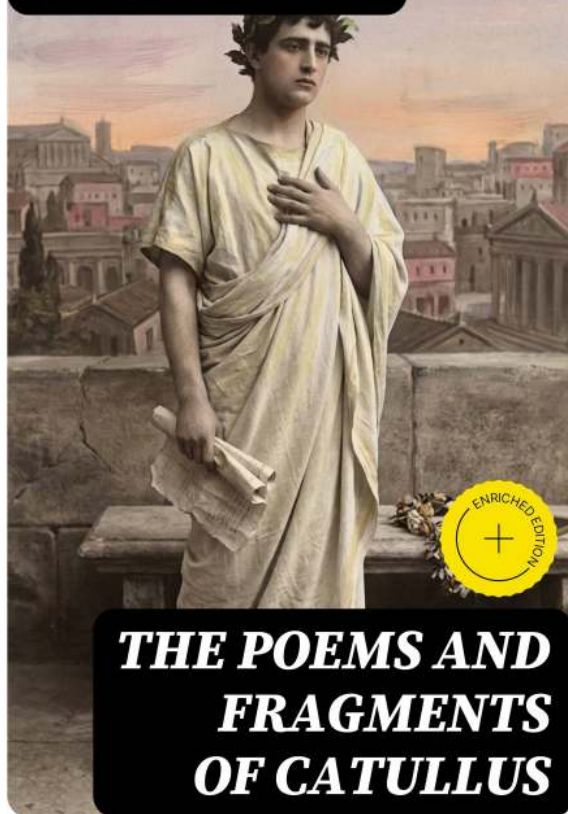


***GAIUS VALERIUS
CATULLUS***



***THE POEMS AND
FRAGMENTS
OF CATULLUS***

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Gaius Valerius Catullus

The Poems and Fragments of Catullus

Enriched edition. Translated in the Metres of the Original

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Cooper Black

EAN 8596547011224

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022



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Introduction

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This collection, *The Poems and Fragments of Catullus*, gathers the surviving work of Gaius Valerius Catullus into a single, coherent volume for modern readers. Its scope is comprehensive within the limits of transmission: the principal poems are presented together with fragmentary remains that attest to what time and manuscript fortune have left incomplete. The arrangement is designed to honor traditional groupings while remaining accessible, so that the reader may encounter Catullus both as an artist of self-contained lyrics and as a poet whose voice echoes even where the record is broken. The result is a portrait of a compact, enduring, and distinctly Roman oeuvre.

Catullus wrote in the final decades of the Roman Republic. Though biographical details are sparse, his poems speak from the milieu of an educated, urbane poet attuned to contemporary society and to learned Hellenistic models. The corpus is notable for its brevity and concentration: a finite book of lyrics rather than a sprawling lifetime of volumes. From intimate addresses to mythic narratives, from public invective to private lament, the range of subjects is striking. This collection presents that range without attempting to fix a single story about the author's life, allowing the poems to stand as the primary testimony.

The texts represented here are predominantly poems: short lyrics, epigrams, occasional pieces, wedding songs, and longer narrative compositions in verse. The collection

also includes fragments—lines or passages preserved incompletely—and paratextual matter that frames the reading experience. There are no novels, short stories, essays, letters, or diaries; the volume is a compendium of poetry and remnants of poetry, anchored by an introductory apparatus. The reader thus encounters Catullus in the genres he practiced, with the understanding that the poet's artistry resides in verse forms whose brevity and precision invite close attention.

The volume opens with To Alfred Tennyson, a dedicatory address that situates the book within a wider conversation about lyric tradition and modern readership. A Preface follows, clarifying the editorial principles and the scope of what is included under poems and fragments. Together these preliminaries prepare the way for Catullus, the main body of the work, before concluding with Fragments, which gathers incomplete survivals. The structure aims to guide readers from orientation to immersion, and finally to the margins of the record, where a poet's voice can still be sensed in partial traces.

Unifying themes thread through the whole. Love, in its elation and its ache, is central: poems of desire and devotion stand beside poems of estrangement and regret. Catullus repeatedly tests how private feeling can be shaped by public art, and how a small lyric can hold the gravity of a life's turning. This collection allows those tonal shifts to be felt in sequence, with the love poems neither isolated as idylls nor submerged in rhetoric, but presented as part of a larger book about attachment, vulnerability, and the forms that express them.

Another abiding theme is the social texture of friendship, loyalty, and rivalry. The poems often address named contemporaries, forging a literature of direct address that feels immediate even at a historical distance. Compliment and complaint, gratitude and reproach, mingle in a civic register that reveals how poetry intersects with reputation, rumor, and reciprocity. The voice that emerges is poised and personal, at once composed and spontaneous. Read as a whole, the collection exhibits the poet's capacity to turn social exchange into artful discourse without losing the bite or warmth of lived relation.

Stylistically, Catullus is distinguished by metrical versatility and verbal economy. He writes in hendecasyllables, limping iambics, glyconics, and elegiac couplets, among other measures, each chosen for a particular effect. Learned allusion to Greek predecessors coexists with colloquial Latin, producing a texture that is both refined and startlingly direct. The poems prize clarity, concentrated imagery, and control of cadence. The collection's organization highlights this metrical variety so the reader can hear how form bears meaning: how a change in measure signals a shift in mood, topic, or rhetorical pressure.

The longer poems expand the horizon of the book beyond the lyric moment. In them, myth and ceremony become frameworks for reflection on desire, fidelity, and fame. A wedding song turns communal ritual into art; a miniature epic explores the intricacies of passion and departure. While these poems differ from the brief lyrics in scale, they share the same exacting craft and sensitivity to

texture. Read alongside the shorter pieces, they reveal a poet attentive to structure and sequence, to framing and counterpoint, and to the way narrative amplifies the resonance of private feeling.

Catullus is also a master of invective and satire, crafting sharp-edged poems that articulate grievance, expose pretense, or defend artistic standards. These works pose questions about the ethics of speech and the responsibilities of wit. In presenting them, the collection does not seek biographical verdicts but emphasizes the poems' literary strategies: their handling of persona, their calibrated use of shock, and their role within a book that balances praise with blame. The reader can thus attend to technique and tone rather than reduce the poems to documents of personal history.

The Fragments section acknowledges the incompleteness inherent in the transmission of ancient poetry. A fragment may be a single line cited in another source, a damaged passage in a manuscript, or a lacuna where only context survives. Including these pieces serves two purposes: it preserves the record of what remains, and it casts light back on the finished poems by revealing the edges of the corpus. The fragments underscore the fragility of literary memory while affirming that even partial utterance can carry the timbre of an original voice.

The lasting significance of Catullus lies in the precision and intensity with which he defined a lyric self in relation to language, tradition, and community. His compact book influenced later ideas of the poet's collection as a shaped whole, and his blend of learned craft with emotional

immediacy has appealed to readers across centuries. The presence of a modern dedication in this volume gestures to that long conversation, in which ancient and modern lyricists recognize a common pursuit. The poems endure because they are exact, bounded, and alive to the complexities of feeling and form.

This collection offers not a historical reconstruction but a sustained encounter with a living art. The preliminaries orient, the poems speak, the fragments persist at the threshold. Read sequentially or by returning to favorite pieces, one perceives a unity built from variety, a design that accommodates tenderness and wit, celebration and critique. The book invites readers new to Catullus and those returning to him to measure how a finite corpus can feel inexhaustible. Within these pages are the poems and what can be rescued of them, assembled so that the voice they carry may continue to be heard.

Author Biography

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Gaius Valerius Catullus was a Roman poet of the late Republic, active in the mid-first century BCE, often dated roughly 84–54 BCE. Born in the Transpadane city of Verona, he became the most celebrated voice of the neoteric movement, favoring polished brevity, learned allusion, and intense personal expression. Though his life was brief, his collected poems exerted a disproportionate influence, shaping later Latin lyric and epigram. Catullus wrote across meters and moods: playful, obscene, tender, and erudite. His surviving corpus, preserved in a single ancient tradition, reveals a poet who fused Greek models with Roman urbanity to striking effect.

Details of his education are not securely recorded, but his poetry reflects a rigorous engagement with Hellenistic scholarship and style. The neoterics, of whom he was a leading figure, championed Callimachean ideals—refined craftsmanship, compressed narrative, and learned myth. He adapted and echoed Greek lyricists such as Sappho and scholars-poets like Callimachus, filtering them through Latin idiom. In Rome he moved among literary contemporaries including Licinius Calvus and Helvius Cinna, and he dedicated his collection to the historian Cornelius Nepos in an opening poem that signals both friendship and intellectual aspiration. This milieu fostered technical experimentation and a distinctly personal poetic voice.

Catullus appears to have spent formative years in Rome, circulating poems within elite salons where witty exchange and sharp invective were prized. He briefly accompanied the governor Gaius Memmius to Bithynia in Asia Minor, an experience he later treated with wry disappointment, noting the meager rewards of provincial service. The poems suggest alternating periods of intense social engagement and retreat, as he crafted finely wrought pieces for private reading and performance. References to contemporaries and public figures indicate a poet fully embedded in the civic life of the late Republic, yet primarily devoted to the artistry of small-scale forms.

His volume, often referred to simply as the *Carmina*, comprises polymetric lyrics, longer mythological pieces, and elegiac epigrams. Among the longer works, the wedding of Peleus and Thetis stands out for its intricate epyllion form; the poem on Attis experiments with galliambics; and the Lock of Berenice adapts a Hellenistic original. Many shorter poems trace an affair with the figure known as Lesbia, a pseudonym whose historical identity remains debated. The present collection's Catullus and Fragments reflect this range, presenting both the core poems and stray lines preserved in the manuscript tradition, where damage and loss occasionally interrupt the sequence.

Recurring concerns include desire, friendship, betrayal, loyalty, grief, and reputation. Catullus perfected hendecasyllabic attack poems that lampooned rivals and public figures, yet he could pivot to elegiac tenderness or formal hymn. His invectives mention, directly or by implication, names such as Caesar and the engineer

Mamurra; ancient testimony reports that he later reconciled with Caesar, a reminder that literary offense and social amends could coexist. The poems avoid programmatic political advocacy, instead dramatizing personal ethics—faithfulness, candor, style—as standards by which public and private behavior were judged. The mixture of intimate confession and urbane performance defines his lasting appeal.

Catullus' poems likely circulated among contemporaries in small booklets. After antiquity their survival narrowed to a single medieval copy, now lost, from which all later manuscripts descend. Renaissance scholars retrieved and corrected the text, and modern editors continue to debate readings and arrangement. In English, translators from the nineteenth century onward responded to his metrics and candor. That tradition is echoed by the dedication to Alfred Tennyson and the accompanying preface found in this collection—paratexts of a later era that frame Catullus for new audiences—while the core sections, Catullus and Fragments, present the ancient poet's voice and its remnants.

Catullus seems to have died in his thirties, sometime in the 50s BCE; the cause is unknown. Despite the brevity of his career, his innovations in Latin lyric, his adaptation of Greek models, and his fusion of erudition with colloquial immediacy profoundly shaped later poets, from Ovid and Martial to modern writers. The precarious textual history—single codex, later copies, occasional gaps—heightens the sense of a voice recovered and continually reinterpreted. Today, readers encounter him as both classic and

contemporary: a poet whose technical mastery and candid emotional register still illuminate the textures of love, friendship, satire, and art.

Historical Context

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This collection brings together a Victorian translator's engagement with the Latin poet Gaius Valerius Catullus (active roughly 60s–50s BCE) and the late Roman Republican world his poems inhabit. Its parts—an address to Alfred Tennyson, a preface, the core poems, and fragments—bridge two distinct historical moments: Catullus's age of political upheaval at Rome and nineteenth-century Britain's era of industrial growth, philological rigor, and expanding print culture. The volume thus functions both as access to a first-century BCE lyric voice and as a document of Victorian classicism, when English poets and scholars sought to reproduce ancient metres and sensibilities under the constraints and debates of their own time.

Catullus was born in Verona in Cisalpine Gaul, probably in the 80s BCE, and died young, likely in the mid-50s BCE. He moved in a circle of *poetae novi* (“new poets”) who favored learned brevity, polished form, and Greek Alexandrian models over older Roman epic manner. His friends included literary figures such as Calvus and Cinna, and he dedicated his book to the historian Cornelius Nepos (Poem 1). Catullus's poetry ranges from intimate epigrams to ambitious mythic narratives, situating a private, highly crafted lyrical voice amid the social and intellectual networks of late Republican elites.

The period of Catullus's activity coincided with severe political tensions after Sulla's dictatorship (82–79 BCE), the

Catilinarian crisis (63 BCE), and the formation of the First Triumvirate (Caesar, Pompey, Crassus) around 60 BCE. His invectives reflect a climate of rivalry, enrichment, and public scandal. Poems attacking Mamurra and Julius Caesar (e.g., 29, 57) are pointed examples of how lyric could register resentment at perceived corruption and military profiteering, especially during Caesar's Gallic campaigns (58–50 BCE). While not a political program, such poems mirror the era's conflicts by dramatizing the moral judgments and social friction of Rome's governing class.

Catullus's poems also illuminate urban sociability: dinners, gifts, literary circulation, and the delicate economy of favors and insult. Poem 49 salutes Cicero with a tone that can be read as ceremonious or edged, exemplifying how praise and irony interlace in elite exchange. The small world of friends, rivals, and patrons appears repeatedly—Furius and Aurelius are foils or messengers in several pieces. Publication in the late Republic largely meant private copying on papyrus rolls and circulation among acquaintances, not public recitations on an Imperial scale; the texture of the poems fits this intimate, manuscript-based milieu.

His love poetry transforms Greek precedents into Roman terms. The pseudonym "Lesbia," tied by a second-century CE testimony of Apuleius to a woman named Clodia, signals both Sapphic affiliation and contemporary social reality. Poems such as 5 and 7, with their numerable and innumerable kisses, craft an urbane *ars amatoria* in miniature—tender, competitive, and self-conscious. The oscillation between rapture and recrimination, so marked

across the Lesbia cycle, reflects a literary exploration of desire, loyalty, and reputation within a world where marriage, lineage, and politics intersected with personal affairs.

Formal experimentation is central to Catullus's art. He writes hendecasyllables, iambics, sapphics, glyconics, and elegiac couplets, and composes epyllia—short learned epics—in a high Alexandrian manner. His preference for fine polish and allusive density echoes Callimachus's aesthetic of refinement. The tightly turned invectives and love lyrics coexist with elaborate set pieces; technical control and metrical variety enable quick turns of tone. This formal diversity became a touchstone for later poets and translators, who debated how to convey quantitative metres in accentual languages without losing the compactness that gives Catullus's verse its bite.

Among the long poems, 64 stands out as an epyllion on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, with an ecphrasis featuring Ariadne. The poem's learned mythography and richly patterned narrative have often been read as juxtaposing heroic legend and human faithlessness. Without presuming an authorial thesis, one can say the poem stages contrasts—festivity and abandonment, promise and desertion—that many readers link to contemporary Roman anxieties about public virtue and private conduct. Its craftsmanship and mythic canvas situate Catullus within the neoteric drive to renew epic matter through miniature, intricate art.

Religious and ritual themes register Rome's plural cultic landscape. Poem 63 dramatizes Attis and the rites of

Cybele, engaging with imported ecstatic worship and the question of self-transformation. Poems 61 and 62 are wedding songs that evoke communal ritual and gendered choruses, while 34 is a hymn to Diana, guardian of transitions. Together, these pieces show how lyric could inhabit ceremonial genres, reworking public forms for a literary audience. They also index the Republic's receptivity to Greek and Anatolian cults, and the tensions such cults could arouse in Roman discourse about masculinity, order, and the city's ancestral customs.

Catullus offers a ground-level look at Rome's empire as lived experience. Poem 10 sardonically recalls a stint in Bithynia under the governor Gaius Memmius (c. 57–56 BCE), deflating expectations of profit from provincial service. Poem 46, anticipating spring travel, and 31, a joyous return to Sirmio on Lake Garda, register the rhythms of mobility in a Mediterranean world bound by roads, ships, and administrative circuits. Such poems make empire concrete: not an abstraction of conquest, but itineraries, postings, and homecomings that connect the Latin West, Greek East, and Italy's local landscapes.

The text we read is the survivor of a fragile transmission. Catullus's "book" appears to have been rediscovered in a single manuscript at Verona around the early fourteenth century; that archetype is now lost. Our surviving tradition derives from a handful of fourteenth-century copies. Editors have long confronted lacunae, corrupt lines, and small dislocations. Hence modern collections often include "Fragments" and dubia: brief pieces transmitted imperfectly or with uncertain placement (e.g., 14a, 58b). The editio

princeps was printed in Venice in the 1470s, and Renaissance humanists began the long enterprise of restoring and explaining the text.

From the fifteenth century onward, Catullus influenced neo-Latin lyric and the vernacular traditions of Italy, France, and England. Humanists such as Politian admired his technique; the epyllion inspired experiments like Cinna's *Smyrna* in antiquity and later miniature epics in the Renaissance. Early modern poets adapted his *carpe diem* and kiss-counting motifs, and scholars annotated his diction and metres. By the eighteenth century, Catullus stood as a classic of urbane lyric, though often mediated through school selections that emphasized decorous pieces and left invective or explicit passages to the learned few.

The nineteenth century brought a new philological rigor. German scholarship developed stemmatic methods for editing texts, and British classicists increasingly adopted these techniques. University reforms expanded formal classical study, and presses produced annotated editions for students and specialists. Catullus benefited from this turn: collations of the medieval manuscripts, conjectural emendation, and debate over arrangement sharpened the text's contours. The same period saw intensified discussion of metre in translation, as scholars and poets argued whether English could imitate quantitative rhythms or should recast Latin verse into native accentual forms.

The dedicatory address to Alfred Tennyson situates this translation squarely within Victorian metrical experimentation. Tennyson, Poet Laureate from 1850, wrote English Sapphics, Alcaics, and hendecasyllables, and

engaged classical subjects throughout his career. A dedication to him declares allegiance to a high, artful standard and an ambition to naturalize ancient form in modern English. It also places Catullus alongside the century's debates about how the classics speak to contemporary sensibility, whether through faithful replication of form or through analogical effects that reproduce, as best as possible, the original's force.

A Victorian preface to Catullus typically justifies choices of metre, diction, and decorum. Translators weighed competing imperatives: accuracy of sense, equivalence of rhythm, and the limits of polite publication. The Obscene Publications Act (1857) and a culture of moral propriety made literal rendering of certain invectives risky in mainstream print. Editors therefore sometimes omitted, paraphrased, or relegated explicit passages to Latin notes. Such framing documents belong to the history of reception: they record how nineteenth-century Anglophone readers encountered the ancient poet through filters shaped by law, pedagogy, and prevailing taste.

Industrial and educational change also mattered. Steam-powered presses, cheaper paper, and expanding distribution lowered costs and multiplied audiences for classical texts. Debates about translation—prominently aired in discussions of Homer—spilled into approaches to all ancient poetry. The 1870 Elementary Education Act in England broadened basic literacy, while secondary and university reforms sustained advanced classical study. The result was a layered readership: schoolroom versions emphasizing moral poems and scansion; scholarly editions

with apparatus criticus; and poetic translations, like this one, courting the general public while demonstrating technical command of measure and tone.

Specific Catullan poems display the era's geography, social rites, and personal loss. Poem 11, dispatched via Furius and Aurelius, catalogs distant peoples—India, the Hyrcani, Arabs, and Nile—signaling Rome's widening horizons. Poem 12 jokes about a stolen napkin, yet exposes a gift economy bound up with friendship and status. Poem 31 celebrates Sirmio, placing a provincial homeland within Roman identity. Poem 101, lamenting a brother's death near the Trojan shore, folds private grief into Rome's historical imagination of the East. Each piece ties intimate voice to networks of empire, travel, and memory.

The "Fragments" component reflects both the physical vulnerability of ancient books and centuries of scholarly labor. Catullus's corpus conventionally numbers 116 poems, but a few items survive in incomplete or displaced form, and editors disagree about their order and independence. The small addenda labeled a, b, or similar (such as 14a and 58b) embody the material realities of copying, loss, and repair. Presenting them acknowledges the limits of certainty and the editor's role in reconstructing a poet's "book" from damaged witnesses, a practice honed by Renaissance humanists and refined by modern textual criticism of the nineteenth century onward.—wait.