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V. PISANI e G. SCARPAT

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CATULLUS IN NEW ZEALAND POETRY:  
THE PROGRAMMATIC POEMS OF BAXTER,  
STEAD, AND JACKSON

Abstract

*This paper examines the Catullan adaptations of three New Zealand poets, James Baxter, Karl Stead, and Anna Jackson. The relationship between their English poems and their Roman models is the principal focus, and this relationship is here examined by way of critical readings of the programmatic poems in the Catullan sequences of each New Zealand poet. Provisional conclusions are also drawn regarding the nature of New Zealand's literary engagement with the poetry of Catullus.*

*Keywords: Catullus; reception; Latin poetry; Roman Alexandrianism; Modernism.*

1. *Beginnings, endings, programmes*<sup>1</sup>

a. *Baxter, The Party*

A kind of cave – still on the brandy,  
And coming in from the outside,  
I didn't like it – the room like a tunnel  
And everybody gassing in chairs –  
Or count on finding you there, smiling  
Like a stone Diana at  
Egnatius' horse-laugh – not my business exactly  
That he cleans his teeth with AJAX,  
But he's the ugliest South Island con man  
Who ever beat up a cripple ...  
Maleesh – the booze rolls back, madam;  
I'm stuck here in the void  
Looking at my journey's end –  
Two breasts like towers – the same face  
That brought Troy crashing  
Down like a chicken coop – black wood and flames!

<sup>1</sup> This paper resumes an investigation begun in W.J. TATUM, *Catullus in New Zealand Poetry: Baxter, Stead, and Jackson read Catullus Poem 11*, «Paideia» 73, 2018, pp. 1515-1537.

Baxter commences *Words to Lay a Strong Ghost* by reworking an angry, spiteful, obscene outburst deployed by Catullus to mark the nadir of his relationship with Lesbia. In Poem 37 Catullus, rejected by his lover, finds her in the louche setting of a *salax taberna* sitting with the hundreds of men who have hyperbolically replaced him in her erotic attentions<sup>2</sup>. Appalled, Catullus insults them, threatens them with rape, and, perhaps anticlimactically, warns that he will cover their *taberna* with obscene graffiti. Egnatius, a man whose teeth are brushed with Spanish piss, is singled out for abuse by Catullus because, in this poem, he is keenest on Catullus' ex. She is unnamed in the poem, but the poet recalls her as:

amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla,  
pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata (Catull. 37,12-13).  
loved as no woman shall ever be loved,  
for whose sake great wars were fought by me.

In looking back by way of these lines, in the disgraceful contemporary circumstances of Catull. 37, Catullus encapsulates in this single work the past story of his affair with Lesbia and its unhappy, ignominious outcome. Baxter's beginning, then, is Catullus' humiliating end. Not the end of Catullus' anguish or poetic ruminations about his unhappy affair, of course. But the end of any hope.

It is Egnatius who signals this poem's connection with Catull. 37. Baxter's Egnatius, like Catullus', is keen on the object of the poet's interest (though she is unnamed here, we can call her Pyrrha: the reader of Baxter, like the reader of the first poems in the Catullan collection, must wait for the revelation of her identity). Catullus' Egnatius is, perhaps, a Spaniard, Baxter's is apparently a local. But like his classical predecessor this Egnatius cleans his teeth by way of an unorthodox operation: he employs the cheap cleaning agent Ajax, still in everyday use<sup>3</sup>. This lowbrow commercial appropriation of a Homeric hero, whose presence here anticipates the fall of Troy at the poem's conclusion, both marks Egnatius' coarse personal habits and indicates something of the vulgarity that characterises his attempt at impressing Pyrrha. So, too, his

<sup>2</sup> On Poem 37, see L.C. WATSON, *Catullus and the Brothel-Creepers: Carmen 37*, «Antichthon» 43, 2009, pp. 122-136 (and the criticism cited there).

<sup>3</sup> It is in fact used, by some, for cleaning teeth: Diane IRONS, *The World's Best-Kept Beauty Secrets: What Really Works in Beauty, Diet and Fashion*, Naperville, 2001, p. 179, must caution readers against it. As for the alleged Spanish practice, see D.S. 5,33,5; Str. 3,4,16.

«horse-laugh». Baxter's Egnatius is dishonest, violent, and (unlike Catullus' Egnatius) ugly. Still, this domesticated Egnatius maps on to Catullus' character so neatly that their identity is unmistakable. In this way, Baxter makes it obvious how the *The Party* reprises Catull. 37.

*The Party* is the first poem in Baxter's sequence. Nevertheless, *The Party* is, like Catull. 37, an aftermath poem. Tenses are important here. In *The Party* Pyrrha is addressed in the present as Baxter's Catullus recalls the party which is the subject of his poem<sup>4</sup>. That party, and his unexpected encounter with Pyrrha, are clearly things of the past («I didn't like it ... or count on finding»). When, however, Baxter's Catullus assimilates Pyrrha to Helen of Troy, evoking the disastrous conclusion of his relationship with her, he is in the present («the booze rolls back... I'm stuck here in the void / looking»), a distinction that is underscored by way of simple punctuation («Who ever beat up a cripple ...»). The cataclysmic end of their affair lay in the future on the occasion of the party but now, as the poet addresses Pyrrha, it lies in the past. In a sense, then, this poem occupies more than one poetic time zone. It is the first poem of the collection. It could also be the last one.

This effect, situating poetic moments in fluid time zones, is very Catullan. The Lesbia cycle, notwithstanding the long application of scholarly ingenuity, evades perfect clarity or exactitude both by way of the poems' arrangement in the corpus but also by way of their apparently overlapping content and references. Catullus simply shies away from anything like an obvious beginning or a definitive conclusion to his relationship with Lesbia. Nor is the inner sequence always easy to apprehend<sup>5</sup>. This is also true in the case of Catullus' poems addressed to Gellius, works the intratextualities of which render it impossible to designate with any certainty a beginning, a middle, or an end<sup>6</sup>. For this reason,

<sup>4</sup> S. HARRISON, *Catullus in New Zealand: Baxter and Stead*, in ID., *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, Oxford 2009, p. 299, sees it differently: «the speaker seems to be addressing a barmaid in a maudlin manner while staring at the object of his thwarted passion».

<sup>5</sup> Julia T.D. DYSON, *The Lesbia Poems*, in Marilyn B. SKINNER (ed. by), *A Companion to Catullus*, Oxford 2007, pp. 254-275; W.W. BATSTONE, *Catullus and the Programmatic Poem: The Origins, Scope, and Utility of a Concept*, in SKINNER, cit. *supra*, pp. 235-253; P.A. MILLER, *Catullus and Roman Love Elegy*, in SKINNER, cit. *supra*, pp. 404-410, pp. 31-42; G.O. HUTCHINSON, *Booking lovers: desire and design in Catullus*, in I. DU QUESNAY and T. WOODMAN (ed. by), *Catullus: Poems, Books, Readers*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 48-78.

<sup>6</sup> W.J. TATUM, *Friendship, Politics, and Literature in Catullus: Poems 1, 65 and 66, 116*, in Julia Haig GAISSER (ed. by), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Catullus*, Oxford 2007, pp. 393-395.

Baxter's decision to employ Catullan poetics constitutes a remarkable choice for a poet seeking to lay the ghost of a lost love – if it is a sense of an ending that is hoped for.

Whether or not *The Party* depicts the first meeting between Pyrrha and Baxter's Catullus is unclear, perhaps intentionally<sup>7</sup>. In any case, this meeting was unexpected. Nothing in this poem even remotely hints that Baxter's Catullus actually spoke with Pyrrha on the occasion. As Stephen Harrison has observed, in *The Party* our attention is directed toward the poet's «visual concentration on the object of passion»<sup>8</sup>. This is true for both encounters elaborated in this poem: the contemporary address to Pyrrha and the party at which the poet saw Pyrrha and Egnatius together. At the party, however, Baxter's Catullus was apparently silent.

It has been suggested that the poet's experience at the party recalls Catullus' in Poem 51, his adaptation of an ode by Sappho<sup>9</sup>. There Catullus, like Sappho before him, envies the companion of his beloved – *ille mi par esse deo videtur* (Catull. 51,1) This man is blessed because he can gaze at Lesbia closely while he listens to her laugh. As for the poet, he is dazzled and reduced to utter speechlessness by the sight and sound of her. This poem has long been regarded by influential critics as the first poem which Catullus presented to Clodia Metelli<sup>10</sup>. Perhaps Baxter shared this view. Which gives us, in *The Party*, something in the way (by no means tidy) of a poem within a poem, or perhaps two poems rubbing along with one another as best they can: one, Catull. 37, marking the end, the other, Catull. 51, the beginning, of Catullus' affection for Lesbia – one characterised by passionate Sapphic silence, the other by hateful Latin invective that is ultimately no more potent than scribbling on a wall. *Odi et amo*, from the start.

<sup>7</sup> It was at a party in Dunedin in 1946 that Jane Aylmer met and fell in love with the man she would marry, an event that led to her ultimate break up with Baxter: F. MCKAY, *The Life of James K. Baxter*, Auckland 1990, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> HARRISON, *Catullus in New Zealand*, cit. n. 4, p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> J. DAVIDSON, *Catullus, Horace and Baxter*, «Islands: A New Zealand Quarterly of Arts and Letters» 5, 1976, pp. 88-89; HARRISON, *Catullus in New Zealand*, cit. n. 4, p. 299. Catull. 51 is an adaption of Sapph. fr. 31 in D.A. CAMPBELL, *Greek Lyric, vol. 1: Sappho and Alcaeus*, Cambridge, Mass., 1982.

<sup>10</sup> L.P. WILKINSON, *Discussion of Jean Bayet 'Catulle: La Grèce et Rome*, in *L'influence grecque sur la poésie latine de Catulle à Ovide*, Geneva 1953, pp. 47-48; C.J. FORDYCE, *Catullus*, Oxford 1961, p. 219; K. QUINN, *Catullus: An Interpretation*, London 1971, p. 57; cf. Julia Haig GAISSER, *Catullus*, Oxford 2009, pp. 213-214.

Pyrrha does not speak. She only smiles «like a stone Diana» when listening to Egnatius laugh, a juxtaposition that we can now see as a kind of inversion of the situation of beloved and rival in Catull. 51. Here it is the beloved, not her plus-one, who appears like a god. This is Pyrrha's first appearance in *The Party*, and she enters the poet's field of vision as a cold manifestation of the Romans' goddess of virginity. In a poem by Baxter, however, this is anything but a straightforward semiotic signal: again and again, throughout his poems, Baxter's Diana becomes a frightening divinity: the reader must not overlook her latent menace here<sup>11</sup>. At first glance, however, Pyrrha's dangerousness is no more than potential. It is the statue-like indifference of a virgin goddess that appears to be to the fore.

Pyrrha is like a statue of Diana but she does not remain that way for long. Very soon she becomes a very different kind of woman: the eager bride of the *Song of Solomon*:

I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers: then it was I in his eyes as one that found favour (*Ct.* 8,10).

Immediately after that, there is another radical transformation: she is Christopher Marlowe's Helen of Troy:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium –  
Sweet Helen (Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* 5,1,90-92)

These two figures, biblical bride and Marlowe's Helen, are linked in Baxter's adjacent allusions though his emphasis on the imagery of towers.

This is a baleful mutation: the beautiful but adulterous Helen, in classical literature and thereafter, routinely signals desire, obsession, and the destruction of others<sup>12</sup>. For Marlowe's Faustus, she is all consuming (*Doctor Faustus* 5,1,93: «Her lips suck forth my soul»), and Faustus, like the later Baxter, as we shall see, is all too willing in the heat of his passion to rewrite Greek mythology and give the destruction of Troy a contemporary setting:

<sup>11</sup> G. MILES, J. DAVIDSON, and P. MILLAR, *The Snake-Haired Muse: James K. Baxter and Classical Myth*, Wellington 2011, pp. 289-291; see, now, G. MILES, *James K. Baxter and the Gorgon Moon*, in Margurite JOHNSON (ed. by), *Antipodean Antiquities: Classical Reception Down Under*, London forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> Ruby BLONDELL, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation*, Oxford 2013.

I will be Paris, and for love of thee,  
Instead of Troy, shall Wertenberg be sack'd (*Doctor Faustus* 5,1,97-98).

The sudden appearance of Helen in *The Party* can only annihilate Pyrrha's depiction as the bride from the *Song of Solomon*. And for Baxter's Catullus, she can only be a destroyer: in *Doctor Faustus*, it is Helen who clinches Faustus' eternal damnation when he decides to raise her from the dead<sup>13</sup>. Pyrrha's is a truly dangerous ghost.

The Catullus of Catull. 37, like Marlowe's Faustus, is bold enough to take up arms. Indeed, he complains that he has waged war on his Lesbia's behalf:

pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata (Catull. 37,13)

Not literally of course, and there is no hint in the Catullan collection of any actions along these lines. But Catullus has had to contend with rivals for Lesbia's attentions, a contest he describes here through the language of warfare, an instance of the familiar Roman conceit of *militia amoris*<sup>14</sup>. In Catullus' poem this line is little more than a cliché. But, as Baxter appreciated, it is a literary move that naturally suggests Helen and the destruction of Troy. So, too, the closing lines of Catull. 51:

otium et reges prius et beatas  
perdidit urbes (Catull. 51,15-16).

Leisure has, in the past, destroyed kings and prosperous cities.

Here, as in Catull. 37, Catullus' passion for Lesbia is associated with war, and Harrison is right to suggest that their violence is also present in the closing lines of *The Party*<sup>15</sup>. In Baxter's poem, by way of its evocation of Catull. 51, discussed above, the first sighting of Pyrrha leads, by way of a Catullan specimen of the creative translation of a Greek classic, to the fall of Troy. So, too, Marlowe's adaptation of Greek myth. There is, in *The Party*, no way of getting round the Trojan War<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., T. HEALY, *Doctor Faustus*, in P. CHENEY (ed. by), *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 185-186; Kate CHEDGZOY, *Marlowe's men and women: gender and sexuality*, in CHENEY, *The Cambridge Companion*, cit. *supra*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>14</sup> The *militia amoris* theme is frequent in Latin literature: e.g. Tib. 1,1,75-6; Prop. 1,6,29-30; Ov. *am.* 1,9,1-2; *ars am.* 3,1-6; cf. R.K. GIBSON, *Ovid Ars Amatoria, Book 3*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 85-87.

<sup>15</sup> HARRISON, *Catullus in New Zealand*, cit. n. 4, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup> Baxter and the Trojan War: MILES, DAVIDSON, and MILLAR, *The Snake-Haired Muse*, cit. n. 11, pp. 346-347.

The fall of Troy, a foundation myth of Roman identity<sup>17</sup>, has a distinctive relevance for New Zealanders. For both Australia and New Zealand, it is the First World War, and especially the campaign at Gallipoli, that is traditionally regarded as the event which registered the rise in each nation of an independent and independently minded society distinct from Great Britain<sup>18</sup>. From the beginning, Troy was an important element in the Australasian reaction to Gallipoli and the Great War. Gallipoli, after all, lies near the site of Troy, and their association is a recurring one in New Zealand<sup>19</sup>. Baxter puts this pairing to work in *The Party*, where the fall of Troy almost inevitably calls to mind, for a historically minded New Zealand reader, the First World War. This connection is made all the more natural by Baxter's prior inclusion of the word *maleesh*: this word, owing to its origin, gestures toward the campaign at Gallipoli<sup>20</sup>.

Which brings us to «journey's end». At first blush, «journey's end» appears to refer to Pyrrha's «two breasts like towers» and to mark a bit of «banausic breast-gazing», as Harrison puts it, on the part of the poem's drunken speaker<sup>21</sup>. Taken this way, the opening lines of this final stanza generate a crude, perhaps comic, effect that threatens to deflate

17 E.g. E.S. GRUEN, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, Ithaca, 1992, pp. 6-51.

18 Concise introductions to the topic, with further references, include: G.W. RICE, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Auckland, 1992, pp. 344-345; I. MCGIBBON, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland, 2000, pp. 27-30; J. BELICH, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000*, Auckland 2001, pp. 95-118; Giselle BYRNES, *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 252-255. See also the essays in R. EDMOND and Janet WILSON (ed. by), *New Zealand and the First World War*, «Journal of New Zealand Literature» 33, 2015.

19 Sarah MIDFORD, «Constructing the 'Australian Iliad': Ancient Heroes and Anzac diggers in the Dardanelles», «Melbourne Historical Journal» 39, 2012, pp. 59-79; A. SAGAON, M. ATABAY, C.J. MACKIE, I. MCGIBBON, and R. REID (ed. by), *Anzac Battlefield: A Gallipoli Landscape of War and Memory*, Cambridge, 2016; Maria PERREAU and Lynette KINGSBURY, *The Anzac Iliad: Early New Zealand School Journals and the Development of the citizen-child in the new dominion*, «Citizenship, Social and Economic Education» 16, 2017, pp. 157-173; M. TRUNDLE, *The Reception of the Classical Tradition in New Zealand War Reporting and Memory in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, in Diana BURTON, S. PERRIS, and J. TATUM, (ed. by), *Athens to Aotearoa: Greece and Rome in New Zealand Literature and Society*, Wellington 2017, pp. 313-325. See also Elizabeth VANDIVER, *Stand in the Trenches, Achilles: Classical Receptions in British Poetry of the Great War*, Oxford, 2010.

20 This is a Turkish word that Australians and New Zealanders picked up during the First World War and put to work to express «so what?» or «never mind»; see H.W. ORSMAN, *The Dictionary of New Zealand English*, Auckland, 1997, p. 464.

21 HARRISON, *Catullus in New Zealand*, cit. n. 4, p. 300.



the epic quality of the fall of Troy which follows. There is no real reason to close down this approach because there is no real reason why Baxter's boozy Catullus cannot combine uninhibited leering with the composition of serious literature.

At the same time, it is difficult not to detect in «journey's end» a reference to the controversial and celebrated play of the same name by R.C. Sherriff, which premiered in 1928<sup>22</sup>. Set in the trenches, Sherriff's *Journey's End* captures the horror and futility of the Great War in scenes charged with boozy dialogue, anxiety over sex and loyalty, and human despair. *Journey's End* was well known, and its subject was highly topical for a writer like Baxter, who again and again revisits the morality of war<sup>23</sup>. Its presence in this poem can hardly be accidental. Here it is shorthand for The Great War and supplies a means of conflating, in a typical New Zealand fashion, the Trojan War with the First World War.

But *The Party* is not a poem about war in that sense. In this poem, like Poem 37 of Catullus, war is (mostly) a metaphor for love – in this case a love that is doomed and whose object must, like Marlowe's Helen, cost the poet his soul. Every lover is a warrior, to be sure, only here the campaign, like the First World War, is pointless and ruinous. And so it must all come «crashing down like a chicken coop».

This simile is a homely expression that perhaps evokes a modest agricultural New Zealand. At the same time, and this is important for grasping the dynamics of this poem's final lines, Baxter's is also exactly the kind of simile preferred by Homer when describing great events:

ἦ τοι πρόσθε σταῖσα βέλος ἐχεπεθκὲς ἄμυνεν.  
ἦ δὲ τόσον μὲν ἔεργεν ἀπὸ χροός, ὡς ὄτε μήτηρ  
παιδὸς ἐέργη μυῖαν, ὅθ' ἠδέει λέξεται ὕπνῳ ... (*Iliad* 4,130-133).

Standing in front of you [Menelaus], she [Athena] warded off the stinging arrow. She swept it aside from his flesh just as when a mother shoos a fly from her child when it lies in sweet sleep.

This is not a solitary example. At *Iliad* 15,362-364, to provide a further instance, Apollo routs the Achaeans as a child on a beach wrecks a sandcastle. Homer's similes avoid the legendary past of the heroes whose

22 R.C. SHERRIFF, *Journey's End, a Play in Three Acts*, New York, 1929.

23 J.E. WEIR, *The Poetry of James K. Baxter*, Wellington, 1970, pp. 60-62; MCKAY, James K. Baxter, cit. n. 7, pp. 206-207; MILES, DAVIDSON, and MILLAR, *The Snake-Haired Muse*, cit. n. 11, pp. 119-120.

adventures he narrates, and they rarely involve mythology. They are «delightfully unexpected», and in Homer a homely image often conveys a sublime reality<sup>24</sup>. And, in a sense, that is true here too. But because the Trojan War in *The Party* is already a metaphor, a homely image is here combined with a grand image in order to convey the epic quality of the pain of this failed love affair. There is, perhaps, some incommensurability here, and it is this potential imbalance that makes it possible for these final lines to oscillate so wildly between breast-gazing and the human disaster of the Great War. Brandy, and lovesickness, will do that.

In *The Party* the reader finds the essential themes played out in the residue of the sequence. Booze recurs, as does sex. Jealousy and invective (see, especially, *The Counter-lunch*) are reprised. New Zealand takes on classical models are repeated. Like *The Party*, most of the poems in the sequence are addressed to Pyrrha, who remains mostly silent (*The Peach Tree*: «But Pyrrha doesn't talk»). And throughout this collection, Baxter's Pyrrha, like the addressee of *The Party*, is a shape-shifter: she is a goddess associated with the Sutherland Falls in *The Earth* (an identity inspired by Catullus' description of Lesbia as *candida diva* at Catull. 68,70)<sup>25</sup>; she is also Cybele, who in Baxter as in Catullus inspires self-castration (*The Wound*; *The Friend*; cf. Catull. 63); in *The Rival* she is Scylla, or, more precisely, Scylla is located, Baxter tells Pyrrha, «between your thighs» (cf. Catull. 60,2); Pyrrha is a vampire in *The Streetlight*.

*The Party* is not, however, a simple overture: complexities, even subversions, obtrude. To take an obvious example, in the poet's first glimpse of Pyrrha in *The Party* she is like Diana, a reference that activates the issue of her virginity. An allusion to the *Song of Solomon* introduces the idea of marriage. In *The Hymen*, however, a poem that incorporates elements from Catull. 61 and 62 (Catullus' wedding-poems), each of these ideas is rejected. In an abbreviated priamel, in which Callimachus is adduced as a poetic authority lauding virginity in the young and praising the institution of wholesome marriage (a reference to Catull. 66, Catullus' translation of Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice*), Baxter's Catullus rejects them both:

<sup>24</sup> The quotation is from C.M. BOWRA, *Homer*, London, 1979, p. 62. On similes in Homer, see H. FRÄNKEL, *Die homerischen Gleichnisse*, Göttingen, 1921 (fundamental); BOWRA, cit. *supra*, pp. 60-66; R. BUXTON, *Similes and other likenesses*, in R. FOWLER (ed. by), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 139-155.

<sup>25</sup> DAVIDSON, *Catullus, Horace and Baxter*, cit. n. 9, p. 90.

– I don't

Ask that of you, Pyrrha,  
To bind or be bound,  
Because it's not your style –

This simple assertion, however, is rendered significantly less unequivocal when it is read against Pyrrha's appearances to Baxter's Catullus in *The Party*.

*b. Stead, The Clodian Songbook, poem 1*

Stead's extensive deployment of his Catullan persona puts exceptional pressure on *Clodian Songbook*, poem 1:

Whom do we write for

Cornelius  
in a popular culture  
under a cooling star

for the dear loves?  
the children?  
the lovely and the lonely

moments?  
Catullus could sign himself away  
and all his words

but Clodia?  
this near world?

Never!

Here's my thin sheaf

friend  
take it it's  
(till the cows come home)  
yours.

Originally the introduction to a single and carefully ordered sequence of poems, *The Clodian Songbook*, poem 1, has now become the preface to the extended literary career of Stead's Catullus – a Catullus who Stead has insisted remains «the same person, with the same friends and enemies from poem to poem»<sup>26</sup>. This complexity invites, in any consideration

<sup>26</sup> C.K. STEAD, *Shelf Life: Reviews, Replies and Reminiscences*, Auckland 2016, p. 289.

of the programmatic qualities of this poem, at least some reference to works that lie outside the fifteen pieces in *The Clodian Songbook*.

Stead's sequence is far more conventional in its adaptation of Catullus than is Baxter's, not least in the use it makes of Catull. 1. That poem, notwithstanding controversy over the actual contents of the collection it originally prefaced, is universally and rightly regarded as programmatic<sup>27</sup>. Such introductions were natural for Hellenistic and Roman poetry books. Much has been written regarding the proleptic elements of Catull. 1<sup>28</sup>. Here we must distil. Catullus describes his volume as graceful (*lepidum*) and new (*novum*) and refined (*expolitum*). And he dedicates his book to Cornelius Nepos, also a writer, whose work, according to Catullus, is bold (*ausus es*), learned (*doctis*), and the product of intensive study (*laboriosis*). Cornelius is Catullus' ideal reader: he recognises the real merit of Catullus' rubbishy little poems (*nugae*)<sup>29</sup>. In view of the identity established in this poem between Cornelius and Catullus, it is only natural to apply to Catullus' volume the virtues he ascribes to Cornelius. And so we find here a claim by Catullus that the poems that follow will exhibit grace, novelty, boldness, deep learning, and exquisite technique. And, in fact, they do. These literary and aesthetic qualities reflect a commitment to a poetics the Romans associated with the influential Alexandrian poet Callimachus and which modern critics often subsume under the rubric of Roman Alexandrianism. Catull. 1, then, is something of a literary manifesto<sup>30</sup>. This same poem also adumbrates central themes which will recur throughout the collection, such as friendship, friendship's difficult relationship with patronage, and the tensions in Roman society between the city of Rome and Roman Italy.

<sup>27</sup> On the issue of Catullus' collection(s), see Marilyn B. SKINNER, *Authorial Arrangement of the Collection: Debate Past and Present*, in EAD., *A Companion to Catullus*, cit. n. 5, pp. 35-53.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. BATSTONE, *Catullus and the Programmatic Poem*, cit. n. 5; TATUM, *Friendship, Politics, and Literature*, cit. n. 6, pp. 374-379 (each with further references). See also Alison M. KEITH, *Latin elegiac collections and Hellenistic epigram books*, in EAD., *Latin Elegy and Hellenistic Epigram: A Tale of Two Genres at Rome*, Newcastle 2011, pp. 99-115.

<sup>29</sup> Some critics, it must be noted, detect irony in Catullus' introduction of Cornelius in this poem: e.g. J.E.G. ZETZEL, *The Poetics of Patronage in the Late First Century B.C.*, in Barbara K. GOLD (ed. by), *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome*, Austin 1982, pp. 100-101; B.K. GIBSON, *Catullus 1.5-7*, «CQ» 45, 1995, pp. 569-573.

<sup>30</sup> On this point see F. CAIRNS, *Roman Lyric: Collected Papers on Catullus and Horace*, Berlin 2012, pp. 1-5, who also assembles the Greek terminology (with pertinent texts) adopted by Roman poets. On Callimachus and his poetics, see Annette HARDER, *Callimachus Aetia*, 2 vols., Oxford 2012.

Stead's poem, in its own way, is also programmatic. Stead adapts but does not translate Catull. 1. And, in one particular at least, he offers a correction. Nothing in Catullus' programmatic first poem hints at the existence, much less the importance, of Lesbia<sup>31</sup>. Which perhaps tells us something about how we ought to read his poetry book. Still, this is an instruction that Stead, like nearly every other reader of Catullus, elects to ignore. Here Clodia – not Lesbia and not Pyrrha – occupies the poem's centre, an emphasis that demands attention to the relationship between a literary persona and its connection to personalities in the real world of the flesh and bone poet. It is she, and the here and now, that matter most – not future generations. Not every poem in the collection that follows is about Clodia – and the last poem in this sequence, like the final poem in Baxter's *Words to Lay a Strong Ghost*, is a reprise of Catull. 101. Nevertheless, as one might expect in a work entitled *The Clodian Songbook*, this life and its Clodia are the preoccupations of Stead's Catullus.

Now the Catullus of Poem 1 conflates his literary and personal relationship with Cornelius: their friendship and Cornelius' capacity for reading Catullus in the right way are inextricable. And of course Catullus the author will, throughout his collection, bear a difficult relationship with Catullus the recurring character. Cornelius, it is obvious, knows how to read his way through this complexity. Not every reader does, and Catullus, in the shocking obscenities of Catull. 16, elaborates the hazards facing readers who get things wrong owing to overly simple biographical reading. There Catullus threatens Furius and Aurelius with rape because they have read his poems about kissing Lesbia in too biographical a fashion – in a poem that itself rapidly falls apart because, for the threat to work, Furius and Aurelius must read it (like the kiss poems) simply and biographically. This is a degree of cleverness unlikely to be appreciated by readers seeking simplicity. Catullus requires more of his audience. He needs readers like Cornelius<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> But see W. FITZGERALD, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1995, pp. 38-42, who detects erotic suggestions in Catull. 1's figuration of the collection it introduces, on which topic R. SEAGER, *Venustus, lepidus, bellus, salsus: Notes on the Language of Catullus*, «Latomus» 33, 1975, pp. 891-894, is also relevant.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., BATSTONE, *Catullus and the Programmatic Poem*, cit. n. 5, p. 248; W.J. TATUM, *Social Commentary and Political Invective*, in SKINNER, *A Companion to Catullus*, cit. n. 5, pp. 346-348 (each with further references).

In his *Collected Poems, 1951-2006*, Stead spelled out, for the less-than-ideal reader, the risk of mixing up characters with authors: the Catullus of his poems, he declares, is «neither Catullus nor myself, but a shifting fictional identity somewhere in between»<sup>33</sup>. And in fact Stead's Catullan poems frequently recur, often playfully, to identity issues of this kind. And Stead's play with the problem of getting this right very often demands of his reader the right degree of industry in chasing down allusions and in applying a keen Modernist, if not Alexandrian, sensibility.

A single example must suffice. In *Catullus Again*, which appeared in *Straw Into Gold*, a pair of poems presents an exchange between Catullus and Calvus (*Dogs I* and *Dogs II*)<sup>34</sup>. In the first poem, Catullus savages Calvus, belittling his talent and ridiculing his keenness to be popular with dogs. In his response, Calvus does not address Catullus' slighting of his ability but instead emphasises the peculiarity of Catullus' interest in his actions – and the perversity of his hostile interpretation of it. He concludes by inviting Catullus to ignore the distraction of dogs and join in the human race:

Give over Catullus  
stop playing the lone wolf.  
Living's our only offence.  
We do it together.

Calvus is a recurring character in Stead's *Catulliana*. Whether or not a real life literary rival lies behind him is something that hardly matters in the operations of this poetic diptych. More important is how, in this confrontation, Catullus plainly comes out the loser as Calvus unpicks the somewhat sad caricature that animates the irascible persona of the figure who is attacking him. This is true even if the reader is left uncertain about the accuracy of Catullus' aspersions on Calvus' literary gifts, an issue that is left hanging. Both Calvus and Catullus are, in a sense, the creations of Stead's Catullus, and they are all of them – obviously – the creations of the flesh and bone Stead. Still, heavily biographical inclinations would surely tilt any reading of this poem in the wrong direction.

<sup>33</sup> C.K. STEAD, *Collected Poems, 1951-2006*, Auckland 2008, p. 525.

<sup>34</sup> C.K. STEAD, *Straw into Gold: Poems New and Selected*, Auckland 1997.

After all, there are further voices at work here. *Dogs I* and *Dogs II* unmistakably reprise Horace, *sat.* 2,7<sup>35</sup>. In that poem, Horace is taken to task by his slave Davus, who rightly points out that the moralising poet, for all his pretensions, is riddled with foibles, faults, and failures. After discoursing on the Stoic truth that only the wise man is free, the slave concludes by telling his master what a hypocritical failure he is (*sat.* 2,7,111-115). Horace is hardly humbled: he reacts to this characterisation angrily, threatening his slave with physical pain or condemnation to a chain gang on his Sabine farm. And with this final warning, Horace lays bare the very real gap between the poetic symbolism of his beloved Sabine estate and the grim realities of its real life operations. Horace's actions in this poem, it is clear, make Davus' case for him. *Dogs I* and *Dogs II*, then, are Horatian poems posing as Catullus poems, in which Stead's Catullus plays the part of Horace's Horace, with important and engaging twists. Presumably this Catullus is no less flawed a figure than his Horatian model. And presumably he is no more likely to be reformed by Calvus than is Horace by Davus.

Now it must be said that Stead the literary celebrity has shown himself very willing to return to the question of how best to analyse the various strands that make up his Catullus' literary DNA<sup>36</sup>. And in his poem 'C.K.', which appeared in 2007 collection *Black River*, he addresses, in uncomplicated, almost reductive terms, the relationship between his personal and poetic identities<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, Stead energetically puts his Catullus to work to provoke further controversy. The best-known instance of this is *From the Clodian Songbook*, poem 16:

Suffenia, feminist in fiction  
and Tullius Tuhoe  
walk off with the Book Awards  
and Catullus chalks up another defeat.

<sup>35</sup> Frances MUECKE, *Horace, Satires II*, Warminster 1993, pp. 212-26; Ellen OLIENSIS, *Horace and the Rhetoric of Authority*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 41-63; A. CUCCHIARELLI, *La satira e il poeta: Orazio tra Epodi e Sermones*, Pisa 2001, pp. 156-161.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. M. HARLOW, *Craft Conversation with C.K. Stead*, «Landfall» 37, 1983, pp. 460-3; Fleur ADCOCK and C.K. STEAD, *C.K. Stead and Fleur Adcock: A Conversation*, «Landfall» 46, pp. 60-62; STEAD, *Shelf Life*, cit. n. 26, pp. 2872-91; see, further, Maxine LEWIS, *C.K. Stead Writes Catullus: Persona, Intention, Intertext and Allusion*, in BURTON, PERRIS, and TATUM, *Athens to Aotearoa*, cit. n. 35, pp. 245-266.

<sup>37</sup> C.K. STEAD, *Black River*, Auckland 2007, pp. 63-64. The intrusion of Stead's public personality into his poetry and its reception is discussed by H. RICKETTS and M. WILLIAMS, *From Hiruharama to Hataitai: The Domestication of New Zealand Poetry, 1972-1990*, in M. WILLIAMS (ed. by), *A History of New Zealand Literature*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 237-238.

Gender and race combine  
     like an All Black front row –  
 unstoppable!

Yes yes they are deserving.  
     Certainly they are the best –  
 as much and as truly the best  
             among our writers  
                     as it is true to say  
 Catullus is the worst.

This piece is modelled on Catull. 49, the poet's ironic, intriguing expression of gratitude to the famous orator. Stead's poem, by contrast, is anything but mysterious. It is the outburst of an aggrieved talent. This Catullus is bitterly jealous of his rivals and holds society to blame. The relationship between the two poems – flagged by the bizarre hybrid name Tullius Tuhoe, obviously intended to suggest a Māori author (Tūhoe is the name of an iwi, a Māori people or community), and the reprisal of the parallelism of the last lines of Catull. 49 – is superficial. Catullus' poem carefully sets up a compliment only to dash it. Stead's Catullus shows his hand early. And this Catullus makes it clear why he is making this criticism of Suffenia and Tullius Tuhoe: he is resentful, both of them and of an artistic community that, in his view, privileges race and gender over talent.

Now apart from the inescapable irony of its closing lines, almost nothing about Catull. 49 is obvious. It is testimony to the allure of the autobiographical poetic pose that the bulk of criticism devoted to this poem has struggled to surmise a specific occasion on which to base an explanation of its operations<sup>38</sup>. Other approaches are possible and almost certainly preferable<sup>39</sup>. But the biographical obsession attending Catull. 49 is the obvious aspect of the poem and its reception that Stead's poem is designed to register for its readers, thereby activating the same kind of biographical critical reaction.

It is unsurprising, then, that this poem stimulated objections – not to its style but to its message and to the poet who composed it<sup>40</sup>. In a

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., the survey supplied by E.A. FREDRICKSMEYER, *Catullus 49, Cicero and Caesar*, «CPh» 68, 1973, pp. 268–278. The beat goes on: see P. GREEN, *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2007, p. 227.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., W.J. TATUM, *Catullus' Criticism of Cicero in Poem 49*, «TAPhA» 118, 1998, pp. 179–184; S.H. SVAVARSSON, *On Catullus 49*, «CJ» 95, 1999, pp. 131–138.

<sup>40</sup> A sophisticated response to the problem of literary identity in Stead's poem is LEWIS, C.K. *Stead*, cit. n. 36, pp. 252–254, taking up an idea in HARRISON, *Catullus in New Zealand*, cit. n. 4, p. 319.



now notorious review, Charles Croot adduced this poem as evidence that Stead «seems to feel that he is undervalued by the writing establishment» and «assumed the persona of the Latin author in order to settle some rankling old scores»<sup>41</sup>. Stead reacted to this review with a vigorous repudiation of Croot's biographical reading of his poem:

I don't deny that there is a connection between 'Catullus' and CKS, but to make it so literal is as crude as to suggest that this poem's 'message' has more to do with personal pique than with the serious subject of positive discrimination<sup>42</sup>.

An exchange along these lines was inevitable, and the friction generated by the intrusion of Stead's objugatory public identity into the reception of his often deprecatory poetry is very much a part of the contemporary literary scene in New Zealand. It is perhaps owing to this phenomenon that Croot has complained that it is only by way of ventriloquism that Stead can speak for himself:

... Stead the poet suffers from being so well-endowed as Stead the critic; he can't help sounding like the poets he reads and absorbs so effectively. ... in *Between* we detect the unmistakable voice of Stead loud and clear only in the bitchy imitations of Catullus ...<sup>43</sup>

It does not appear to have been noticed how Croot is here by and large recycling Wyndham Lewis' well known criticism of Ezra Pound's penchant for literary imitation:

When he writes about living people of his acquaintance as sometimes he has done, he shows himself possessed of a sort of conventional malice [...] There is nothing he intuits well, certainly never originally. Yet when he can get into the skin of somebody else, of power or renown, a Propertius or an Arnaut Daniel, he becomes a lion or a lynx on the spot. This sort of parasitism is with him phenomenal<sup>44</sup>.

It is tempting to pursue this allusive critical conflation of Stead with Pound. But this could easily get out of hand.

41 C. CROOT, *Poetry in New Zealand 1988-89*, «Journal of New Zealand Literature» 8, 1990, p. 23.

42 C.K. STEAD, *Correspondence*, «Journal of New Zealand Literature» 9, 1991, p. 134. On this inconsistency between this statement and the critical principles Stead has elaborated elsewhere, see A. PHILLIPSON, *C.K. Stead and Three Modes of New Zealand Poetry*, University of British Columbia dissertation, Vancouver 1967, p. 421.

43 CROOT, *Poetry in New Zealand*, cit. n. 41, p. 24.

44 W. LEWIS, *Time and the Western Man*, London 1927, p. 70.

The controversy over Stead's poetic identities need not detain us further. The important point is that, in his Catullan poems, the idea of literary identity and its relationship with reading constitutes a programmatic principle. By delineating, in his reaction to Croot's animadversions, what Stead regards as the right sort of New Zealand *writer*, he indicates, I believe, something important for grasping what he and his Catullus regard as the right sort of *reader* for poem 1 and the sequence that follows it:

Our problem in New Zealand – our lack – is not over-literary writers but rather under-educated ones who are egotistical enough to believe that 'individual talent' is enough, and too stupid, too lazy or self-absorbed, to make themselves part of the living, on-going continuum which is literature<sup>45</sup>.

One begins to see, in this outburst, how Stead reads Catullus' *doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis*.

c. *Jackson*, Envoi, Uncounted, [unheard], and [fragment]

The first poem in *Catullus for Children* reprises Catull. 1, and, like that poem, describes the ideal reader of the book. It is almost certainly not the reader who is holding the volume in which this poem is found, however, unless that reader is a child.

*Envoi*

Who am I writing this poetry for?  
For the unacknowledged  
poets of the world –  
you geniuses  
who speak poetry  
before prose,  
whose narratives incorporate  
vast geographies,  
whose plots  
can turn and stop  
like no earthly vehicle.  
How can I think it is good enough  
for you? It's just fuel  
to pack up for the future  
with your mandarins and yoghurt –

<sup>45</sup> STEAD, *Correspondence*, cit. n. 42, p. 135.

there is poetry in the peel you toss aside,  
 you have your own Catulluses  
 already inside.

Now it is obvious how *Envoi* responds to and rejects the prescriptions of *The Clodian Songbook*, poem 1, where the possibility of writing for children is raised only to be discarded. Instead, as we have seen, Stead's reader is put to work unpicking the literature texture of poetry and bringing to the collection an advanced Modernist sensibility. Jackson asks her readers to undertake something different: they must elect to share a child's point of view and discover the poetic possibilities in the emotions and the discourse of the young. And, in the poems that follow, that is exactly what one finds: Catullan poems recast for children and, sometimes, as if they were written by children.

But sustaining this childlike perspective is not easy. Readers of this collection, unlike Stead's readers, must, in a sense, *not* look things up. They must not read like the Cornelius adduced either by Catullus or Stead. Let us consider one example. In *Deer*, we find a reprise of Catullus' Poem 5, devoted to kissing. In the Catullan corpus this poem is normally read along with Poem 7, another kissing poem, and each supply the appropriate references for the highly obscene Poem 16. In that poem, as we have seen, Catullus reacts to a misreading of his kissing poems. *Deer*, as we shall see, positively invites misreading.

### *Deer*

Look at you! As soon as we touch  
 the school grounds, you start  
 to change – your legs lengthen,  
 your whole body quivers,  
 are you turning into a deer?  
 You flee from me, who some time  
 did me seek – wait just a minute!  
 I only want a thousand kisses  
 and then a hundred more,  
 and then just one more thousand  
 and a hundred added to that,  
 and if we could add some thousands more,  
 who would be able to count?  
 We could kiss a million times

and no one could tell!  
 A billion and the whirl of mouths  
 would make such a force field  
 it would propel you into class  
 invisible, but on arrival, such a star.  
*How did you do that?*  
 You wouldn't have to tell.

Now it is obvious how this poem takes up the matter of early, innocent physical attraction: here kissing and not telling becomes a familiar playground episode, pure and simple. At the same time, this addressee, by reason of a metamorphosis into a deer, can only recall, for any adult reader, the fate of Actaeon, destroyed by Artemis for inadvertently spying her nakedness. That is neither simple nor pure.

Jackson cites Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as her source of these lines (the Actaeon story is told at *Ov. met.* 3,138-252):

I borrowed a bit of metamorphosis from Ovid, too, about turning into a deer, which also seems to describe what I have seen of the effects of the playground setting on childhood behaviour<sup>46</sup>.

Actaeon, in Ovid's version, meets his grisly fate when his innocent transgression is met with a highly sexualised and violent reaction on the part of Diana. His death enacts, in an unforgettably ghastly way, a reversal of roles between hunter and quarry. And for the reader who knows Ovid, the goddess' final, frightening words to her victim can only have a disturbing effect on the closing line of *Deer*:

nunc tibi me posito visam velamine narres,  
 sit poteris narrare, licet! (*met.* 3,191-192).

Now go ahead, tell how you have seen me all unrobed –  
 if you can tell!

Jackson's expression, «you flee from me, who some time / did me seek», very nearly quotes the opening line of Thomas Wyatt's *They Fle from Me* («They fle from me, that sometyme did me seke»), which, like the *Metamorphoses*, is by no means a poem for children. Wyatt's unspecified *they*, it is often but by no means universally held by critics, are deer, or at the very least suggest deer. The imagery of tame deer in the opening stanza of Wyatt's poem, however, soon gives way to the poet's

<sup>46</sup> Anna JACKSON, *Catullus in the Playground*, «Antichthon» 40, 2006, p. 109.

sensual recollection of better times, when « [...] she me caught in her armes long and small, / And therewithall swetely did my kysse, / And softly said, ‘dere hert, how like you this?’»<sup>47</sup>.

More relevant to a Catullan poem is Catull. 8, a sorrowful lament of unrequited passion in which the poet must admonish himself to stop pursuing her who flees him (Catull. 8,10). Nor can any reader ignore our earliest specimen of an erotic reversal of chase and flight, found in Sappho, fragment 1, where Aphrodite, speaking to the poet, asks:

τίνα δηῦτε πείθω  
 ἄψ σ' ἄγην ἐς φᾶν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ  
 Ψάπφ', ἀδικήει;  
 καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει·  
 αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει.<sup>48</sup>

Whom am I to persuade  
 this time to lead you back to her love? Who,  
 Sappho, wrongs you?

If she is fleeing, soon she will pursue.  
 If she does not receive gifts, she will give them instead.

*Wait just a minute!* – to quote Jackson. Jackson’s poem warns us against going too far. That interjection, in conjunction with the Catullan controversy that cannot be ignored by any reader of the Poems 5 and 7 over against Poem 16, obliges any reader of *Deer* to reconsider the correct strategy for reading this poem. Our poet, it appears, insists that we go wrong when we read *Deer* by way of its unmistakable literary allusions. Still. How can we not?

If we want to enter the poetic universe of *Catullus for Children*, we must, somehow or in some sense, *not* follow up the allusions that have been built into this poem. We must suspend our critical inclination to read this Catullan poem as if it were a Catullan poem the literary references of which constitute part of its meaning. But this is a strategy we can knowingly adopt only after we have, in a sense, got it wrong. In

<sup>47</sup> On the widely ranging interpretations of the imagery in the first stanza of Wyatt’s poem, see K. MUIR and Patricia THOMPSON, *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. Liverpool, 1969, p. 299, and Susan BRIGDEN, *Thomas Wyatt: The Heart’s Forest*, London, 2012, pp. 23-27, each furnishing further references. It is perhaps worth noting here that Baxter regarded Wyatt’s poem as «one of the finest love poems in the language» (J.K. BAXTER, *James K. Baxter as Critic*, ed. by F. MCKAY, Auckland 1978, p. 24).

<sup>48</sup> Sapph. fr. 1, in Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, vol. 1, cit. n. 9.

other words, the complications entrained by a reading of *Deer* are not unlike the complications entrained by a reading of Poem 5 and Poem 16 in tandem. Not every poem in *Catullus for Children* oscillates so violently between adult and child themes, but *Deer* is evidence enough that *Catullus for Children* demands conflicting responses from its reader – if that reader is not truly a child. These poems are not simple at all.

*I, Clodia* lacks any programmatic introduction. Its first poem, [*untitled*], thanks Catullus for a poetic gift, «the sweet memento you sent me of our brief time / together», and in its use of *trinkets* to characterise Catullus' poetry this piece clearly responds to *nuage* in Catull. 1. But this cheerful poem is not a response to Catullus' collection, which in any case is a gift for Cornelius and not Lesbia, and its sentiment locates it sometime in the happy phase of their love affair. Although this poem identifies the author of the collection – «I, Clodia Metelli» – and its recipient – «you, Valerius Catullus» – it otherwise does very little in the way of presaging the nature of the poems that follow.

In the poetry of *I, Clodia*, its author rehearses experiences many of which are familiar to any reader who knows Catullus and Cicero reasonably well<sup>49</sup>. Here Clodia is sensual, vain, and a sportive adulterer who none the less remains fond of her husband; she is a widow, and a merry widow; she is a devoted mother; in politics she is loyal to her brother. Principally, of course, she is the lover who, in the end, is vilified and rejected by Catullus. And it is Clodia's response to this experience that constitutes a turning point in the sequence. At first, in this collection, she is true to her Catullan form. But after Catullus departs Rome for Bithynia, in the spring of the year, his absence changes everything<sup>50</sup>. Clodia finds that she is rapidly becoming Lesbia, a figure fashioned in poetry that is already written and no longer a part of her flesh and bone reality.

There was a time it seemed you'd never get ahead,  
you kept yourself so busy throwing down  
verses for me to pick up. Now, you  
have written yourself into history and I  
am left at a stand-still watching it run into the future... (*Late summer sun*)

<sup>49</sup> Maxine LEWIS, *Anna Jackson's I, Clodia: Catullus, women's voices, and feminist implications*, «Classical Receptions Journal» 10, 2018, pp. 127-148 furnishes a feminist reading of *I, Clodia*.

<sup>50</sup> So, also, LEWIS, *Anna Jackson's I, Clodia*, cit. n. 49, p. 133.

By winter, «I read your poems like auguries of my fate» (*The winds and the tides*), and Clodia, now lovesick, writes «Oh Venus [...] / What I wouldn't give if you would restore / Catullus back to me, Catullus as he used to be» (*Some poet from the provinces*). And it is as a dejected lover, fearful of her transubstantiation into a mere poetic relic, that Clodia closes her collection.

Indeed, the final poem of the work is only a fragment:

Jackson, [*fragment*]

I had a dream I was a ghost  
and only one man could see me ...

It is by now a familiar principle of Catullan criticism that the final item in his collection, Poem 116, should be read as an inverted dedication, a programmatic poem that looks backwards<sup>51</sup>. This is not a literary feature unique to Catullus, but the use to which Catullus puts it is striking<sup>52</sup>. Poem 1 and Poem 116 each of them characterise Catullus' poetry as Alexandrian, and each deploys a poetic sequence as a tool for examining the operations of friendship. Poem 1 finds in Cornelius its ideal reader, whereas in Poem 116 Gellius is a noble who resists Catullus' friendly advances and persists in taking his poetry the wrong way – a man who, in the poetry that precedes Poem 116, is (or, has become) an enemy.

Looking to the end of Jackson's sequence for something in the way of an inverted dedication is an approach that pays dividends for a reader of *I, Clodia*. It is obvious, for instance, how the relationships that animate its opening and closing poems, each of which is based in something we should denominate love, diverge in their essential dynamics. The *sweet memento* of this collection's opening is, by the time the conclusion is reached, giving way to disintegration. So, too, Clodia's reality.

The final poem, [*fragment*], looks back, programmatically, to its immediate predecessors, [*unheard*] and *Uncounted*. The latter is especially relevant to our purposes here:

<sup>51</sup> C. MACLEOD, *Collected Essays*, Oxford 1983, pp. 181-186; TATUM, *Friendship, Politics, and Literature*, cit. n. 6, pp. 393-397; BAISTONE, *Catullus and the Programmatic Poem*, cit. n. 5, p. 241.

<sup>52</sup> See e.g. Hor. *sat.* 1,10; Prop. 2,34b; cf. KEITH, *Latin elegiac collections*, cit. n. 28.

Jackson, *Uncounted*

Strange to think you will be remembered as a playwright,  
 when I knew you as a poet. All those verses  
 you used to rattle off discarded by an audience  
 calling for another performance  
 of *The Ghost*, with its unheroic hero  
 uncertain how to live, or to love,  
 and your 'Lesbia' replaced  
 by a slip of a girl, crazed and abandoned,  
 strewing herbs and flowers ... At most I can hope  
 posterity might catch an echo of our story  
 in the great poems you sent back from Bithynia –  
 but I would give up all posterity for one uncounted kiss.

In *Uncounted* the Catullus of this collection is also a mimographer – and it is Catullus' mimes, Clodia fears, and not his poetry about Lesbia, that will subsist<sup>53</sup>. Now there was a Catullus the mimographer, and he is almost certainly to be dated to the late republic. And one of his mimes, which remained popular into the imperial age, was entitled *Phasma*, or *Ghost*<sup>54</sup>. Here Clodia, correctly foresees the enduring popularity of this work. Lesbia, by contrast, as Clodia sees it, appears destined to become a minor motif in the Catullan oeuvre – as if she were somehow aware that she does not even make an appearance in either Poem 1 or Poem 116.

It cannot go unremarked that this poem also takes up poetic ideas found in the programmatic poems by Baxter and Stead. Let us begin with Stead. It will be recalled how his Catullus, in his programmatic poem, after rejecting posterity as his ideal audience, made clear his passionate preference for Clodia in the here and now. In *Uncounted*, Jackson's Clodia is coming around to the same way of thinking, though for decidedly different reasons, from a different perspective, and through a highly sophisticated conflation of literature and life: «I would give up all posterity for more uncounted kisses».

In the same poem, *Ghost* clearly activates Baxter's sequence, and an «unheroic hero / uncertain how to live, or to love» is not a bad description of his Catullus. Baxter's ghost is a presence that intensifies in the

<sup>53</sup> Here Jackson takes up the (highly controversial) thesis of Peter Wiseman that Catullus the poet and Catullus the mimographer are the same man: T.P. WISEMAN, *Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 188–206.

<sup>54</sup> Juv. 8, 185–188, with scholia; cf. P. WESSNER *Scholia in Iuvenalem uetustiora*, Leipzig 1931, p. 147 and p. 205.



final three pieces of *I, Clodia*. In the closing line of [*unheard*], composed after Catullus' death, Clodia asks:

Who am I, Clodia, but a ghost once loved by a poet?

Here we have an unmistakable reprisal of the identity imposed on Pyrrha by Baxter's Catullus. But whereas Baxter's Catullus found himself unable to escape his passion for Pyrrha, Clodia, in this poem, pleadingly demands:

Haunt me, I command you,  
Don't you ever think of letting go.

Clodia, it appears, desperately seeks the everlasting perseverance of the Catullus of the Lesbia poems. Indeed, in a sense, at least when these lines are viewed by way of Baxter's collection, she seeks to take on for herself the role of that Catullus.

All of which lends a deep poignancy to Clodia's figuration in her final poem. Here she is not a ghost, but a dream of a ghost, surely an allusion to the final strophe of Pindar's *Eighth Pythian Ode*:

ἐπάμερον. τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὐ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ  
ἄνθρωπος. (Pi. P. 8,95-96).

Creature of a day. What is anyone? What is anyone not? A human being is a shadow's dream.

But by now Clodia is no longer a woman, a real human being, and Lesbia, so she believes, is no longer a literary lover whom anyone will read about. Mime, Stead's «popular culture», if nothing else, will shove her aside. And what of her own verses? The poignancy of this poem is deepened by the reader's perspective: we know she has it all wrong – on the long view in any case. And yet, in this profoundly disturbing conclusion, Clodia believes she matters only to one man. An audience of one. And that in a past tense.

## 2. *Some conclusions*

Allen Curnow insisted of the New Zealand poet that, «he is of the greater traditions, but not in them»<sup>55</sup>. Whether this statement was ever really widely valid – it is advanced not as a description of the New Zealand literary scene but as part of a polemic over what that scene

<sup>55</sup> A. CURNOW, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, Auckland 1960, p. 59.

ought to be – it is evident how this pronouncement fails to apply to Baxter, Stead, or, leaving aside Curnow's *he*, Jackson. At least not in the case of their Catullan poetry. Indeed, in view of his longstanding and significant presence in the traditions of English poetry, it is not at all surprising that Catullus should have appealed to New Zealand poets writing in English. But one could hardly have predicted that, in what by literary standards can only be deemed a truly rapid succession, New Zealand would have produced several sequences of Catullan poems.

This is a remarkable phenomenon that must owe itself at least as much to Baxter's canonical status in New Zealand literature as it does to Catullus' standing as a poet of enduring international consequence. Why Baxter turned to Catullus, however, is not instantly obvious. It is tempting to point elsewhere, to adduce, for instance, the controversial achievement of Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, which was completed in 1917. That Pound was important to Baxter is obvious enough. But there seems to me no reason not to take Baxter at his word when he asserts that he recognised in the poems of Catullus the literary expression of a painful, personal experience which afflicted his own internal condition – a connection that was naturally facilitated by Baxter's passion for classical literature, a staple of his poetic career.

No classicist himself, Baxter possessed enough poetry and enough Latin to appropriate and adapt Catullus into a fresh New Zealand idiom that none the less resonated with its original expression. And it is clear that Baxter worked hard, not least by way of his collaboration with Kenneth Quinn, to create a Catullan sequence that was philologically well informed, perhaps a reaction to the criticism aimed at Pound's *Homage*<sup>56</sup>. Baxter's Catullus, for all his passion and sensuality, was clearly designed to recover something of the *doctus Catullus* admired by antiquity and by Modernist poets. By plunging into commentaries and chasing down allusions, furthermore, Baxter set a scholarly standard for his Catullus that Stead and Jackson subsequently matched, each of them focusing on Catullus but each of them also very conscious of the New Zealand Catullus fashioned by Baxter's poems.

The New Zealand Catullus, then, for all the fierce passions infusing the collections of each New Zealand poet, is marked by an academic

<sup>56</sup> J.P. SULLIVAN, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation*, London 1964.

style of writing<sup>57</sup>. Furthermore, all three poets lend their versions of Catullan poetry a distinctive local colour through their inclusion of demotic New Zealand English as well as New Zealand flora, fauna, and topography. These are commonplace moves in New Zealand poetry. Baxter and Stead go further, insinuating into their poems references to historical events the significance of which have remained affecting ones in the collective cultural memory of New Zealand society. None of our poets writes *ex nihilo*, and Stead, by looking back to Baxter, and Jackson, by looking back to both, give shape to an intricate and elaborate specimen of a distinctly regional and still highly cosmopolitan literary tradition. In reading these poems, the issue of standing inside or outside greater traditions hardly arises. This is poetry possessed of complicated ambitions, yielding work that even when it is lucid or lacking ostentation is anything but straightforward. These versions of Catullus are often sensual and often passionate. But never simple<sup>58</sup>.

The Victoria University of Wellington  
 Faculty of Humanities  
 School of Art History, Classics  
 and Religious Studies  
 Old Kirk Building 508  
 Wellington | 6140 (New Zealand)

W. JEFFREY TATUM  
 jeff.tatum@vuw.ac.nz

<sup>57</sup> On the academic style in New Zealand poetry, see K. SMITHYMAN, *A Way of Saying: A Study in New Zealand Poetry*, Auckland 1965, pp. 124-143.

<sup>58</sup> It is with great pleasure that I include this paper in a volume dedicated to the scholarship of Giuseppe G. Biondi. Earlier drafts were read by Diana Burton, Geoff Miles, and Simon Perris, to each of whom I am grateful.

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