I have given you a sampling (far from complete) of poets from three important periods for Greek and Latin poetry—Greece during the Archaic Period; Alexandria during the 3rd century BC; and Rome from the 1st century BC to the 1st century CE.

PLEASE NOTE THAT SOME OF THESE POEMS—PARTICULARLY BY THE POETS WRITING IN LATIN—HAVE SOME VIVID SEXUAL MATERIAL. IT WOULD BE A DISERVICE TO REPRESENTING THE POETRY OF THE PERIOD TO EXCLUDE THIS MATERIAL, THOUGH I HAVE TRIED TO AVOID SOME OF THE MORE “OFFENSIVE” POEMS.

POETS FROM ARCHAIC GREECE

ALCAEUS (620 BC-6th Century BC)

Poem 135
Zeus thunders from a stormy sky;  
The streams are iced.

Damn the storm and stoke the fire.  
Bring on lots more honeyed wine.  
Wreathe your head with crowns of wool;  
Don't think about your sorrows now.  
That won't get us anywhere.  
Wine's the medicine for sadness.  
Yes, drinking wine and drinking  
Now.

SAPPHO (615 BC-550 BC)

Poem 1

1.
Artfully adorned Aphrodite, deathless  
child of Zeus and weaver of wiles I beg you  
please don't hurt me, don't overcome my spirit,  
goddess, with longing,  
but come here, if ever at other moments  
hearing these my words from afar you listened  
and responded: leaving your father's house, all  
golden, you came then,  
hitching up your chariot: lovely sparrows  
drew you quickly over the dark earth, whirling
on fine beating wings from the heights of heaven
down through the sky and
instantly arrived - and then O my blessed
goddess with a smile on your deathless face you
asked me what the matter was this time, what I
called you for this time,
what I now most wanted to happen in my
raving heart: "Whom this time should I persuade to
lead you back again to her love? Who now, oh
Sappho, who wrongs you?
If she flees you now, she will soon pursue you;
if she won't accept what you give, she'll give it;
if she doesn't love you, she'll love you soon now,
even unwilling."
Come to me again, and release me from this
want past bearing. All that my heart desires to
happen - make it happen. And stand beside me,
goddess, my ally.

--Translated by Jim Powell

Poem 4

Some say a host of horsemen is the most beautiful thing
on the black earth, some say a host of foot-soldiers,
some, a fleet of ships; but I say it is
whatever one loves.

Wholly easy it is to make this intelligible
to everyone, for she who by far surpassed
all humankind in beauty, Helen,
forsook her husband,
noblest of men, to sail away to Troy;
neither of child nor of beloved parents
did she take thought at all, being led astray by . . .
[one line missing]

. . . for pliant . . .
. . . lightly . . .
. . . now has brought Anaktoria to my mind,
though she is absent:

I would rather see her lovely step
and the glancing brightness of her face
than Lydian chariots and foot soldiers
arrayed in armor.

--Translated by A.M. Miller

Poem 94

I just really want to die.
She, crying many tears, left me
And said to me:
"Oh, how terribly we have suffered, we two,
Sappho, really I don't want to go away."
And I said to her this:
Go and be happy, remembering me,
For you know how we cared for you.
And if you don't I want to remind you
.............and the lovely things we felt
with many wreathes of violets
and ro(ses and cro)cuses
and............. and you sat next to me
and threw around your delicate neck
garlands fashioned of many woven flowers
and with much.............costly myrrh
 .............and you anointed yourself with royal.....
and on soft couches.......(your) tender......
fulfilled your longing..........

--Translated by William Harris

Poem 31

He is more than a hero

He is a god in my eyes —
the man who is allowed
to sit beside you — he

who listens intimately
to the sweet murmur of
your voice, the enticing

laughter that makes my own
heart beat fast. If I meet
you suddenly, I can’t

speak — my tongue is broken;
a thin flame runs under
my skin; seeing nothing,

hearing only my own ears
drumming, I drip with sweat;
trembling shakes my body

and I turn paler than
dry grass. At such times
death isn’t far from me.

--Translated by Mary Barnard

ALEXANDRIAN POETS

CALLIMACHUS (310 BC-240 BC)

***

Word of your death, Heraclitus,
Made me weep. To think
How many times the two of us
Put the sun to sleep. I guess,
My friend from Halicarnassus,
Your ashes are stone cold,
But your nightingales live on, of which
Hades, Seizer of all, dare not lay hold.

***

I hate the epic cycle.
I can’t abide a path which carries many people to and fro.
I loathe a promiscuous lover.
I don’t drink from that well.
I despise all things public.
But you, Lysanias, are as handsome as handsome can be
Yet before I can say it clearly,
Some echo says,
“Another man’s got him.”

***

I was once the priestess of Demeter,
The Kabiri, and then of Kybele,
I, an old woman, now dust,
The charge of many new brides-to-be.
Two boys were born to me,
And in their hands I closed my eyes,
In fair old age. Farewell. Carry on.
***

Our guest has a secret wound. See how he draws up
troubled sighs among his breaths
and drinks down a third cup. The roses of his garlands
shed their petals and fall to the ground
as some great thing consumes him. Not from the powers behind it,
nor from its form
do I know it, but a thief knows the tracks of a thief.

**ASCLEPIADES OF SAMOS (325 BC-?)**

I don't care if I'm twenty-two;
I'm tired. Love, you're too painful.
Go burn someone else.
What happens if I die?
What'll you do?
Without a tear for me.
You'll go off and gamble with somebody else.

***

Dórkion wants to set young men on fire,
Knows how to shoot off quick darts of desire
Just like a tender boy,
Lewd love they all enjoy,
So in felt hat, lust flashing from her eyes,
She lets her cloak reveal her naked thighs.

***

**Poem 9**

Bittó and Nánnion are two
Samian women, women who
Wish not to visit Love’s domains
By rules the goddess preordains,
Deserting her prescribed delight
For other joys that are not right.
Hate, Aphrodite, those who’ve fled
From your dominion’s marriage bed!

***

**Poem 17**

Didýme’s bloom has put me in her power;
I melt with desire,
Like wax by the fire,
When I behold, alas, her youthful flower.
If she is black, who cares? So too is coal,
But put in the flame
It glows red, the same
As roses when their petals first unroll.

**POSIDIPPUS (340 BC-285 BC)**

I’m old Batis. Athenodikē hired
Me here in Phókaia, I was required
To toil at spinning for my daily wage.
I lived among small children to great age,
Instructing how to work the wool and thread
To plait the hairnets girls put round their head,
And colored headbands that they tie below.
But these young maidens, now about to go
Up to the threshold of their bridal room,
Have put me, old “cane-bearer,” in my tomb.

**ANYTE (b. 340-320 BC-?)**

Oh Lokris, by dense-rooted brush you died,
Yap-loving puppy with the fleetest stride.
A snake with neck of many colors put
Such brutal venom in your nimble foot.

**ROMAN POETS**

**CATULLUS (84 BC-54 BC)**

**Poem 51 (translation of Sappho 31, above)**

That man seems to me to be equal to a god,
That man, if it is right to say, seems to surpass the gods,
who sitting opposite to you repeatedly looks at you
and hears

your sweet laughter, something which robs miserable me
of all feelings: for as soon as I look
at you, Lesbia, no voice remains
in my mouth.

But the tongue is paralyzed, a fine fire
spreads down through my limbs, the ears ring with their
very own sound, my eyes veiled
in a double darkness.

Idleness, Catullus, is your trouble;
idleness is what delights you and moves you to passion;
idleness has proved ere now the ruin of kings and prosperous cities.

Note: “Idleness” in the last stanza above has also been translated as “daydreaming.”

Tears for Lesbia’s Sparrow
Sparrow, my sweet girl’s delight,
whom she plays with, holds to her breast,
whom, greedy, she gives her little finger to,
often provoking you to a sharp bite,
whenever my shining desire wishes
to play with something she loves,
I suppose, while strong passion abates,
it might be a small relief from her pain:
might I toy with you as she does
and ease the cares of a sad mind!

The Death of Lesbia’s Sparrow
Mourn, O you Loves and Cupids
and such of you as love beauty:
my girl’s sparrow is dead,
sparrow, the girl’s delight,
whom she loved more than her eyes.
For he was sweet as honey, and knew her
as well as the girl her own mother,
he never moved from her lap,
but, hopping about here and there,
chirped to his mistress alone.
Now he goes down the shadowy road
from which they say no one returns.
Now let evil be yours, evil shadows of Orcus,
that devour everything of beauty:
you’ve stolen lovely sparrow from me.
O evil deed! O poor little sparrow!
Now, by your efforts, my girl’s eyes
are swollen and red with weeping.

Let’s Live and Love: to Lesbia
Let us live, my Lesbia, let us love,
and all the words of the old, and so moral,
may they be worth less than nothing to us!
Suns may set, and suns may rise again:
but when our brief light has set,
night is one long everlasting sleep.
Give me a thousand kisses, a hundred more,
another thousand, and another hundred,
and, when we’ve counted up the many thousands,
confuse them so as not to know them all,
so that no enemy may cast an evil eye,
by knowing that there were so many kisses.

**How Many Kisses: to Lesbia**

Lesbia, you ask how many kisses of yours
would be enough and more to satisfy me.
As many as the grains of Libyan sand
that lie between hot Jupiter’s oracle,
at Ammon, in resin-producing Cyrene,
and old Battiaides sacred tomb:
or as many as the stars, when night is still,
gazing down on secret human desires:
as many of your kisses kissed
are enough, and more, for mad Catullus,
as can’t be counted by spies
nor an evil tongue bewitch us.

**Advice: To Himself**

Sad Catullus, stop playing the fool,
and let what you know leads you to ruin, end.
Once, bright days shone for you,
when you came often drawn to the girl
loved as no other will be loved by you.
Then there were many pleasures with her,
that you wished, and the girl not unwilling,
truly the bright days shone for you.
And now she no longer wants you: and you
weak man, be unwilling to chase what flees,
or live in misery: be strong-minded, stand firm.
Goodbye girl, now Catullus is firm,
he doesn’t search for you, won’t ask unwillingly.
But you’ll grieve, when nobody asks.
Woe to you, wicked girl, what life’s left for you?
Who’ll submit to you now? Who’ll see your beauty?
Who now will you love? Whose will they say you’ll be?
Who will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite?
But you, Catullus, be resolved to be firm.

**Poem 16**

The following poem is one of several addressed to two men: Marcus Furius Bibaculus (who had an affair with Catullus' young male lover Juventius) and Marcus Aurelius Cotta Maximus Messalinus. In most of his poems addressed to Furius and Aurelius, Catullus heaps abuse onto his cohorts, and in this particular one, he threatens them with explicit rape because they have suggested he is less than virile for writing emotional poetry.
I will sodomize you and face-fuck you, bottom Aurelius and catamite Furius, you who think, because my poems are sensitive, that I have no shame. For it's proper for a devoted poet to be moral himself, [but] in no way is it necessary for his poems. In point of fact, these have wit and charm, if they are sensitive and a little shameless, and can arouse an itch, and I don't mean in boys, but in those hairy old men who can't get it up. Because you've read my countless kisses, you think less of me as a man? I will sodomize you and face-fuck you.

Poem 32
I beg you, my sweet, my Ipsitilla, my darling, my sophisticated beauty, summon me to a midday assignation; and, if you're willing, do me one big favor: don't let another client shoot the door bolt, and don't decide to suddenly go cruising, but stay at home & get yourself all ready for nine - yes, nine - successive copulations! Honestly, if you want it, give the order: I've eaten, and I'm sated, supinated! My prick is poking through my cloak and tunic.

Poem 85
I hate and I love: I bet you're going to ask me why. I don't know. But, I feel it happening and I am crucified.

OVID (PUBLIUS OVIDIUS NASO)
43 BC-17 CE

From Amores (The Loves), 18 BC

Amores 1.1

Arms, warfare, violence—I was about to produce a regular epic, with verse-form to match—hexameters of course. But Cupid (they say) with a snicker snatched one foot from each alternate line.
“Nasty boy, I said, who gave you jurisdiction over meters?
We poets come under the Muses, we’re not in your crowd.
What if Venus took over the weapons of blond Minerva,
while blond Minerva fanned the flames of passion?
Who’d approve of Ceres ruling over hilly forests,
or the quiver-wearing Virgin safeguarding crops?
Who’d approve of Apollo arrayed for battle with a sharp spear,
while Mars played Apollo’s lyre? You’ve got your own dominion,
boy, and in fact, you’ve got too much power;
why do you go after a new task even more ambitious?
Or is your power everywhere, is Helicon yours,
is Apollo’s lyre scarcely safe anymore?
When a new page has sprung up, with a good opening line,
then the next line takes away my power.
I don’t have a suitable theme for your frivolous meter,
neither a boy, nor a girl with coiffured hair.”
Immediately after I complained, he opened his quiver,
chose arrows designed for my destruction,
bent the winding bow firmly against his knee, and said
“Poet, you want something to sing, take that.”
Wretched me! That boy had unerring arrows:
I’m on fire now, and Love rules over an empty heart.
So let my verse rise with six measures,
and drop down to five. Farewell to cruel wars,
and to the meters that go along with them.
Come, Muse, wreathe your blond hair with myrtle,
singing in meters of eleven.

--Translated by Ellen Greene

Amores 1.5

Love in the afternoon
It was very hot. The day had gone just past its noon.
I’d stretched out on a couch to take a nap.
One of the window-shutters was open, one was closed.
The light was like you’d see deep in the woods,
or like the glow of dusk when Phoebus leaves the sky,
or when night pales, and day has not yet dawned,
- a perfect light for girls with too much modesty,
where anxious Shame can hope to hide away.
When, look! here comes Corinna in a loose ungirded gown,
her parted hair framing her gleaming throat,
like lovely Semiramis entering her boudoir,
or fabled Lais, loved by many men.
I tore her gown off - not that it mattered, being so sheer,
and yet she fought to keep that sheer gown on;
but since she fought with no great wish for victory,
she lost, betraying herself to the enemy.
And as she stood before me, her garment all thrown off,
I saw a body perfect in every inch:
What shoulders, what fine arms I looked on - and embraced!
What lovely breasts, begging to be caressed!
How smooth and flat a belly under a compact waist!
And the side view - what a long and youthful thigh!
But why go into details? Each point deserved its praise.
I clasped her naked body close to mine.
You can fill in the rest. We both lay there, worn out.
May all my afternoons turn out this well.

--Translated by John Corelis

From Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love, 3 BC)

This guide to dating is split into a section on advice for men, and a section on advice for women. This first set of selections is from the advice to men.

Book I Part XII: Write and Make Promises

Try wax to pave the way, pour it out on scraped tablets:
let wax be your mind’s true confidante.
Bring her your flattering words and play the lover:
and, whoever you are, add a humble prayer.
Achilles was moved by prayer to grant Hector’s body to Priam:
a god’s anger’s deflected by the voice of prayer.
Make promises: what harm can a promise do?
Anyone can be rich in promises.
Hope lasts, if she’s once believed in,
a useful, though deceptive, goddess.
If you’ve given, you can quite reasonably be forgotten:
she carried it off, and now she’s nothing to lose.
But if you don’t give, always appear about to:
like barren fields that always cheat the farmer,
like the gambler who goes on losing, lest he’s finally lost,
and calls the dice back endlessly into his eager hand.
This is the work, the labour, to have her without giving first:
and she’ll go on giving, lest she lose what she’s freely given.
So go on, and send your letter’s flattering words,
try her intention, test the road out first.
Cydippe was deceived by the message the apple brought,
and unaware the girl by her own words was caught.
I warn you, youths of Rome, learn the noble arts,
not just to defend some trembling client:
like the crowd, the grave judge, the elected senate,
a woman will give her hand, won by eloquence.
But let your powers be hidden, don’t display your eloquence:
let irksome words vanish from your speech.
Who, but a mindless fool, declaims to his sweet friend?
A strong letter often causes her displeasure.
Let your speech be credible, use ordinary words,
flattering though, speak as if you were present.
If she won’t receive the letter, returns it un-read,
stick to your plan, and hope she’ll read it later.
In time stubborn oxen come to the plough,
in time the horse learns to suffer the bridle:
constant use wears away an iron ring,
the curved plough’s lost to the endless furrow.
What’s harder than stone, softer than water?
Yet soft water carves the hardest stone.
Once steadfast you’ll conquer Penelope herself in time:
you’ll see Troy captive, though it’s captured late.
She reads and won’t reply? Don’t press her:
just let her keep on reading your flattery.
If she wants to read, she’ll want to answer what she’s read:
such things proceed by number and by measure.
Perhaps at first a cool letter comes to you,
asking: would you please not trouble her.
What she asks, she fears: what she doesn’t ask, she wants,
that you go on: do it, and you’ll soon get what you wish.

**Book II Part VII: Give Her Little Tasteful Gifts**

I don’t tell you to give your mistress expensive gifts:
give little but of that little, skilfully, give what’s fitting.
When the field is full of riches, when the branches bend
with the weight, let the boy bring a gift in a rustic basket.
You can say it was sent from your country villa,
even though it was bought on the Via Sacra.
Send grapes, or those nuts Amaryllis loved,
chestnuts, but she doesn’t love them now.
Why even thrushes are fine, and the gift of a dove,
to witness your remembrance of your mistress.
Shameful to send them hoping for the death of some childless
old man. Ah, perish those who make giving a crime!
Do I also teach that you send tender verses?
Ah me, poems are not honoured much.
Songs are praised, but its gifts they really want:
barbarians themselves are pleasing, so long as they’re rich.
Truly now it is the Age of Gold: the greatest honours come with gold: love’s won by gold.
Even if you came, Homer, with the Muses as companions, if you brought nothing with you, Homer, you’d be out.
Still there are cultured girls, the rarest set: and another set who aren’t, but would like to be.
Praise either in song: and they’ll commend the reader whatever his voice’s sweetness:
So sing your midnight song to one and the other, perhaps it will figure as a trifling gift.

**Book II Part XVII: Don’t Mention Her Faults**

Above all beware of reproaching girls for their faults, it’s useful to ignore so many things.
Andromeda’s dark complexion was not criticised by Perseus, who was borne aloft by wings on his feet.
Andromache by all was rightly thought too tall: Hector was the only one who spoke of her as small.
Grow accustomed to what’s called bad, you’ll call it good: Time heals much: new love feels everything.
While a new-grafted twig’s growing in the green bark, struck by the lightest breeze, it may fall:
Later, hardened by time, it resists the winds, and the strong tree will bear adopted wealth.
Time itself erases all faults from the flesh, and what was a flaw, ceases to make you pause.
A new ox-hide makes nostrils recoil: tamed by familiarity, the odour fades.
An evil may be sweetened by its name: let her be ‘dark’ whose pigment’s blacker than Illyrian pitch:
if she squints, she’s like Venus: if she’s grey, Minerva: let her be ‘slender’, who’s truly emaciated:
call her ‘trim’, who’s tiny, ‘full-bodied’ if she’s gross, and hide the fault behind the nearest virtue.

*Here are some selections from Ovid’s advice to women:*

**Book III Part V: Conceal Your Defects**

I’ve not come to teach Semele or Leda, or Sidon’s Europa, carried through the waves by that deceptive bull, or Helen, whom Menelaus, being no fool, reclaimed, and you, Paris, her Trojan captor, also no fool, withheld. The crowd come to be taught, girls pretty and plain: and always the greater part are not-so-good.
The beautiful ones don’t seek art and instruction: they have their dowry, beauty potent without art: the sailor rests secure when the sea’s calm: when it’s swollen, he uses every aid. Still, faultless forms are rare: conceal your faults, and hide your body’s defects as best you may. If you’re short sit down, lest, standing, you seem to sit: and commit your smallness to your couch: there also, so your measure can’t be taken, let a shawl drop over your feet to hide them. If you’re very slender, wear a full dress, and walk about in clothes that hang loosely from your shoulders. A pale girl scatters bright stripes across her body, the darker then have recourse to linen from Alexandria. Let an ugly foot be hidden in snow-white leather: and don’t loose the bands from skinny legs. Thin padding suits those with high shoulder blades: a good brassiere goes with a meagre chest. Those with thick fingers and bitten nails, make sparing use of gestures whenever you speak. Those with strong breath don’t talk when you’re fasting. and always keep your mouth a distance from your lover.

**Book III Part XVIII: And So To Bed**

To have been taught more is shameful: but kindly Venus said: ‘What’s shameful is my particular concern.’ Let each girl know herself: adopt a reliable posture for her body: one layout’s not suitable for all. She who’s known for her face, lie there face upwards: let her back be seen, she who’s back delights. Milanion bore Atalanta’s legs on his shoulders: if they’re good looking, that mode’s acceptable. Let the small be carried by a horse: Andromache, his Theban bride, was too tall to straddle Hector’s horse. Let a woman noted for her length of body, press the bed with her knees, arch her neck slightly. She who has youthful thighs, and faultless breasts, the man might stand, she spread, with her body downwards. Don’t think it shameful to loosen your hair, like a Maenad, and throw back your head with its flowing tresses. You too, whom Lucina’s marked with childbirth’s wrinkles, like the swift child of Parthia, turn your mount around. There’s a thousand ways to do it: simple and least effort, is just to lie there half-turned on your right side. But neither Phoebus’s tripods nor Ammon’s horn
shall sing greater truths to you than my Muse:
If you trust art’s promise, that I’ve long employed:
my songs will offer you their promise.
Woman, feel love, melted to your very bones,
and let both delight equally in the thing.
Don’t leave out seductive coos and delightful murmurings,
don’t let wild words be silent in the middle of your games.
You too whom nature denies sexual feeling,
pretend to sweet delight with artful sounds.
Unhappy girl, for whom that sluggish place is numb,
which man and woman equally should enjoy.
Only beware when you feign it, lest it shows:
create belief in your movements and your eyes.
When you like it, show it with cries and panting breath:
Ah! I blush, that part has its own secret signs.
She who asks fondly for a gift after love’s delights,
can’t want her request to carry any weight.
Don’t let light into the room through all the windows:
it’s fitting for much of your body to be concealed.
The game is done: time to descend, you swans,
you who bent your necks beneath my yoke.
As once the boys, so now my crowd of girls
inscribe on your trophies ‘Ovid was my master.’

From Ovid, *Remedia Amoris* (*Remedy for Love*)

*This book is directed at those people who were not able to achieve success by following Ovid’s advice in the Ars Amatoria.*

**Part VIII: Be Cool With Her**

But if my suggestions have value, if Apollo
through my mouth teaches all to mortal men,
though, unhappy man, you’re roasting in the midst of Etna,
make it seem to your girl that you’re chillier than ice:
and if you’re grieving deeply, look happy, lest she see it,
and laugh, when tears come to you.
Not that I order you to break off in mid-sorrow:
my commands aren’t as cruel as that.
Pretend to what is not, and that the passion’s over,
so you’ll become, in truth, what you are studying to be.
I’ve often wished to seem asleep, lest it seem I’ve been drinking,
while I seemed so, I gave my conquered eyes to sleep:
I’ve laughed at one caught, who pretended to himself he was in love,
hunting birds, but fallen into his own net.
Love penetrates the heart by habit, through habit it’s forgotten:
he who can imagine he’s well, will be well.
She might ask you to come: go on the night agreed:
you’ve come, and the door is locked: well endure it.
Don’t speak fawning words, or abuse the doorpost,
nor lay your body on the hard threshold.
The new day will dawn: lose your words of grievance,
and show no signs of suffering in your face.
She’ll soon drop her disdain, when she sees your indifference:
this too’s a gift you’ll gather from my art.
Still, deceive yourself as well, don’t let there be a plan
to stop loving: the horse will often fight against the bit.
Conceal your advantage: what’s not declared will be:
the bird avoids the net that’s too apparent.
Don’t let her be too pleased with herself, nor have the power
to despise you: be brave, so she gives way to your bravery.
The door’s wide open? Though you’re called to, pass by.
There’s a night agreed? Hesitate to go on the given night.
To be able to endure it’s easy, when, if patience fails,
it’s fine to take your enjoyment with easy girls.

HORACE (QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS)
(65 BC - 8 BC)

Ode 1.11

Do not inquire, we may not know, what end
the Gods will give, Leuconoe, do not attempt
Babylonian calculations. The better course
is to bear whatever will be, whether Jove allot
more winters or this is the last which exhausts
the Tuscan sea with pumice rocks opposed.
Be wise, decant the wine, prune back
your long-term hopes. Life ebbs as I speak –

Ode 1.13

Lydia, when you praise
Telephus’ rosy neck or Telephus’
wax-white arms, alas,
my simmering liver swells with crotchety bile;
nor my mind nor complexion
are true to their nature, and stealthy tears
on my cheeks are symptoms
of inward maceration above slow fires;
and if some violent, drunken row
has marked your snowy shoulders or the ravening
boy has stamped a memento
on your lips with his teeth, I am charred.
You may not, let me tell you,
expect fidelity of the savage who injures
that delicious mouth which Venus
has imbued with the essence of her nectar.
Thrice happy the couple
who are not torn apart by quarrels
but are held in a bond
of unbroken love which only death dissolves.

Ode 2.10

The proper course in life, Licinius,
is neither always to dare the deep, nor,
timidly chary of storms, to hug
the dangerous shore.
Who values most the middle way
avoids discreetly both the squalor
of the slum and a palace liable
to excite envy.
The gale shakes most the lofty pine,
tall towers fall with the louder
crash and the highest peaks most often
are struck by lightning.
Hopeful in evil times and cautious
in good, ready for weal or woe,
be prepared. Jupiter imposes
the ugly winter,
but then withdraws it. Bad luck
is not for ever: Apollo varies
his archery sometimes by harping
to waken the Muse.
In difficult straits show spirit
and fortitude, but on the other hand
always shorten sail when you
run before the wind.

Ode 4.7

Snows are dissolved and grass returns to the meadows
and foliage to trees;
Earth suffers her changes and diminishing rivers run
between their banks;
Gratia with her Nymphs and twin sisters dares,
naked, to lead the dance.
The year and the hour that snatch our day warn us not
to hope for eternal life.
Frosts melt for Zephyr; the summer tramples
the spring but will die
when autumn pours out harvest; and soon the numb
short days recur.
Swift moons, moreover, recoup their celestial losses:
when we have fallen and joined
our father Aeneas and opulent Tullus and Ancus,
we are dust and shadow.
Who knows whether the high Gods will add more tomorrows
to the sum of todays?
Devote the whole sheaf to your own sweet will and thwart
the avid hands of your heir.
When once you have perished and Minos has passed
his royal verdict,
neither race, Torquatus, nor eloquence, nor righteous
deeds shall restore you:
for even Diana cannot free her celibate Hippolytus
from the underworld’s murk;
nor can Theseus prevail to break the Lethean bonds

MARTIAL (MARCUS VALERIUS MARTIALIS)
(38-41 CE-103 CE)

EPIGRAMS

Why is it modern poets are ignored
and only dead ones get adored?
That’s how envy works, Regulus,
the dead make the safest rivals.
So we mourn Pompey’s colonnade
and its nostalgic, leafy shade
just as our fathers praised the temple
Catulus restored not wisely nor too well.
Rome reads Ennius, though Virgil is to hand,
as Homer was a joke in his own land;
Menander’s best plays were thought dull;
only Corinna knew her Ovid well.
So, little books, let’s not rush to our fate.
Since death comes before glory, let’s be late.

--Translated by William Matthews

5.36
Someone I flattered in a book pretends
he owes me nothing. Oh the trash I have for friends!

--Translated by William Matthews

1.46

Hedylus, when you say, "I'm in a hurry, if you're going to do it, do it," my disabled love
 languishes on the spot and ceases. Order me to wait: I come faster when I am held back.
Hedylus, if you are in a hurry, tell me not to hurry.

--Translated by Joseph S. Salemi

1.90

Bassa, I never saw you hang with guys—
Nobody whispered that you had a beau.
Girls surrounded you at every turn;
They did your errands, with no attendant males.

And so, I guess I naturally assumed
That you were what you seemed: a chaste Lucretia.
But hell no. Why, you shameless little tramp,
You were an active humper all the time.

You improvised, by rubbing cunts together,
And using that bionic clt of yours
To counterfeit the thrusting of a male.

Unbelievable. You’ve managed to create
A real conundrum, worthy of the Sphinx:
Adultery without a co-respondent.

--Translated by Joseph S. Salemi

7.67
The girl-rubber Philaenis fucks boys and, with lust worse than a husband, afflicts eleven girls in
a day. She also plays handball with her leggings tied up, and turns yellow from [wrestling in the] sand, and with her upper arm easily swings weights that are heavy for athletes. She does not eat dinner until she first vomits up six pints of undiluted wine; to which she thinks she has the right to come back after she has eaten seven steaks. After all this, when she gets horny, she does not give head - she doesn't think that is virile enough - but rather she completely devours the crotches of girls. May the gods give you your mind, Philaenis, since you think licking pussy is virile.

11.81
Aegle was once in bed with double action—
The eunuch Dindymus and some old geezer.
She lay between while they both got her hot.

Neither guy could make a go of it;
One lacked equipment, the other was senescent,
So Aegle burned without real satisfaction.

What could she do? She fell down on her knees
And prayed to Venus for herself and them:
“Make Grandpa young, make Dindymus a man!”

--Translated by Joseph S. Salemi