

Catullus 64.18: *nutricum tenus*

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Catullus' *Peleus and Thetis* describes the first sighting of the Nereids as follows:

*illa, atque <haud> alia, viderunt luce marinas
mortales oculis nudato corpore Nymphas
nutricum tenus exstantes e gurgite cano.* (64.16–18)

Commentators endeavour to explain Catullus' *nutricum* by reference to Greek $\tau\iota\tau\theta\acute{\omega}\nu$ ¹. The same commentators nonetheless evince considerable uncertainty about this explication²; they also accuse Catullus of ineptitude³. The aim of the present note is to offer an interpretation that is both more economical and free from such dubiety, while at the same time vindicating Catullus' poetic competence: his *nutricum* is simply an indubitable and very adroit instance of the rhetorical figure of 'transumptio'.

Lausberg gives the following definition of 'transumptio'⁴: 'Mit der Metonymie verwandt ist die ... "transumptio" ..., die in der Setzung eines in dem betreffenden Kontext semantisch ungeeigneten Synonyms besteht.' Like Quintilian's discussion of the same figure (8.6.37), Lausberg adduces *Od.* 15.299 ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu\theta\epsilon\nu\ \delta\prime\ \alpha\tilde{\upsilon}\ \nu\acute{\eta}\sigma\iota\sigma\iota\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\pi\rho\acute{o}\epsilon\eta\chi\epsilon\ \theta\upsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$), which invests $\theta\upsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ ('quick') with the meaning of $\acute{o}\xi\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ ('sharp'). Lausberg comments: 'Die Wörter $\acute{o}\xi\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ und $\theta\upsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ sind für andere Kontexte in der Bedeutung "schnell" synonym. Dagegen ist die Bedeutung "spitz, steilabfallend" nur dem Adjektiv $\acute{o}\xi\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ eigen. Die Synonymität der beiden Wörter in der Bedeutung "schnell" veranlasst ... den

1 Cf. (e.g.) K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London 1970) 304: '*nutricum*: for *mammarmum*, apparently because $\tau\iota\tau\theta\acute{\omega}\nu$, genitive plural of $\tau\iota\tau\theta\eta$ (= *nutrix*), is also genitive plural of $\tau\iota\tau\theta\acute{o}\varsigma$ (= *mamma*)'.

2 Cf. (e.g.) C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus: A Commentary* (Oxford 1961) 280 ('seems to have been suggested'); Quinn (n. 1) 304 ('apparently'); R. Jenkyns, *Three Classical Poets: Sappho, Catullus, and Juvenal* (Cambridge, Ma. 1982) 105 ('seems to be inspired'); J. Godwin, *Catullus: Poems 61–68* (Warminster 1995) 140 ('may be').

3 Cf. (e.g.) R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1889) 285 (quoting Hertzberg; 'tasteless'); Quinn (n. 1) 304 ('the trick hardly comes off in Latin, one feels'); Jenkyns (n. 2) 105 ('weird').

4 H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* (Stuttgart 1990) 295.

Dichter, nun auch das Wort [sc. *θούος*] in der im Kontext allein möglichen Bedeutung “spitz, steilabfallend” zu verwenden.’

The nouns *nutrix* and *mamma* are likewise synonyms when they signify ‘nurse’⁵; on the other hand only *mamma* can also mean ‘breast’. Thanks however to the figure of ‘transumptio’ this synonymity in the sense of ‘nurse’ has here allowed Catullus to employ *nutrix* with the meaning ‘breast’, which is really peculiar to *mamma*⁶.

5 For this sense of *mamma* cf. *Thes. Ling. Lat.* VIII, 248, 15–50 (‘i. *q.* ... *nutrix*’).

6 For a nearly contemporary instance of the same figure cf. the present writer, “A Virgilian Crux: *Aeneid* 8.342f. (*lucum ingentem, quem Romulus acer asylum / rettulit*)”, *AJPh* 122 (2001) 527–531. Since with the meaning ‘to restore’ *referre* is a synonym of *reddere*, Virgil is here employing the former in the sense of ‘to render’, which is in fact restricted to the latter.