

**Roy GIBSON**

**Is there a Text in this OCT?**

In an article for the *TLS*, Jasper Griffin compares the history of textual criticism to the story of a frontier town, where textual critics are gun-slingers rooting out corruption and making the text-town safe for peaceful readers and for the settler-commentators who follow. This narrative raises all sorts of questions. But the one I want to ask is how far a text can be made 'safe' for its readers.

It can be argued that the great 19th-century addition of *recensio* to *emendatio* led to great advances in the consistency and quality of texts. It made them 'usable'. In this sense, most of the established texts of canonical authors 'will do'. But the reassuring stability provided by an OCT's text (at the top of page) and apparatus criticus (at the bottom) may be illusory. I take as illustration Catullus, whose textual history is (only) an extreme version of the norm. Here *recensio* proves in the end to be of limited use. Even when V - the lost Veronese ancestor of most of the Catullan mss. tradition - has been reconstructed, it provides a text that demands – but often defeats - emendation. V may have contained at least 1,000 'errors'. The text of Catullus as we have it today is thus, in a more literal sense than is usually envisaged by modern critical theory, the creation of its readers. Strikingly divergent editions of Catullus can be produced by distinguished critics.

There can be no complacency among readers about this act of creation. The text of Catullus in the OCT may be 'usable', but can never be regarded as definitive. In what sense, then, is there a text in the OCT? One ultimately unproductive response to this question would be to press for the total freedom of readers to create their own texts. (Not all variants or conjectures are of equal interest or validity.) There is another way. The art of textual criticism does not lack internal theoretical debate. What practitioners sometimes lack is the inclination to reflect such debates and methodological doubts in their explicit practice. A textual critic's rhetoric of certainty of choice - as routinely found in the literature – may be in implicit conflict with the same critic's careful documentation and preservation of the variants that have not been chosen.

There will continue to be a need for new OCTs, particularly for authors who lack a modern critical text. But there is also a need for a new type of text-critical edition - especially for today's students, who are now often quite innocent of textual criticism. Would it be possible to produce for the Anglophone market an edition of Catullus (in codex or electronically) where textual critical information was presented less schematically, more discursively, in English (not Latin & Greek), and with some idea given of the actual impact of the various alternatives on reading and interpretation? What benefits might there be in producing editions of canonical authors which present mss. information in a user-friendly fashion? Not the least of such benefits might be increased access to variants and the rich testimony they offer to the reception and understanding of the text through the centuries.