

BELLARIA



Saturnalia, Antoine-Francois Callet, 1783

'Bellaria' means 'sweets, dainties', and in these hard times Classics for All will try to lighten the mood and put a spring in the step by posting delicious extracts from ancient literature, the original text followed by a translation or translations, and very occasionally with explanatory notes.

Auberon Waugh, then editor of *Literary Review*, invented the now famous annual 'Bad Sex' Award 'to draw attention to the crude, tasteless, often perfunctory use of redundant passages of sexual description in the modern novel, and to discourage it'. The first winner (1993) was Melvyn Bragg with his *A Time to Dance*, but the (dis)honour has had regrettably little effect on the literary world, actually spurring on some scribblers with their fast-flowing biros to try to win the Award.

Well: whatever the modern world can do, the ancient can obviously do far better. Given that C-19 means we are all apparently doomed, it is the socially responsible thing to encourage the population's philoprogenitive urges. With so many more people staying at home, and therefore with maximum opportunity to propagate, this is where *Classics for All* can play its part on behalf of the nation.

Classics for All's series of *Bellaria* will therefore start with five scenes which would (probably) have won an ancient 'Good Sex' award, though in this first instance it is perhaps Pope's riotous imagination which takes the prize. Anthony Verity's version accurately translates the Greek.

GOOD SEX AWARD (1)



Jupiter and Juno on Mount Ida by James Barry, 1773, City Art Galleries, Sheffield, England.

Nature responds as Zeus makes love to his wife Hera

τὴν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς:
“Ἥρη, μήτε θεῶν τό γε δείδιθι μήτε τιν' ἀνδρῶν
ὄψεσθαι: τοῖόν τοι ἐγὼ νέφος ἀμφικαλύψω
χρύσειον: οὐδ' ἂν νῶϊ διαδράκοι Ἥελιός περ,
345 οὗτε καὶ ὀξύτατον πέλεται φάος εἰσοράασθαι.”
ἧ ῥα, καὶ ἀγκὰς ἔμαρπτε Κρόνου παῖς ἦν παράκοιτιν:
τοῖσι δ' ὑπὸ χθῶν δῖα φύεν νεοθηλέα ποίην,
λωτόν θ' ἔρσήεντα ἰδὲ κρόκον ἠδ' ὑάκινθον
πυκνὸν καὶ μαλακόν, ὃς ἀπὸ χθονὸς ὑψὸς ἔεργε.
350 τῷ ἓνι λεξάσθην, ἐπὶ δὲ νεφέλην ἔσσαντο
καλὴν χρυσεῖην: στιλπναὶ δ' ἀπέπιπτον ἔερσαι.
ὣς ὁ μὲν ἀτρέμας εὔδε πατὴρ ἀνὰ Γαργάρῳ ἄκρῳ,
ὑπνῶ καὶ φιλότῃτι δαμείς, ἔχε δ' ἀγκὰς ἄκοιτιν...

Homer, *Iliad* 14.341ff.

Translated by Anthony Verity

In answer Zeus who gathers the clouds addressed her:
‘Hera, do not be afraid on that account, that some god or man will see us;
I shall wrap a golden cloud around us,
such that not even the Sun could see us through it,
345 he whose light gives him the keenest sight of all.’
So the son of Cronus spoke, and clasped his wife in his arms;
and beneath them the bright earth put forth fresh-growing grass
and dew-drenched clover and crocus and hyacinth,
thick and soft, which kept them raised above the ground.
350 On this the two of them lay, wrapped in a beautiful
golden cloud; and from it fell drops of glistening dew.
So the father slept, motionless on the height of Gargarus,
overcome by sleep and love, clasping his wife in his arms.

Homer *The Iliad: A New Translation* (Oxford 2011)

Translated (and gloriously expanded) by Alexander Pope (1720)

[She ceased: and smiling with superior love,
Thus answered mild the cloud-compelling Jove:
“Not god nor mortal shall our joys behold,
Shaded with clouds, and circumfused in gold;
Not e’en the sun, who darts through heaven his rays,
345 And whose broad eye the extended earth surveys.”
Gazing he spoke, and, kindling at the view,
His eager arms around the goddess threw.
Glad Earth perceives, and from her bosom pours
Unbidden herbs, and voluntary flowers;
Thick new-born violets a soft carpet spread,
And clustering lotos swelled the rising bed,
And sudden hyacinths the turf bestrow,
And flamy crocus made the mountain glow.
350 There golden clouds conceal the heavenly pair,
Steeped in soft joys, and circumfused with air;
Celestial dews, descending o’er the ground,
Perfume the mount, and breathe ambrosia round.
At length with love and sleep’s soft power oppressed,
The panting Thunderer nods, and sinks to rest.



This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/

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