

Leviter deducens fila: Catullus's Aesthetic Terminology

What part did Catullus take in the creation of a Latin aesthetic terminology?

Catullus's stylistic, poetic and metapoetic vocabulary remains more elusive than that of his elegiac successors, largely because most works by the other Neoterics were lost. While the aesthetic terminology of Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid can and has been thoroughly compared by such critics as D. Kennedy (1993) or A. Keith (1999), only few poems from Catullus's time remain to put his terminology into perspective. In particular, the Latin terms used to translate Alexandrian poetics are well-known in the Augustan era, but still insufficiently explored during Catullus's times. Yet, I argue that Catullus played a major role in the constitution of the Latin terminology used by Augustan poets.

The scholarship focuses on Catullus's explicitly programmatic poems, such as the very first one with its opening description of the book as "a graceful new booklet, freshly smoothed off with dry pumice-stone", *lepidum novum libellum / arido modo pumice expolitum*. F. Cairns (1969) showed that these lines summon the Callimachean ideal of brevity (*libellus*), originality (*novus*) and refinement (*lepidus*), and that the poem alludes to Hellenistic poets in a typically erudite way (*doctus*). W. Batstone (1998) revealed that *aridus* also has a stylistic sense, namely that of concision. More importantly, he showed that the Roman reception of Alexandrianism took place within the larger rhetorical debate opposing Asianism and Atticism, and that Catullus drew extensively on the rhetoric terminology to define his poetics, using terms that would be abandoned by the Augustans (*e.g. lepidus, aridus, expolitus, laboriosus, nugae*; see also Newman, 1990).

Yet, a larger view of the Catullan corpus can help trace the continuities between the Neoterics and the Augustans, thus defining more clearly Catullan poetics and the history of Latin aesthetic terminology. Indeed, the words *levis, tenuis, and deductus*, well-known as

Augustan translations of the key Callimachean concept of λεπτότης or refinement, are all present in Catullus, albeit often in less explicitly stylistic passages. Concepts associated to the elegy's definition such as *tener* and *mollis* also appear in Catullus. Exploring these terms' occurrences throughout Catullus will give a more accurate map of their semantic evolution.

Since *levis* has been shown to translate λεπτός in an epigram by Catullus's friend Cinna (fr.13 Hollis; see Thomas 1979), this paper will focus on one of its occurrences in the highly metapoetic description of the spinning Parcae in Catullus 64. Although the Parcae's spinning has long been revealed coextensive to their singing, the metapoetic terminology used by Catullus there has barely been analyzed (one exception is Prioux, 2016). I will show how intricately the poet interweaves Callimachean and Atticist concepts such as *levis*, *aridus*, *mollis* and *aequatus* in order to inaugurate the use of *deductus* as a new translation of λεπτός, long before Virgil's famous *carmen deductum* from the fourth *Bucolic*. Indeed, intertextuality will show that Virgil was probably alluding to this Catullan passage when he wrote these lines.

Then, this paper will show how the treatment of Ariadne's poetic voice and body in the same *carmen* 64 anticipates the elegiac metaphor of the *scripta puella* through an elaborate use of aesthetic terminology, describing Ariadne's veils as *levis*, *teres* and *subtilis*. Paradoxically, Ariadne is portrayed losing these garments, thus anticipating the conflicting treatment of feminine *cultus* in elegy (see Klein, 2013) where it is both valued for its refinement and rejected for its artificiality.

Finally, the importance of textiles in both these examples will show how Catullus's aesthetics encompasses not only poetry but its relation to figurative arts, thus passing on another Hellenistic tradition to the Augustan poets: the co-construction of art criticism and literary criticism.

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