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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of Classics

The Carper, the Wallflower, and the Voyeur:

Silencing Amicitia at the Cena Inaequalis

By Rachel L. Hanlin

A thesis presented to
the Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

August 2022

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Rachel Hanlin

Washington University in St. Louis

August 2022

*For my grandfather, Rex Pflantz,
who ignited my love of ancient cooking
with many meals cooked over the fire pit
and in the mud oven.*

Qui alis propriis volant, eos constans habes.

Introduction

Dinners have the potential to forge friendships, strengthen relationships, and provide an opportunity to rub elbows with social elites. Dinner parties feature prominently in Roman literature because they offer a window into the social interactions of mixed socio-economic company. In the hands of Pliny, Martial, and Juvenal, the *cena* is transformed into a debased monstrosity of its former self where all manner of vice, greed, and depravity are brought to life and the guests are left yearning for the “good ol’ days” where traditional values of hospitality and etiquette were observed.

In this thesis, I compare the usage and purpose of the unequal dinner, or *cena inaequalis*, theme in the works of Martial, Pliny, and Juvenal to garner insight concerning the changing functions of *amicitia* in order to determine the root of the social divide between patron and client as well as analyze the solutions provided within and by the texts. The first chapter explores the cultural changes that the patron-client system underwent as a response to the changes in the Roman government culminating in the social tension documented in our late first and early second century CE sources. These changes took the form of two parallel tracks: 1) there was a shift in the dining habits of the elites from communal dining to individual plates, and 2) the *cena* moved from being a practice to promote inclusivity and relationship-building in which differences in the host’s and guests’ social statuses were ignored to a practice that aimed to reinforce external social and economic hierarchies around the dinner table, namely the *cena inaequalis*. The second chapter delves into the primary texts and analyses the ways in which these hierarchies are reinforced. This results in common tools of division that the authors use to signify their writing to a particular topos. Such tools include differences concerning the quality and quantity of food, neglecting to serve certain courses, and inhospitable treatment of the

guests. While each author plays with this subgenre in a unique way, the single uniting aspect among all of these texts is the lack of communication between host and guest. This is explored in the third chapter, where I analyze the *cena inaequalis* as a critique on the social tension between patron and client. Each author provides their own solution to the problem in their respective works, but I posit these texts are an attempt to end the silence by providing a distorted, hyperbolic, “worst-case-scenario” of what could happen should the silence continue.

There are three authors who are key to our understanding of the *cena inaequalis*: Pliny the Younger, Martial, and Juvenal. From 97-108, Pliny the Younger compiled his personal letters into a series of ten books with the admission that he did not follow any strict chronological or thematic sequence.¹ Purely personal letters make up one part of the collection, in which Pliny offers advice on social, political, and literary problems that their addressees may face. They follow three main rules; that each letter contains a single theme, they are not excessive in length, and they prefer simple language.² Pliny defines his letters as carefully written (1.1.1), but scholars have theorized that the original version of the letters were longer and messier, and then pared down to focus on a singular topic for publication. Pliny, however, presents these letters as authentic correspondence.³ Pliny’s letters have received greater attention in recent years due to their varied content concerning Roman social life.⁴ The collection gives a panoramic view of Roman culture in the early Empire, ranging from descriptions of historical events, critiques of political actions, and advice concerning cultural issues.

¹ Conte 1994, 526; Sherwin-White 1998, 20-26. Whitton (2013 11-17) disagrees, noting the letters follow cycles both within the books and in the series as a whole.

² Sherwin-White (1998, 5) states that “the commonest of nouns, only the most essential of adverbs and adjectives are used.”

³ Sherwin-White 1998, 11. Pl. *Ep.* 2.6.

⁴ Corke-Webster, J. 2017, 246-262.

In letter 2.6, Pliny the Younger writes to Avitus, an up-and-coming elite, about a dinner he attended. The host not only ranked his friends in terms of their worth, but also served his guests in proportion to their status. A fellow guest noticed Pliny's disgust, and inquired what dining practice he followed, to which Pliny responded that he served his guests equally. The guest, baffled, explained this must incur extraordinary costs, but Pliny denied this idea, stating that his custom is to dine at a lesser quality because this is not only thrifty but also morally right. After relating this exchange, Pliny addresses Avitus directly. He rails against gluttony and points out the hypocrisy of frugality through luxury. The hosts are spending just as much to serve themselves the highest quality wine and food, but are using the pretext of frugality to not share these luxuries among everyone at the table. By serving themselves luxuriously and their guests commonly, they spend just as much – if not more – all for the purpose of reifying their own higher status above their guests. He urges Avitus to not fall for this trick and to generally avoid people who do.

The second key author, Martial, depicted a variety of unequal dinners within several books. In total, Martial published 14 books of epigrams from 84-102 CE. The content of his poetry varies from funerary epitaphs to erotic couplets, from declamations to satiric and parodic epigrams. His work has been widely circulated and quoted by late antique and modern writers, with interest peaking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After this climax, translations all but ceased due to obscene material that one translator described as “unbecoming a Roman.”⁵ Since then, scholars have aimed to redeem Martial by explaining his obscene epigrams as an exercise in the same vein as declamation and casting him as a Juvenal-esque figure.⁶ After this rebranding, his epigrams have been utilized to illustrate a historical, cultural, and topographical

⁵ Hay 1755, 1 vol.

⁶ Bohn 1860, iii.

picture of Roman life in the late first century CE. Nearly thirty years ago, Fowler posited the books were constructed with both the naïve and established literary audience in mind. The poems are unique enough to stand on their own for the naïve reader, but when consumed as a whole, the experienced reader will be encouraged to reread the books in order to pick up on reoccurring themes and characters.⁷ Garthwaite has noted Martial's use of intratextuality to show his careful construction of cyclical themes.⁸ Groups of epigrams share a similar theme, motif, common language, or structure that encourages the reader to link the present poem with those that come before and immediately after. These cycles serve as a structuring device within each book, while alluding to larger cycles throughout the corpus.

One of these cycles includes epigrams concerning dinner parties. Martial is not always fortunate in the invitations he receives and consequently attends a slew of unequal dinners featuring the double menus including food and drinks of differing quality, quantity, and opulence. The epigrams that follow this theme are 1.20, 3.60, 3.82, 4.68, 4.85, 6.11, and 9.2. In 1.20, Martial records the dinner of Caecilianus where he puts on a show by eating truffles while serving his invited guests nothing. In 3.60, Martial is invited to dine with Ponticus who serves himself oysters, truffles, turbot, and a golden-turtle dove. Martial, conversely, is served a single mussel, mushrooms, a small bream, and a magpie. 3.82 features Zoilus whose character appears to be similar to Trimalchio and is even called "Malchio" in the epigram. He is attended by a crowd of servants ready to fulfill his every whim. They give him massages, keep him cool, and even attend to his urinary needs, while serving him luxurious food and plenty of wine until he passes out drunk. The guests, having never received their dinner, are ordered to remain in

⁷ Fowler 1995, 34-37.

⁸ Garthwaite 2001, 46.

silence. 4.68 features a couplet which highlights the financial disparities between Martial and Sextus' plates. Martial returns to Ponticus' table in 4.85, where Ponticus unsuccessfully attempts to hide his superior-quality wine in an opaque alabaster cup from his guests, to whom he served the cheap wine. 6.11 addresses Marcus' unequal dinner where host and guest are divided by both food and clothing, and ends with a plea to treat the guests in the same manner that Marcus treats himself. The greediness and fiscal mismanagement of the host, Lupus, in 9.2 extends past the dinner table. Rather than fulfilling his duties as a patron – which includes serving an equal dinner – Lupus would rather spend his money on his girlfriend.

The last author of interest, Juvenal, had a career in declamation and began writing the Satires sometime after the death of Domitian in 96 CE. He composed sixteen Satires in five books, divided by the author himself. His poetic persona presents a Rome plagued by spreading vice and moral decay, which he felt compelled to critique. He deviates from his satiric predecessors with his preference towards overt declamation rather than introspection. The Satires reemerged in the fourth century as a source of inspiration and adaptation for poets and continued to inspire authors throughout the Renaissance to the modern day.⁹ In recent decades, greater scholarly attention has been paid to the Satires in terms of defining the genre of Roman Satire itself, as well as examining his works as a lens into Roman social and cultural history.¹⁰ Satire gives a unique glimpse into Roman perceptions of (in)appropriate behavior, social structure, and interpersonal interactions.

Juvenal's fifth Satire portrays the most in-depth depiction of an unequal dinner. Trebius has been invited to dine with his patron, Virro. Juvenal describes the type of dinner Trebius can

⁹ Braund 1996, 36-37.

¹⁰ Cf. Keane, 2006, 2015; Jones, 2007; Nappa, 2018; Umerhan, 2018; Rosen, 2007; Uden, 2015.

expect if he takes up the invitation, including paltry food and poor-quality wine, mistreatment from the intimidating slaves, and a general sense of alienation from the elites. The Satire begins with a prologue that sets the tone for the rest of the poem. Juvenal questions Trebius' desire to dine at Virro's table, asking whether it is worth enduring humiliation in exchange for awful food, or if it would be better to gnaw on the same scraps as stray dogs. The invitation is given (5.18) and the dinner begins. The double menu unfolds in the same way as Juvenal's literary predecessors – differing drinks, food, and servants – but Juvenal depicts more courses in greater detail. Virro's plates are nearly mythic in quality, while Trebius' are moldy, rancid, or simply forgotten. The epilogue (5.156-173) displays Virro's true intentions: not to save money, not even to humiliate Trebius for some kind of perverse delight, but to relegate him to the same status as a slave.

Together, these three authors show how the familiar setting of a dinner party can turn into a battleground. They display how the lines separating host from guest were actively reinforced to further divide one from another. They expose, shame, and critique the hosts' efforts to silence any attempt of fostering *amicitia* around the dinner table. All the while, they incentivize a return to traditional notions of hospitality and attempt to reignite the conversation between patron and client. My argument is driven by the primary texts, but I do utilize archaeological evidence to supplement when appropriate. Unlike these hosts, my goal is to include a wide audience in the discussion of these unequal dinners while still depicting the story and themes in their own words, so I will continue to include translations when I quote the Latin texts.

Despite food and beverage being the most basic of necessities, they continue to be the most uniting aspect of human existence. The cooking and preparation of food separates humanity from our mammalian family, it defines us as a people, and distinguishes one culture from

another. From political differences to social divides, when two people share and enjoy the same food, it conquers every barrier that has the potential to separate the guests from their host. Alas, the inverse is also true. The barriers separating host from guest multiply when food is used to sow and cement derision. The sources examined in this study will show how food can be wielded to divide the table along socioeconomic lines, and in doing so, how it invites silence as the honored guest.

Chapter One: The Decline of Communal Dining

It is a common assumption that friendships are forged when people break bread together, and a series of recent studies have ratified this conjecture. In order to determine which factors of feasting increase trust, Dunbar confirms that eating the same type of food brought people in conflict to resolution much quicker than those eating different kinds of food.¹¹ Woolley and Fishbach went a step further and determined that when meals are served family-style, in which meals are served from the same vessel, this method increased perceived cooperation.¹² From these studies, communal dining generates an aura of trust and support around the entire table. In both studies, this surge of cooperation occurred between existing friends and among strangers.

Though scientifically unconfirmed in the Roman era, these ideas were intuitively felt and so reflected in their eating practices. The physical layout and décor of the traditional Roman dining room (*triclinium*) aimed to cultivate stronger bonds among hosts and guests. The *triclinium*, usually three couches placed around a central dining table, promoted communal eating of the same food. The frescoes that adorned the walls displayed scenes of Greco-Roman mythology or scenic views which fostered conversation.¹³ In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the evening meal (*cena*) originally functioned as a communal dinner and the responsibilities of host and guest within the context of the patron-client relationship. This structure was employed to stabilize a socio-economically divided culture, but this system struggled to redefine its purpose under the empire as certain responsibilities from both parties were nullified. Alongside this shift, the dining practices of the elites changed from communal meals to individually served

¹¹ Dunbar 2017, 198-211.

¹² Woolley and Fishbach 2019, 541-522.

¹³ Hudson 2010, 664.

plates not only in the private *triclinium*¹⁴ but also at public dinners, which I will delve into later in this chapter. This method deviated from the original goal of bringing guests together to instead reinforcing the guests' status. Introducing this hierarchy around the table created tension between the host and guest, as it allowed for unequal service to be justified under the pretense of maintaining social boundaries. This tension serves as the framework for the *cena inaequalis* motif in Roman literature.

Since the goal of a traditional *cena* was to increase trust and cooperation among the attendees, it is necessary to explore how the Romans thought about their relationships around the table. *Amicitia*, commonly translated as “friendship,” is often used to describe these bonds, but our modern connotations associated with the word “friendship” do not entirely capture the bond produced by the patron-client relationship.¹⁵ It was not a pure friendship, nor a strictly business relationship either, but between these two extremes. Patrons and clients had specific responsibilities in the Republic. The patron was most notably responsible for legal advice, assistance, and protection, but his responsibilities extended to rights of citizenship, career placement, and offering basic resources when needed.¹⁶ In return, the client was expected to provide political support, loyalty, and potentially leave a portion of their will for the patron as a final token of appreciation.¹⁷ The ideal successful patron-client relationship existed between the modern connotations of friendships and business relationships in which both parties shared a mutual respect while performing the responsibilities of their station.

¹⁴ Hudson (2010, 691) includes “Archaeological evidence has shown that this movement occurred primarily at the tables of the elites, but not among the non-elites who practiced communal dining and foster[ed] emergent egalitarian communities.”

¹⁵ Cf. Konstan 1995, 330.

¹⁶ Deniaux 2006, 401-420.

¹⁷ Saller 1989, 49-62; Garnsey and Saller, 1987.

The implicit power structure and associated responsibilities of the patrons and clients were supposed to be left at the door when attending a *cena* but this ideal was often hard to achieve. The *triclinium* was designed to aid in unifying all dinner go-ers as equals. This is displayed in the architectural layout of the room itself. The “U” shape of the couches created the dynamic for conversation to flow with ease, and frescoes and décor offered conversational topics when there were natural pauses. These spaces were designed to utilize communal eating as the primary dining practice. Food was not prepared for individual plates but was instead served in larger vessels intended to serve two or more guests.¹⁸ These dishes had similar, if not identical, shapes and would have had a “unifying effect” among all the guests.¹⁹ Not only were the guests sharing and eating the same food, but also from identical looking dishes. Because the guests were responsible for taking their own portions, there is a potential that a disparity could occur, should a guest take a larger portion than his couch-mates. Such behavior was likely self-regulated, as repetitive faux pas would sour one’s chances of a future invitation. In these dinners, host and guest ate the same food from matching vessels, increasing trust and cooperation in both the relationships between the host and guest and among the guests themselves. Communal eating was widely practiced among the non-elites and the tradition held into the late empire. This helped the non-elites to “construct and maintain an anonymous yet united community identity.”²⁰

When in mixed company, these traditions created a social sphere in which the external pressures of the social hierarchy were paused. The break from these external hierarchies cultivated social harmony between the haves and have-nots, ideally creating cultural unity

¹⁸ Hudson 2010, 670.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Hudson 2010, 670, 693. Hudson reasons this due to images of communal dining found in the third and fourth century catacombs below Rome. These scenes depict a banquet with baskets of bread, fish, and pudding from the catacombs of St. Callixtus and Vibia.

despite disparity between the mixed socio-economic statuses of the host and guests. David Konstan provides an excellent analysis:

“If friendship in ancient Rome had a strong element of obligation and deference associated with it, as a number of excellent scholars have maintained, then friendship might turn out to be so close to the patron-client relationship in its general characteristics that it would hardly be worth the effort to draw a line between them...”

“...Where earlier conceptions of friendship, during the period of the Athenian democracy, emphasized the social equality of the partners, later thinkers put the stress on integrity and frankness, which was incumbent upon friends without regard for rank and station. Such a relationship was compatible with the hierarchical structure of clientship, provided that the partners took care to preserve the honesty and mutuality that friendship entails. But the idea of friend was never reduced to that of patron or client.”²¹

Although *amicitia* was never diminished to merely a transactional relationship, Konstan classifies *amici* in four categories: the *superiores*, *pares*, *inferiores* and *clientes*. This is seen in Pliny, *Ep.* 7.3.2; “Won’t you return to the city soon? Where there is dignity, honor, and both greater and lesser friendships” (*Quin ergo aliquando in urbem redis? ubi dignitas honor amicitiae tam superiores quam minores*). Imposing a hierarchy on friendship aligns with the shift from communal to individually served meals, as this classification of friends can be warped to justify serving guests in proportion to their relationship with the host. Plutarch, a Greek philosopher and historian writing around 100 CE, excuses this practice, reasoning that equality is attained by this inequality; the humble man is not raised to the status of the elites, thereby insulting those of higher status, and the elites are not offended by being reduced to the same status of the humble man.²² This worked to emphasize the personal identities and boundaries of the elites – Plutarch among them.

²¹ Konstan 1995, 330 and 341.

²² Plut. *Mor.* 2.10.2.

Along with the shift from communal vessels to individual plates, the responsibilities of the patrons and clients shifted as well. In the Republic, it was customary for the clients to greet their patrons in the morning and offer their assistance and protection during the patron's errands. Afterwards, the patron would repay the client's favor with an invitation to dinner. This custom lost its importance under the empire, and the throng of clients became an annoyance instead of a benefit. Nevertheless, the patrons still enjoyed the prestige associated with "the pompous display of a numerous body of retainers."²³ Because of this, the regular invitation to dinner was replaced with the *sportula* under Nero.²⁴

There is much debate concerning the practices surrounding the *sportula*. The contents of the *sportula* initially consisted of a ration of food as a small daily substitution for the lack of a dinner invitation. For the sake of convenience, the edible *sportula* was soon replaced by its monetary equivalent of roughly six and a quarter sesterces.²⁵ The *sportula* acted as a payment for the clients and took multiple forms; most commonly occurring in the morning, but more rarely at the evening meal.²⁶ Slater denies the last assertion, stating that *sportulae* were never issued in the *triclinium*, nor were both dinner and payment recorded as concurrent instances, citing Martial 3.30, "The *sportula* is no longer given, you recline at dinner without payment" (*sportula nulla datur: gratis conviva recumbis*).²⁷ Duncan-Jones contends with Slater, stating that the evening meal and *sportula* was the most desirable as it displayed double the generosity, both payment

²³ Ramsay 1875, 692-693.

²⁴ *Sportula* does not have an adequate English translation or comparison, which is why I have retained the Latin in this passage. It is loosely translated as a "little basket" or "small gift," but neither of these literal translations capture the Latin meaning.

²⁵ Martial 10.70, 10.75.

²⁶ *Sportula* could also be given at the baths, cf. M 1.59.5.

²⁷ Slater 2000, 110. Slater's argument conflates giving the *sportula* at the *cena* with giving a *sportula* in the *triclinium* specifically, stating that the *sportula* would not be given in the *triclinium*, thus it would not be given at the dinner. But if the *sportula* were given in the *vestibula* before dinner, then dinner is served, would the Roman author differentiate between these two occurrences, or simply state that he received a *sportula* at the dinner? The evidence is currently unclear.

and food.²⁸ I am unsure whether Slater's assertion is justified, as the ending of Martial 3.60 states "let the absence of the *sportula* be a benefit; let us eat the same" (*Sportula quod non est, prosit: edamus idem*). The ending of this epigram insinuates Martial would rather have an equal meal with Ponticus than a meal suitable for a client in conjunction with the *sportula*. Because these poems are addressed to different individuals, Gargilianus and Ponticus respectively, it is possible that the lack of *sportulae* is a situational occurrence. It is unclear whether the *sportula* would have been given at the *triclinium* itself, as Slater states, but it seems that both the *sportula* and meal can be given in the same visit, even if the guest would prefer otherwise.

This change was not without detractors, as the *sportula* had the potential to reduce the patron-client relationship from a personal connection into a commercial association. The priorities of the patrons shifted from networking and cultivating *amicitia* among their dependents to practices which favored heightening their own status. This notion even spread to the emperor himself, as Nero replaced public dinners with the public *sportula* (*publica sportula*). Imitating the private practice, the citizens received a ration of meat or equivalent sum of money instead of a seat at public dinners. These handouts were highly unpopular, and the public dinners were ultimately reinstated by Domitian (Mart. 8.50, Suet. *Ner.* 16 and *Dom.* 7).

Because of these changes concerning the customs of the *cena*, the original goal of bringing people together despite the external social hierarchy was altered to the degree that these social positions were not obscured, but instead reinforced within the *triclinium*. I argue this cultural shift was a ripple effect of the change from Republic to Empire, in which some of the previous benefits of the patron-client system became obsolete. This put the patron-client system

²⁸ Duncan-Jones (2008, 144-145) writes "in the first two cases [in the morning and at the baths], the client at least performed a visible service, either dancing attendance on his patron at a painfully early hour or swelling his retinue at the baths." This transactional aspect of the *sportula* is absent when it is given during the *cena*.

in flux by each side attempting to redefine its worth to other. The patron's emphasis on the boundaries between himself and client during the *cenae* became the way to exhibit their legitimacy in their role while preserving the pretense of authority.

The most blatant example of this restructuring occurred during Domitian's *cenae rectae* (Suet. *Dom.* 7.1). The *cena recta* is "a term whose origin and meaning are not entirely clear" but refers to the act of reclining on the couches while dining.²⁹ At Domitian's public dinners (*cenae publicae*), food was distributed in proportion to the individual's political status with senators and equestrians receiving large baskets of food (*panarium*) while the plebeians received a meager portion.³⁰ D'Arms argues that these dinners served two functions; first, they displayed the grandeur of the *Domus Flavia* (Flavian Dynasty), but more importantly, these public feasts proved that "Domitian must also have recognized the value of such banquets for communicating ideological directives."³¹ These ideological directives reinforced the power of the host; he ate first and sat at the highest seat. His physical place above the rest of the attendees signaled his social and political status over them.³² The food was distributed individually, not shared from a common table or vessel. This separates host from guest and further divides the guests from each other by their perceived worth to the emperor. But even the "publicness" of Domitian's *cena publica* is questionable, as free-born poor and slaves are "conspicuous by their absence."³³ By the end of the Flavian era, the focus has swung towards supporting the authority of the leader and away from the unity of the people.

²⁹ Donahue 2003, 435.

³⁰ Suet. *Dom.* 4.5.

³¹ D'Arms 1984, 341.

³² Suet. *Dom.* 4.5.

³³ D'Arms 1984, 342.

There is one example of equal dining under Domitian, contained in the *Silvae* of Statius. The *Silvae* are a collection of poems that vary in content concerning elite life under Domitian, with the deified *princeps* as the centerpoint of the work. Statius' *Silvae* 1.6 details an equal dinner hosted by Domitian during Saturnalia. In the poem, Domitian hosts a feast in which all people, regardless of their station (*parui, femina, plebs, eques, senatus* all eat at one table, 43-44) or wealth (both rich and poor, *inops* and *beatus*, 49), are invited to eat alongside the emperor. Entertainment of gladiatorial fights and athletic events accompany the occasion. Overall, the poem is laden with praise for this spectacular and equal dinner. Nevertheless, the poem combines two contradictory elements, "the emperor's entertainment in the amphitheater, the site of imperial control, and the Saturnalia, the festival of popular liberty."³⁴ These contradictions are furthered by line 45, *libertas reverentia remisit* (freedom has set aside reverence), with Statius' praise of Domitian. Both Statius and the crowd refer to Domitian as a leader (81-82, 49-50) and Domitian is portrayed as a godlike figure.³⁵ Chinn argues that these competing elements of Statius' praise rhetoric "emphasize the granting of freedom rather than the actual experience of it and hence valorize the control of Saturnalia over the spirit of the festival itself. Freedom, understood in this way, does not imply true social equality but only constitutes a gesture of indulgence by social superiors to their inferiors."³⁶ This portrays the equal dinner of Domitian not as a celebration of equal dining but as a spectacle, much like the entertainment that follows.

Perhaps entrusting the crowd with a communal feast was simply too much of a logistical nightmare to employ commonly, but previous leaders were undaunted by the task. Caesar was reported to have set out twenty-two thousand couches in a triumph, and, at a similar public feast,

³⁴ Newlands 2002, 227-28.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 239-43, 254-55.

³⁶ Chinn 2008, 106.

he learned that the servants served lower quality wine to his guests but reserved the better wine for his table. Caesar demanded everyone drink the same (Plut. *Caes.* 55.2, Suet. *Iul.* 26-27).

Although these anecdotes may not be entirely trustworthy, they could illustrate that the priorities of the upper class shifted. Caesar's actions hinge on the desire to promote social harmony by serving the same wine and placing the plethora of couches.

In tandem with praise of Caesar's communal dining habits, in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, he portrays the differences between two Republican leaders, Cimon and Lucullus. One of these comparisons contains their different dining habits where Cimon gives "democratic and charitable" (δημοκρατικῆ καὶ φιλανθρώπων) dinners available to many while Lucullus' table is "sumptuous and oriental" (πολυτελεῖ καὶ σατραπικῆν) and reserved for the elites (Plut. *Comp. Cim. Luc.* 1.5-7). Although this gives evidence for unequal dinners in the Republic, the focus is on comparing the effective leadership of Cimon with the poor leadership of Lucullus and not their dining practices. Their differing table settings are indicators of their quality as a leader. This falls in line with the previous examples, indicating that dining practices are a tool used to denote a leader's worthiness, therefore those who the authors deem and praise as good leaders will host equal dinners. These examples denote that both equal and unequal dining existed in the Republic, but the degree to which the practice of unequal dining was practiced not just among the leaders but the general elite populus is still undetermined. Cicero's writings indicate that the practice of unequal dining was shunned in the private sphere during the Republic as the Roman culture scorned displays of private luxury but delighted in public displays of wealth (*odit...privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit*, Cic. *Mur.* 76).

Sometime between Cicero's observation and Domitian's reign, the prevalence of unequal dinners gradually increased within elite culture. Perhaps the elites were following the examples

set by their leaders and were influenced to adopt similar unequal customs and apply them in their own private dinner parties. It may not have been deemed morally right, but socially justifiable as these ideals were practiced by the emperor and ratified by the upper members of Roman society. Once the banquet – either public or private – adopted a political dimension, the food became a symbol that reinforced the host’s dominance over the guests.³⁷ Then, unequal meals served as a mechanism for social control rather than cohesion.

As the function of the dinner shifted, so too did the practices at the dinner. Before, the emphasis was placed on bringing host and guest together.³⁸ The shared vessels and communal feasting was replaced with individual meals, in which the host predetermines the quality and quantity of food distributed to each guest. One of the responsibilities of the host was to dispense dishes that are difficult to portion; like sauces, cakes, and puddings.³⁹ Although this practical convenience resembles communal eating – in which the food is shared from the same vessel – the power to fill one’s plate was in the hands not of the individual, but of the host. This emphasizes the authority of the host over the guest. While these dinners were more divided than their predecessors, the guests were still united by the dishware. If both the host and their guests dined using matching table settings, the dishes were watched over by the attending servants, lest a careless guest damages the dish.⁴⁰ The repetitive reinforcement of one’s station at these dinners naturally led to rising tensions as the opportunity to transcend one’s social status and dine as equals lay in the mercy of the host.

³⁷ D’Arms (1984, 339) states “when the powerful individual invites others to share in the consumption of food, commensalism instantly acquires political dimensions, and the communal meal functions simultaneously instrument of social harmony (for the partaking of food binds guests more closely to their host, as well as to one another) and as a mechanism of social control (for the gift of food reinforces the powerful’s domination of his subordinates).”

³⁸ Konstan 1995, 341.

³⁹ Hudson 2010, 667.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Juv. Sat.* 5.37-41.

According to Plutarch, the ideal host was merciful. The individual portions ensured each guest received the same quality and quantity of food. Removing the responsibility of doling out equivalent portions from the guests eliminated the potential for conflict.⁴¹ In the first and second centuries CE, individual portions were commonplace at the elites' tables as they believed this method of eating promoted harmony while reinforcing hierarchy.⁴² This practice continued into the Late Roman period, even when the elites were not in mixed company.⁴³ Thus, this dining method worked for the Romans, and it was likely that this practice was often done in good faith. Nonetheless, the trust and cooperation garnered at these tables would be less than the communal eating practices of the non-elites who were not concerned with reminding themselves of their status. All of these changes surrounding Roman culinary customs allowed, and perhaps fostered, tension between host and guest. Tension among differing social classes has taken form in some fashion in every culture. For the Romans, it was the duty of the host to ameliorate these tensions and bring Plutarch's "equality through inequality" to fruition. This must have been unsuccessful because unequal treatment and equality are inherently mutually exclusive. This elitist mentality justified the patron's power over his sub-elite guests, inevitably producing tension. These tension-inducing practices were not restrained to private dinner parties but extended to public dinners as well which ratified public thought of this private practice. Moralists, epigrammatists, and satirists thrive when tension arises and the theme of the "unequal dinner" took hold as a consequence. In the following chapter, I will explore how a slew of unreasonable hosts

⁴¹ Plut. *Mor.* 2.10.2.

⁴² Hudson 2010, 338-339.

⁴³ Hudson (2010, 693) describes this practice as "status dining." "During the Late Roman period, status dining was practiced predominantly by the elite, which allowed the Late Roman aristocracy to emphasize and retain their personal identities and statuses at banquets of peers, since their sub-elite *clientelae* were no longer invited to participate."

weaponize this tension in a letter from Pliny the Younger, selected epigrams of Martial, and the fifth Satire of Juvenal.

Chapter Two: The Tools of Division at the *Cena*

2.1: Pliny the Younger, Letter 2.6

A tense situation occurs between Pliny the Younger and a fellow guest at an unequal dinner, recorded in letter 2.6 addressed to Avitus who is a young equestrian protégé of his. Pliny admits his books and the letters therein were compiled without regard for their chronology (*non servato temporis ordine*, 1.1.1).⁴⁴ Thus, some letters, especially concerning domestic and cultural matters, are harder to date than letters concerning political events. Based on Avitus' military service and political events discussed in book two, Sherwin-White proposes this letter dates between 97 and 98 CE. Pliny first describes how his host served the guests unequally before advising Avitus to avoid partaking in the custom of unequal dinners and, more generally, to avoid unnecessary luxury. This digression allowed Pliny to opine on ethical and philosophical quandaries while presenting himself as a moral paragon giving advice. In this example, it permitted Pliny to offer his thoughts on the immorality of dinners with hierarchical menus. I have divided the letter into three sections, the first concerning how the host lays out the dinner, the second containing the conversation between Pliny and another guest, and the third presenting Pliny's advice to Avitus. In the first section, we see a hierarchical menu in which closer friends – Pliny included – receive higher quality wine while lesser friends receive lower quality. This section displays the practices of the host who separates guests into three separate statuses. The host also remains unnamed and unspecified, which may indicate that Pliny fabricated certain elements of the dinner, if not the entire scene. The letter begins as follows (Pl. *Ep.* 2.6.1-2):

⁴⁴ This supposed lack of organization is contested, cf. Whitton 2013; Murgia 2016.

Longum est altius repetere nec refert, quemadmodum acciderit, ut homo minime familiaris cenarem apud quendam, ut sibi videbatur, lautum et diligentem, ut mihi, sordidum simul et sumptuosum. [2] Nam sibi et paucis opima quaedam, ceteris vilia et minuta ponebat. Vinum etiam parvolis lagunculis in tria genera descripsit, non ut potestas eligendi, sed ne ius esset recusandi, aliud sibi et nobis, aliud minoribus amicis (nam gradatim amicos habet), aliud suis nostrisque libertis.

It would be long to repeat and not of any worth to relate how it happened that I was invited to dine with a man I was not a close acquaintance of, who, as he thought, was posh and scrupulous, but as I thought, was disgraceful and extravagant. For he placed assorted delicacies before himself and a few others, and small and cheap dishes before the rest. He had even separated the wine into three kinds in small jugs, not so that they would have the power to choose, but so that they would not be able to refuse. He kept one kind for himself and us, another kind for his lesser friends - for he considers his friends by different gradations - and yet a third for his and our freedmen.

This dinner displays a different twist on the practice of serving individual plates by displaying not simply a double menu, but – even worse – a *triple* menu in which different qualities of wine are served to guests based on their relationship to the host.⁴⁵ The guests served the middle quality wine are already alienated from the host and the host's equals, and the lowest are even further estranged. Each guest, regardless of their station, does not have the power (*potestas*) to drink otherwise; the power lies solely in the hands of the host. This shows the host's perspective on friendship is more transactional than authentic; those who are worth more *to* him receive more *from* him.

It is interesting to note that Pliny's host at this dinner remains unnamed.⁴⁶ A reasonable explanation would be that Pliny is following the second rule of his genre – brevity – as the name

⁴⁵ Whitton 2013.

⁴⁶ This deviates from Martial who often called out his prejudiced hosts by name, as is the custom with the epigrammatic genre. Whether or not Martial's hosts actually existed is another question entirely. If they did, it would make sense to change their names, or combine like individuals into one prejudiced persona in order to create characters which signal repeated themes such as Ponticus, who appears in several epigrams concerning bad dinners (3.60, 4.85, 9.19), or Zoilus who appears in epigrams under the *os impurum* umbrella (2.41, 2.57, 3.82, 6.91, 11.30, 11.85, 11.92). This is not a rigid system, as Zoilus and Ponticus appear in other poems outside their themes.

of the host has no bearing on the content within the letter. Or, Avitus simply does not know the host so including the name has no meaning to the recipient. Pliny mentions in the letter's opening that he was not particularly close (*minime familiaris*) to the host, so Avitus may not have any prior knowledge of the host even if he was regularly acquainted with those in Pliny's circle. In doing so, he also distances himself from those considered "disgraceful and extravagant" (*sordidum simul et sumptuosum*), thereby protecting his reputation. Pliny admits that such a story is too long to repeat and ultimately of little importance to Avitus (*longum est altius repetere nec refert*). Nonetheless, the overall lack of specificity makes it difficult to determine whether such a dinner occurred, or whether this scene is Pliny's invention. Whatever the case, the opening of the letter immediately fashions Pliny as the archetypal moralistic and philosophical elite.

Scholars have wrestled with the question of the truthfulness of Pliny's letters. Guillemin concludes that all the situations of the letters were fictional due to her analysis of Pliny's language and structure which, she states, show more influence of his literary predecessors than original content.⁴⁷ Sherwin-White disagrees with Guillemin, stating that such an opinion is a "crude approach" when examining the influences of one author on another; such influences should be expected as every author has been influenced by their predecessors.⁴⁸ The unnatural dialogue in this letter (as depicted below) reveals that the letter was polished before its publication. The questions are terse allowing Pliny the room to expound on his ideas without much debate. The scene itself is marked by its vagueness; the host and guest are unnamed, and Pliny chooses to avoid mentioning any specific details concerning how this event came about

⁴⁷ Guillemin 1929.

⁴⁸ Sherwin-White 1998, 3.

(*Longum...refert*). However, “it would require an extraordinary ingenuity to invent so many convincing minor details,” like the aside that the host ranks his friends, “for the setting of so miscellaneous a subject-matter as that of these letters.”⁴⁹ Whether Pliny has such an extraordinary ingenuity is up to the reader to decide. If this scene was entirely designed solely to allow Pliny the opportunity to ponder the *cena inaequalis* question, it may suggest that such unequal practices were, at the very least, common enough that his audience – both Avitus and his public readers – knew of their occurrence.

Pliny records the conversation he has at the dinner with another, also unnamed, dinner guest. In this section, the dialogue seems revised (or at least what Pliny deemed a plausible situation) due to the guest’s curt questions all of which attempt to pick apart Pliny’s argument but lack any real substance or supporting evidence. The mindset of the host is affirmed through the mouth of the guest, through which Pliny is able to disagree with them both while avoiding the social *faux pas* of calling out the host at his own dinner party. In this section, the differing priorities of Pliny and the host become apparent both to Pliny and his readers (Pl. *Ep.* 2.6.3-4):

Animadvertit qui mihi proximus recumbebat, et an probarem interrogavit.⁵⁰ Negavi. “Tu ergo” inquit “quam consuetudinem sequeris?” “Eadem omnibus pono; ad cenam enim, non ad notam invito cunctisque rebus exaequo, quos mensa et toro aequavi.” [4] “Etiamne libertos?” “Etiam; convictores enim tunc, non libertos puto.” Et ille: “Magno tibi constat.” “Minime.” “Qui fieri potest?” “Quia scilicet liberti mei non idem quod ego bibunt, sed idem ego quod liberti.”

⁴⁹ Sherwin-White 1998, 12.

⁵⁰ Sherwin-White 1998 interprets this to mean that the host has constructed multiple *triclinia* and the guest takes notice of different wines served at the different tables, citing Vitruvius 6.7.3 and Athenaeus 2.47 for constructions of multiple *triclinia*. This construction may also appear in Petronius’ *Satyricon* during Trimalchio’s dinner, in which tables are distributed for the purpose of reducing contact with stinky slaves. (*Laudatus propter elegantias dominus “Aequum” inquit “Mars amat. Itaque iussi suam cuique mensam assignari. Obiter et putidissimi servi minorem nobis aestum frequentia sua facient.”* Pet. *Sat.* 34) Brown 1956 concluded there are two *triclinia* used. While Sherwin-White’s reading is a valid possibility, there is nothing in the text that explicitly states multiple *triclinia* are erected at this meal.

The man who was reclining nearest me noticed [all this], and asked whether I approved. I said it did not. “So,” he said, “which practice do you follow?” “I place the same meal before everyone; I invite them to dinner, not to a census, and those whom I have deemed worthy of my table and couch, I regard as equal in all things.” [4] “Even freedmen?” “Indeed; For on this occasion I consider them tablemates, not freedmen.” He responded: “It is a great cost to you.” “Not at all.” “How are you able to do that?” “Because naturally my freedmen do not drink the same as I do, but I drink the same as them.”

This guest, like the host, remains unnamed. He takes notice (*animadvertit*) of this practice, which indicates this is a contested custom. His placement near Pliny (*proximus*) indicates he is of the same elite status. The guest appears to defend the host’s philosophies; questioning the inclusion of freedmen in the elite status and stating such practices must be expensive. Because the guest is benefitting from the system (i.e. receiving high-quality wine) his affirmation of the host’s exclusionary practices is not surprising. He has bought into the system because the system benefits him. On some level, however, the guest must recognize this practice is either novel (cf. *novam societatem* 2.6.7) or not a widely accepted custom, which prompts him to ask Pliny’s opinion on the matter. Pliny promptly retorts that he serves everyone equally, even freedmen, who are equals (*convictores*) when at his table and that his table-mates “do not drink the same as I do, but I drink the same as them.” This openly addresses the host’s and guest’s practice of serving their guests in accordance to their rank and attacks the underlying rationalization of these immoral practices. Pliny explicitly calls out the guest for his inability – or unwillingness – to adopt a humble perspective while likewise painting himself as the arbiter of equality. He reveals the root problem is one of vanity; the unnamed host and guest do not want to be seen consuming anything deemed below their status and, doing so, vice is disguised as virtue.⁵¹ Their priorities lie in protecting their own image and are thereby too preoccupied with other’s perceptions to risk diminishing their perceived status by drinking ordinary wine. Pliny prioritizes building

⁵¹ Whitton, 2013.

community and conviviality around the table over reaffirming his status. Therefore, he does not fear a potential hit to his status by drinking the same low-quality wine as his table-mates. Doing so, he avoids the absurd cost of serving high-quality wine. Their priorities differ; the host and guest prioritize affirming their status through the symbol of wine while Pliny prioritizes building relationships and thriftiness.

The scene seems almost too convenient, and Pliny's responses are too perfect. The guest gladly offers his economic and insecurity-driven justifications for the practice without regard for the impact exclusive dining has on building relationships across the table. Pliny schools him on every point, dismantling his justifications and exposing the guest's vanity. This perfect setup makes it harder to argue that this was a real occurrence. The rest of the conversation is not included in the letter, as if the guest was unable to provide a response to Pliny's winning argument. Pliny's fashions and bolsters his reputation as a modest but equal host.

The remainder of the letter steps back from the scene described in the previous two sections. This closing passage comprises Pliny's final thoughts on the situation along with advice for Avitus in case he finds himself in a similar setting (Pl. *Ep.* 2.6.5-7):

[5] Et hercule si gulae temperes, non est onerosum quo utaris ipse communicare cum pluribus. Illa ergo reprimenda, illa quasi in ordinem redigenda est, si sumptibus parcas, quibus aliquanto rectius tua continentia quam aliena contumelia consulas. [6] Quorsus haec? ne tibi, optimae indolis iuveni, quorundam in mensa luxuria specie frugalitatis imponat. Convenit autem amori in te meo, quotiens tale aliquid inciderit, sub exemplo praemonere, quid debeas fugere. [7] Igitur memento nihil magis esse vitandum quam istam luxuriae et sordium novam societatem; quae cum sint turpissima discreta ac separata, turpius iunguntur. Vale.

[5] And, by Hercules, if you moderate your gluttony, it is not a financial burden to share what you enjoy with others. It is this gluttony, therefore, which must be checked and put in its place if you would be sparing with expenses. You could take care of this better by personal restraint than by insults to others. [6] Why say this? So that you, a young man of exceptional character, are not deceived by

certain men's extravagance at the table that has the appearance of frugality. But it is fitting for my dedication for you to forewarn by this example, however often such an event may occur, as to what you should avoid. [7] Therefore, remember there is nothing more that should be avoided than this new association of luxury and stinginess; these qualities are absolutely dishonorable when they are divided and separated, but more dishonorable when connected. Goodbye.

In this passage, Pliny's motive for writing becomes clear. Whether or not the dinner happened, or if the details of the dinner occurred as he recorded, his objective is to advise Avitus (and be seen offering this advice) against condoning or adopting this practice. Pliny furthers his argument that vanity underlies the host's greed and unwillingness to eat an equal meal; luxury is reserved for the host only to enhance external social perception among those in his social class. Traditional Roman frugality has been warped and weaponized into a tool of division through which selectively applied stinginess (*sordium*) cheapens any prospect at unifying host and guest. He identifies this connection between luxury and stinginess as a new association (*novam societatem*). How "new" this new practice was is undeterminable, but it highlights that this method of dividing dishes based on the guests' worth is practiced often enough, or perhaps is increasing enough in practice, that Pliny felt it pertinent to advise Avitus should he be presented with a similar situation (*quotiens tale aliquid inciderit*). Pliny offers a solution to deal with this bad behavior: to simply not attend the dinner (*debeas fugere*). By curbing his proclivities to excess, Avitus will not fall into the same trap that captured the unnamed guest, but he, like Pliny, will be able to see through the games and maintain the moral high ground. By having the guest character voice a lame defense of the practice, Pliny has armed Avitus with the discursive tools necessary to dismantle the argument which another potential host may use to justify his behavior.

2.2: Selected Epigrams of Martial

Martial addresses similar dilemmas, such as the *cena inaequalis*, that are depicted by Pliny but replaces Pliny's overt moralizing and self-fashioning with a lighter tone and humbler perspective. Although Martial describes his own writing as simple, throughout these poems there are often multiple layers of interwoven jokes and regular allusions to other authors. A hallmark of Martial's poetry is his active involvement in the scene. His epigrams are frequently written in the first person, which makes distinguishing reality from the literary works difficult. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to his persona as 'Martial', but I acknowledge that his persona may not reflect the historical person's experiences. He portrays himself as having equestrian status (3.95) and likewise having barely enough monetary help from his patrons to continually fund his writing and publication. He finds delight in exposing the troubles and vices of both himself and his acquaintances,⁵² and even larger cultural issues. One of these troublesome situations Martial repeatedly finds himself in is the need for a meal.⁵³ Throughout the books, Martial attends a series of dinners with double menus and responds by either complaining about the unjust service or lamenting his situation. The first of these dinners occurs in book one, and, as the publications progress, the dinners become more and more outlandish. This epigram is relatively simple compared to Pliny's letter to Avitus and even Martial's later poems, but in four lines Martial is able to expose Caecilianus' actions as performative and inherently designed to infuriate the guests with his tactless behavior (Mart. 1.20):

Dic mihi, quis furor est? turba spectante vocata
Solutos boletos, Caeciliane, voras.

⁵² Pliny's friendship with Martial did not excuse him from being the subject of some of Martial's epigrams. Upon Martial's death, Pliny wrote a touching letter (*Ep.* 3.21) in which he recites his favorite of these poems where Martial jokes that it is only good to visit Pliny in the evening, once he is relaxed and tired of philosophizing.

⁵³ Watson and Watson 2003, 6; cf. Mart. 1.59.

Quid dignum tanto tibi ventre gulaque precabor?
Boletum qualem Claudius edit, edas.

Tell me, what is this madness? Having invited a crowd of watching guests, you alone, Caecilianus, eat truffles. What fate should I call upon to match such a belly and gullet? May you eat the same truffles Claudius ate.

Caecilianus dines alone (*solus*) despite inviting a number of people to a dinner (*turba vocata*). Caecilianus adds insult to injury by dining not just on ordinary mushrooms,⁵⁴ but specifically truffles (*boletos*). Martial immediately calls such behavior “madness” (*furor*), insinuating Caecilianus has deviated from both the crowd’s and Martial’s expectations of a normal dinner. This *furor* mirrors the invective in the closing line, in which he wishes for these mushrooms to kill Caecilianus, as they did for emperor Claudius.⁵⁵ This almost seems to be more of a spectacle than a dinner; the host seems similar to an actor putting on a show to elicit a response not from guests but from a *turba* – from a crowd. The guests appear to go unserved, instead feasting their eyes on the performance of the host. Caecilianus fails to successfully combine “dinner” with “theatre.” Instead, the event results in a maddening display.

In the following poems, there is more emphasis and description of the actual dinner, unlike in 1.20 and Pliny 2.6. Martial 3.60 introduces Ponticus, a reoccurring name within Martial’s unequal dinner poetry, and his mistreatment of his guest. We see an actual double menu for the first time, differing both in quality, quantity, and exoticness (Mart. 3.60):

Cum vocer ad cenam non iam venalis ut ante,
Cur mihi non eadem, quae tibi, cena datur?
Ostrea tu sumis stagno saturata Lucrino,
Sugitur inciso mitulus ore mihi:
Sunt tibi boleti, fungos ego sumo suillos: 5
Res tibi cum rhombost, at mihi cum sparulo:
Aureus inmodicis turtur te clunibus implet,
Ponitur in cavea mortua pica mihi.

⁵⁴ Rendered elsewhere in Martial’s poetry as *fungi*.

⁵⁵ Claudius was murdered in 54 by mushrooms laced with poison, potentially by his wife, Agrippina. Tac. *Ann.* 12.66-67, Suet. *Claud.* 43.

Cur sine te ceno, cum tecum, Pontice, cenem?
Sportula quod non est, prosit: edamus idem.

10

Since I am no longer invited to dinner for a price as before, why is the same dinner not given to me, as to you? You eat oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake, my mouth is cut sucking on a mussel. [5] Truffles are given to you, I take up hog mushrooms. A turbot is given to you, a small bream to me, a fattened golden turtle dove fills you, a dead magpie in its cage is placed before me. Why do I dine without you, Ponticus, when I dine with you? [10] Let the absence of the *sportula* be a benefit: let us eat the same thing.

Ponticus enjoys a meal of oysters, truffles, turbot, and a golden turtle-dove (*ostrea, boletus, rhombus*, and *aureus turtur*) whereas Martial dines on a mussel, mushrooms suitable for hogs, a small bream, and a dead magpie (*mitulus, fungus, sparulus*, and *pica*). While the quality of Martial's plate obviously pales in comparison to Ponticus' platters, the exoticness of Ponticus' dishes is not as obvious. Excluding the different types of mushrooms, the geographic disparity of the food mirrors its qualitative inequality. The rhombus was caught in the deep ocean, but Martial's bream was harvested from the Italian coasts.⁵⁶ Ponticus' oysters were raised from the Lucrine Lake, but Martial's mussels originate from a nearby stream.⁵⁷ Generic turtledoves were common, but the qualifier of golden (*aureus*) may suggest a more exotic subset.⁵⁸ Martial's magpie was native to Italy. This poem demonstrates that the exoticness of the meal is a tool of division alongside quality and quantity of the dishes served.

⁵⁶ The rhombi (*scophthalmu maximus*) inhabit the Marmara and Black seas, as well as the Aegean at depths from 20-100m. Because of this, harvesting rhombi in the Aegean was incredibly unlikely for ancient fishermen, as their nets could not reach this deep. Thus, the *rhombus* atop Pontius' plate likely came from either the Marmara or Black Sea. However, Martial's *sparus* (gilt-head bream *sparus aurata*) are native to the Italian coast according to Turan et al. 2019; Rossi, Perrone, and Sola 2006.

⁵⁷ *Mitulus* can simply be a 'mussel,' 'crayfish,' or more generally 'river fish.' If we take the broader definition, it is likely that Martial's *mitulus* came from the Tiber, opposed to Ponticus' oysters which are from the Lucrine Lake in southern Italy. This geographic disparity is flipped in Martial 6.11 when the Lucrine oysters reappear, (*tu Lucrina voras, me pascit aquosa peloris*.) Because of this, the point is not that the Ponticus' oysters presumably originate farther than Martial's crayfish, but rather that the oysters are from the Lucrine. Thus, the quality of the oysters from this lake supersedes all others, no matter how exotic other oysters may be.

⁵⁸ Of these subspecies, the laughing dove (*spilopelia senegalensis*) is more golden than the other subspecies with varying hues of yellow, red, and orange coloring their breast and head. This subset of the turtledove is not native to Italy, but instead is found in the Middle East, India, and North Africa. Whether this is the bird that graced Ponticus' plate is undeterminable.

Just a few epigrams later, we find the longest unequal dinner in Martial. Spanning a total of 33 lines, this poem nearly doubles the length of the other poems under the same theme. Multiple aspects of this poem draw on established themes of Petronius' *Satyricon*, whose host, Trimalchio, is even referenced in line 32. This unequal dinner features Zoilus and his lavish displays of wealth; his retinue of slaves, eastern treasures, fancy clothing, and pillows dyed red and green. Martial depicts the host flaunting his wealth and exotic connections at every opportunity, both on and off the table (Mart. 3.82):

Conviva quisquis Zoili potest esse, Summemmianas cenet inter uxores Curtaque Ladae sobrius bibat testa: Hoc esse levius puriusque contendo.	
Iacet occupato galbinatus in lecto	5
Cubitisque trudit hinc et inde convivas Effultus ostro Sericisque pulvillis. Stat exoletus suggeritque ructanti Pinnae rubentes cuspidesque lentisci, Et aestuanti tenue ventilat frigus	10
Supina prasino concubina flabello, Fugaque muscas myrtea puer virga. Percurrit agili corpus arte tractatrix Manumque doctam spargit omnibus membris; Digiti crepantis signa novit eunuchus	15
Et delicatae sciscitator urinae Domini bibentis ebrium regit penem. At ipse retro flexus ad pedum turbam Inter catellas anserum exta lambentis Partitur apri glandulas palaestritis	20
Et concubino turturum natis donat; Ligurumque nobis saxa cum ministrentur Vel cocta fumis musta Massilitanis, Opimianum morionibus nectar Crystallinisque murrinisque propinat.	25
Et Cosmianis ipse fuscus ampullis Non erubescit murice aureo nobis Dividere moechae pauperis capillare. Septunce multo deinde perditus stertit: Nos accubamus et, silentium rhonchis	30
Praestare iussi, nutibus propinamus. Hos Malchionis patimur inprobi fastus,	

Nec vindicari, Rufe, possumus: fellat.

Whoever is able to be a guest of Zoilus would eat among Summemmian women and would drink while sober from the broken pitcher of Leda: this, I reason, is easier and more decent. [5] Garbed in green, he reclines on the sofa, having taken it over, and shoves guests with his elbows on this side and that, propped up on purple silk pillows. His twank stands handing red feathers and lentisc wood [10] toothpicks to his master when he belches. And when he sweats, a concubine, reclining, blows a cool gentle breeze with a green fan, and a young boy puts flies to flight with a myrtle stick. A masseuse runs her hands over his body with deft skill and sends her nimble hands along each limb. [15] A eunuch and expert of the master's urinary habits watches for the signal of snapping fingers and guides the inebriated penis while his master drinks. And he (Zoilus), bending back toward the crowd at his feet, among the puppies licking *foie gras*, [20] divides the neck of a boar among the wrestlers, and gives the thighs of a turtle dove to his concubine, but we are given wine from the Ligurian rocks or grape juice fermented over Massilian smoke. Opimian wine in crystalline and fluorspar cups are given to the slaves. [25] He drenches himself in Cosmian perfume and does not blush to divide gilded mussels among us, of the kind which cheap prostitutes use. Done in by many a half pint, he falls asleep snoring. [30] We recline tableside and are ordered to keep silent while he snores, we salute with a nod. This is the haughtiness we endured from the proud 'Malchio, we cannot be vindicated, Rufus – he sucks.

This unequal dinner differs from the others of Martial simply due to its length. In this poem, Martial explores both the *os impurum* and *cena inaequalis* themes, seemingly straying from his normal trend of “simple jokes.” The poem begins with an unnamed subject – *quisquis* – he who would be able to dine with Zoilus would also eat and drink among the women of the Summoenium, the cheapest class of sex-workers. Such company, however, would be better than Zoilus, Martial posits.⁵⁹ The previously unknown identity of the guests is defined as the plural “us” (*nobis*) at line 22. This is furthered by “we recline” (*accubamus*) in line 30, “we salute” (*propinamus*) in line 31, and “we are able” (*possumus*) in line 33. By the end of the poem, we learn Martial has been at the table all along, and that he is the undefined *quisquis*. His use of self-

⁵⁹ Watson and Watson 2003 also note these women were known for *fellatio*, as seen in 11.61.2 (*Summemmianis inquinatio buccis*). The selection of these sex-workers specifically was likely due to this aspect alone.

deprecation lightens the overall mood, keeping the poem playful while hinting at an underlying invective tone.

The wine Martial and the guests drink originated either from the Ligurian rocks or from Marsilian, both of which are notorious for producing bad wine.⁶⁰ Not only is this wine unsavory, but it is also unaged, described as fresh juice fermented by Massilian smoke (*cocta fumis musta massilitanis*), as opposed to the vintage Opimian wine which was renowned for its quality, even if it was undrinkable by this time.⁶¹ Not only the wine, but the cups are luxurious too, made from crystal and fluorspar (*chrySTALLINIS* and *murrinis*) that were likely imported from the East at a remarkable sum. Cushions and smells reinforce Zoilus' luxurious displays; our first glimpse of Zoilus depicts him reclining on purple cushions.⁶² Zoilus smells of the high-quality Cosmian perfume, while Martial and the guests receive unguents used by lowest of cheap sex-workers (3.82.26-28).

The tools of division extend to Zoilus' servants as well. The servants are equipped to furnish whatever Zoilus requires; whether it be toothpicks, fans, fly swatters, a personal masseuse, or a eunuch ready to tend to his urinary needs.⁶³ The luxuriousness is not limited to the plates but extends to the smallest of details at the dinner. The *exoletus* offers Zoilus a choice of red feathers (*pinnae rubentes*), perhaps coming from a flamingo,⁶⁴ or mastic wood to use as

⁶⁰ Strabo, 202; Pl. *NH* 14.124.

⁶¹ Pl. *NH* 14.6.55.

⁶² Cf. Petr. *Sat.* 38, in which Trimalchio's purple pillows are so luxurious that they are even stuffed with purple colored wool. There are numerous connections between Trimalchio and Zoilus, including naming Zoilus as a "Malchio" in line 32. Either, Martial signals to Petronius' work so that his readers will connect the two as similar characters, or – if we ascribe more agency to Zoilus – Martial has crafted a character that aims to fashion himself into a Trimalchio-esque elite. Nonetheless, the similarities between the two indicate that the readers will connect Zoilus to Petronius' Trimalchio and will thereby have an established expectation of his proclivities.

⁶³ Trimalchio has a slave with similar duties, Petr. *Sat.* 27.

⁶⁴ Both flamingos and the color red were associated with luxury, Pl. *NH* 21.45-6; Suet. *Nero*, 30.3; for flamingos, cf. Thompson 1936 and Toynbee 1973. Trimalchio picks his teeth with a silver quill, cf. Petr. *Sat.* 33.

toothpicks. The green fan-waving slave is exceptionally exotic; both the color of the fan and the duty of fan-waving exhibit Zoilus' eastern proclivities.⁶⁵ Not only is the fan green, but Zoilus himself is dressed in green clothing. While this does indicate he has enough excess wealth to wear dyed clothing, the usage of this color points more to Zoilus' effeminacy than his luxury.⁶⁶ The slaves are treated well, being served fattened turtledoves, but where is the guests' food? Zoilus is so consumed in his personal pampering that he seems to have forgotten his guests are even there. He eventually falls asleep and Martial and the other guests are ordered to keep silent to avoid waking him (3.82.30-31), but are still only served wine, not food. By these decorative items and choice of slaves, Martial resumes the theme established in 3.60 of exotic goods denoting and amplifying the host's luxury.

At the end of the epigram, Martial implies that punishment should be inflicted on Zoilus for being a bad host. This repeats the similar threat made towards Caecilianus in 1.20 that hosting an unequal dinner has consequences; nevertheless, in either case the guests do not bring about this revenge themselves. They are neither escorted out, nor do they leave, and they cannot get revenge: *nec vindicari, Rufe, possumus: fellat*. (3.82.33). *Fellat* insinuates the type of revenge in mind – *irrumare* (to force oral sex) – which would ultimately be ineffective, as this type of revenge would only please a *fellator* (one who practices fellatio).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Watson and Watson 2003.

⁶⁶ Williams (1999, 129) concludes the color green is often associated with effeminacy.

⁶⁷ This use of *irrumo* as revenge comes from Catullus 16.1. Catullus' influence on this last line is also highlighted by Sapsford 2012, where she notes the similarities with Cat. 59: *Rufa Rufulum fellat*, with this line being the only time Catullus uses *fello* thereby furthering this connection. Cf. Watson and Watson 2003, this "was normally a verbal threat, not meant to be carried out in reality. The humor here lies in taking the idea as a literal possibility."

Book four gives us two delightful couplets concerning unequal dinners. The first highlights the financial differences between the meals and follows Pliny's evaluation of the host's actions as a means to reaffirm the meal as a status symbol (Mart. 4.68):

Invitas centum quadrantibus et bene cenas.
Ut cenem invisor, Sexte, an ut invidiam?

You invite [me] to dinner worth a mere hundred quadrantes and you eat well,
Am I invited in order to dine, Sextus, or to envy?

This couplet demonstrates that emotional manipulation is another facet of the unequal dinner.

This echoes Pliny, concisely stating Sextus' underlying goal of the unequal dinner is to remind Martial of Sextus' higher status. Sextus employs an unequal dinner to elicit Martial's response – in this way, the dinner centers around the emotional reaction of the guest in order to function. Without this emotional ploy, if Martial were unmoved by Sextus' expensive display, Sextus would not achieve his goal of affirming his status above Martial.

In the second couplet, Martial returns to dine with Ponticus. Ponticus has learned something from his previous unequal dinner, but he is still unwilling to serve items of equal quality. Instead, he attempts to deceive his guests (Mart. 4.85):

Nos bibimus vitro, tu murra, Pontice. Quare?
Prodat perspicuus ne duo vina calix.

We drink from a glass, but you Ponticus, drink from alabaster. Why? Lest a transparent cup should reveal two wines.

The word used for glass here, *vitro*, denotes their cups were of common quality.⁶⁸ A cup made of alabaster (*murra*) marks its expensiveness. Ponticus is aware that serving different wines is frowned upon, so he hides his higher-quality wine in an opaque alabaster cup. The deception fails because Ponticus has already acquired the reputation of an unequal host. He is neither

⁶⁸ Stern 1999, 441–84.

willing to waste the good wine on his guests, nor willing to shame himself by drinking ordinary wine. His reluctance to give up fine wine in deference to serving an equal course displays the hallmark of Ponticus' character throughout Martial's epigrams; he wears a mask of indifference to hide his materialism.

In this regard, Ponticus resembles the unnamed host of Pliny, whose vanity also prevents him from serving an equal meal. These connections could demonstrate that both authors had independently determined an underlying personality trait of the bad hosts, or Martial has taken inspiration from Pliny and established a recurring trope. Self-centeredness is an essential feature of each host; they either put on a show in which their actions are the main attraction, reserving food and pampering for themselves, or they reaffirm their wealthier status. All of these aspects serve not to endear the guest to the host, but rather to heighten the host's perceived status to everyone *not* around the dinner table.

The next poem features Marcus as yet another unequal host. This poem resembles 3.60 as both begin with a question in the first two lines before turning to the double menu. Likewise, Lucrine oysters make an appearance on the host's plate, but not the guest's. Both end with pleas for the host to alter his behavior, the former due to the lack of the *sportula*, the latter based on a mythological example. Martial begins by referring to Pylades and Orestes who exemplified virtuous companionship. Although their relationship existed within the hierarchy of host and guest, Orestes still managed to treat Pylades with dignity and fairness to which Pylades returned the favor with his unwavering loyalty. By opening with the rhetorical question asking why these customs are relegated to legend, Martial foreshadows his ending plea to emulate proper hospitality (Mart. 6.11):

Quod non sit Pylades hoc tempore, non sit Orestes,
 Miraris? Pylades, Marce, bibebat idem,
 Nec melior panis turdusve dabatur Orestae,
 Sed par atque eadem cena duobus erat.
 Tu Lucrina voras, me pascit aquosa peloris: 5
 Non minus ingenua est et mihi, Marce, gula.
 Te Cadmea Tyros, me pinguis Gallia vestit:
 Vis te purpureum, Marce, sagatus amem?
 Ut praestem Pyladen, aliquis mihi praestet Oresten.
 Hoc non fit verbis, Marce: ut ameris, ama. 10

Do you wonder why there is no Pylades in this era, and no Orestes? Pylades, Marcus, drank the same thing, and better bread or thrush was not placed before Orestes. But there was one and the same meal for both. [5] You eat Lucrine Oysters, I nourish myself on those from Pelorian waters. My taste is no less noble than yours, Marcus. Cadmean Tyre garbs you, dull Gallic garments clothe me: do you wish that I, sagum-clad, respect you, Marcus, when you wear purple? So that I may assume the role of Pylades, someone should fulfill Orestes's place for me. [10] This isn't done with words, Marcus: treat [me] as you would be treated.

A double menu unfolds. Marcus dines on oysters of the highest quality, whereas Martial eats oysters from Pelorus. Although other poems feature exotic foods as a means of dividing host from guest, the inverse is true for oysters: exotic oysters are typically rotten oysters. Pelorus is situated on the north-eastern tip of Sicily, making Marcus' oysters geographically closer to Rome. Oysters of any distant origin are presumably spoiled by the time they reach Italy, as the ancient methods of transporting oysters failed to keep them alive long enough to reach their destination.⁶⁹

The two are also divided by their clothing. Marcus wears purple-dyed clothing, visibly displaying his opulence while Martial wears a sagum; a simple garment worn typically by soldiers solely for its practicality. Martial dressed for the occasion he believed he would experience – a simple dinner – but was instead met with a host clearly reinforcing his sumptuous status.

⁶⁹ Apicius was tasked with solving this issue at the behest of Trajan and supposedly did by transporting them in a “pitch-fumigated vinegar drum” (Apicius, *De Re Conquinaria* 9). But scholars doubt the validity of this, as this was not implemented in regular practice. Cf. Faas 2005.

The final poem in my examination of Martial displays unequal treatment extends beyond the dinner table. In caring for his girlfriend, Lupus has neglected his other responsibilities as a patron. The opening line (*Pauper amicitiae cum sis, Lupe, non es amicae*) suggests that this poem ought to be classified under the *cena inaequalis* theme, though it is doubtful that the reader – both ancient and modern – should expect such an explicit poem to follow. Typically, obscenity is employed to connect with Martial’s Roman readers and to attack those who deviate from accepted sexual norms.⁷⁰ In this poem, Martial targets Lupus’ girlfriend with his obscenities to degrade her in her status as an adulteress (*moecha*). Martial uses a variety of terms to depict both the girlfriend and the client. In reference to the girlfriend, Martial employs *amicae*, *adultera*, *moecha*, and *puellae*. *Adultera* and *moecha* (mistress and tart) are both derogative with reference to her sexual promiscuity which primes the reader to read *amicae* and *puellae* (girlfriend and girl) with a similar scorn. *Amicitiae*, *convivam*, *sodalis*, *cliens*, and *amicus* (friends, guests, comrade, client, and friend, respectively) are all used to describe the client. All of these individually connote an amicable friendship between the patron and client, and therefore can be read ironically. Although Martial does not say it explicitly, the underlying golden rule prevalent in 6.11 is revisited (Mart. 9.2):

Pauper amicitiae cum sis, Lupe, non es amicae,	
Et queritur de te mentula sola nihil.	
Illa siligineis pinguescit adultera cunnis,	
Convivam pascit nigra farina tuum;	5
Incensura nives dominae Setina liquantur,	
Nos bibimus Corsi pulla venena cadī;	
Empta tibi nox est fundis non tota paternis,	
Non sua desertus rura sodalis arat;	
Splendet Erythraeis perlucida moecha lapillis,	
Ducitur addictus, te futuente, cliens;	10
Octo Syris suffulta datur lectica puellae,	
Nudum sandapilae pondus amicus erit.	

⁷⁰ 1.35.3-5; Watson and Watson 2003; Watson 2002, 228-231.

I nunc et miseros, Cybele, praecide cinaedos:

Haec erat, haec cultris mentula digna tuis.

You are a pauper when among friends, Lupus, but you are not like this with your girlfriend and only your dick has nothing to complain about concerning you[r actions]. Your mistress grows fat on vag-shaped siligo breads, while coarse bread feeds your guests. [5] Snow is melted into Setian wine for your girl, but we drink dusky poison of Corsica from the bottle; you purchase a night [with her] with your inheritance, but your deserted comrade can't even plow his own land; your tart - adorned with red gems - shines, [10] and while you're fucking, your client is taken away. A litter supported by eight Syrians is given to your girlfriend, your friend will be carried nude to a simple bier. Go on then, Cybele, and maim that pitiable sodomite: this is the one, this is the dick that's worthy of your knife.

Lupus' stinginess extends from the table to the grave. He feeds his guests coarse bread (*nigra farina*). The verb *pascit* is the same verb one uses when feeding animals – literally putting out to pasture. Not only is the bread of poor quality but it is served with the same gravity as filling a trough. The guests are given wine to wash it down, but the beverage is so harsh it might as well be poison. Though the wine is so bad it's practically unheard of,⁷¹ the insult is furthered by the wine's murkiness (*pulla*). This indicates that the wine has not been strained and is swimming in sediment.

Lupus does not treat his girlfriend the same way he treats his guests. Instead, he gives her breads made from siligo flour (*siligineis*). Siligo is a type of winter wheat grown in Gaul⁷² and was reputed to produce the highest quality of wheat flour available to the Romans.⁷³ Winter wheats are typically high in gluten, thereby producing light, fluffy breads and cakes. Due to the higher quality and longer transport, the price of siligo flour was double that of normal wheat

⁷¹ Henriksen 2012 clarifies that “there is at least some negative ring to *Corsus*, since in the empire Corsica was still considered a less civilized place, suitable for deportations; its wine is not mentioned anywhere else in the whole of classical literature, and perhaps this is Martial's point: Lupus' friends get wine from an out-of-the-way spot, wine such as nobody has ever heard of.”

⁷² Pl. *NH* 20.9.

⁷³ Winter wheats are sown in autumn and grow to the vegetative stage before winter, during which they enter hibernation. The sprouts resume growth in the spring and are typically harvested in mid to late summer. This process produces wheats with higher gluten content than spring sown wheats. Jasny (1944, 120-122) states that the harsher winters in Gaul were better suited to produce winter wheats, whereas the Mediterranean winters were too mild, the hibernation stage was much shorter which produced winter wheats with lower gluten content and the crop would reach the harvest stage by spring, not late summer. Because of this, siligo was not grown in Italy.

flour.⁷⁴ But this is not just any loaf of siligo bread. Lupus procured high-quality bread in the shape of female genitalia (*cunnis*). Baking breads into obscene shapes is not unheard of in the ancient world, but our two other literary references contain phallic-shaped breads.⁷⁵ There is potentially more artistry in creating a *cunnus*-shaped loaf than a phallic one, thus the price of this loaf of bread must have been extremely high. The quality of wine Lupus gives to his girlfriend matches the quality of the siligo bread. In Martial's age, Setia was known almost exclusively for producing high-quality wine.⁷⁶ Unlike the guests, her wine is free from floating dregs as it was strained (*liquantur*). Like the bread, Lupus does not stop at merely serving high-quality wine, but goes even further by cooling it with snow. Snow was imported from Italian mountain tops, at a presumably lofty sum.

In the rest of the poem, Lupus' pampering of his girlfriend inversely correlates with his decreasing concern for his friends and clients. He buys her gems, pays for her time with his inheritance, and pays for a lavish litter to carry her around. Meanwhile, his friends face losing their land, the prospect of a paltry funeral, and his client is carried off for unpaid debts.⁷⁷ This poem reveals the result of the 'bad host' lifestyle. He who chooses to direct his lavish displays on a single target rescinds proper Roman priorities and debases traditional hospitality. In doing so, he becomes increasingly stingy in his other relationships, ultimately developing a willful ignorance of the monetary plight of his friends and clients. Lupus has descended so far into his ignorance and greed that he no longer has the agency to turn away from this path. The invocation

⁷⁴ Jasny (1947, 191–92) also cites that siligo flour was of a lower extraction which increases the costs (opposed to wheat flour of higher extraction). The water retention capacity of siligo was much lower than other types of flour which also raised the cost. Thornton (1971, 628) concludes common wheat flour was worth 4/8 denarius per *modius* under Domitian.

⁷⁵ Mart. 14.70, Pet. *Sat.* 60.4.

⁷⁶ Henriksen 2012 adds that this wine is of such high quality that it was a favorite of Augustus.

⁷⁷ Henriksen 2012.

of Cybele underlines his descent into madness; self-mutilation is the only rational step for one so far removed from Roman values.

2.3 Juvenal, Satire 5

Juvenal's 5th satire marks the third genre and author within the unequal dinner theme. Throughout sixteen Satires, which were written in the early second century, the *cena* becomes a common backdrop. Juvenal's style combines the moralizing undertones of Pliny with the invective tone that Martial preferred to avoid. Juvenal takes thematic inspiration from his literary predecessors but offers his own interpretation of the *cena inaequalis* in Satire 5. As with Martial, it will never be clear the degree to which 'Juvenal the individual' and 'Juvenal the persona' align. For the purpose of simplicity, I will refer to Juvenal's persona as "Juvenal." Because he does not face the same length constrictions of an epigram or letter, his audience is treated to a full dinner that integrates all of the tools of division within the works of Martial and Pliny: quality, quantity, exoticness, slaves, cups, and performance. Unlike Martial and Pliny, Juvenal does not attend the dinner. Juvenal's absence from the dinner allows him to exploit the motif without passing a judgement on those in attendance. Juvenal frames the narrative as his attempt to discourage Trebius from accepting Virro's dinner invitation. The warning itself culminates in a series of imagined events in which Virro has predesigned increasingly humiliating plates by utilizing every tool of division in the bad host's playbook. He routinely criticizes both Virro and Trebius for their involvement: the former for serving a double menu and the latter for even considering accepting the invitation, thereby degrading himself by attending an unequal dinner. The dinner itself proceeds in pairs of unequal courses, some of which are so unequal that they are only enjoyed by the host, depicted in the following chart:

Virro's Menu	Trebius' Menu
Fine wine	Cheap wine
Soft white bread	Hard moldy bread
Lobster, asparagus with olive oil dressing	A single egg stuffed with a prawn, cabbage with lamp-oil dressing
Imported mullet and eel	Roman sewer fish
Foie gras	-
Fattened poultry	-
Boar	-
Exotic truffles	-
Mushrooms	Toadstools
Ripe apples	Rotten apples ⁷⁸

Juvenal advises his addressee early on in the poem that satiating your appetite with your patron's measly rations is more humiliating than eating scraps left for stray dogs. Trebius, the neglected client (5.16), has been invited to dinner only because the host, Virro, has yet to fill the last – and lowest – seat. The unequal dinner begins with drinking different qualities of wine. Trebius' wine is of such a poor taste and of such a high alcohol content that it pushes the guests over the edge into making fools of themselves. Although it is normally part of the hosts' duties to ensure their guests do not become too inebriated, Virro instead guarantees that this spectacle will occur. Through the neglect of his expected duties, Virro⁷⁹ sets the standard for the rest of the dinner well before the first course of food is served (Juv. *Sat.* 5.24-25, 30-32):

Qualis cena tamen! vinum quod sucida nolit
 lana pati: de conviva Corybanta videbis.

What a dinner! [You – Trebius - will be served] wine that fresh wool wouldn't wish to put up with: you will see Corybants⁸⁰ [made] from the guests.

ipse capillato diffusum consule potat,
 calcatamque tenet bellis socialibus uvam,

⁷⁸ This chart is an adaptation of the chart present in Braund's commentary. Her chart includes details concerning the different serving vessels, slaves, and water.

⁷⁹ Gowers 1997 posits that Juvenal selected Virro as it resembles *virus*, or snake-poison, as Virro "feeds the client on snake-like eels and he also serves him oil only good for warding off *serpentibus atris*" in line 91. Braund suggests the name is an ironic evocation of manliness.

⁸⁰ The Corybants (*Corybanta*, *Κορύβαντες*) were priests of Cybele who were known for their wild, drunken dancing.

cardiaco numquam cyathum missurus amico;

[Virro] drinks wine bottled when the consuls had long hair and holds trodden grapes from the Social Wars, and never provides a cup for his friend with indigestion.⁸¹

The personified fresh wool (*sucida lana*) refers to wool which was used in ancient medicine to apply topical sterilizing treatments.⁸² This suggests Trebius' wine is even poorer quality than the cheap wine used by doctors.⁸³ Despite the bad taste, the wine is potent enough to make the drinker heavily intoxicated, turning the guests themselves into the dinner's entertainment. This conflation of public spectacle in a private setting is orchestrated by Virro, similar to the organization and control traditionally held over violence in the arena.⁸⁴ Throughout the dinner, Trebius will continue to be the centerpoint of Virro's spectacle. Conversely, Virro's wine is marked by its age as it originates from the era of the Social War, making the wine roughly 200 years old. Aged wine is not always better wine, as wine production of the modern age far exceeds that of ancient fermentation. Wine this old would have congealed to the viscosity of honey and would have acquired a taste so sour that imbibing it required mixing it with plenty of water.⁸⁵ Virro, like Ponticus and Pliny's host, drinks this wine to communicate and reinforce his superior status, not for the taste. Furthermore, even if the wine was worth sharing, Virro does not share it. He differs from Pliny's host here; he does not share his wine among his fellow elites, nor would he share even when a "friend" is suffering from indigestion.

Akin to 4.85, the quality of the cups matches the wine within. Virro drinks from fancy, bejeweled goblets, which Trebius will likely be barred from using. Should the luxury grace his

⁸¹ *Cardiaco* was a kind of indigestion that included fever and perspiration. Seneca (*Ep.* 15.3.4) records that the life of a dyspeptic is to drink and to sweat (*bibere et sudare vita cardiaci est*). Pliny (*NH* 23.1.24) records that indigestion was treated with wine.

⁸² Pl. *NH* 29.30.

⁸³ Braund 1996.

⁸⁴ Cf. Coleman 1998, 80.

⁸⁵ Pl. *NH* 14.55.

hands, a slave will watch over Trebius' fingernails like a physical manifestation of Virro's distrust with sub-elite clients (Juv. *Sat.* 5.37-41):

Ipse capaces
Heliadum crustas et inaequales berullo
Virro tenet phialas: tibi non committitur aurum,
vel si quando datur, custos adfixus ibidem,
qui numeret gemmas, unguet observet acutos.

The man himself holds capacious goblets encrusted with amber and uneven with beryl. The gold is not entrusted to you, or if one is handed over, there is a guard who is standing watch right there to count the gems and observe your sharp fingernails.

Instead of bejeweled golden goblets, Trebius will drink from cracked, second-hand pottery to avoid any potential of harming the host's lavish dishware. The humiliation is furthered by the type of slave chosen to wait on Trebius, who ignores him. This slight degrades Trebius from a free-born man to a status below a slave. This marks the first example of status degradation on top of reinforced sub-elite status (Juv. *Sat.* 5.46-48, 52-65):

tu Beneventani sutoris nomen habentem
siccabis calicem nasorum quattuor ac iam
quassatum et rupto poscentem sulphura vitro.

You will drink from cups bearing the name of the shoemaker at Beneventanus, with its four nozzles, already cracked, and seeking Sulphur-tipped matches in exchange for broken glass.

tibi pocula cursor
Gaetulus dabit aut nigri manus ossea Mauri
et cui per mediam nolis occurrere noctem, 55
clivosae veheris dum per monumenta Latinae.
flos Asiae ante ipsum, pretio maiore paratus
quam fuit et Tulli census pugnacis et Anci
et, ne te teneam, Romanorum omnia regum
frivola. quod cum ita sit, tu Gaetulum Ganymedem
respice, cum sities. nescit tot milibus emptus 60
pauperibus miscere puer, sed forma, sed aetas
digna supercilio. quando ad te pervenit ille?
quando rogatus adest calidae gelidaeque minister?

quippe indignatur veteri parere clienti
quodque aliquid poscas et quod se stante recumbas. 65
Maxima quaeque domus servis est plena superbis.

And your cup will be handed to you by a Gaetulian runner or the bony hand of a dark Moroccan, who you'd not want to run into in the middle of the night while being carried past the tombs of the hilly Latin Way. [55] The flower of Asia stands before the man himself, acquired for a price higher than the assets of warriors Tullus and Ancus and, lest I keep you, all the knickknacks of the kings of Rome. Since that's the way it is, you must look for your African Ganymede when you are thirsty. [60] A boy purchased for so many thousands does not know how to mix drinks for paupers. But his handsomeness and his youth justify his arrogance. When will that waiter come to you? When will the server of hot and cold water respond to your request? By all means, he is annoyed at obeying an old client who is asking for things, reclining while he stands.[65] The greatest households are full of haughty slaves.

While Virro reserves the prettiest slaves for himself, Trebius is served by visibly disagreeable slaves. Not only are these slaves unappealing to Trebius' eye, but they also ignore him. The second to last sentence signals that the slaves in Virro's house have a degree of agency for they actively avoid meeting Trebius' gaze (*tu ... respice, cum sitis*) and are resentful (*indignatur*) of fulfilling requests. Virro does not correct this behavior. His silent approval of the slave's haughtiness implies that Trebius ought to be up and serving along with the slaves, assuming he should be elevated to their status. If read in this way, the closing line of this passage may also be applied to Trebius; he is too proud to adequately fulfill his servile role within Virro's domain.

After the opening round of mismatched drinks and attending slaves, an appetizer of bread is served. The differences between the breads exemplifies Virro's attention to detail concerning the unequal quality of each pairing of plates. His actions appear to be neglectful of his client's needs, but instead they are a calculated attempt to reinforce Trebius' lower status by serving him the lowest quality of bread available (*Juv. Sat. 5.68-71*):

ecce alius quanto porrexit murmure panem
vix fractum, solidae iam mucida frusta farinae,
quae genuinum agitent, non admittentia morsum;

sed tener et niveus mollique siligine fictus
servatur domino ...

Look at this other servant - with how much grumbling he offers bread, hardly breakable, pieces of solid flour already moldy which work your molars and prevent you from taking a bite; but soft and snowy [bread] made from the nicest siligo flour is served to the host...

The bread (*panem*) placed before Trebius is tough, moldy, and barely edible. While it is unclear what flour was used to make the bread, it is reasonable to conclude that it was not made from a wheat flour. The higher gluten content in wheat flours allow the bread to rise better than grains with lower gluten content, and Trebius' bread is hardly breakable (*vix fractum*). It is likely that this bread was made with barley flour which has a low gluten content, is relatively cheap, easily attained,⁸⁶ and was regarded as the lowest quality grain,⁸⁷ all of which fit thematically. Virro's bread, however, is delicate and snowy (*tener et niveus*) because this was made from siligo flour. This completes the appetizer. Already, Trebius has been humiliated with drunkenness, distrusted by both his host and the retinue of slaves, and reduced from a free, sub-elite to a status unworthy of a slave's attention.

As the dinner proceeds, the disparity between the dishes becomes greater and each plate serves as a reflection of the recipient. Virro's first dish, lobster, arrives looking down upon the guests in scorn. Trebius' plate attempts to imitate Virro's, but the crayfish simply cannot compare to the lobster. The staged carelessness of Trebius' courses serves to humiliate Trebius and alienate him from the rest of the high-status dinner goers as it directly reinforces his sub-elite

⁸⁶ Barley was (and still is) grown near Rome, and typically outyields wheat. Jasny (1950, 228-232) writes that although wheat was the preferred grain, barley was more resilient and could be planted in land unsuitable for wheat production. Because of this, it was an exceptionally common staple throughout Italy, perhaps more common than wheat among the sub-elite classes.

⁸⁷ Pl. *NH* 20.9, cf. Suetonius who records (*Aug.* 24.2) from Augustus that barley rations were used as a punishment for those who fled from battle; and Polybius (*Histories* 6) who records soldiers are punished with rations of barley instead of wheat, and the shame of eating barley rations warns other soldiers from perpetrating similar mischief. Based on the connotations with barley evidenced by these three sources, it seems likely that Virro would serve Trebius a loaf of barley instead of wheat.

status. It signals that while Trebius attempts to emulate men of a higher status, such imitations are immediately recognized as failed attempts to transcend his current status (Juv. *Sat.* 5.80-88):

Aspice quam longo distinguat pectore lancem
quae fertur domino squilla, et quibus undique saepta
asparagus, qua despiciat convivia cauda,
dum venit excelsi manibus sublata ministri.
set tibi dimidio constrictus cammarus ovo
ponitur exigua feralis cena patella. 80
ipse Venafrano piscem perfundit: at hic qui
pallidus adfertur misero tibi caulis olebit
lanternam;

Look at the lobster that is served to your patron, look how it distinguishes the dish by its long breast, and with what fine asparagus it is garnished all round; and with what a tail it seems to look down on the assembled guests, as it arrives, raised on high by the hands of the tall slave. But a common crayfish is served to you, scantily bound into half a sliced egg, a meal fit only for the dead on a small plate. [80] The man himself drowns his fish in Venafran oil, but the pale cabbage set before pitiable you will stink of the lamp.

Both Trebius' food and plate appear to be an afterthought, but this staged carelessness is a careful calculation by Virro. He orchestrates a rare element of unity between himself and Trebius by having both of their plates stuffed to the brim. This superficial commonality is undermined by the different plate sizes; Virro's enormous lobster takes up the nearly the entire plate with asparagus crowding the remaining room. Trebius' crayfish appears to be a miniaturized imitation of lobster, and the plate itself is diminutive. Each detail of Virro's performative carelessness, beginning with the initial invitation and continuing throughout the meal, aim to chip away the guests' reputation. Trebius' explicit goal is to have a meal and redeem the previous favors given to his patron (5.12-14), but the unwritten aspiration of each attendee at a *cena* of mixed social strata is to network. The funeral dinner served to Trebius could look forward to the dubious mushrooms in line 146 but could generally represent the demise of his reputation. The meal and ensuing humiliation kill any chance of connecting with powerful elites, who watch the maltreatment of Trebius as if it is a dinner-theatre. Furthermore, under the pretext that attendance

at an elite's table heightens one's perceived status among their current sub-elite community, the treatment buries the possibility of bettering his reputation among his own social circles.

In second course of seafood, Juvenal hypothesizes that Virro will receive either a mullet or an eel from distant waters while Trebius is forced to make do with a fish native to Rome. Like the previous seafood course, these fish mirror their consumers. Virro enjoys the spoils of a conquered ocean; gluttony drives Virro as it drives rampant overfishing. Both Trebius and his sewer-born fish are underfed and imprisoned by the Romans positioned above them (Juv. *Sat.* 5.92-96, 5.99-106):

Mullus erit domini, quem misit Corsica vel quem
Tauromenitanae rupes, quando omne peractum est
et iam defecit nostrum mare, dum gula saevit,
retibus adsiduis penitus scrutante macello 95
proxima, nec patimur Tyrrhenum crescere piscem,

Your patron will have a mullet sent from Corsica, or the rocks of Tauromenium, since all our own waters have been ransacked and left destitute, while gluttony rages, while the market searches the neighboring waters with its unwearied nets, [95] and we do not allow the Tyrrhenian fish to mature.

Virroni muraena datur, quae maxima venit
gurgite de Siculo; nam dum se continet Auster, 100
dum sedet et siccat madidas in carcere pinnas,
contemnunt mediam temeraria lina Charybdim.
vos anguilla manet longae cognata colubrae,
aut glacie aspersus maculis Tiberinus, et ipse
vernula riparum, pinguis torrente cloaca. 105
et solitus mediae cryptam penetrare Suburae.

Virro is given the largest kind of eel that comes from the Sicilian whirlpool. [100] For while Auster keeps himself close, while he sits and dries his wet feathers in prison, the heedless nets do not fear the middle of Charybdis. An eel, kin to snakes, awaits you, or a fish from the Tiber, spotted from the winter's ice, itself a home-grown slave of the bank, fattened by the stream of the sewer, [105] and accustomed to enter the drain of the middle of the Subura.

The word used to describe the Trebius' fish is notable: *vernula*. A *verna* is a slave born into the master's house and generally regarded as a point of pride due to the economic return on

investment. In this context, *vernula* indicates the fish is both domestic and imprisoned in the sewers of Rome. The diminutive form signals its malnourishment and overall size. In this context, the fish parallels Trebius' status. Trebius is literally underfed at this dinner, and metaphorically unable to ascertain his fullest potential as an individual due to the lack of economic nourishment on the part of his patron. Because of these improper conditions, both Trebius and the *vernula* are insignificant to their providers – Virro and Rome, respectively – when both could serve a greater role, in another social stratum or on another dinner plate. Rome's sewers have imprisoned the *vernula*, preventing it from experiencing the freedom of the open ocean. Trebius, although technically a free man (he has three names, 5.127), is constrained by the neglect of his patron. What little Trebius receives from his patron is of equivalent quality to the refuse which feeds the sewer fish. Nevertheless, both fish and client are inherently Roman; born, fed, and raised on the scraps of the city above whereas Virro's foreign fillet only reaches Rome as a prize of conquest.

Three more plates are given to Virro in quick succession, each one not lacking in ostentation, but lacking in description. There is no mention of plates, however paltry, being served to Trebius. This is a stark departure from Juvenal's usual digressive vignettes; throughout the Satires, Juvenal makes a custom of taking an established theme and expanding it to its theoretical limits. Thus, the lack of description is not a literary oversight. The omission serves as further method of humiliation (Juv. *Sat.* 5.114-116):

Anseris ante ipsum magni iecur, anseribus par
altilis, et flavi dignus ferro Meleagri
spumat aper.

Before the man himself is the liver of a huge goose; a fat capon, as big as a goose;
and a wild boar froths at the mouth, worthy of the spear of the yellow-haired
Meleager.

The meat dishes are normally the climax of the *cena*, but Juvenal does not even give them three entire lines. Why does Juvenal neglect the opportunity to expound on the loftiness of Virro's meal, or showcase different ways in which Trebius will be humiliated by his food? The most attention is paid to the boar (*aper*), who is a worthy prey to the legendary Meleager, thereby implying that Virro is on the same level as Meleager. Virro's arrogance is reinforced, but not developed. Instead of humiliating Trebius with a plate of goose feet or raw chicken, the greater insult is to not feed him anything. Each of Virro's plates are overfed: the liver of geese is fattened by overfeeding, a capon is a fattened rooster, and the boar is of literal legendary size. Trebius, served nothing at what should be the highest point of the meal, is dehumanized to the point of being neglected more than the animals raised for slaughter.

Juvenal resumes his detailed description of the double menu with the next course of differing qualities of mushrooms. Here, Juvenal takes influence from the diction of Martial 3.60, and combines it with the punchline of Martial 1.20 into the only instance of similar dishes between Virro and Trebius (Juv. *Sat.* 5.146-148):

Vilibus ancipites fungi ponentur amicis,
boletus domino, sed quales Claudius edit
ante illum uxoris, post quem nihil amplius edit.

Dubious mushrooms will be placed before the poor clients, a truffle before the master, but the kind that Claudius ate before the one from his wife, after which he ate nothing more.

As the boar elevated Virro to legendary status, the truffle raises him to the same stratum as the emperor. Juvenal sets the reader up to hope that Virro will eat the truffle (*boletus*) that is the same kind which killed the emperor (*sed quales Claudius edit*) and put an end to his mind games and humiliating ploys. Alas, these hopes are dashed with the enjambed phrase in 148 which specifies these truffles are like the ones eaten before Claudius' killer mushrooms. Trebius does not get such a lucky break, as his mushrooms are denoted as potentially hazardous (*ancipites*). If

the staged carelessness of the previous dishes is perceived by Trebius to be a standard level of neglect concerning his food, and this perceived neglect carries to Virro's selection of mushrooms, then Trebius must wonder whether such mushrooms are a death sentence. The previous plates, while disgusting, were likely to cause indigestion but pose no real danger to one's life. While the guests may lament their pitiable status and food, up to this point there is only a danger to their reputation. Once Virro crosses this line by issuing them a dish with the potential to shorten their lifespan, he provokes the ultimate surge of anger. Although Trebius' anger is not fully realized until 159-160, when Trebius is compelled to "pour out bile alongside tears and give a long hiss through clenched teeth" (*per lacrimas effundere bilem/cogaris pressoque diu stridere molari*), this marks the climax of events orchestrated to enrage Trebius.⁸⁸ The next and final course, dessert, functions to remind Trebius of his subordinate status and permanently assign him to the role predestined by Virro.

Neither Pliny nor Martial depicted dessert, which commonly consisted of fruit and nuts, as a part of the unequal dinner. Juvenal takes on the task that Martial and Pliny neglected and combines all the previous tools of division into one vignette. At Virro's table, dessert consists of apples; his own equivalent to mythological delicacy, while Trebius' apples serve to further dehumanize him from his present status beneath livestock into the lowest form of animal: the performing monkey. Coupled with the reference to emperor in the preceding section, Juvenal drives home Virro's depiction as a tyrant, whose repeated attempts at humiliating Trebius make him no better than the monkey's master (Juv. *Sat.* 5.149-157):

Virro sibi et reliquis Virronibus illa iubebit
poma dari, quorum solo pascaris odore, 150
qualia perpetuus Phaeacum autumnus habebat,
credere quae possis subrepta sororibus Afris:

⁸⁸ Keane 2015, 63-64.

tu scabie frueris mali, quod in aggere rodit
qui tegitur parma et galea, metuensque flagelli
discit ab hirsuta iaculum torquere capella. 155
Forsitan inpansae Virronem parcere credas.
Hoc agit, ut doleas;

Virro will order apples to be served to himself and his brother Virros; apples on whose fragrance alone you could be nourished, [150] such as the eternal autumn of the Phaeacians produced; or such as you might believe were stolen from the Hesperides. You will enjoy some scabby crabapple, such as is munched at the promenade by a monkey equipped with buckler and helmet, who, fearing the whip, learns to hurl his javelin from the shaggy goat's back. [155] Perhaps you believe Virro is being careful with expenses - he does this so that you'll suffer.

While the hosts of Pliny and Martial conceal their goal under the excuse of thriftiness, Juvenal pulls back the curtain to reveal Virro's goal – suffering. This solidifies Trebius' status as sub-human. He is deemed to be worth even less than that of the overfed livestock; his place at the dinner holds the same significance as a performing monkey. If the served food continues to act as a mirror to characteristics of Trebius' nature, then this vignette exposes Trebius' underlying motivator – fear. The monkey is generally ignorant: it understands its world through “good” and “bad” actions as determined by receiving food or the whip, respectively (*metuensque flagelli*). This black-and-white depiction of reality is a simulation created by the whim of the owner. Trebius, similarly, is unable to determine that the dinner is “bad,” as evidenced by the fact that Juvenal spends 150 lines explaining that the food served is the whip in disguise rather than being a treat for the client's good deeds. If the monkey had reason, it would recognize that its owner is a tyrant and its sole purpose under his totalitarian rule is to appease the master. But what other options does the monkey have? If it decides to stay within the tyrannical structure by seeking another owner, it could find one who ideally would be less domineering. But this is not guaranteed, and the new owner could potentially be even more overbearing. Should it decide to run away from the abusive master, it lacks the necessities the tyrant currently provides; moderate safety from external forces, and the assurance of food even if it is as payment for performance.

Like the monkey, Trebius finds comfort in tyranny. As the saying goes, Virro is the “devil he knows.” Trebius’ choice to abstain from the dinner party has the potential to upend what little security he has. He is able to find comfort within his current reality, however humiliating, because there is a certain comfort in fulfilled expectations.

This vignette uncovers the underlying motivations of the author as well. Juvenal has assumed the motif and taken influence from Pliny and Martial regarding the tools of division present at the dinner table, but he expands the scope of the dinner into a critique of the tyrannical aspects potentially present (if not prevalent) within the patron-client system. Juvenal’s *cena* is not about hunger or food, but tyrannical people wielding food as a whip to beat their clients into submission in order to dispel any doubt concerning the fracturing hierarchical social systems surrounding *amicitia*.

Chapter Three: The Silent Social Critique

What are these authors attempting to do by writing these letters, epigrams, and satires? By the time of Juvenal, the *cena inaequalis* theme has coalesced into a full-fledged subgenre of Roman literature which depicts a pessimistic perspective on the elite social climate. In this literary world, there appears to be little – if any – benefit in attending a dinner of mixed social status. In order to explore the social function of these texts, it is necessary to first frame the author's ideas within their respective genres. Gibson and Morrison identify the structure of a letter as the primary signifier of a work's adherence to the genre,⁸⁹ and describe the primary agenda of a letter as didactic. Within the genre, Pliny's letters are remarkably inclusive. His style and vocabulary are accessible to non-elite readers rather than excluding them.⁹⁰ He teaches his readers the rules of inclusive social conduct within the literary sphere, and – through publication – expands his audience and teachings beyond his social circle, furthering the inclusivity he promotes. Such inclusivity is on full display in 2.6; the host's fault lies in including the vices of luxury and meanness as instructors of social dynamics, instead of promoting an inclusive atmosphere among all his guests.

The epigram has a long and varied history, so attempting to confine it to a rigid definition within a particular genre is inherently problematic.⁹¹ Martial's extensive corpus plays within and builds upon all the subgenres of the Greek epigram set by his Hellenistic predecessors, resisting a

⁸⁹ Gibson and Morrison 2007, 1-17.

⁹⁰ Morello 2007, 169-190.

⁹¹ Sullivan 1991, 80.

narrow characterization of his agenda.⁹² The selection of epigrams presented in this thesis can be categorized under the “abusive and satirical epigram” umbrella due to their content detailing the mistreatment of guests, the employment of an invective tone, and the overt leveling of threats against the host’s abuses.

Satiric authors hybridize various techniques and agendas through which characteristics of distortion, performance, and didactic goals are displayed.⁹³ Juvenal himself states “whatever people do, prayers, fear, anger, pleasures, joy, and goings-on, is the fodder of my little book” (*Quidquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas, / gaudia, discursus, nostri farrago libelli est.* 1.85-86). This claim presents Juvenal’s work as one that addresses the individual, but reflects on major Roman institutions. Virro and Trebius are individual characters, but function as tools utilized to investigate the failures of the patron-client system.

The distorted and reconstructed version of reality present within each of these works protects the authors and allows them to criticize the problems perceived in their actual reality. These texts expose the corruption in the patron-client system in three major ways: 1) they depict the breakdown of proper decorum by the deviation from traditional societal roles, 2) they reveal the normalization of this misbehavior through the admission that this breakdown of proper decorum is long term, and 3) they divulge the fundamental lack of communication between host and guest, and thereby between patron and client. From there, the authors take on a didactic role and offer solutions to the long term problems, but their solutions do not seem to be enough to address the root of the tension felt between patron and client. Therefore, there is an additional

⁹² Sullivan (1991, 81-82) writes that the Categories of the Greek epigram as established by Cephalas are: votive inscriptions and dedications, epitaphs or tomb inscriptions, amatory and pederastic, epideictic, ekphrastic, reflections and advice on life and morality, convivial pieces, abusive and satirical epigrams.

⁹³ Keane 2006, 4-5.

nuance to the impact these texts have by modeling a redistribution of agency through which balance can begin to be sought and the tension between patron and client may begin to be ameliorated.

The breakdown of proper decorum is depicted through distortion and exaggeration. Despite the differences between their genres, each author constructs a literary world utilizing satiric techniques. The first manner of this construction is the intentional distortion of reality. Pliny's representation of the events in the letters are distorted by means of his practice of revising and polishing each letter prior to their publication. The vague description of the dinner and Pliny's lack of relationship with the host coupled with the perfect circumstance to elucidate his ideas delivers a constructed version of reality. Martial's epigrams depend on a "paradoxical relationship with reality."⁹⁴ The birdcage containing the dead magpie placed before Martial in 3.60 is certainly not to be taken as a literal representation of Martial's tablesetting, but ought to be understood as an exaggeration that highlights the discrepancy between Martial's and Ponticus' plates. Juvenal's depiction of the dinner is an entirely hypothetical account of what could happen should Trebius accept Virro's invitation. Exaggeration occurs at both ends of the spectrum; the too-perfect set-up in the *Letters* devolves to the boondoggle depicted in the *Satires*.

None of the authors are constrained to a single perspective in the *cena inaequalis* motif; the texts are not strictly recordings of conversation, nor personal accounts, nor lectures, yet they intertwine certain attributes of all these forms in their portrayal of the unequal dinner.⁹⁵ Pliny utilizes his personal account as an allegory to depict the problem in a situation and genre which

⁹⁴ Cloud (1989, 206) clarifies: "For example, the jokes about wine being cheaper and less valuable than drinking water in Ravenna (3.56-57) depend for their point on the fact, borne out by Strabo's account of the town (5.1.7), that there was no local source of fresh drinking water there." In other words, it seems too absurd to be true, but there is an element of truth in the absurdity.

⁹⁵ Hooley 2007, 7.

suspends the readers' sense of disbelief. By featuring what Pliny would do if he were the host in contradiction to the host's practices at the dinner, he represents both the host's and guest's perspectives. Martial's poems act like snapshots of his personal interactions but are restrained to one-sided conversations and further limited by featuring only the guest's perspective. Although Trebius and Virro never speak to one another across the *triclinium*, Juvenal addresses them both individually. Juvenal is not a guest yet he presents the Satire as if he himself has dined at Virro's table. Because of this, he represents each side's viewpoints (that is, host and guest) alongside a third, outside perspective of the narrator. Every work approaches the same *topos* through a multifaceted perspective. The result is far from a depiction of everyday life, but is a quasi-fantastical literary construction. This multifaceted approach allows the authors to ground their work within the familiar while extending it into the imagined.

The author's frequent use of exaggeration hinders our understanding of how familiar the situations depicted in these texts would have been to the Roman audience. Although it is impossible to determine which aspects of these works explicate the author's actual reality, nevertheless, these works are still grounded by their lived experience. The Roman readers, to some degree, would already be sensing a tension in the patron-client relationship and the changing roles within. The authors seize this tension, untangle it, and weave a fantasy from the threads of reality, representing what will occur if the tension is not checked by the culture at large. This common grounding provides the foundation for the jokes, which are promptly warped, exaggerated, and spun in order to stretch their created reality to its hypothetical limits. Doing so provokes the reader to buy into the author's created reality. Pliny's letter and Martial's epigrams capture this social tension felt by not only by the authors but their audience as

well. Juvenal combines their approaches but takes it a step further by weaving a depiction of how appalling and unbalanced this system will become if left unchecked.

It is not a stretch to state that the authors criticize the patron-client relationship considering all of these hosts fail to perform their expected duties. They adopt the practice of ranking their friends and implement this segregation by serving food appropriate to the guest's status. They flaunt their luxury rather than share their wealth. Their behavior typifies the hosts' arrogance and aims to bolster their status over their guests. The relationship between host and guest is not based on friendship, nor attempting to create one, but instead it is rooted in calculation and egotism.⁹⁶ Not only do the hosts perform this misbehavior, but it is reinforced by the guests themselves. Pliny converses with a fellow guest who ratifies the host's actions. The "other Virros" (*reliquis Virronibus*, 5.149) never speak out against the mistreatment of Trebius. Any attempt to break down these barriers are rebuked by the slaves who stand guard should Trebius be given a gemstone encrusted goblet or reach for non-moldy bread.⁹⁷ Trebius himself, Juvenal alleges, likewise enables Virro's behavior by accepting the ridicule and humiliation.

Throughout all of the epigrams, the letter, and the Satire, the host and guest never directly converse at the dinner.⁹⁸ Pliny's conversation occurs with a fellow guest; the host is excluded (or excludes himself) from the conversation. Each of Martial's epigrams names one individual and some (1.20, 3.60, 4.68, 4.85, 6.11) pose direct questions to the various hosts yet no responses to these questions are recorded within the epigrams. Furthermore, throughout the dinner with Zoilus (3.82), the host only interacts with his slaves – getting a massage (13) and snapping his fingers

⁹⁶ Adamietz 1972, 96.

⁹⁷ Adamietz 1972, 110.

⁹⁸ Morford (1997, 221) deserves credit for this observation, as he points this out in the context of Juvenal's 5th, but I have expanded his observation to include Pliny and Martial as well.

(15) – while he is conscious. After Zoilus passes out drunk, the guests are ordered to keep silent (30-31) further suppressing any attempt at creating conversation among the guests in the absence of dialogue with the (unconscious) host. In Satire 5, There is a single instance of communication between Virro and Trebius: the invitation itself. Even this communication is curt (*una simus* “let’s get together,” 5.18), as if Virro could not stand to give any more consideration to the matter. The pair cannot manage to extend their communication beyond the two-word exchange before the dinner. Trebius does communicate with the slave – he asks for things (*aliquid poscas* 5.64) but it is unclear whether the slave, in his annoyance (*indignatur* 5.63), responds vocally or continues to ignore Trebius’ requests of service. It is only when Trebius crosses the line by attempting to eat from the same breadbasket as the high-status guests that the slave issues a verbal command to remember his place. Discipline and regulation of the dinner guests is distributed not by the host, but by the slaves. Through them, Virro’s commands are fulfilled, marking them as the conversational middlemen. The slaves keep the dialogue between host and guest relegated to indirect communication, if not preventing it occurring altogether by simply ignoring the guest.

The authors do not relegate themselves to simply describing, distorting, and criticizing the problem, but attempt to check its continued advance.⁹⁹ While each text criticizes specific practices of the unequal dinner in their own way, these texts are united in their rebuke of the lack of communication between host and guest.¹⁰⁰ This is the root of the tension from which the problematic practices culminating in an unequal dinner arise. The authors intervene in this lack

⁹⁹ Keane 2006, 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ In this way, each of these works follows Effe’s “Transparenter Typus” of Didactic poetry (1977, 80-97), that the poem appears to be teaching one thing on the surface, but it is instead imparting a different, deeper message.

of communication in two primary ways: through their didacticism and through the advice proposed in each work.

The audience of the authors are not passive witnesses, but active participants in the authors' teachings.¹⁰¹ Pliny's addressee not only actively received the work as a letter, but also – presumably – adopted Pliny's advice into his own practice. Martial's epigrams are each addressed to an individual character, who is called out for their social misbehaviors. If his characters were in part based on real people, then actively scolding them would generate a sense of shame as a motivator for a change in their behavior. Juvenal's addressee, Trebius, listens to his diatribe without interruption. This structure allows for the audience to take one of three places when reading each text.¹⁰² They can assume the role of the guest, identify with the host, or the bystander who observes the guest/author reprimand the host. Each of these positions allows for the authors to generate a didactic discourse from the writer directly to the reader.

A consistency across each author's work is their admission that this tension will continue to occur in the future and affect more people than just themselves. They acknowledge the issues within the patron-client system cannot be quickly fixed and what response they are able to garner may not do much in providing a solution adequate enough to restore balance. Pliny discusses the unequal dinner in order to warn and advise Avitus, who he expects will face this issue as he participates and advances in elite society. Martial attends a slew of unequal dinners – he even returns to Ponticus' table when he knows Ponticus will treat him just as poorly as he did before.

¹⁰¹ “Where the satiric genre imitates practices that expose and punish, it allows the reader to walk through the implementation of those practices and to experience their effects while also viewing them from the outside.” Keane 2006, 107, 120. This is standard in didactic poetry, cf. Volk 2002, Gale 2004.

¹⁰² This follows the double-discourse model proposed by Volk (2002, 122-139) whereby the text has two internal audiences, one being the host explicitly addressed (and named in the cases of Martial in Juvenal), and the other being the guest, whether he be Trebius, or the unnamed table-mates of Pliny's or Martial's.

He acknowledges this sarcastically in 9.19.2 by calling Ponticus as the one who gives a good dinner (*cenantis bene Pontici*).¹⁰³ Sabellus, the subject of this poem, has written great praise of Ponticus' baths but Martial exposes that Sabellus does not wish to bathe, but to dine with Ponticus, despite the maltreatment Sabellus will face. Not only does Martial's poetic persona fall into the trap of regular attendance to unequal dinners, but others will also fall victim to Ponticus' mistreatment.

These long-term harms are displayed in Satire 5 as well. An alternate reality within Juvenal's literary world is explored in lines 132-133, stating that if Trebius were rich and still aimed to garner the respect of Virro, he ought to avoid having children. Trebius' potential children would rightfully receive the inheritance thereby obstructing Virro from his pursuit of Trebius' wealth. If Trebius were to produce offspring, however, lines 141-145 show a different side to Virro, in which he appears to fulfill his duties as patron. Virro comes to Trebius bearing an assortment of gifts; a cloak, nuts, and a coin for each child. At the outset, this action seems to contrast the established character of Virro, considering he is hardly able to serve a decent meal to Trebius. Why does Virro pay the children any mind at all? Perhaps Virro is simply fulfilling the bare minimum of his responsibilities as patron, yet his actions throughout the dinner display a disregard for such social obligations (Juv. *Sat.* 5.141-145):

sed tua nunc Mycale pariat licet et pueros tres
in gremium patris fundat semel, ipse loquaci
gaudebit nido, viridem thoraca iubebit
adferri minimasque nuces assemque rogatum,
ad mensam quotiens parasitus venerit infans.

But even if Mycale could bear three boys and pour them into their father's lap at once, Virro will rejoice at the talkative nest, he will order a green toy breastplate to be brought, tiny nuts, and a penny upon request, when the baby parasite comes to the table.

¹⁰³ The full poem of Mart. 9.19: *Laudas balnea versibus trecentis / cenantis bene Pontici, Sabelle. / Vis cenare, Sabelle, non lavari*. In 300 verses you praise the baths of Ponticus, who gives a good dinner, Sabellus. You wish to dine, Sabellus, not to bathe.

The gifts are of the least value possible – the smallest of nuts (*minimas nuces*), the cheapest coin, and a poor-quality and effeminizing toy breastplate¹⁰⁴ – and make a mockery of the typical gifts a patron gives to his client’s dependents. Though the passage appears to show an alternate side to Virro, the meager gifts do not show a patron fulfilling his duties, but that Virro is playing the long game. His happiness at Trebius’ and Mycale’s family (*loquaci / gaudebit nido*) initially appears to show genuine joy at his client’s new fatherhood, but it is instead a deceptive mask which hides his true joy: he will make Trebius’ children into parasites like their father, lured by “inexpensive treats handed out by a calculating patron.”¹⁰⁵ If he is unable to attain whatever inheritance Trebius may leave, he still ensnares three little Trebii as future scorned clients at his table and reignites the cycle.

Each author offers his own advice on addressing the tension in the patron-client system. Pliny communicates his explicitly: he advises Avitus to avoid hosts who conduct their dinner parties in this way and shames such hosts by publishing his letter. Pre-publication, this is not a wide-reaching solution as it could only be adopted by his and Avitus’ immediate social circle. Post-publication, the audience expands outside his immediate sphere of influence but relies on the readers to actively follow his advice. It would be more easily followed by the elites who have the ability to avoid the dinners of the demeaning hosts. Such advice, however, will not be

¹⁰⁴ Nuts were commonly given to children as they are both a plaything and a snack. Some nuts, like walnuts, were favored (Pl. *NH* 15.24), but due to their size (*minimas*) these are not the large, respectable walnuts given out at festivals and weddings. This coin is not given willingly but must be begged for (*rogatum*). Ullman (1966, 274-284) posited that the *viridem thoraca* could be read instead as a green breastplate, whose green patina signifies its pitiful and aged condition, but this assumes that Virro not only has an old toy uniform but also one which he would be willing to give away. Hopman (2003, 561-562) instead reads this green garment as a failed dye-job. In dying cloth Tyrian purple, the cloth is first soaked in a tub of murex pelagium which dyes it green, then the purple dye is applied. This process of double dyeing achieves a rich purple when done correctly. What was supposed to become a luxurious purple garment instead results in a mediocre green, which parallels the disappointing quality of the rest of Virro’s gifts. Green is connected with effeminacy and foreignness, coupled with *thorax* which Hopman regards as an unusual garment a Roman male is a further attack on the boys’ masculinity. cf. Braund 1996.

¹⁰⁵ Tennant 1993, 87.

followed by elite hosts that are already set in their habits, but it has the potential to mold the future cultural standards of the following generations. This could be one of Pliny's aims (self-fashioning aside), considering Avitus is an up-and-coming elite, so by imparting his ideas upon Avitus, he reaches his circle of friends as well. All of this is directed towards the elites and leaves little room for the sub-elites who remain at their patron's mercy.

Martial offers two responses: he either threatens the host directly or he indirectly requests that they alter their behavior. Martial hints that the hosts in 4.68 and 4.85 ought to change their ways because Martial already sorted out how much Sextus spent on their dinners, and Ponticus' opaque cup gives away the better wine rather than hiding it. These rather flippant couplets aim to shame the hosts by exposing their actions to be fueled by their greed. This is akin to Pliny's use of shame as means to sway the hosts from repeating the behavior and to deter the audience from following the hosts' lousy examples. Martial threatens the hosts in 1.20, 3.82, and 9.2 with violence, of which the latter two are connected by other moral and sexual wrongs. The culmination of multiple wrongs, perhaps, triggers the literary threats. But 1.20 is peculiar in that it does not combine vices. This could be explained by the fact that this was Martial's first exercise in writing within this motif and he may have intended to highlight the *cena inaequalis* as Caecilianus' sole offence. Martial directly calls for change in 3.60 and 6.11. Martial demands the host alter their behavior to reflect a unified meal (3.60) which begets a return to the traditional customs (6.11). The motives behind these changes are twofold; the present lack of the *sportula* (3.60) ought to motivate the host to alter his behavior, and this change connects the host and guest with the grandeur and respectability of the legendary past. Here, he undermines the hosts' desires to better their reputation through reinforcement. They will reap the same benefits,

that is, an elevated reputation and status, by mistreating their guests as they would by treating their guests with dignity.

On the surface, Juvenal's response to the corruption of the patron-client relationship is not to engage in the system altogether. To him, it is better to avoid such humiliating circumstances, for there is more dignity in begging and eating the same scraps that stray dogs consume (5.1-23). He rejects not only the present ostentation but also the pseudo-morality of archaic table manners.¹⁰⁶ His use of double-irony seems to leave little beneficial advice for Trebius and the readers. This is the opposite approach from Martial's direct requests for change, which require a nostalgic mindset to be effective. But, as is often the case, there is a deeper message within Juvenal's pessimism. Although Trebius never gets the chance to communicate with Virro directly, Juvenal does. In this digression, Juvenal takes on the role of the guest/client and reprimands Virro. He vocalizes the client's private thoughts and, in doing so, provides a compromise – an element lacking from the accounts of Pliny and Martial (Juv. *Sat.* 5.107-113):

Ipsi pauca velim, facilem si praebeat aurem.
nemo petit modicis quae mittebantur amicis
a Seneca, quae Piso bonus, quae Cotta solebat
largiri (namque et titulis et fascibus olim
maior habebatur donandi gloria): solum
poscimus ut cenes civiliter. hoc face et esto,
esto, ut nunc multi, dives tibi, pauper amicis.

I'd like a word with the man himself, if he'd lend a willing ear. No one asks for the gifts that used to be sent to his humble friends by Seneca or the gifts good Piso and Cotta used to give out (for in those days the glory of giving was held in higher regard than titles and symbols of office): We ask one thing - that you dine as a fellow citizen [among your guests]. Do this, then you may, you really may, as many already do, be lavish to yourself and stingy to your friends.

If the audience takes the role of Trebius in the rest of the poem, the focus flips here. For seven lines they assume the role of Virro. In this way, Juvenal extends his advice across the dinner

¹⁰⁶ Fredericks 1979, 178-91.

table and reaches both the misguided host and the disgruntled client. This is revolutionary as it does what Trebius is unable to do by breaking the verbal barriers separating host from guest. This creation of discourse functions not only within the context of the literary dinner, but also represents the voice of the client who is too afraid or complacent to speak against his host's actions due to the repercussions. Although Pliny is the one who preaches inclusivity as the uniting virtue, it is Juvenal who realizes and fulfills the advice.

None of the advice proposed by any author could do much in addressing the tension felt across the dinner table. Avoiding problematic hosts does not impact those unbothered by (or even supportive of) the practice of ranking and reinforcing status. Rather, adopting the uncompromising attitude has a potential to restrict the opportunities afforded to the moralistic attendee, like Pliny or Avitus. Negatively engaging in the system, however, has its drawbacks as well. If the guest were to approach the problem by issuing threats and condemnation, there are two potential outcomes: either, the host sees the folly of his ways, or the host becomes offended and disdainful of the "proper" practice due to the adversarial manner that the guest adopted in explaining the problem. Taking action by condemning problematic practices would create a negative feedback loop in which the host would respond adversely to the guest's antagonistic approach. The negative approach would generate a combative response which will fail to convince the host to change his ways. This effect will produce the exact opposite effect of what the guest wants: it will create additional support of the problematic practice. Instead of attaining their goal of changing the host's mind, the negative feedback loop in turn will produce more support for the practice and will further an unwillingness to entertain competing ideas. This backfire is only heightened by elevating the condemnation to threats. Both avoiding and condemning unequal dinners work within the system, but disengaging from the system entirely,

as Juvenal claims, depends on a mass boycott to instigate change. Such coordination and dedication is difficult to pursue in the modern age with instant communication, and would have been even more difficult to pursue in the ancient world, should we assume there was widespread support for such a boycott, which we cannot.

I posit the social impact generated was not through the advice given within their works, but by the work itself. The texts have no impact on the external world, ancient or modern, as they are only ink on a page. Rather, they rely on the reader to act upon the author's provoking ideas and alter their behavior to prevent the author's literary fantasy from becoming their common reality. Relying on the readers to take the author's literal, if misleading, advice has a decent chance of creating immediate problems for the reader rather than promote a long-term cultural change. Thus, the actions required to avoid the reality portrayed in the texts originates *not* from within their content but from readerly engagement with their content. If the focus of these texts were to instead function as the communication between host and guest since verbal communication has broken down, then both sides of the social divide are united by their mutual recognition of the problem. They have identified the problem as long-term, for which reason the promotion of a long-term solution is the only way to prevent the silence from growing.

Since the authors have identified these problems as long-term, they respond by promoting a long-term solution of changing the cultural mindset through the readers rather than depending on the patrons to change their ways. In order to provide the foundation from which the conversation can begin, agency has to be redistributed. Pliny returns power from the "greedy" to the "morally upright" elites by verbally equipping the elites to prevent them from becoming swept up in the misguided practices. By providing the proper responses, he disarms the hosts of their justification for their tools of division. Martial takes the inverse approach through his role as a

guest. Through his complaints, condemnation, and threats, he returns the voice to the silenced client. Doing so removes any doubt from the host's mind that their actions do not reflect the proper (albeit still problematic) practice of ranking friendships, instead exhibiting the unjustified nature of their methods. Juvenal redistributes power by insulting both patron and client. Casting blame on both sides removes the host from his lofty status and returns that agency to the client to not allow the unequal practices of the system to continue. In other words, Pliny works downwards from the top, Martial works from the bottom up, and Juvenal combines both of their approaches. This period of flux in the patron-client relationship creates the uncertainty concerning to the finalized responsibilities for both parties. Before the practice of unequal dining was set in stone as a communally affirmed method of dining for mixed company, the responsibilities were still moldable. By inciting communication where none is present, the authors attempt to sway the society away from the worst-case scenario of the *cena inaequalis*.

Conclusion

Literary humor centers on topical political or cultural mishaps and distinguishes itself by its ironic representation that the issues depicted are only surface level, but it rarely delves deeper to address the root of the problem. It exposes issues and exaggerates problems, it isolates the inconsistencies of prevailing social ideas, and brings misuses and manipulations of traditional ideals to light. If an author wishes to highlight problems inherent in the system, there is no better place to do so than the setting of the *cena*. Dinners are a microcosm of political, social, and economic tension where such divisions ought to be left at the door. Although the root of social tension is left on the table, as it were, the *cena inaequalis* reveals one of the underlying reasons for the divide between patron and client.

The shift from traditional communal dining to individual plates indicates that there is a change in the function of the *cena* at the tables of the elite. Where before the *cena* was supposed to foster relationships and networking, it became a way to reinforce the practice of ranking friends and serving them in accordance with their social status. This “separate but equal” mentality could have been utilized while avoiding abuse, but these authors show how any system that reifies hierarchies will be misused and corrupted by individuals hungry for power rather an equal meal. When these greedy individuals have the power, they wield it by reserving the best wine for themselves, loading their plates with the most exotic and expensive food, and keeping the prettiest slaves as their personal attendants. The guests must make do with food and service appropriate to their station, receiving food akin to fodder, if they were fed at all. At best, their status is situated just below the host’s, but at worst, they are dehumanized to the standing of livestock, tended only when necessary. The authors display in vivid – and sometimes gross –

detail how all of these tools of division are wielded by the power-hungry host to depict his own importance, while he reminds the guest of their inconsequential place in their patron's life.

Polished letters, epigrams, and satire utilize distortion as a necessary aspect of their humorous depiction of a problem. It is problematic to assume these authors are accurately portraying the Roman reality based on the evidence that 1) these authors are contemporaries and 2) they composed works which fit within the same theme. Likewise, it is too generalizing to assume that widespread abuse occurred in the manner depicted by these authors. Although we cannot trust Pliny, Martial, or Juvenal to have recorded an objective and genuine depiction of late first century Roman existence, we can conclude that the depicted existing tension between the patron and client. The easiest way to cultivate a relationship and dispel tension among individuals is to find a compromise through communication, yet this is lacking at every unequal dinner. Just as these hosts would not attempt to communicate with livestock, they do not initiate a conversation with their sub-status guests. The guests do not dare speak out against his host at the dinner; Pliny's conversation occurs between himself and another guest, Martial and the other guests remain silent after Zoilus passes out, and Trebius never addresses Virro directly. The hosts have stripped their guests of their voice at the table and relegated the written word as the only way of reigniting communication.

The *cena inaequalis* theme lives on in late antiquity and in modern scholarship. Ammianus Marcellinus 28.4.6-34 presents a tangent criticizing all the vices of both the elite and common people in Rome. Of these vices, the luxuriousness of exotic foods at the dinner are literally weighed with scales (28.4.13), refusing to attend the dinner of an acquaintance is more shameful than killing the host's brother (28.4.17), and – worst of all – they only want to read Juvenal (28.4.14). Gibbon reproduces this text, with minor adjustments to avoid distortion, yet still

presents this depiction as an “authentic state of Rome and its inhabitants.”¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the core of Gibbon’s depiction, Ammianus Marcellinus’ complaints, and the authors writing under the *cena inaequalis* theme all share the same grievance: the elites are still given to proving their importance by their opulence and justify their status with materialism.

Does this indicate that Pliny, Martial, and Juvenal failed in their attempts to rectify what they perceived to be the degradation of the patron-client system? The explicit presence of unequal dinners is lacking from Marcellinus’ diatribe; instead, he highlights that the elites are still given to displays of luxury. Perhaps the *cena inaequalis* is too specific of an example to include, or too obscure a theme to explore in the brief time Ammianus gripes about the vices of Roman culture. Although it is impossible to definitively affirm Shero’s original interpretation that widespread abuse occurred in late first century Rome because of these literary unequal dinners,¹⁰⁸ the advice present in these texts is applicable to any society that has economic and social disparities. From ancient to modern times, the warnings of Pliny, Martial, and Juvenal still holds: any relationship – between individuals or collectives – that exists despite economic or social disparity will turn abusive if both sides, in their silence, fail to check the other’s exploits.

¹⁰⁷ Gibbon 1804, 89-104.

¹⁰⁸ Shero 1929 states “Here [in Juvenal’s 5th Satire] we have a description of a banquet in which excessive luxury is satirized more or less in the traditional manner. But superimposed upon this is an attack upon the discrimination against and ill-treatment of poor clients by their wealthy patrons, which we know from contemporary writers [citing Pliny 2.6 and Martial 3.60] to have been a widespread abuse in the social life of the time.” Shero’s only justification for widespread abuse of patron and client is that Juvenal, Martial, and Pliny were all contemporaries who wrote about similar unequal dinners. While the basis for his observation was a starting point to this thesis, Shero’s observation lacks the nuance I have provided.

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