

CATULLUS

THE COMPLETE
SHORTER POEMS

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*a ceiling mosaic in the
Library of Congress, Washington D.C.*



*a fourth century Roman mosaic,
Villa del Casale, in Sicily.*

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*[the names of people and places mentioned by Catullus
are identified immediately after the English translation.]*

*[the word **NOTE** indicates a crux in translation, which is
discussed further. Click on **NOTE** to be taken to that
discussion, and then on **RETURN** to come back to the text.]*

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the sheer extent of poetry produced by his near-contemporaries, the extant output of the Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus (84-54 BCE) does not seem large. Whereas Virgil, born only 14 years later, composes not only the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, but also the massive epic *The Aeneid*, or Horace (born 19 years later) writes his extensive *Satires*, *Odes* and *Epistles*, Catullus hands down to us a little over 110 poems. A few are substantial, but most are short. Generally divided into three parts, the collection comprises, first, 60 poems in various metres, commonly known as the *Polymetra* or *Polymetrics*. These are followed by four very substantially longer poems, and four more of some length, concerned with the worlds of Greek and Roman mythology; and the collection concludes with a return to brevity in some fifty further poems. The shortest Catullan pieces, and there are no fewer than six of them, comprise exactly two lines each. Compared with the nearly 10,000 lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*, or the over 3,000 lines of Horace's *Odes* alone, Catullus' entire work is a little over 2,250 lines long.

Such a relatively limited compass no doubt owes a good deal to the literary influences that Catullus admired and assimilated. Part of a loose association of like-minded poets called by Cicero the 'neoterics' [the new poets], Catullus applauded verse that was finely crafted and that delighted in detail and subtle resonance – verse that was much more a miniature or fragment than a thunderous statement in classical epic mode. Such new poetry concentrated wittily upon a small-scale personal and domestic arena, the elegant and intelligent features of urban life – its grace, its gossip, its peccadilloes. It is significant that the key words by which Catullus marks out his aesthetic landscape recall so much of an Art for Art's Sake movement. *Bellus* (beautiful, pretty) occurs fifteen times, *lepidus* (delightful) twelve, *uenustus* (lovely) eleven, *sal* (= salt, a metaphor for 'wit'), nine, *facetus* (clever) six times. Together, the words evoke a world of decoration and form, of clever, playful, technical brilliance.

It would be misleading, though, to interpret such features as indicative of a narrow, passive, self-regarding aestheticism. In fact, what is immediately obvious about Catullus' work is the very reverse: its variety and raw energy, the ways in which it offers a constant challenge to the worlds of constraint and

restrictiveness. In terms of subject matter, he addresses political and moral corruption, the nature of poetry, individual pretentiousness and deceit, the constituents of beauty and of goodness, our responses to death and mourning, and most especially the human experience of love and desire and sex – both straight and gay. And this breadth of theme is informed by a voice that is constantly changing its accents: from surface frivolity to quiet depth, from bitter attack and invective to calm, philosophic reflection, from riotous obscenity to moral seriousness. Far from seeming sparse or restrictive, the prevailing sense the poetry generates is rich, kaleidoscopic, generous in the root meaning of that word.

It is for these reasons, no doubt, that Catullus has attracted such attention from translators. His introduction into the English-speaking world was relatively slow, the first complete English translation of his work appearing only in 1795, and later 19th century versions paraphrasing or bowdlerising his obscenities. But in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, translations of his work have soared, nearly twenty complete versions in English alone having been published since 1975. World-wide, too, his reputation continues to grow, with current versions in more than forty languages. It becomes clear that what now almost universally draws his audience is a sense of his distinctively ‘modern’ sensibility – questioning, ironic, changing, no longer trusting in a world of whole meanings.

Given the number of languages and the number of versions into which Catullus’s work has been translated, it is scarcely surprising that variety rather than uniformity has characterised the different treatments. And in scrutinising even a single poem, that variety becomes very evident. Poem 31, for instance, is a quiet and measured reflection on the joys of homecoming, neither extreme in rhetoric or invective against others, nor exaggerated in personal self-regard:

Paene insularum, Sirmio, insularumque
ocelle, quascumque in liquentibus stagnis
marique uasto fert uterque Neptunus,
quam te libenter quamque laetus inuiso,
uix mi ipse credens Thuniam atque Bithunos
liquisse campos et uidere te in tuto.
o quid solutis est beatius curis,
cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino
labore fessi uenimus larem ad nostrum,
desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?
hoc est quod unum est pro laboribus tantis.
salue, o uenusta Sirmio, atque ero gaude

gaudente, uosque, o Lydiae lacus undae,
ridete quidquid est domi cachinnorum.

There is little that is difficult about Catullus’s Latin here, the only possible ambiguity being the phrase *uterque Neptunus*, which could be rendered ‘the god of both seas’ (i.e. the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian, although Sirmio is in neither), or more plausibly as ‘god of both the lakes and seas’. But, as the following four translations show, such clarity of utterance produces very different effects:

Version 1

Sirmio, thou dearest dear of strands
That Neptune strokes in lake and sea,
With what high joy what stranger lands
Doth thy old friend set foot on thee!
Yea, barely seems it true to me
That no Bithynia holds me now,
But calmly and assuredly
Around me stretchest homely Thou.

Is there a scene more sweet than when
Our clinging cares are undercast,
And, worn by aliens moils and men,
The long untrodden sill repassed,
We press the pined for couch at last,
And find a full repayment there?
Then hail, sweet Sirmio; thou that wast,
And art, mine own unrivalled Fair!

This, the earliest of the four versions, was written by Thomas Hardy in 1887. It is not altogether unsuccessful in capturing the emotional charge of the original: phrases like ‘with what high joy’ and ‘clinging cares’ evoke both the exhilaration and the remembered pain at seeing his family home once again. But only too often, such positives are undermined by a diction that is over-inflated, archaic, and unnecessarily ‘poetic’ (‘homely Thou’, ‘undercast’, ‘aliens moils’, ‘mine own unrivalled Fair’). At moments, indeed, any clear meaning is hard to grasp (‘the long untrodden sill repassed’). And the adoption of rhyme, when the original avoids it entirely, leads to some sense that the demands of sound are controlling the phrasing deployed, rather than the demands of meaning. The next version is very different.

Version 4

Dearest of islands and peninsulars
of standing waters or the boundless seas –
for both the glittering sea god Neptune holds –
how willingly, Sirmio, I come to you.
I scarce believe I've left the plains of Thynia
and Bithynians to safely reach you here.
What blessedness to lay aside old cares,
and come, mind burdened with its travelling,
at such a cost, wearily to our own home,
and take again our ever-longed-for bed:
alone the recompense for all our toils.
Hear me, Sirmio, let your rapture add
to mine, and have your Lydian waves delight
with laughter let out from this shuttered house.

In complete contrast to the third Version, what is at once noticeable about this rendering, by John Holcombe, is its naturalness and lack of contrivance. With unforced clarity, the translation reproduces the central pairings, both complementary and contrasting, that Catullus evokes: between islands and peninsulars, lakes and seas, Thynia and Bithynian, mind and body, outside and inside, travelling and home. And these doublets advance with a rhythmic fluency (often iambic pentameter) that is persuasive. No doubt a few details might be reconsidered, chiefly of diction. 'How *willingly*' does not quite capture the joyous force of *quam...libenter quamque laetus*, and 'take again...our bed' seems rather unidiomatic. 'Shuttered house', too, although providing an effective cadence, is a reading into Catullus's simple *domi*. But the prevailing impression remains of an attentive and sensitive translation, which captures the tone of voice in the original with skill and awareness. Holcombe's fascinating account of the process of drafting his version is to be found at <http://www.textetc.com/workshop/wt-catullus-1/html> [see Further Reading and Links].

It is clear that the translation presented in this collection is closer in spirit and language to Version 4 than to any other:

Sirmio, you jewel of every island and peninsular
that Neptune shoulders, both in the clearest inland
lakes and in the vastness of the open sea –
how gladly and with what joy I see you now.
Scarce can I believe that I've left Thynia
and the Bithynian plains behind, and found you safe.
What greater joy is there than when cares are cast aside,
the weight is lifted from the mind and, tired of foreign
service, we come back home
and lay our head upon the bed we've yearned for?
This on its own makes up for all the hardship borne.
And so I greet you, lovely Sirmio. Rejoice now
in your master's joy. And you, the waters of this Lydian lake,
laugh with all the mirth that you are *home*.

(Tim Chilcott)

I have focussed in this introduction upon a single poem (no. 31). Yet there is no question that a similar juxtaposing of different translations could be made for every one of the 100 or more poems by Catullus in this collection. Did space permit, the true variety of the versions his poetry has generated would then become even more overwhelmingly evident. Yet such richness of response is, after all, scarcely surprising. Given the barely controlled anarchy of his themes, attitudes, language, tones of voice, it is fitting that translations into English, and into many world languages, should be likewise so various, and ultimately indeed so bounteous.

Tim Chilcott
April 2013

CHRONOLOGY

- 84 BCE probable year of Catullus' birth, when he is given the names Gaius Valerius Catullus. His father is a citizen of Verona, and of sufficient eminence to have entertained Julius Caesar in his house. Little else is known of Catullus' family.
- 69 ? possibly his first experiences of both love and of writing poetry. At some time later, becomes part of a literary group (which includes Cinna, Calvus, and Valerius Cato) called the *neoterics* ('new poets') by Cicero. The group prizes sophisticated, urbane, witty, short poems, demonstrating highly polished technical skills.
- 62/61? probable first meeting with Clodia, the second (?) daughter of Appius Claudius Pulcher, who had been consul in 79. Clodia is married to Quintus Metellus Celer, and would have been about thirty-three, ten years older than Catullus himself. He immortalises her in his poetry as the woman addressed as Lesbia.
- 59 Metellus dies, and Catullus may have thought, mistakenly, that Clodia would now marry him. Instead, she takes another lover, Caelius Rufus.
- 58 his elder brother dies and is buried in the Troad, the northwest corner of Asia Minor.
- 57 he and his friend Cinna are on the staff of Gaius Memmius, who serves as praetorian governor of the eastern province of Bithynia, in what is now Asia Minor. During his time there, visits his brother's grave near Troy.
- 56 returns from Bithynia, and may have spent some time at his villa in Sirmio in northern Italy (the modern Lake Garda);
- 54 probable year of his death, from unknown causes. He would have been just thirty.

Cui dono lepidum novum libellum
 arida modo pumice expolitur?
 Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas
 meas esse aliquid putare nugas.
 iam tum, cum ausus es unus Italorum
 omne aevum tribus explicare cartis –
 doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis!
 quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli
 qualecumque quidem est, quod patrona virgo
 plus uno maneat perenne saeculo.

To whom can I give this lovely little book,
 new and just now polished smooth with pumice stones? **NOTE**
 Cornelius – to you. Because you always thought
 my scribbles were something,
 even when, alone in Italy, you had the nerve
 to tell the whole of history in just three tomes:
 learned stuff, by God, and so much work!
 So please accept this little book for what it is,
 and what it's worth. And may my virgin patroness
 let it survive a hundred years, at least.

[Cornelius: Cornelius Nepos (110-24 BCE) was a biographer, historian, and writer of light verse. Only fragments and short pieces now survive of his prodigious output, and the three-book history of the world, Chronica, is no longer extant.]

virgin patroness: an invocation to the Muse who has inspired his work.]

II

Passer, deliciae meae puellae,
 quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
 cui primum digitum dare appetenti
 et acris solet incitare morsus,
 cum desiderio meo nitenti
 carum nescio quid lubet iocari
 et solaciolum sui doloris,
 credo ut tum gravis acquiescat ardor:
 tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem
 et tristis animi *leuare curas*.

IIb

Tam gratum est mihi quam ferunt puellae
 pernici aureolum fuisse malum,
 quod zonam soluit diu ligatam.

2a

Oh sparrow, **NOTE** my girlfriend's pet,
 whom she likes to play with, cuddle in her lap,
 tempt it with her fingertip,
 tease the pecker to nip harder –
 while my own bright-eyed longing
 fancies just a bit of fun,
 a bit of comfort for her pain.
 To dampen so much grievous passion,
 I think I'd like to play with you like her,
 and lighten all my spirit's wretched cares.

2b

That would be as welcome to me as, they say,
 the woman runner found the golden apple,
 which freed the girdle round her, too long tied.

[2b: some commentators argue that these three lines connect coherently with the sentiments in 2a, while others feel they are a fragment from an entirely different poem. The issue is unresolved.]

[the woman runner: a reference to the story of Atalanta, who agreed to marry whoever could beat her in a race. Having been given a golden apple by Venus, either Hippomenes or Milanion threw it down in front of her, and distracted her from winning the race.]

III

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque,
 et quantum est hominum uenustiorum:
 passer mortuus est meae puellae,
 passer, deliciae meae puellae,
 quem plus illa oculis suis amabat.
 nam mellitus erat suamque norat
 ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem,
 nec sese a gremio illius mouebat,
 sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc
 ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.
 qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum
 illuc, unde negant redire quemquam.
 at uobis male sit, malae tenebrae
 Orci, quae omnia bella deuoratis:
 tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis
 o factum male! o miselle passer!
 tua nunc opera meae puellae
 flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli.

3

So mourn, you Venuses and Cupids,
 and all the lovelier people that there are,
 my sweetheart's sparrow now is dead.
 The sparrow was my girl's delight,
 dearer to her than her own eyes.
 He was as sweet as honey, and knew his
 mistress better than the girl her mother.
 Never from her lap would he go off
 but hop around this way and that,
 chirping away to her, and her alone.
 And now he takes that darkened journey
 from which they say no one returns.
 To hell with you, you wicked shadows of
 the underworld, who guzzle up all lovely things.
 You've stolen from me such a pretty sparrow.
 What evil... to such a little bird...
 It's you who've made my sweetheart's
 eyes swell red with tears.

[you Venuses and Cupids: Venus is the Roman goddess of love, and Cupid her son. Both names, whether in the singular or the plural, evoke love, passion, charm, sexual desire.]

IV

Phaselus ille, quem uidetis, hospites,
ait fuisse nauium celerrimus,
neque ullius natantis impetum trabis
nequisse praeterire, siue palmulis
opus foret uolare siue linteo.
et hoc negat minacis Hadriatici
negare litus insulasue Cycladas
Rhodumque nobilem horridamque Thraciam
Propontida trucemue Ponticum sinum,
ubi iste post phaselus antea fuit
comata silua; nam Cytorio in iugo
loquente saepe sibilum edidit coma.
Amastri Pontica et Cytore buxifer,
tibi haec fuisse et esse cognitissima
ait phaselus: ultima ex origine
tuo stetisse dicit in cacumine,
tuo imbuisse palmulas in aequore,
et inde tot per impotentia freta
erum tulisse, laeua siue dextera
uocaret aura, siue utrumque Iuppiter
simul secundus incidisset in pedem;
neque ulla uota litoralibus deis
sibi esse facta, cum ueniret a mari
nouissimo hunc ad usque limpidum lacum.
sed haec prius fuere: nunc recondita
senet quiete seque dedicat tibi,
gemelle Castor et gemelle Castoris.

4

My friends, you're looking at a boat
that claims she was the fastest ship afloat.
No wooden hull on water had power enough
to overtake her, as on she sped,
oar-driven, or else with sails unfurled.
This is confirmed, she says, by the rough
Dalmatian coast, and the islands of the Cyclades,
and famous Rhodes, and the savage sea of
Marmora, and the wild gulf of the Black Sea.
There it was that she – the ship to be – was first of all
leaf-covered woods, which on Cytórus's mountain ridge
would often whisper with their rippling foliage.
Town of Amastris, mount Cytórus where the boxwood grows –
the ship says all of this was once well known to you,
and is so still. When she was born, she says,
it was on your summit that she stood,
in your waters that her oars first flashed.
From there, through many, many stormy straits,
she took her master, whether the breeze was blowing
from the left or right, or whether a following wind
drove hard upon both sheets of sail at once.
Nor did she ever need to pray to
dry-land deities, as she came finally
across the open sea and all the way to this clear lake.
But that was long ago. Now she grows old
in quiet seclusion, and dedicates herself to you,
twinned Castor, and to Pollux, your twin.

*[Dalmatian coast...islands of the Cyclades...Rhodes...sea of
Marmora...Black Sea: all refer to places in the Adriatic, Mediterranean, and
Black Seas.*

*Cytórus...Amastri: a mountain and town in Paphlagonia, on the southern
coast of the Black Sea.*

*Castor and Pollux: the so-called Dioscuri or sons of Zeus, were a useful
constellation in the sky, and therefore became the patron Gods of sailors.]*

Vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
 rumoresque senum seueriorum
 omnes unius aestimemus assis!
 soles occidere et redire possunt:
 nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
 nox est perpetua una dormienda.
 da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
 dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
 deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum.
 dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,
 conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
 aut ne quis malus inuidere possit,
 cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.

Let's live, dear Lesbia, and let's make love –
 as for dour old men and their tittle-tattle,
 let's not count them worth a penny.
 Suns can set and rise again;
 for us, though, once our brief light has set,
 there's one unending night for sleep.
 Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
 then a thousand more, a second hundred,
 then yet another thousand, a hundred more.
 And when we've had so many thousands,
 we'll muddle up the figures, and lose count.
 Then no-one with an evil eye can envy us,
 knowing how many kisses we have kissed.

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

VI

Flavi, delicias tuas Catullo,
 ni sint illepidae atque inelegantes,
 uelles dicere nec tacere posses.
 uerum nescio quid febriculosi
 scorti diligis: hoc pudet fateri.
 nam te non uiduas iacere noctes
 nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat
 sertis ac Syrio fragrans oliuo,
 puluinusque peraeque et hic et ille
 attritus, tremulique quassa lecti
 argutatio inambulatioque.
 nam inista preualet nihil tacere.
 cur? non tam latera ecfututa pandas,
 ni tu quid facias ineptiarum.
 quare, quidquid habes boni malique,
 dic nobis. uolo te ac tuos amores
 ad caelum lepidio uocare uersu.

6

Flavius, had she not been crude and gauche,
 you'd have tried to tell Catullus all about
 your little sweetie. You couldn't have kept it quiet.
 In fact, you've fallen for some hot and sweaty
 tart, and are ashamed to say so.
 That you're not spending monkish nights
 alone and all in vain, your bed proclaims.
 It reeks of garlands and Syrian perfume.
 Both the pillows on each side of it
 are dented equally, and the rickety bedstead
 creaks and groans as it totters up and down.
 There's no use keeping quiet about it.
 Your body wouldn't look so much fucked out
 if you weren't up to something silly.
 So whatever you've got there, good or bad,
 just tell us! I want to praise you and your lovebird
 to the skies in witty verse!

[Flavius: although guesses have been made about his possible identity, he remains an unknown figure. Likewise, his girlfriend.]

VII

Quaeris, quot mihi basiationes
 tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque.
 quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae
 lasarpiciferis iacet Cyrenis
 oraclum Iouis inter aestuosi
 et Batti ueteris sacrum sepulcrum;
 aut quam sidera multa, cum tacet nox,
 furtiuos hominum uident amores:
 tam te basia multa basiare
 uesano satis et super Catullo est,
 quae nec pernumerare curiosi
 possint nec mala fascinare lingua.

7

You ask me, Lesbia, how many kissathons **NOTE**
 would be enough and more. As huge
 a number as the grains of Libyan sand
 that lie around Cyrene, rich in silphium,
 between the oracle of sweltering Jove
 and old Battus' holy sepulchre –
 or as many as the stars that in the silent night
 look down upon the stolen loves of humankind.
 To kiss you just so many kisses,
 that's what would satisfy the frenzy of Catullus.
 So many that the nosy couldn't count them all,
 nor could bad luck be brought by vicious tongues.

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

Cyrene, rich in silphium: Cyrene, the then capital of Libya, was renowned for its production and exporting of the plant asafoetida, a herb used both in food, especially cheese, and also in medicine to treat a number of physical afflictions.

oracle of...Jove and...Battus' holy sepulchre: the oracle may refer to the temple of Ammon, the Egyptian god equivalent to Zeus and Jupiter/Jove, known to have been sited in the Libyan desert. Battus was the founder and first king of Cyrene, and his tomb stood in the city centre.]

VIII

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
 et quod uides perisse perditum ducas.
 fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
 cum uentitabas quo puella ducebat
 amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.
 ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,
 quae tu uolebas nec puella nolebat,
 fulsere uere candidi tibi soles.
 nunc iam illa non uult: tu quoque impotens noli,
 nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser uiue,
 sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.
 uale puella, iam Catullus obdurat,
 nec te requiret nec rogabit inuitam.
 at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
 scelestas, uae te, quae tibi manet uita?
 quis nunc te adibit? cui uideberis bella?
 quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
 quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
 at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

8

Poor old Catullus, stop playing the fool.
 You know what's died – so write it off as gone.
 Time was, the sun shone bright for you.
 You dogged her heels wherever *she* led *you*,
 and loved her as no girl will ever more be loved.
 So many sweet, arousing things
 that you desired, and she did not refuse.
 Truly, the sun shone bright for you.
 But now, she just says *no*. So say *no* too, you wimp.
 Don't chase what runs away. Don't live in misery.
 Harden your mind. Go on. Stand fast.
 So good bye, sweetheart. Catullus now stands fast,
 won't look or seek you out now you're not willing.
 But you'll be sorry when no one asks for you.
 You silly bitch, what kind of life do you have left?
 Who'll make advances now? Who'll find you pretty?
 Who will you love? Who'll say you're theirs?
 Who will you kiss? Whose lips will you now bite?
 So you, Catullus, stay stubborn, and stand fast.

Verani, omnibus e meis amicis
antistans mihi milibus trecentis,
uenistine domum ad tuos penates
fratresque unanimos anumque matrem?
uenisti. o mihi nuntii beati!
uisam te incolumem audiamque Hiberum
narrantem loca, facta nationes,
ut mos est tuus, applicansque collum
iucundum os oculosque suauabor.
o quantum est hominum beatiorum,
quid me laetius est beatiusue?

Veranius, of all my friends
you stand out by three hundred miles. **NOTE**
Have you come home to see your household Gods,
your loving brothers, and your aged mother?
You have? That news makes me so glad.
I'll see you safe and sound, and listen to your stories
about Spain – the places, people, what they've done –
as only you can tell it. I'll hug you close,
and kiss your lovely face and eyes.
Of all the happy people in the world,
who could be happier or more glad than me?

[Veranius: clearly the closest of all Catullus' friends, but little is known about him, otherwise. He seems to have served on the provincial governor's staff in Spain (?61 or 60 BCE), and also in Macedonia (58/7 to 55 BCE).

your household Gods: Roman deities, Penates, who guarded hearth and home. Each Roman home would have its own particular set of spirits.]

Varus me meus ad suos amores
 uisum duxerat e foro otiosum,
 scortillum, ut mihi tum repente uisum est,
 non sane illepidum neque inuenustum,
 huc ut uenimus, incidere nobis
 sermones uarii, in quibus, quid esset
 iam Bithynia, quo modo se haberet,
 et quonam mihi profuisset aere.
 respondi id quod erat, nihil neque ipsis
 nec praetoribus esse nec cohorti,
 cur quisquam caput unctius referret,
 praesertim quibus esset irrumator
 praetor, nec faceret pili cohortem.
 'at certe tamen,' inquit 'quod illic
 natum dicitur esse, comparasti
 ad lecticam homines.' ego, ut puellae
 unum me facerem beatiorem,
 'non' inquam 'mihi tam fuit maligne
 ut, prouincia quod mala incidisset,
 non possem octo homines parare rectos.'
 at mi nullus erat nec hic neque illic
 fractum qui ueteris pedem grabati
 in collo sibi collocare posset.
 hic illa, ut decuit cinaediorem,
 'quaeso' inquit 'mihi, mi Catulle, paulum
 istos commoda: nam uolo ad Serapim
 deferri.' 'mane' inquit puellae,
 'istud quod modo dixeram me habere,
 fugit me ratio: meus sodalis –
 Cinna est Gaius – is sibi parauit.
 uerum, utrum illius an mei, quid ad me?
 utor tam bene quam mihi pararim.
 sed tu insulsa male et molesta uiuis,
 per quam non licet esse neglegentem.'

Seeing me lounging in the Forum, my friend Varus
 dragged me off to see his girlfriend –
 a little tart, as I could see at once,
 though not without some style and charm.
 When we got there, we talked of this and that,
 of various things, including Bithynia –
 how was it doing now, and
 had it made me any money?
 I answered straight. There was no way
 that even governors themselves, still less their staff,
 could come back with their pockets lined, **NOTE**
 especially when the governor was a shit,
 and didn't give a bugger for his staff.
 'But still,' they said, 'you must have had
 what's said to be their major export,
 men to be your litter slaves.' Anxious to make
 a good impression on the girl,
 'Sure,' I said, 'things weren't so bad for me.
 Despite the fact I got a rotten province, I still
 could find eight sturdy men to carry me around.'
 In fact, I'd no one, either there or here,
 could even lift the broken leg of a cheap
 camp-bed upon his shoulder.
 At which – just like the tart she was – she said,
 'Catullus, darling, lend them to me. Please...?
 Just for a teensy while? I need a ride to
 Serapis' shrine.' 'No, wait,' I said,
 'what I said just now I had...
 it slipped my mind... It's my colleague,
 Cinna – you know, Gaius – they're his.
 But what's it matter whose they are?
 I use them just as if they're mine.
 How damned tactless can you be, you pain,
 who won't allow a man to overstate a little.'

[Varus: possibly a reference to Alfenus Varus, who rose from humble beginnings in Cremona to become the first Cisalpine consul in 39 BCE.]

But the more likely candidate is Quintilius Varus, born 75 BCE, who was a distinguished man of letters, and the friend of both Virgil and Horace.

Bithynia: a Roman province on the north-west coast of what is now modern Turkey. Catullus served there on the staff of Gaius Memmius, governor in 57-56 BCE.

Serapis' shrine: Serapis was an Egyptian god, associated with medical cures and healing. His cult had reached Italy by the end of the second century BCE.

Cinna...Gaius: Gaius Helvius Cinna, a contemporary poet and close friend of Catullus, who served with him in Bithynia [see above]. He was killed by the mob at Caesar's funeral in mistake for the anti-Caesarian, Lucius Cornelius Cinna.]

XI

Furi et Aureli comites Catulli,
 siue in extremos penetrabit Indos,
 litus ut longe resonante Eoa
 tunditur unda,

siue in Hyrcanos Arabesue molles,
 seu Sagas sagittiferosue Parthos,
 siue quae septemgeminus colorat
 aequora Nilus,

siue trans altas gradietur Alpes,
 Caesaris uisens monimenta magni,
 Gallicum Rhenum horribiles quoque ulti-
 mosque Britannos,

omnia haec, quaecumque feret uoluntas
 caelitum, temptare simul parati,
 pauca nuntiate meae puellae
 non bona dicta.

cum suis uiuat ualeatque moechis,
 quos simul complexa tenet trecentos,
 nullum amans uere, sed identidem omnium
 ilia rumpens;

nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
 qui illius culpa cecidit uelut prati
 ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
 tactus aratro est.

11

Furius and Aurelius, you're comrades of Catullus,
 whether he carves his way to furthest India,
 where the shore is pounded by far-resounding
 breakers from the East,

or to the Caspian sea, or to the soft and languid Arabs,
 or the Scythians, or the Parthians with their arrows,
 or that delta that the seven channels of the Nile
 make colourful,

or makes his way across the towering Alps
 to see the monuments of mighty Caesar,
 the Gallic Rhine, and monstrous woad-faced Britons
 at the limits of the world –

you are prepared to face all this,
 and whatever else the gods may bring.
 So just deliver to my girlfriend
 a few unfriendly words:

long may she live with her adulterers,
 whom she seems to hug three hundred at a time.
 She loves none of them in fact, but breaks the balls
 of all of them, time and time again.

So let her not, as once she did, rely upon my love.
 Through her fault, it's fallen like a flower
 at the meadow's edge, after it's been mown down
 by the passing plough.

[Furius and Aurelius: Furius may be the poet Furius Bibaculus, born in 82 BCE, and thus a year or two younger than Catullus. The figure Aurelius cannot be identified with any certainty.]

India...Caspian sea...Arabs...Scythians...Parthians...the Nile...towering Alps...Gallic Rhine...Britons: the peoples and places listed here are not so much important as specific geographical references as general indications of the breadth and variety of Catullus' imagined journeyings.]

XII

Marrucine Asini, manu sinistra
 non belle uteris: in ioco atque uino
 tollis lintea neglegentiorum.
 hoc salsum esse putas? fugit te, inepte:
 quamuis sordida res et inuenusta est.
 non credis mihi? crede Pollioni
 fratri, qui tua furta uel talento
 mutari uelit: est enim leporum
 differtus puer ac facetiarum.
 quare aut hendecasyllabos trecentos
 exspecta, aut mihi lintheum remitte,
 quod me non mouet aestimatione,
 uerum est mnemosynum mei sodalis.
 nam sudaria Saetaba ex Hiberis
 miserunt mihi muneri Fabullus
 et Veranius: haec amem necesse est
 ut Veraniolum meum et Fabullum.

12

You're not using your left hand, Marrucine Asinius,
 as you should. While we tell jokes and drink away,
 you nick the napkins from distracted guests.
 You think that funny? You're wrong, you fool.
 It's a downright dirty, charmless trick.
 You don't believe me? Then trust your brother
 Pollio, who'd gladly pay a massive sum
 to stop your larceny. For he's a boy
 full of such wit and charm...
 So give me back my napkin, then,
 or else face three hundred lines of verse like these. **NOTE**
 I'm not concerned about its price,
 but it's a souvenir of my comrades.
 Fabullus and Veranius sent me the finest
 linen napkins as a gift from Spain.
 And so I love them just as much
 as I love dear Veranius and Fabullus.

[Marrucine Asinius...your brother Pollio: Asinius is usually taken to be Caius Asinius Marrucinus, the elder brother of Caius Asinius Pollo (BCE 76 – BCE 4). Marrucine describes the out-of-the-way region on the eastern coast of Italy from which Asinius came – a possible explanation for his lack of social etiquette. His brother Pollio was far more distinguished, being a politician, writer and historian, and the friend of Horace and Virgil as well as Catullus. He established the first public library in Rome.]

*Fabullus and Veranius: Fabullus and Veranius were clearly two of Catullus' closest friends, but almost nothing is known about them, save that they **may** have served, first in Spain (?61 or 60 BCE, possibly with Caesar) and later in Macedonia.(58/7 to 55 BCE.)*

XIII

Cenabis bene, mi Fabulle, apud me
 paucis, si tibi di fauent, diebus,
 si tecum attuleris bonam atque magnam
 cenam, non sine candida puella
 et uino et sale et omnibus cachinnis.
 haec si, inquam, attuleris, uenuste noster,
 cenabis bene; nam tui Catulli
 plenus sacculus est aranearum.
 sed contra accipies meros amores
 seu quid suauius elegantiusue est:
 nam unguentum dabo, quod meae puellae
 donarunt Veneres Cupidinesque,
 quod tu cum olfacies, deos rogabis,
 totum ut te faciant, Fabulle, nasum.

13

You'll dine with me in style, dear Fabullus,
 and very soon, should the gods be kind.
 And if you could bring along a large and lavish
 dinner, not without (of course) a pretty girl,
 plus wine and wit and gales of laughter –
 if, as I say, you could bring these, you charmer,
 you'll dine with me in style. The purse that your
 Catullus has is full – of cobwebs.
 Still, in return, you'll get my pure affection,
 and something even tastier and charming.
 I'll give a perfume to you that Venus
 and her Cupids gave my girl.
 Get one whiff of it and you will beg the gods,
 dear Fabullus, to turn you into one huge nose.

[dear Fabullus: often presumed to be the same Fabullus as in the previous poem.]

Venus and her Cupids: Venus is the Roman goddess of love, and Cupid her son. Both names, whether in the singular or the plural, evoke love, passion, charm, sexual desire.]

XIV

Ni te plus oculis meis amarem,
iucundissime Calue, munere isto
odissem te odio Vatiniano:
nam quid feci ego quidue sum locutus,
cur me tot male perderes poetis?
isti di mala multa dent clienti,
qui tantum tibi misit impiorum.
quod si, ut suspicor, hoc nouum ac repertum
munus dat tibi Sulla litterator,
non est mi male, sed bene ac beate,
quod non dispereunt tui labores.
di magni, horribilem et sacrum libellum!
quem tu scilicet ad tuum Catullum
misti, continuo ut die periret,
Saturnalibus, optimo dierum!
non non hoc tibi, false, sic abibit.
nam si luxerit ad librariorum
curram scrinia, Caesios, Aquinos,
Suffenum, omnia colligam uenena.
ac te his suppliciis remunerabor.
uos hinc interea ualete abite
illuc, unde malum pedem attulistis,
saecli incommoda, pessimi poetae.

XIV b

Si qui forte mearum ineptiarum
lectores eritis manusque uestras
non horrebitis admouere nobis,

14a

Calvus, you old tease, did I not love you
more than my own eyes, I'd be as cross
about your gift as is Vatinian with you.
What have I ever said or done to have you
swamp me with these rotten poets?
May heaven bring down curses on the client
who sent you such a heap of rubbish.
And if, as I suspect, this new, unusual gift
was given you by Sulla, elementary grammar teacher, **NOTE**
I'm not sorry but delighted
that all your labours haven't been in vain.
But dear god, what a damn awful little book.
You must have sent it to your friend Catullus
to kill him outright on the day
that is the best of all: the start of Saturnalia.
You won't get away with this, you clever dick.
Soon as it's light, I'm off to all the bookstalls
to pick up every poison that I can:
Caesius, Aquinus, Suffenus.
And then I'll pay you back with agonies like them.
Meanwhile, all you – you curses of our time,
you shitty poets – *out*, and goodbye. Just you go back
to where you brought your rotten feet from. **NOTE**

14b

There may be some of you who'll read
my nonsenses, and will not shrink
from laying hands on me...

[Calvus: Gaius Licinius Macer Calvus (82-47 BCE), one of Catullus' closest friends, was a poet, orator, lawyer, and politician. He and Cicero were well acquainted.]

Vatinian: *Publius Vatinius was an ally of Julius Caesar, and dogged throughout his career by justifiable charges of bribery and extortion. In 54 BCE, he was prosecuted by Calvus (see note above) for illegal electioneering in his successful campaign for the praetorship. Cicero defended him, and won.*

Sulla: *not otherwise known, but characterised here as a litterator, or teacher of the elementary mechanics of language, rather than of any deeper literary understanding.*

Saturnalia: *the winter festival in honour of Saturn that began on 17 December and lasted for three days. It was a feast that celebrated licence and freedom from restraint, with much eating, drinking, and games playing.*

Caesius, Aquinus, Suffenus: *the identity of all three poets is unknown, save for their ineptness as writers.*

14b: *these three lines, which bear no relationship to 14a, are clearly fragmentary, and part of a larger poem. They have often been interpreted as part of a second preface, announcing a sequence of more daring and obscene poetry. But this is purely speculative.]*

Commendo tibi me ac meos amores,
 Aureli. ueniam peto pudentem,
 ut, si quicquam animo tuo cupisti,
 quod castum expeteres et integellum,
 conserues puerum mihi pudice,
 non dico a populo – nihil ueremur
 istos, qui in platea modo huc modo illuc
 in re praetereunt sua occupati –
 uerum a te metuo tuoque pene
 infesto pueris bonis malisque.
 quem tu qua lubet, ut lubet moueto
 quantum uis, ubi erit foris paratum:
 hunc unum excipio, ut puto, pudenter.
 quod si te mala mens furorque uecors
 in tantam impulerit, sceleste, culpam,
 ut nostrum insidiis caput lacessas.
 a tum te miserum malique fati!
 quem attractis pedibus patente porta
 percurrent raphanique mugilesque.

I entrust to you, Aurelius, both my love
 and me, and ask a modest favour.
 If ever in your heart you've longed
 for something pure and undefiled,
 please keep this boy away from harm.
 Not from the public as a whole – I'm not afraid
 of those who're up and down the streets,
 preoccupied with their own business –
 it's *you* I'm scared of, and your cock,
 a threat to all boys, whether good or bad.
 Thrust it around, where and how you fancy,
 whenever you've a mind to, for a trick outside.
 Just leave *this* one alone, in modesty.
 But bastard that you are, if spite or frenzied madness
 should drive you to the crime
 of plotting to provoke me,
 oh then you'll rue your wretched fate,
 with feet trussed up apart, your arse-hole open,
 as radishes and mullets race inside.

[Aurelius: the figure Aurelius cannot be identified with any certainty, and, given his characterisation in this poem, cannot automatically be assumed to be the same Aurelius as in poem 11.]

radishes and mullets: the insertion of these objects into the anus was a recognised and traditional punishment for adultery, known at least as early as the fifth century BCE.]

XVI

Pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo,
 Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
 qui me ex uersiculis meis putastis,
 quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
 nam castum esse decet pium poetam
 ipsum, uersiculos nihil necesse est;
 qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
 si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,
 et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
 non dico pueris, sed his pilosis
 qui duros nequeunt mouere lumbos.
 uos, quod milia multa basiorum
 legistis, male me marem putatis?
 pedicabo ego uos et irrumabo.

16

I'll bugger you and fuck your mouths,
 you pansy Aurelius, you faggot Furius.
 Because my little poems seem a bit voluptuous,
 you think that I'm not decency itself?
 Although true poets should be as pure as snow,
 their verses needn't be like that.
 In fact, they've only got some spice and charm
 when they're a bit unmanly and indecent,
 and can arouse the urge... –
 not in boys, I mean, but in those hairy
 sods whose heavy loins quite weigh them down.
 Just because you've read about my countless
 thousand kisses, you think that I'm not manly?
 I'll bugger you and fuck your mouths.

[Aurelius...Furius: Furius may be the poet Furius Bibaculus, born in 82 BCE, and thus a year or two younger than Catullus. The figure Aurelius cannot be identified with any certainty. If they are in fact the same figures as the Aurelius and Furius who appear in poems 11, 23 and 26, they clearly serve a different function here.]

XVII

O Colonia, quae cupis ponte ludere longo,
 et salire paratum habes, sed uereris inepta
 crura ponticuli axulis stantis in rediuiuis,
 ne supinus eat cauaque in palude recumbat:
 sic tibi bonus ex tua pons libidine fiat,
 in quo uel Salisubsali sacra suscipiantur,
 munus hoc mihi maximi da, Colonia, risus.
 quendam municipem meum de tuo uolo ponte
 ire praecipitem in lutum per caputque pedesque,
 uerum totius ut lacus putidaequae paludis
 liuidissima maximeque est profunda uorago.
 insulsissimus est homo, nec sapit pueri instar
 bimuli tremula patris dormientis in ulna.
 cui cum sit uiridissimo nupta flore puella
 et puella tenellulo delicatior haedo,
 adseruanda nigerrimis diligentius uuis,
 ludere hanc sinit ut lubet, nec pili facit uni,
 nec se subleuat ex sua parte, sed uelut alnus
 in fossa Liguri iacet supernata securi,
 tantundem omnia sentiens quam si nulla sit usquam;
 talis iste meus stupor nil uidet, nihil audit,
 ipse qui sit, utrum sit an non sit, id quoque nescit.
 nunc eum uolo de tuo ponte mittere pronum,
 si pote stolidum repente excitare ueternum,
 et supinum animum in graui derelinquere caeno,
 ferream ut soleam tenaci in uoragine mula.

17

Verona, you so much want to celebrate on your long bridge,
 all ready for some dancing there. And yet you're frightened
 of the poor old bridge's spindly legs, propped up by cast-off timbers,
 in case it falls down on its back, and sinks into the swamp!
 May you get a fine, new bridge, and just the way you want it,
 so that even Mars' leaping priests can be safely worshipped.
 But you must play a joke for me, to split my sides with laughter.
 This fellow townsman that I know – I want him booted off your bridge,
 head over heels, slap bang into the sludge,
 just at the spot, in all the lake and foully stinking marsh,
 where there's the deepest sinkhole and most livid-looking mud.
 The man's a total imbecile, with no more sense than a toddler
 two years old, who's fast asleep, rocked on its father's arm.
 He's married to a girl, who's in the flower of youth,
 a girl indeed who's friskier than the sweetest little kid,
 who needs more careful watching than the very ripest grapes.
 He lets her freely fool around, and doesn't turn a hair.
 Nor does he try to keep it up, but lies there like some alder tree
 that's lying in a ditch, felled by a Ligurian axe,
 no more aware of anything than if *she* had never been.
 And there you have this total dolt of mine – neither sees nor hears a thing,
 not a clue of who he is, or if he really is at all.
 I want to toss him headlong from your bridge,
 to see if he can suddenly shake off his stupid lethargy,
 and leave his spineless spirit stuck there in the mud,
 just as a mule can lose its iron shoe in the clinging clay.

[Verona: the Colony addressed in the Latin original is often taken to be Verona, the city at the head of the Po valley in northern Italy, and Catullus' birthplace – though the detail is vague enough to prevent an incontrovertible identification.]

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

leaping priests of Mars: *the word Saliubsalus occurs only on this single occasion in Latin, and may be a reference to the worship of the god Mars, whose priests were known as Salii, or 'men who jump'. The Latin verb salire, which means 'to jump', seems closely related.*

this fellow townsman: *a similar vagueness surrounds the unnamed man.*

Ligurian axe: *Liguria is a coastal region of northern Italy, whose inhabitants were famous for their toughness and hardihood.]*

The break in numerical sequence between poems 17 and 21 records the removal of three short poems from the canon. They were first added in 1554 by Muretus (Marc-Antoine Muret), but are now widely considered to be spurious.

Aureli, pater esuritionum,
 non harum modo, sed quot aut fuerunt
 aut sunt aut aliis erunt in annis,
 pedicare cupis meos amores.
 nec clam: nam simul es, iocaris una,
 haerens ad latus omnia experiris.
 frustra: nam insidias mihi instruentem
 tangam te prior irrumatione.
 atque id si faceres satur, tacerem:
 nunc ipsum id doleo, quod esurire
 meus iam puer et sitire discet.
 quare desine, dum licet pudico,
 ne finem facias, sed irrumatus.

Aurelius, you're father of all Appetites,
 and not just hunger, but every craving that has been
 in the past or will be in years to come.
 Quite openly, you yearn to bugger
 my beloved boy. You're with him, telling jokes,
 sticking to his side, trying it all on.
 It's all no good. You plot against me...?
 I'll get you first and fuck your mouth.
 If you did it full of food, I wouldn't say a word.
 What really gets me, though, is that you'll train
 my boy in fucking thirst and hunger.
 So lay off, while you decently can,
 in case you find a messy end, all stuffed with cum.

[Aurelius: the figure Aurelius cannot be identified with any certainty, and, given his characterisation in this poem, cannot automatically be assumed to be the same Aurelius as in poem 11.]

Suffenus iste, Vare, quem probe nosti,
 homo est uenustus et dicax et urbanus,
 idemque longe plurimos facit uersus.
 puto esse ego illi milia aut decem aut plura
 perscripta, nec sic ut fit in palimpsesto
 relata: cartae regiae, noui libri,
 noui umbilici, lora rubra membranae,
 directa plumbo et pumice omnia aequata.
 haec cum legas tu, bellus ille et urbanus
 Suffenus unus caprimulgus aut fossor
 rursus uidetur: tantum abhorret ac mutat.
 hoc quid putemus esse? qui modo scurra
 aut si quid hac re scitius uidebatur,
 idem infaceto est infacetiore rure,
 simul poemata attigit, neque idem umquam
 aequae est beatus ac poema cum scribit:
 tam gaudet in se tamque se ipse miratur.
 nimirum idem omnes fallimur, neque est quisquam
 quem non in aliqua re uidere Suffenum
 possis. suus cuique attributus est error;
 sed non uidemus manticae quod in tergo est.

Dear Varus,
 that man Suffenus, whom you know well,
 is a charming person, witty and urbane.
 And his verse production is enormous.
 Ten thousand lines he's written, as I reckon –
 it could be more – and not on re-used paper, either,
 like ordinary folk. It's brand-new rolls of royal papyrus,
 new bosses, red ribbons, parchment covers,
 lead-ruled lines, and ends smoothed down with pumice.
 But when you *read* the stuff, that nice, urbane
 Suffenus becomes a yokel, some country
 clown. He's so unlike himself, so changed.
 How to explain it? Just now, he was a city wit,
 or something even more refined than that,
 but he's more cloddish than a country clod
 as soon as he tries poetry – and yet he's
 never happier than when he's writing verse.
 He's so self-satisfied, thinks he's marvellous.
 And yet we all, I fancy, have that fault. Not one of us,
 you'll find, is not Suffenus in some way.
 Each one of us has our own failings,
 but we can't see the faults we carry on our backs.

[Varus: possibly a reference to Alfenus Varus, who rose from humble beginnings in Cremona to become the first Cisalpine consul in 39 BCE. But the more likely candidate is Quintilius Varus, born 75 BCE, who was a distinguished man of letters, and the friend of both Virgil and Horace.]

Suffenus: his identity is unknown, although the personal details mentioned here suggest a real person rather than a literary fiction.

faults we carry on our backs: in Aesop's fable, Zeus, the father of the Gods, gives human beings two knapsacks: the one carried on the front contains the faults of others, the one on the back our own faults. We can see the faults of others much more clearly than we see our own.]

XXIII

Furi, cui neque seruus est neque arca
 nec cimex neque araneus neque ignis,
 uerum est et pater et nouerca, quorum
 dentes uel silicem comesse possunt,
 est pulcre tibi cum tuo parente
 et cum coniuge lignea parentis.
 nec mirum: bene nam ualetis omnes,
 pulcre concoquitis, nihil timetis,
 non incendia, non graues ruinas,
 non facta impia, non dolos ueneni,
 non casus alios periculorum.
 atque corpora sicciora cornu
 aut siquid magis aridum est habetis
 sole et frigore et esuritione.
 quare non tibi sit bene ac beate?
 a te sudor abest, abest saliuā,
 mucusque et mala pituita nasi.
 hanc ad munditiem adde mundiozem,
 quod culus tibi purior salillo est,
 nec toto decies cacas in anno;
 atque id durius est faba et lapillis.
 quod tu si manibus teras fricesque,
 non umquam digitum inquinare posses
 haec tu commoda tam beata, Furi,
 noli spernere nec putare parui,
 et sestertia quae soles precari
 centum desine: nam sat es beatus.

23

Furius, you've neither slave nor piggy-bank.
 You've got no spiders, bugs, or fire,
 just a father and a stepmother
 whose teeth could even chew through flint.
 You get on splendidly with father,
 with father's wooden wife as well.
 No wonder, for all of you are in such health:
 no indigestion, nothing to fear,
 no fires or houses falling down,
 no violent crime, no plots to poison you,
 no other dangerous circumstance.
 What's more, your bodies are as dry as bone –
 or whatever could be drier still –
 from sun and cold and near starvation diets.
 Why shouldn't you be well and happy?
 You never sweat, you've no saliva,
 and no snot either, no dripping from the nose.
 And to this cleanliness, add something even cleaner:
 an arsehole that's more polished than a salt tureen.
 You shit ten times a year or less, and
 what comes out is harder than a rock or bean,
 and if you rubbed it in your hands,
 you wouldn't soil a single finger, even.
 These are rich blessings, Furius –
 don't spurn or undervalue them.
 And do stop nagging for that hundred
 thousand. **NOTE** You're rich enough already.

[Furius: Furius may be the poet Furius Bibaculus, born in 82 BCE, and thus a year or two younger than Catullus. He was noted both for his scurrilous lampoons (against Caesar and, later, Octavian), but also for an historical epic on Caesar's Gallic campaigns.]

XXIV

O qui flosculus es Iuuentiorum,
 non horum modo, sed quot aut fuerunt
 aut posthac aliis erunt in annis,
 mallet diuitias Midae dedisses
 isti, cui neque seruus est neque arca,
 quam sic te sineres ab illo amari.
 'qui? non est homo bellus?' inquires. est:
 sed bello huic neque seruus est neque arca.
 hoc tu quam lubet abice eleuaque:
 nec seruum tamen ille habet neque arcam.

24

Sweet blossom of the family Juuentius –
 not those just now, but all who've ever lived
 and generations still to come –
 I'd rather you shelled out a fortune
 on that shit who hasn't got a slave or any cash
 than let him love you as you do.
 'What?' you ask. 'But isn't he quite nice?' Well, yes.
 His 'niceness', though, hasn't got a slave or any cash.
 Pooh-pooh all you like, ignore it quite.
 But *still*, he hasn't got a slave or any cash.

[Juuentius: Catullus' young boyfriend, alluded to in poems 15 and 21, but now here named for the first time. His family may have been of Etruscan origin, but he appears to have belonged to an old and well-known consular family in both Verona and Rome at the time.]

Cinaede Thalle, mollior cuniculi capillo
 uel anseris medullula uel imula oricilla
 uel pene languido senis situque araneoso,
 idemque, Thalle, turbida rapacior procella,
 cum diua Murcia arbitros ostendit oscitantes,
 remitte pallium mihi meum, quod inuolasti,
 sudariumque Saetabum catagraphosque Thynos,
 inepte, quae palam soles habere tamquam auita.
 quae nunc tuis ab unguibus reglutina et remitte,
 ne laneum latusculum manusque mollicellas
 inusta turpiter tibi flagella conscribillent,
 et insolenter aestues, uelut minuta magno
 deprensa nauis in mari, uesaniante uento.

You pansy, Thallus, softer than a bunny-rabbit's fur,
 or a goosey-woosey's marrow, or a teensy-weensy ear-lobe,
 or an old man's drooping penis, with cobwebs growing round –
 yet when diners get all tipsy, careless, off their guard, **NOTE**
 this man, Thallus, is greedier than a violent storm.
 So give me back that coat of mine you pounced upon and pilfered,
 the Spanish napkins too, and embroidered set of towels,
 which (you silly idiot) you keep on showing off as family heirlooms.
 Unglue them from your claws right now, and give them back,
 unless you want your downy little buttocks and namby-pamby handies
 all scribbled on with whips, that brand you to your shame.
 And there you'll be – all hot and heaving, **NOTE**
 a baby boat in an enormous sea, caught by my raging storm.

[Thallus: the name is probably derived from the Greek thallos, meaning a young shoot or sprouting twig. A Caesar Julius Thallus of unknown date has been identified, but there is no evidence that this is the Thallus Catullus refers to.]

XXVI

Furi, uillula vestra non ad Austri
flatus opposita est neque ad Fauoni
nec saeui Boreae aut Apheliotae,
uerum ad milia quindecim et ducentos.
o uentum horribilem atque pestilentem!

26

Furius, your little country cottage stands facing,
not the blasts of wind from south or east
or west or savage north, but a blasting overdraft
of fifteen thousand sesterces...and two hundred... **NOTE**
What a vile, plague-ridden wind!

[Furius: Furius may be the poet Furius Bibaculus, born in 82 BCE, and thus a year or two younger than Catullus. He was noted both for his scurrilous lampoons (against Caesar and, later, Octavian), but also for an historical epic on Caesar's Gallic campaigns.]

XXVII

Minister uetuli puer Falerni
 inger mi calices amariores,
 ut lex Postumiae iubet magistrae
 ebrioso acino ebriosioris.
 at uos quo lubet hinc abite, lymphae
 uini pernicies, et ad seueros
 migrate. hic merus est Thyonianus.

27

Waiter, you're serving out a vintage wine,
 yet pour me out a glass that's sharper to the taste –
 that's the rule our hostess Postunia has decreed
 (who's even drunker than the drunken grape itself).
 But water – you get out of here, and stay away.
 You ruin wine. Go off and join the puritans. **NOTE**
 Undiluted is the way the wine stays here.

[Postunia: she may have been the wife of the celebrated lawyer Servius Sulpicius Rufus, and the rumoured mistress of Caesar. But little is known about her apart from these sparse conjectures.]

XXVIII

Pisonis comites, cohors inanis,
 aptis sarcinulis et expeditis,
 Verani optime tuque mi Fabulle,
 quid rerum geritis? satisne cum isto
 uappa frigoraque et famem tulistis?
 ecquidnam in tabulis patet lucelli
 expensum, ut mihi, qui meum secutus
 praetorem refero datum lucello?
 o Memmi, bene me ac diu supinum
 tota ista trabe lentus irrumasti.
 sed, quantum uideo, pari fuistis
 casu: nam nihilo minore uerpa
 farti estis. pete nobiles amicos!
 at uobis mala multa di deaque
 dent, opprobria Romuli Remique.

28

Piso's entourage, empty-handed staffers,
 with piddling little backpacks weighing less than air –
 and yet Veranius, the best of men, and my own Fabullus,
 how are you doing there? Haven't you endured enough
 flat wine, and cold, and hunger, with that crook?
 Do your accounts show any profit,
 or are they just a loss, like mine? When I served my governor,
 I had to enter my expenses as a gain.
 O Memmius, as I lay on my back, you screwed me
 well and long, and slowly stuffed me with that massive cock.
 As far as I can see, you two have
 fared the same, stuffed by no less a prick
 yourselves. Find noble friends, they say!
 May Heaven send curses down upon that pair,
 an absolute disgrace to Romulus and Remus.

[Piso...Veranius...Fabullus: Lucius Calpurnicus Piso Caesonius, consul in 58 BCE and the father-in-law of Julius Caesar, was governor of Macedonia in 57-55 BCE, and Veranius and Fabullus served under him.]

Memmius: born c. 100/98 BCE, he fiercely attacked Caesar in 58 BCE, and went out the following year as governor of Bithynia, with Catullus on his staff. He was notorious for his sexual advances, notably to other men's wives. He was later found guilty of electoral corruption, and went into exile in Athens. He was dead by 46 BCE.]

Romulus and Remus: the legendary founders of Rome, they often stand for Rome itself and for the tradition of historical greatness they embody.]

Qvis hoc potest uidere, quis potest pati,
 nisi impudicus et uorax et aleo,
 Mamurram habere quod Comata Gallia
 habebat ante et ultima Britannia?
 cinaede Romule haec uidebis et feres?
 et ille nunc superbus et superfluens
 perambulabit omnium cubilia,
 ut albulus columbus aut Adoneus?
 cinaede Romule, haec uidebis et feres?
 es impudicus et uorax et aleo.
 eone nomine, imperator unice,
 fuisti in ultima occidentis insula,
 ut ista uestra diffututa mentula
 ducenties comesset aut trecenties?
 quid est alid sinistra liberalitas?
 parum expatruit an parum elluatus est?
 paterna prima lancinata sunt bona,
 secunda praeda Pontica, inde tertia
 Hibera, quam scit amnis aurifer Tagus:
 eine Galliae optima et Britanniae.
 quid hunc malum fouetis? aut quid hic potest
 nisi uncta deuorare patrimonia?
 eone nomine urbis o piissimi
 socer generaque, perdidistis omnia?

Unless they're shameless, reckless, and a pig,
 who could watch and let this happen? –
 Mamurra skimming all the cream that long-haired
 Gaul and far-off Britain used to have.
 You poofter, Pompey, how could you watch and let this happen?
 That arrogant and overweening arse
 leaping around in everybody's bedroom,
 like some soiled-white dove, or else Adonis?
 You poofter, Pompey, how could you watch and let this happen?
 You're shameless, reckless, and a pig.
 Was it for this, O Caesar-issimo,
 you visited that far-off island in the west,
 so that your pal, that shagged-out prick,
 could squander tens and tens of thousands?
 What's that then, if not bungling waste?
 Surely he's leched and guzzled up enough.
 First, he blued his inheritance away,
 then the Black Sea loot, and then
 the Spanish spoils, as the gold-rich river Tagus knows.
 Does *he* not have the finest parts of Gaul and Britain?
 Why the hell should *he* be cosseted? What's *he* done
 apart from wolfing down fat private fortunes?
 You ultra-moral Roman pair, father and son-in-law –
 was it for this you wasted everything?

[Mamurra: Caesar's chief engineer from 58 BCE, and noted for his skills in structural construction, for which he was richly rewarded. He almost certainly accompanied Caesar in the first invasion of Britain in 55 BCE. His house in Rome was notorious for its extravagant luxury, and he himself for his sexual adventures.

long-haired Gaul: *transalpine Gaul was called Gallia comata because it was the fashion there to wear the hair long, unlike cisalpine Gaul, called Gallia togata, where Roman customs of dress and appearance prevailed.*

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

you poofte, Pompey...Caesar-issimo: *on both occasions, the Latin reads Romulus, a name (together with Remus) that Catullus often uses as a metonym for noble Roman ancestry. Here, it seems reasonable to consider the first ten lines as an address to Pompey, the second ten as an address to Caesar, with a coda addressed to them both.*

the Black Sea loot: *a reference to the spoils acquired during Pompey's campaigns against King Mithridates in 64-63 BCE.*

the Spanish spoils: *the money acquired during Caesar's campaigns in Lusitania (modern Portugal) where Mamurra was his chief engineer.*

father and son-in-law: *Caesar's daughter Julia had married Pompey in 59 BCE.]*

Alfene immemor atque unanimis false sodalibus,
 iam te nil miseret, dure, tui dulcis amiculi?
 iam me prodere, iam non dubitas fallere, perfide?
 nunc facta impia fallacum hominum caelicolis placent.
 quos tu neglegis ac me miserum deseris in malis.
 Eheu quid faciant, dic, homines cuiue habeant fidem?
 certe tute iubebas animam tradere, inique, me
 inducens in amorem, quasi tuta omnia mi forent.
 idem nunc retrahis te ac tua dicta omnia factaque
 uentos irrita ferre ac nebulas aereas sinis.
 si tu oblitus es, at di meminerunt, meminit Fides,
 quae te ut paeniteat postmodo facti faciet tui.

Alfenus, thoughtless and false to your close companions,
 have you no pity left, hard though you are, for your sweet friend?
 No qualms, you traitor, at tricking and deceiving me?
 Are those in Heaven now pleased by wicked acts of treachery?
 But you ignore the Gods, and leave me wretched in my misery.
 Tell me what men should do; whom should they trust?
 You it was – yes, you, you cheat – who told me to give my soul,
 who lured me into love, as if no dangers lurked.
 Now you pull back, and let the winds and airy clouds
 carry your words and deeds away, not one of them fulfilled.
 Even, though, if you forget, the Gods and good faith will remember,
 and they will make you wish that what you've done could be undone.

[Alfenus: although Alfenus here is often identified with the lawyer Alfenus Varus (see poems and notes to 10 and 22 above), the identification is conjectural. Equally uncertain are the circumstances that might have provoked such anger and despair on Catullus' part: a homosexual seduction? a heterosexual relationship that was urged upon him but with no success?]

Paene insularum, Sirmio, insularumque
 ocelle, quascumque in liquentibus stagnis
 marique uasto fert uterque Neptunus,
 quam te libenter quamque laetus inuiso,
 uix mi ipse credens Thuniam atque Bithunos
 liquisse campos et uidere te in tuto.
 o quid solutis est beatius curis,
 cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino
 labore fessi uenimus larem ad nostrum,
 desideratoque acquiescimus lecto?
 hoc est quod unum est pro laboribus tantis.
 salue, o uenusta Sirmio, atque ero gaude
 gaudente, uosque, o Lydiae lacus undae,
 ridete quidquid est domi cachinnorum.

Sirmio, you jewel of every island and peninsular
 that Neptune shoulders, both in the clearest inland
 lakes and in the vastness of the open sea –
 how gladly and with what joy I see you now.
 Scarce can I believe that I've left Thynia
 and the Bithynian plains behind, and found you safe.
 What greater joy is there than when cares are cast aside,
 the weight is lifted from the mind and, tired of foreign
 service, we come back home
 and lay our head upon the bed we've yearned for?
 This on its own makes up for all the hardship borne.
 And so I greet you, lovely Sirmio. Rejoice now
 in your master's joy. And you, the waters of this Lydian lake,
 laugh with all the mirth that you are *home*.

[Sirmio...Neptune: Sirmio is a rocky point, now the modern Sirmione, running out into the southern end of Lake Garda. Neptune is, of course, the Roman god of water, both of fresh inland lakes and seas, and of the salty oceans.]

Thynia...flat Bithynian plains: Bithynia was a Roman province on the north-west coast of Asia Minor. Catullus served there on the staff of Gaius Memmius, governor in 57-56 BCE. The Thyni were a Thracian tribe who had settled along the coast of Bithynia.

this Lydian lake: Lydian because the inhabitants of the region, the Etruscans, were believed to have originally come from Lydia in Asia Minor.]

XXXII

Amabo, mea dulcis Ipsitilla,
 meae deliciae, mei lepores,
 iube ad te ueniam meridiatum.
 et si iusseris, illud adiuuato,
 ne quis liminis obseret tabellam,
 neu tibi lubeat foras abire,
 sed domi maneas paresque nobis
 nouem continuas fututiones.
 uerum si quid ages, statim iubeto:
 nam pransus iaceo et satur supinus
 pertundo tunicamque palliumque.

32

Please, *please*, my love, sweet Ipsitilla,
 my darling, charming, clever girl,
 just order me to come and see you after lunch –
 and if you do, please help by making sure
 that no-one's locked the outer door,
 and that the fancy doesn't take you to go off out.
 Just stay at home, and get ready for
 nine fuckfests, without an interruption.
 In fact, if you're up for it, order me right now.
 I'm lying on my back, stuffed full,
 a stiffy boring through my tunic and my cloak.

[Ipsitilla: speculation about her identity ranges from her being a courtesan, the Aurelia Orestilla who married the Roman politician Catiline (108-62 BCE), or alternatively his illegitimate daughter, or a fictitious figure whose name derives from the diminutive illa, added to the feminine form ipsa, meaning 'mistress'.]

XXXIII

O Furum optime balneariorum
 Vibenni pater et cinaede fili
 (nam dextra pater inquinatiore,
 culo filius est uoraciore),
 cur non exilium malasque in oras
 itis? quandoquidem patris rapinae
 notae sunt populo, et natis pilosas,
 fili, non potes asse uenditare.

33

You cream of all the bath-house thieves,
 Vibennius the father and his bum-boy son
 (the father's got the stickier hand,
 the son the greedier arse) –
 why not piss off into exile, or to hell?
 You might as well – when father's larcenies
 are known to everyone, and son can't sell
 his hairy arsehole for a penny.

[Vibennius and his bum-boy son: nothing is known further about these two characters, apart from the details Catullus offers here.]

Dianae sumus in fide
 puellae et pueri integri:
 Dianam pueri integri
 puellaeque canamus.
 o Latonia, maximi
 magna progenies Iouis,
 quam mater prope Deliam
 deposiuit oliuam,
 montium domina ut fores
 siluarumque uirentium
 saltuumque reconditorum
 amnumque sonantum:
 tu Lucina dolentibus
 Iuno dicta puerperis,
 tu potens Triuia et notho es
 dicta lumine Luna.
 tu cursu, dea, menstruo
 metiens iter annuum,
 rustica agricolae bonis
 tecta frugibus explēs.
 sis quocumque tibi placet
 sancta nomine, Romulique,
 antique ut solita es, bona
 sospites ope gentem.

We are in Diana's care,
 girls and boys who are untouched.
 Let us, untouched boys and girls,
 sing of Diana now.

Latona's daughter, great
 child of greatest Jove,
 whom your mother brought to life,
 near the Delian olive-tree,

future mistress of the mountains
 and the greening forests
 and the far-off woodland glades
 and the rivers echoing.

Women in the pain of birth
 call you Lucinda Juno,
 powerful Lady of the Crossways,
 moon of borrowed light.

Goddess, with your monthly course,
 you mark the journey of the year.
 You fill the farmer's country barns
 with ample crops.

Whatever name you choose,
 you will be known as holy.
 Protect the race of Romulus,
 as you have done in ages past.

*[Diana's care...Latona's daughter...greatest Jove...Delian olive-tree:
 Latona refers to the Greek goddess Leto, who slept with the god Zeus (= the
 Roman Jupiter or Jove), and who subsequently gave birth to Apollo and to
 Artemis (= the Roman Diana) on the island of Delos. The birth was said to
 have taken place under an olive-tree. Diana was associated with hunting,
 healing, and wild places.*

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

Lucinda Juno, / powerful Lady of the Crossways: a good example of the syncretism and cross-association often found in Greek and Roman myth. In addition to her attributes noted above, Diana is now also associated with childbirth (Juno) and with Hecate, goddess of the crossroads, and also of witchcraft and the underworld.

race of Romulus: Romulus was one of the two founders of Rome, and the mention of his 'race' is a convenient shorthand for noble Roman ancestry.]

Poetae tenero, meo sodali,
 uelim Caecilio, papyre, dicas
 Veronam ueniat, Noui relinquens
 Comi moenia Lariumque litus.
 nam quasdam uolo cogitationes
 amici accipiat sui meique.
 quare, si sapiet, uiam uorabit,
 quamuis candida milies puella
 euntem reuocet, manusque collo
 ambas iniciens roget morari.
 quae nunc, si mihi uera nuntiantur,
 illum deperit impotente amore.
 nam quo tempore legit incohatam
 Dindymi dominam, ex eo misellae
 ignes interiorem edunt medullam.
 ignosco tibi, Sapphica puella
 musa doctior; est enim uenuste
 Magna Caecilio incohata Mater.

Papyrus – would you kindly ask
 Caecilius, love-poet and my friend,
 to leave the walls of Como and its lakeside
 far behind, and come now to Verona.
 I'd like him to contemplate some 'thoughts'
 that a friend of his and mine has had.
 So, if he's wise, he should race right up the road,
 even though some pretty girl may call
 him back a thousand times, flinging her arms
 around his neck and begging him to stay.
 If what I hear is right, this girl
 is totally consumed with love for him.
 For ever since the day she read
 his *Mistress of Dindymus* (still unfinished),
 raw passion has been eating out her heart.
 I don't blame you, girl, since you're more scholarly
 than Sappho's muse. And Caecilius'
Great Mother is – so far – exquisitely done.

[Caecilius: he may have been an ancestor of the elder and younger Pliny, both of whom were Caecilii from Como, or equally the figure Caecilius Epirota, the freedman of Cicero's correspondent Atticus.]

Mistress of Dindymus...Great Mother: both phrases refer to the goddess Cybele, who inspired ecstatic religious worship comparable to that for Dionysus. Her cult was brought to Rome in the third century BCE.

Sappho's muse: Sappho was a celebrated Greek lyric poet of the late seventh century BCE, born on the island of Lesbos in the Aegean.]

XXXVI

Annales Volusi, cacata carta,
uotum soluite pro mea puella.
nam sanctae Veneri Cupidinique
uouit, si sibi restitutus essem
desissemque truces uibrare iambos,
electissima pessimi poetae
scripta tardipedi deo daturam
infelicibus ustulanda lignis.
et hoc pessima se puella uidit
iocose lepide uouere diuis.
nunc o caeruleo creata ponto,
quae sanctum Idalium Vriosque apertos
quaeque Ancona Cnidumque harundinosam
colis quaeque Amathunta quaeque Golgos
quaeque Durrachium Hadriae tabernam,
acceptum face redditumque uotum,
si non illepidum neque inuenustum est.
at uos interea uenite in ignem,
pleni ruris et inficetiarum.
annales Volusi, cacata carta.

36

You *Annals* of Volusius, full of crap,
just keep this promise that my girlfriend made.
She swore to sacred Venus and to Cupid that,
if I went back to her, and stopped
my sniping at her in my nasty lines **NOTE**,
she'd give the choicest writings of the
direst poet to the lame god Vulcan,
to set alight upon a cursèd pyre.
This promise to the gods, my girl
(as dire as any) intended as a playful joke.
So then, Venus, created from the deep blue sea –
worshipped in Idalium and on bleak Urii,
in Ancona and reedy Cnidus,
Amathus too and Golgi,
and the Adriatic taverns of Dyrrachium –
if this promise has some wit and charm,
record it now and enter it as paid.
As for you, meanwhile, you load of
bumpkin boorishness, just fuel the fire,
you *Annals* of Volusius, full of crap.

[You Annals of Volusius: the identity of this poetaster is unknown, though the most likely candidate seems to be Quintus Volusius, who was a protégé of Cicero and a well-known literary dilettante. His Annals would have been an epic poem about events in Roman history.]

Venus and...to Cupid: *Venus is the Roman goddess of love, and Cupid her son. Both names, whether in the singular or the plural, evoke love, passion, charm, sexual desire.*

lame god Vulcan: *the ancient Roman god of fire. His mother, Juno, was so horrified by his appearance at birth that she hurled him from the top of Mount Olympus. He landed in the sea, but broke one of his legs as he hit the water, hence his lameness.*

Idalium...Urii...Ancona...Cnidus...Amathus...Golgi...Dyrrachium:
a series of names all connected with the worship of Venus, and deliberately wide-ranging, from towns in Cyprus, through places in Italy, to the coast of what is now modern Albania.]

XXXVII

Salax taberna uosque contubernales,
 a pilleatis nona fratribus pila,
 solis putatis esse mentulas uobis,
 solis licere, quidquid est puellarum,
 confutuere et putere ceteros hircos?
 an, continenter quod sedetis insulsi
 centum an ducenti, non putatis ausurum
 me una ducentos irrumare sessoros?
 atqui putate: namque totius uobis
 frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam.
 puella nam mi, quae meo sinu fugit,
 amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla,
 pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata,
 consedit istic. hanc boni beatique
 omnes amatis, et quidem, quod indignum est,
 omnes pusilli et semitarii moechi;
 tu praeter omnes une de capillatis,
 cuniculosae Celtiberiae fili,
 Egnati. opaca quem bonum facit barba
 et dens Hibera defricatus urina.

37

You boozers at that randy inn,
 nine doors along from the brothers wearing hats,
 d'you reckon you're the only ones with pricks,
 the only ones who've got the right to fuck the girls,
 and that the rest of us are stinking goats?
 Since you're lined up there like blockheads in a row,
 one hundred of you, maybe two, you think I wouldn't dare
 fuck all two hundred mouths at once, just as you sit?
 So, think of that. Or I could cover
 all the frontage of the tavern just with cocks.
 And why? My girl, who's run away from my embrace,
 once loved by me as no girl ever will be loved,
 for whose dear sake I fought great wars,
 has settled in there. The great and good are all
 in love with her. What's more (and here's the shame),
 the wimps and backstreet pervs all love her too.
 But you, Egnatius – you're the leader of the long-haired gang,
 the product of a Spain that teems with rabbits,
 whose black beard lends respectability,
 with teeth brushed clean in Spanish piss.

[the brothers wearing hats: a reference to Castor and Pollux, who were often represented in art forms, and on coinage, as wearing caps rather like egg-cosies. The temple dedicated to them was situated on the south side of the Forum, scarcely a stone's throw from the salax taberna described here.

Egnatius: probably the Epicurean poet Egnatius, who wrote a didactic De Rerum Natura, and who followed the fashion of wearing both his hair and his beard long. He may have spent some time in Spain, a country that was celebrated for its long-haired rabbits, as well its peoples' habit of cleaning their teeth in urine.]

XXXVIII

Malest, Cornifici, tuo Catullo
 malest, me hercule, et laboriose,
 et magis magis in dies et horas.
 quem tu, quod minimum facillimumque est,
 qua solatus es allocutione?
 irascor tibi. sic meos amores?
 paulum quid lubet allocutionis,
 maestius lacrimis Simonideis.

38

Life really is a bitch, Cornificius, for your Catullus,
 an honest bitch, by God – such heavy going,
 and worse and worse with every day and hour.
 But have you offered any comfort,
 the least and easiest thing to do?
 You've really pissed me off. So much for love!
 Please send some small condolence if you will,
 sadder than Simonides' tears.

[Cornificius: almost certainly Quintus Cornificius, an orator and poet, and an able and ambitious military and political figure. He married Catiline's widow in 50 BCE, and supported Caesar two years later. After 44 BCE, though, he changed sides, was condemned to death, and was killed in Africa in 41 BCE.]

Simonides' tears: Simonides of Ceos (556-467 BCE) was a skilled writer, famous for his Threnoi, or Dirges, where themes of emotional loss and deprivation play a central role.]

Egnativs, quod candidos habet dentes,
renidet usque quaque. si ad rei uentum est
subsellium, cum orator excitat fletum,
renidet ille; si ad pii rogum fili
lugetur, orba cum flet unicum mater,
renidet ille. quidquid est, ubicumque est,
quodcumque agit, renidet: hunc habet morbum,
neque elegantem, ut arbitror, neque urbanum.
quare monendum est te mihi, bone Egnati.
si urbanus esses aut Sabinus aut Tiburs
aut pinguis Vmber aut obesus Etruscus
aut Lanuvinus ater atque dentatus
aut Transpadanus, ut meos quoque attingam,
aut quilubet, qui puriter lauit dentes,
tamen renidere usque quaque te nollem:
nam risu inepto res ineptior nulla est.
nunc Celtiber es: Celtiberia in terra,
quod quisque minxit, hoc sibi solet mane
dentem atque russam defricare gingiuam,
ut quo iste uester expolitiore dens est,
hoc te amplius bibisse praedicet loti.

Because Egnatius has such white teeth, he
flashes them just everywhere. When the defendant's
barrister in court is turning up the tears,
he's flashing them. At the funeral of a loving son,
as the grieving mother mourns her only boy,
he's flashing them. Whatever's happening, wherever it may be,
whatever he is doing, he's flashing them. In my view,
this disease is neither elegant nor polite.
So, good Egnatius, let me give you this advice.
If you were Roman, or a Sabine, or a Tiburtine,
or a podgy Umbrian, or a fat Etruscan,
or a swarthy Lanuvine with teeth,
or (to mention my own folk as well) a Transpadane,
or anyone who cleans their teeth in good clean water,
I'd still not want you always flashing them.
There's nothing sillier than a silly grin.
But you're actually a Spaniard; and in Spain,
whatever you piss out in the morning,
you use to scrub your teeth and sore red gums.
So the brighter that your white teeth are,
the more the piss this tells us you have drunk.

[Egnatius: the same figure as the one mentioned at the end of poem 37, but now with an entire poem devoted to his white teeth and the reasons for them.]

Sabine...Tiburtine...Umbrian...Etruscan...Lanuvine...Transpadane: all references to different regions and peoples in Italy, some of them quite close to Rome itself.]

Qvaenam te mala mens, miselle Rauide,
 agit praecipitem in meos iambos?
 quis deus tibi non bene aduocatus
 uecordem parat excitare rixam?
 an ut peruenias in ora uulgi?
 quid uis? qualubet esse notus optas?
 eris, quandoquidem meos amores
 cum longa uoluisti amare poena.

Poor little Ravidus, what clouded judgment
 drives you headlong into my lampoons?
 What god did you unwisely call upon
 to stir up such a senseless fight?
 Was it to get a public audience?
 What do you want? Fame at any cost?
 You'll get your fame, and pay a long-term price,
 now that you've picked my loved one for your love.

[Ravidus: apart from the details in this short poem, and the inferences to be drawn from them, nothing else is known about Ravidus.]

Ameana puella defututa
 tota milia me decem poposcit,
 ista turpiculo puella naso,
 decoctoris amica Formiani.
 propinqui, quibus est puella curae,
 amicos medicosque conuocate:
 non est sana puella, nec rogare
 qualis sit solet aes imaginorum.

Ameaena, that fucked-out girl,
 has asked me for a cool ten thousand,
 the girl who sports that hideous nose,
 the girlfriend of that bankrupt come from Formiae.
 You're her relatives, and should look after her,
 so call on friends and doctors to advise.
 The girl's not right, and never asks
 a mirror for the truth. **NOTE**

[Ameaena: nothing is known about this woman, and even her name is either scribally corrupt, or archaic or provincial in its spelling. She may have come from the same town as her bankrupt boyfriend. Formiae was a flourishing Roman community some seventy-five miles from Rome.]

XLII

Adeste, hendecasyllabi, quot estis
 omnes undique, quotquot estis omnes.
 iocum me putat esse moecha turpis,
 et negat mihi nostra reddituram
 pugillaria, si pati potestis.
 persequamur eam et reflagitemus.
 quae sit, quaeritis? illa, quam uidetis
 turpe incedere, mimice ac moleste
 ridentem catuli ore Gallicani.
 circum sistite eam, et reflagitate,
 ‘moecha putida, redde codicillos,
 redde putida moecha, codicillos!’
 non assis facis? o lutum, lupanar,
 aut si perditius potes quid esse.
 sed non est tamen hoc satis putandum.
 quod si non aliud potest ruborem
 ferreo canis exprimamus ore.
 conclamate iterum altiore uoce.
 ‘moecha putide, redde codicillos,
 redde, putida moecha, codicillos!’
 sed nil proficimus, nihil mouetur.
 mutanda est ratio modusque uobis,
 siquid proficere amplius potestis:
 ‘pudica et proba, redde codicillos.’

42

Come here, hendecasyllables, one and all,
 wherever you may be, every last one of you.
 A rotten tart thinks that I'm a joke,
 and won't give me my notebook back. **NOTE**
 Are you prepared to stand for that?
 Let's chase her, and demand it now.
 You ask which one she is? You see the woman there,
 with that disgusting walk and quite appalling actressy
 laugh, her face like some French poodle?
 Surround her, and demand it back:
 ‘Rotten tart, give the notebook back!
 Give the notebook back, you rotten tart!’
 She doesn't give a hoot, the filthy slut,
 or whatever-else-is-even-more depraved.
 So don't think that has done the job.
 At least we should be able
 to force a blush from the bitch's brazen face.
 So raise your voice and shout again:
 ‘Rotten tart, give the notebook back!
 Give the notebook back, you rotten tart!’
 We're getting nowhere. She's still unmoved.
 We need to change our tactics and our tune,
 and see if better progress can be made.
 ‘Ah lady, so pure and chaste, please give the notebook back.’

[a rotten tart: the actual identity of the woman addressed here is unknown.]

XLIII

Salve, nec minimo puella naso
 nec bello pede nec nigris ocellis
 nec longis digitis nec ore sicco
 nec sane nimis elegante lingua,
 decoctoris amica Formiani.
 ten prouincia narrat esse bellam?
 tecum Lesbia nostra comparatur?
 o saeclum insapiens et infacetum!

43

Greetings to the girl who has no shapely nose,
 or pretty feet, or dark black eyes,
 or long straight fingers, or nice dry lips,
 and certainly not a voice that you could ever call refined –
 the girlfriend of that bankrupt come from Formiae.
 Are *you* the one the province calls a beauty?
 Is it with *you* my Lesbia is compared?
 What tasteless, loutish times!

[the girl: this could be the same woman (Ameaena) as addressed in poem 41.]

XLIV

O Fvnde noster seu Sabine seu Tiburs
 (nam te esse Tiburtem autumant, quibus non est
 cordi Catullum laedere; at quibus cordi est,
 quouis Sabinum pignore esse contendunt),
 sed seu Sabine siue uerius Tiburs,
 fui libenter in tua suburbana
 uilla, malamque pectore expuli tussim,
 non inmerenti quam mihi meus uenter,
 dum sumptuosas appeto, dedit, cenas.
 nam, Sestianus dum uolo esse conuiuia,
 orationem in Antium petitozem
 plenam ueneni et pestilentiae legi.
 hic me grauedo frigida et frequens tussis
 quassauit usque, dum in tuum sinum fugi,
 et me recurauit otioque et urtica.
 quare refectus maximas tibi grates
 ago, meum quod non es ultra peccatum.
 nec deprecor iam, si nefaria scripta
 Sesti recepso, quin grauedinem et tussim
 non mihi, sed ipsi Sestio ferat frigus,
 qui tunc uocat me, cum malum librum legi.

44

O farm of mine, which art or Sabine or Tiburtine
 (for whoso hath no heart to hurt Catullus will call thee
 Tiburtine, whilst whoso hath a heart to hurt
 will wager anything that thou art Sabine).
 But whether thou art Sabine or (more verily) Tiburtine,
 I was right glad to sojourn in thy villa on the edge of town,
 to rid my chest of some wretched cough I had,
 not undeservedly given me by this, my stomach,
 as I kept craving for some sumptuous dinners.
 I longed to be a dinner-guest of Sestius,
 and so I read his diatribe on Antius as a candidate,
 a speech so full of poison and disease.
 Whereat a feverish cold and chronic cough
 kept shaking me till I retreated to thy bosom
 and cured myself with rest and nettle tea.
 Wherefore, recovered now, I render thee great thanks
 because thou didst not punish my offence.
 Should ever I take up the ghastly works of Sestius again,
 I won't complain if their frigidity
 gives him – not me – a cough and cold.
 I only get invited when I've read his lousy work.

[the deliberately hyperbolic and orotund style of Catullus' Latin is echoed here in a similarly archaic and high-sounding English.]

Sabine...Tiburtine: the distinction highlights the snobbery, which has scarcely diminished over the centuries, attached to location. Tibur, modern-day Tivoli, was a favourite area for expensive, out-of-town villas, and considerably more fashionable than Sabinum, where houses and farms were more rustic and unpretentious.

Sestius: Publius Sestius was a politician and orator, defended on several occasions by Cicero, who nonetheless shared Catullus' distaste for his pompous writing style. Nothing more is known about Sestius' speech attacking Antius, who may have been the Caesar Antius Restio represented on coins of 49-45 BCE. Antius had been the author of a law restricting magistrates' dining-out rights and expenditures, and was thus a natural target for Sestius with his lavish entertainments.]

XLV

Acmen Septimius suos amores
 tenens in gremio 'mea' inquit 'Acme,
 ni te perdit amo atque amare porro
 omnes sum assidue paratus annos,
 quantum qui pote plurimum perire,
 solus in Libya Indiaque tosta
 caesio ueniam obuius leoni.'
 hoc ut dixit, Amor sinistra ut ante
 dextra sternuit approbationem.

at Acme leuiter caput reflectens
 et dulcis pueri ebrios ocellos
 illo purpureo ore suauitata,
 'sic' inquit 'mea uita Septimille,
 huic uni domino usque seruiamus,
 ut multo mihi maior acriorque
 ignis mollibus ardet in medullis.'
 hoc ut dixit, Amor sinistra ut ante
 dextra sternuit approbationem.

nunc ab auspicio bono profecti
 mutuis animis amant amantur.
 unam Septimius misellus Acmen
 mauult quam Syrias Britanniasque:
 uno in Septimio fidelis Acme
 facit delicias libidinisque.
 quis ullos homines beatiores
 uidit, quis Venerem auspiciorem?

45

Sitting his girlfriend Acme on his lap,
 Septimius said, 'My sweetheart Acme,
 if I don't love you totally, and keep on
 loving you throughout my life
 in utter desperation, then let me
 find myself in Libya or scorched India,
 and have to face a green-eyed lion alone.
 As he said this, Love sneezed approvingly,
 first on the right, and then on the left.

Then Acme, gently lifting up her head,
 kissed her darling boy's besotted eyes
 with her red lips, and said:
 'Lovely Septimius, you are my life.
 So let us serve this one and only lord for ever,
 just as much greater, fiercer fires
 burn through the soft marrow of my bones.'
 As she said this, Love sneezed approvingly,
 first on the right, and then on the left.

Setting out with these good omens,
 they're loved and love with blending hearts.
 Little Septimius prefers his Acme
 to all your Syrias and Britains;
 and faithful Acme finds her delights and her
 desires in Septimius alone.
 Has anybody ever seen a happier pair,
 or ever seen a love more blessed?

[Acme...Septimius: Acme is a woman's name, clearly associated with the Greek word acme, which means 'culminating point, peak, zenith'. Acme is therefore suggestive of a Greek freedwoman of great qualities, who is adored by (and who in turn adores) the Roman Septimius. No further details about either of them are confirmed.]

Love sneezed approvingly: Love is Cupid, the son of Venus. In the ancient world, sneezes were commonly believed to be prophetic signs from the gods.

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

COMPLETE SHORTER POEMS

to all your Syrias and Britains: a contemporary reference by Catullus that points to the year 55 BCE, when an ill-fated expedition to Syria was launched, and Caesar was about to invade Britain.]

XLVI

Iam uer egelidos refert tepores,
 iam caeli furor aequinoctialis
 iucundis Zephyri silescit aureis.
 linquantur Phrygii, Catulle, campi
 Nicaeaeque ager uber aestuosae:
 ad claras Asiae uolemus urbes.
 iam mens praetrepidans auet uagari,
 iam laeti studio pedes uigescunt.
 o dulces comitum ualete coetus,
 longe quos simul a domo profectos
 diuersae uarie uiae reportant.

46

Now spring warms up the world again,
 and equinoctial storms up in the heavens
 are hushed now by the west wind's pleasant breeze.
 Catullus, let's leave these Phrygian plains behind,
 with sweltering Nicaea's fertile fields,
 and let's now fly to Asia's famous cities.
 My heart's excited, eager to set off,
 my feet are tapping in anticipation.
 So goodbye to my band of sweet companions.
 We set out from our home together,
 but now return on different roads, apart.

[Phrygian plains...Nicaea's fertile fields: both references to the region of Bithynia, a Roman province on the north-west coast of Asia Minor. Catullus served there on the staff of Gaius Memmius, governor in 57-56 BCE.]

XLVII

Porci et Socraton, duae sinistrae
 Pisonis, scabies famisque mundi,
 uos Veraniolo meo et Fabullo
 uerpus praeposuit Priapus ille?
 uos conuiuia lauta sumptuose
 de die facitis, mei sodales
 quaerunt in triuio uocationes?

47

Porcius and Socraton, Piso's pair of *left*-hand
 thieves, the itch and greed of all the world –
 are you the two that shagged-out Priapus preferred
 to dear Veranius and Fabullus?
 And are you throwing smart, expensive dinners
 all day long, while *my* friends
 tout for invitations in the street?

[Porcius and Socraton: Porcius may have been Gaius Porcius Cato, who was tribune in 56 BCE, and Socraton ('little or pocket Socrates') may refer to the Epicurean philosopher and poet Philodemus. But these identifications are highly speculative.]

Piso: a reference to Lucius Calpurnicus Piso Caesonius, consul in 58 BCE and the father-in-law of Julius Caesar. He was governor of Macedonia in 57-55 BCE, and Veranius and Fabullus served under him.

Priapus: a minor deity whose main function was as a guardian of gardens, orchards, and fields. He is normally represented as a scarecrow-like figure with a huge wooden phallus, which he used to ward off intruders.

Veranius and Fabullus: clearly among the closest of all Catullus' friends, but little is known about them, otherwise. They may have served, first in Spain (?61 or 60 BCE, possibly with Caesar) and later in Macedonia (58/7 to 55 BCE).]

XLVIII

Mellitos oculos tuos, Iuuenti,
 si quis me sinat usque basiare,
 usque ad milia basiem trecenta
 nec numquam uidear satur futurus,
 non si densior aridis aristicis
 sit nostrae seges osculationis.

48

Oh Juuentius, if they would let me
 kiss your honeyed eyes, and keep on kissing them,
 I'd kiss three hundred thousand times
 and never feel that I had had enough,
 not even if our kisses' crop
 were tighter-packed than ripened ears of corn.

[Juuentius: Catullus' young boyfriend, alluded to in poems 15 and 21, and named for the first time in poem 24. His family may have been of Etruscan origin, but he also appears to have belonged to an old and well-known consular family in both Verona and Rome at the time.]

IL

Disertissime Romuli nepotum,
 quot sunt quotque fuere, Marce Tulli,
 quotque post aliis erunt in annis,
 gratias tibi maximas Catullus
 agit pessimus omnium poeta,
 tanto pessimus omnium poeta,
 quanto tu optimus omnium patronus.

49

Marcus Tullius, most eloquent of all of
 Romulus' descendants, whether past or present,
 or those to be in future years –
 Catullus, the worst poet in the world,
 sends you many, many thanks.
 For he's as much the world's worst poet
 as you're best advocate for anyone at all. **NOTE**

[Marcus Tullius: Marcus Tullius Cicero, orator, writer, politician, was born in 106 BCE, and died in 43 BCE. While Catullus and he travelled in the same circles, especially during the decade 60-50 BCE, their personal relationship is not known. His attitude towards the kind of poetry espoused by Catullus and his colleagues seems, at best, to have been guarded.]

Romulus: with his brother Remus, the legendary founder of Rome. Like Remus, he often stands as a symbol for Rome itself, and for the tradition of historical greatness it projects.]

L

Hesterno, Licini, die otiosi
 multum lusimus in meis tabellis,
 ut conuenerat esse delicatos:
 scribens uersiculos uterque nostrum
 ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc,
 reddens mutua per iocum atque uinum.
 atque illinc abii tuo lepore
 incensus, Licini, facetiisque,
 ut nec me miserum cibus iuuaret
 nec somnus tegeret quiete ocellos,
 sed toto indomitus furore lecto
 uersarer, cupiens uidere lucem,
 ut tecum loquerer, simulque ut essem.
 at defessa labore membra postquam
 semimortua lectulo iacebant,
 hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci,
 ex quo perspiceres meum dolorem.
 nunc audax caue sis, precesque nostras,
 oramus, caue despuas, ocelle,
 ne poenas Nemesis reposita a te.
 est uehemens dea: laedere hanc caueto.

50

Yesterday, Licinius, with nothing much to do,
 we fooled around a lot with all my writing-pads. **NOTE**
 We'd both be skittish, we agreed,
 each of us scribbling little verses,
 playing around now in this metre, now in that,
 capping joke with joke, and toasts with toasts.
 I came away from there, Licinius, on such a high
 from all your elegance and wit
 that eating gave no pleasure – poor old me.
 Nor could I close my eyes to sleep,
 but tossed and turned in bed with wild
 excitement, longing for the day to break,
 to be with you and talk again.
 But once my tired and aching limbs
 had lain, half dead, across the little bed,
 I wrote this poem for you, lovely man,
 to let you see the pain I felt.
 Don't be too hard, please – and don't
 reject my pleas, dear thing, in case
 you're made to pay for it by Nemesis.
 She is a violent goddess. Don't ruffle her.

[Licinius: Gaius Licinius Macer Calvus (82-47 BCE), one of Catullus' closest friends, and arguably the closest of all in terms of imaginative temperament, was a poet, orator, lawyer, and politician. He and Cicero were well acquainted. Only a few fragments of his work survive.]

Nemesis: the Greek goddess who punishes human pride, and who avenges wrongdoing mercilessly.]

Ille mi par esse deo uidetur,
 ille, si fas est, superare diuos,
 qui sedens aduersus identidem te
 spectat et audit

dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
 eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
 Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi
 < vocis is ore >

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
 flamma demanat, sonitu suopte
 tintinant aures gemina, teguntur
 lumina nocte.

otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
 otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
 otium et reges prius et beatas
 perdidit urbes.

To my eyes, that man is equal to a god,
 or (if I dare say it) surpasses all of them.
 Time and again, as he sits opposite,
 he sees and hears you

sweetly laughing – a fact that takes away
 all sense from poor old me. For no sooner,
 Lesbia, do I catch sight of you than
 [my voice dies inside my mouth].

My tongue is paralysed, a subtle fire runs
 through my limbs, my ears are ringing
 with some sound their own, a double darkness **NOTE**
 covers now my eyes.

Leisure, Catullus, does not agree with you. **NOTE**
 It makes you jump up, get overly excited.
 And leisure in the past has ruined kings
 and cities that were prosperous.

[Generally taken to be an opening gambit in Catullus' courting of Lesbia/Clodia (see below), this may well be the first poem that he addresses to her. The first three stanzas, though not the last, which may be from a different poem altogether, are clearly modelled on a famous poem by the Greek poetess Sappho, of the late seventh century BCE; and phrases, images, and attitudes in the original are closely reproduced.]

Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.

Leisure...does not agree with you: the connection between this final stanza and what has preceded it is not entirely clear, and these last four lines may in fact be part of another poem. Alternatively, they could be read as an ironic, negative commentary on the deleterious effects of leisure and desire. For the connotations suggested by the word otium, see the NOTE attached to line 13.]

Quid est, Catulle? quid moraris emori?
 sella in curuli struma Nonius sedet,
 per consulatum peierat Vatinius:
 quid est, Catulle? quid moraris emori?

So what's the problem then, Catullus? Why not die right now?
 That pustule Nonius sits upon the throne.
 Vatinius falsely swears he has a consulship.
 So what's the problem then, Catullus? Why not die right now?

[Nonius: this may have been Marcus Nonius Sufenas, who occupied several high offices of state in the 60s and 50s BCE. He presumably suffered from similar disfiguring marks as Vatinius, below.]

[Vatinius: Publius Vatinius was an ally of Julius Caesar, and dogged throughout his career by justifiable charges of bribery and extortion. In 54 BCE, he was prosecuted for illegal electioneering in his successful campaign for the praetorship. Cicero defended him, and won. He seems to have suffered from several physical disabilities, which included weak legs and scrofulous swellings.]

LIII

Risi nescio quem modo e corona,
 qui, cum mirifice Vatiniana
 meus crimina Caluos explicasset
 admirans ait haec manusque tollens,
 'di magni, salaputium disertum!'

53

My dear friend, Calvus, had just laid out quite
 brilliantly the charges that Vatinius would face,
 but then I had to laugh when someone in the crowd
 raised his hands in wonder, crying
 'God, what a clever little prick.'

[Calvus: Gaius Licinius Macer Calvus (82-47 BCE), one of Catullus' closest friends, was a poet, orator, lawyer, and politician. He and Cicero were well acquainted. He was a short man, hence the 'little' above.]

Vatinius: Publius Vatinus was an ally of Julius Caesar, and dogged throughout his career by justifiable charges of bribery and extortion. In 54 BCE, he was prosecuted for illegal electioneering in his successful campaign for the praetorship. Cicero defended him, and won. He seems to have suffered from several physical disabilities, which included weak legs and scrofulous swellings.]

Othonis caput oppido est pusillum,
 et, trirustice, semilauta crura,
 subtile et leue peditum Libonis,
 si non omnia, displicere uellem
 tibi et Sufficio seni recocto...
 irascere iterum meis iambis
 inmerentibus, unice imperator.

Caesar, you hick. **NOTE** Otho's head **NOTE** is quite
 minute, and rarely does he wash his legs,
 and Libo's gentle, crafty farts – I'd hoped
 that some of these at least got on your nerves,
 you and that warmed-up oldie, Sufficius.
 Yet, Generalissimo, it's once again my innocent
 iambs that get your goat.

[Caesar: Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), was a soldier, politician and writer who played a critical role in the gradual transformation of the Roman republic into the Roman Empire. Catullus must have known him from an early age, since he was a frequent guest at the house of Catullus' father in Verona.

Otho: his name is not common in the Roman Republic, although he has been tentatively identified as the tribune Lucius Roscius Otho, who sponsored a controversial law giving knights preferential seating in the theatre.

Libo: the most probable candidate is Lucius Scribonius Libo, who was a trusted adviser to Pompey, and whose daughter married Pompey's son Sextus in circa 56/55 BCE.

Sufficius: the name has also been read as Fufidius, a reference to an acquaintance of both Cicero and Horace. Horace satirised Fufidius for his extravagant money-lending.]

Oramus, si forte non molestum est,
 demonstres ubi sint tuae tenebrae.
 te Campo quaesiuius minore,
 te in Circo, te in omnibus libellis,
 te in templo summi Iouis sacrato.
 in Magni simul ambulatione
 femellas omnes, amice, prendi,
 quas uultu uidi tamen sereno.
 cette huc, sic ipse flagitabam,
 Camerium mihi pessimae puellae.
 'en' inquit quaedam sinum reducens,
 'en hic in roseis latet papillis.'
 sed te iam ferre Herculi labos est;
 tanto te in fastu negas, amice.
 dic nobis ubi sis futurus, ede
 audacter, committe, crede luci.
 nunc te lacteolae tenent puellae?
 si linguam clauso tenes in ore,
 fructus proicies amoris omnes.
 uerbosa gaudet Venus loquella.
 uel, si uis, licet obseres palatum,
 dum uestri sim particeps amoris.

We ask you, if it's not too troublesome...
 show us where your hide-out is.
 We've scouted round the smaller Campus,
 and round the Circus, in all the bookshops, even
 in the hallowed shrine of Jove Almighty.
 Meanwhile, down in Pompey's colonnade,
 I grabbed at all the tarts, my friend,
 although I saw they looked quite blank.
 'Give him up,' I kept demanding,
 'I want Camerius, you wicked girls.'
 'Look,' said one, pulling down her dress,
 'he's hiding here, between my rosy tits!'
 But putting up with you is now a Herculean task.
 You refuse your company with such arrogance, my friend.
 Tell us where you're going to be, say it
 out loud, share it, trust the light.
 Or have those milk-white girls now got you in their clutches?
 Shut your mouth and hold your tongue,
 and you'll throw the fruits of love away.
 Venus loves a chatterbox.
 Or else, if you want, keep your mouth zipped up
 as long as I can share your love. **NOTE**

[smaller Campus...Circus...bookshops...shrine of Jove Almighty...Pompey's colonnade: all references to well-known places in Rome, although the smaller Campus has not been identified.

Camerius: almost certainly one of Catullus' close-knit circle of intimates, though further information about him is lacking. It has been suggested that his name could derive from the Greek for brassière, giving added point to the girls' response.

a Herculean task: a hero, in both Greek and Roman mythology, of prodigious strength, who performed twelve immense tasks, including killing lions, hydras and birds, capturing bulls and boars, and stealing apples and horses.

Venus: the Roman goddess of love, passion, charm, and sexual desire.]

LVI

O rem ridiculam, Cato, et iocosam,
 dignamque auribus et tuo cachinno!
 ride quidquid amas, Cato, Catullum:
 res est ridicula et nimis iocosa.
 deprende modo pupulum puellae
 trusantem; hunc ego, si placet Dionae,
 protelo rigida mea cecidi.

56

Oh Cato, what a funny thing – what a giggle –
 worth you hearing and chuckling at it.
 As much as you love Catullus, Cato, laugh.
 It's funny, all too much a giggle.
 I just caught my girlfriend's boy slave
 wanking, and so (god bless me!),
 I banged him in rhythm with my cock.

[Cato: either the poet Valerius Cato, who achieved great fame during his lifetime but who died destitute and forgotten, or the stern moralist Marcus Porcius Cato, who once walked out of a theatre rather than watch a striptease act. Although the former identification seems the more likely, it would not be beyond Catullus to address this obscene poem to a rigid puritan.]

LVII

Pulcre conuenit improbis cinaedis,
 Mamurrae pathicoque Caesarique.
 nec mirum: maculae pares utrisque,
 urbana altera et illa Formiana,
 impressae resident nec eluentur:
 morbosi pariter, gemelli utrique,
 uno in lecticulo erudituli ambo,
 non hic quam ille magis uorax adulter,
 riuales socii puellularum.
 pulcre conuenit improbis cinaedis.

57

What a good match, that pair of shameless buggers,
 Caesar and Marmurra – poofters both.
 And no wonder. One's from the city,
 one's from Formiae – and yet the same black marks
 are stamped on them for good, no scrubbing out.
 A pair of twins, both equally diseased,
 two little scholars in a little bed,
 equal in adultery and in greed,
 and rival mates for little girlies.
 What a good match, that pair of shameless buggers.

[Caesar and Marmurra: Marmurra was Caesar's chief engineer from 58 BCE, and noted for his skills in structural construction, for which he was richly rewarded. He almost certainly accompanied Caesar in the first invasion of Britain in 55 BCE. His house in Rome was notorious for its extravagant luxury, and he himself for his sexual adventures, though whether the relationship implied here between Caesar and him had substance is impossible to determine.]

Formiae was a flourishing Roman community some seventy-five miles from Rome.]

LVIII

Caeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa,
 illa Lesbia, quam Catullus unam
 plus quam se atque suos amavit omnes,
 nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis
 glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes.

LVIII b

Non custos si fingar ille Cretum,
 non Ladas ego pinnipesue Perseus,
 non si Pegaseo ferar uolatu,
 non Rhesi niueae citaeque bigae;
 adde huc plumipedas uolatilesque,
 uentorumque simul require cursum,
 quos iunctos, Cameri, mihi dicares:
 defessus tamen omnibus medullis
 et multis languoribus peresus
 essem te mihi, amice, quaeritando.

58a

Caelius – *my* Lesbia, *that* Lesbia,
 the Lesbia whom, alone, Catullus worshipped
 more than himself or all his family –
 at crossroad corners, and down back alleys,
 the grandsons of great-hearted Remus she jacks off.

58b

Even had I been that famous guard of Crete,
 or Ladas, or wing-footed Perseus;
 even had I flown on Pegasus,
 or Rhesus' swift and snow-white mares –
 and add to these the feather-footed and the flying,
 and ask too for the racing winds as well –
 you could harness all these up for me, Camerius,
 and still I should be worn out to the very bone
 and gnawed away by sheer fatigue
 from searching endlessly for you, dear friend.

[two pieces that are not obviously related to each other, though 58b picks up a number of the themes explored in poem 55.]

[Caelius: the name is usually identified with Marcus Caelius Rufus, one of Cicero's brilliant young protégés, who supplanted Catullus as Lesbia/Clodia's lover (see below).]

Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.

that famous guard of Crete: a reference to the giant Talos, who had been fashioned out of bronze by the fire-god Hephaistos for King Minos of Crete. Talos ran round Crete three times a day to repel strangers.

Ladas: an Olympian runner from Sparta, whose name became proverbial for speed, and who collapsed and died as he finished a race.

Perseus: the son of Zeus and Danaë, he was given a pair of winged sandals by the Nymphs, which enabled him to outpace the Gorgon Medusa, whose head he had captured.

Pegasus: the winged horse that sprang up from the blood of Medusa, after Perseus had decapitated her.

Rhesus' swift and snow-white mares: Rhesus was a mythical king of Thrace, and an ally of Priam during the Trojan war. He was celebrated for his snow-white horses, which were stolen by Ulysses.

Camerius: almost certainly one of Catullus' close-knit circle of intimates, though further information about him is lacking.]

Bononiensis Rufa Rufulum fellat,
uxor Meneni, saepe quam in sepulcretis
uidistis ipso rapere de rogo cenam,
cum deuolutum ex igne prosequens panem
ab semiraso tunderetur ustore.

Rufa, that lady from Bologna, sucks Rufulus off –
she's Menenius' wife, the one you've often seen
in graveyards, grabbing her dinner off the funeral pyre,
chasing a loaf that's rolled down from the flames,
and getting banged by the corpse burner, stubble on his chin.

Rufa...Rufulus: neither name can be identified, though both are obviously sexually adventurous, with some hint of an incestuous relationship.

Menenius: Rufa's husband cannot be securely identified, though there was a Menenius who was proscribed in 43 BCE, and who fled to Sicily. The Menenia family was old and patrician, but had seemingly been in eclipse for decades, if not centuries.]

LX

Num te leaena montibus Libystinis
aut Scylla latrans infima inguinum parte
tam mente dura procreavit ac taetra,
ut supplicis uocem in nouissimo casu
contemptam haberes, a nimis fero corde?

60

Not even a lioness in the Libyan mountains
or Scylla barking from her rabid groin,
could have bred you, who have so hard and foul a mind
that you could spurn a suppliant's cry
in great distress. Your heart is purest savagery.

[Scylla: the six-headed sea-monster who lay in wait for unwary sailors in the Straits of Messina. Opposite her, as an equal danger, lay the whirlpool Charybdis.]

LXIX

Noli admirari, quare tibi femina nulla,
 Rufe, uelit tenerum supposuisse femur,
 non si illam rarae labefactes munere uestis
 aut perluciduli deliciis lapidis.
 laedit te quaedam mala fabula, qua tibi fertur
 ualle sub alarum trux habitare caper.
 hunc metuunt omnes, neque mirum: nam mala ualde est
 bestia, nec quicum bella puella cubet.
 quare aut crudelem nasorum interface pestem,
 aut admirari desine cur fugiunt.

69

No need to wonder, Rufus, why no woman
 wants to slide her soft thighs under you,
 even when you tempt her with expensive gowns,
 or rare and sparkling gems.
 Your problem is a nasty rumour that says
 you've got a fierce goat living in your armpits' crack.
 They're all scared, and no wonder. It's a nasty
 beast no pretty girl would go to bed with.
 So either kill this cruel plague on noses,
 or cease to be surprised when they all run away.

[Rufus: generally taken to be Marcus Caelius Rufus, one of Cicero's brilliant young protégés, who supplanted Catullus as Lesbia/Clodia's lover.]

LXX

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle
quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.
dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.

70

My woman says there's no one she would rather wed
than me, not even were she asked by Jove himself.
She says this: but what a woman says to an eager lover
should be written on the running water, on the wind.

[Jove: playing a similar role to the Greek god Zeus, Jove or Jupiter is the chief deity in the Roman pantheon, with a temple on the Capitoline Hill. As the supreme power in the universe, he is the god of the sky, of daylight, and of the weather, particularly thunder and lightning.]

LXXI

Si cui iure bono sacer alarum obstitit hircus,
 aut si quem merito tarda podagra secat.
 aemulus iste tuus, qui uestrem exercet amorem,
 mirifice est a te nactus utrumque malum.
 nam quotiens futuit, totiens ulciscitur ambos:
 illam affligit odore, ipse perit podagra.

71

If ever the cursed goat of the armpit justly got in the way,
 or hobbling gout ever justly caused pain,
 that rival of yours, who's giving your sweetheart some training,
 has caught both afflictions, and wonderfully fits the bill.
 Every time that he fucks, he punishes both –
 sickens her with his smell, kills himself with the gout.

[that rival of yours: yours seems most naturally interpreted as an address by Catullus to himself. The rival, given the same emphasis upon his armpits' smell as in poem 69 above, would be Marcus Caelius Rufus, one of Cicero's brilliant young protégés, who supplanted Catullus as Lesbia/Clodia's lover.]

LXXII

Dicebas quondam solum te nosse Catullum,
 Lesbia, nec prae me uelle tenere Iouem.
 dilexi tum te non tantum ut uulgus amicam,
 sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.
 nunc te cognoui: quare etsi impensius uror,
 multo mi tamen es uilior et leuior.
 qui potis est, inquis? quod amantem iniuria talis
 cogit amare magis, sed bene uelle minus.

72

You told me once, Lesbia, I was the only one you'd ever known,
 that even Jupiter you'd not rather hold than me.
 I loved you then, not as ordinary men love women,
 but as a father loves his sons and sons-in-law.
 But now I know you. So though my passion's all the more intense,
 you're still much cheaper, lighter, in my eyes.
 'How can that be?' you ask. Because such hurt makes
 lovers love much more, and like much less.

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

Jupiter: playing a similar role to the Greek god Zeus, Jupiter or Jove is the chief deity in the Roman pantheon, with a temple on the Capitoline Hill. As the supreme power in the universe, he is the god of the sky, of daylight, and of the weather, particularly thunder and lightning.]

LXXIII

Desine de quoquam quicquam bene uelle mereri
aut aliquem fieri posse putare pium.
omnia sunt ingrata, nihil fecisse benigne
< prodest > immo etiam taedet obstaque magis;
ut mihi, quem nemo grauius nec acerbius urget,
quam modo qui me unum atque unicum amicum habuit.

73

Stop trying to earn thanks from anyone,
or think that anyone will now prove true.
Everywhere, there's thanklessness. Kindness counts
for nothing. It's boring, even. A hindrance, rather.
I know. No one now attacks more cruelly
than he who lately called me 'one and only friend'.

Gellius audierat patrum obiurgare solere,
 si quis delicias diceret aut faceret.
 hoc ne ipsi accideret, patrum perdepsit ipsam
 uxorem, et patrum reddidit Arpocratem.
 quod uoluit fecit: nam, quamuis irrumet ipsum
 nunc patrum, uerbum non faciet patruus.

Gellius had heard that Uncle liked to reprimand
 all those who spoke or acted naughtily.
 To stop this happening to him, he shafted
 Uncle's wife, so making him a silent sacred child.
 He got what he wanted, for even were he now
 to fuck his Uncle's mouth, Uncle could not say a word.

[Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE., where he probably died.]

a silent sacred child: a reference to Harpocrates, who was adapted by the Greeks from the ancient Egyptian child god Horus. Egyptian statues represented Horus as a naked boy with a finger on his mouth, and for the Romans he became, by mistaken transfer of this image, the god of silence and secrecy.]

LXXV

Huc est mens deducta tua mea, Lesbia, culpa
 atque ita se officio perdidit ipsa suo,
 ut iam nec bene uelle queat tibi, si optima fias,
 nec desistere amare, omnia si facias.

75

Lesbia, it is your fault my mind has sunk to this.
 It has so wrecked itself by its own kindnesses
 that, even were you perfect now, it couldn't like you.
 But nor could it stop loving you, no matter what you did.

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

Siqua recordanti benefacta priora uoluptas
 est homini, cum se cogitat esse pium,
 nec sanctam uiolasse fidem, nec foedere nullo
 diuum ad fallendos numine abusum homines,
 multa parata manent in longa aetate, Catulle,
 ex hoc ingrato gaudia amore tibi.
 nam quaecumque homines bene cuiquam aut dicere possunt
 aut facere, haec a te dictaque factaque sunt.
 omnia quae ingratae perierunt credita menti.
 quare iam te cur amplius excrucies?
 quin tu animo offirmas atque istinc teque reducis,
 et dis inuitis desinis esse miser?
 difficile est longum subito deponere amorem,
 difficile est, uerum hoc qua lubet efficias:
 una salus haec est. hoc est tibi peruincendum,
 hoc facias, siue id non pote siue pote.
 o di, si uestrum est misereri, aut si quibus umquam
 extremam iam ipsa in morte tulistis opem,
 me miserum aspiciate et, si uitam puriter egi,
 eripite hanc pestem perniciemque mihi,
 quae mihi subrepens imos ut torpor in artus
 expulit ex omni pectore laetitias.
 non iam illud quaero, contra me ut diligat illa,
 aut, quod non potis est, esse pudica uelit:
 ipse ualere opto et taetrum hunc deponere morbum.
 o di, reddite mi hoc pro pietate mea.

If a man can gain pleasure in recalling
 his kindnesses, in knowing that he has been true,
 never broken his promises, nor abused the name of the Gods
 to deceive other people –
 then Catullus, out of this thankless love,
 much happiness is stored for you in future years.
 Whatever generous things that we can say or do
 to anyone, these you have said and done.
 Yet wasted on a thankless heart, they've disappeared.
 So why keep torturing yourself?
 Why not toughen up your feelings, tear yourself away,
 and stop this misery that the Gods oppose?
 It's difficult to break off long love suddenly,
 difficult – but that's what, somehow, you must do.
 It is your only hope, a battle that you have to win.
 You have to do this, whether you succeed or fail.
 Dear Gods, if you can pity or have ever brought
 some final help to any on the point of death,
 then look upon my misery. If I have lived a decent life,
 then take this ruinous disease away.
 Creeping like numbness through my every limb,
 it's driven from my heart all happiness.
 I ask no longer that she return my love
 or she stay faithful – which is impossible.
 What I crave is health, rid of this foul sickness.
 Dear Gods, if I've been true, please grant me this.

LXXVII

Rufe mihi frustra ac nequiquam credite amice
(frustra? immo magno cum pretio atque malo),
sicine subrepsti mi, atque intestina perurens
ei misero eripuisti omnia nostra bona?
eripuisti, heu heu nostrae crudele uenenum
uitae, heu heu nostrae pestis amicitiae.

77

Rufus, in vain I thought you were my friend – and all for nothing.
(For nothing? No, it's cost me much in suffering).
Is this how you've crept up on me, burned through my guts,
and stolen from this wretch all that I've held most dear?
Yes, stolen from me, damn you. You vicious poison of my life,
damn you, you cancer on the friendship that we had.

[Rufus: generally taken to be Marcus Caelius Rufus, one of Cicero's brilliant young protégés, who supplanted Catullus as Lesbia/Clodia's lover.]

LXXVIII

Gallus habet fratres, quorum est lepidissima coniunx
 alterius, lepidus filius alterius.
 Gallus homo est bellus: nam dulces iungit amores,
 cum puero ut bello bella puella cubet.
 Gallus homo est stultus, nec se uidet esse maritum,
 qui patruus patrum monstret adulterium.

LXXVIII b.

...sed nunc id doleo, quod purae pura puellae
 suaui comminxit spurca saliuua tua.
 uerum id non impune feres: nam te omnia saecula
 noscent et, qui sis, fama loquetur anus.

78

Gallus has brothers. One has quite a dishy son,
 the other has a really dishy wife.
 Gallus is a nice man. He brings sweet loves together,
 so that nice girl can go to bed with nice boy.
 Gallus is a stupid fool. He forgets that he's a married
 man, teaching a nephew how to seduce an aunt.

78 b

...what riles me now is that your disgusting spit
 has pissed upon the snow-white kisses of a snow-white girl.
 You won't, though, get away with it. For centuries to come, you will
 be known; that old woman, rumour, will talk of who you are.

*[the second four lines above are clearly a fragment from a longer poem,
 possibly poem 80 below.]*

*[Gallus: the exact character has not been identified, though one guess is that
 he might be the Caninius Gallus who was tribune of the plebs in 56 BCE.]*

LXXIX

Lesbius est pulcher. quid ni? quem Lesbia malit
 quam te cum tota gente, Catulle, tua.
 sed tamen hic pulcher uendat cum gente Catullum,
 si tria natorum suauia reppererit.

79

Lesbius is... 'pretty'. Of course he is, and Lesbia prefers him
 to you, Catullus, and all your clan.
 So let this pretty boy sell off Catullus and his clan as slaves
 if he can get three kisses from his friends.

[Lesbius: almost certainly Publius Clodius Pulcher, born circa 92 BCE, the radical tribune of the plebs in 59 BCE, and the brother of the Clodia who is usually identified as the poet's mistress Lesbia. He is said to have had incestuous relationships with at least one of his sisters, and was a ruthless political intriguer. After attacking Pompey, he changed sides and supported both Pompey and Caesar in 55 BCE. He died as he seems to have lived: violently in a street brawl in 52 BCE.]

Quid dicam, Gelli, quare rosea ista labella
 hiberna fiant candidiora niue,
 mane domo cum exis et cum te octava quiete
 e molli longo suscitatur hora die?
 nescio quid certe est: an vere fama susurrat
 grandia te medii tenta uorare uiri?
 sic certe est: clamant Victoris rupta miselli
 ilia, et emulso labra notata sero.

How to explain, Gellius, why those rosy lips of yours
 turn whiter than the winter snow,
 both in the morning, when you leave the house, and when these long days
 become mid-afternoon, and you wake up from sleep.
 Something is certainly going on. Is the whispered rumour true?
 That the massive swelling from a man's middle is in your mouth?
 That's it! Poor Victor's shattered groin proclaims it all,
 and the milky liquid sticking to your lips.

[Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE., where he probably died.]

Poor Victor: despite speculation, Victor is not otherwise known.]

Nemone in tanto potuit populo esse, Iuuenti,
 bellus homo, quem tu diligere inciperes.
 praeterquam iste tuus moribunda ab sede Pisauri
 hospes inaurata palladior statua,
 qui tibi nunc cordi est, quem tu praeponere nobis
 audes, et nescis quod facinus facias?

Among so many people, was there really no nice man,
 Juventius, for you to fall in love with
 but that has-been from the dead-hole of Pisaro,
 a visitor who's paler than a gilded statue,
 who's now your favourite, and whom you dare prefer
 to me? You can't know what a horror you're committing.

[Juventius: Catullus' young boyfriend, alluded to in poems 15 and 21, and named for the first time in poem 24. His family may have been of Etruscan origin, but he appears to have belonged to an old and well-known consular family in both Verona and Rome at the time.]

[Pisaurum: an Umbrian town on the Adriatic, the modern-day Pisaro, south of Rimini].

LXXXII

Quinti, si tibi uis oculos debere Catullum
aut aliud si quid carius est oculis,
eripere ei noli, multo quod carius illi
est oculis seu quid carius est oculis.

82

Quintius, if you want Catullus to owe his eyes to you,
or anything more precious than those eyes can be,
then don't run off with what is far more precious than his eyes,
or anything more precious than those eyes can be.

[Quintius: an unidentifiable figure from Veronan society, though most commentators agree that he is probably the brother of the Quintia mentioned in poem 86.]

LXXXIII

Lesbia mi praesente uiro mala plurima dicit:
 haec illi fatuo maxima laetitia est.
 mule, nihil sentis? si nostri oblita taceret,
 sana esset: nunc quod gannit et obloquitur,
 non solum meminit, sed, quae multo acrior est res,
 irata est. hoc est, uritur et loquitur.

83

When Lesbia's husband is around, she never fails to bark at me,
 which fills that stupid man with vast delight.
 Don't you understand, you mule? Silence would show that she'd
 forgotten me, was cured of love. But when she snarls and nags,
 it means that she remembers and – much more to the point –
 that she's upset. She's hurting, so she talks.

[Lesbia's husband: Lesbia is very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher. Her husband was Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. He was widely perceived as a dull and pompous career soldier. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

LXXXIV

Chommoda dicebat, si quando commoda uellet
 dicere, et insidias Arrius hinsidias,
 et tum mirifice sperabat se esse locutum,
 cum quantum poterat dixerat hinsidias.
 credo, sic mater, sic semer auunculus eius.
 sic maternus auus dixerat atque auia.
 hoc misso in Syriam requierant omnibus aures
 audibant eadem haec leniter et leuiter,
 nec sibi postilla metuebant talia uerba,
 cum subito affertur nuntius horribilis,
 Ionios fluctus, postquam illuc Arrius isset,
 iam non Ionios esse sed Hionios.

84 NOTE

'Hadvantages' Arrius always used to say, when he meant
 'advantages', and 'hambush' when he meant 'ambush'.
 He hoped he'd spoken most impressively
 when he delivered 'hambush' with full force.
 I understand his mother always spoke like that –
 his uncle and both maternal grandparents as well.
 Posted to Syria, he gave the ears of everyone a holiday.
 We heard the same words smoothly, gently spoken,
 no longer fearing for those awful 'hatches',
 when suddenly there came the dreadful news
 that Arrius had fetched up at the Ionian sea.
 Ionian no longer, it had become 'Hionian'.

*[Arrius: he is likely to have been the Quintus Arrius described by Cicero as a
 orator of low birth and no discernible natural aptitude. Without any training,
 he crawled to high office by hard work and cultivation of the right people. He
 was probably posted to Syria in 55 BCE, as part of Crassus's Eastern
 campaign against Parthia. He had died by 46 BCE.]*

LXXXV

Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

85

I hate and love. Perhaps you wonder why.
I've no idea. I just feel it – and it's crucifying me.

Quintia formosa est multis. mihi candida, longa,
 recta est: haec ego sic singula confiteor.
 totum illud formosa nego: nam nulla uenustas,
 nulla in tam magno est corpore mica salis.
 Lesbia formosa est, quae cum pulcerrima tota est,
 tum omnibus una omnis surripuit Veneres.

Many call Quintia beautiful. She's fair and tall,
 her posture's good. I grant these points.
 But beauty overall – no, not that. There's no attractiveness,
 not one grain of spice in all her body.
 It's Lesbia who is beautiful. She is completely lovely,
 and has stolen every charm from all the others.

[Quintia: an unidentifiable figure from Veronan society, though most commentators agree that she is probably the sister of the Quintius mentioned in poem 82.]

Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

LXXXVII

Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam
 uere, quantum a me Lesbia amata mea est.
 nulla fides ullo fuit umquam foedere tanta,
 quanta in amore tuo ex parte reperta mea est.

87

No woman can say she has been truly loved
 as much as Lesbia has been loved by me.
 No greater trust has been in any bond
 as found, on my part, in my love for you.

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

LXXXVIII

Quid facit is, Gelli, qui cum matre atque sorore
 prurit, et abiectis peruigilat tunicis?
 quid facit is, patrum qui non sinit esse maritum?
 ecquid scis quantum suscipiat sceleris?
 suscipit, o Gelli, quantum non ultima Tethys
 nec genitor Nympharum abluit Oceanus:
 nam nihil est quicquam sceleris, quo prodeat ultra,
 non si demisso se ipse uoret capite.

88

Gellius – what is *he* doing **NOTE** who lusts for his mother
 and sister, and does it all night in the nude?
 What is he doing, not letting his uncle have a wife?
 Don't you know how great the crime he's committing?
 Gellius – it's a crime so great that neither faraway Tethys
 nor Ocean, father of the nymphs, can wash it away.
 No fouler crime could he commit, not even if,
 head down, he sucked himself off.

[Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE., where he probably died.]

Tethys: in classical mythology, the wife of Oceanus, and called 'far-off' here since the Ocean was thought to be at the very rim of the world. Tethys was said to have given birth to three thousand (sic) daughters, the Oceanids.]

LXXXIX

Gellius est tenuis: quid ni? cui tam bona mater
 tamque ualens uiuat tamque uenusta soror
 tamque bonus patruus tamque omnia plena puellis
 cognatis, quare is desinat esse macer?
 qui ut nihil attingat, nisi quod fas tangere non est,
 quantumuis quare sit macer inuenies.

89

Gellius is thin. Of course he is. His mother's so good-hearted
 and so hearty, his sister's such a dish,
 his uncle's so obliging too, and the whole place full
 of girlie relatives. How could he *not* be thin?
 Even if he touches nothing that he should not touch,
 you'll find there's cause enough why he stays thin.

[Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE., where he probably died.]

Nascatur magus ex Gelli matrisque nefando
 coniugio et discat Persicum aruspicium:
 nam magus ex matre et gnato gignatur oportet,
 si uera est Persarum impia religio,
 gratus ut accepto ueneretur carmine diuos
 omentum in flamma pingue liquefaciens.

From the monstrous mating of Gellius with his mother,
 let a Magus be born, who will learn Persian priestcraft.
 For if that unholy religion is true, a Magus
 can only be born from mother and son.
 He'll worship the Gods with his pleasing chants,
 as he melts the fat caul in the flames.

[Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE., where he probably died.]

Magus...Persian priestcraft: a Magus was an astrologer or magician from Persia or other eastern countries, for whom it was an ancestral custom to have sexual intercourse with his mother.]

Non ideo, Gelli, sperabam te mihi fidum
 in misero hoc nostro, hoc perduto amore fore,
 quod te cognossem bene constantemue putarem
 aut posse a turpi mentem inhibere probro;
 sed neque quod matrem nec germanam esse uidebam
 hanc tibi, cuius me magnus edebat amor.
 et quamuis tecum multo coniungerer usu,
 non satis id causae credideram esse tibi.
 tu satis id duxti: tantum tibi gaudium in omni
 culpa est, in quacumque est aliquid sceleris.

In this wretched, desperate love of mine,
 I used to think, Gellius, that you'd be loyal to me –
 not because I'd got to know you well, or thought you true,
 or able to keep your mind away from obscene thoughts,
 but because I saw that she, for whom I was consumed with love,
 was not your mother or your sister.
 Though you and I had long enjoyed close friendship,
 I doubted you'd find *that* sufficient cause.
 And yet you did. The joy you take in any wrong
 with something criminal about it.

[Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE, where he probably died.]

XCII

Lesbia mi dicit semper male nec tacet umquam
 de me: Lesbia me dispeream nisi amat.
 quo signo? quia sunt totidem mea: deprecor illam
 assidue, uerum dispeream nisi amo.

92

Lesbia's always on at me, and can't keep quiet
 about me. I'm damned if Lesbia doesn't love me.
 The evidence? Because I haven't changed. I criticise her
 all the time, but I'm damned if I don't love her.

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

XCIII

Nil nimium studeo, Caesar, tibi uelle placere,
nec scire utrum sis albus an ater homo.

93

Caesar, I really don't want much to please you,
nor even know if you're black or white.

[Caesar: Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), was a soldier, politician and writer who played a critical role in the gradual transformation of the Roman republic into the Roman Empire. Catullus must have known him from an early age, since he was a frequent guest at the house of Catullus' father in Verona. But the very brevity of this tiny poem indicates Catullus' minimal regard for him.]

XCIV

Mentula moechatur. Moechatur mentula? Certe.
Hoc est quod dicunt: ipsa olera olla legit.

94

Prick's an adulterer. An adulterer, Prick? For sure.
Birds of a feather flock together, as the saying goes. **NOTE**

[Prick: the word mentula, the male organ, is often taken to be a nickname for Mamurra, who was Caesar's chief engineer from 58 BCE, and noted for his skills in structural construction, for which he was richly rewarded. He almost certainly accompanied Caesar in the first invasion of Britain in 55 BCE. His house in Rome was notorious for its extravagant luxury, and he himself for his sexual adventures.]

XCV

Zmyrna mei Cinnae nonam post denique messem
 quam coepta est nonamque edita post hiemem,
 milia cum interea quingenta Hortensius uno
 * * * * *

Zmyrna sacras Satrachi penitus mittetur ad undas,
 Zmyrnam cana diu saecula peruoluent.
 at Volusi annales Paduam morientur ad ipsam
 et laxas scombris saepe dabunt tunicas.
 parva mei mihi sint cordi monumenta sodalis,
 at populus tumido gaudeat Antimacho.

95

Nine harvests and nine winters after it was started,
 dear Cinna's *Zmyrna* has come out at last.
 Meanwhile, Hortensius [scribbles] half a million
 [lines] in one [short day?].
Zmyrna will travel far – to Satrachus' sacred waves – and when
 the centuries turn white-haired, *Zmyrna* will still be read.
 The *Annals* of Volusius, though, will perish by the Po,
 to be used quite commonly to wrap up fish.
 The crowds can clap at long-winded Antimachus,
 but Cinna's small monument speaks to my heart.

[Cinna's Zmyrna: Gaius Helvius Cinna, a contemporary poet and close friend of Catullus, who served with him in Bithynia. He was killed by the mob at Caesar's funeral in mistake for the anti-Caesarian, Lucius Cornelius Cinna. His masterpiece, Zmyrna, was a mythological epic poem focussed upon the incestuous love of Zmyrna for her father Cinyras.]

Hortensius: a reference to Quintus Hortensius Hortalus (114-49 BCE), celebrated as a florid orator and writer, and also famous for his gourmet culinary tastes. He was also an unscrupulous lawyer, resorting to both bribery and intimidation.

Satrachus: the river in Cyprus where Adonis and Aphrodite made love, and therefore a special, holy place that Cinna's poem will reach.

Annals of Volusius: the identity of this poetaster is unknown, though the most likely candidate seems to be Quintus Volusius, who was a protégé of Cicero and a well-known literary dilettante. His Annals would have been an epic poem about events in Roman history.

Antimachus: a fifth-century Greek poet, who wrote a twenty-four book epic, Thebaid, clearly designed to rival Homer's Iliad. His reputation for erudite learning, though, seems never to have overcome the contemporary impression he gave of wordiness and stylistic inelegance.]

XCVI

Si quicquam mutis gratum acceptumque sepulcris
 accidere a nostro, Calve, dolore potest,
quo desiderio ueteres renouamus amores
 atque olim missas flemus amicitias,
certe non tanto mors immatura dolori est
 Quintiliae, quantum gaudet amore tuo.

96

If sorrow, Calvus, could ever be accepted,
 or even welcomed, by the speechless grave,
from the longing with which we live old loves again
 and weep for friendships slipped away,
then Quintilia surely feels less grief at her untimely death
 than gladness at your love for her.

[Calvus...Quintilia: Gaius Licinius Macer Calvus (82-47 BCE), one of Catullus' closest friends, was a poet, orator, lawyer, and politician. He and Cicero were well acquainted. Of his recently deceased wife, Quintilia, nothing more is known.]

XCVII

Non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putauī,
 utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio.
 nilo mundius hoc, nihiloque immundius illud,
 uerum etiam culus mundior et melior:
 nam sine dentibus est. hic dentis sesquipedalis,
 gingiuas uero ploxeni habet ueteris,
 praeterea rictum qualem diffissus in aestu
 meientis mulae cunnus habere solet.
 hic futuit multas et se facit esse uenustum,
 et non pistrino traditur atque asino?
 quem siqua attingit, non illam posse putemus
 aegroti culum lingere carnificis?

97

I thought (so help me God) it wouldn't matter
 if I smelt Aemilius' mouth or else his arse,
 since neither would be more clean or filthy than the other.
 In fact, his arsehole's cleaner and to be preferred –
 it's got no teeth. His mouth's got teeth some eighteen inches long,
 and gums like some old cart-frame with bits missing.
 And when he grins, it's like the splitting open cunt
 of some mule that's pissing when on heat.
 He fucks so many girls, and fancies he's a charmer –
 the tread-mill's where he should be sent, to drive the mules.
 Why shouldn't we believe that any woman touching *him*
 would lick the arsehole of a hangman – and with diarrhoea?

*[Aemilius: speculation is rife about the identity of Aemilius: the triumvir
 Marcus Aemilius Lepidus? or his elder brother Lucius Aemilius Paullus? or
 the poet Aemilius Macer? But no definitive identification has been secured.]*

XCVIII

In te, si in quemquam, dici pote, putide Victi,
id quod uerbosis dicitur et fatuis.
ista cum lingua, si usus ueniat tibi, possis
culos et crepidas lingere carpatinas.
si nos omnino uis omnes perdere, Victi,
hiscas: omnino quod cupis efficies.

98

Smelly Victius, of you, if anyone, it could be said
what's said to windbags and to woodenheads:
that with a tongue like that, given the chance,
you could lick arseholes and farm-labourers' boots.
If you want to kill us all together, Victius,
just *open wide*. You'll do it in one breath.

[Victius: *an unknown figure.*]

XCIX

Surripui tibi, dum ludis, mellite Iuuenti,
 suauiolum dulci dulcius ambrosia.
 uerum id non impune tuli: namque amplius horam
 suffixum in summa me memini esse cruce,
 dum tibi me purgo nec possum fletibus ullis
 tantillum uestrae demere saeuitiae.
 nam simul id factum est, multis diluta labella
 guttis abstersisti mollibus articulis,
 ne quicquam nostro contractum ex ore maneret,
 tamquam commictae spurca saliuua lupae.
 praeterea infesto miserum me tradere amori
 non cessasti omnique excruciare modo,
 ut mi ex ambrosia mutatum iam foret illud
 suauiolum tristi tristius elleboro.
 quam quoniam poenam misero proponis amori,
 numquam iam posthac basia surripiam.

99

Juuentius, my honey, while you were playing, I stole from you
 a tiny kiss, sweeter than sweet ambrosia.
 And yet I didn't get it without cost. An hour or longer,
 I recall, you had me nailed upon a cross,
 while I apologised. But no amount of tears
 would soften all your anger by one bit.
 The instant it was done, you dabbed your lips with water,
 and wiped them clean with gentle hands,
 lest anything infectious from my mouth remain,
 as though it were the filthy spittle from some rancid whore.
 What's more, you didn't wait to hand me over – this poor wretch –
 to angry Love, to crucify and torture me.
 And so that tiny kiss was turned then from ambrosia
 and was more bitter than bitterest hellebore.
 If this is how you punish desperate lovers,
 I'll never steal a kiss from you again.

[Juuentius: Catullus' young boyfriend, alluded to in poems 15 and 21, and named for the first time in poem 24. His family may have been of Etruscan origin, but he appears to have belonged to an old and well-known consular family in both Verona and Rome at the time.]

C

Caelius Aufillenum et Quintius Aufillenam
 flos Veronensum depereunt iuuenum,
 hic fratrem, ille sororem. hoc est, quod dicitur, illud
 fraternum uere dulce sodalicium.
 cui faueam potius? Caeli, tibi: nam tua nobis
 perspecta ex igni est unica amicitia,
 cum uesana meas torreret flamma medullas.
 sis felix, Caeli, sis in amore potens.

100

Caelius and Quintius, flower of Veronan youth,
 have fallen for Aufillenus and Aufillena,
 one for the brother, the other the sister. This has to be
 that 'sweet bond of siblings' that they talk about.
 Who gets my vote? Caelius, you. Our special
 friendship was tried and tested in the fire
 when maddened flames were scorching through my bones.
 So good luck, Caelius. All power to your desires.

[Caelius and Quintius: it is possible that Caelius is Marcus Caelius Rufus, one of Cicero's brilliant young protégés, who supplanted Catullus as Lesbia/Clodia's lover. But this identification seems largely, or entirely, undermined by an obvious question: if Caelius had indeed been Catullus' successful rival, would he be praised for a friendship 'tried and tested in the fire'? The figure of Quintius is entirely unknown.]

Aufillenus and Aufillena: this brother and sister were probably Veronese, and of good family. But nothing else is known about them.]

Multas per gentes et multa per aequora uectus
 aduenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias,
 ut te postremo donarem munere mortis
 et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem.
 quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum.
 heu miser indigne frater adempte mihi,
 nunc tamen interea haec, prisco quae more parentum
 tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias,
 accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu,
 atque in perpetuum, frater, aue atque uale.

Through many countries, over many seas,
 I've come, my brother, for these poor funeral rites
 That I might give to you the final service for the dead
 and comfort your dumb ashes – all in vain.
 Fortune, poor brother, has robbed me of yourself,
 unjustly snatched away from me.
 Yet still, accept these gifts which, by ancestral custom
 of our parents, are served as sad offerings at funerals,
 gifts that are wet now with a brother's tears.
 And so I greet and say good bye to you, my brother, for evermore.

[my brother: nothing is known about Catullus' brother save his death and grave, which Catullus probably visited at some time between 57 and 56 BCE.]

CII

Si quicumque tacito commissum est fido ab amico,
cuius sit penitus nota fides animi,
me aequae esse inuenies illorum iure sacratum,
Corneli, et factum me esse puta Arpocratem.

102

If a loyal friend should ever trust a secret
to one whose loyalty was not in doubt,
you'd find me too, Cornelius, devoted to that rule.
I can become a silent, holy child.

[Cornelius: there is no reason to suppose that this is the same person as the Cornelius Nepos addressed in poem 1, and the figure here is unknown.]

a silent holy child: a reference to Harpocrates, who was adapted by the Greeks from the ancient Egyptian child god Horus. Egyptian statues represented Horus as a naked boy with a finger on his mouth, and for the Romans he became, by mistaken transfer of this image, the god of silence and secrecy.]

CIII

Aut sodes mihi redde decem sestertia, Silo,
deinde esto quamuis saeuus et indomitus:
aut, si te nummi delectant, desine quaeso
leno esse atque idem saeuus et indomitus.

103

Please, Silo, either pay the ten grand back,
(when you can be as rude and arrogant as you like)
or, if the money's to your taste, then please stop
pimping, and being rude and arrogant.

[Silo: possibly a member of a family of Juventius in Rome, who had the cognomen Silo. It has been argued that this Silo might be related to the Juventius of whom Catullus was so enamoured, though there is no conclusive evidence.]

CIV

Credis me potuisse meae maledicere uitae,
ambobus mihi quae carior est oculis?
non potui, nec, si possem, tam perditae amarem:
sed tu cum Tappone omnia monstra facis.

104

You think I could have cursed my love,
more dear to me than my own eyes?
I couldn't. If I could, I wouldn't love so desperately.
But Tappo the clown and you dream up such monstrous lies.

[Tappo the clown: Tappo was a real Roman name, seemingly of Etruscan origins, that is to be found in inscriptions; but it was also the name of a stock character in farce and hence, by extension, took on the more general meaning of 'clown'.]

Mentula conatur Pipleium scandere montem:
Musae furcillis praecipitem eiciunt.

Prick's trying to climb the Mount of Pipla,
while the Muses with their pitchforks toss him down.

[Prick: the word mentula, the male organ, is often taken to be a nickname for Mamurra, who was Caesar's chief engineer from 58 BCE, and noted for his skills in structural construction, for which he was richly rewarded. He almost certainly accompanied Caesar in the first invasion of Britain in 55 BCE. His house in Rome was notorious for its extravagant luxury, and he himself for his sexual adventures.]

Mount of Pipla: Pipla was the name of a spring, dedicated to the Muses (see below), on the northern slopes of Mount Olympus.

Muses: goddesses, traditionally nine in number, who were the patrons of the arts and sciences. They were Calliope (epic poetry); Erato (lyric poetry); Clio (history); Melpomene (tragedy); Thalia (comedy); Terpsichore (sung lyric and dance); Polyhymnia (hymns and mime); Euterpe (flute-playing); and Urania (astronomy).]

CVI

Cum puero bello praeconem qui uidet esse,
quid credat, nisi se uendere discupere?

106

Seeing a pretty boy together with an auctioneer,
who wouldn't think he wants to be 'For Sale'.

CVII

Si quicquam cupido optantique optigit unquam
 insperanti, hoc est gratum animo proprie.
 quare hoc est gratum nobisque est carius auro
 quod te restituis, Lesbia, mi cupido.
 restituis cupido atque insperanti, ipsa refers te
 nobis. o lucem candidiore nota!
 quis me uno uiuit felicior aut magis hac res
 optandus uita dicere quis poterit?

107

To anyone who yearns for something hopelessly,
 to have it happen suddenly is truly joyous to the soul.
 That's why, my Lesbia, you coming back into my longing arms
 is such a joy, more precious than rare gold.
 You have returned to one who had no hope, you have come back
 to me. The day's more bright than white.
 Who could be happier than me? or what thing
 could be more wished for in this life?

[Lesbia: very widely accepted to be a cryptonym for Clodia, one of the three sisters of Publius Clodius Pulcher, and the wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, governor of Cisalpine Gaul and consul in 60 BCE. Both before and after his death in 59 BCE, the aristocratic Clodia was notorious for her sexual profligacy, as well as political intrigues and rumoured attempts at poisoning. Catullus probably met her in 62/61 BCE, when he was in his early twenties, and she in her early thirties.]

CVIII

Si, Comini, populi arbitrio tua cana senectus
 spurcata impuris moribus intereat,
 non equidem dubito quin primum inimica bonorum
 lingua exsecta auido sit data uulturio,
 effossos oculos uoret atro gutture coruus,
 intestina canes, cetera membra lupi.

108

If people were to vote, Cominius, to cut short
 your old age – white-haired, depraved –
 then I've no doubt that first your slanderous tongue
 should be cut out to feed a hungry vulture.
 A black-throat crow could then peck out and eat your eyes,
 with dogs your guts, and wolves the other bits.

[Cominius: his identity is uncertain. Cicero speaks of two brothers with the name Cominius, and one of them, Publius Cominius, had died by 46 BCE, which would make him the right age for the target of the poem. But whether he was indeed the person in question is completely speculative.]

CIX

Incundum, mea uita, mihi proponis amorem
hunc nostrum inter nos perpetuumque fore.
di magni, facite ut uere promittere possit,
atque id sincere dicat et ex animo,
ut liceat nobis tota perducere uita
aeternum hoc sanctae foedus amicitiae.

109

My dear, you promise that this love of ours
will be a joy and last forever.
Great Gods, just let her promise be sincere,
and that she speaks it honestly and from the heart.
Then let us keep this everlasting bond
of sacred friendship all our lives.

Aufilena, bonae semper laudantur amicae:
 accipiunt pretium, quae facere instituunt.
 tu, quod promisti, mihi quod mentita inimica es,
 quod nec das et fers saepe, facis facinus.
 aut facere ingenuae est, aut non promisse pudicae,
 Aufillena, fuit: sed data corripere
 fraudando officiis, plus quam meretricis auarae
 quae sese toto corpore prostituit.

Obliging girls, Aufillena, are always praised.
 They get rewarded for what they've said they'll do.
 But you're no friend. You broke your promise to me.
 You often take and never give, and that's a crime.
 An honest girl just gets on with it, a shy one never even promises.
 To rake in gifts by fraud, though,
 Aufillena, is simple theft – worse than any greedy whore
 whose whole body is for sale.

[Aufillena: previously mentioned in poem 100 with her brother Aufillenus, Aufillena was probably from Verona, and of good family. But, her apparent youth apart, nothing else is known about her.]

CXI

Aufilena, uiro contentam uiuere solo,
nuptarum laus ex laudibus eximiis:
sed cuiuis quamuis potius succumbere par est,
quam matrem fratres efficere ex patruo < parere >

111

To live content with one man only, Aufilella,
is the best and highest praise for any wife;
but better sleep with anyone at all
than give birth to cousins by your uncle.

[Aufilella: as noted immediately above, Aufilella was probably from Verona, and of good family. But, her apparent youth apart, nothing else is known about her.]

CXII

Multus homo es, Naso, neque tecum multus homost quin
te scindat: Naso, multus es et pathicus.

112

You're a man's man, Naso, though few men haven't fucked you.
You're a man's man, Naso – and a raging queen. **NOTE**

[Naso: an unknown figure, though it has been suggested that he might be Sextus Pompeius, a supporter of Pompey who later took part in the conspiracy against Caesar. But the suggestion is very speculative.]

CXIII

Consule Pompeio primum duo, Cinna, solebant
 Maeciliam: facto consule nunc iterum
 manserunt duo, sed creuerunt milia in unum
 singula. fecundum semen adulterio.

113

In Pompey's first consulship, Cinna, Maecilia used to do
 with just two men. Now he's consul for a second time,
 the two remain, but a thousand more for each man
 have sprung up. Adultery is very quick to breed.

[Pompey: the celebrated Roman general and politician, born 30 September 108 BCE, who was consul twice in his career, 70 BCE and 55 BCE. This fifteen-year period is crucial for Catullus' point: that the number of Maecilia's lovers has leapt from two to two thousand and two.]

Cinna: Gaius Helvius Cinna, a contemporary poet and close friend of Catullus, who served with him in Bithynia. He was killed by the mob at Caesar's funeral in mistake for the anti-Caesarian, Lucius Cornelius Cinna.

Maecilia: otherwise unknown, though if her name is emended to Mucilla, a diminutive form of Mucia, a plausible identification can be advanced. Mucia was Pompey's third wife, bearing him two sons and a daughter. He divorced her in 62 BCE, citing her adultery with Caesar.]

CXIV

Firmano saltu non falso Mentula diues
 fertur, qui tot res in se habet egregias,
 aucupium omne genus, piscis, prata, arua ferasque.
 nequiquam: fructus sumptibus exsuperat.
 quare concedo sit diues, dum omnia desint.
 saltum laudemus, dum modio ipse egeat.

114

In his estate at Firmo, Prick's thought rich – and rightly so.
 It's packed with such a lot of lovely things:
 All kinds of birds, and fish, and meadows, ploughland, game.
 But what's the use? It loses money.
 So I don't mind him being 'rich' so long as he's got nothing.
 Let's praise the estate, then, provided that the owner's broke.

[Firmo: a town about forty miles south of Ancona, on the rich coastal plain of the Adriatic.]

Prick: the word mentula, the male organ, is often taken to be a nickname for Mamurra, who was Caesar's chief engineer from 58 BCE, and noted for his skills in structural construction, for which he was richly rewarded. He almost certainly accompanied Caesar in the first invasion of Britain in 55 BCE. His house in Rome was notorious for its extravagant luxury, and he himself for his sexual adventures.]

Mentula habet iuxta triginta iugera prati,
 quadraginta arui: cetera sunt maria.
 cur non diuitiis Croesum superare potis sit,
 uno qui in saltu tot bona possideat,
 prata arua ingentes siluas vastasque paludesque
 usque ad Hyperboreos et mare ad Oceanum?
 omnia magna haec sunt, tamen ipsest maximus ultro,
 non homo, sed uero mentula magna minax.

Prick's got some twenty acres of meadow and
 twenty-seven of ploughing land. The rest is swamp.
 Why shouldn't he outstrip Croesus in his wealth
 when his estate has many lovely things –
 meadows, ploughlands, great forests, endless marshes
 that stretch as far as the sunny north and Oceanus's sea?
 These are big things, but he himself's the biggest –
 he's not a man, but a threatening Prick the Great.

[Prick: the word mentula, the male organ, is often taken to be a nickname for Mamurra, who was Caesar's chief engineer from 58 BCE, and noted for his skills in structural construction, for which he was richly rewarded. He almost certainly accompanied Caesar in the first invasion of Britain in 55 BCE. His house in Rome was notorious for its extravagant luxury, and he himself for his sexual adventures.]

Croesus: a king of Lydia in the 6th century BCE, and a proverbial example of vast wealth and riches.

the sunny north: the Latin reference is to the Hyperboreos, a region of permanent sunshine beyond the North wind, whose inhabitants lived as idyllically joyful worshippers of the sun.

Oceanus: the river that, in Greek mythology, was thought to encircle the entire earth, and where the sun and stars were thought to rise and set.]

CXVI

Saepe tibi studioso animo uenante requirens
 carmina uti possem mittere Battiadae,
 qui te lenirem nobis, neu conarere
 tela infesta mittere in usque caput,
 hunc uideo mihi nunc frustra sumptum esse laborem,
 Gelli, nec nostras hic ualuisse preces.
 contra nos tela ista tua euitabimus acta
 at fixus nostris tu dabis supplicium.

116

I've often tried, yes really tried, to find how I could
 send my versions of Battiades to you, Gellius.
 I hoped that you'd relent and wouldn't keep on
 hurling hostile weapons at my head.
 I see now that this effort was quite wasted,
 and that my pleas were all in vain.
 So now, I'll dodge the missiles that you launch;
 but you'll be cut by mine, and pay the price.

[Battiades: Battus was the legendary founder of Cyrene, and the poet-scholar Callimachus claimed descent from him, using his name as a patronymic. It was to Callimachus that Catullus and his circle looked for inspiration and guidance.]

Gellius: generally thought to be Lucius Gellius Poplicola, born circa 80 BCE, and known for his radicalism and revolutionary attitudes. The charges of incest made against him were not without foundation. He switched sides during the Civil Wars, and fought for Antony at Actium in 31 BCE., where he probably died.]

NOTES

1

arida modo pumice exolitum / just now polished smooth with pumice stones

As far as I am aware, there is no contemporary English equivalent for the action Catullus describes. His words would have been written on sheets of papyrus; and the uneven seams created by the bonding of one sheet of papyrus to the next would have required the famously dry pumice stone to gently smooth those wrinkles into a flat continuous scroll that could then be rolled up. The contemporary phrase that perhaps comes closest to conveying Catullus' meaning is that his book is 'hot off the press'. **RETURN**

2

Passer / Oh sparrow

A scholarly debate has raged for centuries about whether *passer* refers to a small bird, generally taken to be a sparrow, or whether it is a pet name or slang term for the poet's penis. Equally, the word could well denote both meanings, an ambiguity that is emphasised further by translating *morsus* in line 4 as 'the pecker' (= both the pecking bird and one of many slang terms for the penis).

RETURN

7

basiationes / kissathons

basiationes is an abstract noun formed from the concrete term *basium*, a kiss, and seems to have been coined by Catullus. This considerably lengthened form of the root word may suggest the incessant, exaggerated kissing that is taking place, hence the choice of the word 'kissathon'. **RETURN**

9

milibus trecentis / three hundred miles

The phrase has been interpreted as 'three hundred thousand', which can scarcely mean that Catullus has that many friends, but that Veranius is a friend worth three hundred thousand others. Such a vast number, though, still lacks point: why three hundred thousand, rather than two, or six, or eight? A more persuasive reading is that *milibus* here means 'miles', and that Veranius is the best of friends 'by three hundred miles', a colloquial expression that gives some point to the number Catullus chooses. **RETURN**

10

caput unctius / with their pockets lined

literally, *caput unctius* means 'a head better oiled', a reference to a holiday celebration being marked by the oiling of the head. By extension, the phrase comes to mean 'to have something to celebrate', as well as 'to come back richer.' The English phrase 'lining one's pocket' seems to have a comparable colloquial force to the Latin, especially with its suggestions of dishonesty.

RETURN

12

hendecasyllabos trecentos / three hundred lines of verse like these

since this poem, like many others by Catullus, is written in hendecasyllables (i.e. with eleven syllables in each line), this is a self-referential threat to continue writing, and writing, and writing..., presumably until Asinius confesses his guilt and concedes defeat. To a British audience, there may be added point in what used to be a frequent school punishment for minor misdemeanours: writing out 'lines'. RETURN

14

munus dat tibi Sulla litterator / gift was given you by Sulla, elementary grammar teacher

a pun and consequent ambiguity here. *Munus* can mean both a 'gift' and a 'task'; *litterator* can mean both a 'critic' and also a 'schoolmaster', with some suggestion in both cases of pedantry. I find the most persuasive reading to be an elision of both interpretations: i.e. 'this rare new gift / was given you by Sulla, elementary grammar teacher'. RETURN

14

unde malum pedem attulistis / to where you brought your rotten feet from

one of the rare occasions when a pun in one language can be translated directly into another. In Latin, *pes / pedis* can mean both the physical foot, and a metrical unit of poetry. In English, too, 'foot' has these two meanings, among several others. RETURN

23

sesteria...centum / that hundred thousand

although currency values are notoriously difficult to translate, the 100,000 sestertii Catullus mentions is a very substantial sum indeed, possibly equivalent to at least a year's income for a middle-class family. Placing pounds, or dollars, or euros, after the figure is not as important as conveying the overall sense of a large amount of money. RETURN

25

cum diua Murcia arbitros ostendit oscitantes / when tipsy diners grow careless, off their guard

the corrupt manuscript at this point (*cum diua mulier aries ostendit oscitantes*) needs some emendation for a persuasive meaning to emerge. It has been suggested that the 'goddess Murcia' (*diua Murcia*) might be a reference to an obscure goddess associated with sloth or laziness. But translating the words literally in this way obscures, rather than clarifies, the basic sense of the line for modern-day readers – which is, when the dinner-guests have had too much to drink, Thallus can begin his pilfering, since they are past noticing. RETURN

25

aestues / all hot and heaving

aestus has a dual meaning in Latin of both 'heat' (and by metaphorical extension, 'passion') and also 'tide/surge of the sea'. The two adjectives chosen here, 'hot' and 'heaving', evoke these twin senses. RETURN

26

uerum ad milia quindecim et ducentos / overdraft of fifteen thousand sesterces...and two hundred...

compared with the 100,000 sestertii commented upon in poem 23 above, this 15,000 seems relatively modest; but the point is the change in what is really attacking the house: not the winds that blast from every direction, but the mortgage it has to face. RETURN

27

ad seueros / the puritans

a number of institutions suggest themselves as a translation of *seueros*: the Temperance League, the Band of Hope, teetotalers in general. I have chosen 'puritans' here as the term with the broadest resonance, evoking a general cast of mind as well as a specific attitude towards alcohol. RETURN

36

truces...iambos / my nasty lines

iambos literally means poetry composed in an iambic metre, though here the sense is more focussed, to mean the kind of vitriolic poetry written in that metre, of which of course this poem is a fine example. For a similar use of *iambos*, see the second line of poem 40. RETURN

41

nec rogare...aes / never asks a mirror

an untranslatable pun on the word *aes*, which means both ‘money’ and ‘bronze mirror’. The girl asks for money, but not for the mirror that will show her what she is like. [RETURN](#)

42

pugillaria / notebook

pugillaria were writing tablets coated with wax, which could be smoothed clear and then rewritten upon, repeatedly. They were used for writing that was not meant to be permanent (drafts of material, quick letters, scribbled notes, jottings, memoranda, and so on). The closest English equivalent has seemed ‘notebook’, which has similar connotations of brief entries that are not intended to be considered, final versions. [RETURN](#)

49

quanto tu optimus omnium patronus / as you’re best advocate for anyone at all

the ironic self-deprecation that underpins the poem comes to a climax in this last line, which ostensibly praises Cicero only to cut him down. Indiscriminately, Cicero will deploy his hyperbolic oratory for anyone who cares to pay him. Translating *omnium* as ‘anyone at all’ gives the line added point. [RETURN](#)

50

in meis tabellis / with all my writing-pads

tabella, ae is clearly closely associated with the *pugillaria* of poem 42 above; and a similar sense is conveyed of writing that is not meant to be permanent or finalised. The three syllables of ‘writing-pads’ is somewhat more effective rhythmically than the shorter ‘notebook’ of poem 42. [RETURN](#)

51

gemina et teguntur lumina nocte / a double darkness covers now my eyes

gemina is ablative agreeing with *nocte* rather than nominative agreeing with *lumina*, as might be expected. Thus, the sense is that the eyes are not simply covered by darkness/night, but since there are two of them, by a double, even more impenetrable, darkness. [RETURN](#)

51

otium... / leisure

the word *otium* can embrace both positive and negative connotations. Positively, it means ‘leisure’, and productive, beneficial leisure at that. But

negatively, it suggests ‘idleness’, a wasting of time and talent. Catullus’ repeated use of the word here is finely balanced between these two connotations. [RETURN](#)

54

Othonis caput...trirustice / Caesar, you hick. Otho’s head

Although Catullus does not mention Caesar explicitly, he is clearly the implied addressee; and for the purposes of clarity, it seemed best to name him at the beginning of this short poem. Otho’s ‘head’ may allude to the size of his penis, as well as (or rather than) the size of his skull. [RETURN](#)

55

dum uestri sim particeps amoris / as long as I can share your love

The Latin is ambiguous, and could mean anything from a passionate plea to be Camerius’ lover to the far weaker wish simply to know what he is doing. [RETURN](#)

84

Chommoda...sed Hionis / ‘Hadvantages’...‘Hionian’

as in poem 14, a rare example of a play-on-words in the original text being directly translatable. Arrius’ difficulties with aspiration and non-aspiration (‘haitch’ and ‘aitch’) are exactly reproducible into English: ‘hadvantages’, ‘hambush’ and ‘Hionian’. [RETURN](#)

88

Quid fecit is, Gelli / Gellius – what is he doing

although the Latin could be read as a direct address to Gellius about an unnamed third party, it seems more natural to assume that the ‘he’ refers to Gellius himself. [RETURN](#)

94

ipsa olera olla legit / birds of a feather flock together

the Latin literally means ‘the pot chooses its own vegetables’, with a possible though unverifiable sexual implication that loose women attract randy men. Green [see Further Reading section] proposes that the nearest equivalent English proverb may be ‘birds of a feather flock together’. I find this suggestion sufficiently persuasive to adopt it here. [RETURN](#)

112

descendit / te scindat [textual variant]

the Latin manuscript reading is *descendit*, which is accepted by many editors. The primary meaning might be ‘to go down [into the Forum]’, though a secondary sense might be ‘to go down [on one’s hands and knees for sex]’. It

NOTES

has been suggested, moreover, that the manuscript reading could be emended to *te scindat*, i.e. ‘to tear apart by anal penetration’, which would give even more point to the final word *pathicus*, a passive homosexual. Whichever reading is preferred, Catullus’s contrast seems clear: Naso is a ‘butch queen’, disguising his feminine instincts by a show of vigorous masculinity. [RETURN](#)

FURTHER READING AND

INTERNET LINKS

The literature concerned with Catullus – both primary texts and translations, and secondary critical and historical material – is vast; and the bibliography below necessarily concentrates upon work that is central to the translation of his poetry into English.

Major primary editions

- Goold, G. P. *Catullus, edited with introduction, translation, and notes*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1983. [see also below].
- Mynors, R. A. B. *Gaius Valerii Catulli Carmina*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.
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- Balmer, Josephine *Catullus: Poems of Love and Hate*. Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2004.
- Gaisser, Julia Haig *Catullus in English*. London: Penguin Books, 2001.
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- _____ *Catullus: The Shorter Poems*. Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 1999.
- Green, Peter *The Poems of Catullus*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
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- Lee, Guy *Catullus: The Complete Poems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
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- Whigham, Peter *The Poems of Catullus*. California: University of California Press, 1969.
- Whyte, Ewan *Catullus*. Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press Canada, 2004. [a selection only]

FURTHER READING AND LINKS

- Zukofsky, Celia, and Louis Zukofsky *Catullus (Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber)*. London: 1969.

Reference and supporting works

Many of the editions above discuss, in introductions or prefaces, the problems of translating Catullus. In addition, the following texts are useful:

- Adams, J. N. *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- McPeck, J.A.S. *Catullus in Strange and Distant Britain*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 15, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939, rept. 1972.
- Vandiver, Elizabeth 'Translating Catullus', in *A Companion to Catullus*, ed. Marilyn B. Skinner. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

Internet sites

- Holcombe, John www.textetc.com
[a fascinating discussion of the issues encountered in translating poem 31, *Paene insularum, Sirmio, insularunque.*]
- Kline, A.S. www.poetryintranslation.com
[presents Catullus' complete work, with useful hyperlinks elaborating upon people and places.]
- Negenborn, Rudy www.negenborn.net/catullus
[the most comprehensive of all collections of Catullan translations, comprising some 1750 translations by 250 translators in over 30 languages, together with the original texts and associated material.]