

Kristoffer Ramsøy Fredriksen

The Decline of Morality, Direct Criticism and the Roman Republic

Bachelor's project in history

Supervisor: Leif Inge Ree Petersen

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Historical Studies

 **NTNU**
Norwegian University of
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KRISTOFFER RAMSØY FREDRIKSEN

CONTENTS

p.2 – INTRODUCTION

p.3 – THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN THE LATE REPUBLIC

p. 11 – WHAT IS MORAL AND WHAT IS IMMORAL?

p.13 – THE LEX JULIA ADULTERIIIS AND ITS REASONS

p. 14 – CATULLUS THE APOLITICAL POET

p. 16 – OVID THE EXILED POET

p. 20 – CICERO AND THE VALUES OF CRITICISM

p. 23 – VIRGIL AND THE HEROES OF ROME

p. 25 – THE DECLINE OF DIRECT CRITICISM

p. 27 – CONCLUSION

p. 29 - SOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of speech is a common term today, it is seen as one of the cornerstones of modern government, but what about ancient government. Did the roman populace have freedom of speech? To which degree did they have freedom of speech, and how would they define it? And is there any difference between the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire when it comes to free speech? Was there a greater sense of being able to say what you want in the republic? did the critics stay their tongue under Augustus' rule? What punishment did people suffer? And for what crimes were they convicted? It will do this by looking at critiques, poetry and orators in Rome to find examples and explanations for a concept key to democracy in a faltering republic with democratic elements and a fledgling dictatorship.

To answer one question quickly, indeed they did have a form for free speech, *libertas* and this thesis will with this as the core thought define a period between 60 B.C to 30 A.D as the decline of morality, direct criticism and the roman republic. These 90 years saw huge political upheaval, strife, turmoil, tyranny, dictatorship, civil war and most importantly; change. It spans the last years of the Roman republic, the dictatorship of Caesar and the rise of the Empire under Augustus' rule. If there was a period in which we can explore the application of *libertas* in political discourse - often in the form of poems and speeches – it is in this contrasting century.

However, 90 years in one of the most tumultuous periods in Roman history is an undertaking to convey and give complete accounts of, so for the sake of narrowing I will focus on four of the most well-known authors and orators of the time. Catullus for his aggressive critique and callous use of *libertas*, Ovid for his exile prompted by a poem that Augustus didn't agree with. Vergil for his particular position in the emperor's court, and lastly Cicero for his extensive writings on the political climate for this period. As such I will also only focus on specific political events that correlates to any of the writers or their works, as only they would be interesting for the understanding and evaluating to the thesis.

I also find it important to stress that this is an exploration, and not something that will ever be capable of giving a definitive answer. Much has been lost since the first century, and not everything was written down, and even what was written down and have survived is written to serve an agenda. When Ovid writes his apology, he wants to be allowed a better

place of exile. So as much as his words are what I will be using to properly explore the depth of the thesis issue, it is important to always keep the context in mind.

THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN THE LATE REPUBLIC

A common trap when discussing this period is to view the republic and the empire as to completely separate entities with a sharp transition, rather than the gradual change from one to the other. The term “Fall of the Roman Republic” therefore is misleading, as this fall was not like in France, marked by beheading a king, but a slow political process resulting in a different type of government that still shared many of the same identifiers. What is most important though, and is the thing that I will use when distinguishing the two further on in the essay is the presence of a dictator, emperor or *princeps*. As the exploration is into the change of *libertas* in these two periods, they have to be separated, and the difference of decisions ultimately being taken by a majority, and decisions being made by one man alone is what will have the most effect on *libertas*. Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein defines it as such. “In essence, (...) a system directed by a relatively small and entrenched elite subject to popular approval became one apparently at least guided by a single man.”¹ This will ultimately matter when we arrive at the conclusion, as it is this difference in concentration of power that changes the Roman’s freedom of speech

How did this change come to be? The theory by Peter Brunt views the collapse as a result of decades of infighting, conflicting interest and headless actions of short-term gains from the senate that slowly eroded the trust and authority that it had. And in doing so giving room to strong political figures to establish their own dynasties. Which they were able to do by cynically championing the causes of the plebs, peasantry and soldiery.² Meier and Gruen both had their own theories derived from the work of Brunt, where they shared the view that no one actually sought to dismantle the republic. (with the possible exception of Caesar,) but

¹ Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, 2006, p.626

² Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, 2006, p.627

rather to save it. Which by his own words definitively was the case for Augustus.³ Gruen goes somewhat further than Meier, as he claims that the republic in no way was dying in the way that scholars such as Brunt had diagnosed, but rather that it was the Caesarian Civil War that brought about the end of the republic, and not the other way around. “(...) by 49 the republic was an empty shell ripe for toppling (...)” It had, in his eyes, functioned exactly as it had traditionally right up to the eve of the war.

Brunt’s words ring true when we consider the rather petty series of events that led to Cicero’s exile by Clodius, which will be explored later in the essay, where laws were written with the direct purpose of harming an opponent. Actions like those could not help the image of the senate as filled with infighting that Brunt paints. Rome was also trapped in a dichotomy between being a city-state where a senate ruled, and the grand empire with armies and commanders spread over great distances with little to no direct oversight. In essence, as the Senate fought amongst themselves in a city with an increasingly antagonistic populace. Competitive generals, often from families with long aristocratic heritages became figureheads for the soldier’s loyalty, instead of the senate and the people. An example being Caesar.⁴

Ancient writers also attribute the decline to something else, a moral collapse. Primarily caused to two factors. “the enormous influx of wealth into Italy and Rome; and the removal of the last direct and plausible threat to Roman hegemonic domination of the Mediterranean basin,”⁵ the first factor is one I will continually hark back to, as it is directly tied to the appliance of *libertas* this notion that Rome was in decline due to its moral failings drove Ovid out from Rome and fueled discussions of adultery, effeminacy and luxury as deeply problematic. It is what Catullus uses as an impetus for his poem 65, and its criticism of the moral failings of the Roman people concentrated in Caesar and Mamurra.

That there then also would come a man to exploit this internal belief to create a myth about himself as the savior of Roman values is then not so surprising. Neither is it surprising that that man was Caesar’s heir, who would exert his position and heritage to attain power, and legitimize his status by vowing to put an end to the moral decline. “To speak of Augustus means to speak of power: of power overtly exercised, of power disguised, of power

³ Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, 2006, p.628

⁴ Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, 2006, p.630

⁵ Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, 2006, p.634

relinquished; of the power among collaborators and among public bodies such as the senate, the colleges of magistrates, and the assembly.”⁶ Augustus had during his life halted the rapid decline by securing internal peace, as well as passing legislation aimed at combatting moral deviancy. He had promised to deliver to the people of Rome their republic. And his actions of denying any gestures that would imply him as a monarch does reinforce this. He renounced any regalia or insignia of his own personal power, knowing that he already, as the (adoptive) son of the deified Caesar, along with his military, financial and political resources and accomplishments already was elevated to a position that no other citizen in Rome could reach.⁷ he had two clear goals; number one was to reclaim the dominant position that Caesar once held. And number two, make sure he did not suffer the same fate. Therefore, to achieve his goals, he saw tradition as an opportunity, not an obstacle. Reinforcing the old ways of the republic, breathing new life into religious rituals that was almost forgotten, and purifying the Roman citizens moralities.⁸

He did however not start his rise to power in this way, as he recruited an army of Caesar’s former legionaries and confiscated tax revenue from Asia to which he had no right or justification to take, before marching on Rome and therefore committing high treason. It was here he first laid bare his ambitions to follow in his father’s footsteps, and to rid Rome of the tyranny of Mark Antony. Cicero must have believed him capable of such a feat, even though it seemed contradictory to on one hand to emulate Caesar whilst on the other save the republic. Because he managed to move the senate to give Augustus (then Octavian) a military position and save him from the idiom of high treason.⁹

The years of the second triumvirate was marred by propaganda and political tactics that would characterize the period. Octavian’s most important weapon was his image as the republic’s savior. It was because of this position that he had to refrain from declaring war on Antony and Cleopatra. There was no way to do so without losing credibility as the protector of roman traditions, culture and morality.¹⁰ A position he would uphold even after the triumvirate, and that led him to abdicate all of his powers, and let the senate decide. He would refuse to be consul for life, only holding it for three separate periods after his period as a consul during the

⁶ Eder,1990, p.71

⁷ Galinsky, 2005, p.14

⁸ Galinsky, 2005, p.17

⁹ Galinsky, 2005, p.18

¹⁰ Galinsky, 2005, p.22

triumvirate¹¹, and he was not nominated to the position of Pontifex Maximus before the old one died. He however did accept one position for life. Since 23. B.C he held the *tribunician potestas*, the tribune of the people, and could therefore call the senate and propose legislation.¹² This was the pillar of his power, and paradoxically enough the thing that was most anti-republican. Repeated tenure as a Tribune was seen as to strive for kingship.¹³ It was handy then, that Augustus had made himself such a paragon of the republic, and that he had made public efforts to distance himself from being a monarch. All he had was the power of a monarch, but not the appearance. He called for a national consciousness of the values of the Romans, they were superior, it was their calling to rule the world and it could only be achieved through solidarity. “Roman, remember by your strength to rule the earth’s peoples!”¹⁴ The people could identify with this, they could unite in the work towards this task, even though governing was left in the hands of the *princeps* (First Citizen)¹⁵ Augustus had made any attack on him, an attack on the state, and the state the people so therefore also an attack on the people. This is why Virgil later has to approach the circumstances of Caesar’s death in the way that he does. Any opinion that diverged from the princeps was wholly unpatriotic, and if he was to imply that he thought of Caesar as a despicable man, the man on a mission to emulate him might take offence. Augustus had weaponized patriotism to silence opposition and calm strife.¹⁶ When we discuss free speech in the roman republic contra the roman empire, this was a shifting point. Free speech was no longer a matter of opinion. Augustus had made direct criticism an impossibility if one did not desire to commit social suicide. It is therefore we would see the divergence from direct criticism of the actual problem during the time of Catullus and to some extent Cicero, to the indirect criticism of Ovid, a point I will further develop later on in the essay. Not only had Augustus used tradition to transform the republic to an empire, he had also changed the way political discourse had to be handled.

Freedom of speech is one of the ground pillars of democracy. And it is easy to see why, in a form of government where majority rule, the minority have to be able to voice their concerns and opinions in hope to sway the majority to accommodate for them and make sure

¹¹ Galinsky, 2005, p.25

¹² Galinsky, 2005, p.26

¹³ Galinsky, 2005, p.26

¹⁴ Virgil, 1986. 6.851

¹⁵ Galinsky, 2005, p.30

¹⁶ Galinsky, 2005, p.32

that their needs and wants are heard and catered to. If people aren't allowed to voice their mind or practice politics even when they are in opposition to the common majority, the bottleneck of what is accepted narrows until you have a population terrified to not have the correct political opinion. When this happens, we get a dictatorship of fear, even though the government is supposed to be a democracy. Isaiah Berlin in his *Two Concepts of Liberty* writes that “The sovereignty of the people could easily destroy that of individuals”¹⁷ And “the tyranny of the majority and of the tyranny of ‘the prevailing feeling and opinion’ (...)”¹⁸ Being in the minority was then no different than to live in any or under any other form for tyranny. Democracy in Rome needs to be clearly defined, as Rome was not a democracy in the modern sense, it wasn't even a democracy in the Greek sense. The more accurate description would be “a republic with democratic elements” as Murrell puts it “In Rome there was no ‘Who wants to speak?’ so characteristic of the assembly of democratic Athens.”¹⁹ Whereas the Athenians valued a system of equal right and opportunity to perform politics. Rome was extremely limited. Because of the way they divided people into *centuries*, which was by how much wealth you had, those with more money got to vote first and those *centuries* had fewer people. These votes were secret, but the voting habits of the early *centuries* – every *centurie* had collectively one vote – often shaped the outcome. The Roman patron-client system would also heavily favour the political opinions of those that could have more clients as they had more people that they could order to vote the same way they did. Still, I would argue for the use of democracy as a term to define the Roman system. For this essay the only distinction between the republic and the empire that has potency, is the distinction of a government where a large group has collectively the final say in matters of governing, and a system where power is consolidated in one man. Freedom of speech is an element of modern democracy that still would apply to the Roman democracy. In the late republican Rome, the word *libertas* had become a political catchword.²⁰ *Libertas* (It is also found in Greek society, then called *parrhesia*) had implications far beyond only the right to speak, as its literal meaning is liberty. It was a crucial for the Roman politicians to have *libertas* as Allen says, it was “not unusual to impute tyrannical power to opponents”²¹ This, as well as more general exaggerations was common as political rhetoric. This fact clearly tells us that there must have been a great acceptance for being able to express what you please.

¹⁷ Berlin, 2016, p. 111

¹⁸ Berlin, 1969, p. 112

¹⁹ Murrell, 2008, p.2

²⁰ Allen, 1944, p.1

²¹ Allen, 1944, p.1

Likewise, as with democracy, free *speech/freedom of speech* and *libertas* is such important terms for this thesis, that I find it imperative to make sure what I am defining these properly. *Free speech/freedom of speech* is the commonly understood right to speak freely without fearing punishment, although you are not in any way protected from criticism. It also has limitations, anything falling under the paragraph of hate speech is prohibited, as well as calls for violence, harassment or other threats. This is because the definition is defined as so called negative freedom. You are free to do and say as you please as long as it doesn't harmfully interfere with other people's freedom. "A free man is he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do."²²

Libertas differs from the common perception of *free speech* in some key areas: firstly, the fact that whilst we are used to freedom of speech being written into law, it was to Romans a virtue, something they would strive to adhere to, but it was not necessarily something that everyone practiced.²³ As it was a virtue it is also difficult to directly confirm how it was practiced in reality, as all accounts of events would be written in such a way to paint the involved in a way that suited the narrative of the author. All accounts of ruler's virtuousness or lack thereof in dealing with dissidents and critics therefore must be taken with a grain of salt, and any appraisal or damnation of an actions must be questioned by looking at possible motivations by the author. For example, it is from Cicero himself we know most of what he said and did, therefore it would be easy for him to alter wordings or leave out passages that he understood in retrospect would make him look bad, he could even fail to properly explain the opponent's position to further himself. "The necessity that Cicero felt for constantly defending his political creed and career is proof enough that a sizeable group disapproved of his conduct."²⁴ This quote from Allen is one such exploration in what Cicero isn't saying, but that we have to keep in mind when reading his works. In the same vain, when we imagine whether or not censorship was prevalent it is hard to answer with much empirical evidence. Because unless we find widespread accounts of censorship, akin to what happened to Ovid, the absence of any evidence can be used to prove it didn't happen, but also to prove that it did happen, and just was very effective.

²² Hobbes, 1991, p. 146

²³ Van Renswoude, 2019, p.1

²⁴ Allen, 1944, p.8

The second difference is explained by Van Renswoude in this passage “(...)Individuals who had the courage to speak truth to power were much admired by their contemporaries, at least in theory. Speaking freely before authorities was not without danger (...)”²⁵ If we were to single out the most important facet of *free speech* today, it would be the ability to speak without fearing repercussions. This was not the case in Rome. Nor was it such that this freedom was granted to all that lived between the seven hills automatically. It was only free male citizens that got this privilege.²⁶ So if you were a slave, you were not allowed to criticise your master, or even someone else for that matter. Women and foreigners were deemed unsuited to partake in the intricacies of the Roman political life, so they were also not included. But the fact is that even if you were “granted” (if you could say that a cultural privilege expressed through the unspoken wish and drive to be virtuous is in any way grantable.) *libertas*, you were not in any way protected from repercussions of your words. In other words, if someone wealthy or powerful took offence to your words, you had no *securitas*. Therefore, *libertas* was further restricted to those who could afford protection, or at least was under the protection of a patron.

We find therefore another major difference between free speech and *libertas*, and that is to whom in this relationship it falls to uphold it. Because free speech in a modern sense would mean that the recipient should tolerate that someone spoke their mind, because that is their right. *libertas* on the other hand attributes the responsibility to the sender, who is solely responsible to be able to speak freely, but fairly. Van Renswoude formulates it like this “The speaker should convince the person he is criticising that his words, however harsh, are spoken out of love and respect.”²⁷ This is illustrated by Valentina Arena when she in her *libertas and the Practice of Politics in the late Roman Republic* writes that Cicero edited his speeches.²⁸ Cicero does this so that not only can he be sure that his speeches are recorded in a way that would be virtuous, but also so that it could be used to educate new orators. Another reason for this careful editing is as Arena points out to educate younger speakers on how to speak, how to address those with power over you and how to argue in a way that won't test the limits of *libertas* “(...) as a means to learn how to deliver a speech 'under specific circumstances, before a specific audience, and on a specific issue.’”²⁹ *libertas* was so important to the Romans, that

²⁵ Van Renswoude, 2019, p1

²⁶ Van Renswoude, 2019, p.2

²⁷ Van Renswoude, 2019, p.8

²⁸ Arena, 2012, p.3

²⁹ Arena, 2012, p.3

even after the Roman republic was gone, they still clung to this culturally important vestige.³⁰

Libertas however did extend further than a normal understanding of Free speech would, free speech to a modern ear is purely about the expression of opinion, but *libertas* was also a term that was used frequently in politics as a means of justification. “(...) opposing the granting of extraordinary powers to an individual or a group (*potestates extraordinariae*), in supporting the use of the '*senatus consultum ultimum*', and opposing land distribution”³¹ What is interesting here, and more so detrimental to the idea that *libertas* in any way easily can be applied in the same way as free speech is that *libertas* clearly means so much more. Had it been so it would not extend to the way one opposed these issues not the issues in them self. Because in fact these politicians acting according to the idea of *libertas*, is doing so in the name of *liberty*³² This understanding of *libertas* is a basic notion that was present in all Romans minds in the late republic where *libertas* was synonymous with non-slavery.³³ This however is the rough understanding, but not how it actually appeared to work. Arena refers to the *fragmentum Dositheanum* where *libertas* is defined as such: “This was a status which could not depend on the goodwill of the *dominus*, that is, the granting of the status of *libertas* itself could not be subjected to an arbitrary judgement.”³⁴ This meant that any person manumitted (released from slavery) could not and was not granted the right of *libertas*, the idea that *libertas* was non-slavery is faulty, even before we factor in the fact that neither women, children, peregrinus or other non-citizens of Rome had this right. Vergil's character Tityrus experiences exactly this, and through him Vergil explores these problems directly.³⁵ For the purpose of this thesis I will focus on the applications of *libertas* on speech(es), written texts by the four writers: Ovid, Cicero, Vergil and Catullus, as this is the narrow slice of *libertas* I am examining, not the broad idea of liberty itself as that would be a far bigger task.

³⁰ Van Renswoude, 2019, p.6

³¹ Arena, 2012, p.5

³² Arena, 2012, p.5

³³ Arena, 2012, p.14

³⁴ Arena, 2012, p.18

³⁵ Galinsky, 2006, p.6

WHAT IS MORAL AND WHAT IS IMMORAL?

“Romans laid claim to a particular pre-eminence in the spheres of both fighting and morality”³⁶ This is how Edwards begins her *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*. It was a past-time as common as attending the circus or drinking wine.³⁷ and as such it is important to any thesis that concerns itself with self-expression and criticism. Ovid is one of the prime examples of poets and writers that fell to the notion that their works were immoral. In the context of an exploration of *libertas* in the republic contra the empire I have to know what was considered immoral, why it was considered as such and also how it was treated, because only by doing this will I do my due diligence in the exploration.

Morality does not however concern itself purely with ethics or religion as we would assume today. In the modern world politics are separated from such questions, but in Rome they often could overlap or even wholly encompass each other. We are also used to problems being attributed to cause and effect of many interlocking factors. Roman thought was far simpler. Any political problem could be traced to one person’s over-ambition, economic problems to greedy individuals.³⁸

“Attacks on immorality were used by the Roman elite to exercise control over its own members and to justify its privileged position”³⁹ This quote gives us a distinction for what we are to keep an eye out for, as I have written in the introduction. Even the modern sense of free speech has its exceptions, and so *libertas* also naturally has its. If immorality was a charge, one could be attacked with, it would be foolish to overtly admit to any vices, or even urge anyone else to be immoral. We will later see with Ovid that these were not merely social attacks, as he himself was exiled to Tòmis because of an immoral poem. He was “controlled” by the elite which at that time was Augustus and removed. Catullus, whom I shall talk more about later writes “For a serious poet should himself be pure but his verses need not be so. Indeed, they possess wit and charm only when a little soft and not altogether modest.”⁴⁰ Is this because Catullus holds morality in high regard or is it because he is aware of the tower of

³⁶ Edwards, 1993, p.1

³⁷ Edwards, 1993, p.3

³⁸ Edwards, 1993, p.4

³⁹ Edwards, 1993, p.4

⁴⁰ Edwards, 1993, p.10

fame and the pit of immorality that he is staring down into? Is it because an immoral man that speaks about immoral actions is nothing but vulgar, whilst a pure man doing the same shows his broad understanding of the world? If we follow the word of Edwards, there is this discrepancy between those with privilege and those without. The poet role seems to be a connective tissue according to Catullus, one who have the purity of the privileged, but the immodesty and impurity of the plebians.

Cicero does show us how these attacks of immorality would play out. Often highly exaggerated claims and allegations of gluttony, adultery, avarice and luxury would rain over his opponents.⁴¹ This is not altogether unfamiliar to the modern human, as one of politician's favourite tools are still besmirching. But in difference to how we are used to them today, they were not as much taken by face value, Edwards writes that we should not fall for the temptation to assume people believe such vivid accusations, but rather that they served a purpose to give the listeners a general feel for the orators perceiving of someone's general character, as well as display the orator's oratory mastery, an art called *inventio* "Elaboration"

42

As it pertains to the moral quandaries that Augustus spent a considerable amount of effort trying to combat, I would dedicate a paragraph to *incontinentia* or effeminacy. "In the eyes of Roman moralists, the effeminate was like women in playing a "passive" sexual role, but at the same time they were like women in having an excessive interest in sex. (...)"⁴³ this was often associated with catamites – boys held for homosexual purposes – but also more crucially, adulterers. These effeminate men that showed no interest in military activities and cared more to uphold their own image and appearance amongst other flaws. They are therefore being implied to be behaving like women and to be implied to be behaving like a woman was to be called inferior to other men. "Accusations of effeminacy drew attention to the differences between men and women, investing it with a powerful resonance and thereby serving and legitimate power over women"⁴⁴

⁴¹ Edwards, 1993, p.10

⁴² Edwards, 1993, p.10

⁴³ Edwards, 1993, p.81

⁴⁴ Edwards, 1993, s.81

And why is this worth highlighting? Because Emperor Augustus wanted to return to the customs of the old days, where women were busy with home and could not afford the idling that led to being endangered “to the temptation of misdeed, ranging from adultery to ruinous expenditure on adornment”⁴⁵ The continual confirmation of male supremacy over women was therefore important to the Roman moralists, as it was in keeping with the traditions the longed back to. And of course, it was not only women, but everything associated with the feminine. Luxury was according to the Moralists a corrupting force from Asia and Greece that had taken hold in the women of Rome. This because the use of wealth for one’s own private affairs and wellbeing rather than the greater good of society was a concern for the moralists. (Edwards, 1993, s.80)

Effeminacy was as stated earlier also deeply associated with adulterers, for it was believed that effeminate men was more attractive to women with an overt sexual interest. ⁴⁶ It might be quite oxymoronic to think of a catamite being the prime suspect of planning to seduce a wife, but this was an association found in many contemporary poets’ work, amongst them Ovid. The poet, whom himself wrote poetry that was of a sexual nature, was already skirting the line with the *Ars Amatoria*, and when one considers the consistent discussions and apparent beliefs amongst the Roman moralists outlined above, one can start to see how Ovid was controversial in his time.

THE LEX JULIA ADULTERIIS AND ITS REASONS

Adultery was something that plagued Augustus’ mind. If the world was to revert to its old ways, where women was too busy making clothes and watching children to be captured by the vices of *incontinentia* he had to act, and he therefore penned the *lex julia adulteriis*. But exactly how did this law come to be? And What was the motivations behind it?

Emperor Augustus spent considerable effort helming a crusade to purify the Roman family morality, and in 18 B.C. he made sure that the act of adultery, as well as a number of misdeeds related to adultery would be considered criminal.⁴⁷ These misdeeds were for

⁴⁵ Edwards, 1993, p.81

⁴⁶ Edwards, 1993, p.80

⁴⁷ Daube, 1972, p.373

example, not divorcing a wife caught in the act of marrying a known adulterer or “A man, husband or outsider, taking payment for adultery discovered, i.e., payment before the deed for giving his blessing.”⁴⁸ The reason Augustus put this payment; whom in many cases is just a bribe to keep silent, on a par with adultery itself was that he felt there was no compromise with adultery and suppressing the truth about adultery is as bad as adultery itself.⁴⁹ When Ovid 20 years later is accused of mocking the imperial family and urging or even convincing the people of Rome to become adulterers, it is easy to understand that the man who saw suppressing the truth as such a crime also would view this manual in the practice in the same way.

With the historical context and general terminology now explored, I move to the four people this essay will use to clearly define the change in the use of *Libertas* in the Roman world, as well as showing the decline of morality and direct criticism. As well as how the new government, and the position of Augustus as *princeps* would influence the writers that lived under him.

CATULLUS THE APOLITICAL POET

Catullus is the oldest representative in my essay, and also the only one that never saw Rome under Augustus. He does therefore stand out, not only because he died before the assassination of Caesar, but also because he was not considered particularly political. He did show in his poems general disdain for certain politicians, but it might just have been dislike of the persons, and not him being political.⁵⁰ He was a poet most interested in the personal, although there are poems where he does show some signs that deep down there were some political interests. In particular poem 64, where he laments the current state of Rome in comparison to the days when the streets saw deities amongst mortals a twinge of political opinion can be found.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Daube, 1972, p.373

⁴⁹ Daube, 1972, p.374

⁵⁰ Tatum, 1997, p. 482

⁵¹ Scott, 1971, p. 24

He was aware he was witnessing a state in moral decline; Marilyn Skinner perceives in Catullus “(...) despair over real decreases in personal autonomy and diminished capacity for meaningful public action during the agonized final years of the Roman Republic”⁵² And in response to this continual moral failing of the Roman people he would write an angry poem attacking these moral fallacies. He used Mamurra the stand in for all, and asked questions with him as an example of the all-consuming beast of sex and luxury that the romans had become. Difficult questions of morality that had to be answered by the reader, and in that hoping to incite thought (Scott,1971, s. 25) He would consistently use a general code of morality that should be applied to all civilized men. The fact that he consistently and with purpose wrote in his verse the tasteful behavior he sought would imply he thought this was something that should apply to all men. His political interest therefore was not revolved around legislation or war, but are rather built on the foundation of combating the social and sexual perversions of the late Roman republic.⁵³

When considering Catullus and *libertas*, what stands out is that he did not seem to have any clear personal experience with it. This as an empirical evidence is of course not as strong, as the absence of something might as well have been due to lost records. But we know of Catullus from other sources and of from these sources we have no indication that he led indignation or censor because his freedom of speech was in any way limited. There are multiple possible explanations for this. As above it is clear that he was not a particularly political person, and therefore censoring him for the sake of politics wouldn't make much sense. He does have a strong position on morality, but this was not controversial. We would see Augustus only a few decades after Catullus death push the same agenda. But lastly, he was not above criticizing people, and he would almost always resort to *ad hominem* insults. In this 57th poem he writes “Well agreed are the abominable sodomites, the fellators, Mamurra and Caesar. (...)” The fact he can write this without any mention of meaningful repercussions, is in itself and indication that he was not censored.

⁵² Tatum,1997, p. 482-83

⁵³ Tatum,1997, p. 484

OVID THE EXILED POET

The next example is in keeping with Catullus a poet, and in many ways a poet that would writes poems in the same style as Catullus. Ovid wrote short poems, and in particular he wrote a collection of poems called the *Ars Amatoria*. This poem made him the exiled poet, the man who felt the emperor's wrath after treading beyond what in the eyes Augustus was reasonable, for we would get a good example of comparison to Catullus, and later, Vergil.

L.P Wilkinson in *Ovid Recalled* writes “The *Ars Amatoria* was not written in a vacuum; it was the reaction of a witty and high-spirited member of a sophisticated circle and sometimes hypocritical orthodoxy backed by power. Half the point would be gone if there had been no respectable people to shock”⁵⁴ And to fully comprehend exactly what the *Ars Amatoria* was, and why it would generate such ire, we have to explore to context of which it was written.

As I've already given a thorough examination of, morality was politics and a common practice for all Roman citizens.⁵⁵ His rather immoral poetry about the art of seduction would gain attention. But not only was it immoral in the common plebians mind, it was text directly contradicting the crusade Augustus had spearheaded against sexual irregularity and depravity.⁵⁶

“One wonders how the Emperor liked to read the *Ars Amatoria* that his famous mock naval battle had been a splendid occasion for picking up foreign girls, or that the porticos dedicated by his sister in memory of Marcellus and by himself in honour of his wife were among the gallant's best hunting-grounds”⁵⁷

Maybe he thought himself untouchable because of his fame, as at the time he was arguably the most famous and respected poet in Rome.⁵⁸ And although there was some criticism in some parts of roman society, his belief held true. There was only one problem, one that Ovid couldn't foresee, but that changed the context of his work dramatically.

⁵⁴ Wilkinson, 2005, p. 294

⁵⁵ Edwards, 1993, p.2

⁵⁶ Wilkinson, 2005. p.294

⁵⁷ Wilkinson, 2005. p.295

⁵⁸ Wilkinson, 2005. p.294

Augustus had written the *lex julia adulteriis*, a law meant to preserve the sanctity of the marriage, and personally held himself as the paramount of virtue. So, when it was discovered that his daughter had broken it, it was a blow to his image.⁵⁹ He took swift action, but although he showed no signs of nepotism, exiling his daughter and all her adulterers except one that was driven to suicide, he was not convinced it was enough: “When he imagined the mocking *schadenfreude* of fashionable society, he could hardly help thinking about it as crystallized and perpetuated in the *Ars Amatoria*, now on everyone’s lips.” (Wilkinson, 2005. s 297) However, he made no moves towards Ovid yet. But when Ovid in his consequent poems makes sure to extravagantly flatter Augustus it is surely not out of political or imperial furore but rather fear.

Exactly this fear is interesting, as we will also see with Vergil, but it is difficult to exactly say that this was a direct cause of a general change in Imperial Rome versus the Republic, because as discussed earlier, the responsibility to criticise in a manner that is understood to come from a place of love and respect, fell to the sender.⁶⁰ This interpretation of *libertas* muddies the waters when it comes to conclude here, because even if Ovid didn't use the *Ars Amatoria* to criticise, Augustus now sees it as such, or even worse, a mockery. That is far from the words spoken out of love and respect, so is it out of fear Ovid choses to make sure that the Emperor is smothered by flattery, or is it his desire to be a man that upholds his part in the virtue of *libertas*?

Crucially there would be a difference in the works written before and after Ovid’s exile. We know that Ovid had patronage from the house Messala, who were devout followers of the Emperor.⁶¹ We can therefore assume that Ovid would share some – at least publicly – of the Messala's political views. In fact, he writes in the *Tristia* how much respect and gratitude he holds for them, even in exile. But there was no personal relationship between Ovid and the emperor, something we know mostly because in the midst of all his appeals from exile he never mentions or even implies to know the emperor from more than reputation alone.⁶²

⁵⁹ Wilkinson, 2005. p.297

⁶⁰ Van Renswoude, 2019, p.8

⁶¹ Wilkinson, 2005. p.292

⁶² Wilkinson, 2005, p.294

This coupled with the fact that he would claim that he was exiled because of “*carmen et error*.”⁶³ A poem and a mistake, gives us more theories of the intentions of his flattery. The poem he states to be the *Ars Amatoria* directly on four occasions. He does not however claim that he it is the emperor that is in the wrong, but what he does state, is that the emperor is treating him harshly in comparison to other writers, whom also wrote love poetry but suffered no punishment.⁶⁴ This might be a tactic from Ovid, as he knows that any appeal towards suggesting that the Emperor is wrong in his judgement that Ovid's erotic poems led married women to commit adultery, would fail. It is likely that he clings his hope to the fact that whilst he wrote erotic love poems, he is far from the only one, and therefore if he is to blame in the emperor's eyes, he has but a small piece of the blame, not all of it. Wilkinson writes that Ovid is being made the scapegoat of the continual failings of Augustus social reforms, as he was the most obvious representative.⁶⁵

“It was natural that the Emperor should resent his error, but he had meant no harm and broken no law.”⁶⁶ Therefore there is little but a trifling sense of guilt in Ovid's words. And this is true, a poem is words on paper, they are only bound to a metaphysical plane, the stories exist only in the mind of those that read them and therefore the number of laws they are capable to break is few. And none of which the *Ars Amatoria* is even charged with. As Ovid understood it, and as scholars today understand it, it was the poem's perceived encouragement of breaking of the *lex julia adulteriis* combined with the mistake of the timing of its popularity that led to his exile.⁶⁷ Even though no such references are made in the poem. There are references to Augustus or his family in the poem as shown above but these are loose connections to buildings and events and not people, and especially not direct criticism or mockery. In fact, Ovid makes his utmost to assure the Emperor that he at least for his part upheld the virtue of *libertas*. “Such clemency you have shown, even with those that has openly criticised you; whereas I have duly worshipped your divinity and praised you in my poems. (...)”⁶⁸ Therefore, it is hard to look at this as anything other than a sole dictator that *decided what is right to say and not*. Especially when he takes on board the fact that it seems Augustus treatment of cases is not consistent, as the contemporary poet Tibullus was not

⁶³ Wilkinson, 2005, p.298

⁶⁴ Davies, 2006, p.6

⁶⁵ Wilkinson, 2005, p.298

⁶⁶ Wilkinson, 2005, p.299

⁶⁷ Wilkinson, 2005, p.298

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, 2005, p.302

convicted to the same fate.⁶⁹) If a law was clearly broken then so should all that has broken it suffer, but when one man is relegated to feel the ire of a leader's failings, then it is difficult to perceive it as anything other than a breach of a modern sense of free speech and even something that is unvirtuous. Even when we look to the most slavish interpretation of *libertas*, in which all criticism should be expressed through love and respect it is hard to conclude that Ovid for his part upholds this.

Ovid's subsequent pleas to the emperor does reflect this, as Ovid does not direct his pleas to society and the general public to sway their opinion, their opinion does not matter in this context, the sole focus and only goal of his pleas and explanation is to convince the emperor that he should be allowed to choose his place of exile, even though he has given up hope of returning to Rome. "By the gods, by our fatherland, by your family, so may victory ever be theirs, I beg for mercy – not yet for return, but for a place of exile less dangerous and desolate than *Tòmis*."⁷⁰ Nothing in the *Ars Amatoria* is by Ovid's design made to criticise the *lex julia* or the Emperor, even if he is charged with the roman crime of *maiestas*; which meant that he had insulted the imperial family.⁷¹ If Augustus' daughter had not herself committed adultery, the *Ars Amatoria* might just have been a poem Augustus had to begrudgingly allow to be circulated, even if he felt that it undermined his social reform. It was only because of this unfortunate circumstance that he saw it necessary to make Ovid a scapegoat.⁷² Ovid himself makes sure to remind the Emperor about this in his list of dead poets – he did not mention living ones, presumably so that he should not be a part of any punishment laid on them, even though he surely knew of some – that this was an extremely rare punishment "But all have been spared, both in life and in libraries, save him alone." so the question then is, what has changed in Rome from the dead poets lifetime and his? The civil war and the turmoil of the Gracchi surely redrew the political landscape, but it is difficult to see that it was this that allowed a poet to be singled out and punished. A far more likely explanation lies in the simple fact that the dead poets lived in a republic, Ovid did not.

⁶⁹ Davies, 2006, p.6

⁷⁰ Wilkinson, 2005, p.303

⁷¹ Wilkinson, 2005, p.301

⁷² Wilkinson, 2005, p.311

CICERO AND THE VALUES OF CRITICISM

As we now have done a thorough examination of Ovid and his particular experience with being exiled for overextending his rights to liberty in the eyes of the Roman Emperor, I would like to move to Marcus Tullius Cicero, who was subjected to another form for silencing his freedom of speech. My other examples revolve around prose, and depictions of fictionalized reality. Cicero on the other hand was a lawyer and politician, he would be more likely to be subjected to censorship, and it would be more clearly an attack on *libertas* if he was.

As Cicero was born in 106 BC, he was politically active in the early part of the time period this thesis spans and was therefore present at one of the most turbulent times of the Roman Empire.⁷³ When understanding Cicero's career, it is important to remember that he was born in Arpinum, a small city who held no particular importance in the grand worldview of the Romans, as well as the fact that he came from a family with no previous history with holding political power, so his status was about as low as you could get, whilst still be able to partake in political life.⁷⁴

Rome had no officially recognized political parties, but there was a distinction of sort between the different political leanings, one is *Popularis*; the ones that believed that the will of the people is supreme, and that all power should in the end be in the hands of the Roman people. And the *Optimates*: who believed that the act of ruling was best left to a handful chosen because they were best suited. Cicero would claim on occasion to be a *popularis*, but from his letters and public speeches we can far and away determine that he was an *optimates*.

One who was a *popularis* however was Julius Gaius Caesar.⁷⁵ A man that repeatedly sought Cicero's support. In the Atticus he writes "Caesar wants me to become his *legatus*; that's a more honorable way of avoiding danger. I am not altogether rejecting it. How so? I prefer to

⁷³ Murrel, 2008, p.7

⁷⁴ Murrel, 2008, p.8

⁷⁵ Murrel, 2008, p.4

fight. (...) ⁷⁶ Cicero feared the influence and power of Caesar and the other parties in the triumvirate and hoped rather that he could just watch in silence and keep neutral, rather than braving public confrontation and hostility towards the Three. ⁷⁷ Cicero therefore, in his actions, or rather inactions, shows a certain distrust that *libertas* will be upheld, he has realized that the power they now hold is greater than the power of tradition. And although virtue and morality stand strong in Rome, they are hard to quantify, and he was here witness to a political situation that was untraditional, unstable, revolutionary and dangerous. So, him deciding to not trust that his freedom of speech would be upheld, is not entirely unfounded.

In 84 BC, following the Social war and Sulla's first march on Rome, Cicero saw that the republic was without law and without dignity. "For about three years the city was free from armed force; but whether because of the death, absence or exile of orators... Hortensius held the leading place in pleading cases(...)" ⁷⁸ Cicero here implies that he has withdrawn from politics to study, and as he purposefully mentions the exile of orators there are two things that one can read into that: One, Cicero does not think highly of Hortensius, as he implies the only reason he was still leading cases was that everyone else, was dead, gone or exiled. Two, he had observed what a political turbulent period can do to former highly valued orators. He wanted to be as prepared as he could before braving the political life, because he had seen how others had fared. I would like to mention the point by Arena that Cicero would edit his speeches again. ⁷⁹ Because, is this not also the reasoning to a man that has seen the freedom of speech robbed from others, and therefore would be walking on eggshells to make sure the same does not happen to him?

Ovid claims that no other man in his position had been struck by the same cane as he, But Ovid only looked to those who wrote fiction. As orators, and in fact Cicero himself did suffer exile with regularity. It is interesting however that there's is some clear similarities between these exiled orators and Ovid, they both happened in times where the Republic was weak, "without law and without dignity," ⁸⁰ Or in Ovid's case without a Republic at all.

⁷⁶ Murrel, 2008, p. 85

⁷⁷ Murrel, 2008, p. 85

⁷⁸ Murrel, 2008, p.20

⁷⁹ Arena, 2012, p.3

⁸⁰ Murrel, 2008, p.20)

Cicero also suffered exile, but different from Ovid it can be traced to a more direct cause. After the conspiracy of Catalina, he used his position as consul to push for the swift end of the conspirators. “The senators voted to condemn the conspirators to death. They were immediately escorted to the prison and Executed. The deed had been done. It was at once controversial: No Roman citizen might be legally put to death without first being tried before his peers, and the senate was no court of law”⁸¹

When Clodius wrote a law that would specifically target any contributors to an unlawful conviction and execution, he did it to attack Cicero. And when he managed to pass a bill that would keep Cicero from reentering Rome, and be forced to relinquish his properties, he tore his house down and built a temple to Liberty.⁸² This symbolic action is fascinating. As I have previously stated, Cicero was not from a family previously belonging to Roman high society. When he went into debt to buy such a symbol of his newfound position, it was viewed as presumptuous.⁸³

Clodius used this opportunity to humiliate Cicero and calls for its immediate destruction. He attached a tenth of the plot to an estate formerly owned by M. Flavius Flaccus, a traitor, implying that Cicero belonged in the same category. He had previously bought the house next door and used another part of the plot to build himself an extension before he at last erected a shrine to Liberty.⁸⁴ He chose to build a shrine, because it would be even harder for Cicero to reclaim his property if the ground was holy. Dedicating it to Liberty was purely political, and could be seen as an indirect insult towards Cicero, as Clodius had liberated Rome from Cicero.

Almost all we have of historical evidence and sources about Cicero, is from Cicero. Therefore, the image painting would be of him being the supreme guardian of the republic’s ideas. Allen’s point that Cicero felt necessity to constantly defend his political position and actions would show that a lot of people disagreed with him.⁸⁵ The reason Clodius choses Liberty above any other god is because he feels that “With Cicero banished Rome could

⁸¹ Murrel, 2008, p.69

⁸² Allen, 1944, p.1

⁸³ Allen, 1944, p.3

⁸⁴ Allen, 1944, p.4

⁸⁵ Allen, 1944, p.8

return to democratic processes.”⁸⁶ And why would Clodius see Cicero as a roadblock for Rome's democratic processes? Cicero wasn't like the politicians of the old guard, he would constantly be talking about political ideals which no one else had any interest in, and he would judge men and affairs by the morals of their actions, rather than their manners.⁸⁷

When he in 62 B.C then found himself to be the *de facto* spokesperson for the *optimates* he became open to attack. When he led the charge to execute prisoners without trial, he put a target on his back. Clodius might not even have used this against Cicero as he himself was not entirely against the execution.⁸⁸ but in 61 B.C he and Cicero had an altercation that “fell to a low level of personal abuse”⁸⁹ This relates heavily to *libertas* “The speaker should convince the person he is criticising that his words, however harsh, are spoken out of love and respect.”⁹⁰ This Cicero did not do. He traded virtue for winning a verbal battle. Allen writes that Clodius chooses *libertas* as a catchword because he could impute that Cicero was a tyrant and paint him a monster in the people’s minds. There is however the argument that Cicero makes Clodius' job very easy in this regard, as stated he would rather judge people by morals than by manners. It is then strange that he would stoop to personal insults, which although is bad mannered, is also not moral. To criticise without regard was not in keeping with the virtue of *libertas*. Like effeminacy or adultery, if one is unvirtuous, one is also immoral.

VIRGIL AND THE HEROES OF ROME

Virgil is probably most famous for the *Aeneid*, and when we shall explore how he was affected by *libertas* it would suit the argument to start exactly with this epic poem. Virgil was writing in the same space of time as Ovid, he had become a man under the tyranny of Julius Caesar and would write the *Aeneid* whilst Augustus was emperor. Frank writes about a young Virgil who was prepared to worship Augustus as a *deus*, a god. But, when he wrote about him in the *Aeneid*, he would praise him greatly, although never as a divine being.

⁸⁶ Allen, 1944, p.1

⁸⁷ Allen, 1944, p.6

⁸⁸ Allen, 1944, p.4

⁸⁹ Allen, 1944, p.7

⁹⁰ Van Renswoude, 2019, p.8

“It is Rome’s past that he glorifies; and when he passes the heroes in review, he begins with the first Brutus who drove out the tyrants pulchra pro libertate and includes in his list even Pompey, who so recently had died in his struggle to save the republic. We know that Vergil read the passage to Augustus, and we may well believe that the poet had enough confidence in Augustus’ sincere intentions to assume that the prince would not take offense.”⁹¹

I wanted to keep this quote from Frank in full, because I believe it highlights something important to the thesis, the relationship between Augustus and Vergil, and their perceived ideals. During the exploration of Ovid, it became clear that opposition of political ideals was not something Augustus appreciated, even if such opposition is just alluded to by the actions of a fictional character. Vergil however glorified Rome’s great republican past and promoted the republican views that at least outwardly Augustus campaigned. Although the sincerity of any claim that Augustus held that he had given the republic back to the people can be questioned of the basis of his impatience with the senate, and his autocratic behavior.⁹² Vergil then felt so safe in his freedom to write what suited his narrative best, that he made direct reference to the betrayal and murder of Augustus (adoptive) father in a positive light, and still felt safe that he would not suffer consequence’s. One must wonder why? Of course, the desire to bring back the republic was shared, and Caesar was one of the main reasons it had been taken away from the people, but this was still a relative that in much the same manner had gained a tremendous amount of power, would it not be wise to take caution?

Especially noting Brutus amongst the heroes is interesting, as a later Italian writer Dante Alighieri would put him in the three faced demon Satan’s mouth alongside Judas Iscariot and Cassius. Dante and Vergil separate each other by almost 1500 years, but they are referencing the same event. The notion that Brutus was a traitor had to then come to at a later date when the republic was entirely gone, and whom they remember is the betrayed founder of the Roman empire, and not the betrayer and attempted savior of the republic.

Frank alludes to the fact that Vergil felt safe enough with Augustus to recite the passage, but in the name of *libertas* and the base of which Augustus had built his power, he really had no other choice. If he were to act out against Vergil, he would just tell the entire Roman populace that he had no real investment in restoring the republic, because if he did, would he not also

⁹¹ Frank, 1938, p.92

⁹² Frank, 1938, p.91

hail the killer of Caesar as a hero? Vergil is safe not because he believes his personal relationship with Augustus is strong enough, but because he is merely verbalizing the direction the current political trend was flowing, that is towards a restoration of the Roman Empire. “(...) (T)he poet knew before he wrote the famous passage that Augustus had promised to govern Rome according to the forms of the old constitution(...)”⁹³ Of course Augustus might very well have been completely genuine in his wish to govern according to the old republic's constitution, but there was no need for that to be the case when the poet would be kept safe by the political climate, Vergil had *securitas* but not from a patron, but from the Roman people. Because of the way he chose to structure this passage. He made it a passage praising those who sought to restore the republic, rather than directly focus on the man that was its destruction “Vergil's sixth book, written at the time when Augustus was offering Rome a restoration, seems therefore to guarantee the sincerity of Augustus' enthusiasm for the republic.”⁹⁴

THE DECLINE OF DIRECT CRITICISM

Seeing the period of 60 B.C to 30 A.D as a straight line where the republic and the empire bookends Catullus is our earliest example, just barely entering into this period before his death in 58 B.C but his importance as a vestige of the republic's view on free speech remains. We would see in him direct criticism directed towards the most powerful political figures of his time. Delivered in a time of much strife, but without being sent into exile like the later poet Ovid. *Libertas* was a virtue that was directly tied to the republic and the democratic elements that drove it. To be able to criticize or share controversial opinion helped turn the republic's wheels. If politicians became afraid to call each other out on their moral failings, it would just further the moral decline that Catullus was so afraid of. Also, when one considers Roman politics it becomes clear why the politicians themselves strived to uphold it so ‘*Virtus*, for the Republican Noble, consisted in the winning of personal preeminence and glory by the commission of great deeds in the service of the state’⁹⁵ And personal preeminence was often won on the expense of others, it is not odd then that the ideal of virtue, *libertas* there within often would in practice be the arena where the politicians' constant competition

⁹³ Frank, 1938, p.92

⁹⁴ Frank, 1938, p.93

⁹⁵ Tatum, 1997, p. 483

for prestige and power in a community of maligned aristocrats that outwardly talked about peace but in reality only took part in strife.⁹⁶

Cicero was one of these politicians, although not of an aristocratic family, and he would, as Catullus not shy away from direct criticisms towards political opponents. There is of course a huge difference between the largely non-political poet that wrote short poems distributed on the streets and the Orator that would level his attacks in the senate. And it was in some part because Cicero was a politician and not a poet that he would partake in actions that was possible to exile him over. His exile was not a result of his verbal fight against Clodius by decree of the senate. He was not harmed by his direct criticism as such, but it was this indignation that made Clodius legislate the law that would see Cicero exiled.

The real interesting turning point comes when we come to Ovid, whose criticism was not direct. In fact, all mentions of Augustus was appraising and yet he would also face exile, and not because he alluded to a wrongdoing or character flaw Augustus harbored, but because he would write poems that was amoral, and that would be blamed for encouraging adultery. This makes sense in context of Augustus charge to reverse the moral decline of the roman republic. His role as a savior was threatened by an undermining poet. We have no clear indication of whether or not Ovid meant to do this. All his pleas to avoid exile (or at least to be able to suffer it in a nicer place) would tell us he was not, but to admit it was his purpose would not have helped his cause in any way and its absence is therefore just as inconclusive both ways. The actual crime he was charged with was to apparently insulting the imperial family, a charge one would be hard pressed to actually justify. He did write about how to pick up girls on the portico dedicated to Augustus sister, as well as saying August mock naval battle was a good place to pick up foreign girls.⁹⁷ But was this really the same as insulting them. There is an argument that choosing places to pick up girls that is associated with the imperial family that sought to stop adultery and other sexual perversions was to indirectly insult them, however in contrast to the crass words of Catullus not a century earlier it seems rather tame a crime to suffer lifelong exile for.

Virgil shows great guile in his political expressions. He would believe himself on the same side as Augustus, both wishing from a restoration of the republic. Defining Caesar's murders as republican heroes solidifies this. The interesting question is if the construction of

⁹⁶ Tatum, 1997, p. 483

⁹⁷ Wilkinson, 2005. p.295

his epic poem and the presentation of passages like the one about the murders, would have been different if it had been written just a few decades earlier. Of course, he couldn't have written about Caesar's murder, whilst he still was alive. But the reason Virgil promotes Crassus and Brutus as heroes of the republic is because they put an end to what he considered to be one of its biggest threats. Therefore, we could for the sake of the example assume that Virgil could have done the same to another threat. If we use Catullus as a reference to how a poet was to treat political figures he disagreed with, it would seem more likely that the reference would be more direct. Catullus made sure to directly oppose Caesar and Mamurra although he could just have easily praised those that opposed him. In the same way Vergil could have made a more direct reference to the character of Caesar rather than just praising those who put an end to him. This difference lies with whom they are addressing, or rather, who will be listening. In Catullus case, he is being listened to by the people of Rome, and he is trying to sway their opinion of people he dislikes, even trying to change the people themselves by questioning their morality. Whilst Virgil ultimately knows that he will be addressing Augustus. He cannot be absolutely sure that the son won't take offence to a character assassination of his father, August might still believe his adoptive father was a good man that just went too far or was merely doing the right thing in the wrong way. Caesar was deified, so he couldn't even be sure that the people would be entirely on his side, it would be far too easy for Augustus to construct a narrative were Virgil is in the wrong whilst still maintaining his position as the savior of the republic. Praising those who put an end to Caesar's destruction of the Republic however, without actually making a direct reference to Caesar, does not allow Augustus the same opportunity.

CONCLUSION

The latter years of the republic would see the decline of morality, a facet of history that both later historians like Brundt and contemporary poets like Catullus agreed was part of the reason it fell. Morality of course spanned a lot more than would normally be included in modern terms, morality was as much politics as legislation and war was. Not surprising then that they believed that a return to the old ways. The traditional Rome where morality was upheld in the highest order would make the republic strong again. Of course, it was not so easy, Rome was changing, and even with the figurehead, the savior of the roman republic Augustus spearheading the movement they only succeeded in changing it completely. The

senate regain much of its power yes, but with Augustus as the *princeps*, they had gained a monarch in all but name.

This meant that the landscape of which *libertas* was applied now lay differently. *Libertas* was a virtue, and the moralists wanted to be virtuous, but still the damage had been done. The way that government now was structured changed how criticism was handled. Some speculate that *libertas* was something afforded to more people in the empire, and whilst that might in part be true, there was now one person and his family that was exempt if he chose to be. This made a huge difference. Going from a government where the senate had to decide whether or not you had used your freedom in a speech in a way that insulted someone or was such an offence that it was worthy punishment to one where that power and judgement laid with one man meant that poets, like Ovid was less safe. Direct criticism, at least towards the imperial family was too dangerous. One can only try and imagine Catullus writing a similar poem to his 65th about Augustus instead of Caesar with Ovid's fate in mind and realize that such a thing would probably not go unpunished. Instead writers like Virgil would indirectly and with great caution choose to express their criticisms or political feelings in way that would be hard to punish without in the process expose themselves as a tyrant or hypocrite. The years of 60 B.C to 30 A.D was therefore the period where we saw the decline of morality, direct criticism and the roman republic.

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