

38 Life is really a bitch for your

# THE POEMS OF CATULLUS

Cornificius, and (my god!) so boring **A BILINGUAL EDITION** and it keeps getting worse now, daily, hourly—yet have you—it would take the slightest, simplest effort—offered him any consolation?

**GAIUS VALERIUS CATULLUS** I'm pissed off with you. That much for my love, then? Please, please,

**TRANSLATED, WITH COMMENTARY, BY** spare me some small consolation,  
**PETER GREEN** words more tearful than the message on a gravestone!

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OF CATULLUS

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A BILINGUAL EDITION

TRANSLATED,  
WITH COMMENTARY BY  
PETER GREEN

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Carin's, because of so much—  
*quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli*  
*qualecumque—*

They were real people, and we should do  
our best to understand them in their own terms . . . with  
as few anachronistic preconceptions as possible. It is hard to make  
out what there is in the darkness beyond the window, but at least  
we can try not to be distracted by our own reflections.

T. P. WISEMAN,  
*Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal*

It is hard to say which is the greater danger at the current juncture:  
to condemn Catullus too hastily on the grounds that he ought to have  
conformed to a modern liberal ethics of human rights and personhood,  
or to excuse him too hastily by the stratagem of positing, just behind  
the persona, the presence of a "poet" who *did* conform to it.

DAVID WRAY,  
*Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood*

In bed I read Catullus. It passes my comprehension why Tennyson  
could have called him 'tender'. He is vindictive, venomous, and  
full of obscene malice. He is only tender about his brother  
and Lesbia, and in the end she gets it hot as well.

HAROLD NICOLSON,  
*Diaries and Letters 1945-1962*

*At non effugies meos iambo.*

CATULLUS, fr. 3

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## PREFACE

In his elegantly combative book, *Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal* (1985), Peter Wiseman wrote: “Forty-four is probably a good age to stop writing about Catullus, if not already a bit late.” Out of step as always, I find myself *beginning* to write about him when just two years short of the age of eighty. I can only plead that this vesper-tinal engagement comes as the conclusion to a lifelong love of his poetry—the epigrams and long works no less than the better-known “polymetrics”—culminating in a task as enjoyable as it was challenging: a fresh translation of the entire canon, into forms as near their originals as ingenuity, and the limitations of the English language, would permit.

I didn’t really plan this book: like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Topsy, it just grew. One thing led to another. I translated one or two of the early poems for *Southern Humanities Review*; then someone bet me I couldn’t do a version of 63, the Attis poem, into English galliambics, and that even if I did, no one would publish it. Having studied Tennyson’s *Boadicea*, which showed that English galliambics not only were possible but could be made remarkably exciting, I took the bet and won it on both counts: my version was accepted, with most flattering speed, by *Arion*. After that there was no stopping me, not even the availability of a variety of earlier translations, none of which, it seemed to me, came near enough to conveying Catullus’s (very un-English) style, rhythms, and diction to an audience unfamiliar with the original.

No one in their right mind (except egomaniac translators and fundamentally lazy readers) would actually prefer a translation, of poetry in particular, to the original; translation must always remain, in the last resort, a second-best crutch, something recognized, as early as 1568, by Roger Ascham in *The Scholemaster*. (This was not always the case, nor is it generally accepted even today: I have briefly sketched the historical antecedents below, pp. 24–30.) For this reason my version is a bilingual: the more often the reader is tempted to shift attention from right to left, from trans-



lation to text, the better I shall have succeeded in my aim. It is Catullus, not his various impresarios, whether translators, editors, or literary critics, who in the last resort merits the reader's attention.

So, who is my reader? I would like to think that the way this volume has been set up will attract as wide a readership as possible: the intelligent Latinless lover of literature who wants to get closer to a famous, moving, but difficult, elusive, and at times highly disconcerting poet; the student, at whatever level, from high school to university graduate, who is coming to Catullus through a slow mastering of the Latin language; the teacher—again at whatever level—who is guiding the student's footsteps.

It is for all of the above that the glossary and explanatory notes have been written. For these I have, on innumerable occasions, gratefully raided the works of my predecessors, above all those of Ellis, Fordyce, Godwin, Kroll, Lee, Quinn, Thomson, and Wiseman. The notes operate at a number of levels: each reader will pick and choose at need, from simple identifications to brief discussions of critical, historical, or textual problems. I am firmly convinced that the hypothetical general reader is far less scared or put off by notes and references than too many suppose. What one doesn't need one simply ignores. The selective bibliography and references cover enough current scholarship both to give a fair idea of what's going on in the field, and to provide leads into further work for those with the urge to pursue the discussion in greater detail.

My own aim has been descriptive rather than prescriptive throughout, especially where literary theory is concerned, regarding which, as a matter of policy, I carefully refrained, while engaged on my actual translation, from bringing myself up to date. When, in preparation for writing the notes and glossary, I did so, I found, to my encouragement, very few points at which I needed to revise my text or interpretation. (Like others, I have used Mynors's Oxford Classical Text as a kind of benchmark, largely because of the few conjectures it concedes; my own brief *apparatus criticus*, except in a few special instances, is restricted to the fairly numerous cases in which I diverge from it, and which are noted ad loc.).

On the other hand, I met with one or two revealing surprises, of which the most striking was David Wray's expounding, *as a novelty*, in his admirable study *Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood* (2001), the idea of Catullus's attitudes, assumptions, and behavior being predicated—with modern anthropological parallels—on his background in an aggressively public and masculinized Mediterranean society that has changed very little in essence over the millennia. Perhaps because I lived in that society myself for the best part of a decade, it never occurred to me to think of

Catullus in any other way, or to find his many divergences from modern middle-class moral attitudes a cause for concern, much less embarrassment. It is in that relaxed and uncensorious spirit that I invite the reader to study and enjoy an ancient poet who can be, by turns, passionate and hilariously obscene, as buoyantly witty as W. S. Gilbert in a Savoy opera libretto, as melancholy as Matthew Arnold in "Dover Beach," as mean as Wyndham Lewis in *The Apes of God*, and as eruditely allusive as T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*.

*Austin*

*Athens • Molyvos*

*Ikaria • Iowa City*

1992—2003

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Acknowledgments are due to *Arion* and *Southern Humanities Review*, in the pages of which earlier versions of some of these translations first appeared. I owe a very great deal to Nicholas Poburko, the managing editor of the former, and Dan Latimer the joint editor of the latter, for constructive criticism, enthusiastic acceptance, and persistent encouragement over a project which at times seemed to be taking for ever and getting nowhere: to both of them my grateful thanks. Other translations were commissioned by Professor Thomas K. Hubbard for *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents* (2003).

A substantial amount of the notes and glossary was written in the Blegen Library of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, an institution that combines unrivalled resources with a magical ambience peculiarly supportive of every kind of scholarly endeavor regarding the ancient world: my thanks to the School and its director, Professor Stephen Tracy, for appointing me a Senior Visiting Research Associate for fall 2002.

To the Main Library of the University of Iowa, with its extraordinarily rich holdings in classics and the humanities, my debt of gratitude continues to accumulate yearly; I must also record, once again, my thanks to its quietly efficient and speedy Interlibrary Loan Service, which my sometimes exotic requests have never yet defeated.

At the eleventh hour—almost literally—I came across Marlyn Skinner's brilliant and delightful monograph, *Catullus in Verona* (2003), which not only sharpened my understanding of the elegiac *libellus* at innumerable points, but also demonstrated, to my considerable surprise, that modern literary theory can be made both exciting and fun. Whenever I disagreed with her (and I often did) I still invariably learned a great deal from each encounter.

Professor Susan Treggiari read my entire manuscript, with a sympathetic but keenly critical eye, made numerous illuminating suggestions—gratefully adopted—and, more times than I care to think, saved me from the consequences of my own

ignorance or wrongheadedness. I am also indebted to the sensible recommendations of the Press's anonymous referee. But my greatest long-term debt, as always, is to my wife—a legitimate occupant of the Iowan classical academic nest in which I remain an adjunct cuckoo—who knows far more about Catullus, and Roman history and literature generally, than I do, and whose brains I have picked ruthlessly throughout this entire project.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Aesch.	Aeschylus, 525–456 B.C.E.
<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>AnA</i>	<i>Anzeiger für Altertumswissenschaft</i>
Appian	Appianos of Alexandria, fl. early 2nd cent. C.E.
<i>BC</i>	<i>Bella Civilia</i>
Apul.	Apuleius of Madaura, 125–c. 175 C.E.
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia</i>
<i>A&amp;R</i>	<i>Atene &amp; Roma</i>
Aristoph.	Aristophanes, c. 460–c. 385 B.C.E.
<i>Athen.</i>	<i>Athenaeum</i>
Aul. Gell.	Aulus Gellius, c. 125–200 C.E.
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
<i>Boll. Stud. Lat.</i>	<i>Bollettino di Studi Latini</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CB</i>	<i>Classical Bulletin</i>
Cic.	Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106–43 B.C.E.
<i>Ad Fam.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Familiares</i>
<i>Ad Q. Fratr.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem</i>
<i>Att.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Atticum</i>
<i>Brut.</i>	<i>Brutus</i>
<i>Orat.</i>	<i>Orator</i>
<i>Pro Cael.</i>	<i>Pro Caelio</i>
<i>Tusc.</i>	<i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i>
<i>Vat.</i>	<i>In Vatinius</i>
<i>Verr.</i>	<i>In Verrem</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (1863–)
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>

<i>CM</i>	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Classical World/Weekly</i>
Demetr.	Demetrius, ? fl. late Hellenistic period, literary critic
<i>De Eloc.</i>	<i>De Elocutione (On Style)</i>
Dion. Hal.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, fl. late 1st cent. B.C.E.
Eur.	Euripides, c. 480–407/6 B.C.E.
<i>Androm.</i>	<i>Andromache</i>
<i>Med.</i>	<i>Medea</i>
<i>GIF</i>	<i>Giornale Italiano di Filologia</i>
<i>G&amp;R</i>	<i>Greece &amp; Rome</i>
<i>GR&amp;ByS</i>	<i>Greek Roman &amp; Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Historia</i>
Hom.	Homer(os), fl. ? 8th century B.C.E.
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
Hor.	Quintus Horatius Flaccus, 65–8 B.C.E. [Horace]
<i>AP</i>	<i>Ars Poetica</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satires [Sermones]</i>
<i>HSCPh</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
Hyg.	Hyginus, ? fl. 2nd century C.E.
<i>Astr.</i>	<i>Astronomica</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
Just.	M. Junianus Justinus [Justin], ? 3rd century C.E., epitomator of Pompeius Trogus
<i>LCM</i>	<i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i>
<i>LEC</i>	<i>Les Études Classiques</i>
Livy	Titus Livius, 59 B.C.E.–17 C.E.
L-P	E. Lobel, D. L. Page, <i>Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta</i> . Oxford 1955.
Lucr.	T. Lucretius Carus, c. 94–?51 B.C.E.
Macrob.	Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, fl. 5th century C.E.
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Saturnalia</i>
Mart.	Marcus Valerius Martialis, c. 40–c. 102 C.E.

<i>MH</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
<i>Mnem.</i>	<i>Mnemosyne</i>
Nepos	Cornelius Nepos, biographer, c. 110–24 B.C.E.
<i>Att.</i>	<i>Atticus</i>
Ovid	Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 B.C.E.–18 C.E.
<i>AA</i>	<i>Ars Amatoria</i>
<i>Am.</i>	<i>Amores</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Heroides</i>
<i>Tr.</i>	<i>Tristia</i>
<i>PCPhS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
Petron.	T. Petronius Arbitrator, d. 66 C.E.
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satiricon</i>
<i>Philol.</i>	<i>Philologus</i>
Pind.	Pindar(os) of Thebes, 518–c. 438 B.C.E.
<i>Isthm.</i>	<i>Isthmian Odes</i>
<i>Nem.</i>	<i>Nemean Odes</i>
Plat.	Plato, 429–347 B.C.E.
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
Plaut.	T. Maccius Plautus, d. 184 B.C.E.
<i>Poen.</i>	<i>Poenulus</i>
Plin.J.	Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, 61–114 C.E.
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
Plin.S.	Gaius Plinius Secundus, 23–79 C.E.
<i>NH</i>	<i>Natural History</i>
Plut.	Plutarch (L. Mestrius Ploutarchos), c. 50–c. 120 C.E.
<i>Brut.</i>	<i>Life of Brutus</i>
<i>Caes.</i>	<i>Life of Caesar</i>
<i>Cic.</i>	<i>Life of Cicero</i>
<i>Pomp.</i>	<i>Life of Pompey</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	<i>Life of Romulus</i>
<i>Sull.</i>	<i>Life of Sulla</i>
Porph.	Porphyry of Tyre, 234–305 C.E.
Prop.	Sextus Propertius, b. c. 50 B.C.E.
Ps.-Virg. Cat.	Pseudo-Virgil, <i>Catalepton</i> (in Appendix Vergiliana)
Quintil.	Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, c. 35–c. 95 C.E.
<i>Inst. Orat.</i>	<i>Institutio Oratoria</i>
<i>QUCC</i>	<i>Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica</i>

<i>RhM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum</i>
Sall.	Gaius Sallustius Crispus, 86–35 B.C.E.
<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Bellum Catilinae</i>
Sen.	L. Annaeus Seneca, c. 50 B.C.E.–c. 40 C.E.
<i>Controv.</i>	<i>Controversiae</i>
<i>SLLRH</i>	<i>Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History</i>
<i>SO</i>	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>
Soph.	Sophocles, 496/5–406 B.C.E.
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Philoctetes</i>
Suet.	Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, C.E. 70–c. 130
<i>De Gramm.</i>	<i>De Grammaticis</i>
<i>Div. Jul.</i>	<i>Divus Julius [Life of Caesar]</i>
<i>Syll. Class.</i>	<i>Syllecta Classica</i>
Tac.	P.? Cornelius Tacitus, 56–c. 118 C.E.
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annales</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogus de Oratoribus</i>
<i>TAPhA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
Virgil	P. Vergilius Maro, 70–19 B.C.E.
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>
<i>WJA</i>	<i>Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>WS</i>	<i>Wiener Studien</i>



# INTRODUCTION

## LIFE AND BACKGROUND

We know very little for certain about Catullus himself, and most of that has to be extrapolated from his own work, always a risky procedure, and nowadays with the full weight of critical opinion against it (though this is always mutable, and there are signs of change in the air). On the other hand, we know a great deal about the last century of the Roman Republic, in which his short but intense life was spent, and about many of the public figures, both literary and political, whom he counted among his friends and enemies. Like Byron, whom in ways he resembled, he moved in fashionable circles, was radical without being constructively political, and wrote poetry that gives the overwhelming impression of being generated by the public affairs, literary fashions, and aristocratic private scandals of the day.

How far all these were fictionalized in his poetry we shall never know, but that they were pure invention is unlikely in the extreme: what need to make up stories when there was so much splendid material to hand? Obviously we can't take what Catullus writes about Caesar or Mamurra at face value, any more than we can Byron's portraits of George III and Southey in "The Vision of Judgement," or Dryden's of James II and the Duke of Buckingham in "Absalom and Achitophel." Yet it would be hard to deny that in every case the poetic version contained more than a grain of truth. If we treat Catullus's character-gallery of friends, enemies, and lovers (as opposed to his excursions into myth) as creative variations on an underlying basic actuality, we probably won't be too far from the truth.

So, first, dates. St. Jerome records Catullus's birth in Verona under the year 87 B.C.E., and his death in Rome either at the age of thirty or in his thirtieth year, in 57. His age at death is likely to be at least roughly correct: Ovid (*Am.* 3.9.61) also refers to his youth in this connection, and, as Fordyce (1961, ix) reminds us, "the age at which a man died was often recorded on his tombstone." On the other hand,

Jerome's date of 57 is demonstrably mistaken: in poems 11, 12, 29, 45, 55, and 113, Catullus refers to known events which show conclusively that he was alive as late as 54 (Skinner 2003, xx and 186 n. 4; Thomson's arguments [1997, 3–5] for 53/2 remain speculative). Nepos (*Att.* 12.4) notes that Catullus was dead by thirty-two, but gives no indication of the exact date. This has encouraged speculation. The generally accepted, and convincing, solution to this problem is that Jerome or his source confused the year of L. Cornelius Cinna's first consulship (87) with that of his fourth (84), and that Catullus's life can be dated 84–54. This makes him a couple of years older than his great friend and fellow poet, Calvus, and—if we accept the identification of “Lesbia” offered by Apuleius (*Apol.* 10)—ten years younger than his *in-amorata* Clodia Metelli. It also makes him the contemporary of Lucretius, Cornelius Gallus, and just about every major protagonist, cultural or political, of Roman society during the fraught years of the late Republic.

Many of these leading figures he knew personally, and we catch tantalizing glimpses of them in his verse. During the winter intervals between his Gallic campaigns, probably from 58/7 onwards, Caesar was a regular guest of Catullus's father in Verona (Suet. *Div. Jul.* 73); the relationship survived Catullus's acidulous attacks (see 29, 54, 57, 93, with notes). This hints at disagreements between father and son; also, unless he had released his son from paternal control by a fictitious bill of sale (*emancipatio*), Catullus's father still held him *in potestate*, so that Catullus would have been living in Rome on an allowance (Skinner 2003, xxi). That the family entertained Caesar, and (it would appear from 31) owned much if not all of the Sirmio peninsula, indicates very substantial assets.

Catullus's friends and acquaintances are such as we would expect from his background. Asinius Pollio (12), some eight years younger than Catullus, was to become a distinguished Augustan historian, like Quintilius Varus the friend of Virgil and Horace, and the builder of Rome's first public library. Catullus's dedicatee Cornelius Nepos was a prominent biographer. M. Caelius Rufus, quite apart from his role in *l'affaire* Lesbia, was one of Cicero's more entertaining correspondents. L. Calpurnius Piso (28, 47) may have been the original owner of the House of the Papyri in Herculaneum, with its collection of texts by Philodemus. Catullus's close friend Licinius Calvus was a prominent lawyer as well as a poet. The poet's relationship to Cicero remains enigmatic, largely on account of 49: how ironic was he being there? The relentlessly savaged Mamurra (29, 41, 57, 94, 105, 114, 115), labelled by Catullus “The Prick,” was Caesar's very efficient chief supply officer in Gaul. How well Catullus knew Pompey is uncertain, but they must have been at least on speaking terms. L. Manlius Torquatus, whose epithalamium (wedding hymn) Catullus wrote,

belonged to one of the oldest and most distinguished families in Rome. The cast of characters in the Catullan corpus may be embellished, but is certainly not invented.

Catullus's own family was provincial and, in all likelihood, equestrian: upper-class but not really aristocratic, well off through business connections but not wealthy by Roman standards, and certainly not part of the intensely political group, with a consular tradition going back several centuries, to which Clodia and her siblings belonged. (She was always a cut above Catullus socially, and at least until 56 had far more political clout.) In 57 Catullus went to Bithynia on the staff of C. Memmius (see 10.28), visiting en route the grave of his prematurely deceased and much-loved brother in the Troad (65, 68a and b, 101). He returned from this attachment in the spring of 56. Shortly before his death (? 54) he seems to have been contemplating another such posting, either with Caesar in Gaul or with the millionaire Crassus on his ill-fated Eastern campaign. Bearing in mind the brief lives of both brothers, the hacking cough to which Catullus seems to have been a martyr (44), his references—not necessarily or exclusively metaphorical—to a chronic and unpleasant malaise (76, ?38), his febrile intensity (50), and, not least, his intense and debilitating erotic preoccupations, it seems distinctly possible that tuberculosis (one of the great silent scourges of antiquity) ran in the family and was the cause of his death.

The old Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times,” certainly applies to the thirty-odd years of Catullus's existence. His first conscious years witnessed the civil war in Italy that left Sulla as dictator. Spartacus's slave revolt, not to mention the trial of Verres for gross abuse of office in Sicily, took place during his early adolescence. He probably arrived in Rome (which as an adult he regarded as his true home, 68a.33–36) when he was a little over twenty (63 B.C.E.), about the time of the Catilinarian conspiracy suppressed by Cicero. Shortly afterwards came the scandal caused by Clodius Pulcher's gate-crashing the women-only rites of the Bona Dea in Caesar's town house—about the same time as Catullus first made the acquaintance of the gate-crasher's already notorious sister.

In 60 came the formation of the first alliance between Caesar, Pompey, and the millionaire Crassus, and the beginning both of the Civil War (in Asinius Pollio's reasonable view, Hor. *Odes* 2.1.1–2) and of Caesar's inexorable climb to near-absolute power, a progress watched by Catullus and his friends with mounting alarm. (And Catullus had the chance to observe the great man at close quarters: it was now that Caesar's winter visits to the poet's father in Verona took place.) While Caesar campaigned in Gaul, Clodius and Milo organized rival street-gangs in the capital: Catullus's intermittent love-affair with the gangster-tribune's sibling (and reputed bed-fellow) could never be really clear of politics.

Despite his protestations, he may not have been entirely sorry to leave for Bithynia in 57; Caelius Rufus had become Clodia's chief lover the year before. However, he dumped her during Catullus's absence abroad. Catullus returned to Rome soon after Caelius's trial, notable for Cicero's lethal exposure of Clodia (who had instigated the charges largely out of pique) to public ridicule of the worst kind. Catullus's own attitude to her seems to have vacillated. The year of his death saw renewed, violent rioting in Rome. One way and another, Britain or Syria may well have looked preferable at the time. *Dis aliter visum*: the gods and, probably, illness decided otherwise. Mulroy's suggestion (2002, xxvii) that Caesar could have had Catullus done away with makes no sense; had this happened, it would have been a scandal more notorious than Ovid's subsequent exile, and would have furnished Caesar's many enemies with some highly damaging propaganda against him, of which there is no trace.

## LESBIA/CLODIA

Apuleius (*Apol.* 10) professed to identify, not only Catullus's "Lesbia," but also several other cryptonymic *inamorate* of the Augustan elegists (e.g., the "Cynthia" of Propertius). Where he obtained this information (perhaps from the literary section of Suetonius's *De Viris Illustribus*) is unknown. He claimed that Lesbia's real name was Clodia, but unfortunately failed to say which Clodia. It might, however, be argued that in the context this implied an obvious identification, much as the mention of Salamis in connection with the Greco-Persian Wars does not need a caveat explaining that the reference is not to the city on Cyprus. Certainly this is how it has been taken by most scholars from the Renaissance onwards: the assumption is that Catullus's lover was that notorious aristocratic lady Clodia Metelli, married until 59 to her cousin Q. Metellus Celer (see glossary s.v. Caecilius III), the target of Cicero's scathing and often ribald invective in his speech for Caelius. The cumulative evidence for this identification is in fact a good deal solidier than that for many other firmly held beliefs about the ancient world.

The form "Clodia" rather than "Claudia" at once points to Clodia Metelli and her two sisters, who, when their firebrand brother P. Clodius Pulcher was trying to get himself adopted into a plebeian *gens*, likewise "went plebeian" by adopting the "populist" spelling of the family name. (Clodia Metelli was engaged in what Cicero termed a "civil war" against her conservative husband over this move: naturally Metellus opposed it [*Cic. Att.* 2.1.4–5].) The identity of "Lesbius" with Clodius (79 and note), and hence of "Lesbia" with Clodia, is virtually certain. From