



INTRODUCTION

Latin for the New Millennium, Level 3, introduces you to six authors of the classical period, Caesar, Catullus, Cicero, Vergil, Horace, and Ovid, and several authors from later centuries. Why should you devote so much effort to reading the works of these authors in the original Latin texts? Reading Latin literature in translation will allow you to understand the thoughts of the ancient authors—thoughts that have shaped the culture of our world—but reading the same authors in Latin allows you to see the subtleties and nuances of language and word order that often cannot be captured in a translation. Examples illustrating this point follow.

In Poem 5 Catullus invites Lesbia to enjoy life and to love; Lesbia is the focal point of the “living” and “loving” as is suggested by her occupying the center of the line.

Vivāmus, mea Lesbia, atque amēmus
“Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love”

He next requests that she discount the rumors of rather stern old men. The repetition of “s” in lines 2–3 subtly suggests the sound of the whispers of those very individuals who would disapprove of his and Lesbia’s love; all such rumors are to be valued at one cent:

rūmōrēsque senum sevēriōrum
omnēs ūnius aestimēmus assis!

“and all rumors of rather stern old men
let us assess at one cent!”

We can replicate the “s” sound in English to a certain extent, but it is difficult to do so in the sustained way that Catullus accomplishes in his poem.

To reinforce his point that Lesbia should embrace love, Catullus reminds her of life’s brevity by juxtaposing the renewal of nature against the inevitability of death for humankind (*nōbis, . . . nox est perpetua ūna dormienda*, lines 5–6). The repeated “re-” (which, as a prefix means “back” or “again”) in line 4, a repetition that cannot be achieved in our English translation, calls to mind nature’s cycles:

sōlēs occidere et redire possunt;
“suns are able to set and to return;”

Play on sound and syllables as well as the word order all contribute to the impact of Catullus’s poem.

In Book 2 of the *Aeneid* lines 524 and following, Vergil describes how Achilles’s son Pyrrhus first kills one of Priam’s sons in front of Priam and his wife and then kills Priam himself. The Latin passage cited below paints a heartrending picture of Priam trembling (*tremementem*) from rage and old age and slipping repeatedly—for this is what the participle *lāpsantem* suggests—in the copious blood of his son:

(Pyrrhus) . . . *altāria ad ipsa (Priamum) trementem
trāxit et in multō lāpsantem sanguine nātī,
implicuitque comam laevā, dextrāque coruscum
extulit ac laterī capulō tenuis abdidit ēnsem.*

(Aeneid 2.550–553)

“Pyrrhus drew to the altar itself Priam trembling
and slipping in the copious blood of his son,
and he entwined Priam’s hair with his left hand and
unsheathed with his right hand the gleaming sword and
buried it in Priam’s side up to the hilt.”

Notice that Vergil has, in fact, located Priam in the middle of the pool of blood, with *lāpsantem*, which refers to Priam, framed by *multō* and *sanguine* (line 551). This example shows how the flexibility of the Latin language enables Vergil to exploit word order to enhance the meaning of the text.

In the *First Catilinarian* (5.11), Cicero effusively gives thanks to the immortal gods and to Jupiter Stator, in whose temple the Senate is meeting, for allowing Cicero to escape so many times from the dangers posed by Catiline:

*Magna dīs immortalibus habenda est atque huic ipsī Iovī Statōrī, antiquissimō
custōdī huius urbis, grātia, quod hanc tam taetram, tam horribilem tamque
īnfestam reī pūblicae pestem totiēns iam effūgimus.*

“Great gratitude must be given to the immortal gods and to this very Jupiter Stator (Cicero refers to a statue of the god in the temple), the most ancient guardian of this city, because we now have so often escaped this disease so foul, so fear-inspiring, and so dangerous to the state.”

In this passage Cicero emphasizes the word “gratitude” by placing *grātia* at the end of its clause and separating the word from *magna*, the adjective at the beginning of the clause that modifies it, with the result that “great gratitude” frames the entire main clause. English cannot replicate this effect because, unlike Latin, its word order is less flexible. The *quod* clause also is notable because Cicero uses a metaphor of disease here to refer to Catiline. Catiline is a *pestis*, an infectious and contagious disease that is physically offensive (*taeter* can refer to the smell that accompanies illness), fear-inspiring (*horribilem*), and dangerous (*īnfestus*). It is difficult to capture this metaphor in translation and at the same time make clear that *pestis* signifies Catiline.

Julius Caesar begins his *Dē bellō Gallicō* by explaining why the Helvetians decided to invade Gaul. Orgetorix, the richest and most noble of the Helvetians, had great ambitions to expand their territory. As Orgetorix sets plans in place for the emigration of the Helvetians from their lands, he decides to invite the leaders of the Sequanians and the Aeduans to participate in his scheme to conquer all Gaul:

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Perfacile factū esse illis probat cōnāta perficere, proptereā quod ipse suae civitātis imperium obtentūrus esset.

“He demonstrates to them that to bring about the undertakings is very easy to do because he himself would obtain the command of his own state.”

The language that Caesar uses to reflect Orgetorix’s conversation with these leaders focuses on the doability of his idea by repeating the base for “to do” in *perfacile*, *factū*, and *perficere*. It is impossible to render this wordplay in English.

In *Odes* 1.5, the first love poem of the *Odes* 1–3, Horace uses word order to focus the first line on the subject of his poem; a chiasitic arrangement of nouns and adjectives (an ABBA order of words that is very difficult to achieve in English), a slender boy and many roses, frames Pyrrha (*tē*): *Quis multā gracilis tē puer in rosā*. The Latin here provides a word picture of what is actually happening in the poem, because the close proximity of the *puer* to the *puella* in line 1 is reinforced in line 2 where the *puer* is described as “pressing” her (*urget*):

*Quis multā gracilis tē puer in rosā
perfūsus liquidīs urget odōribus
grātō, Pyrrha, sub antrō?*

“What slender youth, drenched with liquid perfumes, presses you amid many a rose, Pyrrha, under [the shelter of] a pleasant grotto?”

Several lines later (6–8) Horace uses a metaphor of the sea to describe Pyrrha’s fickle character: *aspera / nigrīs aequora ventīs / ēmirābitur*. “[Her suitor] will wonder at the seas [now] rough with black winds.” The Latin also can be translated as “[her suitor] will wonder at seas [now] black with harsh winds” if both adjectives are interpreted as “transferred epithets”; that is, the adjective agrees in sense, but not in gender and form, with another noun. And so *nigrīs* could be taken with *aequora* and *aspera* with *ventīs*. Chances are Horace intended both interpretations, which in English, unlike Latin, are impossible to reproduce simultaneously.

Ovid uses word order in his story of Pyramus and Thisbe for a different effect. In predicting the death of the two lovers, he writes at *Metamorphōsēs* 4.108: “*ūna duōs*” inquit “*nox perdet amantēs*” (“one night will destroy two lovers”). The interlocked order of nouns and adjectives (an ABAB order of words) closely intertwines the single night and the two lovers in a way that English cannot reproduce; what is more, the striking antithesis between the juxtaposed numerals “one” and “two” cannot be replicated in English.

Reading the literature and thoughts of the ancients will broaden your education and sensitize you particularly to classical allusions and sources. For example, in reading the story of the star-crossed lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, in the chapter on Ovid, you will recognize that this story very likely forms the source for one of Shakespeare’s greatest and most celebrated tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet*. Similarly, Ovid’s tale of Pygmalion inspired works of literature and art, including the well-known musical *My Fair Lady*. In the chapter on Catullus, you will discover that poetry

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of the classical period can transcend time and seem as fresh and spontaneous as when it was written over two thousand years ago. From Vergil's *Aeneid* you will learn that literary heroes suffer much personal loss and have to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles; the same qualities characterize heroes in current literary works such as the Harry Potter series, in which J.K. Rowling brilliantly recycles classical myth to suit the purposes and needs of her epic tale. Cicero's *Dē amīcitiā* reminds us of the universality of friendship and how essential interpersonal relationships are to humankind. Caesar's commentaries on the Gallic War, the only surviving historical document from the first century BCE to focus on this part of the world, provide us with a firsthand account of the culture and civilization of Gaul, Germany, and Britain. For some, seeing the continuity between the past and present western cultures offers one of the principal attractions for studying the classical world.



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