αὔτικα χρῷ πῦρ ὐπαδεδρόμηκεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ἒν ὄρημμ᾽, ἐπιρρόμ-
          βεισι δ᾽ ἄκουαι,
κὰδ δέ μ᾽ ἴδρως φῦχρος ἔχει, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ᾽ ὀλίγω ᾽πιδεύης
          φαίνομ᾽ ἔμ᾽ αὔτ[ᾳ.
ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ †καὶ πένητα†[21]

It appears to me that that man is
as fortunate as the gods, who, opposite to you
often sits and listens
          to you speaking sweetly
and to your lovely laughing, truly this for me
has always excited my heart in my breast
for when I look up at her briefly, then it is not possible
          for me to say anything
but my tongue is fixed in silence, at once
a faint fire runs under my skin,
with my eyes I see nothing,
          my ears hum,
a cold sweat covers me, a trembling
takes this girl, I am greener than grass,
and a little short of dying
          I seem to be.
But all must be endured, since...and a worker/poor man

Because of the vast number of parallels between the two poems, the Sapphic meter of Catullus' translation, and Catullus' mistress being named after Sappho's home, Lesbos, it can be assumed that Catullus expected his readers to immediately recognize that his poem was a translation of Sappho's poem.

[21] Greek text from D. H. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1982). The translation is my own.

However, apart from the similarities between the original and the translation, what would also be apparent to Catullus' learned audience is the handful of differences between the two poems.[22] First of all, while Sappho's speaker is feminine and unnamed, the speaker in Catullus' version is masculine (made evident from line 5's *misero*) and named, albeit in the second person (line 13's *Catulle*). Second, Sappho's catalogue of physical symptoms takes up three stanzas, while Catullus' takes up only two stanzas.[23] Furthermore, Catullus' symptoms seem to be slightly less debilitating than Sappho's, as his tongue is only numb, not fixed,[24] he is not covered in a cold sweat, and he is not approaching death in any manner. And, perhaps most strikingly, Catullus names his beloved, while Sappho does not. Finally, there is, of course, Catullus' final stanza, which (possibly) does not have a parallel in Sappho's original.[25] These differences cause the reader to question why Catullus made the changes he did. Moreover, other than poem 66, which is a translation of a poem by Callimachus, the other poems in the Catullan corpus are presumably not translations; the very existence of a translation in the corpus in itself causes the reader to question why it is even there.[26] Therefore, it follows that, as Catullus 51 is a translation

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[22] As has been discussed by many such as Dolores O'Higgins, "Sappho's Splintered Tongue: Silence in Sappho 31 and Catullus 51," in *Re-reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. Ellen Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 68-78; Greene, "Re-Figuring"; and Clark, "The Poetics of Manhood?."

[23] For the argument that Catullus' third stanza compresses Sappho's third and fourth stanzas into one, see Brent Vine, "On the 'Missing' Fourth Stanza of Catullus 51," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 94 (1992); and Alessandro Pardini, "A Homeric Formula in Catullus (c. 51.11-12 gemina teguntur lumina nocte)," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 131 (2001).

[24] Interestingly, O'Higgins argues that the difference between Sappho's loss of her voice versus Catullus' tongue being numb indicates the difference between Sappho as an oral/performative poet, who needs her voice to create and transmit poetry, and Catullus as a written poet, who views poems as physical things (cf. poems 1, 16, 35, 42, and 65) that have influence even when distant from the poet. O'Higgins, "Sappho's Splintered Tongue," 70-73.

[25] As O'Higgins states, "Catullus depends on his audience's familiarity with the Sapphic poem to create this sense of interruption." *Ibid*., 76. See below for a discussion on the last stanza of Sappho.

[26] Here I am assuming that the ancient reader would have Catullus' entire *libellus* to establish such a context, or at least knowledge of Catullus' other poems. This assumption is informed by Catullus' direct references to physical copies of his poetry (e.g. in poems 1, 35, 50), criticisms of his poetry (e.g. in poem 16), and the distribution/theft of such copies (e.g. in poem 42).

with oddities *other* than the last stanza, and because the modern scholar *does* have access to the same materials that Catullus did (i.e. the rest of his poetry and Sappho 31), to make any cogent comment on the last stanza one must address not only Sappho 31, but also Catullus' poetic intent. That is, the full question that should be addressed is not how to reconcile the last stanza to the rest of the poem, but rather, how to reconcile the last stanza with Sappho 31 and with the rest of Catullus' corpus.

Before further discussing Catullus 51 in relation to the version of Sappho 31 that has survived, one point that must be addressed is the possibility that the last stanza of Catullus 51 *is* actually a translation of the last stanza of Sappho's original. First of all, it must be kept in mind that Catullus may have had a copy (or at least knowledge) of Sappho's poem in its entirety. Based on this possibility, Armand D'Angour has, in fact, used Catullus as evidence to reconstruct Sappho's last stanza.[27] In any event, what we do have of the last stanza of Sappho 31, a fragment that was preserved in a quotation of Longinus, is in itself an abrupt departure from the rest of the poem.[28] For, at this point of the poem, Sappho is supposed to at least be silent, if not dead (τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης / φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὔτ[ᾳ); for Sappho to carry on any further than line 16 is somewhat unexpected. Furthermore, the uncorrupted portion of the stanza (ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ) is read by some as leading into a gnomic statement; as Peter Knox states, "the abrupt transition which this phrase signals is exactly paralleled in Catullus' version, and this sort

[27] Armand D'Angour, "Conquering Love: Sappho 31 and Catullus 51," *The Classical Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2006). While D'Angour's enthusiastic attempt is interesting, he actually has gone on to write an additional three stanzas himself, via strained 'evidence' provided in Catullus 11, Catullus' other poem written in Sapphic meter. See D'Angour's website for the 'full' Sappho 31: http://www.armand-dangour.com/sensational-sappho/.

[28] O'Higgins disagrees with most that πὰν τόλματον should be translated as "all can/must be endured" (as I have), but that it should be "all can be dared" thus making the contrast to the preceding lines stronger in its militant references. Catullus' *otium*, then, "responds to Sappho's military imagery of love...and his idleness has made him unfit for close 'combat' with Lesbia." O'Higgins, "Sappho's Splintered Tongue," 76-77.

of conclusion to a personal poem is not unknown in Sappho's poetry."[29] Whether "exactly" paralleled or not, Catullus' last stanza is at least figuratively parallel to Sappho's final line, if not structurally as well.[30] The question remains, however, what the subject or topic of Sappho's final stanza (or stanzas) was. While it is purely speculation to say that Sappho's conclusion had anything to do with the Greek equivalent of *otium* and the destruction of kings and cities,[31] it should at least not be presumed that Catullus' last stanza has no relation whatsoever to Sappho's original.

Having said that, the fact remains that Catullus 51 in general is a translation. Therefore, how a translation would have been viewed in the 1st century BC is important in considering why Catullus translated Sappho's poem, and what Catullus' readers would have thought of the poem.[32] As part of their quest to create a language that lived up to their claim of cultural superiority, the Romans had an ambiguous and often hostile attitude towards the translation of

[29] Peter E. Knox, "Sappho, fr. 31 LP and Catullus 51: A Suggestion," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* (New Series) 17, no. 2 (1984), 101. Knox cites Lattimore in paralleling the end of Sappho 16 with Sappho 31. See also Lattimore, "Sappho 2"; and Wray, *Catullus*, 93n68. Lattimore and Knox both argue that the gnomic quality of Catullus' stanza (i.e. the pairing of *otium* and the destruction of cities) suggests that it is not Catullus' original idea, but is rather modeled on another source. Specifically, Lattimore has suggested (and Knox has expanded) that Theognis 1103-4 strongly resembles Catullus' stanza, and thus the pairing of *otium* and destruction of cities is a Hellenistic *topos* that could have been in Sappho's last stanza as well.

[30] As Clark notes, "while [Catullus 51] seems different from the final stanza of Sappho in terms of content, [it] is similar in that it breaks the mood the poet has created in the previous stanzas." Clark, "The Poetics of Manhood?" 268.

[31] According to D'Angour, "the deprecation of leisure is not a Sapphic sentiment." D'Angour, "Conquering Love," 299. However, he goes on to argue, if *otium* were replaced with love, the remainder of Catullus' stanza would be quite in line with Sappho's poetic themes. In this way, D'Angour explains any discrepancy seen in Catullus' pairing of *otium* and the destruction of kings and cities, in that the latter was in the original, and Catullus is merely Romanizing or masculinizing the stanza with a substitution of love for *otium*. In contrast, Knox, "Sappho," discusses the possibility of Sappho's last stanza being associated with ἀβροσύνα (in Sappho's dialect, the archaic equivalent of the Hellenistic concept of τρυφή, or the Roman *otium*), which is seen elsewhere in her poetry (e.g. 58 and 148). In this situation, Catullus would then be following Sappho quite closely.

[32] Indeed, this discussion would be much more comprehensive if a discussion on translation theory and the history of translation could be included. Young's full PhD dissertation provides an extremely interesting view on Catullus' Rome as a culture in translation. Also see Frederick M. Rener, *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989) for a detailed discussion of translation theory.

texts written in other languages.[33] Whereas only Latin was allowed to be spoken in the political sphere,[34] Greek texts, the work of *the* culture the Romans sought to appropriate and outdo, profoundly influenced Roman education and literature. Nonetheless, some saw in translation a danger of the translator disappearing into the cultural context of the original text. A translator had to understand the foreign text thoroughly enough to express adequately in Latin, and thus, as voiced by Cato the Elder in the 2nd century BC, there was a fear that "an overly intimate handling of Greek texts would result not in knowledge but in infection."[35]

This "infective" nature of Greek texts was perhaps even more pronounced in the case of translating Greek lyric poetry. In contrast to other poetic forms with Greek origins such as verse satire and epic, "lyric had no traditional or civic purpose to make it a culturally valid Latin literary form."[36] Therefore, the fact that Greek lyric poetry had "profound cultural and historical differences that made it difficult to absorb into Latin"[37] increased the risk of Roman translators becoming invisible beneath the voice and perspective of the foreign poet (perhaps even a female poet) whose words they were translating.[38] In fact, Greek lyric poetry, as a genre to be translated

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[33] See Young, "The Mediated Muse," and her follow-up article, Elizabeth Marie Young, "Sappho Under My Skin: Catullus and the Translation of Erotic Lyric at Rome," in *Complicating the History of Western Translation: The Ancient Mediterranean in Perspective*, eds. Siobhán McElduff and Enrica Sciarrino (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011), 25-36.

[34] Young, "The Mediated Muse," 4-5.

[35] *Ibid*., 186. Young specifically cites (and translates) Cato the Elder's 2nd-century BC advice as recorded in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* 29.14: "It is good to skim their literature but not to thoroughly learn it. They are a worthless and intractable race...when that race gives us its literature, it will corrupt everything, even more so if it sends in its doctors" (Ibid., 187). As Young, "Sappho Under My Skin," 25-27, discusses, Cato's view of reading mirrored the conflicting Roman view on translation, in that it was encouraged to 'look into' (*inspicere*) Greek texts, but not to 'thoroughly learn' (*perdiscere*) Greek texts.

[36] Diana Spencer, "Horace and the Con/straints of Translation," in *Complicating the History of Western Translation*, eds. Siobhán McElduff and Enrica Sciarrino (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2011), 105.

[37] Young, "The Mediated Muse," 10.

[38] *Ibid*., 191.

or imitated in Roman productions, did not receive much attention until Catullus' own time. Catullus, therefore, in a move to be expected from an unceremonious poet such as he, seems to have abandoned any sort of discretion normally associated with translation by choosing to translate a Greek lyric poem (and one with a persona that had little in common with Catullus' own), and his choice to do so likely stood out. Indeed, "[Catullus 51] may well be the first Latin version of a Greek lyric poem ever made public at Rome – it is certainly the first example we know of."[39]

Furthermore, perhaps going against the views of other literary Romans of his time such as Cicero and Horace,[40] Catullus' translation is nearly word-for-word. Catullus 51 is, in fact, generally regarded as the most faithful rendering of Sappho 31.[41] Nonetheless, the handful of changes that Catullus does make (as discussed above), including the *otium* stanza (if it is not a direct translation), can be read as showing Catullus as unwilling to become a completely 'infected' translator. For example, though Catullus could have successfully made the gender of the poem's new speaker known with just *misero*, in contrast with Sappho's nameless original, Catullus inserted both his own name and Lesbia's. In doing so, Catullus both appropriates the Greek poem for the storyline of his Roman *libellus* and creates a metapoetic pun that calls further

[39] *Ibid*., 199. Young goes onto say that "Catullus's translation of Sappho – and his Sapphic preface to this translation – evince a new phase in hellenization, a phase in which adventurous Romans are starting to willingly risk infecting themselves with this peculiar form of Athenian medicine," namely poetry. Ibid., 211. For a discussion on Horace's false claim at being the first to bring Greek lyric to Rome, see Thomas K. Hubbard, "Horace and Catullus: The Case of the Suppressed Precursor in 'Odes' 1.22 and 1.32," *The Classical World* 94, no. 1 (2000): 25-37.

[40] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, particularly 133-134 (*nec uerbo uerbum curabis reddere fidus / interpres*), and Cicero, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, 5.14 (*...nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator, sententiis isdem et earum formis tamquam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis. In quibus non verbum pro verbo necesse habui reddere, sed genus omne verborum vimque servavi. Non enim ea me adnumerare lectori putavi oportere, sed tamquam appendere.).* Latin text taken from The Latin Library website. It should be noted that there has been contention as to whether Horace was writing against a literal approach, or just against a word-for-word (i.e. original word order) approach. See Rener, *Interpretatio*, 289-91.

[41] As Green notes: "While numerous translations and imitations of fragment 31 have been attempted through the past 26 centuries, Catullus' poem 51 is often though to come closest to the original." Green, "Re-Figuring," 2.

attention to the fact that the poem is a translation; as 'Lesbia' literally means 'a woman from Lesbos', Catullus not only replaces Sappho's nameless woman with his mistress, but he also directly alludes to or even addresses Sappho:

> Catullus' version...includes a punning nod to the arduous inspection of a source text that is a necessary prelude to any translation: the phrase "I saw you Lesbia/ Sappho" (*Lesbia aspexi*) contains a double entendre that gestures toward the translation process itself.[42]

A similar metapoetic move can be seen in line 2 (*ille, si fas est, superare divos* ["that man, if it is allowed, passes the gods"]), which does not have an exact parallel in Sappho's poem. While the *si fas est* couches Catullus' opinion of *ille* within the Roman concern for piousness, it could also be read as Catullus asking Sappho, his Muse, if it is *fas* for him to add the extra line to his version.[43] By making such decisions as a translator, Catullus both gives the Greek lyric poem a Roman context and holds it at arm's length by treating the strong emotions of its original simply as material to work with; as Young says, Catullus' readers may have heard not just a translation about "the invasive process of falling in love," but also a poem about "the equally invasive process of translation."[44]

What then is the function of the *otium* stanza in Catullus' metapoetic translation? First of all, as discussed above, it is entirely possible that the stanza is a translation of Sappho's last stanza. In the event that the stanza is not a direct translation of Sappho's last stanza, however, it can be assumed that Catullus intended his reader to read it in the same manner as the rest of the

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[42] Young, "The Mediated Muse," 201.

[43] Or, if read as a pair with poem 50 as discussed above, Catullus could be addressing Nemesis, the *vemens dea* that Catullus warns Licinius of offending. Also, see J. K. Newman, "Comic Elements in Catullus 51," *Illinois Classical Studies* 8, no. 1 (1983), for a reading of *si fas est* and the *otium* stanza as echoing Plautine New Comedy.

[44] Young, "The Mediated Muse," 199.

poem, namely in light of both Sappho 31 and Catullus' other work. For, if poem 51 is read by itself without any thought of it being a translation, the last stanza could conceivably be read as Catullus chastising himself for *otium* in the general sense, i.e. leisure or inactivity, as opposed to being involved in the daily *negotium* or business of a Roman male. However, this does not entirely make sense, given that Catullus' very career as a poet is, by definition, within the confines of *otium*, and such an interpretation does not address the unity question. Similarly, if read in relation to poem 50 without any thought of it being a translation, the last stanza of poem 51 could be read as Catullus reversing the view of *otium* that he held at the beginning of poem 50, but this gets us no further than looking at poem 51 in isolation.

Here we must recall that poem 50 can be read as a 'cover letter' for poem 51, just as poem 65 is for poem 66. Catullus' description of the pain (*meum dolorem*) involved in his writing of *hoc poema* (with *poema* being a Greek-derived word used in only one other Catullan poem, poem 22), his request in poem 50 for Licinius to not reject it (*cave despuas*), and his warning that doing so could incur the wrath of a Greek goddess (Nemesis) sets up the following poem both as a piece inspired by a Greek text and as a situation in which Catullus is not on sure footing in the poem's production and distribution. When poem 51 is then read, the reader realizes that Catullus was not just referring to a Greek-inspired poem, but a *translation* of a Greek *lyric* poem, an exercise that deserved explanation in its contemporary boldness; this explanation is provided by poem 50. Therefore, as discussed by Young, poems 50 and 51 are parallel to "the

ancient translator's habit of prefacing his work with a text – very often a letter – that discusses the translation's genesis and defends it against attack."[45]

In Catullan fashion,[46] however, it is Catullus himself, not Licinius, that reacts against the efforts that his *otium* produced, as he ends his Greek-turned-Roman poem with "a peculiarly Roman obsession: *otium*."[47] By doing so, in the context that poem 50 sets up, and in the context of poem 51 being a translation, *otium* is to be understood not as 'inactivity', but as the pursuit "of creative and intellectual past-times imported from Greece," such as the translation of a Greek poem.[48] Furthermore, Catullus' last stanza is read as an insertion of himself into a 600-year old Greek poem that is more forceful than his previous change in the gender of the speaker with line 5's *misero*, or with line 7's naming of Lesbia, for it is in the last stanza that Catullus names himself. And, if the stanza is not a direct translation of Sappho's last stanza, he pointedly inverts what we know does exists in Sappho's original: escape through a chosen pastime (*otium*) as opposed to enduring all things (ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον), and kings and blessed cities (*reges...et beatas...urbes*) as opposed to a poor man (πένητα). Whether Catullus' self-chastising is rooted in unhappiness with having wasted his free time attempting to translate a Greek lyric poem rather than writing his own original work, or whether he is continuing the defensive stance for his translation set up by the end of poem 50 is up for interpretation. Either way, the last stanza alludes to the fact that, by carrying out the dangerous act of translating a Greek lyric poem, it is

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[45] Young, "The Mediated Muse," 191-2 (see also 195-6). In Young, "Sappho Under My Skin," 35, Young gives the examples of the prologues to two plays of Terence, *Andria* 1-27 and *Adelphoe* 1-25, as well as Cicero's *Topica* 1.1-5 and *On the Ends of Good and Evil* 1.1-12.

[46] I.e. making himself look the fool (as in poem 10) and having an unexpected ending (as in poems 11 and 23).

[47] Young, "The Mediated Muse," 201.

[48] *Ibid*., 202. See Young 141-43 for *otium* as 'à la Grecque'.

Catullus, not Licinius, who runs the risk of destruction, as Cato the Elder had warned, and as has previously happened to *reges* and *beatas urbes*.

Catullus 51 is a multi-layered poem that both deserves and demands a rigorous reading. It refers to the Lesbia narrative of Catullus' corpus, it concludes and directly responds to Catullus 50, and, most importantly, it is a close translation of Sappho 31, a poem from a genre that had largely remained untouched before Catullus' time (if not before Catullus himself), and of a poet who inspired the name of Catullus' literary mistress. Furthermore, the prefacing nature of poem 50 and the deliberate insertion of Catullus into poem 51 together allude to the uneasy attitude that the Romans had about translation, specifically, perhaps, the translation of a genre that had little in common with Roman culture. Therefore, asking how poem 51's last stanza fits in with the rest of the poem is simply the wrong question. When all layers of the poem are considered, the *otium* stanza is seen as an integral part of a very Catullan poem, and of a very Roman translation.