

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

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Catullus, as William Fitzgerald acutely observes, is a poet whom “we have taken rather too much to our hearts” (1995: 235). For a considerable part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both lay and academic audiences reacted to the lyric voice in the Catullan collection as that of a friend and contemporary, whose grief over a brother’s death and anger at betrayals of trust struck us as candid, universally human responses to circumstance. Yet treating Catullus sympathetically as one of ourselves greatly impeded efforts to appreciate his literary achievement as a whole and to locate his poetry within its particular cultural and historical milieu. New Criticism finally taught readers to value the longer works of the learned “Alexandrian” Catullus and even to relish displays of erudition in the love poetry, but only at the price of dismissing his barbed invective and his coarsely funny occasional pieces as material supposedly displaying a “lower level of intent” (Quinn 1959: 27–43). Appreciation of the Catullan corpus, obscenity and all, in its entirety and within its proper context had to wait for the rise of New Historicism in the 1980s and the subsequent impact of the cultural studies movement on the humanities.¹

It is just since the 1980s, then, that wide-ranging research has succeeded in grounding Catullus firmly in the socio-historical world around him – by investigating his provincial North Italian background, his family connections, and his dealings with the Roman elite; by observing his interactions with fellow provincials seeking advancement; by teasing out references to matters of everyday life in his poems; by studying, lastly, the circumstances under which his works were produced and disseminated and what they might have conveyed to the audiences at which they were aimed. This historicizing approach has proved unusually fruitful; since Wiseman’s *Catullus and His World* (1985), influential articles and entire monographs on Catullus have appeared with increasing frequency. Such recent critical studies have employed a variety of incisive tools, including those of anthropology, cultural studies, gender theory, Lacanian psychology, performance theory, reader-response theory, and sociolinguistics, to delineate the basic cultural and rhetorical frameworks within

which the poetry operates. They have given us a more nuanced grasp of Catullus' language and poetics and his standing among his contemporaries.

Unfortunately, this ferment in present critical discourse seldom trickles down to high-school or even undergraduate college classrooms, although on both levels of Latin instruction Catullus is now one of the three ancient authors most commonly encountered. As Ancona and Hallett demonstrate in this volume, his current pedagogical popularity is likewise a nascent phenomenon. Within the living memory of many North American teachers, Catullus was a text assigned only on the college level, and then with some trepidation: despite their relatively easy syntax and their immediate emotive appeal, the poems were deemed simply too racy for the young. Incorporation into the Advanced Placement syllabus (for examinations usually taken in the senior year of high school, approximately age 17) gradually furthered Catullus' secondary-school canonicity, though he was not finally accepted as a core AP author until 1994. Consequently, although annotated teaching texts and materials on the poet have proliferated over the past few years, and good general introductions, such as those of Martin (1992) and Hurley (2004), are available, students and teachers looking for more detailed summaries of current scholarly opinion find nothing really suitable in English. Hence the Blackwell *Companion to Catullus* appears to be a timely project. Containing essays on a range of topics by recognized and emerging authorities and drawing together two decades' worth of research into a collection adaptable for classroom use, this volume is intended to present C. Valerius Catullus to a wider public as a writer who was very much a man of his time and a perceptive eyewitness to the last troubled decade of the Roman Republic.

Unlike most studies of literary figures that attempt to reach out to non-specialist readers, the Blackwell *Companion to Catullus* does not begin with a chapter on the author's life, for the very good reason that we know almost nothing about it. Texts, translations, surveys, and entries in reference works dating from earlier periods do contain short biographies of Catullus. Most have been based, directly or indirectly, upon Ludwig Schwabe's 1862 reconstruction of his career, known to those of us in the field as the *Catullroman* ("Catullus novel"). As that term of art hints, Schwabe's account is quite speculative, and prior biographies that leaned on it wove the scant data into highly imaginative scenarios. They focused on Catullus' affair with the pseudonymous "Lesbia," generally assumed to be Clodia, wife of Metellus Celer (*cos.* 60 BC) and sister of the radical demagogue P. Clodius Pulcher (*tr. pop.* 58). Drawing heavily on the first-person statements in the poetry, and treating artistic utterances as confessional pronouncements, they represented their subject as the disillusioned lover of a corrupt and degenerate noblewoman and attributed his purported early death to the suffering caused by that experience (or, alternatively, to tuberculosis, on no evidence whatsoever).

Here, too, the new socio-historical approach results in a changed emphasis. We can still start with the few external facts. Following earlier authorities, the late-antique chronicler Jerome reports Catullus' birth at Verona in 87 BC (*Chron.* 150 H.) and assigns to 58–57 BC his death at Rome during his thirtieth year (*XXX aetatis anno, Chron.* 154 H.). The latter date is demonstrably incorrect: all the poems in the collection to which dates can be ascribed were written during the period 56–54 BC, though we find no unambiguous reference to events subsequent to 54. Most scholars, accordingly, have treated Catullus' life-span of 29 years as fixed and

moved the date of birth down to 84; there has been a recent tendency to shift the death-date as well, down to 52 or even 51 (Granarolo 1982: 19–30; Wiseman 1985: 191; Thomson 1977: 3–4). But there is a possibility that the number XXX could be a scribal error; might Catullus have instead lived almost to the age of forty (XXXX) and thus seen the outbreak of civil war? Cornelius Nepos, to whom he dedicated his *libellus*, confirms that by 32 BC he was dead (*Att.* 12.4), but we have no idea how long before that he died, or what, if anything, he might have been doing after 54 BC.²

In his *Life of the Deified Julius* (73), the biographer Suetonius records: *Valerium Catullum, a quo sibi uersiculis de Mamurra perpetua stigmata imposita non dissimulauerat, satis facientem eadem die adhibuit cenae hospitioque patris eius, sicut conseruat, uti perseuerauit* (“[Caesar] had not denied that Valerius Catullus had put a lasting mark of shame against his name by his lampoons concerning Mamurra, but, on the same day Catullus apologized, Caesar invited him to dinner and continued to accept the hospitality of Catullus’ father, just as he had been accustomed to do”). In this volume, T. P. Wiseman unpacks what this sentence tells us about the social standing of Catullus’ family, and David Konstan explores its implications for Catullus’ view of politics. I have elsewhere noted (Skinner 2003: xxi) that, with a father still alive, Catullus would have been a *filiusfamilias*, or son subject to paternal authority (*potestas*), legally unable to own property and dependent upon others for his living expenses in Rome. That would make his vitriolic personal attacks upon his father’s guest, no less a personage than the military governor of Cisalpine Gaul, all the harder to explain. In the absence of extenuating circumstances, about which we know nothing, one wonders how on earth Catullus thought he could get away with embarrassing the family so blatantly.

The last bit of information contained in other sources is Apuleius’ testimony (*Apol.* 10) that “Lesbia” was a cover name for a woman named Clodia. That statement is corroborated by internal evidence, for in poem 79 Catullus informs us that “Lesbius” (who, in accordance with Roman nomenclature, must be some paternal relation of “Lesbia”) is “Pulcher,” a broad hint at the notorious Clodius Pulcher. As Dyson Hejduk explains (below, pp. 254–5), the identification of Clodia Metelli as Catullus’ mistress is not wholly certain, but there is a reasonable probability that it is correct, given her own social and political visibility. These days, though, historians are less interested in the details of the affair (if it was real) and more concerned with their implications for Catullus’ contemporary Roman audience. In the poems, a married woman associated with a powerful aristocratic clan is not only adulterously involved with the speaker, a young Transpadane, but accused of indiscriminate relations with named and unnamed others and figuratively branded in cc. 37 and 58 a common prostitute. Few today would accept this as a realistic picture of a noblewoman’s life. The cruel beloved is a standard generic component of ancient erotic verse (Dixon 2001: 137–40), and libelous charges of sexual immorality were part of the orator’s and the politician’s rhetorical gear, unscrupulously deployed against female as well as male opponents. Is the construction of “Lesbia” in the corpus just an assemblage of literary *topoi*, though, or does it also pass a harsh judgment upon the social scene in which she moved? There would be little point to the poet’s dramatic revelation that “Lesbia” was the aristocratic Clodia if the world of Roman politics were not somehow relevant to her literary and symbolic function. W. Jeffrey Tatum in this volume consequently finds a telling parallel between her lack of personal integrity and the

high-handed way in which the nobility, in Catullus' eyes, was exploiting the municipal equestrian class, and Konstan provocatively analyzes her insatiable promiscuity in c. 11 as a trope for Rome's wars of imperial expansion and plunder.

From the poems themselves we learn a few additional facts: that Catullus served for a year in Bithynia on the personal staff of the propraetor C. Memmius, probably in 57–56 BC (cc. 10, 28, 46); that the loss of an elder brother, who died and was buried in the Troad, was a devastating blow (cc. 65, 68a–b, 101); that his family owned property on the peninsula of Sirmio, near Verona (c. 31), and also an estate (most likely a working farm) somewhere between upscale Tibur and the rustic Sabine district (c. 44); that he formed close ties at Rome with numerous other poets and intellectuals (Cinna, Cornificius, his great friend Licinius Calvus, the brothers Asinii, Nepos, probably Valerius Cato) and was acquainted with several distinguished Roman senators, members of the nobility, and key players, including Cicero, Gellius Publicola, Hortensius Hortalus, Manlius Torquatus, and Cicero's influential ally P. Sestius. For a young unknown provincial, Catullus must have climbed the social ladder in Rome very quickly. Did he simply make the most of good connections, or were other talents brought to bear?

More and more Catullan scholarship is embracing a theory of performativity: that many of Catullus' poems were originally scripts for live recital by their author, most likely at banquets to which he had been invited, and that in those scripts the speaker fashions a self-image that will further his goals and ambitions. Critics emphasize various and sundry elements implicated in Catullan performance: Selden (1992) considers it a form of rhetorical, and Krostenko (2001a) a mode of linguistic, critique; Fitzgerald (1995) studies it as a tool for controlling and manipulating audience response; Wray (2001) analyzes it as a display of competitive masculinity; more pragmatically, I have suggested (1993a, 2001) that live performance was a tactic allowing a talented outsider to curry favor with those able to help him advance socially, economically, and perhaps politically.³ Several chapters in this volume acknowledge the likelihood of convivial recitation, but it is Elena Theodorakopoulos' reading of poem 68 in light of that assumption that reveals how postulating a "back story" of performance on private occasions may clarify old Catullan questions. Consequently, imagining the presence of the poet as a guest, a well-known artist and entertainer, in the dining rooms of leading Roman personages allows us to view him as someone not only having access to privileged information about the workings of power but also very much concerned about its concrete use and abuse.

Contributors to this volume examine current developments in traditional, as well as new, areas of Catullan research. In part I, "The Text and the Collection," J. L. Butrica reviews the transmission of the Catullan text from antiquity to the present day, while I myself offer an account of the debate over the vexed question of authorial arrangement (a chore I hesitated to impose on any colleague). Part II, "Contexts of Production," then introduces us to the numerous ways in which Catullus' poetry can be regarded as reflective of its times. T. P. Wiseman, who pioneered investigation of the poet's family and its later fortunes (Wiseman 1987), provides a history of the Valerii Catulli and their presence in Northern Italy. David Konstan examines the contemporary political scene in Rome, offers an explanation for Catullus' direct attacks on Caesar and Mamurra, and, most interestingly, finds political reverberations in other ostensibly non-political poems. Andrew Feldherr locates Catullus' studied

appeal to a learned coterie in the context of larger intellectual debates over Hellenization and shows how he and his fellow provincials employed learning to their advantage as they jockeyed for status within the circles of the Roman nobility. Elizabeth Manwell provides an overview of research on gender and masculinity and then analyzes contradictory paradigms of masculinity in Catullus, a matter that has received considerable attention in recent years.

Later generations habitually characterized Catullus as *doctus*, “learned,” in tribute to his impressive acquaintance with the earlier poetic tradition. Although numerous predecessors exercised influence on his work, he himself recognizes Sappho and Callimachus as his primary poetic models. In part III, “Influences,” Ellen Greene shows how Catullus’ appropriation of the “Sapphic voice” enables him to express his private erotic subjectivity – yet, by disrupting conventional gender polarities, likewise destabilizes his own sense of male identity. Peter E. Knox provides a concise introduction to Callimachus, including a review of his most important works and an explanation of the innovative features of Callimachean poetics; Knox then surveys the far-reaching effects of “Callimacheism” on the Roman poetic tradition, from Ennius through Catullus and his fellow neoterics, down to the Augustan Age.

Catullan language and style are distinctive. In part IV, “Stylistics,” three authorities investigate those formal aspects of the poetry. We still speak of the “Catullan revolution” as an abrupt break with previous artistic techniques. W. R. Johnson wittily elucidates Cicero’s grumpy reactions toward the poets he christened the “neoterics” and considers possible reasons why Catullus and his colleagues might have developed their innovative poetics. George A. Sheets analyzes the elements of Catullan style—diction, rhythm and meter, pragmatics—that endow it with its characteristic flavor, while Brian A. Krostenko shows that Catullus’ deployment of the vocabulary that connotes “elegance” (or the reverse) plays upon ambivalent cultural attitudes toward displays of aestheticism in the political arena.

The Catullan corpus is by no means homogeneous – indeed, no other Latin poetic collection manifests such diversity in genre, meter, tone, and subject matter. Critics therefore frequently treat thematically related groups like the “Lesbia poems” as coherent elements of the collection and approach some of the “longer” poems, cc. 64 and 68 in particular, as independent compositions worthy of monographs. In part V, “Poems and Groups of Poems,” we find studies of thematic categories, as well as in-depth readings of those two major works. William W. Batstone considers a set of poems commonly labeled “programmatic pieces” and boldly inquires what the label means and whether it can justifiably be applied: what makes verses programmatic, and is the program in the author’s eye or the eye of the reader? Julia T. Dyson Hejduk examines the large body of poems thought to relate to the poet’s affair with “Lesbia,” finding, intriguingly enough, not one but three distinct “Lesbias,” with contrasting poetic functions. Vassiliki Panoussi rereads the wedding compositions, 61 and 62, from an anthropological perspective. As re-enactments of ritual activity, each examines weighty cultural issues: tensions between male and female, conflict of personal desires and societal demands, continuation of the family line, sexual fidelity – all topics privately meaningful to the Catullan speaker as well.

Current work on Catullus 64, the short epic known today as “The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis,” concentrates upon its intertextual relations with predecessors and uncovers the implications of allusions to earlier Greek and Latin masterpieces. Jeri

Blair DeBrohun's chapter on this epyllion specifically analyzes its use of Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. This Hellenistic poem, she concludes, underlies Catullus' text in unsuspected ways: it determines the essential structure of the narrative and, through ominous reflections of the suppressed tale of Jason and Medea, tropes the poet's indebtedness to the past as intergenerational conflict. Elena Theodorakopoulos carefully walks the novice through the massive array of textual and interpretive problems associated with Catullus 68, which, for her, becomes an exceptional attempt to achieve permanence by overcoming the limitations of time and mortality. Finally, W. Jeffrey Tatum considers the function of Catullan invective: beginning with a consideration of the role of polemic in Roman political debate, he examines the conventions of political abuse as they are reflected in Catullus' poetry and analyzes the hidden messages in Catullan obscenity, showing that the concerns expressed are of a piece with the ethical stance of the speaker throughout the corpus. Despite the apparent diversity of the collection, then, certain leitmotifs emerge that provide an overall impression of engaged social commentary.

How did Catullus' subsequent readers view his poems, and how have their reactions to the author shaped the ways in which we read him? Reception theory – which studies how later perceptions, products of their own time, are mapped onto the original poem and become part of the text we confront – is represented in this volume by the series of chapters grouped under the rubric of part VI, "Reception." Four of these essays deal with responses to Catullus in antiquity. For Randall L. B. McNeill, the great problem is Horace's apparent dismissal of Catullus as a precursor and model: was the later lyric poet really as ungenerous as he seems? Vergil, on the other hand, makes sophisticated and often poignant reference to certain poems; going beyond a mere listing of passages, Christopher Nappa's chapter seeks to envision "Catullus" as Vergil might have perceived him. In Paul Allen Miller's view, Catullus, not Gallus, is the real inventor of Latin love elegy and poem 68 the single text that gave birth to it; Miller's reading of 68b complements and complicates Theodorakopoulos's in taking it as the expression of a polarized subjectivity. Martial, according to Sven Lorenz, redefines Catullus as primarily a composer of iambics and invokes his practices to justify the use of aggressive obscenity, meanwhile insisting that his own joking verses do no harm. This section concludes with two studies of Catullus' reception in later periods. Julia Haig Gaisser tells of the rediscovery of the text at the beginning of the Renaissance and the slow process of purging its most egregious errors; her account spells out the debt Catullus owes to his earliest editors and commentators. Brian Arkins surveys his assimilation by Romantic, Victorian, and twentieth-century poets and critics, who together created a sentimental image of Catullus still lingering as a ghostly presence in our classrooms.

We come then to the question of how Catullus is to be presented to students, as explored by veteran instructors in part VII, "Pedagogy." Ronnie Ancona and Judith P. Hallett discuss problems stemming from the relatively recent adoption of Catullus as a high-school author. Given the short tradition of teaching Catullus in the United States, they find that Latin instructors are less advantaged than their colleagues in the United Kingdom, where his poetry has been on the syllabus for decades. Ancona and Hallett also discover that British and American pedagogical treatments of Catullus differ considerably: in Britain, the "biographical" approach to the poet is still in vogue, while in the American classroom that method is no longer popular. Acquainting students with the

sexually explicit poems is still a controversial matter; teachers may benefit from the authors' suggestions on that point. Ancona and Hallett's chapter is followed by that of Daniel H. Garrison, who offers practical strategies for teaching Catullus in college. This juxtaposition of chapters reveals that articulation between levels of instruction is a major educational problem. The poems of Catullus that AP students have read in the high-school classroom were, in Garrison's words, "a thoughtfully chosen subset of his work that was tailored to their youth rather than the complexity of Catullus' actual oeuvre" (p. 516), and their experience of him in college will consequently involve learning to read him in a more sophisticated way. The question Ancona and Hallett pose – "Whose Catullus?" – is therefore a pertinent one: is he the intellectual property of scholars, kindergarten through twelfth-grade teachers, college teachers, or their respective students? Each category of readers, it seems, views him from a distinct perspective not easy to reconcile with those of the others.

Lastly, there is the Catullus many readers confront only through the medium of an English translation. In part VIII, "Translation," Elizabeth Vandiver explains just how difficult rendering Catullus into another language can be. It is hard to find equivalents for both meter and vocabulary, and obscene words pose their own particular difficulties, for Roman cultural assumptions are not the same as ours. Some poems depend on an equivalence of sound and meaning, and others, the longer "Alexandrian" poems, derive weight from the learned obscurity of their mythological references; how can these effects be replicated in an idiom and a poetics as alien as those of English? As Vandiver finally shows, Catullus' own ventures in translating from Greek to Latin opt for free adaptation rather than strict fidelity to the language and meaning of the original. Perhaps there is solace in knowing that the poet had at least some inkling of his modern translator's dilemma.

Although the *Companion to Catullus* was intended as a reference work, authors were encouraged to go beyond summarizing received critical attitudes and urged to supply the reader with original insights into their subject matter. These chapters can therefore be regarded as innovative contributions to the field. Some break new methodological ground when attempting to offer solutions to long-standing problems. Others frankly acknowledge the controversies that swirl around an author whose surviving text is so lacunose and problematic and whose life is very much a mystery; while they do not reach a definite conclusion on a particular topic, then, they seek to present a balanced survey of all the evidence bearing upon it. Researchers may find it expedient to refer to such essays for capsule accounts of the state of a given question. Students and teachers, for their part, should feel confident that this volume contains the most reliable and up-to-date opinion on Catullus and his unique place in Roman intellectual and literary history. Finally, each of our contributors is at pains to demonstrate that the poet's artistry, despite its embeddedness in its own cultural milieu, will perpetually speak to the current generation in the form of a *lepidus nouus libellus*, as a fresh new voice.

NOTES

- 1 For an assessment of how these two approaches have affected present critical investigations of literature, see Klein (2005: 83–106).

- 2 In Skinner (2003: 181–3), I tentatively advanced the idea that the historical Catullus might have married and continued the family line. Wiseman, thinking in similar fashion, now calls attention to the small fragment of fresco recovered from the imperial-age villa at Sirmio that depicts a young man holding a scroll. As the scroll could indicate someone distinguished in the literary realm, it may, he suggests, represent Catullus himself (below, pp. 65–6). One other clue to the figure’s identity is his barefoot state, for the analogous bare feet of the Prima Porta Augustus are a symbol of heroization (Müller 1941: 496–7; Galinsky 1996: 161). Deceased ancestors were objects of familial cult: in a letter dubiously attributed to Cornelia, mother of the Gracchae, the writer envisions her son C. Gracchus paying her posthumous rites: *ubi mortua ero, parentabis mihi et inuocabis deum parentem* (“when I am dead, you will make ritual offerings to me and call upon your parent as a divinity,” *ap. Nep. fr. 2*). As a recipient of cult, the young man must be a recognizable and not a generic individual, conceivably the ancestor of the person responsible for the décor of the villa. That is not conclusive proof, of course, but perhaps it is evidence enough to permit serious consideration of the hypothesis.
- 3 Although some still adhere to the older view that Catullus rejected politics to devote himself to a life of art and enjoyment (e.g., Miller 1994: 134–6), we now see increasing consideration of his use of poetry to negotiate his cultural identity and his provincial status among members of the Roman elite (Fitzgerald 1995: 185–211; Habinek 1998: 94–6) and to critique Roman society from that perspective (W. J. Tatum 1997; Nappa 2001). Because employment on a provincial governor’s staff was one recognized way to launch a political career, Catullus’ term of service abroad with Memmius may also have been undertaken for motives beyond his (ironically) professed hope for self-enrichment.

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