

Pervert, Prostitute, Politician, Prankster:
Plautine Allusion in Catullus 21, 24, and 49

One of the most provocative and challenging aspects of Catullus's poetry is its propensity for complex internal references between poems within the corpus. The lover's lament in poem 8, for instance, shares a line (*amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla*, 5) nearly word-for-word with one in the poem 37's scurrilous invective (line 12) and again in poem 87's profession of fidelity (lines 1-2), and much fruitful scholarship has developed from examining how poems thus connected affect each other (e.g., Skinner 1971). But so far one set of Catullan references has eluded explanation, namely the bizarre appearance of the phrase *non harum modo, sed quot aut fuerunt / aut sunt aut aliis erunt in annis* in almost identical form and opening position in poem 21 (on Aurelius's sexual voracity), 24 (on Juventius's financial prospects), and 49 (on Cicero's patronage). Why do these seemingly unrelated poems invoke each other so conspicuously?

In this paper I demonstrate that the intratext that binds all three poems together is also an intertext with a familiar stock scene from Plautus, one that celebrates ironic deception and explores issues of domination and submission through the character of the clever slave from Roman comedy. Moreover, I argue that while individually these poems present very different scenarios, the Plautine intertext that connects them reveals that in fact they deal with the same themes of rivalry and control that are prominent throughout Catullus's poetry and highlight the role of humor in Roman social competition.

Kroll (1959) notes that the phrase repeated in poem 21, 24, and 49 is unusual and cites Plautus's *Persa* 777 (*qui sunt qui erunt quique fuerunt*) as a comparandum. Fraenkel (2007) remarks that this construction is uniquely Plautine and appears prominently in two famous comic monologues, the one in the *Persa* and the other at *Bacchides* 1087. In both examples the phrase is applied to a traditionally dominant character (an old man and a pimp, respectively) who has just been tricked by a clever slave.

By invoking Plautus in these three poems, the Catullan speaker thus puts on the mask of a *servus callidus* in the process of undercutting an individual in a position superior to his own. This guise is particularly appropriate for the speaker in poems 21, 24, and 49, because each piece presents a situation in which he attempts to exert control, be it sexual, social, or literary, over another individual by means of some deceit. In poem 21 the speaker entraps the lecherous Aurelius using his *puer delicatus* as bait and then threatens him with *irrumatio* when he catches him trying to steal the boy and consummate his lust. The entire incident is a trick set up by the speaker to exert his authority by replacing Aurelius's *pedicatio* of the boy with the speaker's *irrumatio* of Aurelius himself (cf. the pimp Ballio from Plautus's *Pseudolus*, whose control over a *puer delicatus* is displayed in 767-789 but who ultimately is undercut by the play's eponymous clever slave). Likewise in poem 24 the speaker diverts Juventius from the attentions of Furius by making the man an object of fun for the *servus callidus* and tricking the boy into believing he is financially and socially superior to this rival (cf. O'Bryhim 2007, who shows that Catullus depicts Furius as an *amator adulescens* without a clever slave). Finally poem 49 presents the Catullan speaker as a *poeta* removed from respectable society by his concern for private *otium* in direct contrast to Cicero, the superior *patronus* of public *negotium*. The humor and conflict of the poem has long been appreciated (Basson 1980, Tatum 1988), but this intertext sheds new light on Catullus's use of irony in the poem and its relationship to his other lightly-invective poetry.

To conclude I suggest that Catullus's use of the *servus callidus* in these poems allows for a fuller examination of the dynamics of social control, just as McCarthy (2000) has shown in the case of Plautus himself, and that New Comedy offered Romans from across classes innovative models and methods for exploring social relationships.

Works Cited

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