



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

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

Martial: The Power of Love

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 following:

- 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.
- **Acknowledgement** of resources used in preparing these notes

- 3 **dum ... Averno:** The Lucrine Lake is an inlet off the Bay of Naples, near Pozzuoli, while Lake Avernus is some 500 metres further inland. Both are volcanic lakes about a mile from Baiae (see line 4 below). In Martial's day, the lakes and were a popular holiday resort where people came for boating.

Notice that the repetition of *modo* ('sometimes') in this line, and of *dum* ('while') here and in line 4, suggesting the easy rhythm of life at the lakes.

demittit: Martial's verb choice here implies in the simplest sense that Laevina 'lowers herself' into the water or perhaps into boats on the lakes, but he also implies that by her life of leisure and luxury, Laevina 'lowers herself' morally as well.

- 4 **et ... aquis:** Baiae was a fashionable seaside resort on the western side of the Bay of Pozzuoli, famous for its hot springs and luxurious bathing complex. The mineral waters of the hot springs were known for their health-giving properties (see for example, Pliny, *Natural History* 31.4-6), but by the late Republic the resort had become a notorious party town.

Propertius calls the place *corruptas... Baias* ('corrupt Baiae') and begs his lover Cynthia not to stay there, fearing that she will fall in love with someone else and abandon him (1.11) just as Laevina abandons her husband in this epigram.

fovetur: Martial tells us that Laevina spent her days at Baiae being 'warmed up' or 'pampered' in the hot baths. This pampering contrast with her 'austere' (*tristis*) character in line 2 and prefigures her fall into the 'flames' of love in the next line.

- 5 **incidit in flammis:** a sudden contrast with the leisurely mood of the preceding two lines emphasised by the assonance on 'i' in the first two words. There is a joking connection here between the 'flames' of passion and the hot waters at Baiae. The Greek poet Sappho was perhaps the first to use the metaphor of fire to describe her desire for her female lover (fragment 31), and Catullus translated Sappho's words into Latin when describing Lesbia's effect on him: *tenuis sub artus flamma demanat* ('a subtle flame steals through my limbs': Catullus 51, (not in these materials). Martial playfully pokes fun at this tradition with his pun on the heat of the baths.

- 5-6 **iuvenemque secuta relicto coniuge:** Notice that Laevina is presented as following her young man into adultery (rather than being the instigator), and as a consequence of this her husband is left behind. The mirroring of word patterns (*chiasmus*) in *iuvenemque secuta* (noun, participle) with *relicto coniuge* (participle, noun) emphasises her shift from the influence of one man to another.

- 6 **et Penelope venit, abit Helene:** Martial's punchline is also emphasised by the construction of the closing four words, where *Penelope venit* (name, verb) is mirrored (*chiasmus*) by *abit Helene* (verb, name).

Again, Martial's humour relies on stark contrasts (juxtaposition): Penelope is the faithful wife of Odysseus, dutifully awaiting his return from Troy in the face of her persistent suitors, while Helen's adultery with Paris was the fabled cause of the Trojan war. By the close of the epigram, Laevina has been transformed from one wifely paradigm into the other.

Discussion

Themes: adultery, marriage and fidelity, qualities of a wife, moral decline, chastity

This poem reveals a good deal about the expectations placed on Roman wives. Like Laevina at the start, good wives were expected to be chaste and faithful, as Martial's comparison with the Sabine women and Odysseus' wife Penelope imply. Since faithfulness and chastity were difficult virtues to prove, wives were expected to signal them through their outward appearance and behaviours. This meant staying at home as much as possible and dressing simply.

There is often a gap between the 'ideal' and the reality, and this was true in Roman society too. In Martial's day, women often ventured beyond the home, went to the baths and to parties, and impressed acquaintances with their learning and conversation. This gap created fears for some about moral collapse, which Martial explores and pokes fun at here.

Martial's poem seems to imply that love and desire are forces that, like fire, cannot be controlled. Notice that Laevina's actions are presented almost as a natural consequence of her self-indulgence at notorious Baiae and the surrounding lakes. Moralists like Seneca (see *De Beneficiis* 3.16: 'Changing morals' in this prescription) expressed concern that luxurious living led to moral decline, particularly the moral decline of women, who were believed less capable than men of self-control.

In this epigram, no one is immune from Martial's biting satire. He belittles the female exemplars that were cherished by Roman society, but he hardly thinks better of the men involved, who remain nameless figures of fun. Part of the purpose of Martial's satire is to hold a mirror up to society so it can see itself in all its contradiction, warts and all.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then re-read each line, 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.

casta nec antiquis cedens Laevina Sabinis (line 1)

- Who does Martial claim is no less chaste than the Sabine women of old?

et quamvis tetrico tristior ipsa viro (line 2)

- How does Martial describe Laevina's husband in this line? How does he compare Laevina with him?

dum modo Lucrino, modo se demittit Averno (line 3)

- Which two places does Martial tell us Laevina visited?

et dum Baianis saepe fovetur aquis (line 4)

- What does Martial tell us is happening to Laevina at Baiae?

incidit in flammis: iuvenemque secuta (line 5)

- What two things does Martial tell us Laevina did in these words?

Penelope venit, abit Helene (line 6)

- Who does Martial tell us Laevina resembles when she leaves Baiae, and who did she resemble when she arrived?

Questions on Style

1. (line 1) How does Martial emphasise the significance of Laevina's chastity in this line?
2. (line 2) How does he describe Laevina's character in this line?
3. (line 3 and 4) How does Martial emphasise Laevina's leisurly lifestyle at the lakes and Baiae in these lines?
5. (line 5 -6 to *conjuge*) How does Martial convey the power of love and desire in this line?
6. (line 6 from *Penelope*) How does Martial emphasise Laevina's transformation in this line?
7. (whole poem) Compare and contrast the ways in which the qualities of a Roman wife are described in this poem and in Pliny Letters 6.24 ('Faithful unto death' in this prescription)?
8. (whole poem) Compare and contrast the ways in which chastity and adultery are described in this poem and in Seneca *De Beneficiis* 3.16 ('Changing morals' in this prescription)?

Further Information and Reading

For more information on Martial and his works, including a useful very brief summary, see the Britannica entry here <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martial-Roman-poet>

A guardian article from October 2021 describes archaeological finds that provide insight into Baiae's reputation as a 'party town':

<https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/30/baiae-naples-ancient-rome-party-town->

Acknowledgements

Howell, Peter (1980). *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial*. The Athlone Press, London (page 253 to 257).