

II

“No ancient,” observes Paul Veyne, “not even the poets, is capable of talking about himself. Nothing is more misleading than the use of ‘I’ in Greco-Roman poetry. When an ancient poet says ‘I’m jealous, I love, I hate,’ he sounds more like a modern pop singer . . . and makes no claim that the public should be interested in his own personal [condition].”⁵⁷ In the case of Catullus what is striking is not his recourse to contradictory characterological constructions, but the consistency with which the personae he creates seem to mystify his readers. Whereas one would expect the technical criticism of his poetry to have long since displaced biographical concerns, historically this does not turn out to be the case. Empirical demonstrations of the pieces’ first-person artifice, whatever the degree of their disruption, never succeed entirely in dislodging the impression of “an independent [individual] who forces his personality into his poetry.”⁵⁸ A popular rhetorical tradition, from Plato through Cicero and beyond, equates the writer ethically with his speech (*qualis autem homo ipse esset, talem eius esse orationem*),⁵⁹ so that in the *Brutus*, for example, Q. Catulus is said “to have possessed a graciousness not only in his life and nature, but even in his style” (*summa non vitae solum atque naturae, sed orationis etiam comitas*).⁶⁰ Catullus clearly likes to flirt with this connection, and the same set of adjectives that he employs to portray his private life (*lepidus, facetus, salsus, elegans*) also constitute the principal stylistic features that he attributes to his verse.⁶¹ A similar consistency between character and composition is suggested in poem 22, where the polish and sophistication of Suffenus (*venustus et dicax et urbanus*) matches the elegant appearance of his published books (*cartae regiae, . . . /directa plumbo et pumice omnia aequata*). In this case, however, the poem goes on to discover not only a disparity between the man’s habitual refinement and the coarseness of his work, but a discontinuity so great that one would think the writer issued

from a wholly different social world or class: *haec cum legas, tum bellus ille et urbanus/Suffenus unus caprimulgus aut fossor/rursus videtur: tantum abhorret ac mutat* (c. 22.9–11). Catullus punctuates this realization with a good deal of surprise (*hoc quid putemus esse?*), though significantly he does not lambaste Suffenus as a literary aberration. Unexpectedly, he turns the tables on himself and concludes that all authors, in one respect or another, are implicated in this model error: *idem omnes fallimur, neque est quisquam/quem non in aliqua re videre Suffenum/possis* (c. 22.18–20). Since “Suffenus” here stands principally as a figure for the rift between the poet and the persona projected by his work, the generalization ought unequivocally to cast suspicion on any deduction of Catullus’ own circumstances from his verse. It is curious, then, that c. 22 continues to be received not only “as a historical document,”⁶² but as a testimonial which, as one recent reader puts it, “reveal[s the author’s] fundamental philosophy of life.”⁶³ Why allegations of this type persist, despite explicit warning from the poet, is by no means clear, nor can they be derived from the patterns of semantic interference that we have studied up to this point. Rupture in Catullus’ work is genuinely aporetic, though, as the cycle of poems addressed to Lesbia thematically suggests, recognition of this rift may well be only one facet of a more complex opposition between conflicting orders of response: *amantem iniuria talis/cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus* (c. 72.7–8).

The key text in this connection is c. 16, which since antiquity has been recognized as programmatic for Catullus’ work. The poem takes up the same error in reading diagnosed in c. 22 and, in blunt and rather roguish terms, it excoriates two readers who have fallen prey to this misprision:

Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,
Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,
quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
nam castum esse decet pium poetam 5
ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est;
qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici
et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
non dico pueris, sed his pilosis 10
qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.
vos, qui milia multa basiorum
legistis, male me marem putatis?
pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo.

I’ll fuck you in the ass and fuck you in the face, Aurelius, you queer and you faggot, Furius, who have thought me, from my little verses, because they are a little delicate, not to be quite decent. It is proper for the faithful poet to be

chaste himself, but there's no reason that his little verses need to be so; which only then have salt and charm, if they are a little delicate and not quite decent and can arouse a lewd itching, I don't mean in boys, but in those hairy men who can't move their hard groins. You, who have read many thousands of kisses, you think I'm not sufficiently a man? I'll fuck you in the ass and fuck you in the face.⁶⁴

The salt here is seasoned with a paradox. On the one hand, Catullus exonerates himself from the charge of impropriety, which he attributes to a metonymical confusion between the writer and his work (*me ex versiculis meis putastis*):⁶⁵ however lascivious a poet's compositions, he may be personally dutiful (*pium*) and free from taint (*castum*). At the same time, however, Catullus maligns the two men who have impugned his morals (*pathice et cinaede*)⁶⁶ and threatens them with rape.⁶⁷ Forcible violation of this type fell within the range of crimes that the Romans generally called *stuprum*,⁶⁸ and was by no stretch of the imagination compatible with either *pietas* or *castitudo*.⁶⁹ "In the language of political alliance," writes David Ross, "he is *pious* who has fulfilled his obligations by *officia* and *benevolentia*, who is guilty of no *iniuria* against his political *amicus*."⁷⁰ Since, elsewhere, Aurelius and Furius are identified as *comites Catulli*,⁷¹ that is fellow members of a *cohors amicorum*,⁷² rape is a direct perversion of the *beneficia* they might reasonably expect.⁷³ It is, moreover, entirely at odds with the ideal of *castitudo*, which essentially entails abstinence, particularly from sexual relations.⁷⁴ At Rome, *pedicatio* with free-born men (*ingenui*) not only brought disgrace,⁷⁵ but was probably illegal;⁷⁶ and oral sex is uniformly represented in the culture as polluting.⁷⁷ In one of the *controversiae* recorded by the elder Seneca, a citizen is held to be unchaste for simply kissing inappropriate companions (*conservarum osculis inquinatur*),⁷⁸ and Artemidorus stigmatizes oral copulation unequivocally as an unutterable act of vice (*arrhêtopoiein*).⁷⁹ Logically, then, the authorial defense here is self-negating: if the poet is actually virtuous and chaste, he will never carry out the rape, and, if he carries out the rape, he substantiates the claims against his morals. The imminence of the threat to punish Aurelius and Furius for failing to distinguish the decorous writer from his dissolute persona is, thus, maddeningly predicated on the validity of their (mis)reading.

This impasse at the opening of *c.* 16 succinctly thematizes the undecidability that we have observed in the Catullan corpus elsewhere. The piece not only warns its readers off of any access to the writer through his text, but is specifically set up to block that passage. At this point, however, the poem goes on to distinguish between the information that the text conveys about the author's character (*castum esse decet pium poetam*), the appeal of the verses (*habent salem ac leporem*), and the effect they have upon the reader (*quod pruriant incitare possunt*). The three features of his composition that Catullus singles

out here reiterate a set of *topoi* central to the theory of rhetoric as elaborated currently at Rome. Aristotle had recognized three means for procuring an audience's good faith (*tôn de dia tou logou porizomenôn pisteôn tria eidê*),⁸⁰ and Cicero reworked this triad to define the enterprise of rhetoric in general.⁸¹ "The supreme orator," he argues, "is the one whose speech instructs (*docet*), delights (*delectat*), and moves (*permovet*) the minds of his listeners: to instruct is his obligation, to delight a premium (*honorarium*), and to move a necessity."⁸² For the senator, these three methods of appeal represent less a series of options for the orator, than mutual reinforcements engaged in common cause: teaching and persuasion will enter into strict alliance (*mirificam societatem*),⁸³ and, suffused with charm, the entire disquisition ought to operate as an organic whole. Thus, in the dialogue *de oratore*, M. Antonius remarks, "There are three ways of bringing people round to our opinion—instruction, gratification, and arousal. The first of these must be openly put forward (*prae nobis est ferenda*) so that we seem to wish solely to impart instruction, but the other two should be infused throughout the whole of each speech like the blood that is in our bodies."⁸⁴ Good oratory, then, aims at a synergic *docere-delectare-movere*. While each of these functions may make separate demands and entails its own agenda, the skillful speaker is conscientiously at pains to minimize their difference. In the ideal composition, he will not only see to it that they cooperate; the three will fuse into a complex knot which no opponent, however dexterous, will be able to unravel or succeed in cutting through.

Catullus adopts this canonical triad of functions, in their customary order, as the formal framework for *c.* 16, though as the poem unfolds, it renders the relationship between the terms increasingly more problematic. In the first place, where the text takes up the issue of instruction, it does so only to inform us that it conveys no information about its subject. This is, of course, a possibility that Cicero envisions (*concessum est rhetoribus ementiri in historiis*),⁸⁵ but one whose consequences he depreciates and is always anxious to contain. "It is from factual perception," he insists, "that oratory has to blossom and to thrive, for unless it is grounded in fact (*nisi subest res*), . . . there is something empty and almost childish about the utterance."⁸⁶ Whereas an orator of any reasonable competence would at least pretend to communicate the truth (*satis id est magnum, quod potes praestare, ut . . . vere dicere videaris*),⁸⁷ Catullus mischievously parades before his audience the inauthenticity of his own claims. Secondly, and this is somewhat more disturbing, the abrogation of instruction here yields no apparent consequences for either the appeal of the poetry or its ability to arouse the reader. If Catullus' work deliberately frustrates biographic certitude, it nonetheless (*tum denique*) possesses charm and proves palpably effective as a source of stimulation. This is, again, a possibility that Cicero admits (*magis affectis animis iudicium quam doctis . . . est a nobis tum accusatio victa*),⁸⁸ though he is

quick to brand such a dissociation as aberrant. "The faculty of eloquence," he argues, "after compassing a knowledge of the facts (*scientiam complexa rerum*), will express the perceptions and resolutions of the mind in such a way that it is able to propel the audience whithersoever it applies its force (*ut eos qui audiant quocumque incubuerit possit impellere*)." ⁸⁹ Whereas the senator desires to insure instruction as the principal condition of public response, in *c.* 16 this link is pointedly dissolved: to teach and to affect are, for Catullus, independent functions, so that the poet claims the power to delight and move his readers even as his text surrenders any pretense to supply them determinate fact. Third and finally, moreover, what is most untoward here is the reification of arousal that this discontinuity allows (*duros movere lumbos*). Cicero's own language is often rife with figures of seduction (*neque vero mihi quidquam . . . praestabilius videtur, quam posse dicendo tenere hominum coetus, mentes allicere, voluntates impellere quo velit*), ⁹⁰ though his discussion inevitably plays down the erotic connotations of his terms. "Obscenity," he urges, "is not only degrading in the forum; it is hardly to be suffered at a dinner party of free men." ⁹¹ While the orator has scrupulously to banish all such crudity from court, the avowed intention of Catullus' work is prurient. The *voluntates* that his poetry excites are sexual and, as such, divert the senator's *coetus hominum* quite literally to coition. ⁹² As a whole, then, *c.* 16 is a puckish travesty of orthodox rhetorical prescriptions. The poem not only cuts the knot that binds oratorical instruction (*docere*) to arousal (*movere*); it develops their capacities to unexpected ends, without in the least diminishing the composition's charm (*delectare*).

Within the framework of rhetorical teaching at Rome, however, Catullus' insistence that we distinguish the information from the outcome of his work also constitutes a serious challenge to the dominant critical position. "It is one thing (*aliud*)," Cicero concedes, "to set forth empirical events . . . , but another (*aliud*) to stir up the hearer," ⁹³ and *c.* 16 purports to press the nature of that difference. By denying authorial indecency at the same time that it claims to incite illicit desire, the poem plays off the referential value of its statements (*esse*) against their predicative power (*posse*). In our own day, it is John L. Austin and his students who have helped us to understand this distinction. To begin with, Austin stresses, it is essential to demystify the illusion, promoted generally in the philosophical tradition, that the only thing at stake in language is the "truth" or "falsity" of a proposition. ⁹⁴ While such criteria are indeed applicable to the types of utterances that Austin calls "constative," that is, to descriptive sentences that set forth matters of fact, truth and falsehood have no bearing on a second category of expressions, for which Austin introduced the term "performative" into linguistics: utterances whose function is not to inform or to describe, but to carry out an operation, to accomplish something through the very process of their enunciation. Austin's chief example here is the verbal act by means of which the Anglo-

Saxon marriage is traditionally performed. When a bride responds in the affirmative to the ritual and legal question posed during the marriage ceremony—"Do you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband?"—it is clear that she is not describing what she does, but acting, for in uttering the words "I do," she accomplishes the bond. In the same way, Austin notes, to say "I swear," "I apologize," "I bet" does not describe an operation, but performs one: by pronouncing the words, the speaker literally produces the event he designates, the act of swearing, apologizing, betting, or what have you. As such, the performative has no referent beyond itself; it does not record something that exists outside speech and prior to it, but engenders or transforms a situation *that it alone effects*. ⁹⁵ Its language is oriented neither toward the unveiling of a fact, nor the adequation of a judicative statement to the thing itself, and it is thereby liberated from the authority of truth value: insofar as the performative constitutes an objective force or deed, its utterance can logically be neither true nor false, only "felicitous" or "infelicitous" in accomplishing its designated ends. In place, therefore, of the veridical standards essential to constative language, Austin substitutes, in the case of the performative, the criterion of the success or failure of the enterprise in question. The whole point of a speech act, as Marx succinctly put it, is not to expound or clarify the world (*esse*), but to change it (*posse*). ⁹⁶

"How can we be sure," Austin asks, "whether any utterance is to be classed as a performative or not?" ⁹⁷ Grammatically, in Latin as well as English, the main criterion is the asymmetry that occurs in certain verbs between the first person of the present indicative, active voice, and its other persons, moods, and tenses. Whereas an individual, by uttering the verb in the first person present tense, effectively accomplishes the act he names ("I promise," "I guarantee," "I bid you welcome," "*dari spondes? spondeo*," "*vos precor, veneror, veniam peto*"), the remaining verb forms are descriptive, and report or simply state a fact ("she promised," "I bid him welcome," "*veniam a vobis petebat*"). In the long run, however, this criterion proves to be insufficient, for it fails to account exhaustively for all the different cases of speech acts. There are many utterances, Austin notes, which do not exploit this grammatical asymmetry, yet still belong to the category of the performative, in that they carry out an operation and lie beyond the pale of the truth/falsity distinction. For example, the impersonal "You are hereby authorized to represent me" is readily rephrased in standard form ("I authorize you to represent me"), just as the imperative "*cave canem*" can be seen as an ellipsis of the indicative ("*monemus te a cane cavere*"). Performative language, then, is by no means always explicit but, as often as not, has been transposed or is only implied. ⁹⁸ This generalization of the rule is crucial and makes it possible to see that the majority of Catullus' poetry is in fact performative and not constative. ⁹⁹ Whereas the principal burden of his contemporaries' compositions—Lucretius, Cicero, Varro Atacinus—tends to be descriptive,

that is to record *res gestae* or explain the phenomena of nature,¹⁰⁰ Catullus' texts are for the most part incidental and almost always have a specific act in view. The individual poems function less to communicate factual information than as agents of some pragmatic force, so that the collection as a whole reads virtually as a catalogue of different discursive operations: dedication (c. 1), censure (c. 39), advice (c. 69), condolence (c. 96), warning (c. 21), request (c. 27), repudiation (c. 11), greeting (c. 31), apology (c. 65), blessing (c. 61), invitation (c. 35), and so forth. Even pieces which are generally treated in the literature as descriptions of an affective state turn out, on technical inspection, to be intentionally performative in thrust. Thus, the famous lyrical address to the pet sparrow (c. 2), though it certainly calls to witness bits of fact (*acris solet incitare morsus*, etc.), is formally a high-style hymn in which the poet prays to be released from care (*tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem/et tristis animi levare curas*).¹⁰¹ In a similar way, the multipartite c. 68 centers on particulars about the poet's mistress (*furtiva dedit mira munuscula nocte, ipsius ex ipso dempta viri gremio*) and about his brother (*Troia infelice sepultum/detinet extremo terra aliena solo*), but the passages that frame these statements subsume their declaration within an act of *pietas*: the poem repays Catullus' debt to Allius through the commemoration of his benefactor's good grace (*confectum carmine munus/pro multis . . . redditur officii*). This memento is itself, moreover, prefaced by a verse epistle which offers the whole of the appended testimonial to the lovelorn Manlius in consolation for his old friend's grief (*neu me odisse putes hospitis officium,/accipe*).¹⁰² As such, the descriptive kernel of the poem is not only imbricated structurally within two different layers of speech acts;¹⁰³ constative language here stands wholly in the service of these performatives, so that c. 68 asks ultimately to be appreciated not for whatever biographical detail it may convey, but for the manner in which it realizes its compensatory and assuasive aims.¹⁰⁴

That Catullus both acknowledges a basic distinction of this nature and regards it as central to his work is evident from c. 42. As is well known, this poem is based on a conventional form of popular Italian justice, whereby an individual denied his due, instead of resorting to legal proceedings, called his friends together, accosted the offending party in a public place, and gave a loud and abusive account of his offense, in the hope of shaming him into compliance. The traditional term for this procedure was *flagitatio*, and it is by this process that Catullus playfully enlists his lyric verses to help secure the restitution of his writing tablets from an uncooperative girl.¹⁰⁵

Adeste, hendecasyllabi, quot estis
omnes undique, quotquot estis omnes.
iocum me putat esse moecha turpis,
et negat mihi vestra reddituram
pugillaria, si pati potestis.

persequamur eam et reflagitemus.
quae sit, quaeritis? illa, quam videtis
turpe incedere, mimice ac moleste
ridentem catuli ore Gallicani.
circumsistite eam, et reflagitate,
"moecha putida, redde codicillos,
redde, putida moecha, codicillos!"
non assis facis? o lutum, lupanar,
aut si perditius potes quid esse.
sed non est tamen hoc satis putandum.
quod si non aliud potest, ruborem
ferreo canis exprimamus ore.
conclamate iterum altiore voce,
"moecha putida, redde codicillos,
redde, putida moecha, codicillos!"
sed nil proficimus, nihil movetur.
mutanda est ratio modusque nobis,
siquid proficere amplius potestis:
"pudica et proba, redde codicillos."

Help me, hendecasyllables, every one of you from everywhere, as many of you as there are. A foul slut thinks that I'm a joke and says she won't return your writing tablets. Are you willing to put up with that? Let's go after her and demand them back. So, you want to know which one she is, then? There, you can see her strutting shamelessly, laughing like a cheap comedian with the noisome yap of a Gallic hound. Crowd around her and demand them back: "Filthy slut, return the tablets, return the tablets, filthy slut!" You don't care a bit, do you? You piece of dirt, you walking brothel, you anything that could possibly be worse. But we mustn't let her get off at that. If nothing else, let's wring a blush out of the bitch's brazen face. Call out again, this time in a louder voice: "Filthy slut, return the tablets, return the tablets, filthy slut!" We're getting nowhere; she isn't moved at all. We'll have to change our method and approach; see if you have any more success: "Chaste and honorable lady, return the tablets!"

Both the drama and the humor of this piece hinge on a pragmatic analysis of the language of vituperation. To the Roman mind, insults of this type were not a trifling matter, but explicitly forbidden and policed by law. Under the XII Tables, slander was punishable by death,¹⁰⁶ and intermittent prosecution impressed upon the populace the gravity of the offense.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the Republic, calumny had been subsumed within the general edict for *iniuriate*,¹⁰⁸ and this made defamation technically equivalent to bodily assault. Labeo, for instance, recognized *iniuria verbis* alongside *iniuria re*,¹⁰⁹ and their connection is explained in the *Sentences* of Paul as follows: *iniuriam patimur aut in corpus aut extra corpus: in corpus verberibus et illatione stupri, extra*

corpus conviciis et famosis libellis.¹¹⁰ These passages attest to the extraordinary efficacy that was attributed to speech at Rome, where the power of a word was thought to be every bit as forceful as the impact of a blow.¹¹¹ The point of departure for Catullus' composition is a double fault within the structure and authority of these speech acts. First, his invective capitalizes on the insight that the potency of language is not only distinct from, but operatively independent of its referential value: the insult (or flattery) that the poet levels at the girl packs its punch regardless of the truth or falsehood of his claims. Thus, the poet does not hesitate to present contradictory assessments of the girl's morals in order to exert the type of verbal pressure that contingencies require. The performatives simply exploit constative language here, even to the point of shattering descriptive logic and coherence. Secondly, the dramatic conflict in the piece develops out of a discrepancy between what Austin calls the "illocutionary" force of the utterance and its "perlocutionary" effect:¹¹² the act performed *in* saying something (insult, compliment) is not to be confused with the result achieved *by* saying it (recovering the books). While the illocutionary operations here are all exemplarily performed,¹¹³ they fail quite conspicuously as perlocutions, since, despite the poet's verbal efforts, the girl remains unmoved. As a whole, then, Catullus' composition is organized around the discontinuity and tensions between these different registers of speech: meaning vs. force, force vs. effect. The resulting drama not only offers a wry critique of *flagitatio* as a judicial institution; as a poem about the usages of poetry, the piece implicitly locates Catullus' work within the larger field of diction. Considered programmatically, the scenario in *c.* 42 distinguishes the poet's verbal enterprise from both the truth and consequences of his propositions (constatement/perlocution), whereas it aligns his verse directly with the agency and impress of the voice (illocution): *adeste, hendecasyllabi . . . , circumssistite . . . , conclamate*.¹¹⁴

In *c.* 16, Catullus not only confirms the opposition of performative to constative language, but designates their mutual resistance as the generative principle of his work. The first section of the poem, as we have seen, takes stock of the constative dimension of the poet's speech and openly denies its heuristic value altogether. The poet's complaint to literal-minded readers (*me ex versiculis meis putastis, / quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum* (vv. 3–4)) implicitly repudiates authenticity or candor as criteria appropriate to his reception and thereby situates the achievement of his writing outside the pale of knowledge—as Kenneth Quinn puts it: "the poet's confessions mustn't be taken as *true* confessions."¹¹⁵ It is against this cognitive suspension that, in the second section of the piece, Catullus asserts the performative power of his compositions, shifting critical attention from what his work reveals to what it does. In this case, it is no longer an occasional speech act, like adulation or condolence, that is the issue, but the extent to which his poetry operates as a captation, a seductive force or lure that emerges in the act of reading:

qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici
et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
non dico pueris, sed his pilosis 10
qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.
vos, qui milia multa basiorum
legistis, male me marem putatis?
pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo.

The basis for this effect, as these lines present it, is the make-up of the poems themselves (*sunt molliculi ac parum pudici*);¹¹⁶ the compositions are inherently provocative (*habent sal ac leporem*) and, as such, entail the ability to arouse desire even in the most intractable of readers (*quod pruriat incitare possunt*). The hankering inspired by the poet's words, moreover, turns out to be a rather special type of itch. The phrase *duros movere lumbos* is ambiguous, but it strongly suggests passive homosexual behavior, that is *cevere*,¹¹⁷ and the surrounding sexual vocabulary uniformly converges on this sense: *pedicabo, pathice, cinaede, molliculi*, and so forth. To be penetrated, the poem submits, is what the poet's readers really want, and the final lines here are set up as a tease to gratify that fancy. The erotic subject matter of the pieces (*milia multa basiorum*) not only puts the reader into heat, but tantalizes him with the picture of a virile and sexually aggressive poet: *male me marem putatis?* The possibility is correctly formulated as a question since, from the first part of the poem, we know that conclusions of this type—about the writer from his work—can never amount to more than a suspicion. Despite this caveat, however, in the climactic verse, the virility that was at first posed only in potential has suddenly materialized as imminently real. In direct response to his readers' fantasmatic wishes, the poet promises to satisfy them by performing precisely those sexual services that he has got them to desire: *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*. As a whole, then, the progression in this passage is from the properties intrinsic to the poet's verse (*versiculos esse*) through a moment of reading (*legistis*) to the point where Catullus begins to take on a life and character independent of his poems (*ego*). This is an operation that the *auctor ad Herennium* calls *conformatio*:¹¹⁸ "the figure represents (*confingitur*) an absent person as if present, or makes a mute or formless thing articulate (*res muta aut informis fit eloquens*), attributing to it a shape and speech (*et forma ei et oratio adtribuitur*) or some behavior (*actio*) that is appropriate to its disposition."¹¹⁹ In this case, the transference unfolds as a metaleptic reversal in which specific textual components and their determinate effects give rise to an animated trope that is subsequently retrojected as the source or author of the composition.¹²⁰ This anthropomorphism,¹²¹ the passage suggests, arises at the direct incitement of the verse, which concomitantly elicits in the reader both a desire for that image, as well as an historical investment in the figural exchange.

Insofar, then, as the entire movement is set up as a calculated illocution, what the poetry effectively produces is an “author” for its text.

One of the implications of the performative poetics outlined in *c.* 16 is that Catullus’ writing is not so much a record or reflection, as the introduction of a new referent into the world. The persona projected by the text has no exterior or prior origin, though insofar as the peculiar burden of the effect is to advance itself as cause, the lyric’s argument eventually comes round full circle: from an initial assertion of the poet’s presence to his readers (*ego vos* (v.1)), the piece proceeds to undermine the referential bases of this assumption by stressing the ethical autonomy of the poet’s text; having reached a zero grade of textuality, however, the poem goes on to trace the reader’s reconstruction of the authorial persona it has just dismantled, culminating in the same supposition of identity from which the composition issued (*ego vos* (v. 14)). This reassertion of the poet’s presence is now subject to demystification in its turn and, as the reader reverts back to the opening of the lyric, the cycle repeats itself anew. The ambit of the poem seems at face value to suggest a pattern of reception in which the biographical appreciation of the poet’s work is perpetually destined to be displaced by textual understanding, and vice versa. Philologically, however, it would be naive to take the sequential manner of the lyric’s exposition for a series of diachronic or historical events. The order of response described here unfolds according to the commonplace figurative scheme that Cicero refers to as *conversio* and Hermogenes calls *chiasmus*: the specular inversion of four terms of which the first is reiterated by the last and the second by the third (PQQP).¹²² The handbooks stress the conceptual challenge of this figure (*difficile inventu*), and it can hardly be coincidental that the majority of their examples have to do with cognitive language or with poetics: *quae de illo dici possunt non dicuntur, quae dicuntur dici non possunt. item: poema loquens pictura, pictura tacitum poema debet esse. item: si stultus es, ea re taceas, non tamen si taceas, ea re stultus es.*¹²³ These model propositions make it clear that what their chiasmic crossing spatializes is not a sequence but a synchronic tension, and it is this basic paradigm that supplies Catullus with the logic for his lyric: the reduction of the authorial persona to the text is matched simultaneously by the textual production of the same persona. What allows this contradiction to arise is that the two sides of the equation, far from being complementary, are not in fact symmetric. On the one hand, Catullus’ poetry can in all honesty point out that its significance does not reside in an objective entity or consciousness which the verse is trying to reflect. On the other, it is free to posit such a referent in complete good faith: as a speech act, the personification of the poet does not record the temper of a subject that exists prior to the moment of reception, but generates a character of which it predicates rational anteriority.¹²⁴ These two operations can occur side by side in the same text without one ever interfering with the other, since the

first is grounded on the principle of verity, the second on that of force. Insofar as the juridical, descriptive use of language lacks the authority to disable or arrest its illocutionary power, Catullus’ poetry can continue to perform the very speech act that cognitively it discredits. What is controversial about *c.* 16, then, is not simply that it drives a wedge between “the character of the poet and that of his poetry”;¹²⁵ more problematically, the persona that the text demystifies turns out to be a subject which, in the very process of unmasking, it nonetheless propounds. The order of knowledge and the order of action unfold here entirely at cross-purposes and, as a more extended analysis of the text would demonstrate, it proves impossible at any moment to privilege either one.¹²⁶

What is most remarkable, perhaps, is that the conflict of information (*docere*) with enterprise (*movere*) here is realized in the realm of pleasure (*delectare*). Just as Austin’s fundamental contribution to modern logic is to substitute, in the case of the performative, the criterion of satisfaction for the criterion of truth,¹²⁷ so Catullus represents the personification of the poet as a prospect of sexual fulfillment. “A crucial feature of [promisory speech acts],” John Searle notes, “seems to be that the promisee wishes (needs, desires, etc.) that something be done, and the promisor is aware of this wish (need, desire, etc.).”¹²⁸ This is staged quite literally in *c.* 16 where the illocutionary animation of the poet plays directly to the erotic wishes of the reader. The construction of the author’s persona (*conformatio*) transpires across the critic’s exchange of intellect for affect, and it is the sexual nature of this conversion that explains the link between prosopopeia and chiasmus in Catullus’ lyric. As Michael Riffaterre observes:

[We can posit] a corollary to prosopopeia: the address calls for a reply of the addressee, the gaze that perceives animation invites gazing back from the animated object to the subject daydreaming a Narcissistic reflection of itself in things. This corollary is chiasmus, the transfer or crisscrossing exchange between subject and object, a most striking example of which [occurs] in Milton’s epitaph of Shakespeare: the living overwhelmed by the voice from the grave, by Shakespeare’s ever living verse, his true monument, are literally petrified (“... thou our fancy of itself bereaving/Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving”). Chiasmus, the symmetrical structure of prosopopeia, entails that, by making the dead speak, the living are struck dumb—they too become the monument. Prosopopeia thus stakes out a figural space for the chiasmic interpretation: either the subject will take over the object, or it will be penetrated by the object.¹²⁹

The prosopopeia in poem 16 sets a similar series of reversals into play,¹³⁰ though the terms of the transference are not in this case life and death, but hard and soft, active and passive sexual positions.¹³¹ If the reader can (re)animate the poet from his compositions, then the character that he con-

structs can in turn objectify the reader.¹³² Thus, the poet's verse, which is said to be intrinsically *mollis* (soft, pliant, effeminate, immoral), gives rise to a persona that is, by contrast, *durus* (hard, stiff, masculine, austere), while Aurelius and Furius, at first described as *durus*, imagine sexually submitting to this figure in a manner that is *mollis*.¹³³ In keeping with the self-reflexive logic of the lyric, the erotic roles staked out for Catullus and his friends (*irrumatio, pedicare*) do not function as indices to authentic acts of copulation, but serve as placemarkers in an exchange of objective relations to the text.¹³⁴ This is why the terms of the scenario are homosexual: though elsewhere women figure prominently among the audience envisioned for Catullus' work, the match here is a contest between equals in which the shift from top to bottom, active to passive dramatizes a scandalous, yet ultimately satisfying capitulation to poetical effect.¹³⁵ The pair of slurs that the lyric levels against its addressees (*pathice et cinaede*) are not simply gratuitous insults, but accurately describe the reader's submission—not to the poet's person, but—to the personified pressure of his text. Under the impact of the writer's illocutions, the reader is passively subject to the coercion of external force (*pathicus*)¹³⁶ and, by conceding to this textual aggression, "he" compliantly sets "himself" in the position of receptor (*cinaedus*).¹³⁷ Whether in performance or off the written page, the addressee not only cooperates with this reversal; "he" derives considerable pleasure from "his" surrender to a stance that could, in this case, quite properly be called "aesthetic." This critical insight would take us a long way toward understanding the psychopathology of literary institutions, which turn out to involve a good deal more masochism than is generally supposed.¹³⁸ In the present context, however, it will be enough to note that the poet's public remains directly invested not only in the project of prosopopeia, but in the personal subjection that this inevitably entails. Aurelius and Furius stand for all future readers of Catullus' work who, at the very moment they think that they have gained some descriptive or evaluative control over the poet, discover that they have simply been "fucked over" by his text.

Like the other poems that we have looked at, then, *c.* 16 is constituted as a site of opposition between two irreconcilable facets of the poet's speech. Whereas in more basic texts the autonomy of syntax, rhetoric, or genre from semantics gives rise to mutually resistant meanings, the problem that Catullus tackles here is the surplus of the performative over the constative, the ability that language has to overrun even a *crux* or *paresis* of understanding. In this case, moreover, Catullus' explication of the principle is metacritical and alludes conspicuously to his corpus as a whole: the piece is an invective about the reading of erotic poetry; its reminder *milia multa basiorum/legistis* (v. 11–12) refers us synecdochically to both the Lesbia and Iuventius lyrics,¹³⁹ the two main cycles of amatory verse, hetero- and homosexual, that make up the collection; and the entire set of literary issues brought into

play here arises out of competing claims to civil rectitude (*pietas*), so that both the personal and the poetic are ultimately inscribed within the horizon of the political. As an epitome of Catullus' writing across the board, then, *c.* 16 explains why a technical criticism of the poet's work is never able to displace biographical concerns. No matter how directly Catullus' verses elicit contradiction, no matter how lucidly they name this impasse or excoriate readers inattentive to its structure, the illocutionary force of his statements ultimately outscripts their descriptive function and introduces a nexus of effects that is fundamentally at odds with the poems' expository intent. No amount of understanding of the poet's craftsmanship will entirely undo the rhetorical production of his persona, just as, however forceful, this impression lacks the power to efface the knowledge of its own linguistic means. Considered as constative, the poems' assertions short-circuit the effect of their performance, but when taken as performatives, they literally escape the hold of truth. Catullus' poetry is set up both to exploit and to expose this friction and, to the extent that the two features of the text prove incompatible, they cannot help but rupture the appreciation of his work. Thus, on the one hand, the compositions readily afford a self-reflexive science of aesthetic composition, while, on the other, they persist in fostering a sense of unmediated access to the poet's heart and mind, but these two perceptions of his writing are fated never to converge. Perennially bifurcated in this way, the critical tradition does not so much master Catullus' literary achievement as play out a series of responses that is already predicated and predicted by his work. Like the lover who must face the fact that his mistress's assurances are no necessary guarantee of their declarative truth value, the critic is forever trying to reconcile the text's ability to promise with the surety of knowledge, and forever destined to record his failure: *di magni, facite ut vere promittere possit, / atque id sincere dicat et ex animo* (*c.* 109.3–4).¹⁴⁰ The contest between constative and performative is what both propels and paralyzes the interpretation of Catullus and lends to his reception the appearance of a history.¹⁴¹ As Isaac Voss observed some time ago, "The more fault-ridden the poet's verses (*quanto nequiores*), the greater their appeal (*tanto plus leporis*),"¹⁴² and it is this constituent logic which simultaneously disillusiones the reader and perpetually renews his faith that, despite the present fracture of his knowledge, he is poised upon the brink of reclaiming Catullus for his own.