

METER: sapphic (named for the Greek poet Sappho. Horace uses this meter frequently; Catullus only twice. See Introduction, p. 1). The first three lines of each stanza repeat the same metrical pattern; the fourth, called an adonic, is different:

(3 lines) - - - - - || - - - - -
 (1 line) - - - - -

In the first three lines of each stanza a caesura normally falls after the fifth syllable.

- 1 **Ille:** i.e., a man discussed further in lines 3–4. **mī:** take with **vidētur**.
- 2 **fās est**, it is permitted. The word **fās** often refers to what is permissible under divine law. **superāre:** supply **vidētur**. ***divōs:** = **deōs**.
- 3 **adversus**, -a, -um, opposite. **identidem**, again and again, repeatedly.
- 5 **dulce:** = **dulciter**. **miserō:** take in agreement with **mīhi** (6) as a dative of separation ("from . . ."). **quod:** "a situation which" (a summation of lines 1–4 and subject of **ēripit** in line 6). **omnis:** = **omnēs**. In early Latin and in many of the poets, the accusative plural of i-stem nouns and adjectives often ends in -is.
- 6 **sensus**, -ūs (m), sensation, feeling, (plural) consciousness. **simul:** supply **ac**.
- 7 ***aspiciō, aspicere** (3), **aspexī, aspectum**, to catch sight of, behold, look at. **nihil . . . mī:** the full meaning of this is unclear, since line 8 has been lost in transmission. Can you think of a way to fill in the gap? **super**, over, left, remaining.
- 9 **torpeō, torpēre** (2), to become numb. **tenuis**, -is, -e, thin, fine. ***artūs, -uum** (m pl), joints, limbs.
- 10 **dēmānō** (1), to flow down, penetrate. **sonitus**, -ūs (m), sound, noise. **suōpte:** "by their very own" (-pte intensifies the possessive adjective).
- 11 **tintinō** (1), to ring. ***auris, auris** (f), ear. **geminus**, -a, -um, twin, double. Catullus uses a striking *transferred epithet* (an adjective used to describe one noun instead of another that it would normally modify) here. With what word does **geminā** agree grammatically? With what word does it agree in sense?
- tegō, tegere** (3), **tēxī, tēctum**, to cover.
- 12 **lūmen, lūminis** (n), light, (plural) eyes.
- 13 ***ōtium, -i** (n), leisure, freedom from responsibility, idleness. **molestus**, -a, -um, annoying, bothersome. Note that the fourth syllable of this line is short.
- 14 **exsultō** (1), to rejoice, revel in. **nimum**, too much. **gestiō, gestīre** (4), **gestīvī**, to carry on, enjoy oneself, desire.
- 15 **prius** (adv.), before, previously.

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6. In the following poem by Shelley (1792–1822), what new elements have been added? What has been retained from Sappho? From Catullus?

To Constantia Singing

My brain is wild, my breath comes quick,—

The blood is listening in my frame,

And thronging shadows, fast and thick,

Fall on my overflowing eyes:

My heart is quivering like a flame;

As morning dew, that in the sunbeam dies,

I am dissolved in these consuming ecstasies.

Catullus Translates a Poem from Sappho.

This poem is considered the first in the cycle of love poems to Lesbia.

Ille mī pār esse deō vidētur,
ille, sī fās est, superāre divōs,
quī sedēns adversus identidem tē
spectat et audit
5 dulce rīdentem, miserō quod omnīs
ēripit sēnsūs mihi: nam simul tē,
Lesbia, aspexī, nihil est super mī

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artūs
10 flamma dēmānat, sonitū suōpte
tintinant aurēs, geminā teguntur
lūmina nocte.
Ōtium, Catulle, tibī molestum est;
ōtiō exsultās nimiumque gestis;
15 ōtium et rēgēs prius et beātās
perdidit urbēs.

1. **This poem is a translation or adaptation of a Greek poem written by the female poet Sappho (ca. 620–ca. 550 B.C.). Here is a translation of Sappho's poem:**

Fortunate as the gods he seems to me, that man who sits
opposite you, and listens nearby to your sweet voice
And your lovely laughter; that, I vow, has set my heart
within my breast a-flutter. For when I look at you a
moment, then I have no longer power to speak,
But my tongue keeps silence, straightway a subtle flame has
stolen beneath my flesh, with my eyes I see nothing, my
ears are humming,
A cold sweat covers me, and a trembling seizes me all over,
I am paler than grass, I seem to be not far short of death. . . .
But all must be endured, since. . . .

[translated by Denys Page]

2. **In Sappho's poem who are the three people? Give a specific account of the sensations Sappho feels in stanzas 3, 4, and 5.**
3. **If, in Catullus' translation, the word *tē* (3) refers to Lesbia, the woman with whom Catullus has fallen in love, who are the other two people? In the first three stanzas, where has Catullus changed the original? Why did he do so?**
4. **The initial placement and repetition of the word *ōtium* in the fourth stanza make this word significant. According to Catullus, what has *ōtium* been responsible for in the past? Why do you think it is *molestum* to Catullus? What in the past has *ōtium* allowed him, the poet and person, to indulge in? What are the consequences of *ōtium* both to great kings and cities and to small people (Catullus)?**
5. **The last stanza is not in Sappho's original, and there is some question as to whether or not it belongs to poem 51. Do you see a connection between it and the first three stanzas? Some commentators believe that the fourth stanza was added to poem 51 after the affair was over. If that is so, what possible comment on the first three stanzas did Catullus intend?**