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VOCABULARY OF CATULLUS' POEMS

HAPAX LEGOMENA AS VULGAR WORDS

Summary: “There are 150 words in Catullus which occur once only in his writings, and of these more than 70 per cent are rare in the whole of Latin literature, and more than 90 per cent do not occur in Vergil at all” – writes J. Whatmough in his work *Poetic, Scientific, and other Forms of Discourse*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956, 41. It is necessary to distinguish between genuine and apparent once-words. The true once-word is a coinage that never recurs; the number of the true once-words is exceedingly small. Catullus' once-words were well known, but not in writing. Theoretically one would expect such words to be polysyllabic; so are the comic jawbreakers of Aristophanes which fit the pattern of his verse so well. The *hapax legomena* of Catullus are not genuine once-words of the spoken language, but they are vulgar and in some contexts obscene. We can, therefore, regard them as taboo words. They occur sometimes in similes; cf. Poems 17, 23, 25, 97. In my paper I would like to analyse some vulgar *hapax legomena* of Catullus.

Key words: Catullus, vocabulary, *hapax legomena*, vulgar words

I.

István Károly Horváth argues for the vulgar sources of Catullus short poems in his paper *Catulle et la tradition populaire italique*.¹ Me, too, touched this topic in my study *Bemerkungen zur Invektive*.² We both found these sources in the popular administration of justice, in the so called *occantatio* and *flagitatio*, that is invective. Recently W. Jeffrey Tatum gave a comprehensive survey on Catullan invective.³ Neither Horváth, nor me, nor Tatum examined the terminology of Catullus' invective. In my paper I would like to give compensation of this gap. So much the more

¹ HORVÁTH, I. K.: *Catulle et la tradition populaire italique*. *Acta Ant. Hung.* 5 (1957) 169–200.

² ADAMIK, T.: *Bemerkungen zur Invektive*. *AnnUCL* 5–6 (1977–1978) 89–100.

³ TATUM, W. J.: *Social Commentary and Political Invective*. In *A Companion to Catullus*. Ed. by M. B. SKINNER. Blackwell Publishing 2007, 333–353.

because Joshua Whatmough stresses in his article *Pudicus Poeta: Words and Things, The Vocabulary of Catullus*, that Catullus' "commonplace vocabulary – is remarkably low", that is, "his vocabulary is anything but commonplace".⁴ For example in the line: *gaudete vosque, o Lydiae lacus undae* (31. 13) *Lydiae* occurs nowhere else in Catullus, therefore the editors wanted to change it, from Scaliger to Palmer.⁵ For example, recently Thomson changes it in such a way: *gaudente, vosque lucidae lacus undae*.⁶ But it is a fault because Catullus likes strange words, as Whatmough remarks: "There are 150 words in Catullus which occur once only in his writings, and of these more than 70 per cent are rare in the whole of Latin literature..."⁷

According to Whatmough we have to distinguish between genuine and apparent once-words. The true once-word never recurs; the number of them is exceedingly small. The once-words in Catullus were well enough known, but non in writing. "Their very appearance in the manuscripts of Catullus led to the almost complete disappearance of *all* the copies, of every single copy of the works of Catullus."⁸ Their brevity is an indication that they are not genuine "once-words" of the spoken language. But because of their obscenity they have always been under taboo.⁹

To discover the meaning of a *hapax legomenon* "is not always the simplest matter" – writes Whatmough.¹⁰ For example, the word *ploxenum* what does it mean in Catullus 97 – he poses the question. In order to answer to this question he quotes the whole poem:

*Non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putavi,
utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio.
nilo mundius hoc, niloque immundius illud,
verum etiam culus mundior et melior:
nam sine dentibus est: os dentis sesquipedalis, 5
gingivas vero ploxeni habet veteris,
praeterea rictum qualem diffissus in aestu
meientis mulae cunnus habere solet.
hic futuit multas et se facit esse venustum,
et non pistrino traditur atque asino? 10
quem siqua attingit, non illam posse putemus
aegroti culum lingere carnificis?*

After quoting this poem, Whatmough states: "Of peculiar interest are one of two taboo words that, while not all frequent anywhere, are relatively so in Catullus, and actually

⁴ WHATMOUGH, J.: *Poetic, Scientific and Other Forms of Discourse. A New Approach to Greek and Latin Literature*. Berkeley – Los Angeles 1956, 39.

⁵ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 39–40.

⁶ THOMSON, D. F. F.: *Catullus. Edited with a Textual and Interpretative Commentary*. Toronto–Buffalo – London 1997, 118.

⁷ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 41.

⁸ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 43.

⁹ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 44.

¹⁰ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 44.

make half of their appearances in this very poem.”¹¹ Then he enumerates the obscene words found in this poem: *culus*, six times in Catullus, three of them in this poem; *cunnus* once in line 8, nowhere else in Catullus; *meiens* once in Catullus, is a veterinary term; *dentes sesquipedales* an adjective found only here in Catullus, rare in Latin, a technical term, of exact measurement (1.5 ft.); *carnifex* only here in Catullus, is a technical term, and not free from a certain fascination of horror.¹² Its horror is emphasized by a simile:

*Quem siqua attingit, non illam posse putemus
Aegroti culum lingere carnificis* (11–12).

Wouldn't one think that any woman who touched *him*
Could lick the arsehole of a sick hangman.¹³

All these obscene words are vulgar.

“But *ploxenum* (6) is a different story. It is an absolut *hapax legomenon*, for the mention by Quintilian and by Festus is merely an unsuccessful attempt to explain the word in this very place in Catullus, not an independent occurrence.”¹⁴ According to Whatmough “there is nothing in the phonematic pattern of the word *ploxenum* that might not be Latin, except the medial short *-e-* instead of *-i-* that certainly does point to a dialect source. In fact Quintilian (1. 5. 8) locates it in the vicinity of the river Po, and there are possible cognates in the Raetic *ploum* “plough”¹⁵ and in Latin *plaustrum*, and a variant spelling *-in-* is recorded¹⁶ – evidently *ploxenum* has something to do with a wheeled vehicle. Another modern etymology connects the word with *plectere*, which suits the ancient definition *capsa in cisio* better. Now *crates stercoriae*, apparently the same as *sirpeae*, are known from Cato and Varro as wicker contraptions used in carting farm manure from the dung pits to the fields. In the city, cesspools (*foricae*) were emptied by despised contractors (Juvenal 3. 38). Here, I believe, is the answer: *ploxenum* is a two-wheeled cart carrying a wicker bascet used for this purpose; as the basket was worn by use, brocken withies stuck out as much as half a yard, and the mouth, gums, and theeth of Aemilius, foul and diseased, reminden Catullus, he says, of a much used *cratis stercoria*.”¹⁷ All this means that *ploxenum* is vulgar once-word.

II.

We find an instructive vocabulary in Catullus 17, which can be regarded as invective, too. I quote it full, following the method of Whatmough:

¹¹ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 46.

¹² See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 46–47.

¹³ *The poems of Catullus*. Ed. with Introduction, Translation and Brief Notes by G. LEE. Oxford 1990, 137.

¹⁴ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 48.

¹⁵ CONWAY, R. S. – JOHNSON, S. E. – WHATMOUGH, J.: *The Prae-Italic Dialects of Italy* [PID]. 3 vols. London 1933, II 63.

¹⁶ PID II 204.

¹⁷ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 49.

*O Colonia, quae cupis ponte ludere longo,
 et salire paratum habes, sed vereris inepta
 crura ponticuli axulis stantis in redivivis,
 ne supinus eat cavaque in palude recumbat;
 sic tibi bonus ex tua pons libidine fiat, 5
 in quo vel Salisubsili sacra suscipiantur,
 munus hoc mihi maximi da, Colonia, risus.
 Quendam municipem meum de tuo volo ponte
 ire praecipitem in lutum per caputque pedesque,
 verum totius ut lacus putidaeque paludis 10
 lividissima maximeque est profunda vorago.
 Insulsissimus est homo, nec sapit pueri instar
 bimuli tremula patris dormientis in ulna.
 Cui cum sit viridissimo nupta flore puella
 et puella tenellulo delicatior haedo, 15
 adservanda nigerrimis diligentius uvis,
 ludere hanc sinit ut lubet, nec pili facit uni,
 nec se sublevat ex sua parte, sed velut alnus
 in fossa Liguri iacet supernata securi,
 tantundem omnia sentiens quam si nulla sit usquam; 20
 talis iste meus stupor nil videt, nihil audit,
 ipse qui sit, utrum sit an non sit, id quoque nescit.
 Nunc eum volo de tuo ponte mittere pronum,
 si pote stolidum repente excitare veternum,
 et supinum animum in gravi derelinquere caeno, 25
 ferream ut soleam tenaci in voragine mula.*

This poem of Catullus consists of 26 lines. Thomson divides it into three parts: *part 1*: 11 lines, *part 2*: 11 lines, and *part 3*: 4 lines. I am not satisfied with this division, because in such a way the structure of the poem is not enough clear. I divide it in 5 parts.

In *part 1*, Catullus addresses the town, which wanted to organize a festival in honour of a god on a long bridge, but it is afraid that the the poor old bridge will fall in the deep bog (1–4. lines).

In *part 2*, the poet wishes them a new strong bridge, on which they can arrange a festival in honour of god *Salisubsalus*, provided that they slap a fellow townsman from the bridge into the mud (5–11).

In *part 3*, Catullus tells why they have to slap his fellow townsman: because he is perfect fool with less sense than a suckling child (12–13).

Out of *part 4*, will be evident, why is this fellow townsman is so fool. Because he is married to a girl who is beautiful and frivolous, therefore she needs careful wathing, but her dolt husband sees nothing and hears nothing (14–22).

Finally in *part 5*, the poet suggests: he would like to throw him down from the bridge to see if he can suddenly shake off his stupid sloth (23–26).¹⁸

There is to be found a vulgar form in this poem, as well: *ludere ... et salire paratum habes* (17. 1–2) instead of *ludere ... et salire parata es*; see Cic. *Att.* 8. 11b. 1: *ita fuimus ut navem paratam haberemus*. Fordyce comments on it so: “*habere aliquid paratum* with a noun object (*iter, exercitum, consilium, classem*, etc.) is a very common use in which the verb and the participle have each its normal function (‘have an army in readiness’). Here the noun is replaced by an infinitive: ‘have dancing in readiness, all set’. The nearest parallel seems to be Tac. *Ann.* XI 1. 2 *turbare nationes promptum haberet*, ‘found it easy to’.”¹⁹ Thomson, too, remarks: “For its much more common use with a noun, cf. 60, 4–5 *vocem contemptam haberes*.”²⁰

This poem has some vulgar words: *Salisubsali* (6) occurs nowhere else: it is *hapax legomenon*. Its reading in the codices O, G is *sali subsili*.²¹ The interpretation proposed by Fordyce is acceptable: “*Salisubsali*: if this word is a genitive, *Salisubsalus* (or *-ius*) must be taken to be either the title of a god on whose honour cult-dances were performed or the name of dancers who performed them. Its form has suggested a connexion with *Salii*, the ‘leaping priests’, associated particularly with Mars, who are found not only at Rome but at other places in Italy, Verona among them.”²²

The diminutive nouns *ponticulus* from *pons*, *axulus* (3) from *axis* and the diminutive adjective *tenellulus* from *tener* (15) are vulgar and *hapax legomena*, as well.

The adjective *supernata* – [sub+perna+o] “Having the leg cut from below, hamstrung”,²³ it is vulgar and *hapax legomenon*, as well.

The poem ends with a vulgar simile, as the poem 97:

*et supinum animum in gravi derelinquere caeno,
ferream ut soleam tenaci in voragine mula* (25–26).

And leave behind his spineless spirit in the mire
As a mule leaves her iron shoe in ther clinging clay.²⁴

III.

According to Aristotle “that which is scarcer is a greater good than that which is abundant, as gold than iron, although it is less useful”.²⁵ If this principle is true, then can we suppose that the part of Catullus’ poetry which has more *hapax legomena*, that is the invective, is better than the other part, the lyric poems? To answer this question

¹⁸ See KLOSS, G.: Catulls Brückengedicht (C. 17). *Hermes* 126 (1998) 58–79.

¹⁹ FORDYCE, C. J.: *Catullus. A Commentary*. Oxford 1961, 140–141.

²⁰ See THOMSON (n. 6) 253.

²¹ See THOMSON (n. 6) 111.

²² See FORDYCE (n. 19) 142.

²³ GLARE, P. G. W.: *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford (1968) 1990, 1881.

²⁴ See LEE (n. 13) 23.

²⁵ Aristotle: *The “Art” of Rhetoric*. With an English Translation by J. H. FREESE [LCL 193]. Cambridge, Mass. (1926) 1982, 1364a, 14.

we need to see the opinion of Quintilian about Catullus' poetry, namely he gives a critical overview of Greek and Latin literary genres. He mentions Catullus in connection of *iambos*: *iambus non sane a Romanis celebratus est ut proprium opus, <sed> aliis quibusdam interpositus: cuius acerbitas in Catullo, Bibaculo, Horatio, quamquam illi epodos intervenit, reperitur* (10. 1. 96).²⁶ – “The Iambic has not been much cultivated by Romans as a separate genre, but has been used by some in conjunction with other metres. Its bitterness may be seen in Catullus, Bibaculus, and Horace (though in him, the epode breaks it up).”²⁷ Also in ancient times Catullus belonged to iambic poets, he had a reputation for his *iambi*. Quintilian calls the attention to this explicitly:

*aspera vero et maledica, ut dixi, in carmine iambis grassatur:
Quis hoc potest videre, quis potest pati
nisi impudicus et vorax et aleo* (9. 4. 141).

– “Harsh and abusive language, as I said, goes on the attack with Iambi in poetry too:

Who this can see, who this can tolerate,
Except a shameless glutton and a gambler?”²⁸

In our quotation with the phrase *ut dixi* – “as I said” Quintilian refers to his former statement: “Harshness, on the other hand, is best produced by Iambi, not only because these consist of only two syllables, so that their beat is more frequent as it were (a feature quite contrary to smoothness), but also because they have a rising motion at each foot, and climb and swell from short to long; this is why they are preferable to Chorei, which drop from long to short” (9. 4. 136).²⁹

Quintilian illustrates with the first two verses of Catullus' 29. poem that the iambic poetry is offensive. It's worth quoting the whole poem in order to know who is *impudicus et vorax et aleo*.

*Quis hoc potest videre, quis potest pati
Nisi impudicus et vorax et aleo.
Mamurram habere quod Comata Gallia
habebat ante et ultima Britannia?
Cinaede Romule, haec videbis et feres?*

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²⁶ See KENNEDY, G.: *Quintilian*. New York 1969, 108: “Catullus' name appears only among the iambic poets (X, I, 969), not among lyric or elegiac, and probably he would have relatively little contribute to an orator, though Quintilian quotes him occasionally elsewhere.” COVA, P. V.: *La critica letteraria nell' «Institutio»*. In COVA, P. V. – GAZICH, R. – MANZONI, G. E. – MELZANI, G.: *Aspetti della 'paideia' di Quintiliano*. Milano 1990, 48: “Catullo era più noto come giambico e poeta dotto.”

²⁷ Quintilian: *The Orator's Education*. Books 9–10. Edited and translated by D. A. RUSSEL [LCL 127]. Cambridge, Mass. 2001, 303–305.

²⁸ See Quintilian (n. 27) 238–239.

²⁹ See Quintilian (n. 27) 236–237: *Aspera contra iambis maxime concitantur, non solum quod sunt e duabus modo syllabis eoque frequentiore quasi pulsum habent, quae res lenitati contraria est, sed etiam quod omnibus pedibus insurgunt et a brevibus in longas nituntur et crescunt, ideoque meliores choreis, qui ab longis in breves cadunt.*

et ille nunc superbus et superfluens
perambulabit omnium cubilia,
ut albulus columbus aut Adoneus?
Cinaede Romule, haec videbis et feres?
Es impudicus et vorax et aleo. 10
Eone nomine, imperator unice,
Fuisti in ultima occidentis insula,
ut ista vestra diffututa mentula
ducenties comesset aut trecenties?
Quid est alid sinistra liberalitas? 15
Parum expatratum an parum eluatus est?
Paterna prima lancinata sunt bona,
secunda praeda Pontica, inde tertia
Hibera, quam scit amnis aurifer Tagus;
nunc Galliae timetur et Britanniae. 20
Quid hunc malum fovetis? aut quid hic potest
nisi uncta devorare patrimonia?
Eone nomine, urbis o potissimi,
socer generque, perdidistis omnia?

Out of the poem it clear, that the whole is an attack on Mamurra, Caesar and Pompey. It was written probably in the autumn of 55 BC, after Caesar's invasion of Britain. But the main target of its invective is Caesar, it is evident out of the first ten lines, which is read so in the translation of Lee: "Who can watch this, who suffer it, unless / He's shameless and a glutton and a gambler – / Mamurra having all the fat that long-haired / Gaul and remotes Britain used to have? / Poof Romulus, you'll watch this and allow it? / That supercilious and superfluous figure / Prancing about in everybody's bedroom / Like a white lovey-dovey or Adoneus? Poof Romulus, you'll watch this and allow it? You are shameless and a glutton and a gambler."³⁰ Catullus says to Caesar: *es impudicus et vorax et aleo*. The adjective *impudicus* occurs often, the *vorax* rarely, but the noun *aleo* is almost *hapax legomenon*, so *aleo* has the biggest emphasis. Besides, it is a vulgar word; see Ernout–Meillet: "*aleo, -onis* m. (cf. *ganeo, lustro*) formation populaire en *-o, -onis*".³¹ But the adjective *vorax* is very offensive as well, because its meaning is ambiguous: 1. ravenous, insatiable; 2. sexually perverse; Caesar is *fellator* too. Catullus emphasizes the meaning of these words by repetition, as well:

nisi impudicus et vorax et aleo (2).
es impudicus et vorax et aleo (10).

³⁰ See LEE (n. 13) 29–31.

³¹ ERNOUT, A. – MEILLET, A.: *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots*. Troisième édition. Paris 1951, 37.

He's shameless and glutton and a gambler (2).
You're shameless and a glutton and a gambler (10).³²

Catullus calls Mamurra *diffututa mentula* (13) – 'multifucking tool',³³ *diffututa* is hapax and vulgar in Roman literature; from *futuere* which is vulgar as well.³⁴ It occurs once in inscription: QVD (i.e. quot) TV MVLIERORVM DIFFVTVISTI *CIL* IV 5213;³⁵ "*mentula* rustic, ... is possible cognate with *membrum*, which Catullus uses as a synonym".³⁶

Another once word is in this poem *expatrat* (16) – 'he has leched',³⁷ from *patrare* (achever, exécuter) which is "peut-être ancien terme rituel, cf. T. L. 1, 24, 6, *pater patrat* ad *iusiurandum patrandum*, i. e. *sanciendum*, *fit foedus*".³⁸

Its synonym is *helluatus est* (16) – 'he has gormandized',³⁹ from the verb *helluor*, *helluari* – 'To spend immoderately on eating and other luxuries'.⁴⁰ It is very rare, as the nouns *ellio*, *onis* m.; *helluatio*, *onis* f. According to Ernout–Meillet "À peu près uniquement dans Cicéron. ... Terme d'injure à consonne géminée caractéristique, que Cicéron joint à *gurgis*; cf. Pis. 17, 41, *ille gurgis atque helluo, natus abdomini suo*".⁴¹

Its second synonym is *lancinata sunt* – 'he blued',⁴² from the verb *lancino*, *lancinare* [cf. *lacer*, *lacinia*]. – 'To tear in peacis, rend apart, mangle'.⁴³ It occurs only in Catullus, Seneca, and Pliny the Elder. "Premier exemple, semble-t-il, dans Catulle; évité par la prose classique; reparaît dans la latinité impériale (Sén., Plin., Arn.); rare. La forme usuelle et classique est *lacero*."⁴⁴ It is also vulgar.

IV.

In conclusion I would like to highlight, that the vocabulary of Catullus' invectives (that is *iambi*) consists of rare and vulgar words. This characteristic feature of his lexis is to be found in the invectives on Caesar, as well. And it is not accidental but intended, because Caesar's ideal of style was clarity and precision (cf. Cicero: *Brutus* 262), and he was severe literary critic.⁴⁵ In 54 BC, Caesar had written two volumes

³² See LEE (n. 13) 29–31.

³³ See LEE (n. 13) 31.

³⁴ See ERNOUT–MEILLET (n. 31) 470.

³⁵ See GLARE (n. 23) 541.

³⁶ See WHATMOUGH (n. 4) 50.

³⁷ See LEE (n. 13) 31.

³⁸ ERNOUT–MEILLET (n. 31) 865.

³⁹ See LEE (n. 13) 31.

⁴⁰ See GLARE (n. 23) 790.

⁴¹ ERNOUT–MEILLET (n. 31) 518–519.

⁴² See LEE (n. 13) 31.

⁴³ See GLARE (n. 23) 999.

⁴⁴ ERNOUT–MEILLET (n. 31) s. v.

⁴⁵ ADAMIK, T.: Caesar als Literaturkritiker. *Acta Classica Univ. Scient. Debrecen*. 38–39 (2002–2003) 5–12.

entitled *De analogia* which were concerned with purity of diction. In first volume he states a fundamental principle: 'as the sailor avoids the reef, so should you avoid the rare and obsolete word' (See Aul. Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1. 10. 4: *habe semper in memoria atque in pectore, ut 'tamquam scopulum, sic fugias inauditum atque insolens verbum.*)⁴⁶ "On this view 'analogical' forms and words which were too far from common usage should be avoided."⁴⁷

Catullus' rare and strange words were too far from common usage therefore it was a counterblast to Caesar's purity of diction. There were also two opposites between Catullus and Caesar which this poem mirrors: moral and stylistic. W. Jeffrey Tatum highlights the moral opposition, when he writes: "This poem represents Caesar's familial tie to Pompey as entirely utilitarian and, in the worst sense, political – and with disastrous results for Rome's subjects and for the integrity of Roman families. In short, Caesar's connection with Mamurra instantiates a poisonous perversion of *fides*. Put differently, Caesar is a bad man – and the proof of it is Mamurra's reprehensible lifestyle."⁴⁸ What concerns me I regard the stylistic opposition too as important as the moral one between them, as explained above.

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⁴⁶ See KENNEY, E. J. – CLAUSEN, W. V. (eds): *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*. Vol. 2: Latin literature. The Late republic. 1982, 109.

⁴⁷ DOUGLAS, A. E.: *M. Tulli Ciceronis Brutus*. Oxford 1966, 186.

⁴⁸ See TATUM (n. 3) 342.