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*CUM TACENT, CLAMANT:*  
THE PRAGMATICS OF SILENCE IN CATULLUS

RANDALL L. B. MCNEILL

CATULLUS' POEMS HAVE BEEN characterized as social documents through which he tests or confirms the strength of his personal relationships.<sup>1</sup> Talking with others obviously represents a central ingredient of any social life, so it is scarcely surprising that Catullus also demonstrates an abiding interest in the literary depiction of conversation, its patterns and rhythms, its techniques of performance, and its utility as a conduit for interaction. Indeed, Catullus does more than simply represent spoken dialogue within inherently monologic poetic forms.<sup>2</sup> His grasp of the subtleties of social communication extends to a keen appreciation for the fact that conversation comprises more than speech. Pointed omissions, pregnant pauses, and lengthy silences can give eloquent expression to a person's true feelings and views, while the simple act of not speaking can be as crucial as any utterance to the successful conveyance of meaning. Thus, when Catullus represents himself or his characters as saying nothing, their silence frequently performs an important semiotic function.<sup>3</sup>

Work in sociolinguistics on the pragmatics of silence, including experimental and observational case studies undertaken in a wide range of cultures and social contexts, has generated a sizable body of evidence in support of the idea that silence is an integral element of discourse, and constitutes a

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1. See Habinek 1998, 112–13; Skinner 1993, 62–63; Tatum 1997, 483–84; and Nappa 1998, 392–95.

2. For which see Putnam 1983, 256; Martin 1992, 100–106. See, e.g., Poems 45, 53, 67, and 72. In this Catullus follows the model of Greek iambic and lyric poets such as Archilochus, Hipponax, and Sappho (cf., e.g., Archil. 23 and 196a, Hipponax 25 and 53, and Sappho 1, 94, and 137), but the existence of these literary precedents does not detract from the originality of Catullus' poetic representations of spoken conversation. See Newman 1990, 65–66.

3. Acts of silence in Catullus' poetry must be studied carefully, for they perform conversational operations as opposed to simply describing them. See Austin 1975, 6–9; Selden 1992, 480–82. It should be noted that the conceptual basis of Austin's distinction between "locutionary" and "illocutionary" acts obscures the performative function that acts of silence can also play; see Austin 1975, 94–101 and esp. 151–64. Cf. the interesting work recently done on silence in Greek literature, including Montiglio 2000 and Heath 2005.

socially significant act when it is voluntarily performed during a conversation.<sup>4</sup> Such acts are generally intended to address some aspect of the relationship between the parties involved in the interaction, by way of establishing, maintaining, curtailing, or clarifying the personal connections that exist between them.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, researchers acknowledge that these acts of silence are inherently polysemic in that they can express both positive and negative messages in an array of interactive contexts, and potentially ambiguous in that they can be subject to misinterpretation by the recipient.<sup>6</sup> What matters, therefore, is the extent to which the performer of a given act of silence is able to control its subsequent reception, and thereby determine its ultimate significance.

This article seeks to explore some of the ways in which Catullus treats silence as a meaningful pragmatic action along these lines. It takes as its broader subject the social resonance of speech acts, a central theme of Catullan poetry that has received increasing attention from scholars in recent years.<sup>7</sup> Silence has hitherto been identified in this context as an essentially adversarial state that results from an existing imbalance of power between the participants in an exchange, in that it is either forced upon would-be interlocutors or else adopted as a means of passive resistance against a dominant speaker.<sup>8</sup> In what follows I hope to develop our understanding of an alternative function of silence in Catullus, first by considering some passages of Cicero that exemplify a special use of silence in contemporary Roman discourse, and second by showing that Catullus represents silence on several occasions as a voluntary performative act in a variety of social contexts. Evidence for Catullus' familiarity with the employment of silence as a pragmatic technique can be found in the polymetric and elegiac poems alike: in Poem 102 the performance of silence is construed as sending an emphatic signal of public discretion and reliability; in Poem 6 Catullus presents Flavius' silence as the key to the interpretation of their friendship; in Poem 10 Varus' act of silence highlights the weakness of Catullus' conversational position even as it underscores the apparent closeness of their relationship. In each case a double issue surrounds the enactment and reception of the silence itself: Who performs this silence within the discourse, and who determines how it is subsequently read? In effect, Catullus treats acts of silence as markers of discursive authority as well as personal friendship in his represented social world.

At the outset, we must recognize that Catullus follows a wider contemporary Roman rhetorical practice in using silence to convey meaning in a

4. See Saville-Troike 1985; Jaworski 1993 and 1997; and Kurzon 1998 for overviews of the field.

5. See Jensen 1973; Sifianou 1997, 69 and 72; and Meise 1996, 47. It should be noted that the act of maintaining one's own silence is different in both conception and execution from the act of imposing silence upon others or otherwise depriving them of speech. For this latter form of "silencing" see n. 20 below and Herdina 1996.

6. See, e.g., Jaworski 1993, 31–35 and 66–69.

7. See, e.g., Fitzgerald 1995; Krostenko 2001; Nappa 2003; and Lowrie 2006. For analysis of the polymetric poems and epigrams as instances of social performance, see Wray 2001, 67, 100–106, and 109–11.

8. Nappa 2003, 60–61.

range of linguistic circumstances. Brian Krostenko has convincingly demonstrated how Cicero's use of language reflects a broad cultural framework of attitudes toward speech and social performance, and has moreover shown that Catullus operates within this same framework while responding to it innovatively as a poet.<sup>9</sup> It is significant, then, that Cicero exhibits considerable skill in deploying studied and purposeful acts of silence to their maximum semiotic impact. In his letters, orations, and philosophical treatises, he regularly makes use of silence to establish effective lines of control over both his discourse and its interpretation, in rhetorical as well as conversational contexts. In a letter to Atticus from December of 45 B.C.E., for example, Cicero describes how he responded to his nephew Quintus' decision to escape his creditors by joining Caesar's proposed Parthian campaign (Cic. Att. 13.42.1):

venit ille ad me καὶ μάλα κατηφής. et ego "σὺ δὲ δὴ τί σύννους;" "rogas?" inquit, "cui iter instet et iter ad bellum, idque cum periculosum tum etiam turpe!" "quae vis igitur?" inquam. "aes" inquit "alienum, et tamen ne viaticum quidem habeo." hoc loco ego sumpsit quiddam de tua eloquentia; nam tacui.

You-know-who came to see me, "looking very down." So I said, "Why the long face?" "Do you need to ask?" he replied. "I'm facing a journey and a journey to war, and one that's as dishonorable as it is dangerous!" "What's forcing you?" I say. "Debt," he tells me, "and as it is I can't even cover my travel expenses." At this point I borrowed something of your eloquence: I kept silent.

Cicero chooses to fall silent at a moment when he might plausibly have been expected to speak. In relating this episode to Atticus, he explicitly defines this silence as an act of *eloquentia*. In other words, Cicero adopts silence as a conversational stance in order to convey his views and feelings in such a way that audible speech becomes superfluous. It should be noted that although the initial performance of silence can perhaps be interpreted in different ways, Cicero pointedly reframes this silence in his letter as an affectionate and complimentary gesture to Atticus.<sup>10</sup> Cicero may have originally intended his silence to express his dissent and disapproval of Quintus' actions, or he may have been politely refraining from comment on his nephew's plight; in either case, he certainly expects that Atticus will feel amused and gratified when he hears about the episode.<sup>11</sup>

As this example suggests, an act of silence can mean (or can be read to mean) different things in different circumstances, so the adroit performer is

9. See Krostenko 2001, esp. 233–90.

10. Meise (1996, 57–58) notes the existence in literary representations of dialogue of two "levels of communication" at which silence can play a signifying role: that of author/narrator to reader (Cicero to Atticus, in this case) and that of character to character (Cicero to Quintus).

11. Peter White has suggested to me that the Menandrian language used in this letter indicates that Cicero has worked up the encounter as a staged and artificial comic scene, with himself playing the disapproving old man to Quintus' callow and spendthrift youth. Following this insight, we can see that Cicero has chosen to depict himself as falling silent at a crucial moment in the dialogue, with the assumption that Atticus (the audience of his playlet, as it were) will instantly grasp the meaning of the act. Even if invented, this exchange demonstrates that Cicero and Atticus alike recognized that silence could constitute a valid response within a conversation and even serve as an "eloquent" statement of one's views. This is further supported by the fact that Cicero goes on to describe how Quintus instantly switched to a new topic of conversation (namely, his concern that his maternal uncle Atticus was annoyed with him for delaying his marriage plans); it is tempting to read him here as reacting to Cicero's evident lack of enthusiasm.

well advised to provide some direction as to how the silence itself should be interpreted. If this preemptive step is not taken, other participants in the interaction can move in to seize control over its pragmatic implications. In the context of public meetings and assemblies, Cicero frequently treats the silence of others as a tacit yet meaningful expression of endorsement and support; on such occasions he takes it upon himself not merely to anticipate but actively to shape the way in which this silence is perceived. The most notable example of this rhetorical figure comes in the first Catilinarian oration, where Cicero invokes the silence of the senators as conclusive evidence that they are all on his side (Cic. *Cat.* 1.20–21):

quid est? ecquid attendis, ecquid animadvertis horum silentium? patiuntur, tacent. quid exspectas auctoritatem loquentium, quorum voluntatem tacitorum perspicis? . . . cum tacent, clamant.

What is the matter, Catiline? What are you waiting for? Do you perceive the silence of these men? They concur—they are silent. Why do you wait for spoken words of endorsement, when you can recognize the will of those who do not speak? . . . In keeping silent, they are shouting.

To be sure, an audience at a public oration is not the same thing as an interlocutor in a private conversation, but even so Cicero's quietly approving throng of senators represents an interesting comparandum to the act of *eloquentia* that he describes in his letter to Atticus. The Romans clearly recognized that silence could carry a positive message when it was performed in a public context; indeed, speakers hoped for such displays no less than for rounds of applause, whereas a murmuring crowd was generally taken to be expressing its opposition.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this passage confirms that the performer of an act of silence does not automatically dictate how it is received. Cicero here co-opts the silence of the listening senators, deftly establishing a boundary between a despicable “outside” (Catiline and his supporters) and a privileged “inside” (Cicero and the senators). By construing their silence a priori as a token of their support, he effectively leaves the senators with only two options: either to remain silent and implicitly agree with him, or else to speak up and thereby appear to confess to being in collusion with Catiline.<sup>13</sup> In other words, not only does Cicero embrace the notion that refraining from speech can send a powerful signal of assent and approval; he also manipulates his audience into acquiescing to his reading of their silence by capitalizing upon its mutability as a mechanism of discourse.

It is significant to our analysis of the role of silence in Catullus' poetry that Cicero thus not only specifically acknowledges that silence can serve as a pragmatic expression of one's personal opinions, but also apparently recognizes that everything ultimately depends on how this silence is perceived, and, more important, on who controls it. In the *Brutus*, Cicero inserts an intriguing exchange into the dialogue (Cic. *Brut.* 231):

12. See, e.g., Cic. *Q. Fr.* 2.1–3, and discussion in Montiglio 2000, 152–57.

13. I am indebted to an anonymous reader for this observation. See also Cic. *Sest.* 107.

tum Brutus, "non est," inquit, "ista causa quam dicis, quam ob rem de eis qui vivunt nihil velis dicere." "quaenam igitur," inquam, "est?" "vereri te," inquit, "arbitror ne per nos hic sermo tuus emanet et ei tibi suscenseant quos praeterieris." "quid? vos," inquam, "tacere non poteritis?" "nos quidem," inquit, "facillime; sed tamen te arbitror malle ipsum tacere quam taciturnitatem nostram experiri."

Then Brutus said, "You say you don't want to speak about orators who are now alive, but the reason you give is not the real one." "What is it, then?" "What is it, then?" I asked. "I think you're afraid," he replied, "that what you say here will leak out through Atticus and me, and the ones you pass over will get mad at you." "Why," I said, "won't you be able to keep quiet about our conversation?" "Yes, of course, very easily," he answered. "But I think you'd prefer to keep silent yourself rather than test our ability to do so."

No fewer than four discrete silences are envisioned here in two separate conversations: Cicero's silence about living orators in general; his reticence about the true reason for this silence; his silence about specific living orators (*ei . . . quos praeterieris*), which is what he theoretically fears Brutus and Atticus will inadvertently reveal in some subsequent conversation with outsiders; and the silence that Brutus promises he and Atticus would maintain if such a conversation should in fact take place. With remarkable economy, Cicero uses this set of silences to convey a wealth of information about the various attitudes and relationships of the people involved in the two interactions. The first and third silences are taken to express Cicero's critical opinion of his contemporaries, fellow orators whose ability and technique he judges on an aesthetic and professional basis. The second and fourth silences demonstrate the circumspection of the three friends, who hold their tongues on a sensitive issue as a sign of mutual respect and consideration for each other's future social encounters.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it must be acknowledged that Brutus is effectively bidding for control over the subtext of the discourse by identifying these silences and speculating as to their purpose. Nor does Cicero demur; on the contrary, the two men cooperate in a joint definition of the significance of Cicero's speech act. This in turn prompts Brutus' pledge of future discretion, which actualizes his reading of Cicero's third silence. The exchange of *Brutus* 231 points out the extent to which any act of silence is an inherently interactive form of communication, inasmuch as it requires at least two partners for its final meaning to be established. The performer must either control how it is perceived, or else bow to the interpretation given it by its recipient. For silence to be effective as a conversational and pragmatic tool, someone must establish and maintain authority over the discursive space in which the silence occurs.

Clearly, Cicero is acutely aware of the expressive qualities of silence, and takes full advantage of its versatility both as a multivalent conversational stance and as a rhetorical device to be employed in situations where speech

14. The *Brutus* as a whole is modeled on the structure of a formal *laudatio funebris*, in which living ancestors were traditionally not mentioned; see, e.g., Fantham 1997, 45–46. Even so, particular significance is ascribed here to the motives and semiotic implications of these silences. My thanks go to an anonymous reader for calling my attention to this point.

represents a less desirable option.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he shows himself capable of engineering a particular *reading* of silence, forcing its performance to be interpreted in specific ways in both private and public contexts. In this way, Cicero's use of performative silences to articulate subtle features of his friendships and personal interactions shows interesting similarities to Catullus' treatment of figures of silence in his poetry (in terms of both their pragmatic function and their semiotic effect), for Catullus too employs acts of silence to elucidate the rhetorically and linguistically complex terrain of his depicted social landscape. The poet portrays himself and his friends as commenting upon their relationships with each other through the conscious performance of silence, which represents a viable alternative to speech in their interactions and becomes one of the defining characteristics of friendship in their world. At the same time, Catullus, like Cicero, appreciates the fact that for silence to be truly effective as a mechanism of social interaction, one or the other of the participants in each exchange must be able to impose a particular reading upon its performance. As a result, Catullus treats his own ability to control these silences as a kind of sliding indicator of the relative degree of social authority that he exercises within each of his friendships. The more Catullus depicts himself as shaping the pragmatic and semiotic resonance of an act of silence (whether his own or a friend's), the more dominant and secure his position appears to be within the relationship that provides the context for its performance. By contrast, when he portrays himself as being unable to impose a particular reading upon an act of silence, it suggests his comparative lack of control over the nature and terms of his interaction with those around him.

Catullus offers his most forceful articulation of the positive social resonance of acts of silence in Poem 102, where he explicitly characterizes the expectation and maintenance of tactful silence as being the hallmarks of a reliable friendship:

Si quicquam tacito commissum est fido ab amico,  
cuius sit penitus nota fides animi,  
meque esse invenies illorum iure sacratum,  
Corneli, et factum me esse puta Arpocratem.

If anything at all has ever been entrusted to someone who keeps quiet by a faithful friend whose loyal heart is well and truly known, then you will find, Cornelius, that I am bound by solemn oath to the code of such men. Think of me as a veritable Harpocrates.<sup>16</sup>

Catullus celebrates his own capacity for discretion as clinching evidence of the solidity of his relationship with Cornelius. What is especially noteworthy about this formulation is that Catullus ties the issue of friendship so closely

15. See also Cic. *Att.* 16.7.5; *Clu.* 156.

16. Harpocrates is the Hellenized name of one form of the Egyptian god Horus, who was popularly represented in Greek and Roman art as a young boy with a finger to his lips as if advising silence. It should be noted that this was universally the Roman interpretation of Harpocrates' gesture; see, e.g., Varro *Ling.* 5.10.57, Ov. *Met.* 9.692. The speculation of Kitchell (1983, 103–4) that Catullus somehow learned the original Egyptian meaning of the gesture as “the normal, childish act of sucking one's finger” cannot be accepted, since this would render the allusion pointless.

and specifically to the voluntary suppression of speech. His designation of himself as *tacitus* stands as both the manifestation and the guarantee of his sense of reciprocal loyalty toward his friend, which in turn is accorded all the solemnity and permanence of a sacred vow.<sup>17</sup> The fact remains, however, that Catullus is essentially manipulating Cornelius into accepting this particular interpretation of his silence, since to read it any other way hereafter risks implying a rejection of their friendship.<sup>18</sup> This does not invalidate the sentiment of the epigram, but rather underscores the degree to which Catullus presents himself as exercising complete control over the way in which his message is received, and by extension over the parameters of their relationship itself. Like Cicero and the senators in the first Catilinarian oration, Catullus places Cornelius and himself on the inside of a particular social group. The poet's pledge that he will never reveal Cornelius' secrets to outsiders establishes their friendship and carries the promise of its smooth continuation, with himself as the defining and dominant partner.<sup>19</sup>

Silence, in other words, can serve as a powerful demonstration of a man's relative authority, as well as his *fides* when he is called upon to render a public account of his social relationships.<sup>20</sup> But as we have seen, when silence is voluntarily performed as a pragmatic technique, the point at issue becomes one of ascertaining who will exert final control over the act's reception. The enactment of silence thus provides an ostensibly reliable index to the closeness of the friendship between two men, but at the same time the interpretation of this silence effectively exposes the relative positions of each party in the relationship by clarifying (or in some cases altering) the terms of their discursive interaction. In Poem 6, for example, Catullus construes the silence of Flavius in such a way that it shapes our understanding of their friendship.

17. Although cf. Skinner (2003, 129), who suggests that the closing invocation of Harpocrates establishes a connection to the coarse sexual humor of Poem 74 and imparts to Poem 102 a deflationary and parodic tone. The difference, I would argue, is one of agency and volition: in Poem 102 Catullus purposely likens himself to Harpocrates as a gesture of discretion and support for Cornelius, whereas Gellius in Poem 74 forces his uncle into the role in order to gag and humiliate him. Silence and silencing are construed in very different ways; see discussion in n. 20 below.

18. Edwards (1990, 383) contends that the epigram is insincere and the friendship simulated; in his words, "[if the secret] were important enough to require elaborate confidentiality, the addressee would surely not have advanced its publication." It is true that the initial premise of Poem 102 is that Cornelius has something to hide, but the secret itself is not really at issue so much as Catullus' public demonstration of their mutual confidence and loyal friendship (which he affirms as being sincerely upheld). It is the social gesture of silence that matters here, not whatever may have occasioned its performance.

19. Cf. 68b.1–4, where Catullus claims that he must break his silence and reveal how his friend Allius has helped him: *non possum reticere, deae, qua me Allius in re / iuuerit aut quantis iuuerit officiis / ne fugiens saeculis obliuiscens aetas / illius hoc caeca nocte tegat studium* ("I cannot hold back, goddesses, the matter in which Allius helped me, or how great a favor he did for me, lest Time should cover up his zeal in unseeing darkness as it runs through the forgetful ages"). Allius has apparently kept Catullus' secret well, much as Catullus promises to keep the secret of Cornelius in Poem 102; it is up to Catullus, who again stands forth as the leading figure in their friendship, to decide how this friendship will be presented to the outside world, and under what circumstances the silence that underpins it will at last be broken.

20. Catullus is careful to distinguish between this form of silence and that of silence as an externally imposed state that is unwillingly endured as a painful symbol of one's humiliation or powerlessness, as when Gellius in Poem 74 silences his uncle through a mortifying act of *irrumatio*; here Harpocrates is invoked as a symbol not of silence but of *being* silenced. See Fitzgerald 1995, 67; Kitchell 1983, 105. Cf. Poems 16 and 37 for other instances of *irrumatio* as a form of silencing. For *irrumatio* as a metaphorical assertion of control, see Braund 1996, 52–53.



This poem begins with Catullus eagerly inquiring about Flavius' latest girlfriend; he claims that Flavius would ordinarily be unable to refrain from telling him all about her, and takes the fact that Flavius has remained silent as proof that the woman must be hopelessly low-class (6.1–5):

Flavi, delicias tuas Catullo,  
ni sint illepidae atque inelegantes,  
velles dicere nec tacere posses.  
verum nescio quid febriculosi  
scorti diligis: hoc pudet fateri.

Flavius, if your sweetie weren't devoid of wit and taste, you would want to tell me all about her. You wouldn't be able to keep quiet. As it is, you must be in love with some skanky whore, and you're too ashamed to admit it.

Much as Brutus does with Cicero in *Brutus* 231, Catullus asserts his authority over the broader discourse of the poem by calling attention to Flavius' silence and offering an explanation for it. In doing so, he establishes the premise that the two men are friends and as such should theoretically have no secrets from each other. The reader is led to believe implicitly in the existence of a close relationship between these men, such that this conversational exchange seems entirely plausible.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Catullus represents himself not simply as an incidental observer but as the specific target of Flavius' act of silence: he has learned his friend's secret only because Flavius' bed "shouts" what he has been up to (6.6–7): *nam te non viduas iacere noctes / nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat* ("Your bed remains silent, but it's no use: it fairly yells that you've been having some busy nights"). This detail initially appears to be simply one feature in the litany of physical clues to Flavius' affair (6.7–11), but the bed stands out in this list in that it plays an active and almost sentient role in the scene. Catullus gives it voice and action, and even hints at a motive by suggesting that it has tried its best to keep quiet about its owner's activities (*nequiquam tacitum*).<sup>22</sup> In this way the bed could almost be said to demonstrate *fides* on the model of Poem 102, since it at least attempts to keep from divulging Flavius' secrets. It certainly stands in contrast to Catullus, whose impertinent investigation of Flavius' bedroom represents an aggressive intrusion into his friend's private business.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, Catullus' desire to break into this silence constitutes the central theme of the poem.<sup>24</sup> *Nam nil stupra valet, nihil tacere* ("it's no good keeping quiet about your romps," 6.13): Flavius cannot hide the sordid truth, Catullus proclaims. But Flavius clearly wanted to remain quiet about the affair, and has told Catullus nothing. Catullus' initial presumption of absolute candor between Flavius and himself has thus been compromised. Flavius' silence does more than simply provide Catullus with the occasion

21. See Nielsen 1984, 106; also Syndikus 1984, 96.

22. For thematic and stylistic connections to the gossiping front door in Poem 67, see, e.g., Thomson 1997, 222, although Thomson relates the door not to the reluctantly garrulous bed but to Flavius himself.

23. See Forsyth 1989, 95; Newman 1990, 280–82; and Holzberg 2002, 120.

24. See Evrard-Gillis 1977, 122; and Skinner 1983, 141–42.

for an ironic literary celebration of his friend's vulgar fling (6.15–17).<sup>25</sup> It establishes the dimensions of their friendship while simultaneously focusing attention upon the apparent limitations of their intimacy.<sup>26</sup> In effect, Catullus' response to Flavius' silence is the hinge on which the entire structure of Poem 6 turns. Some scholars regard this poem as depicting not a friendship but a rivalrous or even openly hostile competition between two elegant young men of the smart set.<sup>27</sup> Others hold that Catullus is affectionately teasing Flavius about his inelegant and inappropriate *amores*, in a demonstration of the closeness of their friendship.<sup>28</sup> One might alternatively read Catullus as feeling frustrated or even a little hurt by Flavius' unexpected reticence, but choosing to pass it off as a joke rather than openly express his displeasure.<sup>29</sup> The fact remains that at its core Poem 6 portrays nothing more nor less than Catullus' interpretation of Flavius' unwillingness to speak. Regardless of the extent to which the poem accurately depicts the dynamics of their particular friendship, it dramatically illustrates how the overall character of a social relationship can be altered or even determined by the enactment and perception of silence.

So what happens when control over this silence is lost? As the intricacies of Poem 6 suggest, Catullus' depictions of his social interactions demonstrate an underlying preoccupation with the degree to which he himself is able to exercise authority over the various discourses through which he negotiates his personal relationships.<sup>30</sup> When he represents himself and his friends as engaging in the performance and interpretation of acts of silence, he elucidates the dynamic quality of his social landscape even as he reflects upon his own shifting place within it. It must be noted, therefore, that at times Catullus represents himself as being very much at a tactical disadvantage as he attempts to manage the discursive space in which he operates.<sup>31</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in Poem 10, which scholars have identified as an important locus for Catullus' treatment of issues of urbanity,

25. Poem 6 itself is scarcely complimentary to Flavius, who is left looking like an oversexed lout, or at best an infatuated naïf in need of poetic redemption. Flavius' girlfriend remains an anonymous *febriculosum scortum*, and no further images are introduced to replace the unedifying spectacle of mashed pillows and *latera ecfututa*.

26. Cf. the similar dynamic of Poem 55, where Catullus pushes his way into the details of Camerius' love affairs on the grounds that he deserves to know everything as Camerius' friend. In this instance Catullus explicitly gives Camerius permission to keep his secrets as far as the rest of the world is concerned, so long as he grants Catullus the privilege of his full and private confidence (55.21–22): *vel si vis, licet obseres palatum, / dum vestri sim particeps amoris* ("Or if you wish, you may lock up your lips, provided that I am in the loop concerning your affair").

27. See Morgan 1977. Catullus claims for himself a more elegant self-image by addressing Flavius in this way; see Fitzgerald 1995, 52–54.

28. See, e.g., Nielsen 1984, 106–7; Krostenko 2001, 236–37 and 250–51.

29. Cf. his anger and despair when he believes he has been "betrayed" by friends in Poems 30 and 60. Flavius' crime is comparatively minor, so Catullus' reaction is more jocular and in line with his typical interactions with his friends, as in Poems 14 and 35.

30. See discussion in Wiseman 1985, 122–27. For the way in which the narrator shapes the reactions of the audience even as the audience becomes aware of its manipulation, see Pedrick 1986, 187–89.

31. See also, e.g., Poem 83, where an envious and defensive Catullus attempts to assert control over the interpretation of Lesbia's speech as well as her imagined silence, but in so doing merely exhibits his own capacity for willful self-delusion, thereby casting into sharper focus his inability either to command Lesbia's affections or to compete successfully against the *vir*. See Janan 1994, 83–85; Skinner 2003, 130.

gender, and political engagement.<sup>32</sup> We may further enhance our understanding of Poem 10 by recognizing that Catullus's friend Varus falls silent at a crucial moment in the conversation it depicts, and that Catullus includes this performance of silence in part to reinforce the comic and deprecatory quality of his self-portrait here. By representing himself as failing to control the pragmatic resonance of Varus' silence, Catullus underscores the vulnerability of his role in the discourse of the poem, as well as the weakness of his position in the social scenario that it describes.<sup>33</sup>

We can begin to discern the significance of Varus' silence by first observing how the character maneuvers through the conversation of Poem 10. The opening lines indicate that Varus extends a friendly verbal invitation to Catullus to come meet his girlfriend (10.1–4).<sup>34</sup> Catullus, Varus, and the *puella* engage in a desultory chat (*incidere nobis sermones*); when talk turns to Catullus' recent stint with the praetor Memmius' *cohors* in Bithynia, Varus joins the girl in asking a series of increasingly specific questions about his friend's tour (10.5–8). Catullus responds by grouching about how badly it went (10.9–13), so Varus and his girlfriend ask if he was at least able to pick up some of the sedan-chair bearers for which Bithynia is famous. The inclusion of the verb *inquunt* is especially important, for it indicates that Varus remains a vocal participant in the conversation up to this point (10.14–16).<sup>35</sup> Catullus now falsely claims to have obtained no less than eight *lecticarii* (10.16–23). Varus, however, says nothing when his girlfriend asks to borrow these imaginary chair bearers, and he remains silent as Catullus backpedals in confusion, then peevishly begins to insult her (10.24–34). Significantly, these closing lines are directed at the girl alone (*inquii puellae*, 10.27). The poet could have had Varus speak at any point during this final exchange, so Varus must be read as performing a voluntary act of silence from line 24 onwards.<sup>36</sup>

In order to understand the function of Varus' silence in the second half of Poem 10, we must consider Catullus' portrayal of his own role in the encounter. It is important to recognize that Catullus' position in the discourse of the poem, never very authoritative to begin with, in fact gradually deteriorates over time. He begins as an essentially passive participant, agreeing to Varus' invitation largely because he has nothing better to do (*otiosum*, 10.2). This passivity continues into the conversation proper, as Catullus appears not to generate any topics of conversation himself, but merely

32. See, e.g., Nielsen 1987; Skinner 1989; Braund 1996; and Nappa 2001; cf. Miller 1998, 179–80.

33. Cf. Nappa 2001, 89 n. 4. Catullus as the narrator must be distinguished from Catullus as a character within the depicted spoken exchange.

34. Varus' designation in line 1 as *meus* emphatically identifies him as Catullus' good friend, for this is a distinction that the poet accords to only a few men: Veranius in 12.17 and 47.3, Calvus in 53.3, and Cinna in 84.1; cf. Catullus' use of *tuus* to describe himself in 14.13 (to Calvus) and 38.1 (to Cornificius).

35. See Nielsen 1987, 153 and 156.

36. It is somewhat misleading to describe Varus as having been "relegated" to this role (Nielsen 1987, 156) since Varus is presented throughout as an independent actor in the conversation. For the considerations of performance, audience, and self-presentation that are reflected in Varus' continuing presence and ultimate silence, see Skinner 2001, 65–69, who reads his attitude as being one of disapproval rather than amusement.

answers the questions posed by Varus and the girl (*respondi*, 10.9). Catullus now takes the floor as *raconteur*, but does not exhibit much discipline in doing so: his initially straightforward description of slim pickings in the province (10.9–10) gives way to mounting agitation (10.10–12) and slides into vulgar obscenity (*praesertim quibus esset irrumator / praetor*, 10.12–13).<sup>37</sup> When Varus and his girlfriend respond to this outburst, Catullus evidently realizes that he has created a poor impression by making himself look like a failure and complaining too much. His empty boast about the chair bearers represents a clumsy and irritated attempt to repair this self-inflicted damage (10.16–17).<sup>38</sup> The *puella*, of course, instantly and neatly demolishes what remains of his conversational authority by calling his poorly thought-out bluff.<sup>39</sup> Catullus scrambles for an excuse (his stammering and broken syntax mirroring his discomfiture in 10.27–30), briefly attempts to assume a pose of airy nonchalance (*verum . . . quid ad me?*, 10.31–32), and finally lashes out in chagrin (10.32–34).<sup>40</sup>

From a pragmatic standpoint, Catullus' performance in the discourse—and by extension in this whole social encounter—is a complete fiasco. He has failed to control the flow of the conversation or the implications of his statements, and he is now unable to exercise much control even over his own speech; his final tirade against the girl underscores the extent of his collapse.<sup>41</sup> Varus, in turn, looks on without speaking as the formerly arrogant and boastful Catullus gets his comeuppance at the hands of the clever *puella*. It is tempting to read Varus' silence as expressing his amusement and appreciation as he observes Catullus making a fool of himself, although this must be reconciled with the implicit message of the poem that the two men enjoy a close friendship.<sup>42</sup> More importantly, by presenting himself as failing to respond

37. Bernek 2004, 87. Catullus' description of his experiences in Bithynia takes on added bite through its juxtaposition with the phrase *id quod erat*, which connotes sober factual statement. See Cic. *Fam.* 4.6.2, Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.60, and comment by Syndikus 1984, 117. Although humorous, Catullus' language in these lines suggests his growing agitation as he complains about the iniquities of the *irrumator praetor*, Memmius.

38. "By now Catullus is angry," observes Fraenkel (1957, 115). Catullus' aside does not simply bid for the loyalty of his extrapoetic audience; it also reveals that within the poem Catullus has been forced to abandon the stance of lofty and condescending detachment that he affected at the start of the encounter (10.3–4, note esp. *tum repente visum est*), and must now react directly to what is happening to him. Cf. Pedrick 1986, 198.

39. Most commentators agree that the *puella* comes off to good advantage in this exchange as a woman truly *venusta* and *lepida* who playfully catches Catullus in his blatant lie; see discussion in Nappa 2001, 92. For the socially circumscribed role that the *puella* is nevertheless forced to play in Poem 10, see Skinner 1989, 14–15, and esp. 19; see also Fitzgerald 1995, 177–78.

40. Nielsen 1987, 158.

41. Catullus' plea of *neglegentia* is intelligible only as his harassed, spur-of-the-moment excuse, for he was not being *neglegens* at all: he lied and was caught. See Pedrick 1986, 200; Fitzgerald 1995, 173; although cf. Kroll 1989, 24. For the application of the term *cinaedus* to the *puella* in line 24, see Skinner 1989, 17, and Fitzgerald 1995, 177–78; cf. the translation of *cinaediorem* in Pedrick 1986, 199, and Nappa 2001, 88.

42. An analogy can perhaps be drawn to Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.60–74, where Horace desperately signals to his friend Fuscus to save him from a social-climbing chatterbox (Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.63–65); Fuscus knows full well that Horace is having a hard time with the pest, but rather than get involved he mischievously feigns ignorance (Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.65–66) and runs away without saying anything. Horace makes Fuscus' intention quite clear, whereas Catullus purposely depicts himself as neither intercepting nor interpreting Varus' act of silence. Still, these episodes do bear some similarity to each other (see Thomson 1997, 231), and it is worth noting that

openly to Varus' silence, much less asserting control over its interpretation, Catullus adds one final touch to his self-deprecating portrait in Poem 10 as a man in command of neither his social nor his linguistic situation.<sup>43</sup> As Rüdiger Bernek has pointed out, the narrative structure of Poem 10 is highly reminiscent of Roman comedy, with Catullus playing the braggart soldier to the girl's *meretrix*.<sup>44</sup> Varus begins in the role of the lovestruck *adulescens*, but shifts his position over the course of the poem to become a proxy audience for this comic scene. Catullus, meanwhile, presents himself as a risible figure whose ultimate downfall stems from his own overestimation (on this particular occasion at least) of his ability to set and control the terms of his interactions with others. In effect, the poet uses Varus' unobtrusive performance of silence to articulate the same principles of discursive authority that he lays out in Poems 102 and 6, this time with himself as their target rather than their agent. Poem 10 is thus akin to the exception that proves the rule: the performance of silence plays an important function in the process of linguistic exchange, but it is the separate act of establishing control over the meaning of that silence (or failing to do so, as here) that carries the greatest pragmatic weight.

In the three poems that we have considered in this article, we can see that Catullus presents silence as a voluntary and significant social and rhetorical act, one that gives subtle yet eloquent expression to the positions of performer and recipient within a given social encounter, and simultaneously clarifies the relationship that exists between them. In this way Catullus demonstrates a sure understanding of the multivalent communicative properties of silence, treating it as a basic and definitive mechanism of social interaction and linguistic exchange. It seems clear that acts of performative silence should be recognized as constituting an integral component of Krostenko's "language of social performance," for silence no less than speech constitutes an important tool of language and social performance in its own right.<sup>45</sup> Silence, then, is worthy of consideration not simply as an intriguing motif in Catullus' poetry but as a crucial element of Catullan discourse. Indeed, acts of silence are directly relevant to the poet's literary representation of his interactions in the forums and dining rooms of Late Republican Rome, those dangerous arenas in which Roman aristocrats and newly arrived provincials alike jockeyed with each other for social and political prominence. In this volatile and competitive world, an individual's standing was maintained in no small part through the exercise of rhetorical and conversational skill.<sup>46</sup> For Catullus, as for Cicero, the enactment of silence would have represented a useful tool of self-presentation and linguistic performance, and a means of fixing one's place in the surrounding social landscape—provided always that

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Horace uses his encounter with Fuscus not only to enhance his self-deprecating portrait as a comic victim (*Hor. Sat.* 1.9.73–74), but also to suggest that he and Fuscus are good friends and members of the same social circle. See, e.g., Rudd 1966, 82–83; McNeill 2001, 52–53.

43. Cf. Nielsen 1987, 160; Nappa 2001, 92.

44. Bernek 2004, 83–90.

45. See Krostenko 2001, 1–15.

46. See, e.g., Gruen 1974, 48–49; MacMullen 1974, 105–19.

one could control how each act of silence was performed and interpreted. We have seen that when Catullus portrays silence as a discursive technique, he either controls how this silence is perceived, or else calls special attention to the difficulties that he faces when this control is lost. The underlying issue of enacted silence thus becomes a nexus for considerations of the role that Catullus adopts in each portrayed linguistic exchange.<sup>47</sup> In this way, Catullus' poetic depiction of the enactment of silence represents a striking demonstration of the subtlety of his artistic response to the dynamic considerations of verbal and nonverbal interaction that infused his social world.

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47. Catullus' handling of figures of silence represents a further element in his commentary on the practices of rhetoric and characterization. See discussion in Selden 1992, 495–98.

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