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# An Introduction to Catullus

## *Catullus: The Historical Context*

Gaius Valerius Catullus (ca. 84–54 B.C.) lived during one of the most turbulent periods in Roman history. The first century B.C., (the last century of the Roman Republic) saw a breakdown of government as ambitious and powerful generals commanded legions more loyal to themselves than to the state. Only about four years before the birth of the poet the Roman general Sulla had led his troops in a march on Rome itself, and in 60 B.C., when Catullus was still in his twenties, Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great, and Marcus Crassus formed the First Triumvirate, an illegal pact designed to take control of the Roman government. As would-be rulers like Caesar and Pompey usurped the powers of the Roman Senate, Republican loyalists like the great orator Cicero could do little to turn back the clock. It was only a matter of time until Caesar and Pompey would engage in a civil war that would end in the triumph of the former and the total collapse of the Republican constitution. It was against this unsettled and violent background that Catullus created the poems that we have today, some of which in fact allude to the politics and politicians of the day.

## *The Life of Catullus*

Very little is actually known about the life of Catullus, although a close reading of his poems offers some biographical data. The poems and other ancient sources indicate that he was born in the northern town of Verona, in what was then known as Cisalpine Gaul, and that his family was prominent enough to associate with Julius Caesar himself. It is likely that Catullus moved from Verona to Rome as a young man, not to pursue a career in politics, as might be expected of a scion of an important family, but rather to enjoy the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of the capital. In Rome Catullus soon met many people whose names appear in his poems, such as the lawyer, writer, and orator Cicero, the promising young politician Caelius Rufus, and the lawyer and poet Licinius Calvus. In short order, Catullus concentrated his attention on poetry and became a member of the so-called Neoterics (or "New Poets"), a circle of men who brought to the Roman literature of their time a new infusion of Greek, or, more specifically, Alexandrian (so-called after the city of Alexandria in Egypt) poetic principles. The Neoterics were especially influenced by the Greek Alexandrian poet Callimachus (ca. 310–240 B.C.), who had advocated the writing of short, but elegant and very learned poems. It is illustrative of Catullus' admiration for Callimachus that his Poem 66 is a close translation of a poem by that Alexandrian author. While other Greek poets also influenced the Neoterics (e.g., Poem 51 of Catullus is for the most part a translation of a Greek poem by the renowned Sappho of Lesbos), none had as great an impact as Callimachus. In the particular case of Catullus, Callimachus' great concern for learning and form would become merged with the Roman poet's own passion and wit to create a type of poetry unique in Rome. [For an examination of the Neoteric movement in general, see R. O. A. M. Lyne's "The Neoteric Poets" in the *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1978) 167–187.]

While Catullus clearly associated with some of the best young poets of the day, by far the most famous acquaintance he made in Rome was Clodia, a woman of great intelligence, wit, and beauty who became immortalized in his poems under the pseudonym of

"Lesbia" (a name chosen in order to associate Clodia with the equally unique Sappho of Lesbos, both women being *docta*, that is, highly cultured and educated). Most modern scholars believe that Catullus' Clodia was the wife of Quintus Metellus Celer, a conservative Roman aristocrat who had served as governor of Cisalpine Gaul in 62–61 B.C.; some even theorize that Catullus had first met Clodia in Cisalpine Gaul and then had followed her to Rome. This worldly woman was a member of a politically influential Roman family, and her brother, Publius Clodius, played a role in the downfall of the Republic as an amoral thug-for-hire. Clodia, who was at least ten years older than Catullus, enchanted the young poet, and their affair would inspire some of the finest poems in the Catullan collection. Catullus even seems to have looked upon their liaison as a form of marriage, and he may have hoped that, with the death of Metellus in 59 B.C., Clodia would actually marry him. If so, he was to be extremely disappointed, since Clodia not only did not reciprocate Catullus' passion, but even took a new lover in the person of Caelius Rufus.

To the everlasting delight of historians, Clodia's affair with Caelius came to a disastrous end which was well documented by Cicero in his *Pro Caelio*. Caelius must have come to realize that his liaison with Clodia would not help advance his political career in Rome, and so he seems to have ended their relationship. Clodia, however, was not a woman to take rejection lightly: in 56 B.C. she filed charges against Caelius, accusing him of the act of *vis* (that is, extreme political violence) and of attempting to murder her. In response, Caelius turned to Cicero to defend him. The result was the famous speech *Pro Caelio*, in which Cicero completely destroyed the credibility of Clodia. Unfortunately, how Catullus reacted to the scandal surrounding both his friend and his lover is not clear.

Not surprisingly, discussions of the complex relationship between Catullus and Clodia have been the focus of much modern secondary literature. Perhaps the most thorough and at the same time most provocative analysis can be found in T. P. Wiseman's *Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal* (Cambridge, 1985). As for Clodia, an excellent article is that of M. B. Skinner, "Clodia Metelli" in the *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 113 (1983) 273–287. See also A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley, 1934), and G. P. Goold, *Catullus* (London, 1983).

As difficult as the loss of Clodia must have been, another great loss also deeply affected Catullus: the unexpected death of his brother in the Troad of Asia Minor ca. 59 B.C. One of the best known Catullan poems (101) refers to this loss, and suggests that the poet eventually went to the Troad to make funerary offerings at his brother's grave. Many scholars have argued that this trip and the ensuing poem date to the period 57–56 B.C., when Catullus joined the general staff of Gaius Memmius, the new governor of the eastern province of Bithynia. On his return home, Catullus seems to have spent some time at his villa at Sirmio in northern Italy (the modern Lake Garda). Shortly thereafter Catullus died, probably at the relatively young age of thirty. Like so many other details of Catullus' life, the cause of his death remains unknown.

### *The Poems of Catullus*

The collection of over 100 poems that forms the Catullan corpus is colored dramatically by the poems to and about Lesbia. These poems depict the growth, maturity, and dissolution of a complex relationship, but are nonetheless far more than spontaneous outbursts

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of love and/or hate. While Catullus is often (and to some degree rightly) praised for his explosive candor and depth of feeling in the so-called "Lesbia poems," he was at all times a consummate artist, conscious of his audience and of literary tradition. The genius of Catullus indeed lies in the fact that he successfully employed studied artistry in the expression of intense emotions that still affect readers to this day.

It is important to realize that, despite their prominence in the eyes of modern readers, the Lesbia poems represent only one aspect of a larger collection. Catullus often turned his attention to other subjects, and among his poems are many which deal in one way or another with friendship. The poet seems to have expected from his friends the same kind of loyalty he wished for in vain from Lesbia: those who remained his steadfast friends, men such as Veranius, Calvus, or Fabullus, find their reward in poems that express genuine affection, while those who betrayed the trust of the poet find themselves the recipients of vilifying poems such as 73. Indeed, the breaking of trust in general seems to lie behind the harshest invectives to be found in the collection.

Literary themes (e.g., what is good or bad writing) infuse many poems (e.g., 1, 22, 35, 36, 44, 50). A close reading of these poems reveals Catullus' deep respect both for the power of the written word and for the art of transforming words into poetry. Poem 50 is especially instructive in providing the reader with a window into the world of poetic composition: we watch carefully as Catullus and his friend Calvus compete with each other in the making of poetry. From such poems we gain valuable insight into Catullus as a Neoteric, "Callimachean" poet who extols the virtue of quality over quantity and praises substance over image.

Other themes of note in the Catullan collection include marriage (especially dominant in poems 61–68), travel (e.g., 4, 11, 46), and bad manners or habits (e.g., 10, 12, 84). From the collection as a whole, in fact, we come to understand the world of Catullus—his likes and dislikes, his friends and enemies, his values, and, not least in importance, his views on the art of poetry itself.

### *The "Book" of Catullus*

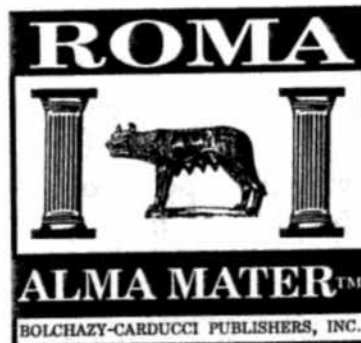
Did Catullus arrange his poems in the order in which we have them today? This question has occupied much scholarship over the years. The first poem in the collection, the dedication of Catullus' book to Cornelius Nepos, uses the Latin word *libellus*, a diminutive form which may simply express humility on the part of the poet, or which may indeed indicate that only a small collection of poems had been made. For a long time scholars were convinced that the collection as we have it was the work of a later editor, but more recent scholarship has suggested that at least parts of the collection do reflect the ordering intended by Catullus.

A "minimalist" position takes the view that only poems 1–14 constituted the *libellus* of Catullus [cf. T. K. Hubbard, "The Catullan Libellus," *Philologus* 127 (1983) 218–237]. At the opposite end of the critical spectrum, T. P. Wiseman has argued that the entire collection as we have it (1–116) was arranged and published by the poet himself [cf. T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester, 1969); see also J. D. Minyard, "The Source of the Catulli Veronensis Liber," *Classical World* 81 (1988) 343–353]. In between these extremes are "moderates" who see the *libellus* as consisting of poems 1–51 [cf. M. B. Skinner, *Catullus' Passer: The Arrangement of the Book of Polymetric Poems* (New York, 1981)], or perhaps of poems 1–60 [cf.

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Kenneth Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London, 1970); also, W. Clausen, "Catulli Veronensis Liber," *Classical Philology* 71 (1976) 37-43]. Given the lack of conclusive evidence, readers of the poems are encouraged to form their own opinions on this matter.

Whatever Catullus' original *libellus* was, the text as we have it today falls clearly into three sections arranged by meter and length: poems 1-60 (known as the poly-metrics) are short pieces composed in a variety of lyric meters, the most common being the hendecasyllabic; the more expansive poems 61-68 are classified as the "long poems"; and poems 69-116 are epigrams written in the elegiac meter. The very existence of these three categories demonstrates the versatility of Catullus as a poet: he was not bound to any single type of verse, but preferred to experiment in several. It is hoped that the selection of poems made here will enable the student of Catullus to appreciate his genius as a poet who was able to unite artistry with passion in a way few others have ever achieved.

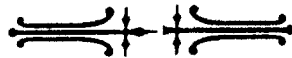


Catullus probably wrote this poem when he was finished writing his collection. But what was that collection? We do not know exactly what he refers to by the word *libellus*. The 116 poems of Catullus are divisible into three groups: the polymetric poems 1–60, the long poems 61–68, and the elegiac distich poems 69–116. There is ample justification for thinking that the collection which we possess is a merging of several *libelli*. But there is considerable question as to where the separation of lines is or was, and further, whether we have the poems in the order in which the poet wanted them arranged. Poems 1–3 are in the hendecasyllabic meter.

Cui dono lepidum novum libellum  
 arida modo pumice expolitum?  
 Corneli, tibi: namque tu solebas  
 meas esse aliquid putare nugas  
 iam tum, cum ausus es unus Italorum  
 omne aevum tribus explicare cartis  
 doctis, Iuppiter, et laboriosis.  
 quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli  
 quaecumque; quod, <o> patrona virgo,  
 plus uno maneat perenne saeclo.

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- 1 **dono:** *dono, donare, donavi, donatum*, give, dedicate  
**cui:** (interrogative pronoun) to whom?  
**lepidum:** *lepidus-a-um*, adj., fine, elegant, charming  
 Does the poet refer here to a physical attribute of the finished book itself?  
**libellum:** *libellus, -i, m.*, small book; it is important to observe the way in which the poet uses alliteration and diminutives. What special effects does this word produce?
- 2 **arida:** *aridus-a-um*, adj., dry  
**modo:** *modo*, adv., just, now, only recently  
**pumice:** *pumex, pumicis, m./f.*, lava-stone, pumice  
**expolitum:** *expolio, expolire, expolivi, expolitum*,  
 smooth off, polish; this book originally would have been written onto sheets made from strips of the papyrus plant. The uneven seams created by the bonding of one piece of papyrus with another by means of the natural secretions released in stripping the plant itself would require the use of pumice stone to gently smooth the papyrus into a scroll.
- 3 **Corneli:** vocative form of the proper noun *Cornelius*; this is Cornelius Nepos, author of a tersely written history whose learnedness and polish won the admiration of Catullus.  
**nam:** *nam*, conj., for, with the enclitic conjunction *que*  
**solebas:** *soleo, solere, solitus sum*, be accustomed to (with a complementary infinitive)
- 4 **aliquid:** *aliquis-aliquid*, (indefinite pronoun)  
 someone, something  
**putare:** *puto, putare, putavi, putatum*, think, consider  
**nugas:** *nugae, -arum, f.* (plural), nothings, nonsense, trifles
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- 5 **ausus es: audeo, audere, ausus sum, dare**  
**unus: unus-a-um, adj., alone, one**
- 6 **aevum: aevum, aevi, n., age, history**  
**tribus: tres-tres-tria, adj., three**  
**explicare: explico, explicare, explicavi, explicatum**  
 unfold, explain; does **explicatum** recall **expolitum** of line 2?  
**cartis: carta, cartae, f., a sheet of the Egyptian papyrus;**  
**cartae** suggests a series of sheets glued together to form a scroll, hence three volumes.
- 7 **doctis: doceo, docere, docui, doctum, teach;** the perfect passive participle used here means "learned."  
**Iuppiter:** (vocative case, an apostrophe) Jupiter. The poet may be invoking the king of the gods to emphasize his admiration for Cornelius' literary accomplishments.  
**laboriosis: laboriosus-a-um, adj., labored over, worked**
- 8 **quare: quare, adv., on account of which thing; therefore**  
**habe tibi:** an abrupt, colloquial phrase with legalistic overtones suggesting the transfer of real property; essentially Catullus says, "Take it in 'as-is' condition."  
**quidquid: quisquis-quaequae-quidquid,** (substantive use of the indefinite relative pronoun) whoever, whatever
- 9 **qualecumque: qualiscumque-qualecumque,**  
 (interrogative/indefinite adjective) of whatever sort  
**quod: qui, quae, quod,** (relative pronoun), refers to a neuter indefinite antecedent which is the object of the imperative **habe** and modified by **qualecumque**.  
 <o>: Pointed brackets like these indicate an omission in the original manuscript which has been tentatively restored by the text editor to complete the meter.  
**patrona: patronus/a, -i/ae, m./f., patron**  
**virgo: virgo, virginis, f., maiden, virgin;** with the words **patrona virgo**, the poet is invoking a muse in a manner which recalls the invocation of the muse in Homer.
- 10 **plus: plus, adv., (followed by ablative of comparison) more**  
**maneant: maneo, manere, mansi, mansum, remain;** here the jussive subjunctive form means "let it remain."  
**perenne: perennis-perenne, adj., enduring, unending**  
**saeclo: saeculum, saeculi, n., an age, a generation**

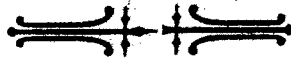


The occasion of this poem, the first of the *passer* poems, is the poet's fanciful jealousy of a pet sparrow. The sparrow has been fortunate to become the focus of the attention of Catullus' girlfriend, Lesbia (Clodia). This occasion makes the poet eager to be with his beloved, to play with the sparrow and to receive the love and attention he craves.

Passer, deliciae meae puellae,  
 quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,  
 cui primum digitum dare appetenti  
 et acris solet incitare morsus,  
 cum desiderio meo nitenti 5  
 carum nescio quid lubet iocari,  
 et solaciolum sui doloris,  
 credo, ut tum gravis acquiescat ardor:  
 tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem  
 et tristis animi levare curas! 10

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- 1 **passer:** passer, passeris, m., sparrow  
**deliciae:** deliciae, deliciarum, f. (plural), delight, favorite, "sweetheart"
- 2 **quicum = quocum:** (relative pronoun) with whom  
**ludere:** ludo, ludere, lusi, lusum, play  
**sinu:** sinus, sinus, m., the fold of the toga at the breast or chest, one's lap  
**tenere:** teneo, tenere, tenui, tentum, hold, keep
- 3 **cui:** (relative pronoun) to whom  
**digitum:** digitus, digiti, m., finger  
**primum digitum:** fingertip of the index finger  
**appetenti:** appeto, appetere, appetivi, appetitum, seek, seek greedily
- 4 **acris:** acer-acris-acre, adj., sharp, fierce  
**solet:** soleo, solere, solitus sum, be accustomed to, be used to; this verb takes four complementary infinitives, ludere, tenere, dare, incitare.  
**morsus:** morsus, morsus, m., hunger pain, a bite, a peck
- 5 **cum:** cum, conj., when  
**desiderio:** desiderium, desiderii, n., longing  
**nitenti:** niteo, nitere, nitui, shine, be bright; the participle may be modifying the noun **desiderio** or may be taken with an unexpressed but understood word for Lesbia in the dative case. **Desiderio** would then be taken as an ablative qualifying **nitenti**, and **meo**, while strictly speaking a possessive adjective, can be taken in the sense of "for me."
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- 6 **nescio:** nescio, nescire, nescivi, not know: with the indefinite pronoun *quis-quis*, an indefinite idiomatic adjectival construction modifying *carum*, and with *iocari* it means "to make some loving joke."  
**libet = libet:** libet, libere, libuit/libitum est, it pleases  
**iocari:** iocor, iocari, iocatus sum, tease, joke
- 7 **solacium:** solacium, solacii, n., a little comfort or solace  
**doloris:** dolor, doloris, m., grief, pain
- 8 **credo:** credo, credere, credidi, creditum, believe  
**gravis:** gravis-grave, adj., serious, dire, grave  
**acquiescat:** acquiesco, acquiescere, acquievi, acquietum, become quiet, settle down  
**ardor:** ardor, ardoris, m., flame of passion
- 9 **sicut:** sicut, conj., just as  
**possem:** possum, posse, potui, (optative subjunctive) be able
- 10 **tristis:** tristis-triste, adj., sad, miserable. This is an example of the poetic form of the regular third declension accusative plural ending, *-es*.  
**animi:** animus, animi, m., mind, being  
**levare:** levo, levare, levavi, levatum, lighten  
**curas:** cura, curae, f., care, anxiety, love



## 2B

Some scholars have suggested that several lines are missing at the end of Poem 2. They believe that these missing lines would have formed a coherent connection with Poem 2b.

tam gratum est mihi quam ferunt puellae  
 pernici aureolum fuisse malum,  
 quod zonam soluit diu ligatam.

- 1 **gratum est:** it is pleasing  
**ferunt:** in the sense of "they say"  
**puellae:** refers to Atalanta, who was to marry the person who surpassed her in running. Milanion dropped a golden apple in front of Atalanta while racing her. She stopped to pick up the apple and was thereby defeated by Milanion, who then won her hand in marriage.
- 2 **pernici:** pernix, pernicis, adj., swift  
**aureolum:** aureolus-a-um, adj., golden  
**malum:** malum, -i, n., apple
- 3 **zonam:** zona, -ae, f., girdle  
**solvit:** solvo,olvere, solvi, solutum, free up, untie  
**ligatam:** ligo, ligare, ligavi, ligatum, tie up, bind

## 3

The second sparrow poem paints a semi-serious picture of Catullus inviting his listeners to cry with him over the death of the little sparrow, a virtual mock funeral. The poem builds considerable pathos for the deceased sparrow, and offers a dramatic tonal contrast with Poem 2.

Lugete, O Veneres Cupidinesque,  
 et quantum est hominum venustiorum:  
 passer mortuus est meae puellae,  
 passer, deliciae meae puellae, 5  
 quem plus illa oculis suis amabat.  
 nam mellitus erat suamque norat  
 ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem,  
 nec sese a gremio illius movebat,  
 sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc 10  
 ad solam dominam usque pipiabat;  
 qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum  
 illud, unde negant redire quemquam.  
 at vobis male sit, malae tenebrae  
 Orci, quae omnia bella devoratis: 15  
 tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis.  
 O factum male! O miselle passer!  
 tua nunc opera meae puellae  
 flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli.

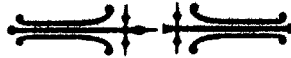
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- 1 **lugete:** *lugeo, lugere, luxi, luctum*, mourn, lament
- 2 **quantum:** *quantus-a-um*, (interrogative adj.) how much; used here as a pronoun upon which the subsequent genitives depend.  
**venustiorum:** *venustus-a-um*, adj., beautiful, charming. Note that this form is the genitive plural of the comparative degree of *venustus*, which modifies *hominum*, a genitive of the whole or partitive genitive.
- 5 **plus:** *plus, pluris*, adj., more  
**illa:** *ille-illa-illud*, (demonstrative pronoun/adjective) that;  
**illa:** nominative case, subject of the verb *amabat*, effectively an emphatic personal pronoun meaning she.  
**oculis:** *oculus, -i, m.*, eye; *oculis* is an ablative of comparison introduced by **plus**. Note the figure of speech, chiasmus.
- 6 **mellitus:** *mellitus-a-um*, adj., honey-sweet  
**norat = noverat:** syncopated pluperfect active form  
**norat:** *nosco, noscere, novi, notum*, know, be acquainted with
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- 7 **ipsam: ipse-ipsa-ipsum**, (intensive pronoun) -self; here **ipsam** is probably being used as a noun to stand for the words, "the lady herself, the lady in charge, the mistress"; essentially **ipsam = dominam**.
- 8 **gremio: gremium, -ii, n.**, lap
- 9 **circumsiliens: circumsilio, circumsilire**, hop around
- 10 **piplabat: pipio, pipiare or pipire, pipiavi, pipiatum**, chirp
- 11 **qui:** (relative pronoun) refers to **passer**  
**tenebricosum: tenebricosus-a-um**, adj., dark, obscure, murky
- 12 **quemquam: quisquam-quadquam**, (indefinite pronoun) anyone, anybody, any person
- 13 **sit:** may it be, may it go (jussive subjunctive)  
**male:** male, adv., badly  
**tenebrae: tenebrae, -arum, f.**, (plural) darkness (of the underworld)
- 14 **Orci: Orcus, -i, m.**, name of the god of the underworld, metonymy for the entire underworld  
**devoratis: devoro, devorare, devoravi, devoratum**, devour, destroy  
**bella: bellus-a-um**, adj., beautiful, nice. Note apostrophe, personification, and chiasmus in this line.
- 15 **mihi:** (dative of separation) from me  
**abstulistis: aufero, auferre, abstuli, ablatum**, take away, steal
- 16 **miselle: misellus-a-um**, adj., poor little (diminutive form of the adjective **miser-miseramiserum**)
- 17 **opera: opera, -ae, f.**, work, deed
- 18 **flendo: fleo, flere, flevi, fletum**, cry  
**turgiduli: turgidulus-a-um**, adj., swollen  
**rubent: rubeo, rubere, rubui**, be red, "bloodshot"





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- 7 **da: do, dare, dedi, datum, give**  
**mi = mihi**  
**basia: basium, basii, n., kiss; basium appears for the first time in Roman literature in Catullus.**  
Later authors such as Martial use the word frequently. Its origin is obscure; perhaps it was a dialectical word whose use was elevated by Catullus' poems; possibly it was native to Catullus' home in northern Italy.  
**deinde: deinde, adv., then**
- 9 **usque: adv., continuously, without a break**
- 10 **fecerimus: facio, facere, feci, factum, (future perfect form) make, do**
- 11 **conturbabimus: conturbo, conturbare, conturbavi, conturbatum, confuse, disturb, upset**  
**sciamus: scio, scire, scivi, scitum, know**
- 12 **quis = aliquis: (the indefinite pronoun) someone, anybody**  
**malus: malus-a-um, adj., bad, evil**  
**invidere: invideo, invidere, invidi, invisum, cast an evil eye upon**



## 8

The despair which pervades this poem suggests that its occasion must have been a catastrophic break-up between Lesbia and Catullus. Note the courage which the poet displays in composing the poem and balance that with the despair he exposes. The meter is limping iambs (choliambics or scazons).

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,  
 et quod vides perisse perditum ducas.  
 fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,  
 cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat  
 amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla. 5  
 ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,  
 quae tu volebas nec puella nolebat,  
 fulsere vere candidi tibi soles.  
 nunc iam illa non volt: tu quoque  
 inpote<ns noli>,  
 nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser vive, 10  
 sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.  
 vale, puella. iam Catullus obdurat,  
 nec te requiret nec rogabit invitam.  
 at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.  
 scelesta, vae te! quae tibi manet vita? 15  
 quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?  
 quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?  
 quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?  
 at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

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- 1 desinas: desino, desinere, desii, desitum, cease, stop  
 ineptire: ineptio, ineptire, make a fool of oneself
  - 2 perisse: pereo, perire, perii, peritum, perish, die  
 perditum: perdo, perdere, perdidi, perditum, destroy, ruin, lose  
 Ducas is a jussive subjunctive from duco.
  - 3 fulsere = fulserunt: fulgeo, fulgere, fulsi, shine  
 candidi: candidus-a-um, adj., bright
  - 4 ventitabas: ventito, ventitare, ventitavi, ventitatum, keep on going, keep following
  - 5 Nobis is dative of agent with amata.
  - 6 iocosa: iocosus-a-um, adj., joking, playful  
 fiebant: fio, fieri, factus sum, happen, take place
  - 7 Observe the litotes in this line.
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- 
- 9 **illa:** neuter plural or nominative singular? The impersonality of the third person nominative might lend a slight nuance to the rift between the lovers.  
**inpotens:** *inpotens, inpotentis*, adj., uncontrolled, powerless  
**noli:** *nolo, nolle, nolui*, not wish; the imperative followed by an infinitive means "don't."
- 10 **sectare:** *sector, sectari, sectatum*, run, chase, follow, run after; **sectare** is a form of the imperative.
- 11 **obstinata:** *obstinatus-a-um*, adj., resolute, determined, fixed  
**perfer:** *perfero, perferre, pertuli, perlatum*, carry through, endure, put up with  
**obdura:** *obduro, obdurare, obduravi, obduratum*, persist, stick it out
- 13 **requiret:** *requiro, requirere, requisivi, requisitum*, seek again, look after  
**invitam:** *invitus-a-um*, adj., unwilling
- 15 **scelestus:** *scelestus-a-um*, wretched, unfortunate  
**vae:** (interjection which governs the accusative or dative) *alas, woe!*
- 18 **labella:** *labellum, -i, n.*, little lip  
**mordebis:** *mordeo, mordere, momordi, morsum*, bite
- 19 **destinatus:** *destinatus-a-um*, adj., fixed, determined in mind





- 6 **Sagas:** *Sagae, -arum, m.*, Scythians  
**sagittiferosve:** *sagittifer-sagittifera-sagittiferum, adj.*, arrow bearing  
**Parthos:** *Parthi, -orum, m.*, Parthians, people living in Parthia, a land northeast of Syria, bounded by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
- 7 **septemgeminus:** *septemgeminus-a-um, adj.*, sevenfold, here perhaps "seven-throated"
- 8 **Nilus:** *Nilus, -i, m.*, Nile river
- 9 **gradietur:** *gradior, gradi, gressus sum, go, journey*
- 13 **omnia haec:** object of temptare in line 14  
**quaecumque:** *quicumque-quaecumque-quodcumque, whatever*  
**voluntas:** *voluntas, voluntatis, f.*, wish, will
- 14 **caelitem:** *caeles, caelitis, m./f.*, heaven-dweller, god
- 17 **vivat:** *vivo, vivere, vixi, victum, live*  
**valeat:** *valeo, valere, valui, be strong, be healthy*  
**moechis:** *moechus, -i, m.*, adulterer
- 18 **complexa:** *complector, complecti, complexus sum, embrace*  
**trecentos:** *trecenti-ae-a, adj., m.*, three hundred
- 19 **vere:** *vere, adv.*, truly  
**identidem:** *identidem, adv.*, continually, again and again
- 20 **ilia:** *ilia, ilium, n. (plural)*, the groin  
**rumpens:** *rumpo, rumpere, rupi, ruptum, break, burst*
- 21 **respectet:** *respecto, respectare, respectavi, respectatum, look back upon*
- 22 **velut:** *velut, adv.*, just as  
**prati:** *pratium, -i, n.*, meadow
- 23 **ultimi:** *ultimus-a-um, adj.*, ultimate, at the edge of  
**flos:** *flos, floris, m.*, flower  
**praetereunte:** *praetereo, praeterire, praeterivi, praeteritum, to go past*
- 24 **tactus:** *tango, tangere, tetigi, tactum, touch*  
**aratro:** *aratrum, -i, n.*, plow

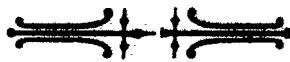


## 31

This poem expresses the poet's joy upon return to his native Sirmio after the celebrated trip to Bithynia completed in 56 B.C. The poem lends itself to associations with Poems 4 and 46. The meter is limping iambics (choliambics or scazons).

Paene insularum, Sirmio, insularumque  
 ocelle, quascumque in liquentibus stagnis  
 [marique vasto] fert uterque Neptunus, which  
 quam te libenter quamque laetus invisio,  
 vix mi ipse credens Thuniam atque Bithunos 5  
 liquisse campos et videre te in tuto.  
 O quid solutis est beatius curis,  
 cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino  
 labore fessi venimus larem ad nostrum,  
 desideratoque acquiescimus lecto? 10  
 hoc est quod unum est pro laboribus tantis.  
 salve, O venusta Sirmio, atque ero gaude  
 gaudente, vosque, O Lydiae lacus undae,  
 ridete quidquid est domi cachinnorum.

- 
- 2 ocelle: ocellus, -i, m., eye, here "jewel"  
 liquens, liquentis, adj., liquid, fluid, clear  
 stagnis: stagnum, -i, n., standing or still water
- 6 liquisse: linquo, linquere, liqui, leave, abandon
- 7 solutis: solvo, solvere, solvi, solutum, release, set free
- 8 peregrino: peregrinus-a-um, adj., foreign
- 9 larem: lar, laris, m., household god, (by metonymy) hearth, dwelling, home
- 10 acquiescimus: acquiesco, acquiescere, acquievi, acquietum, become physically quiet, re-  
 pose, rest  
 lecto: lectus, -i, m., bed
- 12 ero: erus, -i, m., master of the house (in respect to servants), owner
- 13 Lydiae: Lydius-a-um, adj., Lydian, Etruscan  
 lacus: lacus, -us, m., lake, pond
- 14 cachinnorum: cachinnus, -i, m., loud laugh, a jeering; used by some authors to suggest the  
 noise of clashing waves



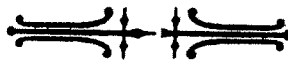
## 36

This poem conveys the impression that Lesbia has made a vow to Venus and Cupid that if Catullus would return to her and would end his sarcastic writing, she would offer up in sacrifice the best poems of the worst poet. The implication is that to Lesbia this meant that she would sacrifice selected verses of Catullus. But to Catullus, this means the poetry of that most awful poet Volusius. The meter is hendecasyllabic.

Annales Volusi, cacata carta,  
 votum solvite pro mea puella.  
 nam sanctae Veneri Cupidinique  
 vovit, si sibi restitutus essem  
 desissemque truces vibrare iambos, 5  
 electissima pessimi poetae  
 scripta tardipedi deo daturam  
 infelicibus ustulanda lignis.  
 et hoc pessima se puella vidit  
 iocose lepide vovere divis. 10  
 nunc o caeruleo creata ponto,  
 quae sanctum Idalium Uriosque apertos  
 quaeque Ancona Cnidumque harundinosam  
 colis quaeque Amathunta quaeque Golgos  
 quaeque Durrachium Hadriae tabernam, 15  
 acceptum face redditumque votum,  
 si non illepidum neque invenustum est.  
 at vos interea venite in ignem,  
 pleni ruris et inficetiarum  
 annales Volusi, cacata carta. 20

- 
- 1 **Annales:** *annalis, -is, m.*, yearly record, annal  
**cacata:** *caco, cacare, cacavi, cacatum*, defile, defecate  
**carta:** *carta, -ae, f.*, paper
- 2 **solvite:** *solvo, solvere, solvi, solutum*, dissolve, break up, free, release  
**votum:** *votum, -i, n.*, solemn vow
- 4 **vovit:** *voveo, vovere, vovi, votum*, vow  
**restitutus:** *restituo, restituere, restitui, restitutum*, restore
- 5 **desissemque:** *desino, desinere, desii, desitum*, give up, abandon, stop from  
**truces:** *trux, trucis, adj.*, savage, grim, fierce  
**vibrare:** *vibro, vibrare, vibravi, vibratum*, brandish, shake, flick
- 6 **electissima:** *electus-a-um, adj.*, select, picked
- 7 **tardipedi:** *tardipes, tardipedis, adj.*, slow-footed, limping
-

- 8 **infelicibus: infelix, infelicis, adj., unlucky**  
**ustulanda: ustulo, ustulare, ustulavi, ustulatum, burn a little, scorch**  
**lignis: lignum, -i, n., wood, firewood**
- 9 **Pessima must be nominative case to fit the meter.**
- 10 **iocose: iocose, adv., humorously**  
**lepide: lepide, adv., charmingly**
- 11 **caeruleo: caeruleus-a-um, adj., blue**  
**creata: creo, creare, creavi, creatum, create, beget**
- 12 **Idalium was a city on Cyprus, center for the worship of Venus.**  
**Uriosque: Uria may refer to Uria, a city in the southern part of Apulia between Brundisium and Tarentum.**
- 13 **Ancona was a town near Picenum, modern Osculi Piceno, on Italy's Adriatic coast. Cnidus was the famed point on the southwest coast of Asia Minor where Praxiteles' great statue of Aphrodite was displayed.**  
**harundinosam: harundinosus-a-um, adj., overgrown with reeds**
- 14 **Amathunta . . . Golgos: Amathus and Golgi were two towns located on Cyprus.**
- 15 **Durrachium was the landing port in Illyria for ships which departed from Brundisium, and hence was a very heavily used seaport.**
- 16 **face: imperative form of facio (here instead of the more usual fac).**
- 19 **pleni: plenus-a-um, adj., full of (with genitive)**  
**inficetiarum: inficetiae, -arum, f., coarse jokes**





**ares:** *auris, auris, f.*, ear  
**gemina:** *geminus-a-um, adj.*, twin, both; this adjective is in the ablative case.  
**teguntur:** *tego, tegere, texi, tectum, cover, cloak*

- 13 **otium:** *otium, otii, n.*, free time, ease, leisure  
**molestum:** *molestus-a-um, adj.*, troublesome, irksome
- 14 **exsultas:** *exsulto, exsultare, exsultavi, exsultatum, revel in, boast about*  
**gestis:** *gestio, gestire, gestivi, gestitum, throw oneself about, be cheerful about, long for*



## 53

This anecdote in hendecasyllabic meter compliments the eloquence of Catullus' friend Licinius Calvus, who was noted for his prosecution of Vatinius. It is impossible to determine from the text whether Calvus' speech of 58 or 54 B.C. is referenced. The clever wit of Catullus animates the poem.

Risi nescio quem modo e corona,  
 qui, cum mirifice Vatiniana  
 meus crimina Calvos explicasset,  
 admirans ait haec manusque tollens,  
 'di magni, salaputium disertum!'

5

- 1 **risi:** *rideo, ridere, risi, risum, laugh*  
**nescio:** *nescio, nescire, nescivi, nescitum, not to know, be ignorant of; with the indefinite pronoun quem: someone (or other)*  
**modo:** *modo, adv.*, just, now, only recently  
**corona:** *corona, -ae, f.*, a circle of bystanders at a trial
- 2 **mirifice:** *mirifice, adv.*, wonderfully, exceedingly  
**Vatiniana:** *Vatinianus-a-um, adj.*, of or belonging to a certain Vitinius, whose name became associated with disrepute after prosecutions by Cicero and Calvus
- 3 **Calvos = Calvus:** prosecutor of Vatinius
- 5 **salaputium:** *salaputium, -ii, n.*, midget  
**disertum:** *disertus-a-um, adj.*, eloquent, clever in speaking

