

A NOTE ON CATULLUS 63.5¹

At Catullus 63.5, OGR read:

deuoluit iletas acuto sibi pondere silices.

The gist of this ('he rolled down from (?) himself flints with sharp mass') is improbable, and in particular the form *iletas* is a non-existent word and two syllables too long for the metre.

The sense requires that v.5 tell of Attis' self-castration; the most conservative attempt to extract this from the paradosis is:

deuoluit *ile* acuto sibi pondere silicis.²

This involves: (i) taking *ile* to mean 'the genitals'; and (ii) taking *acuto...pondere silicis* to mean 'with a sharp mass of flint'. However, *ile* in the singular is without a convincing parallel³ and the signification 'genitals' (rather than 'groin') is also unparalleled.

Avantius changed (i) *silices* to *silice*, ablative in agreement with *acuto*, 'with sharp flint'; and (ii) *pondere* to *pondera*. Bergk proposed (iii) *ili* (or its orthographical variant *ilei*) for the corrupt *iletas*; this genitive is then made to depend on *pondera*, 'the burdens of his groins', i.e. his genitals. Haupt further proposed (iv) *deuolsit* for *deuoluit*, giving a more graphic verb ('tore down') to suit the activity. The line so reconstructed reads:

deuolsit *il(e)i* acuto sibi pondera silice.

Despite being almost universally adopted by editors, the supplement *ili* is subject to some powerful objections. Not only is the word for groin normally plural, as we have seen, it is also third declension. The genitive is elsewhere always *ilium*, the dative and ablative almost invariably⁴ *ilibus*. Yet the interpretation in question requires a form which is properly that of the second declension singular.

There are several parallels for the expression *ilium pondera* (or an equivalent),⁵ most notably Ovid, *Fasti* 4.241 *onus inguinis*, also describing the castration of Attis, and closely resembling the Catullan passage in its wording.⁶ But there are also examples of *pondus* (and its synonyms) being used of the genitals without any dependent genitive: Lucilius 534–6 *ibat forte aries, inquit, iam quod genus! quantis | testibus! uix uno filo hosce haerere putares | pellicula extrema exaptum pendere onus ingens*, Martial 7.35.3–4 *sed meus, ut de me taceam, Laecania, seruius | Iudaeum nulla sub cute pondus*

¹ I am much indebted to Oliver Lyne for his advice and various suggestions which I have incorporated.

² So R. Ellis, *Catulli Veronensis liber*² (London, 1878).

³ There are only two doubtful occurrences of *ile* in Latin literature. (i) Servius says of Virgil's practice *ad A.* 7.499 and *Ecl.* 7.26: '*hoc ile*' et '*haec ilia*' facit; but the singular form does not in fact occur in Virgil (*A.* 7.499 and *Ecl.* 7.26 both have *ilia*). (ii) It is the conjecture of H. W. Garrod (*P. Papini Stati Thebais et Achilleis* [Oxford, 1906]) at Statius, *Theb.* 9.766 *figitur <ile> Lamus, flet saucius inguina Lygdis*. The manuscript P reads *ilia*, most editors follow the vulgate in reading *ora*.

⁴ Latin does have a number of metaplasts. But for *ilia* a second declension form is attested only once: *iliis* (dative) at Celsus, *Med.* 4.1.12. *iliis* (ablative) is a conjecture at Seneca, *Dial.* 7.7.1 (MSS *illis*). Perhaps *ilibus* should be read in both these places? The only place where a form of *ilia* occurs which is both second declension and singular is Servius, *A.* 7.499 *ab ilio*; this, however, is a pun on *ab Illo* ('from Troy / from the groin'), cited from the mimographus Marullus. Servius himself condemns the form: '*ab ili*' debuit dicere (cf. Servius, *Ecl.* 7.26: *est autem hoc dictum per amaritudinem rusticam*).

⁵ Cf. J. N. Adams *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), 71.

⁶ With Catullus 63.5 *acuto...silice* cf. Ovid, *Fast.* 4.237 *saxo...acuto* and with Catullus 63.6 *itaque ut relictas sensit sibi membra sine viro* cf. Ovid, *Fast.* 4.242 *nullaque sunt subito signa relictas viri*.

habet. These parallels show that the genitive with *pondera* at Catullus 63.5 is not indispensable: the fact that Ovid chose to make the expression explicit with a genitive need not imply that Catullus did so. In Lucilius and in Martial, as at Petronius 92.9 *habebat enim inguinum pondus tam grande, ut ipsum hominem laciniam fascini crederes*, the metaphor of the genitals as 'weight' serves to convey the impressive size of the *membra*. At Catullus 63.5, on the other hand, they are seen by Attis not as a valuable asset but rather as burdensome, undesirable baggage. At v.6 Attis feels his limbs at last unencumbered (*relicta*, 6) by his unwanted manhood; only later (v.46) does he see this 'burden' for what it really was: *liquidaque mente vidit sine quis...foret*. The metaphor in v.5 is still unspecific; the nature of the 'burden' and the horror of the castration become progressively clearer in the subsequent lines: 6 *relicta...membra sine viro*, 7 *terrae sola sanguine maculans*, 17 *corpus evirastis*. The recognition that *iletas* need not have been a corruption of *inguinum* (*vel sim.*) now opens new avenues for emendation.

Statius' suggestion⁷ for *iletas* is *icta*: 'he tore off with sharp flint the weights (i.e. genitals) which he had struck':

deuolsit *icta* acuto sibi pondera silice.

But how appropriate is *icta* really? Are we to suppose that Attis not merely cut off his genitals, but beat them first as well? An act of tearing does not require an additional act of striking.

I suggest a different track. An obvious candidate to fill the metrical gap in the place of *iletas* is the pronoun *ille*, but this gives an inappropriate emphasis: the subject is still the same as it was in the previous four lines. Better is *ipse*,⁸ which is 'used to lay stress on the reflexive relation':⁹

deuolsit *ipse* acuto sibi pondera silice.

The combination of *ipse* with forms of the reflexive pronouns (*me*, *te*, *se*, etc.) and of the reflexive possessive adjective (*meus*, *tuus*, *suus*, etc.) is well attested in expressions of violence directed against the self, and especially suicide: Virgil, *Aen.* 12.659f. *dextra | occidit ipsa sua* and Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.14 *suam ipse ceruicem perfregit*. Catullus himself uses this expression to emphasize the reflexive relation at 22.17 *se ipse miratur*, 31.5 *vix mi ipse credens*, 67.30 *qui ipse sui gnati minxerit in gremium* (emphasizing the incestuous relationship), 76.11 *istinc te <ipse> reducis*,¹⁰ 88.8 *non si demisso se ipse uoret capite* (emphasizing the self-directed sexual act) and 107.5–6 *ipsa refert te | nobis*. The expression is used of self-induced harm at 64.81–2 *ipse suum Theseus pro caris corpus Athenis | proicere optauit*, 75.2 *se officio perdidit ipsa suo*. Most tellingly, the expression occurs three times in poem 63, viz.: 45 *simul ipsa pectore Attis sua facta recoluit*, 56 *cupit ipsa pupula ad te sibi derigere aciem* and 85 *ferus ipse sese adhortans raidum incitat anim<um>*. In line 5 the expression would serve to emphasize the horror and unnaturalness of Attis' self-mutilating act, providing not only an idiomatic Latin expression, but a powerful and effective sense in context.

The conjecture is admittedly far from the paradosis. But it may be a mistaken enterprise to try to reconstruct the true reading from the hopelessly corrupt *iletas*. *iletas* is extremely close to the sequence *-lictas-* which occurs in the line below; it is even conceivable that in some lost exemplar the former appeared directly above the

⁷ Followed by R. G. M. Nisbet, *Collected Papers on Latin Literature* (S. J. Harrison [ed.], Oxford, 1959), 99 = *PCPS* 24 (1978), 112.

⁸ The same conjecture was also arrived at independently by Dr S. J. Harrison.

⁹ B. L. Gildersleeve & G. Lodge, *Latin Grammar* (London, 1895), §311, R.2.

¹⁰ Read thus by Ellis, Thomson and Goold. OGR have *istinc teque reducis*.

latter.¹¹ The visual similarity between lines 5 and 6 is further increased by the occurrence of *sibi* at the beginning of the second half of each line:

5 deuoluit*iletas*acutosibi...

6 itaq;ut*relictas*ensitsibi...

The garbled sequence *iletas* in line 5 may therefore have arisen through parablepsy, a misreading of the letters directly below. In that case, the true reading which it ousted need not have any paleographical resemblance to it.¹² This would entitle us to emend the text purely on grounds of sense and metre.

The conjecture *ipse* improves on previous conjectures by offering an expression which is excellent Latin and common in Catullus. Emphasizing the reflexive relation in Attis' horrific and unnatural act, it is entirely appropriate in context. Moreover, there is a ready explanation of the corruption in the supposition of parablepsy.

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¹¹ Particularly if the *-que* of *itaque* were written compendiously (as my representation below supposes).

¹² For the parablepsy, cf. Catullus 95.5, where the reading of OGR, *Zinirna canas*, is probably influenced by *Zinirna cana* in the line below, and cf. Nisbet (op. cit. n. 7), 98 ad loc.: '*canas* has clearly jumped from the line below, and in such circumstances palaeographical considerations should not be given undue weight.'

MYTHOLOGICAL INCEST: CATULLUS 88

Quid facit is, Gelli, qui cum matre atque sorore
prurit et abiectis pervigilat tunicis?
quid facit is, patrum qui non sinit esse maritum?
ecquid scis quantum suscipiat sceleris?
suscipit, o Gelli, quantum non ultima Tethys
nec genitor Nympharum abluit¹ Oceanus:
nam nihil est quicquam sceleris, quo prodeat ultra,
non si demisso se ipse voret capite.

Here Gellius, also the target of poems 74, 80, 89, 90, 91 and 116, is accused of incest with his mother, sister, and aunt. This accusation is coupled with the only extended mythological reference to be found in the group of short Catullan epigrams 69–116:² not even Tethys or Oceanus can wash out Gellius' crimes. This notion that large bodies of water are unable to wash away the stain of crime is of course a topos going back to Greek tragedy,³ but the individual naming of the two sea-deities seems to make a point—a literary point which is relevant to the invective of the poem.

Oceanus and Tethys appear as a pair in Homer (*Iliad* 14.201 Ὠκεανὸν τε θεῶν γένεσιν καὶ μητέρα Τηθύην) and the Hellenistic poets (Callimachus, *Hymn* 4.17, *Ap. Arg.* 3.244), but the author being recalled here is Hesiod. At *Theogony* 337–70 we are given an extensive list of the progeny of Oceanus and Tethys, consisting of rivers

¹ The manuscripts transmit the present indicative *abluit*, but better would be either the subjunctive *abluat* of the Aldine edition of 1502 ('can wash away') or the future *abluet*: in support of the latter are the imitations at Seneca, *Phaedra* 715–16 *quis eluet me Tanais aut quae barbaris / Maeotis undis incumbens mari; Hercules Furens* 1323–6 *quis Tanais ... abluere dextram poterit*.

² This point is noted by D. O. Ross, *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 103 and H.-P. Syndikus, *Catull: Eine Interpretation III* (Darmstadt, 1987), 67 n. 10.

³ To Sophocles, *O.T.* 1227–9: cf. Syndikus loc.cit. (n. 2) and Coffey and Mayer's commentary on Seneca, *Phaedra* 715–18. It is notable that in both *O.T.* and *Phaedra* the topos refers to incest or quasi-incest, as in Catullus.