

Henry Stead, *A Cockney Catullus: The Reception of Catullus in Romantic Britain, 1795-1821*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 339. £65. ISBN 9780198744887.

In this latest addition to Oxford's *Classical Presences* series, Henry Stead tracks Catullus' 'turbulent journey into the British classical canon through the stormy seas of Romantic-era Europe' (1). Catullus, on Stead's reading, comes by the epithet 'Cockney' in two ways. First, the Romantic spike in Catullus' literary stock was facilitated largely by members of the so-called 'Cockney School'. Second and more fundamentally, the qualities that distinguish him from the Latin canonical mainstays Virgil and (at least in the *Odes*) Horace – Hellenistic Greekness, aggressive obscenity, political satire, and frank celebration of things like sex and love, male friendship and sociality, emotion, paganism, idleness, and flouting gender norms – all conspired to align Catullus with the period's alternative and countercultural voices.

In Chapter 1, 'Catullus Unchained', Stead examines the two English versions of Catullus whose dates of publication frame his study. John Nott's anonymously published 1795 translation, less poetically ambitious and now less familiar than Charles Lamb's 1821 version, turns out to have been the far more interesting and influential achievement. Bilingual, with Latin text facing a workmanlike verse translation and (accessible) scholarly notes underneath, Nott's edition made *all* of Catullus available to a growing and diverse body of readers seeking knowledge chiefly as a means of social advancement. While cleaning up the dirty bits in translation – rendering e.g. Poem 16's threat of anal and oral rape as 'I'll treat you as 'tis meet' and concealing the gender of the boy toy Juventius – Nott also, as Stead shows, always left enough clues to alert a curious reader, and to open up the possibility of sympathetic readings of poems that cheerfully flouted every established norm. The glossy surface of Lamb's translation, with the nasty poems omitted altogether, seems by contrast a throwback (minus the literary excellence) to the gentlemanly style of polite letters embodied in the epic Englishings of Dryden and Pope. Lamb's translation project, Stead shows, was less a reflection of a widespread conservative cultural turn than is often thought and was even lambasted by one contemporary critic as 'absolute murder' (65-66).

Chapter 2, 'Catullus 64 in Translation and Allusion', begins by comparing two Romantic translations of the miniature epic on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. Frank Sayers' 1803 'free imitation' in heroic couplets bespeaks the influence of Ovid's *Heroides* and German drama by its intimate psychological interest in Ariadne's half-awake state of consciousness, while Sir Charles Alexander Elton's 1814 blank verse translation proceeds by 'unwrapping' the meaning and syntax of the Latin, often in pedantic detail. Stead here complicates the tidy binarism imposed by the translation theories of Lawrence Venuti. 'Domestication,' Stead insists, 'does not always work in favor of the hegemonic classes' (121), and Elton succeeds not so much in 'foreignizing' Catullus as in showing 'what it was like to translate a Catullan poem if you had been to Eton' (122). The rest of the chapter spotlights allusions to Catullus 64 in Thomas Love Peacock's *Rhododaphne*, Keats' *Endymion*, and Hunt's *Bacchus and Ariadne*.

The 'Non-Cockney Responses to Catullus' surveyed in Chapter 3 include translations and poems by Landor, Wordsworth, Thomas Moore, and Byron. A high point here is Stead's reading of the Catullan borrowings in Byron's Latin elegy (discovered in 1974) on the death of his beloved John Edleston. The chapter ends by studying some reactionary appropriations of Catullus in the *Anti-Jacobin*, where the poet's 'openly affectionate and normatively effeminate style' (207) is parodically aimed at pro-revolutionary Romantics like Erasmus Darwin.

In Chapter 4, 'Catullus the Reformer: Leigh Hunt's Reception', Stead presents the king of the Cockneys wielding Catullus (often mediated through Nott) as a powerful implement for activist intervention. In translations published in *The Examiner* and elsewhere, Hunt is shown teasing out the countercultural potential implicit in Catullan sociality and affect, through diction that draws those aspects of his poems into the sphere of Cockney 'talk' and 'cheer'. The chapter closes strikingly with Hunt's use of Poem 63, on Attis the self-castrating devotee of Cybele, as a reflection first on Primitive Methodist 'ranters' and later on the last of the great Italian castrati.

Chapter 5, 'Keats' Catullan Samphire', concludes the book with new perspectives on how the most famous of the Cockney poets read Catullus: knowledgeably, in Latin (having mastered the language at Enfield by translating the entire *Aeneid*), and with a keen ear that sometimes manifested itself in sonic allusion to the original text.

With sensitive critical alertness and in an engaging post-ironic style warmed with a generous measure of the 'cheer' and sociality he imputes to the best Cockney readers he studies, Stead tells an important story about how Catullus came to look the way he looks now. It is a story that will interest classicists, comparatists, and translation theorists as well as literary historians.

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