



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

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

Pliny: To Calpurnia Hispulla his wife's aunt

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.

Pliny: Letters 4.19 - To Calpurnia Hispulla, his wife's aunt

Pliny praises his wife's virtues and thanks Hispulla for her part in her niece's upbringing

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, better known to us as Pliny the Younger (c.AD 61-c.AD 113) was a Roman politician from Comum, a city in Northern Italy. He is most famous now for the huge numbers of letters he wrote and subsequently published. These include a great deal of official correspondence with the Emperor, gossip about well-known figures, and commentary on life at the time for upper-class citizens of the Roman empire. His most famous letters are the eyewitness accounts he gave of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79.

Pliny wrote this letter shortly after his third marriage, to Calpurnia, who was probably no more than about 15 at the time, though Pliny was over 40. Such marriages were normal in Rome, at least among the upper classes. Calpurnia had lost her father and, as a result, was taken under the wing of her aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla, to whom the letter is addressed. The marriage appears to have been a happy one though they did not have any children, lasting about ten years until Pliny's death in Bithynia in about AD 113.

The Latin is adapted.

Text

cum sis pietatis exemplum, filiam fratris tui ut tuam diligis nec tantum amitae ei affectum repraesentas verum etiam patris amissi. maxime igitur gaudebis, cum cognoveris eam dignam patre, dignam te, dignam avo evadere. summum est acumen, summa frugalitas; amat me, quod castitatis indicium est. praeterea studium litterarum ex mei caritate concepit. meos libellos habet, lectitat, ediscit etiam. quanta sollicitudine afficitur cum ego acturus sum, quanto gaudio cum egi! disponit qui nuntient sibi quem assensum quos clamores excitaverim, quem eventum iudicii tulerim. eadem, si quando recito, in proximo discreta velo sedet laudesque meas avidissimis auribus excipit. versus quidem meos cantat formatque cithara, non artifice aliquo docente sed amore, qui magister est optimus.	5
his ex causis in spem certissimam adducor perpetuam nobis maioremque in dies futuram esse concordiam. non enim aetatem meam aut corpus, quae paulatim occidunt ac senescunt, sed gloriam diligit. nec aliud decet puellam tuis manibus educatam, quae amare me ex tua praedicatione consueverit. ergo tibi gratias agimus, ego quod illam mihi, illa quod me sibi dederis. vale.	10 15 20

Notes

- 1** the translation is **diligis** (you care for) **filiam fratris tui** (your brother's daughter) **ut tuam** (as your own)

pietatis: dutifulness was one of the great Roman virtues. It meant duty to parents, husband, Rome, the gods and any other worthy recipient. Here Pliny refers to the exemplary way Calpurnia Hispulla has taken care of her niece.

exemplum: a 'model' in the sense of a paragon.

fratris tui: Hispulla's brother had been Calpurnia's father.
- 2-3** the translation is **repraesentas** (you show) **ei** (her) **nec tantum** (not only) **affectum** (the affection) **amitae** (of an aunt) **verum etiam** (but also) **patris amissi** (of her lost father)

patris amissi: Hispulla has taken responsibility for Calpurnia following the death of her father.
- 3-4** **dignam patre, dignam te, dignam avo**: a list of three (*tricolon*) emphasising Calpurnia's worthiness, the repetition (*anaphora*) of **dignam** fixing the word in the mind of the reader. The lack of conjunctions (*asyndeton*) creates a punchy feel to the list.
- 4** **avo**: teachers may be interested to know that Calpurnia's grandfather was Calpurnius Fabatus, an eques and respected councillor of Comum (Pliny's home town).

evadere: notice the present tense here: she is still 'turning out' as the marriage continues to develop.

acumen: shrewdness in managing the household, rather than 'academic' intelligence.
- 4-5** **summum...summa**: Pliny emphasises her qualities by repeatedly describing them as 'great'. Throughout this letter, he uses hyperbolic vocabulary to describe Calpurnia, and also Hispulla's imagined reactions to learning of her niece's virtues.
- 5** **frugalitas**: thrift in terms of personal expenditure was valued in a wife.

castitatis: love was a bonus in Roman marriages between people of the upper classes. These marriages were often arranged for convenience, and often at a very young age. There was also often, as here, a large age-gap between the partners. Pliny's point is that the fact that Calpurnia loves him indicates that she will be faithful to him.
- 6** **ex mei caritate**: Pliny is clearly delighted that Calpurnia wishes to share in his own interests. Pliny's reaction also suggests that he would not have expected his wife necessarily to be interested in literature.
- 7** **libellos**: literally 'little books' and so 'writings'. Pliny published a wide variety of work over the course of his life, including speeches, poems and, most famously, letters.

habet, lectitat, ediscit: the *asyndeton* and *tricolon* create a swift, ascending list: not only does she have the books, she reads them; not only does she read them, she learns them by heart.

lectitat: the frequentative form of the verb shows that she read the works repeatedly.

7-8 **quanta...quanto:** note the contrast here, established by the repetition of this word.

8 the translation is **disponit** (she sends out) **qui** (people to) **nuntient** (tell) **sibi** (her)

acturus sum: much of Pliny's work involved working in the law-courts giving speeches. These speeches were as much a form of entertainment as legal arguments. Calpurnia is worried that his speech may not be successful.

8 **gaudio:** this suggests that his speeches are generally successful.

9 **recito:** Pliny recited his own works in front of small audiences.

9-10 **in proximo...sedet:** the audience at recitals would have been exclusively male. If a woman wished to listen, decorum would have required her to avoid being seen. Calpurnia would have sat in a neighbouring room.

10 **velo discreta:** internal doorways in Roman houses generally had curtains instead of wooden doors.

10 **laudesque meas:** notice how Pliny believes that his wife is more interested in the praise his recitals generate than their content, showing her loyalty to him.

11 **versus:** Pliny wrote at least two books of poems, now almost all lost.

cantat: verses were often chanted to the accompaniment of a cithara, a guitar-like instrument.

12 the translation is **non** (not) **artifice aliquo** (with some expert) **docente** (teaching)

13-14 the translation is **nobis** (for us) **futuram esse** (there will be) **concordiam** (a harmony)

perpetuam (lasting forever) **maioremque** (and greater) **in dies** (day by day).

perpetuam...futuram esse: since many marriages ended in divorce (see the text 'Seneca: changing morals'), Pliny is expressing the simple hope that theirs will last. It did: she accompanied him to Bithynia in AD 111, leaving only to return to Italy on the death of her grandfather. Pliny himself was to die in Bithynia shortly after this.

15 **aetatem... corpus:** Pliny was over 40 at the time of writing. He was realistic enough to accept that a girl of Calpurnia's age would hardly be likely to find him attractive.

16 **senescunt:** Pliny had about another ten years to live, dying at the age of about 51. This is relatively young for a man of his class. He is probably speaking figuratively rather than literally here, however.

gloriam: for a Roman, distinction in life was something to be sought and openly proud of when achieved. Since Roman women were not encouraged to have any sort of official public life, they could often only achieve distinction outside the home through their husbands.

16-17 tuis manibus educatam: Hispulla has taught Calpurnia how to be a model wife.

praedicatione: although Roman marriages were arranged and the weight of social expectation would have been on the woman to accept these arrangements, the marriages were not usually forced. Hispulla, once the betrothal had been made, would have praised Pliny's qualities as a way of persuading Calpurnia to accept her husband-to-be.

18-19 ego ... illum mihi ... illa ... me sibi: a neatly-balanced conclusion to emphasise how suitable Pliny believes the match to be, with equal beneficial outcomes for both himself and Calpurnia.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread 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.

cum sis...amissi (lines 1-3):

- What does Pliny say Hispulla is a model of?
- Who did Hispulla care for? How did she treat her?
- What kind of affection did she show Calpurnia? What had happened to Calpurnia's father?

maxime igitur...evadere (lines 3-4)

- How will Hispulla feel? Why?
- Who has Calpurnia turned out to be worthy of?

summum est...ediscit etiam (lines 4-7)

- What two aspects of Calpurnia's character does Pliny describe as great here?
- How does Calpurnia feel about Pliny? What does he think this is a sign of?
- What has Calpurnia taken up the study of? Why has she done this?
- What does Calpurnia have? What else does she do with them?

quanta...tulerim (lines 7-10)

- What does Calpurnia feel? When does she feel this?
- What does she also feel? When does she feel this?
- Why does Calpurnia send people out? What three things does she want to hear about in particular?

eadem...est optimus (lines 10-13)

- What activity of Pliny's is he talking about here?

- When Pliny does this, what does Calpurnia do? Where does she do this? How is she hidden?
- What does she listen to? What does she listen with?
- What does she sing? What does she accompany the singing with?
- Who didn't teach her to do this? What did teach her? What does Pliny say about this teacher?

his ex causis... consueverit (lines 14-19)

- Which reasons is Pliny referring to? What have these reasons led him to? What two hopes does he have for the future about their harmony?
- What two things does Pliny say Calpurnia does not love him for? What happens to these things gradually? What does Calpurnia love him for?
- What does nothing else benefit? What has Calpurnia grown to do? What caused her to do this?

ergo...vale (lines 19-20)

- Who thanks whom? Why does Pliny thank her? Why does Calpurnia thank her?
- How does Pliny sign off his letter?

Questions on Content, Style, and Culture

1. (lines 1-3) How does Pliny compliment Hispulla in these lines?
2. (lines 3-4) How does Pliny emphasise how pleased he is with his wife in these lines?
3. (lines 4-7):
 - a. What examples of her behaviour does Pliny use to praise his Calpurnia?
 - b. How does Pliny emphasise her behaviour through his style of writing?
4. (lines 7-10) Describe Calpurnia's behaviour whenever Pliny is speaking in court.
5. (lines 10-13):
 - a. How does Pliny show his wife's devotion to him through his writing?
 - b. How does Pliny emphasise her devotion through his style of writing?
6. (lines 14-15) How does Pliny show he is confident that their marriage will continue to be happy?
7. (lines 15-19):
 - a. What does Calpurnia love about Pliny, according to the author?
 - b. Why is this a relief to him?
8. (lines 19-20) Explain how Pliny uses his style of writing to show how both he and his wife are equally pleased with their partnership.

Discussion

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

From this letter we learn much about Pliny and Calpurnia in particular, but also much about contemporary attitudes towards women and marriage. Pliny is delighted at the suitability of the match between himself and Calpurnia: that is to say that Calpurnia's behaviour as it is described here reflects well upon Pliny.

Upper-class Roman marriages were probably arranged rather than forced, and it certainly seems here that Calpurnia had some opportunity to refuse the match. We can speculate as to how much pressure she would have been under from family and society to accept. She does appear to understand the expectations.

Although Roman readers would probably have found little to surprise them here, a modern reader may draw the conclusion that Pliny is both patronising and lacking a genuine emotional bond with his wife. However, he clearly is delighted that Calpurnia is developing a genuine affection for him and is keen to share his interests, which is more than a Roman husband could generally expect from his wife. Perhaps it is too early in their married life for Pliny to have begun to see Calpurnia as an (almost) equal; in some ways she probably seems more like a daughter.

Questions on the whole passage

1. How does Pliny use praise of his wife to highlight his own achievements?
 2. What does this passage suggest about the desirable qualities of an upper-class Roman wife in Pliny's day?
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Further Information and Reading

Pliny wrote several letters which are addressed to Calpurnia herself: Book VI, letters 4 and 7, and Book VII letter 5. In VI.4, Pliny describes how much he misses her and is worried for her health; in VI.7, he describes how glad he is that she misses him as much as he misses her; and in VII.5 he explains that he is throwing himself into his work to avoid thinking about her absence.

Sherwin-White, A. N. (1966) *The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

Radice, B. (2006) *The Letters of Pliny the Younger (2nd edition)*, Penguin

Walsh, P. G. (2006) *Pliny the Younger: Complete letters*, Oxford, Oxford University Press