

Ancient Erotic Poetry

ed. T. K. Pedersen 2012



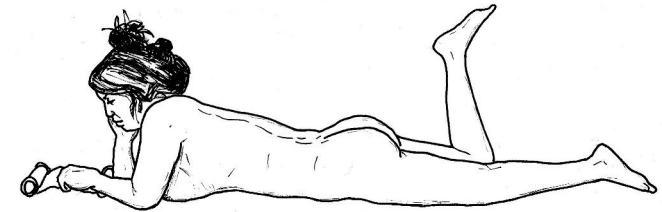


How should I explain, Gellius, why those rosy lips of yours
should be whiter than the snows of winter,
when you leave your house in the morning
and when the eighth hour rouses you
from a gentle nap when the day is long?
Certainly there is something: do the rumors
indeed whisper truly that you eat out
the full-grown erections from the middle of men?
Certainly it is thus: they cry out that poor little Victor's
balls have been burst and your lips have been
stained with sucked-off seed.

Catullus 80, after Kathleen 2001

Your older warrior loves sensibly and wisely,
suffers much that the beginner won't endure:
he won't break the door down, burn it with cruel fire,
attack his mistress's tender cheeks with his nails,
or rip apart his clothing or his girl's,
nor will torn hair be a cause of tears.
That suits hot boys, the time of strong desire:
but he'll bear cruel wounds with calm mind.
He burns, alas, with slow fires, like wet straw,
like new-cut timber on the mountain height.
This love's more sure: that's brief and more prolific:
snatch the swift fruits, that fly, in your hand.

Ovid, Ars Amatoria, III 565-576, trans. A. S. Kline 2001



Honeyed Juventius, while you were playing I stole from you
a sweeter kiss than sweet ambrosia.
Yes, but I didn't get it scot-free, for I remember
being stuck for more than an hour on a cross
while I made my excuses to you but could not move
your cruelty one bit with all my tears.
For hardly was it done before you drenched your lips
with water-drops and wiped them with soft knuckles,
lest anything infectious from my mouth remain,
as though it were some pissed-on whore's foul spittle.
Besides you were not slow to hand wretched me over
to angry Love and crucify me every way,
so that for me that kiss was now turned from ambrosia
to a bitterer thing than a bitter herb.
Since you propose this penalty for a wretched lover,
Henceforth I'll never steal a kiss again.

Catullus 99, after Guy Lee 1990 and Christopher Bradley 1999

Lesbia, let us live, and let us love
and if we valued old men's tales aright
a price of just one penny we'd approve!

The sun will set, and rising, send its light
to us just once before it fails, before
we're made to sleep the never-ending night.

Give me a thousand kisses, a hundred more,
Another thousand, and a hundred new,
And yet another thousand, and fivescore.

And after many thousands, I and you
we'll mix them up in glorious confusion
so no-one can be bad or jealous who
can count our kisses in their wild profusion.

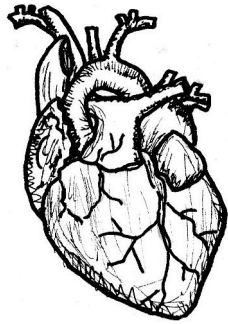
Catullus 5, trans. Edward 2011



I hate and love. Perhaps you're asking why I do that?

I don't know, but I feel it happening, and am racked.

Catullus 85, trans. Guy Lee 1990



My woman says there's no one she would rather wed

than me, not even if asked by Jove himself.

Says – but what a woman says to an eager lover

one should write on the wind and the running water.

Catullus 70, trans. Guy Lee 1990

Trust me, love's pleasure's not to be hurried,
but to be felt enticingly with lingering delays.

When you've reached the place, where a girl loves to be touched,
don't let modesty prevent you touching her.

You'll see her eyes flickering with tremulous brightness,
as sunlight often flashes from running water.

Moans and loving murmurs will arise,
and sweet sighs, and playful and fitting words.

But don't desert your mistress by cramming on more sail,
or let her overtake you in your race:

hasten to the goal together: that's the fullness of pleasure,
when man and woman lie there equally spent.

This is the pace you should indulge in, when you're given
time for leisure, and fear does not urge on the secret work.

When delay's not safe, lean usefully on the oar,
and plunge your spur into the galloping horse.

Ovid Ars Amatoria II 717-732 trans. A. S. Kline 2001

I'll shove your shit and fuck your face--
Aurelius, you cocksucker; Furius, you little bitch--
since you think that my little poems
have gone soft and I must not be too upright!
It's true; the devoted poet should stand erect
in his values, but not necessarily in his little
poems, which are truly witty and charming
when they're a little soft, and not too stiff,
but can still cause a little tingling--
I don't just mean for youth, but for hairy men
who can't make their own loins stand upright!
You! You read about my "many kisses"
and doubt I'm fully a man?
I'll shove your shit and fuck your face!

Catullus 16, after Carl Kohn 2011



He's equal with the Gods, that man
who sits across from you,
face to face, close enough,
to sip Your voice's sweetness,

And what excites my mind,
your laughter, glittering. So,
when I see you, for a moment,
my voice goes,

My tongue freezes. Fire,
delicate fire, in the flesh.
Blind, stunned, the sound
of thunder, in my ears.

Shivering with sweat, cold
tremors over the skin,
I turn the colour of dead grass,
and I'm an inch from dying.

Sappho, trans. A. S. Kline 2005



Sparrow, my girl's darling,
whom she plays with, whom she cuddles,
whom she likes to tempt with finger-
tip and teases to nip harder
when my own bright-eyed desire
fancies some endearing fun
and a small solace for her pain,
I suppose, so heavy passion then rests:
Would I could play with you as she does
and lighten the spirit's gloomy cares!

Catullus 2, trans. Guy Lee 1990

Juventius, if I could play at kissing
your honeyed eyes as often as I wished to,
Three hundred thousand games would not exhaust me;
never could I be satisfied or sated,
although the total of our many kisses
were greater than the ears of grain at harvest.

Catullus 48, after Charles Martin 1998
