HEAVY PETTING IN CATULLUS

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Catullus's poem on the death of his girl's sparrow has been the subject of frequent attention since the Renaissance:

Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque,
et quantum est hominum venustiorum:
passer mortuus est meae puellae,
passer, deliciae meae puellae,
quem plus illa oculis suis amabat—
nam mellitus erat suamque norat
ipsam tam bene quam puella matrem;
nec sese a gremio illius movebat,
sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc
ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.
qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum
illud, unde negant redire quemquam.
at vobis male sit, malae tenebrae
Orci, quae omnia bella devoratis:
tam bellum mihi passerem abstulistis.
o factum male, quod, miselle passer,
tua nunc opera meae puellae
flendo turgiduli rubent ocelli![1]

Weep, Venuses and Cupids,
and anyone who is a fellow of decent taste:

1 The text is Mynors's, with Goold's emendation *quod* in line 16. Translations throughout are the author's own.

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Sparrow's dead—my girl's sparrow,
Sparrow, my girl's pet.
The one she loved more than her eyes—
For he was a real honey and used to recognise his
Mistress as well as a girl recognises her mother;
And he never shifted himself away from her lap,
But hopping around from here to there,
It was to his mistress alone that he continually
chirped.
He's now pacing that murky path
Off to where they don't allow anyone to return.
Well damn you, evil shadows of
Orcus, which swallow all nice things:
You've deprived me of such a nice sparrow.
Rough luck, poor little sparrow,
That by your fault my girl's
Little eyes are a bit swollen and red from crying.

It is not my intention to rehash the suggestion, originally made by Politian in 1498, that the *passer* is in fact an allegory for *penis*. Guiseppe Giangrande's restatement of Politian's case (1975) and Harry Jocelyn's response (1980) offer the clearest arguments against and for the belief that sometimes a sparrow is just a feathered bird.[2] However, it may be worth stating briefly that the argument for a metaphorical *passer* would be strengthened if it could be shown that that word was used for a phallus[3] and if there were some agreement on what the resulting narrative would be. An all-singing (*pipiabat*), all-dancing (*circumsiliens*) penis brings us to the world of Benny Hill's Ernie the milkman rather than the urbanity of the neoterics. There are other scenarios, but they seem equally unsatisfactory. Perhaps most bizarre is E. N. Genovese's suggestion that the *passer* can be taken in several senses—

2 Giangrande 1975, Jocelyn 1980. Nadeau has sought to support Giangrande in two articles: Nadeau 1980, 1984. More substantial is Hooper 1985, now complemented by Jones 1998, who observes (190) that the sparrow is probably a thrush! The argument has also been revisited by Thomas 1993, who stresses the parallels with the *Greek Anthology*.

3 Festus (p. 313, l.23 [L]: "Strutheum. in mimis praecipue vocant obscenam partem virilem, <a> salacitate videlicet passeris, qui Graece στρουθὸς dicitur" ("*Strutheus*: so they call the unmentionable male bit in mimes particularly, from the randiness of the sparrow, which is called a *strouthos* in Greek") is actually an argument against *passer* being used for a penis, given the need to adopt a *Greek* term in the Roman theatre.

allegorically, as the poet's penis, as an imitation winged phallus complete with ringing bell, and as a real sparrow, now consumed as an aphrodisiac, heading for Lesbia's nether regions (the Orcus which devours all fine things).[4]

For the purposes of this paper, I will not be considering the *Nachleben* of the *passer,*[5] but will simply treat it as a pet, possibly even an idealised bird if one does not like the idea of a common sparrow as a pet[6] or objects that its affectionate actions go beyond the abilities of the usual domestic feathered friend (Hooper 1985.162). It is as non-specific as the *puella* of the poem, who need not be Lesbia, and the girl's lover who narrates the verses, who is only "Catullus" to the extent that the latter claims authorship of the poem. Given our lack of knowledge about the original production of Catullus's poems, I will also refrain from interpreting the poem on the basis of Catullus 2. Catullus 3 could, for instance, have been written and circulated before Catullus 2 and only placed in this numerical order when the poems were collected. But many of the comments I will make in this paper about the anthropomorphising of the *passer* would apply to Catullus 2 as well. Keeping these points in mind, I think it is possible to detect some interesting features of the poem in terms of genre and Roman values which have not previously attracted much attention.

Laments for dead animals had something of a vogue in Hellenistic poetry. In the *Greek Anthology*, Book 7.189–216, there are elegies for grasshoppers (189: Aristodikos of Rhodes; 192, 194: Mnasalcas; 195: Meleager; 197: Phaennas; 198: Leonidas of Tarentum), cicadas (190, 202: Anyte [190 includes the Catullan themes of implacable, δυσπειθής, Hades taking away a girl's *paignia* and leaving her to cry, although, in this case, the *korê* is probably a child rather than a term of endearment as with Catullus's use of *puella*]; 196: Meleager; 200: Nikias; 201: Pamphilus; 213: Archias), jays (191: Archias), doves (193: Simias), thrushes (199: Tymnes), partridges

4 Genovese 1974; the aphrodisiac properties of sparrow: Athen. *Deipn.* 9.46 (Terpsicles).

5 Although Martial's references to Catullus's *passer* (1.109 on the puppy Issa; 1.7 on Stella's *columba*; 4.14, a gift to Vergil; 7.14, a human pet; 11.6, an erotic gift) are a fascinating topic, their significance is contested and could not, in any case, necessarily be read back onto Catullus. I have accordingly not touched on this topic in this paper, nor on later imitations such as the memorial for the dog, Patrice (*CIL* 6.29896 = Courtney 1995.no. 203), which shows similarities to inscriptions to *ancillae,* or Myia's tombstone (*Anth. Lat.* II 2.1512 = Courtney 1995.no. 204).

6 So Havelock 1929.147, who found the animal insufficiently noble for high-style poetry, thus missing the point altogether.

(203: Simias; 204: Agathias), ferrets (205: Agathias; 206: Damocharis), hares (207: Meleager), horses (208: Anyte; 212: Mnasalcas), ants (209: Antipater of Sidon), swallows (210: Antipater of Sidon), dogs (211: Tymnes), and even dolphins (214: Archias; 215: Anyte; 216: Antipater of Thessalonica). Such epitaphic epigrams clearly have an influence on our poem, but, as Quinn notes,[7] the introductory lines suggest a dirge. In Bion's *Lament for Adonis*, a female singer begins the mourning wail and the Erotes take up the refrain.[8] In Catullus 3, however, the poet controls the proceedings, calling on the Venuses and Amores to mourn, and inviting the same response from all those who are men of refinement (*venustiores*). The pattern appears to be derived from noble Roman funerals, where a hired mourner (*praefica*) or a member of the family would expound the virtues of the deceased and encourage the listeners to remember their loss.[9] As Polybius describes the custom, the orator

> ascends the rostra and speaks about the virtues of the dead man and the deeds he has accomplished in his life. Thus the crowd remember these acts and see them before their eyes—not only those who participated in them, but also those who were not involved. They become so affected that the loss is felt not to be confined to the relatives but to be shared by the populace.[10]

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7 Quinn 1973.96. It should be noted that the poem is written in the more colloquial form of hendecasyllables rather than in the elegiac couplets typical of memorials.

8 Bion *Ep. Adon.* 1.2: Αἰάζω τὸν ῎Αδωνιν, "ἀπώλετο καλὸς ῎Αδωνις"· / "ὤλετο καλὸς ῎Αδωνις," ἐπαιάζουσιν ῎Ερωτες ("I lament for Adonis: 'Beautiful Adonis has perished'; 'He has perished, has beautiful Adonis,' the Cupids lament in reply").

9 Varro *Vit. Pop. Rom.* 4 apud Non. p. 212L; Cic. *Leg*. 2.62; Polybius 6.53–54.2; Kierdorf 1980; Pomeroy 1991.114–15; Flower 1996.chs. 4 and 5.

10 Polybius 6.53.2–3: ἀναβὰς ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐμβόλους . . . λέγει περὶ τοῦ τετελευτηκότος τὰς ἀρετὰς καὶ τὰς ἐπιτετευγμένας ἐν τῷ ζῆν πράξεις. δι' ὧν συμβαίνει τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀναμιμνησκομένους καὶ λαμβάνοντας ὑπὸ τὴν ὄψιν τὰ γεγονότα, μὴ μόνον τοὺς κεκοινωνηκότας τῶν ἔργων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐκτός, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον γίνεσθαι συμπαθεῖς ὥστε μὴ τῶν κηδευόντων ἴδιον, ἀλλὰ κοινὸν τοῦ δήμου φαίνεσθαι τὸ σύμπτωμα. The custom was still remembered as late as the fourth century A.D.: "moris quondam fuit ut super cadavera defunctorum in contione pro rostris laudes liberi dicerent et instar lugubrium carminum ad fletus et gemitus audientium pectora concitarent" ("It was once the custom that children would deliver a eulogy over the bodies of the deceased from the speakers' platform before a crowd and, as do lamentations, arouse weeping and groaning in the hearts of the listeners," Jerome *Ep.* 60.1.3).

Catullus thus begins by calling upon the "aristocrats" of the erotic universe, the Venuses and Amores (one might compare the Claudii and Nerones—or the Iulii, eventually the most successful of the families who claimed linkage with Venus[11]), then extends the invitation to the crowd (*quantum est*) of *venustiores.* Restricting attendance to the refined parallels the likelihood that *hoi polloi* of Polybius are not the general *volgus*, but rather the numerous clients of the aristocratic family staging the funeral display. *Urbanitas* does not mean all those who live in the Urbs—the *homines venustiores* may not be the nobility (the *viri* who achieve triumphs in the service of Love), but they are not the *plebs sordida* of Rome either. David Ross has alerted us to Catullus's deliberate play on domestic and political vocabulary,[12] and here, introducing the *elogium*, we find a mixture of Greek and Roman themes, of the mock heroic and the quotidian.[13]

Bathos follows. *Passer* is dead, *passer*, my mistress's darling (*deliciae*).[14] The oddities of Roman nomenclature and terms of endearment[15] leave the relationship between the *puella* and sparrow uncertain until the latter begins hopping (*circumsiliens*—the correct technical language for the motion of a sparrow, according to Pliny *NH* 10.111) and chirping (*pipiabat*) in lines 9–10. At this point, it is clear that all the fuss is merely over a woman's plaything, a birdie.[16] The use of the term *deliciae*, which can

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11 Cf. also Scipio Aemilianus's foundation of the cult of Venus Genetrix (Serv. ad *Aen.* 1.724), Sulla's adoption of the cognomen *Epaphroditus* as a Greek translation of *Felix* (Plut. *Sull.* 34.2–3), and the linking of the cult of Venus Victrix with his theatre by Pompey the Great (Pliny *NH* 8.20).

12 Ross 1969.80–95, not diminished by Brunt's (1988) attempt to redomesticate the language of *amicitia* (351–81: "*Amicitia* in the Late Roman Republic").

13 Cf. Mcleod 1973 for Catullus's fondness for parodying erotic themes.

14 On pet animals as well as pet children: Nielsen 1990, at 81. The first attested example of a *deliciae* at Rome seems to be Sarmentus in the 30s B.C. (described by Plutarch as a παίγνιον, "which the Romans call *delicia*," *Ant.* 59.4), but the production of such children at Alexandria (Stat. *Silv.* 2.1.72–75, 5.5.76–79) may have begun much earlier. Augustus is said to have regularly played with imported *pueri minuti*, especially Syrians and Moors, whose prattling (*garrulitas*) and good looks (*facies*) suggest that they were similar to the Alexandrian *deliciae* (Suet. *Aug.* 33).

15 Cf. the use of *passer* as a term of affection in Plaut. *Casin.* 136–38 ("mea mellila . . . meus pullus passer, mea columba, mi lepus," "My honeycomb . . . my chickadee sparrow, my dove, my hare") and *Asin.* 666–67 ("dic me igitur tuom passerculum, gallinam, coturnicem, / agnellum, haedillum me tuom dic esse vel vitellum," "So call me your little sparrow, cock, quail, lambkins—say I am your kiddiwinks or calfling").

16 Birds are traditionally the pets of women (e.g., Ovid *Am.* 2.6: Corinna's parrot; Martial 7.14.5–6 on Ianthis's dove, celebrated in a poem by Stella) and children—cf. Echion's

equally be applied to pet slaves,[17] suggests a surrogate human relationship between mistress and *passer*, reinforced by the language of household service ("suamque norat / ipsam . . . ad solam dominam," 6, 10) and familial relations ("tam bene [norat] quam puella matrem," 7). Having prepared the audience for the genealogy, deeds (*facta*), and characterization (*mores*) which are the stock-in-trade of the *elogium*, the poet offers no family tree, since slaves and pet animals are notoriously the creation of their owners (Patterson 1982.54–55), nor any marvellous deeds. All that can be listed under domestic virtues are a pleasantness of disposition (*mellitus erat,* 6) and a constant loyalty ("nec sese a gremio illius movebat . . . ad solam dominam usque pipiabat," 8–10) which is rewarded with reciprocal affection ("quam plus illa oculis suis amabat," 5). These are stock epitaphic themes: the sweetness of the deceased is indicated on innumerable inscriptions,[18] while a love as dear as one's eyes is a commonplace in Hellenistic poetry.[19] Equally conventional is the final, irrevocable journey to Hades.[20] The poet concludes with a personal imprecation against the darkness of Orcus (15: *mihi*)[21] and speaks to the deceased directly. This second-person address is a feature of the traditional Roman *laudatio funebris,*[22] but here,

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view that his son is *in aves morbosus,* which he solves by killing the child's three goldfinches and blaming it on a weasel: Petron. 46.3–4. It is Eumolpus's bad luck that the boy he seduces by the presentation of two doves moves on to the adolescent pleasures of fighting cocks, and finally can only be won over by the promise of a stallion, a thoroughly adult, masculine pet (Petron. 85–86).

17 Cf. the northern English use of "pet" as a term of endearment.

18 E.g., *IG* II² 3.2 13209 (τῷ γλυκυτάτῳ μου ἀνδρὶ, "to my sweetest husband"); *IG* XII 7 323 (Ἀρισστόδημ[ο]ς Εὐπ[λ]άσσ[τ]ου γλυκύτατος [χαῖρε], "Aristodemus, the sweetheart of Euplastos, greets you"); *CIL* 12.1014 (*marito . . . melitissimo*).

19 Call. *Hymn* 3.211: ἴσον φαέεσσι φιλῆσαι ("you loved her like your eyes"); Moschus 4.9. Ter. *Ad.* 903 ("qui te amat plus quam hosce osculos" ["who loves you more than these eyes"]) already has the comparative version.

20 *AP* 7.203.4 and Philetas fr. 6 Powell are examples cited by Fordyce 1961; cf. *IG* XII 1 149: ταὐτὰ λέγοντες ταὐτὰ φρονοῦντες ἤλθομεν τὰν ἀμέτρητον ὁδὸν εἰς Ἀΐδαν ("Saying the same words and thinking the same thoughts, we traveled the unmeasured road to Hades"); *ICUR* III 132.7: πρώτην ὁδὸν δὲ στέλλομαι πρὸς Ἀίδαν ("I set out on my first journey—to Hades").

21 For the darkness of Hades, his cruelty and animal-like appetite, cf. *CIRB* 126.3: στυγνὸς ὑπὸ σκοτίην σε συνάρπασε πένθιμος Ἄ⟨ι⟩δας ("Hateful and cruel Hades snatched you into the darkness"); *IG* IX 1² 2 312.3: δισσὰ δὲ τέκνα λιποῦσαν ὁ παντοβαρὴς λάβε μ' Ἄδης ἄκριτον ἀστόργου θηρὸς ἔχων κραδίην ("All-conquering Hades with the mindless heart of a pitiless beast has taken me, leaving two children behind").

22 So, for example, Augustus directs his account of Agrippa's career directly to the deceased: Koenen 1970. Jocelyn objects to *tua . . . opera* ("it's your fault") preferring *vestra*, blaming

despite some words of guarded sympathy, the crowning achievement of the *passer*'s career turns out to be inflicting continuing grief on his mistress.[23]

It might be sufficient to view the poem as a witty application to an animal of traditional topoi from personal and public funeral celebrations, and to note how the poet cleverly involves himself in his mistress's grief and proclaims her sorrow. He has thus managed to turn her loss into his gain, to produce a celebration of *mea puella* and a defence of her emotions carried out in mock-serious style. But I would like to question whether the poem should be regarded as being completely innocent. As has been noticed, much of the comic tone in the poem arises from the confusion of the relation between the *puella* and the *passer* and a foster-parent and a pet slave (*deliciae*). Animal rights suddenly meet children's rights—both concepts which were underdeveloped in the ancient world. An examination of commemorations for human *deliciae* who perished before their time[24] suggests that they have features similar to those for domestic pets. Although he or she may have living parents, who may even have been freed, the pet child is defined as the property of the master of the household. For instance, the parents of Martial's *deliciae*, Erotion, are to receive their child, aged five, in the underworld (Mart. *Ep.* 5.34.7–8):

> inter tam veteres ludat lasciva patronos
> et nomen blaeso garriat ore meum.

Orcus (retaining the traditional reading *o* instead of *quod*)—this would, however, miss the opportunity to close the poem in the grand style of a public oration, in the same way as it began, by concentrating on the dead sparrow. The so-called *Laudatio Turiae* (*ILS* 8393 + *AE* 1951.2) is also directly addressed to the deceased.

23 Mild remonstration with the dead is not unknown: Lattimore 1962.180–81, who quotes *CE* 1292: "tu secura iaces, nobis reliquisti querelas" ("You lie at peace, but have left the plaints to us"), and examples of the dead being called *crudelis* (*CIL* VIII 9970, 21804, 21805). In historiography, a conclusion to an obituary which mixes sympathy with criticism is not unusual: cf. Plut. *Galb.* 29.4: οὐδένα ποθοῦντα τὴν ἀρχὴν, οἰκτείραντας δὲ τοὺς πολλοὺς τὸν θάνατον ἀπέλιπον ("He left no one wanting his rule back, but many pitying his death"); *Otho* 18.2.

24 Those *deliciae* who lived to be adults would have lost their attraction, as can be seen in the ghastly description of Trimalchio's *deliciae* (Petron. 28.4, 64.6) and Seneca's bewilderment when informed that a decrepit slave was once his playmate (*Ep.* 12.3). In 7.14, Martial's *puella* has lost her *lusus deliciasque suas* (2)—the joke is that he is "bis denos . . . numerantem . . . annos / mentula cui nondum sesquipedalis erat" ("twice ten years old—and his prick was still not a foot and half long," 9–10), since to be kept on still as a *deliciae* to such an age would suggest that he must have been maturing to a prodigious size. To read *senos* (so Shackleton Bailey in the Loeb translation) seems to miss the point.

> May she play mischievously among her owners of long ago,
> and chatter my name on her stammering lips.

This may be compared with the inscription commemorating Festius, who, if alive, would now be able to pronounce the name of his owner (*CIL* 5.2417):

> Festio Papiri Prisci delicato . . . qui si vixisset domini iam
> nomina faret.
>
> To Festius, pet slave of Papirius Priscus, who would now,
> if he had lived, be uttering his master's name.

In 5.37, Martial compares Erotion to a long list of wonders (1–14), then speaks of her as *nostros amores gaudiumque lususque* (17). It is all very well for his "friend" Paetus, who has his own source of grief, to tell him not to be sad and offering the consolation, "Deflere non te vernulae pudet mortem?" ("Aren't you ashamed to mourn the death of a poor house slave?" 20), when he himself had lost a wife who was famous, of high family, noble, and rich (*notam, superbam, nobilem, locupletem*, 22). Paetus has the consolation of an inheritance of 2,000,000 sesterces as well (24). As Patricia Watson has noted (1992), the poem offers a hyperbolic depiction of the poet's grief at the loss of Erotion, a portrait which is most closely paralleled by his description of the puppy Issa in 1.109, in contrast with Paetus's lack of mourning when faced with the loss of a real human.

Statius offers two extended descriptions of *deliciae*. In *Silvae* 2.1, he consoles Atedius Melior for the loss of Glaucias, a special child, not simply bought at the market along with other goods imported from Egypt.[25] Other references indicate that one could readily find for sale child slaves, who were a mixture of jester and pet, designed (and often taught) to amuse their owners by impudent remarks.[26] Glaucias, however, is initially de-

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25 "Non te barbaricae versabat turbo catastae, / nec mixtus Phariis venalis mercibus infans / compositosque sales meditataque verba locutus / quaesisti lascivus erum tardeque parasti" ("The uproar of the barbarian sale-platform did not spin you around, nor as a child-for-sale, mixed in with Alexandrian goods, uttering learned jokes and rehearsed words, did you mischievously seek a master and gain him after a while," 72–75).

26 Quint. *Inst. Or.* 1.2.7 (comparing modern-day pupils to such scallywags); Sen. *de Const.* 11.3 (who regards it as a sign of declining morals and the arrogance of the masters that what would be a *maledictum,* "insult," from a friend is a *ioculare convicium,* "humorous quip," from a slaveling, *a servulo*).

scribed as Melior's *alumnus*, not as his *deliciae*, and is revealed to be the child of two household slaves who had been freed around the time of his birth.[27] Although he is not Melior's natural child, he was treated as such: "One is required to produce children, but picking them is more fun" ("natos genuisse necesse est / elegisse iuvat," 87–88), which spookily echoes *Absolutely Fabulous*'s Edina taking her choice of Rumanian orphans. Later, Melior's dead friend Blaesus is depicted as meeting Glaucias and initially thinking that he was from an unknown branch of the family ("ignota credit de stirpe nepotum," 199), but later recognising him as the pet child of his dear companion, selected to replace the emotional loss his own death had caused ("delicias et rari pignus amici / sensit et amissi puerum solacia Blaesi," 200–201).[28] The living child is described as constantly affectionate, kissing and hugging his master (*oscula*, 46; "bracchia, quo[29] numquam domini sine pondere cervix," "his arms which were never absent from his master's neck," 51), waking him in the morning (62), delaying his departure (63–64), and greeting him on his return (65–66). He also shows the playfulness of a pet slave, chattering away ("quis tua colloquiis hilaris mulcebit amatis / pectora?" "Who will now, joking, soften your heart with loving talk?" 56–57), deflecting the master's anger at his fellow slaves (58–59), and thieving food and wine from his banqueting table ("inceptas quis ab ore dapes libataque vina / auferet et dulci turbabit cuncta rapina?" 60–61). But hostile Fate intervened (137–45): after a week's illness, Glaucias died in the arms of his master. And he died beautiful (*Silvae* 2.154–57):

> gratum est, Fata, tamen quod non mors lenta iacentis
> exedit puerile decus, manisque subivit
> integer et nullo temeratus corpora damno,
> qualis erat.

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27 "hic domus, hinc ortus, dominique penatibus olim / carus uterque parens atque in tua gaudia liber, / ne quererere genus raptum" ("Here's your home, here your origin, and your parents, both long ago dear to the master's household and free, to your delight, so you would not complain that you had been stripped of genealogy," 76–78). Courtney 1995 punctuates after *genus.*

28 As Vollmer 1898 observes, there is a pun here: Blaesus has been replaced by a stammering (*blaesus*) child.

29 Courtney in his *OCT* reads *bracchiaque* <*et*>, following the *Itali*; but surely the boy should be hanging on his master's neck, not vice versa. See also the remarks of Van Dam 1984 ad loc.

> At least we can be thankful, Fates, that no slow
> invaliding disease
> Ate away his boyhood beauty, and he went down to the
> ghosts
> Untouched and his body not tainted by any incapacity,
> But just as he had been.

In *Silvae* 5.5, Statius offers a paradoxical variation on this theme: the poem is an *epicedion*, whose consolatory role is directed at the poet himself.[30] Its success lies in the impossible task of producing a failed poem (49–56). Although the poem is incomplete, as the manuscripts break off after line 87, the description of the origin of Statius's *deliciae* is preserved (*Silvae* 5.5.66–69):

> non ego mercatus Pharia de pube loquacis
> delicias doctumque sui convicia Nili
> infantem, lingua nimium salibusque protervum,
> dilexi: meus ille, meus.

> It was not a chattering pet slave, one of the Alexandrian
> boys,
> Taught the abuse of his native Nile
> As an infant, too free with his tongue and his jokes,
> Whom I loved: he was mine, mine I say.

Statius describes his presence at the child's birth, receiving him with a prayer and acknowledgement ("tellure cadentem / aspexi atque unctum genitali carmine fovi, / poscentemque novas tremulis ululatibus auras / inserui vitae" ("I saw him fall to the ground and as he was being anointed, I warmed him with a birth poem, and as he demanded the new air with trembling howls, I pushed him into life," 69–72). Could a natural parent offer more than the gift of freedom that the poet bestowed on the oblivious child?[31] The depiction agrees with Hanne Sigismund Nielsen's conclusion

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30 "Qui damna doles aliena, repone / infelix lacrimas et tristia carmina serva" ("You who mourn for others' losses, set aside your tears, wretch, and store away your sad poems," 47–48).

31 "Quid plus tribuere parentes? / quin alios ortus libertatemque sub ipsis / uberibus tibi, parve, dedi cum munera nostra / rideres ignarus adhuc" ("What more can parents offer?

(1990.85) regarding the word group *delicium* / *delicatus*, *-a*: "normally a child of slave status . . . brought up in the house of his or her master; the relationship existing between master and delicium was normally parent/child-like but quite informal, only based on affection and love." The need for the final qualification, "only based on affection and love," need not undermine the close ties that might be felt between master (or mistress) and *deliciae* in individual cases. But the status of the *deliciae* was never assured, since it was dependent on the whim of the master. It may be doubted that traditional forms of protection for children in Roman society (such as the reciprocal demands of *pietas*[32]) would be operative in cases such as these. The power disparity is so obviously excessive that one wonders whether the terms "affection and love" can have their normal meanings in such cases.

The investigation of human *deliciae* has clearly shown the ambiguous status of these pet children. When in Enid Blyton's *Noddy Goes to Toyland* (originally published in 1949), Big Ears asks Noddy the embarrassing question, "Are you a human boy or are you a toy-boy?" the unfortunately phrased query is likely to cause some disquiet for modern adult readers. So, too, the play on the nature of the *puella*'s sparrow should alert us that, beneath the humour, we are viewing the social construction of Roman society, a construction based on power relations as much as on affection. The sparrow is still a sparrow, but the strongly anthropomorphic description in the poem links it with other pets in Roman society.[33] Without needing to imagine it as a penis, we may still find the sparrow's life and death disturbing.

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Indeed I gave you, little boy, a new family and freedom while at the breast, while you were still laughing unawares at my services," 72–75).

32 Saller 1994.102–32 ("*Pietas* and *Patria Potestas*: Obligation and Power in the Roman Household").

33 Cf. Batstone 1998.288, on Martial's Issa poem, which "might at the same time vie with Catullus' poems by replacing erotic ambiguities with an excess of literal (and mundane) detail, while creating a model for the courtier dog who looks like a picture." Something very similar might be said of the relationship between Atedius Melior's parrot (Stat. *Silv.* 2.4) and Catullus's sparrow.

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