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Egnatius the Epicurean: The Banalization of Philosophy in Catullus

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Abstract

This article offers a new examination of the place of philosophy in Catullus' *Carmina*. It focuses on Egnatius, the 'smiling Spaniard' of poems 37 and 39, and argues that Catullus' attacks on this character make use of many standard invective tropes against Epicureans in the late Republic. More than merely an opportunity to show off his whitened teeth, Egnatius' smile may well have been proof of his philosophical detachment and *ataraxia*. Yet Catullus maliciously misrepresents this mark of Epicurean virtue as a social gaffe, and an unflattering reminder of Egnatius' provincial origins. I then reinterpret poems 37, 38, and 39 as a poetic series unified by the 'banalization' of philosophical ideas. Ultimately, Catullus creates his own singular voice – the arbiter of style and taste – by representing aspects of other people's behaviour as trite and ordinary. To banalize is an act of power, and it is a weapon that Catullus wields to articulate a sense of difference from other poets and thinkers in his intellectual world.

Keywords: Catullus; Egnatius; Epicureanism; Roman philosophy; invective; banality in literature

... they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.
But they smile...

Tennyson, 'The Lotos-Eaters', lines 159–62¹

One of Catullus' best-known poems describes a man who smiles at every occasion. When people are crying in the courtroom, he smiles. When people mourn at a funeral, he smiles. The sting in the tail of poem 39 is that the man,

¹ Quoted from Ricks (1969) 437. On Tennyson's reworking of Lucretian ideas in the poem, see MacLaren (1961).

Egnatius, is from Spain, where people brush their teeth with urine, and so his smiling reminds Romans of his native province's grotesque hygiene. But perhaps there is more to this Egnatius – or at least not quite as little as Catullus' invective caricature of him suggests. The Spaniard is serenely unmoved: he 'beams' (*renidet*) even when others are affected by grief at a funeral, or by reversals of fortune in a court case. 'In every situation' (39.2) he is untroubled by the turmoil of everyday life. What if that unchanging smile were less a result of tactlessness or vanity, and something closer to the smile of the lotus-eating Epicureans in Tennyson' poem quoted above? Egnatius appears again in another poem of Catullus as a bearded foreigner among a group of pleasure-seeking *contubernales* in a bar; Catullus sarcastically calls him 'good' (*bonum*, 37.19). Such a characterization matches many invective attacks on Epicurean figures. Hostile observers often misrepresented their philosophical pursuit of *uoluptas* as mere licentiousness or degenerate pleasure seeking. On any reading, these descriptions of Egnatius are insulting. But if some rival poet or thinker were concealed behind the aggressive simplifications of abusive verse, Catullus would then be engaging in another kind of attack. By reducing Epicurean pleasure to dissolute indulgence, and the pursuit of *ataraxia* to incessant smiling, Catullus strips these philosophical actions of any intellectual dignity or integrity. They become social gaffes, undistinguished and banal.

This article analyzes the representation of Egnatius as an example of a wider banalization of philosophy in the *Carmina*. Cicero's philosophical treatises offer a window onto the Hellenistic sects as an object of debate and a means of self-definition in the late Republic. References to words and ideas throughout the letters show the easy acquaintance his addressees had with philosophical learning.² While Cicero's alarmist claim that Epicureans have 'taken over all of Italy' is obviously an exaggeration, it testifies both to the number of Epicurean devotees and to their persistent stereotyping as literarily and philosophically unsophisticated, even boorish.³ I argue that Catullus also makes use of such stereotyping in his poems about Egnatius. The argument that Egnatius was an Epicurean has certainly been made before, in greatest detail by Neudling in his *Prosopography to Catullus* (1955), and then, without any reference to Neudling, in a little-cited article by Németh (1998), both of whom are primarily concerned to tie Egnatius to other major figures of the period: an Epicurean school close to Catullus that included Caelius (Neudling), or a group that included Caesar (Németh).⁴ By contrast, this article shows in detail how the representation of Egnatius employs standard invective tropes against Epicureans, reinterpreting poems 37, 38, and 39 as a series unified by the humorous banalization of philosophical tropes. The banal is not necessarily the unimportant; many poems in Catullus' corpus invest significance in moments of everyday life and etiquette that we would ordinarily

² Volk ([forthcoming](#)) offers a new overview of the importance of philosophy in the intellectual life of the Late Republic; for earlier accounts, see Rawson (1985), Griffin (1995).

³ *Italiam totam occupauerunt, Tusc.* 4.7. On Cicero's surprisingly detailed and complex engagements with Epicureanism in his letters, see Gilbert (2015).

⁴ Németh (1998) 220 also briefly identifies Epicurean images in c. 39, including Egnatius' smile.

classify as fairly banal. Rather, by attacking personalities for their failures of taste rather than for their philosophical convictions or beliefs, Catullus represents his invective targets in a discursive field over which he has control. Poets, philosophers, statesmen: Catullus judges them all for their elegance or gaucherie, and as a result, many contemporary figures – even major ones – end up seeming strangely small.

The idea that a serious Epicurean may lurk behind Catullus' attacks on Egnatius is made more tempting by the fact that we have two fragments of a poem entitled *De Rerum Natura* by a man named Egnatius from the Republican period, 'probably an Epicurean poet', according to Neudling.⁵ Macrobius cites just over a single line of the *De Rerum Natura* as one of two sources (along with Accius) for Vulcan's epithet *Mulciber* in *Aen.* 8.724.⁶ He then cites two lines as the source for the adjective *noctiuagus* in *Aen.* 10.215.⁷ There may be a third piece of evidence: the late antique *Origo gentis Romanae* refers to 'book one of Egnatius' for the startling theory that Remus was never killed by Romulus, although it could be a false reference, since the text is notoriously prone to error.⁸

The fragments are tantalizing, but they also demand caution. Neudling's presumption that the poet was Epicurean rests on the fragments' stylistic and metrical similarities with Lucretius. Particularly similar are the use of *denique* to sum up an argument, the heavy alliteration (*labentibus ... pulsa loco cessit concedens*), and the occurrence of 'sigmatic ecthlipsis' (suppression of the final 's' before a consonant) in the phrase *labentibus Phoebe*.⁹ Yet the verses' content is not especially Epicurean. If, as Courtney argues, the first fragment describes a volcanic eruption, then Egnatius and Lucretius would share an interest in natural science and a tendency towards mythological allegory (cf. *Lucretius* 2.655–60), though of course neither of these elements is exclusively Epicurean. Lucretius uses the word *noctiuagus*, and if the adjective originated with Egnatius, it might signal indebtedness to a poet from the same sect. But it is surely significant that Lucretius uses the word in passages describing views he *rejects*, once in evoking the noises that people irrationally imagine in the night (4.582) then again in describing the excessive religiosity of primitive humanity (5.1191). The title *De Rerum Natura* might have had an Epicurean ring,

⁵ Neudling (1955) 59.

⁶ Macrobius 6.5.2 = Egnatius, fr. 1 (Courtney 1993, 147): *denique Mulciber ipse furens altissima caeli / contingit* ('At last, raging Mulciber himself touches the utmost heights of the sky'). I cite Courtney's text, which accepts Bergk's emendations of *furens* for the MS *ferens* and *contingit* for the MS *contingunt*.

⁷ Macrobius 6.5.12 = Egnatius, fr. 2 (Courtney 1993) 147: *roscida, noctiuagus astris labentibus, Phoebe / pulsa loco cessit concedens lucibus taltist* ('While the night-wandering stars were sinking, dewy Phoebe ceded, driven from her place, surrendering to the [lofty?] lights'). *Altis* has been suspected because, as a description of light, it does not clearly distinguish starlight from daylight; Hollis (2007) 89 conjectures *aethram*.

⁸ *Origo gentis Romanae* 23.6; Cornell (2013) 96–101. The author cites Egnatius alongside the annalist Licinius Macer, which may suggest that this Egnatius is an otherwise-unknown annalist too, although elsewhere the author cites poets and prose writers together; cf. e.g., 20.3: *ut scribunt Ennius libro primo et Caesar libro secundo* (sc. L. Caesar).

⁹ Neudling (1955) 59. For 'sigmatic ecthlipsis', see Butterfield (2008).

since it is attested also as the title of a work by a third Epicurean contemporary, Catus; but it is also attested as the title of a work by Varro, and in any case 'nature' was the watchword of more than one philosophical school.¹⁰ If he was indeed a poet contemporary with Lucretius, and if Virgil alluded to him through his own use of *noctiuagus* (*Aen.* 10.216), then he is someone whose work we might expect Catullus to have known.¹¹ But the fragments are lamentably scant. My strategy in this article is to demonstrate that Egnatius was an Epicurean by reference to the extensive reworking of invective tropes against the sect within Catullus' poems. The fragments might add tantalizing details to the argument, but they have unfortunately little probative value on their own.

I aim also to make a methodological point in this article about our understanding of the relationship between philosophy and poetry in the Catullan corpus. Very often the model to which we turn in classical scholarship to understand the interaction between discourses is one of 'influence'. The poet, naturally receptive and open to the absorption of whatever is around him or her, draws influence from any and all ideas circulating in the contemporary cultural environment. Automatically presuming an openness to influence, though, leaves little room in our analysis for any deliberate attempt to *downplay* the importance of particular cultural currents, to create meaningful silences, to resist the pull of certain ideas. This article aims to replace a model of philosophical influence with one of competitive self-differentiation. By reducing matters of philosophical doctrine to issues of style and decorum, Catullus undermines his targets' means of social distinction. The 'banal', as Saikat Majumdar has put it, represents the 'absolute tyranny of the immanent and the inescapable', the absence of what is transcendent, exceptional, unique. The banalization of philosophy in Catullus' corpus is a means of diminishing the stature and distinction of others and enhancing the singular voice of the poet himself.¹²

The need for competitive self-differentiation is exacerbated by the possibility that Catullus may well have seemed like someone swayed by Epicurean ideas. In his *Carmina*, he appears to live a life detached from any serious political ambition, paints a warm and affectionate picture of the value of friendship, and speaks openly of the pleasures of food and sex.¹³ It is highly probable

¹⁰ Catus: Porph. ad Hor. *Sat.* 2.4.1; for what is known of his work, Sallmann (1962) 239–40. Varro: *Lact. Inst. Div.* 2.12.4; Courtney (1993) 237 argues that the reference is to the poet Varro (of Atax) rather than the Menippean satirist and scholar Varro (of Reate).

¹¹ On Virgil's possible allusion to Egnatius, see Hollis (2007) 87–8, though he remains agnostic on the question of priority (one 'naturally tends to believe that the greater poet wrote first, but the possibility that a lesser work provoked a greater one cannot be excluded').

¹² Majumdar (2013) 4. In Bourdieu's classic account of the social production of taste, the opposition between the 'personal' and the 'banal' is part of a bourgeois valuation of private ownership over what is borrowed and held in common (Bourdieu 1984, 414–7). Polt (2021) has recently argued sensitively that Catullus' use of New Comic stereotypes suggests a *positive* valuation of the commonplace in Catullus' work, a celebration of the clichés that make communication possible and emotions expressible. Nonetheless, when applied to others, those same stereotypes are also a tool of invective, a way for Catullus to 'jockey against men with whom he saw himself in competition' (at 175, 187–8).

¹³ Even in some contemporary scholarship, it is possible to find the claim that Catullus was, in some loose sense, an Epicurean. See e.g., Wray (2001) 152: poems 5 and 7 'seem to be informed by

that Catullus read works by Epicurean contemporaries, such as Philodemus and – although the chronology is highly debated – Lucretius.¹⁴ Yet such similarities should not obscure more obvious differences. As Lucretius’ parody of the besotted lover in book 4 of his *De Rerum Natura* reminds us, Catullus’ intense declarations of love and hatred are the precise antithesis of the Epicurean, who must pursue the absence of mental distress (*ataraxia*) by avoiding romantic love. Catullus’ subjective focus on the individual’s own emotions (jealousy, anger, grief) runs completely counter to the aims of Hellenistic philosophy to preserve the mind from irrational intrusions.¹⁵ I argue in this article that Catullus incorporates philosophical ideas into his poetry only to contrast them with his own, more personal credo about life and love, differentiating his individual perspective from a devotion to the schools. In a recent review of the question of Catullus and Epicureanism, John Godwin argues that, far from subscribing to Epicurean ideas, Catullus uses ‘ironic *personae* from literature and philosophy in order to lampoon, parody, and attack his targets’.¹⁶ This article extends this observation but focuses on a particular mode of attack: the reduction of philosophical ideas to trite commonplaces and social gaffes.

1. Catullus 37: The Epicurean Herd

Catullus 37 is an invective poem addressed to an inanimate tavern and its nameless *contubernales* (‘mess-mates’ or ‘bar-mates’).¹⁷ A huge crowd lolls around in this disreputable place:

Salax taberna uosque contubernales,
a pilleatis nona fratribus pila,
solis putatis esse mentulas uobis,
solis licere, quidquid est puellarum,
confutuere et putare ceteros hircos?

Sleazy bar, and all you bar-mates, ninth pillar from the *pilleus*-wearing brothers: do you think that only you have cocks, that only you are permitted to fuck all together any female around, and think other men goats?¹⁸

what we might call a Callimachean poetics of art and an Epicurean poetics of life’. For a review of earlier theories and a rejection of any formal connection to the school, see Granarolo (1967) 205–24.

¹⁴ Giesecke (2000) 10–30 argues for Catullan allusion to Lucretius; Hutchinson (2001) 156–7 for shared dependence on older models; Támas (2016) for a model of ‘reciprocal intertextuality’ between the two. On Catullus and Philodemus, see Sider (1997) 23–4; Shapiro (2014) reviews – and ultimately refutes – the evidence for identifying the mysterious ‘Socraton’ in c. 47 with Philodemus.

¹⁵ Uden (2006) 31–3; Polt (2021) 125.

¹⁶ Godwin (2018) 851. See also now O’Hearn (2021), who argues that Catullus uses the philosophically inflected term *beatus* with shifting meanings in the polymetrics to express his own ‘scattered, highly subjective conception of the good life’ (at 706).

¹⁷ For the play on the word’s etymology from *taberna* (originally in the sense of a soldier’s ‘tent’), see Thomson (1997) 300.

¹⁸ I use the text of Thomson (1997). Translations are my own.

A group of men – a ‘hundred or two hundred’ (7) – enjoy the erotic opportunities that are offered in the bar. A primary object of their affections is a woman loved by Catullus ‘as much as no girl has ever been loved’ (12) – almost certainly Lesbia, given the clear echo of *c.* 8.5. The poem ends with the first mention of Egnatius, the most objectionable of all (*praeter omnes*, 17). Neudling argued that the prominent use of *contubernales* in the opening line alludes to a specific philosophical use of the word *contubernium* to describe Epicurean ‘fellowship’, though it should be admitted that the evidence for that usage is limited and from a later period.¹⁹ Yet the poem does offer a deliberate, if patently inaccurate, representation of Epicurean aspirations towards pleasure and philosophical community. Capped with a reference to the bearded Egnatius, the text mobilizes many of the clichés of anti-Epicurean invective that remained consistent from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity: the frequenting of bars, the association with prostitutes, the devotion to pleasure rather than to any nobler idea. To describe Egnatius and Lesbia in these terms is obviously an insult. But it also differentiates Catullus, or at least the speaker of his poem. He adopts a poetic voice marked by sexual and emotional extremes, setting himself emphatically apart from the hazy groupthink of the Epicurean herd.

Epicurus’ conception of pleasure as *telos* gave rise to a stubborn mischaracterization of his thought. Despite his protests that ‘constant drinking and partying and enjoyment of boys and women’ were not the components of a pleasant life, his followers were frequently linked in the popular imagination to drinking and sex.²⁰ Athenaeus preserves fragments of the third-century-BCE comic poet Bato in which a character cites Epicurean ideas as license for his own pleasure seeking:

ἔξὸν γυναῖκ’ ἔχοντα κατακεῖσθαι καλὴν
καὶ Λεσβίου χυτρίδε λαμβάνειν δύο·
ὁ φρόνιμός ἐστι <τοῦτο,> τοῦτο τάγαθόν.
Ἐπίκουρος ἔλεγε ταῦθ’ ἃ νῦν ἐγὼ λέγω.
εἰ τοῦτον ἔζων πάντες ὄν ἐγὼ ζῶ βίον,
οὔτ’ ἄποπος ἦν ἂν οὔτε μοιχὸς οὐδὲ εἷς.

Ath. 7.279c–d = [Bato fr. 3 Kassel-Austin]

...the man who can recline with a beautiful woman in his arms, and take hold of two pots of Lesbian wine: this is the sensible man, this is a good thing, Epicurus told us what I’m telling you now. If everyone lived this life I’m living, no-one would be unnatural, no-one an adulterer.²¹

¹⁹ Neudling (1955) 62 refers to DeWitt (1936) 59; Sen. *Ep.* 6.6 seems to be the only passage that refers specifically to Epicureanism rather than merely the ‘blessed fellowship’ of poets (e.g., Tac. *Dial.* 13).

²⁰ Diog. Laert. 10.132; Gordon (2012) 5–9. Cf. Phld. *Epig.* 6 (Sider 1997, 80–1), a poem rejecting the stereotype that associated Epicureans with sexual license and drunken excess.

²¹ Text and commentary: Olson (2007) 232, 253–4. On the philosophical background to Bato’s fragments (six, all preserved by Athenaeus), see Gallo (1976); Gordon (2012) 31–2.

Since Epicurean philosophy is reduced in this comic parody to the pursuit of bodily pleasure, its adherent can use the philosopher's name to excuse the kind of drinking and promiscuous sex that would otherwise lead him to be labelled *atopos* ('unnatural'; literally, 'out of place') or *moichos* (an 'adulterer').²² Cicero uses many of these tropes with particular force in the *In Pisonem*. He depicts the Epicurean Piso with crowds in lowlife bars. 'You listen to them in brothels', he charges, 'amid debauches, while drinking and dining', those men who 'define pain as evil, pleasure as good'.²³ At one point, he describes Piso with his 'extremely low-class herds' (*sordidissimis gregibus*) at an unbridled drinking party that resembles the banquet of the Lapiths and the Centaurs.²⁴ The slander persisted well into the Imperial period. 'Live unnoticed'? Yes, says Plutarch. Drinking and sex with prostitutes are activities best done in the dark.²⁵

Many details in Catullus' picture of the *contubernales* in poem 37 mirror stock tropes of anti-Epicurean invective. The brutish, indiscriminate sexuality at the sleazy bar – ironically, these men accuse *others* of being he-goats (*hircos*) – matches attacks on Epicurean pleasure as animalistic.²⁶ As in Cicero's attack on Piso, the milieu is also emphatically low-class. Scholars have often pointed to the sexual sense of Latin *sedere* ('to sit') in explaining the poem's repeated use of the word (*sedetis ... sessoris ... consedit*), but the mere fact of the men *sitting* at the tavern, rather than reclining in precise positions in the careful hierarchy of an elite Roman dinner party, reinforces the impropriety of the *contubernales'* dissolution of social boundaries.²⁷ The repeated image of sitting also creates an impression of lethargy which fits the stock image of the indolent Epicurean, removed from any worthwhile social or political activity.²⁸ The poem also vividly represents the denizens of the bar as a herd, an exaggeratedly large group of people who come together to devote themselves to pleasure. The verb repeated most often in these opening lines is *putare*, 'to think'. Again and again the word describes pluralized thought, the slavish adherence of a

²² In a similarly hedonistic *apologia* in Petronius, Encolpius pleads that Epicurus 'told us all to love' (*amare iussit*, 132.15).

²³ Cic. Pis. 42: *audis in praesepibus, audis in stupris, audis in cibo et uino ... isti ipsi qui mala dolore, bona uoluptate definiunt.*

²⁴ Cic. Pis. 22. Cf. Torquatus, the spokesman for Epicurean values in the *De Finibus* (1.65): 'But truly what great herds of friends, and with what a shared spirit of mutual affection, did Epicurus keep together in his house – and a small house, at that! Even now, Epicureans do the same thing': *At uero Epicurus una in domo, et ea quidem angusta, quam magnos quantaque amoris conspiratione consentientes tenuit amicorum greges! quod fit etiam nunc ab Epicureis.*

²⁵ Plut. *Mor.* 1129B.

²⁶ For Epicurean pleasure described in animalistic terms, see e.g., Horace's 'pig from an Epicurean herd' (*Epicuri de grege porcum*, *Ep.* 1.4.16); Plutarch: 'like the scratching of pigs and he-goats' (σούων καὶ τράγων κνησιμοῖς εἴκειν, *Mor.* 1094A); cf. 1096C. O'Bryhim (2018) ingeniously uncovers a series of agricultural allusions in *Carmina* 37 and 39 that make Egnatius himself resemble a he-goat.

²⁷ Roller (2006) 94: seated posture at bars 'symbolizes and sustains the social promiscuity and absence of distinctions that elites found so distasteful in *popina*-style dining'.

²⁸ Cf. Godwin (1999) 155: the repeated use of *sedere* has the sense of 'just sitting there doing nothing'.

group of people to a set of mistaken ideas. ‘You think’ (*putatis*, 3) that only you have cocks? ‘You think’ (*putare*, 5) that other men are goats? You ‘don’t think’ (*non putatis*, 7) I would dare assault you? ‘Think again’ (*Atqui putate*, 9).²⁹ Behind the abuse remain the shadows, faint but still perceptible, of virtues: shared thoughts and ideas, fellowship in large numbers, social equality. Catullus’ obscene neologism *confutuere* (5), with its sense of both collective action and intensification, may be a wicked recasting of *amicitia* as a group ideal; as Nappa (2001, 63) puts it, the ‘unification of multiple entities into a collective is perhaps the dominant trope of this poem’. Although we can see the outlines of a coherent philosophical group in this repeated vocabulary, those positive values are vanishingly faint under the distorting invective lens.

Watson (2009) has shown that Catullus uses the characteristic language of Roman prostitution throughout the poem to present the *salax taberna* as a brothel as well as a bar, and this representation also fits aspects of the Epicurean tradition. The time Epicurus spent with *hetairai*, and his admission of women to his philosophical school, was a constant element in hostile accounts of his life.³⁰ Later Epicureans seem to have positively recommended sex with prostitutes as a means of safely satiating sexual desire. In two particularly complex lines, Lucretius twists romantic clichés to instruct his reader to replace love’s metaphorical blows with the physical act of sex with a prostitute.³¹ In an instance of sexual one-upmanship that sounds similar to the brash boasting of the *contubernales* in Catullus 37, Philodemus boasts that he pays just five drachmas for twelve screws from the prostitute Lysianassa, whereas other men waste much more money – and their mental wellbeing – by pursuing married women (*Epig.* 22).³² Similarly, at the beginning of c. 37, the *contubernales* think that they can have sex with *quiquid est puellarum*, ‘any woman around’ (4). Like the comic character in the Bato fragment who says that Epicurus has allowed him (ἔξῳν) to loll drunkenly with a woman, these men think that they are licensed by their philosophy (*licere*, 4) to discharge their sexual urges with whichever woman is available. Bato’s comic character says that if everyone subscribed to the same ideals, no-one would be called an ‘adulterer’ (μοιχός). Yet Catullus’ voice in the poem is just this sort of unphilosophical outsider: once he realizes that Lesbia is among the ‘women available’ in the bar, he calls them *moechi*, a word that ‘signifies only a man who pursues inappropriate women’.³³

²⁹ *Putare*, as one of the readers for *Antichthon* helpfully observes, is also a favoured verb for ethical instruction in Lucretius. In its gerundive form *putandum* / *putandumst* (‘one must think’), it appears as an emphatic line-ending twenty-four times in the *DRN*.

³⁰ Diog. Laert. 10.4–7.

³¹ 4.1070–1: *si non prima nous conturbes uulnera plagis / uulgiuagaque uagus Venere ante recentia cures ...* ([‘You will remain lovesick] unless you confuse the initial blows with new strikes, and first cure fresh wounds by wandering with a wandering Venus of the people ...’); on the wording, see Fitzgerald (1984) 83.

³² Sider (1997) 138–41. Yona (2018) 108–28 demonstrates that Philodemus’ ideas about ethically ‘safe sex’ lie behind Horace’s caricature of adulterers in *Sat.* 1.2.

³³ Williams (2010) 380.

The association with prostitutes also led to the charge – apparently paradoxical, by modern if not by Roman sexual sensibilities – that the Epicureans were effeminate, unmanned by being oversexed. By a familiar Roman cultural paradox, the ‘excessive’ active sexual behaviour of Epicureans with women was coded as a kind of effeminizing weakness.³⁴ Already among Greek thinkers, the Skeptic Arcesilaus (third century BCE) reportedly quipped that Epicureans never left their school to join other sects, since, after all, a eunuch cannot become a man.³⁵ Roman texts assimilate members of the sect with stock archetypes of effeminacy, such as cross-dressers and worshippers of Eastern goddesses, and Epicurus himself was insultingly labelled the κιναιδολόγος (‘professor of passive penetration’).³⁶ In Catullus 37, by threatening to irrumate the *contubernales* all together (6–7), and to inscribe (or tattoo?) the ‘front’ or ‘face’ of the *taberna* with penises (9–10), the poet asserts their sexual passivity and emphasizes their effeminacy and weakness.³⁷ The ironic use of military language throughout the poem – starting with the primary sense of *contubernales* as military ‘tent-mates’, and climaxing with the suggestion that Lesbia is a kind of Helen for whom the poet has fought ‘great wars’ (13) – also alludes ironically to their failure of masculinity, recalling the familiar vision of Epicurean pleasure-seekers as the unmanly opposite of Roman soldiers.³⁸

Egnatius himself appears climactically as the opening word of line 19 after a parodically grandiose introduction that singles him out as the worst of the lot:

tu praeter omnes, une de capillatis,
 cuniculosae Celtiberiae fili,
 Egnati, opaca quem bonum facit barba
 et dens Hibera defricatus urina.

Catull. 37.17–20

You above all of the long-hairs, a son of rabbitful Celtiberia, Egnatius: your shady beard makes you ‘good’, and your teeth are brushed with Spanish urine.

Commentators have long seen Egnatius’ beard as the potential mark of a philosopher.³⁹ It is worth underlining how rare it is. No other figure in Catullus’ poetry wears a beard.⁴⁰ Although a beard could connote the remote *mores* of an older Rome, in the late Republic a heavy beard was ‘worn chiefly by

³⁴ Edwards (1993) 81–4.

³⁵ Diog. Laert. 4.43.

³⁶ Diog. Laert. 10.6. Effeminacy: Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 13.3; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 12.36–7.

³⁷ On *sopio*, a vulgar term for ‘penis’, see Nikolaev (2015). Nappa (2001) 65 argues that the inscribing of penises is a further threat of oral rape.

³⁸ See Johnson (1999) and Wray (2001) 83–6 on the inversion of military imagery in the poem, and Gordon (2012) 44, 118 on Epicureans as anti-soldiers.

³⁹ Baehrens (1885) 218–19; Ellis (1889) 104.

⁴⁰ *Barba* appears elsewhere only in Housman’s conjecture for *labra* at c. 80.8 (*apud* Postgate 1889, 77; I thank one of the readers of *Antichthon* for this observation). Of course, it is impossible to say

philosophers and foreigners' (Christenson 2004, 61). The semiotics of hair in these lines, with their combined references to shagginess and softness, are also redolent of a larger invective discourse exposing the immorality of sham philosophers. Egnatius' beard makes him seem 'good', advertising his virtue as a philosopher. Its shadowy darkness [*opaca*] suggests at once its thickness and the cultural associations of his sect; Seneca called the Epicureans 'the crowd that stays in the shadows' (*umbratica ... turba*, *Ben.* 2).⁴¹ Yet he is also one of the 'long-hairs' (*capillati*), scion of soft and furry, 'rabbitful' Spain (*cuniculosae*, a neologism), words that suggest the archetypal appearance of *pueri pathici*. Egnatius is hinted to be a *moechocinaedus*, a man who is both 'an active lover of woman and a passive lover of men'.⁴²

Catullus moves quickly from aggressor to aggrieved in the poem, in a manner typical of his self-protective insistence on sexual propriety in the *Carmina*. The speaker is outraged that the *contubernales* also love Lesbia, a woman he says has been 'loved as much as no woman will ever be loved' (*amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla*, 37.12). This hyperbolic declaration irrupts at the centre of his invective text as if it had intruded from another world – as indeed it has, since it is quoted almost exactly from a very different poem, *Carmen* 8, 'Miser Catulle' (8.5). It represents an ideal in direct opposition to the *contubernales*. Fitzgerald articulates what was so suspect about romantic love to the Epicureans. Because it 'focuses the attention of the lover on a unique, irreplaceable beloved, love is a prime manifestation of the attitude preventing participation in a constantly changing and generously varied universe ... [T]he love which fosters a sense of the uniqueness of the lover ... is also an enemy of mental health'.⁴³ The individualism of the anguished Catullan *persona* contrasts with his opponents' undifferentiated groupthink (cf. *mi ... meo ... mihi* at 11–13 with *omnes ... omnes ... omnes* at 15–18). He separates himself from an emotion that looks suspiciously or dangerously similar to his own, the generic 'love' (*amatis*, 15, the same word) of the pleasure-loving Epicureans.⁴⁴

with complete surety whether a word or word does not occur in a poet whose textual transmission is as uncertain as that of Catullus.

⁴¹ On *opacus*, commentators cite the use of the verb *opacat* to describe the darkening of a youth's cheeks by his first beard in Pacuvius (*incert. fr.* 34W), but here, used of an adult, it is more likely to connote the darkness of a heavy beard. *Opacus* is used by Serenus Sammonicus of shaggy eyebrows (line 192), and of thick pubic hair in Ausonius' *Cento Nuptialis* (line 111): *TLL* s.v. *opacus* II δ [Beikircher].

⁴² Booth (1985); Kronenberg (2014) 207–9; cf. c. 25.1, in which the *cinaedus* Thallus is 'softer than rabbit fur' (*mollior cuniculi capillo*). Although the Epicurean sage wore a beard much like philosophers of other sects, there is some evidence that the school was associated particularly with a vain attention to hair. Zanker (1996) 117 contrasts the 'handsome' beards on statues of Epicureans with the 'unkempt and crudely trimmed beard of the Stoics' (at 117) and cites Alciphron's description of an Epicurean philosopher 'not indifferent to his curls and proud of his heavy beard' (οὐκ ἀτημέλητος τοὺς κικίνουους καὶ ἐπὶ βαθεῖ τῷ πάγωνι σεμνυνόμενος, 3.19.3).

⁴³ Fitzgerald (1984) 73.

⁴⁴ On 'groupthink', see Nussbaum (1994) 117–36, who argues that Epicureanism encouraged not an active dialectic between members of the sect, but a passive obeisance to the authority of the master's ideas. Cf. Sedley (1989) 97 on the 'virtually religious commitment to the authority of a founder figure' in Hellenistic and Roman philosophy.

offers him- or herself, an Epicurean will not be moved to tears by someone else's court case. In a letter from early 53, Cicero mocks the recent Epicurean convert C. Trebatius Testa for the lack of fit between his new philosophical principles and his work as a jurist: 'how will you uphold the *ius ciuile* when you do everything for your own sake, and not for the citizens'?⁴⁶ At funerals or in court, the Epicurean is an inappropriately serene interloper amid the drama of everyday life.

One outward sign of this serenity was smiling or laughing.⁴⁷ An Epicurean 'must philosophize while laughing' (γελῶν ἅμα δεῖ καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν), according to a *sententia* preserved in one of the ancient collections, and will be 'happy, even when stretched on the rack'.⁴⁸ The emphasis on laughing and good humour is probably part of the legacy of Democritus, the 'laughing philosopher', who seems to have exerted a significant influence on the ethics as well as the materialist cosmology of Epicureanism.⁴⁹ Among Romans, Horace famously claims to 'tell the truth with a smile' in the *Satires* (*ridentem dicere uerum*), a phrase that Sergio Yona associates with the Philodemian dictum that the Epicurean sage be 'cheerful, friend-loving, and gentle', neither rebuking others aggressively nor troubled by others' insults.⁵⁰ The image of the laughing or smiling Epicurean also occurs in the writings of the sect's opponents. Cicero imagines a devotee 'smiling to himself' while others talk of duty and public virtues in the law courts or the Senate (*Fin.* 2.76). Plutarch presents the forced merriment and incessant good cheer of Epicureans as an aggravating delusion (*Mor.* 1091B). At the heart of this idea is the aspiration to live a life that approximates the perfectly happy, imperturbable existence of the gods. 'We should make the statues of our gods cheerful and smiling', according to a fragment of Diogenes of Oinoanda, 'so that instead of being fearful, we smile at them in response'.⁵¹ Elsewhere, the smile of Epicureans was thought to project a godlike detachment. Statius depicts the Roman Pollius Felix, himself a composer of Epicurean verse, gazing down from the 'high citadel of his mind', smiling a detached smile at human error and on ordinary – that is, misguided – joys (*Silv.* 2.2.131–2).

Something of that godlike detachment is evident in the word Catullus uses for Egnatius' smile: he 'shines' or 'beams' (*renidet*). Interpretations of the word to mean a 'boorish grin' (Neudling 1955, 58) or a 'silly grin' (Nisbet and Rudd 2004, 104) are excessively swayed by preconceptions about this particular

⁴⁶ *Fam.* 7.12.2 [= SB 35]: *Sed quonam modo ius ciuile defendes, cum omnia tua causa facias, non ciuium?*

⁴⁷ Notoriously, the verb *ridere* can refer both to laughing and smiling. Beard (2014) 70–6 demonstrates the continuity between the two actions in Roman culture. But one can accept the argument that Romans attributed a different meaning to smiling without accepting Beard's strange thesis that Romans did not smile at all; cf. Milnor (2015).

⁴⁸ *Sent. Vat.* 41 (Arrighetti 1960, 149); Diog. Laert. 10.118.

⁴⁹ Kahn (1985) 3; Clay (2009) 13.

⁵⁰ *Hor. Sat.* 1.1.24; Yona (2018) 118, citing Philodemus, *On Frank Criticism* fr. 85.5–10 (Konstan et al. 1998, 88–9).

⁵¹ *Fr.* 19 II.6–11 (Smith 1993, 179); on the aspiration to a 'godlike' existence, *Lucr.* 3.322; *Plut. Mor.* 1091C. Of course, the *De Rerum Natura* also begins with an image of cosmic gleaming: the seas 'smile' at Venus (*rident*, 1.8) and the sky 'shines' in response (*nitet*, 1.9).

poem. Catullus 39 is the first extant text to use the verb of a person. In the contemporary or near-contemporary poem of Lucretius, *renidet* is used of a rich man's house 'gleaming' with gold (2.27), and the related verb *renidescit* is used of the earth 'flashing' with the bronze armour of marching soldiers (2.326). It is true that in the Augustan period and later the verb becomes a more familiar way to describe a human smile, used variously for the imperious gloating of a Parthian general, the guileless glee of Icarus, and the innocent smile of a baby.⁵² Yet even then it retained its impersonal sense of 'shining'. Horace, for example, uses the word in the *Odes* to describe moonshine reflected on the ocean's surface (2.5.19), and in the *Epodes* to describe the household gods, which gleam when polished with wax (2.66). With its overtones of a grander, impassive 'beaming', Catullus' word for 'smile' conveys a sense of his target's philosophical pretensions while reminding us of the more literal shine on his teeth. He 'gleams'. There may even be a specific philosophical allusion since Epicurean texts often associate their sect's truth with shining light. Lucretius hails Epicurus as the first man who could 'bring forth light from such darkness' (3.1–2; cf. 3.1043–4), and Torquatus in Cicero's *De Finibus* says that Epicurean truth is 'clearer and brighter than the sun itself' (1.71).⁵³ It may be mere coincidence, but it is suggestive that both extant fragments of Egnatius describe shining light: one describes the flash of 'Vulcan' into the sky, and the other the break of daylight at dawn. The paucity of fragments makes it impossible to prove, but it is conceivable that the beam of Egnatius' smile is a deflation of philosophically inflected images of shining light from the man's own writings.

In the remainder of *c.* 39, the poet tells his addressee that he will teach him a lesson, mimicking the stiffly formal tone of a censorious orator – or, perhaps, a philosopher. He has already said that Egnatius has a *morbus*, a 'disease' (7), a word that has a potentially philosophical ring, since Epicureans, among other ancient thinkers, considered their teachings a therapy necessary for ensuring the health of the soul.⁵⁴ Then, at line 9, he says that he 'must issue a warning to you, good Egnatius' (*Quare monendum est te mihi, bone Egnati*, 39.9).⁵⁵ If Egnatius' provincial origins had been in one of any number of regions, anywhere that

⁵² Hor. *Carm.* 3.6.12; Ov. *Ars am.* 2.49 and *Met.* 8.197; Stat. *Theb.* 4.796 (MSS vary between *renitens* and *renidens*). Syndikus (1984) 218 maintains that the word is never a synonym for *ridere* or *subridere* and is used either for a childish smile or an affected, malicious smile. Beard (2014) 74 argues that the verb denotes a 'facial "glow"' rather than an 'ocular curve'. But surely it is both: after all, Catullus alleges that Egnatius 'beams' in order to show off his teeth.

⁵³ Cf. Segal (1990) 156: 'Epicurus the philosopher is suffused by the radiance of triumphant light, even as Epicurus the mortal man ... confronts the darkness of death'. On the symbolism of light and darkness in Lucretius, see Gale (1994) 202–6.

⁵⁴ Diog. Laert. 10.122; Cic. *Fin.* 1.59 (*animi morbi*). On the medical conception of philosophy among Epicureans, see Nussbaum (1994) 102–15; Kazantzidis (2021), 39.

⁵⁵ Catullus uses the impersonal gerundive in this line, a construction 'almost limited to Lucretius and Varro, and in later time to juridical authors, but there are isolated instances in all sorts of texts throughout antiquity': Pinkster (2015) 290; cf. n. 29 above on *putandumst* in Lucretius. Krostenko (2001) 241–58 argues that the formal and archaic linguistic features of poem 39 characterize the speaker as an old-fashioned *senex*, but the 'cool mathematical logic' Krostenko finds in the final lines (253) might equally suggest a philosophical lecture.

washes teeth with clean water, his ceaseless smiling would *still* be a social flaw. The ethnic groups the poet names as possibilities for Egnatius' origins in lines 10–13 move outwards in an imagined itinerary from the metropolitan centre (Roman, Sabine, Tiburtine, Umbrian, Etruscan) and then dart back closer to Rome for Lanuvium, before reaching Catullus' own point of origin ('to touch upon my own people too'), the area north of the Po (*Transpadanus*, 13). Yet Egnatius' outsider identity far exceeds Catullus' own. *His* origins lie in a more distant and alien colonial outpost:

nunc Celtiber <es>: Celtiberia in terra,
quod quisque minxit, hoc sibi solet mane
dentem atque russam defricare gingivam;
ut, quo iste uester expolitor dens est,
hoc te amplius bibisse praedicet loti.

Catull. 39.17–21

But as it is, you are Celtiberian: in the land of Celtiberia, what each one pisses he uses every morning to brush his teeth and gums until they're red. So the more polished that tooth of yours is, the more piss it tells everyone you've drunk.

The idea that Spanish tribes used urine to wash their teeth is attested in other sources, but it may still be, as a scholar of the archaeology of the region puts it, 'an invented stereotype aimed at making the indigenes appear subhuman'.⁵⁶ Cultural memory preserved an image of the Celtiberi as warlike and aggressive, a reputation fostered by the bitter Celtiberian Wars of the second century BCE and no doubt reinforced in the decade after Catullus' death by Caesar's reports of the Celtiberi and other 'barbarian' tribes fighting on the Pompeian side (*BCiv.* 1.38). It therefore became a byword for a lack of civilization.⁵⁷ Cicero harps upon the same blemish of provincial origin in attacking L. Decidius Saxa, tribune of the plebs and former officer of Caesar's army, whose origins nonetheless lie 'in farthest Celtiberia... a man drawn from the farthest peoples'.⁵⁸ Syme doubts whether this Saxa, with his important military position and three Roman names, was really the 'barbarian' that Cicero accuses him of being, and the same may be suspected about Egnatius.⁵⁹ Catullus

⁵⁶ Curchin (2004) 222, who cites Strabo 3.4.16 and a gloss, *cod. Vatic.* 1469 (= Grosse 1959, 444–5): *Lactobriga est qui urina humana dentes sibi fricare solet. Lactobriga* seems to be a corrupt form for (an inhabitant of?) Lacobriga, a town in Lusitania: Goetz (1885) 325–6.

⁵⁷ On the term 'Celtiberian', see Lewis (2018) 130: central Spain's 'diverse tribes, including the Belli and the Lusones did not call themselves "Celtiberian". The Roman name erased cultural and ethnic differences between the various Iberian chiefdoms, grouping these people in terms of a factor that mattered most to the Romans: their shared resistance to Roman occupation'.

⁵⁸ Neudling (1955) 61, citing Cic. *Phil.* 11.12, 13.27: *ex ultima Celtiberia ... hominem deductum ex ultimis gentibus*.

⁵⁹ Syme (1937); cf. Fordyce (1961) 184 on Egnatius: 'He bears a good Italian name and presumably came of a Roman or Italian family settled in Spain: it suits Catullus to make him a Spanish savage'.

turns the man into a rustic caricature – and, indeed, in the writings of Cicero and other opponents of Epicureanism in Rome, rustic caricatures is often how Epicureans appear.

The lack of literary polish in Epicurus' own writings and the alleged barbarousness of pre-Lucretian treatises in Latin helped create the stereotype of Epicureans as uncultured.⁶⁰ Just as Catullus attacks Egnatius' smiling as 'neither discriminating, as I judge it, nor urbane' (*neque elegantem, ut arbitror, neque urbanum*, 39.8), so in similar language Cicero attacks the Epicurean Piso, for example, in whose pleasure-seeking there is 'nothing elegant, nothing discriminating, nothing refined' (*nihil ... lautum, nihil elegans, nihil exquisitum*, *Pis.* 67). Epicurean addressees of Cicero's letters seem especially eager, as Griffin (1995) 333 observes, to 'demonstrate their Roman polish and urbanity, qualities felt to be lacking the solemn orthodoxy of professional Epicurean philosophers'.⁶¹ They could also be associated with provincial origins. 'You collect your men from all the hick towns', charges Cicero to his Epicurean interlocutor in the *De Finibus*, 'good men, no doubt, but certainly not very educated'.⁶² The idea of a Celtiberian philosopher must have seemed particularly paradoxical; later, Valerius Maximus says that the 'philosophy' (*philosophia*) of the brutish Celtiberi is to die fighting wherever possible.⁶³ The image of the serene, urine-swilling Spaniard in c. 39 can be read, then, not as the opposite of a philosopher, but as a comic exaggeration of charges of *infacelia* that were already being levelled at Epicureans in the middle of the first century BCE.

Finally, Catullus' aggressive mischaracterization of Egnatius reflects a particular colonial dynamic in the *Carmina*. The poet, while drawing attention to his own provincial origins, also becomes an arbiter of others' ability to adapt their identities to metropolitan expectations. He establishes a hierarchy. Even when he is being self-deprecating or ironic and deflating, Catullus' poems flaunt the fact that he has succeeded in Rome. He sentimentalizes his origins in the province of Cisalpine Gaul in northern Italy, making these origins amenable to a typical Roman yearning for the values of the countryside. But Egnatius' roots lie in a far more distant part of the Empire. His origin is beyond the pale.⁶⁴ Spain is not romantic but barbaric; not humble but backwards; not a place that could be loved in cultured verse – at least not yet. It is a place of base physicality, which can only ever be veiled by a simulacrum of urbanity.

⁶⁰ See Gilbert (2015) for a recent overview of work on the pre-Lucretian treatises of the Epicureans Amfinius, Rabirius, and Catus. As Gilbert convincingly shows, Cicero's dismissive account of these works as vulgarizing and crude should be treated with scepticism (see esp. at 49–52).

⁶¹ *Cic. Fin.* 1.15. For Epicureanism as (allegedly) the philosophy of the multitude, not the elite, see *Fin.* 1.25, 2.49, 2.81.

⁶² *uos de pagis omnibus colligitis bonos illos quidem uiros sed certe non pereruditos*, *Fin.* 2.12. For a thoughtful account of what we can deduce about the diffusion of philosophical knowledge beyond elite circles, see Zetzel (2016).

⁶³ *Val. Max.* 2.6.11, cited by Curchin (2004) 238. Katz (2000) argues that even the sounds of poem 39 reiterate Egnatius' outsider status, suggesting that the poem's repetition of the consonant cluster *-st* mockingly imitates the so-called *tau Gallicum* in Celtic-accented Latin.

⁶⁴ Watson (2012) 168: Egnatius is 'the ultimate outsider, the *ne plus ultra* in uncouthness'.

Catullus, the ‘good’ colonial subject who can move fluidly between the Roman and provincial parts of his own identity, is able to spot the pretender, the ‘bad’ colonial subject who cannot. Behind the incessant smile of Egnatius’ philosophical serenity, then, is something basely physical: an alien custom of brushing one’s teeth with urine. That provincial stain is exposed every time Egnatius opens his mouth.

3. Catullus 38: Banalizing *Consolatio*

There is a final connection to philosophical ideas in the short, apparently unrelated poem that appears between the two Egnatius texts.⁶⁵ In poem 38, the Catullan *persona* angrily rebukes a friend, Cornificius, for not consoling him. Q. Cornificius is remembered in Ovid’s *Tristia* in a list of ‘neoteric’ poets that includes Catullus and his contemporaries (Calvus, Cinna, Anser, and Valerius Cato). His life is also documented in a series of letters from Cicero beginning in 50 that start with his marriage and chart his rising career amid the political upheavals of the 40s. He died in 42 as governor of the province Africa Vetus, having led forces against a rival governor appointed by the triumvirs.⁶⁶ He is also someone, at least from the evidence from the 40s, with an interest in philosophy, almost certainly of a Stoic stripe. When Cornificius had first been appointed governor in 44, Cicero wrote to him urging him to quell disturbances with harsh punishment, even though, he says, ‘you bear such things calmly on account of your greatness of both mind and soul’. Cicero says that he himself is thankful that he has been ‘armed’ by philosophy against the assaults of Fortune, and bids Cornificius be thankful for the same reason – ‘but’, he concedes, ‘you know these things better than I do’.⁶⁷ These letters – admittedly from a period after Catullus’ likely death – praise Cornificius for his ‘hard work’, ‘wisdom’, and ‘great intellect’ as well as his ‘culture’ and ‘wit’, and urge him repeatedly to throw his whole self into service to the state.⁶⁸ Rawson has argued from the philosophical language in these letters that Cornificius should also be identified with the author of a Stoicizing treatise on etymology, the *De Etymis Deorum*, which is cited by Macrobius and the

⁶⁵ For an overview of arguments regarding the arrangement of the poems, see Skinner (2007). In the most recent contribution to the debate, Schafer (2020) 83 argues for deliberate patterning between two linked pairs (cc. 37 and 39, 38 and 40), but, as he says, there are ‘usually multiple ways of persuasively bringing out the artistry behind a given instance of poem adjacency’ (24).

⁶⁶ Ov. Tr. 2.427–36; this list specifies the ‘light work’ of Cornificius (*leue ... opus*, 436), which may imply Ovid’s knowledge of other writings by Cornificius on weightier themes. For overviews of his career and the three fragments of his verse, see Courtney (1993) 225–7; Hollis (2007) 149–54. Kowerski (2008) argues that Catullus is implicitly requesting a poetic consolation from his fellow poet in c. 38.

⁶⁷ Fam. 12.23.1, 4 [= 347 SB] (*propter magnitudinem et animi et ingenii ... sed haec tu melius*). For Cicero’s evolving use of the phrase *magnitudo animi* as the quintessential Stoic virtue, see Schofield (2009) 204–10.

⁶⁸ Fam. 12.19.1 [= 206 SB]: *industria ... prudentia*; 12.17.3 [= 204 SB]: *summo ingenio ... studiis tuis optimis*; 12.18.2 [204 SB]: *scito*.

grammarians.⁶⁹ In Servius Auctus (ad *Aen.* 3.332), that author is named Cornificius Longus (Cicero never mentions a *cognomen*). If Catullus' addressee was in fact 'the long one', there is potential wordplay in his assertion in c. 38 that providing a consolation would be 'a very small thing' (*minimum ... est*, 38.4).

Readers have long noticed other details in poem 38 that suggest that Catullus' address to this high-minded friend might not be entirely serious. The repetition of simple, almost childlike vocabulary in the opening lines could evoke real pathos, or it could be exaggeratedly self-pitying:

Malest, Cornifici, tuo Catullo,
malest, me hercule, et laboriose,
et magis magis in dies et horas.

Catull. 38.1–3

Things are bad, Cornificius, bad for your Catullus, by Hercules, and full of labours – and getting worse and worse, by the day and the hour.

The use of *male* ('badly') twice in two lines has its closest parallels in the Catullan corpus in poems of mock anger or lament: in c. 3, when the poet curses death for stealing away Lesbia's pet bird, and in 14, when Catullus curses Calvus for sending him a gift of horrid poems.⁷⁰ This is the only poem in which Catullus swears 'by Hercules', and if it makes sense here to invoke the traditional exemplar of Stoic discipline, he also follows it with a particularly Herculean word, *laboriose*, an 'unmistakably playful allusion to Hercules' labors'.⁷¹ In the final lines of the poem, Catullus asks Cornificius: 'with what address [*allocutio*] have you consoled me [*solatus es*]?' (38.5).⁷² He pleads for some small consolation from Cornificius 'sadder than Simonides' tears' (*maestius lacrimis Simonideis*, 8), presumably mirroring the elegiac tone popularly associated with the Greek lyric poet.⁷³

Yet, as Burkard (2006) argues most convincingly, sympathy and tears are the opposite of what one should expect from a Stoic consolation. If Cornificius is the man whom Cicero described, and if Catullus' allusions to Hercules recall the addressee's Stoic ideals, then surely any consolation was more likely to contain the usual bracing reminder to bear life's ills with grim acceptance. In the incongruity of asking a Stoic friend for a sad, sympathetic consolation, Catullus seems to draw teasing attention to the conflicting

⁶⁹ Rawson (1978) 192–4; cf. GRF (Funaioli) 473–80. See also Wiseman (1985) 268, endorsing Rawson's identification.

⁷⁰ 3.13, 16: *male ... malae ... male*; 14.5–6: *male ... mala*. Cf. Wray (2001) 101, who describes the tone as 'petulantly guilt-inducing'.

⁷¹ Baker (1960) 37; similarly, Skinner (2003) 201.

⁷² For most commentators, the question implies that Cornificius has sent Catullus nothing; Burkard (2006) 182–3 argues that he has sent an unsatisfactory *kind* of consolation. The Latin word *consolatio* appears first in Cicero (Scourfield 2013, 2–3), but *alloquium* and related forms could have the specific sense 'to console' in earlier Latin: Burkard (2006) 187, citing Varro, *Ling.* 6.57.

⁷³ Kowerski (2008) 148–51.

sides of Cornificius' personality, as both a writer of (vividly emotional?) neo-erotic verse and a devotee of Stoicism, guardian of the rationality of one's own mind. Just as poem 37 treated Epicurean ideas about sexuality as mere indulgence, and 39 treated Epicurean *ataraxia* as tactless, ceaseless smiling, so 38 transforms a hallmark of Stoic interaction – the consolation – into little more than a request for mutual sympathy. Catullus 38 has none of the invective venom of the surrounding poems, but it shares their banalizing reduction of philosophical integrity to questions of social manners.

4. Conclusion

The poetic sequence from *Carmina* 37 to 39 sheds light on a particular aspect of the poems' worldview. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Catullus never seems to take serious philosophy very seriously. Many figures who are linked publicly with Epicureanism in the period appear in Catullus' texts, as both enemies (Memmius, Piso, Caesar) and friends (Manlius Torquatus, Quintilius Varus). In the *Carmina*, however, the philosophical aspects of their character remain mostly invisible, or at best implied. Catullus' representations focus inevitably upon whether these people were good to *him*, not how or whether they pursued the good in other parts of their lives. There is little question that Catullus, like any educated Roman of his period, is aware of philosophical ideas like *officium* and *virtus*, and can twist allusions to them to his own ends. But any identifiable philosophical language that appears in the *Carmina* is transformed, subordinated to the poet's own values and program. Catullus may evoke a sort of philosophical dialogue in his erotic epigrams, for example, and yet his unanswerable questions draw attention instead to the irrational paradoxes of his personal romantic drama.⁷⁴ The poems representing grief for his brother describe a situation well examined in contemporary philosophical texts, and yet their open expression of mourning flouts their usual prescriptions for appropriate masculine behaviour.⁷⁵ The *Carmina* stress repeatedly and emphatically the priority of a private and emotional life over other people's determinations of propriety or virtue. The sequence of poems from 37 to 39 reveals that this apparently minimal impact of philosophy upon Catullus is instead a deliberate diminution. He diminishes the vital importance of philosophy as a mode of individual self-expression in his elite circle, and thereby throws into higher relief his own *persona*, which is marked by the sort of emotional extremes expressly condemned by the Hellenistic schools.

This diminution of contemporary philosophy may be demonstrated by one last example, drawn from the Catullan work most often read through a philosophical lens: poem 13 (*Cenabis bene*). As has long been noticed, the poem is strikingly similar to an invitation poem by the contemporary Epicurean, Philodemus.⁷⁶ I leave aside here the difficult question of which poem came

⁷⁴ Bishop (1971) 639–41; Feeney (2009) 37–8.

⁷⁵ Seider (2016).

⁷⁶ *Epigram* 27 (Sider 1997) 152–60; on the parallels, see Marcovich (1982), who argues for Catullus' dependence on Philodemus as a source. Among many treatments of the poem, see Gowers (1993) 229–44.

first; even if Catullus wrote before Philodemus, the Philodemian poem shows that an invitation to a frugal dinner among friends could potentially be read as an Epicurean motif. Yet assessing poem 13 alongside its explicitly Epicurean counterpart shows just how far Catullus has gone to avoid communicating any philosophical ideal. Notoriously, the poem invites Fabullus to a meal that is precarious and uncertain – it is delivered in a series of conditional clauses – and will only occur if the guest brings all the food, wine, laughter, and women himself. More than a playful turn on an expected idea, Catullus puts into doubt the very thing that an Epicurean would find desirable: the sharing of a meal with friends. Whereas Philodemus invites Piso in his poem to spend time with ‘ever-faithful comrades’ (ἐτάρους... παναληθέας, 27.5), Catullus emphasizes not social equality but something much more singular and elite. He will grace the (potential) dinner guest with his exceptional sense of style, presenting him with the perfume bestowed by Venus and the Cupids on his beloved (13.11). Philodemus evokes the charmed world of the Phaeacians in order to evoke a placid, carefree atmosphere (27.6). Catullus, by contrast, infuses his party with a more flamboyant air of divine paradox, climaxing with the prediction that Fabullus will want the gods to make him ‘all nose’ (13.14) – after which, presumably, he will not be able to eat. Compared to the Epicurean dinner invitation, Catullus’ dinner is flagrantly unreal, elevated by lofty allusions to the gods and to his own aesthetic ideals, and yet also stripped of any meaning as a gesture of philosophical community. An actual meal between companions or initiates is the banal norm against which the poem defines itself. It is an ordinary ideal that the poet exuberantly rejects.

As a *doctus poeta* of the late Republic, connected with elite intellectual circles in Rome, Catullus was surely familiar with the ideas of the Hellenistic schools. He was surrounded by others who discoursed constantly about philosophical ideas, and perhaps if writings in other genres survived by Catullus himself, he might have discoursed in more detail about them too. But the carefully crafted world of the *Carmina* does not reflect the easy absorption of those influences. Rather, philosophy is deliberately diminished in importance. In this singular and subjective world, philosophical ideas are stripped of any specificity or integrity and are represented as commonplaces, and devotees of the schools are deprived of any nobility and represented as mere types. So Egnatius the philosopher vanishes behind a veil of banality. He is not charged with any dangerous or destructive ideas; he is pathetic and inoffensive, mocked for his faux pas. This is, of course, an exercise of power, a case of poetic one-upmanship that succeeded all too well. Today only the smallest traces of Egnatius survive. The most memorable is the glint of that smile, which Catullus has made truly, indelibly, permanent.

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