

A Little Book of Latin Love Poetry

A Transitional Reader for
Catullus, Horace, and Ovid

by

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SELECTION I

Catullus 51.1–12 Modified

READING VOCABULARY

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| <p>Line 1 pār – pār, (pāris) (+ dative): equal, like</p> <p>2 fās est – “it is (divinely) allowed (lawful, right)”</p> <p>superāre – superō, superāre, superāvī, superātum: be above, surpass</p> <p>3 adversus – adversus, -a, -um: turned toward, facing, opposite</p> <p>identidem – adv.: repeatedly, again and again</p> <p>4 dulce – dulcis, -e: sweet, pleasant</p> <p>řidentem – řideō, řidēre, řisī, řisum: laugh, smile</p> <p>6 nam – conj.: for</p> <p>aspexī – aspiciō, aspicere, aspexī, aspectum: look at, behold, lay eyes on</p> | <p>7 ōre – ōs, ōris, n.: mouth; pl. face, countenance</p> <p>superest – supersum, superesse, superfuī, superfutūrus: be left over, to survive</p> <p>8 torpet – torpeō, torpēre, torpuī, _____: be paralyzed or numb</p> <p>9 tenuis – tenuis, -e: thin, slender</p> <p>artus – artus, -ūs, m.: joint, limb</p> <p>dēmānat – dēmānō, dēmānāre, dēmānāvī, _____: run/drip down, trickle, flow, spread</p> <p>10 tintinnant – tintinnō, tintinnāre, _____, _____: make a ringing sound, to ring</p> <p>11 teguntur – tegō, tegere, texī, tectum: cover</p> |
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READING HELPS

Latin, like other languages, has many contractions, synonyms, and idiomatic, poetic or colloquial expressions. Several of these are found in this opening selection.

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| <p>Line 1 <i>Ille</i> is a demonstrative adjective used substantively as the subject of <i>vidētur</i>.</p> <p><i>mī</i> (cf. lines 2 and 7) is a common contraction of <i>mihi</i>.</p> <p><i>vidētur</i>: The passive voice of <i>videō</i> often has the meaning of “seem” and patterns with a predicate noun/adjective or, as here, a complementary infinitive (<i>esse</i> and <i>superāre</i>).</p> <p>2 <i>dīvōs</i> is a synonym for the more common noun <i>deōs</i>.</p> <p>3 <i>sedēns</i>, modifying <i>quī</i>, and <i>řidentem</i> (in line 4), modifying <i>tē</i>, are present active participles. See Major Review #2 if the topic of participles is unfamiliar.</p> <p>4 <i>dulce</i> is an “adverbial accusative,” an accusative form used as a positive degree adverb: “sweetly.”</p> | <p>5 The relative pronoun <i>quod</i> has an “understood” antecedent, and consequently means “a thing which . . .”</p> <p>The phrase <i>mihi miserō</i> is a clear example of the poetic “dative of separation” replacing the more common “ablative of separation.”</p> <p>6 <i>simul atque</i>, introducing a temporal clause here, means “as soon as.”</p> <p>7 The phrase <i>nihil vōcis</i> illustrates the colloquial “genitive of the whole/partitive genitive” construction. “Nothing of a voice” really means “no voice.”</p> <p>11 The final line is a vivid reminder that this is modified <u>poetry</u>, for the poet employs METONYMY twice in this line. METONYMY is the poetic device by which a poet uses one word for another it suggests. Here, the <i>lūmina</i>, “lights” of the body, suggest the eyes. What then does <i>geminā nocte</i>, “twin (or two-fold) night,” suggest?</p> |
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FOR YOUR INFORMATION (hereafter merely FYI)

- Line 2 The indeclinable noun *fās* conveys a very different idea from *lex* or *iūs*. The distinctions will become more clear if the differences among nefarious acts, illegal acts and unjust acts are considered.
- Line 5 Poets sometimes use a “dative of agent” where prose writers use an “ablative of agent” too.
- Line 6 When *atque* appears after *simul*, *aequē*, *īdem* or *pariter*, it means “as.”
- Line 7 Similar to the phrase *nihil vōcis*, consider the phrases *satis pecuniae*, *nimis stultitiae*, *multum aquae*, *parum frumentī* or *plūs virtūtis*.
- Line 10 *Caveat lector!!!* (“Let the reader beware!!!”) The declensional endings help distinguish *auris*, -is, f. (“ear”) from *aura*, -ae, f. (“breeze”) and *aurum*, -ī, n. (“gold”).

Catullus 51.1–12 Modified

This poem follows the text of a Greek poem by Sappho, a poet in the seventh century BCE, who lived on the island of Lesbos off the coast of Asia Minor. Catullus pays tribute to Sappho by using “Lesbia” as a pseudonym for his own object of desire, believed by many scholars to be Clodia, a patrician woman with a notorious reputation (cf. **Introduction**). She has been variously associated with the corruption of young men (in particular M. Caelius Rufus), with religious impropriety, and with the exile of Cicero.

Many readers consider this poem the first in Catullus’ cycle of poems to Lesbia. In the text below, Catullus describes a man sitting opposite Lesbia, but focuses upon the poet’s own physical reactions to her presence.



Sappho

Ille mī pār esse deō vidētur,
 ille, sī fās est, mī superāre dīvōs vidētur,
 quī sedēns adversus identidem tē spectat
 et tē dulce rīdentem audit,
 5 quod omnēs sensūs mihi miserō ēripit:

nam simul atque tē, Lesbia, aspexī,
 nihil vōcis mī in ōre superest
 sed lingua torpet,
 tenuis flamma sub artūs dēmānat,
 10 aurēs sonitū suō tintinnant,
 et lūmina mea geminā nocte teguntur.

ANALYSIS AND COMPREHENSION OF THE LATIN TEXT

(See **Notes to Students** for information about the differences between the various types of questions)

1. To whom does the demonstrative adjective *ille* in lines 1–2 refer? the personal pronouns *mī/mihi* in lines 1, 2, 5 and 7? and *tē* in lines 3, 4, and 6?
2. Identify the antecedents of the relative pronouns *quī* in line 3 and *quod* in line 5.

LITERARY ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. What impact does the text suggest the sight of Lesbia has upon the poet? Is this description meant to be taken seriously, or is it an exaggeration? If it is the latter, the poet is employing **HYPERBOLE** to heighten or exaggerate the dramatic effect, another poetic technique (cf. **METONYMY** in the Reading Help for line 11).