

RESEARCH PROPOSAL 2021

Queer Catullus – The Power of Gender Impersonation in Creative Arts

John Nott's translation of Catullus' poems introduced the Roman poet of the 1st century BC to Britain in 1795 for the first time. Several translations were to follow; the legacy of historical reception has yet been strongly polarised by the poems' explicitly sexual and violent descriptions which caused strict censure. Simultaneously however, these explicit descriptions of love affairs with both men and women were exactly what also made him an icon for gay rights activists in the 19th century.

While both these extreme approaches are centred around Catullus' portrayal of sexuality, this project will focus on the performance of gender through the construction of sexuality. The project will regard the violent and the romantic aspects of Catullus' poems as a reciprocal dynamic that challenges the very construction of normative perceptions of gender and sexuality by appropriating the same roles.

With recent academic achievements in gender studies that provide important tools to deconstruct the power and the reclamation thereof, this project will take an interdisciplinary approach when considering this dynamic. Bearing in mind Susan Sontag's definition of 'camp', this project will focus on the construction of femininity and masculinity through a lens of impersonation and its most political form of drag in order to explore the power of queer minorities in creative arts. For this reason, the research project will be conducted with the prospect of providing a foundation for a creative workshop in the second summer of the Laidlaw programme. The aim will be to encourage the use of academic research for public engagement and to promote space for queer minorities in academia.