

TWO NOTES ON [VERGIL] *CATALEPTON* 2*

Corinthiorum amator iste uerborum,
 iste iste rhetor (namque quatenus totus
 Thucydides, tyrannus Atticae febris)
 tau Gallicum, min et sphin et – male illi sit,
 ista omnia, ista uerba miscuit fratri.

2 *om. Quint.* 3 tyrannus: Bri(t)ta(n)nus *Quint.* febres *Quint.* 4 min et spin (sphin Ribbeck) *Baehrens*: min et psin *H*: *alii codd. alia*: enim et sphin *Quint.* 5 ita omnia *BHM Quint.*

The difficulty of this little poem is shown by the facts that Ausonius had no idea what it was about,¹ and that Westendorp Boerma's commentary² takes 22 pages to explicate its five lines. The latter relies on Quintilian 8.3.27ff., who quotes the poem, saying that Vergil wrote it to attack a certain Cimber for his taste in obsolete words. This is no doubt the Annius Cimber whom Augustus ridiculed when reprimanding Mark Antony for a similar foible (Suet. *Aug.* 86) and who, as an *antiquarius* is contrasted with the *Asiatici oratores*. For convenience, I have kept Westendorp Boerma's text, but I take issue with his interpretation on two points.

4 tau Gallicum: since Bücheler tentatively suggested it in *RhM* 38 (1883), 508, the standard explanation of this has been to point out that a number of Latin inscriptions in Gaul use a Greek θ or else a barred D (\eth), to represent what appears to have been a dental fricative³ elsewhere indicated in Latin by *-sd-* or *-st-*. Thus Frank, *AJP* 56 (1935), 255, quotes (T)HY \eth RITANVS (*CIL* xii 686) for what is elsewhere spelled *Thysdritanus*, and says that ' \eth clearly represents the best that one Celt could do with *sd*'. On the basis of this supposed Gallic incompetence, Frank went on to see the repeated *-st-* sounds in the poem as some sort of joke on the orator's inability to pronounce this sound. His view seems to have been generally accepted.⁴

There seems to me a profound error in this viewpoint which shows cultural imperialism at its worst. First, let us note that none of the examples of alleged substitution are in Latin words; they are native names for people or places or things. The Latin names by which we know some of them are only the approximation of foreigners, and not in any sense the 'correct' names of those people or places. So when local inscriptions use different forms from those in our Latin texts, it is not that the Celts were unable to cope with the name the Romans used for a place, but quite the reverse – the Roman tongue and alphabet were unable to adapt themselves to the new words and could only approximate to foreign dental fricatives. When we look back on Frank's condescending remark, we see that he got it quite the wrong way round:

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¹ *Grammaticomast.* 5ff. (= Peiper p. 167); if he was not misquoting from memory (*legens* can hardly be taken as literally as Westendorp Boerma thinks it must), Ausonius had a different text before him, for he wonders what *al Celtarum, tau, sil* and *min* signify. The first of these does not appear in the alternative version of Ausonius' poem (see Westendorp Boerma 21f.).

² Assen, 1949.

³ On this see now D. Ellis Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* (Oxford, 1967), 410–19.

⁴ Most significantly by Westendorp Boerma and by Richmond in the *OCT* of 1966.

-sd- (a combination only occurring in Latin in compounds such as *eosdem* or *quibusdam*) was the best that the Romans could do with a sound unfamiliar to *them*. Frank actually quotes a Gallic word with a Greek θ used in it; on his argument, this would mean that the Gauls had trouble pronouncing their own language!

Now, it is conceivable that the Gauls had trouble pronouncing -st- (I.E. -st- seems to have been converted into -ts- in Celtic, written Ð etc. in Gaul, but we cannot be certain of this in all cases⁵), but the fact that they found the Latin alphabet inadequate for representing the sounds of their own language is quite irrelevant to this question. What is required to establish the supposed difficulties of the Gauls is a single instance of a Latin word with -st- being written with θ or Ð; I know of none, and none has been cited in the literature on this topic.

It seems to me that there are two possible solutions to the problem of *tau Gallicum*. Both are based on the way the Romans of the first century B.C. pronounced Greek (and in particular θ) and, given the uncertain nature of our knowledge of this, I find it difficult to choose between them.

Both solutions start from the assumption that many Romans at this time did not clearly distinguish between aspirated and unaspirated consonants when speaking Greek. Transcriptions certainly indicate this for an earlier period, as Greek aspirated and unaspirated consonants are written in the same way in Latin (thus $\pi\sigma\phi\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha$: *purpura*, $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\sigma$: *tus*). But, from the middle of the second century B.C. Latin inscriptions start differentiating between aspirated and unaspirated not only in Greek, but in Latin also.⁶ However, the Romans found great difficulty making the distinction,⁷ as numerous inscriptions which confuse Greek aspirated and unaspirated consonants show,⁸ and there is evidence that this confusion continued right up to the third century A.D.⁹

Against this background our first solution appears. It has already been suggested by de Witt, *AJP* 33 (1912), 318, and recently by Killeen, *Orpheus* 21 (1974), 57ff., that *tau Gallicum* may refer to the aspiration of consonants, the former arguing from Catullus 84 and the latter from the lack of coherence that the traditional explanation entails. The idea is a good one, and it deserves more evidence than has so far been used to support it. For apart from Catullus' poem about the aspirating tendencies of Arrius, we have also the testimony of Cicero (*Or.* 160) that aspiration was being introduced into numerous Latin words around the middle of the first century B.C., which is presumably when the poem would have been written.¹⁰ This phenomenon may not be, as Allen points out,¹¹ an entirely artificial import into Latin, but it seems a reasonable conclusion that it may correspond to a more assiduous attempt by Romans speaking Greek to pronounce aspirated consonants correctly. What sort of link can be made between this and *tau Gallicum*? The vital question concerns the existence of an aspirated *t* in the Gallic branch of Celtic; it would appear that some branches of Celtic had it,¹² and it has been claimed that Gaulish was one of them,¹³ while others seem to have denied the existence of an aspirated unvoiced dental in

⁵ See H. Pedersen, *Vergl. Grammatik. Kelt. Sprach.* (Göttingen, 1909), i.78, 532, but for possible exceptions Evans 399.

⁶ Leumann, *Lat. Gramm.* i.130–2; more concisely in Allen, *Vox Latina* 26–7.

⁷ As indeed did other foreigners – cf. the Thracian in Aristophanes' *Thesm.* 1001ff.

⁸ Leumann 130f.

⁹ Allen, *Vox Graeca* 22

¹⁰ Further ancient discussion cited in Sturtevant, *The Pronunciation of Greek and Latin* (Philadelphia, 1940), 158–60, Allen, *V.L.* 26.

¹¹ *V.L.* 27.

¹² Pedersen i.132–40.

¹³ *Ib.* 533.

Gaulish.¹⁴ The problem is that, as a general rule at any rate, there is no distinction in writing between the supposedly aspirated and unaspirated *t* in Gaulish. But this tells us nothing about whether or not distinct types existed, any more than our failure to distinguish graphically between the *t* in *top* and that in *stop* means that the former is not aspirated.¹⁵ Besides, there is some evidence that what was written with *t* in one place could be written with *th* or Greek *θ* elsewhere.¹⁶ It seems, then, that possibly an aspirated voiceless dental existed in Gaulish which would have had a similar pronunciation to that of *θ* in Athens in the Classical age,¹⁷ and which we can imagine the archaizing rhetor attempting to imitate. *Tau Gallicum* will have been the poet's derogatory way of referring to this affectation, comparing the man with uncouth provincials rather than the great Athenian he aspired to imitate.

The second explanation depends on the pronunciation of *θ* as a fricative rather than an aspirate. We know that in Athens of the Classical period *θ* was pronounced as the latter, but it is clear that, even at that time, it was pronounced as a fricative in some parts of Greece, and that this pronunciation eventually became universal.¹⁸ But, as we have seen, it is also clear that some Romans made no proper distinction between *τ* and *θ* in the first century B.C., so such a pronunciation would have seemed odd to them. On the other hand, we have seen that the dental fricative of Gaulish was sometimes written as a Greek *θ*, which points to a spirantization of *θ* amongst Greek speakers in that part of Gaul at least as early as the first century B.C.¹⁹ Pronounced as a fricative, *θ* was presumably similar to the Gaulish dental fricative, which may have been what the poet had in mind when referring to *tau Gallicum*. This has been suspected before, but certainly for the wrong reasons. Now, along with the archaic *μν* and *σφν*, which, as Westendorp Boerma tells us,²⁰ do not occur in Attic prose anyway, we have a further blunder into which Cimper's mannered antiquarianism led him.

In either case, the conscious stressing of an aspect of Greek pronunciation to which many Romans paid little attention is picked out as an irritating affectation of this Atticizing orator.

3 Atticae febris: *febris* here is usually taken to mean 'madness', but it is doubtful whether the word can have had this meaning before Christian Latin. Of the two pre-Christian uses cited in support of this sense, one (Plaut. *Pseud.* 643) is far weaker than 'madness', and means something closer to 'getting hot under the collar' ('a source of uneasiness' as Lewis and Short translate), and the other (Sen. *Quaest. Nat.* 4.13.11) is consciously figurative (*cor ipsum excoquit* etc.). The accepted meaning of *febris* here seems at best doubtful, but it is certainly preferable to some of the more exotic suggestions that have been made.²¹

It is time to exhume an interpretation of *febris* which Heyne gave in his edition of 1775 with no further references, but which modern commentators ignore. To begin, 'fever' is an inadequate translation of *febris*, for the English only conveys the idea of excessive heat, whereas the coldness which precedes a fever, ague, can be meant by the Latin term.²² Now 'coldness' or 'frigidity' had a very long pedigree as a term

¹⁴ Evans 407f.

¹⁵ Allen, *V.G.* 12.

¹⁶ Evans 407f.

¹⁷ Cf. Allen, *V.G.* 16–20, Schwyzer, *Gr. Gram.* i.204f.

¹⁸ Allen, *V.G.* 20–4, Schwyzer i.205–7.

¹⁹ Schwyzer i.159.

²⁰ 37; but he is wrong in denying *σφν* to the tragedians: cf. A. *Pers.* 759, S. *O.C.* 444, E. *Med.* 399 etc.

²¹ By e.g. Fairclough, *TAPA* 47 (1916), 48ff., and Reitzenstein, *RhM* 79 (1930), 81f.

²² *TLL* I A 2 b.

of literary abuse in the ancient world; the first datable²³ use of it is in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 138–40, where we are told that when the tragedian Theognis put on a play, it snowed in Thrace and the rivers froze, but this joke assumes that the concept had already established itself in the critical language of the fifth century. The idea is used elsewhere by Aristophanes and contemporaries and, perhaps most influentially, by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* 3.3. Studies have been made of the application of the term in literary criticism, but they have been unwilling to face the unpalatable truth that the word conveys nothing very exact at all, but only the user's disapproval.²⁴ I say this lest the passages I quote below on 'frigidity' be thought to imply that I think that one particular fault or class of faults was meant by the term; I only quote them to show that there were critics in antiquity who regarded as 'frigid' the literary qualities of the two authors discussed.

Old Comedy is where we first find this figurative use of coldness, and the remains contain an exact parallel to the interpretation of *febris* I offer here. Phrynichus 69 ridicules the 'water drinking'²⁵ musician Lamprus, and calls him *ἀηδόνων ἥπιαλος*. *ἥπιαλος* is the coldness preceding an attack of fever,²⁶ which the more general *febris* could include.

There are many instances of 'frigidity' in critical terminology from around the middle of the first century B.C., as a glance at just the index to the rhetorical works of Cicero will show.²⁷ Manifestly relevant here is Catullus 44, in which the poet retires to his farm (of disputed location) to recover from a cold he got by reading a speech of Sestius. We return to *Catalepton* 2; is the 'lord of the Attic fever' someone who, like Sestius, can inflict it on others? That some regarded the Atticists as guilty of 'frigidity' is strikingly illustrated by Quintilian 10.2.17:

Ideoque qui horride atque incomposite quidlibet illud frigidum et inane extulerunt, antiquis se pares credunt; qui carent cultu atque sentiis, Atticis; scilicet [qui] praecisus conclusionibus obscuri, Sallustium atque Thucydiden superant...²⁸

²³ Eupolis 244 refers to a *σκάμμα' ἀσελγὲς καὶ Μεγαρικὸν καὶ σφόδρα / ψυχρόν*, almost a literary-critical usage, and this may predate the *Acharnians* (see Edmonds ad loc.).

²⁴ Of course, this disapproval will often be directed against types of error, and hence something precise may be conveyed by occurrences in one particular critic; but the wide divergence even amongst the more methodical critics should warn us against seeking any common factor. A full history of the term in Latin and Greek has yet to be written; any such account would have to consider not only the quasi-technical senses in which it is used by some critics, but also the loose way in which others use it. (The scholarly mind, abhorring chaos, has shied away from the latter.) By far the most thorough discussion so far is by K. Gutzwiller, '*ψυχρός* und *ὄγκος*', Diss. Basel, 1961 (publ. 1969), whose analysis of Aristotle, however, seems to me badly flawed. Gutzwiller argues that Aristotle regards all offences against *τὸ πρεπόν* as *ψυχρά*, whereas in fact he is far more specific and polemical than this, for only 'poetic' prose is regarded as *ψυχρόν*. Van Hook's '*ψυχρότης ἢ τὸ ψυχρόν*', *CP* 12 (1917), 68–76 is quite uncritical in its acceptance of Aristotle's use of the term as the only valid one. In some ways the best assessment is in Ernesti's old *Lexica*; s.v. *ψυχρός* in the *Lex. Technol. Graec. Rhet.* (1795) and *frigidus* in the *Lex. Technol. Lat. Rhet.* (1797).

²⁵ Wine was linked with artistic creativity from an early period; see Archilochus 120.2 W, Epicharmus 132 K, Cratinus 203 KA. The contrast between 'water drinking' and 'wine drinking' poets appears in later criticism as well (see Gow and Page, *The Garland of Philip* [Cambridge, 1968], ii.17, 39).

²⁶ See Aristophanes fr. 346 KA with notes; in this fragment Aristophanes says that he has been forced to drink water, which Gelzer, *RE* sup. 12.1415f, has interpreted as meaning that he was unable (for political reasons) to make certain jokes. There may also be a reference to literary disability in the *ἥπιαλος* with which he is afflicted.

²⁷ Ed. Abbott, Oldfather and Canter (Urbana, 1964).

²⁸ Winterbottom's text; the most important MS at this point (Bernensis 351) reads *Attici*.

With this we should compare Suetonius, *Aug.* 86, where it is implied that Cimber is one of the *antiquarii*.

Is this the only use of *febris* rather than the general concept of 'frigidity' in Latin literary criticism? I think not. The other occurs in the story preserved in Donatus, *Life of Vergil* 44:

Alius [sc. obtrectator] recitante eo [sc. Vergilio] ex Georgicis [I 299]:

'nudus ara, sere nudus'

subiecit:

'habebis frigore febrem'.

The general silence of scholars on this story can only mean that they regard it as mere buffoonery, not worthy of learned attention. Nevertheless, Jocelyn *Papers Liverpool Lat. Sem.* 2 (1979), 142 and Della Corte, *Hommages à H. Bardon* (Brussels, 1985), 76 have suspected that there was something else here, and that Vergil's use of *nudus* incurred the charge of *κακοζηλία*. But it is not even certain that *κακοζηλία* existed as a word of literary criticism in Vergil's lifetime;²⁹ in any case, 'frigidity' was a common charge and could encompass all those things which later critics meant by *κακοζηλία*.³⁰ Thus Vergil's use of *nudus* in a rare sense could easily have been regarded as 'frigid', as indeed could the structure of the sentence. Certainly the half line is a little precious, combining antithesis and *ἰσόκωλον* or *παρίσωσις*.³¹

That this sort of construction could strike some critics as 'frigid' in some circumstances can be seen from Quintilian 9.3.74:

Magnae ueteribus curae fuit gratiam dicendi et paribus et contrariis acquirere... per se frigida et inanis affectatio... (80) Etiam ut sint, quod est quartum, membris aequalibus, quod *ἰσόκωλον* dicitur...

and by the description of features of Isocrates' style by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dem.* 20 as *τὰ μειρακιώδη πάρισα καὶ τὰ ψυχρὰ ἀντίθετα*. These figures were regarded in antiquity as the inventions of Gorgias (Suid. s.v., Diodor. 12.53.4, Cic. *Orat.* 39), whose remains show a liking for them (e.g. *Helen* 7), and who was often accused of 'frigidity' (e.g. Arist. *Rh.* 3.3, Demetr. *de eloc.* 116, Quint. 9.3.74).

A final suggestion to finish: these are the only two places where *febris* is used of an extreme form of literary frigidity. Is this just coincidence? If Vergil did write *Catalepton* 2, as Quintilian, Ausonius, and a number of moderns have thought,

²⁹ Of the many examples that Jocelyn 79–108 collects, none can be confidently assigned to a time before the birth of Christ. The claim that Neanthes of Cyzicus used the word rests only on a title in Eudocia 712 (*FGrH* 84 T.1b). Even if this text is not a worthless sixteenth-century forgery (and the best that Jocelyn can say is that the case for this 'is not watertight' (79)), it only proves that such a title was used for the work in the eleventh century, and we know that few titles of ancient books can be regarded as authentic. Again, Jocelyn 81 admits that the description of an orator as *κακόζηλος* in Diogenes Laertius 1.38 may not come from Demetrius of Magnesia, on whom Diogenes is relying. Finally, it is worth noting that, *pace* Jocelyn ib., the word cannot even be surely attributed to Augustus; Suetonius, *Aug.* 86 *cacozelos*... *sprevit* is not a quotation.

³⁰ Although the terms are distinguished in the stilted classifications of Demetrius, *de eloc.* 186, 'Longinus' (surely closer to the type of criticism to be expected at a reading) virtually treats them as synonyms in 3, 4.

³¹ A word on terminology here: we would call this a 'chiasmus', but the ancients would not. According to *TLL*, the word occurs only twice in Latin, in neither case in a literary context. LSJ tells us that it is a late arrival in Greek; not until Hermogenes in the second century A.D. is it used of literature, and even then it is applied to whole clauses in relation to other clauses, not to individual words. I mention this so that we can recognize the way this figure would have been classified by ancient critics.

perhaps we can postulate an order of events as follows: young Vergil invents the term of abuse . . . and years later, now a rising poet with official patronage, has the charge thrown back at *him* at a public reading. For someone aspiring to write *κατὰ λεπτόν*, such justice can only be described as poetic.

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