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The Books of Catullus

translated by
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**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of PhD in Creative Writing**

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Abstract

The Books of Catullus consists of a completely new translation of Catullus's poems divided into the three 'books' some scholars have agreed is the right order of the poems. These 'books' are divided as book one 1-60, book two 61-64, book three 65-116. This main text is prefaced by six essays: 'Starting Line,' 'The Flâneur: Catullus, Martial, Baudelaire, Frank O'Hara,' 'Catullus and Modernism,' 'The Question of Voice in Catullus,' 'The Accessibility of Catullus,' and 'Sourcing the Origin: Translations of Catullus since 1950'. The essays together have an aesthetic of their own, reflecting what I take to be the most important features in 'the books' of Catullus: the key feature is a flâneurist wandering. The essays are speculative and diverse in their enquiry, and are not only representative of the 'matter' of thought which was going on behind the translations, but also represent the 'form' and circumstances that that thinking took place in. So the essays wander through and around questions relating to the gaze, collecting, 'occasion' and voice, the modern and Modernism, the contemporary, accessibility and difficulty, coterie and the evolution and practice of translation itself, in general, and in relation to Catullus in particular. If the essays wander (and wonder) in these ways, as a flâneur might conduct his perambulations, they also reflect the 'form' of the 'books'.

The poems are anchored by metrical form, they 'wander' around, through and across other possible categorical orderings as diverse as genre (lyric, elegy, epigram, hymn, translation, verse-letter, 'epyllion,' etc.); theme (love, loss, friendship, rivalry, marriage, adultery, politics, sexuality, etc.); length (the poems vary in length from two lines to in excess of four hundred), and so on. George A. Sheets in his essay 'Elements of Style in Catullus' (Skinner 2007, 190) sums up the poems in this way: 'the single most characteristic aspect of Catullan "style" is its protean character'. Other epithets can be added: quotidian, contingent, exploratory, speculative. The essays, therefore, reflect this 'protean character' of the poems in how they address the reader: they can be chatty, informal, formal, comical, serious, academic, intellectual (and intelligent), playful, precise, digressive, 'occasional,' accessible, difficult, 'modern' – all rich characteristics of the poems – in short the art of the poems can be found in the expression of the essays.

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Author's declaration

The essays on Catullus and the translations of Catullus's poems are my own work.

Introduction

Starting Line

The Books of Catullus consists of a completely new translation of Catullus's poems divided into the three 'books' some scholars have agreed is the right order of the poems. These 'books' are numbered as in Thomson's *Catullus: Edited with a Textual and Interpretative Commentary* (1998): and divided as book one, 1-60, book two, 61-64, and book three, 65-116. This main text is prefaced by six essays: 'Starting Line,' 'The Flâneur: Catullus, Martial, Baudelaire, Frank O'Hara,' 'Catullus and Modernism,' 'The Question of Voice in Catullus,' 'The Accessibility of Catullus,' and 'Sourcing the Origin: Translations of Catullus since 1950'. The essays together have an aesthetic of their own, reflecting what I take to be the most important questions in 'the books' of Catullus: the key feature of these 'books' is a flâneurist wandering. The essays are speculative and diverse in their enquiry, and are not only representative of the 'matter' of thought which was going on behind the translations, but also represent the 'form' and circumstances that that thinking took place in. So the essays wander through and around questions relating to the gaze, collecting, 'occasion' and voice, the modern and Modernism, the contemporary, accessibility and difficulty, coterie and the evolution and practice of translation itself, in general, and in relation to Catullus in particular. If the essays wander (and wonder) in these ways, as a flâneur might conduct his perambulations, they also reflect the 'form' of the 'books'.

A modern equivalent, a metaphor perhaps, for the collection of the poems into their 'books' might be Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, where he collects diverse materials into 'convolutes,' and Catullus's 'books' might be seen themselves as 'convolutes,' in this case, a discrete (and discreet) ordering by metrical forms only without the orderings of narrative or chronology – orderings contemporary readers might be more used to. Although the poems are anchored in this way by metrical form, they 'wander' around, through and across other possible categorical orderings as diverse as genre (lyric, elegy, epigram, hymn, translation, verse-letter, 'epyllion,' etc.); theme (love, loss, friendship, rivalry, marriage, adultery, politics, sexuality, etc.); length (the poems vary in length from two lines to in excess of four hundred), and so on. George A. Sheets in his essay 'Elements of Style in Catullus' (Skinner 2007, 190) sums up the poems in this way: 'the single most characteristic aspect of Catullan "style" is its protean character'. Other

epithets can be added: quotidian, contingent, exploratory, speculative. The essays, therefore, reflect this ‘protean character’ of the poems in how they address the reader: they can be chatty, informal, formal, comical, serious, academic, intellectual (and intelligent), playful, precise, digressive, ‘occasional,’ accessible, difficult, ‘modern’ – all rich characteristics of the poems – in short the art of the poems can be found in the expression of the essays.

So, to begin with an anecdote. I started translating Catullus in June 2000, by accident. At that time I worked as librarian at the Poetry Library in London. One Friday afternoon I received a query at the reference desk, which triggered what soon became an obsession. Someone phoned asking about locating an English translation of Catullus’s Poem 8, and I reached for Guy Lee’s parallel text from the OUP edition (*The Poems of Catullus* 8-9). As I was reading Lee’s version down the telephone for the caller to scribble the text, I looked over the Latin and saw ways that I might substitute certain words in Lee’s text, which seemed, at least to my mind, to read more fluently, even though the actual words were not a literal ‘fit’; they seemed more in the spirit of the original. On and off as the afternoon meandered by I carried on working, turning lines and alternatives over in my mind, scribbling down the more promising phrases and even complete lines into a notebook. I took the fragments home and continued to work on them over the weekend. I quickly realised I had created my own very different version to Lee’s. I also realised I had a new poem, which worked very much as one of ‘my own poems’ worked, yet featured many different and quite uncharacteristic qualities. In this poem I was looking at the world through the eyes of another writer, and trying to find solutions in English to writing problems through a different sensibility, and quite a different culture. Already I was looking at the problem of writing a poem from quite an other, ‘outside,’ view to the one I was used to: in fact, more radically still, I had started to find another way to write poems, and a fresh way to see the world, paradoxically using poems two thousand years old, as a prism to find something new, something original to say. The experience was startling, exhilarating even. With some excitement I began work on other poems by Catullus, as it became evident that I must find a new or at least different method by which to proceed. So, I set off up the Charing Cross Road with a flâneurish swagger, visiting every second-hand bookshop as well as Foyle’s and Blackwell’s. Soon I had accumulated a large number of other translations, critical monographs, books relating to other aspects of Roman culture contemporary with Catullus, and

most importantly scholarly commentaries. (These are listed in the ‘Works Cited’ at the end of this thesis, which inform both these essays and the poems translated). Other gaps in the bibliography were filled in using the then new invention of the World Wide Web, with the help of various online booksellers, and later, libraries.

What had first gripped me with excitement in ‘Poem 8’ was the sense, by way of the poet’s use of everyday language, and colloquial address of the reader, that here was an Ancient poet with a modern sensibility. The poem also felt vital in another sense: I had the thrill that this poem was one (and I suspected there would be others) where I could peek at a whole culture and way of life, albeit voyeuristically, as though through a keyhole. These were my initial excitements, and I imagined these to be the first kinds of thrill anyone experiences approaching Catullus (or any other poet from a distant culture) for the first time. No doubt this is one reason why Catullus’s lyric poems are set at GCSE level, because of their apparent accessibility. However, what I also picked up on at the time was Catullus’s ‘otherness,’ which at that moment I couldn’t quite define, but came to figure as more and more an important factor to explore and understand as the project materialised. Indeed, now the translations are finished, I have the sense I ‘know’ the culture Catullus was living in two thousand odd years ago, rather less certainly, paradoxically, with rather less familiarity.

For any poetry project I undertake I set up rules or boundaries for the sequence, so the writing has some kind of purchase on or against language, almost as though the resistances set up between language, expression, emotion, the physical surroundings even, create an energy in their play from where the poem emerges, mapping a record or trace of that struggle. This approach or methodology stood me in good stead for embarking on these translations, which initially were really for my own private amusement – to complete a few of the lyrics as five-finger exercises – but soon, as I was drawn into the oeuvre, translation became a serious and urgent necessity to my own writing procedures, and ‘rules’ or methods to interrogate poetry have become part of my writing as a practice ever since. These methods change and mutate with each project, usually on the scale of a book, or a long, non-narrative sequence. The re-discovery of Catullus’s poetry, and my attempts to render his work into English has changed fundamentally how I think about and approach writing. Translation helps me stand outside the writing

process (strangely objectifying my own), and means I face the challenge of writing problems, which I wouldn't otherwise encounter. There are difficulties and resistances created in relation to metre, syllable count, line breakage, stanzaic structure, metaphor, etc., and the movement of the line, which are not mine and unfamiliar, but need representation, or sometimes a form of ventriloquism.

Indeed, as I moved from 'book' to 'book' of Catullus (1-60, 61-64, 65-116), it became apparent that because the groupings of poems are organized by metrical, tonal and rhetorical register, as well as thematic principles, I would need to reflect these differences in the translations, so as not to flatten out the text as so many translators have in their versions. Some translators use a particular form to mirror the metrics of Catullus's Latin: Michie uses, for the most part, the iambic pentameter in rhyming couplets, for instance. Others abandon trying to reflect the metrical structure of the poems altogether. My versions map a third possible route, relating to the architecture of the three 'books': Thus, the so-called polymetric grouping of poems (1-60) follow a free-verse model, where the 'sense' of the poem can flow across lines; the long poems of 61-64 shadow the stanzaic shape, and try to work around specific metrical feats, such as the use of the hexameter in Poem 64 (see below for details of how this works); and poems 65-116 (written in elegiac couplets) stick more strictly to a line by line, syllabic count to reflect the stricter metrical patterning in these poems. I don't try and reproduce the metrical structure of the originals in terms of quantitative metres, nor in terms of stress patterns as in orthodox metres in English such as iambic pentameter. Instead, these new versions of the poems trace the progressively more astringent and disciplined features of the original, through syllable counts, and reflect a *few* of their feats in terms of metre, whilst shadowing the movement of the verse across the entire body of work.

In some of the polymetric group I also introduce some of my own innovation relating to metrics to reflect the meaning of the poem. For the most part the poems in this grouping are rendered in various free verse forms, and are often chatty or at least conversational (see Poems 16 and 25, for examples). However, some of my versions are literally more calculated. Poem 11 is one of those poems. In this work I utilise syllable count to reflect the meaning, whilst using the shape of the stanza to shadow the original metre: in this case, the Sapphic. So the poem appears to be in Sapphics, but isn't. In terms of meaning this poem starts as a verse letter to the poet's friends Furius and Aurelius, and talks through their possible exploits

covering the length and breadth of the Republic, from India to the Nile, from the Rhine to Britain. As the poem progresses, its argument narrows to the specific, to a note the poet wants taken to his mistress, and his feelings of love for her, which become embodied in the image of the ‘bloom at the far end of tilled land’ (see below, Poem 11). I reflect this narrowing of focus in the meaning of the poem in the syllable count of each stanza: so stanza one has 15 syllables to its three main lines; stanza two 14 syllables; stanza three 13; stanza four 12; and stanzas five and six 11 syllables, which would be the number of syllables in all lines of the original, 1-3, 5-7, 9-11, 13-15, 17-19, 21-23, if I was use a simple syllable count. The ‘outrider’ lines 4, 8, 12, 16, 20 and 24 are of five syllables, as in the Latin. I do this, so my version remains visually mimetic of the verse form, whilst simultaneously revealing the movement of thought through the poem, from the vastness of the Roman World to the single, isolated flower at the furthest remove of a tilled field.

Poem 63 is another example of how I innovate and try to reflect the verse form of the original. Here I attempt something more ambitious. The ‘Attis’ poem was a popular one from the oeuvre for the 19th Century, even inspiring Tennyson to work out an equivalent stress metre to this unique offering of Catullus’s in galliambics. Tennyson’s poem ‘Boadicea’ remains though an ‘echo’ of the original (see Gaisser, *Catullus in English* 282-283), and mine too is an echo, not using a stress metre, but a syllabic count, and also reflecting the break between the second and third foot of the line, by separating the sense of the first half of the line from the second, so the line can either stand as one whole sense structure, or two separate sense structures. I also start my version of the poem using stresses where there might be long syllables and unstressed syllables where there might be short syllables, and as the poem unfolds this stress patterning is varied and becomes more irregular. As Peter Green (*The Poems of Catullus* 38) points out in his note to the metres, the most useful information on the metrics of this poem appears in Thomson’s commentary (*Catullus* 375-377), and I follow Thomson’s notes on the standard and variant lines of the galliambics. So taking the first three lines written, which approximate to the standard form of the line, I have produced lines which, like Tennyson echo the original, but in my version of the 16 syllables of the original line there are stressed and unstressed syllables to approximately substitute for the long and short syllables of the original; and a break in the sense of the line, where the line breaks between the eighth and ninth syllables in the original:

u u - u / - u - - // u u - u / u u u u
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Across deepest /oceans Attis // catapulted / in his quick yacht

u u - u / - u - - // u u - u / u u u u
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

headlong inland / with flight of foot, // approaching the / Phrygian woods

u u - u / - u - - // u u - u / u u u u
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

pressing forward / and through dark woods, // the goddess's / crowning thicket

These methodologies were very much *ad hoc*, and rule of thumb: attempts to develop a working method, as I encountered Catullus's work poem by poem. In addition, I soon found myself coming up against translation theory, and my negotiation of that discipline (or disciplines) became increasingly vital. From the start, however, it was clear that I would not be offering a translation for students trying to learn Latin, and this realisation immediately brought me up against a big question: what is the purpose of translation? And what do you use different translations for? Crib, Literal, Literary, or Imitation. And what could my translation of Catullus offer, which might be new or original?

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So much for anecdotage, so much for happenstance. Set out below are the rules and principles of translation with which I started:

1. The translations should in themselves be good poems that stand up to scrutiny: all great translations are also great poems, as we can see from *Chapman's Homer* (1957), Arthur Golding's *Metamorphosis* (2002), and Dryden's *Virgil's Aeneid* (1997) as well as Peter Whigham's *The Poems of Catullus* from 1966, the latter still (for me) the best translation of Catullus in the Twentieth Century. My own Catullus should at least aspire to this kind of longevity.
2. The poems should, where possible, take an alternative reading to other translations

and versions of the poem offered by other recent and contemporary translators: otherwise why write a new translation of Catullus?

3. A related principle: to check *all* the other available translations of Catullus and try and work around each one, figuring out how other translators have made their versions, and to establish each translator's own methodology and the rules they use to approach the Latin texts.
4. These versions should be 'faithful' to the text, but need not be a literal translation, it could be they concentrate on the spirit (see my version of Poem 16) of the poem. Now, this opens up a whole can of worms, both in terms of the practice of translation and in terms of where translation theory might find its place in this version of Catullus.
5. The poems in their final versions should reflect the thinking of the most up to date scholarship available. In the case of Catullus this seems vital, and more important than evading other translations of Catullus. We can return to the implications of this approach and why I think this is important to my translations when we come to look at scholarly commentaries and their role in these poems.
6. That my translations should at least have the ambition to offer a kind of handbook to translation practice.
7. That certain choices need to be made from the start of each poem: no translator will ever capture the entire sense or effects of a poem, and the translator has to be clear about the direction he or she is heading towards, weighing the exclusions of nuance and meaning of particular words and context to measure the advantages of one path over another, and what limitations might be tolerated.
8. The new versions should reflect the shape of the poem on the page. Perhaps an unnecessary consideration to some translators and critics; Peter Whigham's versions do not see this as is a consideration of any importance, or rather he creates his own shape to the poems, transposing the book of poems from the Late Republic to contemporary America in the shape of late William Carlos Williams, a kind of High Modernist vernacular, which is quite appropriate for the huge width of register in the Latin, from the highly rhetorical longer poems to the sometimes obscene epigrams, and the various registers in between. As my versions developed, tracking this visual impact of the poem on the page seemed also a vital part of the translated poem, shaping the overall impression the poem makes on the the eye of the reader from his or her very first encounter.
9. Related to (8): I also try and 'translate' the movement of the lines and the verse, by 'shadowing' the poem line for line in the elegiac couplets of the last 'book', and by

following the sense as it moves from line to line in the other metrical forms, in the first ‘polymetrical’ ‘book’ and in the longer poems of the central ‘book’.

10. Most of the poems should have a line/title/allusion to a pop song from the last fifty years. Perhaps this ‘rule’ seems perverse, but I like to think of this motif as a kind of mason’s mark, a way of leaving the mark, the moniker of a craftsman. At first, that was how this constraint seemed to work, but soon it became a further way, a method even, to stand outside my usual, habitual practice, and at the same time to create a further ‘objectivity’ test to the translation. For me the relation and the trace of popular music is a deep one between Catullus in the English lyric reaching back to the sixteenth century at least.
11. A practical measure: once I have worked with the Latin text, I read the version aloud, over and over again to master it, and to find a sense of its sounding in English.

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Next to these principles was a methodology, a way to proceed through each poem translated. For each piece I roughed out a translation using *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary* (2000). The next step was to consult the commentaries in a quite unscholarly way, a way they were not designed to be used: Thomson was the first of these I would consult because it is the most up to date (1997), then Quinn (1970), then Fordyce (1961), and also Garrison’s recent *The Student’s Catullus* (2005). These works were devised for students and scholars to better understand the text’s literal meaning, word by word. I used them for this too, but also to help me build a 360° picture of every word, like a mosaic, to realize each text’s potentiality, before I made decisions about how to translate each word, phrase or line. As far as possible I wanted the full weight of linguistic, historical and cultural factors to be present, or at least latent in each translation. Indeed, commentaries formed the authority and bench mark of this translation and were invaluable in securing the textual accuracy of each word with informed conclusions about their meaning (sometimes multiple meanings), their cultural import and difference to our cultural context, as well as determining textual variants between the versions handed down since the discovery of the three copies of Catullus’s poems in the Middle Ages.

At this point, the Loeb Edition, revised by G. P. Goold, *Catullus: Tibullus*:

Pervigilium Veneris (Harvard University Press, 1913; 1995) worked as a crib to make sure the translation produced contains no ‘howlers’. Then the works of criticism available came into the process to inform the texts on various aspects of Roman culture relevant to the period of the late Republic, which Catullus was living in, covering issues such as attitudes to sexuality, politics, friendship, the relationships between work, money and leisure, etc.. Key critical texts to these translations have been: Marilyn B. Skinner’s work on the idea of Catullus’s oeuvre being a series of books (Skinner, 1992 and 2003), a theory developed from Quinn’s earlier work (1972); Charles Martin’s arguments on the chiasmic structure to the sequences of the poems and within the poems’ texts themselves, particularly in the poems 61-68 (Martin, 1992); William Fitzgerald on the idea of the gaze as a structuring mechanism to the poems, particularly Poem 64, and ‘foreign’ structures of obscenity and eroticism (Fitzgerald, 1999); T.P Wiseman on the difference between Catullus’s world and our own (Wiseman, 2000); and also other full-length works in Catullan studies on topics such as subjectivity (Janan, 1994), love (Lyne, 2003) and masculinity (Wray, 2001). All these works lurk in the shadows of these translations, or press in on them at certain moments of their realization.

Once I’d created a version I was satisfied with I would then consult other English translations. All the translations available in English from the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, and those translations into English from earlier centuries, back to the Sixteenth Century available in *Catullus in English*, edited by Julia Haig Gaisser (Penguin: London, 2001) and *Catullus in English Poetry*, Eleanor Shipley Duckett (Russell and Russell: New York, 1925; 1972), were referred to, to make sure my translation was distinct in word choice from other versions in English as possible. At this point adjustments were made, so my version could stand beside those already in existence. In this way, the history of the translation of Catullus into English very much presses behind the versions in my translation of the Roman poet.

Catullus is the most translated Latin poet of the Twentieth Century, and Julia Haig Gaisser opens her ‘Preface’ to *Catullus in English* (Penguin Books, 2001, xiii) with: ‘In 1931 Ezra Pound proclaimed: “There is no useful English version of Catullus.” There are *useful* versions today (though Pound might not agree), but there is still no *satisfactory* version.’ This issue of use is an important one, which I shall explore in relation to the Zukofskys’ translation later on, but the long list of

translations above in my argument and below in the 'Works Cited,' did have a use for me in finding my own way into translating Catullus. Until I found William H. Gass's excellent (and highly entertaining) *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) to articulate my reading process of other translations, I was operating a similar series of 'filters' or criteria to those Gass outlines.

When looking at and using the translations of others to focus and sharpen my own versions, what I really wanted to establish in relation to the translations already available was the *difference* of my own. So: Goold (1983) and Lee (1990) came first in the process: translations by excellent scholars, which were accurate and workmanlike. However they could be plodding, and often were wooden in their English, because they need to be reliable texts for school and university students, and therefore need to be literal and not stray too far from the 'prose' meanings of the original. Despite that disadvantage, they were the truest to the Latin, and provided a good guide to this literal meaning of the source language whilst also maintaining the shape of the poems. Green (2005) is an excellent translation, fluent and readable, often working from the humour and sharpness of the Latin. Green also uses a syllable count, which 'shadows' the shape of Catullus's poems: a technique I have employed particularly for the later elegies. Sisson's is quite a sharp translation, but also strangely dour (not a Catullan characteristic), and reads as the translation of roundhead encountering flamboyant royalist. Whigham (1983), for me is still the best versioning available. This is a work that brings Catullus firmly into the Twentieth Century, where the Ancient World meets William Carlos Williams via Ezra Pound (Poem 64 reads as a kind Poundian Canto). Michie (1998) has much to admire in the body of the poems, but why he needs to rhyme the poems seems a mystery, as this feature mis-represents the movement of the line in the poems. Perhaps he feels the need to connect his translation to the homegrown neo-Classical translations of Pope and Dryden. Mulroy's (2002) is a chatty and American alternative; this version manages at times to trace the shifts in register, particularly to a higher rhetoric, which Catullus is employing. Martin's 1990 version faithfully produces the kinds of features he outlines in his critical book *Catullus* (1992). Raphael and McLeish (1978) conjure up their Age, the permissive 70s, and drop Catullus into the middle of that decade, in the wake and fall out of the 60s. Horace Gregory's 1956 version is an early attempt at a High Modernist reading of Catullus, which takes its bearings from

Pound's 'Homage to Sextus Propertius'. Copley (1957), is a kind of jazz meets pop music of the 50s to contemporize the original. The Zukofskys' 1969 versioning attempts to create a sound or aural homophonic version, as a mapping of the original (see my essay below). Pilling (2009) re-conjures the spirit of Robert Lowell's *Imitations* (1990) in his poems. The versions by Methven (2009) and Petrucci (2006) are light and lively, as Methven claims, his texts are 'variations,' more 'after' Catullus than full-blown translations. Myers and Ormsby (1972) is another curiously rhymed version. Then there are books of poems, which are inspired by Catullus's work, and the two most prominent are both published recently by Bloodaxe Books, Josephine Balmer's *Chasing Catullus: Poems, Translations and Transgressions* (2004), and Tiffany Atkinson's *Catulla Et Al* (2011), a feminist voicing of some of the lyrics and longer poems. One of the more extraordinary versions of Catullus is Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010), a boxed set, a scrap book of memory about the life and death of her brother, produced in near facsimile, using Catullus's epitaph for his brother, Poem 101, as her touchstone, to create a moving and powerful memorial. The most recent publication is the daring, and entertaining volume by American poet Brandon Brown (2011), which offers itself up as a handbook to translating Catullus instead of rendering his own attempts at the poems, where the act of translation is repeatedly deferred. I will return to this project in my last essay below.

A hierarchy of which translations to consult first soon established itself, relating to how close each one might be to the Latin, and how close they might be to the purposes and aims of my translation of Catullus. I wanted to keep my versions fairly close to the Latin, so I would consult, in the last stages of the process the other translations in the order outlined above. The criteria I applied were whether the translations' methodologies, their style or tone, etc., related, through similarity or difference to my own versions. What is striking about this list of 'complete' translations is that only five of them are by out and out scholars, some of whom have rendered other Latin poets in their whole oeuvre: Goold even attempts two versions of Catullus, one prose for the Loeb, and another quite different rendering in verse for Duckworth.

Commentaries take on very different shapes, and there are various models, which initially seemed very appealing because of their scale and ambition. Initially, it was one of my ambitions to create an apparatus on the scale of Nabokov's Pushkin

(1990) or David West's *Odes* of Horace (1995) for my translation of Catullus. But these are huge enterprises, and outside the scope of the present study (Nabokov's epic runs to well in excess of a 1000 pages, West's to three volumes with an essay on each ode). Therefore, rather than attempt an orthodox commentary on every rendering, as I might have done, I offer instead a series of speculative essays written at the time of composition of my version of the complete verse, which tackle what I see as the most important questions, questions which became evident through this translation process. They reflect on not only the detailed mechanical procedures of my translations, but also wider questions about why Catullus is important as a figure to translate into English now. In the first piece I look at the Flâneur as a way of 'translating' Late Roman Republican culture into our own, via the Roman Empire which was the world of Martial (Martial 'translates' Catullus's cultural wandering for his own situation 150 years later), and explore some aspects of Baudelairean Flâneurism as a possible form of equivalence to the Epicureanism of Catullus's period, and how we might trace a direct line from Catullus circa 55b.c. to the Catullus of our own time: Frank O'Hara. The key questions for this series of speculations is the translation of cultures and their transmission; how Catullus reaches into our literary culture, and what happens when Catullus is found, alive and kicking (or strolling, so to speak) down the streets of New York City. Walter Benjamin's model of the flâneur and his active strolling, of imaginative and intellectual insouciant wandering, forms a template for the way these essays are connected, and how the concepts and ideas, which I have worried at across the years of translation, have appeared as a result of my practice. These concepts, niggling queries or doubts, (sometimes challenges) have meandered through my acts of translation, and represent some of the questions of culture, history, politics, translation theory and practice, which lie in the margins, informing my translations. Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* with its complexity of categorizations and collecting and the simultaneity of knowledge, offers a blue-print for the idea of Catullus's 'books,' the three distinctive groupings the poems were found in when rediscovered around 1300. Indeed, these questions provide a frame and also good reasons for why translating Catullus has become such a necessary activity for me.

Paired with the first piece on Flâneurism and Epicureanism, where Catullus treads through modern poetry, is an essay on Catullus and Modernism. This piece concentrates particularly on the use Ezra Pound makes of Catullus's work in the

early drafts of *The Cantos*, where Pound uses different texts from Catullus at different times during the drafting process of his epic poem to develop his own aesthetic of the image, the Vortex and the Unwobbling Pivot. Ezra Pound seemed to have a *use* for Catullus after all. The development of this aesthetic for Pound comes to focus on the different ways Catullus uses the images of feet, and this essay reflects back on how Catullus himself uses the images of feet to organize moments of high tension at certain key moments in his own poems – one practice is closer to the other over 2000 years than seemed to be the case at first. So as well as Pound’s ‘use’ of Catullus to articulate a key Modernist feature of his own aesthetic, there is also a kind of dialogue Pound is having with Catullus’s poems, expressed in the shift from the Latinate to Hellenic in his shaping of *The Cantos*.

Voice is an important feature of any translation, and a key for the translator to get right. The next pairing of essays reflect on voice in Catullus, concentrating on a reading of poems 76 and 97 to show how Catullus uses occasion (connecting him again to the poet of occasion for our own time, Frank O’Hara, and Ben Jonson’s Neo-Classicism of a previous era) rather than mask (the claim High Modernism has on Catullus it would seem through Pound and Whigham), as the ‘voicing’ that takes place in his poetry. Also this essay emphasizes voice as a function of rhetorical occasion (again linking Catullus to poets like Jonson in the seventeenth century), rather than identifying ‘voice’ as some kind of essentialist authenticity, to be found in the ascendant more conservative accounts of contemporary poetry.

This issue of voice, voicing and ventriloquism could be related to all the poems in the corpus of Catullus’s poems. In the longer poems at the beginning of the ‘third book,’ Poems 65-116, the issues are slightly different. Two poems where this is apparent, and which would carry this conversation about voice and voicing forward are Poems 65 and 66. They offer further occasions that the translator needs to be aware of, the intimacy of a verse letter to a friend (Poem 65), and the occasion and voicing of Catullus’s own theory and practice of translation – for 66 is a translation of Callimachus and close enough to the Greek, that Stanley Lombardo in his version of Callimachus (1987), translates Catullus’s Poem 66 in place of the remaining original fragments. Catullus’s own translation practice emerges as curiously ‘modern’ across the whole corpus of his work: he presents us with the apparent literalism and faithfulness of Poem 66, and the variation and complexity of Poem 51, where in addition to changing the sexuality and

viewpoint of Sappho's great Poem 31 (see Anne Carson's version in *If Not, Winter* 62-3), Catullus also adds his final stanza as a Romanised critique of Hellenist culture. Between these two poles of translation, we might, therefore, take our cue from Catullus's own translation practice, which seems to operate between this literalism or faithfulness on the one hand, and a form of cultural and literary criticism on the other. This kind of variation of *use* in Catullus's own translation practice might justify similar variations and digressions in a contemporary translation into English.

The second essay in this pairing on voice looks at an associated and very contemporary issue, that of 'accessibility,' in Josephine Balmer's versions of Catullus (*Poems of Love and Hate*, 2004), versions which in their eagerness to render Catullus our contemporary compromises the ordering of the poems, adding titles and subject headings, thereby obfuscating the subtleties of his voicings, conflating voice with contemporary representations of the authentic to effect an uncomplicated accessibility.

The last essay is concerned with the two most significant translations of Catullus since 1950: the Zukofskys' (1969) and Brandon Brown's (2011), which offer new ways for us to think of the practice of translation itself, its use, what it means as a literary activity, and its vital relevance to our culture. It invokes the idea of 'foreignisation' from Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (2008), but discusses how the Zukofskys' versions take that idea to a further level, not simply making the reader aware of the material text as a 'translation' an 'other' text to the source text, but further questions the impossibility of translating work from another language, leaving the English at a place which exists at a level prior to signification. Brandon Brown's book employs a level of wit and play to produce a book of rhetorical throat clearings, so the texts remain prior to translation in quite a different way: avoiding actual translation but offering constantly varied possibilities for strategies of translation, repeatedly deferred.

In the end, these essays turn over the questions, which have haunted me throughout this project; questions that have constantly formed a background to the translations, working both in tandem with my practice and informing that practice. In this way, these questions constitute a reflection on issues, which sit in the background to my practice, and shape the practice itself: what makes Catullus

modern, what makes Catullus Modernist? In short, what makes Catullus still speak to us now, and why attempt another translation?

The purpose of these principles, this methodology and the various essays where I have attempted to think through my translation processes, is to ensure the translation I've produced is as different from what other translations have achieved as possible in order to establish an identity for this new one, and to use all available scholarly material to inform, make authoritative, and render a fresh, new and exciting a translation, in short to mark out this translation's own territory. In their own way these translations endorse Pound's slogan *Make It New* (*Make It New* 1934).

There are two issues, which fascinated me when I took on the task of translating all of Catullus's work, one specific to Catullus is the issue of who put the poems into the present order of the 116, and the second, was where does translation theory relate to my practice as a translator.

The first question: who arranged Catullus's manuscript into its present ordering? To briefly rehearse the debate. Is the book of Catullus three books, or is it an anthology created by Medieval scholars? This is a key question, and if we take the ordering of the book to be in three sections, based on the physical dimensions of papyrus rolls, then the whole book starts to make more sense than the ordering by theme that Josephine Balmer favours in her recent selection for Bloodaxe Books. The three books are 1-60 (the polymetrics); 61-64 (the long poems marriage hymns and epyllion); and 65-116 (elegiacs). The organisation of the book is purely a question of form. The poems obviously speak to one another across the books, and are often paired: 51 is placed with 11 for instance, and mirrors the beginning and end of the relationship with Lesbia. The work on these questions is already done, begun by Wiseman (1969), most recently, and developed mainly by Marilyn B. Skinner (1992 and 2003) on the grounds of detailed analysis of metrics and style. Charles Martin makes the argument for the architecture of the 'Books of Catullus,' drawing attention to their chiasmic structure (*Catullus* 26-36) as an over-arching principle, and one which, to my mind at least, is one an author is more likely to think of and employ than an editor, because of the way that structuring can be directly linked to the kind of micro structures Skinner is at such pains to detail. The counter arguments, most recently Josephine Balmer's (*Poems of Love and Hate*,

2004), seem a lot less convincing, and form part of the discussion below on accessibility. One further way we might want to think about the ‘Books’ of Catullus would be through Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, and see the ‘books’ as organized in a parallel structuring to Benjamin’s sprawling opus. I touch on this possibility in the essay on flâneurism. For me the organization of the ‘books’ as we have them is the best one we have, reflecting Catullus’s own, and his obvious sophistication and elegance, whether the poems were ordered by Catullus himself, a later editor, or by a combination of the two.

The second question, which seemed important at the beginning of this project, is about the relationship between translation theory and translation practice. As I read and absorbed work as diverse as Robert Lowell’s attempts to capture ‘tone’ (*Imitations* xi-xiii), Brodsky, Clarence Brown, W.S. Merwin and Yves Bonnefoy on translating ‘form,’ rhyme and prosody (Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 462-475), as well as more general, over-arching theories such as George Steiner’s in *After Babel* (1998), it became clear that finding one answer, one theory or even one method to translate Catullus was going to be impossible. And although work such as Lawrence Venuti’s *The Translator’s Invisibility* (2008) provided compelling and persuasive arguments about foreignising texts and avoiding a transparent and appropriating translation, when confronted with the lines of Latin ‘on the ground,’ at the micro level of bringing over a word, a sound, or a rhythm into English, theory was not going to fundamentally help.

In the end, it was the scholarly commentaries that offered the most useful direction and threw down the most challenging of gauntlets in regard to producing as excellent a translation as possible, and helped shape my versions of the poems. So I decided most often to take aesthetic challenges from these sources, such as the one Kenneth Quinn remarks on in his commentary to Poem 64, and produce a translation shadowing the four or five words to a hexameter line from the original, a feat not achieved before now in translations of this poem:

The poem opens with a 5-word hexameter, a line of which C. is extremely fond – nearly 1 line in 4 in this poem is a 5-word hexameter (counting the refrain 327 etc. as one line). There are four 4-word hexameters, 15, 77, 115, 319. The line is also an example of neoteric verbal ingenuity.
(*Catullus* 299-300)

As this feature counts for 25% of the poem it seemed like something very difficult

to ignore in the translation, and difficult to believe no one had attempted to reflect this kind of complexity before. Indeed, this feature of the poem seemed to be its defining moniker.

In a recent lecture at the University of Kent (2013), Edith Grossman, translator of Cervantes and author of *Why Translation Matters* (2010), when asked by me in the question and answer session after her talk: ‘What use do you have for translation theory?’ She replied, ‘absolutely none’. Which seems an extreme position, but I too have found theory to have less and less *direct* importance to this project as it proceeded. What I mean by translation theory here is the body of work, which has grown, especially since the time of Dryden’s divisions of metaphrase: ‘the turning [of] an author line by line, from language into another’; paraphrase, ‘translation with latitude,’ and imitation, ‘taking only some general hints from original’ (Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 145-146). Theories have especially proliferated in the 20th Century from Pound’s advocacy of free verse form in translation, and his advocacy of translation as kind of criticism (Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 274-289); to Nabokov’s, ‘the term “free translation” smacks of knavery and tyranny The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase’ (Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 383). Walter Benjamin’s classic essay, ‘The Task of the Translator’ provides me with the closest account of what translation is, and details the crucial importance of the activity for me, summarising my own experience of translation when it has succeeded: ‘the task is this: to find in the translator’s language the latent structure which can awake an echo of the original’ (Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 303). But these remarks in all cases arise as reflection *after the act* or experience of translation, and don’t really help with the nitty gritty of the immediate context of a phrase or line in the Latin of a Catullus poem.

Translation theory *does* lurk at the margins, and seeps in at the edges, and certainly forms part of the background thinking to my versions of Catullus, which follow this introduction. I have followed Venuti in trying not to appropriate Catullus’s poems and make them transparent in English and reveal instead their foreignness to our culture; I have also tried to capture the varying and various tones of the poetry as Lowell might approve. There are some other fundamentals, however, that Grossman articulates, and these seem particularly appropriate in thinking of the advanced evolution that Catullan translation finds itself occupying in 2013,

where Catullus is the most translated poet from Latin into English in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. I trace out that evolution in the essay on Zukofskys' and Brown's translations of Catullus, but suffice to say, because we have excellent prose cribs of Catullus, and various literal, literary and paraphrase versions in between, this means translators can think of themselves as Grossman states in her book *Why Translation Matters* (2010):

I believe that serious professional translators, often in private, think of themselves ... as writers ... What exactly do we literary translators do to justify the notion that the term 'writer' actually applies to us? ... The most fundamental description of what translators do is that we write – or perhaps rewrite – [so that readers] will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the esthetic experience of its first readers.

(6-7)

This seems to me to be a fundamental truth to my experience of translating Catullus, and its essential challenge (and I should venture its satisfaction too). In fact, I might go further and say translation is both the most fundamental form of reading a text I know, and the most fundamental form of literary criticism I know, as this activity causes the translator to work outside the text in the context of criticism and cultural background, and inside the text in looking at the mechanics and nuances of language.

The Flâneur: Catullus, Martial, Baudelaire, Frank O'Hara

There is much research published in the field of Classical Studies on the reception of Latin and Greek texts in translation, mapping out the relationship between original (or source) texts and the language of the translation (or target language). This relationship works at a level beyond simply translating the words. Further challenges face anyone undertaking a translation: there are questions about the translator's purposes in translating the text; the 'style' of the translation, whether it be literal, in prose or verse, a work 'close' to the source language, or a version or imitation of the source text. Then there is the question of the reader, which the translator might have in mind for his or her translation. Someone using a translation to learn a language will require a very different text to someone who will only ever read a translation instead of the original. The former will require a literal version, the latter a text, containing most of the key features of the source text, but will want a work readable in English, a text, standing perhaps as a work of literature in its own right. However, there is the cultural context any translator is living in and through, that needs to be taken into account too, and how that might relate to the cultural context of the author and text in the original or source language. Lorna Hardwick in her book *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (Duckworth: London, 2000) puts it this way:

There is also ... the role of the translator's interpretation of the wider meaning of the source text, both in its own time and for later readers. This aspect raises big questions about how the translator/writer views the relationship between ancient and modern, not just in terms of language but also in terms of values and ideas. The relationship between the two texts is also shaped by the readers or audience, who receive the new version and in turn give it their meaning.

(10)

Hardwick's book is an excellent guide to several of the questions all translators need to address in their practice: the debate around 'scholarly' and 'poetic' translation; Dryden's distinctions between metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation (Weissbort and Eysteinson 145-47); the shift in Twentieth Century translation between fidelity and equivalence as yardsticks to quality, and the most difficult task of all:

It is not possible simply to translate one word by its apparent verbal equivalent ... There is a complex web of tone, register and meaning which draws on the

effects of vocabulary, sound, rhythm and meter in both the source text and the translation. This web is also shaped by the fact that translation is a movement which takes place not only across languages, but across time, place, beliefs and cultures.

(Hardwick, *Translating Words* 17)

Hardwick then goes on to expand in her book how Classical (for the most part) literary translations, have been used to find equivalences between issues and contexts directly relevant to the late Twentieth Century. Firstly, she reconsiders the low regard presently held of Nineteenth Century translation and translators. She then looks at how works of translation have been used, quite straightforwardly in the Twentieth Century, to investigate how translation practice has been ‘transplanted into new work’ (*Translating Words* 43) in writers as diverse as H.D. and Christopher Logue. There are chapters on the use of Classical texts in work challenging political orthodoxy such as Heiner Müller’s *Tales of Homer* (1990) from the GDR; the relationship of Classical texts to recent Irish literature; and Derek Walcott’s use of *The Odyssey* for his long poem *Omeros* (2005). Hardwick’s book provides a necessary map and much of interest; however, there are more radical ways of thinking about the process of translation and what connects the source and target texts. One such way might be to examine cultural, theoretical and philosophical equivalences (or differences) between works of translation now undertaken in the early Twenty-first Century and poems from the Roman World. Perhaps it might be useful to find equivalences for the way some Roman poets might think about and experience the world with models of thinking from our own.

Where Lorna Hardwick concentrates on Greek epic and drama I want to look at Roman lyric and epigram. Because of Catullus’s importance to Martial I will also include his work in my analysis to show how the republican epicurean transforms into the imperial stroller, eventually emerging as the Industrial Age’s flâneur, and consider Baudelaire in this context through the eyes of Walter Benjamin, and then finally view our contemporary lunchtime browser, that most recent significant poet of Catullan sensibilities, Frank O’Hara. This walk through history is a stroll through cultures and ideologies.

Despite the 150 years difference Martial is closest to the late republican poet, in terms of his preoccupations and sensibility in the epigram. As J.P. Sullivan points out in *Martial: the Unexpected Classic* (2005): ‘Catullus, long an

established classic not least for his volume of short poems known as *Passer* (i.e. *The Sparrow Book*), is the writer most frequently mentioned' (94), in Martial's 12 volumes of epigrams. Sullivan goes on to say: 'what Martial found attractive was the strong personal element that Catullus introduced into the epigram tradition, the willingness to talk about himself, his sex life, his emotional reactions, his friends and social activities' (96). Indeed, Martial's poems are full of good humour and *sal* (wit) at his master's expense, name checking the earlier poet and even using his most renowned image, the sparrow in his gentle tauntings:

My friend Stella's favourite is Maximus,
His dove (dare I say it and Verona hears!)
Passes Catullus' sparrow beyond measure.
My friend Stella eye-balls your Catullus,
Just like a dove weighs in against a sparrow.
(Book I Poem 7, my translation)

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The poem I have chosen to look at in detail by Catullus is Poem 10; not one of his famous poems from the bittersweet Lesbia sequence, or one of the longer poems on marriage, or one of the barbed epigrams. I have chosen this poem because four things came together as I was preparing this essay: looking over this quite uncharacteristic poem of Catullus; looking back at Martial's epigram Book V Poem 20; then leafing through the new four volume set of Walter Benjamin's *Selected Writings* (edited by Michael W. Jennings 1996-2003) alongside the hefty *The Arcades Project* (1999) in the bookshop; and later that day finding, second-hand, Lucretius' *The Nature of Things*, translated by A.E. Stallings (2007), on one of the bookstalls outside the National Film Theatre. Browsing and leafing had collected together the necessary materials for me.

So to Catullus's poem 10:

Dearest Varus caught me mooching about the Forum,
Insisted I attend visiting hours with his girl.
A right bimbo I thought, on first impressions,
But not without intelligence or uncharming.
On our arrival we chatted through various
Sorts of stuff, covering a range of issues
What the news was of Bithynia, how was
Life over there, did I make much money.

Truthfully I retorted, not for praetors
 Nor for aide-de-camps was there any way
 They could strike a deal, nor were they the richer,
 Even more so if your praetor's a bugger,
 One who didn't care a sod for his long-suffering aides.
 'All the same,' they say, 'you definitely purchased
 What everyone knows as the indigenous
 Resource – bearers.' Determined to look good
 To the girlfriend and shine out over the rest,
 'Of course,' I say, 'it wasn't all bad where I was,
 Against the odds of selecting a poor province
 I did manage to pick up eight strapping lads.'
 If the truth were known there wasn't one, here or
 There capable of shouldering and heaving
 The bust leg of a broken down bed-chair.
 At this point the teenage dirt bag chimes in with
 'My dearest Catullus, let me borrow them
 For a bit, I need bearing to the temple
 Of Serapis.' 'Hold on a minute,' I say
 To her, 'what I said a moment ago, those
 Lads, I must be losing my mind, a slip
 My friend Cinna – Gaius – they're his purchase.
 Anyway, why should I give a damn, mine or his?
 I get the use of them whenever I please.
 But you are a right pain, a disaster area
 Who won't let the slightest of things pass you by.'

Walter Benjamin, in a note from 1936, 'Translation — For and Against,'
 discusses the technique of translation:

And as such, why should it not be combined with other techniques? I'm
 thinking primarily of the technique of the commentary ... This successful
 form of translation, which acknowledges its own role by means of
 commentary and makes the fact of the different linguistic situation one of
 its themes, has unfortunately been on the wane in modern times. The
 period of its flowering extended from the medieval translations of Aristotle
 to the seventeenth-century bilingual editions of the classics, with
 commentaries.
 (*Selected Writings Volume 3*: 250)

'Modern times' to Benjamin mean the 1930s, and there has been a return to the
 commentary as an important tool for interpreting texts since then. Benjamin's
 remarks here are of particular relevance to Catullus, the most translated Latin
 poet of the Twentieth Century, and relate to my own work translating the Late
 Republican poet. I am not a Latin scholar, so the commentary is a primary tool I
 employ in the preparation of my translations, and Catullus is remarkably well
 served with scholarly commentaries from Fordyce (1961, 1973), Quinn (1970,

2003) and most recently Thomson (1997, 1998) and Garrison (1992, 2005).

These are the texts I most frequently use to establish context, nuance and explore the ambiguity of meanings for each word.

But to look at Poem 10 in detail, and focus on its first two lines. What struck me on consulting the commentaries was the lack of interest in the word ‘otiosum’ – in the Latin it appears at the end of line two – I have rendered its meaning as ‘mooching’ in my translation. Fordyce, Quinn, Thomson and Garrison ignore the word completely. From the point of view of translation I have found with Catullus that most of the shorter poems have one word the translator must concentrate on and get right: they almost act as a key to unlocking the rest of the poem. ‘Otiosum’ is the key to Poem 10. ‘Otiosus’ means to be at leisure or without occupation and is related to ‘otium’ meaning free time, leisure, or ease. However, most of the discussions on ‘otium’ in the scholarship centre upon poems 50 and 51. Charles Segal’s article ‘Catullan *Otiosi*: The Lover and the Poet’ (Gaisser, *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Catullus: 77-86*) is perhaps the fullest account. His analysis of the significance of the word is useful for Poem 10. ‘Otium’ is the pursuit of ‘a privileged class of young men [of which Catullus was a part] held together by common interests and tastes ... The word ... adumbrates both a mode of life and (indirectly) an aesthetic,’ the word has “disreputable” associations’ (78). However, Cicero, elder contemporary of Catullus and no friend of the up and coming young Turks, talking of Scipio Africanus points out: ‘even at leisure [otium] [he] thought about business [negotium]’ (78). Later in his article, Segal touches on Poem 10 and points out the opposition between ‘otium’ and ‘negotium,’ leisure versus activity (or busy-ness) (80-1). Of course Catullus has been caught out at the hub of busy-ness and activity, the Forum. As Segal puts it:

Such an *otiosus* not only leads a life which has its centre far from the forum and is discrepant with its occupations; he also devotes his energies to analysing, savouring, recording these ‘unforensic’ experiences.
(80-81)

But ‘otium’ and ‘negotium’ don’t seem at odds with one another – as Cicero has pointed out: one can be contained in the other. If ‘otium’ takes place ‘far from the forum’ what is Catullus doing there? Thinking of how to make right his

losses in Bithynia? The Forum is a place of politics, business, law and commerce and it is the focal point of cultural life. In addition to public buildings there were tabernae (inns and restaurants) and shops. Part of that mooching, that idling, that hanging around with nothing to do, is observation, looking, watching the activities of the Forum. Looking is a form of busy-ness, focus as much as distraction, for 'otium' is not idleness in this context; it is time for reflection, cogitation, contemplation. It is the time for the deep thought necessary for writing poetry.

The identity of Varus is significant here: according to the commentaries, he could be one of two men, but both are identified in the commentaries as lawyers, men of 'negotium'; Varus should be at the Forum, not distracting Catullus into another activity to be associated with 'otium,' the visit to his girl. Just as Catullus is caught out at the Forum, so he is caught out by Varus' girl: it's as though the activity of the gaze at the Forum impairs Catullus's judgement for this later encounter.

What lies behind 'otium' as a value is Epicureanism, derived from that translation of Lucretius's *The Nature of Things* (2007) from the NFT bookstall. At the core of the philosophy is the juxtaposition of pleasure with pain. Basically the goal is to live a life, a 'good life', of pleasure and mitigate pain as much as possible. There is some evidence for Catullus at least being familiar with the work of Lucretius, and he might even have known him – it is quite likely they died within a year of one another. More compelling still, the praetor of Poem 10 is one Memmius, and Lucretius's patron; and more compelling than that is Catullus's long Poem 64 contains whole phrases from *The Nature of Things*. Looking at the wider social and historical context the popularity of Epicureanism as a way of life makes logical sense: Rome had endured 200 years of civil war, and contrary to later Christian propaganda about the Epicureans, it actually offered a creed more akin to Buddhism as a way of life, frugal and without excess – excessive pleasure (which is the usual stereotype for Epicureans) could only end in excessive pain, and that should be avoided. No, balance and therefore social order was the ideal. Epicurus himself was famous for his walled garden of tranquillity set against the warlords battling for Athens outside; it is very much a philosophy for how individuals can survive the chaos of a collapsing society. Actium is only two decades away after the deaths of Lucretius and Catullus, heralding the Empire,

and Emperors of varying degrees of liberalism and brutality. The philosophy makes good sense for writers and intellectuals up against self-seeking politicians and a largely ignorant and volatile population. Moreover, this Epicurean balance is the essential state for a poet, a moral imperative, the vital activity, his ‘negotium,’ required for the writing of poetry.

If Epicureanism is the moral philosophy behind ‘otium’ then the neoteric must be its aesthetic. There has been much written about the (non) existence of the neoterics, which I don’t want to get into here, suffice to say Catullus was supposed to be at its heart, and Cicero was supposed to have coined the term, as something derogatory for young, upstart poets of an intelligent but arrogant disposition. Their taste for either short epigrammatic poems or the epilyon, short narrative poems based on minor incidents from mythology, were pitched against the long, portentous epics of the time designed to emulate Homer. Their taste for wit and ‘sal’ is in keeping with the no-nonsense philosophy of living for the moment: Catullus’s short lyrics and epigrams could be the aesthetic embodiment of the philosophy of the Now in Epicureanism.

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Throwing the focus wider, doesn’t this activity of mooching fall across the activities of Walter Benjamin’s ‘flâneur’ like a shadow? Isn’t the Forum the Roman world’s Paris Arcade with its colonnades, shops and browsers?

Benjamin is the great forensic scientist of the big city. Earlier in his essay ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’ he states: ‘Baudelaire uses the term *dupe*. The word refers to someone who is cheated or fooled, and such a person is the antithesis of a connoisseur of human nature’ (*Selected Writings Volume 4: 21*). Catullus does not seem at ease with the Forum, but an outsider ‘about’ rather than in the thick of observing its activity, connected only through his gaze, and distracted enough to be ‘caught out’ first by Varus and then by Varus’ girl, he is their dupe. Indeed, Benjamin goes on: ‘The more alien a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature . . . one needs to operate in it’ (*Selected Writings Volume 4: 21*), which marks the tipping point between the comedy of Poem 10 and the disquiet of Baudelaire’s world.

Benjamin picks up on the idea of the man of leisure in the work of E.T.A.

Hoffmann later in 'The Paris of the Second Empire':

The flâneur was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure. He goes his leisurely way as a personality; in this manner he protests against the division of labour which makes its people into specialists. He protests no less against their industriousness.

(Selected Writings Volume 4: 30-31)

Catullan 'otium' and 'negotium': Benjamin's 'leisure' and 'industriousness'.

The point about the Parisian flâneur and neoteric Latin poet is this aesthetic is about lifestyle in the most fundamental sense; on the one hand the action of the flâneur is to slow industrialisation and commerce down, to smash the Industrial Revolution with a kind of creative indolence, on the other, the 'otium' of the Latin poet is to embrace an Epicurean ideal, a living in and of the Now, to check the excesses of Republican (and soon to be Imperial) expansionism. Catullus's form of leisure is as much a moral imperative, a way to the 'good life,' as much as Benjamin's flâneur with his turtle on a ribbon is a moral imperative and critique of the busy-ness of industry.

Which leaves, so it seems, the rest of Poem 10 begging. For hasn't Catullus taken part in the very rapacious activity Epicureanism scorns and rejects, in being a part of the governor of Bithynia's retinue, expecting kick backs and booty? Well, yes, and he's been very bad at it: he's chosen in Memmius the meanest of praetors to hitch his ambitions to. He receives no favours, monetary or otherwise; he's been shafted, and he hasn't even been able to acquire slaves, and then has to undergo the ignominy of having his embarrassment pointed out to the world by a girl his social inferior. The point is, good Epicureans (or neoteric poets for that matter) can't make industrious, business-like Romans: indeed, the punch line of the story is don't do it, don't attempt to do it, and don't even lie about doing it. The flâneur and neoteric poet stand outside the mechanisms of exchange, commodification and slavery: Catullus's dabbling in this form of 'negotium,' which his adventure to Bithynia represents, is a financial catastrophe and moral sin.

Furthermore, Catullus's activities and (non) acquisitions in Bithynia leave him wide open to the abuse of Varus's young girl. Catullus's dilemma when his bluff is called is akin to that of Benjamin's (and Baudelaire's) flâneur: 'The

intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity' (*Selected Writings Volume 4*: 31). Just as the girl has an eye on Catullus as a prospective customer (one of the translations for the word 'scortillum' in line 3 is 'little prostitute'. I translate the word as 'a right bimbo'), so her ears prick up at the prospect of a free ride to the temple of Serapis. The real sting for Catullus reveals itself as he is marked as her slave through the web of lies he's woven about non-existent 'strapping lads'. The one thing, as a connoisseur, a practitioner of 'otium,' he should be good at, is using language; instead, she puts him in his place, a commodity in Benjamin's terms, the place of human capital. Rhetorically, he becomes her slave, and the humiliation is not simply comic, in a kind of comedy of manners, but is fundamental, philosophical.

If Catullus's Poem 10 offers a moral tale about the perils of the misuse of acquisition and the waste of 'otium,' Martial's epigram Book V Poem 20 appears more relaxed, more confident, more the poet comfortable with his leisure. Indeed, Martial's poem gives us a detailed sense of Roman flânerie, albeit 140 years later than Catullus, at the centre of an empire rather than a republic, and therefore even closer to Benjamin's (and Baudelaire's) Paris.

The Martial named in the poem is not the poet, and according to the commentaries was a lawyer, like Catullus's Varus, and therefore a representative of 'negotium'. Here Martial and his companion stand outside the mechanisms of exchange, commodification and slavery. Indeed, the central purpose of the poem is to track and maintain that Epicurean balance:

If only you and I, dearest Martial,
 Could fritter our days endlessly idle,
 If we discovered free time, "The Good Life",
 Ignorant of big houses and "Big Names",
 Or the boring laws and their dusty courts –
 No, for us: bridle-ways, chatter, the baths,
 The Virgin's Aqueduct, bookstalls, the shade
 Of urban gardens, drinking in "The Sights",
 The gymnasium – our daily routine.
 But the state-of-play is neither's got it,
 The good times sinking down as each sun sets.
 So every day we loafed, chalked up as debts;
 Wouldn't every man live, if he knew how,
 Giving it all away to here and now?
 (Book V Poem 20)

Surely this poem is clear evidence of the Roman flâneur? Again that word ‘otiosum’ appears (this time at line 3, and in my translation is rendered as ‘idle’). Again the poem associates “The Good Life” with those activities of the flâneur, and the closely related processes and activities of the gaze in the idea of collecting, possessing and commodifying. Again the poem is about freeing the speaker and his companion of the obligations of ‘negotium’ (activities) of the Forum, the ‘boring laws’ and ‘their dusty courts’. That is a way of life for others to pursue. Significantly, Martial has control over the things he lists in his poem, in a way Catullus does not. The anxiety here is the threat of that loss of control over ‘The Sights,’ whereas for Catullus the poem enacts that moment where he loses control of his story over to the girl (and reader). In Martial there is a distant, almost stately, control being exercised; in Catullus the rag bag of things he has supposedly collected in Bythnia are already scattered and out of the bag, a scattering enacted through his loss of composure, the stuttering lines of his speech, and his eventual final abuse of the girl, his social inferior. By Martial’s time under the likes of Domitian, it seems Epicurean mooching has almost become formalised, even a form of tourism, where those that indulge do so without a threat to their social status; for Catullus in the turbulent late Republic, the activity is more uncertain, more dynamic.

The way Martial registers the activities of the Roman flâneur is through a kind of foreshortened looking: the centre of the poem is almost like a series of snapshots or postcards home. It is as though Martial is negotiating the line between *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*, from Benjamin’s essay, ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’ (*Selected Writings Volume 4*: 313-355). The point is the poem’s central experience is in that Epicurean moment of the Now in ‘The Sights,’ not the pleasure and classical perspective of seeing. Reading Benjamin’s essay, this experience of the Now in Martial’s poem is more akin to Benjamin’s discussion of the experience of photography in Baudelaire’s Paris than classical painting in the construction of the gaze where Art is ‘retrieved out of the depths of time’ (338). In Benjamin’s model photography does not return the gaze and therefore create the necessary aura, it is of the Now: ‘what happens here is that the expectation aroused by the gaze of the human eye is not fulfilled’ (339). So it is the same for Martial’s sights. For Benjamin landscape folds out distance in the image; in Martial’s poem distance is concertinaed. The perspective of the aura is collapsed and atomised into the moment of the Now, of seeing ‘The Sights,’

visiting the baths, indulging in chatter, enjoying the shade of urban gardens. Or that is the ideal. In fact what the poem leaves us with is a crisis, and registers what Benjamin calls (in relation to photography), ‘a crisis in perception itself’ (338), for the final five lines register something darker in the Epicurean way of life that can’t be avoided in the crisis of, ‘the state-of-play is neither’s got it.’ Herein, lies the main difficulty of Epicureanism: it is balance, not indulgence, routine not novelty, which the individual must seek. That ‘routine’ *is* the Epicurean’s labour, his ‘negotium’ contained within the goal of ‘otium’. What the Epicurean ideal requires in the Good Life is a living through the moment as its valency of worth, and the creation of spaces for those moments in ‘otium’; the doubt of the closing lines of this poem is focused on finding a way to create reflective, meditative leisure rather than unproductive idleness. Additionally, Martial couches the dilemma of his crisis using a financial model for his rhetoric, that of the Forum, of ‘negotium.’

The use of the gaze in Martial’s poem is one model we can fruitfully reflect on, utilising Benjamin’s essays and remarks about Baudelaire and the flâneur. A further connected way we can find Benjamin’s reflections useful for a reading of Catullus and Martial is through *The Arcades Project* (1999), particularly if we look at it as a model for collecting. This collecting is related to the collapsed gaze in Martial and the chaotic gaze in Catullus. To remind you, Catullus can not only find no bearers to bring back to Rome, but ‘there wasn’t one, here or/There capable of shouldering and heaving/The bust leg of a broken down bed-chair.’ Catullus’s gaze ‘collects’ things almost at random, in the moment of panic, as he improvises a list of things made up on the spot, collecting together a pack of lies. Martial’s list of things to see, views to behold, impressions to experience, to collect through the gaze, has lends decorum to a space distanced and seemingly rational: ‘bridle-ways, chatter, the baths,/The Virgin’s Aquaduct, bookstalls, the shade/Of urban gardens, drinking in “The Sights”,/The gymnasium’. In short, and in both cases, these are collections of fragments, with the gaze as their collection box, but more than this even, more than a list of fragments – the fragment is how we perceive things in the city. It is the unit of perception. As the translators’ preface to *The Arcades Project* puts it for Benjamin’s book:

Benjamin’s intention ... was to grasp such diverse material under the general category “primal history” of the nineteenth century ... It was not the great men ... but rather the “refuse” and “detritus” of history, the half-concealed,

variegated traces of the daily life of “the collective,” ... and with the aid of methods more akin ... [to] the collector of antiquities and curiosities ... Not conceptual analysis but something like dream interpretation was the model. (*The Arcades Project* ix)

For *The Arcades Project* collects, like Martial ‘collects’ his impressions and snapshots in his poem, and Catullus is expected to ‘collect’ things (slaves in this case) by Varus and his girl: for Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* is flâneurist in its very methodology, Epicurean in its gaze, neoteric in its wit and polish. Benjamin collects quotations, his own aphoristic reflections, fragments of thought, together under headings as associative clusters, boxes of curiosities from far off lands of the imagination, akin to the shop-fronts in the Paris arcades themselves, which would include trinkets and spices from Indo-China and so on. The British model might be a museum collection: the shrunken heads and fetishes of the Pitt Rivers Museum. As the translators’ foreword goes on to state, Benjamin is creating ‘an *image* of that epoch’ (*The Arcades Project* x).

One view of Benjamin’s *Project* is that these bundles of pages were working notes towards a huge critical book of which the Baudelaire essays were just the beginning. Again the translators’ foreword:

It has become customary to regard the text which Benjamin himself usually called *Passagenarbeit*, or just *Passagen*, as at best a “torso,” a monumental fragment or ruin, and at worst a mere notebook, which the author intended to mine for more discursive applications. (*The Arcades Project* x)

However, I would concur with this view set out later in the foreword, which states: ‘*The Arcades Project* is just that: a blueprint for an unimaginably massive and labyrinthine architecture – a dream city in effect. This argument is predicated on the classic distinction between research and application’ (xi). It is a book constructed using the ‘montage form’ (foreword, xi), which ‘had become a favourite device in Benjamin’s later investigations ... ‘One-Way Street,’ ‘A Berlin Childhood around 1900,’ ... ‘Central Park’ (xi). It seems to me that rather than creating an analytical magnum opus, Benjamin instead is creating an associative labyrinth, addressing the reader with a quite different challenge. Here is a text to be dipped in and out of, which can be approached at page one or 201, or anywhere where it might seem to signify or create a network of associations or meanings for the interested, absorbed reader. It is a book without chronology or

Aristotelian shape, a work in three dimensions, a building like the Parisian arcades themselves. Indeed, the method seems part of the *Zeitgeist*; there are other writers of the time equally radical, fragmentary, distilled: the contents of Fernando Pessoa's trunk come to mind, only now being published in various editions as *The Book of Disquiet* (see the Penguin edition 2002).

Drawing the gaze further back, and in the light of this commentary above on Benjamin's mammoth labyrinthine work, the 'books' of Catullus might be seen as a form of 'Arcades Project,' where the poems are organised into groupings other than narrative, akin to Benjamin's 'convolutes,' as fragments, into a form of montage, held together by little more than grouping by metrical form, thereby creating a 'dream city' of associative chance, a poly-narrative without chronology.

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One way to reflect on these findings about Catullus and Martial might be to read those findings back into and illuminate Benjamin's thought in particular, and the contemporary 'scene' in general, use what we have found reflecting on Catullus and Martial to cast new light on our present situation, culture and aesthetics. The relationship between the works of Catullus and Martial themselves set a precedent. William Fitzgerald in his book *Martial: the World of the Epigram* (2007) concludes his study with a chapter on how Martial can be read back through Catullus, indeed, the work necessarily must be read in this way.

Fitzgerald observes:

The history of reception has a way of reversing chronology ... The paradox serves to remind us that we can never entirely dismiss our experience of what comes after from our reading of what comes first. With some poets, it is more literally true that the earlier is read through the later. The Renaissance did not rediscover or imitate the ancient writers in chronological order; in the case of Martial and Catullus ... Martial was known before Catullus.
(*Martial* 166)

The reception of Martial and Catullus are out of chronology, almost out of time, in relation to one another. Related to this issue of the atemporal is another: the parallel positioning of Catullus and Martial's Rome and Baudelaire's Paris (which Benjamin's study is addressing), these cities, Rome and Paris – leading to

the dream cities, the literary phantasmagorias of these poets, which also seem to float ‘out of time’ – are *the* very real centres of power and culture in the Western world of their times. The capitals of Catullus’s Late Republic, Martial’s Roman Empire and Baudelaire’s Third Empire, are all places where the curiosities and riches of dominant ruling powers end up enriching and entertaining the population from the middle classes upward, and simultaneously act as anchor to the various loci of ‘dream cities’ in the poetries of Catullus, Martial and Baudelaire. Benjamin, therefore, seems mistaken to limit his version of the Poet and the flâneur to late-Capitalist society. Whether the poet or flâneur exists in a late-Capitalist society or not, the fact of Empire and the rapacious expansionism of an oligarchy seem more pertinent and relevant pre-conditions for the Epicurean stroller or flâneur to exist and flourish, creating the wealth of time which affords leisure, uneasily parked alongside material spoils of the ruling class.

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The process of reading back Catullus, Martial, Epicureanism, Baudelaire’s Paris and Benjamin’s flâneur, through contemporary poetry can usefully be served by offering a reading of a poem by the American poet Frank O’Hara, whose day-job was as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, who spent his lunch hours mooching about the streets, shops and stalls of New York City, who was well familiar with, and a champion of, another collector of images and objects, the visual artist Joseph Cornell. (Cornell’s famous boxes uncannily resemble the collections of objects to be found in the arcades of nineteenth century Paris). As we see in this poem, O’Hara is a mid-Twentieth Century collector of sorts:

A Step Away from Them

It’s my lunch hour, so I go
for a walk among the hum-colored
cabs. First, down the sidewalk
where laborers feed their dirty
glistening torsos sandwiches
and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
on. They protect them from falling
bricks, I guess. Then onto the
avenue where skirts are flipping
above heels and blow up over

grates. The sun is hot, but the
cabs stir up the air. I look
at bargains in wristwatches. There
are cats playing in sawdust.

On

to Times Square, where the sign
blows smoke over my head, and higher
the waterfall pours lightly. A
Negro stands in a doorway with a
toothpick, languorously agitating.
A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
Federico Fellini, *è bell' attrice*.
And a chocolate malted. A lady in
foxes on such a day puts her poodle
in a cab.

There are several Puerto
Ricans on the avenue today, which
makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
And one has eaten and one walks,
past the magazines with nudes
and the poster for BULLFIGHT and
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,
which they'll soon tear down. I
used to think they had the Armory
Show there.

A glass of papaya juice
and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.
(*The Collected Poems* 257-8)

Here is O'Hara, who on the face of it collects sensory impressions like Cornell, arranging them into the boxes of happenstance, as they occur in real time, and yet also the impressions are arranged in the jump cut edit of 'reel time,' of a kind of home movie on 8mm film. These impressions are not ordered and classified like an inventory, nor are they offered as the sights/sites not to be missed in Martial's perambulations; nor are they the 'must-have' items of Catullus's (non-existent and imaginary) booty from a far away province. Nor are they the impressions

collected together of an agitated outsider, like the speaker to be found in Baudelaire's 'Les Fleur du Mal,' locked in the agony of a kind of push and pull of simultaneous repulsion and fascination of the gaze in a poem like "Une Charogne" ('The Carcass'). In this poem the gaze collapses into a hiatus opening between distance and immediacy, mimetic of the operations of difference and identification created by the shock of photography as the new form of representation. Here the shock of the apparent state of the body causes the aura of the gaze to collapse, so representation can only be found in a dream – in a representation (here spoken of in terms of painting) separated from the immediate, photographic shock of its perception. Representation is elsewhere, can only take place in an 'other' place, 'from memory alone'. After the immediate, up-close, photographic horror of the state of the carcass, representation, the formation of the gaze, has no place in the scene, but is instead pushed to one side of perception to emerge as the nostalgia of 'memory alone':

Do not forget ... that thing we saw on that fine summer's morning, that was so mild ... a disgusting corpse on a bed of shingle ... oozing poisons ... laying open its belly.

The sun was blazing down on that rotten meat as if to roast it to a turn ...

The flies were humming on its putrid belly from which black battalions of maggots crawled, flowing like a turgid fluid along those living rags of flesh ...

... It was all rising and falling like a wave of the sea, and it seethed and glittered as if the body, swollen with a faint breathing, was alive and being multiplied.

Its forms were blurred as in a dream, nothing but a slowly shaping sketch forgotten on a canvas, which the artist must perfect from memory alone.
(*The Complete Verse* 102-3)

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For Catullus his stroll to the Forum, which has cost him dear, means a further stroll through the imagination, transforming into an elaboration through lying, to cover over his inability to collect objects (resulting from his relative or feigned poverty), accumulating lies in their stead. The comedy comes from the way his lack of power to accumulate things is highlighted by his need to pile the lies high in direct proportion to this lack, as categories slip into chaos:

Determined to look good
To the girlfriend and shine out over the rest,

‘Of course,’ I say, ‘it wasn’t all bad where I was,
 Against the odds of selecting a poor province
 I did manage to pick up eight strapping lads.’
 If the truth were known there wasn’t one, here or
 There capable of shouldering and heaving
 The bust leg of a broken down bed-chair.
 (Catullus Poem 10)

In the end, though, the rhetoric and syntax won’t hold the lies; Catullus’s speech breaks down, the mask slips, the rhetorical perambulation stumbles, disintegrates:

‘Hold on a minute,’ I say
 To her, ‘what I said a moment ago, those
 Lads, I must be losing my mind, a slip
 My friend Cinna – Gaius – they’re his purchase.
 (Catullus Poem 10)

For Martial the situation is quite different. Here the imagination re-collects the impressions from the safe distance of memory; in this poem, the spoils of empire somehow seem safer than those of the republic, somehow more under the control of the speaker/viewer, collected into discrete images or ‘postcards’ in the form of the ‘routine’ perambulation:

No, for us: bridle-ways, chatter, the baths,
 The Virgin’s Aquaduct, bookstalls, the shade
 Of urban gardens, drinking in “The Sights”,
 The gymnasium – our daily routine.
 (Martial, Book V Poem 20)

In the case of O’Hara, he doesn’t stroll to recollect and elaborate a lie (Catullus), nor collect in an inventory from the safe distance of the perambulating tourist (Martial), nor is he fixed in the hiatus of the Baudelairean gaze, O’Hara doesn’t have time to stroll or wander, nor be terrorised by the city, O’Hara’s eye is the lens of the movie camera, registering impressions as they happen, and then rushes (quickly) on to the next one. O’Hara’s busy-ness is not the business of the Forum, nor the languid recollection of a stroll to the baths, but the rapid accumulation of immediate sensory data into a narrative of the street, where seemingly unconnected characters and actions hold together simultaneously, choreographed into something which is as much a dance as a walk:

First, down the sidewalk
 where laborers feed their dirty

glistening torsos sandwiches
 and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
 on. They protect them from falling
 bricks, I guess. Then onto the
 avenue where skirts are flipping
 above heels and blow up over
 grates. The sun is hot, but the
 cabs stir up the air. I look
 at bargains in wristwatches. There
 are cats playing in sawdust.

On

to Times Square, where the sign
 blows smoke over my head, and higher
 the waterfall pours lightly. A
 Negro stands in a doorway with a
 toothpick, languorously agitating.
 A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
 smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
 suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
 a Thursday.

(The Collected Poems 257)

How far the speakers in these poems have travelled from Epicurean rambler to contemporary, sophisticated urbanite is manifest in their respective anxieties. The difference between the speakers of these poems is revealed in their destination, in the respective anxieties for which the poems have become the vessels. The end of the walk, the ramble, the stroll, the perambulation – ends in crisis, breakage and the confrontation of this anxiety. For Catullus it is the revelation to social inferiors (and the reader) that his spoils add up to less than nothing, an embarrassing pack of lies, a mirage broken in its rhetoric; for Martial, the objects of his stroll, remain elusive in the distance of the conquered and imperial landscape:

But the state-of-play is neither's got it,
 The good times sinking down as each sun sets.
 So every day we loafed, chalked up as debts;
 Wouldn't every man live, if he knew how,
 Giving it all away to here and now?
(Martial, Book V Poem 20)

For Baudelaire, the anxiety is fixed in the gaze unable to tear itself away from the corpse, an oscillating mixture of fascination and disgust. For O'Hara, there is a sudden revelation, that all his busy-ness, his frenetic anxiety has been a form of deferral, an attempt to block out the stark reality of the loss of friends (there is, of course, a parallel here with Catullus's loss of his brother in Poem 101):

First

Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock. But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
(*The Collected Poems* 258)

O'Hara is our contemporary Epicurean, our Catullus, as Allen Ginsberg points out: 'He taught me to really see New York for the first time ... It's like having Catullus change your view of the Forum in Rome' (Gooch 288).

It is in the end to these journeys through and across time, where we can start to identify the necessary differences and similarities across cultures – in taking a walk with Catullus in the Forum which transforms the city of Rome, in the taking in of *The Sights* with Martial, in the shock of Baudelaire's Western Capitalist metropolis, and in the translation and transformation of Frank O'Hara's New York City, where the prosody of film, the edit, the jump-cut, follows the feet, in a dance marrying the Ancient to the Contemporary.

Catullus and Modernism

I came to Catullus early and to translation late. Catullus was the first writer I understood to be a poet, at age eleven in my Latin class. After ‘O’ levels, he rather dropped into the background, only for me to take him up again at nearly 40, when I was living with a writer’s block. Ezra Pound once said. ‘It would be worth ten years of a man’s life to translate Catullus’ (*The Criterion* 226). The reason why Pound’s assessment is accurate – his assessment of Catullus’s ‘worth’ – is that the ‘books’ of Catullus form a kind of poetry handbook, a handbook of challenges for how a poet might write poetry, as relevant now as it was two thousand years ago. Few poets of any age offer such variety and virtuosity of genres and forms, and in such a small collection as in these ‘books’ (see George A. Sheets’ essay, ‘Elements of Style in Catullus’ (Skinner, 2007, 190-211) for a detailed discussion of the diversity of genres and forms in Catullus).

Of course many questions occurred to me as I worked through the translation project, not least of which was, with Catullus being the most translated Latin poet of the 20th Century why do we need another translation. For me, initially, I had no intention of publishing my efforts; however, I felt Catullus had chosen me, and therefore I had a licence, which others might not have. Indeed, my own poetry is very different from Catullus’s work: my poetry is paratactic, allusive, fragmentary, non-linear, non-narrative, but it soon became clear that to my mind every poet should translate Catullus, personally for me *because* of its difference to my own, and also because of what his *oeuvre* offers as a multi-faceted, poly-vocal series of texts, which challenged and modified my own poetry practice. After I started writing the translations, I couldn’t write my own poems in the same way again, a dialogue was occurring between my own work and Catullus’s poems; indeed, the boundary between ‘what is my own work’ and what is Catullus’s, itself became problematic. I started to feel the same kind of affection and attachment to the translations as to any so-called original poem I might compose. Fundamentally, through ventriloquising Catullus’s voice I could move my own work forward, whilst simultaneously it was becoming clear that I was creating my own work via other means in these translations.

Here I want to concentrate on how modern or contemporary Catullus can seem in relation to the question of why we might need yet another translation of the Latin

poet. It is clear to me that Catullus's work is of such strength, depth and richness, that his poems can support an infinite range of translation practice from G.P. Goold's Loeb literal translations, via Whigham's Carlos Williamseque renderings, and Zukofsky's soundings, and Raphael and McLeish's eroticisms, to Brandon Brown's latest, almost free jazz riffing.

Of course, Catullus at one level seems very 'modern': I too was attracted from the outset by the love lyrics – it was Poem 8 that had drawn me in – and here is my version of the poem:

Poor Catullus, quit kidding yourself just quit
now know you've lost by admitting the losing.

There was a time when the sun shone all day long on you;
when you followed where the girl led you loved by us all as well

as we who never loved no one before. No not never nor after. Never.

There were plenty of the "good times" to go around
and you wanted them all and she wanted them

from sun up to sun down it was as good as it gets.
From here on in she's not up for it and nor should you be

you jerk don't scuttle after what runs away faster after
Don't do it. It's make your mind up time and stand firm.

Ciao, my pretty. And so today Catullus stands firm
won't say a word or come looking if you're not willing.

But you'll be sorry when nobody calls, mark my words.
God damn you love what kind of life are you looking for?

Who's calling you pretty now? What kind of guy touches you up?
Who will call you "my love" my love? Whose will you be called?

Who will you kiss? And whose lips do you get to bite at next?
But you, Catullus, you with your mind made up stand firm.

The poem's immediate thrill is from its direct appeal to the senses, and its seeming to be an archetypal love poem. Looking at the tradition of love poetry in English from the Renaissance onwards this is truer than first appearances, especially when Poem 8 is read in conjunction with Catullus's Poems 5 and 7. However, when I came to the more Hellenistic poems, and the long ones in

particular, this distance turned into a sense of the *very* foreign, of alienation, even. Some translators have been tempted to render Catullus as our contemporary, eliding this crucial difference. Here I want to look at Catullus as a Modernist: I could focus on William Carlos Williams or Horace Gregory or Louis Zukofsky or Peter Whigham. I'm going to concentrate here instead, on Catullus in the work of Ezra Pound, most specifically in the early *The Cantos*. Pound and Latin literature has proved to be a lion's den in the past, but perhaps we've moved on since the controversy of the 'Homage to Sextus Propertius' and the outrage of Professor Hale of 90 years ago (for details of this spat see, Sullivan, *Ezra Pound* 3-16).

Pound's first attempts at writing *The Cantos* turned out to be a series of throat clearings. In retrospect he seems very unsure of what he is doing and where he might be going with the poem. Parts of *The Cantos* were started in late 1915, and published in *Poetry* (Chicago) in 1917. (See Daniel Albright's recent discussion in 'Early Cantos I-XLI' for an account of how *The Cantos* developed, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* 59-91). Almost immediately he started to revise the text called, 'Three Cantos,' interestingly, he sought editorial advice from T.S. Eliot; a role Pound himself was to take up a few years later with 'The Waste Land'. Eliot advised he 'impersonalise' the text, removing 21 personal pronouns, and cut redundant or explanatory passages, rendering the poem more fragmentary, more allusive, and elliptical, which were exactly the kind of editorial interventions Pound provided for 'The Waste Land'. Further passages were excised from 'Three Cantos' for publication in a magazine *The Future* for the February-March 1918 issue from a text that had now become re-titled, 'Three Cantos of a Poem of Some Length'. This cluster of poems had appeared the previous year at the back of the collection *Lustra*. (For more detail of these circumstances, see the note to 'Three Cantos of a Poem of Some Length,' in *Poems and Translations* 1284-5). What is of particular interest for the readers of the Roman poet, is that Pound uses passages from the work of Catullus in these poems. The voice of the opening 'Canto' is very much ventriloquising that of Robert Browning of the Italian exile years, and there seems to be a need to locate 'The Cantos' in an Italian and Roman setting. Using Catullus's poems is part of that Romanising of Pound's project. The first quotation from Catullus is from Poem 31:

As well begin here, here began Catullus:
 ‘Home to sweet rest, and to the waves deep laughter,’
 The laugh they wake amid the border rushes
and here the sunlight
 Glints on the shaken waters, and the rain
 Comes forth with delicate tread, walking from Isola Garda . . .
 Sun-fed we dwell there (we in England now)
 For Sirmio serves my whim, better than Asolo,
 Yours and unseen. Your palace step?
 My stone seat was the Dogana’s vulgarest curb
 (*Poems and Translations* 319)

Then in the second Canto we have this:

Society, her sparrows, Venus’ sparrows.
 Catullus hung on the phrase . . .
 Wrote out his crib from Sappho:
 God’s peer, yea and the very gods are under him
 Facing thee, near thee; and my tongue is heavy,
 And along my vein the fire; and the night is
 Thrust down upon me.
 That was one way of love, *flamma demanat*,
 And in a year: ‘I love her as a father,’
 And scarce a year, ‘Your words are written in water,’
 And in ten moons: ‘O Caelius, Lesbia illa,
 Caelius, Lesbia, our Lesbia, that Lesbia
 Whom Catullus once loved more
 Than his own soul and all his friends,
 Is now the drab of every lousy Roman’;
 So much for him who puts his trust in woman.
 (*Poems and Translations* 323)

On the face of it these lines put into practice Pound’s own maxim of *condensare*, (from the Latin meaning to condense), which comes to its fullest definition in the *ABC of Reading* (92), but perfected prior to, and during World War I: here the poet conflates material from Poems 51, 72, 70 and 58 to tell Catullus’s story, almost his biography, and to give this Canto historical and literary depth, as well as that Romanising context.

If we were to look back to the *Poetry* (Chicago) publication in 1917, the first time Pound uses Catullus in *The Cantos*, then we would find another way that Pound is thinking about Catullus, and another version this time of Poem 51, in a fuller more complete translation, before Pound wields the scalpel of *condensare*, and employs the technique of juxtaposition so familiar to us in the Imagist ur-text of

the poem 'In a Station of the Metro'. Here is Pound's trimmed version of Poem 51:

'God's peer that man is in my sight –
 Yea, and the very gods are under him,
 Who sits opposite thee, facing thee, near thee,
 Gazing his fill and hearing thee,
 And thou smilest. Woe to me, with
 Quenched senses, for when I look upon thee, Lesbia,
 There is nothing above me
 And my tongue is heavy, and along my veins
 Runs the slow fire, and resonant
 Thunders surge in behind my ears,
 And the night is thrust down upon me.
 (*Early Writings* 152)

Comparing the versions from *Poetry* (Chicago) and the *Lustra* collection show how Pound has shifted his view on presenting the context and blueprint for *The Cantos*, his long, epic poem, which is to pre-occupy him for the next 40 years and more. In the collaged version of Poems 51, 72, 70 and 58, which appeared in the later expanded American edition of *Lustra*, we can see a new urgency of juxtaposed fragmentation, almost as though Pound is falling over his own thought process in the act of presenting his narrative of Catullus's biographical account, concentrating on his relationship with Clodia Metelli. More importantly, there is an evident shift in aesthetic from a fairly straightforward versioning of Poem 51 clipped into Pound's text, to a radical cut and pasting, relying more on a kind of sampling, to tell the love story of Catullus and Lesbia (Clodia). This latter versioning, more radical in aesthetic, is, however, quite traditional in its 'telling the story' of the lovers, and reflects the orthodox view of how the poems can be used to re-construct, like a mosaic, Catullus's biography.

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A Draft of XVI Cantos was published in 1925. There is no trace of the material I've just been discussing. Pound's thought about *The Cantos* and its structure had radically shifted in the wake of the controversy over 'Homage to Sextus Propertius,' the composition of his satire 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' and Pound's role in the editing and publication of Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. However, Catullus has not disappeared from the poem without trace. Instead, we now have

these fragments and echoes of fragments from Catullus's Poem 61, and the 'marriage' poems of the grouping 61-68:

ANAXIFORMINGES! Aurunculeia!
 Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows!
 The silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare,
 Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light;
 Dew-haze blurs, in the grass, pale ankles moving.
 Beat, beat, whirr, thud, in the soft turf
 under the apple trees,
 Choros nympharum, goat-foot, with the pale foot alternate;
 Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in the shallows,
 A black cock crows in the sea-foam;

And by the curved, carved foot of the couch,
 claw-foot and lion head, an old man seated
 Speaking in the low drone . . . :
 Ityn
 Et ter flebiliter, Ityn, Ityn!
 (lines 3-17, IV, *The Cantos* 13)

And:

Saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot: Hymenaeus Io!
 Hymen, Io Hymenae! Aurunculeia!
 (lines 85-86, IV, *The Cantos* 15)

Additionally:

Gold-yellow, saffron . . . The roman shoe, Aurunculeia's
 And come shuffling feet, and cries "Da nuces!
 "Nuces!" praise, and Hymenaeus "brings the girl to her man"
 (lines 24-26, V, *The Cantos* 17)

By 1925 other material, particularly from Ancient Greek Literature, that remains from 'Three Cantos' has been radically reworked and reordered, so the poem now starts with the passage from *The Odyssey*, Book X, in the shape of Pound's translation into English from a Latin translation of the Greek original by Andreus Divus published first in 1538:

And then went down to the ship,
 Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
 We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
 Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also

Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
 Bore us out onward with bellying canvas
 (lines 1-6, I, *The Cantos*, 3)

Here we can see that by the publication of *A Draft of XVI Cantos* Pound's direction has completely changed – no longer is the main background of the poem an Italian or Roman one, Greece has taken Rome's place, even if (and I think this is why this passage from the *Odyssey* headlines the poem) Pound presents an English translation of a Latin translation of a Greek epic. This shift represents a further radicalisation of Pound's aesthetic. Here there is a multi-layering of translation on translation on original, mimetic of the whole process and procedure of the epic, as though we are seeing the origin of the poem through a multiple filter: translation enacts memory trace and the retelling of history. This aesthetic also reflects on the translation process and procedures of Catullus himself in Poems 51, a versioning of Sappho's Poem 31 (with its crucial additions in the final stanza, forming a critique of Greek culture), and Poem 66, a literal translation of Callimachus.

My account above begs the question of why Pound doesn't keep Poem 51 in his epic, after all, Pound's translation is a translation of Catullus's poem (a Latin poem) which is itself a translation of the Greek poem by Sappho. Surely keeping a translation of that poem in *The Cantos* would be consistent with Pound's treatment of Andreus Divus' version of *The Odyssey* at the opening of his poem, and this layering of translation on translation on original, to create an almost Cubist (and therefore Modernist) sense of space and time, with a sensation of simultaneity.

Commentators from Ron Thomas in his *The Latin Masks of Ezra Pound* to most recently Daniel Albright in his essay 'Early Cantos I-XLI' in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, have speculated that Pound's change of Catullan material is related to the Hellenisation of the opening Cantos of this epic. I have no doubt this is true (my account here corroborates this view), but there is compelling evidence that there might be other reasons for why Pound makes the decisions he makes in radically re-thinking the things he's going to include and exclude from *The Cantos*. The reasons to my mind are not simply to do with cultural reference, a view of history, or the Hellenisation of the poem. There are aesthetic reasons for why Pound makes his changes. It might be that Pound is

attracted to the changes in the text above because of the fragmentary nature of the original text of Poem 61, where these lines come from. In addition, Poem 51 cannot stay for the same reason that Poems 31, 51, 72, 70 and 58 have to go as well: they are too personal, too anecdotal, too lyrical, and too autobiographical: ‘Catullus’ eventual disappearance from canto II suggests Pound’s own realisation after 1919 of the inappropriateness of beginning his epic poem with the work of a lyric poet’ (*The Latin Masks* 24). What is also significant is that Pound has replaced the Latin lyric with the Hellenic mini-epic. But more important, even than that, the short lyrics don’t operate the aesthetic, which Pound is looking for. The passages from the new Cantos IV and V, either quote from or echo Catullus Poem 61, renowned for its Greek sensibility and origin. Ron Thomas’ later argument on Catullus (*The Latin Masks* 30-1) seems quite wrong-headed: ‘when reviewing Pound’s Hellenic career in retrospect, we do not see Aurunculeia’s “aureolos pedes” (61.167), but rather hear Lesbia’s “arguta solea” (68.72) – true enough, but Thomas does not go on to interrogate further the aesthetic issues at stake here. If we reflect on the lines again, and press forward to reveal the aesthetic implications of Pound’s changes, we can see with my emboldening of the text where Pound intersects with Catullus, we find something far more startling:

ANAXIFORMINGES! **Aurunculeia!**
 Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows!
 The silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare,
 Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light;
 Dew-haze blurs, in the grass, **pale ankles moving.**

And:

Beat, beat, whirr, thud, in the soft turf
 under the apple trees,
 Choros nympharum, goat-foot, **with the pale foot alternate;**
 Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in the shallows,
 A black cock crows in the sea-foam;

And:

And by the curved, carved foot of the couch,
claw-foot and lion head, an old man seated
 Speaking in the low drone . . . :
 Ityn!
 Et ter flebiliter, Ityn, Ityn!

And:

Saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot: Hymenaeus Io!

Hymen, Io Hymenae! Aurunculeia!

And finally:

**Gold-yellow, saffron . . . The roman shoe, Aurunculeia's
And come shuffling feet, and cries "Da nuces!
"Nuces!" praise, and Hymenaeus "brings the girl to her man"**

There is one feature, which each of these fragments comes to focus and concentrate on: feet.

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The poems contained in Pound's collection *Lustra* (1917) are part of a struggle Pound had to create a new poetry, as documented in the manifestoes he worked on from Imagism to Vorticism. With 'In A Station of the Metro' (*Poems and Translations* 287) Pound seems to find a new way to reinvent the short lyric. It is worth reminding ourselves of his account of this process, which he relates in the book *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*:

Three years ago in Paris I got out of a 'metro' train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words ... as lovely as that sudden emotion ... there came an equation ... not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. It was just that – a 'pattern' ...
(*Gaudier-Brzeska* 86-7)

And:

The 'one image' is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work 'of second intensity.' Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence: –

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
 Petals, on a wet, black bough.
(*Gaudier-Brzeska* 89)

When Pound comes to the composition of *The Cantos* he meets a new challenge: how can you make a poem as strong as 'In A Station of the Metro,' but on an epic scale? His solution lies in that 'patterning' he describes above, which he develops (partly) in the way he starts to link Cantos IV and V, not through narrative, but through his choice of passages from Catullus in the formal

patterning and shifting around the Vortices, if you will, of ‘Aurunculeia’s ... pale ankles moving’; ‘Choros nympharum, goat-foot, with the pale foot alternate’; ‘And by the curved, carved foot of the couch, claw-foot and lion head, an old man seated’; ‘Saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot: Hymenaeus Io!’; ‘Gold-yellow, saffron ... The roman shoe, Aurunculeia’s / And come shuffling feet’. Using this material of translation Pound drives the poem forward through time and across literature with an associative energy, which articulates the epic not by means of narrative, but via what Pound later identifies as the ‘unwobbling pivot’. The image of the foot is the ‘pivot’ or still-point of the Vortex in this context, and the organisation of time and space is registered by the way the image of the foot shifts from scene to scene, whilst simultaneously anchoring the poem through the ‘presence’ of the image, where the means of organization is paratactic, fragmentary, non-linear, allusive.

What, if any, are the consequences of this discovery for a reading of Catullus? What would happen if we take this reading of Pound’s *The Cantos* and then feed it back into the texts of Catullus? Firstly, there is an even more fundamental reason for Pound being interested in this trope from Poem 61. Feet are not only an important image in the organization of Poem 61: we find the image of the foot connecting poems in the group 61-68 in exactly the way that Pound starts to use the same image across Cantos IV and V. The vortex, the unwobbling pivot, functions in Catullus’s poetry too – one could claim Catullus as a Modernist, 1900 years before Modernism. The function of feet at the aesthetic level, their metonymy, seems oddly similar (see also Brian Arkins’ article, ‘The Modern Reception of Catullus,’ in *A Companion to Catullus* 461-78) for other issues around the reception of Catullus in English). Here are feet, as used in poems 61-68:

Poem 61

Come happily come, snow-white
 Feet lemon-sandaed.
 (lines 9-10)

Fresh bride step forward.

Fresh bride step forward. If it
 Pleases you hear our requests.
 Do you see? Watch the torches

Shiver burning follicles.
 Fresh bride step forward.
 (lines 94-100)

And as flexible tendrils
 Wrap around next door's trees
 So he will be wrapped around
 In your arms; but days pass by
 Fresh bride step forward.

Divan for those attending
 * * * * *
 * * * * *
 * * * * *

Bed's glistening toe.

Such ecstasies fall his way,
 Such huge ecstasies your husband's
 Pleasured by as the night passes,
 Midday too! But days pass by;
 Fresh bride step forward.
 (lines 106-120)

Trip golden-heeled over
 The lintel, with fine report
 Pass via the slick portal
 (lines 159-161)

Poem 65

Not long since a wave rose on the full-flood of Lethe
 To lap my brother's death-white foot,
 Snatched from my view, and buried in a Trojan ditch
 (lines 5-7)

Poem 68b

To a gated estate with private road he gave
 me access, a house (and mistress of that house),
 under whose eaves together we shared our lovemaking.
 Here my blinding vision with silent footsteps
 rested her dazzling foot a moment on the worn-
 smooth doorstep, tilts forward sandal squeaking,
 as long ago, consuming love for her groom drew
 Laodamia to Protesilaus'
 house, a house half-built for want of blood-sacrifice
 to satiate gods of the firmament.
 (lines 67-75)

In 61 we have Hymen's dancing feet; the bride is asked to step forward; followed by Aurunculeia's foot; (even the feet of the bed seem enchanted, almost humanoid); and then the bride is urged to trip over the step, thus *not* touching the threshold of the bridal home for good luck. In Poem 65 Catullus focuses in on

the ill-omen of his brother's 'death-white foot' touching the beach at Troy. Poem 68 binds these two images together. Here Catullus's mistress *does* stand on the doorstep, thus leading the relationship to its doom, and weaves in the extended metaphor/story of the ill-fated husband of Laodamia, who knows he will be the first to die at Troy if his foot is the first to touch land. The reality of Catullus' brother's death is therefore infused with significance by fusing it with the mythical death of Protesilaus: they both die on the beach at Troy. This image of the foot, therefore, links together and expands from and through the personal, the historical and the mythical: Catullus' brother's death; the wedding of Manlius/Allius to Aurunuliaea some years before Catullus arrives at the homestead with his mistress; and the death of the mythical figure of Protesilaus. This is how the image of the foot is 'structured' with a non-linear logic, in a kind of sure-footed shorthand. Even more significantly the personal, historical and mythical collapse, superimposed one on another to form a kind of Cubist multi-dimensionality. Each poem in the grouping of long poems tells a story, follows a narrative, whilst simultaneously, at moments of crisis or high emotion, the poems are further linked through this form of metonymical connection and signification, highlighting how the same gesture or action can rapidly and infinitely replay, changing its significance through the context of the person carrying out that action. This is a non-linear binding of these poems together, fixed through the image of the foot (the image as vortex), fixed in terms of an image, but registering energy and change at the level of the shifting contexts between these poems' scenes.

It is this form of encoding and non-narrative storytelling, which Pound has discovered through this process of selection and drafting of the early *Cantos*. Catullus's texts aesthetically suit the 'new' method of his epic, and Pound uses those texts in *The Cantos*, instead of the more conventional biographical storytelling in Catullus's work, composed and conjured by late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century scholarship. What is important for Pound is that he finds an aesthetic motor in Catullus's long poems, which accord with the non-linear, allusive connectivity he is seeking to organize and drive forward *The Cantos* on an epic scale. For this reason, *The Cantos* speak across time to the long Hellenistic poems of 61-68, through the trope and vortex of the image of the foot. Pound shows that it is the level of the technical, which in the end, is the most important feature of the Roman poet's work for the Modernist project, not the

canonised love poems, and their 'love story' in the Lesbia poems or the 'kiss' poems. It is at the level of the aesthetic where Catullus's work counts and informs Pound's poetry, not the biographical, and the story of the genesis of the early Cantos, is a fascinating and telling one as to how Pound came to use other cultures and their artefacts from the past. Where the Lesbia and 'kiss' poems are crucial to the English lyric tradition, from Wyatt to Campion and Herrick, Pound finds the Hellenised marriage hymns and mini-epics of the middle grouping (61-68) to be the poems speaking to the far more complex problems of how to write an epic across the Twentieth Century. In this way Catullus's poetry can speak across time to very different poetries in English as testament to the greatness of his work, and marks his poetry's crucial importance to English verse-making.

The Question of Voice in Catullus

There is something quite distinct and attractive about Catullus's poetry over and above other Latin poets; his work is so much part of the fabric of poetry in English, that *not* to engage with his work at some level would be to miss an important facet of English verse making. The most immediate appeal of his poetry comes from the seeming contemporaneity of his voice. What leads on from this freshness of voice, this immediate timbre, is that apparent familiarity and its attendant accessibility; these qualities in the poetry have been handed down to us through representations of his work since the 16th Century. The most popular poems are the much anthologized 'Lesbia' poems, meaning most poets and readers are familiar with the kiss and sparrow poems, and poem 85, 'odi et amo'. It is in these poems we find the familiar, personal love poet, who appears to possess a unified, identifiable voice; indeed, with Petrarch (who owned a manuscript copy of Catullus, one of the three to come down to us from the Medieval period) this garland of verses became the voice of love in English poetry – imitated, versioned, translated. Most gentleman-courtiers of the 16th and 17th Centuries with aspirations would have tried his hand at a kiss or a sparrow poem. Looked at in this context, Catullus's oeuvre is a construct, which appears a 'natural' precursor to English love poetry. Catullus, however, has been represented by only a handful of poems – with this invention of the English love lyric, then, later in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, the Lesbia poems were used to create the narrative of the poet's relationship with his mistress. This story was the version of Catullus handed to me as a school boy, and to so many like me. The quite alien idea to the culture of the time, of a younger man having a relationship with an older woman was, however, glossed over! Catullus *seems* lyrical, personal, even at times, confessional: a poet we can identify with, a poet whose voice is our voice, a voice we can trust.

A further way Catullus's voice has been presented to modern readers is most modern translations tend to treat the text singularly, giving the poems one voice. For instance, the 1960s and 1970s were decades offering Michie's rhyming couplets; Copley's tin pan alley; Raphael and McLeish's 'permissive' free verse; Whigham's Poundian or Williamsesque mask – each versioning tells a story, a modern transfer from the Latin to English, using one stylistic voice or another: Catullus the English Classicist; Catullus the popular song writer; Catullus the

racy man-about-town; Catullus the Modernist. There are many more translations, and many other Catullus's from this period too. This singular stylistic rendering of the whole body of the carmina is where so many modern translations sell the poetry short and misrepresent what this numerous and various book of poems offers in reality.

Catullus can seem 'modern' and he can seem Modernist. Pound versioned Catullus, used the Latin poet's work in *The Cantos* (as we saw in the last essay) and returned to the poet throughout his career, including writing music for Poem 61. And still, the most entertaining, vital, and daring translation of Catullus is Peter Whigham's Modernist translation for Penguin Classics. Yet Whigham's translation for all its brilliance, intelligence and wit falls down, as the poems are voiced through the *singular* mask of a Modernist. Whigham makes the same error other 20th Century translators make: the voices of the poems are more various than this. There is the love-torn youth, the urbane, bright young thing of Rome, the sophisticated, Neoteric poet dazzling poet-friends, the broken, mourning brother, the vicious and foul-mouthed satirist, the commissioned poet penning wedding hymns for aristocratic friends, the translator of Greek lyric forbears, or Alexandrian masters – each one is nuanced, individually voiced – which have been flattened out in most modern and contemporary translations. All of these Catullus's are in the Latin, the voice shifts and modulates through some quite violent changes, and no other Roman poet has this range of voices to delight, challenge, and confuse the reader (and translator). This range of voices is the real challenge for the translator.

I want to offer another approach to Catullus, which might seem, on the face of it, old-fashioned, and perhaps foregrounds too facile an aspect of the poems for modern sensibilities: their occasion, for this might be a new way to address the challenge of voice in this complex collection of texts, and register more successfully their difference. So, we can see Catullus as an occasional poet. For the modern reader, however, this conjures the poetry and poetics of a Betjeman, or if you're American of Ogden Nash, light, witty, popular verse. However, Thom Gunn in his introduction to *Ben Jonson*, identifies Jonson as such an 'occasional' poet. His remarks reflect on Catullus too, and are relevant here:

Much [of Jonson's poetry] is elicited by external events, or is intended to compliment some noble, or is written to commend another person's book ... The occasion in all cases – literary or imaginary – is the starting point ... to which the poet must ... stay true. The truer he is to it, the closer he sticks to what for him is its authenticity, the more he will be able to draw from it in the adventures that it produces, adventures that consist of the experience of writing.

(*Ben Jonson*, ix)

Of course the figure that lurks in the shadows here is Martial, one of the Latin poets Jonson turns to for inspiration and at moments of emotional intensity. William Fitzgerald's remarks on the reception of Martial and Catullus in his book *Martial* (166), which I referred to in the essay on the Flâneur, seem pertinent here too, as Martial is re-read through Catullus: Martial is more familiar to Jonson, yet Catullus lurks there too, in the shadows of Martial's epigrams. The cultural significances of 'occasion,' which Gunn identifies as essentially 'writerly,' can be mapped across Catullus, Martial and Jonson, and forward, into English poetry, and this sense of 'occasion' is a significance that needs to be registered in translations of Catullus. At the head of the 'books' of Catullus, the poet identifies his verses as 'nugae,' mere trifles in Poem 1, mere 'occasions'. But the reader doesn't have to venture far into the book to find this is elegant, sophisticated understatement, and see that mere 'occasion' is fundamentally an occasion of (and for) the act of writing, an occasion for Neoteric wit or 'sal'.

The thing is Whigham (and Pound) almost get it right, because they identify the mask as the means through which the voice can be projected, distorted, fashioned. However, what is at stake is far more complex, and interesting. If the Catullan poem is an occasion, and not a mask then the question of voice and voicing changes: the question becomes not what personality do the poems speak out of, but what do the poems speak to? What are they projecting their voice towards? What is their occasion? As Thom Gunn points out, this could be 'an occasion of the imagination' (*Ben Jonson*, ix). Many of the poems have a direct, named addressee, and even those that don't, because they are framed and contextualised by poems that do, give the game, and (often) the name away. And just as we find ourselves in different situations in our lives – at work, at home, with children, and (god forbid) with poets – we adjust our language register, lexicon and tone, dare I say it, voice? And Catullus's poems are about that registering in much the same way. Indeed, in this respect we might see his work as very much a modern, a realistic, perhaps fragmented, speaker through these

poems. Here is Poem 76, for example, where Lesbia's name is not used, but the context of other Lesbia poems close by make it unlikely the poem is aimed at anyone else:

Poem 76

If, to recollect all the past good things he's done,
 a man realises pleasure in friendship;
 His covenants unbroken, nor in a cabal
 used the good words of gods to exploit men,
 Then, stored in the many years ahead, Catullus,
 numerous good times laboured from spurned love.
 For what honourable deeds can be said to be done
 to anybody, all you did and said.
 In total these squandered on ungracious love,
 why then prolong your agony further?
 Why not be strong of mind, retreat from where you are,
 defeat unhappiness gods overthrow?
 It's tough to sever longstanding love finally,
 it's tough, somehow you need to achieve this,
 This your last throw of the dice, battle to glory,
 this has to be your aim, able or not.
 Oh gods, if you can find pity, if you offered
 relief to one in their final moments,
 Gaze on my agonies, if my life resembles
 purity rip out this mortal affliction,
 Which seeps insinuating poison through my veins
 to expel all joy from my heart's depths.
 I look no more she reciprocate my feelings,
 or, beyond hope, she desire chastity.
 I hope for wellbeing, purged of this malady,
 oh gods, allow me this for my service.

Immediately we identify that familiar voice of the love poet, albeit the voice of the 'resigned' love poet, characteristic of the elegiacs, poems 65-116, rather than the amorous or angry love poet of the polysyllabics, poems 1-60. On display is the idea of the intimate addressee, one we as an audience are expected to be acquainted with, and the closely associated idea of occasion: what is the poem speaking to? Who/what is the poem projecting its voice towards? The poem begins using a register, which is almost a form of public address, a prayer, but reveals itself at line eight in the second person, and this then shifts again at line 23 to the intimacy of the first person. The poem pulls the focus of address and occasion from the generalised, almost public address of the opening lines, through the rhetorical 'you' to the spotlight of the individual talking to himself, almost for reassurance in the face of isolation. The poem draws the reader very

subtly into an intimate space of soliloquy, manoeuvring the reader into the uneasy position of eavesdropper. So the ‘occasion’ of this poem becomes the unfolding of this complex rhetorical address. The modern poet most closely resembling Catullus in this form of address is Frank O’Hara. There is a sense when one reads O’Hara that one is overhearing a commentary or conversation, not with one person, but with several, at a party. Catullus’s poems create that same sensibility, that same space, and for the modern reader this can be an uncomfortable experience. Apart from the discomfort of eavesdropping this rather transgresses on that watchword of contemporary poetry, accessibility, for O’Hara’s and Catullus’s poems face in the opposite direction to the ease of the accessible. One can’t escape that sense of coterie in O’Hara and Catullus, and associated private language about and for addressees you *should* know, or you have no business listening in. Both Catullus and O’Hara expect the reader to step up to the plate: to accept the challenge of their level of sophistication, their sense of writerly occasion. In the case of Catullus, he voices his poems from the advantageous position of the equestrian elite either in a kind of ‘private’ discourse, as in Poem 76, with fellows (and lovers) of that elite or aims his barbed iambs at social, sexual and intellectual inferiors.

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Let us turn now to another poem and another occasion for voice, aimed probably at a social and certainly (in Catullus’s eyes) sexual inferior. Poem 97 is probably the most obscene poem in the Catullan oeuvre. This is a poem of a very different occasion to poem 76, but reveals no less rhetorical sophistication. It is certainly one of the most alienating and ‘foreign’ poems to modern sensibilities, a poem that makes contemporary audiences squirm. It is eye watering, either it invokes laughter, a disgusted turning away, or something perhaps more physically violent. It is the other, nightmarish, ‘mouthing’ to the ‘kiss’ poems we are so familiar with, halitosis instead of honey. The brilliance of this poem is its fantasy, as Quinn in *The Catullan Revolution* (1999) remarks, ‘the poem flares up into a series of images the execution of which is as brilliant as their merciless fantasy is breathtaking’ (36). And then there’s the poem’s physicality: it provokes in the reader, something close to that bristling observed in himself by A.E. Housman whilst shaving:

Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act. This particular symptom is accompanied by a shiver down the spine; there is another which consists in a constriction of the throat and a precipitation of water to the eyes; and there is a third which I can only describe by borrowing a phrase from one of Keats's last letters, where he says, speaking of Fanny Brawne, 'everything that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear'. The seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach.

(*The Name and Nature of Poetry* 19)

In this sense, we know Poem 97 is a 'real' poem, visceral in content and provocation.

Late 20th Century commentaries on Catullus, describe Poem 97 as 'savage, if genially exuberant,' (Quinn, *Catullus: the Poems* 434), Thomson (1998), our most recent scholarly edition of the poems, calls 97, 'versified prose [with] hardly any attempt at poetical ordering ... An exercise above all in richness of vocabulary,' and continues, 'half of all Catullus's "taboo" words are to be found here' (530). Fordyce (1960), of course, excludes the poem altogether from his selection.

In fact, Poem 97 is more complex and projects a less familiar voice, once the shock of the poem subsides. This is a work where form and rhetoric are vital to understanding the occasion of the poem, for the 'delight' if we can call it that, begins with form and rhetoric. If Poem 76 represents a kind of turning inward, taking the reader into the space of a private musing or address, Poem 97 opens towards the reader, unfolding (unloading even) a space rather less inviting, and positively hostile. The poem might address the unfortunate Aemilius, but is actually speaking to, voicing towards an audience where an obscene rhetorical unfolding is held in playful tension with sophisticated poetic and formal daring. In this poem the form and rhetoric *are* the occasion: and these effects can only be represented by a translation that shadows the Latin line for line to reveal what Catullus unveils, and follow the unfolding of the poem down the page. Here the form of unfolding acts as a kind of musical score the reader must necessarily follow:

97.

I supposed (gods give me strength) there be no difference

I breathe in Aemilius' gob or dirt-box,
 The one being no fresher to the fetid other,
 truth is the dirt-box is germless, gentler –
 Toothless. The gob has gnashers eighteen inches long
 and gums worn out as a knackered shit wagon.
 And there's more: where it gapes open broad as the vag
 of a mule which pisses the summer's heat.
 And he's fucking all the fillies, turns on the charm,
 the grindstone's where he belongs, with the ass.
 Any girl touching him might kiss the shit-box of
 a hangman, running with diarrhoea.

The sense of discomfort we experience from this poem begins with the mouth, the place of voicing, and its rather unpleasant collocation to the anus. In terms of the juxtaposition of imagery and the olfactory these two openings to the body are (we are unwillingly reminded) intimately connected, although at the farthest distance of the alimentary canal. In his discussion of obscenity and closure in Poem 97 William Fitzgerald in *Catullan Provocations* (1995), relates these two ends of the human body to the two ends of the poem, so the movement of the poem is mimetic of the body, which leads to further discomfort for the reader and audience: 'the formal difference between the beginning of a poem, where anything is possible, and the end, where there is nowhere else to go, is thematized by the relation of the speaker to Aemilius' body' (80). Catullus brilliantly reminds reader and audience of this connection, by having the reader voice the words of the poem, whilst the audience is saturated with obscenity. The reader is left with a dirty mouth, the 'os impurum,' (which is itself a kind of sub-genre in Latin) and the audience in need of a shower. Fitzgerald again:

As we pronounce the final line, filling our mouths with obscenity, we duplicate the behavior of the girlfriend of Aemilius ... The poet transfers the stain of obscenity on to the mouth of another, who is contrasted with the insouciant persona of the poet ... this figure in turn stands for the reader, whose tongue lingers over the end of the poem, its anus in fact.'
 (80)

So reader, audience, cameo characters (the girlfriend and hangman) and addressee are all in need of a visit to the baths. The poem, therefore, is not simply as Thomson suggests, 'versified prose' or 'an exercise in the richness of vocabulary' (530): it is a subtle, sophisticated and complex voicing towards an unfortunate victim, and an unfortunate (though sophisticated) audience. The subtleties of voice and occasion projected through rhetorical device and poetic form mean the joke is on, and all over, everyone. As Donald Lateiner in his 1977

essay, 'Obscenity in Catullus' (Gaisser ed., *Oxford Readings* 261-81) observes regarding the form of the elegiac couplet:

We have pentameters, which do not, as commonly in Latin poetry, complete the meaning of the hexameter, but rather proceed in a new direction, sometimes opposite to the hexameter. The statement of l.1 is entirely undercut by the striking juxtaposition of l.2; the balanced antithesis of l.3 is exactly contradicted by l.4; the proud claims of Aemilius in l.9 are said to deserve the worst slave's punishment in l.10; finally the woman who will touch Aemilius (l.11) ought to be thought of as committing an obscenity (l.12).
(Lateiner in Gaisser ed., *Oxford Readings* 270)

Lateiner then goes on to count the list of rhetorical constructs Catullus uses to register Aemilius' unpleasant physical state: 'comparison (l.2), evaluation (l.3-4), accusation of monstrosity (l.5), further comparisons (l. 6, 8), allegations of vanity (l.9), condemnation (l.10), insult (l.12),' (270-271).

In this way the momentum of the poem becomes hyperbolic as the lines move from the outrageous, to the grotesque, ending in almost Surrealist fantasy. This is why a translation of this poem must follow the Latin line by line essentially to 'translate' the nightmarish and comic 'blossoming' of the poem as one image complex is opened on the next, creating more outrageous grotesques as the mouth of the reader becomes progressively mired and brim-full, and the bottom jaws of the audience fall wider and wider, the reader's voicing stuffing the open, silent mouths of the audience with worse and worse obscenity.

The voiced occasions of these two poems is crucial to a faithful translation of Catullus, demonstrating the breadth of address, the tonal range, which a translator must necessarily register, if he or she is not to flatten the poetry into one voice. By focussing on occasion, and identifying the 'occasion' of the poem, and the poem's addressee, a translator can render a far more authentic versioning of the original.

The Accessibility of Catullus

One major question about translating Catullus in the Twenty-First Century centres on accessibility, and on the face of it, Catullus seems like the perfect candidate to introduce people who don't know Latin literature to a great selection of writers and texts. Josephine Balmer's approach to the selection and grouping of the poems is one recent attempt to make Catullus contemporary, but there are issues in terms of the scholarship, and contemporary politics and education, which assume a kind of cultural background pressure, making this kind of approach easier, and seemingly preferable, over representing what Catullus's work actually is: a difficult, alien poetry, with polyphonic voices, using esoteric forms and Hellenic genres. Balmer's translations appeared in the context of the second Gulf War and the rationalisation of New Labour's education policy. These two major features of the cultural backdrop seem vital to the context of Balmer's *Poems of Love and Hate* (Bloodaxe, 2004), and reflect its cultural significance and purpose.

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"One of the main purposes of education is to encourage people to think. But education for its own sake is a bit dodgy" ('Clarke Criticised Over Classics'). These reported comments of former Education Minister Charles Clarke are from January 2003, and were followed up with the admission he was "less occupied by the Classics". His retraction a few days later of these remarks was, perhaps, an unknowing recognition of the political potential and power of the Classics. For the timing, in the run up to the second Gulf war, seemed either proof of synchronicity or his remarks provided further evidence of myopia as the Labour government of the time peered across its long-range cultural origins and then present circumstances without an understanding of either.

On the face of it, there might not be much the Blair government and the world of the late Roman Republic or the first years of Augustus have in common, but all the poets of the late Republic and early Empire seemed to be against war except Virgil (and possibly Horace). Their engagement with the subject is as urgent and relevant to our time as to theirs. Neither Catullus (84-54 B.C.), nor the later Roman elegists had much time for the pursuit of war or the manipulations of

politicians, except as metaphor for Love, and illicit bedroom activity. Catullus is famous for his excoriations of Caesar, Propertius for his avoidance strategies around dedicating books of poetry to Augustus and his military exploits. Much is made of his use of the rhetorical device the “recusatio”, or refusal, to write of wider political and public themes. And Tibullus and Ovid are even more overt in their rejections of the soldier’s life. Propertius’ *Elegies*, II.15:

If every man wanted to live their life like mine,
 at leisure, arms and legs droopy with wine
 There would be no vicious blades or war galleons,
 Actium’s waves would not break our bones,
 Nor Rome, often victim of her own ambitions
 shy away from proper displays of grief.
 This thing our forebears will grace us with certitude:
 our skirmishes never caused gods fury.
 (*London Bridge* 9: 41-48)

Clarke also levelled the charge that subjects worthy of study “need a relationship with the workplace”. All sorts of questions are laid open with this remark. When studying the Law what could be more relevant for law students than studying Roman Law, to their future career? If you want to become a politician, what about Cicero’s speeches, or a smattering of Plato or Aristotle? Where else is the foundation of Western democracy other than in the Ancient worlds of Greece and Rome? Where else would you find the ideological bases of New Labour and the Neo-Cons and the institutions they exist in? The kinds of attitudes revealed in Charles Clarke’s remarks persist in the present ‘Coalition’ (perhaps more acutely). So much of contemporary culture is still presented in Graeco-Roman terms, and most negative aspects of empire are latent in this background and history too: slavery, the second-class status of women, racism, elitism, jingoism, and nationalism. These concepts and ways of being and living start in Greece and Rome for Western democracies, and need to be traced in their terms, before they can be related to our own.

I’ve already discussed that Catullus became the most translated Latin poet in the 20th Century. This trend has accelerated the translation of other Latin poets of this period in the last 15 to 20 years. Ovid and Propertius particularly benefited. As study of the Classical languages has decreased over recent years, translations have increased with the popularity of courses in Latin and Greek cultural history. Therefore, if students are to become reliant on English versions of Ancient texts

then they should be the best representations of that culture at all levels of translation, from the textual through the contextual to the cultural, both to represent the cultural similarities *and* differences.

Doubtless Charles Clarke would find much to approve of in one of these recent and proliferating translations of Catullus, the versioning by Josephine Balmer. If we are going to tolerate the Classics in our ahistorical culture of immediacy, transparency and instant understanding then this is the Catullus for the age of New Labour and New Con Coalition.

Balmer reveals her aesthetic with that watch-word of government education and arts policy: “accessibility”. Her principle of translation is based “most importantly, on a desire for the poetry to be as accessible as possible, as enjoyable ... to those with no prior knowledge of Latin or the poet.” (*Poems of Love and Hate* 26). This goal is rendered with ease, thematically, and by giving the poems titles. Adding to this Balmer cuts out (not quite) all the long poems, the ones of real difficulty, with mythological themes and alien marriage rituals, to leave the epigrams and shorter elegies. This editing exaggerates Catullus’ blessing and curse: he seems so fresh, so adolescent, well, *so* now. Balmer then arranges the work into thematic units, denying the structure of the three “books” that for forty-odd years scholars have painstakingly shown to be the case.

But what is wrong with Balmer’s approach? Don’t the poems become more understandable to an audience of the 21st Century? They certainly come to resemble the discreet lyric acceptable as the modern face of English poetry since 1950. However, the 116 poems are in an order already intelligible, coherent and intelligent, and make sense with a little effort of study. The order could have been concocted in the Renaissance as Balmer points out (*Poems of Love and Hate* 26), but recent research about papyrus of the late Republican period is compelling. The argument goes that the physical length of the papyrus roll fits perfectly the three groups (or “books”) Catullus has made by metre (see both studies by Marilyn B. Skinner, *Catullus’ Passer* (1992) and *Catullus in Verona* (2003) for her arguments on the metrical and physical evidence). That the poems should have come down to a modern audience in this way Balmer calls “the second miracle” (*Poems of Love and Hate*, 25). I err on the side of that miracle, a chiasmic miracle that pivots at the very centre of the book in Poem 64: Theseus’

black-sailed boat disappears from Ariadne's gaze and looms on the horizon for Aegeus, his father, without the white sail that would signify Theseus' safe return. The black sail Aegeus sees he misinterprets as a sign of his son's death, and so he throws himself from the cliff-tops. (See Charles Martin's account (1992), for the full argument). The important thing about the positioning of Poem 64 in the sequence is that the kind of decision about the poem's placement can't have been made by an editor: this is a 'writerly' decision, based on aesthetic grounds, and shows that the ordering of the poems is as much a compositional decision as the 'micro' decisions about metre (the poems in Sapphics for instance form some kind of conversation with Catullus's Greek precursor). Cutting out long poems like Poem 64 destroy the symmetry and design that is quite other to contemporary ideas of aesthetic order, but absolutely vital and necessary to a clear view of this book and its context, the late Roman Republic.

There is other evidence that corroborates this interpretation of the integrity of the 'books' forming an artistic whole. The codex (a way of distributing text that resembles the modern book) was invented by c.70 A.D., a hundred years after Catullus. Martial's epigrams appeared in this form. A change of format like this changes a book's length, and it seems plausible there would have been texts circulating of this type by Catullus. Or maybe not. We know Catullus had *disappeared* by the second century A.D., perhaps this was because not only his style of poetry had become unfashionable but also the format in which it was distributed was no longer cutting edge enough for the literati. A bit like carting around a Corona typewriter when everyone else carries an iPad.

Further to this *physical* evidence, Catullan aesthetics are also problematic for Balmer's project. Catullus was part of a group called the neoterics. They based their art on learning, and allusion, and saw their tradition beginning with Alexandrian poets writing in Greek, like Callimachus. Most importantly of all their aesthetic was based on form, and I suspect not just in individual poems but also in the design of whole groups or 'books' of poems. Their idea was to wear learning very much on the sleeve, to show-off. And indeed, it is important to realise that Catullus was writing for *literary* friends and those of a certain class, not anybody like a general reader. Coterie was good not bad. Our idea of accessibility would seem not only alien to Catullus, but hostile to his notion of the championing of difficulty. The translator of Catullus and academic Charles

Martin has likened Catullus and the group around him to the early High Modernists, Eliot, Pound, etc, and it is certainly true that Catullus's aesthetic seemed attractive to Pound, and was an influence on his poetry (see *Catullus* 3-20).

Then there is the 21st Century apparatus Balmer employs: the use of themes and titles as an organisational principle of the collection, which is severely flawed. No Latin poet uses titles for their poems. They (Catullus in particular) would be completely bewildered with this innovation, and would see these signposts as entirely misleading. The ordering by theme harks back to a trend for Catullan translation from the 1930s and 1940s, for a biographical reading of the poems: which is at best quaint now. Critically, the ordering of poems by theme starts to break down as we see Poem 45 (in the original 'three book' numbering) appear on page 66 with its own section, 'IV Love, Requited'. One short lyric with its own section? This quirk highlights the weakness of thematic methodology, and reads both awkwardly and lamely.

Even more compelling, however, is when you group all the really great poems together. Do this and repetitions of lines, phrases and whole passages are revealed, but placed side by side the poems become repetitious and boring. Poets who order their work across a whole book often use this technique of repetition to bind together and give cohesion to the poetic and thought processes *across time* through the experience of reading an entire collection. These are poems that should be separated by other poems, and opened out with other ideas and preoccupations, not bunched and corralled into themes like sheep in their pens. To sort the poems into these groupings misses the vitality of the poet's work, closing down their conversation, and the aesthetic intent in terms of a larger architecture and broader vision of what lyric poetry can achieve, losing the effects created of this genre sitting alongside other forms from epigram to epyllion. All these poems on their various topics and in their various forms reflect a particular shape to a very particular life. There are poems about Catullus' affair with Lesbia, poems to friends, to enemies, his criticism of career politicians, poems on myths – all these topics mixed together form part of a rich, precious, detailed and unquantifiable life, a continuum. The strange mix that is the 'three books' reflects this life under a discipline of various poetic forms and metres. The ordering of the texts fundamentally determines how we read them in their detail;

the entirety matters as much as the minutiae, so Balmer's sound and sometimes terrific translations get buried by this misleading imposition of thematic accessibility. The final flaw of Balmer's method is to open and close the collection with the same poems that all other translators use following the 'Renaissance' model: thus implicitly validating that ordering of the texts.

Poems of Love and Hate (2004) cross the boundary from creative representation to a dangerously twisted caricature of this body of work and the society that bore it. Reducing Catullus' 'books' to a thematic structure means we can't see through to the culture of the late Roman Republic; Josephine Balmer interprets (and interrupts) the work of this great Roman poet, moving away from its cultural roots, crushing it into a shape that resembles our own. There is no respect for difference here, but in overturning aesthetic values the cultural ones are obfuscated too: this version of Catullus fulfils all the accessibility criteria whilst failing those of authenticity. The reading experience should be as close to the Roman as possible in its entirety; instead, it is replaced with a textual and contextual experience entirely of Balmer's own making. Balmer excludes the 'difficult' and culturally alien long poems – tellingly we are told these will appear 'in a subsequent, second volume' (*Poems of Love and Hate* 26). As of 2013, these have not appeared, probably because it would seem quite impossible to translate them whilst adhering to the accessibility agenda.

The more one studies Catullus the less his world seems to resemble ours: on that impression many translators, commentators and scholars have agreed. These differences range from such issues in this period around sex and sexuality in stark contrast to recent (19th and 20th Century) sexual mores relating to bisexuality and homosexuality not recognised in the Late Republic; the rights of women (especially the freedoms of rich women like Clodia Metelli); to the rights and the hierarchy of free man and women. It is an indictment of where we are now, in the opening years of the Twenty-First Century, and a weakness of our own literary culture, that a translator of Balmer's capabilities should see these differences homogenised and not cherished.

Sourcing the Origin: Translating Catullus since 1950

Since the Second World War, Catullus's poetry seems to have become particularly attractive to English language poets on both sides of the Atlantic, not only to Classical scholars. In the Twenty-first Century the pace of publishing new translations carries on unabated, with Peter Green's *The Poems of Catullus* from the University of California Press (2005), and Brandon Brown's *The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus* from Krupskaya in 2011, as well as Josephine Balmer's versions from 2004, which account for the full range of possible Catullus's, from the scholarly-faithful to the extreme avant-garde via the accessible. So how can we account for this seemingly endless fascination with this poet from the Late Roman Republic? Indeed, why do we even need yet another translation of Catullus?

The answers to these questions lie, at least to begin with, in the scholarship. For the last 150 years Catullus has been well-served by Classics departments across Europe and the United States, from the German philologists of the mid-nineteenth century, through the work of great commentaries like Robinson Ellis's *A Commentary on Catullus* written in the 1870s – commentaries from Fordyce, Quinn, Thomson followed in the Twentieth Century – latterly there has been the critical work of Wiseman (1969, 2000), Martin (1992), Skinner (1992, 2003, 2007) and Lyne (1980, 2007) – all of these efforts have constructed as authoritative a text as we are likely to find (unless another manuscript turns up in a wine vat, or a monastery), and established the facts around the composition of the poems as clearly as we are likely to establish them, as well as having set in motion the important debates on Catullus and his poetry.

In addition, over the Twentieth Century, translations from scholars have proliferated, including complete translations from Charles Martin (1990), Guy Lee (1990), David Mulroy (2002), and two from G.P. Goold (1983, 1995), one in verse, one a prose 'crib' for the Loeb series. It is clear, therefore, that Catullus has been exhaustively supported by the academic community, and the *text as source* is as fully realized as it can be when the state of the three existing manuscripts seems so questionable. One aspect of the scholarly work which I find fascinating is how, as more scientific methods were used to try and construct an authoritative text in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this

knowledge was used to hypothesise and reinforce an already very Romantic, even sentimental idea of the poet, in keeping with late nineteenth century ideas of what a poet should be; it seemed that a biography or some kind of *roman à clef* could be constructed from the evidence of some of the poems. This practice of hypothesising about Catullus and his world stems from how little we actually *know* from the poems. Hypothesizing also extends into the endless scholarly debate around the ordering of the poems into books, and whether Catullus organised and authored this ordering, or some later, maybe medieval editor, is responsible. Most of these efforts are based on conjecture and circumstantial evidence. The thing is, enough *is* known, there is enough ‘source material’ if you will, to create a ‘critical mass’ of knowledge to infinitely speculate, and even improvise. There is a kind of space for literal and literary gossip (would Catullus enjoy the chatter and intrigue? – he probably would) opened out from the facts, and from the possibility of various degrees of speculative ‘evidence,’ such as the identification of Lesbia as Clodia Metelli, a ‘fact’ which is probable, but not definite. This field of uncertainty around textual, biographical and cultural matters creates a space, which cannot be comfortably occupied by academic discourse, but is manna to creative writers, and poets in particular – it is this field, or space of uncertainty, which creates the possibility to elaborate countless new improvisations not only around the life, but also around any new translation which might be attempted. What is opened up for the poet/translator is the space of the text. In answer to the question ‘why do we need another translation of Catullus?’ we might want to answer, there is enough space for one more; in fact there is enough space for many more, and with Catullus’s status as a source for so much of English language poetry, perhaps it might be that all poets writing in English should attempt to version Catullus.

As I have detailed in the essays so far, there are various, well-rehearsed lines of argument for why Catullus appeals to modern and contemporary poets and audiences: he seems so accessible, a myth easy to believe if you concentrate on the half dozen or so most translated poems, which have been re-translated again and again since the Renaissance. Associated with this misconception is that Catullus is so modern. In short, Catullus, appears, or sounds as though he is speaking to us now, and the source of where he is speaking from is something we share with him – from feeling, from direct presentation of emotion, his love-life, his friendships, his complaints about employers and corrupt politicians – all of

these topics and his remarks on them ring true, chime with the shape of our own thoughts and feelings. He is modern, he is contemporary, he is one of us. These observations are all valid, up to a point.

Then he is also *so* Modernist. He is attractive to poets because he asks questions about questions, and he asks questions about how we make poems – lyrics, love poems, poems of occasion – for dinner parties, weddings – mini epics, lampoons, satire. These are aesthetic, formalist interests, and constitute a part of the poems’ ‘use’ for contemporary poets. As I have already touched on, he was part of the ‘neoterics’ (the new poets, a term of scorn coined by Cicero), both ‘neoterics’ and High Modernists were groups of poets emphasising the intellect, intelligence, learning, elegance. The enthusiasm with which Pound and then Bunting took up Catullus as essential to the canon is testimony to this, as is the translation of Peter Whigham, a kind of voicing through the mask of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, or Horace Gregory’s versions, where he acknowledges the influence, of Pound’s ‘Homage to Sextus Propertius’ and D.H. Lawrence’s unrhymed poems. Through these poets Catullus is re-worked, contextualized and accommodated, even appropriated, to the Modernist project.

These form the usual arguments for why Catullus is popular with audiences and translators alike, but there are other reasons too for this popularity. The first of these we have already looked at: the opening of the space of the text because of what the scholarship *doesn’t know* about Catullus and his texts, and probably never will know. Into this vacuum rushes the speculations of scholars and critics, but also the creative improvisations of translators. There are certainties rubbing closely enough with uncertainties to generate infinite and countless new and exciting possibilities in translation. Catullus is unique among poets who have been translated into English because of how the field of translation has developed: the *evolution* of Catullus translation seems far ahead of other poets.

Then there is the overlooked idea of *use*. What is the *use* of these translations? We are now at a place where the answer to this question is more complex and more pressing (and perhaps more liberating?) than with any other poet. For most writers the answer to the question why translate them is relatively simple: to bring across as much of the meaning and nuance into the target language as is possible from the source language. With Catullus the proliferation of translations

means we have multiple and different modes of faithfulness to the Roman poet's body of work, and multiple *uses* for those translations. Obviously if one wants to learn Latin then a combination of Goold's Loeb (1995) alongside Garrison's *The Student's Catullus* and one or two of the other translations by scholars, Lee (1990) or Green (2005), might be best. The use factor here is how to become a better Latinist. But from Copley's tin-pan alley renderings first published in the 1950s, to Sisson's rather pinched, bleak austerities (1966), to Michie's bright, neo-Classical couplets (1998) – these poets pick out a tone, or sensibility which matches something of their own, and distill the process of translation, that commingling of essences. For these poets the *use* factor is to make good, *new* poems, which by reading across the uncertain field of the Catullan, playing the text almost as a musical score, they conjure new work which is not quite Catullus's and not quite theirs either, and yet are both. Poets like the impossible, and the uncertain field of the Catullan text provides the site where poems can be made out of infinite complexity and the alchemy of the impossible. There is nothing mystical about this, just the impossible complexity and hovering openness of language. The use factor for poets translating Catullus is how do you improvise on the source, a site where curiously innovation and use go hand-in-hand? To improvise could imply a cop-out or an abuse of the text. Looking over Catullus translations by poets, however, what they all hold in common is they do not try to offer a definitive version of the text, rather they will pick up one thing, and that thing, two poet/translators as diverse as Robert Lowell and Guy Davenport have agreed upon is tone. As Lowell states in the introduction to *Imitations*: 'Boris Pasternak has said that the usual reliable translator gets the literal meaning but misses the tone, and that in poetry tone is of course everything' (xi). And Davenport, from his essay, 'Zukofsky's English Catullus': 'The real achievement in translating classical poetry is not linguistic but guessing the right tone' (*Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet* 370). What poets have done over the Twentieth Century in very different ways, is to improvise the tone of Catullus. By improvise I mean how you might transpose this technique from jazz, particularly bebop, where a motif or a melody or a series of chords might be taken and manipulated, as one might find in the work of say, John Coltrane, or Miles Davis, to create something new which is recognizable from its source but also different, with an identity and signature all of its own. Two of the most exciting versions to use the poems of Catullus in this way as their source since 1950 are Louis and Celia Zukofsky in *Catullus (Gai Valeri Catulli*

Veronensis Liber), and Brandon Brown in his *The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus*. These two translations are testament to how far Catullan translation has evolved, and where new translations might find direction for the future.

∞

Lawrence Venuti in his *The Translator's Invisibility*, takes up the Zukofskys' *Catullus* as an example of translation practice, which is most faithful and sensitive to the tone of its source material in modern translations of the Roman poet. The Zukofskys' version, Venuti argues, stresses the signifier, making a foreignising translation, at odds with the mainstream of translation practice where the text in English is presented as transparent, an act he identifies as appropriation. (For Venuti's full and persuasive arguments on transparency, fluency, foreignness, violence and homophonic translation in relation to the Zukofskys' *Catullus* see *The Translator's Invisibility* 186-194).

Here is the Latin of Poem 51, followed by the Zukofskys' translation:

Ille mi par esse deo videtur,
 Ille, si fas est, superare divos,
 qui sedens adversus identidem te
 spectat et audit
 dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
 eripit sensus mihi; nam simul te,
 Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi
 [vocis in ore]
 lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
 flamma demanat, sonitu suo
 tinitinant aures, gemina teguntur
 lumina nocte.

He'll hie me, par *is* he? the God divide her,
 he'll hie, see fastest, superior deity,
 quiz – sitting adverse identity – mate, in-
 spect it and audit –
 you'll care ridden then, misery hold omens,
 air rip the senses from me; now you smile to
 me – Lesbia aspect – no life is to spare me
 [voice hoarse in a throat]
 linked tongue set torpid, tenuous support a-
 flame a day mown down, sound tone sopped up in its
 tinkling, in ears hearing, twin eyes tug under
 luminous – a night.

(Zukofskys' *Catullus*, in the first third of the volume)

Zukofskys' *Catullus* is a language just coming over into understanding, simulating the moment prior to where language formulates into an intelligibility of meaning. This refusal of meaning mitigates against Venuti's charge of appropriation: the very processes of sound reach a pitch, deflecting the Latin away from any appropriation by English – the poem doesn't come to 'rest' in the target language at all. Thus at best our sense of pleasure in sound modulating through unease, to at worst our sense of frustration or even fury at its seeming nonsense. The position of rest in the target language is forever deferred, and so the poem trembles in a kind of sonic antechamber prior to meaning, prior to the kind of pleasure we are accustomed to in the orthodox modes of signification we expect from translations. There is a sense in which we are encountering language just on the moment or cusp of its signification. *Catullus* enacts the moment where the Latin comes over into English, where sound tips over into signification: it is no accident (as Guy Davenport points out in 'Zukofsky's English *Catullus*' (*Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet* 365) that Yiddish was Zukofsky's first language, not English, and therefore his experience of understanding English as this second language is something which enables this unique bringing over from its Latin source to its new American-English poetry. It is as though this roughness or resistance to English enables a finer tuning. For this reason Zukofsky is well-placed in his attunement to the aural and musical understanding of this language process.

Reading *Catullus* at one sitting reveals the work in all its 'sonic shape,' so the book starts with a version of Poem 1 which would not look out of place in a 'normalising' series of translations, and those that follow set off weaving further convolutions of sonic experiment, each one more daring than the last. Incidentally, the current edition of the text, from New Directions (2011) only supplies the English text without the parallel Latin, and does the work a disservice – it is essential to have the Latin opposite the Zukofskys' rendering, so the eye can map across the intricacies of sound structure between the Latin and the English, suspending the gaze as a mimetic act to the suspension of meaning operating in the text across the two languages, stretching the gaze rhythmically as the sound is elongated and contracted. For this reason the beautiful Cape

Goliard/Grossman edition of 1969 with its dual text remains the definitive edition.

What the Zukofskys' version does is register the difference between the Latin and English, and simultaneously registers the difference of sensibility in the articulation of language, the Otherness of Late Roman Republican culture, delighting in that difference. In this way, the Zukofskys' version is faithful to the Latin text: the English traces the sonic contours of the Latin registers, where the English meets and departs from the sound of the Latin, sometimes bringing sense into startling focus, and at other moments registering where the English breaks down radically in its sense of the Latin. For Zukofsky there is no smoothing over or eliding of difference into a comforting and accommodating English meaning, 'Englishing' the Latin, rather the version we have is a foreignised English, the English becomes Latinised, or perhaps even Catullused – instead each poem sounds out correspondence, alienation, foreignisation, fluidity, and break down. Whilst Venuti makes a strong case for *Catullus* being one of the best examples of a foreignising translation resisting the transparency and fluidity of contemporary translation theory and practice, it is actually a far more literary and radical version than this. The Zukofskys' version has a faithfulness to the Latin and the culture it springs from, and quite a different truthfulness, and to my mind is more exciting than even Venuti gives it credit. The language registers the moment where the Latin lies alongside the English in direct alignment, and also where prose meaning fails, and connection between English and Latin can only be registered through sound. This is a translation about failure, in the most radical sense, not because it fails as a translation, but because it maps out the failures of transmission between one language and another, sounding out cohesions and differences at the level of the sound of language, the fundamental root of cultural difference elaborated by Venuti. In this sense the Zukofskys' version insists that cultural difference is rooted, and cannot reach beyond, language at the most basic and intimate level of its sound, and the micro level of phonemes, graphemes and morphemes.

Of course the elephant in the room for Zukofskys' *Catullus* is that Latin is a 'dead' language, we don't really know how it sounds, so *Catullus* becomes even more radical in the politics of its translation practice, an exercise of pure artistic abstraction, one of 'pure sound,' a sounding and sourcing of the unknown and

unknowable. In this way, Zukofsky has struck upon another way we cannot *know* Catullus's poems, another field of conjecture or uncertainty; Zukofsky's play of language becomes more akin to avant-garde music; in fact, more John Cage than John Coltrane, with rules based around empirical certainties, using formal structures like the mesostic, where words form a vertical phrase intersecting lines of horizontal text, similar to an acrostic, but with the vertical phrase intersecting the middle of the line, as opposed to beginning each new line (see Cage's *M* (1973) for examples). Here, Celia Zukofsky's literal translation of the poems word by word, also acts as an anchor to the text, so Louis Zukofsky can follow the Latin syllable by syllable to create abstract sonic patterns, the Latin poems become a series of abstract music boxes, a score for the mouth as instrument, thereby registering the impossibility of translation and poetry, the impossibility of sourcing the origin. For these reasons a musicologist might be better equipped to understand how Zukofsky is orchestrating his sources as resources, rather than a literary critic or Classics scholar. *Catullus* is, therefore, a score for voicing, for sonics, sounding across the body, so the body registers its presence through speaking, and where the sound diverges from the sense in English Zukofsky shows a respect to the integrity of the Latin without subjecting it to the assault of normalization and transparency. And in this way this translation instead makes the *failure* of its English to accommodate the Latin a form of respect for its textual, linguistic and syntactic difference.

∞

Brandon Brown with his *The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus* (2011) registers a different kind of impossibility and respect for the Latin in his translation of Catullus, acknowledging the body and voice of the translator as agencies, which manipulate and direct the translation. The acknowledgement of these agencies mitigates against appropriation. In fact, he doesn't offer up a translation at all, but instead substitutes such appropriation with commentary, and other ways of placing agencies between himself as colonizer and the text. Here is Poem 46:

The inane repetition of alienated labor is the opposite of what this translation is hoping to accomplish. So I go to work with the corpus of Catullus and splice my body: half eyestrain, half translator. Catullus and I meant to become professional Marxists, only something red-flagged in the interview process. Maybe it was the two thousand years that slipped between Catullus writing *Sparrow* and me writing *The Poems of Gaius*

Valerius Catullus. The forty-sixth poem in his corpus is about the names of the wind, and their assistance to weary travellers. Weary laborers and their kneepads. Sore performative.
(54)

The goal of Brown's Catullus is to create a contemporary and equivalent elegance to Catullus's Latin in English, this is the tone he seeks. In this poem/commentary Brown shows how he physically intercedes between the 'corpus,' the body of Catullus's work (the only body left, the only evidence), using his text as agency in a process of deferral of translation or (in what would be in Venuti's terms) violation. The sophistication and elegance generated comically plays about the terms of engagement between the two bodies 'in the interview' process. There is a sexual play here too: Brown is gay and Catullus most probably bisexual, so the text describing the enactment of deferral (or denial) of the translation process, slips between the two writers in a form of erotic foreplay, which manifests itself in the interrupted moment of oral delivery (or reception) in the form of the final two (submissive) sentence fragments: 'Weary laborers and their kneepads. Sore performative'. Here performance becomes deferral and 'sore' through its repetition of that enactment of deferral.

Earlier Brown elaborates his aesthetic in 'poems' 29-31, he outlines his attitude towards translation practice and his purpose, seeing deferral as 'detour' in a kind of Bartelbian refusal, to '*choose to not*,' with the pun on (k)not, a knotting of source and target texts ('preceding' and 'proceeding writing') across the body of the translator:

29

Translation as I understand it involves a preceding writing, a proceeding writing – in between is the body that translates. The preceding writing is absorbed by the body of the translator in the act of reading ... However, far from idealizing repetition, this translation

30

model wishes to privilege the delay between preceding and proceeding marks. To acknowledge the *fact of detour*. To suggest things can go *haywire*. Also, this translation model resists the binary of fidelity and treason ... Instead, among other actions, the translator can *choose to not*.

31

I *choose to not*. And I don't feel bad about it either. It's not like you can't go read the corpus of Catullus in translations by Peter Whigham or Ryan

Gallagher. Or Bernadette Mayer or Louis Zukofsky. And those translations are terrific.

(37-39)

Throughout the rest of the book he goes on to employ some of these avoidance strategies: Poem 51 is a very different approach to Zukofsky, or anyone else for that matter, listing a whole series of possible translation procedures, one more zany than the last, there are 12 in all, with a coda:

51

A short list of possible ways to translate the fifty first poem in the corpus of Catullus, itself a translation of a poem by Sappho:

1. Given that Catullus was clearly attracted to the work of Sappho . . . translate some other work of a poet to whom I am similarly attracted.
2. Translate the Sappho poem from the Greek and, like Catullus, add an extra stanza about my laziness.
3. Convince David Brazil to translate the Sappho poem, and add an extra stanza about my laziness (funnier?).

The procedures culminate in:

10. Write about specific imagery that caused me discomfort at the inauguration of Barack Obama in 16 lines, then alter the form so the poem looks like a prose poem.
11. Skip the fifty first poem in the corpus of Catullus entirely. Get refreshment. . . .

Otium molests Catullus. Otium he exulted in and what does he get? Otium beats up his Prius in the suburbs.

(59-60)

Other strategies include ‘Flarf’ translations of Poem 99, nine of them (‘Flarf’ is an approach to writing poems by searching the internet with random search terms then reworking the results into odd and disturbing texts); an essay on the Gelius cycle of poems ruminating on the strategy of humiliation in this sequence of poems, and the position of the body in the translation process. It is perhaps in these notes to his commentary that we can see the impossibility of what is at

stake in translation, a series of strategies, which acknowledge the impossibility of sourcing the origin and creating *the* definitive translation of Catullus, and fundamentally change the translator in a metamorphosis of the body, so translation is not only effective on the corpus of the text being ‘invaded,’ but on the very body of the translator: what sets out as a cerebral process results in a visceral transformation, not of source text or target text (translation), but instead the process turns back upon the perpetrator:

For years I had been writing about translation, attempting to reconstitute the body of the translator into the process known as translation. What happened to me there at that kitchen table, was something a little different: translation *changed my body*. My articulated politics, hopes, desires clashed with the physical gestures of the writing, itself totally shaped by the forms and vocabulary of the Roman poet Catullus. It’s true that the writing which proceeds from the preceding writing does so *via* the body of the translator, but that body is not left *in/tact*. This should be obvious – but again it was only in a moment of ecstatic crisis that I could understand it. (184)

Looking at the work of Celia and Louis Zukofsky and Brandon Brown in this way shows the evolution of translation of Catullus has developed with great acceleration from 1950 to the present day. Through the work of poet-translators of Catullus, these various versions of the Roman poet demonstrate how vital that poetry continues to be to the writing of poetry in English, and continues as a form of dialogue between the Ancient World and contemporary, modern culture, with the poem as vehicle for that ‘occasion’.

Book 1**1.**

Whom do I present my pretty little sequence
buffed up this very minute with light-grey pumice?

To you, of course, Cornelius, for only you
were friend enough to think something of my ditties –

first and only amongst Italians, who'd risk
chronicle The Whole Story in three episodes,

well-read, by God, an obvious labour of love;
keep my booklet (trim and slender) for all it's worth –

let us pray, Great-Good-Lady patroness on high,
it'll live longer than one trip around the block.

2.

Sparrow, her pet, my darling's darling,
who she always plays with on her lap,

to whose peck peck she offers her fingernail
pushing or prodding to grip harder,

when on a whim all glistening eyes
she fancies my charisma and play,

I expect that as her love-ache ebbs,
she finds a little consolation for the hurt

to play with you as she does – I wish –
and brighten each sad care my heart beats with!

3.

Go on, cry, you Cupids and Venuses,
and you beautiful people of the World.

My dearest girl's sparrow has passed away,
my darling's darling, her petted sparrow,

that she loved more than her own eyes:

he was sweet as honey, could read her mind
as easily as a daughter her mother's;

her lap was all the world he dreamt of;
hopping here and now there, this and that way

pipng his song to her and her alone.

Now his flight is a one-way trip only
into darkness where no-one's known return.

Damn you to Hell, dreadful agents of Orcus,
for destroying all beautiful things,

what a darling sparrow you've stolen
(what awful cruelty! Sad little thing!);

you've done what you did, my dear girl welled-up;
her poor little eyes burning with the tears.

4.

The craft before you fellow citizens
declares he was the quickest of vessels,

for speed unsurpassed, no lumber more limber,
would yield not one chance to passing clippers

with lightening flight of paddle and sail.

The Adriatic's rejections he rejects

tossed to its beaches, the Cycladic islands,
illustrious Rhodes, Propontis trembling drenched

in Thracian hurricanes, or the blackening gulf
of Pontus, where he, shortly to be a skiff,

was once dense follicles, topped Cyturus
rattling with chatter other leaves close by.

Pontic Amastris and box-full Cyturus,
this craft says you know what was and what is.

You know. He's positive you recall his birth
long ago, your pinnacle of pinnacles,

it was in your seas he first wet new blades,
and from that place cutting through wild ocean

bore his captain as the winds offered themselves
first to port then starboard, or Jupiter

fell full astern filling both sails together.

No promises were made to the land-gods

on his behalf when after all else he sailed
straight from oceans up this freshwater lake.

But that's all dead and gone; today he grows old
gracefully, totally devoted to you –

the twin Castor and to the twin-of-Castor.

5.

Let's *really* live, Lesbia, which is to love,
and tote up the rumours and grumblings of grey,
old men, to be worth nothing but one sous.
Suns will set and suns will rise forever more,
for us, finally, our short life snuffed out,
one night, infinite, to sleep the big sleep.
Give me a thousand kisses, then one hundred,
then a thousand, then a second hundred more,
a thousand without a break, and a hundred –
then, when we're totaled up thousands on thousands,
we'll throw them in the air to lose the knowledge,
so no bad person control us with knowing
the grand equation of the sum of our kisses.

6.

Falvius, if your sweetheart were not lacking
charm and coarse, you'd want to tell Catullus all
about it, and wouldn't be able to stop.

The thing is you've fallen for some common bitch
sickly to look at, but you just won't own up.

For you are not celibate in the night, acting
dumb won't help when your boudoir screams at the top
of its voice, heady with bouquets, Syrian
fragrance, pillows left and right flattened out, and
the shambling bed half-busted shuffles around
on its vibrato, shaky jiggling about.

There's no future to your taciturnity.

You may well ask why. You wouldn't seem so clapped out
if you weren't involved in some monkey business.

So spill the beans, for better or for the worse

I want to celebrate you and your lover
to heaven with the force of my funny verse.

7.

Your question, the total count of your kisses,
Lesbia, to satiate me, and the rest:
as many as there are Libyan sands out
there in lasarpicium-rich Cyrene,
reaching from the sweltering oracle of
Jupiter to the divine grave of Battus;
or as counted a multitude across night's
soundless stars overseeing secret lovemaking.
That's the sum of kisses kissed on kisses kissed.
These would more than satiate insane Catullus:
too numerous for busybodies to add up,
or the wicked spread vile rumours about.

8.

Poor Catullus, quit kidding yourself just quit
now know you've lost by admitting the losing.

There was a time when the sun shone all day long on you;
when you followed where the girl led you loved by us all as well

as we who never loved no one before. No not never nor after. Never.

There were plenty of the 'good times' to go around
and you wanted them all and she wanted them

from sun up to sun down it was as good as it gets.
From here on in she's not up for it and nor should you be

you jerk don't scuttle after what runs away faster after
Don't do it. It's make your mind up time and stand firm.

Ciao, my pretty. And so today Catullus stands firm
won't say a word or come looking if you're not willing.

But you'll be sorry when nobody calls, mark my words.
God damn you love what kind of life are you looking for?

Who's calling you pretty now? What kind of guy touches you up?
Who will call you 'my love' my love? Whose will you be called?

Who will you kiss? And whose lips do you get to bite at next?
But you, Catullus, you with your mind made up stand firm.

9.

Dearest Veranius, best friend of them all,
standing out three hundredfold from the rest –
actually home at last to your household gods,
your close-knit brothers and elderly mother.
You really are? This makes me happy, happy!
Seeing you safely return and hear tales
of Iberia, places, peoples, daily
lives, in your own words, I'll draw you close to me,
kissing your delicious mouth and lovely eyes.
Oh, add up all the happy shiny people,
Who's more happy, more shiny, right now, than me.

10.

Dearest Varus caught me mooching about the Forum,
insisted I attend visiting hours with his girl.
A right bimbo I thought, on first impressions,
but not without intelligence or uncharming.
On our arrival we chatted through various
sorts of stuff, covering a range of issues:
what the news was of Bithynia, how was
life over there, did I make much money.
Truthfully I retorted, not for praetors
nor for aide-de-camps was there any way
they could strike a deal, nor were they the richer,
even more so if your praetor's a bugger,
one who didn't care a sod for his long-suffering aides.
'All the same,' they say, 'you definitely purchased
what everyone knows as the indigenous
resource – bearers.' Determined to look good
to the girlfriend and shine out over the rest,
'of course,' I say, 'it wasn't all bad where I was,
against the odds of selecting a poor province
I did manage to pick up eight strapping lads.'
If the truth were known there wasn't one, here or
there capable of shouldering and heaving
the bust leg of a broken down bed-chair.
At this point the teenage dirt bag chimes in with
'my dearest Catullus, let me borrow them
for a bit, I need bearing to the temple
of Serapis.' 'Hold on a minute,' I say
to her, 'what I said a moment ago, those
lads – I must be losing my mind – a slip –
my friend Cinna – Gaius – they're his purchase.
Anyway, why should I give a damn, mine or his?
I get the use of them whenever I please.
But you are a right pain, a disaster area,
who won't let the slightest of things pass you by.'

11.

Furius and Aurelius, Catullus's *compadres*,
 whether he journeys to the outer reaches of India,
 where the long coastline lies wide open to far away echoes
 of Eoan waves,

or to the Hyrcani with those voluptuous Arabs,
 or to the Sacae, or to the quivering Parthians,
 or to the lowlands dyed all the colours in the Nile
 Delta's seven mouths,

or whether he plots his route traversing the vast Alps,
 taking in the sights which tell tales of Caesar's greatness,
 the Frankish Rhine, plus those barbarously daubed Brits –
 the end of the World –

these adventures the pair of you are tough enough
 to share with me (and heaven knows what else happens),
 seek out my dearest and hand her this short note with
 Some none too kind words:

go on, let her live with her lovers forever,
 all at once grabbing three hundred in her arms,
 true to none, over and over busting the nuts
 and guts of the lot;

she should not expect my love as yesterday's,
 which because of her, topples like a slender
 bloom at the far end of tilled land, being caught
 on a plough's sharpness.

12.

Asinius Marrucinus, your left hand
inelegant as we imbibe and chatter,
whipping table napkins from engrossed diners.
You reckon you're clever – inept is the truth,
frankly, its sordid and its so distasteful.
You don't believe me? Then believe Pollio,
your brother, happy to have your wrong-doing
paid off with real talent; he's overflowing
a young man of *le mot juste*, a charmer too.
Stand by: three hundred hendecasyllables,
or you mail, by return, my table napkins.
I'm not worried by what they cost so much as
they were a present from my dear compadres,
Saetaban table napkins, dispatched from Spain
by Fabullus and Veranius, a gift:
how can I not, therefore, love them deeply, as
I love my Veranius and Fabullus.

13.

A fine supper for my Fabullus with me
here, in a day or two, should the gods say so,
so long as you offer a fine, sumptuous
meal and don't leave out the dazzling, young filly,
and the vino, all sorts of salt and laughter.
If, as I've said, my dear boy, you offer all
this, you'll eat finely, for your Catullus'
purse is woven entirely from spiders' webs.
But, in exchange, you'll receive my love, full-on,
or what is more subtle, and more delicious,
for I'll provide the scents gifted to my love
by all the Venuses and all the Cupids;
on the instant you catch the fragrance you'll beg
the gods, Fabullus, be re-born as just nose.

14.

If I didn't adore you more than mine own
eyes, wittiest Calvus, I'd hate you for this
gift with a hate beyond that Vatinius;
is it something I did or something I said?
You've done me to death, infested with poets –
gods in heaven pile evil on that client
who mailed you such a gallery of suspects.
If, I surmise, this new and ingenious
work donated by that academic Sulla,
then no, I bare no malice, I'm pleased as punch
that all your good deeds are not gone for nothing.
Good god, what a grim and terrible booklet!
And this the article you mailed Catullus
to knock him off on the day that comes after –
the Saturnalia, the great day of joy!
No, no, no you prankster, this won't be the end:
at daybreak I'll be off down the booksellers
to draw up that venomous crap out of the likes
of Caesius, Aquinus and Suffenus –
and with these as your price, pay you, tit for tat.
As for you, you shower, back in your box you
go, to where your flat feet hobbled this way from,
vermin of our epoch, bad versifiers!

14b.

If there are any of you out there willing
to view my little bits of trash and don't shrink
away at you running your hands over us ...

15.

I place my all in trust to you, and my love,
Aurelius, and request a small, good deed:
that if with your total Being determined
you maintain a thing fresh and undefiled,
then you'll hold my sweet boy, safely protected,
I'm not thinking of the common people, I've
no worries about those bustling here and there
around the market place and doing deals,
you're the one I fear, you and your massive prick,
ever present hazard to good and bad boys.
Wave the damn thing in whatever direction
you like when you're walking out on the pull,
this particular boy leave out just this once.
But if malice or your loss of the senses
motivates you, you bastard, to betrayal,
an offensive act against my very life,
how I fear for you, the sticky end you'll come to!
With feet bound apart and the asshole spread wide
rammed to brim full of radishes and mullet.

16.

(Aurelius in the gob) I'll take on all comers as only
I know how to fuck (Furius up the ass) the both

of you read my poems backward but can't read me

so just watch it – you think I'm a bird, don't you?

If the *real* poet should be chaste his poems needn't be –

then they should rub salt with charm – then,
and only then, when like a poofy truck driver

not decent, my verses might incite an itch you can't
scratch, some action in the grey-haired old fuckers

in need of hip replacement, but you who read my lips
for a thousand kisses are mistaken about my manhood:

up the ass or in the gob, I'll take on all comers.

17.

Colonia! Desirous of a long bridge for fun and games,
prepared to jump up and down, but scared of the trembling uprights
of this long, ancient footbridge buttressed with recycled piles,
at the risk it collapses backwards, consumed by surrounding filth –
pray a fine bridge be constructed to meet your heart's every need,
resilient to support even Salisubalian
rites, allow me one real laugh-out-loud moment, Colonia!
There's this close neighbour of mine who I'd like to see tipped head first,
slap bang wallop, arse over tit, off your bridge into the muck,
just at the place where the entire bog hole is deeper, blacker,
sulfurous in its stench, a lurid mass of weed and algae.
This one's a right bloody fuckwit without a clue, no more than
a toddler, two years old, cradled in his daddy's arms dreaming.
Though he's married to a young lady approaching perfection,
and a girl fuller of life than the naughtiest little kid,
who requires a more diligent eye than the darkest of grapes,
he doesn't care she plays about as she likes, like he can't see.
And he doesn't stand up for himself, laid low as an alder,
down a drain crippled, as by a sharp Ligurian woodsman,
sentient of all the World as if it never had existed.
My nomination for fool sees no evil, hears no evil,
he's clueless, lost to who he is, even if he *is* at all.
This one's the one I'm dying to hurl head first off of your bridge
to find out if all of a sudden he can be shocked out of
laziness, drop his supine being there in the filthy silt
just as a mule has her shoe dragged off and stuck in the mud.

21.

Aurelius, the father of appetites,
not only today's, but of those bygone days,
those that are and down all tomorrows decades:
you're determined to arse-fuck my lovely boy:
not quietly either: you stick to him, giggling
away, up close, covering all the angles.
No joy I'm afraid: despite planning behind
my back, I'll beat you to it with your gob full.
You'd best pipe down if you've been gorging away.
What irks me is that boy will come to know all
you know about eating it and drinking it.
So desist while you still have some decency,
otherwise you'll end up with a great gob-full.

22.

Suffenus, with whom you are not unacquainted, Varus,
is a charming man full of fine talk, urbanity,
and, simultaneously, productive with verses,
ten thousand lines at the last count – then add the difference –
not the usual scrawl on scraps, like the rest of us –
au contraire: regal pages, virginal papyrus,
spotless new rolls, crimson ties to handsome end-covers,
the whole lot smoothed with pumice, lined up true to the lead.
One reads the stuff, this charming man of urbanity,
Suffenus, comes out an ordinary goat-milker,
cloth-eared, and he's *so* other, *so* out of himself.
We deduce what from this? A sophisticated wit
one minute, if anything sharper (is *that* possible?)
in the same breath sounds more hayseed than a hillbilly
nevertheless, the moment he turns versifier,
he's so self-satisfied when versifying verses,
he's so full of himself, and he's so self-regarding.
Evidently, everyone harbours that illusion,
each in some petty manner of speaking, *Suffenus*,
each to his own idiosyncratic foible –
unknowing of the weight you carry on your shoulders.

23.

Furius, you possess no slave or wallet,
not an arachnid, insect, or firewood,
but a father *and* a stepmother are yours
with gnashers hard enough to devour flint-stone.
What a wonderful life you spend with father
and the old fella's dried stick of a woman.
No surprise there – a happy family in
rude health, settled tummies without a care in
the World, no fires, no dilapidated homes,
no domestic violence or poisoning,
or other dangerous possibilities.
In any case, your bodies dry as old bones,
or drier even than that, if such a thing
exists, with freezing cold, sunshine, dieting.
So how come you're not so fit and well-off?
You've never broken into a sweat or drooled,
no gobbing, no sneezing, you've kept you're nose clean.
Now that's clean, clean, clean, and what's cleaner than clean,
an arsehole more polished than a saltcellar;
you can't be taking a dump more than ten times
a year, dessicated as beans, dry as stone,
if you squeezed it between the palms of your hands
you wouldn't force dirt under your fingernails.
These are fine endowments indeed, Furius,
neglect them not, nor disown these great riches,
and desist pursuing me for the hundred
thousand, as you're doing absolutely fine.

24.

Oh you, fullest bloom of all Juventii,
those alive and kicking, those been and long gone,
and all those yet to come over the decades,
I'd prefer you pass on Midas's fortune
to this one possessing neither slave nor wallet
than you permit the man to make love to you.
'How? Is he not a charmer?' You inquire. Yes:
he's a charmer alright, no slave, no wallet.
Belittle and rationalise this away:
he remains without a slave or a wallet.

25.

Thallus you shirt-lifter

softer than a honey bunny's fur

or a goosey-gander's feather

or an ear lobe floppy

as an old codger's todger

blowy cobwebs hang about

Thallus, you money grabber

by moonlight flap wildy as a Force Ten

when the goddess of thieves preys and pries

objets d'art from sleepy hosts

give me back that cloak you swooped

on when my back was turned

and my Spanish napkins (the finest) and the Bithynian tablets

you boast *your* family silver

you filthy philistine! Give them back

or else – you light-fingered Johnny –

you'll find your pretty little ass

and soft dannies ruddy branded by the lash

of my whip, tossing a little

skiff on a tidal wave out in Hurricane Sebastien, you will

26.

Oh, Furius, your little country mansion
not credited with breezes from west or south
nor with brutish easterlies and northerlies,
overblown at fifteen thousand sesterces.
A draught guaranteed to make your toes curl up!

27.

Boy-minister of good old Falernian
splash me out a goblet of drier vintage,
grande dame of ceremonies Postumia
orders, who's merrier than merry wine.
You waters be wherever you want to be,
wine's ruin off you go, live with teetotallers,
this man here is untainted Thyonian.

28.

Piso's *compadres*, the penniless cohorts,
carrying lightened loads and traveling light,
dearest Veranius and my Fabullus,
how's tricks? Have you put up with starvation,
vinegary wine and freezing for that dead-beat?
Does your bookkeeping enter the little gains,
like mine, stacked to the left as loss? Slaving for
my praetor I'd tot my spending as earnings.
Oh, Memmius you really fucked me over,
buggered me completely and without concern.
So, the pair of you are stuck, as I see it,
long suffering a similar giant prick,
shafted. Look out for high-born associates,
pray the gods and goddesses mete out foul
obscenity on Romulus and Remus!

29.

Who can look on this, who can put up with *this*,
except the unashamed or greedy ‘punters’?
Marmurra possessing all transalpine Gaul
and what far-distant Britain used to possess?
Romulus, girly homo look on, let it go?
When there he is overblown, overpowering,
struts his stuff through all and sundry’s wedding bed,
arrogant as a white dove or Adonis,
Romulus, girly homo look on, let it go?
Then *you* are unashamed, greedy, a punter.
Was this ledger *it*, oh leader of leaders,
what drove you off the edge, the final points west?
Was *this* the case? Your dissipated nob of knobs
might gulp down twenty to thirty million?
What is cock-eyed liberalism but this?
Hasn’t he fucked up and guzzled more than his lot?
In the first place he blew his family’s loot,
for seconds Pontic spoils, then polished off for
dessert Spanish booty, says the golden Tagus.
Are the riches of Gaul and Britain at risk?
Why the hell coddle that one, the pair of you,
good for nothing but devouring whole lands?
Was *this* the ledger, truly great citizens,
as in-laws, which you trashed the republic for?

30.

Alfenus forgetful, leading astray your faithful compadres,
do you show no mercy, no empathy for your close confidante?
So it has come to this false betrayal without hesitation?
You conceive treachery, sinning placates those that dwell above us?
So you neglect me and abandon me in all my wretchedness?
What is there to be done? Ah, pray show me who can men rely on?
Certainly, my false friend, you insisted I hand my Being over,
reeling me in to love, making it up as if there were no risk.
Now you are backtracking from all you said and all the things you did,
tossed away on the wind in uselessness, reduced to mere vapour.
If you have forgotten the gods recall, and Good Faith recalls all,
and all in good time you'll be sorry for every little deed done.

31.

Of all islands, Sirmio, and peninsulas

you are the pearl of all the two Neptunes
either crystal-clear lakes or salty oceans ...

how ecstatic I am – what delight to gaze on you again

it's hardly credible, the flat lands of Thynia and Bithynia
pushed well behind me, to re-discover you safe and sound.

Oh, what a joy to have packed troubles off when the mind,
dog-tired, dumps duty (that baggage) in the road where it belongs

– foot-sore, home at last, we truly have arrived at our own front door,
and thank the gods to rest our weary heads between the sheets, home

again home again jiggerty-jig, with it all worth the candle.
Hello, gorgeous! Sirmio, aren't you happy your Master's

happy too – lapping, glittering Lydian waters –

laughter in the ripples laughs all the way home.

32.

Pretty please, my dear little sweetie, you will,
my sweetheart, my high-class beauty, pretty girl,

ask me around tout de suite, postprandial.

And if you do ask me round make it easy:

be certain nobody slides your bolt across,
don't you go slipping out for the hell of it

either but remain indoors, ready ourselves
for nine flying fucks one on top of the other.

So, if you're up for it call me over

I'm ready for you, supine, horizontal,
stuffed to the gills, cock huge, bursting pants and flies.

33.

Most distinguished wide-boy of the public baths,
daddy Vibennius and your bumper son –
for the daddy's right hand might be grubbier
as the boy's asshole is all the more hungry –
why don't you bugger off to exile in some
shit hole, of daddy's light fingers we all and
sundry know, whilst you sonny boy, cannot trade
your hirsute shit box for one or two bits!

34.

The purest boys and girls we are,
with Diana our guardian.

* * * * *

and young girls form a chorus.

Daughter of Latona, greatest
off-spring of greater Jupiter,
who your mother gave birth to close
by the Delian olive,

you became mistress-of-the-peaks
and the verdant, sprouting woodlands,
and the long-deserted scrublands,
and the babbling rivulets.

You are named Lucina Juno
by those in labour of childbirth,
you are known as night's Trivia,
Luna of the stolen light.

You, goddess, mark out month by month
the year's annual direction,
filling to the brim the farmer's
store with fresh fruit and produce.

By whichever name pleases you
you will be praised, as in bygone
days to shield from all the evils
descendants of Romulus.

35.

Dear papyrus, gently nudge the poet
of love, my compadre, my Caecilius –
set out for Verona, leave behind Novum
Comum's city wall, and the Larian shores.
I need him to cast his mind over certain
reflections of a friend known to both of us.
So, if he shows his good sense he'll consume
the miles, even if a lovely girl calls
a thousand times over, her arms locked around
his neck, begging him defer his departure.
There's one, right now, if the truth be rightly told,
loves him madly and without reserve.
From the day she looked into that fragmented
segment of the *Mistress of Dindymus* fires
of love have consumed the sad girl to her core.
I feel for you girl, more refined than Sappho
the Muse, as Caecilius manufactures
a great fragment to begin his 'Magna Mater'.

36.

Those cacky sheets of Volusius' *Annals*

uphold the promise you're made for: my dearest
made a promise to the holies Venus and Cupid

that if I were to return to her and quit
chucking the vicious iambs about

she might just despatch the worst possible verses

from the World's Worst Poet to the hop-along Devil
for kindling olive branches at the poet's own funeral.

The Worst-Girl-in-the-World concocted this vow
as a joke for the gods – and it's too cocky by half.

So, goddess of the deep and of the wide and of the blue,
who resides at the holiest Idalium, the wide

open waterways at Urii, at Acona, reedy Cnidus,
at Amathus and Golgi's shrine

at Dyrrachium and all the pubs and clubs of Hadria,

cross this vow off as a contract totted up and paid,
unless you deem the jape without merit or credit.

Meanwhile into the fire you go, fuel the flames
you bunch of hayseed platitudes:

Volusius' *Annals* pure bullshit every one. Page on page.

37.

That hang out for beasts of the field and all you piss-heads,
 nine pillars beyond 'The Brothers' pad (C & P sporting 'party hats') –

do you really think for one minute you're the only ones with a dick?
 The only swordsmen to carry a licence to fuck the sweeties wholesale

over and over, all the rest of us stink something rotten – as goats?

Or, perhaps, you lounge-lizards sitting back in your queue
 (is it one or is it two hundred of you, whatever) don't suppose

I wouldn't dare make you eat it at one sitting: I would.

Ponder and reflect, you wankers: I'll daub 'pricks'
 and 'cunts' right across the front wall of your inn,

for my sweet girl who slipped from my arms,
 who was never loved by anyone as she was loved by me,

for whom I've fought my many great battles has set
 up her stall right here right now. She's your lover,

the great and good-hearted, and what's more (the shame
 of it) of every back-alley cocksucker and kerb-crawler,

with you, first and foremost, one of those long-haired louts,
 son of a buck-toothed Spaniard,

Egnatius, for whom a goatie makes a pretty face (marks
 him out) whose teeth are brushed in Spanish piss.

38.

This is bad, Cornificius, for your dear Catullus
this *is* bad, bloody Hercules it is, and hard graft

indeed every hour of every day it's huge and getting bigger.

As for you, what is the least you can do –
Have you shown him the smallest comfort?

God, I'm pissed off with you. What about my love?

Mail a word or two for comfort, I beg of you,
attached to a few tears of Simonides.

39.

Because Egnatius sports shiny white gnashers
his smile's all about Town: whilst the defence works

the court over, wringing out the sobs he's smiling;
a grief-stricken mother loses her only boy –

there he is again, at the pyre, choppers flashing.
Whatever's going on: all the time, here and there

and everywhere his weakness, this smiling, and not,
if I may say so, with elegance or taste.

So, just a thought, sunshine, matey Egnatius:
if you were a man of Rome, or Tiburtine, or

Sabine, or a porcine Umbrian, a chubby
Etruscan, or a black, toothy Lanuvian,

or of breeding, a Transpadane (one of my sort)
or any other who brushes with spring water,

I'd banish that interminable smiling forever:
nothing's more vacant than a vacuous smile.

But you're a Spaniard, and in Spain you're all

of the same custom with your own piss for toothpaste
each morning, and every tooth every raw gum brushed.

So for teeth whiter than white and one true test:
the brighter the smile the more piss you'll have drunk.

40.

Such a derangement of the senses, Ravidus
casts you up on to the razors of my iambs.

Good God, you've advocated none too cleverly,
provoking such dumb-assed quarrelling between us.

Are you really *this* desperate for adulation
from the common people? *This* limelight at all costs?

It's all yours: you've opted to love my lover too.
Pay the toll – my price your reputation, Big Time.

41.

Ameana, that completely fucked slag,
demands I cough up a straight ten thousand,
the slapper who features less than a straight nose,
consort to the broke debtor of Formiae.
Those nearest and dearest in charge of the woman
must call out the doctors, call in her friends:
the girl's lost her marbles, doesn't stop to ask
the bronze full of images her real worth.

42.

Come along, hendecasyllables, everyone
of you out of everywhere and every last one.
A cheeky scrubber has taken me for a ride
saying, if you don't mind, she'd rather not hand back
our notebooks – that's more than difficult to swallow.
We need to pursue her, require she give them up.
You may well ask which one is she? It's that one there
with the inelegant gait and histrionic
cackle, and all the looks of a real French bitch.
So, form a circle now, let's shout together,
'disgusting hooker hand over the notebooks now,
hand over the notebooks, you disgusting hooker.'
She flips us the 'v's. Ah, the scrubber, the hooker,
or whatever other name-calling you can think of.
But we cannot think the game's over with that.
We can do nothing more I suppose than make her
burn red in the face with complete embarrassment.
Yell at the top of your voices, all together:
'disgusting hooker hand over the notebooks now!
hand over the notebooks, you disgusting hooker!'
This is getting us nowhere, she doesn't bat an eyelid.
We'll have to adjust our pitch and methodology.
Let's give this a go and see where it might get us:
'Lady of Honour and Purity, my notebooks?'

43.

Good day, young lady, neither snub-nosed enough
nor with beautiful feet, without the coal eyes,
without the long fingers, without the dry mouth,
hardly with the most beautiful of accents.
Consort to that broke debtor of Formiae,
you the Province announces as the stunner?
In comparison to my Lesbia?
Oh, what times we live in without taste or reason!

44.

Our homestead, whether Sabine, whether Tiburtine –
so some assert you Tiburtine who care not to
harm Catullus, on the other hand there are those
who stake at all costs you're definitely Sabine –
but if you're Sabine, or perhaps, in fact, Tiburtine,
I was immensely grateful of my sojourn in
suburbia to cure me of a chesty cough,
which were just deserts caused by stomach-churning greed
in my mad-dash rush after exclusive dinners.
For, in my haste and speed to become Sestius'
guest I read his oration opposing Antius,
'the candidate,' stuffed with bile and contagion.
Whereupon I came down with a stinking cold and
hacking cough, which wracked me until I retreated
to your haven for remedy, quiet and herb tea.
So now, fit again, I tender grateful thanks
you saw right I not suffer for my misdemeanour.
Nor will I take exception to terrible works
by Sestius, but handling the cold pages visit
sniffles and tickly cough, not on me, but Sestius,
whose invites come once I've read his contagious speech.

45.

Septimius his dear, dear Acme held close
 on his knee whispered, 'my dearest one, Acme,
 if I'm not driven out of my mind with love,
 totally devoted to you forever,
 just as mad as a madly "in love" lover,
 let me alone in Libya or baking
 India stare out the lion-of-green-eyes.'
 then, with that said, Amore once to the left,
 once to the right, atichooed, for good measure.

Acme tipping her head softly backwards,
 brushing with a full, velvety bee-sting for lips
 the swimming eyes of her young boy sent tipsy,
 and she said, 'Septimius, light of my life,
 swear our servility to this sole leader,
 certain as and as scorching as the keen fire
 ignites my tender core and courses through me.'
 Then, with that said, Amore once to the right,
 once to the left, atichooed, for good measure.

Choosing a sunny path of positive signs,
 in love and loving in equal measure:
 love-sick Septimius adores Acme above
 all your Great Britains and all your Syrias;
 for Acme love will out in Septimius,
 collecting her complete set of fun and games.
 Who's observed two more beautiful people?
 In whom the Goddess Venus reads more hopeful signs?

46.

Now springtime returns days to the mildest air,
now the gale-force madness of the equinox
is quieter by the zephyr's welcomed hush.
Take off, Catullus, from Phrygian lowlands
and the enclosed, heat-hazed plains of Nicaea.
Let's head for the dazzling cities of Asia.
Now my heart's aflutter with plans to roam,
now my toes tap in eager anticipation.
Adieu to the whole genial entourage
who set out on a long journey from homelands
wander back via diverse solitary routes.

47.

Porcius and Socraton, Piso's pair, both
light-fingered Johnnys, harbingers of scabies
and appetite, you held above Fabulus
and my Veranius by *that* upstanding
Priapus? Is it you planning exclusive
dinner-times in day-time whilst my compadres
are forced to scrape the alleyways for invites?

48.

Your eyes sweetened as honey, Juventius,
if they permit me my fill, all-I-can-kiss,
I'd carry on kissing three hundred thousand
fold, nor would I be satiated,
not if the gathering of all our smoochings
were packed more tightly than ripened ears of corn.

49.

The very best of speakers of Romulus'
genus, of those that went before you Marcus
Tullius, are, or go ahead in years to come,
a great and heartfelt 'thank you' from Catullus,
he the direst of all the poets in the World,
equally the direst of all the poets
as you stand above all rhetoricians.

50.

Yesterday, Licinius, didn't we while away the hours
like a couple of naughty school boys at my lap top

pissing about together, sniggering at a good joke –
we each in turn whacked off some little ditties,

one in this metre then one more in that for good
measure, just for a laugh to match excellent wine.

After *that* you bet I left all fired up
by your wit and charm, Licinius, so much

so poor little me lost his appetite for dinner,
nor could I find relief with a lie down or shut-eye,

but tossed and turned in bed all night
long, longing for daybreak that I might

return to your side and chatter away some,

arms and legs aching after all that
I lay in bed more or less half-dead

and wrote this trifling poem for you my dear
so you can see the state you've left me in,

don't be rough, pretty please, don't chuck out my prayers
I beg of you, my nearest and dearest: there's always Nemesis

who might demand payback with menaces –
she's the bitch goddess you don't want to mess with.

51.

I reckon that man appears a god's equal,
or, if I may, that man is a superior
to the gods, sat opposite looking who listens
and hears you over

and over, its your pretty laughter that wrenches
me, wretched, totally of my senses, Lesbia,
simultaneously, when I gaze up at you
I lose all talent

to chat away, my tongue numb, limbs heated to white-
hot, ears ringing with sounds all of their own accord,
a double nightfall wraps about the twinkling light
in both my eyes.

Leisure, Catullus, not a good idea for you,
leisure leaves you energised, over-stimulated.
Leisure: the thing that unseated kings, lost and ruined
magnificent cities.

52.

What's the use Catullus? Drop dead right here, right now?

Nonius that boil, takes up an official seat,

Valinius lies his way to the consulship.

What's the use Catullus? Drop dead right here, right now.

53.

Someone from the crowd made me smile today:
who, once my dear Calvus had wonderfully
explicated the crimes of Vatinius,
punched the air and cheered in astonishment,
'good God, that little upstart can talk the talk!'

54.

Otho's dickhead (exceedingly miniscule),
your thighs, Rusticus, are of the great unwashed,
and Libo's passing wind, silent but deadly –
I hope against hope all these things bring discomfort
to you and re-animated Fufidius ...

54b.

You'll be furious at my whiter than
white iambs, again, our one Great Leader.

55.

We implore you, if it's not over-taxing,
reveal to me your darkest whereabouts.
I've been looking here and there in the Campus
Minor, the Circus Maximus, at the sign
of booksellers, the most sacred place of Jove.
I took a stroll down the Great Walk as well
my friend, quizzed every little tart there,
but they blinked back innocently enough.
'Turn him in,' I insisted of each one,
'give me Camerius, you sinful lot.'
'Right here,' called one, unlacing her thin slip,
'look here, he's resting between my rosy tits!'
All of this trouble you've been is the work
of Hercules, you're too snobby, compadre.
So, let us fix a venue and time, declare
it, commit to it, believe in daylight.
Do the pretty little blondes tether you down?
If you bite your tongue, remain tight-lipped
you'll have frittered away love's harvest.
Venus thrives on the fullness of rhetoric.
In any case, as you like it, zip it,
just as long as I'm cut my cut of your love.

56.

O a most amusing jape, Cato, how daft
one you need to know of and titter about!
Laugh you must Cato, loving your Catullus:
its so, so very amusing, too too daft.
This minute I found my sweet girl's servant boy
knocking one out, so preserve me Dione,
I straight shafted him – Lucky Pierre style!

57.

Such splendid partners, a right pair of nobs,
Marmurra and Caesar girly homos, those two.
No surprise. Besmirched in equal measure,
one city-stained, the second Formian,
branded permanently it won't fade away.
Infected the same, these two peas in a pod,
a couple of poetasters to one stool,
one voracious in adultery as his mate,
each in competition over sexy teens,
such splendid partners, a right pair of knobs.

58.

Caelius, my Lesbia, Lesbia, *the* Lesbia above all,
above all the one and only Catullus loved more

than himself, all his family and all his friends thrown

together, now hangs around street-corners and back-alleys
popping peas for the great and good-hearted sons of Remus.

58b.

Were I moulded as Crete's custodian,
nor Ladas, nor feather-footèd Perseus,
nor if I swept aloft astride Pegasus,
nor Rhesus' teamed stallions dazzlingly white –
supplement to these the wingèd, the downy,
and demand the swiftness of full-blown gales:
tie me in to all of these, Camerius
I'd be tired to my bones, dead-beat tired beyond
tired, with repeated exertions after
this interminable hunt, my compadre.

59.

– *Rufa the Bononian fellates Rufulus* –

she's Menenius' wife, you know, the one you spot
from time to time down the crematoria ripping off

a crust or two as it rolls from the half-charred bodies
whilst the undertaker's unshaven slave bangs her rear.

60.

Was it a lioness from the Libyan foot-hills

or was it Scylla that spat you howling

her vulva which bore a mind so hard

so cruel you dash the prayer from

this believer's lips, oh stony-hearted love?

Book 2

61.

Helicon's inhabitant,
 O Urania's off-spring,
 Who tears away fresh-faced girls
 For their grooms, *O Hymenaeae Hymen,*
O Hymen Hymenaeae,

Garland your locks with heady
 Sweetness, blooms of marjoram;
 Parade the flaming veil
 Come happily come, snow-white
 Feet lemon-sandaled.

Awakening this lovely
 Day declaim the wedding songs
 With as sweet a voice, trample
 The earth with dance shaking
 The burning pine branch.

Junia, pert as Venus,
 Idalium's girl facing
 The Phrygian magistrate;
 Good girl with favourable
 Signs, weds Manlius;

Lovely as Asian myrtle
 Radiant with flowery stalks
 Hamadryades (wood nymphs)
 Feed with the fresh morning dew,
 Their very own toys.

Come along, quickly arrive,
 Take leave of Aonian
 Places on the Thespian

Rock, cooling Aganippe
Irrigates above.

Entice the mistress homeward,
Desiring her new partner,
Wrapped about with affection,
As ivy seeks here then there
Embraces the tree.

And you, the rest of the girls
Unmarried, whose day will come,
Sing along with me and in
Tune: *O Hymenaeae Hymen,*
O Hymen Hymenaeae,

That He will readily hear
Calls He occupy the role
Correctly his, Venus' guide,
And conjugate lovers both
Legitimately.

Which god is more suitably
Sought by anxious love-makers?
What deity should beings
Pray to, *O Hymenaeae Hymen,*
O Hymen Hymenaeae?

Anxious fathers pray to you
For the children, young girls slip
Out of their girdles for you,
For you excited bridegrooms
Heed with ready ears.

You have yourself pressed into
The hands of a mannish boy
A fresh-faced girl torn from her

Mother's breast, *O Hymenaeae Hymen,*
O Hymen Hymenaeae.

With you absent Venus can't
 Seek the fun celebrity
 Permits; yet she's able if
 You are willing too. Which god
 Challenges this god?

With you absent: childless homes,
 Parent's lines discontinued,
 Heirless: yet they're able if
 You are willing too. Which god
 Challenges this god?

Lacking your rituals no
 Nation fields patrols at its
 Check-points: yet it's able if
 You are willing too. Which god
 Challenges this god?

The door unlocked and flung wide,
 Come bride, come. Watch the torches
 Shiver, burning follicles

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High-born chastity prevails
 To which she is most attuned,
 Cries the hard parting.

Stop up your tears. No way, Au-
 runculeia, exists the chance
 A woman more beautiful

Will witness the clear dawn light
Rise over the seas.

As in the multi-coloured
Plots of the rich landowner
The hyacinth stands up straight.
You hesitate, days pass by,
Fresh bride step forward.

Fresh bride step forward. If it
Pleases you hear our requests.
Do you see? Watch the torches
Shiver burning follicles.
Fresh bride step forward.

It is not true: your groom will
Not cheapen himself lying
With some dirty whore, or chase
Ignoble paths by sleeping
Apart from your breast.

And as flexible tendrils
Wrap around next door's trees
So he will be wrapped around
In your arms; but days pass by
Fresh bride step forward.

Divan for those attending

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Bed's glistening toe.

Such ecstasies fall his way,
Such huge ecstasies your husband's
Pleased by as the night passes,

Midday too! But days pass by;
Fresh bride step forward.

Pages! Hold torches skywards
The flaming veil approaches.
Sing along with me and in
Tune, "*Io Hymen Hymenae* io,
Io Hymen Hymenae."

Muzzle not the Fescennine
Fun, but let it carry on
Make the smartest page toss nuts
To slave boys once his master's
Love he knows is gone.

Toss nuts to slave boys, lazy
Page, you're time is up, for long
Enough you've toyed with nuts. Cease!
Now go serve Talassius.
Lazy page toss nuts.

Just the other day you swore
At the farm bailiff's wives, page.
Now the barber's attendant
Clips away. Poorest of boys!
Lazy page toss nuts.

You have difficulty, say
Some, foregoing pretty boys –
Forego you must, fragrant groom!
Io Hymen Hymenae io,
Io Hymen Hymenae.

We recognise a licence
For men-about-town was yours,
But none for spouses exists.

Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

And you, new wife, be careful
 Denying your man's pleasure –
 He'll make for another place.

Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

Look, how opulent a house
 (Big and grand) your master's is,
 And all this at your service,
 (*Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,*
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.)

When snowy with old-age you'd
 Nod assent without question,
 Say yes to all and sundry,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

Trip golden-heeled over
 The lintel, with fine report
 Pass via the slick portal,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

Gaze on your spouse relaxing
 Indoors over a divan
 Entirely inclined to you.
Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,
Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

A fire-storm sweeps through each
 Ventricle of his heart, fierce
 As yours, and more intensely.

Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,

Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

Release the girl's tender arm
Purple-robed youth this minute;
Released to her spouse's bed.

Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,

Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

All of you good, worldly dames
Conjugated with their old
Chaps, help the bride to her seat.

Io Hymen Hymenaeae io,

Io Hymen Hymenaeae.

Groom, now you are permitted,
Approach your new wife's boudoir,
Her cheeks radiant as young
White buds of the daisy or
A flaming poppy.

Praise be to the gods, young man
If you aren't as lovely, fair
As she: Venus sees to you,
But days pass by, step forward,
Hold back no longer.

You didn't hold back for long.
You've come already, Venus-
the-Good to aid you. It's plain
What you want, you want the best
Love with no holds barred.

He who calculates each grain
Of African sand, each glint
On glint of the heavenly

Bodies could enumerate
Your great love-making.

Make love as numerously
As possible, shortly spawn
Children. Ancient titles need
Heirs, and along similar lines
Perpetuated.

I want a little baby
Torquatus reach out tiny
Hands from his mother's embrace
To "papa" – happily smile
Little lips opening.

Would he be as Manlius
The image of his father
Obvious to all he meets,
And his face fairly portray
His mother's honour.

Pray his good name evidence
His line from a true mother,
As Penelope the best
Handed on Telemachus'
High reputation.

Slam the doors, virgin slave-girls.
Enough of our joy. But you,
The happy couple, well done,
Enjoy your lives to the full
As wife and husband.

62.

Venus rises:

young turks raise yourselves:

Venus flickers

High above Olympus,

long-anticipated.

The moment has arrived,

up,

tables groaning:

Here comes the bride,

here wedding chants to be performed.

Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

You girls,

observe the young turks?

Line up opposite.

The bringer of night kindles the Oetaean glow.

Yes,

without doubt.

They're keen,

quick out of the traps!

They spring forward;

a good chance their song's the favourite.

Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

Brothers,

no push-over victory lies in store.

Listen,

the birds rehearse their off-by-heart lyrics.

Rehearsals pay back well;

a catchy melody.

No surprises.

They concentrate their attention.

Meanwhile we think of one thing whilst listening to another;

We lose,

 fair enough;

 winning needs blood,

 sweat and tears,

For the minute bring your thoughts to bear on the job;

They're about to pipe forth,

 then it's our turn to respond.

 Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

Hesperus, who blazes more fiercely in heaven?

How could you wrench a girl from her mother's bosom

From her mother's bosom wrench a clingy girl,

And pass a virgin over to a hot young buck.

Could an enemy seize a town more viciously?

 Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

Hesperus, who beams more happily in heaven?

Your brightness casts a light over the marriage vows

That fathers promise in advance and grooms promise,

But won't deliver without your blazing overhead.

What moment do gods offer more pleasureable?

 Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

Sisters, Hesperus, has spirited one away

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For as you appear security guards clock on.

Robbers are shrouded by dead of night, you return,

Hesperus, disguised as Eous, shadowing them.

Virgins like to trouble you with made-up stories.

Who cares? If for all their false chatter you're the one.

 Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

As a flower nurtured by a sheltered garden,

Invisible to the herd, untouched by ploughshares,

Kissed by gusts of wind, stronger for sun, grows in rain,
 Countless boys, numerous girls reached out towards it:
 For this self-same bud, stripped between finger and thumb,
 Neither the boys nor the girls reach out towards it.
 An unsullied young girl enjoys her tribe's constancy;
 Her body polluted, losing her purest bud,
 She's the object of desire for neither boys nor girls.

Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

As an unsupported vine creeps over stripped land,
 Won't reach the heights, won't yield the generous sweet fruits,
 Instead weakens, folds in half with the sheer burden
 Nearly, nearly brushes root system with feshet;
 She uncultivated by farm-hand or the ox:
 Yet one by chance hitched up to a caring elm,
 She is cultivated by farm-hands and oxen:
 An unsullied young girl will grey if neglected,
 Yet in due course forges a seemly coupling,
 More loved by her spouse, less a nuisance to parents.

You, new wife, dare not to squabble with your partner,
 Don't quarrel with the man your father signed you to.
 Your mother, your father, your duty – make them proud.
 You don't own your honour, your parents own some shares;
 Your father dealt a third, your mother a third too,
 You receive a third. Don't argue with mum and dad
 They signed you away, rich assets for a new son.

Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen here O Hymenaeae!

63.

Across deepest oceans Attis catapulted in his quick yacht,
 headlong inland with flight of foot, approaching the Phrygian woods,
 pressing forward and through dark woods, the goddess's crowning thicket,
 and at that point tortured beyond sense, reason blinded beyond logic,
 arrowhead razor-sharpened he sliced away his genitals.

So then *she* sensed her limbs useless, severed, lacking his manliness,
 even as new blood spattered down, reddening the earth all around –
 with the quickest of reactions, white-knuckled she shook the timbrel –
 your timbrel, Cybebe, all yours, Matriarch – mysteries on high,
 rattling and tapping out deftly, finger-tipped the sonorous hide,
 and forthwith she started to sing, a-tremble, to her disciples:

'Up, up and away together, Gallae, to Cybele's tree-tops,
 follow me together, lost of Dindymenian Domina,
 who were quickly banished from homes, look towards foreign places,
 tow my line of reasoning, accomplices on my pathway
 have resisted sea currents and the fury of the oceans,
 unmanning your own bodies, beyond total disgust for Love:
 make ecstatic your goddess' heart with non-stop frenzied dancing.
 Expunge all thought of postponement – all together, in my footsteps
 to Phrygia, Cybele's home, to the goddess' Phrygian woods –
 where voices of cymbals sing out, where tambourines echo reply,
 where the Phrygian flautist booms deeper sounds from a curved horn,
 where the Maenads garbed with ivy shake their heads in complete frenzy,
 where with piercing cries blurted loud and clear they play out sacred rites,
 where wayward followers to the goddess often fled on foot,
 towards that place we must trip quick-stepping our way speedily.'

In that moment, no real woman, Attis sang to the company,
 the whole troupe cried a-trembling, voices out loud ululating,
 where tambourines rattled once more, again cymbals tinkled away,
 on jostling, flitting feet the chorus converged towards verdant Ida.
 Delirious, wobbly, panting, senseless, breathing her one last breath,
 supported by tambourine, Attis unthinking, pressed through dark woods,

(a cow undomesticated, throwing off the weight of harness),
 for the Gallae keenly to track their leader from her footsteps.
 Cybebe's shrine attained, an effeminate lassitude fell
 across them, sleepy after strife, huge labour without sustenance:
 over tired eyes sleepiness ebbs and flows, enveloping eyes shut,
 soothing frantic thoughts with quiet to melt desperation away.
 But when the sun, bright, golden-faced, the piercing gaze of his warm eyes
 scanned across the lucent sky, the harsh ground, the furious sea,
 driving away shadowy night with his horses, a team fresh-shod,
 then Sleep retreated quickly, (leaving Attis alert, wide awake),
 to the Goddess Pasithea, enveloped in her pulsing heart.
 So after quiet time and rest, free of over-heated panic,
 when Attis reflected on those actions she herself had triggered
 and saw in the cold light of day what she had come to, what was lost,
 in chaotic and teeming thoughts she retraced her steps to the beach,
 gazing over desolate seas, there she wept tears copiously,
 in this pitiful state she spoke broken-voiced to her motherland:

'Oh my country which created me, oh my country where I was born
 and pathetically abandoned, just as fugitive slaves abscond
 their masters, and fled light-footed into Ida's dense woodland,
 that I might live up in snowfields, amongst animals' frozen dens,
 venturing in my distraction to seek their every habitat –
 in what direction, whereabouts do I believe you are, my land?
 My eyes of their own accord drawn to direct their vision at you,
 in this briefest of interludes whilst my senses are free of stress.
 Am I to be kidnapped from home, spirited away to these woods?
 My motherland, goods and chattels, all acquaintance, family – gone?
 Gone from the Forum, palestra, stadium, and gymnasia?
 Miserable, miserable soul whose existence is mere grief,
 what variant of human have I not metamorphosed into?
 I am a woman, I am a young man, I am a juvenile, a boy,
 I was the gymnasium's bloom, sweet-scented beauty:
 mine were the doorways crowded out, mine were the doorsteps always warm,
 mine were the bouquets of flowers which decorated the household,
 as the sun climbed the heavens and I departed my bedroom.

Am I now reckoned slave to the gods, and in service to Cybele?
 Am I considered a Maenad, am I half a self, am I unsexed?
 Am I to lurk about the snowbound, evergreen slopes of chill Ida?
 Am I sentenced to a lifetime beneath Phrygia's dizzy heights
 where the deer finds its home in woods, where the wood-foraging boar lives?
 Now, now I am agonised, now, now full of remorse.'

As soon as this speech was broadcast abroad, loud from her rosebud mouth,
 conveying unexpected reports to the gods' acute hearing –
 then Cybele untied the halter and reins binding her lions,
 and provoking the master of herds, leashed on the left, she said:

'Go on,' she urged, 'go on angry beast, ensure insanity vex her,
 see her downed by insanity, retreating to my wooded lands,
 she who enjoys excess freedoms, over-eager to slip my hold.
 Beat your hindquarters with your tail, bite back the trashing of yourself,
 make sure every compass point is filled with your thundering roar
 fearless one, unfurl your yellowy mane from your muscled neck.'

So Cybele furiously declared untying the halter,
 the raging animal steeled, incited his angry being,
 jumping up, growled out loudly, tramped down surrounding cover.
 And as he approached the wetlands of glistening, foamy shore
 and encountered effeminate Attis next to the marble sea,
 he lunged. She, panicked and routed, a wild thing, retreated to woods:
 always to stay, a life sentence, to be forever the slave-girl.

Goddess, great goddess, Cybebe, goddess, Matriarch of Dindymus,
 pray all your discord and anger remain distant from my home –
 push the rest to insanity, push the rest to pleasure's excess.

64.

Fir-trees, descendants from Pelion's pinnacles,
 so it is rumoured, stroked through Neptune's breakers
 to the watery Phasis and Aetes' borders,
 when the finest boys, the backbone of Argive youth
 endeavoured hijacking the Colchian fleece,
 daring their quick skiff navigate the salt sea Abyss,
 pinewood blades brushing over aquamarine,
 for them the goddess who rules the mountain cities
 constructed the speediest vessel with her fair hands,
 interlaced the softwood with hardwood framework;
 the original vessel to skim Amphitrite.
 Just as soon as the bow had tilled the blustery sea,
 oarsman curling wave-tops to foamy whiteness,
 faces rose with the surf out of curiosity,
 Nereids admiring the phenomenon.
 For that day and that day only mariners gazed
 upon sea-nymphettes rising above foaming
 ocean swell, full-frontal, topless, nipples erect.
 Then, Peleus flared with passion for Thetis,
 then Thetis did not cast aside wedding a human,
 then the Father knew Peleus was made for Thetis.

Oh you, born into the best of epochs much missed,
 all heroes we salute you, sons of the gods
 and noble ladies I salute you one more time!
 Again, again I will celebrate you with song.
 You above the rest, lucky with the marriage torch,
 Peleus, Thessaly's rock, who Jupiter himself,
himself, god of the gods, relinquished his own love;
 did Thetis, gorgeous Nereid, overwhelm
 you, did Tethys grant you permission to wed her child's
 child, and Oceanus, who clinches the world in one?
 Then, as the right moment approached for the couple,
 all Thessaly frequented the house, bursting

the palace with delirious company,
 each one offering tributes, shiny happy faces.
 Cieros a ghost-town; Phthiotian Tempe
 Crannon and Larissa – everywhere emptied;
 Pharsalus crammed, crowding Phalarian households.
 The countryside deserted, oxen out of shape,
 the curling rake no longer guides the creeping vines,
 the bull and plough fail to turn over heavy clays,
 no secateurs chop back the shades of olive groves,
 farm machinery abandoned rusts away.

But at the master's house, whichever direction rich
 hallways stretch, gleams a vision of gold and silver,
 the thrones of white ivory, tables glittering cups,
 the entire palace joyous at the rich spectacle.
 The centrepiece a marriage-divan fitting
 a divinity, ornamented with Indian
 ivory inlay, shell-stained, decked out in crimson.

This needle-pointed throw picks out ancient characters,
 and dexterously depicts their heroism.
 Unstoppable, from Dia's wave-echoing beach
 Ariadne's gaze on Theseus' quick vessel,
 disappearing to a dot, eaten up inside
 she scarcely credits witnessing what she has seen,
 little wonder this, as on that precise instant
 she was snapped out of sleep, discarded on cold sands.
 That thoughtless boy escaping to rhythmic oars, tosses
 promises overboard into winds' teeth.
 At such a distance, Minos' daughter, sea-weed about
 her feet, frozen bacchant gazing out, pitiful,
 gazing on, knocked off balance by surging emotion;
 the precious hair-band loosens from her long blond hair,
 light-as-a-feather her dress slips off her shoulders,
 her brassiere drops from full and milky breasts –
 all her clothes fell from her body in a heap,

trivia to salt-water breakers about her feet,
 uncaring about headbands, uncaring about
 dresses, her heart swollen to bursting, Theseus,
 all her mind, all her body dependent on you.
 Sad thing, where Erycina cast barbed worry
 in her heart, who she obsessed with infinite pain,
 forever and a day since the rash Theseus
 exited Piraeus, its sweeping harbour-mouth,
 reaching Gortynia, the outlaw's kingdom.

So the myth goes how vicious diseases visited,
 reparation for Androgean's killing,
 Cecropia was compelled to select perfect
 young girls and men for the Minotaur's table.
 His provincial city threatened by injustice,
himself, Theseus, decided to risk his own
 body for Athens than endure awful carnage,
 Cecropia's walking-death exported to Crete.
 So then, entrusting his quick craft to the warm winds
 he fetched up at Minos, 'the magnanimous.'
 From the first moment the regal daughter gazed on
 him, although restricted to her fragrant bedroom,
 still cradled in the gentle arms of her mother,
 like myrtle propagated by Eurotas
 or colours differentiated in Spring,
 her first looking lingered longer on him until
 her entire body was engulfed, to be consumed
 at her very heart, her depths in conflagration.
 Sacred boy, maliciously concocting powerful
 feelings, mix joy with pain for Man, stoney-hearted,
 and you, queen of Golgi and verdant Idalium,
 on tempestuous oceans you discarded
 the girl there, heart on fire, murmuring for the blond guest!
 Such huge dread she endured with an exhausted heart!
 Repeatedly she grew sallow as gold's reflection,
 for Theseus, desperate to challenge the vicious

man-beast sought death or the spoils of victory!
 She promised trifles, promises appealing to gods,
 mouthing silences to deities above.
 As an oak from the tops of Taurus waves its branches,
 or a cone-heavy conifer, bark seeping amber,
 a hurricane angrily ripping apart
 its body – dismembered, upended, crashes,
 reducing all to matchwood in its path far and wide,
 so Theseus leveled the weighty man-beast, horns
 uselessly waving about emptied spaces.
 Then back he retraced the pathway to loud acclaim, a
 slenderest thread navigating the journey
 in case the labyrinthine meanderings
 entangle him within incomprehension.

So why do I stray widely from my first poem?
 Recall how a daughter deserted a watchful
 father, how she deserted a sister, a mother
 who loved to distraction her miserable child,
 who adored Theseus before all these others?
 Or how he stole her away by sea to Dia's
 spumy shore, or how he left her sleeping the deep sleep,
 heartlessly embarking, no second thoughts?
 Frequently, so the myth goes, with her heart consumed,
 she would drag out jagged sobs from her deepest being
 now at her most wretched, scaling sheerest cliff-tops
 where she could observe clearly the desolate ocean,
 or would dash headlong into the choppy sea-surge, legs
 exposed, hitching her diaphanous dress –
 these were the words she cried out in bitter finality,
 cheeks tearfully reddened, sobbing wretchedly:

‘Is that all there is, cynic, entice me from home,
 abandon me to this god-forsaken shore, Theseus?
 Stealing away, forgetful of deities,
 off home, smuggling the freight of broken promises?’

Not one idea flipped your mind from such a heartless
 conclusion? You found no deeper emotions
 to draw from your stony heart, show me no finer feelings?
 What a far cry from the smooth-talking, sweet-sounding
 blandishments, or false expectation you led me
 to believe of perfect weddings, a blissful marriage –
 all these the winds toss about, atomized nothings.
 From now on no woman should trust a man's promise,
 nor hope that what a man says is a sign of truth.
 As long as their hearts lust after controlling you
 there's nothing they dare not pledge, no promise reserved,
 the moment his needy desires satiated
 he becomes forgetful, vows far less important.
 But it was me who dragged you free of the maelstrom
 when you tripped, choosing to substitute my brother
 than lose you, the deceiver, at the point of crisis.
 The price of this for me, a cadaver picked at
 by animals and birds with no peace in the earth.
 What lioness birthed you behind a desolate
 rock, what ocean threw you clear of the waves pull,
 what Syrtis, what lethal Scylla, what Charybdis,
 that you throw away life's spoils realized thus?
 If marriage to me fell short of your designs
 on account of a father's old-fashioned values –
 in spite of all of this – you could have shipped me home
 as your slave-girl to toil for you out of total love,
 massaging your feet in mineral-water,
 folding crimson coverlets over divans.

'So why should I cry out beyond my wits in pain
 vainly to the uncaring heavens, indifferent
 to listening, or responding blankly to my cries –
 he, instead, will be halfway home at this minute
 without a living being in sight of this coast.
 So Fortune, entirely indifferent to my need,
 refuses me an audience to hear my sad tale.

All-ruling Jupiter, would that in the first place the
 Cecropian armada not reached Cnossos,
 nor, handing the dreadful man-beast doomed gifts,
 that lying captain harboured his vessel at Crete,
 nor, with malicious intent beneath honeyed smiles,
he had enjoyed our hospitality as a guest!
 Hopelessly lost, what can I hold to, discarded?
 Should I toil up Ida's peaks? A vast chasm
 expands between: the water is wide as treacherous.
 Dare I expect my father's aid? He I abandoned,
 favouring my brother's blood-soaked boy-assassin?
 Be content with devotions of my husband,
 who eludes me, oars flexing against the ocean?
 Instead this isolated beach, deserted rock,
 the surrounding oceans offer no sea-lane off,
 no route to leave by, hopeless, all is soundless,
 all desolation, all this signifies the end.
 But death will not darken the light behind my eyes,
 and before feeling exits my fatigued body,
 before that, betrayed as I am, I demand recompense,
 requiring finally, complete, heaven-sent justice.

'Thus you, whose vengeance echoes men's darker actions,
 Eumenides, crowned with serpents writhing,
 exhaling diabolic fury, boiling over –
 I demand your audience, to hear a just case,
 which I, unfortunate waif, wrench from the heart
 doomed with no choice but pursue blinded with anger,
 as these troubles are my truthfully heartfelt off-spring,
 my heart's labour; do not let my cries be lost, let
 go; instead, just as Theseus left me all alone
 in such a state of mind, oh deities, leave him with his.'

After she laid bare herself with such a torrent of words,
 demanding revenge, the extreme penalty,
 the Heavenly Power nodded unstoppable

approval, so that the earth moved, the seas boiled over,
the universe violently shook galaxies.

But Theseus, his thoughts impenetrable with darkness,
dropped all advice for forgetfulness,
which until then totally focused his attention,
forgetting to haul high the right sign for his pensive
father, telegraph his safe sighting Erechtheus.

At the beginning, the story goes, son about to sail free
of the goddess's citadel, Aegeus,
kissing his heir whispered directions:
'Boy, my only boy, dearer to me than my years
who I am required to dispatch on a questionable
journey, recently returned to me at the end
of my days, because my fate and your hot bravery
wrench you away against my judgment – my fading
vision not yet satisfied with seeing your face –
I will not wish you on your way with a fond farewell
nor permit you run up signals of a windward fate,
instead, first, export the discomfort of my heart
smearing my white locks and grey beard with earth and dirt
then drape your departing mast with dark-dyed sails
so my deep sadness and smoldering disquiet
be flagged as Iberian iron-blue.

On condition she who lives on Itonus, who
guaranteed to save us and Erechtheus' land,
will permit you bathe your right hand in the bull's blood,
please see to it these instructions I lay in your mind
stay strong and true, not forgotten with time's passing,
in order that as your quick eyes set sights on home
lowering mourning signs, dark-dyed sailcloth,
you raise, untwisted brilliant-white spinnakers,
so that as soon as possible I witness the signs,
great happiness for me at your joyful return.'

These directions, to begin with, were the first things
 on Theseus' mind, but in time, were as clouds drifting,
 then storm-blasted from snowy-peaked mountains.
 And so the father, scanning the horizon above
 the battlements, his eyes swollen and red from the tears,
 momentarily glimpsed the shadow of a blooming
 sail, stepped out from the most precipitous cliff,
 understanding Theseus obliterated by Fate.
 And so, entering a home grieving for his father
 headstrong Theseus had to face up to the same
 damage of forgetting that caused Minos' daughter pain.
 Simultaneously, she gazed on a vanishing dot,
 replaying countless heartfelt labyrinthine scenes.

From another place on the coverlet Iacchus,
 his group of Sileni Nysa and Satyrs
 attending, lustful, flew to you, Ariadne.

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Fanatical Thyades whirled around the god,
 head tossing declared Bacchic 'euhoe, euhoe,'
 some waved thyrsi with concealed points above their heads,
 some play about with hacked up body parts of the bull,
 others, wrap-around snakes coiling themselves,
 others processed, carrying *orgia*, in boxes
 none of the uninitiated should know about,
 high-held hands tapping drumbeats rhythmically,
 or tinny cymbals rattling noises out of their bronze,
 multitudes blowing their bass-drone racket,
 shrieking piccolos scraping melodies away.

These great characters decorated epically
 this coverlet enfolding the divan.
 When the young people of Thessaly were happy
 they had seen it all, they moved aside for the gods,
 resembled Zephyrus troubling a flattened sea,
 the day-break breezes swelling sea-surges,

whilst Aurora breaks before the onward-moving sun,
 so beginning softly, urged by the lightest wind –
 processing, shattered with bubbling laughter –
 the wind becoming stronger, increase on increase,
 peak and crest further away in sparkling light –
 so, departing through the palace's front-porch
 the visitors burst out, each one rushing home.
 And so, with them completely dispersed, first Chiron
 from Pelion's mountain-tops carrying country
 offerings: all the flora of Thessaly's groves
 from across the region, or beside the river's flow
 cultivated in Favonius' temperate warmth,
 these he presented bound together, unsorted;
 soothed by the heady scents the palace swooned and smiled.
 Immediately, Penios arrived from Tempe,
 Tempe, that enclave surrounded by thickest woods
 celebrated by Haemonian Dryads dancing,
 not unladen: he handed on, roots whole and intact,
 massive beeches and high laurels with straight trunks,
 alongside these offerings, the bending poplar trees burnt
 Phaeton's sibling, and flexing cypresses.
 All the walls about the palace woven with his screen
 that the vestibule be festooned in greenery.
 Next in line after him, creative Prometheus,
 scar-tissue faintly showing of long-ago
 tariffs settled, shackled hand and foot to flinty rock
 dangling above oblivion from craggy
 overhangs, then the Father of Gods appeared
 from on high, accompanied by wife and children, leaving
 Phoebus, his sister, Idanus' mountain-dweller: –
 you and your sister alike treated Peleus
 with contempt, and she snubbed the wedding of Thetis.

Once they had found their places in straight-backed ivory chairs,
 the dining tables were dressed with assorted dishes,
 then, at the same time, bodies rattling with old age,

Parcae (a threesome) recited prophesy.

Brilliant white gowns wrapped all about their shivering bodies,
falling groundward ankle-length and crimson-trimmed,
rose-coloured garlands decorated their dazzling white hair,
manipulated busily their infinite work.

The left hand grips the spindle wrapped around in wool,
the right hand nimbly teasing the fibres down, shaping
with fingers turned upward, then twisting down with the thumb,
spinning spindles around circular flywheels,
and then all the time biting and straightening the thread,
wool-fibres adhere, puckering dried-up lips
that before had roughened the now slick and supple thread.

Under their feet, safely stacked, the shimmering balls of wool,
tidied-away, wicker baskets overflowing.

As they played each strand in turn, voiced with clarity
divine hymns in prophetic melodies –
hymnals no epoch to come will prove false or untrue:

‘You, with inherited distinction exceed bravery,
mainstay of Emanthia, dearest off-spring
to Ops, listen to the Sisterhood’s prophesy
on this special day, the true source, destiny’s sequence:
quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘At last, he who grants a groom his desires will arrive,
Hesperus, this brilliant star will escort a wife
who will overcome your heart with love’s tidal wave,
happily indulging your conjugal slumbers,
encircling arms smoothly embracing necks.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘No palace has sheltered a love as strong as this,
no lovemaking has enjoined lovers so deeply
as that binding Peleus and Thetis today.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘A boy-child unknowing fear, Achilles,
will be born, not showing the enemy his back,
but a brave chest, frequently winning long-distance
races against the trail-blazing roe.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘None of the heroes will prove his match face-to-face,
Phrygian badlands flooded with Teucrian blood
during the interminable Trojan siege,
falling to Pelops’ third-generation descendant.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘His unparalleled adventures and brilliant
feats, mothers will retell at their sons’ burials
as they pull down their untidy hair from snow-white crowns,
tearing wrinkled breasts, fists quivering.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘Like the cropper who slices as he advances,
dense wheat ripening in yellow fields under hot sun, he
wields menacing steel leveling Trojans.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘Witness to his valiant deeds, Scamander’s flow
flooding the Hellespont via every
artery, diverting with mounds of the butchered dead,
heating the conduit with carcasses.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘Finally see he will be repaid hereafter
when his circular grave in the raised tumulus houses
the sacrificed virgin’s deathly-white limbs.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

‘Then as Fate decreed the battle-fatigued Achaens
energy to sever Neptune’s enchanted

shackles, freeing the Dardanian city,
 his raised grave was flooded by Polyxena's blood, axed
 knees buckled, a sacrifice, headless.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

'Forward then, indulge the lovemaking long expected,
 bride-groom embrace the goddess happily,
 and have the bride handed on to her keen husband.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.

'Her nurse returning early the following daybreak,
 realizes yesterday's necklace no longer
 fits, nor need her mother fret over a daughter tricky
 or estranged, but imagine grandchildren.

Quickly running spindles weave complexity.'

The Parcae declared divinations long
 ago for Peleus, heartfelt prophecies.
 In centuries past deities would physically
 appear, visiting the righteous homes of leaders,
 before religious beliefs were rejected.
 Regularly the Father of Gods from his spangled
 shrine, would observe one hundred bulls axed in ritual
 sacrifice, his day of celebration.
 Regularly, roaming Liber urged before him
 raving Thyades, off Parnassus, hair
 wild, as Delphians hurried away from their city
 happily welcoming him, altars smoldering.
 Regularly, in the thick of battle, Mavors,
 or quick-footed Triton's consort, or the young girl
 of Amarynthus appeared, cheering on the ranks.
 But once the globe was polluted by criminal acts
 mortals driving just causes from envious minds,
 brothers steeped in brotherly blood-letting,
 sons failing to commemorate parents,
 fathers praying for son's funerals

to experience the delights of the virgin-bride,
a godless mother sleeping with her innocent son
sins without fear and defies the holy Penates –
so by mixing good and bad in devilish chaos
we forfeited the deities tolerances.

Thus they never descend to our celebrations,
nor tolerate direct contact with broad light of day.

Book 3**65.**

Although I'm utterly drained by grief, Hortalus,
 distracted by despair from the know-all Virgins,
 my mind's eye birthing still more stillborns for the Muses,
 vision wobbly to a vanishing-point –
 not long since a wave rose on the full flood of Lethe
 to lap my brother's death-white foot,
 snatched from my view, buried in a Trojan ditch,
 then crushed beneath the beach at Rhoetum
 * * * * *
 sentenced never to gaze on your face? Who
 I love more than life itself with a capital 'L,'
 evermore sing sad songs for your dying,
 just as the Daulian pipes between bough and shades,
 mourning Itylus she laments murdering –
 still, in the face of such deep sorrow, Hortalus,
 I will mail you these fine lines of the son
 of Battus, so you'll know you're requests weren't scattered
 to the four winds, forgotten by yours truly,
 just like an apple dispatched (registered) as a sign
 by her lover, drops 'plop' from a girl's lap,
 hid in the dress's folds covering her bosom,
 simultaneously as her mother
 enters the bedroom, bumping all along the floor,
 as a ruddy flush blooms across both girl's cheeks.

66.

He who observed the pin-prick lights of Infinity,
 who combed the stars for risings and settings,
 how the sun's fire and punishing heat is eclipsed,
 how stars click round skies through the fixed phases,
 how Trivia was relegated to Latmus,
 dear love enticing her from her orbit –
 he was Conon: spotted me at the sky's doorway
 curls from Berenice's hairstyling,
 shimmering brilliantly, she'd variously
 offered the gods lifting her arms to pray,
 at the moment the king emboldened by marriage
 set out to pillage the Syrian lands,
 sporting the dear traces of the night's encounter
 he'd fought to cast off the clothes of a virgin.
 Do newly wedded brides loathe Venus? Or do they
 upset parents' joy with crocodile tears,
 blubbering at the threshold of the marriage suite?
 As the gods' my witness, they are liars.
 I understood this to be the case from my queen's
 continued anguish as her king went to war,
 and, so you say, was left behind and grieving not
 for a marriage bed, but a lost brother.
 How to the very depths sadness ravaged your soul!
 Your heart utterly inconsolable,
 such derangement of the senses, drained of sense! Yet
 even as a bright young thing you were brave.
 Do you misremember the bold action, which saw
 you royally married, who braver dared?
 But what a send off for your man, such sad goodbyes!
 God, how many times you rubbed tears away!
 Which powerful god transformed you? Or perhaps lovers
 cannot stand the absence of the loved one?
 With that you promised me to all gods, spilt some bull's
 blood too, sealing your beloved husband's

safe homecoming. In short order he'd totted up
 the vanquished Asia against Egypt's border.
 With these conquests, I am offered up to the gods
 as pledged, a fresh sacrifice to old honour.
 Grudgingly, O queen I was parted from your scalp,
 grudgingly, I vouch by you and your crown,
 he who takes this vow in vain will reap what he sews.
 Who would choose a face-off against drawn steel?
 Even that great peak was eclipsed, there was none greater
 the glittering seed of Thia ascend,
 as the Medes cut a fresh channel, as the young
 savages' flotilla glided through Athos.
 What is a curl to do when peaks fail to steel?
 Jupiter, wipe out the entire Chalybes,
 and he who first mined the earth for iron deposits,
 who discovered the technique for wrought iron.
 Cut: that very minute my sister curls were weeping
 over my loss, when, the twin brother of
 Eithiopian Memnon showed, stretching his wings,
 the winged horse of Locrian Arsinoe
 wafts me to heaven, flitting through the darkest night
 to rest in the purest lap of Venus;
 for this task, Grecian immigrant of Canopus,
 Zephyritis, seconded her envoy;
 and then, speckled about the star-spangled cosmos,
 apart from Ariadne's gold tiara,
 affixed above, I might take my shining place,
 platinum blonde, devoted offering;
 drenched with spray on course to the houses of the gods,
 the goddess raised me, morning star with the old.
 Brushing the pin-prick lights of Virgo and raging
 Leo, nearby Callisto, Lycaon's child,
 I click into my place, heading languid Bootes,
 who drops, dips last minute, merged with the Deep.
 Despite the gods tramping over me through the night
 I'm restored by break of day to Tethys –

with your permission, Rhamnusian girl, allow
me to say, without dread of truth-telling,
not if the stars shred me with malicious whispers,
simply unlock what is stored in my heart –
I take little pleasure, tormented apart
parted forever from my queen's coiffure;
formerly, as a virgin, she abstained wifely
scents, while I imbibed countless low-priced unguents.
So you, who waited for that long-desired morning,
do not give up your bodies to loving
partners untying your bodice, laying your bosom bare,
until the onyx pot offers me up
heady scents – *your* onyx upholding a true bed.
But girls who surrender themselves to grubby
adultery, ah, make sure their offerings are dried out:
I demand no spoils from the immoral.
But instead, you brides, forever grant peace and calm,
forever lasting love live in your house.
O queen, when tracing the map of constellations,
paying homage to Venus on holy days,
don't allow your lady-in-waiting go without
scents, instead shower me with endless gifts.
Damnation to the stars! I would be a royal curl,
Orion shimmer beside Aquarius!

67.

Oh, treasured by married men, treasured by parents,
 hello, and might Jove himself keep you well,
 front door, word is you served Balbus generously
 at the time when the old chap was in charge,
 yet rumour is you did for his son wretchedly,
 the old boy gone, and you the bride's threshold.
 Go on, spill the beans, why does the street say you changed,
 shirked off your vows to your elderly owner.

'This is not – with your permission Caecilius,
 my present master – my fault, which they claim,
 nor can they allege I've committed immoral acts,
 even if local gossip says so –
 because whenever something dodgy crops up
 all together people shout: "Door's to blame!"'

One simple contradiction is no substitute,
 everyone must know, be helped to face facts.

'But how? When no one enquires or takes the trouble.'

Do tell, and don't hold back on the detail.

'First things first, the tale I was handed a virgin,
 that's lies. Her last husband hadn't laid a finger;
 his dagger dressed to the left, a pendulous root,
 never pressed his shirt about the midriff.
 Yet word has it the father beat about the bed
 of his son and defiled the household.
 Either his flaming lusts had clouded his judgment,
 or the son was impotent and sterile,
 and by other means more sinuous were devised
 techniques to peel the girl's tights and pants off.'

You tell us what a fine, faithful father he was,
one who pisses in his own son's lap!

'But that's not the only thing Brixia knows of,
overshadowed by Cygnus' lookout post,
the town by which slides the Mella, golden, softly,
Brixia, loved mother of my Verona,
reports Postumius and Cornelius' love-games,
with whom the girl was crudely adulterous.
At this one is bound to say, "Door how do you *know*,
your permanent post your master's entrance,
unable to tune into the locals, and lodged
below the lintel, swung open, then shut?"
Frequently I've overheard her and faint voices
of slave-girls chatting about her vices,
naming names I've named, obviously not thinking
through I might possess either ears or tongue.
And, she touched on one I'd best keep quiet about
by name, he might just arch his ginger brows –
a tall chap once caught out by a major court case,
a made-up birth, a belly full of lies.'

68a.

The fact you are hard-pressed by the Fates and bad luck,
 dispatch this little missive smudged with tears –
 a man wracked by storms whipped up on an ocean swell,
 crying out for assistance at death's door,
 on whom sacred Venus confers no tranquil sleep,
 exiled to a cold and lonely bed;
 nor do the Muses hold much delight in fine verses
 of the Ancients, your insomniac mind
 twitching – most satisfying this: you name me friend –
 request delights of the Muses *and* Venus.
 But you may not be aware of my difficulties,
 Manlius, concluding I spurn friendship:
 I want you to know I have slipped beneath Fate's
 inundation, there'll be no gifts from me.
 With that first day I donned the manly white toga
 as my prime awakened to joyous spring,
 I acted the lover; no stranger to the Lady
 mixing care with bittersweet love potions,
 but my pursuit of *that* is lost to my brother's
 death, totally. Oh, brother torn from me,
 you, yes you brother, obliterated my spring,
 our entire inheritance alongside.
 Alongside you every good thing of mine has died,
 good things buoyed up by your love while you lived.
 Since he went I've entirely expunged from my mind
 every superficial thought or pastime.
 You write to tell me what a shame Catullus is
 in Verona where the top-drawer elite
 rub arms and legs to keep warm a lonely bed
 which, Manlius, is not a shame, just sad.
 Excuse me my failure that I cannot offer
 you the delights sorrow cheated of me.
 Now, I don't have a great library of learned writings
 to call on – I'm based in Rome: that's my home,

that is my place, where I live my life to the full,
just the one trunk of books joins me up here.
As this is the situation I don't want you
concluding I'm grudging or too tight
to fulfill either of your demands, had I means,
I would volunteer, unsolicited.

68b.

Muses, I cannot fall dumb about Allius,
 his aid and the charity of that aid,
 in case the passage of time and its obscurity
 cover with blinding night that charity,
 so I insist in telling, you must spread the word,
 ensure these sheets declaim down the Ages,
 * * * * *
 posthumous, his reputation increased,
 permit no spider work her thread out of the air
 to obliterate Ailius's lost name.
 You are aware of the sadness the duplicity
 of the goddess Amathus heaped on me,
 scolded, smoldering as the Trinacrian rock,
 or the Malian fount below Oeta
 at Thermopylae, my red eyes constantly sore
 with crying, my cheeks dowsed in showery rain,
 similarly, as from the mountain tops gleaming,
 a brook shoots across green-weeded pebbles
 to plunge vertical through precipitous gullies,
 over a busily populated
 thoroughfare, supplying refreshment to passersby
 when the baking heat cracks up ploughed fields,
 or just as are seamen buffeted by black squalls
 find a softer leeward breeze intercedes,
 reply to their pleadings of Castor, of Pollux –
 this was Allius, this was his charity.
 To a gated estate with private road he gave
 me access, a house (and mistress of that house),
 under whose eaves together we shared our lovemaking.
 Here my blinding vision with silent footsteps
 rested her dazzling foot a moment on the worn-
 smooth doorstep, tilts forward sandal squeaking,
 as long ago, consuming love for her groom drew
 Laodamia to Protesilaus'

house, a house half-built for want of blood-sacrifice
 to satiate gods of the firmament.
 I desire for nothing, Rhanusian virgin,
 without reason and the gods' permission!
 How so the hungry altars demand sacrifice
 of the true, Laodamia understood,
 husband lost, he bodily torn from her embrace
 after a first and before a second
 winter of dark nights relieved her unquenched ardour,
 so she might survive a shattered marriage,
 that the Parcae were well aware was not far off
 the second he bore arms against Troy's walls.
 At that moment, Helen's rape, Troy turned back upon
 herself the fury of the Argive leaders,
 Troy (the horror!) Europe and Asia's sepulchre
 Troy, putrid remains of men and heroic
 Deeds, which visited on my brother lamentable
 death? Oh brother ripped from me in my sorrow
 oh brother the pleasure of broad daylight buried,
 our entire inheritance alongside.
 Alongside you every good thing of mine has died
 good things buoyed up by your love while you lived,
 You now distant, not surrounded by family
 headstones, or close-by ancestral remains
 but laid out at decadent Troy, terrible Troy
 lost to a remote field, in exile's ground.
 To that city the elite flowering of Greece
 raced, abandoned their home-fires, kith and kin,
 so Paris may not take delight in the mistress
 he seized, easy, leisured, abed, at length.
 Which is why, most beautiful Laodamia,
 something more precious to you than life itself
 was torn away – your husband, the riptide of desire
 dragging you under, down the dark void
 as the Greeks speak of, close-by Cyllenean Pheneus
 the marshland is transformed to fertile earth,

the alleged son of Amphitryon, once upon
 a time reportedly pierced the mountain
 core, as he nailed the Stymphalian vultures on
 straight arrows, ordered by a lesser master,
 so the doorstep of paradise was stepped across
 by one new god, nor Hebe stay unwedded.
 But your adoration ran deeper than that void,
 trained your innocence to carry the burden.
 Not so precious to the man nearly out of time
 is the unexpected heir his daughter
 cradles, a boy at long last, matched to inheritance,
 a name inscribed to sign and seal the will
 and wipe the smiles from predatory relatives,
 scares off the bird of prey hovering overhead.
 Never did a dove take pleasure in her blinding
 lover, although hearsay says she collects
 kisses outrageously – peck, peck pecking away –
 more ardently than lascivious women.
 But on your own you overtook this passionate
 excess when you came to your white-haired husband
 my dearest gave over little or not at all
 dazzling as she slid into my embrace;
 and Amor darting around here and darting there
 radiant and blinding in saffron robes.
 Not satiated solely by one Catullus,
 we can tolerate the odd regression –
 she’s discreet – in case I seem fussy or silly:
 for even Juno, the highest on high,
 swallows her fury over her husband’s weakness,
 on hearing of Jove’s endless love antics.
 It is inappropriate to pit gods and man
 * * * * *
 * * * * *
 stop this unappealing fuss of a father.
 Indeed, she was not handed me by her father
 in a house sweet-smelling of the Orient,

but no the marvels she stole that enchanted
for me, pilfered from her husband's boudoir
this, adequate sufficiency on condition
she makes note the occasion with a white stone.
This offering, all my best effort, made of poetry,
Allius, repays your generosity,
protects your family name against long-term decay
today, tomorrow and day after day,
to this the gods will stack up more offerings just as
Themis rewarded those in the Golden Age
may you and your lady be contented with Life
and the villa where we once cavorted,
and he who matched us * * * * *
who, in my case, was the good beginning,
particularly she more than all the rest, dearest
shining planet whose life makes mine worth living.

69.

No cause for you to ponder why no lady's keen,
Rufus, to tangle her legs about yours,
Although you wear her down with the choicest of skirts
and the delicacy of lucent jewels.
What's undone you is the hot gossip all about:
a smart goat lingers, stinking out your pits.
This concerns all – hardly surprising – bestial,
which no decent woman would bed down with.
Either fumigate this olfactory pandemic,
or don't ponder why the ladies escape.

70.

My woman would marry none, so she says, other
than me, not if Jupiter pressed his case.

Declares: – what a woman pledges a keen suitor
is better scripted for air and quick streams.

71.

If the goat-stink-of-the-pits rightly afflicted one,
or crippling gout justified agony,
Your competitor who's messing with your girlfriend
has perfectly fused your complaints to a tee:
Each session he does the business he beats the pair –
the stink torments her, the gout murders him.

72.

Once Catullus was the only one who knew you,

Lesbia, you'd not hold Jove before me.

I delighted in you not simply as a man

and 'friend', but as a man with his family.

I have found you out: despite my blazing desires

you're far too trashy, and more vacuous.

"How can I know?" you inquire. Reinforcing such

a wrong, lovers lust more but are less fond.

73.

Give up the expectations, waiting on 'thank yous'
from someone, or that he can show friendship.

The ungracious are everywhere. Good deeds don't count –
au contraire – they are a drag and dangerous.

Experience tells me, whom no one has bullied
more than him; *that* one, my latest 'best friend'.

74.

Gellius was aware of his uncle's stern words
at hand-holding or smutty innuendo.

To evade these himself he 'kneaded' uncle's wife,
flipping uncle into Harpocrates.

He gained his just desserts: now, if he crams uncle's
mouth, the uncle will be stuffed full for words.

75.

Lesbia, my mind plumbed low via your weakness,
obliterated with its own duty,
neither caring for you, even though you're the best,
nor stops adoring you whatever's next.

76.

If, to recollect all the past good things he's done,
a man realises pleasure in friendship;
His covenants unbroken, nor in a cabal
used the good words of gods to exploit men,
Then, stored in the many years ahead, Catullus,
numerous good times laboured from spurned love.
For what honourable deeds can be said to be done
to anybody, all you did and said.
In total these squandered on ungracious love,
why then prolong your agony further?
Why not be strong of mind, retreat from where you are,
defeat unhappiness gods overthrow?
It's tough to sever longstanding love finally,
it's tough, somehow you need to achieve this,
This your last throw of the dice, battle to glory,
this has to be your aim, able or not.
Oh gods, if you can find pity, if you offered
relief to one in their final moments,
Gaze on my agonies, if my life resembles
purity rip out this mortal affliction,
Which seeps insinuating poison through my veins
to expel all joy from my heart's depths.
I look no more she reciprocate my feelings,
or, beyond hope, she desire chastity.
I hope for wellbeing, purged of this malady,
oh gods, allow me this for my service.

77.

Rufus, my assumed *compadre*, trusted vainly –
vainly? No indeed: my debt my ruin.

This the way you seeped in eating out my vitals.

Ah! Tearing out of me all the good things,
Tearing out, ah, viciously toxic to my life,
deathly infection of the friends we were.

78.

Gallus has brothers, who are hitched to a smart wife
for one, with a smart son for the other.

Gallus the pretty man organises a tryst,
so the pretty girl beds the pretty boy.

Gallus the simple man, blind to his own marriage:
uncle lectures on uncle's adultery.

78b.

But what gets my back up is how your stinking phlegm
has pissed on the virgin lips of a virgin.

You won't walk away with impunity. Across
Time celebrity will broadcast your name.

79.

Lesbius is a beauty. Not true? Lesbia
wants him more than you, Catullus, and your whole
Line; the 'beauty' auctions Catullus and his line,
if he gains three kisses through acquaintance.

80.

What explanation, Gellius, how your ruby lips
reflect more whiteness than winter snowfall
When you arise at crack of dawn, or the eighth
hour awakes you from long afternoon slumber?
There's something in the offing: is gossip the truth
that you gorge on the male member's wholeness?
Why of course. The busted balls of sad Victor shriek
out loud, and your milky, sodden goatie.

81.

Of all the crowd is there not one, Juventius,
a beautiful man, to whom you could forge
An attachment besides that stranger from dead-end
Pisaurum, more washed out than a flea-bitten
Statue, who you love for now, who you elevate
above us, and you blindfolded to the error?

82.

Quintius, you'd have Catullus owe you his eyes,
Or one thing as valuable as eyes,
Don't extirpate what is far more significant
Than eyes, far more valuable than his eyes.

83.

Lesbia abuses me before her husband,
 which pleases the bloody dimwit no end.
Indifferent arse. If forgetting me she were mute
 she'd be fancy-free: instead her cursing
And spitting means I nag her thoughts – more important
 she's furious. She's on fire, has to chatter.

84.

He says 'haspirations' when negotiating
aspirations, and 'hinsinuations'

Meaning insinuations – Arrius speaking

'hinsinuations' with true conviction.

I understand his mother, his freed man uncle
and his mother's parents spoke that way.

Then he was stationed in Syria, resting ears,
hearing those very words properly spoken

With no haunting worries over their missed sayings –
without warning the horrible rumour:

The Ionian Sea, as Arrius stepped off
the boat, not Ionian – Hionian.

85.

I loathe and I love. You maybe want to ask why.

I can't tell. It's under my skin and I'm wracked.

86.

Most think Quintia the best. She's fresh-faced, six foot,
upright. I'd concur on these details,
The ultimate looker – never. There's nothing sexy
to her straight back, nothing saucy or hot.
Lesbia's the best, she's the one, completely stunning,
stealing Venus's looks from everyone.

87.

Not one lady can claim she's honestly adored
as my Lesbia was adored by me.

No promise was ever so firm as that written
in the knot, by my adoring of you.

88.

What's happening, Gellius, when a man plays around
with stepmother and sister, *au naturel*?

What's happening, he won't permit uncle be a spouse?
you realize how gross an outrage is that?

So gross an outrage, Gellius, distant Tethys,
nor Oceanus, sire to Nymphs, can wash clean,

For what could be grosser, how much lower could he reach?
not if he went down and sucked himself off.

89.

Gellius is slight. Definitely. Mother so
giving, so healthy, sister so frisky,
An uncle so giving, the family a world
full of girls, no wonder he's a bean-poll.
Even though he lays a hand on what he shouldn't,
there's these many good grounds for his slightness.

90.

A magus, off spring of Gellius' damnable
intercourse with his mother – learns Persian spells:
A magus is the issue of mother and son,
if wicked Persian belief tells the truth,
So their seed with pleasing song pays homage to gods
as the omentum reduces in fire.

91.

I expected, Gellius, your fidelity,
 on this awful, this doomed love we have shared,
Not through close friendship or dependability,
 or your skills to avoid thinking lewd thoughts,
But it was obvious she, I had this 'big love'
 for, was neither your mother nor sister.
Despite intimate and longstanding acquaintance
 I couldn't accept *that* your driving force.
You believed it so. What misdemeanours bring you
 joy, which hint at evil villainy.

92.

Lesbia is constant in her abuse of me,
chatters away. I'll die if Lesbia
Loves me not. What signs? The feelings are mutual,
I abuse her – die if I love her not.

93.

I'm not much interested, Caesar, placating you,
nor bothered which side you're batting for.

94.

Nob of knobs fucks. Fucking nob of knobs? That's for sure
the saying goes: if the root fits pot it.

95.

Zmyrna, my dearest Cinna's, issued nine summers
and nine winters since she was his first thought!

For his part Hortensius five hundred thousand

* * * * *

Zmyrna will run quickly via Satrachi's waves;
grey-templed generations read *Zmyrna*.

Volusius' *Annals* will perish close by Padua,
gift wrapping mackerel for many a year

Close to my heart this little masterwork ...

let the plebs hail verbose Antimachus.

96.

If the soundless mausoleum can welcome good
and precious offerings in our anguish,
Calvus, from the desire through which we set aflame
past love, and cry for friends long abandoned,
Certainly, Quintillia suffers less sadness
at her life cut short, than joy from your love.

97.

I supposed (God give me strength) there be no difference
I breathe in Aemilius' gob or dirt-box,
The one being no fresher to the fetid other,
truth is the dirt-box is germless, gentler –
Toothless. The gob has gnashers eighteen inches long
and gums worn out as a knackered shit wagon.
And there's more: where it gapes open broad as the vag
of a mule which pisses the summer's heat.
And he's fucking all the fillies, turns on the charm,
the grindstone's where he belongs, with the ass.
Any girl touching him might kiss the shit-box of
a hangman, running with diarrhoea.

98.

Of all people, putrid Victius, the charge can
be leveled at you of vacuous chatter.

With that tongue you might, had you had half an excuse,
kiss the dirt-boxes and the farmers' boots.

If you desire the undoing of us completely,
Victius, speak up, you'll win outright.

99.

Honey-lipped Juventius, as you teased away,
mine, a kiss, sweet as sweet ambrosia.

Not without reparation: for an hour and more

I suffered the very worst of tortures,

Time told me, as I sought forgiveness, you unmoved by
my crying, your fury unabated.

At that very moment, you doused your lips with water,
and rubbed them hard with delicate fingers

To make sure you contracted nothing from my mouth,
as it were from a call-girl's pissy gob.

You were happy to quickly pass me to Love, outcast,
for unimaginable crucifixion.

The little kiss transmuted from ambrosia
into bitter as bitter hellebore.

This the price exacted for a miserable lover,
no more kisses shall I pinch of yours.

100.

Caelius desperate for Aufillenus, Quintus

for Aufillena, buds of Verona,

This one for the brother, that one for the sister:

'brotherly love' as the saying has it.

Who should I bet on? Caelius, your comradeship

invaluable, proof through fiery trials,

As yesterday's inferno engulfed my very core.

Caelius, be lucky, conquer in love!

101.

Toiling via numerous lands, over countless
seas, I arrive, brother, with this last offering,
Final tokens which the dead carry with them,
and mouth sayings above your mute remains
Hopelessly, as Fate stole away your living presence,
my sad brother, heartlessly torn from me.
In any case, please accept these tokens I offer,
as are handed over to those passed on.
Completely devastated with a brother's crying,
to the end, brother, 'ave atque vale'.

102.

If an honest comrade trusted a confidence
to one whose fealty was not in doubt,
You will discover me of that faith, Cornelius,
tight-lipped, transformed into Harpocrates.

103.

Please hand back the ten thousand sesterces, Silo,
then be hot and ugly as you choose,
Or if the cash gives you the kick, then don't come on
the pimp, bullying and loutish to boot.

104.

Do you credit me with the damning of my life,
 who is as valuable as my eyes?
Never, if I would, would my love be so extreme –
 you and Tappo make it up, out of air.

105.

Nob of knobs attempts to mount the peak of Pipla:
the Muses fork him off the tops. Down, down.

106.

When you see a lovely lad accompany an
auctioneer, one infers he'd auction himself.

107.

If a thing ever occurred, ever so wanted
to who'd dared not dream – such delightful thoughts.
So this delight purer than gold to the both of us,
Lesbia, you return to me wanting.
My wanting you returned I'd not dared to dream by
your free will. Oh, daylight lighter than light!
Who could be so lucky in love as this, who's to say
there's more good one could want from life, who?

108.

If, Cominius, now that you are old and grey,
the mob terminated your dissolute life,
Without question, first to go the tongue enemy
to virtue, thrown to the guzzling vultures,
Eyes popped out for ravens to suck down their black throats,
innards for dog food, and the wolves what's left.

109.

You hint, dearest, our love shared equally for two
might prove a lasting ecstasy – forever?

Good gods, if only her vows were possibly true,
she declares sincerely, body and soul,
so let us continue, forge ahead a shared life,
an infinite treaty between friends.

110.

Auffillena, decent call-girls are well reviewed
and fairly paid for services rendered.

You tricked me out of your bond, treated me badly,
wrong, you take, take, take, refusing to give,

A well-born girl is honest in deed, not to offer
is chastity, Auffillena, but you

Claw in the presents, withhold services, worse than
a hoarding whore, turning any trick for trade.

111.

Aufillena, for a wife to be happily
co-habiting with a husband is best,
But it's fair enough to bed every man instead
of mothering brothers via her father.

112.

You're a man for all men, Naso, not many men
follow, Naso, man for all men – and gay.

113.

In Pompey's first consulship, Cinna, there were two
did 'business' with Maecilia: he's consul
Again, the two are constant, a thousand grown up
with each one. How generous adultery.

114.

Nob of knobs is wealthy by all accounts at Firmum,
possessing many, many wondrous things –
all the wildfowls, fish, arable, meadow, and game.

Good for nothing: expenditure outstrips means.

I don't care that he's filthy rich, if he's caught short.

Celebrate his land, so long as he's skint.

115.

Nob of knobs holds nearly thirty acres of meadow,
forty of arable; the leftovers marsh.

How can he fall short outstripping Croesus for wealth,
where this farmland possesses wondrous things,
meadow, arable, vast forests, endless wastelands
to the Hyperboreans, Oceanus?

Every magnificence, the largest yet, he himself –
no man but the scariest nob of knobs.

116.

Often with learned and straining thoughts I have tried
conjuring some lines of Battiades

To bring you round, that you desist in your attempts
to ceaselessly aim arrows at my head.

But now it is clear my work was wasted effort,
Gellius, my appeals without foundation.

The shower of your projectiles I'll side-step:
to your cost you'll be wounded by mine.

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