



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources (Themes) Love and Marriage

Cicero: A family matter

For examination in 2024-2026

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the follow:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.

Cicero: *ad Atticum* 5.1 – A family matter

Cicero witnesses a family argument.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC- 43 BC) was a prominent orator and statesman and a prolific author who published many volumes of his correspondence with public figures and friends.

This text is from a letter written by Cicero to his friend Atticus in the spring of 51 BC, shortly after Cicero had left Rome to make his way to his governorship of the province of Cilicia. He began the journey by travelling to his estate at Arpinum, the town of his birth, about 60 miles south-east of Rome. Here, he was met by his younger brother Quintus and his family.

Quintus' wife, Pomponia, was Atticus' sister. She joined Cicero and Quintus for the first part of their journey. Atticus had previously written to Cicero, describing his sister as having a difficult character. Cicero responds in this letter, giving details of what he considers to be an example of unacceptable behaviour by Pomponia.

The Latin is adapted.

Text

nihil vidi tam mite, nihil tam placidum quam meus frater illo die erat in sororem tuam. si offensio fuerat ex ratione sumptus, non appareret.

postridie Arpino profecti sumus et prandimus in Arcano.

humanissime Quintus 'Pomponia' inquit 'tu invita mulieres, ego viros arcessam.' nihil potuit dulcius, non modo verbis sed etiam animo ac vultu. at illa, audientibus nobis, 'ego ipsa sum' inquit 'hic hospita' – id ex hac causa, ut opinor, quod antecesserat Staius

ut prandium nobis videret! tum Quintus 'en' inquit mihi 'haec ego patior cotidie.' id me valde commovit: sic illa absurde et aspere verbis vultuque responderat. itaque discubuimus omnes praeter illam. Quintus ei aliquid de mensa misit, quod tamen illa reiecit. quid multa? nihil meo fratre lenius, nihil asperius tua sorore mihi visum est; et multa similia praetereo.

Notes

- 1 **nihil ... nihil**: the strong negative gives a forceful start to Cicero's account, further strengthened repetition of nihil at the beginning of each clause (anaphora).
- 2 **illō diē**: i.e. on the day that they met at Arpinum.
in sorōrem: 'towards' or 'in relation to' your sister.
- 3-4 **fuerat ... appāruit**: the indicative indicates that it was an open question whether he had taken offence or not.
offēnsiō: i.e. offence taken by Quintus at the amount of money spent by his wife.
- 5 **prandimus in Arcānō**: Arcanum was the name given to the estate of Cicero's brother, Quintus, which lay about four miles south of Arpinum. Progress was clearly slow.
hūmānissimē: the superlative and the word's position at the start of the sentence give emphasis to Cicero's argument that Quintus' behaviour was exemplary.
tū invitā mulierēs: a normal division of labour: Pomponia was to gather the womenfolk together to have lunch. As the villa belonged to her husband, it was natural for her to act as hostess.
- 7 **nihil potuit dulcius**: supply esse.
- 9 **id**: supply *dixit*.
- 10 **antecesserat Staius**: Staius was probably a freedman, sent on ahead by Quintus to see to the preparation of lunch. Pomponia took offence at this, regarding it as a slight to her position as *māterfamiliās*, one of whose responsibilities was to oversee meals and organise the household servants.
- 13-14 Note the double alliteration of *absurdē ... asperē* and *verbīs vultūque*. The effect of the former may be to emphasise Cicero's shock at Pomponia's words and of the latter, to reflect the aggression in Pomponia's conduct.
- 16 **quid multa**: a standard expression to put an end to detailed exposition, lit. 'why (say) many (words)?'
- 17 **nihil ... nihil**: Cicero ends as he began, with a forceful anaphora of nihil, to emphasise the contrast between Quintus and Pomponia. This is further strengthened by the chiasmus *meō frātre lēnius ... asperius tuā sorōre*.
- 18 **mihi vīsum est**: this parallels the vidi in the first sentence. multa similia praetereō: the suggestion that this was only one example of many gives a strong conclusion to this part of the letter. The remainder of the letter recounts how Pomponia refused to sleep with Quintus.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then re-read each line or couplet, asking leading questions so that the class comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

nihil vidi tam mite, nihil tam placidum quam meus frater illo die erat in sororem tuam. (line 1-2)

- How does Cicero describe the behaviour of his brother towards the sister of Atticus (i.e. Quintus' wife)?

si offensio fuerat ex ratione sumptus, non appareret. (line 2-3)

- What possible cause of offence between Quintus and his wife was not apparent?

postridie Arpino profecti sumus et prandimus in Arcano. (line 4)

- Where was the group setting out from and what did they do when they reached Arcanum?

humanissime Quintus 'Pomponia' inquit 'tu invita mulieres, ego viros arcessam.' (line 5 – 6)

- What did Quintus tell Pomponia to do? How does Cicero claim he spoke?
- What was Quintus going to do himself?

nihil potuit dulcius, non modo verbis sed etiam animo ac vultu. (line 6-7)

- Cicero mentions three ways in which Quintus' statement could not have been sweeter. What are they?

at illa, audientibus nobis, 'ego ipsa sum' inquit 'hic hospita' – id ex hac causa, ut opinor, quod antecesserat Staius ut prandium nobis videret! (line 7-9)

- Who does Cicero say is listening when Pomponia speaks?
- What does Pomponia claim to be?
- What does Cicero suggest may have caused Pomponia to feel her role at the meal had been taken from her?

tum Quintus 'en' inquit mihi 'haec ego patior cotidie.' (line 9-10)

- How often does Quintus say he suffers similar behaviour?

id me valde commovit: sic illa absurde et aspere verbis vultuque responderat. (line 10 – 11)

- How does Cicero say that he feels?

- What is it about the way that Pomponia answered Quintus that makes him feel this way?

itaque discubuimus omnes praeter illam. (line 11-12)

- Who was the only person who did not recline ready to eat?

Quintus ei aliquid de mensa misit, quod tamen illa reiecit. (line 11-12)

- To whom did Quintus send something from the table?
- Did she accept what he sent?

quid multa? nihil meo fratre lenius, nihil asperius tua sorore mihi visum est; et multa similia praetereo. (line 13-14)

- What do you think Cicero means by 'quid multa?'
- Cicero says nothing seems to him to be milder than his brother? What equivalent statement does he make about the sister of Atticus?
- What does Cicero say he is leaving out of his letter?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (line 1-7 **nihil ... vultu**) How does Cicero through content and style emphasise his approval of the nature and behaviour of Quintus?
2. (line 7-9 **at illa ... videret**) How does Cicero explain Pomponia's reply to her husband? What do these lines tell us about her expected role in relation to the meal?
3. (line 9-14 **tum ... praetereo**) How by his style and choice of vocabulary does Cicero show that he believes that Pomponia is habitually difficult?

Discussion

Themes: marriage, expectations of women, qualities of a wife, relationships between husbands and wives

From Cicero's description of this interaction between his brother and sister-in-law we can deduce a good deal about the expectations of behaviour for an aristocratic husband and wife. Cicero writes approvingly of the patience and restraint of Quintus in dealing with Pomponia. The second sentence of the text may imply that there has been some disagreement over expenditure, but that Quintus is not causing any unpleasantness over it. This circumspect behaviour in front of his companions contrasts with what later comes across as Pomponia's lack of sensitivity to the comfort of guests by complaining in their hearing ('*audentibus nobis*'). She is clearly expected to hide her own feelings, despite Cicero, and presumably her husband, realising that she feels slighted because Statius has usurped her role in making arrangements for the meal. It seems Pomponia's was expected to accept that her needs and feelings

were secondary to the decisions of her husband. A wife of good character would be more subservient and would also prioritise the comfort of guests before her own. Pomponia's efforts to make Quintus aware of her feelings are perceived as a flaw in her character that requires immense patience from Quintus and draws sympathy for him from Cicero. It is likely that Roman readers would sympathise with this view though students may see their lack of respect or empathy as patronising and unjust. We do not have any corresponding accounts of the behaviour of married couples from the perspective of women, but it is possible that Roman women too would have seen Pomponia as badly behaved.

Questions on the whole passage

- What does this passage tell us about the expected roles and behaviour of husbands and wives from the equestrian class?
 - Compare Pomponia's description here with that of Pliny's wife in his letter to Calpurnia Hispulla. What picture emerges of virtues and vices in Roman wives?
 - Write an imagined account of this incident from the perspective of a female friend of Pomponia. Take into account the virtues that would be expected in a Roman wife at that time.
 - Considering all relevant texts in the Love and Marriage prescription, what impression can we form of the lives of married women?
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Further Information and Reading

The Cambridge Latin Course Book V Stage 38 focuses on Roman marriage and contains a detailed discussion in English. A digital version of this section can be found [here](#).

It may be helpful to read the rest of this letter in translation from the second paragraph onwards to see that Atticus has cautioned Cicero about his sister, Pomponia, before this incident, and that Cicero is hoping to enlist Atticus' help in improving her behaviour. The letter and notes can be found on the Perseus Digital Library at Tufts University site [here](#).