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Lesbia A Voice from the Unheard

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Lesbia
A Voice from the Unheard

Written by: Jullisa Webb

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Classics

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ABSTRACT

This compositional thesis examines and utilizes the works of the infamous Latin poet Catullus in his advances to gain the amours of his mysterious love figure named Lesbia. In an attempt to try and deviate from normal social standards, this thesis gives a woman a voice, power, and supremacy against a man by rejecting his advances, not typical in the era of Catullus. Lesbia takes on the form of female embodiment of power, strength, and defiance.

First I translated in a literal way the poems Catullus wrote to Lesbia. Then I transformed and altered Catullus' poetry into letters with a few changes to express tone and emotion. The latter part of my thesis is a composition of several letters from Lesbia's perspective to Catullus. Her letters reject Catullus' undesirable admiration in an attempt to reject the status quo of the time period.

CHAPTER I: WHO WAS CATULLUS?

Gaius Valerius Catullus was born in Verona, Italy, to a noticeably well-off family. Although the dates of his life are relatively unknown, it is typically accepted he lived 84 to 54 B.C. Poetically, Catullus was associated with the likes of Hortensius Horatius, Cinna, Cornelius Nepos, and Lucius Manlius Torquatus, to name a few. In his lifetime, there are 116 poems that were left behind in Catullus' legacy. These poems range from epigrams to epic poetry.¹ A number of these poems are identified as The Lesbian Poems, in which Catullus displays his affection for a woman using the name Lesbia to evoke the empowering Sappho.

It is commonly speculated that he was involved in a romantic relationship with Clodia Metelli, half sister of Publius Clodius Pulcher and wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus.² Clodia was thought to be the true identity of Lesbia, the object of affection in quite a few of Catullus' poems. Lesbia encompasses the demeaning power of eros. Lesbia has "intelligence, cultivation, brilliance of spirit, and refinement of manner," which stimulated Catullus' admiration.³

¹ Conte, Gian Biagio. 1994. 142-50.

² Conte, Gian Biagio. 1994. 142.

³ Conte, Gian Biagio. 1994. 147.

CHAPTER I: GENDER & MASCULINITY

There is such an apparent difference between male and female gender roles as represented in Ancient Roman poetry. The word *virtus* encompasses the whole ideal of what a man was supposed to be during the time of Catullus.⁴ However, he chose to go against the formalities of Ancient Roman life and portray another side to men. It is understood that several core values were required for a male to be considered a man (*fortis, durus, sanus, interger*). If he possessed the quality of *mollitia*, or softness, his manhood would automatically be revoked because it assumes a man likes to be the penetrated during sex (*cinaedus*).⁵ It is understood manhood had to be earned rather than received. Skinner wrote, “Youths and old men in particular struggle to achieve manhood, since both are at a vulnerable time of life, due to their inability to exhibit the potency of the ideal Roman *vir*.”⁶ As an older man, Catullus struggled with maintaining his manliness when it came to Lesbia.

With Lesbia, his mysterious lover, Catullus gave a voice to women too. He embraced Lesbia as strong, powerful, controlling, manipulative, while he, himself, was

⁴ Manwell, Elizabeth. 2007. 111-114.

⁵ Manwell, Elizabeth. 2007. 115-116.

⁶ Skinner, Marylin. 2005. 213-214.

soft, cowardly, and love-struck. This is an example of a total role reversal in which a woman, Lesbia, is taking on a much more assertive role similar to that of a man in ancient times as Catullus is demurer, like that of a woman. With this role reversal, one can also view Lesbia as a “political disenfranchisement” showing his lack of ability to remove himself from a harmful situation, losing power to a woman.⁷ By Catullus allowing himself to fall victim to Lesbia’s spell and giving her a voice, Catullus’ manhood would be rejected and questioned by society during the time.

⁷ Manwell, Elizabeth. 2007. 121-24.

CHAPTER I: THE POEMS: LESBIA OR CLODIA METELLI?

The biggest debate in defining Catullus' relationship with Lesbia lies in identifying who Lesbia really was. Most think Lesbia was a pseudonym for one of Clodius' sisters, more specifically Clodia Metelli. Clodia Metelli was involved in a highly publicized court case with her ex-lover Marcus Caelius Rufus, whom Catullus described as his rival for her love.⁸ Women who were rich had power and had a voice. Clodia Metelli was a perfect example of this.

Clodia was widowed in 59 B.C. Through history, in part due to the Lesbia speculations, she was associated with betrayal and promiscuity. If Clodia, was in truth, the real Lesbia, Catullus's highlighted love affair between the poet and Lesbia would have occurred before Clodia's husbands' death. Mary Skinner believed Clodia was a political factor of her time. Skinner highlighted that it was rare for a woman to be given a voice in the time of Ancient Rome.⁹ This made Clodia have a different role than what was common for Roman women. This makes the argument of Clodia as Lesbia even more convincing. Clodia served as a historical woman figure by giving her a voice, she is seen as dangerous and a deviant from the normal behavior.

⁸ Dyson, Julia T. 2007. 254-55.

⁹ Dixon, Suzanne. 2001. 146.

In Ancient Rome, women were typically defined by their fathers or husbands. It was a custom for women were given away in their teenage years, not learned, and not allowed to participate in politics or the outside world. Still, there were women who were able to participate in certain aspects of life that would be considered male duties, such as politics. This depends on class, social status, financial status, and more. However, there were exceptions. Interestingly:

The women addressed by the elegiac poets not only possessed the usual attractions of mistresses, but were learned as well... in any case they were free to make liaisons with whomever they chose. The poets were drawn to women who would appreciate their work... Catullus called his mistress by the pseudonym Lesbia.¹⁰

Women were only written about for very specific reasons or to send very specific messages.¹¹ In the Lesbian Poems, the possibility of Lesbia's affection served as a euphoric ecstasy and bitter-sweet distraction for Catullus. Lesbia, to have Catullus' love seem innocent, must be thought of as the one who destroys something beautiful.¹² Lesbia was one of the few female figures to be written about in this time.

Women who were rich had power and had a voice. Clodia Metelli was a perfect example of this. Clodia was widowed in 59 B.C. Through history, in part due to the Lesbia speculations, she was associated with betrayal and promiscuity. Because Clodia is the leading real figure for Lesbia, Catullus's highlighted love affair between the poet and Lesbia would have occurred before Clodia's husbands' death. Mary Skinner believed Clodia was a political factor of her time. Skinner highlighted that it was rare for a woman to be given a voice in the time of Ancient Rome.¹³ This made Clodia have a different role

¹⁰ Pomeroy, Sarah B. 1976. 174.

¹¹ Dixon, Suzanne. 2001. 154.

¹² Dixon, Suzanne. 2001. 140.

¹³ Dixon, Suzanne. 2001. 146.

than what was common for Roman women. This makes the argument of Clodia as Lesbia even more convincing. Clodia served as a historical woman figure by giving her a voice, she is seen as dangerous and a deviant from the normal behavior.

Regardless of who Lesbia was, one cannot deny Catullus was really in awe of Lesbia. In Poem 79, he even adores her saying “Lesbia is beautiful.” At the same time, Catullus was one of the first authors to represent a true friendship relation between man and woman.¹⁴

One can also look into Lesbia’s relationship with her bird to evaluate companionship. In her first introduction, Lesbia’s name is withheld and she is simply presented as “my girl.” Catullus describes Lesbia as “burning with heat” in reaction to her pet sparrow. With this, Catullus finds competition vying for Lesbia’s attention; Catullus feels hopeless. By doing such, Catullus displays himself as innocent, or virgin, in contrast to the seductress Lesbia.¹⁵ Demoting himself to the inferior, Catullus places himself on the same or of lesser intelligence than his love Lesbia. Were they of equal intelligence? In Poem 8, Catullus demonstrates this inferiority while he allows Lesbia to use him as a source or a boy toy for her own pleasure.

In opposition to that, in Poem 72, Catullus is seen as a parental figure for Lesbia. This poem transitions a romantic love between two lovers into a parental love, which was a more accurate depiction of the relationships during Ancient Rome. In this poem, Catullus says, “I loved you then, not only as the common love of a girlfriend, But as a father cares for his sons and son in law.”¹⁶ In Ancient Rome, fathers chose their daughters’ husbands

¹⁴ Dyson, Julia T. 2007. 273.

¹⁵ Dyson, Julia T. 2007. 259-60.

¹⁶ Catullus, Poem 72.

either for money or some kind of political ramifications rather than love.¹⁷ However, there still is an element of true friendship between the two. They are understood to be socially and intellectually equal.

In Poem 83, Lesbia's treatment towards Catullus is a way for her to display her love towards Catullus. Her lack of genuineness and her infidelity towards him gives the relationship a sense of hope and also adds a little humor to their relationship.¹⁸ Catullus goes as far as to acknowledge that Lesbia's mistreatment is a good sign for their relationship in Poem 85. Through all of the Lesbia Poems, she demonstrates a constant growth in her relationship with Catullus.

¹⁷ Dyson, Julia T. 2007. 270.

¹⁸ Dyson, Julia T. 2007. 272.

CHAPTER I: INFLUENCES

It is obvious that Lesbia played a huge role in Catullus' life and works. With that, it is still a mystery of who Lesbia was. It is most apparently viewed that Lesbia was the mistress of Catullus. She has been associated with qualities of cruel, unfaithful, and controlling, which conjures the ways of Sappho. Poem 11 shows that Lesbia was unworthy of Catullus' love and lacks the morals of said love as well.¹⁹ Sappho, as a lesbian, evokes a manly version of a woman. The name Lesbia is commonly associated as an ode to Sappho, as she embodies the manly figure in her relationship with Catullus, who is seen as non-masculine. The enchanting spell that Lesbia holds over Catullus is something that was not seen during the time of Catullus. By dedicating Poem 51 as a translation of one of Sappho's poems, Catullus is obviously admiring that Sappho gives women an empowering voice, which was never before seen. Because Catullus gave Lesbia a voice, he essentially gave her authority over him. Authority was considered a manly virtue, which denatured Catullus' manly essence.

¹⁹ Greene, Ellen. 2007. 142-43.

CHAPTER 2: THE LESBIAN POEMS

Poem 1

Cui dono lepidum novum libellum
arida modo pumice expolitum?
Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas
meas esse aliquid putare nugas.
Iam tum, cum ausus es unus Italorum
omne aevum tribus explicare cartis . . .
Doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis!
Quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli—
qualecumque, quod, o patrona virgo,
plus uno maneat perenne saeclo!

Poem 2

Passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
cui primum digitum dare appetenti
et acris solet incitare morsus,
cum desiderio meo nitenti
carum nescio quid lubet iocari
et solaciolum sui doloris,
credo ut tum gravis acquiescat ardor:
tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem
et tristis animi levare curas!

Poem 3

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque,
et quantum est hominum venustiorum:
passer mortuus est meae puellae,
passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quem plus illa oculis suis amabat.
nam mellitus erat suamque norat
ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem,
nec sese a gremio illius movebat,
sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc

ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.
qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum
illuc, unde negant redire quemquam.
at vobis male sit, malae tenebrae
Orci, quae omnia bella devoratis:
tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis
o factum male! o miselle passer!
tua nunc opera meae puellae
flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli.

Poem 4

Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum severiorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!
soles occidere et redire possunt:
nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum.
dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,
conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
aut ne quis malus invidere possit,
cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.

Poem 7

Quaeris, quot mihi basiationes
tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque.
quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae
lasarpiciferis iacet Cyrenis
oraclum Iovis inter aestuosi
et Batti veteris sacrum sepulcrum;
aut quam sidera multa, cum tacet nox,
furtivos hominum vident amores:
tam te basia multa basiare
vesano satis et super Catullo est,
quae nec pernumerare curiosi
possint nec mala fascinare lingua.

Poem 8

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.
ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,
quae tu volebas nec puella nolebat,
fulsere vere candidi tibi soles.
nunc iam illa non vult: tu quoque impotens noli,
nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser vive,
sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.
vale puella, iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit invitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelestas, vae te, quae tibi manet vita?
quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

Poem 51

Ille mi par esse deo videtur,
ille, si fas est, superare divos,
qui sedens adversus identidem te
spectat et audit
dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi
* * * * * [vocis in ore]
lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suo
tintinant aures geminae, teguntur
lumina nocte.
otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
otium et reges prius et beatas
perdidit urbes.

Poem 58

Caeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa.
illa Lesbia, quam Catullus unam
plus quam se atque suos amavit omnes,
nunc in quadriuis et angiportis
glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes.

Poem 70

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle
quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.
dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.

Poem 72

Dicebas quondam solum te nosse Catullum,
Lesbia, nec prae me velle tenere Iovem.
dilexi tum te non tantum ut vulgus amicum,
sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.
nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,
multo mi tamen es vilior et levior.
qui potis est, inquis? quod amantem iniuria talis
cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus.

Poem 75

Huc est mens deducta tua mea, Lesbia, culpa
atque ita se officio perdidit ipsa suo,
ut iam nec bene velle queat tibi, si optima fias,
nec desistere amare, omnia si facias.

Poem 83

Lesbia mi praesente viro mala plurima dicit:
haec illi fatuo maxima laetitia est.
mule, nihil sentis? si nostri oblita taceret,
sana esset: nunc quod gannit et obloquitur,
non solum meminit, sed, quae multo acrior est res,
irata est. hoc est, uritur et loquitur.

Poem 85

Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

Poem 87

Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam
vere, quantum a me Lesbia amata mea est.
nulla fides ullo fuit umquam foedere tanta,
quanta in amore tuo ex parte reperta mea est.

Poem 92

Lesbia mi dicit semper male nec tacet umquam
de me: Lesbia me dispeream nisi amat.
quo signo? quia sunt totidem mea: deprecor illam
assidue, verum dispeream nisi amo.

CHAPTER 2: THE TRANSLATIONS

Poem 1 Translation

To whom do I give a neat new book,
Just polished with dry pumice?
Cornelius, to you; and since you always thought of my trifles as worthy.
For even when you dared (one of the Italians)
To explain all of the past in 3 works-learned, Juppiter, and with the greatest labor!
Take this little book for whatever it is worth, which, O Virgin Patron,
Let it remain for more than one generation.

Poem 2 Translation

Sparrow, my girlfriend's delight,
with whom she plays, whom she holds in her lap,
whom she gives her fingertip to nip,
and provoke you to nip harder,
when my bright-eyed object of love entertains some charming fun,
and a little solace for her grief,
I believe as the heavy passion rests:
Might I play with you as she does
and lift the sad cares of my spirit.

Poem 3 Translation

Mourn, Oh Venuses & Cupids,
and all of you men whatever is left of rather charming men:
The sparrow of my girlfriend is dead,
the sparrow, delight of my girlfriend,
whom she loved more than her own eyes,
for he was honey-sweet,
and knew his mistress as well as a girl knows her own mother,
nor would he move from her lap,
but hop around now here now there,
chirping to his mistress alone,
now he goes on a dark journey,
from where they say no one returns,
But evil on you all,
dark shades of Orcus which devours all beauty!

Such a pretty sparrow which you've taken from me.
Oh evil deed! Oh wretched sparrow!
It's your fault that now my girlfriend's eyes
Are heavy and red with weeping.

Poem 4 Translation

Let us live, my Lesbia, and love
And value the rumors of strict old men as a single penny.
Suns may die and are able to return;
When once out brief light dies,
There is one perpetual night of sleep for us.
Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
Then another thousand, then a second hundred,
Then still another thousand, then a second hundred,
Then when we've made many thousands
We will mix up their counting so that they won't know
Or any evil person is able to cast their evil eye
Knowing how much we kissed.

Poem 7 Translation

You ask, how many of my kisses to you,
Lesbia, are enough and more.
As great a number as of the Libyan sand
that lies in producing Cyrene
between the oracle of sultry Jove
and old Battus' holy tomb,
or as many the stars, when the night is quiet,
that see stolen love of men;
to kiss you just as many kisses would satisfy and be more than enough for mad Catullus;
which neither the curious shall count, nor a bad tongue make ill.

Poem 8 Translation

Miserable Catullus, you must stop being silly
And admit what you see is lost.
Sunshine was once shining bright on you
when you were arriving where your girlfriend was leading
loved by us as none will be loved.
There we were given so many jokes,

Which you wanted neither did the girl refuse.
Truly the sun shined brightly for you.
Now she does not want:
You also weak one, refuse, nor follow her who flees,
Nor live miserable, but be strong with a made up mind, endure.
Bye, girlfriend. For Catullus is strong;
He won't look for you nor ask for you, unwilling:
But you will be sorry, when you will not be asked for.
Wretched girl, woe to you. What life remains for you?
Who will now visit you? Who will see your beauty?
Whom will you love now? Whose will you be said to be?
Whom will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite?
But you, Catullus, be strong and decided.

Poem 51 Translation

That man, seems to be equal to god to me,
He, if it is his will, superior to the gods,
Who sitting opposite repeatedly,
Watches and hears you laughing sweetly,
Which takes away all senses from miserable me
For soon as I look at you Lesbia, nothing remains to me,
<words in my mouth> but my tongue is seized, a subtle flame holds down through my
limbs,
my ears ring with a noise of their own, twin nights cover the lights of my eyes.
Leisure, Catullus, is harmful to you. In leisure
You are restless and too impulsive.
Leisure, now, has ruined both kings and wealthy cities.

Poem 58 Translation

Caelius, our Lesbia, that Lesbia,
that Lesbia whom alone
Catullus loved more than himself and all his own,
Now in the street corners and alleys
Peels the great grandchildren of Remus.

Poem 70 Translation

My woman says there is no one she would rather marry
Than me, not if Juppiter himself should seek her.
She says- but what a woman says to an eager lover
Should be written on wind and running water.

Poem 72 Translation

You said one day you knew Catullus alone,
Lesbia, and you refuse to hold even Jove rather than me.
I loved you then, not only as the common love of a girlfriend
But as a father cares for his sons and son in law.
Now I know you. And so though my passion burns more intensely,
Yet for me you are cheaper and lighter by much 'How can that be?'
You ask? Because such injury
drives a lover to be more a lover but to like less.

Poem 75 Translation

At this point my mind is reduced by your faults,
Lesbia, and so by its own duty it has destroyed itself,
As now it cannot wish you well,
If you should become the best,
Neither stop loving, if you should make all bad.

Poem 83 Translation

Lesbia says many evil things to me in the presence of her husband:
This makes that silly man very happy.
Mule, do you have any sense? If she quietly forgot me,
She would be sane. But now sneering
And speaking bad things, she not only remembers, but what is a harsher thing by a lot,
She is angry. That is, she burns and talks.

Poem 85 Translation

I hate and love. Why do I do so, perhaps you ask.
I do not know, but I feel it happen and am distressed.

Poem 87 Translation

No woman can say that she has been truly loved as much,
my Lesbia, as you have been loved by me. No fidelity so great
was ever found in any bond,
such as my part in loving you.

Poem 92 Translation

Lesbia always speaks bad of me
And can't ever keep quiet about me: I am
Damned if Lesbia does not love me.
By what sign? Because I am just the same:
Praying to be rid of her continuously but I'm damned if I don't love her.

CHAPTER 2: LETTERS TO LESBIA

LETTER I

Dear Lesbia,

To whom should I give this neat new book, just polished with dry pumice? A collection of what you mean to me, Lesbia...to Cornelius? (since he always thought my trifles were worthy). For even when one of the Italians dared to explain all of the past 3 works-learned, Juppiter, and with the greatest labor!

Take this little book for whatever it is worth, O Virgin Patrons, let it remain for more than one generation.

Yours truly,
Catullus

LETTER II

For the Sparrow I grudge,

Sparrow, my girlfriend's delight, with whom she plays, whom she holds in her lap,
whom she gives her fingertip to nip, and provoke you to nip harder...when my bright-eyed object of love entertains some charming fun, and a little solace for her grief, I believe as the heavy passion rests: Might I play with you as she does and lift the sad cares of my spirit (sigh)

In Contempt,
Catullus

LETTER III

Mourn, Oh Venuses & Cupids, and whatever is left of more charming men! The sparrow of my girlfriend is dead; the sparrow, joy of my girlfriend. ~~my competition.~~

She loved it more than her own eyes, for he was honey-sweet, ~~or so she claims~~, and knew his mistress as well as a girl knows her own mother. He wouldn't move from her lap.

Instead,

he'd hop around now here now there, chirping to his mistress alone. Now he goes on a dark journey, from where they say no one returns, but evil on you all, dark shades of Orcus which devours all beauty! Such a pretty sparrow which you've taken from me. Oh evil deed! Oh wretched sparrow! It's your fault that now my girlfriend's eyes are heavy and red with weeping. I am left to pick up the pieces of her broken heart.

Catullus

P.S. Thank you, Zeus!

LETTER IV

Dear Lesbia,

Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love as we value the rumors of strict old men as a single penny. Suns die and still return; But once our brief light dies, there is one perpetual night of sleep for us. Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred, Then another thousand, then a second hundred, Then another thousand, then a second hundred! Then when we've made many thousands, we will mix up their counting so that they won't know or any evil person is able to lay their evil eye knowing how much we kissed.

With Love,

Catullus

LETTER V

Dear Lesbia,

You ask, how many of my kisses to you, are enough and more than enough. As great a number as of the Libyan sand that lies in siliphium-producing Cyrene between the oracle of sultry Jove and old Battus' holy tomb. Or as many the stars, when the night is quiet,

that see stolen love of men; to kiss you just as many kisses would satisfy and be more than enough for crazy old me; which neither the curious shall count, nor a bad tongue make ill.

I Love You,

Catullus

LETTER VI

To Myself,

I, Miserable Catullus, must stop being silly and admit as lost what I see is lost! Sunshine was once shining bright on me...when I would go where my girlfriend was leading loved by us as none will be loved. There we had so many jokes, which neither of us refused.

Truly the sun shined brightly for me. Now she does not want: I am the weak one, refusing, nor following Lesbia who flees. Do not live in misery, but be strong with a made up mind, persevere. Bye, girlfriend. For I am strong; I won't look for you nor ask for you, unwilling to be loved by me: But you, Lesbia, will be sorry, when you will not be asked for! Wretched girl, woe to you. What life remains for you? Who will now visit you? Who will see your beauty? Whom will you love now? Who will you belong to? Whom will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite? But I, Catullus, shall be strong and decided.

Even if this is the end,

Catullus

LETTER VII

Dear Lesbia,

That man, seems to be equal to god to me...He, if it is His will, will be superior to the gods, who, sitting opposite repeatedly, watches and hears you laughing sweetly. This takes away all my senses from my miserable being. For soon as I look at you Lesbia, nothing remains to me, the words in my mouth are forgotten, my tongue is seized by my desire for you. A subtle flame captures down through my limbs and my ears ring with a noise of their own... twin nights cover the lights of my eyes. Leisure, is

harmful to me. In leisure, I am restless and too impulsive. Leisure, now, has ruined both kings and wealthy cities.

Dangerously in Love,

Catullus

LETTER VIII

Dear Caelius,

Caelius, our Lesbia, **THAT** Lesbia, she whom alone I loved more than myself and all my descendants! Now in the street corners and alleys, peels the great grandchildren of Remus.

Desirous,

Catullus

LETTER IX

Dear Lesbia,

You, **my** woman, say there is no one you would rather marry than me. Not even if Juppiter himself should seek her! (~~Which brings to me great joy and satisfaction~~) You say this- but what a woman says to an eager lover should be written on wind and running water.

I won't trust these words, but I won't forget,

Catullus

LETTER X

Dear Lesbia,

You said one day you knew Catullus alone and you refuse to hold even Jove rather than me. I loved you then, not only as the common love of a girlfriend, but as a father cares for his sons and son in law. Now I know you... so though my passion burns

more intensely, still, for me you are cheaper and lighter by much. 'How can that be?'
You ask? Because such injury
drives a lover to be more a lover but to like less.

Confused & Lost,
Catullus

LETTER XI

Dear Lesbia,

At this point my mind is reduced by your faults, Lesbia, and so by its own duty
it has destroyed itself, as now it cannot wish you well, if you should become the best,
neither stop loving, if you should make all bad.

Constantly Battling,
Catullus

LETTER XII

Dear Lesbia,

You say many evil things to me in the presence of your husband: This makes
this silly man very happy. I question if I am a senseless mule... If you quietly forgot
me, you would be sane. But now sneering and speaking bad things, that you not only
remember, but what is even more harsh is that you are angry. That is, you seethe and
talk.

Restless,
Catullus

LETTER XIII

Dear Lesbia,

I ~~hate~~ and love. Why do I do so, perhaps you ask. I do not know, but I feel it
happen and am distressed.

Distressed,
Catullus

LETTER XIV

Dear Lesbia,

No woman can say that she has been truly loved as much, my Lesbia, as you have been loved by me. No fidelity so great was ever found in any bond, such as my part in loving you.

Your Better Half,

Catullus

LETTER XV

Dear Lesbia,

Why are you always speaking bad of me and can't ever keep quiet about me? I am

Damned if you do not love me. By what sign? Because I am just the same: Praying to be rid of you continuously but I'm damned if I don't love you.

Love Me Please,

Catullus

CHAPTER 2: POEMS VS LETTERS

There is an apparent difference between a poem and a letter. Both can display a significant amount of emotion and personal reflection in different formats. A poem maintains a steady pace and rhythm while a letter is more of a strict constant. Visually, a poem can give one more flexibility, but content-wise, a letter can represent a wider variety. My intention in this transformation from poetry into a letter format is to give the poems even more emotion and increase the personal level of each poem. There were several things that I did to attempt to enhance this transformation.

First, I used Roman numerals to count the letter numbers to be more authentic to Ancient Roman style. I started the greetings of the letters by addressing the subjects of the poem. Ultimately, all these poems were intended for Lesbia. However, Lesbia was not always the subject of said poems. For example, Poem 2 was about Lesbia's love for her sparrow, so I decided to address the letter to her sparrow ("For the sparrow I grudge"). Sometimes, I decided to leave out to whom the poem is addressed to if I felt like it was an ambiguous subject. In Letter 6, I decided to transform that poem into a letter to Catullus himself, to give the effect of pity and talking out loud to himself.

I attempted to give more emotion to the closings of the letters. In the closings, I tried to reflect how Catullus portrays the emotion of the poem and how that emotion was reflected in the letters. For example, in Letter 7 I ended with, "dangerously in love, Catullus" due to the fact that in Poem 51, he likened himself with that of a deity, which

was dangerous territory for any mortal to do. Obviously, Catullus was blinded to the dangers by his love for Lesbia. Another example can be seen in Letter 9, or Poem 70, in which I ended with “I wont trust these words, but I wont forget, Catullus.” This closure reflected the message of the poem in which Catullus feels as if Lesbia is giving him false hope.

Finally, there a few poems I would like to address specifically:

Poem 1/ Letter I:

I inserted the phrase “a collection of what you mean to me, Lesbia” to emphasize the level of dedication Catullus has to Lesbia. Also I played with word order to make the letter flow more nicely.

Poem 2/ Letter II:

In Letter 2, I bolded the word “love” to remind readers of the passion that rests in Catullus and his jealousy of the sparrow. I also inserted a “sigh” at the end to show his hopelessness and reflected that in the closing of “In Contempt, Catullus.”

Poem 3/ Letter III:

I used “joy” instead of delight because I feel as though it gives a lighter and more frivolous tone. I inserted the two phrases “my competition” and “or so she claims” and struck through the phrases to give insight to Catullus’ thoughts and display his jealousy. In most cases, instead of addressing the sparrow, I would refer to the bird as “it” to give less agency and personification. I inserted the last line “I am left to pick up the pieces of her broken heart... P.S. Thank you, Zeus!” to show that is what Catullus wanted, to provide the shoulder for Lesbia to cry on.

Poem 4/Letter IV:

I removed the terms “may” and “are able” to be more definitive and concrete.
And I changed “cast” to “lay” for moderation.

Poem 7/Letter V:

I changed “Mad Catullus” to “crazy old me” to make it first person and more personal.

Poem 8/Letter VI:

The letter is addressed to Catullus to serve as a reality check. I used “I/me” instead of “you” to change from second person to first person, for a more direct approach. I ended it with “even if this is the end” to show that he is hoping for the best.

Poem 51/Letter VII:

In this poem, Catullus compares himself to a deity and basically heightens Lesbia to a goddess as he is mesmerized by her aura. I used “my tongue is seized by my desire for you” to personify the tongue and display the necessity for her love and the strength of their bond. I used the word “captures” to show that Catullus is engulfed in the relationship with Lesbia. The closing states “dangerously in love” because he is captured in a world that he cannot resist.

Poem 71/Letter IX:

I inserted the phrase “which brings to me great joy and satisfaction” to show that Catullus is eager to be loved by Lesbia although he doubts the love is authentic. The letter ends in “I won’t trust these words, but I won’t forget” to show that he wishes they were true.

Poem 83/Letter XII:

I changed the “mule, do you have any sense?” into a rhetorical question, “I question if I am a senseless mule” to show that he knows he is. I used the word “seethe” to give the poem a dark mood.

Poem 85/Letter XIII:

I crossed out hate because I wanted to show that he regrets saying it. Also I ended with the word “distressed” to sum up the feelings of Catullus.

CHAPTER 3: “TO CATULLUS” COMPOSITIONS

Letter 1

Salve Catulle,

Videor tibi familiaris. Quamquam, non aliquid scio de te. Ego curo non de tuo parvo libro. Relinque tuum amorem mihi. Nescio; non curo.

Letter II

Cur sentis similis meae deliciae passerii? Meus passer est mihi Omnia. Tu es nihil mihi. Non possum te discernere et foramen in muro. Fiat ut discedas et linquas me solam.

Vexabar etiam, Lesbia

Letter III

Senex,

Lugete vestros "Veneres et Cupidines, et quantum est otii tibi." Tu nunquam curabas meo passerii. Tu non potes dissimulare tuam latetitam. Quamquam, tu eris numquam meus passer.

Discede!

Letter IV

Timeo ne non "vivamus atque amemus," Catulle. Non "rumores senum severiorum omnes unius aestimemus assis!" Non tenebar placebarque. Noster brevis lux numquam vivebat. Non dabo ulla basia. Non unum, non mille, non centum. Facis me aegram.

Vale, Lesbia

Letter V

Rogabam numquam te aliquid de tuis basiis. Vero, rogabas me. Cur velim ego umquam tangere tua labia mea meis labiis? Habe tua basia et tuas Libyassae harenas. Non basia sunt satis et satis mihi. Tu insanis et timeo. Timeo ne tu saucias me.

Letter VI

Tu, Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire et quod vides perisse perditum ducas. Numquam te amabo. Nolebam amare te. Nec require me nec roga. Sum invita. Vae te, sceleste.

O mi *dee*²⁰!

Letter VIII

Catulle,

Sum Caelii, non tuum. Si tu amas me, discede me. Is est meus maritus, meus amor, non tu.

Letter IX

Catulle,

Sum non tua mulier et nubere malim Iovi quam tibi, tu es nemo. Si Iuppiter ipse me petas quomodo possim obstinere. Insane vir.

Letter X

Non dixi me nosse te Catullum, volo tenere Iovem non te. Tuum genus amoris est non ordinarium.

Letter XI

Nunc sum perdita propter tuas culpas. Tu te ipsum laedis. Facis te insanum amore. bene velle est non satis in te iuvando. Opus est tranquillitate animi. Valeas.

Letter XII

Dico mala multa tibi quia sum non vobis. Tu frueris dolore et recusatione. Es mulus sine sensu. Si me oblivisceris in silentio, sanus esses.

Letter XIII

Catulle,

Odi et odi. Quare id faciam? Quia tu non intelligis et conspicias signa.

Letter XIV

Es rectus. Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam esse vere, quantum tu amas me. Quamquam non cupio id. Tu est fidelis ad sententiam amoris.

²⁰ "The vocative singular of **deus** does not occur in classic Latin, but is said to have been **dee**; **deus** (like the nominative) occurs in the Vulgate. Allen and Greenough section 49.

Catulle,

*Hic est finis. Nolo hortari tuos conatus. Dico semper male de te tamen adhuc
amas me. Dispereas quia non amo te. Quod gaudium accipis hic? Accipio nihil.
Deprecor illum tollendum. Vale.*

CHAPTER 3: COMPOSITION TRANSLATIONS

Greetings Catullus,

Letter I

I seem to be familiar to you. However, I do not know anything about you. I do not care about your little book. Leave behind your love for me. I do not know; I do not care.

Letter II

Why do you feel similar to my sweet sparrow? My sparrow is my all. You are nothing to me. I am not able to distinguish you from a hole in the wall. I wish so that you shall be gone and leave me alone.

I am annoyed, Still! Lesbia

Letter III

Old Man,

Mourn your Venuses and Cupids, and whatever is pleasure to you. You cared nothing about my sparrow. You are not able to conceal your happiness. Although, you will never be my sparrow.

Leave!

Letter IV

Lest, I fear that we not let us live and let us love, Catullus. Nor value the rumors of very strict old man at one ass! I am not held nor pleased. Our brief light never lived. I will not give you one kiss. Not one, not a thousand, not a hundred. You make me sick.

Goodbye, Lesbia.

Letter V

I never asked you anything concerning your kisses. In truth, you asked me. Why would I ever wish for your lips to hold mine? Have your kisses and your Libyan sand. No kisses are enough and more than enough for me. You are insane and I am afraid. I fear lest you will hurt me.

Letter VI

You, miserable Catullus, must stop being silly and admit what you see is lost. I will never love you. I refuse to love you. Neither look nor ask for me. I am unwilling. Woe to you, wicked.

Letter VII

Oh my god!

Letter VIII

Catullus,

I am Caelius', not yours. If you love me, leave me. He is my husband, my love, not you.

Letter IX

Catullus,

I am not your woman and would rather marry Jove than you, you are nobody. If Juppiter himself were to seek me, how am I able to resist? Mad man!

Letter X

I never said I knew you Catullus, I wish to hold Jove, not you. Your kind of love is not normal.

Letter XI

At this point I am lost because of our faults. You are harming yourself. You are making yourself mad with love. Wishing well is not enough in helping you. You need peace of mind. Get well.

Letter XII

I say many evil things to you because I am not into you. You enjoy pain and rejection. You are a mule without sense. If you quietly forgot me, you would be sane.

Letter XIII

Catullus,

I hate and I hate. Why do I do so? Because you do not understand and notice signs.

Letter XIV

You are right. No woman can say that she has been truly loved as much as you love me. However, I do not desire it. You are loyal to the thought of love.

Letter XV

This is the end. I will not encourage your efforts. I always speak bad of you, however, still you love me. You are damned because I do not love you. What joy do you receive from this? I receive none. I pray to be rid of you. Be well.

CHAPTER 3: THESIS GOALS

While reading and transforming Catullus' letters, I attempted to make him seem desperate and as someone who wants a person they have no chance with. In return, I made Lesbia seem bothered by Catullus' unwanted advances. My goal was to portray the message that Catullus will never have a chance with her and that he should give up. I am going against the normal standards in this thesis by giving a woman a voice. It was always understood in these times that men and women were not equals. By having Lesbia address Catullus and turn him down would be a rare occasion. I intended on representing Lesbia with a "mean girl" appearance. Her attitude towards Catullus' letters is displayed as bitter, annoyed and aggravated.

Here are a few examples of lines I wanted to make Lesbia react to. In Poem 2, when he addresses the sparrow as his girlfriends' sparrow, I wanted Lesbia to demonstrate the difference between the sparrow and Catullus, making it clear that she loves and cares for the sparrow, while she is not pleased with Catullus feeling as if he could compete. In Poem 4, I mocked his words "Let us live, my Lesbia, and love, and value the rumors of strict old men as a single penny...give me a thousand kisses." Then I had Lesbia show Catullus that she wishes to kiss him none at all! In Poem 70, Catullus writes, "My woman says there is no one she would rather marry than me, not if Juppiter himself should seek her." At this claim, I made Lesbia outraged as to the fact that Catullus thinks he could ever compare with a deity. Lastly, in Poem 83, he says, "Lesbia

says many evil things to me in the presence of her husband.” I wanted Lesbia to address that statement by letting him know its because she isn’t interested.

I tried to represent Lesbia’s thoughts through the way I respond in the letters. I utilized different formats to aid in this. I used a variety of methods like bold, strike out, italics, capitalization and so forth, to represent both of their thoughts and portray their emotions. I want Lesbia to almost seem as she is mimicking Catullus, making a mockery of his love for her. I used different grammar constructions to further emphasize my point. Examples of grammatical constructions I attempt to use are fear clauses, gerundives, and subjunctives.

CHAPTER 4: THE PROCESS- THESIS

This thesis defies what was normal for Roman women, giving them an enduring voice. Not much were written about women; what is known, mostly, was written by a male perspective. My thesis gives Lesbia the power of voicing rejection against an unwanted suitor. In doing this, I am presenting a new representation of the dangers of a woman with a voice.

Chapter one of my thesis focuses on information about Catullus, Lesbia, and Clodia Metelli. I provide background information on Catullus, his political relationships, and his poetry, most specifically, the collection of poetry known as the Lesbian Poems. Then I provide some information about Lesbia and her role in the Lesbian Poems as well as her place in Catullus' life. Lastly, I provide some history about Clodia Metelli, who was thought to be the real Lesbia. I discuss her importance in history and her being a powerful female figure of her time.

In the second chapter, I present and translate the Lesbian poems. After the literal translations, I then transformed those into letter formats. Following that is a section dedicated to the changes that I made while transforming the literal translations into letters to Lesbia.

The third chapter focuses on the compositional work that I have done of writing replies, in Latin, to the letter versions of Catullus' poetry. After this, there are translations

of the letter compositions, and then there are goals of what I wanted to accomplish in my compositions, as well as, the motive of these compositions.

Lastly, chapter four contains the conclusion that provides an insight on the process of composition and formulating my thesis idea in general. This conclusion offers a written description for the entirety of my thesis. It will serve as a brief representation of the work that I have completed over the two terms.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The Lesbian Poems demonstrate that being captivated by the power of eros could cause a role reversal of genders. Usually, men who sought women in the times of Ancient Rome were practically guaranteed her hand in marriage. However, Catullus demonstrated what would happen when a woman is given a choice. Lesbia, the object of Catullus' desire, overall rejected his advances. From time to time, she would entertain the thought of him being her only lover, but Catullus knew he was sharing her with another man. Lesbia embodies female empowerment because unlike most women in this time, she was given a voice through Catullus. Although historically, Lesbia never replied to Catullus, his poems provide insight on how she toyed with his emotions. In some poems, the two are so in love with one another's company. In others, Catullus curses Lesbia's name realizing he would never stand a chance in being the only man. Lesbia represents that a woman with power can be dangerous to a man. She is associated with adultery, deviousness, intoxication, and sexual desire. Lesbia served as a desire for the best of both worlds, a wife and a sexual partner, as she was married but participated in extra marital affairs. There is an apparent danger and enticement in placing an educated, wealthy, and powerful woman in the place of that of which is totally opposite, as that woman succeeds in both roles.

By completing this thesis, I have gained an incredible appreciation for the Latin language and the beautiful art of poetry. Originally, I chose this idea because I, myself, am a poet and found Catullus' admiration for Lesbia to be artistically beautiful. The Lesbian Poems draw me in, as I feel it is fundamental in human nature to desire what you cannot have. As Catullus dances back and forth with the idea that the love between him and Lesbia could possibly, one day, be something that both of them could share solely with one another. Reading the poems, one can feel the emotions that Catullus was enduring, almost as if his words came to life off of the page.

Through this thesis I was able to learn about different components in the Latin language. I learned that one word, sentence, or phrase can be interpreted in many different ways. Also, depending on how you translate it can affect the meaning of the line. I have gained an appreciation for new literary tools and grammatical constructions, as I had to use a few of them in my composition part of my thesis. The most challenging part of the thesis was when there was not a Latin equivalent for English colloquialisms. There were some words that I had to look up multiple alternative meanings for, and could not get the meaning I wanted portrayed. Overall, though challenging, I am grateful for the experience.

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