Catullus

Julia Haig Gaisser

Catullus

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Preface

This book is for people who like poetry—in any language. It is for those who like thinking about words and what happens when they are put together, how they sound, how they resonate both inside a poem and with other poems they have read. I hope that there will be something new in it for those who already know Catullus well, but I am thinking mostly of readers whose acquaintance is not so deep, or perhaps not deep at all. That would include students at every level, but especially undergraduates and graduate students, as well as faculty members coming to Catullus from fields like English or comparative literature, or classicists not specializing in Roman poetry. I am also thinking of non-academics—perhaps people who read Catullus once and liked him, or those who never read a word of Latin, but would like to include him in their poetic universe.

For all these readers I have tried to situate Catullus in his times, which are among the most exciting and interesting eras in Roman history. I have tried to bring his poetry to life, looking at it in as many ways as possible. There are chapters on the arrangement of the poems, the character or persona that Catullus presents in his poetry, his language and poetic structure, the ways his poetry draws on and resonates with earlier poetry, and finally, on the interpretations of his readers from antiquity to the present. My concerns above all are always literary and poetic, and I try to show the ways in which looking at meter or the persona or intertextuality or the approaches of other readers can help us to enjoy and find meaning (often multiple meanings) in the poetry.

Catullus' poetry presents two apparent barriers to the reader. Much (about a quarter) of it is obscene, and all of it is in Latin. I have confronted both of these facts head on and unapologetically in the belief that twenty-first century readers do not need to be protected from either.

Catullus' obscenity is not just a matter of "dirty words." Unlike most of the obscenity we hear in the media and daily life, it is not empty or gratuitous, but purposeful in the context and construction of each poem where it appears. Sometimes it is shocking, sometimes funny; but it is always meaningful. I translate and discuss obscene poems frankly throughout.

Catullus' Latin of course is fundamental. Poetry is a compound of thought and language. Its words matter, not only for their meanings, but also (and sometimes almost even more) for their sounds and rhythms and the patterns those sounds and rhythms make with other words. Each poem (or part of a poem) is presented first in Latin, then in translation, but I constantly refer to the Latin in discussion. In Chapter 4 ("What Makes It Poetry") I encourage even Latinless readers to read the Latin aloud, presenting a simplified account of pronunciation, meters, and sound effects and how they create meaning in the poetry.

I have included both footnotes and a bibliography of secondary sources in English because I think it is important to let readers interested in a particular point know where they can find out more. But I have not used the footnotes for discussion or to cite every conceivable item of bibliography. My purpose is to get readers started, not to finish them off.

The poems are quoted from the text of D.F.S. Thomson's *Catullus* (1997). All Latin is translated. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are my own.

I have greatly enjoyed working on this book. Catullus is a poet who amply repays reading, rereading, and rethinking, and I constantly found myself seeing things in his poetry I had not seen before, which I think is the greatest pleasure a poetry lover can have. The project has been aided and abetted by several good friends and colleagues. I am extremely grateful to Al Bertrand at Wiley-Blackwell for proposing it and to my editor Haze Humbert for patiently waiting for it to come to fruition. My thanks also go to Joseph Farrell, Susannah Brower, and Thomas Gaisser, each of whom read chapters and provided helpful comments. I owe a special debt of gratitude to David Ross, who generously read every chapter with an eagle eye and gave me the benefit of his learning and poetic insight.

1

Introduction: The Young Poet in Rome

> Romae vivimus: illa domus,
> illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas.
> (Poem 68.34–5)

Catullus is the most accessible of the ancient poets. His poems (even the very long ones) convey an emotional immediacy and urgency that claim the reader's sympathy. The emotions themselves—love, sorrow, pleasure, hatred, contempt—are clear, direct, passionate, very much like our own, we are tempted to imagine. They are set out for us not in the abstract but in the real, historical world of late republican Rome. This Rome, evoked for us with a few light, sharp strokes, is a virtual character in the poetry, with its politicians, playboys (and girls), low-lifes, and fellow poets. Catullus' language seems for the most part as clear and direct as his feelings. His characteristic meter, the phalaecean hendecasyllabic, is relaxed, conversational, and memorable. He is learned (formidably so), but a first reader does not have to be equally learned in order to respond to him. Many of his poems are short—of fewer than 20 lines—so that even a novice Latinist can take them in at a sitting.

But Catullus' accessibility is deceiving. He draws us into his world and its emotional landscape so artfully that we think we know him much better than we do, rather like a seemingly open and guileless acquaintance we have known for a time and then realized we did not know at all. The emotional immediacy and factual details in Catullus' poems can make us forget that his poetry, like all poetry, is a fiction. The Catullus we see in the poems is a character or persona created by Catullus the poet, and we can never be sure where the one leaves off and the other begins. We will look more closely at the Catullan persona in chapter 3. In this chapter, however, we will consider what we can know about Catullus the poet,

the maker (not the subject) of the poetry, and about the world in which he created his poems.

Fragments of a Biography

A few details of Catullus' life are recorded by ancient sources. The fourth-century writer Jerome mentions Catullus twice in his *Chronica* (a chronological list of historical dates). For 87 B.C. he says: "Gaius Valerius Catullus the lyric writer is born in Verona" (*Chronica* 150H); for 58 B.C.: "Catullus dies at Rome in the thirtieth year of his life" (*Chronica* 154H). But Jerome's dates cannot be right. Catullus mentions events of both 55 and 54, and he was still alive as late as August 54 (the date of his friend Calvus' prosecution of Vatinius, mentioned in poem 53).[1] Scholars generally accept the idea that Catullus died when he was twenty-nine or thirty. (Perhaps he did, even if dying young is a very "poetic" thing to do.) They adjust Jerome's chronology accordingly, dating Catullus' life to something like 84–54 or (more often) 82–52. But Jerome's testimony is important even though his chronology is inaccurate. He gives us at least approximate dates, identifies Catullus as a lyric poet (a point that is often disputed, as we will see), and places him in Verona and Rome, sites that resonate powerfully (and in different keys) in his poetry.

Jerome probably took his information on Catullus from a much earlier work on the lives of literary men called *De viris illustribus*, written by the biographer Suetonius around the beginning of the second century. This work is now lost, but Suetonius preserves another important biographical snippet in his *Life of Julius Caesar*. He uses the following anecdote about Catullus to demonstrate Caesar's eagerness to lay aside even legitimate grievances.

> Caesar did not hide the fact that Valerius Catullus had placed a permanent mark of infamy on him with his verses about Mamurra. But when Catullus apologized, he invited him to dinner on the same day, and continued to enjoy the hospitality of his father as he had been in the habit of doing. (*Life of Julius Caesar* 73)

Catullus wrote two poems attacking Caesar and his henchman Mamurra (29 and 57).[2] Suetonius (and Caesar) could have had both poems in mind, but 57 is especially virulent. It begins:

Pulcre convenit improbis cinaedis,
Mamurrae pathicoque Caesarique. (57.1–2)
(The shameless faggots are well matched,
Both queer Mamurra and Caesar too.)

The story in Suetonius is valuable evidence for the circulation of Catullus' poetry, for the verses on Mamurra must have been very widely known for Caesar to believe that he had received "a permanent mark of infamy." The story is also surprisingly informative about Catullus' family and social position. The essential point is that the Valerii of Verona had enough status and wealth and a sufficiently grand establishment to qualify as frequent hosts to a great man like Caesar. Italian tradition since the time of the Renaissance has located their property at Sirmione (ancient Sirmio) on a beautiful peninsula of Lake Garda near Verona. The tradition was inspired by archeological evidence (ruins of a great Roman villa of the first century A.D. are found on the site), but still more by Catullus' poem 31, in which he salutes Sirmio as his home and refers to himself as its master (*erus*). Modern scholars have agreed with the identification, and it has been suggested that the site was still in the family a century after Catullus' time when the villa was built.[3] Suetonius does not say when Catullus' apology and dinner with Caesar took place, but it would have been in the middle 50s during the Gallic wars when Caesar generally wintered in Cisalpine Gaul ("Gaul on this side of the Alps," i.e., northern Italy).[4] In any case, Catullus' father (whom the poet never mentions) was still alive at the time.

The most famous piece of ancient biographical information comes from Apuleius in the *Apology* (mid-second century). In response to the charge of using pseudonyms for the boys he addresses in his erotic poetry he says: "By the same token they should accuse Gaius Catullus because he used the name Lesbia for Clodia" (*Apology* 10). Apuleius' identification of Lesbia places Catullus' most famous subject and the poems about her in a particular social context, for Clodia was a member of one of the greatest and most ancient patrician families in Rome, the Claudii. The spelling of her name (Clodia, not Claudia) tells us that she was a sister of the infamous demagogue Publius Clodius Pulcher, who used the "popular" spelling. But it is not clear which sister she was.[5] Clodius had three sisters, all named Clodia, the feminine form of their *nomen*. Like most aristocratic women, they were differentiated either by the genitive form of their husband's name or by an ordinal number corresponding to their place in the birth order of female children (Prima, Secunda, Tertia,

etc.). Thus, the three were Clodia Metelli (Clodia the wife of Metellus), Clodia Luculli (Clodia the wife of Lucullus), and Clodia Tertia, who was the third daughter born, but not the youngest of the surviving group (Clodia Luculli was the youngest). Clodia Metelli is generally identified as Lesbia, largely on the basis of Cicero's racy and slanderous portrait of her in his oration *Pro Caelio*. But she is not the only possible candidate. Little is known of Clodia Tertia, but Clodia Luculli lived at least as fast and loose as Clodia Metelli. All three sisters, but especially Clodia Metelli and Clodia Luculli, were rumored to have committed incest with their brother Clodius. The charge is reflected in Catullus' invective on "Lesbius pulcer" in poem 79, which begins:

> Lesbius est pulcer; quid ni? Quem Lesbia malit
> quam te cum tota gente, Catulle, tua. (79.1–2)
> (Lesbius is pretty. Why not? For Lesbia would prefer him
> to you with your whole family, Catullus.)

From the details provided by Jerome, Suetonius, and Apuleius we can begin to piece together the outlines of the poet's life. He was born in the 80s and died about thirty years later. He was of a wealthy and important provincial family in an area that had come fairly recently under Roman control. (The settlements in northern Italy between the Alps and the river Po were designated Latin colonies in 89 and their inhabitants, called Transpadani, "people on the other side of the Po," received a general grant of Roman citizenship only in 49.) He lived for some time in Rome and wrote poems to a patrician woman (Clodia) calling her by the pseudonym Lesbia. He died in Rome.

A few more pieces of the poet's biography can be gleaned from the poems themselves. Catullus tells us that he served in the *cohors* or entourage of Memmius in Bithynia (poems 10 and 28). He also says he didn't like it. Since Memmius is known to have been governor of Bithynia in 57–56, Catullus' complaints provide one secure date in his biography and poetry: poems 10 and 28 and the others referring to Bithynia (31 and 46) were written in 57–56 or later. His presence in Memmius' *cohors* helps to flesh out the picture of his social status we saw in Suetonius, for such positions were held by young men with excellent connections and political prospects. Being in a governor's *cohors* was not uncommon in Catullus' circle, nor was coming home disenchanted with it. Catullus' friends Veranius and Fabullus served in Piso's *cohors* in Spain (poems 12, 28, 47), and they seem to have enjoyed their experience no more than Catullus did. Their

dissatisfaction, like Catullus', was financial: they had expected to make money out of the province and failed to do so. We get a glimpse of the expectations and frustrations of such young men in poem 10. (Catullus is reporting a conversation with his friend Varus and Varus' girlfriend.)

> Huc ut venimus, incidere nobis
> sermones varii: in quibus, quid esset
> iam Bithynia; quo modo se haberet;
> ecquonam mihi profuisset aere.
> Respondi, id quod erat, nihil neque ipsis
> nec praetoribus esse nec cohorti,
> cur quisquam caput unctius referret,
> praesertim quibus esset irrumator
> praetor, nec faceret pili cohortem. (10.5–13)
> (When we got there, various topics came up in our conversation—among them what Bithynia was like now, how it was doing, whether I had made any money out of it. I replied (and it was true) that neither the natives nor the praetors nor the entourage had any way to line their pockets—especially those whose praetor screwed them and didn't give a damn for his entourage.)

Catullus also speaks of a brother (otherwise unknown), whose death in Troy he laments in poems 65, 68, and 101. Poetically the brother is useful and important, providing an emotionally powerful foil to Lesbia, and representing the pull of Verona and familial love against that of Rome and eros. But the only thing we know about him is his death far from home, and that only from Catullus. Another detail that emerges from the poetry is mysterious in a different way. A dozen or so of Catullus' 116 poems can be dated, but none of the datable poems falls outside the short period 57–56 to 54.[6] The fact may or may not be significant. Perhaps he wrote all of the extant poems within a period of three or or four years, but it is also possible that the clustering of datable poems is a coincidence.[7]

A final piece of the poet's biography is so large that we might almost overlook it even though it overshadows all the rest. At some point Catullus went to Rome. We do not know when or why he did so, but there are some probabilities. It is likely that he arrived at some time in the late 60s or early 50s, perhaps with the intention of embarking on a political career. The career did not materialize, but he settled in Rome, anyway. A number of his poems are set in the territory of Verona, but it is Rome that he celebrates as his home, as in poem 68:

> . . . Romae vivimus: illa domus,
> illa mihi sedes, illic mea carpitur aetas. (68.34–5)
> (I live in Rome. That is my home,
> that is my place, there my life is spent.)

In the rest of this chapter we will consider what Rome was like—politically, socially, intellectually—for the young poet living there in the last decades of the Roman republic.

Politics

Rome in the 50s B.C. was a large, dirty, rich, violent, exciting city, the head of an increasingly far-flung empire that stretched from Asia Minor in the east to Spain in the west, taking in parts of north Africa on the way. Political strife had been a constant accompaniment to its great and still growing power, and in the 50s—the last full decade of the Roman republic—violence, social unrest, and the competition for political supremacy intensified. In 59 the three rival dynasts, Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, formed an uneasy alliance (the so-called first triumvirate) that held together for the first half of the decade. The alliance on the part of Caesar and Pompey was sealed with the marriage of Caesar's daughter Julia to Pompey. The marriage made Caesar Pompey's father-in-law, a fact that provided irresistible fodder for political satirists. Catullus makes a jingle of it in the last line of poem 29:

> socer generque, perdidistis omnia? (29.24)
> (father-in-law and son-in-law, have you squandered everything?)

Each of the three stood to gain by their arrangement, but Caesar's prize turned out to be greatest: a special command in Transalpine Gaul. He waged a long and brutal campaign (58–51), brought Gaul under Roman control, and enriched himself and his friends. The three renewed their agreement in 56. Under the new agreement Pompey and Crassus became consuls in 55; Caesar's command in Gaul was renewed for five years; Pompey became governor of Spain and Crassus of Syria, which he used as a base to attack the Parthians. But this time the agreement could not hold. After Pompey's wife Julia died in 54 and Crassus and his army were massacred by the Parthians in 53, there was nothing to prevent Pompey and Caesar from becoming open enemies. The two jockeyed for

supremacy for the rest of the decade, and events marched toward the civil war that began in 49 when Caesar invaded Italy with his Gallic legions.

Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus were the principals in the power struggles of the 50s, but there were also other players. Among the most important was Clodia's brother, Publius Clodius Pulcher.[8] Clodius had his own ambition: to control the city through the urban mob. To do so, he needed to become tribune of the *plebs*, which required renouncing his status as a patrician and transferring to the *plebs*. He achieved this feat in 59 with the connivance of the triumvirate, but for the most part he remained an independent operator outside their control. He won popular support by distributions of grain and used gangs of thugs to terrorize his opponents. In 58 he satisfied an old grudge against Cicero by getting him exiled in spite of Pompey's attempts to defend him, and he used his thugs to try to forestall efforts to recall him, breaking up assemblies and even besieging Pompey in his house. But Clodius' opponents had armed gangs of their own, and there were bloody battles between them. In 52 Clodius was murdered on the Appian Way by the gang of Pompey's supporter Milo. Rioting followed. Clodius' body was carried to the forum, where the fires of his funeral pyre destroyed the Senate House. In the aftermath Pompey was named sole consul, setting the stage for his confrontation with Caesar.

We cannot know how many of these events Catullus was in Rome to see or hear about. The date of his arrival in the city is unknown. He would have missed much of the excitement in 57–56 over Cicero's return from exile since he was in Bithynia with Memmius' *cohort*, and perhaps he did not live to know of Crassus' great disaster in 53 or Clodius' murder in 52. But he would have seen plenty of political turmoil all the same. Like everyone in Rome, he was aware of the violence in the streets and of the high-handed behavior of the great and powerful. As an intimate of Clodia, he would have had a privileged perspective on Clodius' activities. Major political figures appear in several of his poems: Caesar in 11, 29, 54, 57, and 93, Clodius in 79, Pompey in 29 and 113, Cicero in 49. Other figures less well known to us but famous at the time appear in many more.[9]

High Society

The Valerii Catulli of Verona were *domi nobiles* ("nobles at home"). (The term describes families rich and important in their native province who had not yet "arrived" socially and politically in Rome.) Catullus was

sufficiently well connected to join a governor's entourage and to move in at least some of the higher circles of Roman society. His friend and fellow poet C. Licinius Calvus, for example, was a rising political orator from a prominent family: Calvus' father was a praetor, and a Licinius had been consul as early as the fourth century.[10] Catullus' lover Clodia (whichever Clodia she was) had even higher social credentials. As Cicero reminds Clodia Metelli in his oration *Pro Caelio*:

> Had you not seen that your father was a consul, had you not heard that your uncle, your grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, great-great-great-grandfather were consuls? (Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 34)

Catullus' ancestry could not compete with those of Calvus or Clodia, for he was probably descended from Italian or Roman settlers who had moved into Transpadane territory around the end of the second century, ordinary men who had done very well in their new surroundings, perhaps in commerce of some kind.[11] But he was no country bumpkin either. In the late republic, provincial families like his were in the process of rising to senatorial rank within a generation or two (his own family would accomplish the feat by the time of Tiberius in the early first century A.D.).[12] He had a splendid education, as the learning—especially the Greek learning—of his poetry attests. He had plenty of money, and whatever he chose to do with it, a family connection with Caesar. Above all, he had great literary talent and interests in tune with contemporary poetics, as we will see in the last section of this chapter.

Many modern scholars argue that Catullus' provincial origins made him an outsider in Roman society and that he was correspondingly anxious about his status.[13] Certainly the persona we meet in his poems is very much attuned to nuances of behavior, status, and even accent. In poem 44 he notes that some people might think his country house has the wrong address (in rustic Sabine territory as opposed to fashionable Tibur). In poem 12 he castigates someone gauche enough to filch a napkin at a dinner party. In poem 84 he mocks a certain Arrius who mispronounces his aitches. But similar comments can be found in his contemporaries, particularly in Cicero. Cicero, too, can be seen as socially insecure (he was a "new man," the first in his family to reach the consulship, and like Catullus, he came to Rome from elsewhere in Italy). The more important point, however, is that Roman society in general was alert to details of behavior, dress, and speech as markers of status. Men (for it was men who appeared in public settings) both closely observed

each other for such markers and were careful to construct their own performance to confirm their place on the desired rung of the hierarchical ladder. It is safe to say that Catullus shared his society's preoccupation—he could hardly do otherwise. Allusions to status in his poetry demonstrate his interest (as well as the fact that he was a keen observer of social behavior). But they cannot show that his interest was different in kind or degree from that of his contemporaries. To put it another way: we cannot infer deep *personal* anxiety about his status from particular poems.

The markers of status in Roman society were various in kind. Some were obvious and definite: pedigree, wealth, political power. Others were intangible, the sum of selected personal qualities of behavior, speech, and appearance. Among the most important intangible markers was *urbanitas*, which we can translate as "urban sophistication"—but only so long as we remember that such terms are not universal and unchanging across societies or even over time in the same society. (Consider the difference between the "urban sophistication" of the *Thin Man* movies of the 1930s and that of *Seinfeld* or *Sex in the City* in the 1990s.) Elite Romans themselves saw *urbanitas* as indefinable: they knew it when they saw it.[14] Pressed for a definition of "an urban coloring" (*urbanitatis color*) in rhetoric, Cicero says: "I don't know. I only know that it exists" (*Brutus* 171). But the very indefinability of *urbanitas* was its strength. The people who had it knew what it was; their shared possession of it bound them together, as did their confidence that others could not fully understand or achieve it. Its power to exclude is nicely summed up in this definition by Michael Winterbottom: "*Urbanitas* was the code of attitudes and behaviour employed by the sophisticated ancient to make the outsider feel small."[15] As Winterbottom's words suggest, *urbanitas* was a composite of qualities. It included what was tasteful (*elegans*), witty (*facetus*), charming (*lepidus*), attractive (*venustus*), nice (*bellus*), and humorous (*festivus*). We will discuss some of these words in later chapters. For now the important point is the fluidity and relative vagueness of *urbanitas* and its components and their precariousness as social markers. A man's pedigree was stable, his wealth and political power perhaps somewhat less so; but *urbanitas* could be compromised in an instant by an ill-judged action or remark. In poem 22 Catullus shows us how fragile *urbanitas* is for the poet Suffenus[16]:

> Suffenus iste, Vare, quem probe nosti,
> homo est venustus et dicax et urbanus,

idemque longe plurimos facit versus.
. . .
haec cum legas tu, bellus ille et urbanus
Suffenus unus caprimulgus aut fossor
rursus videtur. (22. 1–3, 9–11)
(That Suffenus, Varus, whom you know well, is a charming and witty
and urbane fellow, and yet he makes by far the most verses.
. . .
When you read these things, that smart and urbane Suffenus now seems
an ordinary goatmilker or a ditchdigger.)

Although many markers of status operated across elite society, the Roman social world was not monolithic. It contained different circles whose attitudes, interests, and activities varied widely. The circle we meet in Catullus' poetry is young, well-off, pleasure-loving, and focused more on private concerns than on public responsibility.[17] In this respect they were at odds with traditional Roman values, which promoted worthwhile activity (*negotium*) on behalf of the state. Men were supposed to keep busy—in the army, in politics, in provincial administration, or even in commerce. But not everyone did. In the late republic there were plenty of privileged young men who used their wealth and position to suit themselves, perhaps dipping in and out of politics, perhaps dropping out of public life altogether, as Catullus seems to have done. Cicero likes to talk about such young men about town, his tone hostile or indulgent depending on the situation. In an oration against Catiline he portrays some of them as vicious and dangerous revolutionaries (*In Catilinam* 2.22–4), but in his defense of Caelius he takes a softer line: youth should be allowed its pleasures before it assumes the responsibilities of marriage, the forum, and the state (*Pro Caelio* 42). In both contexts he describes them as given over to a life of pleasure: love, all-night parties, dancing, and adultery.[18]

Catullus presents himself and his friends in a different light. Their *otium*, which means not "leisure" or "idleness" exactly, but perhaps something we could call "lack of *negotium*," or "lack of busy-ness," includes sensual pleasures and a certain amount of frivolity; but it is not merely a slothful refusal of gainful employment as Cicero and other traditionalists would see it, but rather a positive choice of private over public life. An important component in their choice is a shared commitment to poetry, whether writing it, talking about it, or criticising it. Catullus often shows poetry as an activity shared by members of the group: for example, in poem 14 Calvus sends Catullus a collection of terrible poems as a gift

and Catullus threatens to retaliate; in 22 Catullus criticises Suffenus' poems to his friend Varus; in 35 he writes to Caecilius about one of Caecilius' poems; in 38 he asks Cornificius for a poem of consolation; in 50 he recalls writing poems for fun with Calvus when they were *otiosi* ("at leisure"). Poetry was the activity of their *otium*, but it was also serious business. Cicero speaks approvingly of the great Roman hero Scipio Africanus, who was said "even in *otium* to think about *negotia*" (*De officiis*. 3.1.1). We might say the same of the young men in Catullus, except that theirs was a different *negotium*: not matters of state but poetry.

Sexual Attitudes

To the social markers discussed in the last section we must add another, which some modern scholars consider the most important of all: masculinity.[19] In the rigidly hierarchical world of Roman society, masculinity represented not merely the possession of certain physical attributes, but status, domination, and power. Masculinity manifested itself in carriage, speech, actions, and conduct, but above all in the sexual act, its most basic demonstration of control. The dominance belonged to the one who penetrated another with his penis, whether he did so vaginally, anally, or orally (respectively, *futuere*, *pedicare*, *irrumare*); and the one penetrated, whether female or male, was considered submissive and lesser in power and status.[20] The essential point was not the sex of the person with whom a man performed a sexual act, but whether or not he was the penetrator. The ability to penetrate another was a demonstration of masculinity and power; submitting to penetration (or being forced to submit) was an act of softness (*mollitia*) and an acknowledgement of inferiority. For a male slave it was just another aspect of his servitude; for an adult male citizen it was humiliating and shameful. Women did not play an important role in this social calculus of dominance and submission. Of course they participated in sexual activity, whether willingly or unwillingly, and whether as wives, mistresses, prostitutes, or slaves. But since it was a given that they were the ones penetrated, they occupied the negative pole of the virility continuum: the penetrated male was said "to suffer the woman's role" (*muliebria pati*). The contest of masculinity was for men.

Dominance could be demonstrated by actual sexual acts, but also by verbal or physical aggression, threats of homosexual rape, and accusations of *mollitia* or of having endured oral or anal penetration.[21] Catullus'

poetry contains many examples of masculine accusations and threats, the most famous being in poem 16.

> Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,
> Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
> qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,
> quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum. (16.1–4)
> (I'll bugger you and stuff it down your throats,
> queer Aurelius and faggot Furius!
> who think from my verses, because they're
> a little soft, that I'm not quite modest.)

Furius and Aurelius have accused Catullus of being *parum pudicum* ("not quite modest"—i.e., "unmale" and submitting to penetration by another) because he writes poems that are *molliculi* ("a little soft") and *parum pudici*. He retaliates by threatening to demonstrate his masculinity by raping them anally and orally. The threat is heightened if we agree with Wiseman that the epithets *pathice* and *cinaede* are proleptic or anticipatory and that Furius and Aurelius will be *made* pathic and "unmale" by his rape.[22] Catullus' masculinity will be asserted by his act, while theirs will be diminished or destroyed. Since phallic aggression was a display of power, the exercise of domination and control could be represented metaphorically as a sexual act.[23] In both poem 10 and poem 28 Catullus characterizes Memmius, the praetor with whom he served in Bithynia, as an *irrumator* (literally, someone who penetrates his "partner" orally). In 28 the language is graphic:

> O Memmi, bene me ac diu supinum
> tota ista trabe lentus irrumasti. (28.9–10)
> (O Memmius, when I was on my back you took your time and stuffed my mouth well and long with that whole beam of yours.)

Memmius had greater power and status than Catullus and let his subordinate know it, and Catullus describes his contemptuous domination in sexual terms. The metaphor in his description is not dead or even faded, but as potent as Catullus' Memmius, taking its force from the deep-seated connection between social standing and aggressive masculinity.

No label of effeminacy or homosexuality was attached to a man who penetrated another male, for as we have seen, his masculinity depended on his being the penetrator, not on the sex of the person he penetrated. But there were clearly understood laws about the status and character of his partners.[24] Free-born citizen boys were off-limits, as were free-born

girls, married women, and slaves used without their owner's consent. Foreigners, one's own slaves, and citizens of either sex who had engaged in prostitution were fair game. A slave in Plautus' comedy *Curculio* explains the rules to his young master: "Make love to anything you like, as long as you keep away from the wife, the widow, the virgin, young men, and free-born boys" (lines 37–8).

Within these limits the elite male could do as he pleased, but the conduct of elite women was closely scrutinized. The Roman matron was protected by law and custom from rape or seduction, but if her virtue was suspect, she was subject to punishment by her husband or family that—in theory, at least—might include even death.[25] At the least, however, she became vulnerable to slander and humiliation. The reputation of Clodia Metelli was such that Cicero felt free to treat her publicly with vicious contempt. In *Pro Caelio*, his speech in defense of her former lover M. Caelius Rufus, he calls her "a woman not only noble but notorious" (*Pro Caelio* 31), alludes insinuatingly to the rumors of her relations with Clodius ("her husband—I meant to say her brother—I always make that mistake;" *Pro Caelio* 32), and refers to her as *amicam omnium*, which we might translate as "everyone's very good friend" (*Pro Caelio* 32). Modern scholars have correctly cautioned against uncritical belief in Cicero's characterization of Clodia.[26] But his account is still valuable—not so much for its portrait of the historical Clodia as for the insight it provides into contemporary attitudes. In his sketch of the immoral behavior of a supposedly hypothetical woman (intended to be recognized as Clodia) we get a contemporary glimpse of decadent high life and its likely social consequences for a woman too publicly engaged in it.

> I say nothing now against this woman [Clodia]. But just suppose there were someone unlike her who made herself available to everyone, who always had an openly declared lover, into whose garden, house, seaside villa every lecher went back and forth at will, who even kept young men and compensated for their fathers' stinginess with her own generosity; suppose a widow were living freely, a bold widow were living shamelessly, a rich widow extravagantly, a lecherous widow like a whore, would I consider anyone who greeted her a little too freely an adulterer? (*Pro Caelio* 38)

New Poets and Poetry

Catullus arrived in Rome in time to become a major figure in a group of poets engaged in a new kind of poetry. The poets were young, like