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Julia Haig Gaisser, *Catullus. Blackwell Introductions to the Classical World*. Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Pp. x, 243. ISBN 9781405118897. \$99.95.

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One of the best books ever to have been written on Catullus came from the pen of J. H. Gaisser (*Catullus and His Renaissance Readers*, Oxford, 1993). She is also the author of several monographs and articles on the same poet, as listed in the bibliography (p. 229, to which should be added her article "Picturing Catullus", *CW* 95.4, 2002, 373-85). At the same time, the recent *Companion to Catullus* edited by M. B. Skinner (Blackwell, 2007) is a fairly comprehensive work. Was, then, another survey of Catullus really necessary? In view of this essay, which I have devoured in just a few days (I am reminded of books like E. Fraenkel's *Horace* or *The Classical Text* by E. J. Kenney), my answer is a resounding 'yes'. Gaisser has taken numerous diverse studies and managed to synthesize in little over 200 pages (*unum e pluribus*) all that can be said in a simple, direct, didactic and scientific manner about Catullus and his work. The book is aimed at "people who like poetry--in any language" (p. ix). And also at students, both under- and post-graduates, as well as scholars, whether classicists or not. Such a simple and yet profound book could only have been written by someone with the authority conferred by a detailed knowledge of Catullus' work, its transmission and its reception over the ages. With a good text of Catullus at hand (Mynors or Goold) and this model interpretive essay, *quis me uno uiuit felicior?*

In the introduction (pp. 1-21) Gaisser notes the fragments that constitute Catullus' biography, summed up in a single paragraph on p. 4; she places Catullus in his historical context at the end of the Roman Republic: Politics ("Rome in the 50s B.C. was a large, dirty, rich, violent, exciting city, the head of an increasingly far-flung empire...", p. 6), High Society (Catullus was no frivolous youth, but a young man who had opted for the private in a life filled with *otium* in preference to a public life devoted to the *negotia* [agriculture, commerce, a military career, politics] of traditional Romans), Sexual Attitudes (freedom for the man, control for the woman), New Poets and Poetry (Calvus, Cinna, Parthenius, Alexandrianism), and Conclusion. The notes are relegated to the end of each chapter in order, I presume, not to hinder the continuous reading of the body of the main text. For note 37 on p. 21, add also J. M. Trappes-Lomax, *Catullus, A Textual Reappraisal*, Swansea, 2007, pp. 269-270.

The first paragraph of the second chapter ("Poetry Books", pp. 22-44) sums up in a masterly fashion Catullus' opening programmatic poem. It is worth citing in full as it demonstrates that difficult simplicity of exposition that is within the reach of only a very few scholars. After the Latin text and its English translation she states: "This poem, placed at the beginning of Catullus' book, announces his literary program, explaining his aesthetic principles and telling us what to expect in the poetry that follows. The program is not set out as a manifesto of abstract ideas. Rather, it emerges as a concrete demonstration from the poem itself. Each detail of structure, theme, language, and technique illustrates Catullus' conception of poetry and how it should be written. The poem, like many in Catullus, possesses a high degree of what we might call poetic economy. In only ten verses Catullus describes his book (*libellus*), dedicates it to Cornelius Nepos (and tells us why), describes Nepos' literary work, and hopes that his own *libellus* will last "for more than a single age". These ideas follow each other easily and naturally, almost casually, but

the underlying structure is anything but casual. Everything revolves around the two figures of Catullus and Nepos, their books, and their literary and perhaps personal friendship" (pp. 22-23). In the following pages Gaisser goes on to show us how the poetry of Catullus circulated in Rome, how his poems were read--preferably out loud, even when the reader was alone--and how he made the switch from papyrus to codex.

In the course of chapter 3 ("The Catullan Persona", pp. 45-71) Gaisser explains the mask that Catullus has fashioned for himself, as opposed to the Catullus of real life, of whom we know practically nothing. In his poems Catullus presents himself to us as a defender of his masculinity (16), as a practitioner of the urban etiquette of his day (109) and as a passionate lover: heterosexual with Lesbia (8) and homosexual with Juventius (24 and 99). A real character of poetic fiction.

From content in the preceding chapters Gaisser moves on to form in chapter 4 ("What Makes It Poetry", pp. 72-99). And to capture all the nuances of the oral poetry of Catullus, there is no way to avoid reading his poems aloud, because "reading Catullus with the eye is like studying the libretto of an opera without listening to the music" (p. 73). In a straightforward manner Gaisser introduces the reader to some elementary notions of Latin pronunciation, prosody and metrics. She offers an overview of the metres used by Catullus: Phalaecean Hendecasyllable, Sapphic Strophe, Iambics, the tricky Galliambic, Dactylic Hexameter and Elegiac Couplet. She goes on to study Catullan vocabulary in the Polymetrics (diminutives, the language of social performance [*lepidus*, *venustus*, *facetus*, *elegans*] and vulgarisms), in the Long Poems (Grecisms, diminutives and compounds), and in the Epigrams (obscenities, vulgarisms, ordinary and neutral language). In short, as Gaisser herself states, all poetry must have "sound, rhythm, language and something to say" (p. 97).

However, it is not sufficient to construct blocks of poetry with sounds, words and rhythmic effects; it is also necessary "to consider the poems from an architectural point of view ("Poetic Architecture", pp. 100-132). The structures of the Catullan poems are formed in four ways: "by repetition, by using blocks of text, by presenting a sequence of temporal or spatial movements, and by deploying the question-and-answer template" (p. 101). Repetition, often in the form of ring composition (cf., e.g., poem 13, 46), can appear in the ideas, the words, the phrases or in whole lines. Blocks of text are built by means of the repetition of lines and phrases, as in the wedding songs (61, 62), where the blocks appear as stanzas. In some cases it is time (101) and space that mark the sequence of the poem (4, 64), while on other occasions the poem is constructed around a question, explicit or implicit, and its response, a very frequent technique in the epigrams (79, 85, 89, etc.), though one also present elsewhere. Examples are immediately given of all of this in certain poems, but one which stands out above the rest is the study of the structure of poem 68b as a "Chinese Box of five rings: the Allius ring (41-50, 149-160), the ring devoted to Catullus (51-69, 135-48), the Lesbia ring (70-6, 131-4), the two parts of the Laodamia ring (77-86, 105-30), the Troy ring (87-90 and 101-4), with the heart of the elegy consisting of Catullus' lament for his brother in lines 91-100. In note 12 on p. 130 read *The Poems of Catullus*, the correct title of the bilingual edition by P. Green (Berkeley, 2005), who translated "and the milked sperm-stains round (not around) your lips" (p. 109).

I was afraid that in chapter 6 ("Songs for Mixed Voices: Allusions, Intertexts, and Translations", pp. 132-65) Gaisser might have excessive recourse to theoretical approaches to the work of the very direct and sensitive poet of Verona, but my fears proved unfounded, since, although Gaisser masters the "growing bibliography of important theoretical discussion", the sections of this chapter are easily understandable: "Signpost of Allusion (Poems 70 [Catullus and Callimachus] and 101 [Homer, Catullus, and Vergil])", Translations and Cover Letters: Poems 50, 51 (Sappho and Catullus), 65, and 66 (Callimachus and Catullus), Time after Time (Medea and Ariadne in Poem 64), dealt with in a previous article (*AJPh* 116, 1995, 579-616). And here once more her introductory paragraph exudes profound and comprehensive simplicity in the definition of epyllion: "An epyllion (the term is modern) is a miniature epic, a poem in epic meter (dactylic hexameter) in hundreds rather than thousands of verses, and often on an "unepic" theme -not heroic adventure, but unhappy or even criminal love, with emphasis on a heroine and her emotions. Catullus' poem is the only surviving neoteric epyllion, but from both Alexandrian and

later Roman examples it is clear that epyllia tended to feature certain formal elements, the most common of which is a story within a story, sometimes narrated by a character, sometimes presented in an ephrasis (description of a work of art)".

The last two chapters (7: "Receiving Catullus I: From Antiquity through the Sixteenth Century", pp. 166-93, and 8: "Receiving Catullus 2: England and America", pp. 194-221) were areas covered more completely in her previous monographs *Catullus and His Renaissance Readers* (cf. her "Catullus in the Renaissance", in Skinner, *Companion to Catullus*, pp. 439-60) and her *Catullus in English* (Penguin, 2001; read also her "Picturing Catullus", cited above).

There follow two brief Appendices on Catullus' Meters (p. 222) and a Glossary of Metrical and Rhetorical Terms (pp. 223-240). The bibliography should, in my view, have included the textual commentary by John M. Trappes-Lomas, *Catullus. A Textual Reappraisal*, Swansea, 2007. On p. 225 *Catulle* should be in capitals (*Les Amours de Catulle* by Jean de Lachapelle).

The volume closes with a valuable "General Index" (pp. 235-241) and a useful "Index of Catullus's Poems", where it can be seen that a number of poems have neither been commented upon nor cited individually: 25, 34, 40, 44, 55, 56, 59, 60, 71, 76, 82-83, 94, 98, 100, 103-108, 111-112. I find it surprising that the Hymn to Diana (34) and poem 76, which is regarded as crucial for an understanding of the transition from epigram to love elegy, have not been analysed in this book, which I consider the best existing survey on Catullus, even if the volume was surely deserving of greater care and attention as far as the binding and the quality of the paper and the hard cover are concerned.¹

Notes:

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