

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 expolitum?
Cornēlī, tibi: namque tū solēbās
meās esse aliquid putāre nūgās
- 5 iam tum, cum ausus es ūnus Italōrum
omne aevum tribus explicāre cartīs
doctīs, Iuppiter, et labōriōsis.
quārē habē tibi quidquid hoc libellī
quāālecumque; 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. . . expolitum:** 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.

READING 5

In Poem 49 Catullus expresses thanks to Marcus Tullius Cicero, Rome's greatest lawyer. The occasion of the poem—the reason for Catullus's gratitude—is shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, the hyperbolic expression of gratitude, the formality of Catullus's addressing Cicero by both his *praenōmen* and *nōmen*, the five superlative adjectives that occur within the space of seven lines, which mimic Cicero's own style, Catullus's description of himself as “the worst poet of all,” and the double meaning of the phrase *optimus omnium patrōnus* strongly suggest that the poem has ironic undertones.

A THANK YOU

CATULLUS CARMEN 49

Meter: Hendecasyllable

- 1 Disertissime Rōmulī nepōtum,
quot sunt quotque fuēre, Mārce Tullī,
quotque post aliīs erunt in annīs,
grātiās tibi maximās Catullus
- 5 agit pessimus omnium poēta,
tantō pessimus omnium poēta,
quantō tū optimus omnium patrōnus.

NOTES AND VOCABULARY

- Line 1: **disertus, -a, -um** articulate, eloquent
Rōmulus, -ī, m. Romulus, the traditional founder of Rome
nepōs, nepōtis, m. descendant; the phrase *Rōmulī nepōtum* refers to the Romans at the time that Catullus was writing.
- Line 2: **quot, adv.** how many; note the ANAPHORA in the repetition of *quot* in lines 2–3.
fuēre = fuērunt
- Line 3: **post:** used as an adverb here, with the meaning of “hereafter, in the future.”
alius, alia, aliud other
- Lines 4–5: **grātiās . . . agit:** give thanks, thank
- Line 6–7: **tantō . . . quantō:** by as much as . . . so much
- Line 7: **patrōnus, -ī, m.** lawyer, patron
optimus omnium patrōnus: In addition to the meaning “best lawyer of all [lawyers],” the phrase can be interpreted to mean “best lawyer of all [men],” with the less than flattering implication that Cicero was willing to defend anyone, even those individuals he had previously prosecuted, such as the scoundrel Vatinius, who was a loyal supporter of Caesar.