

*Catullus and Poetry in English since 1750**Stephen Harrison***Introduction**

This chapter will concentrate on the English-language literary reception of Catullus since 1750, particularly in poetry;<sup>1</sup> there is stimulating work elsewhere on the reception of Catullus in other European literatures in this period.<sup>2</sup> It will largely focus on Britain, with occasional excursions into other English-speaking environments. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Britain had seen much interest in translating and adapting Catullus into English,<sup>3</sup> but the Augustan world of Pope and Dryden preferred the more obviously polished Virgil, Horace and Ovid amongst the Latin poets,<sup>4</sup> a taste continued in the age of Dr Johnson (d.1784),<sup>5</sup> and it was in the Romantic period from the later eighteenth century that Catullus began to regain in Britain the literary popularity he had enjoyed in the age of the Tudors and Stuarts.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For other material on this topic see Harrington (1923) 192–215, Wiseman (1985) 211–45, Fitzgerald (1995) 212–34, Vance (1997) 112–32, Gaisser (2001) xxvii–xli, Ziolkowski (2007), Arkins (2007), Gaisser (2009) 194–221. For Catullus in prose fiction see nn. 34 and 35 below. My thanks to Karl (C. K.) Stead, Josephine Balmer, Anna Jackson and James Methven for kind permission to quote from their work in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> For material on Germany see Seidensticker (1994) and von Albrecht (2003) 3–50, on France David-de Palacio (2005) and Aranjo (2005), on Italy Della Corte (1989) and Fo (2002); for further bibliography on Catullan reception in these and other countries see Holoka (1985) 291–6 and Frenz and Stelte (2012).

<sup>3</sup> See the wide range of work anthologised in Gaisser (2001) and the surveys in Harrington (1923) and McPeck (1939).

<sup>4</sup> Though the catasterism at the end of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) clearly looks to that of the lock of Berenice in Catullus 66 – see Martindale (1992) 204.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson translated Horace and Virgil, William Cowper (d.1800) Horace, Virgil, Ovid and the great Welsh neo-Latin poet John Owen, neither of them Catullus.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Stead (2016) 34–40. Catullus is mentioned only twice in the standard survey of classical reception in English literature from 1660–1790, Hopkins and Martindale (2012), but much more often in the volumes covering 1558–1660 and 1790–1880, Cheney and Hardie (2015) and Vance and Wallace (2015).

### Georgian and Victorian

It was only in 1795 that the first more or less complete translation<sup>7</sup> of Catullus into English was published by John Nott, physician and scholar, followed a generation later by that of the Hon. George Lamb (1821), Whig politician, likely natural son of George IV and half-brother of the second Viscount Melbourne, Queen Victoria's first prime minister.<sup>8</sup> Both these were liberal figures choosing to translate a Latin poet who was seen as relatively unconventional and subversive, especially given his tendency to obscenity in invective.<sup>9</sup> Nott indeed apologises in his preface for presenting the less polite parts of the text: 'I have given the whole of Catullus without reserve. The chaste reader might think them [indecencies] best omitted; but the inquisitive scholar might wish to be acquainted even with the ribaldry and broad lampoon of Roman times.'<sup>10</sup> The translation itself is unexceptional, as a quotation of the opening of poem 2 shows:

Dear sparrow! the pride of my maid,  
                     With whom in sport she often plays,  
 Whom oft, on her snowy breast laid,  
                     She toys with a thousand fond ways;

Lamb is a little more elegant and closer to the original:

Dear Sparrow, long my fair's delight  
                     Which in her breast to lay,  
 To give her finger to whose bite,  
 Whose puny anger to excite  
                     She oft is wont in play.

In his preface he is concerned to present Catullus as a respectable Roman and a heartfelt poet of love, while recognising his occasional crude language: 'when he celebrates Lesbia, the heart speaks in every line; sensuality is refined into a higher tone, and only twice in his works, when driven into exile by extravagances of which she was the cause [i.e. Poem 11], and venting to Caelius his rage and grief at her voluntary debasement [i.e.

<sup>7</sup> Nott (1795) presents the whole of Catullus' Latin text, but often tones down the translations of obscene passages.

<sup>8</sup> For biographies of both translators see *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 online version [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com).

<sup>9</sup> See the full account of both versions and authors in Stead (2016) 33–98, who notes that selected poems of Catullus translated by the radical politician John Wilkes were posthumously published in 1798.

<sup>10</sup> Nott (1795) i.xi.

Poem 58], does he, concerning her, indulge in the least grossness of expression'.<sup>11</sup>

Some sense of Catullus as an 'alternative' Latin poet can be seen in Robert Burns' appropriation of the famous simile of the flower cut down by the plough at the end of Catullus 11 in the last stanza of his 'To a Mountain-Daisy: On Turning One Down with the Plow', in April, 1786:

Ev'n thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,  
That fate is thine – no distant date;  
Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives elate,  
Full on thy bloom,  
Till crush'd beneath the furrow's weight  
Shall be thy doom.<sup>12</sup>

Here Burns literalises Catullus' simile, recounting an incident from his real-life lowly occupation as a ploughman, and the flower (probably a poppy in Catullus) is the humble daisy. Both these elements can be seen as claiming Catullus for a broader social class, though the poem is in decorous English rather than Burns's more demotic Scots mode.

At the same time Catullus' politer poems began to be more prominent in school education: the juvenilia of Wordsworth and Coleridge from the 1780s include versions of Poem 3 (the death of the sparrow, here metamorphosed into a starling) and Poem 5 (*Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*). Wordsworth's starling is not without pathos:

Pity mourns in plaintive tone  
The lovely Starling dead and gone.  
Weep, ye Loves, and Venus, weep  
The lovely Starling fall'n asleep.

In the case of Byron, Harrow School's encouragement of translation of classical poetry into English led to several versions of similar Catullan poems, published in *Fugitive Pieces* (1806) when the poet was eighteen; these were also influenced by the versions of the Irish poet and musician Thomas Moore published by him at the age of twenty-one in his 1801 *Poetical Works of Thomas Little*.<sup>13</sup> Byron's homoerotic love-life at Cambridge was reflected here in his choice to translate the kiss-poem to the boy Juventius (48):

<sup>11</sup> Lamb (1821) xxxiii; at lxi Lamb admits to excising problematic poems in his version, more genteel than that of Nott.

<sup>12</sup> Burns and Catullus were linked in the Victorian period as poets of genuine passion: see Vance (1997) 123.

<sup>13</sup> For all this material see Stead (2016) 152–99.

Oh! might I kiss those eyes of fire,  
 A million scarce would quench desire;  
 Still would I steep my lips in bliss,  
 And dwell an age on every kiss;  
 Nor then my soul should sated be,  
 Still would I kiss and cling to thee:  
 Nought should my kiss from thine dissever,  
 Still would we kiss and kiss for ever;  
 E'en though the numbers did exceed  
 The yellow harvest's countless seed;  
 To part would be a vain endeavour:  
 Could I desist? – ah! never – never.

Leigh Hunt, radical friend of Byron, Coleridge and Wordsworth, enlisted Catullus as a poet of protest and polemic, employing a version of the poem narrating the story of the ecstatically self-castrating Attis (63) to attack the religious excesses of Primitive Methodism (1811), and pathetic elements from the same to enlist sympathy for the castrato singer Velluti (1825). In more conformist mode, he also translated Poem 61 to celebrate the marriage of George IV's daughter and heir apparent Princess Charlotte (1816) to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, the future king of the Belgians.<sup>14</sup> But in general, Catullus' position as the Latin poet favoured by the liberal and the young in the Romantic period seems clear.

One Romantic who engaged with Catullus throughout his long life was Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864),<sup>15</sup> who at the age of twenty included much Catullan material in his first collection of poems (1795), including versions of Poems 3 and 5,<sup>16</sup> and nearly half a century later (1842) produced an extensive interpretative essay 'The Poems of Catullus' incorporating more of his own versions and paraphrases.<sup>17</sup> Here he comments on most of the poems while omitting the indecent ones, confirms his age's particular taste (see above) for Poems 3 and 63, and rounds off with the judgement that 'he [Catullus] always is shrewd and brilliant; he often is pathetic; and he sometimes is sublime'.<sup>18</sup> Of the versions in the essay, those of the lighter poems are more successful, for example the first half of Poem 39 (Landor does not render the poem's more pungent second half on Egnatius' dental hygiene):

Egnatius has fine teeth, and those  
 Eternally Egnatius shows.  
 Some criminal is being tried

<sup>14</sup> On Hunt and Catullus see in detail Stead (2016) 222–68. <sup>15</sup> See Super (1976).

<sup>16</sup> See Stead (2016) 153–65. <sup>17</sup> Best found in Welby (1930) 177–225. <sup>18</sup> Welby (1930) 223.

For murder; and they open wide;  
 A widow wails her only son;  
 Widow and him they open on.  
 'Tis a disease, I'm very sure,  
 And wish 'twere such as you could cure,  
 My good Egnatius! for what's half  
 So silly as a silly laugh?<sup>19</sup>

Landor's later 'On Catullus' of 1853 seems to be about to face the issue of Catullus' obscenity<sup>20</sup> but then turns to pure praise of his natural qualities:

Tell me not what too well I know  
 About the bard of Sirmio . . .  
 Yes, in Thalia's son  
 Such stains there are . . . as when a Grace  
 Sprinkles another's laughing face  
 With nectar, and runs on.

In the Victorian period into which Landor survived, Catullus was more widely read and studied:<sup>21</sup> the learned if dry editions and commentaries of the Oxford scholar Robinson Ellis<sup>22</sup> were supplemented by a volume of his translations which bravely tried to render each poem into an English approximation of the original Latin metre,<sup>23</sup> while the Edinburgh professor W. Y. Sellar contributed a sympathetic account of Catullus to his pioneering critical work on the poets of the Roman Republic.<sup>24</sup> The obscenity of many of Catullus' invective poems was an issue both for educationalists and for Victorian society as a whole: selection and expurgation of Catullus, who according to Byron in *Don Juan* (10.111) 'scarcely had a decent poem', was the rule for school texts,<sup>25</sup> while a translation intended for the general reader by Theodore Martin, the future biographer of Prince Albert, as well as excising a number of poems for their crudity, pleads in its introduction that the poems 'most deeply stamped with licentiousness' were a product of the poet's youth and the decadence of his age in the late Roman Republic.<sup>26</sup>

However, the more unconventional aspects of Catullus clearly appealed to the equally unconventional tastes of Algernon Swinburne, who in his

<sup>19</sup> Welby (1930) 206.

<sup>20</sup> Admitted by Landor not only implicitly in the omissions in his 1842 essay, but also in an earlier poem 'Written in a Catullus', which talks of the poet's 'uncleanly wit' and 'rank putridity'.

<sup>21</sup> For the Victorian reception of Catullus see especially Vance (1997) 112–32.

<sup>22</sup> See Ellis (1867) and (1876), both followed by a number of further editions. <sup>23</sup> Ellis (1871).

<sup>24</sup> Sellar (1889) 408–74 (in the third edition of a work first published in 1863), concluding: 'If to love warmly, constantly and unselfishly be the best title to the love of others, few poets, in any age or country, deserve a kindlier place in the hearts of men than the young Catullus' (474).

<sup>25</sup> See Trimble (2012). <sup>26</sup> See Martin (1861) xi–xii.

mesmeric sado-masochistic poem 'Dolores' (1866) incorporated elements of Catullus 63 and the Priapean poems previously known as Catullus 18 and 19, thought Catullan by Swinburne.<sup>27</sup> More conventional is Swinburne's use of Poem 101, the lament for the poet's brother, which he imitates in his lengthy elegy for Baudelaire which has the last words of Catullus' poem as its title ('Ave Atque Vale', 1878): here in the eighteenth and final stanza Swinburne's poetic brother is addressed in a version of the Roman poet's words to his actual brother:

For thee, O now a silent soul, my brother,  
Take at my hands this garland, and farewell.  
Thin is the leaf, and chill the wintry smell,  
And chill the solemn earth, a fatal mother,  
With sadder than the Niobeian womb . . .

For Swinburne, Catullus like Baudelaire was a brother poet (in 'To Catullus' (1883) the Roman is addressed as 'My brother, my Valerius'); for him Catullus was 'the first if not the only Latin poet I loved',<sup>28</sup> and he imitated his characteristic metres in English equivalents in 'Hendecasyllabics' (1866) and in twenty-one Latin pure iambic trimeters (no mean feat) in '*Ad Catullum*' (1878), another poem of praise.

Catullus 101 was also picked up more than once by another prominent Victorian poet. In *In Memoriam* (1850) Tennyson invokes the poem in lamenting his dead more-than-brother Arthur Hallam (57):

I hear it now, and o'er and o'er,  
Eternal greetings to the dead;  
And 'Ave, Ave, Ave' said,  
'Adieu, adieu' for evermore.

Likewise '*Frater ave atque vale*' (1880) records Tennyson's visit to Catullus' home of Sirmione, citing and echoing Catullus' own praise of the peninsula in Poem 31, but also recording through its quotations from the last line of Poem 101 (101.10 *atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale*) Tennyson's grief for his own brother, who had died the previous year.<sup>29</sup>

Row us out from Desenzano, to your Sirmione row!  
So they row'd, and there we landed – 'O venusta Sirmio!  
There to me through all the groves of olive in the summer glow,

<sup>27</sup> See Boulet (2009).

<sup>28</sup> In an 1894 letter to the Cambridge literary scholar F. W. H. Myers: Meyers (2004) 72. For Swinburne's imitations of Catullus see further Ridenour (1988).

<sup>29</sup> See Pavlock (1979).

There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers grow,  
Came that 'Ave atque Vale' of the Poet's hopeless woe,  
Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen-hundred years ago,  
'Frater Ave atque Vale' – as we wandered to and fro  
Gazing at the Lydian laughter of the Garda Lake below  
Sweet Catullus's all-but-island, olive-silvery Sirmio!<sup>30</sup>

Tennyson also imitated Catullan metre in 'Hendecasyllabics' (1863), a likely model for Swinburne's homonymous poem (see above), which was also Catullan in its invective content:

O you chorus of indolent reviewers,  
Irresponsible, indolent reviewers,  
Look, I come to the test, a tiny poem  
All composed in a metre of Catullus,  
All in quantity, careful of my motion,  
Like a skater on ice that hardly bears him,  
Lest I fall unawares before the people,  
Waking laughter in indolent reviewers.  
Should I flounder awhile without a tumble  
Through this metrification of Catullus,  
They should speak to me not without a welcome,  
All that chorus of indolent reviewers.

### **The Twentieth Century**

W. B. Yeats' 'The Scholars' (1919) famously contrasts Catullus' putative romantic life with the supposedly desiccated existence of the scholars who study him, perhaps thinking of the volumes of Robinson Ellis:

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,  
Old, learned, respectable bald heads  
Edit and annotate the lines  
That young men, tossing on their beds,  
Rhymed out in love's despair  
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.  
All shuffle there; all cough in ink;  
All wear the carpet with their shoes;  
All think what other people think;  
All know the man their neighbour knows.  
Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way?

<sup>30</sup> For this and several other Tennysonian poems imitating Catullan metres see Markley (2004) 114–19.

Catullan scholarship of the inter-war period was in fact developing ideas about the two contrasting aspects of Catullus as learned Alexandrian poet and passionate child of nature, expressed for example in the important German edition of Kroll (1923)<sup>31</sup> or the stimulating monograph of the then Toronto-based Havelock (1939). This was something of a counter to the Yeats-style romantic and biographising interpretations of Catullus' poetry then generally prevalent,<sup>32</sup> and on the Alexandrian side incorporated important German work by Wilamowitz on Catullus' use of Hellenistic poetry.<sup>33</sup> The 1930s and 1940s saw a series of biographical novels on the affair of Catullus and Lesbia, with the best known of them Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March* (1948);<sup>34</sup> this established a literary tradition that still continues in British and US romantic/historical fiction.<sup>35</sup> This romantic tendency was wittily subverted by Dorothy Parker in 'From a Letter from Lesbia' (1928), suggesting a dysfunctional relationship and satirising the often-imitated pathos of the dead sparrow of Poem 3:

That thing he wrote, the time the sparrow died –  
 (Oh, most unpleasant – gloomy, tedious words!)  
 I called it sweet, and made believe I cried;  
 The stupid fool! I've always hated birds . . .

As always, Catullus' aggressive side could be invoked as well as his pathetic capacity. In 'To Catullus' (1921) the aged Poet Laureate Robert Bridges wished for the Latin poet's invective firepower to attack an unnamed enemy, following Swinburne and Tennyson's 'Hendecasyllabics' (above) in using a rhythmical version of Catullus' own hendecasyllable:

Would that you were alive today, Catullus!  
 Truth 'tis, there is a filthy skunk amongst us,  
 A rank musk-idiot, the filthiest skunk,  
 Of no least sorry use on earth, but only  
 Fit in fancy to justify the outlay  
 Of your most horrible vocabulary.

More in the spirit of the times, Catullus was taken up by some major figures in the modernist movement: Ezra Pound's translations include versions of three short Catullan poems (26, 43 and 85),<sup>36</sup> while Basil

<sup>31</sup> Kroll (1923) vii.    <sup>32</sup> See Havelock (1939) 73–86.

<sup>33</sup> See Wilamowitz (1924) 2.277–310, taken up in English by e.g. Wheeler (1934).

<sup>34</sup> For these see Wiseman (1985) 233–41

<sup>35</sup> For such novels of the pre-1975 period see Wiseman (1975), and for more recent examples see n.45 below and Theodorakopoulos (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Pound (1970) 408. The earliest of these (43) was written in 1916.



Bunting produced a loose version (1931) of Poem 63 (*Attis*) and gave up in irritation a closer version (1933) of Poem 64 (*Peleus and Thetis*), though he later completed one of Poem 51 (1965).<sup>37</sup> The most striking Catullan product of the modernist aesthetic was the homophonic translation by Louis and Celia Zukofsky, influenced by Pound and composed over a decade before its publication in 1969.<sup>38</sup> I cite the opening of Poem 8 followed by the Latin whose sounds it imitates:

Miss her, Catullus? don't be so inept to rail  
at what you see perish when perished is the case.  
Full, sure once, candid the sunny days glowed, solace,  
when you went about it as your girl would have it,  
you loved her as no one else shall ever be loved.

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,  
et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.  
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,  
cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat  
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.

Catullus was a natural classical focus for the youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s. Already in 1942 Louis MacNeice, in his 'Epitaph for Liberal Poets', depicts Catullus as an unsuccessful youthful rebel:

The Individual has died before; Catullus  
Went down young, gave place to those who were born old  
And more adaptable and were not even jealous  
Of his wild life and lyrics.

Similarly, the American scholar Frank Copley's lively versions from 1957 present Catullus as a kind of James Dean figure ('a rebel, a radical, an experimenter, an innovator, a pioneer'),<sup>39</sup> and are at their most successful in the lighter poems where they convey an attractive contemporary flavour, for example at the start of Poem 13, where uneven lineation and non-use of capitals and punctuation recall the work of E. E. Cummings:

say Fabullus  
you'll get a swell dinner at my house  
a couple three days from now (if your luck holds out)  
all you gotta do is bring the dinner

<sup>37</sup> Bunting (2000) 30–1, 153, 141 respectively.

<sup>38</sup> Zukofsky and Zukofsky 1969; for an excellent brief account and bibliography see [www.z-site.net/notes-to-poetry/catullus-1969-with-celia-zukofsky](http://www.z-site.net/notes-to-poetry/catullus-1969-with-celia-zukofsky).

<sup>39</sup> Copley (1957) xi.

and make it good and be sure there's plenty  
Oh yes don't forget a girl (I like blondes)  
and a bottle of wine maybe . . . .

It was in the 1960s and 1970s that increasing general toleration of obscenity, as we have seen a consistent issue for earlier readers of Catullus, led to translations where his colourful obscene language could be accurately rendered: effective English translations of this kind include those by Peter Whigham (1966), C. H. Sisson (1967) and Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish (1978).

Amongst poetic adaptations in this period, perhaps the most stimulating are the work of the New Zealand poet James Baxter (1926–72).<sup>40</sup> In 1966–8 Baxter was a creative writing fellow at his *alma mater* the University of Otago, where he attended the classes of Kenneth Quinn, who was then working on the second edition (1969) of his influential *The Catullan Revolution* (1959) and his commentary on Catullus (1970) and seems to have encouraged Baxter in what Quinn regarded as 'creative translations'. These versions were published a few years later in Baxter's posthumous collection *Runes* (1973) as a fourteen-poem sequence 'Words to Lay a Strong Ghost'. The third poem in the sequence, 'The Budgie', provides a neat version of Catullus 3:

Pyrrha's bright budgie who would say,  
'Pretty fellow! Pretty fellow!'  
For bits of cake from her hand is now  
Silent in the underworld.

Here the more European sparrow (though in fact found in New Zealand) is changed for the typically Antipodean budgerigar, and other telling transformations of detail neatly relocate the poem to Baxter's own time and space. It is notable that Baxter (here and elsewhere) uses the name 'Pyrrha' for the beloved, not Catullus' 'Lesbia', drawing the name from Horace (*Odes* 1.5).<sup>41</sup>

Baxter, like a number of poets already treated, is also interested in Poem 101; he translated it as a rather conventional sonnet aged 19,<sup>42</sup> but provides a more rewarding version in the 1973 sequence under the title 'At the Grave of a War Hero', appropriately imagining the brother as a modern ANZAC

<sup>40</sup> For more on Baxter's Catullus see Harrison (2009).

<sup>41</sup> The origin is clearly in Horace *Odes* 1.5, where the same name occurs for an ex-lover, and the surprise of Baxter's sequence is its sixth poem, 'The Change-Over', where that famous ode of Horace is clearly appropriated in the middle of a group otherwise dedicated to Catullus.

<sup>42</sup> See Harrison (2009).



Tell her  
 Catullus loves her  
 as the lone lawn daisy  
 loves  
 the Masport mower.

### Catullus in the Twenty-first Century

One key feature of the Anglophone literary reception of Catullus in the twenty-first century has been the prominence of female poets and writers. Others have written on female-authored biographical novels on the Catullus/Clodia affair,<sup>45</sup> and I will focus on female poetic translations and adaptations. One of the most attractive contributions has been that of the classical scholar, poet, translator and critic Josephine Balmer.<sup>46</sup> In *Catullus: Poems of Love and Hate* (Balmer 2004a) she provides a lively modern translation of all the poems except the longest (omitting 61–6 and 68), reordering them by theme to make them more accessible to a modern audience; here she is clearly aware of the hotly debated issue of whether or not the poems in the Catullan collection we have follows the intended order of the poet.<sup>47</sup> Here I cite the first part of her translation of Poem 51, renumbered by her as Poem 5 ('On Seeing Lesbia: A Translation of Sappho'):

That man to me seems the equal of a god;  
 that man – dare I say? – surpasses the divine,  
 the one who sits by you, who time after time  
 looks on you, who hears  
  
 you as you laugh so sweetly, while I'm in hell,  
 senses shredded, torn apart; for when I see  
 you there, Lesbia, there's nothing left of me  
 [no voice to speak of]

Balmer here chooses an English metre identical in shape and syllable-count to Catullus' Sapphic stanza (three identical lines of eleven syllables followed by one of five), and preserves much of the Latin word order, e.g. in the opening 'That man to me' = *Ille mi*; she also shows her scholarly awareness by presenting her eighth line in brackets since it fills in a one-line lacuna in

<sup>45</sup> See Theodorakopoulos (2013), treating *The Key*, by Benita Kane Jaro (1988), *The Floating Book*, by Michelle Lovric (2003), and *Counting the Stars*, by Helen Dunmore (2008).

<sup>46</sup> See her own full discussion of her classical work in Balmer (2013).

<sup>47</sup> For a good summary of the problem see Skinner (2007a), and for Balmer's own view Balmer (2013) 165–7.

the original. As she points out in her own discussion, in her version this poem voices a female version of a male poet's heterosexual version of a female homosexual poem of desire,<sup>48</sup> a gender complexity fully at home in the twenty-first century.<sup>49</sup> She can also produce sharp versions of the more colourful poems, for example 33, renumbered by her as 64, 'A Father and Son team':

Our most renowned pair of bath-house thieves –  
 father Vibennius, rent-boy son  
 (the former's hand is the stickier,  
 the latter's arse-hole the greedier) –  
 should both leave town for nether regions  
 or for hell; father's many bath-thefts  
 are well-known, and son's hairy buttocks  
 a no-go, won't fetch a penny piece.

Simultaneously with her translation, Balmer published *Chasing Catullus* (Balmer 2004b), using poems stimulated by Catullus and other classical sources to deal with some poignant events in her own life.<sup>50</sup> The title poem from this collection explores her method there of appropriating classical poets to make her own personal statements, using a series of witty puns which link metaphorical grammatical and scholarly terms with their more human literal senses:

It's the rule of attraction, the corruption of texts,  
 the way his corpus tastes of skin and sweat,  
 that taint of decay, scent of cheated death.

But then, I've always liked them old –  
 parsed hearts, lost minds, redundant souls;  
 just enough to get me fleshing ghosts,  
 giving them tongue, jumping their bones.

Yet sleep with the dead and you'll wake  
 with the worms – stripped down, compressed,  
 a little accusative, slightly stressed – to find  
 the code you crack, the clause that breaks,  
 is no longer subordinate, it's now your own.

Another female poet-translator is the Canadian classical scholar Anne Carson. In her 2000 collection *Men in the Off Hours* she includes a series of loose versions of short Catullan poems (2, 3, 31, 43, 46, 50, 58, 70, 75, 76, 85,

<sup>48</sup> Balmer (2013) 150–3.    <sup>49</sup> See e.g. Butler (2004).

<sup>50</sup> See her own discussion in Balmer (2013) 171–99.

86, 96, 97, 101 and 109), but her most notable Catullan enterprise is her 2010 *Nox*, based on Catullus 101, the poem of lament for the poet's brother, which she had already rendered in her 2000 series and which, as we have seen, is particularly popular in his modern reception. *Nox* is an extraordinary work on one very long concertina-folded sheet of paper, presented within a book-size box, which combines expanded lexicographical considerations of every word in this short poem and literary comments on it with many other meditational fragments, as well as a poetic rendering of it:

Many the peoples many the oceans I crossed –  
I arrive at these poor, brother, burials  
so I could give you the last gift owed to death  
and talk (why?) with mute ash.  
Now that Fortune tore you from me, you  
oh poor (wrongly) brother (wrongly) taken from me,  
now still anyway this – what a distant mood of parents  
handed down as the sad gift for burials –  
accept! soaked with tears of a brother  
and into forever, brother, farewell and farewell.

Here she translates line-for-line, differently from her looser 2000 versions, and sticks notably close to the Latin and its word order (e.g. line 1, matching *Multas per gentes et multa per aequora uectus*, 'accept' for *accipe* as the first word of line 9, 'and into forever' for *atque in perpetuum* in the last line). The key narrative strand in *Nox* is Carson's account of her troubled and estranged brother Michael who died in 2000 and whose funeral she attended in distant Copenhagen after little contact over two decades: the story of Michael's sad life and dysfunctional relations with his family is gradually pieced together over the volume. This close connection of the situation of the Catullan poem with Carson's own family circumstances lends this remarkable volume particular pathos, as do the many old photographs of the author, subject and other items such as letters and their stamps which give it some of the character of a family album.

A different kind of application of Catullus to a family situation is found in another brilliantly innovative take in the New Zealand poet and scholar Anna Jackson's *catullus for children* (2003).<sup>51</sup> Here Catullus'

<sup>51</sup> For Jackson's own discussion of her work see Jackson (2009). There and elsewhere she acknowledges the influence of the excellent series of earlier New Zealand poetic versions of Catullus by C. K. (Karl) Stead, which I have discussed in detail in Harrison (2009).

poems are recontextualised in the world of contemporary New Zealand children. The closest engagement with a Catullan original is perhaps in the opening of 'Party', a version of 13, the poet's dinner invitation to Fabullus:

You're rounding up all the children  
in the cul-de-sac for a party  
in your treehouse –  
you promise them more food  
than there is sand in Iraq!  
So long as they can cajole  
it out of their parents –  
unless they *want* to eat  
the spider webs that is all  
you have got on your shelves.

Here we find a fusion of the original invitation poem with a detail from Catullus 7, where the poet suggests that only the number of sand-grains in the North African desert can match the number of kisses which is sufficient for him and Lesbia (7.1–6); this is accompanied by a neat topical allusion to Iraq, reflecting the international coalition's invasion of that country in March 2003.

In her more recent volume, *I, Clodia and Other Portraits* (2014), Jackson presents a second-wave feminist approach: her title echoes that of the two scholarly volumes entitled *I, Claudia* (Kleiner and Matheson 1996 and 2000), which sought to stress the value of the often-occluded roles and achievements of women in the Roman world. Here for example she presents a version of Poem 3, the ever-popular death of the sparrow, in 'Pipiabat [used to chirp . . .]':

Look at me, my tear-stained face,  
my red eyes – is this what you came for?  
It's not what you think.  
So there are verses about me  
circulating about the city – how could you  
*possibly* imagine I, Clodia would care?  
I might cry over *your* verses –  
tears of *laughter* –  
but these are real tears,  
I'm grieving.  
Look at what was my little bird,  
yesterday – this was  
*somebody*, closer to me than . . .  
you had better be leaving.

Jackson begins from the end of Catullus' poem which suggests that the bird's death is the reason for Lesbia's tears (3.16–18), and as in 'Party' fuses two Catullan ideas in one poem, adding the notion that the poet has been attacking her in his work (cf. Poem 36). Not only Jackson's overall female framework but also her choice of the sparrow-poem here surely look back to Dorothy Parker's trope of seeing the sparrow's death from Clodia/Lesbia's point of view (see above).

Another female perspective is to be found in Tiffany Atkinson's *Catulla et al.* (2011), presenting a modern female persona in loose adaptations of the male Roman poet. So 'Basia Mille', her version of Poem 5, *Viuamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*, is addressed to Rufus, perhaps evoking Lesbia's likely alternative lover Caelius Rufus (cf. poem 58):

Then live with me, Rufus.  
We'll have four fine rooms  
And an excellent kitchen . . .  
    . . . Meanwhile  
kiss me in the checkout queue  
and let the tight mouths clatter . . .

And Catullus' homosexual love poems to Iuuentius become heterosexual in '99' (turning Catullus 99 on kissing the boy):

Iuuentius, your corona of red hair  
makes my fingers itch. I've wondered what this means.  
You sat behind me; I was cross-legged on the  
carpet like a girl . . .

    . . . I have no answer  
for your cool, soft mouth . . .

This gender-bending is a natural next feminist step and appeals to the twenty-first century interest in fluid gender identity (see above); but it also reflects a strong strand in contemporary Catullan criticism, which has often noted the 'feminine' position taken up by the poet in passages such as the poppy simile at the end of Poem 11.<sup>52</sup>

The Northern Irish poet Leontia Flynn has also produced some sharp and witty versions of Catullus in her collections *Profit and Loss* (2011) and *The Radio* (2017). Particularly pointed is her adaptation of Poem 28, an ironic expression of sympathy with Catullus' friends on provincial service with an exploitative governor, in 'Government Servants' (in Flynn 2017):

<sup>52</sup> See especially Skinner (1993). Suitably, Atkinson includes an allusion to the gender-bending Attis poem (63) in 'Ave atque vale'.



Government servants with your dinky backpacks,  
 cohorts of bullshit, at its beck and call:  
 friend-of-my-youth, and you, my bosom buddy,  
 how is it going? Have you had your fill  
 of corporate wine and state-subsidized feeding,  
 fiddled expenses, claim forms and books cooked  
 to show some profit?

Here we find truly Catullan vivacity and edge, both picking up lexical items from the original ('cohorts of bullshit' renders 28.1 *cohors inanis*) and applying a satirical voice to a modern political issue with telling and amusing contemporary detail ('dinky backpacks').

The latest female translator of Catullus in the UK is Daisy Dunn, whose *The Poems of Catullus* came out in 2016 (Dunn 2016a). She is another scholar-poet, whose versions are natural and close to the originals, for example the opening of Poem 3:

Mourn, Venuses and Cupids  
 And who have tasted love.  
 My girl's sparrow is dead,  
 Sparrow, apple of my girl's eye  
 Whom she loved more than her own eyes . . .<sup>53</sup>

Simultaneously with this translation, Dunn published a vivid and mildly fictionalised biography of Catullus, *Catullus' Bedspread: The Life of Rome's Most Erotic Poet* (Dunn 2016b), which returns to the early twentieth-century tradition of reconstructing Catullus' life and loves from his poems; it is generally well contextualised in contemporary Roman history and culture, and uses her own translations throughout. As in the case of recent novels about Catullus (see n. 45 above), the apparent immediacy and realism of the poems continues to stimulate imaginative biographical reconstruction.

Not all Catullan work of the last two decades has been by women.<sup>54</sup> I finish with two examples, the much praised complete 2005 translation by the veteran UK/US classicist Peter Green, from which I quote the parallel lines to those of Dunn cited above, the opening of Poem 3:

<sup>53</sup> The publication of this version was followed by a correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* about how to translate Catullus 32.8 *nouem continuas fututiones*, rendered 'nine continuous fucks' by Dunn – see [www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/so-how-do-you-translate-fututiones](http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/so-how-do-you-translate-fututiones).

<sup>54</sup> I mention in passing the splendid Ulster-Scots versions by the distinguished Ulster poet Michael Longley (one printed in Longley 2008), which I discuss in Harrison (forthcoming).

Mourn, Cupids all, every Venus, and whatever  
 company still exists of caring people.  
 Sparrow lies dead, my own true sweetheart's sparrow,  
 Sparrow, the pet and darling of my sweetheart,  
 loved by her more than she valued her own eyesight.

Here there is effective close replication of the rhetorical and insistent repetitions of the original, *passer . . . passer* (3–4), *meae puellae . . . meae puellae* (3–4), but also a clear attempt to present Catullus in modern diction ('caring people', 'eyesight').

Especially enjoyable for me are the brilliantly witty versions in James Methven's *Precious Asses* (2009), which transpose Catullus' poems to a modern student environment and sometimes in good twenty-first century mode swap their genders. For example, the poem to Catullus' friend Furius about his villa open to the cold draughts of debt (26) becomes with neat topicality one addressed to Cherie Booth (wife of Tony Blair) about her hair (her expensive travelling stylist in the 2005 UK general election campaign had been the subject of media comment)<sup>55</sup> in 'So what?':

Cherie dear, your cute bob *is* lovely,  
 Mind, at that price it should be,  
 Tho' I must say it leaves your neck  
 Looking a little draughty.

Blown to the East, tugged to the West,  
 Nuzzled to the South, Northwards floating:  
 Cherie's immaculate hair  
 Wins our hearts and votes.

This nicely recreates some of the satirical tone of Catullan poems about contemporary Roman politicians (Caesar and Pompey in 29, Caesar in 57 and 93). More graphic is 'All you can eat for £5.99', which well conveys the shocking idea of Poem 58 (addressed to Catullus' likely erotic rival, Caelius) that Lesbia is servicing the males of Rome as a street prostitute:

Rhodz, I thought you should know:  
 Your Phoebe, my Phoebe, that Phoebe  
 Whom – uniquely –  
 Your Jimmy loved more than  
 All the boys and girls he's ever loved –  
 Was last seen in the door of that greasy

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1516373/Cherie-Blair-spent-7700-on-election-campaign-hairdos.-Sandra-Howard-spent-65.-Which-gets-your-vote.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1516373/Cherie-Blair-spent-7700-on-election-campaign-hairdos.-Sandra-Howard-spent-65.-Which-gets-your-vote.html)

Chinese 'Eat as Much as You Like' caff,  
 Chowing down on the 'skins of  
 High-minded hoodied chavs.

Lesbia's erotic antics in the alleyways of Rome are here memorably updated to a modern urban environment; the last line is a splendid rendering of *magnanimi Remi nepotes*.<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

The foregoing shows (I hope) that the literary reception of Catullus in English since 1750 is rich indeed. Some trends and common elements have emerged: Catullus has consistently been favoured by the youthful and progressive, and has been particularly appealing to women in recent years. His more obscene poems have been more freely translated and imitated as social attitudes to such material in literature have liberalised, especially over the last half-century. Certain poems have had a continuing popularity over the whole period: the poems on Lesbia's sparrow (2 and 3) and the lament for the poet's brother (101), perhaps because they appeal to the universal situations of the passing of pets and close relatives. Catullus has been appropriated for different types of *Zeitgeist*: liberal politics in the nineteenth century, modernism in the first half of the twentieth century, feminism and gender fluidity in more recent years. Literary receptions have also often showed the influence of the Catullan scholarship of their own time, not least because they have been produced by poets who are themselves scholars or from a scholarly environment. Consistent interest has been shown in the apparent emotional realism of the poems, leading to a tendency to read them biographically and to treat them as the basis for fiction. The passionate immediacy of the poet's first-person voice remains just as important as his literary learning and sophistication for his modern receivers.

### Further Reading

Gaiser (2001) is a rich anthology of Catullan translations and imitations which covers our period as well as earlier ones; Wiseman (1985) has a stimulating chapter on the modern literary reception of the Clodia story. On Catullus in the Romantic period Stead (2016) is now indispensable, while the Catullus

<sup>56</sup> For non-UK English speakers, 'chav' is a colloquial term for a low-status young male, while 'caff' is an abbreviation for 'café'.

chapter in Vance (1997) is the key item for the Victorian era, and Ziolkowski (2007) is a rich resource for Anglo-American material since 1945. Other useful material on Catullan reception in our period can be found in Harrington (1923, old but still serviceable), Fitzgerald (1995, suggestive material on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), and Arkins (2007, a good survey of the twentieth century).