

Poem 1

Whom do I give my debonair, new
pumice-polished booklet to?

You, Cornelius! You were inclined
to think that my banter amounted to something
back in the days when you summarized history
(the only Italian who dared) in a trio
of learned (by Jove!) and laborious volumes.

5

So here is a bit of a booklet, whatever
its worth. And by the way, patroness maiden,
let it outlive this one generation.

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2. **pumice-polished:** see note on Poem 22.7–8.

3. The poem dedicates a *libellus* or “little volume” or “booklet,” possibly Poems 1–60, to **Cornelius** Nepos, a historical writer born about 100 B.C. Of his work, there survive little-read biographies of Cicero’s best friend, Atticus, and Caesar’s opponent, Cato, together with a book on the character of selected foreign leaders. He also wrote a *Chronica*, the three-volume world history to which Catullus alludes. A Cornelius is also addressed in Poem 102, in which Catullus promises to keep an unknown secret.

Poem 5

Let us live and love, my Lesbia. Here's
a copper coin for the criticism
of elderly men with exalted morals.
Suns have the power to set and return.
Our light is brief and once it fails,
we have to sleep in the dark forever.
Give me a thousand kisses, a hundred,
another thousand, a second hundred,
a thousand again, a hundred more
until we ourselves lose track of the score,
confusing the kissing count as a sly
method of thwarting the evil eye.

Poem 7

You ask how many kisses, Lesbia,
would be enough for me or more.

How many grains of Libyan sand
in silphium-rich Cyrene divide
the holy tomb of ancient Battus
from the temple of equatorial Jove?

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How many stars in the still of the night
observe the furtive loves of men?

For you to bestow on the raging Catullus
that number of kisses would more than suffice,
some number beyond the calculation
of curious people with evil tongues.

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4–5. **silphium-rich Cyrene** . . . **Battus**: silphium was a flavorful herb used in food, especially cheese, and medicine. It was the chief product of Cyrene (now Shahhat), a Greek colony on the coast of Libya. Cyrene was said to have been founded in 631 B.C. by a Spartan known as Battus (“Stammerer”). The Greek poet Callimachus, one of Catullus’ chief models, was from Cyrene. Catullus refers to him as the son of Battus.

6. **equatorial Jove:** or more literally “boiling Jove,” a riddling way of referring to the Egyptian god Ammon, whose chief temple lay in the Libyan desert about 300 miles southeast of Cyrene.

Poem 8

Poor Catullus, stop playing the fool!
Seeing that something has died, deem it dead.
Bright were the suns that shone once for you,
the times you followed the girl everywhere.

No girl will ever be loved more than she.
Many amusing things happened then,
things you wished and the girl never spurned.
Suns most certainly shone bright for you.
Now she turns her back. Do the same!
Give up your hopeless pursuit! End your grief!
Endure with a resolute mind. Steel yourself.
Girl, Catullus has now steeled himself.
Farewell! Rejected, he makes no appeal.
But you'll be sorry when all courtship ends.
What kind of life, you whore, waits for you?
What man will come and sing beauty's praise?
Whom will you love and whose girl be called?
Whom will you kiss? For whom bite the lips?
But you, Catullus, be firm. Steel yourself.

Poem 9

Veranius, best of all my friends,
all my countless throng of friends,

have you come to your home, to the gods of the larder,
your harmonious brothers and aging mother?

You have! Oh happy news! And I 5

will see you in safety and hear you describe
the people, the places, the customs of Spain,
in your usual manner, then hug your neck
and kiss your smiling mouth and eyes.

Legions of experts in blessings agree: 10

there's nothing more joyful or blessed than me!

1. **Veranius:** evidently one of Catullus' best friends. He is also mentioned in Poems 12, 28, and 47. In each of those poems he is linked with a certain Fabullus. Nothing is known of either Veranius or Fabullus except what can be inferred from Catullus' text. From Poem 12 it appears that they were in Spain together. Poems 28 and 47 imply that they served in some province under a Piso. The Piso in question could be Caesar's father-in-law, L. Calpurnius Piso, who governed Macedonia from 58 to 55 B.C. and was harshly criticized afterwards by Cicero. Fabullus and Veranius

may have served in his administration after an earlier sojourn in Spain. It is not known, however, who governed Spain between 58 and 55. Hence it is also possible that Veranius and Fabullus were there at that time under a different Piso and that this is the only foreign adventure of theirs to which Catullus refers.

Poem 11

To *Furius and Aurelius*.

Catullus' comrades, wherever he goes,
whether he reaches the Indians' realm,
where the far-resounding eastern wave
pummels the shore,

visits Hyrcani, effeminate Arabs,

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Sacae, or Parthians laden with arrows,

or the fields where the floods of the sevenfold Nile
deposit their colors,

or walks across the lofty Alps,

seeing the achievements of Caesar the Great,

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the Gallic Rhine, the choppy main,

the faraway Britons,

ready for any adventure, whatever

the will of heaven's inhabitants brings.

say a few words to my girl, a few
unfriendly words.

15

Let her live and rejoice with her band of adulterers,
embracing three hundred at once, though truly
loving none, and never fail
to rupture their groins,
but not rely on my love as before.

20

It died by the guilt of that girl, as a flower
falls at the edge of a meadow when touched
by a passing plough

One of Catullus' "comrades" may be the well-known poet, **Furius** Bibaculus. **Aurelius** was a common name. Nothing is known of Catullus' Aurelius except what can be inferred from the poems in which he is mentioned. In 15 and 21, Catullus accuses him of trying to seduce his boyfriend. Juventius; in 16, he threatens Aurelius and Furius with sexual violence because they called him effeminate.

5. **Hyrcaei**: a tribe on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea.

6. **Sacae**: a Scythian tribe on the steppes of southern Russia.

Parthians: a tribe that formed part of the ancient Persian empire, the Parthians became dominant in Mesopotamia in the second century B.C.

In 53 B.C. they defeated Crassus' legions.

11–12. **Rhine . . . Britons:** in 55 B.C. Caesar built a bridge across the Rhine and also invaded England.

Poem 13

You will dine with me in style, Fabullus,
in a couple of days, if the gods are kind
and provided you bring a large and excellent
dinner, a bright and beautiful girl,
the wine, your wit, and entertainment.
Bring these things, my charming friend,
and dine in style. Catullus' purse,
you see, is filled to the brim—with cobwebs.
In return you will get my pure affection
or a gift even sweeter and more refined.

POEMS 12-14

if there *is* such a thing. You can sample the scent
that Cupids and Venuses gave to my girl.
A single whiff and you'll pray to the gods
to become, Fabullus, totally nose.

1. **Fabullus:** see note on Veranius, Poem 9.1.

Poem 39

Egnatius always smiles, everywhere,
because his teeth are white. Go to court.
When the lawyer is trying to make jurors weep,
he smiles. At an only son's blazing pyre,
when the grieving mother's sobs fill the air,
he smiles. At every event, never mind
the time or place, he smiles. That is his
disease and not, I think, suave or smart.
Good Egnatius, heed prudent words.
If you were a native of Rome, Sabine land,
or Tibur, the Umbrian hills' thrifty son,
a fat Etruscan, or dark, toothy child
of Lanuvium, one of my own northerners,
—from any tribe with teeth cleanly cleaned,
still I would argue against constant smiles,
for nothing is worse than a smile out of place.
But *you* are from Spain. In Spain's countryside,
it is normal to use what one urinates
to polish his teeth and red gums at dawn.

And so the brighter your teeth shine, the more
they loudly declare how much piss you drank.

1. **Egnatius:** see note on Poem 37.19.


10. **Sabine land:** the Sabines were an Italian tribe occupying the Apennines northeast of Rome.

11. **Tibur:** a city on the Anio River in the Sabine hills, modern Tivoli.

Umbria: region of Italy northeast of Rome, on the Adriatic coast.

13. **Lanuvium:** an ancient town in the Alban hills a few miles south of Rome.

Poem 41

The girl Ameana, a veteran whore,
thinks she can charge ten thousand sesterces,
the girl who sports that hideous nose,
the Formian deadbeat's female companion.
Neighbors and kinsmen who care for the girl, 5
summon her friends and physicians together!
She's out of her mind and not inclined
to consult the image-producing bronze. 

1. **Ameana** is unknown from other sources but also appears in Poem 43 and bears a family resemblance to Catullus' unnamed antagonist in Poem 42.
4. **Formian deadbeat**: Mamurra; see note on Poem 29.3

Poem 43

Girl with a nose not too petite,
a foot unfair, unebony eyes,
untapering fingers, mouth undry,
and a not abnormally elegant tongue,
friend of the Formian deadbeat, hail!
The province says that *you're* a beauty?
Asks if Lesbia matches *you*?
O age devoid of intelligent taste!



Poem 48

If somebody gave me permission, Juventius,
to cover with kisses your honeyed eyes,
I'd kiss three hundred thousand times
and never approach the point of satiety,
not if the yield of our osculation
were thicker than billowing waves of grain.

Poem 49

To Marcus Tullius Cicero

Most fluent of all of the children of Romulus,
all existing presently
or that lived in the past or the future will see,
accept the greatest of thanks from me,
worst of all of the poets, Catullus—
of poets the worst to the same degree
that you are patrons' apogee.

Poem 50

Licinius, yesterday with nothing
to do and determined to live for pleasure,
we found amusement amply supplied
by my writing tablets. Assisted by laughter
and wine, we each invented matching
snatches of verse in various meters.
I left our encounter in flames, Licinius,
from your incandescent wit and charm.
Food did nothing to lighten my misery;
sleep refused to quiet my eyes.
Out of control, insane, I rolled
around on my bed, awaiting the dawn,
yearning to talk and to be with you.
Finally, exhausted from twisting and turning,
more dead than alive on my couch, I composed

Poem 69

Rufus, stop wondering why no woman will slide
her tender thigh beneath you,
not though you weaken her will with gifts of fine
apparel and sparkling gems.

An injurious rumor has spread that a savage goat
inhabits the vale of your arms,
a terrible beast and not the sort with whom
a beautiful girl would lie.

So murder the pest or, left alone in your room,
cease to wonder why.

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1. As is discussed in the introduction, the poem is almost certainly addressed to M. Caelius **Rufus**.

7. **a terrible beast:** *mala valde . . . bestia*, in Latin. In 56 B.C., Caelius prosecuted a former political ally named Calpurnius Bestia. He accused him *inter alia* of killing two or more wives by smearing a fast-acting poison, aconite, on their vaginas as they slept (Pliny the Elder 27.4). Catullus' reference to "a terrible beast" (*bestia* in Latin), with whom pretty girls would not choose to sleep, sounds like a clever, topical pun.

Poem 70

My woman says that she would prefer none other
to me though Jupiter sought her.

She says, but a woman's words to her lover belong
on wind and rapid water.

Poem 72

You said in the past that Catullus alone understood you,
you preferred my embraces to Jove's.
My love was uncommon, the love a father feels
for his sons and sons-in-law, Lesbia.
Now I do understand you and though my fire
is hotter, I think you are fickle
and cheap. How so? Such injury makes desire
greater, but lessens affection.

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1. **Catullus alone understood you:** the Latin is ambiguous, meaning either "that Catullus alone knew you" or "that you knew or desired to know Catullus alone." I have opted for the former because the idea of understanding Lesbia recurs in line 5 and because in Poem 3, Lesbia's sparrow, who is analogous to the poet in several ways, is praised for having gotten to know the girl intimately, as well as she knew her mother. For the assumption in a different context that a worthy male lover has unique understanding of his sweetheart, see the epigram on the grammarian Crassicus (note on Poem 95.1).

Poem 75

My mind has been brought to this by your treachery, Lesbia,
so wrecked itself being loyal,
that I couldn't wish you well, though perfect, or cease
to love, whatever you do.

Poem 76

If it brings any joy to a man to remember acts
of kindness, to know he was faithful
and never betrayed a trust or falsely invoked
the gods to deceive an ally,
many pleasures await your old age, Catullus,

from this ungrateful love.

Everything mortals can say and do for each other
was said and done by you,
and all of it wasted, spent on a thankless heart.

Why do you torture yourself?

Why not be strong, recover, and end your misery,
since the gods are unwilling to help?

Although it is hard to shed an ancient love,
do so, by any means.

That is your one salvation, your victory. Do it,
whether you can or cannot.

Gods, if you feel compassion or ever assisted
men in mortal danger,
consider my plight. If you find my life has been pure,
cast out this fatal disease,
this insidious palsy, that sneaks inside my limbs
and empties my heart of joy.

I no longer ask that she love in return or do
the impossible: choose to be virtuous.

I ask for a cure for myself, to shed this infection.
O gods, in return for my piety.

Poem 81

Does the crowded city contain no beautiful man
for you to love, Juventius,
besides that visitor, paler than gilded stone,
from the moribund town of Pisaro?

He amuses you now. You dare to prefer him to me.
Do you know what a crime you commit?

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2. **Juventius:** see note on Poem 24.2.

3-4. **visitor . . . from the moribund town of Pisaro:** Pisaro was a town on the Adriatic coast that had apparently fallen on hard times. Nothing is known of the Pisan native whom Juventius befriends.

Poem 83

When her husband is listening, Lesbia likes to belittle me,
much to the moron's delight.

O mule, are you totally daft? Her silence would show
I was safely forgotten. Her growling

just means she remembers and, more to the point, is upset:
she burns and has to talk.

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Poem 85

I hate and I love. You ask me why? Who knows?
But I feel it occur and I'm tortured.

Poem 87

No woman can truthfully say she was loved as much
as my Lesbia was by me.

No loyalty found in any alliance compares
with that in my love for you.

Poem 92

Lesbia curses me constantly, never a moment
of silence. So clearly she loves me!

How do I know? Identical symptoms. I constantly
curse her—and love her to death.

Poem 93

I'm not that eager to please you, Caesar. Couldn't
care if you're black or white.

Poem 99

I stole a kiss from you at play, Juventius,
sweeter than sweet ambrosia,
but not for free. The pain is still fresh—of being nailed
to a cross for more than an hour
while I tried to apologize, failing despite my tears
to lessen your anger a whit.

Your response was immediate: soaking your mouth in water,
you wiped it with both of your hands,
lest any contagion remain, as if there were spit
on your lips from a rancid whore.

And all of the time I was savagely racked by the pangs
of unrequited Love.



The kiss I stole was thus transformed: ambrosia
changed to hellebore.

Knowing the way you punish desperate devotion,
I swear to abstain in the future.

Poem 107

The soul obtains the purest joy when a fervent,
hopeless prayer is fulfilled.

Your return to my longing arms, my Lesbia, dearer
than gold, is such a joy,

You came of your own accord when I hungered but hoped 5
no more! O brighter day!

Does anyone have a happier life? Could a man
imagine more perfect joy?

Poem 109

You promise, my life, that *this* will last forever,
this happy love we share.

Mighty divinities, give her the power to honor
that promise, make her sincere,
and permit us to keep our perpetual pact of holy
friendship all of our lives.