



The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition

By Gaius Valerius Catullus

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Catullus, who lived during some of the most interesting and tumultuous years of the late Roman Republic, spent his short but intense life (784-54 B.C.E.) in high Roman society, rubbing shoulders with various cultural and political luminaries, including Caesar, Cicero, and Pompey. Catullus's poetry is by turns ribald, lyric, romantic, satirical; sometimes obscene and always intelligent, it offers us vivid pictures of the poet's friends, enemies, and lovers. The verses to his friends are bitchy, funny, and affectionate; those to his enemies are often wonderfully nasty. Many poems brilliantly evoke his passionate affair with Lesbia, often identified as Clodia Metelli, a femme fatale ten years his senior and the smart, adulterous wife of an arrogant aristocrat. Cicero later claimed she poisoned her husband.

This new bilingual translation of Catullus's surviving poems by Peter Green is fresh, bawdy, and utterly engaging. Unlike its predecessors, it adheres to the principle that the rhythm of a poem, whether familiar or not, is among the most crucial elements for its full appreciation. Green provides an essay on the poet's life and literary background, a historical sketch of the politically fraught late Roman Republic in which Catullus lived, copious notes on the poems, a wide-ranging bibliography for further reading, and a full glossary.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Feel free to refer anyone who thinks rappers' or stand-up comics' abundant use of obscenities is a recent cultural phenomenon to the work of Catullus, especially Green's translation. Writing in the first-century B.C.E., the infamous Latin poet could turn quite the vulgar phrase when insulting his enemies or boasting about his sexual prowess. (Witnesseth: "Ameana, that fucked-out little scrubber...") Green's translations treat the bawdy ("Rotten slut, give back the writing tablets!") and the romantic ("Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred....") with equal care. With a lengthy introduction that explains his approach to the poems, copious notes on each translation and a glossary in case you've forgotten who Phaëthon was, Green has aimed this volume at Latin novices, poetry lovers and fellow classicists. Aside from these extras and the side-by-side printing, which allows for easy comparisons between the translation and the original, what sets apart these versions of Catullus' poems is Green's attempt to bring complicated Latin meters into English. It is a noble goal, to be sure, but it leads to some awkward moments; meter or not, translating an insult as "sucks to the pair of you" or choosing the more literal "I am crucified" to express an emotional crisis in one of Catullus' shortest and best known poems read like works-in-progress, especially when compared with the majority of the translations' polished presentations. Despite its few rocky moments, this volume will expand any reader's understanding of Catullus and his poems, both bawdy and nice.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

Green compares Catullus to Byron—both were well-connected, wrote poetry full of allusions to contemporary affairs, and were no strangers to scandal—and accepts the traditional identification of the faithless lover in the poem "Lesbia" as Clodia Metelli, an aristocrat of great infamy who was also the object of a character assassination by Cicero. Green captures the wised-up, bitchy world of the poems with suitably modern slang—"jerk," "hotshots," "slut"—but at the same time attempts to scrupulously reproduce Catullus' complex original meters: "perky" hendecasyllables, "oddly graceless" choliambics, and so on. These are notoriously difficult to render in English; Green says that he took on the galliambics of Poem 63 as the result of a bet.

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From the Inside Flap

"Peter Green is an outstanding translator. The reader's excited anticipation of pleasure and instruction on receiving a new translation of a Latin poet by Green is not disappointed. This is a labor of love which makes Catullus accessible to the Latinless reader and more familiar to those who can read Latin."—Susan Treggiari, Stanford University

"For almost half a century Peter Green has been one of the finest of all modern translators of classical verse. His Catullus is well up to his usual form—recapturing for a contemporary audience the wit, malice, erudition and erotic charm of the Latin original."—Mary Beard, author of *The Parthenon*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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