

Never Out of Style: Teaching Latin Love Poetry with Pop Music¹

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ABSTRACT

Students often struggle to interpret Latin poetry. To combat the confusion, teachers can turn to a modern parallel (pop music) to assist their students in understanding ancient verse. Pop music is very familiar to most students, and they already translate its meaning unconsciously. Building upon what students already know, teachers can reframe their approach to poetry in a way that is more effective. This essay shows how to present the concept of meter (dactylic hexameter and elegy) and scansion using contemporary pop music, considers the notion of the constructed persona utilizing a modern musician, Taylor Swift, and then addresses the pattern of the love affair in Latin poetry and Taylor Swift's music. To illustrate this approach to connecting ancient poetry with modern music, the lyrics and music video from one song, Taylor Swift's *Blank Space* (2014), are analyzed and compared to poems by Catullus. Finally, this essay offers instructions on how to create an assignment employing pop music as a tool to teach poetry — a comparative analysis between a modern song and Latin poetry in the original or in translation.

KEY WORDS

Latin poetry, pedagogy, popular music, music videos, song lyrics, Taylor Swift

INTRODUCTION

When I assign Roman poetry to my classes at a large research university, I receive a decidedly unenthusiastic response. For many students, their experience with poetry of any sort, let alone ancient Latin verse, has been fraught with frustration, apprehension, and confusion. Even for students of Latin, the switch to verse creates anxiety (though the dread tends to focus on scanning and identifying poetic forms

¹ I would like to thank my students in CLAS 252 and 384 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who were my test subjects, my colleagues, who have helped me work through these ideas, notably Justin Arft, Erika Zimmermann Damer, Jessica Westerhold, and my reviewers, who offered substantial assistance to make this article better. Any mistakes are my own.

rather than a general fear of poetry).² While most of my students know that they *should* be finding all sorts of interesting details, they just find the poetry awkward and baffling. In fact, this may be their only exposure to the poetry or even literature of the Classical world. As a result, they simply lack the knowledge of the cultural context to understand the rules and social constraints which govern the genre. After several attempts to drum up enthusiasm for class discussions on Latin love poetry in my classes, I realized that I needed to intervene and reframe my approach or else the poetry would remain dead to them. To this end, I decided to offer something familiar to demystify the past and its poetry: pop music.

Contemporary pop songs offer a perfect parallel because they follow recognizable patterns, reflect cultural trends, comment on society, and often focus on love. Everywhere we go, we hear pop music.³ It is familiar and students are accustomed to listening to a song and translating meaning unconsciously. Music is a powerful tool to “hook students, to lure them into reading a literature that they probably know nothing about, they usually do not want to know about, and they undoubtedly find difficult to comprehend” (Bellver 888). The value of music in the classroom is well attested for English (Fay), Modern Languages (Bellver, Irby-Massie 31), Sociology (Ahlkvist, Martinez), and even for ancient Latin or Greek composition (Hallett, Irby-Massie), so why not use pop songs to invigorate studies of Latin poetry? In this article, I provide ways of utilizing popular music in the Classics classroom to highlight themes and patterns which can be adapted for Intermediate/Advanced Latin.⁴ First, I discuss the rhythm of two Latin meters (elegiac couplets and dactylic hexameter) with musical examples to stress the beat. Second, I address important ideas shared by Latin love poetry and pop music, particularly as connected to a love affair. Third, I consider a songwriter, Taylor Swift, as a modern example of the constructed persona seen in Latin poetry in comparison to Catullus. Then, I provide an analysis of one of her songs, *Blank Space*, comparing the lyrics and video to the

2 I understand that some Latin teachers do not receive the same negative response as I have had. Nevertheless, the transition to verse from prose does tender anxiety and nervousness in many students, even if they do not vocalize it. Easing the way with a fun discussion can only turn the whole experience into a positive one. My own time in Intermediate Latin with Catullus was at first a scary one though, eventually, the poetry charmed me.

3 The choice of music is a deliberate marketing tool with effective application (Henard and Rossetti, Allan).

4 The concept can be applied to Greek poetry as well. I often play Little Big Town’s *Girl Crush* after presenting Sappho 31. The music video with its moody lighting and the singer’s longing looks at a dancing couple pair well with Sappho’s verse.

corpus of Catullus' poems about Lesbia. Finally, I suggest how to incorporate pop music in an assignment with adjustments for Intermediate and Advanced Latin students as well as non-Latin students.

POP MUSIC IN THE CLASSROOM: METER

Introducing pop music into a Latin (or general Classics) course requires some forethought and preparation. First, I introduce the concept of poetic meter, concentrating on the notion of a specific rhythm within a structure which is limited by the number of beats per line. I give examples of different types of meter, notably dactylic hexameter (- ∞ | - ∞ | - ∞ | - ∞ | - ∞ | - x) and elegiac couplets (- ∞ | - ∞ | - ∞ | - ∞ | - ∞ | - x / - ∞ | - ∞ | - || - ∞ | x), and tap out the beat (and sometimes dance to it).⁵ I correlate the concept of long and short sounds to our own idea of subdividing a measure, even up to the sixteenth note, with the whole foot being equivalent to a single measure. I link the long to a “dum” and the short to “diddy” or “boom” and “shaka” respectively.⁶ To get them on board with what seems a bizarre art, I often play a video about the conceptualization of “beats and bars” in rap music, that is, the breakdown of rhymes within (and beyond) measures ([Rapping](#)). Though not a perfect parallel, early rap (1980s and 1990s) with its spoken word and pared down musical accompaniment can act as a bridge between pop music and Latin meter. In Notorious B.I.G.'s 1994 hit, *Big Poppa*, one line can be finessed into a form of dactylic hexameter (well, technically tetrameter) when repeated in class. The cadence of “Ī löve ĩt | whēn yoū | cāll mē | Bĭg Pöppă,” fits the meter when a slight emphasis is thrown on the opening “I,” the vowels of “love it” where the e is ignored and the o is shortened, and “Poppa” is spoken as the brisker papa (1:08-1:10, 1:13-1:16).⁷ While not exactly accurate (alternatively, the whole line can be read as a series of spondees as the rapper does), this gloss 1) allows for an English version which hits variations of the correct meter and 2) shows how meter can be manipulated. I should warn that the rest of the song is not safe for a high school

⁵ Online resources for Latin scansion abound. For elegy, I have found Turpin's [scansion discussion from Dickinson College Commentaries](#), though it focuses on Ovid, particularly helpful with its YouTube videos. Another more general resource was uploaded by the Latin Library (“[Mr. A's Introduction...](#)”).

⁶ The latter was suggested by a member of the audience at the CAMWS annual meeting in 2017, where I first presented these ideas.

⁷ I thank Becky Cefaratti for bringing this line and song to my attention in our graduate level Greek course on Homer at SUNY-Buffalo. Unknowingly, she helped inspire my interest in modern song and meter in the midst of what seemed like endless translation.

classroom with its misogynistic lyrics, sexual undertone, and explicit language. In the college classroom, all of these issues can be discussed as part of the genre and parlance of a particular rapper/poet in an American context of the 1990s where rap music suddenly moves mainstream and represents a powerful social commentary ([Thompson](#), [Blanchard](#)). In this song (and others), students can see that constructs govern music and poetry in many different forms from antiquity to the present day. Each genre determines the rules by which the music or poet plays.

When reading the original Latin, the specific rhythm is even more important to understand. Again, pop music can offer an aural example.⁸ In the opening verses of [What Lovers Do](#) by Maroon 5 featuring SZA, the lead singer, Adam Levine, hits a series of spondees when he keeps repeating “Sāy sāy | sāy, hēy| hēy nōw | bāb̄y/ Ōh mā|mā, dōn’t | plāy nōw | bāb̄y” (0:08-0:15). While not in hexameter (there are only four feet), the accentuation of each vowel at a uniform rate emphasizes the equivalence of the each throughout the line. Moreover, the repetition of the two notes until the last beat highlights these spondees. The switch in note at the end of “baby” manages to stress the end of the phrase and the line much in the same way a Latin poet might have done in his recitation.⁹ Continuing with the same song, a series of sixteenth notes contrast with earlier spondee section in their speed. When Adam Levine rapidly beseechs, “tēll mē ĩf yōu lōve mē ōr nōt, lōve mē ōr nōt, lōve mē ōr nōt,” the short quality of the dactyl appears ([What Lovers Do](#) 0:25-0:29). Hearing these differences within a song, students are attuned to the relative differences in rhythm in modern music which correspond to the long-short paradigm of meter. In pop music, it is the length of the note which determines the rhythm rather than the quality of the vowel as in Latin poetry. At this point, a modern reading of Latin poetry offers a chance for students to listen to a skilled recitation, look at the Latin lines, and attempt to determine the scansion based on the audio. I have found that Catullus’ poems are received well by students and can be used to illustrate different meters. Keeping with Catullus then, poem 64.53-55 focused on the abandonment and heartache of Ariadne provides an example of love lost in dactylic hexameter:

nāmquē flū|ēntīsō|nō prō|spēctāns | lītōrē | Dīāē
Thēsēā | cēdēn|tēm cēlē|rī cūm | clāssē tū|ētūr

⁸ The choice of “What Lovers Do” by Maroon 5 featuring SZA is not random since it ties in to the greater focus of love poetry discussed later.

⁹ For additional discussion of pronunciation and accentuation of spoken Latin in the classroom, see Vollmann.

īndŏmĭ|tōs īn | cōrdĕ gĕ|rĕns Ārĭ|ādnā fŭ|rōrēs.

([Catullus: Poem 64](#) 0:29-0:43)

And gazing from the surf-pounding shore of Naxos
At Theseus departing with the quick fleet
Ariadne, bearing untamed rage in her heart, looks out.¹⁰

Deserted by her beloved, Ariadne's love for Theseus dies. As is typical with dactylic hexameter, the last syllable acts long and was probably held slightly longer. In the same way, Adam Levine accentuates "ba-by" at the end of the line in *What Lovers Do* and Notorious B.I.G. emphasizes "Pop-pa." In terms of elegy, Catullus 87 offers a parallel and introduces Lesbia with whom the students will soon become very familiar:

nŭllā pŏ|tĕst mŭlĭ|ĕr tān|tŭm sē | dīcĕre ā|mātām
vĕrē | quāntum ā | mē || Lĕsbĭa ā|mātā mē|a ēs.
nŭllā fĭ|dēs ū|lō fŭĭt | ūmquam īn | foēdĕrĕ | tāntā
quānta īn ā|mōrĕ tŭ|o ēx || pārtĕ rĕ|pĕrtā mē|a ēst.

([Catullus 87 in Latin](#))

No woman is able to say that she has been loved so much,
Truly, as much as you, Lesbia, have been loved by me.
No trust ever was so much in any other alliance
As much as was found from my side in love of you.

Several elisions appear in this poem which emphasize the spoken quality of the language. The seemingly fickle (but consistent) quality of the -m at the end of "quantum" and "umquam" is emphasized in lines 2 and 3 as it disappears in the scansion. Vowels collide together to create one sound as in the end of lines 2 and 4, where the -a is lost to the -e. As the students listen to the poem twice, they should begin to hear such adjustments. These quirks of Latin within verse are something that have to be learned. Before the students rebel in frustration, a reminder that native English speakers do similar and more complicated contractions (e.g. "shouldna" for should not have) would be appropriate at this point.¹¹ Beyond meter, poem 87

¹⁰ All translations of Catullus are the author's attempts to remain true to the Latin but also provide a helpful version.

¹¹ If students balk at elisions and think they are unwarranted, I suggest they try to dictate a phrase such as "I saw a clam and a can on the beach" to their phones or computer and see how well it identifies the words. Speech is filled with elisions, accents, and common contractions which are accepted

connects to the repetition present in verse and pop music. In confirming his love for Lesbia, Catullus repeats the negative “nulla” to reinforce the positive nature of his loyalty just as Adam Levine asks repeatedly about the continued (and likely inconsistent) love of his companion (e.g. “tell me if you love me or not, love me or not”). In these examples (Latin and otherwise), the issue of love and relationships are at the forefront and the story is told within the framework of poetic meter.

INTRODUCING MAJOR THEMES IN CATULLUS’ LOVE POETRY

First, the Latin poetry of love is elegy. While Catullus’ love poems and Lesbia cycle do not always follow elegiac meter, he does remain true to the themes present in the genre. With the students now excited to learn about poetry and to listen to music, I turn to those themes in Catullus (and in elegy) which I consider most important for this exercise: the effects of love, the prescribed progression of the affair between the lover and beloved, and the constructed persona of the poet as lover (*amator*) (Gibson 160-162; Kennedy). Contrary to students’ expectations, the love seen in the poetry of Catullus is not a happy, gentle, or romantic emotion. Instead, it is a powerful force of desire compelling the poet, usually with undesirable results such as emotional servitude, wounds, pain, suffering, and even metaphorical death. This contrast between ancient and modern conceptions of love needs to be addressed. At the heart of the portrayed relationship in Latin elegy is dominance, power, and inequality between the lovers (Fulkerson). Who is in charge? Ostensibly, the poet, the lover, loses control at the hands of the object of affection, the beloved, whose actions harm him unknowingly or deliberately. However, a poet like Catullus dominates the affair even as he claims to be a victim. Falling prey to his emotions or some sort of perceived abuse which can be as simple as being ignored, the poet suffers for his love and complains volubly. Catullus grumbles that because of Lesbia, “his mind has been brought down” (*huc est mens deducta tua*) and even “destroyed itself through (his/its) devotion” (*se officio perdidit ipsa suo*) (75. 1, 2). Other poets record even more volatile affairs which can turn outright vicious as if in a full-blown war (Drinkwater 199-202). Propertius’ mistress quarrels with him, knocking over the table (*mensam propellis*) and throwing cups (*proicis insana cymbia*) as well as wounding him (*mea vulnera*) during her assault (3.8.7-8, 21).¹² Love affects not only

and noted (e.g. I’m, you’re, you’ll, etc.).

¹² Modern artists such as Jordin Sparks (2009), among others, have sung about love resembling a battlefield. In Ovid *Amores* 1.7, love turns into violence when the poet physically abuses his girl.

the mind, but also the physical body, even weakening limbs (Cat. 76.20-22). Love wounds the poet. In truth, however, the poet/lover controls the interaction; the whole affair is recorded from his point of view with the beloved functioning as a silent toy for the amusement of the poet. Love is a secret game to which the reader is allowed access by the poet.

The narrative of Latin love elegy begins with an active male poet/lover discussing his relationship with a beloved.¹³ In most cases, the beloved is a female and referred to as *puella*, girl, even if she is a grown woman, though a beautiful boy such as Juventius (e.g. Cat. 99) can also be the focus. Although Catullus' Lesbia is generally accepted to be modeled on a real woman, Clodia, most *puellae* are fictional and their status is difficult to determine (James 21-28; Miller; Wyke 18-31). When possible, the love affair as constructed in Latin poetry follows a progression, even if the poems in the collection are transmitted out of chronological order. The lover sees the beloved, desires and woos the object of affection, and exalts and suffers in the loving, before ultimately losing the beloved and becoming bitter. The blame for the destruction of the relationship falls firmly on the shoulders of the beloved who behaves contrary to the lover's wishes. Before the affair even begins, an acrimonious end is assumed. Nevertheless, the poet basks in the glow of love, seizing his blissful joy, even if it is brief. As recorded in his poems, Catullus' affair with Lesbia follows such a track where the beloved is observed (2a, 3, 51), wooed (5, 7), loved (70, 72, 75, 83, 85, 86, 87, 92, 104, 107, 109), and lost (8, 11, 36, 37, 58a, 76, 79). While simplified, this framework helps direct students when they begin to analyze poems. In setting the foundation, students can begin to recognize patterns which is a key element in learning (Caine, Caine, and Crowell 104).

All of these developments are driven by the poet, who himself is a contrived personality, a construction not unfamiliar to students' own experience with modern pop artists. Playing with perceptions of the reader, the poet creates an image of the *amator* experiencing love in a way determined by the poetic genre, not a true reflection of his own character and life. Such a misconception is understandable since the voice of the poet is clearly established in the poems (e.g. Catullus [5.7-9] firmly places himself in the narrative as the one demanding kisses). The disconnect between the poetic *persona* and the actual individual causes some problems for the poets' reputation as expressed by Catullus in poem 16, discussed in the next section.

¹³ The notable exception to this male construct is Sulpicia. For a concise discussion of Sulpicia, see Skoie or, more recently and extensively, see Batstone or Fulkerson 2017.

For Romans, the issue at hand is the damage to the lover's status and reputation. By relinquishing control to the weaker, feminine beloved, the poet becomes a passive victim in the poetry. It is this perception which Catullus so vehemently denied, asserting his control, dominance, masculinity, and agency. The poet performs in the poetry as this submissive lover, but he, in reality, cannot be so and retain his position in Roman society.¹⁴ Although the poet plays on the imagined or real identity of the lover, the poet is not he. This manipulation of a persona pushes preconceived notions of identity and makes us question what we think we understand about poetry and ancient society. In presenting poems as complex puzzles to be solved, they are transformed from dull verses to ones filled with secret codes and rebellious love.

With students intrigued by these texts, I have small groups read one poem in translation from Catullus, though other elegiac poets can be used, looking for the representation of love, the timing of the affair, their perception of the poet, and any other hidden messages. While most students are able to categorize the moment in the love affair, the subtlety of the character of love and the lover is still often lost (as evidenced by class discussion). When presenting this subtlety to a Latin class, I would wait until we have translated a poem before delving into these intricacies since my first focus is usually on the grammar and basic comprehension. Once translated, the poem can be analyzed. I ask the students: How does the poet feel? Where is the love? The loss? What words reveal his feelings? I help direct discussion with examples if the students are quiet. Catullus 8, though in choliambic,¹⁵ provides a contrast with his kiss poems and hits on several issues of the love affair. There used to be bright days (*candidi tibi soles*), those days filled with kisses, but now they are gone (8.3). Adjectives such as wretched (*miser* 8.1, 10) and powerless (*impotens* 8.9) emphasize the pain that lover suffers; he endures, or should endure, (*obdura*[*t*] 8.11, 12, 19) the loss. However, then Catullus becomes angry, calling Lesbia a wicked one (*scelesta*) or, in a modern colloquialism used for assertive women, a bitch (8.15).¹⁶ In Latin classes, the students tend to be more receptive to the specificity of language, but modern parallels are helpful for them to gain more confidence. For this reason, I turn to pop music so that the students can see these characteristics of Roman poetry in the lyrics, music, and video of a song that they know and understand. This

14 For discussion of the politics and society of Catullus' time, see Wiseman and Konstan.

15 This is a variant of iambic poetry with six feet as follows: $\underline{\text{u}} - | \text{u} - | \underline{\text{u}} - | \text{u} - | \text{u} - | - \underline{\text{u}}$.

16 For a consideration of the *ego* of Catullus in poem 8, see Greene 2-8.

exercise, which I explain below, has the added benefit of building enthusiasm for future translations; they never know when I will show another music video in class.

Since pop music videos watched in entirety are an unusual aspect of a typical class day, even for me, I explain my reasoning for the inclusion to the students. Songs, just like poems, differ from casual speech in their syntax but they look very similar when transcribed (Bradley 14). The emotions, mood, visual cues, and strong rhythms heard and seen in a music video stress the points I want them to understand about poetics, language, and meter. People automatically respond to music and the images expand their understanding. “As visual media that support narrative, videos underscore the constraints of expressing songs’ stories in words alone” (Bradley 309). The music video illustrates the sung poem. When poets recited their works in private houses, the wall paintings might have acted in a similar fashion as illustrations of their mythological subjects. In articulating these ideas, my students take the following discussion more seriously, even if there is laughing.

MUSICIAN AS POET/CONSTRUCTED PERSONA: TAYLOR SWIFT

Turning to a songwriter who rivals Catullus, I now present Taylor Swift as a viable modern poet who uses a multimedia format. I set up the genre of the music video in which she works by discussing the artist as poet and noting the difference between the person who is singing and the story or character represented. In other words, I begin the discussion with considerations of the persona of the poet/musician.¹⁷ While many artists could be utilized, I have found that Taylor Swift works remarkably well. Whether they like her or not, the students are familiar with her reputation and music (and they most definitely have opinions). Swift is a talented singer-songwriter who is involved with the creation and imagery of her music from start to finish. Moreover, Taylor Swift has deliberately chosen to completely transition from the musical genre of country to pop with her album *1989* ([Eells](#)). As a result, her audience has increased and she has transformed herself into a leading pop star with commercial success (Gay 179).

In her album *1989* released in 2014, she creates multiple personae for herself through her first-person narrative and the images presented in her music videos all the while tackling themes of love, loss, stalking, and anger. In [Blank Space](#), which I will discuss in more detail later, Swift becomes a femme fatale, luring and losing

¹⁷ The connection between the persona of Catullus (or other ancient authors) and pop music has been considered by others, but most recently by Polt, who presents a history of the scholarship of the Catullan identity as well as an excellent exercise using the lyrics of Cher.

a man.¹⁸ As a mysterious phantom figure, she haunts a man in the dream-like video of *Style*. Her image appears through or transposed on dappled sunlight (0:10-0:18), mist (0:26-0:27), rain (2:49-2:50), storms (2:31-2:35), fabric (0:44-0:51), and mirrors (1:05-1:18). She expresses the anxiety of a relationship by channeling imagery of Little Red Riding Hood wearing a blue dress in her fairytale video for *Out of the Woods* (2015) where she runs or crawls through multiple landscapes, including a mystical forest (0:10-1:24, 2:20-2:32), snow-covered mountains (1:25-2:08), and a muddy swamp (2:33-2:58) chased by wolves as she searched for her lover but “found herself” (4:00).¹⁹ In *Shake it off*, she embodies a nerdy reject who does not concern herself with the criticism of others. In her video, she breaks conformity by moving in a different, goofy way from her back-up dancers. For example, she awkwardly bunny hops in a white swan tutu surrounded by ballerinas holding a modified dying swan position from Swan Lake (1:57-1:58), drops her pom-poms in a routine with the cheerleaders (2:37-2:38), and starts the chicken dance amidst modern dancers (3:01). As a secret agent (code name: Catastrophe) in *Bad Blood*, featuring Kendrick Lamar, she joins several other female bad-ass assassins (and famous actresses) with names like Arsyn (0:11-0:38), Slay-Z (1:30-1:32), Destructa X (1:36-1:40), Mother Chucker (1:52-1:57), and Cut Throat (1:58-2:02) to wreak havoc. In her nostalgic, and controversial, *Wildest Dreams*, Swift portrays a 1950s Hollywood star beginning an affair in her tent (1:11-1:23) while filming on the African savannah. The last video produced for the album, *New Romantics*, portrays her real life as a singer/songwriter on tour and interacting with her fans at public venues. In the seven of the sixteen songs from her album *1989* which have videos, Taylor Swift has transformed herself into a range of characters, some true-to-life and others complete fantasy.

In all of her songs, Swift is playing with identity and representation, concepts with which we know the ancient poets wrestled. Her music in combination

¹⁸ A literary examination of this video has also been done on YouTube; it focuses on the details of the imagery and lyrics (“[Rhetorical Analysis...](#)”).

¹⁹ The hunt/chase imagery of this music video is very much in line with the same motif in Latin poetry where the lover tracks down his beloved. In addition, Taylor Swift taps into this same concept in her song *I Know Places*, where she alludes to the paparazzi chasing her and her lover. In the chorus, Swift sings, “they are the hunters, we are the foxes/And we run/Baby/I know places we won’t be found and/They’ll be/Chasing their tails trying to track us down/‘Cause I, I know places we can hide” (0:43-1:11). In this case, the lovers are together, and it is the outside world stalking them for information about their relationship. Admittedly, this is a different kind of desire (celebrity gossip), but an equally powerful force.

with celebrity gossip have created a larger than life caricature of her. In fact, Swift composed *Blank Space* as a humorous response to the media's "sensational fictionalization of [her] personal life" ("[1989](#)" [Track-by-Track](#) 1:16-1:19).²⁰ She explains her reasoning as,

You know, they [the media] 've kind of drawn up this profile of this girl who is a serial dater, jet-setting around with all her boyfriends and then, you know, she can get 'em but she can't keep 'em because she is too emotional and she's needy, then she gets her heart broken because they leave and she's jilted so she goes to her evil lair and writes songs about it for revenge. It is just kind of this very complex profile of a person ("[1989](#)" [Track-by-Track](#) 1:20-1:42).

She then considered this character and imagined the kind of song that she would write, creating *Blank Space* where she portrays a crazy, high-maintenance, minx on the prowl.²¹ Catullus faced similar misconceptions about his character. In his case, the criticism was that he was a weak or soft Roman man and he had to assert his masculinity (Manwell 116-125). He too struck back at his critics who thought that he reflected his own poetry arguing that "I will fuck you....you who think that I [have] little shame because my verses are soft" (*Pedicabo ego vos...../qui me ex versiculis meis putastis/quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum*, 16.1, 3-4). Catullus literally wrote a poetic "fuck you" insisting that he was a powerful, virile, dominant man, while Taylor Swift made a parody of herself and laughed at the joke with her fans "shaking off" the criticism of her "haters."

More recently, Swift explicitly took on her critics by releasing her album *Reputation* (2017), itself a commentary of people's perceived conceptions of her. In "[Look What You Made Me Do](#)," Swift re-asserts her agency as a powerful female after having been criticized by the public. The first imagery is an allusion to Cleopatra with Taylor sipping tea served by serpents on a throne inscribed "et tu Brute" (0:50-1:05). Although probably created in response to her feud with Kanye West,

²⁰ I was unable to track down the original interview but this quote has been recorded on YouTube video ("[1989](#)" [Track-by-Track](#) Descriptions by Taylor) and a full transcript is preserved in [Van der Veen](#).

²¹ Swift also reiterates these same ideas in *Shake it Off* by singing, "I go on too many dates/But I can't make them stay/At least that's what people say..." (0:16-0:25).

the video is full of references to her more innocent, younger self and other videos ([Chen](#); [Lang](#)). The subtext is that she has grown and no longer represents such simple characters. Swift, then, in *Look What You Made Me Do*, figuratively murders her weaker, younger self answering a phone, saying, “I’m sorry, but the old Taylor can’t come to the phone right now... Why? Oh, ‘cause she’s dead” (2:56-3:05). That her earlier reputation is dead is reiterated by a zombie-like Taylor walking by a tombstone engraved, “Here Lies Taylor Swift’s Reputation” (0:13-0:19). The break with her earlier *personae* is apparent at the very end of the song where a series of fifteen Taylors from earlier videos, performances, or appearances stand in front of a private jet arguing with each other (3:36-4:11). Which Taylor is the real one? We can only guess, unless she tells us, which she chooses not to do, at least overtly. Instead, Swift comments again on the excessive gossip about her and that, “It [the album] starts with the noise and how that makes you feel, and how it makes you feel when people are saying things about you that you feel, like, aren’t true and living your life sort of in defiance of that. In defiance of your reputation” ([Roth](#)). Without explicitly stating anything, the implication is that none of these characters are truly her.

This is then the beauty of the modern song. Unlike ancient authors, Swift is available to for us to interview, and she rejects her public *persona*: she is not the character in her songs. Like Latin poets, Swift works within a traditional framework, but, instead of poetic meter, it is the predictable structure of a pop song (verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, and chorus) (Bradley 38-40). As a female songwriter, she has twisted the paradigm making herself the active member in the lyrics, dare I say the *amatrix*, and while she may be controlled by love, she directs the outcome — just like Catullus.²² As the singer and often the songwriter, she is quite literally the voice and the force constructing the narrative. Moreover, Taylor Swift is known for writing songs about her relationships and criticizing her ex-boyfriends in a not so subtle way ([Eells](#)).

Nothing encapsulates her unconscious adherence to the format and themes of Latin love poetry better than *Blank Space*. By analyzing the lyrics of this song, we can trace the affair between two individuals from its seductive beginning to destructive end. The gaze and approach of the beloved are chronicled as well as the desire for love and the craziness caused by it. The accompanying music video underscores the progression of the relationship. Once I have emphasized this

²² In many ways, Taylor Swift mimics Sulpicia who developed her own female voice while working within the constraints of Latin love elegy established by male poets. For a thought-provoking discussion of gender in elegy, see Wyke 155-191.

connection of Taylor Swift's music and this particular song with Latin love poetry, I ask my students to read over the lyrics and consider any parallels with the poetry we have read and then we watch the music video. Although I emphasize the similarities between the past and present, we do discuss how the situation and meaning differs from today. For this article, I will provide a progressive analysis of the video and lyrics of *Blank Space* composed by Taylor Swift, Max Martin, and Shellback compared with the Catullan corpus. This study provides a technique which can be utilized in any classroom.

COMPARING POP SONGS TO LATIN LOVE POETRY: TAYLOR SWIFT'S *BLANK SPACE* AND CATULLUS²³

To keep with the analysis that follows, I suggest that the reader open a tab with the music video and pause after the referenced times for each segment in order to see the progression. The music video begins (0:00-0:26) with the handsome male object of desire driving a flashy sports car and parking in front of a mansion. The attractive man immediately gains the attention, even the attraction, of the viewer. He is admired by the singer who exclaims, "saw you there and I thought/Oh my God/Look at that face/You look like my next mistake" (5-8).²⁴ The action switches to Swift, who is dressed in a lacey black dress, holds a small dog, and sits on a white bed bracketed by two white horses. She then descends a double staircase and holds out her hand to her admirer and says, "Love's a game, want to play?" (9). It is the singer who moves from a higher and more powerful position to 'hunt' her next victim. He agrees to her proposition tacitly. The nature of their upcoming relationship, a lyrical proem for the song, is expressed in four disyllabic words, "Magic, madness, heaven, sin" (4) which also happen to be paradoxes, a favorite device of hers ("[Rhetorical Analysis](#)... 3:28-4:03). The scene switches (0:27-0:30) to a romantic dinner in the mansion and then Swift comments on his status (new money) and outfit (suit and tie) (10).²⁵ He is not a whole but a sum of his parts, something desired only superficially. Catullus' desire is inspired, even increased by observing his beloved from afar like Swift. In reworking Sappho's famous poem, he looks admiringly at "that man who

²³ Bradley argues that an ancient Greek would more easily recognize the lyrics to *Blank Space* as a poem than that of a modern poet such as John Ashbery (20).

²⁴ To facilitate discussion, I have numbered the lines of lyrics from *Blank Space* which can be found in Appendix 1.

²⁵ The latter observation seems to be a reference to another popular song of the same name by Justin Timberlake (2013).

seems to be equal to a god” (*Ille mi par esse deo videtur*, 51.1). He is imagining the pleasure that other man has in being so close to and gazing at the Catullus’ beloved. Continuing as a voyeur, Catullus notes, “Sparrow, delight of my girl, with whom she plays, whom she holds against her curves” (*Passer, deliciae meae puellae/quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere*, 2A.1-2). Although he discusses and stares at the bird, the thing desired is what it touches (her body). Both poets look upon their beloved, but only see pieces or aspects of the person which spark their obsession.

In the next segment of *Blank Space* (0:31-0:48), a glamorous and playful courtship develops. They dance, Swift rides a bike and paints her beloved’s portrait. Swift observes that “...rumors fly/And I know you heard about me/So hey, let’s be friends” (12-14). She acknowledges the outside world but focuses on their growing relationship. Her scandalous reputation precedes her, but she hopes he overlooks it. In the same way, Catullus urges Lesbia to ignore the gossip of old men and focus on their love saying, “Let us live and let us love, my Lesbia/and all the rumors of rather serious old men/let us value at one penny” (*Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus/rumoresque senum severiorum/omnes unius aestimemus assis*, 5.1-3). Both artists are encouraging this new relationship. For Swift, the good times continue to flow as the song continues.

The affair in *Blank Space* develops (0:38-1:31) and while the images are romantic — taking walks, riding horses, hanging his portrait, running through the gardens in designer clothes, going on a picnic, standing on a balcony, carving their names on a tree — yet there is a foreshadowing of bad things to come. The video emphasizes their black clothes while walking three fierce Dobermans (a contemporary Cerberus), the overcast skies with dark looming clouds, and a hallway filled with portraits of ex-lovers, one of which has an axe planted in it, as well as Swift’s dexterity with a knife as she easily inscribes the tree. The potential for a perfect love is there, but so is the potential for disaster. Swift sings, “so it’s gonna be forever/or it’s gonna go down in flames” (19-20). While she may be crazy, she loves the burn of love and discounts the signs of impending doom. Catullus remarks on the madness and loss of control caused by love when he responds to Lesbia that he needs endless affection. As many kisses, “as great a number [as] of Libyan sands... to kiss you so many kisses/and more is enough for insane Catullus” (*quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae... tam te basia multa basiare/ vesano satis et super Catullo est*, 7.3, 9-10). He desires to keep on loving even knowing that the beloved cannot be trusted bemoaning, “but what a woman says to her eager lover/it is appropriate to write in

the wind and running water” (*...sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,/ in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua*, 70.3-4). According to the assertions of both Catullus and Swift, the love of a woman is inconsistent and fleeting.

At the height of the affair (1:31-1:51), while going on a picnic or separated as Swift stands on a balcony with her beloved below, the love still is fragmented. Even the lyrics of *Blank Space*, “cherry lips, crystal skies ... Stolen kisses, pretty lies” (35, 37) are chopped into the lyrics to show a shift.²⁶ Here, the beloved is distracted by his cell-phone while Swift consumes the candy heart ... symbolic of her devouring the love; she sees nothing else. The same state affects Catullus when he rejects everyone else but his notorious lover. “Lesbia is lovely, who is most completely beautiful, that one then stole all charms from everyone” (*Lesbia formosa est, quae cum pulcherrima tota est/ tum omnibus una omnis surripuit Veneres*, 86.5-6). We know that these love affairs have expiration dates and will never last. Swift’s is limited to the month where she can play her appropriate and contrived part. “Find out what you want/be that girl for a month” (39-40). Soon it will be over and the joy will be lost. Catullus knows well the loss of his love saying, “Truly the brilliant sun had shone for you/now already that girl does not want [you]” (*fulsere vere candidi tibi soles./nunc iam illa non vult*, 8.9-10). In this same poem, Catullus begins to turn from sorrow to anger, “you will suffer when you are not asked [for kisses]” (*at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla*, 8.14). In the same way, Swift shifts the narrative to jealousy and rage singing, “wait, the worst is yet to come” (41).

In the video of *Blank Space*, suspicion intrudes on the lovers when Swift sees him texting and their love breaks (1:52-2:52). Swift fights with her beloved cautioning him that, “screaming, crying, perfect storms/I can make all the tables turn” (42-43). She then destroys his cherished possessions — dropping his cell-phone into a fountain and cutting up his clothing — and slashes his portrait. Wearing leopard print and with mascara running from her eyes, Swift writhes in front of a marble fireplace and a poor, innocent deer. Her outfit and audience, the deer, are both signs for the ‘true’ character of the woman revealed as a huntress. While she suffers for her love, her man also now feels the effects of her uncontrolled and unreciprocated desire. Whereas Swift shows her lover her unhappiness through destructive behavior, Catullus hears the spiteful words of his beloved, Lesbia, and is tormented.

²⁶ These one or two word descriptors often highlight a theme or shift in the verse as I referenced in lines 4, 10, and 42.

He curses her cruelty but is addicted to her type of volatile love and cannot leave this dysfunctional relationship:

Lesbia always speaks badly about me, she is never silent
about me: I will be damned unless Lesbia loves me.
By what proof? Because mine is just the same: I curse her constantly,
truly I will be damned, if I do not love [her].

Lesbia mi dicit semper male nec tacet umquam
de me: Lesbia dispeream nisi amat.
Quo signo? Quia sunt totidem mea: deprecor illam
assidue, verum dispeream nisi amo (92).

The love affair is over but the lure of the woman is formidable. When Swift sings in her brilliant lines, “I get drunk on jealousy/But you’ll come back/Each time you leave/‘Cause darling I’m a nightmare/Dressed like a daydream” (48-52), she echoes the conflict wrought by an addiction to a person or love that Catullus also feels. “My [mind is] not [able] to cease loving, if you [Lesbia] do anything (*nec desistere amare, omnia si facias*, 75.4). Even though Lesbia treats him poorly, Catullus (or his *persona*) is unwilling to leave her.

In the bridge (2:53-3:12), Swift transforms herself into an even more dangerous figure in *Blank Space*, a sorceress. Completely dominating her victim through sympathetic magic on an apple, she chastises, “boys only want love if it’s torture/Don’t say I didn’t, say I didn’t warn you” (53-54). Flipping the stereotypical paradigm, she tells him he wanted it. In her *persona*, she suggests that this torture is warranted for his supposed betrayal. Love has turned to hate. The apple clearly ties her to imagery of Eve, and Swift then becomes the iconic seductive and dangerous woman who leads to man’s fall. While powerful, Swift is also now the clichéd wronged woman who is seen as hysterical or lesser because of her emotions. Swift’s assertions about men’s conflicting desires seem to be confirmed by Catullus when he declares, “I hate and I love. Why do I do this, you probably ask. I don’t know but I feel it come to pass and I am tortured” (*Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris/nescio. Sed fieri sentio et excrucior*, 85.1-2). However, Catullus’ conflict soon turns to anger over what he sees as Lesbia’s fickle and heartless rejection. Feeling unjustly wronged, Catullus turns on her just as Swift did to her lover. Catullus then blames Lesbia for his problem of unquenched passion sneering that, “now I know

you: Therefore, though I burn more zealously, nevertheless, to me you are much more cheap and light (*nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror;/multo mi tamen es vilior et levior*, 72.5-6). He even suggests that she is really a whore who works on street corners. “[Lesbia] now at crossroads and alleys/strokes the descendants of brave Remus” (*nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis/glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes*, 58A. 4-5). In both cases, there really is “bad blood.”

Blank Space ends with the chorus and further destruction (3:12-4:00). Swift beats her lover’s car with a golf club, jabs a heart-shaped cake with a knife which then bleeds, and chops down the tree with their names. Finally, the beloved has had enough. He drives away in his destroyed car and a new man cruises in, ready to start the cycle all over again. With the third repetition of the chorus, Swift reiterates that the whole affair is a sport for her character. “Cause you know I love the players/ and you love the game” (25-26). To emphasize this, she winks at the camera while draped over her victim saying, “But I’ve got a blank space, baby/And I’ll write your name” (33-34). The whole song focuses on how Swift’s persona feels — her dreams, desires, and emotions; the beloved is secondary to the narrative. Catullus hints the same reasoning about his own poetry alleging, “delightful [friend], I wrote this poem for you/from which you might perceive my pain (*hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci/ex quo perspiceres meum dolorem*, 50.16-17). He wants others to know *his* suffering from love, and yet he too is playing with literary genre and contrived emotion. As much as Lesbia²⁷ figures in Catullus’ poetry, she is not his only beloved; He praises two other lovers Ipsitilla (32.1) and Juventius (48.1). His poems show a resilience and desire to be in love as much as he revels in his sorrow. These emotions are what resonate in Latin poetry and modern songs.

To recapitulate the connections between the two genres, there is clearly a constructed *persona*. The beloved is admired and wooed in a modern elite way with expensive, but romantic items such as a vintage car, white horses, fine clothes, a manor house, even an idyllic picnic. Love happens easily within this fantasy, exclusive world and the lovers love. Then everything goes wrong and love is lost. The lover becomes vicious and vindictive, suffering because of the betrayal. Although done in a novel format, the over-the-top video emphasizes the fictitious nature of the story. It is all really a game and is not Catullus playing too?

27 For a helpful discussion of the Lesbia poems, see Dyson.

ASSIGNING POP MUSIC AS A GRADED PROJECT

As I have shown, by presenting and evaluating a pop song like a poem that happens to have musical and video accompaniment, students learn the appropriate techniques which they can then return to the Latin poetry. As a final assignment, I ask the students to find another modern example (within the last ten years) and write a paper analyzing it within the structure of Roman love poetry, or more specifically elegy, use examples from the Latin poems to show parallels, and to consider the similarities. This also requires that students read more poetry as they search for parallels, which is also part of my dastardly plan. In addition, I also ask that they consider the differences based on context. As much as I argue that the parallels are significant and that we should look for similarities, it is important also for students to realize that American and Roman society are not the same. As I showed in my discussion of *Blank Space*, 1) the medium for modern music is different than Latin poetry, which allows for a more accommodating transmission of cultural ideas (i.e. different rhythms and scores of images in videos) and 2) Taylor Swift presents an active and dominant female directing a relationship that is more-or-less accepted in American culture but definitely would not have pleased the ancient Romans, though her behavior does conform to Roman stereotypes (e.g. Medea, Clodia, Phaedra, etc.). In examining their songs/videos for modern differences, I suggest they focus not on the details such as modern clothes or possessions, but rather the big-picture concepts such as the power dynamics, individual's roles, or social mores. Students can choose to follow a love affair within one song, as I have done, or focus on one aspect of a relationship emphasized in a single song. In essence, the students are writing commentaries on modern songs, considering the language, meaning, themes, and social context of the piece.

The student papers are insightful reflections on the form, meaning, and presentation of 'poetry' in the modern age and its debt to Latin poets. A well-written argument can transform almost any annoying pop song into a sophisticated commentary on the pitfalls of modern love. In the papers I have received, students compare Catullus to a range of popstars, notably female singers such as Selena Gomez, Rihanna, Ariana Grande, Adele, Lady Gaga, to name a few, which immediately changes the power dynamic of Latin poetry. Several students likened the jealousy, passion, and eroticism in Catullus's poems to Selena Gomez' *Perfect* (2015).²⁸

²⁸ The University of Tennessee is very strict about the use of student work and requires extensive permissions. Most of the students who turned in papers for this project have already graduated and

Summarizing these students' analyses, they found that Gomez chronicles her fear about losing her lover to another and wishes to become this other 'perfect' woman. In particular, they noted that she expresses her concern in the repeated chorus lamenting, "I can taste her lipstick and see her laying her across your chest/I can feel the distance every time you remember her fingertips/Maybe I should be more like her" (0:51-1:07). The singer feels that her lover is distracted and imagines watching him in an illicit relationship from afar which my students observed was similar to Sappho 31 and Catullus 51. When Gomez cries, "I can see her body rushing into you/crashing on your skin/Burning within, burning so deep, deep/On your skin, skin next to me" (2:41-2:50) and even thinking she can taste the other woman's lipstick on her unfaithful lover, the students identified the madness of love. They connect the singer admitting that she feels "twisted" (1:39) to Catullus worried about going insane (7.10).

Other students found parallels in Rihanna's *Love on the Brain* (2016), which nicely fits the *amator's* dangerous infatuation with the beloved. Students saw how Rihanna voices her affection for her man multiple times, pleading with him. "Baby you got me like ah, ah/Don't you stop loving me (loving me)/Don't quit loving me, (loving me)/Just start loving me (loving me)" (0:48-1:05). When she becomes even more frantic in the middle of the song begging, "Then you keep loving me/Just love me, yeah. Just love me/All you need to do is love me, yeah" (2:01-2:13), students mentioned that Rihanna is as obsessive as Catullus in his demands for kisses (Cat. 5). It was observed that even Lesbia must have thought Catullus' behavior odd because he had to explain to her when he would have his fill. "You ask, Lesbia, how many of your kisses are enough and more to satisfy me" (*Quaeris, quot mihi basiationes/tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque*) (7.1-2). The implied answer reached by students was that nothing will satisfy him. Students felt that the sultry rhythm of *Love on the Brain* echoes the seductive feelings created by desire, but Rihanna suffers for her love, noting that it "beats me black and blue" (1:31-1:33). They saw how her whole self is consumed by her passion. "Must be love on the brain, yeah/And it keeps cursing my name (cursing my name)/No matter what I do/I'm no good without you/And I can't get enough" (1:38-1:55). One student also commented on the fact that, in the case of Rihanna, the song is also a catharsis about her own experience as a victim in a past abusive relationship. I would note that the violence connected to love and

I cannot track them down to gain permission. As a result, the songs provided were chosen by the students, but the analysis comes from general ideas inspired by students rather than direct citation of their actual papers.

controlling the beloved are sentiments Catullus would understand well as he lashed out against Lesbia for rejecting him (8.14; 37.11-14), but also suffered for loving her (75.1, 85.2) as Rihanna hurts.²⁹ Beyond Rihanna and Gomez, new songs are released every day which concentrate on amorous relationships. In searching for an appropriate song, students analyze the lyrics in a sophisticated manner and they bring a little of the Classics into the 21st century.

For Latin classes, this comparative assignment can be modified as a longer homework requiring a Latin poem be translated and paralleled with a pop song (Intermediate) or a more intensive commentary with the Latin translation and composition (Advanced). In both cases, the students should select a poem or selection from a poem which has not been read in class with a minimum line number (depending on skill level) and then find a modern song which reflects the same sentiment. For the Latin poems, students should scan it, identify poetic devices (e.g. alliteration, chiasmus, synecdoche, etc.), and then translate it into English. The lyrics for the modern song which parallels the Latin should be brought to class in whole with the relevant four to six lines highlighted. Either in discussion or in a short, written commentary, students should be asked to justify their reasoning for selecting their song and how it relates to their chosen Latin poem. Additionally, more experienced students should translate these limited English lyrics into Latin and provide an explanatory commentary for their adaptation. The benefit to this exercise is that it helps students work on their composition skills which in turns helps them consider grammatical and poetic issues of translation.³⁰ Any attempt to impose meter on these new Latin lyrics is, I think, asking too much, but one might offer extra credit for doing so. Still, the placement of words and word choices can be relevant and students can explain their choices (Kershner).

Though many of the songs referenced here are explicit and may not work in a high school setting, the reality is that this is the music students are hearing. I do allow students freedom in selecting poems and songs, regardless of expletives. In a classroom, some of the lyrics can be “cleaned” or only selections played. I want them to listen to music that they already enjoy and think about it in a new way, bringing Latin alive outside the classroom.

²⁹ For a better parallel for the abusive relationship in Latin elegy, see Ovid *Am.* 1.7 and, more generally, Cahoon. In this analogy, Rihanna is harmed by the beloved, rather than being the controlling *amator*.

³⁰ For a discussion of translating pop music into Latin, see Kershner.

CONCLUSION

As I have shown, music provides a gateway into the world of Latin poetry and meter. The familiar rhythms in pop music can be used to teach the different Latin meters. Notorious B.I.G., Maroon 5, and many other musicians provide an opportunity to enliven ancient meter. By demystifying meter and poetic terminology with contemporary music, poetry moves from the world of the elite and becomes accessible and relatable to all. In choosing Catullus to illustrate major themes in Latin love poetry and issues with the constructed persona, I have selected a popular author in the secondary and collegiate Latin curriculum whose poetry always incites a response.

Latin love poetry and pop music both exhibit consistent patterns in their structure and subjects. I have argued that a love affair can be traced, evolving in a relatively reliable fashion with observing, wooing, loving, and losing the beloved in Latin love poetry. Themes of power, control, and desire pervade the verse as the lover engages the beloved in a troubled relationship. These same topics arise in pop music. The struggle to find, to keep, and, at times, to end relationships as well as the jealousy, control, infidelity, and contempt which can destroy love are common subjects in current music. The way in which modern songs address this is through a verse/chorus/bridge story-telling formula with allusions to shared cultural references. Moreover, Catullus' issues with the audience not always recognizing the poet's constructed persona are paralleled with the struggles of modern celebrities such as Taylor Swift, who directly addresses the dichotomy of her own personality and her perceived character in several of her songs. Both authors complain about those critics who do not understand the game being played in their verses.

Such connections between ancient authors and modern songwriters reveal how appropriate pop music is for teaching poetry. To support this, I offered a detailed analysis comparing Taylor Swift's *Blank Space* to the Catullan corpus of Lesbia poems. By tracing a modern love affair in the lyrics and video, I demonstrated how similar sentiments were present in the verses of both Catullus and Swift. This exercise provides the paradigm for an assignment comparing Latin poems with the lyrics of a modern song that can be done in translation or utilizing the original Latin. In searching for a suitable song and Latin poems, students read more poetry and begin to consider verses analytically. Though I have chosen Catullus, Ovid would also be another popular, ancient author to consider for similar exercises. From my own experience, I can say that my students embraced this assignment. They did

create sophisticated commentaries on modern lyrics and discussed how these songs compare (or contrast) to ancient poetry. In their analysis, they began to read more carefully the verses of Catullus and modern singers. Songs are familiar, so students feel like they *can* say something insightful when they might be hesitant to speak about a Latin poem. As students deal with something familiar, they build confidence to delve into the unfamiliar, in this case Latin poetics. Once elegiac couplets are mastered, dactylic hexameter or hendecasyllabic verse seem less intimidating. Even if students cannot remember the rules of a specific meter or the name of a particular poetic device, they will understand the underlying principles of Latin verse. I consider that a successful lesson.

With these guidelines and examples, I hope that anyone can incorporate popular music into their Latin classes. Even if your knowledge concerning the canons of pop music is limited, students will undoubtedly find numerous new illustrations you can use in the future. As popular music evolves, more songs are released, different genres go mainstream, and earlier lyrics/melodies are referenced or sampled. With the help of our students, we can continue to engage with current popular culture and thus remain relevant for each new cohort. What many of these songs and poems have in common are commercial success, potent lyrics, and the universal theme of love, for someone or something. Through these connections, we can open a new discourse about the far-removed past with the familiar. The concept and specifics of meter can be tackled with modern music and melody. The power of word choice, placement, and emphasis — as well as big thematic issues such as control, relationship dynamics, or effects of love — become clear when listening to a song or viewing lyrics as a poem. By reconsidering the way we present poetry, we can help students change their perceptions and to look at the world (Caine, Caine, Crowell 10), modern and ancient, in a different way and, ultimately, value the poetic arts in whatever form they are preserved. Suddenly the poets of the past can become pop stars in the present, ready to write new lines in a blank space.

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APPENDIX 1

[Official Lyrics for Taylor Swift's Blank Space](#) Lyrics by Taylor Swift, Max Martin, and Shellback, 2014, Sony/ATV Tree Publishing/ Taylor Swift Music (BMI), MXM Music AB. (ASCAP) (All Rights Administered by Kobalt Songs Music Publishing, Inc.).

[Verse 1]		And you love the game	
Nice to meet you		'Cause we're young and we're reckless,	
Where you been		We'll take this way too far	
I could show you incredible things		It'll leave you breathless	
Magic, madness, heaven, sin		Or with a nasty scar	30
Saw you there and I thought	5	Got a long list of ex lovers	
Oh my god		They'll tell you I'm insane	
Look at that face		But I've got a blank space, baby	
You look like my next mistake		And I'll write your name.	
Love's a game, want to play			
		[Verse 2]	
New money, suit and tie	10	Cherry lips, crystal skies	35
I can read you like a magazine		I could show you incredible things	
Ain't it funny, rumors fly		Stolen kisses, pretty lies	
And I know you heard about me		You're the king, baby I'm your queen	
So hey, let's be friends		Find out what you want	
I'm dying to see how this one ends	15	Be that girl for a month	40
Grab your passport and my hand		Wait, the worst is yet to come	
I can make the bad guys good			
For a weekend		Screaming, crying, perfect storms	
		I can make all the tables turn	
[Chorus]		Rose garden filled with thorns	
So it's gonna be forever		Keep you second-guessing like	45
Or it's gonna go down in flames	20	Oh my god	
You can tell me when it's over		Who is she	
If the high was worth the pain		I get drunk on jealousy	
Got a long list of ex lovers		But you'll come back	
They'll tell you I'm insane		Each time you leave	50
'Cause you know I love the players	25	'Cause darling I'm a nightmare	

Dressed like a daydream

Chorus

[Bridge]

Boys only want love if it's torture

Don't say I didn't, say I didn't warn you

Boys only want love if it's torture 55

Don't say I didn't, say I didn't warn you

Chorus