CATULLUS (GAIUS VALERIUS CATULLUS, c. 84-54 BCE), LATIN POET. For a brief biography of Catullus, selections from some of his other works, and a brief account of his reception, reputation, and translation in early modern England, see the print anthology, pp. 144-47 and pp. 193-98.

EDITIONS AND CONTEXTS:
For selected early modern and modern translations of Catullus’ verse, as well as a fuller account of his reception, reputation, and translation in early modern England, see the essay ‘Catullus’ in “Classical Writers, their Early Modern Reputations and Translations” (Online Companion).

From THE ADVENTURES OF CATULLUS (1707). On this text, see the print anthology, pp. 146-7 and p. 194.

[Early in the narrative, Catullus recounts visiting his beloved mistress, Lesbia, taking along with him his close friend Licinius. While with Lesbia, Catullus and Licinius compose and exchange verses, writing them down alternately in Lesbia’s copybook.]

Next morning waking much sooner than Licinius, who was weary after his journey, it came in my head to write him a billet1 in verse, which I presently did, and sent it to his room by one of my servants. The words were to this effect:2

Licinius, yesterday at leisure,3
We in my tablets took much pleasure,4
As either of us then thought fit
To versify and deal in wit;
Now in this sort of verse, now that,
As mirth and wine indulged the chat.
And thence Licinius did I part,
So grieved with thy replies so smart
That e’en my food denied me ease,
Nor could sleep my eyelids seize,
But tumbling in my bed all night,
I coveted to see the light
That with Licinius I may be,
And in discourse again be free.
But when my limbs with toil oppressed,
Half-dead, half seemed to take their rest,
This I my merry comrade sent,
That you might know my discontent.
Take care now, be not proud and high,

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1 billet a short, informal letter.
2 The following is a translation of Catullus’ ‘Carmen 50.’
3 Licinius Caius Licinius Macer Calvus (b. 82 BCE, d. before 47 BCE), lawyer, poet and close friend of Catullus. Licinius figures as well in Carmina 14, 53, and 96. He was predeceased by his wife Quintillia, who was perhaps from the family of Quintilius Varus, another friend of Catullus.
4 tablets notebooks.
Nor slight my prayers with haughty eye,
Lest Nemesis reprisals make
And of thy pride just vengeance take:
For she’s a goddess, oh! take care
How you provoke her: she will not spare.

Licinius, finding these lines upon his table just as he got out of bed, came straight to my chamber and begged me to carry him to see some other beauty, ‘That I may fix,’ says he, before I venture to see Lesbia again.’

I took him after dinner to Quintillia’s; she had heard of him already, and heard something of the verses that we made at Lesbia’s the night before; she showed so much impatience to see ‘em that Licinius, who has an extraordinary good memory, called for paper and wrote ‘em over in her presence. He gave her the verses too that I sent to himself, in the morning.

Quintillia received ‘em from him with so much engaging civility that from that moment he began to have a liking for her. And as he was none of those that sigh away their time of business in deep silence, he found a way of declaring his passion upon the spot, but with such abundance of wit that Quintillia, who liked him well enough at first sight, did not scruple to make him a very obliging return, so that one may truly say, here was an intrigue begun and perfected the very first day the persons saw one another, and yet it lasted ever after to an extraordinary degree of passion and constancy on both sides. Licinius’ only care now was how to please Quintillia, and she for her part omitted nothing to secure her conquest, insomuch that observing the great concourse of people at her visits was uneasy to Licinius, she found a way of diminishing that crowd of idle admirers […]

[Catullus and his close friend Aurelius attend a fashionable gathering at which the topic of discussion turns to the beautiful noblewoman Crastinia, with whom Catullus is infatuated.]

Their conversation might have lasted longer if it had not been interrupted by the approach of Ravidius, a Roman knight, one of those troublesome creatures that can never see a couple entertain one another with satisfaction without coming up to say some impertinent thing. Catullus and Aurelius, to get rid of this man, joined the gross of the company, where Crastinia’s beauty was all the discourse. One of the company that was more charmed with her than the rest fancied that she resembled young Juventius mightily in her riding habit. This Juventius was a young gentleman of the first quality in Rome, whose wit and genteel manners and good nature but above all his beauty began to be much talked of. All agreed that there was a great resemblance, and from that day Catullus called her nothing but ‘the Lovely Juventius.’ The verses that he made upon her were inscribed to Juventius, and there were but very few that understood the mystery:

“Hark, ye,” says he, whispering Aurelius in the ear, while the rest of the company
were descanting\textsuperscript{11} upon the likeness of these two fine persons, “I’ll repeat you some lines that I have just now made upon the lovely Juventius.”

“That’s to say, upon Crastinia,” says Aurelius.

Catullus answered with a little nod and went on:

Juventius, might I kiss those eyes
That such becoming sweetness dart,
The numbers might to thousands rise,
Yet be too few to satisfy my heart;
A heart no surfeit would allow,
E’en though the harvest of our kisses were
More thick than what succeeds the plough,
And speaks the blessings of a fruitful year.\textsuperscript{12}

Aurelius made him repeat ’em twice or thrice running, and as soon as he saw Crastinia alone, he rode up and spoke ’em to her; she heard ’em with a great deal of satisfaction, and turning to Catullus, she looked at him and smiled, who did not lose this opportunity of entertaining her.

[After the company has finished participating in a hunt, they all go in to supper and afterwards the discussion turns to the myth of Attis and Cybele, prompting a request for Catullus’s poem on the topic, which he duly recites]

When the chase was over, Caesar gave a noble entertainment to all the company. After supper they fell into the most agreeable conversation that could be; there was hardly one of the company but had a world of wit. The conversation turned first upon the adventure of Lucretius, which was the common talk at that time in all companies. Caesar was pleased to say that the accident was very extraordinary; however, that this was not the first time that love potions worked upwards and disturbed the brain:\textsuperscript{13}

“Witness,” says he, “the fable of Attis, which is now become a mystery of our religion; for, in short, to speak freely of this matter, there are strong presumptions that the good Dame Cybele, being grown old and ugly, when she fell in love with young Attis, gave him some such dose to quicken the young man’s appetite, and that the strength of it made the poor boy commit the folly that he’s charged with.\textsuperscript{14} The poets, who dress up all the fables in a way of their own, give a different account of this matter, but one must be very blind not to see through all their fine glosses\textsuperscript{15} the matter of fact as it appears to me. And if Catullus would speak his mind, I dare say you’d find him of my opinion.”

“Your opinion, sir,” says Catullus, “is always so just and reasonable that ’tis

\textsuperscript{11} descanting commenting.
\textsuperscript{12} A translation of Catullus’ ‘Carmen 48.’
\textsuperscript{13} The conversation ... brain The early Christian writer Jerome is apparently the originator of this tale about the ancient poet and philosopher Lucretius (99-c. 55 BCE), author of De Rerum Natura (‘On the Nature of Things’); modern critics have dismissed as groundless Jerome’s statement that Lucretius wrote most of his poetry while half-mad, under the influence of a love potion.
\textsuperscript{14} the folly that he’s charged with As Catullus’ poem makes clear, this ‘folly’ was self-castration.
\textsuperscript{15} glosses interpretations, lies.
impossible not to follow it in everything.”

“But, after all,” replied the Dictator, “compliments apart, what do you really think of this story of Attis and Cybele?”

“It’s pretty hard,” says Catullus, “to make any certain judgement of the matter; history is not agreed in it. Some say that Cybele, daughter to a certain king of Phrygia, and a very stale maid, fell in love with a youth called Attis, grew into an extraordinary familiarity with him and proved with child. The King her father being informed of it had Attis seized and put to death. Cybele, afflicted at the loss of her lover, ran stark mad and traversed the countries round in this distracted condition, making hideous outcries and lamentations under her disaster. Other historians relate the matter quite otherwise. As for the poets, there’s hardly any one subject that they are so much divided upon: the greatest part of ’em will have it that Attis being beloved by Cybele, in the way of an abstracted intellectual love, happened to love the nymph Sangardide a little more coarsely, and that afterwards incensed at his own folly that had forfeited him the chaste caresses of Cybele, he e’en revenged himself upon that part by which he had transgressed. But as the folks about Parnassus are never very scrupulous in point of truth, every one has treated this subject according to his fancy; and I who seldom or never meddle with the ancient fables have taken the liberty to handle it in a way by myself.”

“Nay, positively,” says Caesar, “since you have confessed so much, you shall let us see what turn you have given to it. We can never conclude the day more agreeably than by hearing a poem which can’t choose but be very excellent from such hand.”

All the company expressed the same curiosity, and Catullus, perceiving that they were all silence, began to speak the following lines: 18

Attis embarked on shipboard hoisted sail,
And reached the Phrygian shore with prosperous gale.
Scarce was he landed but with hasty feet
He climbed up Ida’s Mount, Cybele’s seat,
Which the famed goddess used as her resort,
And amidst stately cedars made her court.
There stung with madness and of brain unsound
He flung himself all furious on the ground,
Whose flints gave birth to such a wond’rous change,
As all must own unnatural and strange,
Since from that fall, another sex he took,
And found that manhood had his limbs forsook.
Hence staining with fresh blood the sacred land,
She snatched the timbrel with her snowy hand—
The timbrel, O Cybele, and the fife,
Thy playthings in thy infancy of life—
And on it as her fingers run along
She thus to her companions trembling sung:
“Go to Cybele’s shady groves and steep,
“Together go, Cybele’s wand’ring sheep,
“What exile-like in quest of foreign lands

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16 stale maid a virgin past her prime, and past the appropriate age for marriage.
17 folks about Parnassus i.e., poets and mythographers (Parnassus was the dwelling place of the Muses, those semi-divine patrons of the arts and sciences, identified figuratively with poetic inspiration and production).
18 The following is a translation of Catullus’ ‘Carmen 63.’
19 She i.e., Attis (reflecting his ‘sex change,’ attendant on his castration).
20 companions in the Latin original, the Gallae, Cybele’s follower-priests.
“Have followed my, your leader’s, strict commands.
“Go, my companions, who have dared sustain
“With me the threat’ning dangers of the main;\(^{21}\)
“That have unmanned yourselves through Venus’ hate\(^{22}\)
“Divert and glad your minds in this our change of state.
“Make no delay, but all together come
“And follow me to famed Cybele’s dome,
“Where cymbals, and where drums and trumpets sound,
“Where Phrygian pipes make Phrygian hills rebound;
“Where Maenads with ivy on their head,\(^{23}\)
“Turn frantic, and around, loud howlings spread;
“Where she and her attendants nimbly dance,
“And where we should incontinent advance.”\(^{24}\)
Soon as the new-made woman thus had sung,
Her comrades yelled aloud with trembling tongue.
The timbrel roared again, the cymbals rung,
While the mad [crew] with unusual hast
Up Ida’s steep ascent promiscuous passed,\(^{25}\)
Attis their chief, insensibly possessed
With want of knowledge and with want of rest,
Attended by the timbrel frisked and played,
Like a young steer that would the yoke evade.
Cybele’s priests their leader’s footsteps pressed;
Cybele’s godhead was by all confessed.
When they no sooner wearied touched her fane,\(^{26}\)
Tired both with scarcity of food and brain,
But downy sleep upon their eyelids crept,
And madness left the wretches as they slept.
But when the sun shot forth his wonted ray,
Darting his beams on air, on earth, and sea,
And drove the dark nocturnal shades away,
With the swift rattling courses of the day,
Then Sleep poor ’wakned Attis’ limbs forsook,
And him Pasithae to her bosom took.\(^{27}\)
Attis who, soon as raised from sweet repose,
Raged not with madness now, but sense of woes,
As memory past accidents revived
Told whom he had lost, and where he was arrived,
With ardent longing for his country burned
And to the beach again with speed returned,
Where when with weeping eyes vast seas he spied,
Thus to his native clime lamenting, cried:

\(^{21}\) main sea.
\(^{22}\) through Venus’ hate i.e., on account of their hatred of Venus (as embodying love, sex and erotic desire).
\(^{23}\) Maenads See ‘Bacchus,’ Glossary (print anthology).
\(^{24}\) incontinent hastily, with all speed.
\(^{25}\) promiscuous in a disordered or chaotic way.
\(^{26}\) fane temple.
\(^{27}\) Pasithae Catullus imagines the god of sleep, Somnus, leaving Attis in order to return to his wife, Pasithae, one of the three Graces, attendants of Venus; she was also known as Aglaia and Euphrosyne.
“O parent! O my dear maternal earth!
"Where I was formed, and whence I took my birth,
"Whom I, poor wretched I, that still must grieve,
"Could like a vagabond for Ida leave!
"That there in dens I might wild beasts survey,
"And see the lurking holes they choose for prey!
"Where or in what position dost thou lie?"
"To thee, my country, I’d direct my eye,
"Whilst with my mind the gods enraged dispense,
"And give me this short interval of sense.
"Must I be banished to these frightful woods,
"Deprived of house, of parents, friends, and goods?
"Must I no more the busy Forum grace,
"Or take the pleasures of the ring or race?
"Wretch, ask thyself that question o’er and o’er,
"What state of life is there but I have bore?—
"A man, a youth, a stripling, and a boy,
"The pride of wrestlers and the swordsmen’s joy.
"Crowded with visitants my rooms were found,
"My house frequented and with laurels crowned,
"Whene’er I rose from necessary rest,
"The courtiers waited all to see me dressed.
"And must I be Cybele’s priest and slave?
"I to whom Nature such advantage gave?
"Must I be part of what I was designed,
"A barren man without the tokens of my kind?
"I live on Ida covered o’er with snow?
"Or upon Phrygian rites my youth bestow?
"In woods which deer and which wild boars frequent?
"Oh, now I’m grieved and heartily repent!”

Soon as he thus with rosy lips complained,
Cybele both her lions straight unreined,
Told both their tasks, and striving to provoke
The off-beast to revenge, these accents spoke:
“Go,” said she fiercely, “go, and be’t thy care
"That to the woods this fugitive repair,
"This fugitive that does my rites disdain,
"And too much dares attempt to scandalize my reign.
"Go, lash thyself with ardour, till the pain
"Makes thee roar out and shake thy yellow mane!”
Thus spoke Cybele, and unloosed the brute,
Who bounded forth with intent on the pursuit.

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28 position place.
29 Forum that area in Rome where judicial and civic business would be conducted; a place reserved for men.
30 ring or race i.e., the masculine pleasures of the tournament and the athletic contest.
31 bore born, experienced.
32 part separated from.
33 tokens his testicles.
34 unreined unleashed, set loose.
35 off-beast unclear: perhaps, simply again, ‘unleashed beast.’
He grinned, he growled, he rushed with hideous force,  
Nor brakes, nor thorns, nor briars could stop his course.  
Eager in mind the foaming shores to reach,  
Where when he saw poor Attis on the beach,  
With rage collected and redoubled might  
He roared and urged the destined wretch to flight,  
Who took it to the woods, and ever since  
Has been Cybele’s slave for this offence.  
O goddess! Powerful goddess, grant that I  
May never under your displeasure lie,  
That this your sacred rage my house may fly!  
Let others with your Furies be possessed;  
May I preserve my sex, may reason guide my breast.

All the company loaded Catullus with praises, but nobody praised him with so much earnestness as Crastinia. She came up close to him and said a thousand obliging things in his ear. As he had abundance of wit and a perfect knowledge of the world, he could not let slip so favourable an opportunity of letting Crastinia know that he loved her, but he did it in so gallant a manner that she could not tell how to be angry; the civility and good humour with which she received this declaration helped to engage his heart, at least to deceive it, and make him believe that he was fully engaged; for in reality he was incapable of loving anything but Lesbia, yet a desire of changing his passion for her made him often imagine himself in love when he was very far from it. He parted for that night, resolved to employ all his skill to make himself beloved by Crastinia. She seemed in his judgement to be very well disposed to hearken to him. He even fancied between whiles that he had made a considerable progress in her affections already; that air of gentleness and facility with which she received his first declaration had imposed upon him […]

[Later in the novel, after Catullus discovers that Aurelius, acting as Caesar’s ‘go-between,’ has turned Juventius (Crastinia) against him (Catullus), there is an instant enmity between the two former friends and between the former lovers. After writing and publishing his condemnation of Aurelius’ character (see selections in the print anthology, pp. 195-6), Catullus finds himself under attack by Aurelius and Crastinia.]

If the breach between Aurelius and Catullus made some noise, these verses made a great deal more. Crastinia complained of Catullus’ suspicion, and did all that woman does on course when she fain would be thought innocent, and thinks her severe virtue called in question. Caesar, who had his reasons for keeping well with Catullus, sent Aurelius away to Italy, where he gave him an employment that kept him at a distance from Rome and the court, that he might not interfere with Catullus anymore.

It happened very well for Aurelius, who, as I said already, was not before-hand in the world, and who found himself now in a condition to retrieve his fortune. However, he had a

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36 brakes thorny thickets or bushes.
37 These verses i.e., ‘Carmen 21’ (see n10; cf. n43).
38 on course i.e., as a matter of course, ordinarily.
39 fain gladly.
40 severe strict, uncompromising.
41 before-hand in the world enjoying material wealth and social advancement.
spite to Catullus ever after, and never let slip an opportunity of doing him all the mischief he could. Furius42 entered into the same quarrel and they both declared against their old friend with a bitterness that was condemned by all the world. As soon as his writings appeared, they were the first to criticize and find fault with with ‘em, and did it with so much noise and heat that Catullus was forced to answer ‘em in his own defence. I must be excused for not translating the verses he made upon ‘em on this occasion; they abound with reproaches that the modesty of our language won’t bear.43

[Catullus’ disgust with Caesar’s political ambitions coupled with his personal hatred of the man leads Catullus to compose several insulting poems that glance at Caesar’s sexual licentiousness, as well as that of Mamurra, a Roman knight and one of Caesar’s most efficient officers. Mamurra was born in Formiae and as an engineer, he first served Pompey during the Mithridatic War (66 BCE) and later Caesar during his campaigns in Gaul (58 BCE) and Britain (55 BCE). Although he did acquire a reputation as a big spender (his luxurious house in Rome was a target of satire), and as a sexually licentious man, he was also clearly an excellent engineer, whom both generals highly valued. Catullus elsewhere terms Mamurra ‘the Prick or Cock’ (Latin, ‘mentula’) and verbally assaults him repeatedly in Carmina 29 [below], 41, 57, 94, 105, 114, and 115]

Mamurra, who was Caesar’s favourite still, shared with his lord in Catullus’ spleen and ill humour. He never let him be at rest; he hardly missed a day but he gave about some scurrilous new lampoon upon him. He could not bear the dictator’s heaping so much wealth upon this fellow, who, the truth on’t is, did not come to that high degree of favour that he was in by the most honourable ways in the world. These, I think are the violentest of all the lines that he made against him:44

Who can bear this, or on it tamely look—
Unless a lecher, spendthrift, or a rook—45
To see Mamurra clothed with all the spoils
Caesar brought home from Gaul and Britain’s isles?
On this can you, O Caesar, tamely look?
Caesar’s a lecher, spendthrift, and a rook.

42 Furius Marcus Furius Bibaculus (b. c. 82 BCE), poet. He is satirized in Carmina 11 and 16 (along with Aurelius) and Carmina 23 and 26 (on his own).
43 I must … bear These poems may be the vituperative ‘Carmen 24,’ where the speaker reproaches Juventius for showering love and wealth on another male lover who is far beneath Juventius socially and economically (Juventius appears there as superficial at best, desiring the man only for his beauty), ‘Carmen 81,’ where Juventius’ taste in men is again satirized, with his new ‘stud,’ being nothing better than a “factitious fuckup” (P. Green, Poems of Catullus, p. 189), or ‘Carmen 16,’ Catullus’ most energetically obscene attack on male rivals. I can find no translations of these poems before 1735.
44 This version of ‘Carmen 29’ leaves out a number of homosatiric insults that Catullus flings at Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), Roman general. Caesar’s ‘bisexuality’ was well known (For Caesar’s purported same-sex relationship with King Nicomedes, see Suetonius’ History of the Twelve Caesars). However, the anonymous translator here understands all of ‘Carmen 29’ to be addressed to Caesar, whom he believes initially appears in the Latin original under the veil of ‘cinaedus Romulus’ (‘bugger Romulus’; Green suggests the vituperative and sneering quality of the label by translating it as ‘fag Romulus’). Modern classicists agree, however, that ‘Romulus’ really refers to the Roman general Pompey, Julius Caesar’s son-in-law and rival. Thus, lines 1-10 (above, the first two stanzas) are now understood as addressed to Pompey, lines 11-20 to Caesar, and the last four to both men. In the original, the characterization of Mamurra as a catamite (here, a man who serves the sexual desires of a male superior) is intensified, since he is the sexual object of both men. For another homosatiric assault on Caesar and Mamurra, see ‘Carmen 57’ (print anthology, pp. 196-7).
45 rook cheat or swindler.
Shall he, blown up with wealth and ease and pride,  
Insult the chastities of all beside?  
Walk o’er the beds of such as he approves  
For catamites, or bill like one of Venus’ doves?  
On this can you, O Caesar, tamely look?  
Caesar’s a lecher, spendthrift, and a rook.

Wast thou for this the first of emperors named?  
When savage Britons by our troops were tamed,  
(Britons, that in the remotest regions lie,  
Distant from the Roman eye),  
That this your stallion should profusely waste  
Three hundred thousand sesterces at last?  
What is it? Or is this destructive grant  
A sum that’s thought proportioned to his want?  
Or has he on his lust but little spent?  
But little to give gluttony content?  
First went his father’s chattels and his lands;  
From all their dirtiness he washed his hands.  
Next were consumed the spoils from Pentus brought,  
And last the wealth of Spain, for which we fought.  
Yet Gauls and Britons do this spendthrift fear.  
Why do ye hold your own destruction dear?  
Or what can he for Gauls or Britons do  
But his voluptuous course of life pursue,  
And glibly swallow down estates a-new?  
O first of chiefs, whom we an emperor call,  
For this did you and Pompey ruin all?  
For this o’erturn in most unnatural broils  
The Roman state that he might have the spoils?

The more I read these verses, the more I wonder at the liberty that the poets of those times took, and the patience of the first emperor of the world. One would think that he had set himself a resolution to tire out Catullus and confound him by dint of goodness. He showed him so much civility, even after these verses appeared that, at last, Catullus surrendered himself to so much generosity and went in a sincere repentance to beg pardon for his transgressions.

[...]