Alessandro Fo, with contributions by Alfredo Mario Morelli, Andrea Rodighiero, *Gaio Valerio Catullo, Le poesie*, Torino: Einaudi, 2018, clxiv+1488 pp., € 58,00, ISBN 978-88-06-22359-5.*

Catullus dedicated a *lepidus nouos libellus*, a "neat little new book" to Cornelius Nepos. His poem of dedication now stands at the head of a collection that is probably not identical to that *libellus*, but it is still fairly thin. Alessandro Fo's bilingual edition with introduction and commentary, published in a prestigious Italian collection of literary, historical and religious texts, devotes one thousand and five hundred densely printed pages to Catullus' slender collection. While its size is a drawback, the erudition, the sound judgment, the comprehensive vision and the outstanding literary sensibility of its editor make it one of the most important publications to have appeared on Catullus in recent years.

At the core of the volume there stands a Latin text of the poems of Catullus with a new Italian translation on the facing pages (pp. 1-315). There follows on pp. 317-19 the text and translation of the surviving fragments of Catullus that conserve passages from lost poems (fragments I-III Mynors); the two fragments that engage in paraphrase rather than quotation (fragments IV-V Mynors) are omitted. The text is followed (at pp. 321-7) by the Greek models of Catullus 51 and 66, namely Sappho fr. 31 Voigt and Callimachus fr. 110 Pfeiffer, with an Italian translation by Andrea Rodighiero.

While the Latin text of the poems lacks a critical apparatus, it amounts to a new edition that diverges from R.A.B. Mynors' Oxford Classical Text of 1958 in about one hundred places, which are discussed in the introduction (pp. lxxiii-cxxx). In poems 63 and 66, Fo has followed broadly the recent editions of Luca Morisi and Nino Marinone.[1] Elsewhere, he has created his own edition, displaying notable autonomy and critical skill and an outstanding attention to detail. He tends to avoid printing manifestly corrupt readings at the price of adopting a doubtful reconstruction, is doubtful, but the need for a legible text is understandable in an edition that

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[1] L. Morisi, ed., *Catullo: Attis (carmen LIII)*, Bologna 1999; N. Marinone, ed., *Berenice da Callimaco a Catullo*, Bologna 1997 (ed. 2).

is accompanied by a literary translation; for the rest, his text is carefully established and somewhat conservative, especially when compared to the work of a radical critic such as Trappes-Lomax.[2] His choices and observations are thoughtful and sometimes innovative. At 27.4 he chooses to print the reading *ebria acina*, reconstructed by Haupt from the testimony of Gellius 6.20.6, on the grounds that the hiatus of *a* illustrates well the speech of a person who is drunk. At 45.8-9 and 17-18, he follows a proposal of Lenchantin de Gubernatis and prints the same words but punctuates them in two different ways, as *Amor, sinistra ut ante, / dextra sternuit approbationem* and as *Amor sinistra, ut ante / dextra, sternuit approbationem*.[3] That is an interesting way to deal with a problematic passage, but it is not convincing: the simple means of punctuation that were available to Catullus would not have made it easy for him to indicate such a distinction, and it is hard to imagine that the same words should have been thus repeated with different punctuation (or with a different interpretation intended by the author) to mean two different things. Even the exact repetition of the same words seems more plausible, in which case each passage would indicate elliptically a pair of sneezes; but textual corruption may have marred lines 8-9. And at 60.1 the manuscript O reads *montibus libissinis* and GR have *libisinis*; most editors write *Libystinis*, which was conjectured by Scaliger on the basis of Vergil, *Aen.* 5.37 *pelle Libystidis ursae*,[4] but Fo follows Lenchantin de Gubernatis in writing *Libyssinis*. That is indeed closer to the transmitted reading; however, Scaliger's conjecture is confirmed not only by the existence of Greek forms such as Λιβυστίς and Λιβυστικός, but also by the reference of Macrobius 1.17.24 to the cult of Apollo Libystinus at Cape Passero in southern Sicily.

Fo's translation of Catullus is unusual by today's standards in that he seeks to reproduce not only the contents of the poems, but also their form. He follows the distinguished Italian tradition of "metrica barbara": the use of qualitative (stress-based) metre to reproduce the quantitative (length-based) metre of classical Latin poetry. This technique works better in some cases than in others; for example, it is more suited to iambic and trochaic metres than to dactylic ones, as an alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables produces a clearer sound pattern than stressed ones followed by pairs of unstressed ones. Fo's Phalaecian hendecasyllables often work very well; "Tu, che sei il fiorellino dei Giovenzi" comes close in rhythm and in tone to *O qui flosculus es Iuuentiorum* (Cat. 24.1). Would it be worthwhile to attempt similar translations into English, and into other languages with

[2] J.M. Trappes-Lomax, *Catullus: A Textual Reappraisal*, Swansea 2007.

[3] M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis (ed.), *Il libro di Catullo veronese*, Turin 1928.

[4] J. Scaliger, *Castigationes in Catullum, Tibullum, Propertium*, Paris 1577, 45-6. In Vergil, Scaliger wrote *Libystidos*.

a stress accent?[5] The dactylic hexameters are less fluent; "Che leonessa mai te generò sotto rupe deserta" is decidedly less strong than *Quaenam te genuit sola sub rupe leaena* (64.154). Further problems arise where long syllables stand in a position in Latin in which they are rarely found in Italian. Scoliambs function reasonably well ("Così un colpo di freddo, ecco, e una gran tosse" for 44.13 *Hic me grauedo frigida et frequens tussis*); dactylic pentameters less so, especially due to the one or two syllables often added before the caesura or at the end of the verse due to the difficulty of ending a clause on an accented syllable in Italian. The results are sometimes not clearly recognizable as dactylic pentameters: at 105.2, *Musae furcillis praecipitem eiciunt* has become "a forconate lo piombano le Muse, a testa all ingiú".

Artistic fidelity to the original does not stop for Fo at the level of the metre. With great care, he even tries to reproduce the sound effects used by Catullus. Overall, his translation is attractive and precise. He is especially good at catching the Roman poet's cultured elegance, less so at following his flights of passion. One high point is the translation of poem 67, which offers an excellent rendition of the learned affectations of the lock of Berenice.

For Latinists, the greatest points of interest in this volume will be the introduction and commentary that accompany the text. The first part of the introduction ("Introduzione. Voi siete qui: un'idea di Catullo dopo due millenni", pp. vii-lv) should be read by all those who study the poetry of Catullus. It offers an important new interpretation that reflects the ideas of distinguished Italian scholars such as Franco Bellandi, Mario Citroni, Alfredo Mario Morelli and Alfonso Traina.

Fo starts out by expressing reservations towards "theoretical interpretations" inspired by "structuralism, intertextualism, narratology, feminist theory, deconstruction, and cultural studies" (p. ix). His own interpretative attitude is informed by the Italian tradition of *filologia*, which is not restricted to textual criticism, but involves a meticulous study of the text and the construction of an interpretation on the basis of the *ipsissima uerba* of the poet. This thoroughly empirical attitude of attention to textual detail pervades the entire book.

Another view called into question by Fo is the notion, common in recent Anglophone scholarship, that the first-person singular voice in the poems is wholly distinct from the real person who was C. Valerius Catullus. Fo warns repeatedly, following Traina, that "we should resist the temptation of writing «il romanzo di Catullo»", «the novel of the life of Catullus» (pp. xii, xxiii).[6] He also notes that any literary representation

[5] In English, Alfred Tennyson set a good example in his poem *Hendecasyllabics*.

[6] "Bisogna resistere alla tentazione di scrivere «il romanzo di Catullo»".

of oneself in writing is bound to transform the person of the author in some way or other (p. xii). But if we cannot reconstruct the life of Catullus because we do not have enough information about it, and if Catullus' image of himself in his poetry is likely to be somewhat different from his real self, it does not follow that there was no link at all between the real Catullus and the first-person voice in his poems. In fact there are strong indications to the contrary: Fo notes that "the guiding line has to remain that of those who observe that *ego* and *Catullus* are often identified explicitly (and always implicitly) and therefore … identifying the speaker with the author is legitimate and can be pursued legitimately until there is a specific, well-founded, philological proof to the contrary" (p. xiii).[7] This is entirely accurate in my view and it shows Fo's key strength of focusing on the poems, and his readiness to disregard interpretative proposals that do not conform to the text.

Fo refers to the light poetry of Catullus, which is for the most part occasional poetry in his view (and in mine), as well as to the carefully written, painstakingly revised Neoteric compositions of the poet and his friends (pp. xvii-xviii). This contrast between personal poems and *carmina docta* is conventional in Catullan scholarship, and yet there may be a mistake in the characterization of the second group. Did the Neoteric poets really favour slow composition and painstaking revision? The view is based on a poem in which Catullus observes that Cinna took nine years to compose his *Zmyrna* (Cat. 95.1-2) and objects to the excessive speed with which Hortensius poured forth his verses (95.3). He seems to imply that poets should not be so prolix; but does he imply that they should all be as slow and painstaking as Cinna? He says nothing of the sort; in fact, his words about the *Zmyrna* seem to carry a touch of awe, suggesting that it was unusual to work on a poem for nine years. None of Catullus' surviving poems are complicated enough to suggest such a space of composition. The assumption that the Neoterics wrote their poems slowly and revised them painstakingly may well be a mistake, a retrojection of Horace's insistence on the *limae labor et mora* (*Ars poetica* 291). As a matter of fact, Horace complains that Latin literature would be excellent if every single poet did not reject this painstaking work of revision. Even for his own generation, that is an exaggeration, as Vergil clearly subjected his works to meticulous revision; but Horace's words suggest that there was no tradition of careful revision and editing in Roman literature. In the absence of specific evidence,

[7] "La linea maestra deve a mio giudizio restare quella seguita da chi fa notare che *ego* e *Catullus* si identificano spesso esplicitamente (e a livello implicito sempre) e quindi … l'identificazione del locutore con l'autore è legittima e legittimamente perseguibile fino a concreta, fondata, filologica prova contraria."

we should not attribute such a practice to the Neoterics, who had been writing a generation earlier.

In an important section of the introduction ("Linee della poesia catulliana", pp. xli-liii), Fo tries to define the main characteristics of the poetry of Catullus. He highlights the variety of forms, styles and subject-matter within a slender collection, a variety that reflects Alexandrian influence. Especially useful is Fo's analysis, following Citroni, of the subtle irony used by Catullus, which moderates his tone and relativizes his message without undermining it. For this quality, Fo has coined the term "serietà nugatoria", "trifling seriousness". Key characteristics are summed up in a quote from Bellandi: "Catullus' playful poetry is thus a poetry that aims at gracefulness, humour, smiling irony, a cool and understated erudition, refined elegance, and avoids undue emphasis, unwieldiness, pedantry and at least intends to limit grossness and vulgarity" (p. xlviii).[8]

The next section of the introduction ("«Un sogno in presenza della ragione»: nota alla traduzione", pp. lvi-lxv) discusses the principles behind the translation. The long section on the constitution of the text has been discussed above ("Nota al testo", pp. lxvi-cxxx). The introduction closes with a "Nota metrica" (pp. cxxxi-clxiii) on the metres used by Catullus and by Fo in his translation.

Last but not least, the commentary (pp. 392-1207, with the fragments discussed at pp. 1208-21 and a brief note on the Greek models of poems 51 and 66 on pp. 1222). This is extremely rich and detailed; for example, poems 68a and 68b, which run to 160 verses, receive 85 densely printed pages of comments (pp. 958-1043).

The commentary focuses on matters of interpretation and style, but it takes in a broad range of issues including modern literature: for example, Fo quotes a thematic parallel for *carmen* 26 in Carlo Emilio Gadda (at p. 524) and free translations of poems 70 and 85 by Anne Carson (at pp. 1048 and 1103). Many notes amount to short essays on a given passage, and discuss stylistic nuances, interpretative possibilities and the contributions of modern scholarship, with generous references and quotations. Several notes are based on unpublished comments by Alfredo Mario Morelli, whose contribution is noted on the title page.

The drawback of all this will be evident: the sheer bulk of the commentary is overwhelming, and it is not easy to digest more than the notes on one or two poems at a time. The style is dense rather than verbose, a fruit of intense research that has yielded dozens of bibliographical references on

[8] "…la poesia ludica di Catullo è, dunque, una poesia che cerca la grazia, lo humour, l'ironia sorridente, la cultura disinvolta e dissimulata, il garbo raffinato e rifugge dall'insistenza fuori luogo, la pesantezza, la pedanteria e almeno nell'intenzione, la grossolanità, la volgarità…" This is a quotation from F. Bellandi, lepos *e* pathos*: studi su Catullo*, Bologna 2007, 34.

every page, and some extended quotations (see e.g. p. 407, almost half of which bears a quotation from Alex Agnesini), as well as of careful thought about most passages. The result is not an aid to reading Catullus, for which the elegant commentary of C.J. Fordyce (Oxford, 1961) is still unsurpassed, but an interpretative guide or a detailed survey of the text. Future scholars writing on Catullus will consult, grapple with, be perplexed and astounded by, and benefit immensely from, this rich, dense and unique commentary.

The volume closes with a guide to further reading (pp. 1225-8) and an impressive bibliography (pp. 1229-315). There are no indices, which is understandable in a book that is aimed at least in theory at non-specialists, but they would have made it easier to access the rich contents of this volume.

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