

*HEUS TU! PROMITTIS AD CENAM,
NEC VENIS? DICITUR IUS!*

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLINY *EP.*
1.15 AND SEVERAL *CARMINA CATULLI*

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Summary: Various studies have already shown that Catullus is one of many authors whose work Pliny the Younger preferred to read and to whom he often referred in his letters. An interesting example of this intertextual reference is found in *Ep.* 1.15. It is obvious that Pliny refers to the specific contents and motifs from three different poems of Catullus, which the addressee of the letter should easily have been reminded of when reading the letter. That Catullus' poems are the underlying (or superordinate) hyper-texts to which Pliny refers is what this paper aims to prove.

Introduction

Pliny's letters are surely among the most revealing and interesting literary publications about Roman life of the first century A.D. The epistles themselves excel both through the multitude of their subjects and the diversity of their addressees. The most famous among them are undoubtedly the extensive correspondence with Emperor Trajan (*Ep.* 10.1-121) and the well-known historian Tacitus (*Ep.* 1.6; 1.20; 4.13; 6.9; 6.16; 6.20; 7.20; 7.33; 8.7; 9.10; 9.14), especially the report on the eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 A.D. (*Ep.* 6.16 and *Ep.* 6.20). In addition, numerous letters are found in the extensive corpus that give the impression that they have initially been intended for private use, before being revised for publication.¹

1 Cf. Ludolph 1997: 23-28; Kuhlmann 2014: 14-15; Wehmann 2014: 64-65.

But even these letters eventually emerge as a kind of art products,² which can give testimony of the erudition (*doctrina*) of their author – the specific *doctrina*, which was the defining element of the work of the Neoterics Calvus and Catullus.³ In addition, just like the Neoteric poets, Pliny is able to adopt the Greek and Latin works of his predecessors, adapt their contents to the intention of the respective letter, and skilfully play with the motifs of the hypotexts.⁴ However, the hidden intertextual allusions – a sign of the author’s *doctrina* – are constantly posing new challenges to modern research, since they make it difficult for the modern reader to get access to the texts and understand them in the end.

At times, the identification of Pliny’s models may not be as easy as it is in *Ep.* 1.7.4, wherein the author himself announces Homer as the source of his quotation, or in *Ep.* 8.2.3, in which an obvious allusion to Virgil (*Aen.* 5.305) can be recognised. Often, the intertextual allusions to underlying hypotexts that the author used in the design of his letters are indirect allusions on content and form.⁵ Moreover, these allusions are found on the meta-level of the texts and are less frequently presented through direct borrowings of words and phrases on the lexical-syntactic level than by indirect hints on theme and structure.⁶

In my opinion, this peculiar kind of intertextual dependency can be seen best in *Ep.* 1.15, wherein Pliny has obviously adopted three poems of the Veronese Catullus while composing the letter to Septicius. Explicitly, the mentioned poems are C. 13, the literary game of an invitation to dinner sent to Fabullus, C. 30, the indignant reprimand of the friend Alfenus for his proven infidelity, and C. 50, the literary reflection of one

2 Cf. Kasten 2003: 667; concerning the difference between ‘real’ and literary letters cf. Ludolph 1997: 23–28.

3 Cf. Haig Gaisser 2012: 165.

4 Cf. Schwerdtner 2015: 48: “In about one tenth of his 247 private letters, Pliny uses over 60 literary citations, with about a quarter from the Latin and three quarters from Greek literature.”

5 Cf. Kuhlen 1991; Genette 1993.

6 According to Gérard Genette’s theory ([1993]: 10–16) this kind of intertextuality is regarded as the effective presence of one text in another which manifests itself in quotations and plagiarism – that means explicitly declared or even not explicitly declared takeovers of the pretext – as well as allusions and statements for whose complete understanding knowledge of the pretext is necessary.

hilarious evening spent with his friend Calvus. In what follows, I would like to prove that these poems are the subordinated or superordinated hypotexts that Pliny had in mind when composing his artificial letter.

*praeterea facit versus,
quales Catullus meus et Calvus*
Pliny's relationship to Catullus

“In the Pliny Circle the poetry of Catullus and Calvus was *en vogue* [...]” is the convincing verdict of Nina Mindt.⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that Calvus and Catullus were among those authors whose works Pliny had demonstrably read as well as incorporated into his letters. The artful intertextual allusions to the poems of the Neoterics would certainly have been recognised and understood by the highly sophisticated addressees as well as the readers of the letters.⁸ Ilaria Marchesi⁹ refers to Pliny's art of allusion as “critical re-reading of Catullus' poetry” which defines his own poetics.

Although only one literal quotation can be found in the epistles – a direct reference to C. 16.5-8 can be seen in *Ep.* 4.14, while in *Ep.* 1.18.4, there is probably just an indirect allusion to C. 82.2¹⁰ – Pliny had an extraordinary appreciation of Catullus, as Matthew Roller¹¹ claims: “Pliny's particularly close engagement with Catullus is easy to demonstrate. Besides praising Catullus by name and quoting him [...], Pliny also shares with Catullus no less than six of the terms by which he labels his own poetry – far more than he shares with any other earlier poet whose works survive.” According to Roller's opinion, these six common terms found in Catullus' poems are the nouns *nugae* (c. 1.4), *ineptiae* (c. 14b.1), *versiculi*

7 Cf. Mindt 2013: 138.

8 Cf. Pliny's own testimonies (e. g. *Ep.* 1.16: *praeterea facit versus, quales Catullus meus et Calvus*; *Ep.* 4.27) and several modern studies e. g. Schenk 1999: 114-34; Schwerdtner 2015.

9 Cf. Marchesi 2008: 55.

10 Cf. Schenk 1999: 116; differently Schwerdtner 2015: n. 202.

11 Cf. Roller 1998: 271.

(c. 16.3 and 6), *poema* (c. 22.15-16), and *hendecasyllabi*, which Pliny mentions in *Ep.* 4.14¹² as well as the verb *ludere* (c. 50.2 and 5), which both – Catullus and Pliny – use as a term to characterise the playful creation of verses.

From the obvious linguistic similarities, it is easy to deduce Pliny's remarkable connection to the language of the Neoteric poetry which Catullus represents. The world of thought of the Neoteric poets, their personal dismay, and the resulting emotionality, which is often expressed in harsh and hurtful words¹³, plays a remarkable role in Pliny's work as well. The author skilfully plays with the motifs and themes that can be found in Catullus' poems, neither by blindly copying them nor by losing sight of the peculiar character of the respective letter by a mere imitation. As a product of this artful game, Pliny's letters emerge as an independent work which – concerning their underlying originality – do not fall short of Catullus' poems any more than Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* does with regard to the epic of the same name by Apollonius of Rhodes. I would like to now investigate the way in which Pliny uses Catullus' poems as templates and alludes to passages and motifs following the rules of intertextuality, by choosing *Ep.* 1.15 as an example.

Pliny *Ep.* 1.15 – Catullus *C.* 13; *C.* 30; *C.* 50

C. Plinius Septicio Claro suo salutem

Heus tu! Promittis ad cenam, nec venis? Dicitur ius: ad assem impendium reddes, nec id modicum. Paratae erant lactucae singulae, cochleae ternae, ova bina, halica cum mulso et nive — nam hanc quoque computabis, immo hanc in primis quae perit in ferculo –, olivae betacei cucurbitae bulbi, alia mille non minus lauta. Audisses comoedos vel lectorem vel lyristen vel — quae mea liberalitas — omnes. At tu apud nescio quem ostrea vulvas echinos Gaditanas maluisti. Dabis poenas, non dico quas. Dure fecisti: invidisti, nescio an tibi, certe mihi, sed tamen et tibi. Quantum nos lusissemus risissemus studuissemus!

12 Concerning Pliny's *hendecasyllabi* cf. Auhagen 2003: 200.

13 Cf. Syndikus 1984: I 66-68.

Potes apparatus cenare apud multos, nusquam hilarius simplicius incautius. In summa experire, et nisi postea te aliis potius excusaveris, mihi semper excusa. Vale.

Shame on you! You promised to come to dinner, and you never came! I'll take you to court, and you will pay to the last penny for my losses, and quite a sum! Ready for each of us were a lettuce, three snails, and two eggs, barley water with honey wine cooled with snow (you must add the cost of snow as well, in fact the snow in particular, as it melts in the dish). There were olives, beetroot, gourds, onions, and countless other delicacies no less elegant. You would have heard performers of comedy, or a reader, or a lyre-player, or even all three, such is my generosity!

But you preferred to dine at some nobody's house, enjoying oysters, sow's tripe, sea urchins, and performing-girls from Cadiz. You'll be punished for this, I won't say how. What boorishness was this! You begrudged perhaps yourself, and certainly me – but yes, yourself as well. What joking and laughter and learning we would have enjoyed! You can dine in many houses on more elaborate fare, but nowhere more genially, innocently, and unguardedly. In short, you must try it out, and in future, unless you make your excuses to others instead, you must always make them to me. Farewell!

(trans. Walsh)

In *Ep.* 1.15, Pliny writes about the invitation to a joint dinner (*ad cenam*), which he extended to his friend and patron, the Roman *eques* and later *praefectus praetorio* of the Emperor Hadrian, Septicius Clarus.¹⁴ However, as already reported in the second half of the letter, Septicius failed to appear, even though he had previously promised to (*promittis*). Feigning outrage¹⁵ Pliny now wants to pass judgement (*ius*) on the 'accused' for

14 Pliny dedicated the first book of letters to Septicius and Suetonius also dedicated his *Biographies of the Emperors* to Septicius, cf. Schulten 1923: coll. 1557-58; Eck 2001: col. 429.

15 In my opinion, it is obvious that Pliny's rebuke of Septicius in this letter is more jocular and even light-hearted than serious. The main reason is that Pliny's threat to take Septicius to court and have him fined is clearly exaggerated: of course, there is

this ‘offence’: Septicius should pay for all that was provided, without exception (*ad assem impendium reddes, nec id modicum*). All sorts of culinary delicacies – Pliny lists lettuce, snails, eggs, spelt mixed with honey and snow (*lactucae singulae, cochleae ternae, ova bina, halica cum mulso et nive*), a very rare and therefore more delicate and luxury item¹⁶, additionally olives from Baetica, beetroot, onions, and a thousand other equally expensive dainties, no less tasty things (*olivae betacei cucurbitae bulbi, alia mille non minus lauta*) – as well as exquisite entertainment – a comedian or a reader or a lyre-player (*comoedos vel lectorem vel lyristen*) – would have been provided as a sign of Pliny’s generosity (*quae mea liberalitas omnes*). Seemingly offended and full of feigned indignation and sarcasm, Pliny reproaches Septicius for having preferred to dine at another host (*at tu apud nescio quem ostrea vulvas echinos Gaditanas maluisti*). For this, Septicius would have to pay penalty, although it is unclear how and in what way (*dabis poenas, non dico quas*). Pliny is convinced that the damage done by Septicius would not only be great for Pliny but for Septicius as well (*invidisti, nescio an tibi, certe mihi, sed tamen et tibi*), especially as Septicius could dine at many houses in better style than at Pliny’s, but nowhere would he have a better time or such a simple and free and easy entertainment (*potes apparatus cenare apud multos, nusquam hilarius simplicius incautius*). In short, Septicius should try (*in summa experire*), and if afterwards he did not prefer to excuse himself to others rather than to Pliny (*nisi postea te aliis potius excusaveris, mihi semper excusa*), then Pliny would give him leave to decline his invitations forever (*mihi semper excusa*).

At first glance, the situation Pliny describes seems in some ways to be taken from everyday life and appears therefore trivial. However, when examining it more closely, it becomes more obvious that a certain literary calculation is hidden behind, which challenges both the addressee and the learned audience to identify three different poems from the work of the poet Catullus that served as models for Pliny.

no civil law procedure to be used against someone who reneges on a dinner invitation, nor any monetary penalty to be paid. Furthermore, the phrase *dabis poenas, non dico quas* seems also joking as the penalty is exactly all the fun Septicius missed. Moreover, it is important to claim that Pliny and Septicius stayed close friends as can be finally proved by the dedication of Pliny’s first book of letters to Septicius.

16 Cf. Weeber 2015: 200.

Pliny Ep. 1.15 – Catullus C. 13

Clearly, the entrance scene of the letter is reminiscent of Catullus' invitation poem C. 13, which is addressed to his friend Fabullus. Regarding the context of the poem, Fabullus is expected to appear for dinner within the next few days after recently having returned from a long distance – confer C. 12¹⁷ (vv. 1-2: *cenabis bene [...] paucis diebus*). But, in contrast to Pliny's writing, Catullus' friend will not be offered luxury items unless the guest provides them himself (vv. 3-4: *si tecum attuleris bonam atque magnam cenam*), because Catullus was as poor as a church mouse (vv. 7-8: *tui Catulli plenus sacculus araneorum*).¹⁸

It is obvious that the poet responds to a literary *topos*, which was peculiar to Hellenistic invitation letters¹⁹: A humble host invites a richer guest and offers him, instead of fancy food, something special, namely Catullus' 'pure and untarnished friendship' (v. 9: *meros amores*), combined with all sorts of wit and good humour (v. 5: *sale et cachinnis*). For sure, it is undeniable that this was deliberately shown self-restraint, which hardly corresponds with reality.

One can speculate that a similar restraint and modesty might have been expressed in Pliny's original invitation to Septicius, which can also be seen in Catullus' invitation poem to Fabullus. Maybe Pliny had also invited his friend for dinner following the rules of *modestia* without offering all forms of culinary delicacies but promising friendly entertainment and cheerfulness. If this assumption is true, Pliny's 'angry' response to Septicius would be justified in a way that was adequate to Catullus when Fabullus did not appear for dinner. Pliny's writing – his probably not quite serious 'reckoning' with his friend Septicius – could thus be regarded as a continuation of Catullus' poem by prolonging the original invitation idea, the origin of which can be found in the underlying poem of Catullus. Or, in other words: In Catullus' poem, Pliny has found the motif which he was able to refer to and carry on in his epistle using the peculiar idea of Catullus' text in an artful literary game.²⁰ Thus, in my

17 Cf. Syndikus 1984: I 127-29.

18 Cf. *ibid.* 130-33.

19 Cf. Bacch. fr. 21 Sn.; Ath. 500b; AP 11.44.

20 Cf. Mindt 2013: 138.

opinion, Catullus' C. 13 can clearly be identified as one of the hypotexts that Pliny had in mind when composing his own letter.

Pliny Ep. 1.15 – Catullus C. 30

Equally noteworthy are the allusions to another poem, which Pliny probably referred to in the next part of the letter. Here, the displaced host first accuses the guest of having accepted another invitation (*maluisti*), preferring the more unusual dishes that were offered at another dinner – oysters, sow's matrices, sea-urchins, and Spanish dancing girls (*ostrea vulvas echinos Gaditanas*). With the emphatic expression: "You'll be punished for this, but I won't say how!" (*Dabis poenas, non dico quas*), Pliny ends the short burst of emotion that the friend's disloyalty has forced upon him.

Pliny, however, does not tell what such a penance might look like. Not a single word of revenge or maledictions is found in his letter. Yet it seems probable that Septicius – or the scholarly recipient of the letter – had a rather concrete impression of a peculiar retribution. This is because Catullus offers in C. 30 an idea of what such a literary retaliation might look like – possibly referring to a very similar occasion such as Pliny's letter.²¹ There, Catullus denounces the unfaithfulness of his friend Alfenus very clearly. Alfenus is declared to be 'fidelity forgotten and false' (v. 1: *immemor atque false*), 'hard-hearted' (v. 2: *dure*), 'unfaithful' (v. 3: *perfide*), and 'unjust' (v. 7: *inique*) and called a man who does not hesitate to betray, to deceive (v. 3: *iam me prodere, iam non dubitas fallere*), and to abandon his friend Catullus (v. 5: *me miserum deseris*).

Keeping in mind the occasion of Pliny's letter to Septicius while reading these verses, the sophisticated reader subconsciously assumes that Catullus' words would also fit well in the situation of Pliny's letter to characterise the addressee Septicius. Very likely, Septicius would have also noticed the subliminal allusion to Catullus' accusing words to Alfenus if he received the letter, which thus *vice versa* became his own 'accusation' by intertextual allusion.

21 It is not clear what kind of crime Alfenus committed to Catullus, cf. Syndikus 1984: I 181-85.

Alfenus' behaviour – Catullus specifically speaks of a retreat (v. 9: *retrahis*), which is to be equated with Pliny's lament over the absence of the *cena* – would have undone all former words and deeds of the friend (vv. 9-10: *te ac tua dicta omnia factaque / ventos irrita ferre ac nebulas aereas sinis*). Even if Alfenus had forgotten about his failure (v. 11: *si tu oblitus es*), all gods would remember and make him pay (v. 11: *di meminerunt*), in particular the personalised goddess Fides (v. 11: *meminit Fides*), who would make him regret his crime later (v. 12: *ut paenitet postmodo facti faciet tui*).

It seems justifiable to assume that this kind of 'divine retaliation' that Alfenus had to expect might implicitly threaten Septicius as well. In my opinion, it is obvious that the addressee of Pliny's words would have recognised the scholarly allusion to the underlying motif, which he found in Catullus' poem. Thus, I regard Catullus' C. 30 as another hypotext or praetext, which Pliny used as a basis by means of intertextual allusion while writing this letter to Septicius.

Pliny Ep. 1.15 – Catullus C. 50

Reading the final part of the letter, the impression that a third poem of Catullus has at least indirectly been a model for Pliny becomes apparent. By demanding punishment, Pliny implicitly states that Septicius' absence was the sign of a hard-hearted man (*dure*) – Catullus' impression of the faithless Alfenus, who has been explicitly mentioned as *durus*, is clearly in mind – and the damage to their friendship would be felt by both partners (*invidisti, nescio an tibi, certe mihi, sed tamen et tibi*). Envisioning the dinner party, Pliny explicitly reminds the friend what he had missed out on that evening (Ep. 1.15.3-4):

Quantum nos lusissemus risissemus studuissemus! Potes apparatus cenare apud multos, nusquam hilarius simplicius incautius. In summa experire, et nisi postea te aliis potius excusaveris, mihi semper excusa. Vale.

What joking and laughter and learning we would have enjoyed! You can dine in many houses on more elaborate fare, but nowhere more

genially, innocently, and unguardedly. In short, you must try it out, and in future, unless you make your excuses to others instead, you must always make them to me. Farewell!

(trans. Walsh)

If Septicius had accepted the invitation, both friends might have joked (*luissemus*), laughed (*risissemus*), and learnt (*studuissemus*) a lot, so Pliny assumes. Although Septicius could have certainly eaten better somewhere else (*potes apparatus cenare apud multos*), he would do so nowhere more genially (*hilaris*), innocently (*simplicius*) and unguardedly (*incautius*) than with Pliny. Concluding, Pliny utters the final admonishing words: If Septicius prefers to excuse himself rather to Pliny than to others (*te aliis potius excusaveris*), then he can certainly do it forever (*mihi semper*).

Once again, it seems obvious that Pliny alludes to a specific situation that Catullus has described in one of his poems before, which the reader of the letter would have felt directly reminded of. Catullus' C. 50 needs to be considered here, which represents a fictitious letter to his friend Licinius Calvus:

Hesternis, Licini, die otiosi
 multum lusimus in meis tabellis,
 ut convenerat esse delicatos:
 scribens versiculos uterque nostrum
 ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc,
 reddens mutua per iocum atque vinum.
 atque illinc abii tuo lepore
 incensus, Licini, facetiisque,
 ut nec me miserum cibus iuaret
 nec somnus tegeret quiete ocellos,
 sed toto indomitus furore lecto
 versarer, cupiens videre lucem,
 ut tecum loquerer, simulque ut essem.
 at defessa labore membra postquam
 semimortua lectulo iacebant,
 hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci,

ex quo perspiceres meum dolorem.
 nunc audax cave sis, precesque nostras,
 oramus, cave despuas, ocelle,
 ne poenas Nemesis reposcat a te.
 est vehemens dea: laedere hanc caveto.

At leisure, Licinius, yesterday
 We'd much fun with my writing-tables
 As we'd agreed to be frivolous.
 Each of us writing light verses
 Played now with this metre, now that,
 Capping each other's jokes and toasts.
 Yes, and I left there fired by
 Your charm, Licinius, and wit,
 So food gave poor me no pleasure
 Nor could I rest my eyes in sleep
 But wildly excited turned and tossed
 Over the bed, longing for daylight
 That I might be with you and talk.
 But after my tired aching limbs
 Were lying on the couch half dead,
 I made this poem for you, the charmer,
 So you could spot my trouble from it.
 Now don't be rash, please – don't reject
 Our prayers, we implore you, precious,
 Lest Nemesis make you pay for it.
 She's a drastic Goddess. Don't provoke her.

(trans. Lee)

In this poem, Catullus reflects on the cheerful and pleasurable meeting with the friend Licinius Calvus, which had supposedly taken place on the day or evening before (v. 1: *hesterno, Licini, die otiosi*), possibly during a *cena*. While drinking wine and hilariously revelling (v. 6: *per iocum atque vinum*), Catullus states that both friends joked a lot on the writing boards (v. 2: *multum lusimus in meis tabellis*) by playfully writing down small verses (vv. 4-5: *scribens versiculos uterque nostrum / ludebat*). Enchanted by

Calvus' erudition and wit, Catullus went home (*abii tuo lepore incensus, Licini, facetiisque*), and since he could not sleep (*toto indomitus furore lecto versarer*), he wrote the present poem to his friend out of longing to see him again (*hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci*), as an example of Catullus' grief (*ex quo perspiceres meum dolorem*). If, however, Calvus should think little of Catullus' feeling, Calvus should beware of Nemesis, the personified retribution, to injure whom would carry negative consequences (*poenas Nemesis repositat a te / est vehemens dea: laedere hanc caveto*).²²

That Septicius might have expected a dinner that followed a similar pattern, just as with the friends Catullus and Calvus, is hinted at in Pliny's tricolon of *luissemus risissemus studuissemus*. The direct intertextual connection to Catullus, however, seems not only to be given by the evoked mood of the two texts, but it is further amplified by the choice of the verb *ludere*, which, as mentioned by Matthew Roller, Pliny and Catullus share as a specific term in a similar semantic framework. Obviously, both Catullus and Pliny use *ludere* here as a term to describe hilarious moments which are spent together with a friend during a dinner.²³ A coincidental use of this specific word in these unique circumstances seems – from my point of view – rather unlikely.

It also seems noteworthy that there is an indirect allusion to Catullus' poem in the threat of punishment, in so far as Pliny points out to Septicius that he will have to pay a 'punishment' for his non-appearance (*dabis poenas, non dico quas*). Although Pliny himself remains vague about the form that the punishment will take, one may be reminded of Catullus' statement that the personified Nemesis will punish Calvus if he ignores his friend's desire. As in Pliny's letter, it is also uncertain in the context of Catullus' poem what the punishment for unrequited friendship will be – Catullus merely notes that Nemesis is a powerful goddess (*est vehemens dea*) whom one should be careful not to offend (*laedere hanc caveto*). The reader of Pliny's letter should certainly bear in mind that the same Nemesis who is threatened to Calvus in Catullus' poem could also call Septicius to account: Regarding the friendship between Catullus and Calvus,

22 Cf. Syndikus 1984: I 250-54.

23 It seems plausible also that Pliny's *risissemus* alludes to the Catullan *per iocum atque vinum* and *studuissemus* ("engaged in literary activity") to the phrase *in meis tabellis ... scribens versiculos*.

Nemesis, the eternal goddess of retribution, also watches over the friendship between Pliny and Septicius – and thereby connects the authors' thoughts and feelings about friendship and its betrayal across centuries. For these reasons, I consider this artful allusion on the meta-level of intertextuality to be another witty connection that Pliny obviously perceived and consequently used to create this kind of highly sophisticated intertextual game with Septicius and the readers of the letter as well.

Based on these considerations and obvious parallels demonstrated above, it is thus convincing that Catullus' *C.* 50 should also be regarded a hypotext used by Pliny who transforms²⁴ the motifs known from the template into the newly created hypertext.

Summary

Concerning Pliny's *Ep.* 1.15, the study could prove that Pliny has used and transformed several poems of Catullus into the conception of his letter to Septicius. In this respect, according to the theory of hypertextuality described by Gérard Genette, Pliny has hinted at Catullus' poems *C.* 13, *C.* 30, and *C.* 50 by associative allusions and conscious reminiscences as well as by transforming the poems' peculiar motifs into his letter, and by literarily continuing the original thoughts. In this process, Pliny was so skilful that the letter is not an ordinary transformation of the contents of the model. Rather, the letter itself has become a literary creation that even today continues to challenge its reader.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that *Ep.* 1.15 must be regarded as the product of a literary game. This can best be seen in the fact that Septicius – who became the dedicatee of the first book of letters, an honour which

24 Whether this transformation is intentional because Pliny is presenting a letter infused with Catullan motifs and vocabulary as a studied appropriation whose literary origin he expects his readers to recognize, or because the Catullan imagery and language comes into Pliny's mind as part of his general literary background cannot be answered unambiguously. However, I am convinced that Pliny has a strong attachment to Neoteric poetry and especially to its main representatives Catullus and Calvus as can be seen in different letters (e. g. *Epp.* 2.2; 4.14; 4.27; 9.16; 9.25: cf. also Marchesi 2008: 62-96), which allows him to allude to their motifs almost naturally.

was associated with several duties and privileges²⁵ – continued to be Pliny’s friend and *patronus*, even though he had been accused with seemingly ‘harsh’ words.

Though Pliny seems to be enraged and offended by Septicius’ ‘infidelity’, he remains more rational, more composed, and far more reflective in his statements and actions towards Septicius than Catullus could be towards Calvus or other friends – this is caused by Catullus’ theory of poetry and his neoteric self-concept as well. Anger as an emotion does not make Pliny act in an uncontrolled or irrational way; moreover, he is led by the underlying motif of *modestia*,²⁶ which is inherent in his letters. This virtue makes Pliny appear moderate, deliberate, and determined by noticeable calculation regarding his own situation and the benefit for it even in situations imagined in *Ep.* 1.15. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that Septicius achieves the nimbus of a *persona Catulliana*, who, like the protagonists of Catullus’ poems, is blamed for his misconduct by the author without losing the friendly relationship at all.²⁷

25 Cf. van Dam 2008: 1-12.

26 Cf. Scheidle 1993; Ludolph 1997: 60-88 and 194-205; Tzounakas 2007: 52-54; Marchesi 2008; Tzounakas 2012: 302.

27 This can also be seen in *ep.* 2.2, where anger for the misconduct of a friend plays a central role as well. Cf. Hogenmüller 2020: 135-49.

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