

CATULLUS 63: OF [BERECYNTHIA](#) AND ATTIS

TRANSLATED BY A.S. KLINE

[Dr. D's note: Cybele was a goddess whose worship originated in Phrygia (modern Turkey). She was known as the Magna Mater (great mother), and beginning in the 500's BCE her worship spread throughout the Greek and Roman worlds. It was officially established in Roma after an oracle predicted that a foreign goddess would bring the Romans victory in their war with Carthage. Especially in the Roman Empire, there were many places where Cybele was worshipped in established civic cults whose priests were (as usual in Roman cult) notable members of the local community. But far more visible and terrifying were the galli. These were itinerate eunuch priests of Cybele, who were said to castrate themselves in the midst of ecstatic rituals to the goddess. Despite the horror and distrust they often inspired, they were also often acknowledged as the source of a particular aspect of divine will. This poem follows the transformation of an ordinary man with a passion for the goddess into one of these priests, cut off (so to speak) from the rest of humanity by the results of a moment of overwhelming religious passion.]

As soon as [Attis](#), borne over the deep seas in a swift boat,
 had reached the [Phrygian](#) woods, with rapid eager steps,
 had returned to a dark corner of the goddess's grove,
 goaded by mad fury, and there, his wits wandering
 had sliced off his testicles with a sharp stone,
 and had seen his remaining members devoid of power,
 and that country's soil spotted with fresh blood,
 he took up the drum lightly in his pale hands,
 your drum, [Cybele](#), yours, Great Mother, in your rite,
 and striking the sounding bull's-hide with delicate fingers,
 chanted to his followers, as it quivered from his assault:
 '[Gallae](#), come, rise, to the high woods of Cybele, now,
 come, now, wandering cattle of [Dindymus](#)'s Lady,
 like exiles wandering here on an alien shore,
 followers of my way, lead by me, my friends,
 you suffered the swift seas and the wild waves
 and sheared your sex from your bodies with great hatred:
 gladden the Lady's spirit with swift movements.
 Banish dull delay from your minds: come, now, follow,
 to Phrygian Cybele's house, the Phrygian goddess's grove,
 where the voice of the cymbal clashes, the drum echoes,
 where the Phrygian flute-player plays on a curving reed,
 where the ivy-crowned Maenads violently toss their heads,
 where they act out the sacred rites with high-pitched howls,
 where the goddess's wandering retinue's wont to hover,
 where we should hurry with our swift triple-step.'
 As Attis, the counterfeit woman, sings this to his friends,
 the [Bacchic](#) choir suddenly cries with quivering tongues,
 the drum echoes it gently, the hollow cymbals ring.
 The swift choir comes to green [Ida](#) on hurrying feet.
 Attis, leading, panting wildly, goading his scattered wits,

enters the dark grove accompanied by the drum,
 like a wild heifer escaping the weight of the yoke:
 The agile [Gallae](#) follow their swift-footed leader.
 Then, since wearied, foodless, they reach Cybele's grove,
 they're seized by sleep from their excessive labours.
 Dull tiredness overwhelms eyes giving way to languor:
 mad frenzy vanishes in the calm of gentle breath.
 But when the Sun from his golden face scanned the bright
 heavens with radiant eye, the harsh earth, and wild sea,
 and dispelled the shadows of night with his lively steeds,
 then the Grace, [Pasithea](#), takes swift Sleep, flying
 from the waking Attis, to her beating heart.
 So, rapidly, from sweet dream and free of madness,
 Attis recollected his actions in his thoughts,
 and saw with a clear heart what and where he had been,
 turning again with passionate mind to the sea.
 There gazing at the wide waters with tearful eyes
 he raised his voice and sadly bemoaned his homeland:
 'Land that fathered me, land that mothered me,
 I, who left you so sadly, have reached the groves of Ida,
 like a slave fleeing his master, so am I among
 snows, and the frozen lairs of wild creatures,
 and should I in madness enter one of their dens
 where would I think to find you buried in those places?
 The keen eye itself desires to turn itself towards you,
 while my thought is free a while of the wild creatures.
 Have I been brought from my distant home for this grove?
 Shall I lose country, possessions, friends, kin?
 Shall I lose forum, wrestling ring, stadium and gymnasium?
 Sorrow on sorrow, again and again complaint in the heart.
 What form have I not been, what have I not performed?
 I a woman, I a young man, a youth, a boy,
 I the flower of the athletes, the glory of the wrestling ring:
 my doorway frequented, my threshold warm,
 my house was garlanded with wreaths of flowers,
 at the dawn separation from my bed.
 Now am I brought here priest and slave of divine Cybele?
 I, to be [Maenad](#): a part of myself: a sterile man?
 I to worship on green Ida in a place cloaked in frozen snow?
 I to live my life beneath the high summits of Phrygia,
 where deer haunt the woods, where the wild boar roams?
 Now I grieve for what I did, now I repent.'
 As the swift sounds leave his rosy lips
 the fresh words reach the twin ears of the goddess,
 as Cybele is loosing the lions from their yoke
 and goading the left-hand beast: she spoke to it,
 saying: 'Go now, be fierce, so you make him mad, so he
 is forced to return to the grove by the pain of his madness,

he who desires to escape my rule so freely.
Let your tail wound your back, let the lashes show,
make the whole place echo to your bellowing roar,
shake your red mane fiercely over your taut neck.'
So Cybele spoke in threat and loosed the leash.
The wild beast urging itself to speed, roused in spirit,
tore away, roared, broke madly through the thickets,
and when it reached the wet margin of the white sands,
and saw delicate Attis near to the ocean waves,
it charged. He fled demented to the wild wood:
there to be ever enslaved, for the rest of his life.
Goddess, Great Goddess, Cybele, Lady of Dindymus,
Mistress, let all your anger be far from my house:
make others aroused, make other men raving mad.

http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Catullus.htm#_Toc531846788 (with hyperlinks)