

Catullus 51

Using a poem by Sappho as a model, Catullus has translated the original Greek into Latin but has also liberally used figures of speech throughout his version. The poem is inspired by the poet's sense of awe upon seeing, even imagining, the stunning and spellbinding presence of his beautiful Lesbia. The meter is Sapphic as in Poem 11.

Ille mi par esse deo videtur,
ille, si fas est, superare divos,
qui sedens adversus identidem te
spectat et audit

dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis 5
eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus 10
flamma demanat, sonitu suopte
tintinant aures, gemina teguntur
lumina nocte.

otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
otium et reges prius et beatas 15
perdidit urbes.

NOTES AND VOCABULARY 51

- 3 **adversus:** *adversus-a-um*, adj., opposite, facing
identidem: *identidem*, adv., again and again, constantly
- 5 **dulce:** *dulce*, adv., sweetly
ridentem: *rideo, ridere, risi, risum*, smile
- 6 **mihi:** dative of separation
nam simul: for as soon as
- 7 **aspexi:** *aspicio, aspicere, aspexi, aspectum*, catch sight of, spot, look closely at, observe
- 9 **torpet:** *torpeo, torpere, torpui*, be numb, be stiff
tenuis: *tenuis-tenuē*, adj., tender
- 10 **demanat:** *demano, demanare, demanavi*, flow down
sonitu: *sonitus, -us*, m., sound
suopte: *suopte*, adj., form of *suus = suo + pte*; an emphatic ablative

- 11 **tintinant:** *tintino, tintinare, tintinavi*, ring, tingle
aures: *auris, auris, f.*, ear
gemina: *geminus-a-um*, adj., twin, both; this adjective is in the ablative case.
teguntur: *tego, tegere, texi, tectum*, cover, cloak
- 13 **otium:** *otium, otii, n.*, free time, ease, leisure
molestum: *molestus-a-um*, adj., troublesome, irksome
- 14 **exsultas:** *exsulto, exsultare, exsultavi, exsultatum*, revel in, boast about
gestis: *gestio, gestire, gestivi, gestitum*, throw oneself about, be cheerful about, long for

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Look at him, just like a god,
that man sitting across from you,
whoever he is, listening to your
close sweet voice,

your irresistible laughter, and O yes
it sets my heart racing—
one glance at you and I can't
get any words out,

my voice cracks, a thin flame
runs under my skin,
my eyes see nothing,
my ears ring,

a cold sweat pours down my body,
I tremble all over, turn
paler than grass, and it seems that I'm
just a shade from dead.

But I must bear it, since a poor . . .

31. Longinus, a first-century C.E. critic who writes about the quality of thought and style (including the rhetorical element) that makes writing sublime, uses this poem in