



ARTICLE

Catullus' Lament for Lesbia's *Passer* in the Context of Pet-Keeping

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Abstract

In the last three lines of Catullus' 'dead sparrow' poem (. . . *o miselle passer! / tua nunc opera meae puellae / flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli*, Catull. 3.16–18), the poet turns his attention from the fate of the *passer* to the effect that its death has on Lesbia. What is remarkable here is the accumulation of diminutives (*miselle, puellae, turgiduli, ocelli*), a feature which most translators fail to take sufficiently into account. In particular, the employment of two (comparatively rare) diminutive adjectives is especially striking. The effect of such overkill is mock pathos, but why does Catullus end his poem on a parodic note? I would like to suggest that we view this in the light of the Romans' tendency to criticise excessive emotional display regarding pets and especially to their deaths, the implication being that Lesbia's reaction is overdone. Catullus' mocking of his girl's unbounded grief for her pet is also to be linked to poem 2 where, it could be argued, the poet displays jealousy of Lesbia's emotional commitment to the *passer*.

Keywords: Catullus 2 and 3; Lesbia's *Passer*; pet animals; excessive emotion; diminutive epithets; mock epitaphs

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque,
et quantum est hominum uenustiorum:
passer mortuus est meae puellae,
passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quem plus illa oculis suis amabat. 5
nam mellitus erat suamque norat
ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem,
nec sese a gremio illius mouebat,
sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc
ad solam dominam usque pipiabat; 10
qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum
illud, unde negant redire quemquam.

at uobis male sit, malae tenebrae
 Orci, quae omnia bella deuoratis:
 tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis. 15
 o factum male! o miselle passer!
 tua nunc opera meae puellae
 flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli.

Catull. 3

Mourn, O Venuses and Cupids and all who love beauty: my girl's sparrow is dead, the sparrow, my girl's pet, whom she loved more than her eyes. For he was a little honey and knew his mistress as well as a girl knows her own mother. He never moved from her lap, but, hopping about here and there, kept on chirping to his mistress alone. Now he goes along that shadowy road from where they say no one returns. A curse on you, evil shades of Orcus, who devour all pretty things: such a pretty sparrow you've stolen from me. O how sad! O you poor little sparrow! Now because of you my darling's poor little eyes are all swollen and red with weeping!¹

Catullus' famous poem on the death of Lesbia's pet sparrow needs no introduction. Ostensibly, it begins as a light-hearted epitaph for a pet bird but ends with a twist in the last two lines in which the poet seems to be more concerned with the effect on his beloved of the sparrow's death than with the death itself. The parodic character of the epitaph is obvious to a reader familiar with the Hellenistic tradition of laments for animals, which are usually non-serious in character.² In addition, even before the final twist, when it becomes clear that the poet's grief for the bird is not to be taken too seriously, the parody is signalled by the incongruous application to a small bird of sentiments more appropriate to a human subject: the hyperbolic address to the *Veneres Cupidinesque* as chief mourners; elements borrowed from the epitaphic tradition, such as the enumeration of the deceased's virtues or the description of the bird's journey to the underworld and the curse on the shades.³ In the last two or three lines of the poem, commentators have frequently noted a change from mock pathos to genuine love and distress at the suffering of the *puella*, some even regarding the whole piece as essentially a love poem (the chief mourners are, after all, *Veneres Cupidinesque*).⁴ But this perceived alteration of tone seems awkward: moreover, if lines 17 and 18 are a serious expression of love, why does the most overblown language in the poem occur in these very lines?

¹ For Catullus, I have used the Oxford Classical Text edited by R. A. B. Mynors (1958). All translations of Catullus and other authors quoted are my own unless otherwise specified.

² Several such epigrams are collected in the *Palatine Anthology* (*Anth. Pal.* 7.189–216).

³ Cf. Ingleheart (2003) 559–60. See also Kroll (1968) and Quinn (1970) ad loc. We might also include *tua nunc opera* (17). Although this has caused problems for scholars because it wasn't the bird's fault that it died (cf. Thomson (1997) ad loc. who reads *vestra*, putting the blame on the shades of Orcus), the phrase could recall a common type of epitaph where a dead person is said to have caused the living grief by dying: see Lattimore (1962) 181, 198 for examples.

⁴ E.g., Herrlinger (1930) 75–8, Van Dam (1984) 338, Kroll (1968) ad loc., Quinn (1970) ad loc.

I would argue that the piece as a whole is ironic and that this is signalled by the use of language in the last three lines. Especially striking here is the accumulation of diminutives – *miselle*, *puellae*, *turgiduli* and *ocelli*. The diminutive form *puella* is not, of course, remarkable in itself (the positive *puera* being obsolete), but it retained affective resonances (erotic or pathetic depending on the context)⁵ and so contributes to the overall effect. More importantly, two out of the four diminutives noted above (*miselle* and *turgiduli*) are *adjectives* – a form used much less frequently than diminutive nouns. In Augustan poetry, they are extremely rare, which is why Dido's wish for a *paruulus Aeneas* (Verg. *Aen.* 4.328) has an especially emotive impact.⁶ Even in Catullus, whose frequent use of diminutives in the polymetrics and the longer poems is well established, diminutive adjectives are considerably less common than diminutive nouns (24 different adjectives used 30 times as opposed to 44 nouns used 79 times).⁷ Moreover, not only are diminutive epithets more striking because of their comparative rarity, but their use, in comparison with diminutive nouns, is significant in another respect. Often the nouns have lost their diminutive force, replacing, or becoming more common than, the corresponding positive form (e.g., *flagellum* 'whip' or *catulus* 'pup' ousted their positive forms *flagrum* and *catus*): in other words, the diminutive form has no particular affective connotations. In the case of diminutive adjectives, by contrast, there is no semantic difference between the diminutive and positive form, so that if the former is preferred, it is usually to produce some special effect. In Catullus, this effect is frequently one of irony or sarcasm, for instance mocking someone suffering from the pangs of love (very commonly), expressing mock sympathy, and so on.

Catullus' use of *misellus* is a good example. Ronconi points out that the word for 'poor, unhappy' in serious contexts in Catullus' time was *miser*, and he cites Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*:⁸

A. Malum mihi uidetur esse mors. M. Iisne, qui mortui sunt, an iis, quibus moriendum est? A. Vtrisque. M. Est miserum igitur, quoniam malum. A. Certe. M. Ergo et ii, quibus euenit iam ut morerentur, et ii, quibus euenturum est, miseri. A. Mihi ita uidetur. M. Nemo ergo non miser.
Cic. *Tusc.* 1.5.9

A. I consider death to be an evil. M. For those who have already died, or for those who must die in the future? A. For both. M. Therefore, it is an event attended by misery since it is an evil. A. Agreed. M. And so, both those to whom death has already happened, and those to whom it is going to happen, are miserable. A. So, it seems to me. M. Therefore there is no one who is not miserable.

Catullus also uses *miser* in serious contexts, for instance in the poem on the death of his brother:

⁵ See Watson (1983).

⁶ See Austin (1955) ad loc., and cf. Catullus' *paruulus Torquatus* (61.209). For the rarity of diminutive adjectives, see Gow (1932) 156.

⁷ Platner (1895) 186–202.

⁸ Ronconi (1940) 126. Text from King (1927).

Multas per gentes et multa per aequora uectus
 aduenio has **miseras**, frater, ad inferias,
 ut te postremo donarem munere mortis
 et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem.
 quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum,
 heu **miser** indigne frater adempte mihi

Catull. 101.1–6.

Travelling through many nations and over many seas I have come, brother, to carry out these sad funeral rites, so that I might give to you the final offering which the dead receive and address your silent ash without hope of reply, seeing that ill fortune has robbed me of you yourself. Alas, poor brother unworthily taken from me

or of Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus (64.57), or several times of his own hopeless lovesick state, for example:

ille mi par esse deo uidetur,
 ille, si fas est, superare diuos,
 qui sedens aduersus identidem te
 spectat et audit
 dulce ridentem, **miser**o quod omnis
 eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
 Lesbia, aspexi....

Catull. 51.1–7

That man seems to me to be equal to a god, that man, if it's permitted to say so, seems superior to the gods, who sitting opposite you again and again can look at you and listen to your sweet laughter, something which in my case, wretched [with love] as I am, robs me of all my senses, for as soon as I behold you, Lesbia...

Compare 8.1 (*miser Catulle, desinas ineptire*), or 76.17–20:

o di, si uestrum est misereri, aut si quibus umquam
 extremam iam ipsa in morte tulistis opem,
 me **miserum** aspice et, si uitam puriter egi,
 eripite hanc pestem perniciemque mihi

O gods, if [as surely as] it is your part to have pity, or if you have ever brought help at the end to those on the threshold of death, behold me in my misery and if I have lived a sinless life, snatch away from me this deadly disease⁹

⁹ See Booth (1997).

Misellus, on the other hand, which Catullus uses five times, always seems to have some sort of ironic force, whether expressing mock sympathy or gently ridiculing the misery of the lover.¹⁰ For instance, poem 40 is directed against a rival lover:

Quaenam te mala mens, **miselle** Rauide,
 agit praecipitem in meos iambos?
 quis deus tibi non bene aduocatus
 uecordem parat excitare rixam?
 an ut peruenias in ora uulgi? 5
 quid uis? qualubet esse notus optas?
 eris, quandoquidem meos amores
 cum longa uoluisti amare poena.

What derangement, poor Ravidus, drives you headlong into my lampoons?
 What god misguidedly invoked by you prepares to incite an insane brawl?
 Or are you doing this so that you can be talked about? What are you after?
 Do you want to be notorious at any cost? You will be, seeing that you have
 wished to love my beloved at the expense of a long punishment.

Here we could describe the tone as 'mock sympathetic',¹¹ and the same applies in the obscene 80, an attack on Gellius for fellatio which makes use of mock high style and in which the description of Gellius' male lover Victor as *misellus* fits in with the sarcastic, invective tone:

Quid dicam, Gelli, quare rosea ista labella
 hiberna fiant candidiora niue,
 mane domo cum exis et cum te octaua quiete
 e molli longo suscitatur hora die?
 nescio quid certe est: an uere fama susurrat 5
 grandia te medii tenta uorare uiri?
 sic certe est: clamant Victoris rupta **miselli**
 ilia, et emulso labra notata sero.

Gellius, what am I to say is the reason why those rosy lips of yours become whiter than snow in winter, when you leave your house early in the morning and when the eighth hour arouses you from soft rest when the days are long? Surely something's up: or does rumour whisper truly that you devour the great rigid [*membra*] of a man's middle? That's it certainly: the burst groin of poor little Victor proclaims it, and your lips stained with seed that has been milked off.

¹⁰ Cf. Ronconi (1940) 127.

¹¹ Cf. Quinn (1970) ad loc. who detects a 'note of (slightly amused) pity'.

In two poems *misellus* is used to gently laugh at erotic passion (contrast 8, 50 and 76 where *miser* is used, and the same emotion – on the part of Catullus himself – is treated much more seriously). The first is 35:

Poetae tenero, meo sodali,
 uelim Caecilio, papyre, dicas
 Veronam ueniat, Noui relinquens
 Comi moenia Lariumque litus. 5
 nam quasdam uolo cogitationes
 amici accipiat sui meique.
 quare, si sapiet, uiam uorabit,
 quamuis candida milies puella
 euntem reuocet, manusque collo
 ambas iniciens roget morari. 10
 quae nunc, si mihi uera nuntiantur,
 illum deperit impotente amore.
 nam quo tempore legit incohatam
 Dindymi dominam, ex eo **misellae**
 ignes interiorem edunt medullam. 15
 ignosco tibi, Sapphica puella
 musa doctior; est enim uenuste
 Magna Caecilio incohata Mater.

Papyrus, I'd like you to tell Caecilius, the love poet, my friend, that he should leave the walls of Novum Comum and the Larian shore (Lake Como) and come to Verona. For I want him to receive some thoughts of a friend of his and mine. So, if he's wise, he'll eat up the road, though a lovely girl calls him back a thousand times when he is leaving and throwing both arms round his neck, begs him to put off his departure. She, if what I've been told is true, is now desperately and madly in love with him. For, since the moment she read his unfinished 'Lady of Dindymus', the poor little thing has been eaten by fires to the core of her bones. I forgive you, girl, more learned than the poetess Sappho. Caecilius has made a very nice start on his unfinished 'Great Mother'.

In this poem, Catullus begs a fellow poet Caecilius to visit, since a mutual friend has criticisms to make of his unfinished poem on Cybele. He seems to be detained by a girl who is madly in love with him: since she fell in love when she read his poem, surely she must be a better literary critic than Sappho herself. A possible explanation of the piece¹² is that Caecilius thinks his poem finished and is ready to publish it; the girl is his excuse for not visiting; Catullus urges his friend to come because he has some suggestions which would improve the work. He pardons the girl and her pretensions as a literary critic because the poem is good, but it needs more work. All the allusions to the girl are ironic or overblown: she appreciates poetry better than Sappho herself;

¹² Copley (1953).

the description of her love is presented in hyperbolic terms – her constant entreaties to Caecilius to stay, and the description of her lovesick state with its echoes of Comedy.¹³ In this context *misella* is mock pathetic rather than expressing real sympathy for a lover's condition.

Similarly, in the Septimius and Acme poem, the description of the lover Septimius as *misellus* is part of the generally light-hearted treatment of the two lovers:

Acmen Septimius suos amores
 tenens in gremio 'mea' inquit 'Acme,
 ni te **perdite amo** atque amare porro
 omnes sum assidue paratus annos,
 quantum qui pote plurimum perire, 5
 solus in Libya Indiaque tosta
 caesio ueniam obuius leoni.'

....
 at Acme leuiter caput reflectens 10
 et dulcis pueri ebrios **ocellos**
 illo purpureo ore suauitata,
 'sic', inquit 'mea uita **Septimille**,

.....
 unam Septimius **misellus** Acmen
 mauult quam Syrias Britanniasque

Catull. 45.1–7, 10–13, 21–2

Septimius holding in his lap his beloved Acme said 'My Acme, if I don't love you to distraction and am not prepared to continue loving you on and on all my days as much as any lover can possibly love, may I come face to face with a green-eyed lion, all on my own, in Libya or sunburned India.... But Acme, bending her head lightly back and kissing with those rosy lips the dear eyes, drunken with love, of her sweet boy, said 'Even so, dear little Septimius, light of my life.... Poor lovesick Septimius prefers Acme alone to any Syria or Britain

To return to Catullus 3, at line 16 *miselle* carries the implication that the poet's expression of grief is ironic, reinforcing the parodic nature of the epitaph, but it also effects a bridge to the final two lines, where the appearance of two further diminutives in 18 continues the tone of parody. Although *ocellus* (17) is commonly used by Catullus with serious emotional overtones (affectionate, for instance of Sirmio (31.2) or his dear friend Calvus (50.19); pathetic (64.60 of Ariadne), it can also be parodic, as in the case of the lover Septimius, where its effect is one of mock pathos (in line 11 Acme kisses the *ebrios ocellos* of her lover whom she addresses as Septimillus). I suggest that *ocellus* produces a similar effect in poem 3.

¹³ *deperire* (l. 12) is frequently used in Comedy. Cf. Thomson (1997) ad loc.

But the ironic tone for which I have been arguing is established above all by the use of the diminutive adjective *turgidulus* (a word which draws particular attention to itself by its paradoxical nature, since *turgidus* suggests augmentation rather than the diminution implied by the termination *-ulus*).¹⁴ Most translators, having difficulties finding an English equivalent, have tended to ignore the nuances of the word, treating it as merely equivalent to *turgidus*.¹⁵ Quinn and Fordyce ad loc. both comment on the affective use of diminutives (without distinguishing between substantives and adjectives) but the former's 'a little swollen' fails to capture the tone of the epithet here, while the latter, though pointing, in an excellent note, to the various emotional overtones that can be conveyed by diminutives (including affection, amusement or contempt), does not specify which of these is relevant in this case.¹⁶

Turgidulus certainly has an emotional colour, but in view of the fact that, as mentioned above, Catullus tends to use diminutive *adjectives* with ironic force, the emotion is not to be taken seriously. (In my translation above I've tried 'are all swollen', to suggest mock pathos).

To summarise, the accumulation of emotive language from 14 onwards, the final line containing two diminutives including an ironically charged diminutive adjective, produces a hyperbolic, parodic tone which continues to the end of the poem. Lines 17–18 are best taken as an expression of pseudo-sympathy rather than an expression of genuine concern for Lesbia's grieving condition.¹⁷

Given this premise, the question arises, at whose expense is the irony in the last two lines? Is Catullus parodying his own *persona* as lover, in a sorry state because his poor girl is overwhelmed by tears? Or is the satire directed rather towards Lesbia herself and her unrestrained grieving for her pet?

The second of these hypotheses gains support in the light of a tendency found in both Greek and Roman writers to pillory those who are overly sentimental towards pets (both pet animals and pet slaves).¹⁸ This is part of a more general disapprobation, in particular on the part of the Stoics, of extravagant emotional display, especially of grief, which should according to Seneca be restrained in public and kept within bounds even in private.¹⁹ In respect of pets, many examples could be cited,²⁰ but two poems of Martial are worth looking at.

¹⁴ Cf. *saepicule* (Plaut. *Cas.* 703, Apul. *Met.* 1.12 etc.), *uastulis corporibus* (Apul. *Met.* 2.32).

¹⁵ E.g., 'my lady's darling eyes are heavy and red with weeping' (Cornish/Goold 1913/1988), 'my girl's eyelids are swollen red with crying' (Lee 1991), 'my sweetheart's eyelids are sore and swollen red from all her weeping' (Green 2005), 'her poor little eyes burning with the tears' (Smith 2018).

¹⁶ Presumably 'affection', given that in his introduction to the poem he comments that the piece turns from a lament into a love lyric.

¹⁷ Ronconi (1940) 133 also thinks, on the basis of the use of diminutives, that Lesbia's grief is not to be taken seriously, but attributes this to 'affectionate joking'.

¹⁸ Animals and slaves can in this case be classed together: the terms for pet (*deliciae* and *delicium*) are used of both. Cf. Mart. 7.87 discussed below and Stat. *Silv.* 2.6.18–20, where *exempla* of mourning for pet animals (horses, dogs, birds, and Lavinia's stag in *Aeneid* 7) are cited to justify the grief of Flavius Ursus for his favourite slave Philetus.

¹⁹ Sen. *ad Marc.* 13. Cf. Cic. *Att.* 12.15, *Fam.* 5.16, *Tusc.* 3, *Cons. ad Liv.* 7–8, 353–4, 467ff., Hor. *Carm.* 2.9.17–18 with Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) ad loc., Lattimore (1962) 217, 219.

²⁰ Cicero (*Att.* 1.12.4), for instance, feels the need to apologise for his grief at a pet slave's death (*me ... plus quam serui mors debere uidebatur commouerat*). For pet animals, cf. Plut. *Per.* 1.1, Eubulus fr.

Si meus aurita gaudet lagalopece Flaccus,
 si fruitur tristi Canius Aethiope;
 Publius exiguae si flagrat amore catellae,
 si Cronius similem cercopithecon amat;
 delectat Marium si perniciosus ichneumon, 5
 pica salutatrix si tibi, Lause, placet;
 si gelidum collo nectit Glaucilla draconem,
 lusciniio tumulum si Telesilla dedit:
 blanda Cupidinei cur non amet ora Babyrtae,
 qui uidet haec dominis monstra placere suis? 10
 Mart. 7.87²¹

If my Flaccus delights in a long-eared fennec, if Canius enjoys a gloomy Ethiopian, if Publius burns with love for a tiny doggie, if Cronius loves a monkey that looks like him, if an aggressive ichneumon delights Marius, if, Lausus, a magpie that says hello pleases you; if Glaucilla coils a clammy snake around her neck, if Telesilla gave a tomb to her nightingale: why shouldn't anyone who sees these freaks pleasing their owners not love the winning face of Cupidlike Babyrtas?

The poet justifies his love for a pet slave, Babyrtas (a sufferer from a physical and/or intellectual abnormality),²² by listing other *monstra* – both human and animal – in which their owners take pleasure, but with less good reason. The keeping of exotic pets was often attacked as symbolic of luxury and extravagance,²³ but in this epigram the mockery is directed more at the owners' excessive and unexpected love for their unusual pets: this is emphasised by a succession of verbs (*gaudet, fruitur, flagrat amore, amat, delectat, tibi . . . placet*). The incongruity between the abnormality of the pets and their owner's fondness for them is further emphasised by giving nearly all the *delicia* an epithet describing striking and/or unpleasant characteristics – the long ears of the fennec (1), the ugliness of the ape (4), the viciousness of the mongoose (5), and so on – and is underscored by the juxtaposition *monstra placere* in the last line. By contrast, although Martial's pet is a *monstrum*, he is agreeable both facially and temperamentally (*blanda Cupidinei . . . ora*).

Martial's ridicule is aimed, however, not only at owners whose fierce attachment to their pets cannot be justified by any attractive qualities possessed by these pets, but as well, he targets excessive love for pets *per se*. This is clearly

114 PCG, Sen. *ad Marc.* 12.2 (*catulos auesque et friuola animorum oblectamenta*), Plin. *HN* 9.172; Citroni (1975) on Mart. 1.109.

²¹ For the two Martial epigrams quoted I have used the Oxford Classical Text edited by W. M. Lindsay (2nd ed., 1929), apart from the reading *Babyrtae* (for OCT *Labycae*) at 7.87.9: see following note.

²² The logic of the epigram demands that Babyrtas is, like the other pets, a *monstrum*. His appealing, childlike features (cf. *blanda Cupidinei . . . ora*) could describe proportionate dwarfism, though the name Babyrtas [cf. *baburrus=stultus*] suggests intellectual impairment. Both dwarfs and *moriones* were popular slave pets among wealthy Romans. See Watson and Watson (2003) 263.

²³ E.g., Theophr. *Char.* 21.9; Petron. *Sat.* 71.11, Ael. *VH* 8.4, Ath. 12.518.

the case with the lapdog (3) and the nightingale (8), neither of which is intrinsically unworthy of their owner's affection. Here, the point must be that the owners are overly enamoured of these tiny insignificant creatures.²⁴ Publius is said to 'burn' (*flagrare*) with love, a verb often used of strong emotions, such as anger, hatred, or human passion (*OLD* s.v. *flagro* 3). The dog, Issa, had been the subject of a eulogistic epigram (Mart. 1.109)²⁵ in which scholars have detected a note of irony or humour.²⁶ In the case of Telesilla (8), affection for her pet is translated into disproportionate sorrow at its demise, so that she gives it a funeral monument.²⁷

Another epigram in which excessive grief for a pet – in this case a pet slave – plays a part is Mart. 5.37:

Puella senibus dulcior mihi cynis,
 agna Galaesi mollior Phalantini,
 concha Lucrini delicatior stagni,
 cui nec lapillos praeferas Erythraeos
 nec modo politum pecudis Indicae dentem 5
 niuesque primas liliumque non tactum;
 quae crine uicit Baetici gregis uellus
 Rhenique nodos aureamque nitellam;
 fragrauit ore quod rosarium Paesti,
 quod Atticarum prima mella cerarum, 10
 quod sucinorum rapta de manu gleba;
 cui comparatus indecens erat pauo,
 inamabilis sciurus et frequens phoenix,
 adhuc recenti tepet Erotion busto,
 quam pessimorum lex amara fatorum 15
 sexta peregit hieme, nec tamen tota,
 nostros amores gaudiumque lususque.
 Et esse tristem me meus uetat Paetus,
 pectusque pulsans pariter et comam uellens:
 'Deflere non te uernulae pudet mortem? 20
 Ego coniugem' inquit 'extuli et tamen uiuo,
 notam, superbam, nobilem, lucupletem.'
 Quid esse nostro fortius potest Paeto?
 Ducentiens accepit et tamen uiuit.

Mart. 5.37

²⁴ See further Watson and Watson (2003) 260–4.

²⁵ Assuming that the name Publius in the two poems refers to the same person.

²⁶ See esp. Citroni (1975) ad loc. Howell (1980) likens the repetition of the name Issa in lines 1–5 to the obsession of a lover. Cf. also Juvenal's satiric attack on modern women (*Sat.* 6.652–4): if they were to find themselves in the same position as Alcestis, who offered her own life in exchange for her husband's, they would prefer to sacrifice their husbands in order to save the life of their lapdog; also Lucian, *Merc. Cond.* 34, ridiculing a wealthy woman's devotion to her pet 'doggy'.

²⁷ On funerary monuments for pets, see Van Dam (1984) 341 (on Stat. *Silv.* 2.4 intro.), who finds Martial sarcastic here; Diggle (2004) on Theophr. *Char.* 21.9, where the 'man of petty ambition' puts up a showy tomb for his pet lapdog.

Girl sweeter to me than aged swans, softer than a lamb of Phalanthine Galaesus, daintier than a shell of the Lucrine lake, to whom you would prefer neither Erythraean pearls nor the freshly polished tusk of the Indian beast or new-fallen snow or untouched lily; whose hair surpassed the fleece of a Baetic flock or the knots of the Rhine or the golden door-mouse; whose breath was fragrant as a Paestan rose garden or new honey from Attic combs or a lump of amber snatched from the hand; compared to whom a peacock would have been ugly, a squirrel unlovable, a phoenix commonplace: Erotion lies still warm on her fresh pyre, she whom the harsh law of the most wicked Fates carried off in her sixth winter still incomplete, my love, my joy, my plaything. And yet my friend Paetus tells me not to be sad, as he beats his breast and tears his hair: 'Are you not ashamed to weep for the death of a little slave girl? I have buried my wife, and yet I go on living – a woman well-known, proud, noble, rich.' What can be braver than our Paetus? He has come into 20 million and yet he goes on living.

The epigram, this time on a pet slave, is a good example of the idea that it is inappropriate to mourn too much for the death of a pet. The poem begins with a eulogy of the dead *delicium* Erotion, the exaggerated character of which leads a surprise interlocutor, Paetus, to reproach the poet for his immoderate display of distress at the death of a mere *uernula*. He himself has been able to go on living (21) despite his loss of an exemplary wife. The unrestrained nature of Paetus' mourning (line 19)²⁸ prepares for a typically Martialian surprise twist, in which the poet points out sarcastically that Paetus certainly bears up bravely, having benefited financially from his wife's death. Obviously, Paetus' avowal of restraint is, in the context of the poem, a means of setting him up for the final revelation of his hypocrisy. But it has its genesis in the idea that grief, especially for a slave pet (*uernula*) is not something to be indulged in to excess.

In Catullus 3, the poet, I suggest, is mocking Lesbia's immoderate show of grief for her pet bird.²⁹ The strength of her attachment to the bird was suggested earlier in the piece by *plus illa oculis suis amabat* (5), an expression used elsewhere by Catullus of strong passion, and, it will be noted, in contexts which are light-hearted or parodic: for instance, at 14.1 *ni te plus oculis meis amarem / iucundissime Calve* the tone is jocular and when the poet uses it of his love for Lesbia in 82 it is in the context of a complex word-play.³⁰

One further point. The keeping of pet animals was associated in particular with children, especially females.³¹ Similarly, weeping over a pet was regarded

²⁸ Cf. Watson (1992) 263–4.

²⁹ This is perhaps suggested by the opening address to the *Veneres Cupidinesque* as chief mourners.

³⁰ *Quinti, si tibi vis oculos debere Catullum / aut aliud si quid carius est oculis, / eripere ei noli, multo quod carius illi / est oculis seu quid carius est oculis*, 'Quintius, if you want Catullus to owe you his eyes, or whatever else is dearer than his eyes, do not snatch away from him what is much dearer to him than his eyes or whatever is dearer than his eyes'.

³¹ E.g., *Anth. Pal.* 7.190, 198, 207, *Diod. Sic.* 13.82, *Apul. Met.* 8.15, *Plin. Ep.* 4.2.3, *Petron. Sat.* 46.3, Lazenby (1949) 249.

as a childish thing: Valerius Maximus (1.5.3) for instance, relates the story of little Tertia, mourning the death of her pet puppy Persa, whose response to her father Paulus' inquiry as to her sorrowing state produced the memorable 'Persa has died', an omen of her father's defeat of King Perses. Even more pertinent is one of the Hellenistic epigrams on the deaths of pets, where the little girl Myro sheds girlish tears³² for her pet locust and cicada:

Ἀκρίδι τῶ κατ' ἄρουραν ἀηδόνι, καὶ δρυοκοίτῃ
 τέτιγι ζυνὸν τύμβον ἔτευξε Μυρώ,
 παρθένιον στάξασα κόρα δάκρυ· δισσὰ γὰρ αὐτᾶς
 παίγνι' ὁ δυσπειθῆς ὄχετ' ἔχων Αἴδας.

Anth. Pal. 7.190³³

For her locust, the nightingale of the fields, and her cicada that rests on the trees a common tomb young Myro has made, shedding girlish tears; for inexorable Hades has carried off her two pets.

In poem 3, then, Catullus could be hinting that Lesbia is not merely displaying immoderate distress but in so doing, is behaving in a childlike, girlish manner. Lines 6–7 (*suamque norat / ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem*: 'and he knew his mistress as well a girl knows her own mother') might carry the suggestion that, like a young unmarried girl, Lesbia's main relationship of intimacy is with her mother rather than a husband or lover. This would tie in with the depiction of Lesbia in poem 2 as a young girl playing with her pet.³⁴

Passer, deliciae meae puellae,
 quicum ludere, quem in sinu tenere,
 cui primum digitum dare appetenti
 et acris solet incitare morsus,
 cum desiderio meo nitenti 5
 carum nescio quid lubet iocari,
 et solacium sui doloris,
 credo, ut tum grauis acquiescat ardor:
 tecum ludere sicut ipsa possem
 et tristis animi leuare curas! 10
 Catull. 2

³² Myro's weeping is emphasised by the choice of her name (μύρομαι = 'shed tears').

³³ Text from Paton (1917).

³⁴ I do not accept the obscene interpretation *passer=mentula*: just because Martial jokingly takes the *passer* in an obscene sense (Mart. 11.6.16) does not prove that Catullus intended it to be read that way. The subject has been hotly debated: see for instance Thomas (1993); contra Jocelyn (1980); also Gaisser (2007) 303–40; Hejduk (2007) 257.

O sparrow, my girl's pet, with whom she is accustomed to play, to hold in her lap, to offer her fingertip to peck at and provoke sharp bites, when it pleases her, shining with longing for me, to play some sweet game, some small comfort for her pain, I suppose, so that her oppressive passion may be allayed: if only I could play with you just as your mistress does and relieve the gloomy cares of my heart!

In this piece, Catullus suggests that Lesbia's games with her bird are a solace for the as yet unfulfilled passion that she feels for him (*et solaciolum sui doloris, / credo, ut tum grauis acquiescat ardor* 7–8). But the poet's confidence is undermined by the use of *credo*,³⁵ which I would see as ironical:³⁶ in other words, 'I'd like to think that Lesbia's playing with her pet is compensation for a strong desire for me, but this is mere wish-fulfilment; if only I could relieve my own passion so easily.' The poet has good reason, then, to resent, or even feel jealous, of Lesbia's affection for the bird, so it no wonder that when it dies his sorrow is insincere. But the mock-serious lament in 3 could also be seen as a parody of Lesbia's own feelings for the sparrow, which, whether rightly, or in a piece of self-deception, Catullus regards as a displacement onto an unworthy object of feelings which Lesbia ought to be entertaining for himself. In other words: here you are, Lesbia, this is the sort of lament you would have me write, but for goodness' sake stop behaving like a child weeping so much for a mere bird. Such extreme affection is more appropriately bestowed on your lover!

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³⁵ Cf. Johnson (2003) 22–3.

³⁶ For the ironic use of *credo*, see Austin (1960) on Cic. *Cael.* 36.

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