GAIUS VALERIUS CATULLUS

Complementary Infinitives and Infinitives with Impersonal Verbs; Partitive Genitive; Diminutives; *Cum* Clauses; Imperatives and Prohibitions; Conditional Sentences; Positive, Comparative, and Superlative Adjectives and Adverbs; Genitive and Dative Pronouns

Chiasmus, Sibilance, Anaphora, Apostrophe, Rhetorical Question, Hyperbaton, Onomatopoeia, Transferred Epithet

Antonio Zucchi (1726–1795) depicts the poetic tradition of Cupid inspiring the Greek poet Sappho in his painting "Sappho Taking Notes from Love." Catullus highly esteemed the poetry of Sappho and emulated her work in his own love poetry.

MEMORĀBILE DICTŪ

Vīvāmus, mea Lesbia, atque amēmus.

"Let us live and love, my Lesbia." (Catullus 5.1)

In this often quoted line, Catullus links living and loving, and later in the poem he recommends a life of love since humans are ultimately mortal.

INTRODUCTION TO CATULLUS

Gaius Valerius Catullus is considered one of Rome's most beloved and influential poets. The time during which he lived, however, was tumultuous, characterized by the aftermath of Sulla's dictatorship (82–79 BCE), by the slave revolt of Spartacus (73–71 BCE), by the conspiracy of Catiline to overthrow the state (63 BCE), and by the jockeying for power by three ambitious and ruthless men, Crassus, Caesar, and Pompey, in the years 70 BCE and following. Periods of civil unrest often generate great literary works, and the collection of Catullus's poetry is no exception. This body of literature represents some of the most original and brilliant poetry of the time, and it was considered a classic already by the early 40s and late 30s BCE when Vergil and Horace began writing poetry.

CATULLUS'S LIFE

Catullus was born around 84 BCE and died in Rome some thirty years later, around 54–52 BCE. He was born in Verona, Italy, to a wealthy and prominent family. According to Suetonius (first century CE), Catullus's father entertained Julius Caesar at his home in Verona. Like other young men from well-to-do provincial families, Catullus was sent to Rome to receive an education that would lead to a career in law and/or politics. From his poetry we learn that Catullus served on the staff of the praetorian governor Gaius Memmius who was assigned the province of Bithynia (57–56 BCE), which in modern times approximates the territory now occupied by north central Turkey. Although Catullus's year abroad in Bithynia was financially disappointing, his assignment to this province apparently afforded him the opportunity to visit the grave of his brother who had died and was buried in the vicinity of ancient Troy.

LESBIA

Catullus wrote poems on many topics, including love, friendship, poetry, marriage, his own and his friends' experiences in the provinces, and social mores. His poems also contain sometimes bitter attacks on rivals for the affections of a beloved, on friends who betray him, on political figures, on social upstarts, and on inferior poets. But he is most well known for the series of love poems about a woman whom he refers to as "Lesbia." Most critics believe that the Lesbia poems are based on a real-life experience.

The name Lesbia alludes to the Greek lyric poetess Sappho of Lesbos, whose love poetry influenced Catullus. The name is intended to suggest a woman possessing the irresistible combination of great intelligence and passion. Almost certainly "Lesbia" is a pseudonym for the very aristocratic Clodia, wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer (who held the consulship shortly before his death in 59 BCE) and the older sister of the notorious Clodius Pulcher, one of whose more risqué exploits involved disguising himself as a woman in order to infiltrate the exclusively female religious festival of the *Bona Dea* in 62 BCE. The love affair proved to be tempestuous because Catullus the lover expected fidelity from his lady while Lesbia's/Clodia's apparently

flirtatious character attracted the attention of a number of admirers. One of these admirers was Marcus Caelius Rufus, who betrayed his friend Catullus by becoming involved with Lesbia/Clodia (this is hinted at in Poem 77). Cicero provides us with a picture of this fascinating woman in the *Prō Caeliō* (56 BCE), where he ruthlessly maligns Clodia's character. In his speech on Caelius's behalf, Cicero defends his protégé from several charges, one of which was plotting to poison Clodia, and argues that the entire trial was motivated by Clodia's deep resentment that her lover broke off the affair with her.

It is important to recognize that Catullus the poet has created a character "Catullus" who is the central figure in his poetry. This character is called the poet's "persona" and can be witty, charming, playful, romantic, arrogant, foul-mouthed, whining, and verbally abusive. The infatuation of this character with Lesbia has great importance for the poetry because the intense and obsessive quality of his love for her serves as a predominant theme that integrates the entire collection.

From a Roman perspective, Catullus's relationship with Lesbia was unusual because he describes his love for her as transcending the physical. As a result, Catullus struggles to express the unique quality of this love and resorts to using vocabulary that characterizes male friendship and social/political networks among Rome's male elite (e.g., *foedus, fidēs, amīcitia*).

THE NEOTERICS

During the middle of the first century, a literary revolution took place in Republican Rome. Catullus and like-minded poets of his generation discovered in Alexandrian literature of the third century BCE (for example, the poet Callimachus) literary values that were relevant and adaptable to their own literary ideals. Like their Alexandrian predecessors, these poets were interested in experimenting with meter, language, content, style, and genre. They preferred short poems over long, discursive epics and personal poetry over that concerned with the public sphere. They embraced the qualities of originality, erudition, and refinement, infusing Latin poetry with new life by introducing to it the language of the man on the street. Conversational language having to do with charm and wit and their opposite notions (*lepidus/illepidus, venustus/invenustus, ēlegāns/inēlegāns, urbānus/inurbānus*, and *salsus/insulsus*) often is featured in poems having to do with social correctness. Diminutives, also characteristic of informal language, permeate the poetry, adding to the effect Catullus is trying to achieve, whether it is wit, irony, sarcasm, sadness, or affection. Cicero refers to these individuals as the "neoterics" or "new poets."

The poetry is lively and entertaining, and the characters Catullus introduces are unforgettable, from Suffenus who is sophisticated until he sets his hand to composing poetry—then he is more rustic than the rustic countryside—to Rufus, who has a bad case of body odor, to Egnatius, who is so socially inept he grins all the time, including on the wrong occasions. The principal topics of love and friendship transcend time; the poetry seems as relevant and original today as when Catullus composed it over two thousand years ago.

CATULLUS'S *LIBELLUS*

The poetry of Catullus made its way into the Middle Ages by the slimmest of threads. A single manuscript of the poetry came to light in Verona near the start of the 14th century; fortunately several copies of this manuscript were made before the original disappeared as mysteriously as it had appeared. The extant collection consists of three major parts: the polymetra (1–60), short poems that are composed in a variety of meters, but mostly in hendecasyllables; the long poems (61–68b), which form the centerpiece of the collection, unified by the theme of marriage; and the elegiac epigrams (69–116), short poems written in elegiac couplets.

The question of whether the order of the poems reflects the hand of Catullus or that of a post-humous editor has been the subject of intense debate. Some scholars are now of the opinion that Catullus organized all (and not just part) of the transmitted text because the organization resembles that in later collections of Latin poetry, where ring patterns of thematically paired poems emerge as the unifying principle. Just as Catullus experimented with form, meter, and content in the individual poems, so the organization of the collection on the basis of length, meter, and, to a certain extent, theme seems experimental, the result, perhaps, of Catullus's deciding to assemble and integrate his best work in a single body of poetry. Verbal repetition often signals relationships between thematically related poems. For instance Poems 49 and 58 are linked by the nearly identical phrases *Romulī nepōtum* (49.1) and *Remī nepōtēs* (58.5), which, in turn, suggest a link between the poems' recipients, Cicero and Caelius (who almost certainly is the same person as Cicero's protégé, M. Caelius Rufus). Recognition of these relationships serves to enhance the interpretation of individual poems. For example, Poems 107 and 109 both deal with the theme of reconciliation of Catullus and Lesbia. While Poem 107 describes Catullus's ecstatic happiness that he and Lesbia are a couple again, Poem 109 reacts to this totally unexpected development, with Catullus having doubts that his lady is capable of making a permanent and exclusive commitment to him alone. The correspondence of Poem 109 to 107, therefore, tempers the rapturous joy of the first of the two poems.

CATULLUS'S LEGACY

Catullus appears to be "the first poet in Greek or Latin who decided to write about a particular love-affair in depth in a related collection of poems" (R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets* [Oxford, 1980] 21). This innovation inspired later writers of Latin love poetry (Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid). Roughly one-fourth of the short poems in the collection (both the polymetrics and elegiacs), together with the long poem 68B, chronicle the on-again, off-again love affair between Lesbia and Catullus in his persona as infatuated lover. This series contains some of Catullus's most memorable and remarkable literary pieces that are so engaging that we share in the lover's desire, joy, anguish, anger, frustration, and despair. It seems appropriate, therefore, that Catullus principally is celebrated as a poet of love.

Our English word "paper" is derived from the Latin *papyrus*, which refers to the parchment-like material made from the papyrus plant, which grew abundantly in the Nile river delta. Pliny the Elder describes the process of making paper in his *Historia Natūrālis* 13.74–82. This image is helpful in visualizing the *libellus* Catullus discusses in his dedicatory poem (see p. 82).

READING 1

In Latin prose and poetry, the reader often needs to "understand" or supply words that are not in the Latin text. Words to be understood are in parentheses in the text below. Different fonts point out words that belong together.

In Poem 1 Catullus dedicates his new book of poems to Cornelius Nepos, whom you met in *Latin for the New Millennium*, Chapter 8 of Level 1 (see p. 123) and then you met him in each chapter of Level 2, where you read selections from his biography of Cicero's confidant and friend Atticus. Like Catullus, Atticus's contemporary Cornelius Nepos (110–24 BCE) hailed from Cisalpine Gaul. Catullus compliments his friend in this poem by describing his and Nepos's literary achievements in similar terms.

THE DEDICATION OF CATULLUS'S *LIBELLUS*

CATULLUS *CARMEN* 1

Meter: Hendecasyllable (for the meter see Appendix B.)

1   Cui dōnō (hunc) *lepidum novum libellum*

    āridā modo *pūmice expolītum?*

    Cornēlī, tibi: namque tū solēbās

    meās esse aliquid putāre *nūgās*

5   iam tum, cum (tū) **ausus es** ūnus Ītalōrum

    omne aevum *tribus* explicāre *cartīs*

    doctīs, Iuppiter, et *labōriōsīs.*

    quārē habē tibi quidquid hoc (est) libellī

    quālecumque; quod, ō patrōna virgō,

10 plūs *ūnō* maneat perenne *saeclō.*

NOTES AND VOCABULARY

Line 1:   **cui:** the dative of *quis,* meaning "to whom"

        dōnō (1) to give

        lepidus, -a, -um charming, delightful

        libellus, -ī, m. little book; *libellus* is the diminutive of *liber, librī*, m. book; see the Language Fact later in this chapter on p. 89.

Line 2:   **āridus, -a, -um** dry

        modo, *adv.* just now, recently‡

        pūmex, pumicis, f. pumice stone‡

        expoliō, expolīre, expolīvī, expolītum to polish

Line 3:   **Cornelī:** refers to Cornelius Nepos.‡

　　　　namque, *conj.* for; *namque* is an emphatic form of *nam.*

　　　　soleō, solēre, solitus sum (semi-deponent) to be accustomed

Line 4:   **aliquid:** something; i.e., something noteworthy

　　　　putō (1) to think; *putāre meās nūgās esse*: indirect statement, "to think that my trifles were."

　　　　nūgae, -ārum, f. pl. trifles

Line 5:   **cum,** *conj.* when

　　　　audeō, audēre, ausus sum (semi-deponent) to dare

　　　　ūnus = *sōlus*

　　　　Ītalus, -a, -um Italian

STUDY TIP

Semi-deponent verbs have active forms and active meanings in the present, imperfect, and future tenses but in the perfect tenses the forms are passive with active meanings. Some examples of semi-deponent verbs are *audeō, audēre, ausus sum* "to dare"; *gaudeō, gaudēre, gāvīsus sum* "to rejoice"; and *soleō, solēre, solitus sum* "to be accustomed."

Line 6:   **aevum, -ī,** n. age, history, time

　　　　trēs, tria three

　　　　explicō (1) to explain

　　　　carta, -ae, f. a sheet of papyrus; here, "volume"

Line 7:   **doctus, -a, -um** learned, knowledgeable

　　　　Iuppiter: translate this nominative of exclamation "by Jove!"

　　　　labōriōsus, -a, -um full of (involving) work

BY THE WAY

Quārē can be written as one word or as two, *quā rē*. As an interrogative, *quārē* means "how?" or "why?" As a relative, *quārē* means "therefore, on which account." In line 8, however, it is a simple adverb meaning "therefore."

Line 8:   **quārē,** *adv.* therefore

　　　　tibi: a reflexive pronoun; translate "have this book for yourself."

　　　　quisquis, quidquid whoever, whatever

Line 9:   **quāliscumque, quālecumque** of whatever sort

　　　　patrōna, -ae, f. patroness, protectress

　　　　virgō: indirect reference to the muse; translate "maiden."

Line 10:   **perennis, perenne** lasting a long time, eternal

　　　　saeculum, -ī, n. age, generation; *saeclum* is the syncopated form of *saeculum.*

　　　　ūnō . . . saeclō: this phrase is an ablative of comparison to be taken with *plūs*, "more than one generation."

　　　　maneat: a subjunctive expressing a wish, sometimes called the "optative subjunctive." Translate "May it . . ." (See Appendix D, p. 540, for more information on this topic.)

TAKE NOTE

1. In the time when Catullus was writing, a Roman book manuscript was rolled up and stored, and unrolled to be read. To make up a roll, papyrus was soaked and cut into strips, which were then joined together to create one sheet of varying length. The sheets were then joined together to produce a roll, and the sheets were polished with pumice to provide a smooth writing surface. When stored, a Roman book resembled a roll of wallpaper. Pumice also was used to smooth the ends of a roll of papyrus, which is what Catullus refers to in line 2.

2. Be careful to distinguish the adverb *modo* that means "just now, recently, only" from *modō,* the ablative singular of *modus, -ī,* m. "manner, method." You can tell the difference only by the final long vowel. When the adverb *modo* is seen twice in a sentence, the pair means "sometimes . . . sometimes" or "now . . . now" or "at one time . . . at another time." The phrase *non modo . . . sed etiam* means "not only . . . but also."

3. Cornelius Nepos was born in a small town in northern Italy near Verona, the birthplace of Catullus and home of Shakespeare's legendary couple, Romeo and Juliet. According to Catullus, Cornelius's work (entitled *Chronica),* like his own collection of poetry, is characterized by innovation and literary achievement. In addition, Catullus indicates that Nepos's history of three volumes exhibits *doctrīna* "learning," a quality highly esteemed by Catullus and his fellow poets. The excessively flattering praise in lines 5–7 lends a humorous touch to Catullus's tribute, which correlates with the poet's modesty regarding his own accomplishment.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of phrases and words that Catullus uses to describe his book. Provide the Latin and their English equivalents.
2. If these words describe not only the physical book but also the poems it contains, what is Catullus telling us about his poetry?
3. Why would Catullus use words like *nūgae* that might indicate that the poems were unimportant?

▶ EXERCISE 1

1. In line 2, what Latin word does *āridā* modify?
2. In line 2, what case is *expolītum* and why?
3. What case is *Cornēlī* in line 3?
4. What word is complementary to *solēbās* in lines 3–4?
5. Translate *ausus es* (line 5).
6. In line 6, what case and use is *tribus cartīs*?
7. What Latin word does *labōriōsīs* (line 7) modify?

VOCABULARY BUILDER

Here are some English derivatives based on words in Poem 1. From what Latin word in the poem is each derived? Give the Latin vocabulary entry and the English meaning for each word.

1. perennial

2. novice

3. putative

4. arid

5. secular

6. explicate

7. laborious

8. patron

LANGUAGE FACT

COMPLEMENTARY INFINITIVES AND INFINITIVES WITH IMPERSONAL VERBS

- **Complementary Infinitives**

  A complementary infinitive completes the meaning of another verb in the sentence. Complementary infinitives do not take an accusative subject. Consider these examples.

  > *namque tū solēbās . . . putāre* (Catullus 1.3–4)
  > "for you were accustomed to think . . ."

  > *cum ausus es . . . explicāre* (Catullus 1.5–6)
  > "when you dared to explain . . ."

- **Infinitives with Impersonal Verbs**

  Many impersonal verbs also govern an infinitive. The person doing the action in these phrases is sometimes in the dative case and other times in the accusative.

  > *Nōn libet mihi scrībere magnum librum.*
  > "It does not please me to write a large book."

  > *Oportet mē scrībere doctum libellum.*
  > "It is necessary for me to write a learned little book."

Here is a list of some of the verbs that take complementary infinitives and impersonal expressions that govern an infinitive.

Verbs Governing a Complementary Infinitive	Impersonal Verbs Governing an Infinitive
possum, posse, potuiī to be able, can	libet (+ *dat.*) it is pleasing
audeō, audēre, ausus sum to dare	placet (+ *dat.*) it is pleasing
soleō, solēre, solitus sum to be accustomed	visum est (+ *dat.*) it seemed
coepī, coepisse to have begun	oportet (+ *acc.*) it is necessary
dubitō (1) to hesitate	pudet (+ *acc.*) it shames
dēbeō, dēbēre, dēbuī, dēbitum to ought	licet (+ *dat.* or *acc.*) it is allowed, permitted
dēsinō, dēsinere, dēsīvī, dēsitum to cease	necesse est (+ *dat.* or *acc.*) it is necessary

▶ EXERCISE 2

Translate. Identify whether each sentence contains a complementary infinitive, an infinitive with an impersonal verb, or an infinitive in an indirect statement (see pp. 72–73 in the Caesar chapter of this book).

1. Cornēlī, dubitāsne meās esse aliquid putāre nūgās?

2. Necesse est mē omne aevum tribus explicāre cartīs.

3. Placet mihi scrībere lepidum novum libellum.

4. Sciō meum libellum āridā modo pūmice expolītum esse.

5. Licet tibi habēre quidquid hoc est libellī.

6. Meus libellus plūs ūnō manēre perenne saeclō potest.

7. Cornēlius existimāvit sē omne aevum tribus cartīs explicātūrum esse.

LANGUAGE FACT

PARTITIVE GENITIVE

Most genitive case nouns translate with the word "of." Sometimes there is a better or more natural way to translate genitive nouns. The partitive genitive expresses the "whole" of which a "part" is being described.

> *optima pars libellī . . .*
> "the best part of the little book"

> *quidquid hoc libellī . . .* (Catullus 1.8)
> "whatever this (is) of a little book"   **LITERAL TRANSLATION**
> "this little book, such as it is"   **MORE NATURAL**
>   **TRANSLATION**

▶ EXERCISE 3

Fill in the blank with the genitive of the phrase requested. Give a literal and then a more natural translation of each sentence.

Example: quantum est hominum beātiōrum (hominēs beātiōrēs)
literal: how much there is of rather blessed people
natural: however many happy people there are

1.   quantum est _____ (hominēs doctiōrēs)
2.   quidquid est _____ (nūgae)
3.   tantum _____ (pecūnia) habēs
4.   aliquid _____ (bonum)
5.   nihil _____ (novum)

READING 1 REDUX

You are now ready to read the poem exactly as Catullus wrote it. For this reason, the words in parentheses and the special use of fonts are no longer used. You have already seen notes in the first version of this poem and you may refer to those notes if you need to. Additional notes are given below the text.

CATULLUS *CARMEN* 1

1   Cui dōnō lepidum novum libellum

     āridā modo pūmice expolītum?

     Cornēlī, tibi: namque tū solēbās

     meās esse aliquid putāre nūgās

5   iam tum, cum ausus es ūnus Ītalōrum

     omne aevum tribus explicāre cartīs

     doctīs, Iuppiter, et labōriōsīs.

     quārē habē tibi quidquid hoc libellī

     quālecumque; quod, <ō> patrōna virgō,

10   plūs ūnō maneat perenne saeclō.

NOTES AND VOCABULARY

Line 1:   Poem 1 is the only formal introductory poem contained in the collection. This poem may have been intended to serve as an introduction to the entire work. If so, the diminutive *libellus* does not reflect the size of the collection ("a small book"), but rather reflects the modest tone characteristic of the poem as a whole with regard to Catullus's achievement.

Lines 1–2: **lepidum novum. . . expolītum:** these adjectives apply to the external appearance of the book as well as to the poetry contained within the book.

Line 3:   **Cornēlī:** Cornelius Nepos's *Chronica*, the three-volume history referred to in this line, is not extant. Cornelius was friends not only with Catullus and Cicero but also with Atticus.

Line 8:   **habē tibi:** an abrupt, colloquial phrase with legalistic overtones suggesting the transfer of real property: essentially Catullus says, "Take it in 'as-is' condition."

Line 9:   The symbol < > is supplied by editors and indicates there is a missing word, syllable, or phrase in the text. Here we know that there has been an omission of a word or syllable as the line is hendecasyllabic (having eleven syllables) but has only ten syllables. The text can easily be restored by the addition of "*ō*."

        <ō> patrōna virgō: Note that Catullus does not ask the Muse for inspiration, a request one would expect in an introductory poem, but rather asks her to assure the immortality of the work.

LANGUAGE FACT

DIMINUTIVES

Many languages have special forms that indicate something is a smaller version of something else. Diminutives often imply affection and "cuteness" as well.

So in Spanish *perro* is "dog" but *perrito* is "puppy," and you might affectionately call your father *papito* instead of *papá*. We have diminutives in English too. A "piglet" could never be confused with a "pig," and if you had an hour, you might finish reading a "booklet" but never a "book." Other examples in English include kitchenette, gosling (a lot smaller than a goose!), and diskette.

Catullus likes and often coins diminutives. Their meaning is usually clear if you know the word from which they derive.

STUDY TIP

Latin diminutives tend to have the letter "l" in their endings, e.g., *-lus, -lum, -ella*.

▶ EXERCISE 4

Fill in the following chart. All the words are used by Catullus in his other poems.

Diminutive	Meaning	Latin Word from Which It Is Derived
libellus	"little book"	liber, book
ocellus	_____	oculus, eye
frīgidulus, -a, -um	_____	frīgidus, cold
labellum	_____	labrum, lip
flōsculus	_____	flōs, flower
misellus, -a, -um	_____	miser, wretched, lovesick
amīculus	_____	amīcus, friend
versiculus	_____	versus, a verse, line of poetry

ESSAY

Use your answers to the first two comprehension questions on p. 84 to help you write this essay.

Discuss what qualities characterize good literature based on the information presented in Poem 1.

Support your assertions with references drawn from throughout the poem. All Latin words must be copied or their line numbers provided, AND they must be translated or paraphrased closely enough so that it is clear you understand the Latin. Direct your answer to the question; do not merely summarize the passage. Please write your essay on a separate piece of paper.

SCANSION

Name the meter and scan the following lines.

iam tum, cum ausus es ūnus Ītalōrum

omne aevum tribus explicāre cartīs

doctīs, Iuppiter, et labōriōsīs.

A mosaic of one of the Evangelists (the authors of the Gospels of the Christian New Testament) demonstrates the continuity of Roman influence in the Byzantine world. The Evangelist is dressed in a Roman toga and sandals. He has unrolled his papyrus with its Greek script. Catullus's collection of poems would have been written on a similar papyrus scroll.