



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

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

Ovid: Advice to a rejected lover

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.

Ovid *Advice to a rejected lover (Ars Amatoria I.469-478)*

Ovid advises young men that the key to success in love is perseverance

Publius Ovidius Naso (43BC – AD 17) was born outside Rome, in Sulmo, to a wealthy equestrian family. He is most famous for his love poems, which he wrote whilst living in Rome. In 8 BC, Ovid was banished from Rome by the emperor Augustus. Ovid writes that the cause was *carmen et error* (a poem and a mistake). The poem was probably the *Ars Amatoria* ('The Art of Love'), but scholars still debate what the mistake may have been. Ovid spent the rest of his days in exile at Tomis on the Black Sea (modern Romania). He never returned to Rome.

The *Ars Amatoria* is a poetic instruction manual in love. This poem is devoted to giving advice to young men about winning the heart of a girl and it reveals a great deal about Roman attitudes towards women. Here, Ovid has turned to the art of letter-writing. In the lines before this passage, he advises the reader to make sure to use appropriate language when writing to his loved one. He now deals with the problem of a letter being returned unread.

Text

si non accipiet scriptum inlectumque remittet,
lecturam spera propositumque tene.
tempore difficiles veniunt ad aratra iuveni,
tempore lenta pati frena docentur equi.
ferreus assiduo consumitur anulus usu, 5
interit assidua vomer aduncus humo.
quid magis est saxo durum, quid mollius unda?
dura tamen molli saxa cavantur aqua.
Penelopen ipsam, persta modo, tempore vinces:
capta vides sero Pergama, capta tamen. 10

Notes

metre: elegaic couplets – pairs of lines with six feet in first line and five in second

–	vv	–	vv	–	vv	–	vv	–	vv	–	v	–
–	vv	–	vv	–		–	vv	–	vv	–	–	–

This poem is structured in pairs of lines (*couplets*). Each couplet takes a new theme:

- 1-2 a letter is rejected
- 3-4 animals which can be worn down by persistence
- 5-6 the erosion of iron
- 7-8 rock worn down by water
- 9-10 the Trojan War

1-2 The metre here is very heavy and plodding, filled with long syllables (*spondaic*). This reflects the content: the repetition of rejection and efforts.

si non accipiet: the subject is a woman who is being pursued by a would-be lover.

non accipiet scriptum inlectumque remittet: these words are arranged in a mirroring pattern (*chiasmus*): verb-participle-participle-verb. This draws attention to the sequence of events (she does not accept what has been written, and, not having read it, she will return it). It also mimics the 'bouncing back' of the letter. When recited, the words **scriptum inlectumque** would have been 'elided' – i.e. run together (**scriptinlectumque**). The lack of a pause between the words suggests the speed with which the letter is sent away.

2 **lecturam spera:** in full this would be **spera eam scriptum lecturam esse**. The idea is that the lover should send the letter again and again, until she gives in and reads it.

3-8 **tempore ...:** Ovid here embarks on a series of parallels drawn from everyday life, serving the same function as similes. His argument is that, just as in many areas of life, a hard, resistant creature or material will eventually be worn down by constant efforts or erosion, so in time an unwilling girl will also be worn down.

3-4 the rhythm is unusually fast in these two lines, providing a startling contrast with lines 1-2. The aim is to emphasise that the process of wearing down resistance will happen sooner rather than later. The quick metre contradicts what is actually said in the lines (**tempore** suggesting slowness and **lenta ... frena**, being held back) - an example of Ovid's sense of humour, aimed firmly at his educated audience.

3 **tempore:** note the emphatic position of this word, which of course is the key to his argument. The word is given the same force in the next line.

difficilēs: 'difficult' in the sense of being resistant to control.

iuuencī: bullocks were regularly used for drawing ploughs, right up until mechanisation. Note how the subject is deferred to the end of the line, for emphasis; the same is true of *equī* in the next line, helping to complete the parallelism between the two lines.

4 **lenta:** *lentus* is a difficult word, with many apparently contradictory meanings. The meaning here is 'long-lasting' and so 'persistent' or 'unyielding', a usage found in verse and prose.

- 5 **ferreus ... anulus:** rings, worn by both men and women, were exclusively of iron until the late republic, when gold rings became the mark of the rank of a senator, and later of the eques as well. Of course, Ovid chooses iron here because it was the hardest of the metals used for rings.
- assiduo usu:** perhaps simply the wearing of it, but Ovid may also be thinking of the use of many rings to sign documents. Note the emphatic repetition of **assiduā** in the same position in the next line, but with a different meaning.
- 6 **assidua:** literally 'constant', 'unremitting', and so by extension 'unending': the ground never ceases to need ploughing.
- 7-8 After four parallel lines, Ovid switches to a rhetorical question, followed by a refutation of the obvious answer to the question. Note also the arrangement in a mirroring pattern (noun adjective ... adjective noun) in *saxō dūrum ... mollius undā*, emphasising the contrast between the two.
- 8 **dura ... molli saxa ... aqua:** a good example of an interlocking of the word order beloved of Roman poets. The aim is often, as here, to provide a pair of contrasts by placing opposites more or less next to each other.
- 9 **Penelopen:** the long-suffering wife of Odysseus, who waited patiently for twenty years until her husband returned from the Trojan War; she became proverbial for uxorial loyalty. During her wait, she resisted the advances of a host of suitors, who never gave up trying to persuade her to abandon her marriage and choose one of them. Picture 5 in the examination prescription shows Penelope at her loom working on the shroud that she weaves and unpicks to delay making her choice. Ovid's argument here is that even Penelope's resistance would have been worn down eventually; the fact that she was famous precisely for not being persuaded might be expected to have raised doubts in the reader's mind about the logic of Ovid's argument.
- persta modo:** in urgent commands, *modo* regularly has the force of 'only be sure to'.
- tempore:** neatly rounding off the series of parallels by relating time to the task in hand and echoing its use in lines 3 and 4.
- 10 Ovid cannot resist one final parallel, to complete the couplet.
- Pergama:** Pergama, or Pergamum, was the citadel of Troy, famously captured after a ten-year siege by the Greeks. In poetry, the word for a part of something is often used to refer to the whole thing, and here Ovid uses the citadel to mean the entire city.
- sero:** Troy was captured after a ten-year siege. The moral is that, because they never gave up, the Greeks finally won.
- capta ... capta tamen:** The striking repetition of *capta* and the emphatic closing *capta tamen* hammer home the message of the poem: capture may be delayed but, with persistence, it will certainly happen.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each sentence, clause, or phrase, 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.

si non accipiet...tene (lines 1-2):

- What does she not receive? What does she do with it instead?
- What does Ovid instruct the reader to hope? What does Ovid instruct the reader to stick firmly to?

tempore difficiles...equi (lines 3-4):

- What kind of young bulls are mentioned here? What do they come to? When do they do this?
- What animals are mentioned next? What are they taught to do? How are the reins described? When do they do this?

ferreus assiduo... humo (lines 5-6):

- What kind of ring is mentioned here? What happens to it? What causes this?
- What kind of ploughshare is mentioned here? What happens to it? What causes this?

quid magis... aqua (lines 7-8):

- What does he ask about rock? What does he ask about water?
- What happens to the hard rock? What causes this?

Penelopen ipsam...capta tamen (lines 9-10):

- What does Ovid instruct the reader to do now? Who does he say the reader will win over? When will this happen?
- What does he say about Pergamum?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-2) How does Ovid's style of writing in these lines reinforce their meaning?
2. (lines 3-4)
 - a. How does Ovid use animals here to explain his point?
 - b. How does Ovid use repetition in these lines to emphasise his point?
3. (lines 5-6)
 - a. Explain how Ovid makes his point clearer by using the images of a ring and a ploughshare.
 - b. How does Ovid use repetition again in these lines to emphasise his point?
4. (lines 7-8) How does Ovid's style of writing in these lines reinforce their meaning?
5. (lines 9-10)
 - a. Explain Ovid's references to Penelope and Pergamum.

- b. Does using epic references here fit in with the rest of his poem?

6. (whole text)

- a. How does Ovid use persuasive techniques in this poem to convince the reader to pay attention to his advice?
- b. Consider all the examples Ovid used here to prove his point about persistence. How effective do you find them?
- c. Throughout this poem, Ovid uses techniques which reflect the meaning of the text. Think about the following techniques and explain how Ovid uses them here:
 - i. repetition
 - ii. chiasmus
 - iii. interlocked word order
- d. Ovid wrote this as a light-hearted poem for his Roman audience. What would have made this text light-hearted for his audience?

Discussion

Themes: finding a partner, stereotyping of women

The *Ars Amatoria* is not always easy for a modern audience to read, and students are likely to have strong reactions to, and opinions on, Ovid's advice here. Ovid's own Roman audience will need to be distinguished from a modern reaction to this material, which will enable students to explore the extent to which attitudes have changed over time.

Ovid here describes how persistence will eventually wear down the object of your affection and here he encourages men to continue sending letters. Students may well be familiar with this type of persistent messaging and how to make a point by leaving messages unread.

Other attitudes and stereotyping can be seen through Ovid's choice of metaphors: women are 'difficult', needing to be tamed, 'worn down' and 'conquered'. Students may be able to draw parallels with more modern presentations of romance.

Ovid is aiming to present his material with a humorous tone. His examples of resistance are almost epic in scope: indeed the subjects of the final couplet are clear references to Homeric epics. The examples are also a parody of didactic poetry, out of proportion with the context. The fact that Ovid is not entirely serious in his argument is shown by his inclusion of Penelope among the exempla.

Questions on the whole passage

1. What can we learn from this text about Roman attitudes towards finding a partner, and especially male attitudes towards women?
 2. Do you think that Ovid believes in his own advice here? (Think about the humour he is using: who do you think he is poking fun at?)
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Further Information and Reading

A.S. Hollis, *Ars Amatoria*, Book I Oxford Clarendon Press 1977

Research has been carried out on the possible link between exposure to media which equates persistence with romance, and problematic behaviors and attitudes. A summary of some findings from the work of Julia Lippman, University of Michigan, is given in [this interview](#).