

The Rules of Gift-Exchange: Catullus 12, 13, & 14

Gift-exchange forms one of the central frameworks for defining social bonds within Roman society, and was part of how Roman poets constructed the world.¹ Rome in the late Republic was a society built on gift exchange and reciprocal obligation, both asymmetrical and between nominally equal friends. At the same time, social and political position was determined by prestige, dignity, and public image, and this combination resulted in tensions and concerns over status in the giving and receiving of gifts, favours and services. Although this tension becomes more evident in the work of later Augustan poets, it can also be seen in the poetry of Catullus. Much of his poetry is concerned, explicitly or implicitly, with the formation and dissolution of social bonds, and comprehending the role of gift-exchange in his poetry is important to a clear understanding of his works.

One of the major ways in which the conventions of gift-exchange in Roman society were adapted by Catullus was in the redefinition of its substance. That is, he presented different expectations about the objects and services that were or should be exchanged, while maintaining the emphasis on the importance of the exchange itself. The poetry of Catullus engages in the creation and maintenance of a community of friends by means of the exchange of things of mutually agreed upon value. The important issue is the form of the objects of exchange. Instead of political support, legal help, dowries, loans, and personal attendance, which were the most common elements of exchange in aristocratic society at Rome, Catullus and his friends exchange poetry, support in love affairs, and companionship in the indulgence in *otium*. The shared acceptance of the value of these *beneficia* is crucial to inclusion in the group of friends.²

This article will explore the role of gifts and Roman expectations about gift-exchange in three poems by Catullus: 12, 13, and 14. Poem 12 accuses Asinius of a gauche attempt to steal a napkin, poem 13 invites Fabullus to a dinner party for which he will have to bring all the supplies, and poem 14 complains to Calvus about a recent gift of horrible poetry. In this article I will demonstrate how the cultural importance of gift-exchange underlies Catullus' interactions with his friends, explore the way in which those interactions are presented to the reader, and show the significance of gift-exchange to his literary programme.

Poems 12, 13, and 14 are connected by both gift-giving and conviviality.³ This miniature unit of poems forms a transition between two larger units that have been argued to exist within

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous readers of this article, who helped me refine its focus and gave me several useful references.

² Friendship is a highly charged term in discussing Roman society; David Konstan's work on the term (*Friendship in the Classical World* 1997) helps to distinguish the various types of relationship covered by this concept. When referring to Catullus' friends, I understand the term to encompass a group of men of similar social, political, and economic status to Catullus, who are probably mostly around the same age as him, and who have a set of interests and activities in common beyond the usual political and military career of a young upper-class Roman. It is also important to note that Catullus did not completely dismiss the conventional Roman *beneficia*, for instance he expected to gain some tangible wealth from his time in Bithynia; however, those interactions were not with members of his inner circle of friends.

³ "The theme of gifts and giving among loving friends is not a prominent one throughout the Catullan corpus; it is, rather, 'clustered' in the poems under scrutiny here. We may conclude that poems 12-14 are not simply a random collection of poems separating two better-defined units; they are themselves well defined, and their position in the text seems intentional" (Forsyth 1985: 574).

the polymetric collection.⁴ In turn, poem 13 acts as a transition between 12 and 14; the theme of a dinner party and the presence of Fabullus connect it to poem 12, while the emphasis on gifts of poetry and shared critical standards points forward to poem 14.

In Catullus 12, the background understanding of all the ramifications and expectations associated with gift-giving give point to the joke at Asinius' expense; the framework adds a typically Catullan depth and complexity to an amusing occasional poem.⁵ The gift in question in the poem is a set of Saetaban napkins and its value lies not in its price, says Catullus, but in its emotional significance as a connection to close friends (12.12-13):

quod me non movet aestimatione,
verum est mnemosynum mei sodalis.

I'm not concerned about its value,
But it's a memento of my comrade.

A similar emphasis on the emotional value of a gift rather than its material worth is also found in Seneca's *de beneficiis*, his treatise on the proper conduct of the exchange of gifts and favours and obligations.⁶ In fact, in his more idealistic passages, Seneca denies that the material item itself has any significance, and asserts that it is in the intention alone that a *beneficium* exists, and it is by gratitude and affection alone that it can be repaid.⁷ The most important concern in this poem, as in much of Catullus' poetry, is friendship and the inclusion or exclusion of others in the poet's circle of friends.⁸ Thus the idealised view of gift-exchange is useful in this poem, since it

⁴ The historical and on-going arguments about the arrangement of the Catullan corpus, and to what extent it is authorial, have been clearly presented by Marilyn B. Skinner in chpt. 3 of *A Companion to Catullus*. The group of poems most commonly thought to have been arranged by Catullus, whatever the situation of the others, is poems 2-14; many scholars in the last few decades have argued for authorial arrangement of large sections of the polymetrics, in particular (e.g. Clausen 1976, Skinner 1981, Ferguson 1986, Minyard 1988, Arkins 1992). "The existence of two clearly defined 'cycles' of poems within the initial lyrics of the Catullan corpus has long been recognized. The first of these, the so-called 'Lesbia cycle', is contained within poems 2-11, while the second, or 'Furius and Aurelius cycle', can be found between poems 15 and 26" (Forsyth 1985: 571).

⁵ This poem is classified by Cairns 1972: 93-94 as a *flagitatio*, a literary form of the "extra-legal or pro-legal self-help by which a man whose property had been stolen ... could attempt to regain his property by subjecting the offender to a barrage of insults and demands for the return of his property."

⁶ **Error! Main Document Only.** Seneca is of course writing long after Catullus, but I have turned to his works for a framework for my discussion of gift-giving and obligation because they give a relatively clear picture of many aspects of the practice of gift-exchange as viewed by someone who participated in it. In particular, because his work is protreptic rather than descriptive, it provides an idealising view of the aristocratic approach to generosity; this can be useful because Catullus, too, often seems to be attempting to establish or elucidate a standard for behaviour, against which he measures the actions of his friends and acquaintances. Both the similarities and the differences between Seneca's ideals and those of Catullus can be illuminating.

⁷ "Quid est ergo beneficium? Benivola actio tribuens gaudium capiensque tribuendo in id, quod facit prona et sponte sua parata. Itaque non, quid fiat aut quid detur, refert, sed qua mente, quia beneficium non in eo, quod fit aut datur, consistit, sed in ipso dantis aut facientis animo"; "So what is a benefit? It is a well-intentioned action that confers joy and in so doing derives joy, inclined towards and willingly prepared for doing what it does. And so it matters not what is done or what is given, but with what attitude, since the benefit consists not in what is done or given but rather in the intention of the giver or agent" (Sen. *Ben.* 1.6.1).

⁸ "The Catullan collection situates the poet as the arbiter of elegance of his circle, in which capacity he is

highlights the indefinable connection between Catullus and his friends, which is so crassly misunderstood by Asinius. Anything that helps Catullus define the boundaries between his knowledgeable, sophisticated group of friends and the rest of Roman society is helpful to him, and the rules governing gift-exchange are a particularly effective tool in this strategy, not least because they involve essentialising concepts and can provide a “natural” standard against which to measure others. In the poem there are clear contrasts between those who understand the proper workings of gift-exchange and Asinius, who does not. Veranius and Fabullus have shown their understanding by sending the gift, and Catullus has shown his by his concern and gratitude for that same gift.⁹ Asinius, however, has failed to appreciate its real value, and demonstrates by stealing the napkins that he sees only their material worth.¹⁰ He has also forestalled any generosity that Catullus could, perhaps, have shown him, since the theft clearly disqualifies him as a possible recipient of Catullus’ gifts by revealing a lack of the qualities required in a suitable recipient.¹¹ Conversely, Veranius and Fabullus have marked Catullus as worthy of their friendship by bestowing a *beneficium* on him, and he has shown his estimation of them by acknowledging the gift and demonstrating his gratitude publicly.¹²

Another aspect of this gift that accords with Seneca’s treatment of gift-exchange is the reference in the poem to it being a *mnemosynum* (12.13). This word, found nowhere else in

more often than not exposing those who fail to meet his standards” (Fitzgerald 1995: 93). Catullus’ poetry was intended for a small, relatively exclusive circle of friends, the *amici* of whom he speaks in his poetry and to whom many of his poems are addressed. Within this circle there was a system of gifts and support parallel to that of political *amicitia*, but centered on the exchange of poetry and criticism and praise of other poets’ work. This corresponds to the Callimachean ideal of writing for a small, highly learned, poetically erudite audience (Clausen 1964: 183). The topic is much examined: Fordyce 1968 has a brief discussion of “Catullus and ‘Alexandrianism’” in his introduction (xviii-xxii); see also Ross 1969 and 1975.

⁹ This is clearly visible in the poet’s use of terms such as *salsum* and *inepte* (12.4), along with *invenusta* (12.5), contrasting with *leporum* (12.9) and *facetiarum* (12.9); these words are important markers of desirable or undesirable behaviour in Catullus’ group (see Fordyce 1968 and Quinn 1973). The poet also includes Pollio, Asinius’ brother, in the category of those who know how to behave. Pollio’s disapproval of and embarrassment about Asinius’ actions indicate this (12.6-8), and the terms used to describe him (“est enim leporum / differtus puer ac facetiarum” [12.8-9]) show the poet’s approval in the customary language of his social group. Krostenko draws attention to the use of the language of social performance in this poem: “*Inuenustus*, *bellus*, *lepores*, and *facetiae* are not loose equivalents for ‘wit’ or ‘style’ but recall respectively gesture, the evaluation of small subgroups, and performances, all of which are plainly appropriate to the poem” (2001: 244). These terms contribute to the demarcation of Catullus’ circle, both socially and aesthetically: “In the context of this poem, possession of the common aesthetic standards described by the language of social performance is also a mark of social solidarity between a kind of elite, comprising Catullus, Pollio, and like-minded persons” (Krostenko 2001: 244). Ross 1969 also discusses the language of *urbanitas* in the polymetrics (104-12 especially).

¹⁰ A man who steals from the dinner-table was a conventional figure in classical literature (Cairns 1972: 94), so Asinius, by committing this breach of hospitality, is perhaps also demonstrating his unfamiliarity with literary convention, another sign of his unsuitability for inclusion in the circle of Catullus’ friends.

¹¹ The poet does, however, suggest a possible inversion of gift-giving if Asinius does not return the napkins: he threatens to send him *hendecasyllabos* as punishment for the theft. The poet can blame as well as praise, and sometimes “gifts” of poetry are in fact the opposite.

¹² According to Seneca, gifts that come from people whose judgement is suspect, or that have provenances of which one is ashamed, are not truly benefits and impose no obligation; one must try not to accept gifts from people with whom one does not wish to be associated (Sen. *Ben.* 1.15.6 and 2.18.3).

Latin, is generally taken to mean ‘souvenir’. Krostenko suggests that the use of this word may also be “meant to suggest the private world of sentimental value by recalling the language of Greek epigram and excluding the Latin equivalent, *monimentum*, which usually described reminders of grand achievements” (2001: 245). This seems especially noteworthy given Catullus’ use of the Latin term in poem 11, the previous poem in the collection as we have it, in fact: *Caesaris visens monimenta magni* (11.10). In that poem the word is deliberately grand and reminiscent of public celebrations and triumphs, in order to heighten the contrast with the seemingly trivial and intensely personal message to be entrusted to Furius and Aurelius. Catullus’ choice to use a different word in poem 12, then, should be viewed as deliberately eschewing those public associations. Fordyce does not make it clear whether he considers *mnemosynum* to mean a souvenir of a place or of the person who sent it,¹³ but as Quinn mentions,¹⁴ it must mean that the gift is a reminder of the people who gave it, since the phrase is “*mnemosynum mei sodalis*”, “memento of my comrade”, and Catullus’ interest is clearly in his friends and not in Saetaba. Again, the personal resonances of the term, as opposed to the public and military associations of *monimentum*, are important; his friends have returned from the provinces, but have brought back for him not war booty and the trappings of a triumph, but a personal, domestic gift, suitable for the private celebration of friendship typified by the dinner party that is the setting of this poem. We see a movement away from the conventional Roman forms of gift-exchange, in which the profits from postings in the provinces are crucial, as are the uses to which they can be put in acquiring political and social advancement, to a more idiosyncratic valuation of emotional ties and private enjoyment as important elements of exchange.

The emphasis on memory contained in the term *mnemosynum*, and the specification that as an object it recalls to Catullus the memory of its sender, also makes sense in the context of gift-giving, as can be seen by certain remarks by Seneca. In spite of his earlier strictures about the thought behind the gift mattering more than the actual gift itself, Seneca does offer opinions about what objects make the best gifts. In discussing this, he suggests that the gift’s ability to recall the giver to the recipient’s mind is crucial:

Ingratos quoque memoria cum ipso munere incurrit, ubi ante oculos est et oblivisci sui non sinit, sed auctorem suum ingerit et inculcat.

But the gift itself provokes even the ungrateful to remember, at least when it is right before their eyes; it does not let them forget the gift and forces the recipient to take notice of the giver as well.

(Sen. *Ben.* 1.12.1)

Clearly the Saetaban napkins function in this way in Catullus 12 – they recall to the writer his absent friends, and remind him of their generosity towards him.¹⁵ Catullus seems to feel that the

¹³ Fordyce 1968: *ad loc.*

¹⁴ Quinn 1973: *ad loc.*

¹⁵ Catullus makes it clear that the value of the napkins lies in their emotional significance not their monetary value in line 12: “*non me movet aestimatio*” He is asserting the importance of the value assigned to an item by an individual, rather than by the weight of Roman law and tradition; by asserting the sentimental value of the napkins, “Catullus is rejecting the legal and official in favour of the private and personal” (Krostenko 2001: 245). This assertion of personal criteria also contributes to Catullus’ definition of his social circle: the values of this circle do not necessarily match the dictates of Roman law, and anticipates its importance as a theme in the following poem

gift, once removed from his sight, might not perform its role adequately, which agrees with Seneca's opinion:

Apud paucos post rem manet gratia; plures sunt, apud quos non diutius in animo sunt donata quam in usu.

Few people retain gratitude when the object is gone; there are more who don't keep gifts in mind any longer than they keep them in use.

(Sen. *Ben.* 1.12.2)

While here Seneca is discussing possible causes of ingratitude, which is not at issue in the poem, the connection between remembrance and the physical object is relevant. Although Catullus stresses the emotional weight of the gift, he still values the objects themselves.¹⁶

This examination of the thematic importance of gift-exchange in this poem, while meant neither to suggest that it is the main point of poem 12, nor to over-stress its seriousness, demonstrates how this concept is a useful tool for Catullus' larger poetic aims.¹⁷ The poem is clearly humorous and light-hearted, and it is likely that, in fact, the reader is intended to realise that Asinius is a friend of the poet;¹⁸ this is an amicable reproach, not a deadly insult.¹⁹ However,

(Catullus 13).

¹⁶ **Error! Main Document Only.** Stroup argues that the napkin is not (primarily – or probably at all) a napkin, but that Asinius has committed some blunder in connection with the exchange of textual objects, for which he is being (humorously) reproached. She focusses on the use of the term *munus* to designate it in line 15; this makes it “a gift made in a closed textual world” where men “let down their guard” (cf *neglegentiorum*) and produce and exchange texts; it is from this world that Asinius is being (perhaps temporarily) excluded (2010: 74-75). She says that by ascribing an economic motive to Asinius, and then explicitly contrasting that with his own non-economic valuation of the *lineum*, Catullus (humorously) labels Asinius not part of the isonomic exchange of texts, and excludes him from the patronal status of his social circle. All of this draws the line between in and out, and between acceptable and unacceptable social behaviour (Stroup 2010: 77-78). This reading takes us farther from the ostensible meaning of the text, but is intriguing; however, whether the *linteum* is real or not, the poem depends on the social construction of affective gift exchange to function.

¹⁷ See Fitzgerald on this poem: “Asinius’ ineptia, the bad timing that makes this exhibition of wit out of place, is the occasion for Catullus’ adroit compliment to Asinius’ brother and for his neat acknowledgment of the gift from his friends” (1995: 94). Fitzgerald argues against seeing poems like this as containing anything deeper and more lasting than surface judgements – he argues against, for instance, Skinner: “in this view, the napkin mediates between surface and depth: trivial yet important, it is the site where the deft instinct for what is right, manifested in the poem’s aesthetic polish, is made to resonate with deeper moral issues of thoughtfulness and ‘deep mutual sympathy’ in the circle of Catullus’ friends” (1981: 96). Fitzgerald considers it important to not believe Catullus’ own portrayal of himself and his *urbanitas*. Nappa supports the contention that this poem uses its “superficially nugatory stance in order to scrutinize the values and social protocols which make that stance seem appropriate” (1998: 385), and argues convincingly that the poet uses “his *nugae* as an attempt to scrutinize his social environment and the value systems which support it” (1998: 396). I would agree that it is important to be aware of the ways in which Catullus manipulates his readers into complicity with his value judgements, but also argue that this process is itself significant, and can reveal important social and literary concerns. The fact that so many of Catullus’ terms “are essentially about surfaces” (Fitzgerald 1995: 96) does not deny them importance; instead, it should focus our attention on the significance of those surfaces in Catullus’ world.

¹⁸ Asinius Marrucinus’ brother (Catull. 12.6-7) is “almost certainly C. Asinius Pollio, the orator and historian and the friend of Virgil and Horace” (Quinn 2007: 131), and it seems probable that both he and his brother were members of Catullus’ social circle; if nothing else, Catullus in this poem presents Asinius Marrucinus as having been at a dinner party with him.

it does serve to mark the boundaries that define acceptable behaviour within Catullus' social circle.

As indicated above, Catullus 13 is linked to poem 12 by the theme of gifts. It demonstrates another aspect of this theme, by challenging conventional Roman expectations: it establishes the prospect of an exchange or obligation, but then rejects the usual substance of that exchange, substituting other things that are given importance in the poet's world. The framework of Catullus 13 deliberately establishes a conventional situation (a dinner invitation) and then seems to deny the importance of the usual content, substituting a complex set of poetic and emotional values. It also establishes the boundaries of the poet's group, defined by the exchange of these *beneficia* and an expectation of shared values and mutual agreement on priorities. As elsewhere in Catullus' oeuvre, an ostensibly trivial poem can be read as focussing attention on an important aspect of contemporary social expectations and practices.²⁰ The poem centres on gift-giving and friendship, while replacing the conventional objects of exchange with *meros amores* and *unguentum*. The importance of this poem lies in its simultaneous expectation of complicity from its addressee (and the larger poetic and social community of which Catullus and Fabullus are both members) and its awareness of the unconventionality of the poet's stance and the reversal of the standard pattern of the dinner invitation. The poem establishes the boundaries of Catullus' social and poetic group and demonstrates the values they espouse while excluding those who do not share them. Catullus presents a confident expectation that Fabullus will share his priorities and will be willing to provide most of the necessities for the party in exchange for the miraculous *unguentum* he is offering.

In form, poem 13 is an invitation to dinner.²¹ It contains conventional elements of invitation: the opening phrase *cenabis bene* (Catull. 13.1) seems to be a standard formula for a dinner invitation;²² time and place are referred to, though not in specific detail (Catull. 13.1-3);

¹⁹ "It may well be that Catullus is merely turning a practical joke into an opportunity for saying 'Thank you' to Veranius and Fabullus and paying a compliment to Pollio" (Fordyce 1968: 129).

²⁰ Cf. for example poems 10, 28, 29, and 49. The use of seemingly trivial poems to address larger social issues is discussed by Nappa: "We can see that poems 12 and 13 exploit their superficially nugatory stance in order to scrutinize the values and social protocols which make that stance seem appropriate" (1998: 385). He suggests that Catullus' poems often "make a more or less clear attempt not only at connecting his poetry to a social milieu, but also at contrasting a set of personal values with those of that milieu" (Nappa 1998: 396).

²¹ This does not imply that the poem was necessarily written about an actual occasion, however: "whereas in early Greek poetry verses of this kind [*vocatio ad cenam*] derived from a definite social occasion, in later Greek and Roman poetry these forms provide an often fictional framework within which the writer could work and impose an individual voice on the basic material" (Arkins 1979: 72). Edmunds discusses the question of how to define the Latin invitation poem and where the form originated. He suggests that true invitation poems form a relatively select group, "each of which bears clear affinities to the others and all of which, individually and as a group, are clearly distinguishable from the other potential examples" (Edmunds 1982: 184). These poems are Catullus 13, Horace's *Epistle* 1.5, and Martial 5.78, 10.48, and 11.52. The elements they have in common are: 1) tripartite structure, comprising the invitation proper, the menu, and the entertainment; "2) the invitation not simply to drinking but to a *cena*; 3) the consequent mention of food; 4) specificity with respect to date and/or time" (Edmunds 1982: 185). Other poems, such as Horace's *Odes* 1.20, 3.29, and 4.12, "contain invitational motifs" but do not meet all of the criteria necessary to be judged invitation poems" (Edmunds 1982: 185).

²² It would reply to the conventional formula of a request: "From Cicero, *De or.* 2.246, it would appear to have been perfectly acceptable conduct to invite oneself to dinner at the house of a familiar friend, using the formula

and the poet describes the expected menu and entertainments, although in this case he protests his own inability to entertain his guest properly, pleading lack of resources.²³ Catullus takes this last element to a comic extreme²⁴ and develops it into an inversion of a traditional invitation: instead of offering a dinner and its attendant enjoyments, he requests them of his guest.²⁵ He promises in return a seemingly trivial recompense, assuring his guest that it will nonetheless be the most important contribution to the party. In spite of this reassurance, the inversion of the normal pattern may appear to be a serious breach of hospitality on Catullus' part, albeit one with a humorous rather than hostile effect.²⁶

Some scholars have in fact read the poem as a refusal, more or less humorous in intention, to give Fabullus the dinner he has asked for. Nappa 1998: 389 refers the formula *cenabis bene* to the interaction of a parasite and patron: "*cenabis bene* answers the request for an invitation uttered most likely by a parasite, *cenabo apud te* ... the opening words imply a dramatic background in which Fabullus has attempted to wrangle a dinner invitation out of his friend"; he proposes that the vagueness of the date and time and the stinginess of Catullus' offer are designed to rebuke Fabullus for the request, or to put him off with humour and, therefore, refuse to invite him. Dettmer sees the poem as a joke at Fabullus' expense. She builds on a suggestion by Marcovich, who argues that Catullus 13 is directly inspired by the Philodemus poem 23 Page = *AP* 11.44.²⁷ Philodemus' epigram, addressed to his patron, L. Calpurnius Piso, is discussed by Marcovich as the inspiration, not just a parallel, for Catullus' poem, with the Latin version modifying aspects of the Greek one for humorous effect.²⁸ And indeed, Dettmer points out that if this interpretation is correct, Catullus addresses his imitation of Philodemus' poem to Piso to someone who served on Piso's staff and failed to get satisfactory rewards or advancement (i.e., Fabullus, whose disappointment is referred to in poems 28 and 47), and who may well have resented Philodemus' success where he failed.²⁹ She says that "seen in this light, C. 13 is a practical joke on Fabullus, not unlike the sort that Calvus plays on Catullus in the very next poem, C. 14".³⁰ In something of the same vein, but with perhaps a darker undertone, Case suggests the *unguentum* is the contents of the *pyxis* sent to Clodia (Lesbia) as a joke, alluding to an episode mentioned by commentators on Cicero and Quintilian, in which, in reference

cenabo apud te" (Thomson 1997 :242).

²³ Edmunds discusses the conventional contents of a poetic dinner invitation: a reference to the insufficiency of the host's resources is common, especially in poems addressed to a nominally more important or wealthier guest (1982: 184-85).

²⁴ Gowers 1993: 229

²⁵ Cairns points out that asking the guest to contribute to the dinner is normal in invitations addressed to social equals, but of course Catullus' request that Fabullus "provide the whole meal and almost all its accoutrements" is humorous exaggeration (1972: 243).

²⁶ "The source of the humor lies in the total reversal of the expectations" (Helm 1980: 213).

²⁷ Marcovich 1982: 136

²⁸ Marcovich 1982: 137-38

²⁹ Dettmer 1989: 81

³⁰ Dettmer 1989: 82

presumably to the events reported by Cicero in the *Pro Caelio*, Clodia was apparently sent various tokens connected with prostitutes, including a *pyxis* containing “an unmentionable substance.”³¹ The *unguentum* would then be a ‘vile substance’ and the joke would lie in the fact that Fabullus would definitely not want to smell it, or be turned into a big nose to enjoy it further.

Gowers develops the idea that the poem in fact denies the hospitality that it seems to offer. She suggests it is designed to frustrate Fabullus by repeatedly seeming to give him something and then denying it to him. Gowers reads the poem as moving from the material to the insubstantial, thereby suggesting more than it promises, and tantalising Fabullus with the promise of sex and food that he cannot, in the end, enjoy, because they are shown to be abstract, elusive qualities rather than solid physical objects.³² Her argument about the elusiveness of Catullus’ offering, connected with the intangible and hard-to-define nature of *urbanitas*, however, does not require that the poem be designed to frustrate Fabullus and (presumably, therefore) the reader. Indeed her reading fails to take fully into account the context of the poem, and the strong thematic importance of gifts in both this poem and its companions, 12 and 14. The poem does indeed present an ambiguous and nebulous picture of the substance of Catullus’ invitation and, by extension, of his personal and poetic qualities. Crucially, however, Fabullus is shown to be not the frustrated and uninformed butt of Catullus’ joke, but a sophisticated and knowledgeable friend who is invited to share in the poet’s world, and who can see and appreciate the humour in Catullus’ inverted invitation. On one level he shares Catullus’ priorities, and is expected to acknowledge that the intangible qualities of friendship, love, sex, and poetry are more important than the conventional trappings of a dinner party; on another, reading the catalogue as a loosely programmatic list of desirable characteristics of Catullan and Callimachean poetics, Fabullus can be relied upon to contribute these qualities himself, showing him to be a knowledgeable participant in Catullus’ world. Cairns’ point about the equality of status implied by Catullus’ request that his guest contribute to the dinner is important: “Catullus demonstrates his own and Fabullus’ friendship in many ways and the equality of the pair is manifest throughout” (1972: 234). Cairns cites Horace’s ode 4.12 as a parallel for the jokes at the expense of a friend who is being invited to dinner: “*Odes* 4.12 is meant to express the friendship of Horace for Virgil as an equal. It should be read in the same spirit as Catullus 13. It is a parody of the invitation to the rich and busy superior which reveals itself as such by its excessive demands on the guest, demands all the more outrageous because a real invitation to a superior would not ask anything from him” (1972: 244). Although my reading of Catullus 13 differs somewhat from Cairns’, I agree that the conventions of the genre are crucial to the poem, and recognising Catullus’ manipulation of them is central to understanding it.

The interpretations of Nappa, Dettmer, Case, and Gowers focus on the inversion of the invitation, but assume that Catullus is reversing the intention behind the invitation, rather than its form or substance. That is, these interpreters assume that the underlying message of the poem is an anti-invitation or denial of hospitality and sharing. However, I would argue that the reversal concerns instead what Catullus is offering to Fabullus, namely the content of the gift-exchange. This fits better with the portrayal of Fabullus elsewhere in Catullus’ poetry (in poems 12, 28, and 47), and with the tone and language of the poem. In this reading, poem 13 can be seen as a privileged and exceptionally warm and meaningful invitation, one that directs its focus away

³¹ Case 1995: 875

³² Gowers 1993: 240

from the material and conventional elements of hospitality and friendship towards those prized by Catullus and his social and literary circle: the intangible ingredients of social intercourse and literary production.

Understanding the relationship between Catullus and Fabullus, as presented in the poems themselves, is important to any discussion of the tone of this particular poem. Throughout Catullus' poetry, Fabullus is presented as a close friend, part of the "world of the *urbani*";³³ in poem 12, Catullus treasures a reminder of their friendship, and in poems 28 and 47, protests on his behalf about his treatment by Piso. Fabullus is a particularly appropriate figure to share in Catullus' world and to receive intangible gifts. As the discussion of Poem 12 shows, Fabullus understands how to behave, in particular with regard to wit and gift-exchange. Within poem 13 itself, he is addressed in affectionate and intimate terms – *mi Fabulle* (13.1), *venuste noster* (13.6), and *tui Catulli* (13.17) – all of which mark the relationship between the two men as close and friendly.³⁴ The use of the term *venustus* to describe Fabullus also identifies him as an especially appropriate recipient of a gift that derives, ultimately, from Venus herself – *donarunt Veneres* (13.12).³⁵ Even the name Fabullus indicates his suitability: diminutive in form, thereby immediately demonstrating his compatibility with Catullus, a name meaning 'little bean' surely suggests that its owner will value simplicity in a meal, and share the poet's Callimachean appreciation for the small and humble. Gowers also notes the suggestiveness of the name, and points out that it "gives a foretaste of the tiny, worthless dinner for which he is destined";³⁶ for her this supports the argument that the poem is a joke on Fabullus, but I believe that Catullus can point out the humorous appropriateness of the name even if his invitation to Fabullus is in some sense a meaningful and affectionate one.

Smallness, indeed, has strong positive connotations in both Catullus' poetry and Callimachean poetics. Although diminutives in Catullus' work have a range of meanings, he does frequently use them to express approval and affection,³⁷ so there is no particular reason to interpret Fabullus' name as indicating something negative. There is a close link between Catullus, Fabullus, and gifts and hospitality in this sequence of poems. The ending of poem 13 inverts that of poem 12: in 13, Catullus offers gifts to Fabullus; in 12, Fabullus is the giver to the poet. It is even possible to see in the sequence of poems a suggestion that the invitation of poem 13 is in fact a further return for Fabullus' gift of the napkins – a continuation of the reciprocal exchange of gifts. Taken alone, poem 12 functions as its own reciprocation, since by demonstrating his gratitude Catullus has returned the gift; poem 13, if viewed as a further expression of gratitude, may be one that, by exceeding the original gift, continues the cycle and

³³ Arkins 1979: 72-73

³⁴ Thomson 1997: 242. Krostenko suggests that *venustus* has a "performative function" here (and in poem 3, where the *homines venustiores* are asked to mourn Lesbia's sparrow): "it is a kind of hortatory vocative that asks the addressees to participate in the fiction of the poem. In other words to be called *uenustus* in these poems is to be asked to appreciate the conventions of polymetric poetry" (2001: 261).

³⁵ Marcovich 1982: 132

³⁶ Gowers 1993: 229

³⁷ "Sometimes the diminutive mocks; sometimes it expresses affection; sometimes it claims sympathy for the poet or his mistress or a dramatic character such as Attis; sometimes it is part of a process of realistic, 'modern' description of scenes or characters from legend" (Quinn: 2007 xxxi).

presents the expectation of a further return from Fabullus.

Several scholars have suggested that the *meros amores* and *unguentum* offered to Fabullus by Catullus are in some fashion representative of his poetry. Bernstein examines the terms used to describe the various elements of the dinner party mentioned in poem 13 and demonstrates that most, if not all, can be taken to refer to aspects of Catullus' poetic style. For example, *sal* is "wit" and *candida* is the "plain" style.³⁸ He suggests that *meros amores* are Catullus' own poems. Marcovich argues for a similar interpretation, citing Philodemus 23 as a parallel.³⁹ Gowers summarises the arguments for seeing the elements of the dinner-party as programmatic for Callimachean poetry.⁴⁰ She also notes the important point that viewing this list as metaphorical does not preclude also regarding it as material: "We can extract physical or metaphorical meanings from its vocabulary without having to reject either".⁴¹ She raises several objections to the view that all the elements are programmatic in a positive sense, however. First, she underlines that *bonam atque magnam cenam* ("a dinner good and large") seems "antithetical to all the other stylistic metaphors", since Catullan and Callimachean aesthetics regularly equate large things with bad things.⁴² This is an important point and should draw our attention back to the frame that surrounds the "aesthetic" elements of the poem. Because the context of a dinner invitation immediately activates the concept of gift-exchange, the suggestion that the dinner will be *magna* may be connected as much to expectations of generosity and hospitality as to aesthetics. Size or quantity is an important element of hospitality, and Catullus is certainly not averse to lavish displays of emotion.⁴³ As a key word, then, *magna* functions to indicate generosity and extravagance. The fact that Catullus then goes on to plead poverty and emphasise his lack of resources focuses this generosity on the things that he does have to offer: *meros amores* and *unguentum*. These are opulent and their presence alone is enough to make the dinner *magnam* instead of scanty. Love itself should be lavish, as should the emotional states that inspire poetry. The two men together will create and experience the pleasures of correct gift-exchange, with lavish excess only where it is appropriate – in their friendship and emotions. Gowers also objects to reading *candida puella* as standing for the plain style, citing the use of the adjective to describe Quintia in poem 86. There, as she says, it is one of the elements that should make Quintia attractive, but do not because she is lacking *venustas* and *sal*; Gowers argues that this means the term does not designate an especially desirable quality in Catullus' poetry, since its presence does not by itself make Quintia *Formosa*.⁴⁴ This is true, but it is precisely because the list of Quintia's attributes in poem 86 is meant to convey positive qualities that are worthless because of the absence of charm and wit that we can see that *candor* is indeed a prerequisite for

³⁸ Bernstein 1985: 128

³⁹ Marcovich 1982: 135

⁴⁰ Gowers 1993: 230-31

⁴¹ Gowers 1993: 230

⁴² Gowers 1993: 232

⁴³ Poems 5 and 7 provide classic examples of emotional displays.

⁴⁴ Gowers 1993: 233

formositas.⁴⁵ The use of *candidus* elsewhere in Catullus' poetry suggests that the term has favourable connotations in his aesthetic.⁴⁶ In the list in poem 13, therefore, while it is perhaps not a technical term designating a specific style, it does contribute to the overall sense that these elements are desirable in the poetic world shared by Catullus and Fabullus.

Gowers' final problem with the standard programmatic reading is that the list of apparently desirable qualities is assigned to Fabullus to bring, and Catullus states that he does not have the resources to provide them himself. According to her, "the banal list-form contrasts so much with Catullus' description of what he will offer in return that it is more likely that a contrast is being made between the bare essentials of a meal or poem and its intangible essence".⁴⁷ I agree that this is one possible reading of the poem, providing an important demonstration of the way in which Catullus used conventional Roman social structures to convey his own unconventional values and priorities. However, I do not agree that such a reading eliminates the possibility of also reading the text on a programmatic level. If the list can be seen as enumerating desirable qualities in Catullus' poetry, then its assignment to Fabullus, rather than reducing the value of the items on the list, heightens the value attached to Fabullus himself. Catullus, by means of this request, invites Fabullus to share in the creation and enjoyment of poetry and demonstrates his confidence that his friend is able to contribute many of the significant aspects of this artistic and social process. Certainly Catullus claims that his own contribution will be superior to that made by Fabullus, but the comparison does not devalue what the latter is asked to bring, but simply establishes that the former will in fact act as host and will give his guest more than his guest gives him. For, in spite of the seeming "meanness" of the invitation,⁴⁸ it is not true that Catullus is not offering hospitality to Fabullus. He says explicitly that he will more than make up for requiring his guest to bring many of the elements of the dinner:

contra accipies meros amores
 seu quid suavius elegantiusve est. (13.9-10)

But in return you'll get love neat
 Or something still more choice and fragrant.

If this programmatic interpretation of the list in poem 13 is accepted, it is natural to take

⁴⁵ While Krostenko notes that "the poem describes the insufficiency of mere physical beauty, symbolized by Quintia, whose shapeliness (*formosa* ~ *forma* 'shape, beauty') is all she has", it is also clear that physical beauty is a necessary condition for complete attractiveness: "Lesbia, by contrast, is not only beautiful in that way, she also possesses *uenustas*" (2001: 236). *Candidus* may therefore not describe the essential attraction of a Catullan *puella*, but that does not make it an uncomplimentary term.

⁴⁶ Of the twelve times the adjective is used by Catullus outside of the two poems under discussion here, seven appear in contexts of love and happiness (8.3, 8.8, 35.8, 61.112, 68.30, 68.94, 68.104, and 107.6). In particular, *candida puella* describes Caecilius' girlfriend, also called "Sapphica puella, / musa doctior" in poem 35, and *candida diva* is used of the *puella* (usually assumed to be Lesbia) in poem 68. Keith notes that "*candidus* belongs to the critical vocabulary of ancient rhetorical theory" (1999: 47), in which it is connected with the plain style "championed by the self-proclaimed Roman Atticists" (1999: 48). It is associated, therefore, with the elegant compression of, for instance, Tibullus' poetry (Keith 1999: 47-48).

⁴⁷ Gowers 1993: 234

⁴⁸ Gowers 1993: 240

unguentum as also referring to poetic activity; in particular, since it is given by Venus and Cupids to the *puella*, who then gives it to Catullus, it seems to represent poetic inspiration and skill. Such poetic inspiration is traditionally associated with divinities and, in the case of love poems, it is appropriate for these divinities to be gods of love instead of the more conventional Apollo, Bacchus, or the Muses. The gifts that Catullus offers are therefore symbolic of the essence of his aesthetic and stylistic program.

There have been several other suggestions in the literature for what the *unguentum* might be, focussing on a literal and physical interpretation: Littman argues that the *unguentum* is meant to represent vaginal secretions, specifically Lesbia's, and that Catullus is offering them to Fabullus to smell, possibly in order to tease him, by offering her secretions but not the girl herself. He also argues that this interpretation makes the reading *meos amores* in line 9 most likely.⁴⁹ Hallett agrees with Littman's general sexual interpretation of the poem, but suggests that the unguent might instead be an anal lubricant that allows Catullus to enjoy his mistress, which makes it better than any of the other trappings of the dinner party; this removes the oddness of having Catullus offer his girl to Fabullus, replacing her with an actual unguent again.⁵⁰ However, these readings have not been generally accepted, although the reminder of the potentially sexual undertones of many of Catullus' poems is salutary. Witke points out some difficulties with Littman's and Hallett's readings, refuting in detail many of the arguments adduced by what he calls the "revisionists".⁵¹ Gowers, while agreeing with Witke that the extreme readings by Littman and Hallett are unlikely, nonetheless argues for an implicitly sexual reading of the poem, though through allusion rather than explicit euphemisms for sex: "Catullus is relying on innuendo, something that can be received or ignored, extended or limited, according to taste".⁵² She goes on to suggest that the invitation to dinner can also be read as an invitation to sexual pleasure, although this invitation is not fulfilled because ultimately Fabullus is not able to enjoy Lesbia, or the *unguentum*, or the *meros amores*: "the nose is another blow to Fabullus' expectations, one part of the body which can never participate fully [in sex]".⁵³

However, any interpretation that restricts the *unguentum* to either its physical or its metaphorical properties ignores the richness of the image.⁵⁴ Perfume is vital to the physical act of dining and socialising at Rome, as well as being an integral aspect of eroticism. At the same time, the intangible element of divine inspiration and beauty, as well as the indefinable quality

⁴⁹ Littman 1977: 123-28

⁵⁰ Hallett 1978: 747-48

⁵¹ His general observations are that these readings require taking some parts of the poem literally (Catullus' protestations of poverty), while ignoring others (the request that Fabullus bring a *candida puella* of his own, for example); that while Catullus is certainly not averse to coarse and overt sexuality in his poems, he is generally explicit in these cases (e.g., poems 10 and 16) rather than relying on double entendres; and that many of the parallels adduced by Littman and Hallett for *unguentum* as secretions or lubricant are found in non-poetic contexts with little connection to the sort of social situation suggested by this poem, and so do not support this interpretation here (Witke 1980: 325-31). Not all of these objections are equally strong.

⁵² Gowers 1993: 239

⁵³ Gowers 1993: 240

⁵⁴ As Gowers astutely suggests, "the vagueness of the last part of the poem may be intrinsic to the nature of the scent itself, which is both real and evocative" (1993: 230).

that makes poetry good (along with the ability to appreciate this quality), are crucial to poetic activity and the friendship and love associated with it. The words *unguentum* and *meros amores* therefore encompass at the same time their literal meaning (the perfume that transforms food into social occasion and the emotion that transforms company into friendship) and the symbolic meaning of poetic talent and inspiration: they are both the inspiration for poetry and the poems themselves, as well as the talent that allows the poet to write. All of these things come from or are associated with the *puella* (Lesbia) and derive ultimately from Venus and Cupids. A complete separation of the metaphorical from the “actual” is not possible because the dinner itself cannot be completely removed from the poem even if the elements are all seen as programmatic metaphors. On one level Catullus offers his poetry or his beloved, along with her miraculous perfume or his poetic inspiration, to Fabullus in return for his provision of a dinner party. This is a mutually acceptable re-organisation of the pattern of hospitality. Catullus’ generosity is perfectly suited to his guest. On another level all the elements of the party are also key words for the aesthetic and poetic program that both men adhere to. Catullus does not reject one level for the other, but welcomes and requires both for the occasion to be complete.⁵⁵

The poem, then, is an invitation that rejects the standard ideas of what should comprise hospitality. Instead of providing his guest with the material components of a dinner party, Catullus offers him poetry and friendship. One crucial aspect of the poem, in this interpretation, is that it expresses the expectation that Fabullus shares the poet’s views of the importance of poetry and aesthetic appreciation. It starts from the assumption that he will understand and agree that the *unguentum* and *meros amores* are more valuable than the trappings of a conventional dinner party, and that his own contribution will be more than matched by Catullus’. At the same time, those things that Fabullus is asked to bring all relate to the poetic program Catullus espouses, so he is therefore cast as a participant in the production and appreciation of poetry. Catullus demonstrates his assumption that Fabullus will recognise the value of his offer in his prediction that Fabullus will wish to be concentrated entirely into his critical faculty and his capacity to enjoy poetry, represented by *totum nasum* (13.14).

The poem is therefore not a rejection of Fabullus’ request for dinner; rather it is a recognition of his place within Catullus’ circle. The framework of the invitation serves to mark Fabullus as included and others as excluded. Only if one understands and subscribes to the values presented in the poem can one participate in this dinner party and in the literary community of which Catullus is a part: “The anti-invitation thus becomes a model of hospitality and friendship, with Catullus and Fabullus becoming equivalent, along with the contributions of each”.⁵⁶ Dogmatic assertions about single interpretations of any element of poem 13, or of the work as a whole, seem unwarranted and less than useful. Ambiguity is common in Catullus’ poems and integral to the understanding of many of them.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “Poem 13 does read as an evocation of Catullus’ style, but the connections are more complicated than has previously been suggested. . . . ultimately there are aspects of his style that are not meant to be pinned down. The essence of *urbanitas* is underplaying. *Meros amores* and *unguentum* combine those aspects of Catullus’ writing that are both most wickedly suggestive *and* most elusive and intangible: the indescribable something that cannot be written down in a recipe” (Gowers 1993: 244).

⁵⁶ Richlin 1988: 357

⁵⁷ “It proves to be impossible to receive Catullus’ work merely as a unit of referential meaning that can be decoded without leaving a residue. The syntax, rhetoric, and generic organization of his pieces are unusually

In fact, the ambiguity of the references in Catullus 13 may provide the key to its meaning. If it suggests a set of values, assumptions, and priorities shared between Catullus and his friends, a set which is not common to others outside that group, why could the poem not be intended to have different meanings for different readers? Might not part of the exclusionary work done by Catullus' poetry be to establish boundaries by means of the possibilities of interpretation within and outside the group? These multiple layers of meaning may not be as organised as "a private code",⁵⁸ but may still be more readily understandable by Catullus' intimates than by outsiders.⁵⁹

Poem 13 presents an innovative strategy for negotiating the relationship between poet and addressee, and a compelling use of the conventions of gift-exchange to establish the poet in a position of authority. The re-definition of the content of a *beneficium* allows Catullus to portray his poetry as a pre-eminent gift. He has the power to give poetry and poetic activity to his friends, and so the prestige and standing of his persona within the poem are enhanced. Poem 14 develops this strategy further, now presenting the use of poetry in gift-giving as obviously acceptable, and concentrating on the more intangible qualities that determine its value. In some ways it reverses the situation: "This poem, in which Catullus refuses a gift (*recusatio*) and threatens to send a counter-gift, clearly contrasts with poem 13, in which he begs for gifts and promises a counter-gift. Like poems 12 and 13 this is a party-poem: the bad poets (i.e., verses) are unwanted guests".⁶⁰

Poem 14 is a much more explicit demonstration of poetry as a gift, with Catullus receiving (and rejecting) a set of poems from his friend Calvus, who (Catullus assumes) had in turn received them from one of his clients.⁶¹ The contexts for the gift-giving are again conventional, just as the souvenirs and dinner party were in the previous two poems. Calvus was given the poems as a token of gratitude by a client whom he had defended, and then gave them to Catullus on the Saturnalia, an occasion on which the exchange of small gifts was customary.⁶² Catullus also appears to express satisfaction that Calvus has been rewarded for his services; in fact, it appears that the actual content of the gift is less important than the fact that Calvus has been given one by a client (since Catullus goes on to make it clear that he does not consider the poems to be worth much in themselves). This is appropriate to the idea that it is the act of

enigmatic and complex" (Selden 1992: 463).

⁵⁸ Witke 1980: 325 n. 5

⁵⁹ Krostenko's examination of the language of social performance, specifically *venustus*, within this poem (and in poem 3) leads him to a similar conclusion: "it is not only that Fabullus and the *uenustiores* are to be familiar with Greek poetry and comfortable with eroticism, they are also in effect challenged by Catullus to make a show of their familiarity by understanding the stance he has taken" (2001: 264).

⁶⁰ Claes 2002: 64

⁶¹ This chain of giving recalls that of poem 13, in which the *unguentum* and dinner party form a connected chain of gifts: "The gods have thus demonstrated their love and affection for Lesbia by way of the very same gift that the poet will use to prove *his* love and affection for Fabullus, who will have, on the occasion of the dinner, demonstrated his own love and affection for Catullus by the gifts he brings" (Forsyth 1985: 572).

⁶² The Saturnalia was a recognised occasion for giving small gifts to one's friends, such as wax candles (Scullard 1981: 207). That a book of poems might be an appropriate gift is shown in a poem by Martial (14.195), written to accompany a Saturnalian gift of a copy of Catullus' poems (Quinn 2007: 138). Of course the Martial poem is quite probably specifically recalling Catullus 14.

recognising a service by giving a gift in thanks for it that is important, not necessarily the gift itself.⁶³

In spite of the low quality of the works in question, in this poem we see Catullus presenting the exchange of poetry as a normal element of conventional *amicitia*.⁶⁴ Whatever the actual provenance of the poems Calvus has offered him, Catullus' assumption that they are a gift from a grateful client seems to indicate that both he and Calvus would accept poetry as a suitable recompense for one of the central activities connected with *amicitia*, legal services.⁶⁵ The language of exchange and reciprocation is prominent in the description of the poems:

quod si, ut suspicor, hoc novum ac repertum
munus dat tibi Sulla litterator,
non est mi male, sed bene ac beate,
quod non dispereunt tui labores. (14.8-11)

And if, as I suspect, this choice new
Gift to you is from schoolmaster Sulla,
Then I'm not sorry but delighted
That your hard work has not been wasted.

To what extent this is intended to represent standard Roman practice, however, is not certain. In this poem Catullus clearly presents himself and Calvus as sharing particular aesthetic views and values, as opposed to such others as Sulla *litterator* and the hack poets Caesius, Aquinus, and Suffenus; perhaps their mutual appreciation of poetry as a gift is meant to be an element of this differentiation from the rest of Roman society.⁶⁶ The same mechanism of exclusion by means of establishing shared values can be seen in Catullus' treatment of the gift as a deliberate joke on

⁶³ The fact that Calvus tried to use these poems as a Saturnalia gift presumably indicates that this would be considered a small token, not a present of substantial value, since the gifts exchanged on the Saturnalia were usually small.

⁶⁴ Among other things, this poem invokes the framework of *amicitia* that Catullus uses throughout his poems to structure his relationships both with his friends and with Lesbia. Ross offers a good discussion of Catullus' use of the terminology of *amicitia* in his poetry about "the working of that formal and typically Roman code of behavior that governed and made possible everyday relationships between men," and his use of the *amicitia* metaphor in his Lesbia epigrams (1969: 80-95). For definitions of *amicitia* in Roman ethical and political discourse, see Konstan 1997: 122-24.

⁶⁵ Quinn is willing to believe Catullus that the poems came from a client (2007: 136); Fordyce calls this a pretence, and suggests that Calvus arranged the selection himself (1968: 135). However, as Thomson says, "F.'s suggestion that Calvus 'perhaps made the selection of poems himself' encounters the difficulty that C. seems to take it as certain that the book (before it was passed on to him) had indeed been given to Calvus by a grateful client, since he speculates (*ut suspicor*) on the *identity* of the client (ll.8-9)" (1997: 244). This suggestion also requires the reader to have knowledge about the situation that has not been provided by the poem itself, and though this is not impossible, it is not Catullus' regular practice.

⁶⁶ Cicero's *Pro Archia* certainly suggests that a poet's work could be seen as equivalent to other more usual services of a client, and that he himself is expecting to be rewarded for his legal help by a poem from Archias about his consulship; however, this is of course special pleading. Poets about one's own exploits are also clearly different than a collection of the type of poetry that Catullus and his friends appear to exchange. However, compare, also, Catullus 49, which is a poem given to Cicero in thanks for an unspecified---possibly legal---service.

Calvus' part.⁶⁷ His assumption that Calvus sent the poems in a jocular spirit is like the assumption in poem 13 that Fabullus will agree with Catullus in valuing the perfume more highly than the usual trappings of a dinner. Both assumptions act as compliments to the addressee by including him in the poet's inner circle. In that sense, the poems act, paradoxically, as published "inside jokes," which define the members of the inner circle through their ability to interpret the tone and meaning of the poem.⁶⁸

Calvus' act of passing on the poems to Catullus appears to continue the cycle of continuous gift-giving that is the practice of *amicitia* within the Roman elite. The bond between the client and Calvus has been demonstrated; now Calvus exhibits his friendship with Catullus by giving him a Saturnalia gift. Or so the situation could have been expected to unfold – but, of course, it does not. As in poem 13, Catullus plays against this background of gift-exchange for humorous effect while at the same time introducing and developing a discussion of poetics. His most dramatic inversion of the expected pattern of gift-exchange is his rejection of Calvus' gift. In the previous poem, Catullus inverted the role of a host by inviting a guest to bring almost all the usual elements of a dinner party; in this poem, he inverts the role of a recipient by making public his refusal and lack of gratitude for a gift. Both poems show Catullus deploying and manipulating the basic conventions of gift-exchange, but substituting poetry and aesthetics for the usual substance of exchange; he also applies his own standards to the process, judging the exchange on criteria that are important to him and his social and poetic circle rather than by the usual standards of Roman elite society. In poem 14, he rejects the poetry on stylistic grounds, rather than because of its monetary value or appropriateness as a gift – it is the quality of the poetry, not its content or the fact that it is poetry that matters.

All three poems I have discussed so far have a notably strong connection to the theme of gift-exchange, but the subject recurs elsewhere in Catullus' poetry. And the moral problems associated with it, as practiced more conventionally in the wider Roman world, are of particular concern to him, it seems. In poem 29, a rant against the unbearable greed, arrogance, and general degeneracy of Mamurra, and his masters Caesar and Pompey, Catullus uses the phrase *sinistra liberalitas*:

eone nomine, imperator unice,
fuisti in ultima occidentis insula,
ut ista vestra diffututa mentula
ducenties comesset aut trecenties?
quid est alid sinistra liberalitas? (29.11-15)

Quinn sees an ambiguity here, in that the *sinistra liberalitas* could refer to Mamurra or Caesar: "But is the generosity meant Caesar's (in letting Mamurra amass such a fortune) or Mamurra's (in squandering it)?" (Quinn 2007 179). Either reading demonstrates that the application of

⁶⁷ This reading of Catullus' attitude, and the overall tone of the poem, is supported by Quinn 2007, Fordyce 1968, and Thomson 1997; both Quinn and Thomson support the reading *salse* in line 16, which would seem to confirm the tone.

⁶⁸ **Error! Main Document Only.** Stroup suggests that the original gift was an attempt to enter the "exclusive sphere of textual exchange" (2010: 80-81); both the giver and the poets contained in the book are dismissed and rejected summarily by Catullus. This demonstrates that not all textual exchanges are equal—that just because poetry is the content of the gift does not automatically make it the correct elegant gift that marks or creates entry into Catullus' world (Stroup 2010: 82).

liberalitas is open to abuse; however, the strong association of Caesar with *liberalitas* elsewhere suggests that the phrase should be linked to him,⁶⁹ even if it also applies to Mamurra's profligate spending, which has already run through his *paterna bona* and the Pontic and Spanish spoils (29.17-19).⁷⁰ The phrase is a paradox, of course; *liberalitas* is a virtue, and so should not be capable of being *sinistra*. The appearance of this paradox in one of Catullus' invective poems about Caesar demonstrates that the proper conduct of *liberalitas* was an important element of the Roman statesman's behaviour, and shows us Catullus making a judgement about the degree to which a particular statesman has succeeded or failed in the demonstration of this virtue. In particular, Caesar was famous for the related virtues of generosity and clemency, and Catullus' attack on his generosity is therefore especially pointed, bringing into question one of the fundamental ways that Caesar had built up a network of friends, allies, and dependants. But it is also relevant to the portrayals of gift-exchange in poems 12-14, since here, underneath the invective and sexually explicit insults, we can see the basic interaction as the traditional workings of Roman *amicitia*. Caesar wins military victories, accumulates wealth, and then distributes that wealth to his supporters. The objects of exchange are money, spoils, and political support; this contrasts strongly with Catullus' circle in poems 12-14, who value very different types of exchange.

But Catullus himself is not wholly removed from this conventional world of *amicitia*. Nappa has done a good job of explicating Catullus' own involvement with this type of exchange, as presented in the poetry, and the moral problems associated with it.⁷¹ Looking in particular at poems 10, 28, and 47, he argues that these poems portray Catullus and his friends not as wholly sympathetic victims, but as in part complicit in their own degradation, because they have attempted to gain social and political status by engaging in military careers (i.e. going to the provinces on the governor's staff): "Veranius and Fabullus, as well as Catullus himself, got what they deserved for trying to exploit the system" (2001 96). He argues for instance that poem 10 shows Catullus as a failure as a manly Roman in 'serious civic life' (2001 93), who got nothing from his time in Bithynia, and that the poem is full of indications of his effeminacy and lack of manliness (as shown by the sexual metaphors and terminology of dominance).⁷² While I find aspects of this reading compelling, I would argue, instead, that Catullus demonstrates in this

⁶⁹ Manning points out Cicero's repeated linking of the term with Caesar in his speeches and letters: "*inter alia* we may cite *Ad Fam.* 11.9.12 and 18; 4.9.4; 7.5.3; 7.7.2; 7.8.1; 7.10.3; 7.17.2 and 3; 9.13.4; *Ad Att.* 9.11A.3; *Pro Rab. Post.* 41; *Pro Lig.* 6; 23;31; *Pro Marcello* 16" (76 n.4). Sallust also highlights the quality of generosity in his summing up of Caesar's character (*Cat.* 54) and uses *liberalitas* itself in connection with Caesar elsewhere (*Cat.* 49.3; 52.11-12).

⁷⁰ The reference to his *paterna bona* is particularly significant, given that one of Cicero's **Error! Main Document Only.** major concerns about the inappropriate *liberalitas* (which is therefore not *liberalitas* but prodigality) is that people may squander their patrimonies and endanger the stability of private property by indiscriminate or excessive giving (*Off.* 2.15.52-55). Prodigal people "disrupt the social order by causing money to flow outside its proper channels" (Edwards 180).

⁷¹ Nappa argues that Catullus constructs a persona, "Catullus", in his poems, with which he can "explore the individual's interaction with the moral and social traditions of Roman society" (2001 24); this allows him in particular to "question traditional Roman notions of morality" (2001 29).

⁷² For example, the supposed 'profit' from Bithynia, the litter bearers have connotations of effeminacy and luxury; the litter was considered by Romans to be suitable only for weaklings, women, & luxurious effeminate, and this is particularly true of one carried by 8 men (Nappa 2001 90). And then, his second lie in the poem, that the litter is actually Cinna's, suggests, says Nappa, that he is a parasite on a richer, equally effeminate man (2001 91).

poem that his *attempt* to participate in the conventional type of exchange is both unsuccessful and corrupting. As a result of it, he becomes inelegant, inarticulate, unwitty – and even his friendship (with Cinna) becomes suspect (whether because he lies about it, or because it takes on the character of a dependent relationship). His place, in other words, in the circle of witty and urbane friends, which is so central to his aesthetic and ethical programme, is threatened by his involvement with the usual objects of exchange.

Similarly, in poem 28 Nappa sees Catullus portraying himself as having willingly submitted to sexual debasement by Memmius (metaphorical, but still powerfully humiliating) in order to try to get the ‘rewards’ of a military career; the bitterness of the “pete nobiles amicos” quip is directed at the entire system, and his and his friends’ own (degraded) place in it (2001 96). I like this reading, but would suggest that my reading of poems 12-14 helps point us towards the positive corollary of Catullus’ negative critique of traditional Roman exchange, *amicitia*, and *liberalitas*. It also suggests a partial motivation for his eschewing the conventional forms of gift-exchange and attempting to establish a different standard. The substitution of his preferred mode of exchange---poetry, aesthetic appreciation, wit, elegance, love---avoids the degradation of conventional interchanges, and produces truly enjoyable and valuable relationships. In this connection, the fact that Veranius and Fabullus are named both in the negative Memmius poems and in the positive poems 12 and 13 provides an important point of comparison between the relationships established (or destroyed) in the former context and those strengthened in the latter, by the proper employment of exchange. We can see this in particular in the contrast between the (lack) of remuneration brought back from Bithynia in poems 10 and 28 and the emotionally significant gift of the napkin in poem 12, and in the comparison between the ‘convivia lauta sumptuose’ of the parasites in poem 47 and the dinner of poem 13.

Nappa does make some connections between the negative portrayals of *liberalitas* in Catullus and poems 12 and 13 in particular; he sees the latter poems as presenting Catullus “as the man who correctly navigates the world of the banquet, that is, the world of social relations. He knows how to choose, and then how to regard, his true friends, and he knows what qualities to value in the social circle he thus creates” (2001 117), and argues that in these poems “common conceptions of value are replaced with a system of significance based on the personal, and here personal relationships do not seem to include the politicized friendships of personal advantage which the word *amicitia* so often denotes” (2001 118). I would go further, however; I agree that in the poems about Memmius, Piso, and Mamurra we see Catullus critiquing the common system of *amicitia* and gift-exchange, but I do not agree that “Catullus can never manage to break free of what he represents as an ethical paradox and moral compromise: to rise in status socially and politically, he would have to fall morally” (Nappa 2001 101). I think poems 12-14 point to a way out of this paradox (though perhaps not one that Catullus always employs completely successfully)---change the terms of exchange, the criteria for success, and the grounds for judging status. While the mechanisms and rules governing gift-exchange stay generally the same, Catullus and his friends redefine its substance in order to avoid the moral taint of the conventional practices, and also in order to allow them to elevate themselves at the expense of those outside their circle, who do not understand the standards of that circle.

This use and manipulation of gift-exchange, and especially the elevation of poetic activity as a valuable commodity to be transferred, is also evident in other poems by Catullus that deal explicitly with the exchange of poetry. The creation and giving of poems can be seen to create a bond of obligation between friends, just as does the exchange of favours and services in Roman society in general. We can see, for instance, in Catullus 38, 65, and 68 “that there is a

significant obligation to compose poetry in answer to a specific request”.⁷³ Catullus’ creation and publication of poem 50 results in Calvus being “bound by the requirements of *amicitia*, by the rules of reciprocal composition, and, at the level of this poem’s central metaphor, by the beloved’s obligation to show favor to the lover”.⁷⁴ In poem 49, Catullus seems to be offering a poem to Cicero as a return for an unspecified favour; here the language of *amicitia* is explicitly invoked, but the object of exchange at issue is still a poem. If this is *amicitia*, it is of course a different version than the Roman social and political obligation usually meant by the term; the priorities and values have changed, though the basic mechanisms remain the same. As we have seen, however, this process is not confined to the poems that explicitly discuss the exchange of poems, but is part of Catullus’ extensive engagement with the conventions that govern gift-exchange in his contemporary world.

⁷³ Burgess 1986: 582

⁷⁴ Burgess 1986: 586

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