

Alla luce della ricchezza di stimoli e suggestioni che il volume propone, dell'interesse delle questioni affrontate e dall'ampiezza di fonti e dati utilizzati, certamente quest'opera continuerà ad alimentare il dialogo tra critica storica e critica letteraria su Catullo.

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CHRISTOPHER B. POLT, *Catullus and Roman Comedy: Theatricality and Personal Drama in the Late Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, XII+215, pp., GBP 70,99, ISBN 978-11-08-83981-5.<sup>1</sup>

We live today in a world saturated by mass entertainment, from cinema through popular music to Netflix series. Many of us take it for granted that this public performative art not only occupies our time, but it also influences our minds: how we speak, how we think, how we feel are influenced by what we have seen enacted. It would be reasonable to look for the same dynamics in ancient Roman society. We know, after all, that there were theatrical performances in ancient Rome at several public festivals every year; an educated Roman of the late Republic will have seen a considerable number of plays. And yet we know fairly little about the influence of Roman theatre on later Classical authors. In part this is surely due to the challenges of comparing texts of different genres, and especially to the gaps in our evidence regarding theatrical performances in this period. And yet there is evidence enough in the texts themselves. Specific instances of the influence of Roman comedy on Catullus have been shown by a number of previous studies, notably in a monograph by Alex Agnesini.<sup>2</sup> Now Christopher Polt has published a comprehensive study by the influence of Roman comedy on the poems of Catullus. Polt maintains that this influence has been profound and structural: "Roman comedy, I argue, offers Catullus a common cultural vocabulary, drawn from the public stage and shared with his audience, with which to explore and convey private ideas about love, friendship, and social rivalry" (p. 7); "I ... argue that Catullus expressly draws inspiration for his poetics, in part, from Roman comedy" (p. 9). There might be debate about the exact degree of this influence, about specific examples of it, or the mechanisms through which it occurred. But

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<sup>2</sup> A. Agnesini, *Plauto in Catullo*, Bologna 2004.

the cumulative evidence is convincing: Roman comedy influenced extensively the poems of Catullus, and by extension probably also the lost writings of the other poets in his circle of “neoterics”.

The Introduction (pp. 1-44) asks why Catullus found “Roman comedy an appealing target of allusion and reflection” (p. 8). Polt identifies three underlying reasons. Catchwords of Catullus’ poetry emphasizing wit and smallness such as *lepidus* and *nugae* are already well attested in the plays of Plautus and Terence; Catullus takes them over, and he adopts the attitude of a “comic parasite” (p. 23). Furthermore, the domestic and urban perspectives of Roman comedy, with its cast of “little people” who resemble the mass of spectators (p. 24), are very close of those of Catullus. Polt states that “Catullus’ world is just as small and intimate as that of the *palliatae*” (p. 25).<sup>3</sup> Third, the peculiar mix of Greek substrate and Roman elements in Roman comedy, which Polt calls “Greco-Roman Hybridity and Translation” (p. 36). This argument is the least convincing, as Greek elements also mixed with Roman ones in many other genres of Roman literature, and also in spoken Latin. The underlying challenge is to separate the specific influence of Roman comedy on Catullus from elements from other sources that happen to be shared by both.

“Through the Comic Looking Glass”: Chapter 1 (pp. 45-69) studies the broader dynamics between theatre, lived experience and self-representation in late Republican Rome. Polt takes up a recent suggestion by William Batstone “that metatheater is an artifact of ancient culture that preexists its theatrical counterpart and presents a means by which Romans approach and interact with their “real” world” (p. 54).<sup>4</sup> Another key concept is “theatricality”, that of human beings feeling that they must act in life as if they were performing in front of observers (p. 55), which Polt argues was a common aspect of Roman sociocultural reality in this era. And if there was a social necessity to perform, “the theater ... offered a ready supply of roles through which Romans such as Cicero and Catullus could become themselves” (p. 69).

Chapter 2, “The Best Medicine: Comic Cures for Love in the First Century BCE” (pp. 70-125) explores how Cicero, Lucretius and Catullus take up the motif of the comic *adulescens* from Terence’s *Eunuchus*. Unlike Cicero and Lucretius, Catullus tries “to think not *with* the comic *adulescens* but *as* him” (p. 73). Polt argues convincingly that the comic figure of the *adulescens*, the young man in lover, underlies Catullus’ self-presentation as a lover in poems such as 5 and 7. More specifically, he detects specific allusions to Terence’s *Eunuchus* in several passages by Catullus. Most striking is the resemblance of Catullus 109.3f. *di*

<sup>3</sup> This is indeed one side of Catullus’ world, but elsewhere his vision extends to Italy and the Mediterranean colonies of the Roman Republic, and even beyond them: see poems 11.1-12, 29, 36.12-15, 39, 46, and others.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. Batstone, “Plautine Farce and Plautine Freedom”, in W. Batstone, G. Tissol, eds., *Defining Genre and Gender in Latin Literature: Essays Presented to William S. Anderson on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, New York 2005, 13-46, at 28.

*magni, facite ut uere promittere possit / atque id sincere dicat et ex animo* to *Eun.* 175-7 *utinam istuc uerbum ex animo ac uere diceret: / ... si istuc crederem / sincere dici, quiduis possem perpeti*. The resemblance is obvious; it is hard to deny that Catullus draws on Terence here. And yet it is not clear to me that strictly speaking we are dealing with an allusion, as opposed to the reuse of a turn of phrase in an act of literary “recycling”, as it is not clear how catching this reference could yield a deeper understanding of Catullus’ text.

Chapter 3 tackles “Heroic Badness and Catullus’ Plautine Plots” (pp. 126-47) through one turn of phrase that connects poems 21, 24 and 49, and it interprets these three passages as instances in which Catullus assumes the clever malevolence of the *seruus callidus*, the cunning slave of comedy. At 21.2f. the phrase appears as *quot aut fuerunt / aut sunt aut aliis erunt in annis*; it recurs with slight variations at 24.2f. and 49.2f. In all three cases, the context is an address to a person. Polt (p. 129) connects this phrase to Plautus, *Persa* 777 *qui sunt, qui erunt quique futuri sunt posthac* and *Bacchides* 1087 *qui fuerunt quique futuri sunt posthac*. The resemblance is obvious, and it is plausible that in these three passages Catullus is imitating comic irony and fake grandiloquence. It seems more doubtful that in these cases the poet is playing with the persona of the Plautine *seruus callidus*, which does not work well at all for poem 24, an address to a beloved whom the poet tries to shield from a rival.

The focus shifts to female characters in Chapter 4, “Naughty Girls: Comic Figures and Gendered Control in Catullus” (pp. 148-73). Polt compares Catullus’ search for Camerius in poem 55 convincingly with Amphitruo’s account of his search for Naucrates (Pl. *Amph.* 1009-19). This is another example of how Catullus’ understatement, irony and repeated statements of failure follow, and may well have been inspired by, comic models. While searching for Camerius in poem 55, Catullus runs into a group of prostitutes in the Portico of Pompey, one of whom uncovers herself and claims that Camerius is hiding in her bosom (55.11f.; Polt p. 155 believes that she is also the speaker in line 13, but it is much easier to assign that line to the poet-narrator). The poet addresses the prostitutes as *pessimae puellae* (55.10), a term that he also uses jokingly for his beloved Lesbia (36.9 *pessima ... puella*). Polt argues that these Catullan passages reflect the “Heroic Badness” of lower-class women in comedy. But here clear verbal parallels appear to be lacking, and the resemblance is at most one of attitude. However, it seems easier to explain these two phrases as instances of an ironic use of language that pervades the shorter poems of Catullus — and also Roman comedy, especially that of Plautus.

An Epilogue (“The Show Goes On: From Roman Comedy to Latin Love Elegy”, pp. 174-88) considers how Catullus set a precedent for the appropriation of comic themes and language in Latin love elegy (a subject studied by Polt’s mentor Sharon James, who has been a profound influence on this book). It does so through the example of poem 110; Polt argues convincingly that the characterization of Aufillena as a greedy but faithless concubine reflects comedy’s representation of mercenary love, and it serves in turn as a model for the greedy girlfriends of Latin love elegy.

In sum, this is a suggestive and insightful book. My only major issue with its argumentation is one of scale. How profound is the influence of Roman comedy on the poetry of Catullus? Here I am a little less sanguine than the author of this book. On the level of style and vocabulary, Catullus' debt to Roman comedy is considerable. There are resemblances in motifs, and in patterns of behaviour, self-presentation and characterization. There is also a limited number of clear textual parallels. On the other hand, allusions that can be clearly identified as such (cf. p. 35) do not appear to be numerous at all.

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CHRISTOPHER B. KREBS, *Caesar: Bellum Gallicum Book VII*, Cambridge Greek and Latin classics, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023, xvi+386pp., 30,33€, ISBN 978-1-009-17714-6.

It is in some ways very difficult to write a review of Christopher Krebs' new commentary on Julius Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum Book VII*, because so much about the volume is self-evident. While there is some variation across individual texts, most classicists know what to expect from a Cambridge Green and Yellow commentary. And certainly no one who works on Latin historiography needs a reviewer to tell them that Krebs is one of the most thoughtful readers of Caesar of our time. My aim here, rather, will be to outline Krebs' general approach and to illustrate the range and depth of Krebs' work with a case study.

As scholarly interest in the "literary" Caesar has increased rapidly over the last two decades, there has been an increasingly urgent need for new commentaries on Caesars' writings that address the issues which concern contemporary scholars. The magisterial commentaries produced by the likes of T. Rice Holmes and other luminaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century cannot be surpassed in their detailed treatment of topography, strategy, weaponry, and battles and their meticulous interrogation of the historical facts of Caesar's account. But this is not how we read Caesar anymore, at least not exclusively. The publication of Kathryn Welch and Anton Powell's edited volume *Julius Caesar as Artful Reporter* in 1998 opened a door to scholarship that took Caesar seriously as a writer, a literary artist on the level of Thucydides (hence the volume's title, a play on Virginia Hunter's classic). Krebs himself has had much to do with the renaissance of Caesar the author, both through his own scholarship and with his oversight of 2018's *Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar* (along with Luca Grillo). While some capital-h Historians may still bristle at the notion of poetic allusions in Caesar's commentaries or scoff at the idea that their rhetorical sophistication