

**CATULLUS AND THE
POETICS OF
ROMAN MANHOOD**

DAVID WRAY

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CATULLUS AND THE POETICS OF ROMAN MANHOOD

This book applies comparative cultural and literary models to a reading of Catullus' poems as social performances of a "poetics of manhood": a competitively, often outrageously, self-allusive bid for recognition and admiration. Earlier readings of Catullus, based on Romantic and Modernist notions of "lyric" poetry, have tended to focus on the relationship with Lesbia and to ignore the majority of the shorter poems, which are instead directed at other men. Professor Wray approaches these poems in the light of new models for understanding male social interaction in the premodern Mediterranean, placing them in their specifically Roman historical context while bringing out their strikingly "postmodern" qualities. The result is a new way of reading the fiercely aggressive and delicately refined agonism performed in Catullus' shorter poems. All Latin and Greek quoted is supplied with an English translation.

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D · M · S
Louise Scott Wray
1931–1997

*Deiner Mutter Seele schwebt voraus.
Deiner Mutter Seele hilft die Nacht umschiffen,
Riff um Riff.*

Paul Celan

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Preface

Like Catullus himself, this book about his poems came to maturity in exciting times. A first version of it, well under way when the monographs of Paul Allen Miller and Micaela Janan gave their names to a Catullan year, had only just been submitted as a dissertation when William Fitzgerald's *Provocations* first came into my hands. Since that time, ongoing dialogue with these refined and complex Catullan voices, and with others as well, has brought fuller elaboration and sharper focus to the critical views expressed in these pages. But exciting times never come as an unmingled gift of fortune, and what began as a revision for publication took, in the event, nearly as long as the original writing. The end result is not so much a rewritten book as a new one.

By all accounts, Catullus still commands a wider audience than any other Latin poet. I have written with a varied readership in mind throughout, perhaps especially in the first two chapters on literary and critical constructions and receptions of the Catullan corpus and its author. The second chapter's discussion of Louis Zukofsky and postmodern poetics, while ultimately crucial to the broader arguments of the book, keeps Catullus' own words largely out of the debate for a longer time than some readers may have expected. Patience and indulgence, if tested in Chapter 2, will, I hope, be compensated in Chapter 3, where the contours of a Catullan poetics of manhood are traced through a sustained and nearly exclusive focus on the text of the poems. Chapter 4 brings comparative material drawn from the work of cultural anthropologists to bear on a delineation of what has always seemed to me a defining and irreducible aspect of Catullus' poems: the aggression personated by their speaker. It was Marion Kuntz who, as a dissertation reader, first suggested to me the idea of eventually attempting to situate Catullan invective in a comparative Medi-

terranean context. That advice is among the many debts I owe her, and the line of inquiry is one I think might fruitfully be taken much further in a separate study. The fifth and final chapter, on Archilochian and Callimachean intertextual presences as “code models” of manhood in Catullus, poses the question of what remains of the “Catullan persona” after the collapse of the critical and metaphysical certainties that underpinned Modernist “persona criticism,” and offers a partial answer to that question in a postmodern model of Roman manhood, and selfhood, as performance. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

I come to the end of this project owing much to many, and owning no coin of payment other than gratitude. Richard Thomas (as director), Marion Kuntz and Richard Tarrant read the dissertation and made all manner of unlikely things possible. Others who have kindly read all or part of various and variant versions, and who have improved the end result by encouragement, advice, championing or challenge include, in more or less chronological order, Gregory Nagy, Ralph Johnson, Robert Kaster, Peter White, Richard Saller, Shadi Bartsch, Robert von Hallberg, Niklas Holzberg and Brian Krostenko. I am grateful to the Press’s two anonymous readers for their thorough, insightful and everywhere helpful criticism, to Michael Sharp for unflagging patience and enthusiasm as editor, and to Muriel Hall for expert, painstaking copy-editing. Many colleagues at the University of Chicago (alongside those already named), and many of my students as well, have contributed to this book in subtler but no less real ways. A book that announces so sparkling a list of friends and benefactors runs the risk of setting its reader’s expectations far too high. Responsibility for any and all hopes dashed by what follows herein must of course rest with the author alone.

The cover jacket image, David Fraley’s “Golden Boy” – a riveting performance, and aptly illustrative of this book’s concerns by its Hellenistic allusivity and self-allusivity, by its “palimpsest” technique of competing textures and lines, and by the delicately fierce wit of its title – is a gift of the artist, graciously confirmed by his estate after his sudden and untimely death. His words, from our twenty years of conversation about art and the postmodern, have superimposed their rhythms, like the Epicurean *clinamena* of his canvases, across these pages. As for his works, death will not put a hand on his nightingales.

Alongside the debt recorded in the dedication, I wish also to thank the following people for help and support of every kind: my father Jack Wray, my late grandmother Grace Scott, my Latin teacher Ruth Wells, Earnest and Mariana Atkins, Bruce Mattys, James Powell and Elizabeth Vandiver.

And the most important thing of all: Kristen, you loaned me your copy of Fordyce's Catullus that summer and I never returned it. Good thing you married me. The next book is for you. So is everything else.

CHAPTER I

Catullan criticism and the problem of lyric

All the new thinking is about loss. In this it resembles the old thinking.

Robert Hass, "Meditation at Lagunitas"

"CELEBRATE YOUR CATULLUS"

New thinking from a new book: a fair enough expectation, even when the new book is a literary study of an ancient poet, and even when the ancient poet is Catullus. But if "new thinking" is to mean thinking away the intervening centuries to reveal a timeless classic preserved under the aspic of eternity, then new thinking about Catullus is neither possible nor even desirable. The tradition of an ancient text – both the discourse that transmits and mediates that text (reception) and the discourse that the text itself mediates (intertext) – is not an obstacle to its proper understanding, something to be set aside, got over. Rather, its ancient and modern tradition is precisely that thing which renders Catullus' text comprehensible in the first place. Forgetting reception history, including scholarly reception (starting with all those emendations of a garbled text), would be as helpful to a reading of Catullus as forgetting the Roman alphabet.¹

Still, there is a sense within Catullan studies that surely we can do better than the Romanticism of the nineteenth century and the neo-Romanticism of much of the twentieth.² Surely we have done better already. The work of T. P. Wiseman, combining detailed

¹ On reception, see Jauss (1990) and, notably among literary Romanists, Martindale (1993) 1–34; on intertext, Still and Worton (1990) with references there.

² The danger of overcompensating for the excesses of Romantic readings, as of any earlier critical stance, is of course a real one. Wiseman (1985) 116 and Thomas (1988) 54–5 suggest that Catullans may have fallen into it long since. On Romanticism and the critical valuation of Latin literature, see Habinek (1992) and (1998) 15–33.

historical reconstruction, informed speculation, and an insistence on reading Catullus' text as a poetry collection rather than the novelistic journal of a love affair with its entries shuffled, is one example of how much better we have done.³ A more recent example, to cite only one among several, is William Fitzgerald's *Catullan Provocations*: the work of a sensitive reader who takes poetry seriously, even as his Foucauldian *ressentiment* teases and prods us, with elegant churlishness, towards an escape from over-sentimentalizing of a poet "we have taken rather too much to our hearts."⁴

If it seems that at last something close to the palette of its true colors is being restored to Catullus' poetry, then a question imposes itself, homerically: How did that image first begin to be denatured? When did the smoke start to cloud the fresco beyond recognition? I seem already to have laid the blame implicitly at the feet of Romanticism, and probably many readers will have accepted that attribution as just. Was it Ludwig Schwabe who led us astray, then, Schwabe with his seductive (in its way) amalgam of empirical historicism, encyclopedic philology, gushing sentiment and – perhaps most importantly – keen novel writer's instinct, expressed in elegantly clear Latin prose?⁵ If it is true that "the founding act of modern scholarship on Catullus is [Schwabe's] identification of the woman behind the name Lesbia," it is also true that there are modernities and modernities.⁶ Schwabe's act, at the head of a century-long modernity now several decades past, consisted in mapping Catullus' written Lesbia onto Clodia *Metelli*, wife of Q. Metellus Celer and the only one of Clodius' three sisters about whom enough is known to tell a really good story. Cicero's *Pro Caelio* is a "conspicuous source," and a damning one for "Lesbia" construed by identification with Cicero's Clodia.⁷ His portrait of a "two-bit Clytemnestra"⁸ has provided plentiful grist for a misogynist mill, one that often mystified the mechanics of its

³ Wiseman, esp. (1969) and (1985).

⁴ Fitzgerald (1995) 235.

⁵ Schwabe (1862), esp. 53–157, "de amoribus Catulli." Other nineteenth century Catullans whose voices continued to resonate in the twentieth include Ribbeck (1863) and Westphal (1867).

⁶ Fitzgerald (1995) 21.

⁷ On the allure of the "conspicuous source," Wiseman (1985) 1–4.

⁸ The nickname *quadrantaria Clytaemnestra*, given by Caelius to Clodia, is preserved by Quintilian (*Inst.* 8.6.53). On Cicero's smearing of her character through derisive humor in the *Pro Caelio*, see Austin (1960), Geffcken (1973) and esp. Skinner (1983).

own grinding behind an exalted veneration for the “tenderest of Roman poets.”⁹ Modernities and modernities: when the “long” modernity, now half a millenium old and counting, welcomed Catullus into its ranks as a printed book, what it took aboard was a text already received, with an author already precooked for readerly consumption, already constructed – even already “romanticized.”

The *editio princeps*, dated 1472, came out of the printing house of Wendelin von Speyer at Venice.¹⁰ None of the chapbook intimacy of our slender scholarly Catulluses: this is a large quarto volume containing, along with all of Catullus, the elegies of Propertius and Tibullus and the *Silvae* of Statius. On the verso opposite the first page of the Catullan collection stands this notice:

Valerius Catullus, scriptor lyricus, Veronae nascitur olympiade CLXIII anno ante natum Sallustium Crispum diris Marii Syllaeque temporibus, quo die Plotinus Latinam rhetoricam primus Romae docere coepit. amavit hic puellam primariam Clodiam, quam Lesbiam suo appellat in carmine. lascivus fuit et sua tempestate pares paucos in dicendo frenata oratione, superiorem habuit neminem. in iocis apprime lepidus, in seriis uero grauissimus extitit. erotica scripsit et epithalamium in Manlium. anno uero aetatis suae xxx Romae moritur elatus moerore publico.

Valerius Catullus, lyric writer, born in the 163rd Olympiad the year before the birth of Sallustius Crispus, in the dreadful times of Marius and Sulla, on the day Plotinus [*sic*] first began to teach Latin rhetoric at Rome. He loved Clodia, a girl of high rank, whom he calls Lesbia in his poetry. He was somewhat lascivious, and in his time had few equals, and no superior, in verse expression. He was particularly elegant in jests, but a man of great gravity on serious matters. He wrote erotic pieces, and a marriage-song to Manlius. He died at Rome in the thirtieth year of his age, with public mourning at his funeral.¹¹

This publisher’s blurb was composed or compiled, we now know, by one Gerolamo Squarzafico, a “modest and ill-paid humanist who worked for Wendelin.”¹² The dates of birth and death come from Jerome; the rest may be invention, or extrapolated from the poems, or possibly drawn from an ancient source available to Squarzafico but now lost to us.¹³ Of course Squarzafico is follow-

⁹ Tennyson, “Frater Ave atque Vale.” ¹⁰ Gaisser (1993) 25–31.

¹¹ Text and translation from Wiseman (1985) 207. ¹² Gaisser (1993) 26.

¹³ Jerome *Chronica* 150–1H; Wiseman (1985) 270–1.

ing the traditional form used by ancient *grammatici* in composing similar Lives of the Poets: life, works and literary *color*. But even within that convention, the glamor of the Life seems already to have encroached upon the artistry of the Poet. After the (probably fabricated and in any case inaccurate) synchronicities accompanying the nativity comes a sentence with its verb emphatically fronted: that “he loved” (*amauit*), we are to understand, is the central fact of Catullus’ existence. And the object of his love is identified first as Clodia – presumably on the authority of Apuleius, *Apol.* 10, though the description *primariam puellam* (“girl of high rank”), not found in Apuleius, sounds genuinely ancient. Only subsequently does Squarzafico give the name “Lesbia” (we are to understand a simple one-to-one correspondence), glossed as the name by which Catullus referred to her *in his poetry*, that last phrase tacked on almost as an afterthought. Eerily modern (or is it eerily Romantic?) of Squarzafico to have written “Clodia” before “Lesbia.” Apuleius, at least, had had the good taste to say it the other way around: “by the same token they should indict Gaius Catullus for using the name ‘Lesbia’ to stand in for ‘Clodia’.”¹⁴

Already present, somehow, in Squarzafico’s early modern words is “our Catullus,” intact and entire, “biographical fallacy” and all: life privileged over work, and the Lesbia poems (or should we say “Clodia poems”?) over the rest of the collection.¹⁵ This construction of an author named Catullus addressed to the users of a new technology has become familiar to us, through frequent citation, as part of the story we tell about the journey of Catullus (the name of a book and an author) through the centuries into our hands.¹⁶ The story is an odd one, dramatic for all its familiarity: if a single manuscript containing all the poems of our modern editions had not turned up at Verona in the late thirteenth century or the first few years of the fourteenth, Catullus would be for us little more than a name and a series of fragments and testimonia. Textual criticism calls that manuscript V, for *Veronensis*: “Veronese,” like Catullus himself, though in fact we have no idea where it had been or where it was actually discovered, or by whom (except in an unsolved riddle). V was copied at least once before it dis-

¹⁴ Apuleius *Apologia* 10: *eadem opera accusent C. Catullum quod Lesbiam pro Clodiam nominarit.*

¹⁵ Gaisser (1993) 28.

¹⁶ The entire paragraph is reproduced in Wiseman (1985) 207, Gaisser (1993) 26 and Miller (1994) 52.

appeared again, this time apparently for good. From a copy of V, denoted as A (also now lost), we have one direct descendant (O) and two grandchildren (G and R) by a different parent (called X, also lost).¹⁷

Catullus the book, then, reached us just before our modernity. Sometime in the first decade of the fourteenth century – possibly in the same year that Dante, recently exiled from Florence, was taking consolation in the hospitality of the Scaligeri at Verona – a contemporary witness of Catullus’ return, Benvenuto Campesani, composed a Latin poem to mark the occasion:

Ad patriam uenio longis a finibus exsul;
 causa mei reditus compatriota fuit,
 scilicet a calamis tribuit cui Francia nomen
 quique notat turbae praetereuntis iter.
 quo licet ingenio uestrum celebrate Catullum,
 cuius sub modio clausa papyrus erat.

I who was an exile am come to my country from a faraway land. The cause of my return was a fellow countryman: namely, the one to whom France gave a name from *calami* (reeds) and who marks the path of the passing crowd. With all the wit you may, celebrate your Catullus, whose *papyrus* (papyrus/light) had been hidden under a bushel.

This epigram, like many of Catullus’ own poems, is inhabited by a series of indeterminacies.¹⁸ First, the middle couplet appears to offer a pair of etymological riddles, presumably on the given and family names of the manuscript’s discoverer, whose identity remains undiscovered to date. *Compatriota* (2) would seem to assign him Veronese origin, though in that case *Francia* (3) is a difficulty.¹⁹

Next there is the Foucauldian question: “Who is speaking?”²⁰ To answer that the verses are “put into the mouth of Catullus himself” is unobjectionable, but what does “Catullus” mean in that answer?²¹ “I who was an exile am come . . .”: the thing that was missing and now returned is after all the *book of poems* in the reader’s hands. At least in its opening words, the epigram harks

¹⁷ McKie (1977) 38–95 demonstrated that O and also X, the lost parent of R and G, were copied not directly from V but rather from a lost copy of V, now designated A. See Thomson (1973), (1978) 3–63 and (1997) 22–38.

¹⁸ On Catullan indeterminacy, Selden (1992).

¹⁹ Gaisser (1993) 18 suggests, toward solution of the riddle, a given name of Francesco.

²⁰ Foucault (1979).

²¹ Fordyce (1961) xxvi.

back to a very ancient mode of writing: a first-person inscription by which the inscribed artifact or surface is turned into a “speaking object.”²² Such inscriptions make sense only when attached to the objects they ventriloquize: in this case, a copy of Catullus. Ancient poetry bookrolls often bore similar prefatory inscriptions, some turning the book into a speaking object, others ventriloquized in the voice of the author. An example of the former type, written by the author himself, was attached to Ovid’s *Amores* in its second edition: *Qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli, | tres sumus* (“We who had recently been Naso’s five books are now three”). An example of the second type is the spurious (probably non-Virgilian, that is, but genuinely ancient) opening of the *Aeneid*: *Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus auena | carmen* (“I am he who once composed a song upon a slender oaten pipe”).²³

The speaker of Benvenuto’s epigram sits indeterminately between these two choices; neither choice has its full meaning without the pressure exerted by the other one. Both those choices, of course, are subsumed under the name “Catullus.” The corporeal presence of the poet, and the trace of his absence in his *corpus*, are both represented by the signifier of the proper name.²⁴ English still says “reading Catullus” or “liking Catullus” when it means the *poems*. Latin employed this effaced trope even more readily than our language; the Roman author said, not “my works are read,” but “I am read.” The mistaking of the verses for the poet, for the author, that we generally ascribe to outmoded (“Romantic”) forms of literary criticism, and that Catullus’ Poem 16 seems to attribute to Furius and Aurelius, is in fact already imbedded in the language used, in both our own tongue and Catullus’, to describe the act, desire and enjoyment of reading.

A further locus of indeterminacy in Benvenuto’s poem resides at the level of its Catullan intertext. The first verse speaks of absence

²² Burzachechi (1962), also Svenbro (1993) 26–43, a chapter entitled “I Write, Therefore I Efface Myself.”

²³ Conte (1986) 84–7 has argued compellingly that Ovid’s epigram at the head of the *Amores*, when read together with the opening of the first poem of the collection, makes an allusive gesture both toward the “fake” opening of the *Aeneid* (which Ovid must therefore have known, perhaps as the inscription beneath a portrait lozenge at the head of a deluxe edition) and toward the epic’s “real” opening. On the “fake” opening of the *Aeneid* and its (in)authentication, see Austin (1968).

²⁴ On the (Derridean) “trace” as the textual presence of an absence, Barchiesi (1984), also Riffaterre (1980b).