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## ARCTOS – ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

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## THE TEXT OF CATULLUS 6,12–14

TRISTAN POWER

10 *nam te non uiduas iacere noctes  
nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat  
sertis ac Syrio fragrans oliuo,  
puluinusque peraeque et hic et ille  
attritus, tremulique quassa lecti  
argutatio inambulatioque.  
nam †inista preualet† nihil tacere.  
cur? non tam latera ecfututa pandas,  
ni tu quid facias ineptiarum. (6,6–14)*

12 *del. Muret: inista preualet O: ni ista preualet GR: iam tu ista ipse nihil  
uales tacere Schmidt: nil perstare ualet nihil tacere Skutsch*

Catullus' friend Flavius has been spending his nights with a new girlfriend, who is described as a *scortum febriculosum* (6,4–5).<sup>1</sup> Lines 12–14 pose problems of

<sup>1</sup> I print the Latin of the OCT by R. A. B. Mynors (ed.), *C. Valerii Catulli carmina*, Oxford 1958 in this paper, with my own apparatus criticus. I also refer to the following texts by the editor's last name alone: M.-A. Muret (ed.), *Catullus et in eum commentarius*, Venice 1554; J. J. Scaliger (ed.), *Catulli, Tibulli, Propertii nova editio*, Paris 1577; C. Lachmann (ed.), *Q. Catulli Veronensis liber*, Berlin 1829; M. Haupt (ed.), *Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius*, Leipzig 1853; L. Schwabe, *Catulli Veronensis liber*, Giessen 1866; R. Ellis (ed.), *Catulli Veronensis liber*, Oxford 1867; A. Riese (ed.), *Die gedichte des Catullus*, Leipzig 1884; B. Schmidt (ed.), *C. Valeri Catulli Veronensis carmina*, Leipzig 1887; F. W. Cornish (ed.), *Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris*, London 1912; W. Eisenhut (ed.), *Catulli Veronensis liber*, Leipzig 1983; G. P. Goold (ed.), *Catullus, Tibullus, Pervigilium Veneris*, rev. ed., Cambridge, MA 1988; G. Lee (ed.), *The Poems of Catullus*, Oxford 1990; A. R. de Verger (ed.), *C. Valerii Catulli carmina*, Huelva 2005.

interpretation, not least because the first part of the text is corrupt, and Cornish's Loeb edition originally omitted any translation altogether, in keeping with his practice of removing obscene material, and printed only the Latin emendation by Schmidt. But even some of the best conjectures on *in/ni ista preualet* are unacceptable. Lachmann's *nil ista ualet* and Haupt's *nil stupra ualet*, for example, although both widely accepted on account of their faithfulness to the *ductus litterarum*, fail to reconcile the usage of the *nil-nihil* combination elsewhere by this poet, where the second word *nihil* never appears as a repetition merely for effect.<sup>2</sup> Rather, while Catullus is indeed fond of this doublet, we only find it connecting verbs or infinitives that each refers in parallel to a separate action, not to the same one (*nil uidet, nihil audit*, 17,21; *nil proficimus, nihil mouetur*, 42,21; *nil ... iurare, nihil promittere*, 64,146).<sup>3</sup> The best proposal to date has thus been Skutsch's more sensible *nil perstare ualet*, which omits the connective *nam*, but at least coheres with Catullus' style, and is printed by Goold in his revised Loeb as well as by de Verger in his edition.<sup>4</sup>

Yet this emendation by Skutsch still leaves us with a missing rationale for how line 12 is connected to the preceding part of the poem and to the next two lines. The translation that accompanies Goold's unexpurgated text is of no help,

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Unless otherwise stated, all references are to Catullus, and all translations my own. I wish to thank the anonymous readers for helpful comments on an earlier version.

<sup>2</sup> Pace J. Godwin (ed.), *Catullus: The Shorter Poems*, Warminster 1999, 121, who claims that "[t]he strengthening of an initial *nil* with a subsequent *nihil* is attractive", although he cites no parallel for this usage in Catullus.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Wills, *Repetition in Latin Poetry: Figures of Allusion*, Oxford 1996, 463–4. We might also compare e.g. Stat. *silv.* 4,3,111: *nil obstat cupidis, nihil moratur*. The emendation by Haupt in particular is based on Scaliger's *ni supra ualet*, but *supra* also seems too pejorative a term for such a jovial epigram; cf. D. S. McKie, *Essays in the Interpretation of Roman Poetry*, Cambridge 2009, 2; A. Minarini, "Catullo, Flavio e le *deliciae inlepidae*: il carme 6 del *liber*", *Paideia* 73 (2018) 1742–3. On *stuprum* generally, see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, Baltimore, MD 1982, 223.

<sup>4</sup> O. Skutsch, "Zur Überlieferung und zum Text Catullus", in R. Muth (ed.), *Acta philologica Aenipontana*, vol. 3, Innsbruck 1976, 69: "*perstare* (so für *stapre*, d. h. *stare* mit übergeschriebenen Sigel)". Skutsch's emendation had been anticipated by Ellis' *nil stare ualet* and Riese's *nil celare ualet*; cf. also A. W. Van Buren, "Osservazioni su alcuni testi letterari ed epigrafici", *RPAA* 19 (1942–3) 185–91, proposing *nil iurare ualet*. The conjecture by Skutsch also meets with the approval of K. M. Kokoszkiwicz, "*Et futura panda siue de Catulli carmine sexto corrigendo*", *Hermes* 132 (2004) 125, although he only cites Goold for it. In his own footnote, Goold unfortunately provides only the manuscript reading *inista preualet* in *O*, omitting the alternative in *GR*.

sidestepping the difficulties that necessarily result from accepting the Latin text as *nil perstare ualet, nihil tacere*:

For that you are not spending nights on your own the bed, vainly dumb, cries out aloud, perfumed as it is with garlands and Syrian scent, as do the dents right and left on the bolster, and the chattering and shuffling of the rickety bed when shaken. *It's no use standing fast in denial, no use being silent.* You ask why? Well, you wouldn't present such a debauched sight unless you were up to some fancy capers.

“It's no use ... no use” for whom? Or, to put it another way, who or what is the subject of *ualet*? When one considers the emphatic pronoun *tu* in line 14, the subject of the verb in line 12 is more likely to be also in the second person on logical grounds, because it is clearly Flavius whom Catullus dramatically turns to address in 6,12–14; hence, for example, Schwabe's conjecture *ualet*, which was followed by Munro.<sup>5</sup> The previous passage of Poem 6 is about Flavius' bed, and functions as an explanation, introduced by an initial *nam* (6,6), of why Catullus suspects that his friend's romance is with a low-class girl.<sup>6</sup> This second *nam* now establishes the overall structure of the poem, which moves from the uncouth girl (6,1–5), to the wrecked bed as a metaphor for the fatigued lover (6,6–11),<sup>7</sup> to Flavius himself, who begins to be addressed here in the second person (6,12–14),<sup>8</sup> and then finally, as a consequence (*quare*, 6,15), to his need to admit everything to Catullus (6,15–17).

<sup>5</sup> H. A. J. Munro, *Criticisms and Elucidations of Catullus*, Cambridge 1878, 26–7.

<sup>6</sup> I am not convinced by the baseless argument of J. Uden, “*Scortum diligis*: A Reading of Catullus 6”, *CQ* 55 (2005) 642 that this girl is really a “high-class woman”, or by the over-subtle view of A. Corbeill, *Sexing the World: Grammatical Gender and Biological Sex in Ancient Rome*, Princeton, NJ 2015, 95–9 that the *scortum* in Poem 6 is allegedly a homosexual boyfriend.

<sup>7</sup> Flavius' bed noisily shuffles around as though alive (*argutio inambulatioque*, 6,11). On such personifications or euphemisms in Catullus, see J. K. Schafer, *Catullus through His Books: Dramas of Composition*, Cambridge 2020, 87. On the structure of Poem 6, see D. F. S. Thomson (ed.), *Catullus*, Toronto 1997, 221.

<sup>8</sup> In bringing the descriptions back to the lover himself, Catullus makes clear his main source for Poem 6, a Greek epigram by Meleager (*Anth. Pal.* 5,175); see T. Power, “Catullus 6.17”, *Philologus* 164 (2020) 300–7 with bibliography.

Moreover, aside from *ualet* being grammatically in the wrong person, this word also does not fit well within the context, and probably represents a misreading of a different verb. I should also argue that *cur* in line 13 is best taken as the first part of a sentence, rather than as a rhetorical question standing alone, as it is usually punctuated, which is smoother Latin but does not affect the general meaning of lines 13–14.<sup>9</sup> Once we accept these changes, we may read the lines better as follows, with the poet posing a longer question to Flavius, in order to gain more information about his new girlfriend:

*nam ista pro nihilo putas tacere.*  
*cur non tam latera ecfututa pandas,*  
*ni tu quid facias ineptiarum?*

For indeed you consider it of no value to keep those things quiet. Why would you not exhibit sides so love-weary, unless you were doing something foolish? (6,12–14)

The contemporary usage of the phrase *pro nihilo* with *puto* in this sense is illustrated by, for example, one of Cicero's speeches: *hoc pro nihilo putas* (*Phil.* 10,6; cf. *pro nihilo id putas*, *Cic. fam.* 10,26). The error of 6,12 involved the scribal transposition of words, much like the palaeographical argument in support of Skutsch's emendation (*perstare* > *stare per* or the abbreviated *stare p* > *sta pre*). However, I presume that *nihilo putas* was instead reversed into *putas nihilo*, being anticipated by Schmidt's conjecture *iam tu ista ipse nihil uales tacere* with regard to the word order of *nihil uales*,<sup>10</sup> and by Pighi's *nil ista pudet* in its divination of the beginning *pu*-.<sup>11</sup> The corruption of *pro putas* into *pre ualet* is understandable, due to the five letters that both phrases share (*ista pro nihilo*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. P. Bondam, *Variarum lectionum libri duo*, Zutphen 1759, 130, who in place of *cur* alternatively suggested *cum*, which was entertained by Riese in his commentary *ad loc.* and later printed by Lee.

<sup>10</sup> For conjectures similar to that of Schmidt, cf. also T. G. Tucker, "Catullus: Notes and Conjectures", *CQ* 4 (1910) 1–2; T. Gärtner, "Kritisch-exegetische Überlegungen zu Catullgedichten", *AAntHung* 47 (2007) 11–13; McKie (above n. 3) 3–4. On such common word-inversions in Catullus' manuscripts, see *ibid.* 12 n. 45.

<sup>11</sup> G. B. Pighi, "Emendationes Catullianae", *RhM* 94 (1951) 42–43, whose conjecture is printed in the Teubner text of Eisenhut, although it is liable to the same refutation as Lachmann and Haupt due to its unprecedented usage of *nil ... nihil*.



*putas > inista preualet nihil*), while the prefixes *per-*, *prae-*, and *pro-* were often confused by medieval scribes. The change of case from *nihilo* to *nihil*, another common error, may have occurred simultaneously, or may have been a later effort to repair the metre.

The new line's closeness to the *paradosis* further bolsters its certain good sense and stylistic suitability, which are already the best arguments in its favour. This emendation brings cogency to the poem as a whole, and rescues 6,12 from the charge of being a superfluous repetition. It was this verse's similarity to the paradoxical line 7 (*nequiquam tacitum cubile clamat*) that led Muret to propose the deletion of line 12 as an alleged marginal gloss that became interpolated, and Trappes-Lomax likewise wished to omit the entire verse, claiming that it "cannot be restored to Catullan excellence".<sup>12</sup> However, with our emended text, we can see that lines 12–14 are actually rather different from the sentiment about his bed expressed in lines 6–11, taking the thought a step further: Flavius obviously sees no advantage in trying to conceal his affair, because of the exhausted sides that he openly displays. Like the other signs of lovemaking such as his dented pillow (*puluinusque peraeque et hic et ille / attritus*, 6,9–10), Flavius divulges the truth despite his silence, since he does not think that it is worthwhile to hide these matters. Thus, Flavius' jangling bed (*tremulique quassa lecti*, 6,10) is connected with its recent occupant in this scene, implying that he too reveals his own post-coital state. One might indeed call that Catullan excellence.

New York

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<sup>12</sup> On Muret's conjecture, see J. M. Trappes-Lomax, *Catullus: A Textual Reappraisal*, Swansea 2007, 12, 47–48 (quotation at 12); cf. *id.*, "Eleven Suggestions in Latin Poetry", *Mnemosyne* 55 (2002) 581: "This inability of generations of scholars to find a truly compelling restoration of anything that Catullus might himself have written is significant in itself".