

CATULLUS AND EMPIRE: POEMS 11 AND 29

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I offer this essay to Horatio Vella with respect and out of admiration for his many contributions to the study of Latin literature.

Catullus' poetry is unthinkable without Roman imperialism. Not only does the poet refer to activities in the provinces or mention foreign goods that come from conquered lands, but also much of his poetry displays attitudes and feelings that reflect back on empire. When one thinks about the political context, one begins to appreciate how deeply and intricately Catullus' verse is entangled in Roman imperialism.¹ In truth, the poems treat the theme of empire with a complexity, subtlety, and sophistication that need to be interpreted with care. What is noteworthy about Catullus' poetry is its ability to conform to the elite's yearning for world empire and to point to the devastating consequences of its realization. Within the framework of imperial collusion, there are moments when the poems cannot affirm empire fully or without reservation. These

discrepant visions are a reflection on the possibility of alternative experience, within the scope of the critique that the poet allows himself.

We shall look mainly at poems 11 and 29, but let us begin with a brief glance at the poem that stands at the head of the collection and that is programmatic for the book as a whole. The dedication to Cornelius Nepos serves as a reminder of how the Italians are making their way to the metropolitan centre, a centre whose status as a world power they are able to affirm. Assertions of Rome's domination over the rest of the world are attested as early as the second century BC, when speakers refer to the city as the master of the inhabited world (*oikoumene*). In the first century BC, men such as Pompey gave a particular definition to the expression *orbis terrarum*, which was increasingly used in concert with declarations of Rome's global ambitions. And not just Pompey, but Nepos too. Claude Nicolet reminded us that 'in the time of the Triumvirate, Nepos could clearly state that *in ea urbe in qua domicilium orbis terrarum esset imperii* (*Att.*, 3.3), or note that Antony and Octavian each wanted to be the first 'not only of the City (*Urbis*) but of the world' (*orbis terrarum*) (*ibid.*, 20.5).² Nepos attests in his work the use of the expression *orbis terrarum* to refer to Rome's domination of the world. If Nepos set forth 'all the ages' (*omne aevum*) in his writings, as the narrator of poem 1 says, the role and position of Rome in his *Chronica* may well be guessed at from his use of the expression. Nepos 'alone of the Italians' dared to rival the Greeks and compose a world history in which the rise to greatness of Rome, the dominant world power and his adopted city, must have played a significant part. In dedicating his work to Nepos, then, Catullus is offering his poems to the man who already presents the conjunction between city and

world in his writings, even before Augustus and the Roman Catholic Church would adopt it for official use.³

Poem 11 offers the most complex treatment of empire of any of Catullus' poems. In this work, imperial themes coexist with the devastating message that Furius and Aurelius are told to deliver to Lesbia:

Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli,
sive in extremos penetrabit Indos,
litus ut longe resonante Eoa
tunditur unda,
sive in Hyrcanos Arabasve molles,
seu Sacas sagittiferosve Parthos,
sive quae septemgeminus colorat
aequora Nilus,
sive trans altas gradietur Alpes,
Caesaris visens monimenta magni,
Gallicum Rhenum, †horribilesque† ulti-
mosque Britannos,
omnia haec, quaecumque feret voluntas
caelitum, temptare simul parati,
pauca nuntiate meae puellae
non bona dicta.
cum suis vivat valeatque moechis,

quos simul complexa tenet trecentos,
nullum amans vere, sed identidem omnium
 ilia rumpens:
nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
ultimi flos, praeter eunte postquam
 tactus aratros.

Furius and Aurelius, who will be Catullus' fellow-travellers, whether he makes his way even to distant India, where the shore is beaten by the far-resounding eastern wave, or to Hyrcania and soft Arabia, or to the Sacae and archer Parthians, or those plains which sevenfold Nile dyes with its flood, or whether he will tramp across the high Alps, to visit the memorials of great Caesar, the Gaulish Rhine, the formidable Britons, remotest of men—O my friends, ready as you are to encounter all these risks with me, whatever the will of the gods above shall bring, take a little message, not a kind message, to my mistress. Bid her live and be happy with her paramours, three hundred of whom she holds at once in her embrace, not loving one of them really, but again and again draining the strength of all. And let her not look to find my love, as before; my love, which by her fault has dropped, like a flower on the meadow's edge, when it has been touched by the plough passing by.

At a basic level, the geography of the poem is indicative of the Roman imperial interest in non-Roman lands, and the ease with which the narrator refers to such a range of places is made possible by the reality of Rome's imperialism. The details in the catalogue supplied by Catullus pertain to Indians, Hyrcanians, Arabians, the Sacae, the Parthians, the Nile, the Alps, the Rhine, and the Britons. In 55 BC, some of the areas mentioned had been the target of Roman campaigns: in the spring, Gabinius travelled to Egypt and restored Ptolemy Auletes to the throne, after which he embarked on his third Jewish and Nabatean campaigns; in the summer, Caesar crossed the Rhine and, in the autumn, made his way to Britain; and in November, Crassus set out for Syria and the east. No reading of the poem can be innocent of these details of Roman military history, and no Roman reader coming to the poem in or around 55 BC would be able to read the names and disregard Rome's imperial aspirations. The build-up of geographic names in the opening sequence parallels the expansion of Rome's empire overseas and includes a good many places that were either subject to Roman rule or the prospective target of it.

Consider, further, the military imagery of the poem. These images are available to someone who is thinking within an imperial framework, and poem 11 itself has to be seen as part of the structure of an unfolding and all-consuming imperialist venture. It is significant that Catullus hints at a military metaphor in the first line and then develops it in lines 2-12. In line 1, the narrator describes Furius and Aurelius as his *comites*—*comites* can refer to soldiers or to the members of a provincial governor's staff—and says that they will march with him across all the named regions if necessary. Just as Roman armies march across the world in order to establish Roman rule, so Furius and Aurelius will journey with 'Catullus' through all these places, and then deliver a message to his

mistress. ‘Catullus’ is putting Furius and Aurelius to use for himself, but his appeal is founded on their ability as his *comites* to traverse with him the vast extent of Rome’s possessions, from the edges of the east to the edges of the west. On this reading, Roman ‘Catullus’ is deploying all his imperial resources to send a message to Lesbia, but she is not an easy person to whom an ex-lover may send a communication. Not only has she rebuffed the narrator, but also she lies beyond the margins of civilization and beyond even the distant peoples whom the Romans are seeking to subjugate. She is as violently dangerous to ‘Catullus’ as the enemies of Rome are at its frontiers, or as the passing plough to a flower in a meadow. As William Fitzgerald has written, ‘The imperial scenario is introduced by Catullus because it provides the appropriate hyperbole for the problem of ‘getting through’ to Lesbia, and it casts this problem in terms of the confrontation of the civilized with the savage: Lesbia’s unbridled lust is as threatening as the peoples on the boundaries of the empire.’⁴ By this interpretation, ‘Catullus’ aligns the military might of Rome on his side in the conflict against Lesbia and her three hundred adulterers.

Part of the problem with interpreting poem 11 is, however, that it both reproduces and criticizes the imperial ideology of its time. To say only that the poem is part of an imperialist structure would fail to do justice to the complexities and difficulties of the poem. For instance, why Furius and Aurelius should be the bearers of the narrator’s message is not clear, given the hostility shown to them in other poems, unless they are the messengers in this instance precisely because they have sunk to the same level that she has.⁵ ‘But if these lines are ironical,’ C. J. Fordyce writes, ‘they are a very complicated kind of irony, containing as they do what can only be a genuine compliment to Caesar.’⁶

Other critics have taken exception to the view that the lines are complimentary to Caesar. Secondly, the positions of Lesbia and 'Catullus' vis-à-vis Roman imperialism are not at all straightforward. In the context of the poem, the analogy to Lesbia's lust is the insatiable appetite of Rome's generals for conquest and empire. But Lesbia's lust is presented here as destructive, omnivorous, and unquenchable (she breaks three hundred lovers) or ruthlessly and violently unsentimental (she cuts down a flower). Her touch cuts and severs the flower so as to leave it languid on the ground; she does not truly love her many lovers but ruptures their loins again and again in her collective embrace. Moreover, the plough to which Lesbia is compared, while an instrument of culture and civilization, functions here in order to damage natural beauty; as the poem's concluding image pits Lesbia against 'Catullus', a civilizing force is shown to do violence to the world of nature. This association between Lesbia's desire and the violent imperial drive for power and pelf makes problematic the Romans' conquests overseas, even if they occur in the name of the civilizing process. If Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus are primarily serving their own rapacious greed and ambition, then Rome's conquests are illustrative of their debased and destructive urges and not of the city's greatness.

Differing visions of empire coexist in poem 11, and this is exemplified also by the multiple positions occupied by 'Catullus' within the lyric: the narrator does not shrink from turning empire's machinery against Lesbia, but he recoils from the motivations for imperial plunder; he is the imperial administrator who dispatches his message to a threatening force on the edge of civilization, and he is the flower withering at the margins of Roman civilization after it has been cut down by unstoppable lust. In poem 11, 'Catullus' manages, simultaneously and paradoxically, to hold on to the privileged

framework of empire from which he can survey the world as a series of places to conquer and to stand back and experience otherness from the standpoint of the marginalized. The poem accommodates or overlays different impulses within its structure in such a way that differing perspectives on empire remain possible. With this work of Catullus, lyric poetry becomes a vehicle for exploring imperialism and colonialism, and it serves to weigh the phenomena and the consequences from various angles.

Significantly, this movement between different visions of empire in the poem is also captured at the level of desire. Desire is disseminated in the poem in such a fashion that both 'Catullus' and Lesbia resemble the imperialists in the ferocity of their drives, and all of them figure as desiring subjects incapable of requiting their passions. The narrator's desire for his mistress was not returned, just as Lesbia's lust for her adulterous lovers is so great that even three hundred all at once may not be sufficient. In this respect, they both resemble imperialists such as Caesar, whose lust for power is insatiable, and, in this respect, both their passions are imperialist. Love and Roman imperialism are dynamic forces that depend on an appetite, but this kind of appetitive desire is itself constitutive of an ever-present object inscribed in the heart of things. Whether the object of desire is Lesbia's lost love or the distant land mass of Britain, it is figured by and emerges from the desire of the narrator and the imperialist. The fluidity with which eros and empire open onto each other is telling, since it illustrates that two may have more in common than readers might suppose. The strange message of the poem, then, seems to be that imperialism is like nothing so much as unrequited passion.⁷

The limit of Catullus' critique is the absent referent at the centre of the poem, for Rome is not named anywhere in these verses.⁸ Perhaps because 'Catullus', Furius, and

Aurelius will be setting out from Rome, the narrator does not need to name the city as a place they will visit together. Nevertheless, the narration follows an arc that moves loosely from east to west, and it is striking that the gaze of the narrator passes over the city and does not mention it. But a Roman general is mentioned in roughly the middle of the catalogue, and he is Caesar *magnus*. What this suggests is that the poet's critique of empire is directed more at the men of state responsible for giving imperialism the particular direction it has taken in the late Republic than at Roman imperialism as such. Figures such as Caesar and Pompey have used the city and its resources to satisfy their own lust for imperial domination, wealth, and glory. In the process, they have resorted to extremes of violence, they have invoked the forces of civilization only to destroy nature, and they have made Roman sovereignty conterminous with the known world while paying only lip-service to Rome itself. As David Konstan remarks, Catullus' poetry evinces 'his political opposition to the deals struck by the triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, in which he saw a conspiracy to loot the entire world in order to pay for their personal depravities'.⁹ Hence, the city is absent from the poem, but the memorials of great Caesar are all too evident in a place where the city ought to have been visible.

Viewed from this perspective, the poems about such exponents of imperialism as Caesar or his friend Mamurra are attacks against their profligacy and their dubious motives for conquest. In a string of poems grouped loosely at the end of Catullus' book, Mamurra is called Mentula, and is savagely derided and criticized for luxury and vice; in the Mentula poems, greed and lust are the characteristic traits of empire-builders, with the result that, once again, imperial and sexual motifs cross each other in telling ways in Catullus' work. Mamurra was Caesar's *praefectus fabrum* in Gaul from 58–55 BC and a

close ally, so the appellation ‘Cock’ and the activities ascribed to Mamurra in these poems are naturally also an insult to Caesar.¹⁰ In poem 93, ‘Catullus’ has already expressed complete indifference to Caesar or his lofty stature in Rome. Then immediately follows the first of the Mentula poems in the collection, a poem in which the fornicating cock goes forth and seeks what it needs. This Cock’s habits are beyond belief, and, in poem 114, it transpires that Mentula has indeed gone out everywhere and acquired much but is such a spendthrift that his estate cannot keep up with him. His grounds at Firmum have many fine things, fish, fowl, pasture, cornland, and game. Unimaginably, Mentula goes through all this and spends more than his estate can produce. In the adjoining poem 115, Mentula has acres of land and water, enormous woods, and large lakes as far as the Hyperboreans and Oceanus’ sea, but the ‘monstrous menacing cock’ (*mentula magna minax*) is the most noteworthy feature of the estate. The Cock’s appetite is gigantic indeed, and the (in every way) phallic nature of Roman imperialism is affirmed.¹¹

‘Was it this then, you one and only general, that took you to the furthest island of the West, was it so that that debauched cock of yours should devour twenty or thirty million?’ Roman imperialism forms the essential background to Catullus’ notorious lampoon of Mamurra, Caesar, and Pompey in poem 29. The context to the poem is provided by the invasions of Britain and Gaul by Caesar, the booty seized by Pompey in the Mithridatic wars in Pontus in 64–63 BC, the campaign in Lusitania conducted by Caesar as propraetor of Hispania Ulterior in 61 BC, and the Spanish gold mines beside the Tagus that the Romans thoroughly and systematically looted over scores of years.

Quis hoc potest videre, quis potest pati,
nisi impudicus et vorax et aleo,
Mamurram habere quod comata Gallia
habebat ante et ultima Britannia?
cinaede Romule, hoc videbis et feres?
et ille nunc superbus et superfluens
perambulabit omnium cubilia,
ut albulus columbus aut Adoneus?
cinaede Romule, hoc videbis et feres?
es impudicus et vorax et aleo.
eone nomine, imperator unice,
fuisti in ultima occidentis insula,
ut ista vestra diffututa mentula
ducenties comesset aut trecenties?
quid est alid sinistra liberalitas?
parum expatratum an parum helluatum est?
paterna prima lancinata sunt bona:
secunda praeda Pontica: inde tertia
Hibera, quam scit amnis aurifer Tagus.
†hunc Galliae timet et Britanniae†
quid hunc malum fovetis? aut quid hic potest
nisi uncta devorare patrimonia?
eone nomine, urbis o piissimi,

socer generque, perdidistis omnia?

Who can look upon this, who can suffer this, unless he's shameless and a glutton and a gambler, that Mamurra should have what Gallia Comata and furthest Britain used to have? Faggot Romulus, you can see this and allow it? And shall he now, proud and full to overflowing, prance around everyone's marriage-bed, like a white cock-pigeon or an Adonis? Faggot Romulus, you can see this and allow it? You're shameless and a glutton and a gambler. Was it this then, you one and only general, that took you to the furthest island of the West, was it so that that debauched cock of yours should devour twenty or thirty million? What is misguided generosity if not this? Has he not spent enough on lust and gluttony? His ancestral property was first torn to shreds; then came the Pontic loot, then in the third place the Spanish, which Tagus, the gold-bearing river, knows. Is this the man who has the pickings of Gaul and Britain? Why do you both support this scoundrel? And what is he good for except devouring rich patrimonies? Was it for this, most honorable men of Rome, that you, father-in-law and son-in-law, have ruined everything?

Rome's conquests of Pontus, Gaul, Spain, and Britain provide the poet with the opportunity to launch a harsh attack against Mamurra and through him, against Caesar and Pompey. It is evident that, in the narrator's eyes, Mamurra is living scandalously, and that his extravagant lifestyle is made possible by the spoils of empire. 'The dynamics of world conquest,' Marilyn Skinner writes, 'have been harnessed to a cycle of wanton

self-indulgence.¹² It is as if Caesar and Pompey have subjugated lands and peoples just to feed the appetite of this omnivorous, insatiable glutton, though to support Mamurra's way of life is plainly not an acceptable reason for world conquest. By skilfully exploring images connected with greed, wasteful excess, and sexual profligacy, Catullus offers a vituperative description of Caesar and Pompey and their tool Mamurra.

While the rebuke to Caesar and Pompey as well as to Mamurra is blatantly obvious, the question of Roman imperialism is held in abeyance. The poem turns to the issue of Roman imperialism and at the least explores the subject within the terms of its attack on elite figures. There is no mistaking that the agents of imperialism and their selfish motives for world hegemony are called into question. The verses suggest that Roman imperialism in Catullus' day is the result of domestic rivalries, flawed generals with dubious leadership qualities, execrable subordinates, and the need in certain quarters within the city to maintain a dissolute lifestyle. At some level, the poem is inviting its readers to examine critically this moment, and by implication other moments, in the history of imperialism. While it is transparent from the poem that Caesar, Pompey, and Mamurra are acting for the wrong reasons, it is, however, much less apparent whether or not there are acceptable reasons for Rome to be conquering and ruling over other lands and peoples at all. Pontus, Gaul, Spain, and Britain should not be conquered just because of men such as Mamurra— but if it were not for Mamurra, would the conquests be justifiable? To this question the poem presents no unambiguous response, whatever else it conveys. Loaded with personal and political invective, brimming with sexual and parasitic affronts, charged with irony and sarcasm, the poem subjects the particular mid-century imperialism of Caesar and Pompey to a devastating polemic, but, in the absence

of a broader critique, it leaves open the legitimacy and value of other kinds of imperialism in theory and in practice.

Roman writers from Catullus' period show few if any scruples about the city's acquisition of overseas dominions. Caesar and Cicero did not hesitate to praise Rome's right to rule over subject peoples, and they claimed that this right derived naturally from Rome's great traditions, military capabilities, and the favour of the gods. In the first century BC, and possibly even earlier, this attitude had resulted in an aggressive imperialistic policy in which any independent overseas territory was subject to annexation by Roman armies. By the time Catullus was composing his last poems, Rome had already claimed hegemony over the following provinces: Achaea, Africa, Asia, Bithynia and Pontus, Cilicia, Crete and Cyrenaica, Cyprus, Epirus, Gaul, Illyricum or Dalmatia, Judaea, Macedonia, Sardinia and Corsica, Sicily, Spain, and Syria. No sustained objection to this long series of conquests can be found in the surviving literature of the late Republic. In his study of conceptions of empire in the age of Cicero and Caesar, P. A. Brunt wrote about Rome that 'the limits of the *orbis terrarum* within which she claimed dominion were continually advancing. There was no point at which such expansion could halt, so long as any independent people remained . . . the very existence of a truly independent power was viewed at Rome as a potential threat to her own security.' Brunt adds: 'Caesar would not accept either Rhine or Channel as limits to Roman power. Whatever the practice of earlier ages, his attitude was characteristic for his own time.'¹³ Against this background, Catullus' handling of Roman imperialism seems almost innovative.

Empire emerges, in Catullus' poetry, as both richly productive and stunningly wide-ranging in influence and impact. The 'expanding horizons of contemporary Rome' provided the poet with a political and cultural environment on which he was able to draw for the purposes of poetry that is at once brilliant and intense.¹⁴ It would be reductive to ignore the creative impetus given by empire to Catullus or any Roman poet, or to overlook the great literary and artistic merit of work made under imperial circumstances. At the same time, the poet was consciously and unconsciously affected by the fact that he lived in an imperial society. This background was so impossible to avoid, so dynamic in its effects, so capable of mystifying historical causes, and so powerful in its interpellation of subjects that in one way or another Catullus' work is perforce connected to it. The vast scope and range of empire partly explains why Catullus' critique of imperialism does not chiefly treat imperialism as such but pertains rather to the abuse, excess, and profligacy of the imperial elite; it explains why a colonial in Rome might not have wished fully to consider an Asian or Spanish perspective in his poetry. Few if any Romans were able to stand outside imperialism and look at it with a critical eye. In his own manner, Cicero saw the hypocrisy and corruption, knew the Romans were hated in the provinces, and foretold the inevitable consequences, but he was unable to reject imperial conquest out of hand.¹⁵

From the first century BCE to the third century CE, the Valerii Catulli themselves were direct beneficiaries of empire, and the fortunes of the family experienced a steady improvement throughout the period. Peter Wiseman, who has expertly illuminated the literary, epigraphic, and archaeological sources for the study of the family, notes that 'there is no inconsistency between Hellenistic literary studies and the wealth and status

that could be won by financial exploitation of the empire. The Valerii Catulli of Verona were a family . . . rising in three of four generations from equestrian rank in the late Republic to the highest levels of metropolitan society under the Julio-Claudians. . . .'¹⁶ The history of Catullus' family indicates that it was able to take advantage of imperial resources, to the point that a family of Transpadanes was able to enter the ranks of the wealthy aristocracy in Rome after Augustus, a passage that appears to have begun in the poet's own time. Verona was made a Latin colony in 89 BC, and the inhabitants received Roman citizenship in 49 BC under Julius Caesar. Soon after receiving citizenship, the Valerii Catulli reached senatorial rank under Augustus. As Wiseman writes, 'The Valerii Catulli were a favoured senatorial family under Augustus and of consular rank under Tiberius. The natural inference is that in the late republic they were wealthy *domi nobiles* and that Catullus' father was one of the *principes viri* of Verona.'¹⁷ One is wary of forming poetic interpretation out of biographical details and of making too much about the family background of Catullus. Nevertheless, the poet's interest in empire is consistent with what we know about the family's political and social activities and aspirations.

What is interesting about Catullus' attitude to empire is that it comes from one whose life blurs demarcations between colonizer and colonized. In so far as the poet was not a citizen, he, too, was a colonial subject and an outsider in the city of Rome.¹⁸ In fact, Verona lay in Cisalpine Gaul, a province created after the Social War, at which time also the Transpadanes received Latin rights but not full citizenship. Nevertheless, the Latin colonies were not the provinces, and the inhabitants of these colonies enjoyed rights, privileges, and reciprocities that were substantially different from those granted to the

overseas provincials. Empire was a fluid and shifting concept in the first century BCE, and different levels of political and economic freedom sometimes existed even within the regions of a province; but Italian colonials would not have wished to be treated in the manner that the natives of Asia or Spain were by Rome. The first century BC shows a gradual assimilation into Roman society of new men and colonials. Michel Serres has remarked that from its founding ‘Rome absorbs contradictions’ and that ‘its mélange is inclusive’; eventually, even provincials and non-Romans would come to occupy the emperor’s position in Rome.¹⁹ In the poet’s era, the integration or Romanization of Italian equestrians had already begun, as the history of the Valerii Catulli indicates, and Catullus was able to gain literary renown in his adopted city. The poet who shows such mastery of the Latin language was, then, a non-citizen Italian colonial in Rome, from a family of high equestrian standing but not senatorial status, and a Transpadane from Cisalpine Gaul. What does it mean to speak about empire in relation to an identity framed in so many-sided a fashion?

Even to appreciate the personal or cultural resonances for Catullus of places such as Verona or Rome is not easy for us. He himself must have had to grapple with his Veronese, Roman, and Italian identities, not to mention with the Greek tradition in which he was schooled. The Transpadane towns were probably more Hellenized than Rome, and the equestrian families, including the Valerii Catulli, were already involved in extensive trade with the Greek East. With Rome displacing the Greek cities as a centre of culture and patronage in the first century BC, the Hellenized elites from the Italian peninsula took advantage of their prior exposure to Greece and rose to positions of power and privilege within Rome itself. Along with the upward mobility came the challenging

task of balancing the importance given to Italy and Rome in cultural matters, though usually the scale tipped in Rome's favour. Catullus' poetry is more often than not about life in Rome, but the narrator never disguises his Italian or Veronese origins.²⁰ Cornelius Nepos, like Catullus, was *Transpadanus*, and thus the expression 'alone of the Italians' (*unus Italorum*) in poem 1 can be read, in part, as a gesture toward a shared Italian heritage.²¹ At other times, the narrator is careful to maintain that his home is now in Rome, as he does in poem 68, where he mourns his brother's death from Verona. Verona, Rome, Italy, Greece: the places define Catullus' intellectual life and indicate how multiple allegiances and affiliations characterize his situation.

I do not think of Catullus as complicit with empire. Not I do expect him to take the anti-imperialist stance that characterized movements for national freedom in the twentieth century. Lyric poetry is, for him, a medium 'where social, political, and historical issues are submitted to the most exacting kinds of questions', and his poetry illustrates the varied attitudes to culture and imperialism that can sometimes coexist in one and the same individual.²² There are moments in the *libellus* when the poet ridicules foreigners for their foreignness (see poem 39), but he also repeatedly attacks Romans for a variety of reasons. His poetry is oppositional to writers such as Cicero and to the actions of politicians such as Caesar, but these passages are frequently laced with such irony that interpretation of them becomes difficult. Suetonius records that Caesar invited Catullus to dinner on the very same day that he tendered an apology.²³ For all the criticism and invective of Catullus' poetry, however, the libidinal subject in his verse has no other locus from which to speak than that of late Republican empire. Despite witty insults against the city's elite, the poems reflect an imperial condition that exists at the

back of the aesthetic creation and that affects the poet's choice of words, metaphors, images, and sounds. At its innermost core, Catullus' work is inextricably bound to imperial processes and relations, while the poet himself expresses a profound disenchantment with the vain conflicts and passions of contemporary society.²⁴

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¹ The relationship between Catullus and his political context is much discussed. Skinner 2015, pp. 176-182, offers an excellent survey of recent studies on the subject. The relevant sections of Skinner 2015 summarize recent work on poems 11 and 29, which are the focus of my chapter.

² Nicolet 1991, p. 33.

³ See Ovid, *Fasti* 2.684: *Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem*.

⁴ Fitzgerald 1995, p. 181.

⁵ See poems 15, 16, 21, 23, 24, and 26.

⁶ Fordyce 1961, p. 125.

⁷ On this theme in relation to the lyric poetry of sixteenth-century Europe, see Greene 1999.

⁸ Janan 1994, pp. 63-64.

⁹ Konstan 2000, p. 229; cf. Greene 1997.

¹⁰ For Mamurra, see Neudling 1955, pp. 112-15.

¹¹ On this point, see Konstan 2000, pp. 216-24.

¹² Skinner 1979, p. 146.

¹³ Brunt 1990, p. 300, who refers to Veyne 1975.

¹⁴ Du Quesnay and Woodman 2012, p. 260.

¹⁵ Cicero, *Pro lege Manilia* 65, *In Verrem* 2.3.207, *Epistulae ad familiares* 15.1.3.

¹⁶ Wiseman 1985, 100.

¹⁷ Wiseman 1987, 274.

¹⁸ It is, given the evidence, difficult to state definitively whether Catullus was a citizen: see Wiseman 1987 and 2007.

¹⁹ Serres 1991.

²⁰ Tatum 1997.

²¹ See Habinek 1998, 94-97, and Ando 2002, 130-31.

²² Selden 1992, p. 498.

²³ Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 73.

²⁴ I am grateful to Carmel Serracino for editorial guidance and to the reader for comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Translations of Catullus are adapted from the Loeb volume.