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MEDIA, MATERIALITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF RECEPTION

Anne Carson's Catullus

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It is worth pointing out that translators do not translate books. Translators translate text. Strictly speaking, "books are not written at all. They are manufactured by scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines" (Roger Stoddard 1987, cited in Chartier 1989:161). Anne Carson is a rare example of a translator who translates both books and texts. That Carson had a hand in the making and manufacture of *Nox* (Carson 2010b), which is a translation of Catullus and an *objet d'art*, is not the reason why this is so. Rather, Carson translates Catullus poem 101, which first appeared in the book form of a papyrus roll, as material artefact; that is, Carson's Catullus is not versioned for a book with bound pages but unfolds in concertina format when you take it out of its book-box – which makes *Nox* an exercise in poetry translation as much as in media translation. Her interest in the materiality of the medium is shared by Catullus, who in poem 1 introduces his corpus[1] by reflecting on the manufacture, craftsmanship and material durability of his little book (*libellus*). Accordingly, this chapter reads *Nox* in relation to both poems to suggest that poem 1 forms part of the background to Carson's translation of poem 101. In turn, poem 101 is no less media-conscious since it speaks to the material conditions of commemoration, transmission and retransmission that are constitutive of elegiac tradition (Liveley 2020:256). By making mediality integral to translation, *Nox* makes visible something that is rarely practised or theorized: it is books and texts – outside and inside – that get translated, transformed and transmediated with every new translation and repackaged edition.

The aim then is to show how a translation that draws attention to thingness, bookishness and mediality, as *Nox* does, can contribute on the one hand to a wider understanding of the materialities of translation and, on the other hand, to an expanded notion of translation that is operative across the boundaries of the linguistic, textual, visual and medial. To this end, I build on two key notions that Theo Hermans introduced in *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* (1985c) and in *Second-Hand: Papers on the Theory and Historical Study of Literary Translation* (1985d): that translation is a form of rewriting and manipulation; and that translation has a crucial function in shaping literary culture, even though it

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is often deemed a second-order or second-hand product by authors, critics and translators. Here, however, I take materially what was already implicit in the terms *manipulation* and *second-hand*, namely that translation entails *mani*pulation and that this is so not just linguistically and textually but palpably, as its Latin root in *manus* (hand/s) suggests.

In what follows I address transmissions, receptions and medial translations of Catullus, invoking the shared etymologies of *mani*pulation and *manu*facture, and focus in particular on the hands, handlings and handiworks that have given shape to Catullus's work/persona in stone, copper, on papyrus, and paper, including Carson's handmade notebook and *digit*-ally produced book-in-a-box. After all, it is impossible to translate without handling,[2] and without something to handle, without the manual gestures that hold a book, turn pages or operate a touchscreen; just as it is impossible to circulate books in translation without what in German is so aptly named the *Buchhandel* (book trade).

While the conjunction between book history and translation studies is relatively recent, it is Hermans's two volumes that laid the groundwork for thinking about translation as part of a wider circuit of production and reception. As he pointed out as early as the 1980s, a host of manipulative agents and agencies "govern the production and reception of translations" in the target literary system (Hermans 1985b:11–12), among them, patrons, publishers, editors, readers, critics, reviewers, etc. who variously "produce, support, propagate, censor" translations (Lefevere 1985:237, 226–228). It is precisely this emphasis on the cultural contexts of the production and reception of translation that makes possible a more materially oriented study of translations. Indeed, Bachleitner makes a similar point in acknowledging the "Manipulation School", initiated by Theo Hermans and including André Lefevere, as paving the way towards a more book-historically informed study of translation that pays attention to "translations as material objects", including "the outer appearance of a translation" (Bachleitner 2018:103) and what in the context of this chapter I call translation's *manu*facture.

Catullus's book

My entry point for translation's manufacture is not found inside a book but located on top of a building. On the roof of the splendid Loggia del Consiglio in Verona, which was built in the 1480s as the city council chamber, stand five statues, each commemorating a famous son of Roman Verona. Among the five statues by Alberto da Milano are Catullus (Figure 9.1) and his friend and mentor Cornelius Nepos (Figure 9.2), each clutching a book, the former holding it in the crook of his arm, the latter holding it upright with both hands to display its spine. The statues are the inspiration for the engravings, attributed to William Blake, that are the frontispieces of John Nott's translation of Catullus's poems, published anonymously as a bilingual edition in two volumes in 1795 and the first (almost complete) rendition of his corpus into English. Since Blake's engravings are based on illustrations by Saverio Dalla Rosa of the statues, they are third-hand: "translations on to copperplate of images first executed in other media by other artists" (Essick 1991; cited in Dörrbecker 1994/95:103). According to Robert Essick, they "are given short shrift" by critics for being "reproductive prints" rather than "original print-making", despite the fact that they "were often executed with the same tools" (ibid.) – an attitude only too recognizable to scholars of translation who have long grappled with the all too persistent secondary status of translation over the supposed primacy of originals (Hermans 1985a:116).

There is another aspect, however, that I want to draw out here and that concerns the Catullus engraving's manipulation, albeit subtly, of the poet's appearance by way of accentuating

FIGURE 9.1 Alberto da Milano, statue of Catullus (1492), Loggia del Consiglio, Piazza dei Signori, Verona, Italy

Source: photograph by D. Kamaras (2017, Flickr/Creative Commons)

FIGURE 9.2 Alberto da Milano, statue of Cornelius (1492), Loggia del Consiglio, Piazza dei Signori, Verona, Italy

Source: photograph by D. Kamaras (2017, Flickr/Creative Commons)

his facial hair (Figure 9.3). As Stead points out, the engraving depicts Catullus with "facial hair in the Grecian style", which conveys visually that Catullus, whether he did or did not have a beard in real life, was a "self-consciously Hellenizing Roman poet" (2016:88). Put differently, Catullus's face embodies the idea that "classical reception studies are as old as Antiquity" given that "much of Latin literature amounts to an extended reception study of the Greeks" (Hutchinson 2018:107). The style of the facial hair is also a reminder that translation plays a key role in the reception of literature and was central to Roman literary production, including Catullus's work as a poet and translator. From this we might conclude that Catullus's face as represented by Blake is translatory, that is, it is shaped by and expressive of translation, just as Roman literature is steeped in translation or, indeed, just as "translation permeates Catullus's oeuvre but in forms that are frequently unrecognisable to us" (Young 2015:1).

Bodies matter in other respects too. Both the Verona statue and Blake's engraving make a feature of two kinds of bodies: the body of the book and that of Catullus. In Blake's engraving

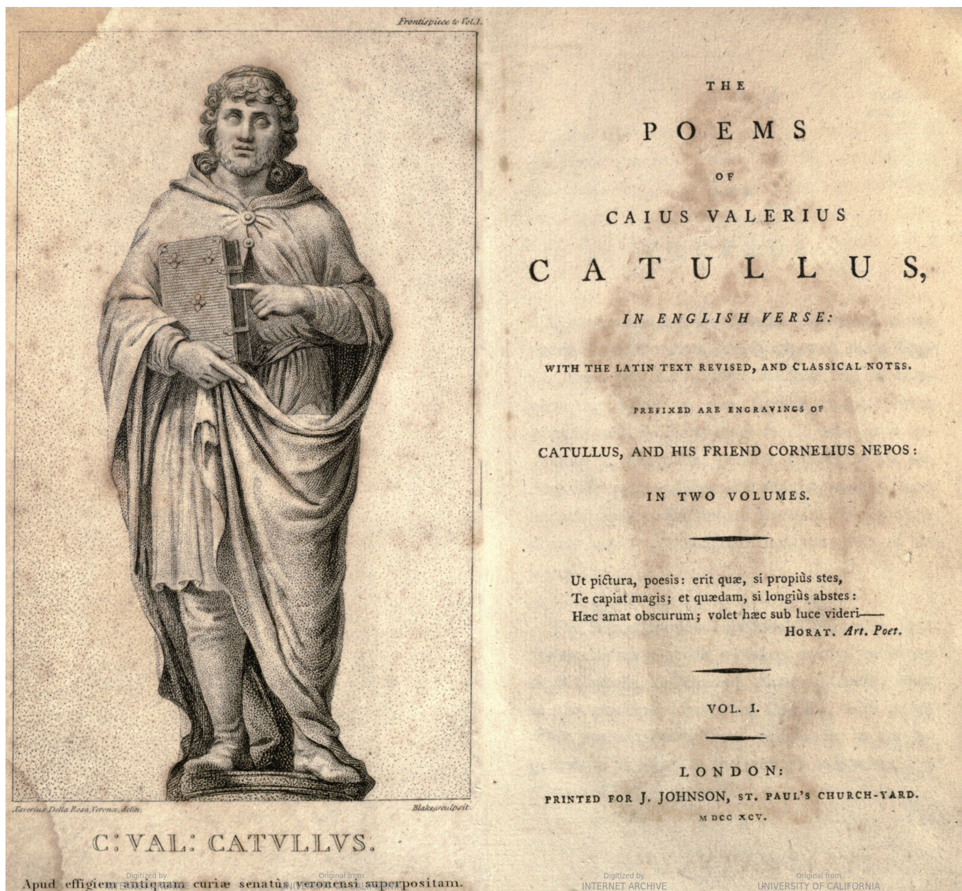


FIGURE 9.3 William Blake, engraving of Catullus from *The Poems of Caius Valerius Catullus*, volume 1, translated by J. Nott (London: J. Johnson, 1795)

Source: University of California Library (External-identifier urn:oclc:record:1050793252)

Catullus cradles the book protectively in his arm and drapes it with his clothing, as if the book was an extension of his body and person, and points to it with his left index finger – a gesture that recalls the manicule or "pointing hand" on the pages of medieval manuscripts and incunables (Sherman 2008:25–52). What his digit points to and touches is a codex not a bookroll, and as such is representative of the dominant book form in Alberto da Milano's age, not Catullus's. This change in medial form from roll to codex goes to the very heart of this chapter, highlighting the fact that works of literature are radically affected by their new media conditions and that therefore we need to think about reception and translation studies in material terms. If we accept that "changes" in the medium in which a text appears also "govern the transformations in its meaning", as book historians and bibliographers have demonstrated (Chartier 1989:163; McKenzie 1999), then this has a bearing on translation too. As scholarship, especially in medieval and early modern studies, has shown, "the meaning of a translated text resides, not simply in the text itself" but also in the visual and bibliographical codes that are materially reworked in the target system (Hosington 2015:11).[3] A work of literature is not a disembodied text; rather, it is always an articulated or expressive material object which is subject to transmediation every time it is copied, reedited, translated or retranslated. Transmediation serves as a descriptor both for media transitions, here between different writing cultures, as well as for the medial translation between book forms and between source and target *mise-en-page*.

Further transmediational modalities are at play for instance in Blake's case, where transmediation additionally serves to describe the translation from a three-dimensional sculpture into a flat and one-dimensional engraving. The caption at the bottom of the page gives this explanatory note: "Apud effigiem antiquam curiae senatus veronensi superpositam". Thus, based on a statue (*effigiem*) that is placed on top of a building (*superpositam*), the ink engraving is literally *über-setzt*, that is to say, not just trans-lated but rather over-laid, super-imposed as well as com-posited. What has happened here architecturally has also happened biblio-materially: there is a translation/superimposition/compositing of the image on the verso page onto the recto page with a ghostly image of Catullus shimmering through the title page (Figure 9.3). The apparition has imprinted itself – self-reproduced – in the passage of time not just onto the title page but also onto the page before the engraving and the page after the title page; thus, the figure of Catullus appears on two different leaves and four successive pages. This accidental, autopoetic imprinting is in effect the living-on of Catullus on paper, or we might say the survival of the spirit in the (printed) letter. Succinctly put, "spiritual *Sein*" shows itself to be dependent on "medial *Dasein*".[4]

Catullus's booklet

The unforeseen inky spectre might also be taken as the image of a certain anxiety, over whether the poet might disappear from history or is destined for immortality. Catullus gives expression to this anxiety in poem 1, which imagines him inspecting the physical copy of his book of poems, scribblings that others, with the exception of Cornelius, had dismissed as stuff,[5] and wondering whether his *libellus*, its papyrus all nicely smoothed with pumice stone, will outlast "more than one generation":

> Whom do I give a neat new booklet
> Polished up lately with dry pumice?
> You, Cornelius; for you always

> Thought my trivia important,
> Even when you dared (the one Italian!)
> Unfold the whole past in three papyri –
> Learned, by Jupiter, and laborious!
> So take this mere booklet for what it's worth,
> Which may my Virgin Patroness
> Keep fresh for more than one generation.
>
> *(Poem 1, translated by Guy Lee, Catullus 1990:3)*

The production process, these lines suggest, has ended and the life of this booklet has now entered the phase of reception, first in Cornelius's hands and then hopefully handed on, with the helping hand of the Patroness Virgin, to the hands of others. Although we might read these lines metaphorically as expressing concern about the reception of this little book's contents, whether the text will stand the test of time, or indeed as expressing distrust of the written word in relation to the spoken or performed word,[6] the reference to the physical object of the *libellus* and its production as an artefact deliberately draws attention, as Farrell has shown, to the "impermanence" and the "fragility of material texts" (2009:165), especially the papyrus bookroll, which is prone to brittleness and soiling from handling. As Farrell also notes, it is the outer edges of the roll and the portion close to the front, where poem 1 would have been located, that would have sustained most damage and become "shopworn most rapidly" (ibid.:167).

Here, wear and tear would constitute evidence of *mani*pulation by each and every reader who picks the *libellus* up. The more a text is read, the more the book is handled; and the more it is used and reused, the more it is abused (Sherman 2008:5–6; Price 2012:225). Catullus 1 thus sets the conditions for a material history of reception since wear and tear and traces of touch show that far from all reception being semantic, hermeneutic, or even linguistic, much of reception bears directly upon and marks indelibly, entropically, the physical entity placed in the receiver's hands, who soils the pages with each handling. The stains, for instance, that are visible on three of the corners of the Nott exemplar, shown in Figure 9.3, are accidental marks that are not intended, that is, are not meant nor are about meaning; but this does not make them meaningless. They are signs of usage, the brands of involuntary ritual, as the Alien anthropologist, newly arrived, would clearly discern.

The volume to which Catullus refers and which he dedicates and gift-gives to Cornelius has been lost to the ravages of time and has not survived materially. Nevertheless, the idea of the booklet lives on in this meta-textual reference, or better still, in this meta-medial commentary on its materiality as bookroll. What it tells us, in addition to what has already been said, is that for Catullus its value as a beautifully finished object and presentation copy lies not merely in its verbal content but also its materiality or character as handiwork.[7] As for the physical arrangements on the inside – the *mise-en-page* – we do not know whether the order of the poems in which we read them now was arranged by Catullus or at the hands of others; how many poems were included in the *libellus's* first 'publication' or rather its first circulation by hand; or, how many poems might have practicably fitted onto a single roll of papyrus (Skinner 2003:xxii–xxiii).

Catullus's anxiety about the reception of his work, as articulated in poem 1, is not exclusively tied to poetic immortality, for posthumous fame "must rest on the existence of written, physically enduring texts" (Parker 2009:219).[8] That is to say, Catullus recognizes

and indeed anticipates that materiality is a precondition for reception. The claim therefore that Catullus's poems "transcend the physicality in which they are first presented to us" and that his words "outstrip the material text", as Feeney has it (2012:38), is only true of the particular exemplar to which Catullus refers in poem 1. Words cannot "outstrip the material text" since this would imply that there can be spirit without matter. For one thing, there would be no Catullus had his words not been stored on rolls, and rolls safely stored in containers, and then transmediated into a variety of modern book forms; for another, words have no existence unless there is a body, a mouth that speaks them or a book that inscribes them. Catullus 1 is a reminder of the "ineradicable materialism of Classics" (Porter 2003:67), and this is even so when the material remains are erased, effaced or eradicated. Although forensically and philosophically it might be worth pointing out that destruction, decay and decomposition by no means would spell the end of a book's body, since bodies even when they turn into ashes or dust break down materially and transform into particles before they are absorbed into something else and into the earth, and thus have a material after-life even when their content is no longer legible.[9] This is just one of many reasons why reception studies, especially of Classics, needs not just hermeneutics and philology but also (media)archeology.[10]

Tom Stoppard's play *The Invention of Love* (1997) addresses these issues playfully through an exchange between two fictionalized characters, both professors of classics and translators, Benjamin Jowett and A.E. Housman. When the latter asks "But isn't it of use to establish what the ancient authors really wrote?" (ibid.:24), Jowett responds by pointing not only to the inevitable transformations that texts undergo when copied again and again, but also to the material decay that changes their physical form or destroys them altogether:

> Think of all those secretaries! – corruption breeding corruption from papyrus to papyrus, and from the last disintegrating scrolls to the first new-fangled parchment books, with a thousand years of copying-out still to come, running the gauntlet of changing forms of script and spelling, and absence of punctuation – not to mention mildew and rats and fire and flood and Christian disapproval to the brink of extinction as what Catullus really wrote passed from scribe to scribe, this one drunk, that one sleepy, another without scruple, and of those sober, wide-awake and scrupulous, some ignorant of Latin and some, even worse, fancying themselves better Latinists than Catullus – until! – finally and at long last – mangled and tattered like a dog that has fought its way home, there falls across the threshold of the Italian Renaissance the sole surviving witness to thirty generations of carelessness and stupidity: the *Verona Codex* of Catullus; which was almost immediately lost again, but not before being copied with one last opportunity for error. And there we have the foundation of the poems of Catullus as they went to the printer for the first time, in Venice 400 years ago.
>
> *(Stoppard 1997:24–25; cited in Green 2005:15)*

It is equally imaginable that the Catullan *libellus* and its papyrus might have ended up as wrapping for fish (Farrell 2009:170), as Catullus predicts about Volusius's *Annals*, which "will die beside the Padua" and "make loose jackets for mackerel" (Poem 95, translated by Lee, Catullus 1990:137). Apart from the snide remark that some authors' works are clearly not worth the papyrus they are written on and the Stoppard character's similarly pointed

comments about scribes and editors, there is also an implicit acknowledgement that books have uses other than reading,[11] or interpretation; here, serving as raw material for fishmongers, rats and fungi.

What the Stoppard passage thus brings into focus is human and non-human meddling with texts and books. Crucially, it thematizes reception in terms of *mediation* (copying, editing) and in a relation of dependency on a *medium* (papyrus scrolls, parchment books, printed books). While mediation and media jointly provide the foundation for Catullus's reception, the latter is the pre-condition of the former: "textuality is predicated upon materiality" (Petrovic 2018:4). That is, the medium is *a priori* insofar as mediation is always contingent on the "materialities of communication" (Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1994).[12] From the perspective of a media-philosophical approach (Kittler 1990; Debray 2000), as I have argued elsewhere (Littau 2011), the crux is this: our cultural products, indeed culture *per se*, are only available to us through media – from the human body to medial carriers such as the tablet, roll, codex, printed book and computer. Media are the hardware of our culture. There would be no culture, were it not for media. It is therefore incumbent on us to explore how media not only give shape to the works of the imagination but also how media actually body forth imaginations, including what shape and form translation might assume.

Carson's book

Scholarly writing has paid considerable attention to Carson's *Nox*[13] as a work that commemorates her brother Michael's death and records her coming to terms with that painful fact by taking inspiration from and solace in Catullus's fraternal elegy 101; and while poem 101 clearly cannot be overlooked as constituting the significance of Carson's work, neither can the manifest attention she has paid to the material constitution of the object, echoing that paid to its fragility in Catullus 1. Thus, while Carson translates Catullus 101, it may have gone unremarked that *Nox* is filtered through Catullus 1 and the issues this particular poem raises and introduces right at the outset of the Catullan corpus about the materiality and fragility of the *libellus*. Arguably therefore, *Nox*, the text, is a translation of poem 101 and *Nox*, the book, is a translation of poem 1 for this reason: Catullus 101 is a commemoration, just as Catullus 1 reflects on the demise of the book, but the *libellus's* translation into other book forms, its re-embodiment, is the condition under which commemoration can survive at all. Carson thus foregrounds a crucial insight that she shares with Catullus regarding the materiality of media as the *sine qua non* for any possibility of reception, let alone the contingencies and manipulations of actual receptions.

Insofar as *Nox* is a translation of an elegy, additional medialogical considerations are involved. For example, Liveley reads *Nox* as "an elegy for the death of the traditional printed book" (2020:238);[14] crucially, however, she also reads *Nox* in relation to "Roman elegy's concerns with its own materialty and mediality" (ibid.:239). Elegy is a clear example of a poetry that is "both written and performed" (ibid.:246) and is thus from its inception "acutely aware", as Liveley argues, "of its own fragile status *qua* medium" (ibid.). A commemoration of the dead in the form of spoken funerary lament, it only has an afterlife if it is inscribed on a surface sufficiently durable to ensure that this ritualized remembering of the dead lives on, such as on a tombstone, or on papyrus used by the poet of elegy.[15] Thus media are implicated in the fragility of elegy: elegy is about remembrance, but remembrance is conditional on media as storage devices. The first material translation is from the lamenting

body into media as technological extensions of memory, which are then subject to further transmediation as initial embodiments wear out, as indeed Catullus fears in poem 1. Carson's translation of Catullus 101 is accordingly a translation in text and book form of a poem that itself is a transmediation of an oral song of lament into a tombstone and onto papyrus, thus a handing down of what was already a series of medial translations, here translated one more time into the media-conscious *Nox*. As Carson's own translation pithily sums up these issues: funerary lament is as custom dictates what is "handed down as the sad gift for burials". The question is: *by what means, in which media* does this "handing down" occur?

By emphasizing the extent to which mediality and textuality are inextricably linked, what Carson's translation in effect critiques, to borrow Porter's words, is the "presumed timeless immateriality of Classics" (2003:65) and with it the irrelevance of materiality to translation. That materiality is what is lost in translation[16] is not the case here. Carson thinks of her translation not simply as text but as expressive artefact; consequently, she translates verbal meaning and the materiality of media forms. This makes *Nox* an extraordinarily rich example of how media shape works of the imagination and body forth imaginations about translation.

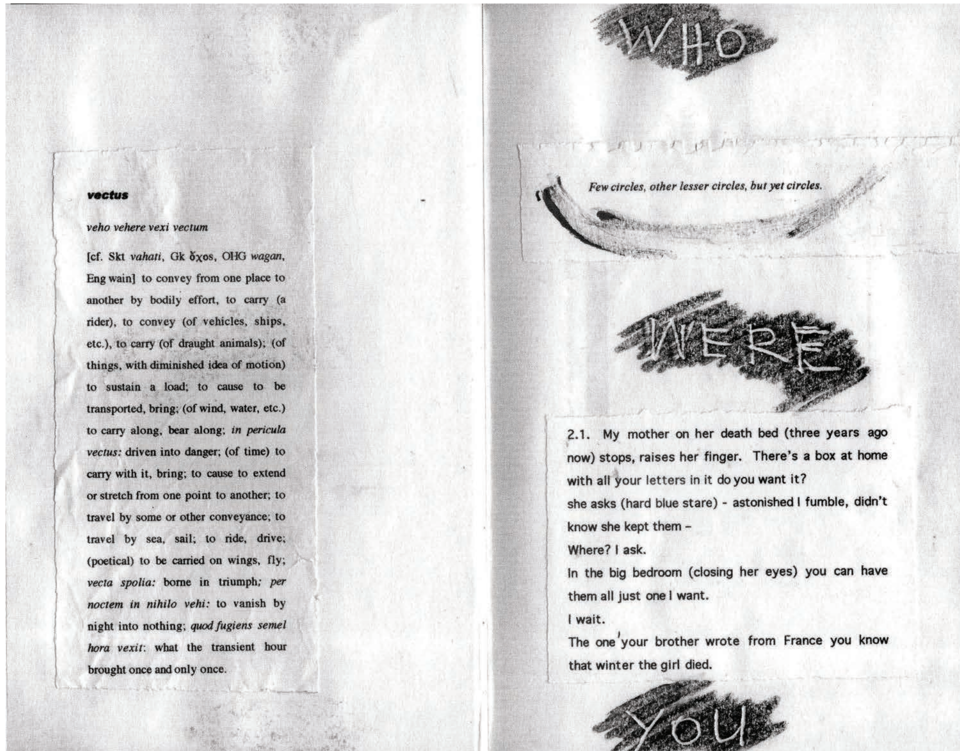
Nox is based on Carson's private, hand-made scrapbook, which in collaboration with her husband Robert Currie and a host of agents from typesetter to printer to publisher, was remodelled into a "fold-out book in a box" (Carson 2012) – with the single fold-out sheet reminiscent of the bookroll and the box resembling the hard cover of a codex (Figure 9.4), or a "tomb" or "tombstone" (Brillenburg Wurth 2013:24). Contrary to Carson's claim that its fold-out design makes the book sufficiently robust to drop it down the stairs (Carson 2011), its unwieldy character in fact makes it "sturdily fragile" (MacDonald 2015:56), so

FIGURE 9.4 Book box for *Nox* and opening pages unfolded
Source: photograph by S. Shintani (2010, Flickr/Creative Commons)

much so that *Nox* makes palpable Catullus's concerns in poem 1 about the fragility and insecure material future of the *libellus*. On the inside, the signs of manufacture are evident on every page, as is the manipulation of the Catullus source text, broken down into lexical entries on each Latin word on the verso page to provide us with a range of meanings for each word[17] and the means to create our own translation, not least "[b]ecause the backs of the pages are blank" so that as a reader "you can make your own book there", Carson tells us (2011). *Nox* ends with an illegible English translation on a crumpled, stained and smudged piece of yellow paper; again, a visual display of the anxiety that Catullus mooted in poem 1 about the decay of his *libellus*. As an object and text, as a product of hands, hearts and heads, *Nox* shows on each and every page that translation is a combination of *manu*facture and *mani*pulation.

Carson's translation is also part of an identifiable Canadian feminist tradition that views translation as a "womanhandling of the text" not merely to "flaunt the signs of her manipulation of the text" (Godard 1990:94) so as to make the presence of the translator as a creator visible to the reader, but to confront us with the materialities of translation, both as process and product. Carson's book obliges us to take into account the presence of the medium in our hands and scrutinize it as an object on the outside and inside. In this respect Carson takes on board, broadens and materializes Barbara Godard's proposal for a new poetics of translation. Here, translation is a material practice – a woman*handling* – that makes manifest the etymological links between *materia, mater* and *matrix* (Butler 1993:31) and thus genders the *mater*iality of translation as feminine from the ground up.[18] *Nox* unsettles deeply ingrained assumptions about books and about translations that have been as prevalent in literary studies as in translation studies; namely, that the material object of the book is nothing more than an empty shell, transparent and invisible to us when we read, and immaterial to our interpretations, as the phenomenologist might insist.[19] And likewise, that the translator must remain "hidden, out of view, transparent, incorporeal, disembodied and disenfranchised" (Hermans 2001:7). Carson's translating persona does not remain hidden, but flaunts her presence; nor does her translation assume for the Catullan original an "aura of sacred untouchability" (Hermans 1985b:7).

As a bookish translation that draws attention to itself as book and as translation, *Nox* is emblematic of changing attitudes to translation,[20] to the book as medium and artefact, and to matter more generally.[21] Carson's brother Michael's name is handwritten in broad pen strokes on the opening page and shimmers through a scrap of paper on which are printed in majuscules, as a nod to Roman square capitals, the words "NOX FRATER NOX".[22] Traces of the ink soak through to the next page, as if to make contact with the Catullus poem which is reproduced here in Latin on a scrap of yellowish paper (Figure 9.4). Thereafter the page layout follows that of the bilingual edition, with the translation on the left-hand side and Carson's commentaries and account of her brother on the right-hand side, although there is bleeding across pages, and through them. The brother's life Carson tries to stitch together from fragments and memories remains as ungraspable as the translation, since spirit and matter are equally subject to decay. "WHO WERE YOU" (Figure 9.5), Carson asks, followed by a photograph of her brother on the next page. The phrase is imprinted on successive pages (Figure 9.6), not as self-reproduction (as is the case with the Catullus image in the University of California library copy of Nott's book) but as a simulation of autopoesis. Contrary to its tacile appearance, the page is as smooth as Catullus's freshly pumiced bookroll, if not more so.



vectus

veho vehere vexi vectum

[cf. Skt *vahati*, Gk ὄχος, OHG *wagan*, Eng wain] to convey from one place to another by bodily effort, to carry (a rider), to convey (of vehicles, ships, etc.), to carry (of draught animals); (of things, with diminished idea of motion) to sustain a load; to cause to be transported, bring; (of wind, water, etc.) to carry along, bear along; *in pericula vectus:* driven into danger; (of time) to carry with it, bring; to cause to extend or stretch from one point to another; to travel by some or other conveyance; to travel by sea, sail; to ride, drive; (poetical) to be carried on wings, fly; *vecta spolia:* borne in triumph; *per noctem in nihilo vehi:* to vanish by night into nothing; *quod fugiens semel hora vexit*: what the transient hour brought once and only once.

WHO

Few circles, other lesser circles, but yet circles.

WERE

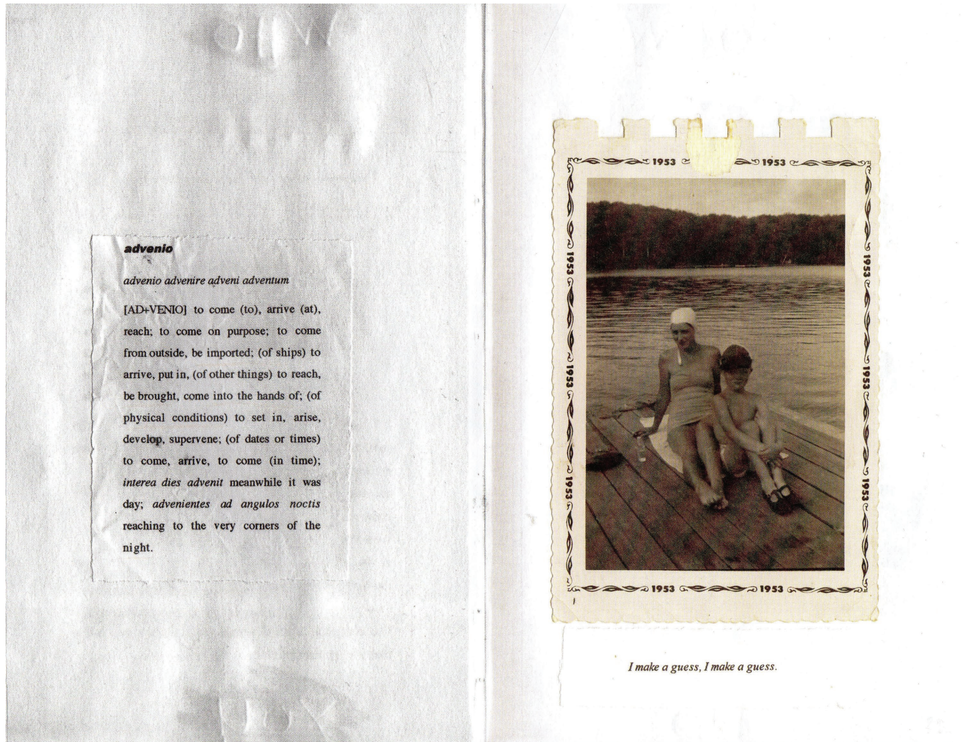
2.1. My mother on her death bed (three years ago now) stops, raises her finger. There's a box at home with all your letters in it do you want it?
she asks (hard blue stare) - astonished I fumble, didn't know she kept them -
Where? I ask.
In the big bedroom (closing her eyes) you can have them all just one I want.
I wait.
The one your brother wrote from France you know that winter the girl died.

YOU

FIGURE 9.5 Double page spread with handwritten words
Source: copyright © 2010 by Anne Carson, reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Transmediated from the scrapbook that Carson had made to commemorate her brother and which was almost lost when she gave it to a bookmaker in Germany (Carson 2011), the paper fragments in *Nox* are variously stained, washed-out, singed at the edges, dog-eared, crumbled, worn and torn to make a display of material decay, the very degradation that confronts the scholar and translator of the classics who works with papyrus fragments.[23] Carson (2004) explains her rationale for the design of the original scrapbook that became *Nox*:

> I also used bits of text from Michael's letters, actual pieces of the letters, some of my mother's answers to his letters, paint, plastic, staples and other decorative items on the right-hand side. I also tried to give the book, on the left-hand side, a patina of age – because it's supposed to be an old Roman poem – by soaking the pages in tea, which added a mysterious sepia overtone. … tea stains add a bit of history. It's an historical attitude. After all, texts of ancient Greeks come to us in wreckage, and I admire that – the layers of time you have when looking at sheets of papyrus that were produced in the third century b.c. and then copied and then wrapped around a mummy for a couple hundred years and then discovered and put in a museum and pieced together by nine different gentlemen and put back in the museum and brought out again and photographed and put in a book. All those layers add up to more and more life.[24]


advenio

advenio advenire adveni adventum

[AD+VENIO] to come (to), arrive (at), reach; to come on purpose; to come from outside, be imported; (of ships) to arrive, put in, (of other things) to reach, be brought, come into the hands of; (of physical conditions) to set in, arise, develop, supervene; (of dates or times) to come, arrive, to come (in time); *interea dies advenit* meanwhile it was day; *advenientes ad angulos noctis* reaching to the very corners of the night.

1953 1953

I make a guess, I make a guess.

FIGURE 9.6 Double page spread with impressed markings of the handwriting from previous page
Source: copyright © 2010 by Anne Carson, reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

The 'layers' that add life to bookrolls and books are like remnants, material memorials to disappearing pasts. Presenting *Nox* in the *leporello* book form – a concertina-folded roll that arguably "marks an intermediate stage between the scroll and the codex" (Brillenburg Wurth 2013:23) – is a medial translation and a means by which to enable the mediality of an old medium to live on. *Nox* further translates several media into one, including letters as well as handwritten and typed notes that appear alongside xeroxed and scanned pages, photographs and drawings. As Carson notes elsewhere with reference to deploying old and new technologies: while "[t]he scan is a digital method of reproduction, it has no decay in it" (Carson 2010a), with the xerox "you get all those edges and life, you get … the 'decay' put back in" (Carson 2014).

Bookish translation

By drawing on old and new media technologies, including ancient book forms alongside contemporary forms of digital reproduction, the work as a whole resists reduction to a mediatic 'Now'. As Brillenburg Wurth has shown, while "the foregrounded presence of photo-imaging in *Nox* makes the connection with the digital screen all too evident", there is also "resistance to the digital" (2013:27) insofar as Carson herself is all too aware that *Nox*, produced in the Kindle age, is materially "un-Kindle-isable" (Carson 2011). If bookishness

is understood here as a resistance to the digital, it is paradoxically the digital that has in effect made bookishness possible. This is true in two senses: (1) the changing role and status of the book in the digital age, as Pressman (2009) explains, and not just fear of the death of the book, has been the trigger for a host of books of late that revel in bookish materiality; (2) bookishness in *Nox* is achieved through distinctly digital means. Pressman sees "the aesthetic of bookishness" as "an emergent literary strategy that speaks to our cultural moment" (ibid.:465); similarly, *Nox's* aesthetics might be seen as an emergent literary-translational strategy that responds to media change and reflects on how the book and translation are shaped by the media of today.[25]

Throughout this chapter my approach to *Nox* has been to read it as a book and not primarily as text. This is why I have deliberately not engaged in a critical reading of the translated text, which would have required attention to be paid to its linguistic and semantic qualities. I have instead sought to focus on the ways in which Carson translates Catullus 101, mediated by Catullus 1, pluri-medially in relation to ancient and modern media. To this end, I have argued that reception is as inseparable from translation as translation is from transmediation. Put differently, since media are themselves subject to transmediation through history, it follows that translating from the classics is as much about the translation of old into new media as it is the translation of ancient texts into modern languages and contexts. Carson's *Nox* articulates – indeed, *materially theorizes* – precisely this in her translation of Catullus.

Notes

1 Catullus's poetry survived in one manuscript, the Verona codex (MS *V*). Although MS *V* is lost now, it was copied in the fourteenth century, from descendents of which our Catullan corpus derives. On the complex transmission history and whether the corpus was comprised of 116 poems or not, see Lee (1990:ix–xiv). For an overview of "the 'one-role' theory – that Catullus designed all the extant poetry to stand as a single unified collection – and the 'three-roll' theory – that our corpus represents a combination of three different ancient rolls that respectively contained poems 1–60, 61–8, and 69–113", see Butrica (2007:19).

2 My point draws on Leah Price's astute observation that it is "[i]mpossible to read without handling" (2012:6).

3 Important work in this field is also done, among others, by Armstrong (2013) and Coldiron (2015).

4 *Sein* in German means being, and *Dasein* means existence, but should be translated here as 'being-there'. The phrases *geistiges Sein* and *mediales Dasein* are used by Assmann to signal a wider shift in cultural studies and the humanities towards the study of material media (2006:21).

5 On the meanings and significance of *nugae* as 'stuff', see Copley (2007:30–33).

6 Hugh Macnaghten's translation of this line – "prolong More than one age my timeless song" (Catullus 1899/1925) – evokes oral culture and performance, assuming not only that song is the dominant medium of transmission, but also that song (as opposed to writing) is eternal, thereby linking poem 1 with poem 65, where Catullus casts himself not as a writer but as a poet who will "always sing songs" of woe for his dead brother. While there is some debate as to whether Roman media culture was predominantly oral rather than textual (Parker 2009), the translation strategy deployed here is congruent with McElduff's assessment that "Catullus wrote for performance: these translations may exist on the printed page, but they were meant to be spoken, and spoken within a *Roman* context" (2013:127).

7 See also Dupont's point that "[i]f the book (*volumen*) at Rome is an object whose material reality is ceaselessly recalled, that is because it is so often integrated into the social practice of the gift. Its value then lies as much, if not more, in its material beauty as in the texts it contains" (2009:149).

8 Parker makes this point in the course of a larger argument that debunks the myth that Rome was predominantly an oral rather than a textual culture, where song, performance and listening supposedly took precedence over books and reading.
9 I am drawing on ideas by the art/media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys, who argues that bodies are active even after death and that "the process of decay is potentially infinite". In other words, transformation of material substances is "perpetual and everlasting" (2008:346). It is also worth pointing out here that media philosophy and media archaeology are closely related in German media theory.
10 This is precisely the kind of task that the collection of essays in *Classics and Media Theory* (2020), edited by Pantelis Michelaki, has undertaken.
11 On the uses of books other than for reading in the context of the nineteenth century, see Price (2012:6).
12 With the concept of the "materialities of communication" Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer sought to include "all those phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning, without being meaning themselves" (Gumbrecht 2004:8), namely all those materialities – or medialities – from the human body to exosomatic medial carriers, from human memory to the memory chip, that house and give shape to the products of spirit, mind and consciousness. For an application of these ideas to translation, see Littau (2016).
13 The word *nox* is left untranslated in Carson's title, signifying at once its Latin otherness and its multiple meanings as night, nightfall, goddess of night, darkness, death, concealment, mystery, chaos, turmoil (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*).
14 Conversely, Plate reads *Nox* as a "eulogy for the book" (2015:108), celebrating the book medium's capacity to persist even as it comes under threat.
15 Catullus 101 "alludes both to the ritual context of *conclamatio*" and "to the epitaph inscribed on a tomb and read out loud by the passersby" (Elena Theodorakopoulos, cited in Lively 2020:255), which poem 101 and Carson's translation of it bring out by way of alliteration.
16 I am paraphrasing Robert Frost, who famously claimed that it is poetry which gets "lost out of" translation (1973:159).
17 For instance, the entry for the Latin *per*, the second word in poem 101, includes definitions ranging from "across (a barrier or boundary)" to "through … (indicating the medium through which things are perceived)" to the use of *per* as in "*per manus tadere* to pass from hand to hand" (Carson 2010b:no page numbers), thus foregrounding the multiple meanings of *per* in a variety of material contexts.
18 This point also resonates with Hélène Cixous's positioning of woman with "[m]atter" and "ground" (1986:63).
19 I am thinking here of Georges Poulet who made this claim in 'The Phenomenology of Reading': "Where is the book I held in my hands? It is still there, and at the same time it is there no longer, it is nowhere. That object wholly object, that thing made of paper, as there are things made of metal or porcelaine, that object is no more, or at least it is as if it no longer existed, as long as I read the book. *For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist.* And where is this new existence? Surely not in the paper object. Nor, surely, in external space. There is only one place left for this new existence: my innermost self" (1969:54; emphasis added).
20 In this context, see also Balmer (2004).
21 Both Brillenberg Wurth (2013) and Plate (2015, 2018) read *Nox* in the context of a new materialism and the material turn, respectively.
22 Carson's lexical entry for *frater* includes the following: "a son of the same father or mother, brother", "of a kindred race", "as an affectionate way of referring to a person of one's own age", "as a euphemism for a partner in an irregular sexual union", "as an honourific [*sic*] title for allies", "referring to a member of a religious club" (2010b:no page numbers).
23 On translating Sappho fragments, Carson explains that her use of brackets is an "exciting" means and "aesthetic gesture towards the papyrological event" by which to "give the impression of missing matter" and highlight the "drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes … – brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure" (2002:xi).
24 Elsewhere, Carson (2014) says "[t]he experience of reading Latin, to me, is an old dusty page you could hardly make out".

25 *Nox* is a book that is contained in a box, but it is also a book without borders, forming part not only of an art installation at the Hampden Gallery in Amherst in December 2011 by Alexis Fedorjaczenko, but also part of a dance performance at the O, Miami Poetry Festival in April 2011 (Plate 2015:106–107).

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