

Martial, Part 2: Issa (I.109)

In a poem written more than one hundred years after Catullus wrote his eulogy for Lesbia's pet sparrow, Martial dries the tears of those who mourn a deceased pet in any century. Issa, the lap-dog of his friend Publius, however, is still very much alive. Although often sharply satirical, Martial's description of this pampered pooch and the adoration of her owner, appears affectionate and sincere. Or is it?

Text and Translation

Issa est passere nequior Catulli,
Issa is naughtier than the sparrow of Catullus,

Issa est purior osculo columbae,
Issa is purer than the kiss of a dove,

Issa est blandior omnibus puellis,
Issa is more seductive than all the girls,

Issa est carior Indicis lapillis,
Issa is more precious than Indian diamonds,

1. **Issa, -ae, f.:** island in the Adriatic Sea; here, the name of the pet bird
passere: *passer, -eris, m.:* sparrow
nequior: *nequam* (comparative of indeclinable adjective): naughty
Catulli: *Catullus, -i, m.:* Roman poet; see Worksheet for Chapter 25
2. **purior:** *purus, -a, -um:* pure
osculo: *osculum, -i, n.:* kiss (diminutive of *os*, "mouth")
columbae: *columba, -ae, f.:* dove
3. **blandior:** *blandus, -a, -um:* flattering; here, seductive
4. **carior:** *carus, -a, -um:* dear; here, precious
Indicis: *Indicus, -a, -um:* Indian
lapillis: *lapillus, -i, m.:* little gem (diminutive of *lapis*, "stone"); here, diamond

Issa est deliciae catella Publi,
Issa is the darling of Publius, his tiny puppy.

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Hanc tu, si queritur, loqui putabis.
If she whines, you will think (that) this girl is speaking.

Sentit tristitiamque gaudiumque. . . .
She feels both sadness and joy. . . .

et desiderio coacta ventris
and (when) compelled by the impulse of her bladder

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gutta pallia non fefellit ulla,
not a single drop has (ever) befouled the covers,

5. **deliciae:** *deliciae, -arum, f.* (Latin plural for English singular): darling
catella: *catella, -ae, f.*: little dog (feminine diminutive of *catulus*, “young animal”)
Publi: *Publius, -i, m.*: Roman name
6. **queritur:** *queror, queri, questus sum* (deponent verb): whine
loqui: *loquor, loqui, locutus sum* (deponent verb): speak
7. **tristitiam:** *tristitia, -ae, f.*: sadness
gaudium: *gaudium, -i, n.*: joy
10. **desiderio:** *desiderium, -i, n.*: impulse
coacta: *cogo, -ere, coegi, coactum*: compel
ventris: *venter, ventris, n.*: stomach; here, bladder
11. **gutta:** *gutta, -ae, f.*: drop
pallia: *pallium, -i, n.*: coverlet
fefellit: *fallo, -ere, fefelli, falsum*: deceive; here, befoul
ulla: *ullus, -a, -um*: any; here, a single
12. **blando:** see above, note #3; here, sweet
pede: *pes, pedis, m.*: foot; here, paw
suscitat: *suscito* (1): arouse from sleep; here, nudge
toro: *torus, -i, m.*: couch

sed blando pede suscitāt toroque
but with her sweet paw she nudges (you) and from the couch

deponi monet et rogat levāri.
forewarns (you that she needs) to be put down and asks to be lifted back up.

Castae tantus inest pudor catellae,
There is a very great sense of modesty in this virtuous puppy,

ignorat Venerem; nec invenimus
she does not know Love; nor have we found

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dignum tam tenerā virum puellā.
a mate worthy of a girl so delicate.

Hanc ne lux rapiat suprema totam,
In order that (her) last day not snatch her away altogether,

13. **deponi:** *depono, -ere, -posui, -positum*: put down
levāri: *levo* (1): lift up
14. **castae:** *castus, -a, -um*: morally pure; here, virtuous
inest: *insum, inesse, infui* (+ dative): be in
pudor: *pudor, -oris, m.*: sense of modesty
catellae: see above, note #5; dative with *inest*
15. **ignorat:** *ignoro* (1): not to know
Venerem: *Venus, -eris, f.*: goddess of love; here, (sexual) love
nec: (negative particle) not; here, nor
16. **dignum:** *dignus, -a, -um*: worthy
tam: (adverb) so
tener_: *tener, -era, -erum*: delicate
17. **lux ... suprema:** literally, “last light”; euphemism for death
totam: here, altogether

pictā Publius exprimit tabellā,
Publius portrays (her) in a painted picture,

in quā tam similem videbis Issam,
in which you will see an Issa so similar

ut sit tam similis sibi nec ipsa.
that she herself is not so similar to herself.

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Issam denique pone cum tabellā:
In short, place Issa alongside (her) picture:

aut utramque putabis esse veram,
either you will think that each is real,

aut utramque putabis esse pictam.
Or you will think that each is painted.

18. **pictā**: *pingo, -ere, pinxi, pictum*: paint
exprimit: *exprimo, -ere, -pressi, -pressum*: portray
tabellā: *tabella, -ae, f.*: small painting (diminutive of *tabula*, “tablet”)
21. **denique**: (adverb) in short
pone: *pono, -ere, posui, positum*: place
- 22-23. **aut ... aut**: (conjunction) either ... or
utramque: *uterque, utraque, utrumque*: one, the other