

CAMWS 2020

Leviter deducens fila: Catullus's aesthetic terminology

Link to the abstract:

<https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2020/abstracts/2067LeviterDeducens.pdf>

1. The Song of the Fates: Catullus 64, 305-322, translated by F. W. Cornish, with adaptations:

305 ...cum interea infirmo quatientes corpora motu
ueridicos Parcae coeperunt **edere cantus**.
His corpus tremulum complectens undique uestis
candida purpurea talos incinxerat ora,
at roseae niueo residebant uertice uitae,
310 aeternumque manus carpebant rite **laborem**.
Laeua colum **molli** lana retinebat amictum,
dextera tum **leuiter deducens fila** supinis
formabat digitis, tum prono in pollice torquens
libratum **tereti uersabat** turbine fusum,
315 atque ita decerpens **aequabat** semper **opus** dens,
laneaque **aridulis** haerebant morsa **labellis**,
quae prius in **lēui** fuerant exstantia **filo**;
ante pedes autem candentis **mollia** lanac
uellera uirgati custodibant calathisci.
320 Haec tum clarisona uellentes uellera uoce
talia diuino **fuderunt carmine fata**,
carmine, perfidiae quod post nulla arguet aetas.

...in the meantime, swaying their bodies
with palsied motion, the Parcae began to
reveal truthful **chants**.
A white veil enfolding their aged limbs
robed their ankles with a crimson border;
on their snowy heads rested rosy bands,
while their hands duly plied the eternal
labor. The left hand held the distaff
clothed with **soft** wool; then the right
hand lightly **drawing out the threads**
with upturned fingers **shaped them**,
then with downward thumb **turned** the
spindle poised with a **polished** whorl;
and so with their teeth they still plucked
the threads and **made the work even**.
Bitten ends of wool clung to their **dry**
lips, which had before stood out from the
smooth thread. At their feet **soft**
fleeces of white-shining wool were kept in
baskets of osier. They then, as they
plucked the wool, sang with clear voice,
and thus **poured forth the Fates in a**
divine poem. That **poem** no length of
time shall prove untruthful.

2. The Song of the Fates: Catullus 64, 323-337, translated by F. W. Cornish, with adaptations:

O decus eximium magnis virtutibus augens,
Emathiae tutamen, Opis carissime nato,
325 accipe, quod laeta tibi pandunt luce sorores,
ueridicum oraclum. sed vos, quae fata sequuntur,
currite ducentes subtegmina, currite, fusi.
adueniet tibi iam portans optata maritis
Hesperus, adueniet fausto cum sidere coniunx,
330 quae tibi flexanimo mentem perfundat amore
languidulosque paret tecum coniungere somnos,
leuia substernens robusto brachia collo.
currite ducentes subtegmina, currite, fusi.

“O thou who crownest high renown with
great deeds of virtue, bulwark of Emathia,
to the son of Ops most dear, receive the
truthful oracle which on this happy day the
Sisters reveal to thee; **but you, run on,**
drawing the woof-threads which the
fates follow, you spindles, run.

“Soon will Hesperus come to thee,
Hesperus, who brings longed-for gifts to the
wedded, soon will come thy wife with
happy star, to shed over thy spirit soul-
quelling love, and join with thee languorous
slumbers, laying her smooth arms under
thy strong neck. **Run, drawing the**
woof-threads, you spindles, run.

335 nulla domus tales umquam contexit amores,
nullus amor tali coniunxit foedere amantes,
qualis adest Thetidi, qualis concordia Peleo.
currite ducentes subtegmina, currite, fusi.

“No house ever harboured such loves as these; no love ever joined lovers in such a bond as links Thetis with Peleus, Peleus with Thetis. **Run, drawing the woof-threads, you spindles, run.**

3. Catullus 64, 24 and 116, translated by F. W. Cornish, with adaptations:

24 vos **ego** saepe mero, vos **carmine** compellabo.

You will I often toast with wine, **you will I invoke with poem.**

116 Sed quid **ego** a primo digressus **carmine** plura commemorem...?

But why should **I** leave the first subject of **my poem** and tell of more...?

4. Theocritus, *Idyll 1, 64*, my translation

Ἄρχετε βουκολικᾶς, Μοῖσαι φίλαι, ἄρχετ' αἰοιδᾶς...

Start, dear Muses, **start** the bucolic song...

5. Cicero, *Orator*, 110-111: the three rhetoric styles, translated by G. L. Hendrickson and H. M. Hubbell

Aut in isdem causis perpetuum et eundem spiritum sine ulla commutatione obtinebis? Demosthenes quidem cuius nuper inter imagines tuas ac tuorum, quod eum credo amares, cum ad te in Tusculanum venissem, imaginem ex aere vidi, nil Lysiae **subtilitate** cedit, nil **argutiis** et acumine Hyperidi, nil **lēvitate** Aeschini et **splendore** verborum. [111] Multae sunt eius totae orationes **subtiles** ut contra Leptinem, multae totae **graves** ut quaedam Philippicae, multae **variae** ut contra Aeschinem falsae legationis, etc.

Or in the same cases will you always keep to the same high pitch without variation? Take Demosthenes, for example, whose statue in bronze I lately saw among those of yourself and your kinsmen when I visited you at your Tusculan villa, placed there, I am sure, because you admire him; he yields nothing to Lysias in simplicity, nothing to Hyperides in refinement of expression and **subtlety**, nothing to Aeschines in **smoothness** and **brilliance** of language. Many of his speeches [111] are **simple** throughout—the one Against Leptines is an example; many are **impassioned** throughout, as certain of the Philippics; many are **varied**—the one against Aeschines regarding Malfeasance in the Embassy etc.

6. Callimachus, *Epigrams*, 29, translated by F. J. Nisetich

Ἡσιόδου τό τ' ἄϊσμα καὶ ὁ τρόπος· οὐ τὸν αἰοιδὸν
ἔσχατον, ἀλλ' ὀκνέω μὴ τὸ μελιχρότατον
τῶν ἐπέων ὁ Σολεὺς ἀπεμάζατο· χαίρετε **λεπταὶ**
ῥήσιες, Ἀρήτου σύμβολον ἀγρυπνίη.

The song is Hesiod's in theme and style but it isn't
Hesiod to the last drop: No the man of Soloi
Has skimmed the sweetness and left the rest. Hail,
Delicate discourses, tokens of Aratus' vigilance.

7. Cinna, *Epigrams*, fr. 13 Hollis (11 Courtney), translated by A. Hollis

haec tibi Arateis multum vigilata lucernis
carmina, quis ignis novimus aërios,
lēvis in **aridulo** malvae descripta **libello**
Prusiaca vexi munere navicula.

This **poem**, which teaches us about the fiery bodies in the sky, the subject
of my sleepless nights with Aratus' lamplight, I have brought to you as a
present in a boat of Prusias, written on the **dry** bark of a **smooth** mallow.

8. Vergil, *Ecl.*, 6, 1-8, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough

Prima Syracosio dignata est ludere versu
nostra nec erubuit silvas habitare Thalea.
cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthus aurem
vellit et admonuit: "pastorem, Tityre, **pinguis**
5 pascere oportet ovis, **deductum** dicere **carmen**."
nunc ego (namque super tibi erunt qui dicere laudes,
Vare, tuas cupiant et tristia condere bella)
agrestem **tenui** meditabor **harundine Musam**.

My Muse first deigned to sport in Sicilian strains,
and blushed not to dwell in the woods. When I
was fain to sing of kings and battles, the Cynthian
plucked my ear and warned me: "A shepherd,
Tityrus, should feed sheep that are **fat**, but **sing**
a lay fine-spun." And now—bards in plenty
will you find eager to sing your praises, Varus,
and build the story of grim war—now will I woo
the rustic Muse on slender reed.

9. Horace, *Epist.*, II, 1, 224-225, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough

...cum lamentamur non apparere **labores**
nostros et **tenui deducta poemata filo**...

...when we complain that our work and our poems spun with a fine thread are not visible...

10. Vergil, *Ecl.*, 6, 1-8, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough

46 "Talia saecla," suis dixerunt "**currite**" **fusis** "Ages so blessed, run on!" cried the Fates to their
concordes stabili fatorum numine **Parcae**. spindles, voicing in unison the fixed will of Destiny.

11. Catullus 16, 1-11, translated by P.Green, with adaptations:

Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,
Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
qui me ex **versiculis** meis putastis,
quod sunt **molliculi**, **parum pudicum**.
5 nam castum esse decet pium poetam
ipsum, **versiculos** nihil necestest.
qui tum denique habent **saalem** ac **leporem**,
si sunt **molliculi** ac **parum pudici**
et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
10 non dico pueris, sed his pilosis,
qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos.

I'll fuck you in the ass and in the mouth,
you Aurelius the Queen and Furius the
faggot, who dared judge me on the basis of
my **verses**: they **mayn't be manly**, does
that make me **indecent**? For the sacred
poet himself ought to be chaste, but not his
verses. Why, they only acquire **wit** and
spice if they are not **unmanly** and **less**
than decent, and can rouse with their
ticklings, I don't mean boys, but those
hairy old ones unable to stir their arthritic
loins.

12. The coverlet of Ariadne: Catullus 64, 62-67, translated by F. W. Cornish, with adaptations:

prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis,
non flauo retinens **subtilem** uertice mitram,
non contacta **leui** uelatum pectus amictu,
65 non **tereti** strophio lactentis uincta papillas,
omnia quae toto delapsa e corpore passim
ipsius **ante pedes fluctus salis alludebant**.

...[Ariadne] watches, and is tossed on a sea of torment:
nor does she still keep the **delicate headband** on her
golden head, nor has her breast veiled by the covering of
her **light garment**, nor her milk-white breast bound with
the **smooth band**: all these have fallen from all her body;
scattered at her feet, they were the playthings of
the salty waves.

13. Ovid, *Am.*, I, 14, 1–8, translated by Grant Showerman:

1 Dicebam “medicare tuos desiste capillos!”
tingere quam possis, iam tibi nulla coma est.
[...]
5 Quid, quod erant **tenues**, et quos ornare timeres? 5
Vela colorati qualia **Seres** habent,
uel **pede** quod **gracili deducit** aranea **filum**,
cum **leue** deserta sub trabe nectit **opus**.

I used to say: “Stop drugging that hair of yours!”
Now you have no locks to dye! [...] They were **fine**
in texture, so fine that-you feared to dress them; they
were like the **gauzy** coverings the dark-skinned
Seres wear, or the **thread drawn out by the**
slender foot of the spider when he weaves his
delicate work beneath the deserted beam.

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