CHAPTER 1

Catullan criticism and the problem of lyric

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

Robert Hass, “Meditation at Lagunitas”

“CELEBRATE YOUR CATULLUS”

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

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

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

2 The danger of overcompensating for the excesses of Romantic readings, as of any earlier critical stance, is of course a real one. Wiseman (1985) 116 and Thomas (1988) 54–5 suggest that Catullans may have fallen into it long since. On Romanticism and the critical valuation of Latin literature, see Habinek (1992) and (1998) 15–33.
historical reconstruction, informed speculation, and an insistence on reading Catullus’ text as a poetry collection rather than the novelistic journal of a love affair with its entries shuffled, is one example of how much better we have done. A more recent example, to cite only one among several, is William Fitzgerald's Catullan Provocations: the work of a sensitive reader who takes poetry seriously, even as his Foucauldian resentment teases and prods us, with elegant churlishness, towards an escape from over-sentimentalizing of a poet “we have taken rather too much to our hearts.”

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

1 Wiseman, esp. (1969) and (1985).
3 Schwabe (1862), esp. 53–157, “de amoribus Catulli.” Other nineteenth century Catullans whose voices continued to resonate in the twentieth include Ribbeck (1863) and Westphal (1867).
6 The nickname quadrartavia Clytemnestra, given by Caecilius to Clodia, is preserved by Quintilian (Inst. 8.6.53). On Cicero’s smearing of her character through derisive humor in the Pro Caelio, see Austin (1960), Geffcken (1973) and esp. Skinner (1983).
own grinding behind an exalted veneration for the “tenderest of Roman poets.” Modernities and modernities: when the “long” modernity, now half a millenium old and counting, welcomed Catullus into its ranks as a printed book, what it took aboard was a text already received, with an author already precooked for readerly consumption, already constructed – even already “romanticized.”

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

Valerius Catullus, scriptor lyricus, Veronae nascitur olympiade CVIII anno ante natum Sallustium Crispum diris Marii Syllaque temporibus, quo die Plotinus Latinam rhetoramic primus Romae docere coepit. amauit hic puellam primarium Clodiam, quam Lesbian suo appellat in carmine. lasciuusculus fuit et sua tempestate pares paucos in dicendo frenata oratone, superiorem habuit neminem. in iocis apprime lepidus, in seritis uero grauissimus extitit. erotica scripsit et epithalamium in Manlium. anno uero aetatis suae XXX Romae moritur elatus moerore publico.

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

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

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

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

\[14\] Apuleius Apologia 10: eadem opera accens C. Catullum quod Lesbiam pro Clodiam nominavit.
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appeared again, this time apparently for good. From a copy of V, denoted as Λ (also now lost), we have one direct descendant (O) and two grandchildren (G and R) by a different parent (called X, also lost).\textsuperscript{17}

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

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{18} On Catullan indeterminacy, Selden (1992).

\textsuperscript{19} Gaissar (1993) 18 suggests, toward solution of the riddle, a given name of Francesco.

\textsuperscript{20} Foucault (1979).

\textsuperscript{21} Fordyce (1961) xxvi.
back to a very ancient mode of writing: a first-person inscription by which the inscribed artifact or surface is turned into a “speaking object.” Such inscriptions make sense only when attached to the objects they ventriloquize: in this case, a copy of Catullus. Ancient poetry bookrolls often bore similar prefatory inscriptions, some turning the book into a speaking object, others ventriloquized in the voice of the author. An example of the former type, written by the author himself, was attached to Ovid’s *Amores* in its second edition: *Quí modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli, totus sumus* (“We who had recently been Naso’s five books are now three”). An example of the second type is the spurious (probably non-Vergilian, that is, but genuinely ancient) opening of the *Aeneid: Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus auena | carmen* (“I am he who once composed a song upon a slender oaten pipe”).

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

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

22 Burzachechi (1962), also Svenbro (1993) 26–43, a chapter entitled “I Write, Therefore I Eface Myself.”
23 Conte (1986) 34–7 has argued compellingly that Ovid’s epigram at the head of the *Amores*, when read together with the opening of the first poem of the collection, makes an allusive gesture both toward the “fake” opening of the *Aeneid* (which Ovid must therefore have known, perhaps as the inscription beneath a portrait lozenge at the head of a deluxe edition) and toward the epic’s “real” opening. On the “fake” opening of the *Aeneid* and its (in)authentication, see Austin (1968).
24 On the (Derridean) “trace” as the textual presence of an absence, Barchiesi (1984), also Riffaterre (1980b).
and of faraway lands: does Benvenuto (Benvenuto’s Catullus) have in mind Poem 101 on Catullus’ brother’s funeral rites, or perhaps a passage or two from Poem 68? The first couplet’s joy in home-coming: might this be an echo of Catullus’ verses on his own return to Sirmio (Poem 31) or on a friend’s homecoming from Spain (Poem 9)? Possibly; but the fact is that there is no verbal affinity close enough to guarantee that Benvenuto had actually read any given poem of Catullus (though it is likely on the face of it that he wrote the epigram fresh from a reading of all or part of the collection). Certainly there are no outright Catullan allusions here, and it may be that the perceived reminiscences are instances of “readerly” rather than “writerly” intertextuality.25 The closest and most obvious model for the situation of V’s (Catullus’) return is the Odyssey, unknown to Benvenuto as a text but undoubtedly known to him as a model, just as it was known as a model to his aforementioned contemporary who, without having read Homer, would soon put a series of “Homeric” references into the mouth of Ulysses at Inferno 26.90–142.26

There is however one unambiguously clear intertextual presence in the epigram, and the reference Benvenuto makes to it is, in the most classical sense of the term, an allusion. Learned and witty, it would be tempting to call it “Callimachean” (since that is what Catullan scholars often say when they mean “learned and witty”), if only it sent the reader’s memory to any ancient text other than the one that the tradition of modern classical philology has tended to rope off and quarantine, whether for reasons of Protestant reform, of secularism or, in a word, of modernity. The reference to a gospel parable, coming at the end of the final verse, gives a pointed epigram its point, its pirouette.27 The presence of the irregular word papirus, and even more so the syllepsis upon the word’s two meanings – one common (“paper”), the other recondite (“lamp”) – performatively mark the poem’s author as doctus

25 The dichotomy “readerly”/“writerly” invokes the work of Barthes, esp. (1970) and (1973). Both “readerly” and so-called “writerly” intertextuality are of course construed in the only place they can be: at the point of reading, by the reader. The comparable distinction between “explicit” and “implicit” intertextuality, drawn by Jenny (1976), is critiqued by Culler (1981) 100–118. On the heuristic value of reintroducing intersubjectivity into a pure (Kristevan) intertextual model, Hinds (1998) 47–51.

26 Poem 101 itself makes an intertextual gesture toward the opening of the Odyssey, as Conte (1986) 32–9 has shown. See 50–1 below.

“learned”), *uenustus* (“sophisticated”), and, in short, a worthy reader of Catullus.

The epigram’s point is in fact still sharper, and cuts deeper. The “*papirus* under the bushel,” once read, retrospectively lights up the entire epigram. Recontextualized by this Christian allusion, the “distant lands” to which the epigram’s speaker had been exiled now represent, metaphorically, not merely the centuries during which there was no Catullus (manuscript), but rather the bourne of death, that place “from which,” at least in Catullus’ poetry, “they say no one returns” (*unde nagent redire quemquam*, 3.12). But Catullus *has* returned, to confound his own pagan wisdom. He is with us once more, bidding us celebrate him and call him our own, and his return, in the odd logic of Benvenuto’s epigram, has more than a little to do with the communion of saints. If such an interpretation seems a fanciful overreading, it did not seem so to the copyist of G, who in 1375 captioned the epigram: “Verses of Messer Benvenuto Campesani of Vicenza upon the *resurrection* of Catullus, Veronese poet.”28

Benvenuto’s epigram instantiates something that all poetry, all art, ultimately, lays implicit claim to (at least under a certain model of reading): the power to charm away the absence of death, daring us to resist the charm even as it flaunts that charm’s failure.29 What renders Benvenuto’s “technology of immortality” foreign to a modern classicist (to this one, at least) is perhaps precisely the fact that it is neither classical nor modern, in any ordinary sense of either term.30 We are no strangers to poetry’s negotiations with death, but in Benvenuto we miss the anxiety, the delirium, the vampirism of a Propertian Baudelaire or a Baudelairean Propertius. For such a poet as those, Benvenuto’s wordplay on Catullus’ *papirus* might have suggested another play, on Catullus’ *corpus*, and the accompanying images of corruption are unsavory ones. But if Benvenuto and his Catullus belong to a different “thought world” from ours, a world also inhabited by Dante and

nearing its historical close, there is another sense – and this is the point of reading his poem here – in which Benvenuto’s “reception” and “construction” of Catullus, no less than Squarzaﬁco’s, is fully familiar to us, and not so very different from the moist and intimate embrace in which Romanticizing novelists and poets, and (to our embarrassment) Romanticizing scholars, have clapsed Catullus, that extraordinary case among ancient poets, “one of the special lyric darlings of Europe.”31

What conclusions can be drawn from this opening look at two cardinal moments in Catullus’ reception after antiquity? For one, authors are “always already” constructed. (That much we knew already.) And if that is the case, then perhaps a second conclusion suggests that the essentialist/constructionist binarism is itself a bit facile from the outset; or at least, perhaps we have been too quick to use the terms as if we knew precisely what they meant. (No less a “constructionist” than Judith Butler has recently suggested as much.)32 A third conclusion takes the form of a question. Should we, then, as Catullan critics, (1) keep our “critical distance” from our author (which sounds proper, moral and grimly pleasureless, even if we believe in that approach’s promise to bring us eventually closer to our text rather than take us farther from it), or might we (2) ease up a bit on our modern (and Modernist) earnestness and follow Benvenuto’s advice to “celebrate our Catullus”? To explore that question, and the possibility of an answer to it that subsumes both choices, is among the aims of this study. I begin with one of the critical terms of art under which readers have most richly celebrated their Catullus.

 Splendors of the Lyric...

*Catullus scriptor lyricus*: lyric has long been a Catullan problem, or at least a Catullan issue. Whether it was so for Catullus is another question, and probably unanswerable. He specifically mentions several other kinds of poetry, but never lyric, and no extant source earlier than Jerome refers to Catullus with the epithet *lyricus.*33 On

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32 Butler, discussing the work of Irigaray in interview with Cheah and Grosz (1998) 19: “[The] utopian dimension actually led me to reconsider what it is that we’ve all been talking about under the rubric of essentialism when we use that term.” See also Butler (1993) 4–12, and de Lauretis (1998) 851–3.
33 Jerome *Chronica* 150–1H.
a pure historicizing view, ancient lyric was a category of poetry written in the strophic metres once used, or believed to have been used, by archaic Greek poets (who spoke of *melos*, never “lyric”) for songs accompanied by the lyre.34 If we apply this etymological, diachronic and ultimately anachronistic definition of a Hellenistic literary critical term to the Catullan collection, exactly three of the fifty-seven short polymeric poems qualify as lyric: the Sappho translation (Poem 51) and the malediction-valediction addressed to Lesbia in care of Furius and Aurelius (Poem 11), both in sapphics; and the hymn to Diana (Poem 34), in glyconics.35

Quite apart from the fact that the critical meaning and value of the term “lyric” is thereby reduced nearly to nil, this identification of genre with metrical form already runs aground even on its own historical terms.36 Catullus surely knew, for example, Callimachus’ fifth hymn *On the Bath of Pallas*, composed in elegiac distichs rather than hexameters, a bold and experimental juxtaposition of *forme* and *fond* in the Hellenistic mode of genre-crossing. More specifically, and closer to the case of Catullus, if “lyric” is to mean “strophic” for Roman poets, then the evidence of Horace is difficult to explain away.37 The programmatic dedication of the first three books of *Odes* seems to lay explicit claim to lyric status (*lyricis uatibus*, 1.1.35). Even if we do not interpret Horace to mean that every poem in his collection is lyric (though I suspect he does mean that), surely it would be perverse to argue that the Leuconoe ode (1.11) is not meant to be read as a lyric poem while the Pyrrha ode (1.5) is, simply because the former is in the stichic “fifth Asclepiadean” metre and the latter is in the strophic “fourth Asclepiadean.” And if lyric could be stichic for Horace, then why not equally so for Catullus, who used the fifth Asclepiadean in an abandoned friend’s complaint to Allenus (Poem 90)? And if one stichic choriambic metre is good for lyric, then why not the hendecasyllabic Phalaecian metre of the sparrows (Poems 2 and 3).

35 Quinn (1972) 31.
36 If this simplistic view of genre in ancient literature seems now to be more straw than substance, that is so thanks to such work as Cairns (1972) and Conte (1994), esp. 105–128.
37 Quintilian, interestingly and very clearly, did not classify Catullus among lyric poets (to the consternation of Havelock [1939] 175). At *Inst. 10.1.36* he names Catullus (along with [Furius] Bihaculus and Horace) among Roman exponents of *tambus*, and in the next sentence pronounces Horace “basically the only [Roman] lyric poet worth reading” (at *lyricorum idem Horatius fere solus legi dignus*).