

erning the latter. Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, and V. S. Naipaul might have exposed the evils of colonialism, but Said finds these "reformers" little better than the imperialists they criticized. Conrad's and Greene's fiction still presents a "Western view of the non-Western world," Said writes, that "is so ingrained as to blind [them] to other histories, other cultures, other aspirations."

This kind of argument—which owes a debt to Michel Foucault's linkages between power and knowledge—has become standard fare in the years since *Orientalism* was published. A reader might want less to question it than to wonder why a literary critic has so obviously checked literature at the door. Said discusses a novel no differently than he does a Verdi opera or a film such as *Apocalypse Now*. Since only extractable messages interest him, novels could just as well all be op-ed pieces in the *New York Times*. Said also tends to focus not on the best but on the worst work of an author and, in it, on some minor point. So in a chapter intriguingly titled "Jane Austen and Empire," he deigns to analyze only *Mansfield Park* and, in that, only a few passing references to Sir Thomas Bertram's having been a planter in Antigua, without ever considering the structure, language, characters, or irony of the novel. Does a person come to resemble, finally, that which he most violently opposes? It would seem so. Having so long unmasked Western literature as propaganda, Said writes literary criticism that is itself barely distinguishable from ideological polemics.



**CATULLUS.** By Charles Martin. Yale. 197 pp. \$30  
**THE POEMS OF CATULLUS.** Translated by Charles Martin. Johns Hopkins. 181 pp. \$35  
**THE NORTON BOOK OF CLASSICAL LITERATURE.** Edited by Bernard Knox. Norton. 866 pp. \$29.95

Who was the first Modernist poet? Ezra Pound? T. S. Eliot? Martin, a critic and translator, suggests an earlier candidate—Gaius Valerius Catullus, a Roman of the first century B.C. Catullus is the only surviving poet from a group known as "the modern ones" (the *neoterics*), a group of Roman bards who sought to throw off the prevailing Homeric yoke and explore new metrical patterns and shorter lyric forms. Even Catullus's subjects—adultery, homosexuality, licentiousness—surprise readers today, who seldom expect such candor in ancient verse. (In fact, as Martin observes, such racy topics were relatively familiar to literate Romans.) Catullus, who was born in Verona but spent most of his brief life (84?–54 B.C.) in a Rome approaching the zenith of its powers and sophistication, has long been regarded as a guilty pleasure among classicists. Repressed by Christian authorities, his work came close to disappearing altogether. After centuries in which he was only a name, a single manuscript of his surfaced in the 14th century in his native Verona, where it was recopied before vanishing forever.

Beyond mere prurience, what is the secret of Catullus's appeal for such 20th-century poets as Pound and Yeats? Catullus sought to explore the kind of truth that exists in everyday life, to release verse from the constraints of the epic. He created short, witty poems, sometimes on deliberately trivial subjects, teasing out his message through irony and innovative perspective. Consider this miniature poem (one of the few possible to quote in its entirety in a stodgy periodical):

I hate & love. And if you should ask how I can do  
 both,  
 I couldn't say; but I feel it, and it shivers me.

Catullus reveals the same complicated emotions, expressed in conversational tone, whether embarrassing a friend into returning a stolen napkin, attacking a bitter enemy with biting sarcasm, or wooing some object of his affections, notably the married female lover to whom he gave the name Lesbia. The very juxtaposition of Catullus's words and—in a larger sense—of the poems themselves

has a contemporary ring to modern readers. A poem that extols the merits of marital fidelity will be followed by one discussing the potential benefits of adultery; one that speaks of erotic obsession will accompany a poem that treats the sanctity of marriage. It is Catullus's ambivalence, his ability to present contradictory views and to encompass the full erotic spectrum, that led Yeats to invoke his name to mock the logical consistency of modern academics and thinkers:

Lord, what would they say  
Did their Catullus walk that way?

Martin's commentary is part of Yale University Press's new Hermes series, whose aim is to reintroduce the classics to a popular audience. Bernard Knox, in his introduction to *The Norton Book of Classical Literature*, reminds us that even fragments of the works of poets such as Catullus "give us unforgettable glimpses into a brilliant archaic world." Those wanting a longer look might start with Knox's introduction to this comprehensive volume. In 40 pages, Knox covers everything from the development of written language to the fall of Rome, tracing the course of classical literature from Homer to St. Augustine. "It would be a pity," Nietzsche wrote in the 19th century, "if the classics should speak to us less clearly because a million words stood in the way." The million words are, by now, probably a billion words, but Martin's study and translation of Catullus, the Hermes series, and Knox's work all skirt the industrial complex of technical scholarship to present ancient literature afresh to the common reader.

### UNDERSTANDING THE DEAD SEA

**SCROLLS:** A Reader from the *Biblical Archeology Review*. Ed. by Hershel Shanks. Random House. 336 pp. \$23

### JESUS AND THE RIDDLE OF THE DEAD

**SEA SCROLLS.** By Barbara Thiering. HarperCollins. 451 pp. \$24

The very name Dead Sea Scrolls has come to evoke, rather like "The Curse of the Mummy," images of temple robbers and age-old intrigue. But if there is a mystery surrounding these documents—the only Hebrew manuscripts on either papyrus or leather to have survived from pre-Christian times—it is a modern one. Not long after Bedouin

shepherd boys discovered them in 1947, a seven-man scholarly team in East Jerusalem gained control of the scrolls and severely limited access to them. "The greatest manuscript find of modern times" (in archeologist W. E. Albright's words) has thus had its meaning deciphered and publicized only piecemeal and slowly. Even the scrolls' long-awaited but unauthorized publication in 1991, through a still-unnamed source, remains something of a puzzle.

Shanks, editor of the *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR), here collects from his own publication the more important essays bearing upon the scrolls' meaning. The scrolls have provoked unending controversy by revealing that many practices once thought to be unique to the early Christian church were prefigured by the beliefs and rituals of a Jewish Essene community near the Dead Sea. The little that was previously known about the Essenes came from a few first-century A.D. writers—Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, and Pliny the Elder, the latter of whom characterized the Essene sect as "remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the world,

