

BOOK REVIEWS

A Companion to Catullus. Edited by Marilyn B. Skinner. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. xxvi, 590 pages. \$191.99.

Catullus (ca. 84–54 B.C.E.) remains one of the most popular of Roman poets today, his apparent familiarity boosted by an ever-fresh supply of translations and adaptations. Though classicists generally welcome such attention for their canonical authors, the case of Catullus represents a special problem. This is well recognized by Marilyn Skinner, an influential scholar of the poet for some three decades and editor of this companion. Scholars and teachers who wish to know and explain the Catullan corpus (113 poems of varied metre, length, and subject) must overcome some cozy preconceptions. Perhaps chief among these is the idea that the famous poems describing the love affair between a young Veronese and the Roman noblewoman Clodia (pseudonym Lesbia) are just lightly fictionalized autobiography. Prevalent too is the notion that Catullus' oeuvre (and especially the short, lyric poems devoted to love, friendship and betrayal) represents an elegant but essentially frank and uncomplicated emotionality. Connected with this is the perception that he is exclusively a poet of the personal voice, by and large eschewing political interests in late Republican Rome, that most politically interesting (and unstable) of times. Censorship has also distorted our readings, either by cutting too much out or by directing too much prurient curiosity towards the prohibited racy bits. Furthermore, over against the personable, intimate construals there are approaches that see only the "learned poet" (*poeta doctus*), whose allusions to his Greek and Latin predecessors run thick and thin through various parts of the collection, sometimes calling into question whether there is much of a personal voice there at all.

In the end, it would seem that Catullus has suffered from the excessive selectivity of his readers, scholarly and otherwise. The twenty-seven chapters in this book, all contributed by "recognized and emerging authorities" (p. 2) together delineate a Catullus as whole and complete as we might have him, given the vicissitudes of time and textual preservation. The editor expects a wide readership: scholars, teachers, and their students. The book is part of the current publishing mania for companions, and Skinner says that while it was conceived first as a reference work, its contributors were encouraged "to go beyond summarizing received critical attitudes and urged to supply the reader with original insights" (p. 7). On the whole, I would say that it lives up to these goals very well. A survey of the eight unequal sections into which the chapters are distributed will give a sense of the scope and range of the volume (a detailed table of contents is available at the publisher's website).

Skinner's Introduction briefly situates the problems noted above in the framework of literary critical history, explaining how the New Historicism of the 1980's first allowed Catullus to be read with fuller insight into his socio-political context, giving rise in turn to a number of new interpretative approaches (some employed in the subsequent chapters) that foster a more integrative understanding of the collection's discrete components.

Part I, "The Text and the Collection," provides a readable account of our imperfect text and how various speculative emendations have affected its interpretation. It then examines the vexed but crucial question of whether the collection as we have it was deliberately arranged, either by the author's hand or by that of another.

Part II, "Contexts of Production," provides more than simply "background" information on the world in which Catullus wrote. T.P. Wiseman presents some recent additions to his groundbreaking research on the historical Catullus and his family. Chapters follow on the poet's political and intellectual milieu, as well as on late Republican constructions of gender. All of these chapters include detailed discussion of poems in which these matters are found to figure (sometimes in surprising new ways).

Part III, "Influences," explores Catullus' debt to his two most prominent Greek models, the sixth-century B.C.E. Sappho and the third-century Callimachus. Sappho inspired Catullus' bold metrical experiments, and he creatively translated one of her most famous poems. Here, he is also shown to adapt Sappho's postures of gender polarity to his own ends. Callimachus leaves his mark on Catullus' learned allusions to authors of the past, especially in his longer and programmatic poems.

Part IV, "Stylistics," is only partly devoted to the mechanics of poetic language. It is ultimately concerned with exploring form and genre as a vehicle of meaning in Catullus' wider literary and social contexts. Especially important here is Krostenko's chapter, which argues that certain aesthetic terms long associated with Catullan poetics have resonances in his political and social circles as well.

The six chapters of Part V, "Poems and Groups of Poems," examine alleged poems of programme, the Lesbia cycle, sexuality and ritual in the wedding hymns, intertextual liaisons between Catullus and Apollonius Rhodius in his *epyllion* (poem 64), the generically challenging poem 68, and the use of invective.

Part VI, "Reception," also includes six chapters, this time using Catullus' influence on later Latin literature (Horace, Virgil, the love elegists, Martial) and in the Renaissance and modern period as an interpretative lens.

Part VII, "Pedagogy," first examines the interpretative biases that have determined the Catullus presented in secondary schools and colleges, and then addresses ways in which teachers, made cognizant of favourite misconceptions, can teach him better in the future.

Part VIII, "Translation," concludes the collection by discussing one of the most ubiquitous and powerful, but potentially most insidious, forms of interpretation. The single chapter here focuses on the most ingrained of challenges to

would-be translators, such as culturally and historically determined diction, but it also discusses the more elusive meaning encoded in the sounds of foreign language and metre.

As with any multi-author work, the tone and methodologies of the chapters differ: some are more provocative, some more persuasive, than others. I was impressed, however, at the editorial arrangement that makes even different interpretative strategies complementary. Though the chapters can be taken up individually, to read them sequentially is to enter into a fruitful dialogue. I read parts of the book together with a group of advanced undergraduates and graduate students in a one-term seminar on Catullus. While the level of sophistication was perfect for this group, I don't think that the companion would function as well for students at lower levels, and it should not be mistaken for an introduction. It will certainly benefit university teachers, not to mention scholars (even Catullus specialists). In treating its subject, the book is quite comprehensive. Even when topics seem to have been missed (I wondered, for example, why no chapter was devoted to poem 63, the marvellous "Attis"), they are often touched on in other places, as the ample indices reveal. Each chapter is equipped with both a list of works cited, and a note on suggested reading. There is also a consolidated (and very up-to-date) bibliography. The price is prohibitive for individual users, but since the book belongs to a popular series, it is likely to be carried by well-maintained academic libraries, which can also subscribe to an electronic version.

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Home Words: Discourses of Children's Literature in Canada. (Studies in Childhood and Family in Canada Series.) Edited by Mavis Reimer. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2008, 312 pages, \$85.00.

Children's literature is probably as difficult to define as a genre as it is appealing to a number of disciplinary approaches. Almost invariably produced by authors significantly older than their audience, and with a variety of motives on the spectrum of instruction and delight, it has until quite recently largely been studied by those whose work has a vested interest in children: educators, librarians, child studies specialists ranging from day care workers to sociologists to psychologists. Lately, ironically perhaps because of the boom in popular consumption of children's literature and a concurrent crossover effect with adult readers, children's literature has become not only a hot topic but a legitimate one in literary/cultural studies, where the concern is less with how children might be encouraged to engage with the works within its broad and flexible range of definition, but with how children actually do respond to them, while all fields of study are concerned with the assumptions made about audience in the creative process.

Home Words: Discourses of Children's Literature in Canada was published in early 2008 as part of the Wilfrid Laurier University Press's Studies in Childhood and Family in Canada Series. Each of its several volumes to date takes an

interdisciplinary, theoretical approach to various issues and texts both current and historical. This volume was edited by Mavis Reimer, Canada Research Chair in the Culture of Childhood, and leading participant in the Centre for Research into Young People's Texts and Cultures at the University of Winnipeg. Several of the thirteen contributors to the eleven essays included are also participants in the CRYTC, most are in literary studies (French as well as English), although library and information studies, and non-academic creative writing are also represented. However, despite the dominant representation of English departments, the approaches are clearly those of scholars who take the possibilities of interdisciplinary studies seriously.

The essays themselves are focused around the fluid notion in Canadian children's literature of "home" as a concept: a dwelling place, a family or pseudo-family, a place of origin, a cultural context, a chosen context for a developed sense of identity or an aspiring sense of nationality (perhaps most intriguing is the difficulty in the two articles written in French of finding a suitable translation for the word "home" itself). The volume contends that its originality lies in its refusal to focus on one aspect of the area (English, French, aboriginal, traditional/"classic," contemporary, textual, visual), so that a considerable range of material is covered, even in individual articles, and notions of the child audience cover a broad range, from beginning readers (there is an impressive glossy-paper insert of full-colour illustrations from the numerous picture books discussed, including what I must confess is a favourite of this adult reader, Lois Simmie and Cynthia Nugent's *Mister Got-to-Go*) to teens. Arguably the author-audience relationship is always a problematic area in children's literature, given that the audience assumptions are always made from a vantage of greater age and experience, but areas of problematic engagement are expanded here in the treatment of, for example, both texts produced within a culture and those representing that culture through an outsider's lens (whether that lens is explicit in the text or not), and for an audience which whether intentionally or not is mostly made up of outsiders. (This problem is crystallized in Perry Nodelman's confessional introduction to his meditation on non-aboriginal literature about aboriginal life, "At Home on Native Land: A Non-Aboriginal Canadian Scholar Discusses Aboriginality and Property in Canadian Double-Focalized Novels for Young Adults." I found myself in reading this recalling dual responses to Tim Wynne-Jones's *The Maestro* when I first taught it several summers ago: one student was astonished with delight to recognize elements of Glenn Gould in a significant character, while another was dismayed at the potentially damaging, clichéd use of the drunken father the protagonist attempts to replace with the Glenn Gould figure.)

It is difficult to identify standout essays in a superb collection in which each essay attempts something of great depth and scope and singularity (even to online strategies for engaging child readers in responding to the notions of "home" explored in the volume as a whole), and where there is a refreshing lack of bandwagon jumping. However, just to suggest the range I will point to Louise Saldanha's "White Picket Fences: At Home with Multicultural Children's Literature in Canada?", which provocatively designs its textual layout to suggest clear and blurred and

almost invisible but still present boundaries, and which asks how “rewritings of ‘home’ [might] display when projected through this multicultural children’s literature where being ‘home’ in the private and personal sense becomes enmeshed with being home in the national and public sense?” (130). I will point as well to Mavis Reimer’s “Homing and Unhoming: The Ideological Work of Canadian Children’s Literature,” which traces in five novels (including Tim Wynne-Jones’s *The Maestro* and Janet Lunn’s *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*) a pattern which might on the surface simply seem an echo of the *bildungsroman* or folktale tradition of going forth (often into the wilderness) to seek one’s fortune, find oneself, or merely to get away from home, but which becomes a deeper journey in which the original “home” must be departed or escaped in order to gain the ability to construct and inhabit a new, more personally satisfactory and useful “home.” Reimer rigorously applies a theoretical discourse examining an ideological shift in notions of home/homelessness, culture, and identity, in increasingly troubled and troubling representations of youth still, as she points out, written by adults and mostly known by young readers whose lives are not so troubled as those of the protagonists of these novels.

This last point brings me to an observation made by Neil Besner in his Afterword, “Homeward Bound?,” where he brings his metacritical skills and his scholarship in Canadian literature to an overview of the project. Identifying a broad range of recent Canadian fiction aimed at an “adult” readership, including Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*, Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*, Richler’s *Barney’s Version*, much of Munro’s short fiction, and a wealth of other texts, he challenges readers to “ask whether these fictions often perform or narrate the identity-formation of young protagonists (they do), and whether there is a corollary movement in many from given bonds of filiation to chosen bonds of affiliation (there is); and whether many, if not all of these fictions present us with mobile subjectivities (they do)” (231). Much fiction represents childhood; not all such fiction assumes an audience of children. However, the issues of representation and assumption need not only be considered separately, and surely this afterword challenges future studies not only to contemplate side by side the varieties of texts considered here, but to consider these texts alongside the rich tradition and ongoing development of identity formation as a crucial element of Canadian literature itself, of fiction itself.

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