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**Gabriel Laguna Mariscal, *Estudio literario de la poesía 67 de Catulo. Classical and Byzantine Monographs, LII*. Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 2002. Pp. 138. ISBN 90-256-0638-5. EUR 32.00 (pb).**

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The aim of this thorough study on Catullus' poem 67 is to shed light on its obscurities and to offer a coherent reading, as definitive as this poem allows. We acknowledge that it is a hard task to comment on and to try to give a sensible explanation to this work, which was perhaps unambiguous for its contemporary Roman audience and whose characters were easily identifiable at that time. The approach of the modern reader could be compared to the fortuitous hearing of a conversation or the reading of a letter, found by chance, deprived of a clarifying context. Interpretation is, thus, open to speculation and conjecture. In this sense, Laguna has done a magnificent job and accomplished his goal, for he provides a well-organized, well-argued, sensitive reading of the poem. Among the many achievements of this book are his masterly perception of polysemy, ambiguity, and obscene double entendre, as well as the amalgam of registers and generic traditions, all of which are the source of great part of the poem's humor. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, despite its erudition, this is not an obscure philological work: Laguna's style and structuring of the material makes the book not only easy to read and but also enjoyable. The only (minimal) objection which could be made is that, coherent as his reading is, it is also univocal: there could be other likely explanations of the individual facts narrated in the poem, which are either rejected or ignored in favor of a more straightforward account. The nature of the poem is, as a matter of fact, elusive and the possible interpretations manifold.

After the introduction, in which the author points out the main difficulties critics have encountered in dealing with this text and anticipates his own solutions, he presents an accurate edited text and translation, the former being, however, rather brief and the latter somehow influenced at some points by his interpretation. For instance, line 30 *qui ipse sui gnati minxerit in gremium* is rendered as "que habría sido capaz de joder a su propio hijo", according to Laguna's interpretation that *minxerit in gremium* alludes to an act of *pedicatio*, not strictly metaphorical (pages 91-92). Even if the implications were such, which we doubt, Catullus employs very different words. The third chapter is the "estudio literario y filológico del poema" proper, followed by the fourth chapter in which the conclusions are aptly summarized. The study provided in chapter 3 follows the structure of the poem and is divided into seven sub-chapters, six corresponding to the different parts of the poem plus an extraordinarily lucid final excursus on the allusive / elusive technique employed in the poem. We will describe each part and evaluate Laguna's innovations and interpretation.

Pages 27-57 analyze lines 1-8, the poetic voice's address to the door. Laguna finely argues that the borrowing of elements from the epithalamium and other genres is crucial for

understanding the overall irony of the poem, with the initial identification of the door with a new bride. He also anticipates a possible double entendre in line 6 (pages 48-50) *porrecto ... sene*. He defends the emendation *nato* in line 5 proposed by Fröhlich, and followed by some other critics, instead of the manuscript reading *voto*, in view of a parallelism between lines 3-4 and 5-6. His arguments are not unconvincing, but the option of the manuscripts might not necessarily be inconsistent with the metaphorical marriage of the door: it might be alluding to the marital vow, which the door-wife has clearly violated, as will be shown throughout the poem.

Pages 59-70 deal with lines 9-14, the reply of the door. In this sub-chapter, Laguna's main achievements are his interpretation of the alliteration of guttural sounds in line 11 as a parody of the stammering of Balbo, "the stammerer" -- his son's name Caecilius ("the little blind") is suggestive of his attitude towards his wife's infidelities -- and an accurate and detailed discussion on the *locus desperatus* of line 12. His adoption of the *lectio* of the *codices deteriores*, *uerum isti populo ianua quicque facit*, is perfectly valid both in semantic and palaeographical terms.

After dealing with a transitional passage (lines 15-18), which he calls "interludio" (pages 71-72), he studies the door's first report of her *domina's* misdeeds in lines 19-28 (pages 73-87). According to Laguna, the events narrated are straightforward: there are three main characters involved, apart from the various lovers, the *domina*, her husband Caecilius, and his father, Balbus, and two homes for the married couple, located in Brixia and Verona; Caecilius was already married when he and his wife moved to the house with the talking door. Although he was impotent, and everyone knew it, his wife did not remain a virgin for too long, as believed in Verona. The door defends herself from the accusations that she is responsible for the behavior of her *domina*: the wife was already dissolute when she lived in Brixia. Moreover, either following Caecilius' request or on his own initiative (page 86) and in order to 'help' his son, it was her father-in-law who deflowered her, thus committing incest.<sup>1</sup> Everyone knew it in Brixia, where the couple lived, but not in Verona. Laguna's discussion of the implications of this passage is outstanding. However, he does not lay much emphasis on the syntactical ambiguity in line 20. He explains that *vir prior* means that it was not her husband who first 'touched' her, but her father-in-law, and dismisses the possibility that the expression may also be taken as 'her first husband', from whom she might have divorced or become a widow. In that case, there would be at least two more characters in the poem, her former husband *vir prior* and her former father-in-law. With this explanation the invective would turn even more poisonous and the wife's portrait more ugly. The father-in-law who had an incestuous relationship would not, then, be Balbus, whose name is not precisely suggestive of sexual vigor. Furthermore, it cannot be inferred from the text that it was the impotent husband (whoever he was) who asked his father for help during their bridal night without the wife's consent--thus enticing him to commit rape as well as incest (page 83): perhaps the incestuous affair was instigated by his daughter-in-law, who is definitely not presented as a paradigm of virtue.

On pages 89-92 Laguna analyzes the brief answer of the interlocutor (lines 29-30). His rendering of the implications of the passage is certainly insightful, although his interpretation of *minxerit* as a hypothetical *pedicatio* is somewhat questionable: in our view, it is rather a metaphorical one. Even in present day colloquial speech, insults of a sexual nature do not necessarily have a real referent. Accordingly, this "pious" father, by literally "fucking" his daughter-in-law, has "fucked" his own son, metaphorically. *Minxerit*, in fact, alludes clearly to ejaculation, but it is a psychological, rather than physical, abuse. If real incest of a homosexual type were hinted at, Catullus would probably have been clearer, for it was a more offensive transgression than incest between father and daughter-in-law.

The final speech of the door (lines 31-48), in which she relates further adulterous affairs of her *domina*, is dealt with on pages 93-110. Laguna's main achievement in this section is his cogent account of the brief and parodic ἔκφρασις on Brixia (lines 31-36). He argues that there is a sexual understatement in this passage: Brixia symbolizes the *matrona* satirized in this poem and the river Mela stands for her impotent (or even homosexual) husband. Laguna's interpretation of the duality Brixia-Verona is as follows (page 94): the wedding took place in Brixia, where the couple used to live. As Caecilius was impotent, his father 'helped' him on his wedding night. After that, Caecilius' wife committed adultery with several men, Postumius, Cornelius, and a third one whose name is not mentioned (lines 45-48), but who could easily be recognized by the audience, as has already been stated. In the meantime, Balbus lived in Verona and, after his death, Caecilius' inherited his father's house and moved there (this, though possible and well-reasoned by Laguna is somewhat inconsistent with the expression *facta marita* in line 6, which evokes a wedding). The people of Verona, aware of Caecilius' impotence, thought that his wife was still a virgin when she arrived there and that her dissolute behavior had begun after her arrival; for them, the door (the house) is to blame for her sudden change of behavior. The door now discloses the truth. Laguna painstakingly reconstructs the series of events alluded to in this poem in an approach both well argued and imaginative, although not all the possibilities are totally explored. The final ἀντίγραμμα, the third lover *magnas cui lites intulit olim falsum mendaci ventre puerperium*, is dealt with on pages 106-110. Laguna's rounds off his commentary by giving a plausible explanation to *falsum puerperium*, which, in addition, may be the strongest argument for the identification of Caecilius with the impotent husband: the *lex Voconia* forbade women to inherit a sum exceeding 100.000 sesterces, so that, if a married couple did not have children, a male relative was named as heir. Although her husband was notoriously impotent, she gave birth to a child who would secure her inheritance. The child, however, was not legitimate, but spurious (i.e. *falsum*), and the male heir concerned took legal action in order to expose the adultery, which was so detrimental to his economic interests.

In conclusion, although it does not always allow for alternate views and does not explore thoroughly the numerous ambiguities in the text, L's reading is detailed, sensitive, coherent, and finds a plausible scenario to account for the hints given by the speaking door.

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#### Notes:

1. Laguna's remark that the wife held a quasi-incestuous relationship with her father-in-law (page 111) is not strictly accurate: this kind of relationship was considered as incestuous as those held by relatives in the ascendant line. See W. W. Buchland, *Textbook of Roman Law: from Augustus to Justinian*, 1975: 166; S. Treggiari, *Roman marriage. Iusti Coniuges from the time of Cicero to the time of Ulpian*, 1991: 37-38; J. F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 1986: 36-37; 125-127. Cf. *Dig.* 48.5.39.pr.1-2.

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