

# **Catullus on Love, Death, and Loss**

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**H**ow ought the Roman man grapple with death and grief? What does he owe the dead and do these obligations supersede those of the living? Should he be stoic or should he grieve? Throughout his diatribes the late Republican poet Catullus wrote about social norms, often critiquing the thoughts and customs of his forbearers while counselling his readers on how best to live their lives. If one was to summarize Catullus' philosophy, it would be to live with passion. How then does the poet tackle death? While he does cover the subject more broadly in poems 3, 5, and 96, Catullus' most clear and thorough elaboration on death focuses on his grief at the loss of his brother in poems 65, 68a, 68b, and 101. Ultimately, through his poetry Catullus argues to live life to its fullest, to feel everything, even the pain of loss; that while the dead are owed their rites of passage, the greater obligation is to remember them, and by these means grant them immortality, a loving remembrance.

To begin this discussion on Catullian grief, thought must first be given to how Catullus represented death and the afterlife in his poems. Critical to this discussion is poem 5, which contains a key elaboration on the poet's philosophy. In the poem Catullus calls his lover, and the audience by association, urging her in the first line: "Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love."<sup>1</sup> His main argument in the poem is that we only have one brief life to live, and when it's over, there is nothing but an eternal sleep, so we ought to make it count. While this sentiment on the urgency of

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<sup>1</sup> Catullus 5.1: *Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*. All translations of Catullus are my own.

# Philomathes

love stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing Roman view that the best life was one devoted to the state, the more pertinent point here is Catullus' view of life; it's short, and nothing comes after it.<sup>2</sup>

Catullus expressed his philosophy on death not only in the words he used but in their very arrangement, structuring the order of the universe through poetry. In lines 4-6, the position of the words *soles*, *brevis lux*, and *nox*, serve to underline humanity's place in the cosmos.<sup>3</sup> *Brevis lux* or "brief light" refers to the short lives of humans, the term is placed directly below the eternal and immortal "suns" or *Soles* that fall but come back again, symbolically conquering death.<sup>4</sup> Directly below the description of humanity's mortality, in line 6 Catullus places *nox*, the night or "death" that awaits us all.<sup>5</sup> By these means Catullus creates a visual allegory for the three realms of existence: the immortal heavens above, the eternal underworld below, and the brief land of the living sandwiched between.<sup>6</sup> The three final words of line 5 ("*occidit brevis lux*") echo the finality of death, each word growing syllabically shorter, from three to two to one syllable before cutting off abruptly after *lux*, visually expressing the notion of death.<sup>7</sup> The words *brevis lux* are also placed in direct opposition to both *soles* and *nox*, signifying humanity's distinction from both immortality and perpetuity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest A. Fredricksmeyer, "Observations on Catullus 5." *AJP* 91, no. 4 (1970): 437, <https://doi.org/10.2307/293083>.

<sup>3</sup> Catullus 5.4-6: *Soles occidere et redire possunt, / Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux, / Nox est perpetua una dormienda.*

<sup>4</sup> Fredricksmeyer, "Catullus 5," 438-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

# Philomathes

The celestial allegory leans further when examined through the lens of augury. When Roman or Etruscan augers searched the skies for signs, thunder on the left was a good sign, a sign from the gods.<sup>9</sup> Here Catullus places the immortal powers, the *soles* and *nox*, on the left side of the poem, signifying their immortal power. On the contrary, humanity's *brevis lux* is on the right, which was generally seen as the good or "*fas*" side, therefore signaling that while perpetuity is the power of the immortals, it is right that humanity has a *brevis lux*, perhaps because it makes our lives that much sweeter.

Yet some semblance of the poet's eventual argument for immortality can be found in the final four lines of poem 5, which describe the hundreds of kisses Catullus and his lover share and how they become endless, defying reason in their countless multitudes.

When once we have made many thousands (of kisses), / we will confuse them (the kisses), that we do not know (the number), / so that none may look with wicked envy, / when knowing the number of kisses.<sup>10</sup>

While many readers focus on Catullus' countless kisses as a means to ward off the evil eye, it can also be interpreted as the poet's attempt to ward off death. The poet seems to argue that, while Catullus and his lover cannot cheat death explicitly, they can fool themselves, they can reject the scrutinies of old men and embrace both passion and irrationality. Catullus and his lover can make so many kisses that they lose count, that they

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<sup>9</sup> L. Houghtalin, "Etruscan and Roman Divination" (Lecture, University of Mary Washington, Nov 8, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Catullus 5.10-3. *Cum milia multa fecerimus, / Conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus, / Aut ne quis malus invidere possit, / Cum tantum sciat esse basiorum.*

## ***Philomathes***

become innumerable, and in so doing, the lovers can create their own form of eternity, simply by abandoning reason. Immortal perpetuity is achieved, therefore, through both love and irrationality.

Yet, Catullan death is not always so tranquil: in poem 3, the only time Catullus ever directly describes the underworld, death is presented as far more frightening. In poem 3, Catullus laments the death of his lover's sparrow, describing the dark unescapable paths it takes into the underworld and the fearful spirits that hold it there.

Who, [the sparrow], now travels by dark paths thither  
[the underworld], / from whence none may ever  
return, / yet may evil befall you, wicked shades / of  
Orcus, who devour all beauty.<sup>11</sup>

Catullus' use of the second person pronoun "vobis" in line 3 is arresting, by addressing the shades of Orcus directly he creates a sense of danger, he makes the forces of death seem active, antagonistic. Death is not described vaguely as a long sleep or eternal night, but rather as a hostile force working against the living. Unlike poem 5, where one can imagine a peaceful sleep, the portrait of death in poem 3 is frightening, evil shades work against the living, swarming the newly deceased and devouring all that is beautiful. The shades of Orcus are designed to be frightening, their animosity toward the living clearly stated with their description as "malae." Line 12 seals Catullus' opinion on death, it is a place from whence no one is permitted to leave. Death in the Catullan doctrine is thus clearly stated in both poem 5 as endless and in poem 3 as totally inescapable. The value of love and life is, therefore, not merely judged by the pleasure it

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<sup>11</sup> Catullus 3.11-4: *Qui nunc it per iter tenebricosum / illuc unde  
negant redire quemquam, / at vobis male sit, malae tenebrae / Orci,  
quae omnia bella devoratis.*

# ***Philomathes***

brings but because it is finite, because when it's over, the afterlife is dark, endless, and inescapable.

Aside from these brief descriptions of death and the afterlife, Catullus focusses comparatively little on souls and the underworld, preferring rather to address the living, counseling them how best to grieve.<sup>12</sup> In poem 96 Catullus consoles his friend Calvus<sup>13</sup> over the loss of his wife, saying: "If anything of ours (can be) pleasing or welcome to silent graves, Calvus, grief can ... Certainly not so much is the grief of an immature death to Quintilia, so much as the gladness from your love."<sup>14</sup> Here we see the poet shift the focus of the dead from their untimely death to the reaction and emotions of those left behind them. Calvus' dead wife Quintilia is rendered less interested in her passing as by the effect it has on and the reaction of her still living husband. Quintilia is supposedly gladdened by her husband's enduring love and pain, the passionate lifestyle espoused by Catullus in poem 5 proving still relevant; the love shared in life persevering after death, its immortality sustained for however long it is remembered. The question thus arises, if

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<sup>12</sup> 65.6-7 also refer to the underworld, describing waves from the River Lethe lapping at the foot of the poet's brother. This short reference suggests the notion of reincarnation, as expressed later in of Virgil's *Aeneid* 6, where souls are described wiping their minds in the Lethe before being reborn. These two lines, however, are the only instance in the Catullan corpus which suggest a belief in reincarnation and conflict directly with the poet's more commonly touched on notions of death as endless and inescapable. See Aaron Seider, "Catullan Myths: Gender, Mourning, and the Death of a Brother," *CA*, no. 2 (2016): 290-1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26362672> for a full explanation.

<sup>13</sup> Calvus was another Roman Elegiac poet. Joseph Romero, "Independent Study," (Independent Study, University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg VA, USA, Oct 31, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Catullus 96.1-2, 5-6: *Si quicquam mutis gratum acceptumque sepulcris / accidere a nostro, Calve, dolore potest ... Certe non tanto mors immatura dolori est / Quintiliae, quantum gaudet amore tuo.*

# ***Philomathes***

the dead are gladdened by the feelings and actions of the living, then what was the best way to honor them?

The Romans had many customs to govern the practice of mourning; The family of the deceased, for instance, were expected to mourn for ten months<sup>15</sup> and excluded from participating in public events like sacrifices, weddings, festivals.<sup>16</sup> Among these customs, however, there was a sharp distinction between the expected behavior of men and women after a loss in the family. While women were expected to seclude themselves and openly grieve their loss, Roman men were expected to uphold a stoic demeanor.<sup>17</sup> Roman men would be closely scrutinized by their fellows, expected to control themselves and not fall into “womanly tears.”<sup>18</sup> These social expectations of emotional repression had a clearly negative effect on the psyches of Roman men.<sup>19</sup> When writing about death and mourning, Catullus pushed back against these restrictive and emotionally repressive customs.

In poem 68a, Catullus establishes a conflict between the social obligations he owes his friend Manlius, and the familial obligations he owes his dead brother.<sup>20</sup> Catullus apologizes to Manlius, urging him not to seek further poems, as Catullus

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<sup>15</sup> Houghtalin, “Roman Rites of Passage.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Seider, “Catullan Myths,” 284.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Following the death of his daughter, Cicero wrote, “And I labor not toward spirit but to appearance itself, if I can, to restore. And doing that sometimes seems wrong to me, sometimes it seems it would be worse not to do.” (Cicero, *Att.* 12.14.3: *omniaque nitor non ad animum sed ad vultum ipsum, si queam, reficiendum, idque faciens interdum mihi peccare videor, interdum peccaturus esse nisi faciam.*)

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Feldherr, “Non Inter Nota Sepulcra: Catullus 101 and Roman Funerary Ritual,” *CA* 19, no. 2 (2000): 213-4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25011120>.

# ***Philomathes***

explains that he is weighed down by grief for his deceased brother and is unable to write:

But in order that my troubles may not be unknown to you, Manlius, / nor that you think the office of host odious to me, / hear, the waves of fortune which engulf me myself, / nor seek yet more beautiful gifts from miserable me.<sup>21</sup>

As social participation was an integral part of the Roman notion of masculinity, Catullus could not refuse his obligations to Manlius without risking his own masculinity.<sup>22</sup> Were Catullus to end his grieving, however, it would deprive his brother's ghost of the love and passion that the poet had already established as being valued by the dead in poem 96. Yet, to indulge in the passionate mourning Catullus felt was owed to the dead would invalidate his masculinity, as excessive grieving was considered effeminate by Roman society.<sup>23</sup> Catullus was in a bind of his own construction, either fulfil his social obligations and affirm his masculinity, or fulfil his familial obligations but lose his social standing; The poet's answer was characteristically brazen.

Catullus embraces the feminine, grieving in a manner more characteristic of Roman women and throwing himself into an outpouring of grief and passion for his brother, a passion which quickly turns dark. Throughout poem 68a Catullus notes how his once happy youth is now blackened with grief for his brother. He writes in lines 20-4 that he and his house are buried with his brother, all joy, once fed by his brother's love, has perished. In lines 1-4 of poem 65 Catullus tells another friend that he cannot write because of his overwhelming grief: "for

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<sup>21</sup> Catullus 68a: 11-4: *Sed tibi ne mea sint ignota incommode, Mani, / Neu me odisse putes hospitii officium, / accipe, quis merse fortunae fluctibus ipse, / Ne amplius a misero dona beata petas.*

<sup>22</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 298.

<sup>23</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 284.

## ***Philomathes***

care secludes me by means of ceaseless pain, Ortalus, from the learned virgins [i.e., the Muses].”<sup>24</sup> He further bemoans the fact that never more will he hear his brother, never more see his brother.<sup>25</sup> Catullus goes on to call his brother “brother more beloved than life,” implying a dark end to the poet’s emotional path.<sup>26</sup> This dark implication that Catullus loves his brother more than life could be brushed aside, were it not for other allusions to suicide, such as the poet’s statement in poem 68a that: “With you all together our household is buried.”<sup>27</sup> Catullus explores this further in poem 68b as he retells the story of Laodamia and Protesilaus.

Laodamia and Protesilaus were married. Before they could finish building their home’s bedroom and complete the due sacrifices, they were pulled apart as Protesilaus had to fight at Troy.<sup>28</sup> The gods were opposed to the lovers, as they had not completed their sacrifices, and therefore Protesilaus was killed shortly after arriving at Troy.<sup>29</sup> Though Catullus does not mention it, the story ends when in grief Laodamia throws herself onto a funeral pyre.<sup>30</sup> In the middle of recounting this story in poem 68b, Catullus mentions that like Protesilaus and so many other heroes, his brother had also died at Troy. This simple fact links Catullus with Laodamia, both associating him with the

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<sup>24</sup> Catullus 65.1-2: *Etsi me adsiduo defectum cura dolore sevocat a doctis, Ortale, virginibus.*

<sup>25</sup> Catullus 65.8,10.

<sup>26</sup> Catullus 65.9: *vita frater amabilior*. See Seider, “Catullan Myths,” 301-2.

<sup>27</sup> Catullus 68a.21-2: *tecum una tota est nostra sepulta domus.*

<sup>28</sup> Lyne, R.O.A.M. “Love and Death: Laodamia and Protesilaus in Catullus, Propertius, and Others,” *CQ* 48, no. 1 (1998): 201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/639763>.

<sup>29</sup> Lyne, “Love and Death,” 207.

<sup>30</sup> Lyne, “Love and Death,” 202.

# ***Philomathes***

feminine and with grief-stricken suicide.<sup>31</sup> In poem 65 Catullus also states that his brother was buried at Troy, and further specifies the location of his grave: "Whom Trojan land crushes under the Rhoetean shore, snatched from our eyes."<sup>32</sup> The 'Rhoetean shore' references the mythic resting place of Ajax, a hero who went mad with grief and shame, eventually killing himself after Odysseus stole the arms of Achilles.<sup>33</sup>

While Catullus' rejection of Roman Stoicism is in line with his philosophy of living with passion, the poet also presents this path as dangerous. He calls his masculinity into question by associating with feminine grieving customs, heroines, and unmanly social seclusion, but also by suggesting that this path of excessive grieving will result in the poet's own death.

The location of Catullus' brother's grave is also an important facet to his portrayal of grief and mourning. The site of Troy connects Catullus' brother with the mythic heroes of Homeric literature, but it also separates Catullus from his brother, symbolizing the isolation inherent in grief. The poet's brother is not buried in native Rome, his ashes are not laid to rest amongst the long-known graves of his family, but in a distant and alien land, a place separate from the normal world inhabited by Catullus:

Who (the brother) now not amongst long known  
graves / nor near family ashes is placed, / but obscene  
Troy, unhappy Troy detains / the grave alone in  
distant alien ground.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 304.

<sup>32</sup> Catullus 65.7-8: *Troia Rhoeteo quem subter litore tellus ereptum nostris obterit ex oculis.*

<sup>33</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 291.

<sup>34</sup> Catullus 68a.57-60: *Quem nunc tam longe non inter nota sepulcra / Nec prope cognatos compositum cineres, / Sed Troia obscena, Troia infelice sepultum / Detinet extremo terra aliena solo.* See also Seider, "Catullan Myths," 306.

## ***Philomathes***

In lines 49-50 of poem 68b, Catullus makes a point to describe Troy as: "Accursed Troy the common grave of Asia and Europe, Troy the bitter ashes of all men and manly deeds."<sup>35</sup> Here the poet directly associates Troy with evil and death, but also with heroes and acts of valor/manliness (*virtus*). While Catullus' lines in poem 65, where he specifies his brother's grave being in the same spot as Ajax, link him with the idea of suicide, the more direct connection made is between Ajax and the poet's brother. This connection, between the tragic death of Ajax and Catullus' brother, ushers in another heroic parallel between Catullus and Odysseus.<sup>36</sup>

As noted in poem 96, when Catullus counselled his friend that Quintilia cared more for the love and grief of her loved ones than for her own death, Catullus saw a proper display of emotion as an appropriate offering to the dead. It is to this purpose that the poet sacrificed his own masculinity, becoming unable to write or maintain his social bonds and obligations, even to the point of committing suicide. Catullus also specifies that his brother is laid to rest in distant Troy, a mythic place of heroes and heroic deeds, far removed from the humdrum life that Catullus inhabits. What heroic deeds might the poet be referencing? Most likely the funerals performed by heroes like Achilles or Odysseus.<sup>37</sup> Catullus specifically mentions that his brother is laid to rest in the same place as Ajax. According to Sophocles' *Ajax*, Odysseus is responsible for causing the death of Ajax, it is thus Odysseus' duty to bury Ajax after he dies.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Catullus 68b.49-50: *Troia nefas commune sepulcrum Asiae Europaeque, Troia virum et virtutum omnium acerba cinis.*

<sup>36</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 308.

<sup>37</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 280.

<sup>38</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 280.

# Philomathes

It is likewise Catullus' responsibility to perform in person the funerary rites and meet his brother at Troy.<sup>39</sup> To this effect, the poet must embark on a heroic journey, an Odyssey to the mythic land of the dead.

The parallels between the opening lines of poem 101 and those of Homer's *Odyssey* have often been noted.<sup>40</sup> As was mentioned above, the connections between Catullus and Odysseus are clearly established in poem 65 but here they are baked into the very language of the poem:

Through many peoples and through many waters  
borne I come for these, brother, miserable offerings,  
in order to present the final offerings of death and  
vainly speak to your mute ashes. (Catullus 101. 1-4)<sup>41</sup>

Sing to me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who  
wandered/ very much, after sacking the holy citadel  
of Troy/ he saw the cities of many men and learned  
their minds,/ but many were the pains he suffered at  
heart on the sea... (Homer *Od.* 1.1-4)<sup>42</sup>

Catullus parallels the many peoples and waters he traverses with the cities of many men and the pains suffered at sea by Odysseus, but the connections between the parallel journeys do not end there. The direction of travel is a key aspect to Catullus' work. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus travels homeward from the mythic land of Troy, he departs a land wrecked by war and death, adventuring through monsters and witches until finally returning home. Catullus' journey is opposite, traveling from the normal world of Rome to the mythic land of Troy, he is a normal

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 288.

<sup>41</sup> Catullus 101.1-4: *Multas per gentes et multa per aequora Vectus / Advenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias, / Ut te postremo donarem munere mortis / Et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem.*

<sup>42</sup> Homer, *Od.* 1.1-4: Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε · πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν.... See also Seider, "Catullan Myths," 288.

## ***Philomathes***

man obliged to enter the strange world of myth for the sake of his loved ones.<sup>43</sup> The two men are mirrored, as Catullus sails to meet his brother, so too did Odysseus sail to find Penelope. While Catullus' journey to Troy can certainly be read as literal, the far more compelling interpretation can be found in allegory.

Like Odysseus, Catullus suffered many pains of heart while tossed about by the sea, but importantly, his pains were felt in the heart. Throughout the poet's corpus, he often uses words associated with water to convey his grief.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, words like "weeping eyes" (*lumina fletu*, Cat. 68b.15) are easily recognizable examples of grief. But other lines like "Hear, the waves of fortune which engulf me myself" (*accipe, quis merse fortunae fluctibus ipse*, Cat. 68a.13) establish the connection between grief and water more clearly. While not directly relating to Catullus himself, the poet also uses words like "shipwrecked" (*naufragum*, Cat. 68a.3) and "flung by means of the sea's foamy waves" (*ieiectum spumantibus aequoris undis*, Cat. 68a.3) in reference to his friend's pain and misfortune. With these poetic allegories established, Catullus' voyage by sea can be interpreted not merely as a physical journey, but as an emotional one. Once Catullus arrives at Troy, at his brother's tomb, he describes his funerary offerings as "wet with many brotherly tears" (*fraterno multum manantia fletu*, Cat. 101.9). While these gifts could be read as literal, they could also be understood to have a far deeper meaning. As elucidated in poem 96, the appropriate and most valued offering the living can give to the dead is love, pain, and remembrance; thus, Catullus' true

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<sup>43</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 306.

<sup>44</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 295.

## ***Philomathes***

offerings to his brother are not physical in nature, but emotional, they are the tears themselves.

Like Catullus, Odysseus also made a trip to speak to the dead, but unlike the poet, Odysseus' ghosts spoke back. When Catullus describes his purpose in coming to Troy, he says: "In order to present the final offerings of death and vainly speak to your mute ashes" (*Ut te postremo donarem munere mortis et mutam nequiquam alloquerer cinerem*, Cat. 101.3-4). Here the poet reveals that his initial desire in departing to Troy was futile, vainly he wished to speak to the mute ashes of his once live brother.<sup>45</sup> Yet, the poet does in other poems display a sense of commonality with his brother, a mirroring of sorts. In the same way that the poet's brother cannot speak to him, rendered mute by death, so too is Catullus rendered mute by grief. In poems 65, 68a, and 68b, Catullus could not complete his social obligations to Manlius because he was too broken by the loss of his brother; the poet had lost his way with words, he had lost the voice that bound him to his living friends and patrons.

Catullus' mirroring of death is baked into the very language he uses to describe his "brother." Unlike other familial relationships like "pater et filius," "frater et frater" is uniquely mirrored. The same word used to designate one brother is the same as the other.<sup>46</sup> Catullus crossed many seas and travelled far just to find a tomb, but the same could be said about his brother.<sup>47</sup> In using the relationship between brothers, Catullus blurs the lines between living and dead.<sup>48</sup> Owing to this seemingly deliberate usage of the brotherly relationship, the

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<sup>45</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 287.

<sup>46</sup> Feldherr, "Non Inter Nota Sepulcra," 217-8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

## ***Philomathes***

question reasonably arises whether Catullus even lost a brother at all, whether the entire story is merely an excuse to deliberate on the proper way to grieve. If so, then the trip to Troy can be read as fictitious and allegorical: Troy shifts from a real place to a mythic spot, the land of the dead.

If Troy is to be read as an allegory for the land of the dead, the same place visited by Odysseus, it recontextualizes Catullus' references to suicide in earlier poems. Catullus' journey overseas and his allusions to committing suicide are one and the same, not a genuine desire to end his life but rather a desire to bridge the gap between living and dead. When embedded in the normal social world of the living Catullus cannot honor the deceased, he must cut himself off in a manner more appropriate to Roman women, he must break his social ties and join the dead in their silence if he wants to speak to them; he must go on an odyssey of grief if he means to meet with his brother at Troy. Yet, to do so Catullus must first cast off his sense of Roman masculinity, a prospect likely not appealing to a male Roman audience. Catullus, therefore, presents an alternative version of masculinity, a version embedded in the mythic heroes of old.

Unlike the Stoicism espoused for men by Roman society, the heroes of Homeric myth expressed grief. Greek heroes, like Achilles, Ajax, and Odysseus, wept. They expressed their grief openly and passionately.<sup>49</sup> By associating himself with epic heroes, by describing grief as an odyssey, Catullus recontextualized the act of mourning as both inherently heroic and masculine.<sup>50</sup> In poem 68b he described Troy as: "Troy the

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<sup>49</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 304.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

## ***Philomathes***

bitter ashes of all men and manly deeds" (*Troia virum et virtutum omnium acerba cinis*, Cat. 68b.50). By mourning heroically Catullus firmly states his argument against the Roman sense of masculinity, paradoxically implying that by not expressing grief, by refusing to go to Troy, Roman indifference was cowardly and unheroic. The good man in Catullus' eyes not only lived passionately but grieved passionately as well.

Yet it was not enough simply to visit Troy, merely to grieve the loss of loved ones, in Catullus' philosophy, as death was both final and eternal, the responsibility of immortalizing the dead fell on those they left behind. As Catullus stated in poem 5, the immortal forces of the heavens can cheat death, but mortals cannot. Humans must live lives filled with passion, but when they too fall, the responsibility of remembering them, of creating an immortality, falls on those they left behind.<sup>51</sup> In poem 65 Catullus pledges to sing forever in mourning for his brother:

Yet certainly will I always love (you), / always will I  
sing sad songs because of your death, / just as under  
the dense shadows of boughs sings / the Daulian bird,  
lamenting the fate of slain Itylus.<sup>52</sup>

Here, he likens himself to the Daulian bird, the mythic queen Procne who transformed into a nightingale after the death of her son.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Catullus is equally transformed by the loss of his brother, fated to sing eternally the song of the grieving nightingale while his brother sleeps in death, just like the sparrow of poem 3.

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<sup>51</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 290-1.

<sup>52</sup> Catullus 65.10-4: ... *At certe semper amabo, / Semper maesta tua carmina morte canam, / Qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris / Daulias, absumpti fata gemens Ityli.*

<sup>53</sup> Seider, "Catullan Myths," 290-1.

## ***Philomathes***

Catullus' view on death and mourning was both complex and multifaceted. Catullus believed that death was both final and inescapable. This view motivated his philosophy on life, that it had to be lived to its fullest, that every feeling had to be felt to its most extreme, and that nothing should be restrained, not love for those living or dead. He believed that the truest offering that could be given to the dead was love, love and the pain that ensued after death. He believed that clinging to Roman ideals of masculine indifference both hurt Roman men and withheld the honors owed to the dead. Catullus, therefore, argued for a breaking from Roman custom, that to honor the dead it was necessary to embrace the pain and anguish of loss. Catullus urged his audience to emulate his own actions, to explore the full and darkest edges of their pain, to go on odyssey to the metaphorical land of the dead, to blur the line between living and dead. He argued that this was the only way to truly honor the dearly departed, to give them funerary gifts wet with tears. He argued that far from effeminate, this act was innately heroic and masculine, that it was preceded in the acts and behavior of the mythic heroes of old. Finally, he argued that because there was no true immortality in the hereafter, the greatest responsibility and honor owed to the dead was in remembering them, in creating for them a personal immortality, to carry them always and to sing forever a sad dirge in their honor.

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# Philomathes

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