

Writing Passion

A Catullus Reader



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Latin Text • Notes • Vocabulary

For AP[®] and College Use

CATULLUS 5

Living/dying, human time/nature's time, calculating/losing track, knowing/not knowing, light/night, kisses and more kisses. Central to this poem is the notion of what has value. (Recall this same issue from Poem 1 where Nepos' valuing of Catullus' "worthless stuff" makes him worthy of being a dedicatee.) Here, the strict moral code of the gossiping old men is to be "counted" as worthless, while the kisses of the oppositional life of making love are to be "counted" repeatedly (and then confused). It is interesting that the "oppositional" life incorporates the language of what it claims to oppose. Must the erotic be quantified?

Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus,
rumoresque senum severiorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!
soles occidere et redire possunt;
nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux,

5

Meter: Hendecasyllabic

- 1 vīvō, vīvere, vixī, victum, live
amō, amāre, amāvī, amātum, love, make love
vīvāmus...amēmus: Note the word order of line 1. The first person plural verbs of exhortation act as a frame, surround Lesbia, and occupy the emphatic initial and final positions in the line. Notice the ASSONANCE of the *m* sound, perhaps anticipating through its labial formation the kissing to follow.
- 2 rūmor, rūmōris, *m.*, clamor, gossip, rumor, unfavorable report, favorable report
senex, senis, *m.*, old man
sevērus, -a, -um, *adj.*, strict, severe, serious
- 3 aestimō, aestimāre, aestimāvī, aestimātum, value, assess at
as, assis, *m.*, coin of small value, penny
ūnius...assis: genitive of value
rūmorēs...assis: Note the ASSONANCE of the *s* sound in lines 2-3 possibly imitating the sound of people gossiping and/or a hissing at them on the part of the speaker.
- 4 sōl, sōlis, *m.*, sun, a day (as determined by the rising of the sun)
occidō, occidere, occidī, occāsum, fall, die
redeō, redire, rediī, reditum, go back, come back, return
- 5 nōbīs: functions as dative of reference or dative of agent with passive periphrastic
semel, *adv.*, once, once and for all
brevis, -e, *adj.*, short, brief
lux, lūcis, *f.*, light, daylight, day, life

nox est perpetua una dormienda.
 da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
 dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
 deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum;
 dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,
 conturbabimus, illa ne sciamus,
 aut ne quis malus invidere possit
 cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.

10

- 6 **nōbīs...lux**: Note the lack of ELISION in line 5 as well as the abrupt rhythm coming to a halt with the unusual monosyllabic conclusion. The brevity of our "light/life" is imaged in the sound of the line.

perpetuus, -a, -um, adj., continuing, permanent, connected

nox...dormienda: lux, "light/life," which ends line 5 immediately becomes **nox** "night" at the beginning of line 6. The similarity of the two words, both monosyllables, both ending in the letter *x* underlines their identification and distinction. An almost epigrammatic **nox est** suggests a definition: night "is" the following, but we must allow the **est** to serve another function as well, as part of the passive periphrastic with **dormienda**. In seeing this, we shift from possible definition to a vision of necessity. The ELISION between **perpetua** and **una** has a lulling, almost soporific effect, yet the sensual sound makes nicely ambiguous night as erotic opportunity or death.

- 7 **bāsiū, bāsī, n.**, kiss

bāsia: this word first attested in Catullus

The succinct imperative, **dā mī bāsia**, is a "wake-up call" for immediate action. What follows is a lingering elaboration upon that idea. Note the careful use of ANAPHORA in lines 7–9. **Mille** and **centum** alternate three times while they repeat, while the adverb **deinde/dein** repeats each time in the initial position of its phrase. The mix of erotic exuberance and exquisite linguistic control is a hallmark of Catullus' style.

- 8 **dein=deinde**

- 9 **usque, adv.**, continuously, continually, all the way

- 10 **fēcerīmus**: the verb can mean "count up"; note the long *i*

- 11 **conturbō, conturbāre, conturbāvī, conturbātum**, mix up, go bankrupt
sciō, scīre, scīvī, scītum, know

- 12 **quis, quid, interr. pron.**, who, what; **indef. pron.**, anyone, anything
malus, -a, -um, adj., bad, nasty, hostile, unfavorable
invidēō, invidēre, invīdī, invīsum, envy, begrudge, refuse

- 13 **tantum, -ī, n.**, so much
bāsiōrum: partitive genitive

CATULLUS

A COMMENTARY BY

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For the apostrophe see on 13 above. For the form of address to the brothers cf. Hor. *Epod.* 17. 42 f. 'Castor . . . fraterque magni Castoris', Prop. ii. 26. 9 'quae tum cum Castore fratri . . . excepi'. Castor is the predominant partner: their temple at Rome is called *aedes Castoris* for short (Cic. *Verr.* ii. 1. 129) and Statius goes so far as to conceal Pollux under the title of *alter Castor* (iv. 6. 15).

5

'Catulle est à la première page de son roman d'amour' (Benoist). The theme of the shortness of life to the lover goes back to Mimnermus: for expressions of it in the elegists see Tibullus i. 1. 69 f. 'interea, dum fata sinunt, iungamus amores; / iam ueniet tenebris mors adopena caput', Propertius ii. 15. 23 f. dum nos fata sinunt, oculos satiemus amore: / nox tibi longa uenit nec reditura dies'.

i. uiuamus: for the emphatic sense, 'enjoy life', cf. Varro, *Sal.* fr. 87 Büch. 'properate uiuere pueras quas sinit aetula ludere esse amare', *Copa* 38 'pone merum et talos; pereat qui crastina curat: / mors aurem uellens "uiuite" ait, "uenio"', *Carm. Epigr.* 190. 7 Büch. 'uiue dum uiuis', Cic. *Q. F.* iii. 1. 12 'sed quando uiuimus?', Hor. *Od.* iii. 29. 43.

2. rumores senum seueriorum: 'the gossip of puritan grey-beards'; cf. Prop. ii. 30. 13 'ista senes licet accusent conuiuia duri'.

3. unius aestimemus assis: there is a curious parallel in Sen. *Ep.* 123. 11 (the hedonist's advice) 'istos tristes et superciliosos alienae uitae censors, suae hostes, publicos paedagogos assis ne feceris'.

5. occidit lux: observe here and in 7. 7 the effect of the break in the last foot caused by the rare monosyllabic ending. Such endings are to be distinguished from those in which an unemphatic monosyllable is combined with a preposition to form a disyllabic or trisyllabic word-group under one accent (10. 31 *ad-me*, 13. 1 *apud-me*, 50. 20 *à-te*).

6. perpetua una: the phrase occurs again, in a very different context, in Cic. *Pis.* 33 'ut omnes . . . male precarentur, unam tibi illam uiam et perpetuam esse uellent'. For the idea cf. Hor. *Od.* i. 4. 15 ff., 28. 15, iv. 7. 13.

7. basia: *basium* (with *basio* and *basiatio*) occurs first in Catullus: after him it is common in Martial and Petronius but rare elsewhere (Phaedrus has it once, Juvenal twice, Fronto and Apuleius twice). Plautus and Terence use

sauium and *osculum*, Ovid only *osculum*. Its origin is obscure; its form points to its being a non-Latin word (intervocalic -s- normally indicates a loan-word unless the -s- is, as in *causa*, *quae-so*, *usus*, *esum*, etc., a reduction of -ss-; so *casa*, *asinus*, *fusus* are probably borrowings) and it is possible that Catullus brought it (as Quintilian i. 5. 8 says he brought *phloxenum*) from his native province. Its absence from comedy makes it almost certain that it was not part of the popular language before Catullus' time; but it must have come into popular use later, for, while *sauium* and *osculum* died with Latin, *basium* has survived into all the Romance languages. The distinction made by the ancient grammarians between the three words for 'kiss' (Don. ad Ter. *Eun.* 456 'oscula officiorum sunt, basia pudicorum affectuum, saulia libidinum uel amorum': cf. Serv. ad *Aen.* i. 256) is not borne out in usage: see Haupt, *Opusc.* ii. 106-9.

8. mille altera: 'a second thousand': so Virg. *Ecl.* 3. 71 'aurea mala decem misi, cras altera mittam' ('a second ten').

9. usque: 'without a break'.

10. milia multa: cf. 16. 12 'milia multa basiorum', 61. 203 'multa milia ludi', 68. 45-46 'dicite multis / milibus'.

fecerimus: for *facere* of making up a total cf. Juv. 14. 326 'fac tertia quadringenta' ('make a third four hundred'), Nepos, *Epam.* 3. 6 'eam summam cum fecerat'. The quantity of the -i- of -imus (and -itis) was originally long in the perfect subjunctive (an optative formation), short in the future perfect indicative (a conjunctive formation), and this distinction is maintained in Plautus. In later verse, for metrical convenience, it is disregarded: -i- in the fut. perf. first found here in verse, is shown to have been Cicero's normal pronunciation by his clausulae (Zielinski, *Philol.*, Supp. ix. 772).

11. conturbabimus: *conturbare*, 'to throw one's accounts into confusion' (the object, presumably *rationes*, is always omitted) is a technical term for fraudulent bankruptcy with concealment of assets; Cic. *Att.* iv. 7. 1, *Q. F.* ii. 10. 5, *Planc.* 68, Mart. ix. 3. 5, Petr. 38. 16 'ne creditores illum conturbare existiment', *Digest* xv. 3. 16 'nummos uenditori non soluerat, postea conturbauerat'. Since the verb in this sense is elsewhere used without an object expressed, it is best taken so here, *illa* being governed by *sciamus*. H. L. Levy (*A. J. P.* lxii [1941], 222) sees in the alternation of *mille* and *centum* a reference to the abacus. Catullus is keeping a tally, with one pebble in the thousands column, then one in the hundreds,

and so on: they will shake the board and obliterate the score. But the technical use of *conturbare* is too common to be ignored, and he misses the point of it: they will cheat the evil eye, as the bankrupt cheats his creditors, by faking their books.

ne sciamus: not merely because 'pauca cupit qui numerare potest' (Mart. vi. 34), but because to count one's blessings is to invite Nemesis and the evil eye.

12. inuidere: here in its original use 'cast the evil eye on', the equivalent of *fascinare* in 7. 12. Pliny uses the two words together: *N.H.* xix. 50 statues of Satyrs are set up in gardens 'contra invidentium effascinationes'. The common dative construction has its origin in a personal 'dative of disadvantage' (*invidetur alicui alicui*), the accusative being normally suppressed. (See Wünsch in *Rhein. Mus.* lxxix. 133.)

7

1 f. basiationes . . . tuae is most naturally taken as 'kisses of you', i.e. 'on your lips'.

2. satis superque: 'enough and to spare': the expression is commonplace (e.g. Cic. *Am.* 45 'satis superque esse sibi suarum cuique rerum', Hor. *Epod.* i. 31 'satis superque me benignitas tua ditauit', xvii. 19 'dedi satis superque poenarum tibi') but appears in poetry of greater elevation at Virg. *Aen.* ii. 642 'satis una superque uidimus excidia'.

3 ff. harenae . . . sidera: these illustrations of the innumerable are combined again in 61. 199–201, as they are in Genesis xxii. 17, in Plato, *Euthyd.* 294b, and often in later literature. Here Catullus enlivens each of these literary commonplaces in a characteristic way. To the first he brings that new gift of *doctrina* to Latin poetry, the romantic use of the proper name, exploiting the associations of a distant country and its precious herb, a mysterious desert shrine, and the legendary founder of that historic city which had produced his own poetic master. The second he moulds to reflect the mood of the poem: the countless stars are the kindly witnesses of his love.

3. Libysae: feminine of *Libys* (not, as L. & S. say, of *Libyssus*): the adjective happens to occur in the same context in *A.P.* xii. 145. 3 *καὶ τὸ Λιβύσας / ψάλλον ἀμβλιγτὴν ἀριάσαι ψεκάδα*.

4. lasarpiciferis: the plant commonly called *laserpicum* (or *lasar-*) was the Greek *αἰθήρων*, 'res fera et contumax et, si coleretur, in deserta fugiens' (Pliny, *N.H.* xix. 38–45),

probably a variety of asafœtida. Its juice, 'magnificum in usu medicamentisque', was given the name *laser*—a popular misformation: *laserpicum* is itself *lac serpicum*, 'serpentine juice', *serpe* (or *siupe*) being the Latin name of the plant, probably an early borrowing from *αἰθήρων*. (Plaut. *Rud.* 630 'siupe et laserpicum' shows the original use.) It grew wild on the fringe of the desert in inner Cyrenaica and was a staple export of Cyrene so distinctive and profitable as to appear as an emblem on its coinage: it was imported into Rome by the state and on the outbreak of the Civil War Caesar found 1,500 pounds of it in the treasury. By Pliny's time it had died out in Cyrene and an inferior quality was being imported from the East.

Cyrenis: in Greek the name is always singular: in Latin the plural is regularly used for the province (as it is here: Ammonium is in the south-east of the territory, the town of Cyrene itself in the north-west) but often also for the town. The first vowel is long in Aristophanes and Apollonius, short in Hesiod and Pindar; Callimachus has both quantities. In Latin verse the long quantity is normal (Virgil, Lucan, Statius, Silius): the short appears only here and in *Catalepton* 9. 61. (See Marx in *Abh. d. Sachs. Akad.*, Ph.-Hist. Kl. 38. 1.)

5. oraculum Iouis: the temple of Ammon, the Egyptian god identified with Zeus and Jupiter, standing in the oasis of Siwa in the Libyan desert (hence *aestuosi*) was the seat of an oracle ('harenosum Libyci Iouis antrum', Prop. iv. 1. 103) which was famous throughout the Greek world.

6. Batti . . . sacrum sepulcrum: Battus was the legendary founder and first king of Cyrene (Herod. iv. 150–5): after his death he was worshipped as a hero and his tomb stood (Pind. *Pyth.* 5. 125) in the centre of his city. Callimachus, as a native of Cyrene, claimed descent from Battus, and Catullus gives him the patronymic *Battiades* (65. 16, 116. 2) which he gave to himself.

7. cum tacet nox: see on 5. 5.

8. uidet amores: Baehrens compares Stat. *Ach.* i. 643 'admo- uet amplexus, uidit chorus omnis ab alto / astrorum', Juv. viii. 149 'sed luna uidet, sed sidera testes / intendunt oculos', Val. Flacc. viii. 50 'sidera . . . haec te meque uident'.

9. te . . . basiare: if *tuae* in l. 2 is 'of you', *basiare* is here constructed with two accusatives, a cognate internal accusative 'basia' (cf. 61. 110–12, 63. 15) and a direct object *te*. The only parallel in Latin is in Cato, *Agv.* 134. 2 'te . . . bonas preces precor', but Moschus uses *φαίειν* in the same way, 3. 69