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Catullus and Urbanitas: Ancient Roman Sophistication through the Eyes of a Multi-faceted Poet

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**Catullus and Urbanitas: Ancient Roman Sophistication
through the Eyes of a Multi-faceted Poet**

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Liberal Studies*

by

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Introduction

In today's modern world, many times the public forgives the misbehavior of rather public figures. We often observe the behavior as scandalous and move on with our lives. For instance in Bill Clinton's salacious affair with Monica Lewinski, the public observed his poor, deplorable behavior, but continued to laud the great work he has done as a leader. Political figureheads today still seek his approval and support despite Clinton's labels a "playboy" and "womanizer". Whether through tabloids or reality television, the world is charmed and captivated by the glamorous lives of elite individuals, even when they commit morally deplorable actions. So why does the public often forgive and keep on reading and watching? Well, the key lies in our perception of their lives. These individuals lead such glamorous, idealized lives that we often forget they are capable of doing wrong or committing *faux pas*. But because we have it so engrained in us to idolize these individuals, we forgive, forget, and continue to be charmed.

This fascination with the private lives of celebrities or high-society has not come about recently. We have always been curious and captivated as readers. Let us take Catullus for instance. He is considered the poetic "playboy" of the late Republic in Rome traveling through the social circles of Roman high-society and displaying atrocious behavior the whole time. His circle was "young, well-off,

pleasure-loving, and focused more on private concerns than on public responsibility” (Gaisser 10). He is linked to the most salacious indiscretions such as his relationship with Clodia Metella, a much older married Roman noble woman who was thought to have had an affair with her brother and several other Roman noblemen and referred to as Lesbia in Catullus’ poetry, but still was accepted in the circles of high-society. Often considered a member of the *poetae novi*, or new poets who often challenged the conventions of traditional Classical poetry, Catullus’ works would be read in many *convivia*, dinner gatherings, of high-society and was praised for his acuity of language, wit, and sophistication of writing. Perhaps this is where we forgive such deplorable actions: his membership in high-society and the sophistication with which he wrote and carries himself in his poetry. The Ancient Romans called this *urbanitas*, denotatively defined as urbane sophistication but as we will soon find out is more difficult to describe in practice. Modern audiences could consider the quality of *urbanitas* as city-snobbery or being an urbanite and doing what urbanites do, but what did the Romans think *urbanitas* entails? This is difficult to find, because sophistication is a matter of the tastes of the elite, and like the elite, tastes change over time and from person to person.

So what were the tastes of the elite in Rome the city during Catullus’ time?

Our work in the first chapter aims to describe how Romans perceived *urbanitas*

and to create a system of sophistication that can be more or less proven applicable to the poetry of Catullus. Gaisser states that *urbanitas* was “[a]mong the most important intangible markers...which we can translate as ‘urban sophistication’—but only so long as we remember that such terms are not universal and unchanging across society or even over time in the same society” (Gaisser 9). So how do we make this intangible quality tangible? Two scholars attempt to describe *urbanitas* by identifying what it is not: country-tastes, or *rusticas*. In *Catullan Provocations*, William Fitzgerald believes that during the late Roman republic *urbanitas* is going through constant change. “In the time of Catullus and Cicero, the application of ‘urbanitas’ is undergoing an expansion; its earlier applications to, literally, life at Rome[the city] or to a certain crude Roman humor are being joined by a more general reference to a person’s metropolitan sophistication” (Fitzgerald 91). Edwin Ramage also expresses the same need to protect high society from a new population. In *Urbanitas: An Ancient Sophistication and Refinement*, he states “[t]he old Roman values are in danger and *urbanitas*, which is part of them, is threatened with pollution, dilution, and destruction from without” (Ramage 52). Looking back at Cicero, a contemporary of Catullus, and Quintilian, later orator writing on *urbanitas*, we can begin to see glimpses of *urbanitas* in practice, or certain qualities being described in the setting of the courtroom, a very formalized arena. The term is not as easily

identifiable as other Roman ideas such as *gravitas*, *pietas*, or *mores*, and so in the first chapter, I will set out to contextualize the descriptions of *urbanitas* from the writing of Cicero and Quintilian. Cicero was a contemporary of Catullus, and Quintilian expounded on Cicero's works to teach oration better. I will also seek to contextualize words *urbanus*, *suburbanus*, and *rusticus* as Catullus uses them to describe those possessing or lacking *urbanitas*.

After figuring out how the word *urbanitas* and its antonyms function in the literature, there's still the matter of finding this idea in practice throughout Catullus' poems in the societal arena. The word does not need to be mentioned for the reader to see sophistication in practice. So how do we know *urbanitas* is present in the poetry of Catullus? Brian Krostenko in *Cicero, Catullus, and the Language of Social Performance* identifies key vocabulary as indications of the use of *urbanitas*. He claims "the 'social performance of identity by aesthetic means' was a concept that the Romans expressed...mainly through the partial appropriation of several approbative lexemes and their opposites" (Krostenko 3). So when these words are used, there is an aestheticism tied to the words that creates this aesthetic performance of words. I go one step further in my belief of this language of social performance. If the qualities of the words *facetus* (charming), *venustus* (beautiful), *salsus* (witty), *delicates* (delicate), *bellus* (beautiful), *urbanus* (urbane), or *lepidus* (bright) are in use, then Catullus is

exhibiting his *urbanitas*. The language can be found in much of his poetry, spanning over the multiple genres, or *personae*, which seems to present our next problem.

Gaiser explains that Catullus is thought of having several *personae*, or masks, that he wears depending on the poem we read. It seems as if the modern readers of Catullus have compartmentalized his poetry into separate genres and believe that these genres are mutually exclusive. Therefore, Catullus' literary *persona* has been separated into *personae* making him a very unbelievable literary character. But are these roles mutually exclusive? Can they be united? The roles identified mostly are Catullus the friendly party animal, Catullus the poet, Catullus the judger of debt and theft, and Catullus the lover. How can these four *personae* be brought together? I argue that the answer lies in the manner that Catullus carries himself as all four: as an urbanite. I argue that Catullus unites these *personae* by his display of *urbanitas* in each poem.

It may seem counter-productive that I continue to separate the *personae* if my aim is to unite the *personae* into one urbane *persona*, but in the efforts to analytically determine that each *persona* possesses elements of the use of *urbanitas*, I must continue to do so. Having worked through Cicero and Quintilian, I turn to a close reading of Catullus' four main *personae*, devoting a chapter to each. The point of this endeavor to continue to separate the poetic *personae* is to

find unity in Catullus' display of *urbanitas* despite the differences in subject matter of each of his poetic themes. In the second chapter, it seems most obvious that Catullus shows himself as urbane in poetry set in the *convivium* and other social settings. But, when he does seem quite un-urbane in his poetry, how does one attempt to defend his urbanity?

Urbanitas is easily identifiable in certain poetry, but when Catullus' crass, biting words appear in his office as a poet writing on poetry, how does one begin to defend his criticisms when the poet himself is sensitive to criticism? Catullus comments on poetry or writing that is either exemplary or poorly crafted. On the other hand, the poet attacks the poorly crafted writing with biting invective. The poet is often sensitive to criticism but has not problem whatsoever offering it sometimes in the harshest of ways. Chapter three's task seems like a daunting task, but through an analysis of poetry, I will find the charm and wit in his vulgarity.

The concepts of debt and theft seem to hit Catullus very hard, since he has been in both roles as one being in debt and as a thief. He deals with both topics quite harshly in his invective poetry, often writing as if he's an arbiter of these individuals not in a courtroom, but in more of a social setting where *urbanitas* seems to be his law, but a loosely tangible law. Though harsh, there still can be found an urbane *persona* in his poetry dealing with debt and theft. I

will argue that his invective poetry on those in debt and on thieves play a role in the development of the urbane *persona* because these poems display elements of his wit and charm.

The topic of love seems very private, but Catullus has no problem explicating his love for Claudia Metella, called Lesbia in the poetry, and Juventius in poetry he knows will be quite public. He conducts himself as an emotional person, expressing *urbanitas* in his poetry when love goes right, but when it goes wrong, Catullus still makes public these feelings that are quite crass and biting. Can *urbanitas* be found in the poetry displaying his anger produced from his heartbreak? If not, is there something about Catullus that we forgive and therefore that allows us to tolerate his behavior? I argue that Catullus expresses his brilliance in his use of allusions and in his development of comical imagery to create this charming effect on the reader, making his invective sophisticated.

Though lightly sketched at the moment, *urbanitas* appears to be a quality that was heavily debatable in definition and description. The term is founded in tastes of those living in the city of Rome, and as we all know, tastes can vary from person to person. But do these tastes vary from Catullan *persona* to *persona*? *Urbanitas* is a social quality without any mythological text on which Romans had a basis for comparison or as an exemplar, making this task quite difficult to interpret. Through the examination of the term in use by Cicero,

Quintilian, and Catullus, I will determine a contemporary basis for *urbanitas*. In the chapters in which I separately analyze the poetry of the individual *personae*, I will attempt to unite Catullus into a believable urbane *persona* by identifying gems of poetic genius that span across the *personae*, after which we can better describe Catullus not as separate characters but as the urbanite who continuously expresses his tastes, or opinions, about each topic charming his readers into forgiving slips in behavior or crassness in language. While it may be impossible to define sophistication in a way that fits all times and places, by taking a close look at Catullus, we can better understand how the aristocratic Romans of Catullus' time understood the concept of *urbanitas* and how it functioned as part of their lives.

Chapter 1: *Urbanitas* Contextualized through Cicero, Quintilian, and Catullus

To prove that the several different *personae* can be united into one urbane *persona*, we need to contextualize *urbanitas* during the time of Catullus. This allows us to use the contextualization as a benchmark by which to identify, to measure, and to describe possible displays of *urbanitas* when the word is absent from Catullus' verses. As stated in the introduction, Gaisser explains that possession of *urbanitas* is an intangible quality, a sort of "you just know you've got it when you've got it" deal. Fitzgerald and Ramage believe that the root of *urbanitas* is the separation between those from the city and those from the country and that during the late republic, there was a heightened awareness of the idea because of the influx of people from the country into the city of Rome. And so, how do the orators Cicero and Quintilian describe or define *urbanitas*? Examining their seminal texts containing the word is in order.

Cicero often wrote of *urbanitas* in terms of what he sees in an excellent orator. Despite having trouble defining the term, he is able to give observable examples of its display. In his dialogue *Brutus*, when asked by Brutus to describe the color of *urbanitas*, Cicero replied "'I cannot,' said I, 'pretend to define it: I only know that there is such a quality existing'" (171). Earlier in the same work, Cicero describes Crassus as possessing *urbanitas*:

[He] possessed a wonderful dignity of elocution, with an agreeable mixture of wit and pleasantry, which was perfectly refined (*urbanitas*), and without the smallest tincture of scurrility. His style was correct and elegant without stiffness or affectation: his method of reasoning was remarkably clear and distinct: and when his cause turned upon any point of law, or equity, he had an inexhaustible fund of arguments, and comparative illustrations.

(143)

Here we see a clearer example of the sophisticated Roman gentleman. The key qualities pulled from this passage seem to be elegant and smoothness in speech, and a learnedness of the law, or one's office.

In *Pro Roscio Amerino*, Cicero does not see men from the country mingling well with the "elegant youths, masters of every art and every refinement (*urbanitate*)" (120). In his *De Oratore*, Cicero states that one should possess "a certain humour, flashes of wit, the culture befitting a gentleman, and readiness and terseness...in repelling and in diverting the attack, the whole being combined with a delicate charm and urbanity" (1.17). Cicero mentions *urbanitas* later on when it comes to what constitutes a well-planned discourse, stating that one must "cull, from all the forms of pleasantry (*urbanitatis*), a certain charm of humour, with which to give a sprinkle of salt, as it were, to all our discourse" (159). From these usages of *urbanitas* in the writings of Cicero, we can then

conclude that to Cicero *urbanitas* is a requirement of a Roman gentleman, is in heavy contrast to *rusticus*, and should be an element found in every pursuit upon which every Roman aristocratic man of the city endeavors.

However, Cicero only gets us so far. Quintilian offers a more in-depth discussion of the word. He often uses Cicero as an exemplar of displaying *urbanitas* and writes in his *Institutio Oratoria* on what constitutes *urbanitas*. Quintilian too believes that *urbanitas* is a synthesis of various components, some vague, but some he marks clearly. In book five, chapter two of *Institutio Oratoria*, the author explains how a teacher demonstrates qualities that he wishes his pupils to learn. Quintilian defines *urbanitas* in clearer terms. In admiring Cicero, he also indicates that *urbanitas* is not only a virtue in the courtroom, but also a virtue in everyday life. Cicero, according to Quintilian, used *urbanitas* in both realms. "For his daily speech was full of humour, while in his disputes in court and in his examination of witnesses he produced more good jest than any other" (2.3.3-4). Quintilian next explains his analysis of terms that are associated with *urbanitas*. Quintilian states that the term "denotes language with a smack of the city in its words, accent and idiom, and further suggests a certain tincture of learning derived from associating with well-educated men; in a word, it represents the opposite of rusticity" (6.3.17). In this description, Quintilian clarifies by offering a contrast of the term, rather than fully elaborating on

descriptions or examples. Quintilian does offer more solidified examples and definitions of *venustus* (attractive), *salsus* (witty), *facetus* (clever), *lepidus* (charming), and *dicax* (smart), but again does not clarify *urbanitas*.

Catullus himself uses the word *urbanitas*, or rather words closely derived from *urbanitas*, in his poetry. In poem 39, Catullus describes his disapproval of Egnatius' grin at the most inappropriate moments.

Because Egnatius has white shiny teeth
 He's always grinning. In court on the defendant's
 Side while Counsel's turning on the tears
 He grins. At a devoted son's cremation
 While stricken mother mourns her only boy
 He grins. Whatever's happening, wherever,
 However employed, he grins. He has this tic,
 Not, in my view, attractive or polite (*urbanum*). (39.1-8)

Guy Lee translates *urbanum* as polite in the context of this poem because Catullus is commenting on this most annoying tic of Egnatius' in public. Catullus seems to believe that *urbanitas* is also closely associated with public decorum. Catullus also uses the word *urbanus* in his initial assessment of Suffenus in poem 22, but does not give a clear indication of what it is. Instead, he creates a contrast between those from the city and those from the country. "[T]hat nice

urbane man / Suffenus now seems a mere clodhopper (*caprimulgus*) / Or boor, he's unlike himself, so changed" (22.9-11). The word *caprimulgus* in Quinn's commentary on the poem "is preferred to some such general word as *rusticus*" (158). The contrast Catullus creates heavily agrees with Fitzgerald's and Ramage's observation that *urbanitas* heavily contrasts with those from the city and those from the country. Catullus uses *rusticus* in one poem, excluding one of the pastoral poems, which we consider the opposite of *urbanitas*. Because of its brevity, poem 64 does not convey a clear message. What we can decipher is a clear attack on Caesar in response to Caesar's "displeasure at [Catullus'] attack on his henchman Mamurra" (Quinn 249).

Otho's head (it's mighty weak)
 And, you hick, his half-washed legs,
 Libo's soft and wily fart,
 These at least I could wish displeased
 You and old warmed up fuficius.
 Once more my innocuous iambics
 Will rile you, Generalissimo. (54.1-7)

Here, Lee translates the word *trirustice* as "hick" because in the context of its use; *trirustice* is being used as an attack, or invective, on Caesar. The attack is made even more evident when at the end Catullus refers to Caesar not as a hick

but as a “Generalissimo” in the vocative, connecting the two words by placing them in the same case to highlight the contrast in the meanings of the words. So, when observing *rusticus* being used in a socio-political setting, it is clearly used as an attack, which brings us to the next question. How are personal attacks or attacks on one’s *urbanitas* considered urbane? For this, we look to Cicero.

If one recalls the passage from Cicero’s *Brutus*, the orator describes that Crassus possesses elocution “without the smallest tincture of scurrility”. It seems as if Catullus in poem 53 is being quite scurrilous with his offensively rude and abusive remarks on Caesar. At first glance, it seems as if abuse or attack is not the action of an urbane man, but upon further investigation of the literature, Cicero offers justification for invective in his *Pro Caelio*, in which he writes that if one is attacked just for the sake of insult, then “that way with ill-temper it is called abuse (*convicium*); but if it is done with some sort of wit and mirth, it is then styled bantering (*urbanitas*)” (3.6). This idea of justification for invective applies to Catullus because he often finds that he needs to write invective against those who have harmed him when the attack was uncalled for and therefore considered *convicium*. If you recall in poem 54, Catullus writes that Caesar is riled up by “innocuous iambics” (54.6), so Caesar’s attack was an uncalled for one, considered *convicium*, but Catullus’ attack differs because Catullus was responding to an attack with an attack, considered the actions of an urbane man.

So what type of attack would one consider filled with “some sort of wit and mirth”? Ancient Roman invective in the late Republic took many forms. In “Social Commentary and Political Invective”, Jeffrey W. Tatum writes that invective was a “Tradition [that] was deemed irrefutably good, a habit of mind that entailed a strong belief in the value of conformity at every social level and in the importance of deference to establish hierarchy” (Tatum 334). Tatum goes on to explain that character assassination, attack on hygiene, and sexual submission were common forms of invective in the Roman political sphere. Tatum mentions that Cicero had “impugned the testimony of Clodia Metella [Catullus’ Lesbia] on the grounds that she was lubricious, adulterous, and incestuous” (Tatum 335). If Cicero possesses *urbanitas*, then this type of invective attacking character must be deemed appropriate, but Cicero’s attack is neither lewd nor crude like much of Catullus’s invective, and Tatum does not necessarily explain that these types of invective were considered urbane or sophisticated. Tatum explains that hygiene is attackable and not just some pretentious idiosyncrasy explaining “physical appearance or dress or speech could be viewed, and were viewed, by the Romans as symptoms of a corrupt character and therefore a potential danger to the state” (Tatum 334). All of these forms of invective or vituperation were deemed appropriate during the late Republic in the court of law usually “with some sort of wit and mirth”.

It is my hope that I was able to shed some light on *urbanitas* contextualized through the literature of Cicero, Quintilian, and Catullus. Cicero and Quintilian give us a decent understanding of how a Roman gentleman should act in a handbook sort of manner. These ancient writers all seem to agree that a sense of sophistication must be present in an individual possessing *urbanitas*, and that wit and control of language is necessary too. When it comes to invective, there has to be justification for an urbane man to use attack and the attack must be done with some sense of wit and mirth. The dialogues, though conversational, seem a little bit cold. What we really desire are examples of *urbanitas* in a societal context. Catullus' use of the word *urbanitas* helps add to the definition we seek, but still lacks an example of a text at which we can look for the elements of sophistication. Instead, he clearly states that Suffenus does not possess it. These uses of the word *urbanitas* only get us so far in our discovery of what ancient sophistication looks like in the social context of the Roman Aristocracy? Perhaps an examination of what Catullus does in his pseudo-biographical poetry can help us understand how a Roman gentlemen acts.

Chapter Two: Invectives in the *Convivium* and other Social Settings

Quintilian states that Cicero carried a sense of sophistication in all aspects of his life. This line from Quintilian opens the door for us to connect the *personae* since sophistication (*urbanitas*) can be found in all aspects of a sophisticated man's life, whether it is in social settings, in his office, as a judge of debt and theft, or as a lover. *Urbanitas* was contextualized in the previous chapter, and many of the examples given were in political settings. When one thinks of a place other than the courtroom for one to display his urbanity, there is no better place than the *convivium* to begin. Here, ancient Romans put their *urbanitas* on display for all their friends to see much like an orator or lawyer does in the courtroom. So I turn to Catullus to answer several questions that will help paint a better picture of what Roman *urbanitas* in the late Roman Republic looks like in a more social setting. The courtroom is extremely formalized with codes of decorum, but how can we better understand the codes of Roman social decorum that were not written in a handbook? Although we cannot call Catullus the ancient Emily Post, because his poetry often bites with an invective that attacks others' character, hygiene, sexuality, and upbringing, nevertheless his poetry about the *convivium* and set in the *convivium* offers the modern reader a better understanding of what ancient sophistication looks like. So, the question I hope to answer is how are

these poems that take place in the *convivium* and other social settings glimpses Catullus' sophistication.

To begin our journey into the *convivium* and other social settings, we must begin to describe this rather unique setting in the late Republic of Rome. When analyzed, the word really just means a dinner party, but in certain contexts the word could be defined as "dinner club" as William Whitaker does in his dictionary database from Notre Dame University. Krostenko describes a changing *convivium*; it is a place that "became in the second century more elegant, even extravagant, under the influence of Hellenistic *symposia*, and attracted restrictive attention from 181 [BCE] forward, with limits imposed on the number of guests and the price of the meal" (Krostenko 1-2). So the once simple act of inviting friends over for a meal began to take a formalized shape with the influx of Hellenism into Rome, and along with Hellenism came the importance of an aesthetic experience. Krostenko creates a language of social performance with the words *bellus*, *lepidus*, *festivus*, *facetus*, *venustus*, and *elegans* that evoke the importance of aestheticism in the Roman language, much of which was used in the *convivium*. In "Place Settings: Convivium, Contrast, and Persona in Catullus 12 and 13", Christopher Nappa states that "Catullus intends us to see this *convivium* not only as a meal but as the locus of a happy and pleasurable interchange between friends" (Nappa 391). The convivial setting also seems to

be time in which the senses are heightened in order to enjoy what Nappa describes as a “happy and pleasurable interchange” (391). In “Poem 68: Love and Death, and the Gifts of Venus and the Muses”, Elena Theodorakopoulos states that the “lack of *venustas* is disparaged” (Theodorakopoulos 318) because the *convivium* is an environment in which Catullus “delight[s] friends with [his] wit, [his] charm, [his] salaciousness at times” (Theodorakopoulos 317). Although the aims and goals of conversation in the *convivium* might not be to argue a case like the conversation or dialogue in the courtroom, the social decorum and sophistication from the courtroom seems to be transferred to the *convivium*. Though still clouded, the *convivium* begins to emerge as a place still unformalized but with possible norms in the fact that Catullus aims to delight his friends, and to make the gathering a pleasurable experience. Nappa states that “the convivial culture...becomes a way of showing the depth of the poet’s personality in the face of a shallow social milieu.... [F]riendship and appropriate behavior among friends are important values” (Nappa 387). So how does Catullus create this pleasurable experience? In the context of the *convivium*, Catullus transfers *urbanitas* from the courtroom to the dinner table, and I argue that Catullus does employ the use of his *urbanitas* into the poetry about and set in the *convivium* and other social settings by the use of his wit in creating comical imagery, verbal irony, and several allusions that require an intelligent

understanding of the literary history. As I venture to analyze these poems, I will not compartmentalize my analysis into separate literary devices, but to analyze the poetry more as a whole because Catullus does not employ the use of just one literary device in each poem, but rather, several literary devices.

All dinner parties begin with an invitation to dine, and Catullus writes a rather witty invitation to his friend Fabullus in poem 12. This poem sheds light on the importance of the sensual pleasures in the *convivium* and Catullus expresses these pleasures in the most charming way to allow his urbane *persona* to be ever present throughout the poem.

You'll dine well, my Fabullus, at mine
One day soon if the Gods are kind to you,
If you will bring with you a dinner
Good and large plus a pretty girl
And wine and salt and all the laughs.
If, I repeat, you bring these with you,
Our charmer, you'll dine well, for your
Catullus' purse is full of cobwebs.
But in return you'll get love neat
Or something still more choice and fragrant;
For I'll provide the perfume given

My girl by Venuses and Cupids

And when you smell it you'll ask the Gods,

Fabullus, to make you one large nose. (Poem 13)

At first glance, the poem uses Krostenko's "Language of Social Performance" with the use of the words *sale* (13.5), *venuste* (13.6), and *elegantius* (13.10). So the questions that arise are how does this poem convey the sensual pleasures of the convivium? Does Catullus do so in a witty way? How does this wit express the poet's urbane *persona*?

To answer the first question, Catullus employs the use of sensory language throughout the poem successfully activates four of the five senses. We look at a "pretty girl" (13.4), taste the "dinner / And wine and salt" (13.5-6), hear "all the laughs" (13.6) and smelly lastly the "perfume" (13.11). The presence of these senses expresses the desire for a stimulating evening. As for our second question, Catullus expresses his urbanity in several ways. First, he attempts to charm Fabullus with vocatives such as *mi fabulle* and *venuste noster*, using these endearing names to express the lack of seriousness in his tone. There is also a role reversal present in the poem. Though Catullus sends the invite as a host, he asks that Fabullus provide a bulk of the supplies for the party such as the dinner itself, the wine, and a pretty girl. The role reversal again is an indication that the poem ought not to be taken seriously and perhaps is not truly

meant to elicit a visit from Fabullus, but perhaps another written response continuing the humorous discourse between friends. Lastly, there's the use of comical imagery in the poem. Two strong images come to mind. Catullus deprecates himself by revealing to Fabullus that his "purse is full of cobwebs" (13.8). It's quite comical that a purse that is empty is described full with cobwebs, used to express how long the purse has been empty. The last comical image occurs when Catullus offers Fabullus an oil given to the poet by his girl by way of Venus and Cupid, which after smelling, Fabullus will "ask the Gods...to make [him] one large nose" (13.14). Catullus ends the poem with the promise that the smell will transfigure Fabullus into a giant organ, a comical image used to express his wit and charm, thus showing the presence of his urbane *persona* in a poem about the *convivium*.

Poem 27 offers further insight into the presence of an urbane *persona* in poems about the *convivium*. Catullus, in poem 27, turns to the desires and importance of wine. According to Aven McMaster in *Liberalitas in Late Republican and Early Augustan Roman Poetry*, "[s]ince the consumption of wine was integral to the convivial activities of the *cena*, wine became a symbol of the emotional and communal aspects of the dinner party" (McMaster 45). These emotional and communal aspects come alive in Catullus' poem with the poet injecting his ancient sophistication in several, clever ways.

Boy server of old Falernian,
 Pour me out more pungent cups
 As toastmistress Postumia rules,
 Who's drunker than the drunken grape.
 Pure water, find your level elsewhere.
 You ruin wine. Shift to the sober.
 Here is unmixed Thyonian. (Poem 27)

So in this *convivium*, Catullus wishes to indulge in pure pleasure, as his host Postumia has done, who is described as “drunker than the drunken grape” (27.4). In this poem, at first glance Catullus’ tone sounds very much like the one of a demanding drunk, but I argue that he has created rather comical and intelligent choices in order to express his urbane *persona*. The portions of the poem that show a level of sophistication are changing the gender of the master of revels to a woman and making mythological references that a learned, witty man would notice. According to Daniel H. Garrison in *The Student’s Catullus*, this poem imitates an epigrammatic style “later much favored by Horace” (Garrison 108) and “evoke[s] the wine-women-and-song mood of the symposium or Greek stag party” (Garrison 108). *Postumiae magistra* (Mistress of Ceremonies), according to Garrison, was usually the role of the *magister bibendi* (Master of Ceremonies), “who would call the toasts and the strength of the wine” (Garrison 108). Catullus

also uses mythological references in the last lines of the poem to reference water and wine. The poet addresses *lymphae*, which according to Garrison is “an apostrophe to the water nymphs, who spoil the wine by diluting it” (Garrison 109). Water is for the sober world and has no place in the *convivium*. Catullus finally references Bacchus in the last lines “Here is unmixed Thyonian” (27.7). The word *Thyonianus* is a reference to Bacchus’s mother, Thyone, and here is an allusion that the learned would understand. Catullus personifies the wine as the God Bacchus at the end with a “non-sense word” (Garrison 109) that truly appears learned. He uses this word to express his want for the purity of the wine. Here, Catullus’ use of imagery, that to the reader on the surface level has a rather intoxicated tone, is quite learned and highly crafted thus expressing that the poet’s urbane *persona* is present.

Before, I examined Catullus’ use of language to express just the senses, but what about the emotional sense? How does Catullus begin to break down the walls of partiality when it comes to melding the political and social the worlds? Does he do this with *urbanitas*? An examination of poem 51 will begin to clarify many of these questions.

That man is seen by me as a God’s equal
 Or (if it may be said) the Gods’ superior,
 Who sitting opposite again and again

Watches and hears *you*

Sweetly laughing—which dispossesses poor me

Of all my senses, for no sooner, Lesbia,

Do I look at you than there's no power left me

[Of speech in my mouth,]

But my tongue's paralysed, invisible flame

Courses down through my limbs, with din of their own

My ears are ringing and twin darkness covers

The light of my eyes.

Leisure, Catullus, does not agree with you.

At leisure you're restless, too excitable.

Leisure in the past has ruined rulers and

Prosperous cities. (Poem 51)

Catullus makes clear that his feelings or emotions are absent of influence by the senses. He consistently states how Lesbia's enjoyment at the dinner table has caused him to feel this otherworldly sense that disables his actual senses. His ears ring, eyes are covered by darkness, and he has no power to move. Lesbia's presence at the *convivium* causes him a sensual sickness that sends a flame that "[c]ourses down through [his] limbs" (51.9). Theodorakopoulos argues that "the atmosphere at such a convivial gathering...can come close to being

erotically charged” (317). Catullus here begins to break down the walls not between the courtroom and the *convivium*, but between the *convivium* and the bedroom. Catullus begins to break down the walls that separate his *personae* in this poem, mentioning all of the realms: *convivium*, bedroom, and public life. In the very last lines, Catullus addresses his acknowledgement of Roman public life and almost warns himself of a possible impending doom that the life of *otium* (leisure) could lead him too, but he makes no efforts to follow his own warning. And so how does the poet express his sophistication? Well, the obvious first expression of sophistication is that the form of this poem imitates and adapts a well-known poem by Sappho, the ancient erotic poetess from Lesbos. The next, the poet creates beautiful imagery with this invisible flame causing his senses to leave him. The very melding of the three worlds is the final way in which he shows his sophistication. Catullus thus expresses his urbane *persona* by putting on display his learned knowledge of ancient writers, his ability to write with beautiful imagery, and his novel ideas about Roman society by breaking down the walls that separate courtroom, *convivium*, and bedroom. More work needs to be done on the invitation into Catullus’ bedroom, or love life, and that will be revealed in a later chapter.

Though Catullus often expresses his urbane *persona* in poems about social settings that are often successfully enjoyable, we might find it harder to

defend him when he makes attacks on those who seem to express a lack of *urbanitas*. As Cicero mentions in *Pro Caelio*, there is a fine line between *convicium* and attack done with a sense of “wit and mirth”. Catullus is capable of friendly, playful attack. Take for instance poem 84.

‘Hemoluments’ said Arrius, meaning to say
 ‘Emoluments’ and ‘hambush meaning ‘ambush’,
 Hoping that he had spoken most impressively
 When he said ‘hambush’ with great emphasis.
 His mother, her free-born brother and his maternal
 Grandparents, I believe, all spoke like that.
 Posted to Syria he gave the ears of all a rest.
 They heard the same words smoothly and gently
 spoken
 And had no fear thenceforward of such aspirates,
 When suddenly there came the frightful news
 That after Arrius arrived the Ionian waves,
 Ionian no more, became ‘Hionian’. (Poem 84)

Catullus ridicules Arrius for his attempt at an urbane accent, with the added aspirates to words beginning with a vowel. Catullus knows that these words were not misspoken, because Arrius says the aspirate with “emphasis” (84.4). His

attack pokes fun at Arrius' affected speech, but he also uses this idea of finding differences between Arrius' speech and what is socially accepted in Rome the city. Catullus states that Arrius' speech was heard "gently and smoothly" (84.8) in Syria. But Catullus takes the attack one step further, when even in Syria Arrius' aspirates are not accepted when he pronounces Ionian as "Hionian" (84.12). The attack here seems playful and does nothing more but attack the way a man speaks, separating this man from sophisticated Roman society and even foreign society, this second separation making the poem that much more comical. Catullus builds up the separation, pushing Arrius further and further away. Catullus sets Arrius up for failure with situational irony. The effect of using aspirates to sound sophisticated has the opposite effect, thus creating a comical situation in which Arrius is not aware of his own *faux pas*.

So in poem 84, Catullus' urbane *persona* is quite present. His tone sounds befitting of any social setting, and the attack on Arrius is done in a learned, witty way. But there are invectives in which Catullus' tone sounds quite harsh and scurrilous. How does one begin to defend the attacks Catullus makes on others because of a lack of convivial decorum? Well, sometimes he's indefensible, but he charms the reader into forgiving his missteps with the most learned wordplay and use of literary devices, like in poem 47.

Socraton and Porcius, Piso's pair

Of left-hand men, the world's Itch and Greed,
 That docked Priapus prefers you
 To my Veraniolus and Fabullus?
 Do you throw smart expensive parties
 All day long, while my companions
 Tout in the streets for invitations? (Poem 47)

This poem attacks and emasculates his enemies because his friends are denied access into the *convivium*. The poet writes about two of his dear *sodales* (comrades) Veraniolus and Fabullus are not invited to parties thrown by Socraton and Porcius. As stated before, the invitation is an important aspect of the *convivium* and Catullus thinks his friends are worth of an invite. This invective is quite harsh because Catullus degrades Socraton and Porcius' when he attacks their character, stating that they are "left-hand men, the world's Itch and Greed" (47.2). According to Lee, Porcius and Socraton "practised extortion in the province on Piso's behalf" (Lee 161). Extortion, or any other crime, does not befit a sophisticated Roman. Catullus attacks their integrity and work ethic, their *negotium*, and does not think they have the right to deny anyone to any gathering. Lee believes that the reference to *de die* (all day long) is "to dine before the end of the working day" (Lee 161). Lee also states that this is a

Sybaritic act, something over-indulgent. This too is not a quality of a Roman citizen possessing *urbantias*.

These are rather harsh criticisms just because his friends were denied an invitation. How does Catullus begin to mitigate his scurrility? Well, the poet employs the use of clever, humorous imagery and displays a learned understanding of the god Priapus. Catullus mentions that Socration and Porcius are favored by a phallic god, Priapus. In this reference to favoritism, Garrison states that “calling the otherwise unnamed Piso [Priapus] suggests his sexual excesses, which were faithfully chronicled by Cicero” (Garrison 119). The god Priapus was most notably known during the Late Republic as a Garden statue that protected plants from birds. According to Richard W. Hooper in *The Priapus Poems: Erotic Epigrams from Ancient Rome*, many of the Priapus statues in ancient Roman gardens were “carved crudely from a log of cheap wood, their most outstanding characteristic being a large erect red phallus that was often supplied by a convenient fork in the log” (Hooper 1). Hooper cites that Priapus can have a dual meaning, one that is comical which involves crass sexual acts, and another as a protector. Which does Catullus draw upon? The more sexual reading would indicate that Priapus prefers Porcius and Socration. If drawn upon as a protector, Priapus protects the garden, and is a god of fertility. Catullus does not mention any indication of fertility or garden in the poem, but does use sexual

language in the word *verpus*, which translates to foreskin pulled back. So I argue that Catullus intends for the reader to think that Priapus therefore favors Porcius and Socraton for sexual acts as punishment for crimes that they commit. Many of the poems in the *Priaprea* warn boys and girls of the God's favor, especially if one steals. Both Porcius and Socraton, indicated by the word *sinestrae* (left side which has a negative, 'sinister' connotation), are deemed guilty of such a violation of law and urbane expectations. Catullus makes a connection between Priapus and Piso, mentioned earlier in the poem, by use of alliteration. Catullus states the Socraton and Porcius are favored by Priapus, who is described having his foreskin pulled back, in order to emasculate the two men. Catullus makes them submissive because they did not invite Catullus' friends to their parties, possibly jeopardizing their citizenship. In "Sexual Scrawling: Homoerotic Invective in Pompeian Graffiti", Alicia Hightower explains that "[t]hose perceived to be passive men were grouped into the *infamia* category in which they would have lost their legal rights and faced serious humiliation" (Hightower 55).

Stating that a phallic god favors the two men does not necessarily seem to be a quality of a sophisticated Roman, but it is Catullus' understanding of the god Priapus and use of the culturally accepted norms of the god to humiliate three 'sinister' men for their deplorable political acts in a public arena. Catullus here too has broken down the barriers of political life and social life. A person's life is no

longer compartmentalized as a politician versus an everyday citizen. In the world of Catullan *urbanitas*, every aspect of one's life creates an overall perception of the person, and Catullus sees Porcius and Socration as deplorable men.

In essence, Catullus indirectly asserts his dominance through his symbolism over all three of his enemies Piso, Porcius, and Socration. He makes a connection between Piso and a cheaply made statue, which many laugh at, and even the gods shun. Hooper writes about an ancient Roman panel in which “[a]n altar panel from the time of Trajan...depicts Aphrodite recoiling at the sight of her infant son, whose phallus can be seen sticking out of the cradle” (Hooper 1). While his language and images are quite crass and vulgar, we forgive Catullus for his vulgarity because of the sophisticated use of the phallic god and the comical tone he creates.

I hope that the analysis of these poems has created some semblance of a glimpse of sophistication in Catullus' world of the *convivium* and other social settings. Catullus creates this world in which aesthetic senses are important, and what's even more important is the presence of someone who can hinder all his senses evoking an emotional response. Catullus brings the social world that much closer to the political world when he attacks those who seem to break codes in decorum, but he too sometimes go too far. Yet we forgive him because he goes too far in such a sophisticated manner. His urbane *persona* connects

every aspect of one's life together to create the whole picture of a person.

Catullus uses his ability to write beautifully creating imagery, using learned allusions, and writing within such a succinct form and organization that conveys his appreciation for the *convivium* and other social settings in which he would find himself. By finding that Catullus begins to break down the walls between politician, socialite, writer, friend, and lover, we begin to see that he puts a great deal of sophistication into each theme. I still plan to use the contextualization used in chapter one to have a benchmark from where to start exploring his sophistication, but like everyone else, Catullus makes lapses in judgment. The beauty is that we for some reason continue to forgive and let it go.

Chapter Three: The *Urbane Persona* in Poetry on Poetry

At its conception, much of Roman literature was translated from Greek tragedies and comedies, but during the late Republic both Sellar and Quinn identify a marked change in the authors and poets of Rome due in part to the emergence of the new, independent poet. Roman literary tradition began as a patriarchal construct: poets were sponsored by patrons and wrote according to the patron's taste, but toward the end of the Republic, poets became independently wealthy and "even the *patroni*, began themselves to dabble in poetry" (Quinn 12). Because of the new level of economic independence, poets imparted their own perspective and personality into their works. In essence, economic freedom led to intellectual freedom to write whatever they wanted. "This is the position in the foreground of interest that Roman republican satire...accords to the personality of the poet, who is not the anonymous craftsman of epic and the drama, but a person whose status and complex attitudes become part of the subject-matter of his poetry" (Quinn 12). It is here we see that poets such as Juvenal, Horace, and Catullus begin to write from a more personal and independent perspective and continue to develop the *persona* of the poet as a real person living in Ancient Rome who faces many personal problems others face. But the poets such as Juvenal and Horace still have this sense of inauthenticity and Roman austerity. Sellar writes that "Horace rises

above his irony and epicureanism, to celebrate the imperial majesty of Rome, and to bear witness to the purity of the Sabine households, and to the virtues exhibited in the best types of Roman character” (Sellar 14). Sellar presents a rather intriguing question in his generalization of Horace. If Sellar thinks that Horace is inauthentic, then what makes a poet authentic? How does a poet reveal that he is a real person through his poetry?

With the rise of the independent poetic perspective comes a group of poets called the *poetae novi*, a group of poets who had the same aesthetics for Roman poetry which in turn helped them develop a camaraderie very similar to the poets, artists, and musicians in the *salons* of Impressionistic France in the late nineteenth-century. Quinn marks three qualities that mark a difference from the *poetae novi* and the rest of the Roman literary tradition.

Firstly, the poet becomes an independent personality who forces his personality into his poetry. Secondly, the poet abandons the service of the community for a more esoteric, more purely poetic kind of poetry. Thirdly, the unit becomes the short poem, intensely personal and structurally sophisticated. (Quinn 26)

Catullus’ poems are intensely personal, dealing with situations to which many Romans can relate, and marks a clear contrast to the strong sense of idealism and nationalism found in his contemporaries and the poets preceding him.

So with the freedom from the social construct of the patron-poet relationship, poets had more liberty to express their personality in their poetry, which strengthens the argument that the poetic *persona* is more of a reflection of self. Yet with this freedom there comes the possibility of chaos or a nebulous characterization of the *poetae novi*. Catullus often writes poetry on poetry. Much of the time he writes in the style of *art for art's sake*. His epyllions *Atticus* and *Bacchus and Ariadne* are quite learned and express his *urbanitas* with their new approaches to telling these myths and expressing his understanding of all aspects of mythology. But in his more *esoteric* poetry on poetry, how does the poet express his *urbanitas*? What are the typical constructs of *urbanitas* when your job is to write poetry? And to reiterate previously posed questions, what makes a poet authentic? How does a poet reveal he is a real person through his poetry? It is my hope that an analysis of certain poems will lead us to the answers to these questions.

To begin this journey into melding the poetic persona into the urbane *persona*, I would like to look back at a poem that incorporates several aspects of the proposed urbane *persona*. Poem 51 is unarguably written about Lesbia and the emotions Catullus feels about her, but the last stanza seems disjointed:

Leisure, Catullus, does not agree with you.

At leisure you're restless, too excitable.

Leisure in the past has ruined rulers and
 Prosperous cities. (Poem 51.13-16)

The word in question here is leisure (*otium*). The stanza, taken at face value, is about how leisure or time off of work leads to troubles. Quinn states that “[f]rom the *otium* in his personal life, C[atullus] passes to the life of peoples, kings and cities. The idea that prolonged peace weakened the energy of a city or nation figures prominently in Poseidonius...Theognis...also Agamemnon, in Ennius, *Iphegenia*...There is an echo of C. in Horace” (Quinn 245). Quinn seems to connote *otium* with peace, but what if Catullus redefines his *otium*? Catullus’ occupation is unique. He works and writes now independently and without influence from others. In *Catullus, Cicero, and a Society of Patrons: the Generation of the Text*, Sarah Culpepper Stroup argues

that *otium* signals, in the late Republican textual code, ‘time to write’ (and talk about writing) and that it would have functioned...as a terminological marker directing our ‘ideal reader’ to a text’s underlying point of focus.

(Stroup 46)

What if we take his *otium* as a time to write? This could be taken as a sort of writer’s brainstorming and drafting phase. This new translation of the word *otium* in a Catullan context also works in this stanza. When writers have time to write, they destroy rulers and cities. So much of the literature of the past has destroyed

rulers: Achilles in the *Illiad*, Agamemnon, etc. So many cities have been destroyed, like Troy. Perhaps Catullus means that at leisure, or during his time for brainstorming and writing, he writes literature that ultimately ends in disastrous beauty.

And so, how does this new translation for the word *otium* express the poet's *urbanitas*? Let's examine a second use of the word *otium* in poem 50.

At leisure, Licinius, yesterday
We'd much fun with my writing-tablets
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. (Poem 50)

Catullus describes Licinius and himself at leisure. During this supposedly leisure time they write poetry that excites Catullus, fueling the flames for Catullus to write poem 50. Under the assumption that writing poetry about life is Catullus *negotium*, then when Catullus is *otiosus*, he is technically working on the inspiration for his next poem. And so how does one know Catullus is *otiosus*? The one similarity between the two afflictions caused by being at leisure is the feeling of an inspirational flame. Catullus describes this in both poems. Licinius' wit and charm left Catullus *incensus* (50.8), or "fired-up" and Lesbia's laughter in poem 51 causes Catullus to feel an "invisible flame / Cours[ing] down through [his] limbs" (51.9-10). However, there seems to be a juxtaposition of what being at leisure does to the poet when looking at the poet's descriptions of his afflictions between poem 50 and 51. In poem 50, being at leisure excites Catullus and causes him restlessness.

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. (50.10-13)

The opposite occurs in poem 51. “[W]ith din of their own / My ears are ringing and twin darkness covers / The light of my eyes” (51.10-12). There is a paralysis that occurs in poem 51 from being at leisure, which prevents him from doing nothing else but think of the laughter, which still rings in his ears even though dinner has long since passed. Catullus does seem to be inspired to work and write while at leisure but the emotions and thoughts about the time at leisure are mixed, much like the emotions one feels in his personal life. Catullus’ leisure reveals the poet’s authenticity because life at leisure does not cause one singular feeling. It can be a tumultuous journey with many mixed feelings and emotions, which express themselves throughout his individual poems. And so how does this expression of the reality of life at leisure reveal his *urbanitas*? According to Krostenko, “the language of social performance here indicates the subcutaneous presence of the rules associated with the cultural model...Acts of aestheticism in the late Republic, as we have seen, demanded a response in kind” (Krostenko 248). The use of the words *lepidus* and *facetiae* indicate to us that Catullus not only discusses this aesthetic pleasure that Catullus feels from writing poetry with

Licinius, but also expresses this act of cultural fulfillment and taste which manifest themselves from the act of writing. Also, at the end of poem Catullus makes an allusion to Nemesis.

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. (50.16-21)

The lines ask for Licinius to critique the poem Catullus has written “lying on the couch half dead” (50.15), but Catullus doesn't want to be judged too harshly and without reason because that would technically be *convicium*, an attack that is uncalled for and not urbane. Catullus does not warn that he will attack Licinius for any *convicium* but that Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, will attack Licinius if there is harsh judgment that is unexplainable. Catullus cleverly adds humor through this contradictory statement at the end. He seeks critique but tells Licinius not to judge. This clever humor thus reveals his *urbanitas*.

Since Catullus' *negotium* is as a writer, Catullus continually inspires his other writer friends to continue to write even when they are lead astray by some of the most indomitable distractions for poets: women. Catullus expresses his

urbanity well in a clever letter to his friend Caecilius by personifying his lines, verses, and meters. His poetry takes on abilities only humans can do. In so doing, he establishes the power poetry has to convey ideas, but which in turn incites physical action. This is another way of displaying his *urbanitas* and wit through his verses. Catullus's poetry has a mind of its own in poem 35. Here, he addresses the actual papyrus on which the poem is written instead of addressing Caecilius directly. The poem is meant as an invitation to Caecilius to come see Catullus in the country so that Caecilius can hear an evaluation of the literary work that Caecilius wrote. The word order of the last two lines amplifies the unfinished nature of the work, creating chiasmus with two words that start with the letter "m" being broken up and not put together because of its *incohata* state. Catullus values the power of poetry over that of the sexual power of a lovely woman, who was moved by a poem of Caecilius, *Dindymi Domanam*, to love Caecilius. So the power of the papyrus, or actual message, is stronger than the person. The message's personified role, being addressed in the vocative, makes the message that much stronger and more powerful, providing motivation to visit Catullus so that Caecilius' unfinished work can be finished. Caecilius is being hindered by love from finishing a great work that Catullus wants edited, and so Catullus uses poetry to call for Caecilius, which Catullus feels is a stronger invocation and hopes that the strength of the papyrus will be just as strong in

setting Caecilius to action as it does Caecilius' girl.

Circling back to the final lines of poem 50, what happens when Catullus does unleash Nemesis on poets who seem to attack his poetry without causation? Catullus seems to think himself a mighty-fine poet. Perhaps the final lines of poem 50 serve as a warning to other poets who read his poetry not to judge him because he will go as far as to invoke the Goddess Nemesis. And so, Catullus does invoke the Goddess several times against those who have either attacked his poetry, taken the tools by which he can write poetry, or those who have sent or written poor poetry for Catullus to read. The invective poems which Catullus writes attack masculinity, and character, but in witty charming ways, creating a humorous tone that expresses the poet's *urbanitas*.

When others attack Catullus' poetry, he often responds with invective that attacks the masculinity of these men. In poem 16, at first glance this invective seems quite harsh. Catullus initially states that he will rape Aurelius and Furius orally and anally, *Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo* (16.1) because they think that Catullus' poetry is soft in reference to a flaccid penis, and so Catullus must not be *parvum pudicum*, a little modest. Yes, this threat does sound quite harsh, but there seems to be an on going joke between Furius, Aurelius, and Catullus in which they attack one another's masculinity. I argue that they are really friends, not enemies, and this is precisely why they can speak with one another in such

harsh words and not think very much of it. In looking at the numerous poems Catullus wrote, Furius and Aurelius receive invective poems from Catullus in several instances in which he threatens to rape them anally and orally in poems 15, 21, and 23. But Catullus also writes a *faux homage* to the travels and journeys of Furius and Aurelius, including them in an attack on Lesbia in poem 11, asking them to tell Lesbia farewell and wishing her happiness “with her adulterers, / three hundred together” (11.17-18). So, the act of rape with which Catullus threatens Furius and Aurelius is merely an inside-joke amongst friends, which is quite obscene, but Catullus frames the attack to display his *urbanitas*. Catullus goes on to state that Furius and Aurelius misunderstand the purpose of his hyperbole in the thousand kisses poetry. It is not meant to incite sexual desire in *pueris* (boys) but in *pilosus* (old, hairy men). Catullus is obviously stating that older men need this hyperbole truly to feel the love and affection found in the poems with the many thousand kisses because as one ages, one loses his sense of feeling. So heightened sensitivity is necessary in order to feel what a boy feels, which Catullus wishes to incite in his reader. Aurelius and Furius misunderstand Catullus’ poems, and so must be punished with invective, but threatening rape orally and anally seems to be a bit extreme and hard to justify from one who possesses *urbanitas*. Since Aurelius and Furius misunderstand the hyperbole meant in the thousand kisses poems, Catullus must in turn teach them

a lesson in hyperbole, which is why he threatens these sexual acts. The poem is framed with the first line also ending the final line, further driving the point of this extreme hyperbole with which Catullus writes this invective, thus expressing the poet's *urbanitas* despite the obscene invective.

Finally, Catullus attacks those who send him poorly written poetry with invective that separates certain poets from Catullus' circle of neoteric poets. In poem 14, Catullus' dear friend Calvus sends him some extremely poor poetry, so poor that Catullus considers them "profanities" (14.7). Catullus is obviously emotional about reading these poor poets stating "Great Gods, a damned awful little book / For you to send to your Catullus / To kill him outright on that day / Of all days best—the Saturnalia" (14.12-15). The juxtaposition of Catullus' pain that is akin to death about reading the poor poetry and having read them on the best of all days heightens the injury the poet suffers from his dear friend, and so he retaliates by going to "all the bookstalls, [and] pick[ing] up all of the poison— / Suffenus, Caesius and Aquinus— / And pay [Calvus] back with pains like them" (Catullus 14.18-20). Catullus sees that his friend has sent these bad poems to him in jest, which is evident when Catullus addresses Calvus as *salse*, and so he must repay the favor in jest expressing the same wit and *urbanitas*.

Poem 95 is another poem in which Catullus addresses poor poetry.

Catullus receives a finished version of Cinna's *Zmyrna*, which is an epyllion. The

epyllion is a new genre of poetry with which the neoteric poets of the late Republic experimented. The epyllion are essentially mini-epics that were meticulously crafted. According to William Fitzgerald in his *Catullan Provocations*, the epyllion “seems to have been required as proof of [a] poet’s powers, and the spirit of rivalry” (Fitzgerald 140). Zmyrna is lost today, but according to Catullus it took nine years for Cinna to craft the epyllion. In the poem, he uses language that attacks Calvus for his poor ability to write and uses his poor poetry to differentiate between what constitutes well-written poetry and what does not. Catullus seems to criticize excessively long poems. It is the style of neoteric poetry to write concisely in a condensed manner, where as many poets such as Hortensius have written “five hundred thousand in one [year]” (95.3). So Catullus attacks those who are not progressively writing in this neoteric style. In other poems, we’ve analyzed poets who have written excessively such as Suffenus in poem 22, but poem 95 clearly indicates the ostracism of many poets because of the lack of care on their part in writing. Catullus concludes the poem stating that Volusius’ writing will be used as “loose jackets for mackerel” (95.8). He again attacks the writing, stating that it has no meaningful value and so the paper on which Volusius wrote only has the practical value of wrapping fish, but what he states in the last line attacks a populace. “The crowd can admire long-winded Antimachus” (95.10). In this line,

Catullus clearly draws the line between his inner circle of friends, and all others. Not only must the members of his circle have access to high society, but they must also have the ability to appreciate well-written poetry.

In this chapter, I hoped to shed light on how Catullus's poetic persona functions as an important part of his urbane *persona*. Catullus is not just a leisurely, privileged man. Since his role in Ancient Roman society is as a free, independent poet, those moments when he independently lives his life and has the freedom to think are when he contributes to better Roman society. Catullus' genuine nature, good humor, and sophistication throughout the poem meld his role as the poet to his urbane *persona* when he sophisticatedly describes what happens in his life. Catullus writes poetry with multiple levels of meaning that require the reader to be learned and also expresses the aesthetics of the neoteric poets in these implicit meanings. Though the explicit meaning may appear as a conventional dedication or invitation, the poet has simultaneously expressed an urbane sophistication that shows Catullus' tastes and love of poetry for poetry's sake. Catullus has opened poetry to the language of social performance by using the vocabulary to express what he believes is good tastes, but when tastes are attacked Catullus retaliates with the kind of invective that attacks masculinity, character, and *urbanitas* with witty and humorous poems that

express the poet's urbane *persona* through hyperbole, overstatement, and juxtapositions.

Chapter Four: Catullus' View on Theft and Debt

Debt and Theft sound like more appropriate topics for discussion in the courtroom, but Catullus seems to have a strong point of view on them too.

Several of his poems deal with the topics but if we try to identify the setting in which these poems are read, we can assume that the poems are read in more private social settings. Much is written about the legal system of ancient Rome but how does an urbane sophisticated population begin to deal with debt and theft in their everyday social life? How does one begin to judge debtors and thieves when late Republic high society was so scandalous and full of debtors and thieves? I look to Catullus to hopefully answer some of these questions.

In "Social Commentary and Political Invective," the scholar W. Jeffrey Tatum writes:

Catullus disapprobates theft, in registers varying from light-hearted (but not unserious) drollery over the removal of napkins (poem 12) to shocking obscenities (e.g., poems 25, 33) to vaporizing outrage over the wholesale plundering of the northern provinces by Caesar and his associates (poem 29). Prodigality and financial embarrassment—serious and unsentimental matters in Rome—are alleged, and, not unnaturally in Roman invective, they are connected to unrestrained physical appetites. (Tatum 337)

From this, Tatum explains that Catullus' reactions vary from a light-hearted tone to obscenities, which seem to be on opposite sides of the spectrum. I argue that Catullus continues to express a pervading urbane *persona* despite the reaction, whether it is light-hearted or obscene, to those in debt or theft. Society protects the public from criminals by incarcerating the criminals. In Catullus' world, he protects his society by ostracizing criminals through invective. Obscenities used in the courtroom that were considered urbane should also be considered urbane in the arena of high society if they both have the same means.

Catullus has been both the thief and the arbiter of thieves; he has also been the debtor and the arbiter of debtors. In these analyses of poems on the topics of debt and theft, we find that Catullus reveals to the reader that these subjects are rather personal to him, in keeping with Quinn's observation of this new type of personal poetry in the late Republic. Two poems establish the poet's perspective on debt and theft. In poem 99, Catullus experiences the negative repercussions that occurred after his theft of one of Juventius' kisses. Catullus was put into debt while performing his civic duty as explained in poem 28, in which he also explains that he felt as if he was put into the submissive role. These offenses defame one's character, and change one's power in terms of dominance and submissiveness. In this section, I will examine the literature in which Catullus addresses debt and theft, build a case in which Catullus writes

invective against debtors and thieves because he himself has been in the position of the thief and debtor and has had to face the consequences. The invective poems use attacks such as character defamation, and placing those in debt in a submissive role. Catullus also questions the roots of his criminals and their family's well being. Though the invective may seem obscene, Catullus' invectives persecute the men still using elements of overstatement, hyperbole, and building comical scenes in which these men are placed, thus expressing his urbane persona.

Catullus establishes his beliefs in how thieves and debtors should be punished or treated when he puts himself in the role as the thief and the debtor in poems 99 and 28 respectively. From understanding Catullus' punishments or repercussions in these situations, we can then postulate that the poet wants other thieves and debtors to face the repercussions of having their character defamed, masculinity questioned, and role of the submissive/dominate reversed when they have committed such crimes. Poem 99 is often considered just a love poem about a misunderstanding Catullus has with Juventius, but this poem also expresses the poet's belief system about theft and how thieves must be emasculated and their character defamed, but in a rather urbane way. The meaning is definitely in a more implicit layer of the poem. Catullus' *urbanitas* manifests itself in the situational comedy he creates by having a boy with rather

effeminate qualities take some rather masculine actions. Catullus “stole from [Juventius] / A sweeter kiss than sweet ambrosia” (99.1-2). This act of theft of something so precious as his kisses causes a reaction that Catullus did not anticipate, for Juventius “drenched [his] lips with water-drops and wiped them with soft knuckles, / Lest anything infectious from [Catullus’] mouth remain” (99.7-9). In these lines, the reader finds juxtaposition between what Catullus intended and how they were received, a situational irony that makes this scene quite comical. He is in a moment of great joy and entertainment, and so takes offense of to this theft, and Catullus interprets Juventius’ feelings about the kiss when the Catullus’ lips are compared to that of a “pissed-on whore’s foul spittle.” (99.10) Julia Haig Gaisser writes that this “insult ‘unmanned’ the persona in two ways: both by the allegation of passive oral sex and by the comparison to the lowest kind of *female* prostitute” (Gaisser 65). Gaisser further goes on to explain that the poem’s interpretation in thematic terms of love poetry is unclear. “Is he reminding Juventius of the episode in hopes of receiving an apology and perhaps even a genuine offer of unpunished kisses, or simply to break off with him? There is no way to tell” (Gaisser 66). Though these intentions about the current condition of the relationship between Catullus and Juventius are unclear at the end of the poem, it is clear that Catullus has established that those who steal must face consequences such as emasculation and character defamation in a sort of social

setting judgment. Catullus' role in his relationship with Juventius is as the dominant, because he refers to Juventius as *flosculus*, a flower, in poem 24. Now, the roles have been reversed because Juventius has taken actions against Catullus, taking on a very masochistic role in which he crucifies Catullus, making the poet go through extreme pain in order for him to feel the punishment a thief ought to feel. He feels as if he has been punished in the worst possible ways, feeling almost crucified and belittled, which he in turn does to those who steal as an arbiter not in court, but in a less formalized social setting such as a reading of his poetry whether in *convivium* or independently. Catullus seems to mingle the dominant with the submissive in his characterization of Juventius in this poem. Juventius has the ability to "crucify [the poet] in every way" (99.12) and yet, he is described as honeysweet and *mollibus articulis*, with soft fingers, in lines 1 and 8 respectively. These are effeminate words, used to describe one in a submissive role. But this submissive boy has been crucifying Catullus, which action entails humiliation and impaling with nails, which can be thought of as penetration, and thus is a dominant controlling action. This mingling of submissive and dominant roles creates a humorous tone and thus expresses Catullus' urbane persona and expressing the conditions and punishments that those who steal need to face and will face in his poetry, by taking on submissive roles, and being degraded to those in lower social standings.

In establishing how Catullus was put into the submissive role and degraded to a lower social standing when he stole a kiss from Juventius, Catullus sets forth the invective he uses to attack those who steal from him. The most famous poem in which we see Catullus' reaction to theft is poem 12. Catullus in this poem uses character defamation and shaming to attack Asinius' theft of one of the poet's prized napkins. Scholars have differing points of view on this theft, where Kenneth Quinn's interpretation is the standard from which he explains that the poem is

A piece of occasional verse, the outcome of circumstances beyond our conjecture. But the circumstances are not really so important; nor need we seek for undercurrent of irony running counter to what C.'s words assert...The Romans apparently took their own napkins to a dinner party; they ate of course with their fingers. (Quinn 130)

As stated previously, Tatum is in agreement with Quinn, stating that the poem is "light-hearted...drollery over the removal of napkins" (Tatum 337) but others believe that the poem has more serious undertones. Sarah Culpepper Stroup seems to think that the napkin does not merely serve as a *memento* of friendship being stolen but has been taken as a monetary action to try to indebt Catullus.

In charging that Asinius' 'transaction' (the theft) was a cash-interested one...In denying his own financial interest in the *munus*, Catullus shifts

onto Asinius the obviously insulting, if humorously disingenuous, charge of base economic motivation. (Stroup 75)

So Stroup argues that Catullus' believes that this was a monetary attack, and so Asinius must be dealt with harshly. Gaisser also uses some pretty harsh words to describe Asinius' theft. The poem "castigates someone gauche enough to filch a napkin at a dinner party" (Gaisser 8). Catullus attacks Asinius by attacking his wit and intelligence, hence Catullus disqualifies Asinius' *urbanitas*, stating that he tried to be *salsum* (Catullus 12.4) but he failed. He also addresses Asinius as *inepte* in the vocative to explicitly label him incapable of *urbanitas*. Catullus continues to attack Asinius further expressing the poet's *urbanitas* when he compares the thief to his rather urbane brother, Pollio.

Believe Pollio

Your brother, who would gladly give

A talent to undo your thefts.

For he's a boy full of wit and charm. (12.6-9)

In this comparison, Catullus not only implies that Asinius does not possess *urbanitas*, but also attempts to make Asinius an outcast from his own family. This level of shame reflects not only on Asinius, but Asinius' household, thus further showing Catullus' dominance in this social situation and expressing his *urbanitas*.

Catullus continues to assert his *urbanitas* through invective poems that attack two other thieves through emasculation. In poem 25, Thallus has taken several items from Catullus, and Catullus demands their return. The poem begins as an invective displaying *urbanitas*, when Catullus attacks Thallus' physical qualities. "Softer than / a little furry bunny / Or a goosey's marrow or / a teenyweeny ear-lobe / Or an old man's drooping penis / or a spider's dust trap" (25.1-3). In these lines, on the surface Catullus attacks Thallus' physical appearance, but when taking a closer look at the words *mollior* and *pene languido*, this is attack on Thallus' virility. When Catullus' poetry was described as *molliculi* in poem 16, he took it as an attack on his virility, so in attacking Thallus' masculinity, the poet has made the thief take the submissive role. Catullus also warns Thallus of possible physical punishments. If he does not return the "cloak,...Spanish napkin...and those Bythynian face-towels" (25.6-7), Thallus' "flabby little flanks / and namby-pamby handies / [will be] branded in an ugly way / and scribbled on with lashes" (25.10-11). Here, we see the emasculation again, but also the threat of physical attack, which again was a central image in poem 99 in which Catullus was crucified for stealing from Juventius. So far Catullus has created his invective attacking Thallus and placing him in a rather emasculated, submissive role, but this is done in a comical way in order to express Catullus' urbane persona. Catullus creates comparisons between soft things such as

bunnies, goose feathers, and then starts changing to bodily softness, first with earlobes and then inserts obscenity in the form of an old man's penis. According to Marilyn Skinner in "Ego Mulier: the Construction of Male Sexuality in Catullus," "the debilitating onset of 'shameful' old age robs even the most robust and austere male of active manhood" (Skinner 135). In creating this comical imagery and comparison, Catullus uses invective that does the job of emasculation and forcing into submission, while still keeping his witty, urbane persona active.

Catullus continues to emasculate and put into submission those who steal from him with invective that again bites but has witty elements that express the poet's *urbanitas*. The final poem in which theft is a central theme is poem 15. Here, Aurelius attempts to steal Juventius from Catullus. The poem seems to be split into three sections in order to create a comedic effect that will show that the poet is witty in his invective. In the first, Catullus addresses Aurelius pleasantly about why Aurelius should guard the boy. He sounds almost as if he is pleading to Aurelius asking a "modest favour—" (15.2). In the second section, he explains that the boy can go out in public but this is where Catullus, at first, attacks a physical feature of Aurelius, stating that "It's you I'm scared of and your penis, / That menace to good boys and bad" (15.14-15). Catullus does not want his

possession defiled and essentially stolen. Catullus again uses a warning when addressing Aurelius in the third section. The poet warns Aurelius if

ill will or mindless madness

Drive you, villain, to the crime

Of treachery against my person,

Ah then you'll rue your wretched fate

With feet trussed up and backdoor open,

Run though with radishes and mullet. (15.14-19)

Catullus threatens anal rape on Aurelius if he takes his boy, so what initial starts off as a poem asking a "modest favor" turns into invective that uses obscenity for comedic effect in order to express the poet's *urbanitas*.

Catullus closely associates theft and debt in the fact that he writes poetry in which in he was placed in debt by expeditions and how that unmanned, or in essence emasculates him. Catullus fears that those who lack wealth or are in debt may cause him social anguish. In poem 24, Catullus warns Juventius of a man who lacks "slave or cash box" (24.5) and repeats the phrase twice. Juventius' association with this man will not bring about the happiness that money can buy, which is when Catullus brings up the allusion to Midas. Money seems like a necessity when it comes to running in Catullus' inner circle of friends. In poem 28, Catullus expresses the repercussive perception he felt when

he was put into debt as a person who has been emasculated and raped. The poet writes to Veranius and Fabullus about their campaigns outside of Rome. Catullus seems to have gone to do his civic duty and pursue Cicero's *negotium*, but Catullus is not fulfilled in the expedition because he was with a good friend who took advantage of him, Memmius. According to Catullus, "In service with / [His] praetor [he] enter[s] debt as profit" (28.7-8). Catullus, as stated previously, was a wealthy Roman from the country-side who did not necessarily have to work, but like all Romans of wealth, felt that he had a civic duty. And when his civic duty does put him into debt, he feels taken advantage of to the point where he feels anally raped. He states that Memmius has "stuffed [him] with all that yard of [Memmius']" (10). He again uses the word *irrumasti* to indicate that he's been attacked deeply and emasculated, thus in the Catullan belief system Catullus feels that those who are in debt are emasculated and humiliated. He has taken the submissive role in being indebted. Catullus knows what it feels to be in debt or lacking money and so must judge those harshly, but in poetry that has an air of wittiness and charm that expresses the poet's *urbanitas*.

Catullus clearly attacks poor Furius for being in debt, and asking for money with invective that attacks masculinity and the well-being of his family and estate, but using witty, urbane language to convey the invective, thus keeping on

the urbane *persona*. In attacking one's estate may seem not to attack one's masculinity in ancient Rome, but according to Skinner:

As a prerogative restricted to the head of household, the status of citizen male is predicated upon control...of one's external circumstances...any diminution of social standing...can weaken the bulwarks of masculinity and cause reversion to a passive 'womanish' condition... (Skinner 135)

And so from the Roman understanding of the well-being of one's circumstances or estate representing his level of masculinity, the reader of this poem can understand that in the context of the Late Republic, Catullus is truly attacking Furius' masculinity when he attacks the wellbeing of his estate and family of which he is supposedly in charge. In poem 23, Furius asks Catullus for money. Again, Catullus brings up the lack of "slave or cash-box" to indicate Furius' poverty. Catullus then mocks Furius, stating that Furius has a wonderful family and estate that their bodies are "drier than horn, / Or whatever's even more dehydrated, / From sun and cold and hungriness" (23.12-14). This lack of water symbolizes Furius' poverty in which he lives. The poem ends with an examination of Furius' excrement, which too is quite dehydrated to the point where "if you rubbed it in your hands / You'd never dirty a single finger" (23.22-23). However, there are connections between hygiene and wealth. In poem 23, Catullus mocks

Rufus' hygiene ironically stating that being absent of water or hydration, now clearly a symbol of wealth, stating that Rufus

never sweat[s], [he's] no saliva,

No mucus, no nasal catarrh.

That's hygiene. This is more hygienic:

An arsehole clean as a salt cellar. (23.16-19)

Catullus uses these images of extreme dehydration and bodily fluids and excrement in order to create a humorous tone that conveys the poet's *urbanitas* while dealing with something as serious as being in debt. Catullus ends the poem with his true purpose in writing. Still mocking Furius, stating that his family is blessed with dehydration, Catullus then tells Furius to "stop begging for that hundred / Thousand—you're rich enough already" (23.25-26). So this poem expresses an invective that has this wit and charm found in one who has *urbanitas*. Catullus attacks the appearance and hygiene of Furius, but he also attacks Furius' estate and his family, thus attacking his masculinity in the Roman context. He questions the wellbeing of Furius' family, which appears to be a deeper wound than exposing Furius' lack of sophistication. Poem 26 further expresses that debt not only affects Furius' character but his entire estate. Catullus tells Furius that his "countryhouse faces / Not draughts of Auster or Favonius / Or savage Boreas or Aphelotes / But fifteen thousand tenscore

sesterces, / An overdraft that's not good for your health" (26.1-5). The gods, or chance, have not put Furius' estate into shambles, but it is Furius' debt that does. Catullus has again created a comical image with the gods and winds to which most Romans usually attribute extreme problems, but in fact it is this "overdraft" that truly affects poor Furius. In creating this juxtaposition, Catullus creates a comical tone, thus revealing that his urbane persona is present.

Catullus is mostly remembered as a lewd, love poet, but that is only one of the many masks he wears. Writing considerably on the topics of debt and theft, Catullus gives the modern reader a more social, pop cultural perspective on debt and theft. There are several similarities between how the ancient Roman aristocracy deals with rather scandalous news and how we deal with it today. For some reason, we think that the very best of our society such as politicians, modern aristocracy, and celebrities are held up on a pedestal of perfection. They possess the ideal life that we all desire to be a part of or to have, but sometimes that ideal life shatters into a million little pieces. Catullus' reaction in his poetry on these debtors and thieves attempts to reveal the criminal and socially to punish them using the same invective that would have been used in the courtroom if these criminals were on trial. Catullus establishes that he has also been the debtor and thief in poems 99 and 28, in which he was robbed of his character and masculinity. Despite the rather sensitive subject, Catullus still injects his wit

and charm into the subject by creating rather comical images that delight the listener with a humorous tone at the expense of those accused of being a thief or in debt, thus allowing his urbane *persona* to be ever present in poetry.

Chapter Five: Catullus' *Urbanitas* Expressed through Love and Invective on Love

Most modern readers consider Catullus an ancient love poet. It is true; he writes numerous poems on love at various stages with poignant, expressive language and with rather ghastly vulgar language. Relationships do not exist on a flat plane; there are ups and downs, ebbs and flows. Catullus' affairs in ancient Rome were not of the typical variety. He cavorts with a married woman and a young boy mainly, but elevates his affairs to the status of love. Perhaps Catullus is that friend who falls in love too fast, but he expresses this fall with such eloquence and romanticism. However, these affairs, like many affairs, end and end in the most disastrous way. I guess the modern reader connects with Catullus because he shows these varying feelings that cover the spectrum of emotionality, which does not seem very urbane to us. So, how does one find anything urbane in an emotionally erratic man?

Perhaps Catullus expresses through the various dedications to both Juventius and Lesbia in the form of *double entendres*, allusions to mythological characters and places, and creation of comical images. Let us first examine the poems in which kisses are a symbol of Catullus' love and the hyperbolic amount of kisses expresses his exuberance and want to the idea of loving both Juventius and Lesbia.

The many thousand kisses poems (5, 7, and 48) address both Lesbia and Juventius. Catullus uses the motif of *basia mille* (a thousand kisses) as a symbol to express his sexual desire or love publically. In poem 5, Catullus writes about the thousands of kisses, which at first seems like just a representation of the act of two lovers, but is a declaration of Catullus' belief that love and life are combined and necessitate the other. In "The Lesbia Poems", Julia T. Dyson-Hejduk believes that "Catullus' passionate, hypnotic expression of love's power also refuses to acknowledge limits" (Dyson-Hejduk 135) much like the poetry of Sappho. Dyson-Hejduk continues to explain that

For a Roman male, the poetic expression of a commitment to passion and imagination as a way of life means not only an encounter with potential loss and abandonment, but also a confrontation with a masculine-dominated culture that on the whole values duty over pleasure, stoic fortitude over emotion, industry over leisure. (Dyson-Hejduk 135)

Throughout this argument, Dyson-Hejduk represents the stages of the relationship between Catullus and Lesbia as separated into the three categories of Catullus' poetry: the polymetrics, the long poems, and the epigrams. She argues that Catullus takes the effeminate role by embodying the role of Sappho in these poems. This role reversal is highly comical, highly sophisticated, and quite witty thus expressing the poet's learnedness and *urbanitas*. In the first of

the *basia mille* poems, Catullus expresses that he and Lesbia should live a life of love, not a life controlled by the thoughts of old men. “We should live, my Lesbia, and love / And value all the talk of stricter / Old men at a single penny.” (5.1-3)

The hyperbolic amount of kisses mentioned later in this poem invokes Roman monetary language usually used in a merchant setting. According to Quinn, *da mi* (supply or literally give to me) was “perhaps the formula for placing an order with a merchant” (Quinn 109). The use of *aestimemus* (let us value) is also word choice associated with buying and selling. By associating Lesbia’s kisses with monetary value and language, he expresses his *urbanitas* by cleverly inferring that the kisses are an activity of Roman industry and productivity, an activity in which an urbane man participates.

Catullus continues to manifest his *urbanitas* in different ways using the same imagery of the thousand kisses, but this time to express the learned nature of an urbane gentleman. In poem 7, Catullus writes that Lesbia asks how many of her “mega-kisses would more than satisfy [him]” (7.1-2). In order to express how learned and educated Catullus is, the poet makes references to various mythological places and figures. Catullus states that an unattainable amount will satisfy him comparing the amount to “Great as the sum of Libyssan sand lying / In silphioporous Cyrene / From the oracle of torrid Jove / To old Battus’ Holy Sepulchre” (7.4-6). In this poem Catullus expresses his *urbanitas* by stating all of

the exotic places he knows in a simile comparing the innumerable amount of kisses that will satisfy him.

Catullus' *urbanitas* manifests itself in his sparrow poems in writing in rather serious poetic forms. Catullus uses a *double entendre* with a playful sparrow to express his wit and charm as well. Catullus, at leisure, watches Lesbia play with a sparrow. He describes the playfulness as "she cuddles [it], / whom she likes to tempt with finger- / Tips and teases to nip harder" (2.2-4). The playful acts that Catullus describes between Lesbia and the sparrow can be paralleled with the playfulness that two lovers have amongst each other. There is also this implication of using fingers to incite bites, more playfulness. Catullus continues to pay homage to this sparrow in poem 3, in which he mourns the death of the sparrow. He is upset that the sparrow is dead. Catullus is writing about the temporary end of his playtime with Lesbia. In this poem, the image of eyes appears. At the end of the poem, Catullus blames the sparrow for causing his girl's "eyelids [to become] swollen red with crying." (3.18). Dyson-Hejduk believes that "the effect in Latin is one of tender affection, perhaps slightly humorous...but not ridiculous or contemptuous" (Dyson-Hejduk 135). It is obvious that if Catullus and Lesbia are not having sex, there must be some reason for it, and so Catullus laments the end of their playtime like a death and

writes these funerary writes for a poor sparrow. The use of double entendre is the means by which Catullus conveys *urbanitas* in his poetry about love.

Catullus also expresses his love for Lesbia by devaluing the beauty and charm of other women and using a comical tone. In poem 86, Catullus degrades Quintia's beauty and character in order to glorify his love for Lesbia. Catullus attacks Quintia by belittling her beauty and personality. "For many, Quintia's beautiful; for me she's fair, / Tall, straight. I grant these separate points, / But not that wholeness 'beauty'. For she has no charm, / No grain of salt in that great body" (86.1-4). Catullus uses Quintia as a contrast to Lesbia who has true "complete" beauty in order to express his *urbanitas*. "Now, Lesbia's beautiful, wholly most lovely, and alone / She has robbed them all of their charms" (86.5-6). Here, Catullus validates Lesbia and expresses his love for her by attacking poor Quintia. The poem expresses his love through devaluation of others, thus Catullus' urbane *persona* has found his place in his *persona* as Lesbia's lover. Catullus again attacks another woman in order to express adoration for Lesbia in poem 43. The unnamed woman seems to be competition for Lesbia, but Catullus belittles the woman by describing her with litotes such as having "no mini nose, / Nor pretty foot, nor dark eyes / Nor altogether felicitous tongue" (43.1-4). Catullus continues to attack her by stating that she possesses no wealth because she associates as a "Friend of the bankrupt from Formiae" (43.5). Catullus again

thinks that this woman cannot be compared to Lesbia and yet, many think so. Catullus ponders how can this girl “[c]ompare to our Lesbia?” (43.7). Catullus then attacks the times in which he lives, stating they must be *insapiens* (not smart) and *infacetum* (not witty), negative forms of words that are often associated with *urbanitas*. So in this poem, Catullus shows adoration for Lesbia again by attacking the beauty, personality, and associations of another woman.

The final way in which Catullus shows his love in an urbane way is through comical overstatement. The poet makes overly dramatic and comical references describing the love between Lesbia and him in terms of relationships between fathers and sons, friends, and contractual obligations. By elevating the seriousness of his love for her, Catullus has created a hyperbole that is debatably comical or serious. I find that the love between a poet and a married woman, who is known for her promiscuity, overly dramatic to the point of comical effect, and thus expresses a type of wit found in the conversations and monologues of men possessing *urbanitas*. Catullus writes poems with vocabulary that is associated with Roman values. In poem 87, after Catullus shows his adoration for Lesbia by attacking another woman, Catullus states that “No faith(*fides*) so great was ever found in any contract(*foedere*) / As on my part in love of you” (87.2-4). These two terms *fides* and *foedus*, according to Gaisser, “are part of the language of male aristocratic friendship, its code of social

commitment. The code was deeply felt and its language carried create emotional force” (Gaisser 58). Catullus also calls Lesbia a *mulier* in line 1, which can mean merely a woman, but could also mean wife. Gaisser argues that “By using [the emotional language] for his love of Lesbia, Catullus treated [the relationship]—and her—with the kind of moral seriousness that Roman men aspired to, not in erotic relationships, but in their most solemn dealings with each other” (Gaisser 58). I argue that if Lesbia were to read this poem, she would not take Catullus seriously at first, because she is merely a lover, and Catullus is trying to win her over with hyperbolic language, which may be seen as an attempt to charm her thus expressing his *urbanitas*. Lesbia’s reaction to this poem would be a giggle, or a smirk, because she knows Catullus is capable of lewd actions, and does not take him seriously, and so to assume Catullus upholds his love with a promiscuous woman like Lesbia to the highest of Roman moral standards is only meant to be read as comical, thus expressing the poet’s *urbanitas*.

Catullus again compares his love to Lesbia in the form of Roman male-to-male relations. “I loved you then, not only as common men their girl-friend / But as a father loves his sons and sons-in-laws” (72.3-4). Again, this cannot be taken seriously, because the love between father and son is so much more than the love of lovers, and thus is used as a witty analogy in order to express Catullus’ *urbanitas*.

While Catullus easily expresses his *urbanitas* in his poetry that glorifies his love and sexual acts, the poet attacks with an invective that seems quite harsh, when his love, especially Lesbia, turns into an enemy, by calling her a prostitute and promiscuous. Though Catullus' invective at first seems like cruelty, the poet presents his invective with an air of wit and humor that truly expresses how the urbane persona plays a role in the persona of the lover and jilted lover. First, Catullus uses invective that is learned, a quality of *urbanitas*, making references again to exotic places and mythology. Then, Catullus writes invective in which his attacks on Lesbia's promiscuity are hidden by mock heroism, displaying a sense of wit also associated with *urbanitas*. In each case, Catullus presents invective that is both biting, but also intelligent, witty, and charming.

In Catullus' invective against Lesbia, Catullus simultaneously attacks her piety while also making references to exotic symbols and mythology, which expresses his learnedness as a man possessing *urbanitas*. So why does Catullus need to express his learnedness while attacking Lesbia? Perhaps it is used to soften the blow of the extreme emotions found in the condensed poem 60. Catullus calls Lesbia a *nimis fero corde* (60.5), "an enemy with an iron heart." Iron is a metal that Homer used throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, if you recall Achilles being referred to as possessing a heart of iron, but Penelope too was thought to have a heart of iron when Odysseus returns. According to Eva Brann,

“Homeric folk say “iron” where we say ‘steel,’ as in ‘man of steel’ or ‘steely-eyed” (Brann 138). If one recalls, Odysseus lashes out at Penelope for at first not believing it truly is he who has returned from the long voyage. Catullus perhaps makes this reference in the hope that Lesbia will finally return his love, as Penelope does to Odysseus, once she sees that he is pained by their separation. Catullus uses other references to mythology, stating that Lesbia was born from a “Scylla barking from groins lowest part” (60.2), again expressing his knowledge of mythology while also attacking Lesbia’s origins. Lesbia was born from a monster, and therefore acts like a monster that devours men without feeling, much like Scylla does to Odysseus’ men in the *Odyssey*, book 12. Again, Catullus here uses another mythological reference in his invective and thus attacks men. Catullus also uses a reference to an exotic animal, stating that Lesbia too could have been born from a “lioness among Libystine mountains” (60.1), expressing his knowledge of exotic animals from far away locations who appear heartless and destroyers of love. Thus, in the invective against Lesbia, Catullus expresses his *urbanitas* by attacking with invective poems that express his learnedness in the forms of mythological and exotic references.

Although Catullus expresses his *urbanitas* in the form of invective that requires intelligence to understand the references to mythology and exotic locations, he also uses invective poems that have elements of wit and humor to

them. In poems 11 and 37, Catullus uses humor while also attacking Lesbia by judging her propriety, and virtuousness. In poem 11, Catullus presents invective with wit and humor by starting the poem addressing his friends who have come back from long journeys. He hides the invective toward the end for comedic effect. Catullus first expresses the lengths his friends will travel for his friends Furius and Aurelius, stating that he'll travel to Arabia, the Alps, Gaul, and Rome for his friends. Catullus stated he would even "visit the memorials of Great Caesar" (11.10), from which the reader knows that Catullus is being facetious because he detests Caesar and his campaigns. Catullus wants his friends to send this message attacking Lesbia's character as a lover, "Farewell and long life with her adulterers, / Three hundred together, whom hugging she holds, / Loving none truly but again and again / Rupturing all's groins" (11.17-19). Catullus at the end blatantly calls out Lesbia for her whorish behavior and promiscuity indirectly. Catullus also adds elements of hyperbole, stating a rather exaggerated number. In hiding this message and having it conveyed to Lesbia by his friends Furius and Aurelius, Catullus has added a sense of wit and charm to his invective poem, thus expressing his *urbanitas*.

The final poem in which Catullus expresses his *urbanitas* in poem 37. Catullus attacks several people in this poem, but mainly because Lesbia has taken another lover. He uses invective attacking both masculinity, Lesbia's

virtuousness, and Egnatius' hygiene and origins again. Catullus also creates this heroic persona, ready to barge into whorehouses in search of Lesbia.

D'you reckon you're the only ones with tools,

The only ones allowed to fuck the girls

And that the rest of us are stinking goats?

Or, since you clots are sitting in a queue

One or two hundred strong, d'you think I wouldn't

Dare stuff two hundred sitting tenants at once?

Well, think again. For I shall scrawl the Inn's

Whole frontage for you with phallic graffiti— (37.3-10)

In this section, Catullus attacks the masculinity of the men who attend the whorehouse where Lesbia is supposedly staying by threatening to stuff their mouths, placing them in a passive, submissive Roman role. The poet uses hyperbole to show this extreme exaggeration in numbers. Catullus creates this heroic persona, because he states that he will scrawl the inn for a woman who he loved “ran from [his] embrace, / Loved by [him] as no other will be loved, / For whom a great war has been fought by [him], / Has settled here” (37.12-14). Catullus creates this mock, heroic epic story referencing his relationship with Lesbia in order to create this feigned heroism of barging into a whorehouse to save her. This heroic figure is comical thus expressing his *urbanitas* in his

invective. Catullus' attack on Lesbia's promiscuity again is indirect. She's settled in a whorehouse, so to him she must be a whore and he attempts to save her from the likes of a certain man Catullus truly despises, Egnatius. Catullus asserts his invective by attacking Egnatius' hygiene, stating again that Egnatius possess "teeth rubbed down with Iberian urine" (37.20). Although this attack on hygiene does not seem comical, Catullus expresses the *urbanitas* in this portion of the poem by attacking Egnatius, stating that Egnatius is a "A son of rabbit-ridden Celtiberia" (37.18) And so in poem 37, Catullus' urbane persona blends with his persona of the jilted lover, manifesting itself in creating a heroic action Catullus takes, indirectly stating that Lesbia is a whore, and questioning Egnatius' hygiene and place of origin outside of Rome the city, and in fact outside of the Italian peninsula.

Love and sophistication seem to be two ideas that are awfully difficult to meld because of the dichotomy between strong, unchecked emotions found in love and the social decorum and control of sophistication. Catullus attempts to personify this sophisticated lover with raw emotions. It is often successful in his moments of joy and celebration of his love for Lesbia and Juventius, but when love goes wrong he becomes an angry fellow, but attempts to soften the blow of his anger by employing overstatement, irony, learnedness, and a plethora of other literary devices. The poet's heart is broken, emotions in shambles, all

sense of control seem to be lost, but he knows in his poetry that the urbane *persona* must be fastened tightly to his face in order for the public reading about his heartbreak still perceive him as an urbane gentleman.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to figure out how Roman sophistication, *urbanitas*, functions in the high society of the late Roman Republic by examining the poetry of Catullus. Though typically separated into several *personae*, I attempt to unite the *personae* by finding elements of *urbanitas* in each of the poetic themes of Catullus as the partygoer, as the poet, as the arbiter of debtors and thieves, and as the lover. Does he successfully express himself as an urbane man in each role? Well, that is a difficult question to answer. The roles of the partygoer, working poet, and arbiter seem to successfully present the poet as an urbane man, witty, sophisticated, and full of humor. But love is a much deeper subject, which deals with one's raw emotions. Catullus' attempt at using *urbanitas* to cover the hurt he feels when Lesbia ultimately breaks his heart is unsuccessful. We see glimpses of *urbanitas* in literary devices such as overstatement, irony, comical imagery and word choice, but it does not hide the hurt he feels, a tone that cannot be masked even by the most sophisticated of poets.

By using the literature of Cicero, Quintilian and Catullus I set out to establish a better understanding of the term *urbanitas* and how it functioned in the courtrooms and *convivia* of the late Republic alike. High-society is all about perception, and so if the public perceives someone as witty, well-educated, able

to speak well, and someone who knows the city and its people, then he has successfully pulled off *urbanitas*.

To the modern reader, Catullus does not seem to have the taste we would normally associate with a sophisticated individual. He is often crass, obscene, aggressive, and pitiless in his invective poetry, making it very difficult to understand how this poet truly is expressing his urban sophistication. But when we contextualize Catullus in his time period, understanding that invective is a typical way in which the Romans taught through negative-example, we see that Catullus appreciates the sophisticated world. Though the invectives are harsh, he softens the blow with witty uses of figurative language, verbal irony, double entendre, and sometimes self-deprecation to let the readers know that his invective poetry is still meant to charm those who read it, and perhaps through his humor he is teaching a great lesson in appreciation of the *convivium*, wealth, poetry, and love.

Finding of glimpses of Catullus' *urbanitas* in each of his *personae* hopefully helps answering the question "Is Catullus a believable literary character?" By uniting the *personae* into one singular urbane *persona*, I hoped to make him a more believable character, but the very nature of the word *urbanitas* seems to imply a bit of dishonesty or omitting the truth. Feelings that are heavier such as anger, anguish, or hurt do not cover as well. I cannot help but find

similarities to some of modern American literary characters, the most striking similarity being Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Both Catullus the literary character and Gatsby attempt to put on an act of sorts, but beneath the act are truer, genuine thoughts. Gatsby emerges during a time of great change post World War I where the societal conventions of the past are being broken, while Catullus lives in a time in which he is able to become more of an independent thinker and poet living in a society with established norms. Both Gatsby and Catullus lie and mask the truth, but somehow we're still drawn to them because they represent the embodiment of an idealized life to which the modern reader is drawn. Everyone one makes mistakes; no one is perfect. We eventually come to this conclusion and accept the character for whom he is.

By looking at Catullus' poetry in which he puts on his urbane *persona*, we find what other scholars have already found: a sensitive man living in a volatile social world with numerous twists and turns, and several social relationships with heavy complexity. Where others fall short is their ability to overlook his failures and faux pas. It is a pointless endeavor to hold him accountable for each of his actions and words. What we as the modern reader really want to know is the character of this *persona*, flaws and all.

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**Catullus and Urbanitas: Ancient Roman Sophistication
through the Eyes of a Multi-faceted Poet**

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