

## Catullus, Poem 3: On the Death of a Pet Sparrow

One of Rome's best-known and best-loved poets, Catullus wrote on a wide range of topics, using various styles, tones, and meters. He was equally comfortable with and skillful at writing erotic or satiric lyrics, witty or abusive epigrams, polished hymns and learned *epyllia* ("little epics").

Born around 84 B.C. to a wealthy family from Verona, Catullus soon settled into the fashionably elegant and educated circles in Rome and fell in love with a rich married woman, Clodia, whom he refers to as "Lesbia" in many of his poems. Although not mentioned by name in the following poem, she is likely the *puella* of this poem and the loss of her pet sparrow, the topic.

Perhaps the scene of his recitation might be in the company of his admirers (*Veneres Cupidinesque*) who have pleaded with him to sing a little song for their entertainment. If so, what is Catullus' tone and what creates it? Is this simply about the death of a pet or does it hint at something more complex, even provocative?

### Text and Translation

Lugete, O Veneres Cupidinesque

Mourn, O Venuses and Cupids

et quantum est hominum venustiorum.

and however great (the number) is of people (who are) rather charming.

Passer mortuus est meae puellae,

The sparrow of my girlfriend is dead,

passer, deliciae meae puellae,

the sparrow, delight of my girlfriend,

quem plus illa oculis suis amabat.

whom that girl loved more than her own eyes.

5

Nam mellitus erat, suamque norat

For it was sweet-as-honey, and knew its own

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ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem;  
mistress herself as well as a girl (knows) her own mother;

nec sese a gremio illius movebat,  
nor was it moving itself from that girl's lap,

sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc  
but jumping around now here, now there

ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.  
and was constantly chirping to its mistress alone.

10

Qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum  
Now it goes along the shadowy path

illuc unde negant redire quemquam.  
to that place where they say that no one returns from.

At vobis male sit, malae tenebrae  
But may it be bad for you, evil darkness(es)

Orci, quae omnia bella devoratis;  
of Orcus, you who devour all beautiful things;

tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis.  
you took away from me such a pretty sparrow.

15

O factum male! Io miselle passer!  
O evil deed! Farewell, poor little sparrow!

Tuā nunc operā meae puellae  
Now thanks to you, my girlfriend's

flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli.  
little swollen eyes are red with weeping.

## Catullus: Death of a Pet Sparrow – Worksheet

a. The questions below pertain to the forms underlined in the passage

b. When you're asked to change a word from one form to another, change only **that** form of the word. For instance, if you're asked to change *habet* to the passive voice, make *habet* passive but leave it in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, present indicative.

1. Make **lugete** singular. \_\_\_\_\_
2. What case is **Cupidines** and why? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Change **passer** to ablative plural. \_\_\_\_\_
4. What case is **deliciae** and why? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Change **suis** to genitive plural. \_\_\_\_\_
6. What case is **mellitus** and why? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Change **norat** to perfect passive (fem). \_\_\_\_\_
8. Make **ipsam** dative. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Change **gremio** to nominative plural. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Change **movebat** to a perfect infinitive. \_\_\_\_\_
11. Change **circumsiliens** to future passive. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Change **solam dominam** to genitive. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Change **pipiabat** to future passive second person plural. \_\_\_\_\_
14. What case is **Qui** and why? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Change **negant** to a passive infinitive. \_\_\_\_\_
16. What mood is **redire** and why? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Make **quemquam** plural. \_\_\_\_\_

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18. Make **vobis** vocative. \_\_\_\_\_
19. What case is **malae** and why? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Make **omnia** singular. \_\_\_\_\_
21. Change **devoratis** to a perfect passive participle modifying *bella*. \_\_\_\_\_
22. Make **mihi** plural. \_\_\_\_\_
23. Make **tuā** plural. \_\_\_\_\_
24. Change **ocelli** to vocative singular. \_\_\_\_\_
25. Change **rubent** to a present active participle modifying *puellae*. \_\_\_\_\_

## Catullus: Death of a Pet Sparrow – Notes and Vocabulary

### Line    Note/ Vocabulary

1.    **lugete:** *lugeo, -ere, luxi, luctum*: mourn  
**Veneres:** *Venus, -eres, f.*: Venus, goddess of love, wife of Vulcan, mother of Cupid; here, plural perhaps referring to the women present  
**Cupidines(que):** *Cupido, -inis, m.*: Cupid, god of love; here, plural perhaps referring the young men in the gathering
2.    **quantum:** *quantus, -a, -um*: how great  
**quantum est hominum:** literally, how much of people there is = however great the number of people (who are)  
**venustiorum:** *venustus, -a, -um*: full of Venus; here, charming
3.    **passer:** *passer, -eris, m.*: sparrow (a bird sacred to Venus)  
**mortuus:** *mortuus, -a, -um*: dead
4.    **deliciae:** *deliciae, -arum, fem. pl.*: delight
5.    **oculis:** *oculus, -i, m.*: eye
6.    **mellitus:** *mellitus, -a, -um*: sweet-as-honey  
**norat:** *noverat* (from *nosco, -ere, -novi, notum*: to be acquainted with; in perfect tenses = know)
7.    **suam ipsam:** its very own (mistress) herself  
**tam...quam:** as...as
8.    **sese:** *sese = se* (acc.)  
**gremio:** *gremium, -ii, n.*: lap
9.    **circumsiliens:** *circumsilio, -ire, -ivi, -itum*: jump around  
**modo...modo:** (adverb) now...now  
**huc:** (adverb) from this place; here, here  
**illuc:** (adverb) to that place; here, there
10.    **dominam:** *domina, -ae, f.*: mistress  
**usque:** (adverb) constantly  
**pipiabat:** *pipio* (1): chirp

11. **qui nunc:** (relative pronoun + adverb) who now; here, now  
**it:** *eo, ire, ivi or ii, itum:* go; *it* is third singular present.  
**iter:** *iter, itineris,* n.: path  
**tenebricosum:** *tenebricosus, -a, -um:* shadowy
12. **unde:** (adverb) whence; here, from  
**redire:** *redeo, redire, redii, reditum:* return (*red-* + *eo*)  
**quemquam:** *quisquam, quaequam, quidquam:* anyone, anything; here, no one
13. **sit:** present subjunctive of *sum*, third person singular = may be (the subjunctive mood expresses a wish or uncertainty)  
**tenebrae:** *tenebrae, -arum,* fem. pl.: darkness
14. **devoratis:** *devoro* (1): devour  
**Orci:** *Orcus, -i,* m.: Orcus, the underworld
15. **abstulistis:** *aufero, auferre, abstuli, ablatum:* irregular verb (*ab* + *fero*); carry off; here, took away
16. **Io:** exclamation of pain; here, Farewell!  
**miselle:** *misellus, -a, -um:* poor little (diminutive of *miser*)
17. **opera:** *opera, operae,* f.: effort; *tu\_ oper\_:* literally, your efforts; here, thanks to you
18. **flendo:** *fleo, -ere, flevi, fletum:* weep; here, the form is ablative gerund (verbal noun) = with weeping  
**turgiduli:** *turgidulus, -a, -um:* slightly swollen (diminutive of *turgidus*, “swollen”)  
**rubent:** *rubeo, -ere:* to be red  
**ocelli:** *ocellus, -i,* m.: little eye (diminutive of *oculus*)