**Classic Poetry Series**

# Gaius Valerius Catullus

## - poems -

**Publication Date:**

2012

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Gaius Valerius Catullus (84-54 BC)

Gaius Valerius Catullus was a Latin poet of the Republican period. His surviving works are still read widely, and continue to influence poetry and other forms of art.

Biography

Catullus came from a leading equestrian family of Verona in Cisalpine Gaul, and according to St. Jerome, he was born in the town. The family was prominent enough for his father to entertain Caesar, then proconsul of both Gallic provinces. In one of his poems Catullus describes his happy return to the family villa at Sirmio on Lake Garda near Verona. The poet also owned a villa near the fashionable resort of Tibur (modern Tivoli); his complaints about his poverty must be taken with a grain of salt.
The poet appears to have spent most of his young adult years in Rome. His friends there included the poets Licinius Calvus, and Helvius Cinna, Quintus Hortensius (son of the orator and rival of Cicero) and the biographer Cornelius Nepos, to whom Catullus dedicated the extant libellus which is the basis of his fame. He appears to have been acquainted with the poet Marcus Furius Bibaculus. A number of prominent contemporaries appear in his poetry, including Cicero, Caesar and Pompey. According to an anecdote preserved by Suetonius, Caesar did not deny that Catullus's lampoons left an indelible stain on his reputation, but when Catullus apologized, he invited the poet for dinner the very same day.
It was probably in Rome that Catullus fell deeply in love with the "Lesbia" of his poems, who is usually identified with Clodia Metelli, a sophisticated woman from the aristocratic house of patrician family Claudii Pulchri and sister of the infamous Publius Clodius Pulcher. In his poems Catullus describes several stages of their relationship: initial euphoria, doubts, separation, and his wrenching feelings of loss. Many questions must remain unanswered—most importantly, it is not clear why the couple split up—but Catullus's poems about the relationship display striking depth and psychological insight. One such poem with insight to the reasons of his parting with "Lesbia" is poem 11, which is addressed to his companions Furius and Aurelius and requests them simply to pass a farewell insult to Lesbia.

Bithynia

He spent the provincial command year summer 57 to summer 56 BC in Bithynia on the staff of the commander Gaius Memmius. While in the East, he traveled to the Troad to perform rites at his brother's tomb, an event recorded in a moving poem.

There survives no ancient biography of Catullus: his life has to be pieced together from scattered references to him in other ancient authors and from his poems. Thus it is uncertain when he was born and when he died. St. Jerome says that he died in his 30th year, and was born in 87 BC. But the poems include references to events of 55 and 54 BC. Since the Roman consular fasti make it somewhat easy to confuse 87–57 BC with 84–54 BC, many scholars accept the dates 84 BC–54 BC, supposing that his latest poems and the publication of his libellus coincided with the year of his death, a most unlikely proposition.
Catullus's poems were widely appreciated by other poets, but Cicero despised them for their supposed amorality. He greatly influenced poets such as <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/ovid/">Ovid</a>, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/horace/">Horace</a>, and <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/virgil/">Virgil</a>. After his rediscovery in the late Middle Ages, Catullus again found admirers. His explicit writing style has shocked many readers, both ancient and modern. Indeed, Catullus was never considered one of the canonical school authors, although his body of work is on the reading lists for American Ph.D. programs in the classics, and is still taught at secondary school level in the United Kingdom.

Poetry

Sources and organization

Catullus's poems have been preserved in an anthology of 116 carmina (the actual number of poems may slightly vary in various editions), which can be divided into three formal parts: sixty short poems in varying metres, called polymetra, eight longer poems, and forty-eight epigrams.
There is no scholarly consensus on whether or not Catullus himself arranged the order of the poems. The longer poems differ from the polymetra and the epigrams not only in length but also in their subjects: There are seven hymns and one mini-epic, or epyllion, the most highly-prized form for the "new poets".
The polymetra and the epigrams can be divided into four major thematic groups (ignoring a rather large number of poems eluding such categorization):
poems to and about his friends (e.g., an invitation like poem 13).
erotic poems: some of them indicate homosexual penchants (50 and 99), but most are about women, especially about one he calls "Lesbia" (which served as a false name for his married girlfriend, Clodia, source and inspiration of many of his poems).
invectives: often rude and sometimes downright obscene poems targeted at friends-turned-traitors (e.g., poem 30), other lovers of Lesbia, well known poets, politicians (e.g., Julius Caesar) and rhetors, including Cicero.
condolences: some poems of Catullus are solemn in nature. 96 comforts a friend in the death of a loved one; several others, most famously 101, lament the death of his brother.
All these poems describe the lifestyle of Catullus and his friends, who, despite Catullus's temporary political post in Bithynia, lived their lives withdrawn from politics. They were interested mainly in poetry and love. Above all other qualities, Catullus seems to have valued venustas, or charm, in his acquaintances, a theme which he explores in a number of his poems. The ancient Roman concept of virtus (i.e. of virtue that had to be proved by a political or military career), which Cicero suggested as the solution to the societal problems of the late Republic, meant little to them.
But it is not the traditional notions Catullus rejects, bur rather their particular application to the vita activa of politics and war. Indeed, he tries to reinvent these notions from a personal point of view and to introduce them into human relationships. For example, he applies the word fides, which traditionally meant faithfulness towards one's political allies, to his relationship with Lesbia and reinterprets it as unconditional faithfulness in love. So, despite seeming frivolity of his lifestyle, Catullus measured himself and his friends by quite ambitious standards.

Intellectual influences

Catullus's poetry was influenced by the innovative poetry of the Hellenistic

Age, and especially by Callimachus and the Alexandrian school, which had propagated a new style of poetry that deliberately turned away from the classical epic poetry in the tradition of Homer. Cicero called these local innovators neoteroi (νεώτεροι) or 'moderns' (in Latin poetae novi or 'new poets'), in that they cast off the heroic model handed down from Ennius in order to strike new ground and ring a contemporary note. Catullus and Callimachus did not describe the feats of ancient heroes and gods (except perhaps in re-evaluating and predominantly artistic circumstances, e.g. poems 63 and 64), focusing instead on small-scale personal themes. Although these poems sometimes seem quite superficial and their subjects often are mere everyday concerns, they are accomplished works of art. Catullus described his work as expolitum, or polished, to show that the language he used was very carefully and artistically composed.
Catullus was also an admirer of Sappho, a female poet of the 7th century BC, and is the source for much of what we know or infer about her. Catullus 51 follows Sappho 31 so closely that some believe the later poem to be, in part, a direct translation of the earlier poem, and 61 and 62 are certainly inspired by and perhaps translated directly from lost works of Sappho. Both of the latter are epithalamia, a form of laudatory or erotic wedding-poetry that Sappho had been famous for but that had gone out of fashion in the intervening centuries. Catullus twice used a meter that Sappho developed, called the Sapphic strophe in poems 11 and 51. In fact, Catullus may have brought about a substantial revival of that form in Rome.
Style

Catullus wrote in many different meters including hendecasyllabic and elegiac couplets (common in love poetry). All of his poetry shows strong and occasionally wild emotions especially in regard to Lesbia. He also demonstrates a great sense of humour such as in Catullus 13.

Musical settings

Catulli Carmina is a cantata by Carl Orff to the texts of Catullus. Catullus' love poem "Vivamus mea Lesbia atque amemus" in the translation by <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/ben-jonson/">Ben Jonson</a> was set to music (lute accompanied song) by Alfonso Ferrabosco the younger. The translation by Richard Crashaw was set to music in a four part glee by Samuel Webbe Jr. It was also set to music in a three part glee by John Stafford Smith.

Cultural references

The epistolary novel Ides of March by Thornton Wilder centers on Julius Caesar, but prominently features Catullus, his poetry, his relationship (and correspondence) with Clodia, correspondence from his family and a description of his death. Catullus's poems and the closing section by Suetonius are the only documents in the novel which are not imagined.
The new musical TULLY (In No Particular Order), which appeared in the 2007 New York Musical Theatre Festival, loosely adapts the poems of Catullus while retaining the non-linear structure of the published edition, exploring his relationships with both Clodia and Juventius, renamed Julie, and the timeless nature of memory and love.
The 20th-century Irish poet <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/louis-macneice/">Louis Macneice</a> references Catullus in his poem "Epitaph for Liberal Poets," where he mentions Catullus as amongst the first liberal poets - "Catullus/ went down young," mentioning him in the context of the death of the individual and recognising his and the universal plight.
<a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/archibald-macleish/">Archibald Macleish</a> wrote a poem entitled "You Also, Gaius Valerius Catullus," where he addresses the poet.
Catullus is discussed in John Fowles's novel The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) as being one of the foremost poets of love, sexuality and desire.
The 16th-century Spanish poet Cristóbal de Castillejo plagiarized Catullus in his well-known work "Dame amor, besos sin cuento".
W. B. Yeats references Catullus in his poem The Scholars.
Ned Rorem has a song entitled, "Catullus: On the burial of his brother."

The poem "Be Angry at the Sun" by Robinson Jeffers includes the line "You are not Catullus, you know, To lampoon these crude sketches of Caesar."
The 2011 radio play A Thousand Kisses was based on his life.
Catullus features in Steven Saylor's historical mystery The Venus Throw (1995).
The webcomic Achewood refers to Catullus as "the first poet who ever got his Bone on."

**A Warning: to Aurelius**

I commend myself and my love to you,
Aurelius. I ask for modest indulgence,
so, if you've ever had a desire in your mind
you've pursued chastely and purely,
keep this boy of mine modestly safe,
I don't speak to the masses – nothing to fear
from those who pass to and fro in the streets
occupied with their business –
truly the fear's of you and your cock
dangerous to both good and bad boys.
Shake it about as you please, and with as much
force as you please, wherever you choose, outside:
I except him from that, with modesty, I think.
But if tempests of mind, and mad passion
impel you to too much sin, you wretch,
so you fill my boy's head with deceptions,
then let misery, and evil fate, be yours!
Of him whom, with feet dragged apart, an open door,
radishes and mullets pass through.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Advice: to himself**

Sad Catullus, stop playing the fool,
and let what you know leads you to ruin, end.
Once, bright days shone for you,
when you came often drawn to the girl
loved as no other will be loved by you.
Then there were many pleasures with her,
that you wished, and the girl not unwilling,
truly the bright days shone for you.
And now she no longer wants you: and you
weak man, be unwilling to chase what flees,
or live in misery: be strong-minded, stand firm.
Goodbye girl, now Catullus is firm,
he doesn't search for you, won't ask unwillingly.
But you'll grieve, when nobody asks.
Woe to you, wicked girl, what life's left for you?
Who'll submit to you now? Who'll see your beauty?
Who now will you love? Whose will they say you'll be?
Who will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite?
But you, Catullus, be resolved to be firm.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Atalanta**

It’s as pleasing to me as, they say,
that golden apple was to the swift girl,
that loosed her belt, too long tied.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Aurelius & Furius, True Comrades**

Aurelius & Furius, true comrades,
whether Catullus penetrates to where in
outermost India booms the eastern ocean's
    wonderful thunder;

whether he stops with Arabs or Hyrcani,
Parthian bowmen or nomadic Sagae;
or goes to Egypt, which the Nile so richly
    dyes, overflowing;

even if he should scale the lofty Alps, or
summon to mind the mightiness of Caesar
viewing the Gallic Rhine, the dreadful Britons
    at the world's far end-

you're both prepared to share in my adventures,
and any others which the gods may send me.
Back to my girl then, carry her this bitter
    message, these spare words:

May she have joy & profit from her cocksmen,
go down embracing hundreds all together,
never with love, but without interruption
    wringing their balls dry;

nor look to my affection as she used to,
for she has left it broken, like a flower
at the edge of a field after the plowshare
    brushes it, passing.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Ave atque Vale**

Through many countries and over many seas
I have come, Brother, to these melancholy rites,
to show this final honour to the dead,
and speak (to what purpose?) to your silent ashes,
since now fate takes you, even you, from me.
Oh, Brother, ripped away from me so cruelly,
now at least take these last offerings, blessed
by the tradition of our parents, gifts to the dead.
Accept, by custom, what a brother's tears drown,
and, for eternity, Brother, 'Hail and Farewell'.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Back from Spain: to Veranius**

Veranius, first to me of all
my three hundred thousand friends,
have you come home to your own house
your harmonious brothers, and old mother?
You're back. O happy news for me!
I'll see you safe and sound and listen
to your tales of Spanish places that you've done,
and tribes, as is your custom, and
hang about your neck, and kiss
your lovely mouth and eyes.
O who of all men is happier
than I the gladdest and happiest?

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## By Ways Remote and Distant Waters Sped

By ways remote and distant waters sped,
Brother, to thy sad grave-side am I come,
That I may give the last gifts to the dead,
And vainly parley with thine ashes dumb:
Since she who now bestows and now denies
Hath ta'en thee, hapless brother, from mine eyes.
But lo! these gifts, the heirlooms of past years,
Are made sad things to grace thy coffin shell;
Take them, all drenched with a brother's tears,
And, brother, for all time, hail and farewell!

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## Driven Across Many Nations

Driven across many nations, across many oceans,
   I am here, my brother, for this final parting,
to offer at last those gifts which the dead are given
   and to speak in vain to your unspeaking ashes,
since bitter fortune forbids you to hear me or answer,
   O my wretched brother, so abruptly taken!
But now I must celebrate grief with funeral tributes
   offered the dead in the ancient way of the fathers;
accept these presents, wet with my brotherly tears, and
   now & forever, my brother, hail & farewell.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Flavius’s Girl: to Flavius**

Flavius, unless your delights
were tasteless and inelegant,
you’d want to tell, and couldn’t be silent.
Surely you’re in love with some feverish
little whore: you’re ashamed to confess it.
Now, pointlessly silent, you don’t seem to be
idle of nights, it’s proclaimed by your bed
garlanded, fragrant with Syrian perfume,
squashed cushions and pillows, here and there,
and the trembling frame shaken,
quivering and wandering about.
But being silent does nothing for you.
Why? Spread thighs blab it’s not so,
if not quite what foolishness you commit.
How and whatever you’ve got, good or bad,
tell us. I want to name you and your loves
to the heavens in charming verse.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## Him Rival to the Gods I Place

Him rival to the gods I place,
   Him loftier yet, if loftier be,
Who, Lesbia, sits before thy face,
   Who listens and who looks on thee;

Thee smiling soft. Yet this delight
   Doth all my sense consign to death;
For when thou dawnest on my sight,
   Ah, wretched! flits my labouring breath.

My tongue is palsied. Subtly hid
   Fire creeps me through from limb to limb:
My loud ears tingle all unbid:
   Twin clouds of night mine eyes bedim.

Ease is my plague: ease makes thee void,
   Catullus, with these vacant hours,
And wanton: ease that hath destroyed
   Great kings, and states with all their powers.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**His Boat**

This boat you see, friends, will tell you
that she was the fastest of craft,
not to be challenged for speed
by any vessel afloat, whether
driven by sail or the labour of oars.
The threatening Adriatic coast won’t deny it,
nor the isles of the Cyclades,
nor noble Rhodes, nor fearful Bosphorus,
nor the grim bay of the Black Sea
where, before becoming a boat, she was
leafy wood: for on the heights of Cytorus
she often hissed to the whispering leaves.
The boat says these things were well known to you,
and are, Amastris and box-wood clad Cytorus:
she says from the very beginning she stood
on your slope, that she dipped her oars
in your water, and carried her owner from there
over so many headstrong breakers,
whether the wind cried from starboard
or larboard, or whether Jupiter struck at the sheets
on one side and the other, together:
and no prayers to the gods of the shore were offered
for her, when she came from a foreign sea
here, as far as this limpid lake.
But that’s past: now hidden away here
she ages quietly and offers herself to you,
Castor and his brother, heavenly Twins.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Home Truths for Varus's girl: to Varus**

Varus drags me into his affairs
out of the Forum, where I'm seen idling:
to a little whore I immediately saw,
not very inelegant, not unattractive,
who, when we came there, met us
with varied chatter, including, how might
Bithynia stand now, what's it like, and where
might the benefit have been to me in cash.
I told her what's true, nothing at all,
while neither the praetors nor their aides,
return any the richer, especially since
our Praetor, Memmius, the bugger,
cared not a jot for his followers.
'But surely,' they said, you could have bought
slaves they say are made for the litter there.'
I, so the girl might take me to be wealthy,
said 'no, for me things weren't so bad,
that coming across one bad province,
I couldn't buy eight good men.'
But I'd no one, neither here nor there,
who might even raise to his shoulder
the shattered foot of an old couch.
At this she, like the shameless thing she was, said
'I beg you, my dear Catullus, for the loan of them,
just for a while: I'd like to be carried
to Serap's temple.' 'Wait' I said to the girl,
'what I just said was mine, isn't actually in
my possession: my friend Cinna, that's Gaius,
purchased the thing for himself.
Whether they're his or mine, what difference to me?
I use them just as well as if I'd bought them myself.
But you are quite tasteless, and annoying,
you with whom no inexactness is allowed.'

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## 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's oracle,
at Ammon, in resin-producing Cyrene,
and old Battiades sacred tomb:
or as many as the stars, when night is still,
gazing down on secret human desires:
as many of your kisses kissed
are enough, and more, for mad Catullus,
as can't be counted by spies
nor an evil tongue bewitch us.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Invitation: to Fabullus**

You'll dine well, in a few days, with me,
if the gods are kind to you, my dear Fabullus,
and if you bring lots of good food with you,
and don't come without a pretty girl
and wine and wit and all your laughter.
I say you'll dine well, and charmingly,
if you bring all that: since your Catullus's
purse alas is full of cobwebs.
But accept endearments in return for the wine
or whatever's sweeter and finer:
since I'll give you a perfume my girl
was given by the Loves and Cupids,
and when you've smelt it, you'll ask the gods
to make you, Fabullus, all nose.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Ionic**

That we've broken their statues,
that we've driven them out of their temples,
doesn't mean at all that the gods are dead.
O land of Ionia, they're still in love with you,
their souls still keep your memory.
When an August dawn wakes over you,
your atmosphere is potent with their life,
and sometimes a young ethereal figure
indistinct, in rapid flight,
wings across your hills.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Lesbia Railing**

LESBIA forever on me rails.
To talk of me, she never fails.
Now, hang me, but for all her art,
I find that I have gained her heart.

My proof is this: I plainly see
The case is just the same with me;
I curse her every hour sincerely,
Yet, hang me, but I love her dearly.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Lesbia’s Sparrow**

All you Loves and Cupids cry
and all you men of feeling
my girl’s sparrow is dead,
my girl’s beloved sparrow.
She loved him more than herself.
He was sweeter than honey, and he
knew her, as she knows her mother.
He never flew out of her lap,
but, hopping about here and there,
just chirped to his lady, alone.
Now he is flying the dark
no one ever returns from.
Evil to you, evil Shades
of Orcus, destroyers of beauty.
You have stolen the beautiful sparrow from me.
Oh sad day! Oh poor little sparrow!
Because of you my sweet girl’s eyes
are red with weeping, and swollen.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**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.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## My Sweetest Lesbia

MY sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love,
And though the sager sort our deeds reprove,
Let us not weigh them. Heaven's great lamps do dive
Into their west, and straight again revive.
But, soon as once set our little light,
Then must we sleep one ever-during night.

If all would lead their lives in love like me,
Then bloody swords and armor should not be;
No drum or trumpet peaceful sleeps should move,
Unless alarm came from the camp of Love:
But fools do live and waste their little light,
And seek with pain their ever-during night.

When timely death my life and fortune ends,
Let not my hearse be vext with mourning friends,
But let all lovers rich in triumph come
And with sweet pastimes grace my happy tomb:
And, Lesbia, close up thou my little light,
And crown with love my ever-during night.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## No. 101 (On His Brother's Death)

By ways remote and distant waters sped,
Brother, to thy sad grave-side am I come,
That I may give the last gifts to the dead,
And vainly parley with thine ashes dumb:
Since she who now bestows and now denies
Hath ta'en thee, hapless brother, from mine eyes.
But lo! these gifts, the heirlooms of past years,
Are made sad things to grace thy coffin shell;
Take them, all drenched with a brother's tears,
And, brother, for all time, hail and farewell!

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**No. 11**

Aurelius & Furius, true comrades,
whether Catullus penetrates to where in
outermost India booms the eastern ocean's
wonderful thunder;

whether he stops with Arabs or Hyrcani,
Parthian bowmen or nomadic Sagae;
or goes to Egypt, which the Nile so richly
dyes, overflowing;

even if he should scale the lofty Alps, or
summon to mind the mightiness of Caesar
viewing the Gallic Rhine, the dreadful Britons
at the world's far end--

you're both prepared to share in my adventures,
and any others which the gods may send me.
Back to my girl then, carry her this bitter
message, these spare words:

May she have joy & profit from her cocksmen,
go down embracing hundreds all together,
never with love, but without interruption
wringing their balls dry;

nor look to my affection as she used to,
for she has left it broken, like a flower
at the edge of a field after the plowshare
brushes it, passing.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**No. 51**

To me that man seems like a god in heaven,
seems--may I say it?--greater than all gods are,
who sits by you & without interruption
        watches you, listens

to your light laughter, which casts such confusion
onto my senses, Lesbia, that when I
gaze at you merely, all of my well-chosen
        words are forgotten

as my tongue thickens & a subtle fire
runs through my body while my ears deafened
by their own ringing & at once my eyes are
        covered in darkness!

Leisure, Catullus. More than just a nuisance,
leisure: you riot, overmuch enthusing.
Fabulous cities & their sometime kings have
        died of such leisure.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## On The Burial Of His Brother

BY ways remote and distant waters sped,
Brother, to thy sad graveside am I come,
That I may give the last gifts to the dead,
And vainly parley with thine ashes dumb;
Since She who now bestows and denies
Hath ta'en thee, hapless brother from mine eyes.
But lo! these gifts, the heirlooms of past years,
Are made sad things to grace thy coffin-shell;
Take them, all drenchèd with a brother's tears,
And, brother, for all time, hail and farewell.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Sirmio**

Sirmio, you jewel of all peninsulas
and all the islands of the crystal lakes
and the great oceans Neptune circles,
how delightedly, how gladly, I return,
hardly believing myself I've safely left
Thynia and those Black Sea shores behind.

What is better than to be free from care
when the mind throws off its load and, at last,
from foreign journeys, we reach our own home,
sink back to rest on the one bed we longed for?
This is reward enough for all our efforts.
You, welcome sight, O lovely Sirmio, be happy,
and you too, Lydian Lake Garda's waters,
laugh, with whatever gleaming laughter you have.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## Sparrow, the Special Delight of My Girl

Sparrow, the special delight of my girl,
whom often she teases and holds on her lap
and pokes with the tip of her finger, provoking
counterattacks with your mordant beak,
whenever my luminous love desires
something or other, innocuous fun,
a bit of escape, I suppose, from her pain,
a moment of peace from her turbulent passion,
I wish I could play like she does with you
and lighten the cares of my sorrowful soul.
It thrills me as much as the nimble girl
in the story was thrilled by the gilded apple
that finally uncinched her virginal gown.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Tears for Lesbia's Sparrow**

Sparrow, 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

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**The Death of Lesbia's Sparrow**

Mourn, O you Loves and Cupids
and such of you as love beauty:
my girl's sparrow is dead,
sparrow, the girl's delight,
whom she loved more than her eyes.
For he was sweet as honey, and knew her
as well as the girl her own mother,
he never moved from her lap,
but, hopping about here and there,
chirped to his mistress alone.
Now he goes down the shadowy road
from which they say no one returns.
Now let evil be yours, evil shadows of Orcus,
that devour everything of beauty:
you've stolen lovely sparrow from me.
O evil deed! O poor little sparrow!
Now, by your efforts, my girl's eyes
are swollen and red with weeping.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

## The Dedication: to Cornelius

To whom do I send this fresh little book
of wit, just polished off with dry pumice?
To you, Cornelius: since you were accustomed
to consider my trifles worth something
even then, when you alone of Italians
dared to explain all the ages, in three learned
works, by Jupiter, and with the greatest labour.
Then take this little book for your own: whatever
it is, and is worth: virgin Muse, patroness,
let it last, for more lives than one.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**The God Abandons Antony**

At midnight, when suddenly you hear
an invisible procession going by
with exquisite music, voices,
don't mourn your luck that's failing now,
work gone wrong, your plans
all proving deceptive--don't mourn them uselessly:
as one long prepared, and full of courage,
say goodbye to her, to Alexandria who is leaving.
Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say
it was a dream, your ears deceived you:
don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.
As one long prepared, and full of courage,
as is right for you who were given this kind of city,
go firmly to the window
and listen with deep emotion,
but not with the whining, the pleas of a coward;
listen--your final pleasure--to the voices,
to the exquisite music of that strange procession,
and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**The Yacht**

STRANGER, the bark you see before you says
That in old times and in her early days
She was a lively vessel that could make
The quickest voyages, and overtake
All her competitors with sail or oar;
And she defies the rude Illyrian shore,
And Rhodes with her proud harbor, and the seas
That intersect the scattered Cyclades,
And the Propontic and the Thracian coast,
(Bold as it is) to contradict her boast.
She calls to witness the dark Euxine sea
And mountains that had known her as a tree,
Before her transformation, when she stood
A native of the deep Cytorian wood,
Where all her ancestors had flourished long,
And, with their old traditionary song,
Had whispered her responses to the breeze.
And waked the chorus of her sister trees.

Amastris, from your haven forth she went,
You witnessed her first outset and descent,
Adventuring on an unknown element.
From thence she bore her master safe and free
From danger and alarm through many a sea;
Nor ever once was known to lag behind,
Foremost on every tack, with every wind.
At last, to this fair inland lake, she says
She came to pass the remnant of her days,
Leaving no debt due to the Deities
For vows preferred in danger on the seas:
Clear of incumbrance, therefore, and all other
Contentious claims, to Castor or his brother
As a free gift and offering she devotes
Herself, as long as she survives and floats.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**To Lesbia (after Sappho)**

I say not not Helios burns so strong,
I say he outshines the flickering sun
when your laughter's radiance falls on him there,
trembling before you;

the song draws the soul from my body, it
shakes me with wanting and fear, because when I
see you I arch to the stars and dissolving I
fade into darkness,

and now, like a mawkish boy, I stammer,
pale flame veins my flesh and my ears ring
crazy in chimes and night veils my eyes,
failing such brightness.

Languor, Catullus, destroys you.  Look out!
Languor ripens your womanish ease.
Languor before has ruined great kings,
laid waste happy cities.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**True of False**

NONE could ever say that she,
Lesbia! was so loved by me.
Never all the world around
Faith so true as mind was found.
If no longer it endures
(Would it did!) the fault is yours.
I can never think again
Well of you: I try in vain.
But . . . be false . . . do what you will-
Lesbia! I must love you still.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**What a Book! : to Calvus the Poet**

If I didn’t love you more than my eyes,
most delightful Calvus, I’d dislike you
for this gift, with a true Vatinian dislike:
Now what did I do and what did I say,
to be so badly cursed with poets?
Let the gods send ill-luck to that client
who sent you so many wretches.
But if, as I guess, Sulla the grammarian
gave you this new and inventive gift,
that’s no harm to me, it’s good and fine
that your efforts aren’t all wasted.
Great gods, an amazing, immortal book!
That you sent, of course, to your Catullus,
so he might immediately die,
on the optimum day, in the Saturnalia!
No you won’t get away with this crime.
Now when it’s light enough I’ll run
to the copyists bookstalls, I’ll acquire
Caesius, Aquinus, Suffenus,
all of the poisonous ones.
And I’ll repay you for this suffering.
Meanwhile farewell take yourself off, there,
whence your unlucky feet brought you,
cursed ones of the age, worst of poets.

Gaius Valerius Catullus

**Words against Lesbia: to Furius and Aurelius**

Furius and Aurelius, you friends of Catullus,
whether he penetrates farthest India,
where the Eastern waves strike the shore
with deep resonance,
or among the Hyrcanians and supple Arabs,
or Sacians and Parthian bowmen,
or where the seven-mouthed Nile
colours the waters,
or whether he'll climb the high Alps,
viewing great Caesar's 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.

Gaius Valerius Catullus