

CHAPTER 12

SUSPENDED ANIMATION: HOW THE FETISH WORLD GAVE LIFE TO CATULLUS AND CALLIMACHUS

Isobel Williams

Too tight: my drawing line – freed when I accidentally discover, as something to draw, an arcane corner of the fetish world which also provides a setting for Catullus (Williams 2023). But before we inspect the arcana, we're off to an all-purpose fetish venue.

Not too tight: silk shift dress, suspender belt, seamed stockings with reinforced heel and toe, ivory silk buttoned opera gloves, tiara, pearls, Order of the Garter (fake), actual garter (probably inauthentic), white fur stole (synthetic). I'm recreating a classic woman, *the* classic, Queen Elizabeth II circa 1963, my icon, mask or metamorphosis (the relentless detail makes it fetish) to become invisible in this club, so that I can study costumes, poses and personae. Representing all of us, a naked human lies inside a glass inspection case. People can reach in through the holes.

Some of my work on Catullus happened at a time of hastily making face masks out of fabric scraps. (The UK was so unprepared for the pandemic that medical fetishists – 'Trust me, I'm not a doctor' – donated their professional PPE to the NHS.) I gave my



Figure 12.1 From left: Sophia Rose, Miss Bones and group, Anatomie Studio © Isobel Williams.

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masks ear-loops of 1960s black knicker elastic from my late mother's haberdashery accumulation. This qualified me to read Catullus 64 which is based on ancestral textile crafts: it describes mythic scenes on a counterpane embroidered with ancient skill.

Poem 64 is constructed like an embroidery hoop, two wooden or bamboo rings held together by the tension of the broken outer one, controlled by a screw. The marriage of mortal Peleus and immortal Thetis constrains the inner plot, the desertion of infatuated Ariadne by preoccupied Theseus – or is it the other way round?

Is the screw Catullus' abandonment-anxiety? Or the looming birth/death of the newlyweds' killing-machine son Achilles? Or the collapse of society and desertion by the gods which end the poem? As it harks back to a lost golden age, my text is stalked by Victoriana and achieves apocalypse by way of Beatrix Potter.

Poem 64, lines 249–65 (Ariadne has just been abandoned by Theseus)

... poor Ariadne ... half-dressed, miserable
... watched his ship diminish and battered her wings
Against the dead ends of her labyrinth

That you loved me still the same
That you loved me
You loved me still the same
That you loved me
You loved me still the same

Then

what?

with a zip-wire trip-wire bomb-bounce big-band
Bang Bacchus fronting the Electrowercz crew
Scouts and shouts for you Ariadne it's love this
Time with a true all-over blue tattoo
And you
 <loss>
 ecstatic erratic
Torture Garden's hardened exhibits
Pour on the dance floors stimulant-silly
Bite the apple and couple and triple
And quadruple
The hand on the bottom the have you had sex yet
Brandish the fertility spike
Cover up the business end
With a pine cone, it works for some,
Juggle joints of botch-butchered bullock
Bodies bound with seething snakes

Cluster round the glass inspection
 Case with the naked human inside
 Thrust bold tentacles through the holes
 (Tourists try to glimpse the rituals)
 Spunked spanked scarlet tooth-vibrating
 Tinnitus-techno here's a floorshow
 The Infamous Boom Boom and Skinny Redhead
 Shinbone shindig flutes with savage
 Harmonics

Wait

Everything is very small

You wake up face down on the counterpane

Each tiny prick each satin stitch
 Flame stitch stem stitch isolated knot
 A deafening echo of embroidery thread
 Dragged by a needle through a hole it made

Some maths exam papers ask you to show your working so that, if you give the wrong answer, you might at least get credit for your method. Convention requires me to show a bit of working but, being the creator, I am not a reliable witness.

A literal translation will show you where my versions hug and depart from the original. But what is the original? Catullus' ropey single posthumous text went missing in action. I use Mynors 1958 plus notes from the Catullus textual criticism class at Oxford University in 2012–13 given by Stephen Harrison and Stephen Heyworth.

Poem 64, an epyllion or mini-epic, is Catullus' longest known work. He rolls out its glittering scenic and emotional variety in the Homeric dactylic hexameter. In the extract above, as elsewhere, I use a broken formality, tumbled metrical pillars. I put <loss> to indicate a lacuna.

Ariadne is part of an embroidered scene on a bed cover. If you wish, she is Catullus' alter ego as rejected lover. When she finds she has eloped from her palace only to be dumped, I interrupt my default pentameter with a snatch of *I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls* from a nineteenth-century opera, *The Bohemian Girl*.

On the heady arrival of the *deus ex machina* with his raucous retinue, the metre rattles over the points then quickens to four strong beats as I splice the scene with impressions from my first visit to a fetish club. Catullus' thyrsus ('fertility spike'), a versatile symbol, might well have been decked with a carved pine cone. He says the *profani* (this could be 'uninitiated' rather than 'ungodly') desire in vain to witness the *orgia*, the secret rites; regular clubbers dismiss such casuals as tourists.

A real Torture Garden entertainer provides a literal translation of Catullus' *bombos*, while rope performer Skinny Redhead (Skinny Red Art online) is Lesbia's sparrow on one of my YouTube videos of Catullus readings.

I embroider poem 64 with authentic needle-speak. The last few lines above, from 'Wait' onwards, are indeed an hallucination: they do not appear in the original.

The club night was in a deconsecrated church, and I found my more specific context for Catullus in a decommissioned pub, a blacked-out south London promontory called The Flying Dutchman – suitable for this poet, a ghost ship that can never put into a safe emotional harbour. It is now a fetish venue (suspension rings in the ceiling, weird things in the dungeon but we don't go there – yet). I find a good-natured bunch waiting to watch and practise Japanese rope bondage, aka shibari, Japanese for 'binding'. I think: 'Alpine plant collectors' club.' It has the same nerdy shared-interest focus.

I am here to draw. In life class, with a static model, you know roughly where the body's lines will go. But in the shibari performance world of theatrical torment, degradation, abandon and practised shame, where the body may be trussed, suspended and spun quickly in bewildering shapes it could not achieve without rope, you must stay alert.

The bottom (model, bunny), glossy and alive in the addictive flood of pain-relief hormones, fakes being passive, otherwise his or her spine might snap. The top (rigger) fakes control but is in communion with the bottom via breaths and glances. Bottoms report feeling free and safe. Being a top is about humility; being a bottom is about power.

Drawing, I might be squashed on a sofa in half-light, with someone on the floor leaning against my shins. On a good night I'll have room to dip things in ink – bamboo pens, bedraggled quills, wooden coffee stirrers, the tip of a white man's dreadlock. Speed and constraint free my line.

Is shibari porn or art or erotic?

Yes. No. Shrug. It depends on you.

Top tips for translators

Can shibari riggers help you deal with your target poet? Yes, if you substitute the italicized words here for their original words.

For me, *translation* needs spontaneity to be real. It is more about the feeling created than an impeccably performed series of stunts. Although that's not to say they don't have their place.

Esinem

Osada Steve says you must assess whether a potential *poet* is going to say, 'Don't touch me, mother****er.' His route to *translation* was martial arts so he gives thought to self-protection

and connection: 'If you do it like this the *poet* can punch you in the face.' [He turns to his *poet*.] 'Sophie, can you feel my heart beat?'

Osada Steve's advice to other *translators* is 'At all times be impregnable.' This reminds me of what birth control pioneer Marie Stopes wrote: 'Be always escaping' (Stopes 1918: chapter vii). That is the *poet's* responsibility.

He dismisses 'power stuff, idiot stuff. We are not in the jerking-off business. We are trying to give the *poet* a good time. And as a *translator* you have a responsibility to put the *poet* into beautiful poses. We want to inflict pleasure. We want to provide the warmth and protection of *translation* to our *poet*.'

Arnoys Nicolas says that the rope around your *poet's* neck should not be tight. And when you straighten the standing *poet's* arm to move him or her down to the floor, don't press the arm down in an ugly movement: kneel, your back straight, retaining elegance and control.

Nina Russ says that *translation* is like growing vegetables: when you start to *translate* a *poet*, you don't know what you'll end up with.

Poetic independence

Sometimes you let go of the poet you are translating and write your own stuff. It may recall a night at the shibari club:

Jack the Whipper folds and ties his right leg then pulls the rope through a suspension ring in the ceiling, ready to haul himself up.

Rope goddess Gorgone says: 'This is going to be nasty.'

'Yaargh! Wuurgh! Waargh! I didn't think about this, did I. Oh *shit*.' Jack reaches down to grab another rope from the floor and starts tying a harness round his chest.

'Should've done this first. It's not gonna be pretty but it *is* gonna be functional. **** it. Can't keep my leg up any more. Haven't tied anything for a month. Ooh ooh *cramp*. **** being a rope bunny, this *shit hurts*. I didn't have anyone to tie for a year and a half. I've done single angle inversions on myself. At sixteen stone that *hurts*. AAARGH!'

What's Catullus doing here?

I never saw Catullus in that club. But I felt that he and his bickering entourage had just left for something private in a Belgravia mansion with a basement swimming pool, hookers of all persuasions and a well-stocked library.

What does Catullus share with shibari? Performative victimhood, beauty, love, torment, a constant flicker between dominance and submission, kissing, captive kissing, pain, symmetry, intricacy, elegance, flayed emotion, romantic versatility, speed, the bones of an ancient tradition being remastered. Rules, plenty of those, strict ones. The vocabulary of a master-slave relationship, but contemporary and consensual.

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(A word about studying slave-owning cultures: the best way to commemorate slaves of the past is to help slaves of the present – de-studying the past breeds sleepwalkers. In the UK, the Human Trafficking Foundation can advise.)

Catullus is a bitchy dominant (with the boys), a submissive (with Lesbia), and sliding along that switchy spectrum with pimps, tarts, enemies and anyone else he takes to be in moral or financial debt to him in his zero-sum world.

Who started it?

Homer, of course. No, shibari stems from ancient Japanese disciplines by way of the martial art of hojōjutsu; its eroticisation was revealed to a wider world when images became more prevalent in the twentieth century.

The *Odyssey* contains two peaks of shibari performance (three if you include Penelope weaving and unweaving to master time). In Book 22, armour-stealing goatherd Melanthius is bound and suspended from the rafters by order of Odysseus – who doesn't carry it out himself, of course, as he is a sub who takes rope-bottoming to extremes, putting others in harm's way for his own gratification.

'I want to be lashed to the mast. I know, let's go past the Sirens. No, Circe told me, I've got to. Block your ears, and if I beg you to untie me, tie me tighter.' This is known as bratty behaviour. A number of my sketches from a bratty behaviour workshop in Oxford ended up in my book – they are appropriate for Catullus' milieu.

Poem 16 – oh dear

Why do people make such a fuss about this one? The first line is *Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo*. Without Latin polysyllables, it collapses into a vacuous, crude, dour 'I'll take you [plural] up the arse and in the face.' Really?

Some translators solemnly wheel out the F-word even though Catullus – who uses it when he wants to – avoids it here. He's just posing. Not for the first time. Others seize an opportunity to shock, reminding me of Flanders and Swann gleefully singing the dirtiest words from the nursery:

Ma's out, Pa's out, let's talk rude –
Pee, po, belly, bum, **drawers**!

Quite unnecessary. Catullus is using figurative language to berate two male friends who accuse him of effeminacy via his poetry – writing about being kissed – uugh, sappy! Poem 16 is his manifesto for separating the art from its creator. He isn't making a genuine physical threat, so there's no need to get hot under the ruff.

My first line of poem 16 points out that Catullus is posing:

Beware the mighty sodomite face-bandit.

I now wish I'd put 'somdomite' [sic] – what the Marquess of Queensberry, in writing, accused Oscar Wilde of being.

This ballad is about what turned out to be in the dungeon below the shibari club (which is not itself a sex club, thank you). I start with my manifesto for translating poem 16:

The Ballad of Drawing at the Sex Club

Some scholars think Catullus sixteen
Is the dirtiest poem they've ever seen
Because he tells two gentleman friends
He'll do rude things to their fronts and ends

But in the real-life situation
He wouldn't itemise his intention:
When boyz get down or up to it
In areas dark or brightly lit,
Aided by sweet-smelling lubricant gel,
The narrative style is show not tell
And on their way to *in flagrante*
The topic could be Elena Ferrante:
Dicks may be big but talk is small.
You can be sure the ancient Roman
Is posturing rhetoricallee –
Translators, don't use words filthie:
He's a reliable sex-club gnomon.
[and so on for scores of lines]

Poem 5 – up in the air

You don't need to know a word of Latin to spy the bondage tie in some of Catullus' poems. One example is poem 5:

Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum severiorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis.
soles occidere et redire possunt:
nobis, cum semel occidit brevis **lux**,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum
dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,

conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
aut nequis malus inuidere possit,
cum tantum sciat esse **basiorum**.

You can see the sibilants, the sibilance, sounding like rope trailing on tatami, or a contemptuous hiss at the *senum severiorum*, 'stern old censors'. The symmetry of repeated syllables (*vivamus*, *amemus* and so on) represents the knots.

Lux = light/day/life. **Nox** = sleep/night/death. This is the turn of the poem, the axis of the performance. Rope around the rope-bottom is passed through a single suspension ring. On **lux**, the bottom is standing or swaying but still touching the ground – maybe with no more than the tip of a toe. On **nox**, the bottom falls upwards, hoisted into suspension by the top.

From life to death. But not yet:

Held by the ropes, my body stands without a ground.

It falls, but does not fear any impact.

It experiences the illusion of Life without the promise of Death.

– Marika Leïla Roux (Gorgone), study-on-falling.com

The top spins the bottom and Catullus spins his hectic demands for kisses – *da mi . . . deinde . . . dein . . .* Give me [that's the initial push], then . . . then . . . *Conturbabimus illa* has a sense of 'let's whiz them around'.

Then the top brings the bottom to rest and bestows a kiss or a slick of lipstick: the last word, *basiorum*, is a kiss onomatopoeia. (For *fellatio* onomatopoeia, see poem 58, *passim*.)

Poem 5

Song of Snogs

Open out to life and love with me,
Clodia, and we'll set the regulators'
Hisses at the lowest rate of interest

Suns go down and dawns will come
But once our pinprick light is out
The night will never be for more than sleeping

I love doing this, let's
Take a long position, swell the
Abacus with kisses

M Cxxx
 MM CxCx Cxxx
 MMM CxCx Cxxx CxCx

And when we've made a killing kissing
 Shake the totals to lose count,
 Take them beyond the kiss inspector's reach

Following the original word order: 'Let's live [be alive], my Lesbia, and let's love, and all the mutterings of more severe old men, let's set their value at one coin of the lowest denomination. Suns set and rise again, they can: for us, as soon as sets our brief light [life], night there is, perpetual, one, for the sleeping of. Give me kisses thousand, then hundred, then thousand more, then second hundred, then yet another thousand, then hundred, then, when thousands many we shall have made, we'll disturb them [muddle up the accounts] lest we know [how many], or lest anyone evil be envious may, since how many that person might know to be of kisses.'

To take a long position means to be heavily invested in something. Catullus uses an abacus (maybe) rather than the double entry ledger, which will not be recorded until 1494, in Venice, but he has a transactional nature, be it for cash or emotion.

Poem 32 – role-swapping

At first poem 32 struck me as a bad case of cognitive dissonance – Catullus is going the wrong way about begging a prostitute called Ipsitilla for an appointment – so I flipped the voice to that of the exasperated businesswoman (time is money).

At the shibari club, I met Ipsitilla – not a prostitute but a professional dominatrix and webcam girl. She spoke of a would-be client: 'He said he wanted to be blackmailed [a known fetish]. I told him to meet me at the X hotel at 2pm next Monday. He said that wasn't convenient. I told him that's not how this works.'

Poem 32

It's from Catullus. *Pleeease*, he says,
Blah blah darling, you're so hot,
So talented –
 He wants my after-lunch slot,

A firm booking with no one else
 Looking. He says if I stay
 In the camera's eye

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And concentrate
He'll come nine times

In that weird way of his.
You know he calls it 'fucktuations', right?
Now it's urgent, have I got
A cancellation? He's full of carbs,
Adopting the position

And here it is.
Look away now.
The dick pic.

In truth, I didn't have to change to Ipsitilla's voice – Catullus has great comic timing, makes jokes against himself and places the laughs. He boasts about having a soldierly erection at the end of the poem, but nothing is achieved.

The penultimate stanza above has my arm's-length translation of *fututiones*, Catullus' coinage with too many syllables for comfort. To me it is arch, an uneasy combination of childishness with a camp private world it's embarrassing to glimpse . . . But this may be my own hyperfastidious misreading down the millennia.

Poem 12 – snatch

Catullus can infect you, inhabit you, make you think (wrongly) that you are like him, or that he'd like you. My Catullus is safely dead, present for dissection on a marble slab. I seek sharp tools and a bucket. He is also a doll I can dress and accessorize:

Poem 12

ROSALIND: *But, for the bloody napkin?*

OLIVER: *By and by.*

– Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Asinius, before I pin
A tail on you, I have to ask:

What personal item did you steal,
Up to your tricks as usual,
In breach of etiquette
With your sly left hand
When we were all stoned?
My Gucci earphones,

A sex toy, a rent boy,
A broken e-cigarette?

My stash? My studded leather
Harness? My suspender
Belt? My vintage Fender?
Larceny isn't clever –
Ask your smarter brother
Pollio: he's all set
To pay your criminal debt
So here's my standard threat –
A fire-hose of public abuse
Or return that souvenir
Of Spain from my own dear
Fabullus and Veranius.
I require it now
As much as I need my pet
Veranius, and Fabullus.

It's what someone like you
Calls a serviette.

The 'As' of Asinius tempted me to pin the tail on the donkey – is that blindfolded game still played? Imported linenware was a luxury for reclining, overheated Roman diners, but I added some other consumer durables and throw-away items – despite knowing that to modernize something is to kill it. Like me, the updated references become quaint, then incomprehensible, then dead.

Catullus joined a cultural elite in a class-conscious Rome. Not being from Rome himself, he was not out of the top drawer, but he took a swipe at the impecunious or (in poem 84) at an arriviste who didn't speak received pronunciation. My last two lines above reflect Alan Ross's essay *U and non-U* (Mitford 1956), where U = upper class:

non-U serviette/U table-napkin; perhaps the best known of all the linguistic class-indicators of English.

Catullus writes poem 12 in hendecasyllables, a supple eleven-syllable metre which he uses for a wide range of purposes from love to rebuke. Taking what driving instructors call a 'press-on attitude', I start here with four strong beats, then, via a few two-beat lines, end up with three beats. I normally leave English reproduction of Catullus' varied metres to the experts, such as Tennyson, although I do carry over some limping iambs (foot-dragging at the end of the line) and adonics (five-syllable lines with an often wistful trail closing a Sapphic stanza). I attempted two lines in galliambs – the vanishingly rare, fiendish, exotic metre used by Catullus in poem 63 only, each line ending with a flurry of

short syllables like tiles cascading off a roof. Then I forsook them forever. See Tennyson's *Boadicea* for a demonstration.

As a context for my Catullus, the shibari world comes and goes. (This is my shibari blog, paused at the time of writing by a pandemic: <http://boulevardisme.blogspot.com>.) In the English versions here, shibari isn't mentioned: other worlds take its place, including private members' clubs and the financial quarter. Catullus' translation of a learned and now corroded text by Callimachus, poem 66, is riddled with obscurity. To make it equally obscure (to you) I base it in Woking, a town in the south-east of England, in 1966. But my memories have faded. Impressions of the past cannot be relied on to stay the same, nor can Catullus' Latin text, still subject to analysis and revision after the miraculous discovery, in about 1300, of a single corrupted version, which was copied, then vanished again.

Callimachus

the sweet myrtle of Callimachus, ever full of harsh honey – Meleager (Paton 1916)

Blame lockdown, the biggest group bondage performance the world has known, but I finally took a closer look at Callimachus (c. 310–c. 240 BCE), the Hellenistic poet who, from about two centuries earlier, influenced Catullus and his coterie. Heroic epic having been abandoned, they mythologized their own lives in shorter form.

Scholarly, a pioneering cataloguer, Callimachus was employed in the Library of Alexandria during the Ptolemaic period. I focus on his epigrams. To many of the epigrams I've added rigging fore and aft, so the shibari influence on me is plain. (For text and numbering I use Mair and Mair 1921.)

Epigram 8

HER STEPSON SAYS DEATH WILL IMPROVE HER
CHEEKY SOD
SO AS HE KNEELS TO LAY A FLORAL TRIBUTE
I FALL OVER AND KILL HIM

I SEE WHY THEY CALL YOU HEADSTONE
SAYS HER GHOST
PUFFING A FAG
YOU GET TO GO DOWN ON HIM
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO LOOK

This anonymous epigram was attributed to Callimachus by the scholar and anthologist Maximus Planudes (c. 1260–c. 1310) and is generously included in Mair and Mair 1921. It is (anonymously) in Paton 1917.

I assign personalities to the headstones in the epigrams. To show where I depart from the original, here is my more literal demonstration in pursuit of word order: 'Stele of stepmother, petite gravestone – the youth was draping a wreath on it, believing the change of lifestyle would also change her personality. But as he knelt by the grave, the stone killed the boy by toppling over. Avoid stepmothers – even their graves – you stepchildren.'

Epigram 30

I hate bloated rehash in the oral
 Tradition, rutting in the road, retrodden
 Boyfriends, drinking fountains, what gets passed
 Around. Now take you, Lysanias. Your pretty
 Face, your beauty. Echo would say pity
 But someone butts in: 'He's assigned his duty.'

Here is another version:

Epigram 30

Spare me your promiscuous epic
 Rutting the more taken road,
 Well-thumbed romances,
 Lovers' side-glances,
 Lipsticked wine-glasses,
 Broken code.

Valium Boy, your face, oh yes,
 Divine, I say divine – and Echo
 Stirs but someone gets in first:
Not thine. Be thin and pine.

Callimachus was disturbed by the too attainable lover and by poets who took predictable paths. He advised a trim poetic silhouette: 'fatten your sacrifice, poet, but starve your muse' (*Aetia* I, 23–4 in Trypanis 1958).

'Lysanias' is defined in dictionaries as freedom from pain, sorrow, worries or grief – hence the Valium.

The forlorn echoes in the original demand to be replicated. It isn't necessary to be able to read Greek in order to pick out the repetitions in the shapes of the lettering, which are as insistent as the sound:

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... ναιχὶ καλὸς καλός – ἀλλὰ ...

... Ἡχώ ... ἄλλος ἔχει.

A. E. Housman is one of the poets I steal from: 'thin and pine' belongs to *Is My Team Ploughing*.

Epigram 33

Out on the pass, come snow, come ice,
Hunter seeks hare, the jenny and jack,
Tracks roe, the buck and doe – but say
'This fine one's hit and down for you!'
He lets it lie.

And so do I. My love must chase,
My sea leaps from the bay's embrace.

Another piece about fastidiousness in the hunt. Years ago I wrote poetry about living on a small island, and my last line is frugally recycled. My chiming monosyllables depart from the polysyllables of the original.

LOT 35

Votive terracotta statuette,
More temple tat.

Inscription:

'Artemis to you this sacred image Phileratis dedicated here,
Do you take it, my lady, in return for keeping her safe.'

Well Artemis was very safe. She could afford not to have sex.

Good luck in childbirth, lady.

No reserve.

I give auction lot numbers to the epigrams about artefacts, such as votive offerings. My jaded auctioneer is cataloguing them with his assistant, using the language of the saleroom. 'No reserve' means 'Don't set a minimum price – it's got to sell.'

Callimachus simply writes the two-line inscription. I extend it in both directions, as a substitute for footnotes.

Epigram 45

I sensed it on the Northern Line, panicked,
 Ripped open a can. A seam began to smoulder
 Under dead ashes. I'm not sure of anything.
 Please don't cuddle me. Subsidence begins
 Out of sight – a buried stream
 Strokes the foundations with delicacy.

I'm scared, Menexenus. I've got to
 Shelter from the stealth love bomber
 Targeting me on the night bus home.

First published in Stand 21 (3)

Callimachus refers to something hidden. The Northern Line, black on the map, has the deepest station on the London Underground, Hampstead. He mentions Pan, inspirer of overwhelming dread, and Dionysus, god of drink. London's landscape is shaped by subterranean rivers. The night bus service is legendary (sometimes, it would seem, mythical) with amatory overtones. Stealth bombers are designed not to be seen.

Epigram 59

No more ship to shore sir
 Whoever you might be sir
 Master found you drowned here
 Put you in the ground here
 Then broke down. His law sir
 Is not the land but sea sir
 He soars and dives to quarter
 The wind and savage water

Another version:

Epigram 59

Who are you, oh drown-dead stranger?
 Whisper your name and the stars will hear.
 Lionheart found you washed ashore,
 Tied your hammock all secure
 And wept for the cruel way he must take –

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No dry land but prey to danger
Scoping seas with the kittiwake.

First published in Stand 21 (3)

There is a lion in the master's name, Λεόντιχος (Leontichos), and in another version not reproduced here I veer off to the Crusades.

Birds are strong presences in ancient poetry and Callimachus features many. For his αἴθυια (*aithuia*) in this epigram, a diving seabird sometimes translated as gull or shearwater, I use kittiwake for rhyme's sake. (Returning to Catullus, there are various contenders for Lesbia's pet bird, *passer*, which could be regarded as the ornithologist's all-purpose 'little brown job'. Peter Green (Green 2005) echoes some other authorities in suggesting it is a blue rock thrush, but sticks to the Renaissance-approved sparrow in his translation, and I'd be reluctant to use thrush in an erotic context.)

If it was maritime, the ancient Greeks had a word for it. The last word of this epigram, θαλασσοπορεῖ (*thalassoporei*), conveys more than any one English word: 'the sea/he traverses it', with a touch of onomatopoeia. Something that sounds far-reaching, perpetual, plaintive and vanishing, five syllables. I'm tempted by concrete poetry – 'sea sea sea he wings'.

Left hanging

Like Jack the Whipper above, I try self suspension, and block or tackle my own verse without a rope bunny but still with a rigour, or rigger if you count the echo of Donne on this particular day:

Hold

I hold the orb in my cupped hand
The sceptre tilts at my command
You the subjugated land
I a queen my ship new manned
The curtained bed from post to post
Harbours all your rugged coast

One room our politics and law
The minibar here to explore
And stock the hold for this first voyage
Setting customs, tongues and coinage
We resolve all border issues
With a box of three-ply tissues

Crush the larger world's distress
To nothing in the trouser press

And make this conference of ours
Extend the inventory of stars

First published in the TLS 24 March 2023

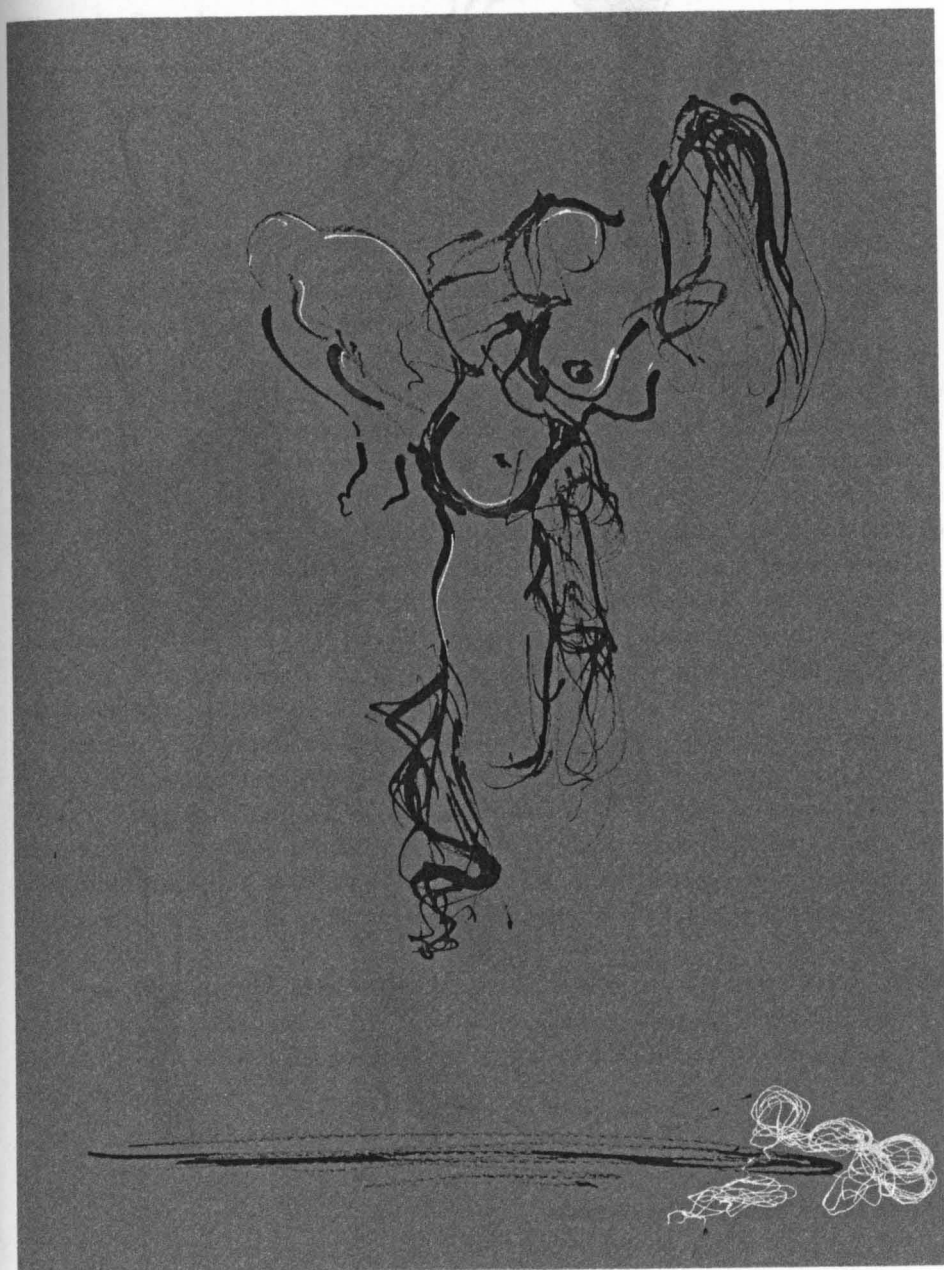


Figure 12.2 Tenshiko tied by Kirigami.

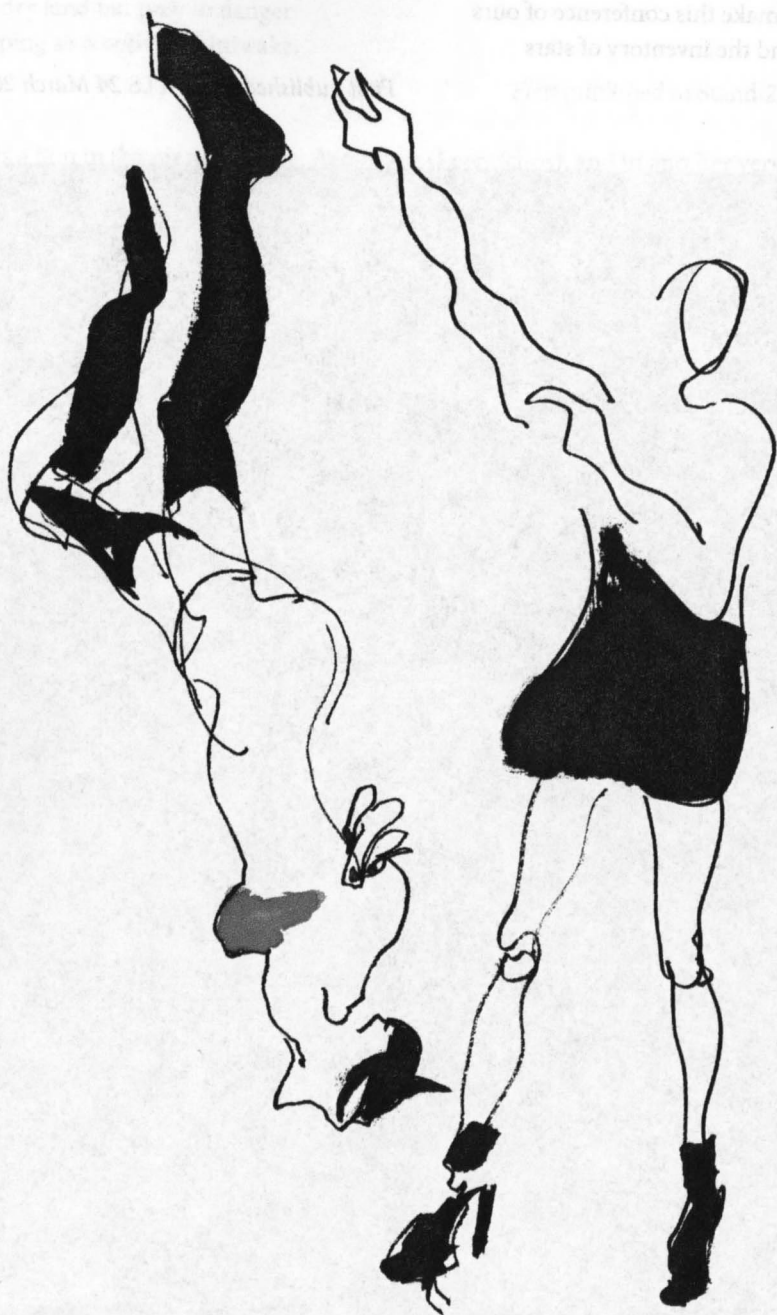


Figure 12.3 Kitty Rea tied by Nina Russ.

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