

Of all the Roman poets, Gaius Valerius Catullus comes closest to an awareness of Eros. Catullus went to Rome in 62 B.C. where he met a woman he calls "Lesbia" (she was probably Clodia, wife of Metellus Celer who was Proconsul of Cisalpine Gaul). Catullus wrote poem after poem for Lesbia, pouring his genius into the immediate passion and misery of Eros -- and as he wrote the brightest celebrations of delight, he also wrote the most sullen outbursts of loathing. We have every reason to believe that Catullus was right in his accusations of all the things Lesbia did, not the least of which was that she was unfaithful to Catullus with at least "three hundred others."

William Packard



2.

Sparrow, O, sweet sparrow,
love of my lady love,
she who's always nursing
you between her breasts and
feeding you her finger-tips;
she, that radiant lady,
delicious in her play with you,
for a while forgetting
all the deeper wounds of love...
I envy her. This pastime
would raise my heart from darkness.

3.

Dress now in sorrow, O all
you shades of Venus,
and your little cupids weep.

My girl has lost her darling sparrow;
he is dead, her precious toy
that she loved more than her two eyes,
O, honeyed sparrow following her
as a girl follows her mother,
never to leave her breast, but tripping
now here, now there, and always singing
his sweet falsetto
song to her alone.

Now he is gone; poor creature,
lost in darkness,
to a sad place
from which no one returns.

O ravenous hell!
My evil hatred rises against your power,
you that devour
all things beautiful;
and now this pitiful, broken sparrow,
who is the cause of my girl's grief,
making her eyes weary and red with sorrow.

5.

Come, Lesbia, let us live and love,
nor give a damn what sour old men say.
The sun that sets may rise again
But when our light has sunk into the earth,
it is gone forever.

Give me a thousand kisses,
then a hundred, another thousand,
another hundred
and in one breath
still kiss another thousand,
another hundred.

O then with lips and bodies joined
many deep thousands;
confuse
their number,
so that poor fools and cuckolds (envious
even now) shall never
learn our wealth and curse us
with their
evil eyes.

tr. Horace Gregory