

Horribilesque ultimosque Britannos

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Perhaps no issue has polarized Catullan scholars as much as that of hiatus. Some critics, such as Goold, have thought that all hiatus, regardless of meter or position in the line, needs to be removed from Catullus, while others, such as Zicàri, have justified hiatus by Greek practice or by suggesting that the words in hiatus are emphasized.¹⁾ Zicàri is so bold as to suggest that the striking (and occasionally emended) hiatus at Propertius 2.32.45 is an allusion to Catullus. It seems necessary to question the argument of Goold in light of the new Gallus fragment which contains in the second line a hiatus which would be difficult to emend away.²⁾ Even if the lines of Gallus are spurious, and in fact even if the line in question needs emendation, to the forger/scribe, writing before A.D. 25, hiatus was still possible.

Catullus 11.11–12 contains one of the most famous instances of hiatus in Catullus. The lines read thus in the manuscripts:

Gallicum Rhenum horribilesque ultimosque Britannos

Most editors emend. Todd, adding his own emendation to twelve others he knows, comments that if the text is sound, this would be the only Sapphic hendecasyllable in Latin without any caesura, since the other three lines in the poem which do not have caesura after the fifth or sixth syllable at least have mildly heard breaks in these positions (*sagitta-ferosue*, line 6; *septem-geminus*, line 7; *praeter-eunte*, line 23).³⁾ In a severe criticism of the hiatus Fordyce invokes the name of Bentley, who “pointed out on Hor. *Od.* iii. 14. 11, [that] there is no

¹⁾ G.P. Goold, *Phoenix* 12 (1958) 106–11; M. Zicàri, trans. D.F.S. Thomson, *Phoenix* 18 (1964) 193–205.

²⁾ *Fata mihi, Caesar, tum erunt mea dulcia, quom tu* (R.D. Anderson, P.J. Parsons and R.G.M. Nisbet, *Journ. Rom. Stud.* 69 (1979) 140; cf., on the meter, pp. 148 and 141 [“Dr. Lyne suggests *tum, Caesar, erunt*, but the hiatus should not be rejected in a poet of the period.”], and, on the date, p. 127).

³⁾ F.A. Todd, *Class. Rev.* 55 (1941) 70–72. To Todd’s list are to be added the emendations of E.M. Thompson, *Amer. Journ. Philol.* 21 (1900) 78–79; E.L.B. Meurig Davies, *Class. Quart.* 44 (1950) 31; and A. Hudson-Williams, *Class. Quart.* 46 (1952) 186.

instance of a short final vowel in hiatus where there is no break in sense.”⁴⁾ Hiatus here seems a difficult case to argue.

Two recent editors, Quinn and Forsyth, have printed the hiatus and defended it with arguments from sense. According to Quinn, the hiatus is “appropriate, whether we regard it as underpinning a feeling of revulsion inspired by the sight of the Britons, or a feeling of breathlessness at the end of the long journey from India to Britain.”⁵⁾ A similar argument was made in 1894 by Giri, who in defending the manuscript reading against Haupt’s conjecture *horribile aequor*, accepted by many editors, commented that the two adjectives modifying the British, *ultimi* and *horribiles*, are both emphasized by their metrical separation.⁶⁾ One curious argument from Greek practice has been adduced as well, although it has been generally ignored, perhaps because written in Spanish. García suggests that in this strophe of Catullus the third hendecasyllable and the adonic are treated as one line of sixteen syllables, with caesura after either the eighth or, as here, ninth syllable.⁷⁾ According to this theory the hiatus would be acceptable, since falling in the caesural position. The theory is interesting, and there is one example in Catullus (11.23; cf. 11.6) where the third line in a Sapphic strophe does not have a normal caesura and ends with a disyllable. In the combined third/fourth line of Sappho such a scansion would be normal (as for example at 2.7–8 L–P, with word break after the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth syllables, observing the bridge after the tenth). But I can find no supporting examples in Sappho or Alcaeus of hiatus after the eighth or ninth syllable of the third/fourth line.

One apparently persuasive argument against hiatus is offered by Meurig Davies; comparing three similar loci, Davies notes “that *ultimos* here is most forceful if it is the sole epithet of *Britannos*.”⁸⁾ The point is well taken, but it should be noted that quite the opposite is the case with *horribilis*. This word generally is linked for emphasis with other adjectives and would lose force if used to modify *Rhenum*, as Davies wants, or a word such as *aequor* inserted into the hia-

⁴⁾ C.J.Fordyce, *Catullus: A Commentary*, corr. ed. (1961) 127.

⁵⁾ K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems*² (1963) 128. Cf. P.Y.Forsyth, *The Poems of Catullus* (1986) 147: “with the hiatus seen as a sound effect, perhaps to emphasize the breathtaking horror of the Britons.”

⁶⁾ I.Giri, *De locis qui sunt aut habentur corrupti in Catulli carminibus*, vol.1 (1894) 85–89.

⁷⁾ J.F.García, *Emerita* 9 (1941) 160–62.

⁸⁾ Davies, op.cit., 31.

tus. A perusal of the entry in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* for *horribilis* as referring to people and gods shows the word used, from Cicero onward, in conjunction with *taeter*, *infestus*, *pertimescendus*, *saevus*, *miserabilis*, *praepotens*, *laboriosus*, *sordidus*, *tristis*, *tremendus*, and *terribilis*.⁹⁾ Most interesting are passages like Cicero, *Sull.* 59, which refer to a tribe or nation (*hominum genus horribile et pertimescendum*); at Caesar, *Bell. Gall.* 5.14.2, is offered the manuscript variant *horridiores* referring to the *Britanni*, although the variant is generally rejected in favor of *horribiliores*. The evidence from elsewhere in Catullus is inconclusive: twice the word is linked with another adjective (14.12; 26.5), twice it is not (84.10; 64.264). The stylistic argument seems to offer little help, although it may be worth noting that the first two cases are in polymetrics, the latter two in dactylic meters.

Illumination can perhaps be shed on our problem by a similar passage in Sappho. 31.9 L-P, the famous poem translated as Catullus 51, also contains hiatus, in fact “a short final vowel in hiatus where there is no break in sense,” although in the weak caesural position:

ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲν γλῶσσα ἔαγε, λῆπτον.

Scholars have traditionally emended or obelized *ἔαγε*, which follows the hiatus, but in recent decades the hiatus has held its own. Heitsch emphasizes the Hesiodic parallel at *Erg.* 534 (*οὐ τ' ἐπὶ νῶτα ἔαγε*), and Hiersche adds that a “Nachwirkung” of digamma, for which there are parallels in Lesbian poetry, would eliminate the hiatus.¹⁰⁾ Nagy, aware of the arguments of Heitsch and Hiersche, adds an argument from sense: the passage is “one other attested instance where a word for ‘break’ seems to have reinforced its own meaning via its position. ... hiatus is the very factor that creates the special effect.”¹¹⁾ While Fowler, the most recent scholar to treat the passage, emends away the hiatus, he does so not on the basis of the hiatus,

⁹⁾ *TLL* 6.3.16, col.2989. The *TLL* of course has not reached *ultimus*.

¹⁰⁾ E.Heitsch, *Rh.M.* 105 (1962) 284–85; R.Hiersche, *Glotta* 44 (1966) 1–5. Examples of hiatus surviving after lost digamma in Lesbian poetry are in A.M. Bowie, *The Poetic Dialect of Sappho and Alcaeus* (1984) 84–86, who supports hiatus here. Bowie speaks, probably more correctly than Hiersche, of “a poetic form preserved after the loss of *digamma* in the spoken language.”

¹¹⁾ G.Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (1974) 45. For a similar but independent defense see B.B.Ford and E.C.Kopff, *Glotta* 54 (1976) 52–56.

which he finds passable, but on the basis of tmesis,¹²⁾ which of course can be removed by reading ἀλλ' ἄκαν.

The hiatus in Sappho is highly relevant to Catullus. Page observes that Lucretius' text of Sappho 31.9 L-P probably read hiatus.¹³⁾ Fowler agrees, although he argues that manuscripts with his own favored reading circulated in the hands of Theocritus, Apollonius Rhodius, and (based on *torpet* at Catull. 51.9) Catullus. Ford and Kopff astutely perceive that the hiatus at Catullus 27.4 would suggest that Catullus' text of Sappho on the contrary contained hiatus, with "Catullus transferring to an amusing context an effect he had found in Sappho but considered perhaps too grotesque for Roman ears to reproduce in the serious 51" (56). In many respects Catullus 11 resembles the Sapphic technique as opposed to the later technique we observe in Horace: short fourth syllables (6 and 15), bridging of the normal caesural positions (6, 7, 11, and 23), combination of the third and fourth lines in the strophe (11–12 and 19–20), and high incidence of elision (ten instances in twenty-four lines). Also in lines 3 and 7 of Catullus 51 the Sapphic bridge between the tenth and eleventh syllables is broken; this does not occur in the more Sapphic Catullus 11. Only with respect to hypermeter (22) does Catullus 11 resemble the technique of Horace. All of these effects add to the emotional pitch of the poem and perhaps, although the statistical sample is small, Catullus intended these metrical effects in the poem to contrast with the gentle metrical tenor of Catullus 51. In any case, hiatus at Catullus 11.11 fits the generally Sapphic nature of the rest of the poem's metrical technique and would be perfectly comprehensible if Catullus thought he was imitating Sappho 31.9 L-P.

¹²⁾ R. L. Fowler, *Gr. Rom. Byz. Stud.* 28 (1987) 433–39.

¹³⁾ D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (1955) 24.

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