## It Takes an O to Make a Ring: Catullus 50.21

S. J. Heyworth emends *laedere* to *ludere* in Catullus 44.3, and his argument is so concise it's easier to quote than to paraphrase:<sup>1</sup>

**"44.2-3** 

nam te esse Tiburtem autumant, quibus non est cordi Catullum laedere.

The sense 'irritate, vex' is perhaps mild enough for this context; but when one notes that *laedere* has arisen from corruption of *ludere* at 17.1 (and as a variant in R at 50.5), it is tempting to think that *ludere* ('mock') should be restored here too."

It seems to me we should make the same change in the last line of Catullus 50:

nunc audax cave sis, precesque nostras, oramus, cave respuas, ocelle, ne poenas Nemesis reposcat a te. 20 vemens est dea: laedere hanc caveto.

19 respuas *Trappes-Lomax* : despuas OGR 21 vemens est *McKie* : est vemens OGR

As in 44.3, there is very little difference between the meanings of the two verbs in this context. When the meaning of *laedere* is extended from 'injure, harm, damage' to 'annoy, offend', and the meaning of *ludere* from 'play, sport' to 'mock, ridicule' or even 'deceive', the meanings of the two are nearly interchangeable.

Should we interchange the verbs here? If they mean much the same thing, what difference does it make which one Catullus used? The advantage of *ludere* is that it provides another instance of ring composition. Catullus 50 uses forms of *ludere* twice in the first five lines, and a third in the last line would make a satisfying closure. Here is my proposed text of 1-6 and 18-21, with the repeated verb emphasized:

Hesterno, Licini, die otiosi
multum lusimus invicem tabellis,
ut convenerat esse delicatos:
scribens versiculos uterque nostrum
ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc,
reddens mutua per iocum atque vinum.

S. J. Harrison and S. J. Heyworth, 'Notes on the text and interpretation of Catullus', *PCPS* 44, 85-109.

. . . . . . . . .

nunc audax cave sis, precesque nostras, oramus, cave respuas, ocelle, ne poenas Nemesis reposcat a te. 20 vemens est dea: ludere hanc caveto.

2 invicem Sabellicus: in meis OGR: in tuis Schwabe

19 respuas Trappes-Lomax: despuas OGR

21 vemens est McKie : est vemens OGR ludere scripsi : laedere OGR

Though the meaning is not entirely clear – Heyworth proposes a lacuna before 18 – the poet seems to be saying that poetry may be a trivial game, at least in some circumstances, but friendship is sacred. Mocking friendship will attract the wrath of Nemesis. The repeated verb would constrast the innocent play of exchanging impromptu verses with dangerous disrespect for Nemesis.

Finally, we should probably follow John M. Trappes-Lomax in preferring the forms *loedere* and *in vicem* to *ludere* and *invicem*,<sup>2</sup> but I have kept the traditional spellings here so readers may set aside the orthographic questions while contemplating the change (or rather non-change) of verb in the last line. However, I could not resist using a title that implies *loedere* rather than *ludere*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Catullus: A Textual Reappraisal (Swansea, 2007), on 44.3 (page 116) and 50.2 (124) respectively.