

**Tiffany Atkinson, interviewed by Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos (06/07/2012)**

**FC:** Can I start by asking if you had any kind of Classical education...you probably did in a nun's convent?

**TA:** Not really, no. We had Latin for a year but then I moved schools, so no. No, I don't have any formal Classical education at all. So this is a very late in life discovery.

**FC:** And so how did it ever happen?

**TA:** By a lot of accidents. When you give a paper like the one I gave yesterday [at the colloquium on Women's Writing and Classical Reception, at the University of Exeter, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2012] you just try to make it sound like it was a kind of seamless critical project from the start. But it wasn't. It was hearing about Catullus, in this case, who came up a lot of times in a lot of conversations. I'd also been to a reading by the New Zealand poet, C.K. Stead, who had read lots of poems of his that were based on Catullus and I thought: "Ah, there's that name again. I should go and read some". And so I did. That coincided with things I was thinking about my own writing practice and wanting to change my default setting, if you like, from this loosely speaking lyric, not quite confessional but confessional-style voice. It just happened at a good time, I think. And it was the difference of it and what seemed to me, not knowing enough about Classical, certainly Roman writing, that was really appealing.

**FC:** Which you called 'fricative'? I liked that.

**TA:** That's how I felt it to be and that's what I was looking for at the time. Not so much poems that you read and you recognise what's happening immediately. Do you read in order to get told again what you think you already know or do you read to have something stretched? And I think certainly recently in the last few years I've wanted more and more to have that experience of being slightly cast adrift rather than having what I think I know already confirmed, if that makes sense?

**ET:** That is a really interesting thing to say about Catullus because for so many people, for such a long time, reading Catullus was like confirming that he's the same as us, or similar.

**TA:** Yes, I've read a lot of criticism like that. That uses, loosely talking, a modernist way to describe it. You know: "he begins in the middle of a conversation...all these other conversations are implied...or there's no sense of context...or there's a particular addressee in mind and it's not addressed to posterity" and that kind of thing. Which looks superficially modern, doesn't it? I don't know, I'm not so sure I felt that when I started reading.

**ET:** It is really interesting that you were looking for something that is not confessional...and you go to Catullus. But no, I think you're right, I think he is the opposite.

**TA:** It's a different kind of voice. It has a different capacity or reach or something like that. There's something about the quality of a Catullan utterance which really appealed to me that is really different from the contemporary voice, I suppose. Different from the voice that's quite common in contemporary poetry at the moment which is a kind of slightly ironic, slightly self-deprecating, rather urbane voice almost as though it were actual speech but of course it isn't, it's

highly rhetorical; but there was something about the directness of Catullus that I found really invigorating.

**FC:** The decision to become Catulla...can you talk us through how that came about?

**TA:** That was, again, kind of incidental and it looks like kind of a fairly obvious, to some extent quite a naff kind of transition: 'oh, you've just made her female...that's interesting'. And that in itself I don't think is that interesting but it did gradually become apparent that in order to write those poems there did need to be a persona in there; otherwise it was going to be quite an intellectual exercise. So there needed to be a Catullus-like persona and I suppose just drawing on other poems I'd written, I felt happier using a nominally female voice although actually, as was pointed out yesterday, a lot of the poems don't actually say what the speaker's gender really is and it shouldn't really matter, I suppose. But I really hope it isn't as what I'd see as banal, as 'making it female and therefore that makes it interesting' because I don't actually think that, in this case. I mean there are some poets who have done that really well, *The World's Wife* would be an example perhaps, but I think in general that's not enough, that's not enough to make something new and interesting.

**FC:** No and actually what Carol Ann Duffy is doing is taking the wives' perspective rather than turning the protagonist into...

**TA:** So it's the other side of the story there, isn't it?

**FC:** And she does do it very well.

**TA:** So well in fact that it becomes quite difficult to compete with anything like that. So that wasn't what I wanted to do. I suppose thinking about it I'd quite like the narrator to be somehow androgynous really.

**ET:** There is a sense in which Catullus is a bit androgynous. You'll have picked this up in the criticism, that sense that he's quite ambiguous about his masculinity.

**TA:** Yes, he places himself in quite an inferior position, doesn't he, in the erotic dynamic. So, yes, I kind of like that complexity actually.

**ET:** Did you make anything of the Lesbia figure in the poems?

**TA:** I was really interested by that...and this is where I did do a bit of reading around who the figure might have been, not that it is necessarily that significant to understanding the poetry. But what seemed to me interesting and possibly distinctive about Catullus, and you'll correct me if this is wrong, was that he was one of the first Roman poets to use a pseudonym for the lover's name. And I read various theories about this, one of them was that it was a Clodia Metelli, for example, or any number of Clodias. But the other argument that I found persuasive was that it was part of making her into a literary construct and giving him, the writer, the freedom to play with that idealised image of a person: so it's not actually a real person but you're kind of introducing an imaginary interlocutor into a poem, which to me is a very interesting thing to do and gives you a lot of licence. So that appealed to me. And clearly there needed to be, in my poems, to maintain that dynamic, there needed to be an addressee of some sort; and so my Rufus character was the approximation of the Lesbia character. But he's not quite real; he's also presented as being something of a construct of

the speaker's imagination, which is what happens in desire, isn't it? So I quite like that idea that you could follow all kinds of historical trails and find out who Lesbia was; but that's not what makes her interesting in the poems, to my mind. And the Rufus figure I have is similar, you know, you only ever see him either through Catulla or through some sort of triangulation with other people in this scenario and you're pretty sure that that's not the real deal but that's not the important thing, the important thing is the fantasy that you project onto somebody you desire.

**ET:** What's really interesting about that is that the Rufus figure in the original poems is part of that triangle of Catullus, Lesbia and Rufus and that contributes to the sense that one gets sometimes in your poems of the androgyny of the speaker. Because it's almost like there's Catullus and there's Lesbia and there's Rufus and somehow there's what you might call a dramatic positioning that works really nicely.

**TA:** I did really enjoy using those names in contemporary settings! You talk about a pub like Dempsey's or something and there's people called Rufus and Aurelius in it and I just thought: 'I love that!'

**FC:** But that was really interesting as well, the way in which you've got ancient Rome and Aberystwyth overlaying each other.

**TA:** Yes, I like that idea of place...I mean obviously there is that sense that there isn't any connection but the idea that we don't really move in one particular time or we don't have to write in one particular time. And in a sense if you're walking around having read Catullus or something, you are experiencing the world through it, so it's only one further step to make it literal. You do kind of carry these characters around; what you're thinking about and reading, they're kind of with you when you're walking around. I know that sounds a bit mystical but I think that is true. So that was kind of fun really. And I can see Catullus in Aberystwyth, I actually can!

**ET:** I loved the poem called 'Dear Kate' because of that real sense of place and I just wondered if you wanted to say anything about the relationship between that and the Catullus poem 58. 58 is such a strange poem and it's a difficult one to translate because it contains that odd expression, *glubit...*

**TA:** This is a very, very loose connection and it had to do with somehow defamiliarising the beloved or somehow, for that moment, being able to shake him or her off. It is a strange poem, 58, about, you know, this is what Lesbia's doing now, she's tossing off the sons of Rome in backstreets. What do you do with that? What kind of statement is that? What I took it to be within the Catullus context was perhaps a rhetorical way of saying: 'Screw you. I'm done'. For that moment, for that utterance at least, being able to create some kind of distance through contempt and exaggeration. And my poem, 'Dear Kate', is really very, very far from that except in that it's one of the very few where the speaker manages to at least put some distance between herself and her vision of, actually in this context, some very seedy guy. So he appears doing his thing on the prom in Aberystwyth and a lot of the Roman settings become the prom, the pier: slightly seedy places in a seaside town and for a moment there she's able to think: 'Actually, your behaviour is a bit gross'. That's a very, very, very lateral take. And in fact that's one of the ones where I wasn't even sure it'd be worth referencing the poem.

**ET:** I don't think it's as far as you think because what you've got with 'Dear Kate' is that sense of complicity between the friends, and poem 58 is actually addressed to Caelius Rufus. So it's the poem in which Catullus says to his friend: 'We're friends, she's outside'.

**TA:** Yes, it's a different triangulation, isn't it? And I think that's right actually, yes, it was it was that connection with a friend as well.

**ET:** And it's a very male friendship. I don't like the poem very much because it's a terribly misogynist poem, it really degrades Lesbia but I think you've turned that round in a really interesting way and made it about female friendship.

**TA:** Yes, I think that was what I wanted to accomplish in that poem. That there was some kind of movement towards... That's one of the things that isn't that present in my collection: Catulla doesn't have many friends, she doesn't spend much time with them, she's so self-absorbed. And that kind of sense of making that connection, although in this poem, as in Catullus', he says it's only a very provisional moment of bravado but perhaps useful at the time.

**ET:** Yes, because that friendship is quite fragile. I just think that line: 'Coffee soon', I mean, you say that so often to those you have neglected...

**FC:** And that you intend to neglect...

**TA:** Yes, you leave the onus on them to say: "Yes, I will come round at 11 o'clock"... I enjoyed writing that poem actually. That was one of the ones that I really enjoyed thinking about.

**ET:** And it was incredibly vivid and had this incredible sense of place and really captured that thing that you get so often in Catullus poems of a dialogue between two people and there's a third person and often the third person in Catullus is Lesbia and the person he's talking to is Caelius Rufus.

**TA:** Yes, there's always triangulations of some sort.

**FC:** When you were preparing to write it did you... you said you read a fair bit of the criticism, I was just wondering whether you looked at any of the fiction that engages with Catullus, like Helen Dunmore's *Counting the Stars*?

**TA:** No I didn't. What I didn't read a lot of but what I'm kind of catching up with it now having finished the book were things akin to what I was doing: so contemporary writers, apart from Josephine Balmer, I read hers, but the ones I read were more like translations in the traditional sense. I didn't read fictionalised versions because I just felt I would be kind of co-opted by their versions. Not that I fear being contaminated by other people's ideas, I was probably worried that they'd be better and also that they would make it seem too much of a muddy water to enter. You know it's quite hard sometimes to maintain the confidence in a project because you know that other people are doing it, in probably much better ways and you can have too much information sometimes. Alice Oswald said this yesterday, didn't she, that you can do lots of research but then you just need to push it away and do something otherwise you'll never get started because there's always something else to read. And actually lots of people were saying: 'Oh, have you read this? Have you read that?' and I thought: 'Well, I could go on researching this forever but I'm not going to. I'm going to read enough that I feel I've got some handle but that there's still a little chink of

possibility that, as far as I know, hasn't been filled in yet.' But it has since been brought to my attention, not least at the conference yesterday, that there are hundreds of years of this kind of thing, of rewritings and adaptations and translations and engagements with...

**ET:** Except they're all by men. The mainstream of the tradition of taking Catullus as a model and rewriting is basically a kind of male, lyrical tradition, of feeling in tune with that persona. Very different from what you've done.

**TA:** Good!

**ET:** I should say Anne Carson. Anne Carson is the only person who... Have you come across *Men in the Off Hours*?

**TA:** Yes I have. I like Anne Carson a lot.

**ET:** And she's done some really wacky things with those poems but not all of them, just a handful.

**TA:** Well as I have, just a handful. It's a huge undertaking really. And there are many different kinds of poems as well and I think some of the longer ones, what seem to me more formal ones, public style poems, those are more challenging I think, poems 63 and 65 and so on.

**ET:** But you took, I think, that challenge up with the last one?

**TA:** There are two that sort of do that: 'Hymen Hymenaeus' and then there's one, 'Ave atque vale'...

**ET:** 'Ave atque vale' yes, I wanted you to say something about that.

**TA:** But those were an attempt to sort of acknowledge the other kinds of poems, as I saw it, that were more sort of abstracted I suppose and more engaged with traditions and more written as it were for posterity as opposed to for the third person in the triangle or something. But they were hard to write.

**ET:** With 'Ave atque vale' I was quite interested that you say in your list that it's 63 and 64 and you know, at the start of it, the first two stanzas of it are very, very strongly reminiscent of all the things about the death of the brother...

**TA:** That was something that had to be tackled, I think, the death of the brother; but there wasn't an equivalent in my scenario. Nonetheless because it's Catullus and that's the famous line, I kind of needed to have it in there somehow and also that sense of the order of gods changing over. That was written pretty much during the elections and so there was that sense of changing over one set of torturing for another set, you know? And this is where I had to do quite a lot of research actually because these longer poems in Catullus assume a huge knowledge in the readership. He is drawing on little bits of fragments of mythologies and sort of throwing them in and that's quite hard for someone who's a non-classicist to pick through but once I'd done that I actually liked that sense of being able to switch. It's an interior landscape, I suppose, where you're perfectly able to talk about your actual brother in one line and then move to the death of a god in another, and why not? I liked that tapestry and a lot of them have tapestries in them, don't they? That feeling of weaving

lines together was hard because you can't rely on persona for that, you can't get that ready thrill of a tone of voice or an address to a persona which has a bite in it, you have to do something else. But I found that really interesting. I didn't do it nearly as well as it could be done but I might come back to that actually as a way of writing.

**ET:** I think you should. I think you do it very well. And I thought your take on the Fates was very interesting.

**TA:** Looms are fascinating actually, aren't they? I think I remember...I can't remember if I actually saw this or dreamt it, but I think there was something on TV that was one of these programmes about rehabilitating young offenders. It involved occupational therapy and one of these things was knitting or it was something to do with fabrics but it was all these young kids, young boys making things and I thought: 'That's wonderful'. But I'm not entirely sure if I saw that or if I made it up. I've got a very clear image in my head of seeing these young offenders weaving or doing something with an old piece of machinery and a woman saying like: 'This is what you do'. I thought that was quite a nice idea...

**ET:** Do you want to talk some more about translations?

**TA:** Well that's interesting because, as I said, I don't read Latin although I did have the Latin open in front of me, partly so I could actually see the forms, the structures and the sheer complexity of those. But I had a number of different translations and some of them were metrical and as a result the language itself was quite contorted but the sense of form was very present, some of them were those little prose digests that you can get and some of them were poetic interpretations like this Peter Whigham version. I probably liked that best and I realised afterwards that it might well be because he also does a lot of work on Modernist poets, particularly William Carlos Williams I think, and he seems to be borrowing that kind of mode in his translations and that appealed to me. But in the end what I would do was read a poem over and over and over in various different versions and then just put it away and not look at it while I was writing and then maybe go back and have a look at something for a point of detail but not actually have it in view because it's heavy, it's going to pull you in, it's better than anything one is writing oneself and you need to make that distance, I think. So it's actually very cavalier and it's not something I would ever do in any other form of writing. I certainly wouldn't do that in academic writing, take those kinds of liberties, but in poetry it kind of felt alright. I don't know if it is or not. And then there's always the question of how to acknowledge those connections in the book, which is why there is a list at the end of the book of the specific poems, but not *with* the poems because it's not as though you need that in order to make sense of the poems. But that took a bit of thinking about. Are there translations that are considered, you know, *the* best ones to use, then? Because I didn't really know...

**ET:** The one that the students use is one by Guy Lee, which you may have come across - it's Oxford World Classics and it's got the Latin on the one side and it is possibly a little contorted, as you say. There's a new one which is very impressively metrical by Peter Green.

**TA:** Yes, I think I have looked at that one. I think I might have discovered that one quite late.

**ET:** It's not been out very long.

**TA:** And then there was Josephine Balmer's as well. It was really great to discover her actually. That was sent to me by Neil Astley at Bloodaxe, it's a Bloodaxe book and that was great.

**FC:** Bloodaxe publishes quite a lot of poetry that engages with the ancient world.

**TA:** Yeah, they have a really interesting range. They also publish a lot of poetry in translation and have done for a long time, particularly Eastern European poets and poets who are only now becoming more mainstream for a British readership. But they were well ahead with that and that's one of the reasons I liked them really, they had this kind of open and non-insular attitude towards poetry and there are a lot of influences there in lots of the poems...

**FC:** Something you were saying earlier when you were talking about the way in which Catullus dedicates poems to his friend, did you have that in mind when you made your dedication?

**TA:** Yes, that's actually a particular person who read it and didn't recognise himself. Yes this is a dear friend, a professor of poetry and it was originally a copy of his Catullus that I borrowed one day and so he's the Cornelius figure, not that he recognised himself, which was a pity but that was a real person, yes. Actually, a combination of two people who've been kind and supportive but in a distant, 'way ahead of me' sort of way. But a lot of the friends who are addressed in the other poems, they are real people. I have that sense in Catullus' poems as well that for all they are fictionalised there are real friendships there and there are real conversations behind a lot of those poems. The one where he and a fellow poet spend the day writing verses and then they can't sleep because they're so jiggled up by it: I kind of think that probably really happened. There's a genuine appreciation there of camaraderie and banter and exchange and I dedicated this book to my friend because it is a book about friendship in a lot of ways. That's the enduring thing. No matter what bizarre erotic fascinations people get themselves into, the friendships are quite stable. And that doesn't get written enough about, I think.

**ET:** And that's a really big thing in Catullus, I think. There are as many poems addressed to his friends as there are to Lesbia. I wondered if you wanted to say anything about your version of the Sappho translation, 51?

**TA:** In my version Clodia is actually Rufus' wife, so she's the other party. I think this is the first one I wrote in the English approximation of the Sapphic stanza which is probably far less complex than the actual Sapphic stanza but nonetheless does a sort of 11/11/11/5 syllabic structure. And this was a kind of embarrassing poem to write because it's about, not that this is a true story, but the scenario is an embarrassing one, where you are the third party in an extra-marital affair and you're imagining, as you can't help but do, the wife, the other woman, even though the speaker is the other woman and the strangeness of that and the way the character identifies with the rival. That was something in Catullus' poems as well where he talks about 'this person who's talking to you...' and that was the Sappho poem wasn't it, about triangulation and watching the beloved in conversation with another and that sort of relationship which is quite interesting and produces unusual identifications. You know, so the cliché would be: 'Oh, you hate the rival in love' but actually that's not always the case, you can be fascinated by them, you can even be attracted to them in some kinds of ways and it was kind of about that, that confusing sense of connection because in those situations you tend to know an awful lot about the rival, you find out a lot, you don't know what to do with the information but you want it all the same but there's a strange sense there of intimacy.

**FC:** But it is true though that you sort of invade the rival's life, don't you? You track it down and find out as much as you can about them.

**TA:** I'm making it sound like I've been in this situation and I haven't, it's not autobiographical, but I think there is a sense of that, isn't there? I mean even at the most banal level, like your boyfriend's exes or something: you want to know but you don't want to know. What do you do with that information? I'm quite interested in those slightly seedy and slightly self-damaging aspects of love and desire. That there is always that ghost of a very needy and insecure inner self that we kind of keep stamped down and in well-behaved poetry we don't acknowledge that.

**FC:** And indeed in well-behaved life, because that's quite a difficult thing to admit to. You couldn't admit, even to your nearest and dearest, that you'd been googling various people...

**TA:** But one does! And in all kinds of situations: in professional life, this is an erotic scenario but it doesn't have to be that. We all do it. We all want to know: 'who's the person that got that job?'. That kind of information that you have and where do you put it? And that interests me and I think it interests Catullus as well. Very few of his poems are direct, face-to-face declarations, they're always skewed through various other scenarios, aren't they? And I think that's how a lot of our lives are spent. A lot of our emotional lives always seem to be wired through other things and that's interesting, I think. It's not comfortable, but it's interesting.

**ET:** What you pick up on in the Sappho poem is that in a way it is a very direct declaration of: 'I love you and I am powerless'; but it starts with that oblique thing: 'that man who's sitting next to you, he seems to me to be like a god'...

**TA:** '*because he's sitting next to you*'...by proxy, there's a kind of...

**ET:** I also thought it was wonderful that you got to the line about the greenness in it, in the last stanza because this is the thing people are always worrying about the 'green Sappho' and of course it's not in Catullus, so that's going back to Sappho.

**TA:** Yes that was a bit of research that crept in there. I don't remember that process but that's what happens when you do that swotting and then you put it away and then a word like 'green' exists and you think: 'why have I got green in there?'. It's that kind of acknowledgement of that neediness: 'Look I'm that sticky fingered brat still clamouring at the apron whining'. There's nothing proud in this poem. That neediness that underlies a lot of everyday relationships, I think is kind of interesting. You don't want to dwell on it too much but to be able to have a little bit of lightness towards it is probably a good thing otherwise we'd all be hopelessly neurotic, wouldn't we?

**FC:** But even if you didn't know the Sappho it makes sense the 'being left green with want', I think. It's a lovely image.

**TA:** The envy code as well, isn't it, green.

**ET:** Would you like to talk about 'women's writing' as a phenomenon?

**TA:** It's an interesting question that or an interesting subject and came up yesterday. I feel kind of bound to it in some sense and I think it's an important thing to acknowledge that one is writing from a particular gender and with particular things in mind but what I don't have is a gender agenda,



if you know what I mean, in my writing because that's just not how I write. But having said that I'm sure that my reading or just general interest in feminist literature and feminist literary history is relevant there but not in a direct way. I mean, I would hate to write a poem that was a flag waving statement about anything. But for example, it did shock me that you mentioned the only translations of Catullus by women have been very, very recent ones, *very* recent. Now why is that? And I think those are questions that need to be asked. I'm not sure that the answer needs to come through one's creative practice and I'm not sure one has that much control over what you write about. You know, you can't really write poetry as criticism backwards, if you see what I mean? It would come out very dry and manifesto-ish. But there is a lot of gender in this collection and there was a sense of exploring, as I've said before, the ragged edges of what lyric does and how you address these clichéd and banal subjects: of being in love and disappointed love and family and all that kind of thing. And there is a sense there that it is important that it's sometimes a woman's voice and that she is able to say things without them being improper or indecorous or inappropriate but I dare say that's true of a male narrator. I don't know, I'm not sure what I'm saying is because it's how I think or because of gender, I'm not even sure if that's for me to say, if that makes any sense? But I do think it's interesting and significant that what came up in our discussions yesterday is that it seems to be women that are particularly engaging with classical traditions with their creative work now in ways that seems a little bit more, from the evidence yesterday, challenging and questioning than men. And that is significant, isn't it? It's important. And suggests something about what these sources enable writers to do. Beyond that I can't really get a handle on it as an overall phenomenon.

**FC:** It's interesting though, because to some extent I'd thought it was because perhaps because we'd got a generation of women who actually did have access to classical education at school and classical civilisation is a burgeoning area and yet you say that you did one year of Latin and then this sort of came out of the blue with just lots of people talking about Catullus.

**TA:** It did, but I'm not sure that you have to have had an official classical education to be aware of these things. I mean, they're around, aren't they? Most of us know the term 'Homeric' without necessarily having read Homer or would have some sense of what an odyssey was. And they're kind of themes that occur particularly in popular culture, in films and games and so on. So I think there is a residual sense that most people do know, you pick these things up and you'd know where to go to look for the originals. Now whether you'd go that far or not is perhaps a matter of individual motivation and taste but I think there is still a sense in which certainly some of these stories and names and ideas are present in the material of everyday culture.

**FC:** They are very present at the moment.

**ET:** They are more present than ever. In previous generations, say before the start of the Penguin Classics which are only relatively recent, there was not perhaps this widespread access to Classics.

**TA:** So there's like a lost generation there. So if you didn't go to grammar school... That's interesting though because that would make someone of my generation the one that grew up under the umbrella of the Penguin generation. So clearly it's worked whatever the idea was. I suppose you could say that about all kinds of literary classics as well. That they are very present, aren't they? And yes, this Penguification of culture. It's probably a good thing.

**ET:** Its specific aim was to get lots of different people reading these things and that's why they were launched, for instance, with E.V. Rieu's prose translation of the *Odyssey* in 1946.

**TA:** So that would be kind of our mothers, then. That's interesting. So women had access. Perhaps it wasn't seen as a, or it hasn't been seen as a, sort of privileged thing that you have to earn your right to engage with, might have something to do with it? As well perhaps this trend, the Duffy phenomenon I suppose, of textual interventions into texts from a feminine if not necessarily feminist point of view. I think there's something important about that intervention, it's not just her it's things like *Wide Sargasso Sea* and things like that, that you can intervene in a classic and that's different from being a scholarly expert but it's a level of engagement that's permissible. I think it's interesting the sense of permissibility is troubling in itself but maybe something like that has happened. That you're allowed.

**ET:** And it is. Once you've got this sort of paperback that you can just get out from the library it does feel more permissible. I mean the thing that Jo Balmer says about Sappho: that when she went to University you couldn't get a paperback, popular translation of Sappho in the UK, so this is in the '70s. You had to order Mary Barnard's from America which was the only one that was about. So if you weren't somebody who had enough Greek to read a scholarly edition of Sappho then that was it. It's all very, very recent.

**TA:** As a Classicist, as somebody who can read the Greek and the Latin, do you think that's a good thing?

**ET:** Most of my students can't, so I think it's fantastic that they can get access.

**FC:** I also think the fact that Classics is so strong in popular culture at the moment means that we no longer have this awful British thing of getting above yourself, that you just can't talk in a natural way about things that might matter to you if they're seen as any kind of high culture. The fact that it's popularised makes it easier for people to talk about it and engage with it.

**TA:** That kind of anti-intellectualism is a problem for poetry as well. It seems to me that poetry suffers from a lot of the prejudice that Classics seems to. There's the sense that it's difficult and it's elitist and it's deliberately obfuscating and that isn't actually true at all but there is this enduring perception about it, which is a real shame.

**FC:** I think that is something that women have suffered from more. In Margaret Drabble's novel, *The Seven Sisters*, where they follow in the footsteps of Aeneas to Italy, the protagonist talks about having to be careful about the way she talks in front of her husband, the headmaster, and his friends because she'll be accused of being too clever by half.

**TA:** Yes, unfortunately that's still the case. When they say about some of these feminist things that we don't need to worry that much anymore you sort of think 'that's not true'. I mean certainly my upbringing, which was military, which is Victorian in lots of ways, it was very much: if you're a girl or a woman you don't contradict a man in public you 'wait until you're in the car please, darling, before you say things like that'. There's a lot of that, still.

**FC:** Was there anything else that you wanted to bring up yourself at all that we haven't covered?

**TA:** Yesterday's discussion with Classicists was a first for me and I was really nervous about it. It was actually fantastic and has been really interesting and has made me want to go back and read far more original texts of all sorts. I found that dialogue really interesting. So I'm glad that that came out of this and I never foresaw that when I started writing this but that conversation is really valuable, so thank you.