

CATULLUS: THE POEMS

Translated by A. S. Kline

2. Tears for Lesbia's¹ Sparrow

Sparrow², my sweet girl's delight,
whom she plays with, holds to her breast,
whom, greedy, she gives her little finger to,
often provoking you to a sharp bite,
whenever my shining desire wishes
to play with something she loves,
I suppose, while strong passion abates,
it might be a small relief from her pain:
might I toy with you as she does
and ease the cares of a sad mind!

5. Let's Live and Love: to Lesbia

Let us live, my Lesbia, let us love,
and all the words of the old, and so moral,
may they be worth less than nothing to us!
Suns may set, and suns may rise again:
but when our brief light has set,
night is one long everlasting sleep.
Give me a thousand kisses, a hundred more,
another thousand, and another hundred,
and, when we've counted up the many thousands,
confuse them so as not to know them all,
so that no enemy may cast an evil eye,
by knowing that there were so many kisses.

7. How Many Kisses: to Lesbia

Lesbia, you ask how many kisses of yours
would be enough and more to satisfy me.
As many as the grains of Libyan sand
that lie between hot Jupiter's³ oracle,
at Ammon, in resin-producing Cyrene,
and old Battiades⁴ sacred tomb:
or as many as the stars, when night is still,
gazing down on secret human desires:
as many of your kisses kissed

¹ Catullus' mistress, Clodia; he calls her Lesbia in honor of the Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos. (RKH); Clodia Metelli the wife of Quintus Metellus Celer, her cousin. She had a reputation for affairs, and was rumoured to have poisoned her husband. (ASK)

² Latin 'passer', a euphemism for 'penis' (RKH)

³ The sky-god, son of Saturn and Rhea, born on Mount Lycaeum in Arcadia and nurtured on Mount Ida in Crete. The oak is his sacred tree. His emblems of power are the sceptre and lightning-bolt. His wife and sister is Juno (Iuno). ([See the sculpted bust \(copy\) by Brassides, the Jupiter of Otricoli, Vatican](#)). (ASK)

⁴ A patronymic for the poet Callimachus, a descendant of King Battus of Cyrene, a Spartan who built the Libyan city in 630 BC. (ASK)

are enough, and more, for mad Catullus,
as can't be counted by spies
nor an evil tongue bewitch us.

11. Words against Lesbia: to Furius and Aurelius

Furius⁵ and Aurelius,⁶ you friends of Catullus,
whether he penetrates farthest India,
where the Eastern waves strike the shore
with deep resonance,
or among the Hyrcanians⁷ and supple Arabs,
or Sacians⁸ and Parthian⁹ bowmen,
or where the seven-mouthed Nile
colours the waters,
or whether he'll climb the high Alps,
viewing great Caesar's¹⁰ monuments,
the waters of Gallic Rhine,
and the furthest fierce Britons,
whatever the will of the heavens
brings, ready now for anything,
tell my girl this in a few
ill-omened words.

Let her live and be happy with her adulterers,
hold all three-hundred in her embrace,
truly love-less, wearing them all down
again and again: let her not look for
my love as before,
she whose crime destroyed it, like the last
flower of the field, touched once
by the passing plough.

12. Stop Stealing the Napkins! : to Asinius Marrucinus

Asinius Marrucinus, you don't employ
your left hand too well: in wine and jest
you take neglected table-linen.
Do you think that's witty? Get lost, you fool:
it's such a sordid and such an unattractive thing.
Don't you believe me? Believe Pollionus¹¹
your brother, who wishes your thefts
could be fixed by money: he's a boy
truly stuffed with wit and humour.
So expect three hundred hendecasyllables
or return my napkin, whose value
doesn't disturb me, truly,
it's a remembrance of my friends.
Fabullus and Veranius sent me the gift,

⁵ Probably Marcus Furius Bibaculus, a Cremonese and one of the new poets. (ASK)

⁶ An unknown friend of Catullus. (ASK)

⁷ Hyrcania: A wild country bordering the Caspian Sea. (ASK)

⁸ Sacia: A Scythian country bordering the Caspian Sea. (ASK)

⁹ Parthia: The Parthian Empire to the south-west of the Caspian Sea was Rome's enemy in the East. Its mounted archers were particularly effective. (ASK)

¹⁰ Gaius Julius Caesar the dictator. Catullus ridicules his homosexuality and his patronage of Mamurra. (ASK)

¹¹ Gaius Asinius Pollio ('Pollionus') a supporter of Caesar and subsequently the Triumvirate. A distinguished poet, patron and orator. Brother of Asinius. (ASK)

napkins from Spain: they must be cherished
as my Veranius and Fabullus must be.

27. Falernian Wine

Serving-boy fill for me stronger cups
of old Falernian,¹² since Postumia,
the mistress's, laws demand it,
she who's juicier than the juicy grape.
But you water, fatal to wine, away with you:
far off, wherever, be off to the strict.
This wine is Bacchus's¹³ own.

29. Catamite¹⁴

Who could see it, who could endure it,
unless he were shameless, greedy, a gambler?
Mamurra¹⁵ owns riches that Transalpine Gaul
and furthest Britain once owned.
Roman sodomite,¹⁶ do you see this and bear it?
And now shall the man, arrogant, overbearing,
flit through all of the beds
like a whitish dove or an Adonis?¹⁷
Roman sodomite, do you see this and bear it?
You're shameless, greedy, a gambler.
Surely it wasn't for this, you, the unique leader,¹⁸
were in the furthest western isle,
so that this loose-living tool of yours
might squander two or three hundred times its worth?
What is it but perverted generosity?
Hasn't he squandered enough, or been elevated enough?
First his inheritance was well and truly spent,
then the booty from Pontus, then
Spain's, to make three, as the gold-bearing Tagus knows:
now be afraid for Gaul's and Britain's.
Why cherish this evil? What's he good for
but to devour his rich patrimony?
Was it for this, the city's wealthiest,
you, father-in law, son-in-law, wasted a world?

51 An Imitation of Sappho: to Lesbia

He seems equal to the gods, to me, that man,

¹² Wine from Falernia, a district in Northern Campania famous for its high quality wine-making. (ASK)

¹³ The god Dionysus, the 'twice-born', the god of the vine. The son of Jupiter and Semele. His worship was celebrated with orgiastic rites borrowed from Phrygia. His female followers are the Maenades or Bacchantes. He carries the thyrsus, a wand tipped with a pine-cone, the Maenads and Satyrs following him carrying ivy-twined fir branches as thyrsi. ([See Caravaggio's painting –Bacchus – Uffizi, Florence](#)) (ASK)

¹⁴ A catamite (Latin form of Greek Ganymede); a pubescent boy who was the intimate companion of a young man in ancient Rome, usually in a pederastic friendship. It was usually a term of affection and literally means "Ganymede" in Latin. It was frequently used as a term of insult. The word derives from the proper noun Catamitus, the Latinized form of Ganymede, the beautiful Trojan youth abducted by Zeus to be his companion and cupbearer. (Wikipedia)

¹⁵ Caesar's chief engineer in Gaul, and one of his intimates. (ASK)

¹⁶ A pejorative term for a gay man (similar to 'faggot'). (RKH)

¹⁷ The son of Myrrha, by her father Cinyras, born after her transformation into a myrrh-tree. (As such he was a vegetation god born from the heart of the wood.) See Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book X:503-559. Venus fell in love with his beauty. She warned him to avoid savage creatures but he ignored her warning and was killed by a wild boar that gashed his thigh. His blood became the windflower, the anemone. (ASK)

¹⁸ Caesar. (RKH)

if it's possible more than just divine,
who sitting over against you, endlessly
sees you and hears you
laughing so sweetly, that with fierce pain I'm robbed
of all of my senses: because that moment
I see you, Lesbia, nothing's left of me.....
but my tongue is numbed, and through my poor limbs
fires are raging, the echo of your voice
rings in both ears, my eyes are covered
with the dark of night.

54. Oh Caesar! : of Otho's head

Otho's head is quite tiny,
and it's owner's legs loutishly unclean,
soft and delicate is Libo's farting:
if not with all that, then let me displease you
with Sufficio, old age renewed...
again let my worthless iambs
rile you, our one and only general.¹⁹

56. Threesome: to Cato

O Cato,²⁰ an amusing ridiculous thing,
worth your ears and your laughter!
Cato laugh as you love Catullus:
the thing is amusing, and quite ridiculous.
I caught my girl's little pupil thrusting away:
if only to please Dione, I sacrificed him
to my rigid succeeding shaft.

83. The Husband: to Lesbia

Lesbia says bad things about me to her husband's face:
it's the greatest delight to that fool.
Mule, don't you see? If she forgot and was silent about me,
that would be right: now since she moans and abuses,
she not only remembers, but something more serious,
she's angry. That is, she's inflamed, so she speaks.

85. Love-Hate

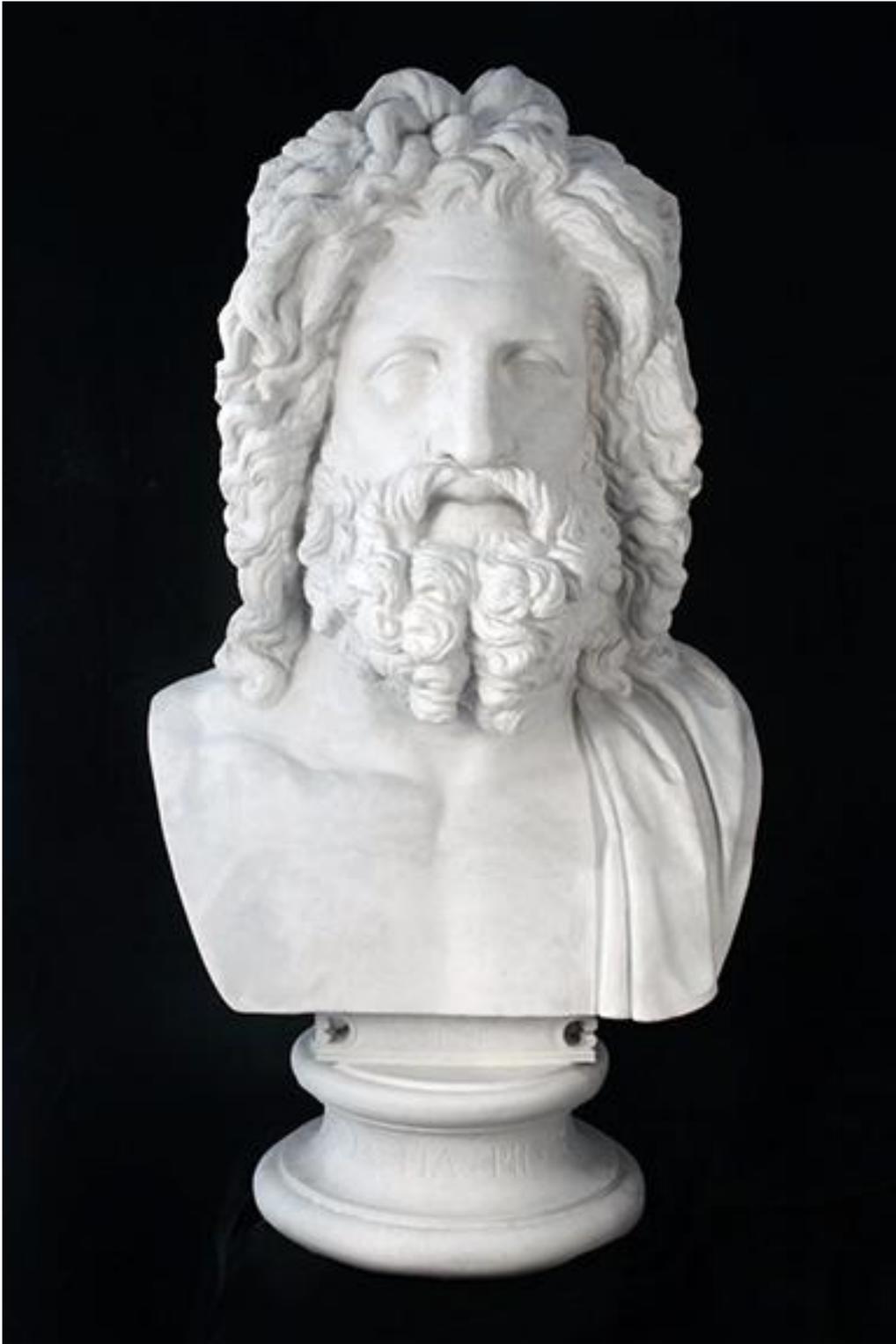
I hate and love. And why, perhaps you'll ask.
I don't know: but I feel, and I'm tormented.

92. Sign of Love: to Lesbia

Lesbia always speaks ill of me, never shuts up
about me: damn me if she doesn't love me.
What's the sign? Because it's the same with me: I'm
continually complaining, but damn me if I don't love her.

¹⁹ Otho, Libo, and Sufficio are unidentified friends of Caesar. (RKH)

²⁰ Publius Valerius Cato, a freedman of Verona, born c100BC, poet and man of letters, perhaps the original source of the new movement in poetry. (ASK)



sculpted bust (copy) by Brassides, the Jupiter of Otricoli, Vatican



Caravaggio; c.1595; Uffizi, Florence



Warren Cup, 50 A.D.; British Museum