

**Robert Holschuh SIMMONS**

**Deconstruction of a Father's Love: Catullus 72 and 74**

The striking imagery of Catullus 72 has long been treated too reverently. While on one level, Catullus' likening of his love for Lesbia to that of a pater for his *gnatos* . . . et *generos* (72.4) can be read as an innovative expression of Catullus' romantic feelings for Lesbia (Kroll 1929; Copley *AJP* 1949), it is also peculiar enough to warrant more skeptical analysis. In revealing the lengths to which Catullus went to free this unusual simile from sexual connotation, this study also uncovers links between 72 and 74 that re-sexualize the image, showing both the poet's consciousness of the unconventionality of his expressed feelings and his disdain for Romans who misconstrue them.

Despite the recent surge in attention paid to the interconnectedness of Catullus' poems (Dettmer 1997; Claes 2002), meaningful connections between 72 and other poems of similar theme and vocabulary have been overlooked. Quinn's (1973) and Fordyce's (1961) puzzlement about the inclusion of *generos* along with *gnatos* as objects of the father's love can be resolved partly by noting references to incestuous family relations in other poems. Catullus' poems confirm or suggest incest, or at least sexual activity, between mothers and sons (64; 88; 89), fathers and daughters (90), brothers and sisters (79), nephews and aunts (74; 88), nephews and uncles (74), male and female cousins (89), and fathers-in-law and daughters-in-law (64; 67). That is why the poet needs to include *generos* as objects of the father's care, implying that he means only "sons" by *gnatos*. If the father had cared merely for *gnatos*, daughters (a potential incest partner) might have been implied in the group. Catullus carefully laundered potential sexual implications from *gnatos* to communicate the desired romantic message of this poem.

But then in 74, Catullus' nemesis Gellius inserts sexuality right back into 72. His seduction of his aunt and forced fellatio on his uncle parody the selfless intergenerational nurturance implied in Catullus' expressed love of Lesbia in 72. And the portrayal of the *patruus* in 74 as censorious and overbearing directly lampoons the platonic, caring pater in 72. The slight shift in family status of pater in 72 to *patruus* in 74, with both figures downplaying the expression of sexuality but with considerably different narrative treatment, suggests that 74 is just 72 read from a different perspective: Catullus as high-minded idealist in 72 is to Gellius in 74 merely a captious killjoy.

This paper argues that the mockery to which Catullus subjects 72's sensitive imagery in 74 indicates his realization that his model, though delicately constructed, is in need of the development to which he subjects it in later poems (75, 76, 85, 87, 109). 74 also introduces the shallow type of character (Gellius) who would be so myopic as to misunderstand the depth of Catullus' feelings.