

Books and Writers: Teacher's Notes

It is hoped that the passages of prose and verse included in this selection will make enjoyable reading in their own right, but they have also been chosen with the aim of providing a pool of evidence for an important aspect of the ancient world which differs enormously from our own. There are two main avenues to explore. One is the actual 'hardware' and process of book production in ancient times. The other is the aims, attitudes, interests, and motives for writing of Roman authors and the concerns and problems they might have in doing so.

The passages, which span a period of almost 200 years, are presented roughly in order of composition, but there are so few signs of development over this time that teachers may safely take them in whatever order seems desirable. The prose passages have been edited or excerpted so as to remove unwanted complications of content or language. The text of the verse passages is in all cases the original, modified only by occasional omission of lines.

One *caveat*. Though, for the benefit of teachers, these notes include a certain amount of background information about the writers and their works, it is emphasised that the examination papers based on this theme presuppose no knowledge by candidates of any information beyond what is either said in the passages themselves or is essential for an intelligent grasp of their significance. Likewise, the metres of the verse passages are indicated and it is certainly hoped that they will be read aloud either by teachers or pupils, but – with the obvious exception of Ovid, *Amores* 1.1 – there is little to be gained by going into the technicalities of metre.

These notes are intended to steer teachers and pupils through the passages and to stimulate discussion of their content, literary features and the context in which they were written. They can lay few claims to originality or comprehensiveness, and do not carry some kind of WJEC 'kite mark'. Ideas have been pillaged unashamedly from many sources, but books that have been cited specifically are listed here.

The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, vol.2 (ed. Kenney and Clausen, CUP, 1982)
C.J. Fordyce, *Catullus: A Commentary* (OUP, 1961)
M.J. Tennick, *Handbook to Libellus* (CUP, 1978)
A. J. Woodman and D. West *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry* (CUP, 1974)
David West, *Odes III* (OUP, 2002).
Rebecca Armstrong, *Ovid and His Love Poetry* (BCP, 2005)
A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny: a Historical and Social Commentary* (OUP 1966)

Books containing good sections about book production

Cambridge Latin Course, Book V (CUP, 2003)
G. Tingay and J. Badcock, *These were the Romans* (Hulton, 1972)
James Renshaw, *In Search of the Romans* (BCP, 2012)
J. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (Penguin, 1956)
U.E. Paoli, *Rome – Its People, Life and Customs* (BCP, 1996)
The World of Rome: an introduction to Roman culture (ed. Jones and Sidwell, CUP, 1997)

CATULLUS, *Carmina* 1

Catullus turns a simple dedication of his newly finished volume of poems into a fulsome tribute to a fellow writer, Cornelius Nepos – better known as a historian and biographer than as a poet – who also hailed from Cisalpine Gaul (= the far north of Italy).

Metre: – – – ∪ ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – – (Hendecasyllables)

1 **cui dono**: 'to whom am I presenting – the present indicative suggests, teasingly, that he is trying to think of the name! By line 3 he has it: **Corneli, tibi (dono)**. Presumably Cornelius eventually received the original, from which other copies would first be made.

lepidum: implying the easy charm and wit affected by Catullus and other members of the circle of ground-breaking writers known collectively as the *neoteri* ('the new age poets').

libellum: Catullus' use of the diminutive ('little book') rather than **librum** is a touch of modest understatement, in comparison with Cornelius' solid three-volume work (lines 6-7). Similarly in line 4 he refers to his compositions as **nugas** ('rubbish, trifles').

2 **arida ... pumice expolitum**: a scroll (**carta** or **volumen**) consisted of two layers of papyrus reeds laid at right-angles to each other. A pumice-stone (**pumex**) was used to smooth off the ragged edges of the roll, as well as to smooth the surface so that it was suitable to be written on and to erase any mistakes. Perhaps **politum** also hints at the literary polish of the contents.

modo: 'only just': Catullus is apparently so excited that he wants to make the dedication the very moment the scroll is ready.

3-4 **namque ... nugas**: order for translation = **namque tu solebas putare meas nugas aliquid esse** (Accusative + Infinitive): 'for you used to believe that my trifles were actually worth something'.

5 **iam tum cum**: 'even at that time when ...'

unus Italorum: apparently Nepos was the first Roman to attempt a complete world history, though several Greek writers had done so. Despite Catullus' flattering comments, only fragments survive; his reputation therefore rests on the somewhat pedestrian biographies. Nicholas Horsfall, in the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature* (pp 290ff), puts him firmly in his place: 'an intellectual pygmy whom we find associating uneasily with the literary giants of his generation (e.g. Catullus)'.

6 **omne aevum explicare**: 'to unroll the whole of time' – neatly combining the notion of 'explaining' the history with 'unrolling' a scroll.

tribus ... cartis: a three-volume work was nothing unusual, since a single scroll was considerably shorter than a modern book. Nepos' biographies ran to over 16 'volumes'.

7 **Iuppiter**: 'by Jove': the exclamation emphasises that these are indeed learned (**doctis**) works and thorough (**laboriosis**), the fruit of much research.

8 **habe tibi**: 'take for yourself' – i.e. 'please accept'.

8-9 **quidquid hoc libelli quaecumque**: 'whatever this is of a book, of whatever quality' – more self-deprecation from Catullus, no doubt fishing for a compliment in return.

9 **quod**: neuter, referring back to **quidquid libelli**.

o patrona virgo: the muse, traditionally invoked by poets at the start of any large-scale literary work. Catullus, however, breaks with convention by imagining his muse in very Roman guise as his patron, rather than as some ethereal source of inspiration.

- 10 **plus uno maneat perenne saeclo:** 'may it remain through the years, for more than a whole entire generation' (Ablative of Comparison) – an extreme piece of hyperbole. Having repeatedly minimised his 'little book' throughout the poem, Catullus suddenly betrays his real estimation of the quality of his work, by laying claim to its immortality!



Part of a wall-painting, in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples, showing a scroll, ink pots and stili. *(Photo, courtesy of VRoma Project's Image Archive).*

CATULLUS, *Carmina* 22

This piece of literary back-stabbing is presented as an off-the-record conversation between friends – a format borrowed by Catullus from his Hellenistic models and used also by Horace in his *Satires*. Suffenus (identity unknown) is said to be a thoroughly decent chap, except that he keeps trying to be a poet – something for which he lacks any talent. He is mentioned again in *Carmina* 14 along with other examples of dud poets, so he was presumably real rather than simply an invented figure of fun. His problem, rather than sheer incompetence, may well have been his refusal to follow the trends favoured by Catullus and his circle (the *neoterói* – see above on *Carmina* 1) – perhaps staying within the confines of the rather stiff manner exemplified by Ennius a century earlier. Catullus' insensitive published criticisms are rendered slightly more acceptable in the finale of the poem (not included here), where he comments that we all have faults, which we overlook in ourselves because we are so busy looking for faults in others – a rather half-hearted attempt to make amends for damage already done! Varus cannot be identified for certain either, but is presumably the same as Catullus' mate in *Carmina* 10 and seems most likely to be Quintilius Varus, literary critic and friend also of Horace and Virgil.

Metre: Iambic – but with a spondee or trochee as the last foot (known as *scazon*, 'limping'):

˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ – – –

- 1 **quem probe nosti**: 'whom you know well'. **ností** is a shortened form of the perfect tense **novisti** (from **nosco**), used partly to fit the metre, partly to give the feel of a natural conversation.
- 2 **homo**: 'chap, bloke': also gives a colloquial, and slightly derogatory, touch.
venustus et dicax et urbanus: Catullus stresses that he has nothing against him personally – indeed he shows the sophisticated qualities so admired by Catullus and his circle.
- 3 **idemque**: 'and at the same time'.
longe plurimos: 'far too many' – Suffenus' machine-like output is itself anathema to the connoisseur of learned, delicate, refined writing in the Hellenistic manner. This excess is made laughable in line 4 by an extraordinary sequence of elisions, which sweeps the reader through a catalogue of numbers going from thousands through tens and down to a few more in single figures. Note also the enjambement between lines 4, 5 and 6 – the first of very few in this poem – and the intrusive P alliteration.
- 4 **illi**: the dative = the agent of the passive participle **perscripta**: 'written by him'
- 5 **sic ut fit**: 'as is usually done'.
palimpseston: papyrus was expensive, so it was normal – except for really important documents – to scrape it with pumice to make it fit to use for another message. The point is that Suffenus – unlike the perfectionist *neoterói*, who would not dream of using anything but **palimpseston** – thinks his ideas are so good that he goes straight into a *de luxe* edition.
- 6 **cartae regiae**: a technical term for large top-quality sheets (cf. traditional names for paper sizes such as *imperial* or *royal octavo*). Individual **cartae** would be joined together to make a complete **volumen** or **liber**.

- 7 **umbilici**: sticks with knobs on, round which the **volumen** was wound.
lora rubra membranae: 'red thongs on the wrapper' (genitive): made of thin parchment, it helped to protect the papyrus inside, like a modern dust jacket.
 Note the weight added to these descriptions by specific choice of vocabulary (**regiae**), repetition of key words (**novi**), alliteration (R and P) and chiasitic word-order (line 8).
- 8 **derecta plumbo**: ruled with lead marks to keep the writing straight.
pumice omnia aequata: 'the whole thing made level with pumice' (cf. *Carmina* 1, line 2).
- 10 **unus**: 'just an ordinary'.
- 11 **rursus**: 'in contrast, on the contrary'.
abhorret ac mutat: both verbs are intransitive – 'so far removed and changed is he (from his usual self)'.
- 12 **hoc quid putemus esse**: the subjunctive is deliberative – 'what are we to make of this?'
modo: 'just now'.
- 12-13 **scurra aut si quid ... videbatur**: 'a wit, or something even cleverer than that if you can imagine it' (lit. 'if anything seems cleverer than that thing')
- 14 **idem**: as in line 3, pointing the contrast within the very same person. Its repetition in line 15, however, seems overdone – perhaps 'careless writing' (Fordyce, *Commentary*).
infaceto ... infacitior: a neat play on words. Line 14 as a whole, however, is 'a notably witty description of dullness' (Tennick, *Handbook to Libellus*), with seven long vowels in succession and two elisions making the words slur monotonously into each other.
 To a 'townie' like Catullus (and many other writers, modern as well as ancient) the countryside is 'uncouth' in comparison with the sophistication of the city – the kind of exclusive and elegant world of which we catch a glimpse in the novels of Jane Austen or TV's *Downton Abbey*. When he really wants to insult Suffenus in line 10, he calls him a 'goat-herd' or 'ditch-digger'. Anyone who feels at home in the **infacetum rus** can be described in Latin as **rusticus**. In line 2 Catullus uses its opposite, **urbanus**, to compliment Suffenus' more sophisticated side.
- 15-16 **neque idem umquam aeque beatus ac**: 'nor is he ever so happy as when ...'.
- 17 Notice (i) how Suffenus' self-centredness is brought out by the repeated **se**, placed symmetrically round **tamque**; (ii) the scornful-sounding alliteration of S and T.

CICERO, *ad Fam.* 9.1

Part of a letter written from Rome to M. Terentius Varro, in late 47 or early 46 BC.

Varro, a celebrated intellectual and prolific writer, took Pompey's side in the Civil War started by Julius Caesar in 49 BC and held the province of Baetica (S. Spain) on his behalf. Surrendering to Caesar's assault on Spain in 48, he received a pardon but then went east to join other Pompeians – including Cicero – in central Greece, where they were convincingly defeated at the battle of Pharsalus. He received a pardon a second time, as part of Caesar's general amnesty after the battle, but apparently had had to wait for permission to return to Italy, where Caesar intended him to be the head of his planned public library.

Cicero meanwhile had already been allowed to return to Rome, where he kept his head down, grudgingly coming to terms with the new regime. As during other periods in the political wilderness, for the next three years he occupied himself with his writing – two works on rhetoric, the *Orator* and the *Brutus*, and the philosophical works *de Finibus* and *de Officiis*.

- 1 **postquam in urbem veni:** on his return from Greece late in 48 BC, Cicero was at first kept under confinement in the town of Brundisium until he received permission from Caesar to proceed to Rome.
- 2 **non idcirco ... quod:** 'not for this reason ... because'.
- 3 **eorum me pudebat:** the impersonal verb **pudet** uses the accusative for the person who feels shame, and the genitive for what he is ashamed about, so 'I felt ashamed / embarrassed about them'.
- 4 **in his temporibus turbulentissimis:** 'in these most turbulent times' – referring to the Civil War and Cicero's own fruitless involvement in the defeat of the Pompeians (see above). Note the heated alliteration.
- 5-6 **ignoscunt mihi, revocant me ... teque ... dicunt:** note (i) Cicero's whimsical personification of his books, (ii) the omission of any conjunction (*asyndeton*), (iii) the pattern of three clauses gradually developing in length and complexity (*ascending tricolon*).
- 6 **quod ... permanseris:** 'because you have remained true to it' (his 'former habit' – i.e. writing books).
- 8 **et ea mala ... et ea quae:** 'both those evils which are pressing on us and those which are hanging over us'. Cicero shows cautious optimism that he will get through this period of continuing uncertainty without further danger. One factor which he could not build into the equation, of course, was Caesar's assassination in 44 BC and its rekindling of civil war.

HORACE, *Odes* 3.30

The first three books of the *Odes* were complete by around 23 BC (the fourth book was added about a decade later, at the request of the emperor Augustus), and Horace intended this final poem to set the seal on his project to reproduce the riches of Greek lyric poetry in Latin (see lines 12-13).

Metre: – – – ∪ ∪ – – ∪ ∪ – ∪ – (First Asclepiad).

Horace uses this only here and in the opening poem of *Odes* I, thus stylistically 'framing' his poetic achievement.

- 1 **exegi monumentum:** with the verb placed first, Horace proudly trumpets his own achievement.
monumentum: normally signifying a stone memorial or perhaps a bronze plaque. Horace poses a conundrum: what **monumentum** could he have constructed which is 'more lasting than bronze and even higher than the royal site of the pyramids? **aere** and **situ:** both are Ablative of Comparison.
- 3-5 **quod non imber ... fuga temporum:** a whirlwind of a sentence, a crescendo (in the length of the phrases, as well as the concepts) from rain, through driving storms, to the passage of the ages – none of which, Horace claims, will have the slightest affect on his poetic reputation.
- 3 **Aquilo impotens:** literally 'lacking control over itself' – hence 'wild, uncontrollable'.
- 4 **innumerabilis:** logically this should refer to the years, rather than to the **series** (transferred epithet)
- 6 **non omnis moriar:** he claims (partial) immortality through his lyric poetry – perhaps like Orpheus did through his music. Note the ascending tricolon insisting on Horace's immortality in lines 6-9, corresponding to that in 3-5 describing the agents of decay.
omnis: Nominative, referring to the subject of **moriar**.
mei: 'of me' (Genitive of **ego**)
- 7 **vitabit Libitinam:** goddess of burials – a witty antidote to all this fancy talk about immortality, stating the same idea in down-to-earth language. Horace will dispense with the services of undertakers, funeral processions, etc.
usque ego postera crescam laude recens: 'I shall continually grow afresh in the praise of future generations' – i.e. Horace's fame will last as long as Rome itself continues to exist.
- 8 **Capitolium:** the Capitol Hill was the most sacred place in Rome. In a solemn ceremony the chief priest (**pontifex maximus**) processed up the hill to the temple of **Iuppiter Optimus Maximus**, accompanied by a Vestal Virgin (keeping silent, so as not to mar the ceremony), to offer prayers for the perpetual greatness of Rome. In *Odes* III.1 Horace portrays himself as **Musarum sacerdos:** perhaps here too there is a suggestion that the poet performs a sacred rôle similar to that of a **pontifex**.
- 10 **dicar:** 'I shall be spoken of': the grand language of a celebrity, artfully set against reminders of Horace's origins.
violens Aufidus: the nearest large river to Horace's birthplace, Venusia.

- 11 **pauper aquae:** Apulia, with its hot, dry climate, was always 'short of water' before the irrigation schemes and aqueduct-building of Mussolini in the 1930s turned it into the prosperous agricultural region it is today.
- 11-12 **Daunus agrestium regnavit populorum:** a legendary king of Apulia, who 'ruled over his rustic peoples' (the Genitive with **regnavit** is an imitation of a Greek construction).
- 12 **ex humili potens:** Horace is keen to present himself as a 'simple boy made good' – a touching recollection of the world he long ago put behind him. At the same time, the sophisticated language which he uses for this tribute raises his life-story out of the ordinary to the level of heroic epic.
- 10-14 **dicar ... princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos deduxisse modos:** 'I shall be spoken of ... as the first to have turned Aeolian lyric into Italian metres'. This claim overlooks Catullus' two experiments (11 and 51) in Sapphic metre, but he had not attempted to compose an entire set of poems reproducing the complete range of Greek lyric. The adjective **Italos** is 'proleptic' – i.e. the metres only became Italian after Horace had composed his poems.
- 13 **Aeolium carmen:** i.e. the lyric poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus, written in Aeolian dialect.
- 14 **deduxisse:** a word suggestive of various metaphors: (i) spinning thread – a standard metaphor for composing poetry; (ii) channelling water – continuing the thought of Apulia being **pauper aquae**; (iii) escorting/bringing Greek poetics to Italy, like some founding father (e.g. Aeneas) leading his people to a new homeland.
- sume superbiam:** 'take the credit deserved by these achievements' – but whose achievements does he mean they are, his own (which would be insufferably arrogant in the context of a prayer) or the muse's? The easiest solution (following David West - see below) seems to be that for himself (note the emphatic position of **mihi**) he claims a laurel wreath, but hands ultimate credit for what he has achieved to the gods. Note the emphasis generated for the climax of lines 14-16 by the high frequency of S sounds.
- 15-16 **Delphica lauro:** 'a wreath of Delphic bay-leaves' – the prize awarded to victors in the Pythian Games. Apollo, god of the oracle at Delphi, is god of lyric poetry. To a Roman, of course, crowning with laurel would also suggest the celebration of a triumphant general.
- 16 **volens:** 'gladly crown me': Horace urges her to grant his wish without more ado – the standard language of prayer and supplication.
- Melpomene:** later the muse identified with tragedy, but 'in Horace's day the muses were not departmentalised' (West), so he could have chosen any of the Nine to address. Her name suggests a connection with song (cf. 'melody'), so perhaps Horace thought it was logical to associate her with lyric poetry.

Teachers lucky enough to still possess a copy of the Handbook to *Libellus* (1978) will find there an exhaustive analysis of this poem by Martin Tennick.

Very illuminating and accessible discussions may also be found in Woodman and West's *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry* and in David West's sensitive commentary on *Odes III*.

Finally, teachers and pupils may be interested in this somewhat ironic twist to Horace's claim to have created a memorial 'more lasting than bronze' – a bronze statue of the maestro himself, standing in the centre of the modern incarnation of Venusia!



Although Horace tells us he was short and stout, the statue of him in Venosa (the modern name for Venusia) presents him as a tall, handsome individual. Both his name and his work live on in Venosa: a local school is named after him and his work is inscribed on plaques which are illuminated at night. A fine villa on display nearby is, unsurprisingly, claimed (without any particular evidence) to be the Horace family home.

To read more about the way in which Horace is received and portrayed today in Venosa, visit **The Vancouver Sun** newspaper website:

<http://www.vancouversun.com/travel/After+2000+years+carpe+diem+still+resonates+ho+metown+Horace/8675952/story.html>

OVID, *Amores* 1.1

The poet claims that his ambition was to write an epic poem in dactylic hexameter, 'with material appropriate to the metre' – i.e. war. However it was not to be: Cupid cheekily 'stole one (metrical) foot' (**unum sumpsisse pedem**, line 4), thus converting Ovid's words into elegiac couplets, the metre of love poetry.

In fact there is no sign that Ovid ever had any such intentions. When he does approach the theme of war, it is merely to make satirical comparisons between soldiers and lovers: **militat omnis amans** 'every lover is a soldier' (*Amores* 1.9).

Metre: Elegiac couplets (= one hexameter line, followed by one pentameter).

Obviously, for any appreciation of this poem, it is important that pupils have a grasp of the basic differences between hexameters and elegiac couplets (= one hexameter line, followed by one pentameter). Something that may seem to them an absurd restriction on a writer is the unshakable association in ancient times between a particular metre and a particular genre of writing. Serious subjects such as war demand 'heavy metre' (**gravi numero**) – i.e. hexameters. Take away one foot and the poet is, willy-nilly, locked into 'subject-material appropriate to lighter rhythms' (**materia ... numeris levioribus apta**, line 11). The assumption made to suit Ovid's purposes in this poem is that elegiacs have to mean love (**aut puer aut puella**, line 12), but in fact pastoral or reflective themes would have been equally at home in this metre.

- 1 **arma ... violenta bella**: a strange start for a book of poems entitled *Amores*! The words are clearly intended to recall Virgil's opening **arma virumque cano** (which in Classical times usually served as the title for what we know as the *Aeneid*). Ovid is parodying the conventional apology from other writers of 'light verse', such as Propertius (3.3), Virgil (*Eclogues* 6.3-5) and Horace (*Odes* 4.15). However, whereas they are called to order either by one of the muses or by Apollo, the god of poetry himself, Ovid replaces a god's stern command with Cupid's naughty little prank! Right from the start, it is clear that the *Amores* is going to be a book of subversive parody and fun.
- 3-4 **risisse Cupido dicitur**: like some naughty schoolboy, Cupid just giggles and gets in the way till Ovid gives him what he wants! In place of the usual claim of ancient poets to be assisted by divine inspiration (e.g. Catullus 1 or Horace, *Odes* 3.30 in this selection), in Ovid's case a mini-god first won't let him write what he wants, then forces a theme on him. He is a 'poetic dictator' (Rebecca Armstrong, *Ovid and His Love Poetry*).
- 5 **hoc in carmina iuris**: 'this kind of control over poetry'.
- 6 **Pieridum vates**: a very highfalutin title (cf. Horace's description of himself in *Odes* III.1 as **Musarum sacerdos**). Ovid tries to pull rank over Cupid, warning him to clear off and mind his own business – 'we're not your gang'!
- 7-8 **quid, si ... faces**: Ovid playfully speculates on the trouble that would be caused if gods started trespassing on each other's functions. Imagine Venus (goddess of love) stealing the weapons from Minerva (goddess of technology, and therefore associated with armaments: she is regularly portrayed with shield, spear and helmet)! Or what if Minerva started brandishing Venus' burning torches of love (**accensas faces**)?
- 9-10 **sunt tibi magna ... novum**: 'these realms are too big for you, little boy – why don't you just stick to your own job'. But who does Ovid think he is to speak like this? In what realm, under whose protection does he think he is – the Muses?
- 11 **non mihi materia ... apta**: sensing that Cupid is not going away, Ovid can only offer a lame excuse: he won't be able to do couplets because – since he is not in love – he can't think of anything to write in that metre. But, of course, Cupid can fix that too!

- 12 **puer**: for affairs with young boys see, for example, Catullus 8, 81, 99 or Tibullus 1.4.
longas compta puella comas: 'a girl adorned with long hair' – an imitation of a Greek construction, the 'Accusative of Respect'.
- 13 **questus eram ...**: note the pluperfect 'I had hardly made my complaint, when ...'.
cum followed by the indicative (**legit ... lunavit ... dixit**) is normal when referring purely to time, especially when the clauses are inverted - as they are here. Ovid's protests are, of course, just asking for trouble, and Cupid's response is both quick (**protinus**, line 13) and powerful (**fortiter**, line 15), his aim sure (**certas**, line 17). Lines 13-15 portray exactly an archer's preparatory routine – the opening of the quiver (**pharetra soluta**), the selection of arrows (**legit spicula**), the steady bending of the bow – before making the shot in line 16. Ovid's lively description may stem from live observation, or perhaps from sculptures.
- 14 **in exitium spicula facta meum**: 'arrows made for my destruction'
- 16 **'quod' que ... opus**: order for translation = **dixitque accipe, vates opus quod canas** ('and' he said 'take this subject to sing about'). The line is deliberately muddled and the rhythm jerky, paralleling the suddenness of the shot. Cupid contemptuously addresses his victim as **vates**, picking up Ovid's pretentious choice of title in line 6.
- 17 **me miserum**: 'Ah, wretched me!': Ovid can only submit with a resigned sigh, as Cupid has taken control (**regnat**) of his 'empty heart'. Now he cries 'I am burning (with love)'.
- 19 **sex mihi surgat opus numeris**: in a neat recapitulation of the opening lines, Ovid bids a histrionic 'farewell' to the metre of 'iron war', and with mock reluctance accepts that his work will 'rise up in six feet, then sink down in five'.

MARTIAL, *Epigrams*

These three short samples of Martial's enormous output give a clear indication of his aims and ambitions as a writer. It would be interesting to ask pupils whether they think that the qualities for which Pliny admires Martial in *Letters* 3.21 are borne out in these three epigrams. They also provide evidence of the circumstances of book publication in Rome to consider beside Pliny *Letters* 1.13 and Suetonius *Claudius* 41.

Metre: Elegiac couplets (the same as Ovid, *Amores* 1.1).

1.38

In a world lacking any notion of copyright, Martial is understandably concerned about what we would call his 'intellectual property' – how a writer can 'own' his words. Fidentinus is again ridiculed for plagiarism in 1.29 and Martial tackles the issue in a number of other *Epigrams*. Interestingly, these nearly all appear in his first volume (38, 52, 53, 63, 66, 72): perhaps once his work became better known, the risk of plagiarism was less than it would be when his poems were not circulating in writing. Pliny (*Letters* 2.10) also urges a promising poet to make his work available in writing as quickly as possible before others steal his thunder.

- 1 order for translation = **libellus, quem recitas, o Fidentine, meus est**. Scansion would not allow **libellus** to come first. The rather clumsy rhyme with **tuus** (something usually avoided in Latin poetry) may perhaps mimic the low quality of Fidentinus' own composition – or perhaps it is simply the result of Martial's wish to create the neat parallel between **quem recitas** and **sed male cum recitas**.

6.60

In this poem we again see Martial's self-confidence about his own work. He certainly could never be accused of modesty about his own popularity in what he likes to call **mea Roma!** Like some modern cartoonist or a Socratean gadfly, however, for him mere celebrity is not enough: his *forte* lies in being provocative, in exposing his victims until they squirm. Martial is delighted that his books are being enthusiastically consumed, but he is particularly pleased that they provoke strong reactions – embarrassment (**rubet**), panic (**pallet**), bewilderment (**stupet**), jaw-dropping (**oscitat**) and disgust (**odit**). 'That is what I really want', he says.

As in other epigrams, the first half seems innocuous enough – if sickeningly smug; the second half brings the 'sting'. This is amplified by the close correspondence between the first couplet and the second. The gleeful string of boasts **laudat, amat, cantat** (note 'asyndeton': lack of connectives), echoed and extended to four verbs in line 3, with the subjects in each line (**mea Roma ... quidam**) arranged chiastically. In the first couplet the whole of Rome is said to enjoy Martial's poems: it is only in the second, when they start to cause offence, that his poems really satisfy their author (**nunc nobis ... placent**).

Other features which contribute to the tautness of Martial's composition include: (i) the hammering effect of **nostros ... mea ...** and repeated **me ... me** and **omnes ... omnis** (*anaphora*); (ii) the dramatic **ecce**, marking a turn away from the niceness of lines 1-2; (iii) the pause in line 4 after **hoc volo**, following three well-behaved end-stopped lines, before Martial finally lays his cards on the table.

7.3

It had long been the custom for fellow-poets to exchange new compositions with a view to receiving admiration or at least constructive comment, and bitchiness between them seems to have been an accepted part of that tradition (e.g. Catullus 22 above, also 36, 95). In several other epigrams, Martial declines to trade his poems with particular individuals. The wording of 5.73, for example, is very close to 7.3, and in 1.63 he says he refuses to read his compositions in public lest a poet called Celer respond with his! How much of all this should be taken seriously and how much is just horse-play between writers who were actually friends is hard to tell; some of the addressees may well be only fictitious or pseudonyms. Pontilianus – real or fictitious – is the target of two more epigrams (5.66 and 12.40), on different themes.

The poem follows a well-worn formula: a question is raised in the first line, followed in line 2 by an answer – starting in similar terms, but ending with an unexpected twist. The cheeky message is sharpened by the interplay between the various personal verb-endings, pronouns and adjectives (**mitto/mittas ... meos/tuos ... tibi/mihi**) – the possessives and the datives being arranged chiastically (**meos tibi ... mihi tuos**) and the sting postponed to the very end by the superfluous repetition of the recipient's name.

PLINY, *Letters* 1.13

All classical literature was composed to be read aloud (even when reading in private) and this passage, together with the passage from Suetonius' *Claudius*, gives a good idea of the importance of the public **recitatio**. In the absence of printing, this was the main vehicle for an author to introduce his work to a select audience – some of whom he hoped would subsequently commission their own hand-written copy to be made by firms of professional scribes (see *Cambridge Latin Course* Bk V, pages 27-29, 80-82). **recitationes** became a form of entertainment among intellectuals, such as the emperor Claudius. Pliny frequently mentions the recitals of poets and historians, and gave exhibition performances of his speeches (e.g. *Letters* 2.19; 3.18). Apparently, however, not everyone seems to have been such a devotee of these events as himself and Claudius!

- 1 **annus hic**: AD 97, the first (and only) full year of Nerva's principate, which to many marked a return to freedom of speech after the stifling censorship of Domitian's latter years (see Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.1; *Agricola* 3).

attulit: from **adfero**, 'has produced'.

mense Aprili: in Pliny's day, this month contained no less than 18 days of public entertainments!

- 2 **quo non recitaret aliquis**: the subjunctive is required by the lead phrase **nullus dies**, which would usually be followed (like other negations such as **non dubito**) by the conjunction **quin** (itself equivalent to **quo + non**).
- iuvat me quod**: 'I am delighted that ...' (*lit.* 'it pleases me because ...'). Note the snappy emphasis on the verbs **vigent** and **proferunt**, promoted to first position in their clauses.
- 4 **pigre coitur**: 'people assemble reluctantly' (Impersonal Passive: *lit.* 'there is an assembling').
- in stationibus**: the porticoes round the edge of the Forum, for example, or the baths or libraries, where men of leisure would meet and talk in the shade.
- 4-5 **tempus audiendi** (gerund): 'time for listening (i.e. to recitals), listening time'.
- 5 **sibi nuntiarum iubent**: 'they order a message to be brought to them' (Impersonal Passive).
- 5-6 **an ... an ... an**: 'whether ... or whether ...' (Indirect Question). Note again how Pliny varies the position of the verbs in the clauses that follow – the first two forming almost a chiasmus.
- 6 **praefationem**: the author's introductory remarks, usually in prose rather than verse.
- 6-7 **e magna parte evolverit librum**: these lazy people wait till the poet has 'to a large extent' unrolled his scroll - i.e. is well into his work.
- 7 **tum demum ac tunc quoque**: the rather laboured repetition is typical of Pliny's style.
- 10 **at hercule**: suggests (mock ?) indignation.
- memoria parentum**: 'in the memory of our parents'.
- ferunt** ('they say') **Claudium Caesarem ... causam requisisse ... subitum recitanti imopinatumque venisse** (Indirect Statement): 'he unexpectedly and on the spur of the moment came to support him (Dative of Advantage) while he was still reciting'.
- 11 **in Palatio**: in the gardens of the imperial palace on the Palatine Hill, overlooking the Forum.
- clamorem, causam requisisse, cumque ei dictum esset recitare**: the C-alliteration may be deliberate, to mimic the noise of chattering.
- 12 **M. Servilius Nonianus**: a senator, none of whose works have survived.

- 13 **otiosissimus quisque**: 'all the most idle people' (*lit.* 'each most idle person').
multo ante rogatus: recitations varied from private affairs in front of a few friends, perhaps at a dinner-party, to large-scale public displays in specially designed **auditoria** (see the passage from Suetonius' *Claudius*). Both occasions were by invitation only.
- 15 **quia non perdidit, perdidisse**: Pliny cannot resist a play on words here.
perdidit: indicative, because the subordinate clause is Pliny's inserted comment rather than part of the speakers' words – in which case it would have had the subjunctive.

PLINY, *Letters* 3.21

Martial came originally from Bibilis, in Spain. For about 14 years he made a career in Rome writing his light satirical verses, but c. AD 98 he retired to his native town. The twelfth and final book of *Epigrams* was published there in 101. Pliny's touching letter, probably dated c. 104, is the only reference to his death.

- 1 **moleste fero**: 'I bear it with difficulty'.
- 2 **ingeniosus acutus acer**: an unusual decreasing tricolon – each word seems heavy with emotion and they gain in impact from not being linked by conjunctions (*asyndeton*).
- 2-3 **salis ... fellis ... candoris**: salt (= wit), gall (= satire), brightness (= frankness, candour). The genitives express quantity – 'a great deal of wit' etc.
- 3-4 **eum ... adiuveram viatico**: 'I had assisted him with his travelling expenses' – as Pliny did for his freedman Zosimus when he sent him to recuperate in the south of France (*Letters* 5.19).
- 5 **versiculis quos de me composuit**: in the full text of the letter, Pliny then summarises the first ten lines and quotes the most flattering! The whole poem appears in Martial X.20, written c. AD 96, when Pliny was only a junior senator.

sed ne tempore non tuo disertam
pulses ebria ianuam videto.
totos dat tetricae dies Minervae,
dum centum studet auribus virorum
hoc, quod saecula posterique possint
Arpinis quoque comparare chartis.
seras tutior ibis ad lucernas:
haec hora est tua, cum furit Lyaeus,
cum regnat rosa, cum madent capilli.
tunc me vel rigidi legant Catones.

(The poet tells the Muse to approach Pliny's house on the Esquiline Hill with respect).

'Make sure that you don't knock drunkenly on his learned door whenever you please. He devotes entire days to crabbled Minerva, while he prepares for the ears of the Centumviral Court something which posterity and future ages may compare even with the pages of Arpinum (i.e. Cicero). You will be safer to go in the evening, when the lamps are lit; that is your hour, when wild Bacchus takes over, when the place is full of roses and men's hair drips perfume. At such a time even stern Catos may read my poems'.

- 7-8 **nam postquam ... putamus**: 'for ever since we ceased to do things worth praising, we also regard being praised as silly.' Even in this touching tribute Pliny cannot resist the opportunity to indulge in a spot of moralising and a touch of rhetoric – **desiimus** corresponding chiasmically to **putamus**, and **laudanda** pointedly juxtaposed with **laudari**.
- 10 **quantum maximum potuit**: 'the greatest amount he could'.
- 12 **fortasse non erunt aeterna**: probably a fair verdict, despite the survival of his work. Pupils might like to debate whether being **ingeniosus acutus acer** is enough to place Martial in the first rank of literature. And if not, then what is missing? What does a writer have to do to achieve 'Premier League' status? Does Pliny qualify? In the opinion of Sherwin-White (*The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary*), "Both pass for minor classics, full of charm, but not 'eternal'."
- 12-13 **tamquam essent futura (aeterna)**: 'as though they were going to be eternal'. Again Pliny builds towards a rhetorically worded aphorism, in chiasmatic order:
non erunt aeterna (A)... quae scripsit (B) ... ille scripsit. (B) ... tamquam essent aeterna (A).

TACITUS, *Annals* 4.34-35

Aulus Cremutius Cordus wrote a History which apparently covered the period of the Civil War and the reign of Augustus. Only a few fragments survive, in the form of quotations by later authors. Cordus' trial took place in AD 25, under the reign of Tiberius. His extravagant praise of Brutus and Cassius was considered to be a deliberate attack on the legitimacy of the principate, tantamount to treason (**maiestas minuta**). Tacitus describes it as 'a new charge, heard for the first time' – apparently this procedure had not been used before against anyone for writing a history. Seneca, however, in a letter to Cordus' daughter Marcia, implies that this was not the only aspect of the case against him, reporting that he had almost certainly fallen foul of Sejanus (commander of the Praetorian Guard) for criticising him because he had commissioned a statue of himself.

- 1 **annalibus**: like Tacitus' own work, Cordus' history was arranged year-by-year.
- 2 **M. Brutum ... et C. Cassium**: the ring-leaders in the murder of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Their aspiration to restore the Republic was thwarted by the swift action of Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), who subsequently joined forces with Caesar's heir, C. Octavianus (later the emperor Augustus). In two separate battles at Philippi in 42 BC, the Republican cause was decisively defeated – first Cassius, then Brutus committing suicide rather than face capture.
- 2 **Romanorum ultimum**: probably Cordus deliberately repeated the words said to have been used by Brutus himself on hearing of the death of Cassius (see Plutarch, *Brut.* 44).
- 3-4 **libros cremandos**: a punishment rarely used in Rome, but also carried out at the end of Augustus' reign on the books of the radical historian T. Labienus, who then committed suicide by walling himself up in the tomb of his ancestors (see Dio 56.27). For other instances of book burning, see Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.50 (under Nero) and *Agr.* 2 (Domitian).

Teachers may also think of examples such as the Nazi campaign against 'Un-German Literature' in 1933, or the vision in Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* (also filmed) of a future America in which all books are systematically destroyed by the fire-brigade.

- 4 **sed manserunt**: here and generally in this passage, note the striking effect achieved by juxtaposing short, pithy statements of fact like this with longer, more complex expositions of Tacitus' opinions.

celati: his work was preserved by his daughter Marcia, amongst others (Dio 57.24; Seneca, *Cons. ad Marciam* 1.3).

- 5 **editi**: the works of Cordus and Labienus were republished with the support of Gaius Caligula (see Suetonius, *Gaius* 16). Quintilian, in the 2nd Century AD, refers to expurgated versions which were also in circulation.

irridere licet: according to Tacitus, all that such censorship ever achieves is increased interest in an author's work and notoriety for those who want to censor it. Compare the boom in sales of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* after the failed prosecution of Penguin Books in 1960 under the Obscene Publications Act.

qui credunt ... extingui posse ... memoriam: 'who think that by their power the memory of the next generation can be wiped out'. A straightforward example of Indirect Statement, except that the words are seemingly all in reverse order – but it is worth noting the emphasis that this places on virtually every one.

- 6 **extingui**: metaphorically continuing the idea of burning.
- 7 **ingeniis**: 'talents, genius'.
- 7-8 **externi reges aut qui simili saevitia usi sunt**: a Roman of the 1st Century AD might associate 'foreign kings' with the Ptolemies of Egypt, the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes, or Mithridates of Pontus who had caused the Romans such trouble in the 1st

century BC. Ever since the expulsion of their own last king c.510 BC, the word 'king' had been anathema in Rome. Tacitus' wording here seems deliberately chosen to draw a line between 'good' Roman **principes** and 'bad' foreign kings. Those emperors (e.g. Tiberius, Nero, Domitian?) or their ministers (e.g. Sejanus?) who cross this line have behaved with 'unRoman' savagery.

- 8-9 **dedecus sibi atque illis gloriam**: note the ABBA order of nouns and pronouns (*chiasmus*), the effect of which is to lay stress on both nouns, especially **gloriam** as the last word. Note also the strident S sounds in this climactic sentence.
- 8 **illis**: refers back to **ingeniis** – the authors.

SUETONIUS, *Claudius* 41

Claudius became emperor unexpectedly in AD 41 after his nephew Gaius Caligula was assassinated in a military coup. Then aged 50, he had been deliberately excluded all his life from any kind of political and military career by his own family, embarrassed by his physical defects - including a stammer, a limp and a nervous twitch (Suetonius, *Claud.* 30). Though regarded by many as an idiot, he was well educated and developed a taste for scholarly research and writing, including several specialised historical works and expositions on the Latin and Etruscan languages (Suetonius, *Claud.* 42).

This passage provides an entertaining snapshot of a **recitatio**, to accompany the description given by Pliny in *Letters* 1.13. Though Claudius seems to have ceased giving his own performances later in life, he continued to write and to be an enthusiastic attender at recitals. The passage also confirms the ominous message of Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34-35, that the period between the murder of Caesar and the victory of his heir Octavian was a minefield best avoided by writers and subject to close censorship.

- 1 **historiam in adolescentia ... scribere coepit**: Seneca refers to this in AD 43 (*Dial.* 11.8.2), so it was almost certainly finished long before Claudius became emperor. The beginning of the second paragraph here (**in principatu**) distinguishes his later writings.
- T. Livio**: the great historian of the history of Rome from the foundation of the city by Romulus to Augustus. Livy died c. AD 17, so the teenage Claudius would certainly have had plenty of opportunity at Augustus' court to meet the distinguished historian and discuss his projected History with him.
- 2 **commisisset**: 'began (to read it aloud)'. This suggests a work in progress, rather than that his History was complete.
- frequenti auditorio**: perhaps a room in the palace, such as Augustus used for his own readings (Suetonius, *Aug.* 85), or something like the 'Auditorium of Maecenas' which survives on the Esquiline Hill in Rome.
- 3 **refrigeratus a se ipso**: literally 'having cold water thrown on him by his own efforts' – i.e. he kept putting himself off.
- initio**: the Ablative indicates 'time when' – 'at the start of the recitation'.
- subsellis**: normally wooden benches, perhaps arranged in tiers which crashed down on one another.
- 4 **ne sedato quidem tumultu**: again the Ablative indicates 'time when' – 'not even when the disturbance died down'.
- 5 **facti**: Genitive with **reminiscor** (as with all verbs of remembering / forgetting).

- 7-8 **per lectorem**: perhaps because of his recurring speech problem (Suetonius *Claud.* 30). Even Pliny, who enjoyed giving recitals of his speeches, preferred to employ a reader for recitations of his compositions in verse. (Pliny, *Letters* 9.34).
- 9 **inferiora tempora**: 'later times' – contrasted with **superioribus**.
a pace civili: most likely starting from the end of the Civil War, perhaps 28 BC – the year in which Octavian (Augustus) proclaimed the 'restoration of the Republic'.
- 11 **saepe correptus et a matre et ab avia**: his mother = Antonia, daughter of Mark Antony; his grandmother = Livia, mother of Claudius' father Drusus, and later wife of Augustus.

This remark supplies notable evidence of the unofficial influence of imperial women. Neither of these was likely to want any light to be shone on the shady years which included the bloody proscription by Antony and Octavian of their political opponents, their annihilation of the Republican cause at Philippi in 42 BC, their fractious alliance throughout the 30s BC, and finally Antony's defeat alongside Cleopatra at Actium in 31 and suicide in Egypt! Claudius had a foot in both camps: he admired Augustus greatly but also celebrated Antony's birthday (Suetonius *Claud.* 11). Such studious non-partisanship helps to account first for his survival and ultimately for his acceptability as emperor.