

METER: hendecasyllabic (see Catullus 5). In line 4, **ait** is scanned as two short syllables.

- 1 **nescio quem:** "someone or other." The indefinite pronoun **nesciō quis, nesciō quid** was initially a phrase that meant "I don't know who," "I don't know what." Note that only the **quis, quid** part declines. **corōna, -ae** {f}, garland, circle (of people), audience, crowd. It was a common sight in Rome to see a circle of bystanders gathered in a **basilica** (Roman law court) to watch a trial.
- 2 ***mirificus, -a, -um**, wonderful, marvelous. **Vatiniānus, -a, -um**, of Vatinius (Publius Vatinius, whom Calvus was prosecuting).
- 3 **crīmen, crīminis** {n}, crime, charge. **Calvus, -ī** {m}, Gaius Licinius Calvus (82–ca. 47 B.C.), an orator, poet, and close friend of Catullus. **explicō** {1}, to explicate, explain, set forth. **explicāsset:** = **explicāvisset:** what mood, tense, and construction?
- 4 **ait**, {he} says. **haec:** "the following words."
- 5 **salapūtium disertum:** "what an eloquent little squirt." **salapūtium, -ī** {n}, little man. Calvus was apparently short.

METER: elegiac couplet, a Greek variation on the dactylic hexameter, the meter used for epic and some long poems, such as Homer's *Iliad*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and poem 64 of Catullus. The elegiac couplet was used for a variety of purposes, including drinking songs, epitaphs, love poems, lamentations, and reflections. The origin of the words *elegiac* and *elegy* is uncertain, but it is clear that the elegiac meter was not confined to serious subjects. The elegiac couplet consists of a line in dactylic hexameter and a pentameter, the latter of which is dactylic except for the third and sixth feet, where only the long syllable of the dactyl remains. The first four feet of the hexameter line may be either dactylic (– ∪ ∪) or spondaic (– –); the fifth foot is regularly a dactyl, and the sixth a spondee or trochee (– ∪). In the pentameter line, the first two feet may be dactylic or spondaic, but the fourth and fifth feet are always dactylic.

Hexameter: – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪

Pentameter: – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – || – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | ∪

A caesura may fall in the second, third, or fourth foot of the hexameter. The pentameter line has no regular caesura but instead a *diaeresis* (word-end between metrical feet here frequently coinciding with a pause in the sense) after the third foot.

- 1 **Nūlli . . . mälle:** translate in this order: **mea mulier dīcit sē nūllī nūbere mälle.** Explain the construction of each infinitive in this line.
nūbō, nūbere {3}, **nūpsī, nūptum** (+ *dat.*), to get married to.
- 2 **sē:** i.e., the **mulier** mentioned in line 1. **petat:** what mood and tense? This is the first half (protasis) of a future less vivid condition. How is the protasis of this type of conditional sentence translated?
- 3 **quod:** place **quod** after **sed** and translate: "but what a woman says. . ." This clause is the object of **scribere** in line 4. **cupīdus, -a, -um**, desiring, lusting.
***amāns, amantis** {m}, lover.
- 4 **oportet, oportēre** {2}, **oportuit** (+ *infinitive*), it is necessary, one ought.

CATULLUS 53

An Amusing Incident at the Law Court

What is the dramatic situation of this short poem? What did Catullus find humorous?

- 1 Risī nescio quem modo ē corōnā,
- 2 quī, cum mirificē Vatīniāna
- 3 meus crimina Calvus explicāset,
- 4 admirāns ait haec manūque tollēns:
- 5 "dī magnī, salapūtium disertum!"

1. Compare this poem to poem 49. What are the clues in both poems that Catullus was critical of the excessive rhetorical styles (verbal and theatrical) of certain lawyers and orators?
2. We know that Cicero and Calvus often faced each other in trials. What is the difference in tone between poem 49 to Cicero and poem 53 on Calvus?

CATULLUS 70

Words, Words, Words!

This is one of several poems in which Catullus tries to analyze the failure of his love affair with Lesbia. What is the theme or central idea of this short poem? What is the tone?

- 1 Nūllī sē dīcit mulier mea nūbere mälle
- 2 quam mihi, nōn sī sē Iuppiter ipse petat.
- 3 Dīcit: sed mulier cupidō quod dīcit amantī,
- 4 in ventō et rapidā scribere oportet aquā.

1. At the center of this poem is the poet's use of irony. Are we to believe that the woman is saying one thing but meaning another (*rhetorical irony*) or is she unaware of the real significance of her words as the poet and audience understand them (*dramatic irony*)? Which irony do you feel that the poet is using? Defend your answer with reference to this and other poems of Catullus.
2. Find examples of repetition and hyperbole. Why are they effective devices in this poem?
3. A fragment from Sophocles (ca. 496–406 B.C.) reads: "I write the oath of a woman onto water." Why are winds and waters such fitting receptacles for empty promises?
4. Compare poem 70 with the following translation of an epigram by the Greek poet Callimachus (ca. 305–ca. 240 B.C.; see Introduction, p. 1). How has each poet treated the same theme differently? What is the difference in tone?

Callignotus swore to Ionis that he would hold
neither man nor woman dearer than her.
He swore: the truth is that love's oaths
do not enter the ears of the immortals.
Now he burns for a man, while of the poor girl,
as of the Megarians, there is no word or record.