



Through the Airy Waves

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Maribo E. Larsen, Kristoffer

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Catullus 66.55

Kristoffer Maribo Engell Larsen

Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford

Department of Greek and Latin, University of Copenhagen

xtb969@alumni.ku.dk

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ἄρτι [ν]εότμητόν με κόμαι ποθέεσκον ἄδε[λφραί,
καὶ πρόκατε γνωτὸς Μέμνονος Αἰθίοπος
ἔτο κυκλώσας βαλιὰ πτερὰ θήλυσ ἀήτης,
ἴππο[ς] ἰοζώνου Λοκρικὸς Ἀρσινόης,
. [.]ασε δὲ πνοιῆ με, δι' ἡέρα δ' ὑγρόν ἐνείκας 55
Κύπρ]ιδος εἰς κόλ[πους ἔθηκε

(Callimachus fr. 110.51-56, Harder 2012)

abiunctae paulo ante comae mea fata sorores
lugebant, cum se Memnonis Aethiopsis
unigena impellens nutantibus aera pennis
obtulit Arsinoes Locridos ales equos,
isque per aetherias me tollens auolat umbras 55
et Veneris casto collocat in gremio.

(Catullus 66.51-56, Mynors 1958)

As suggested in Catullus 65.15-16, Catullus 66 is a translation of a poem by Callimachus, partly preserved to us and known as fragment 110.¹ As lines 51-56 illustrate, Catullus generally translates Callimachus' poem closely. The only words in the passage that Catullus does not translate more or less literally are θήλυσ ἀήτης (fr. 110.53), ἰοζώνου (fr. 110.54), πνοιῆ and, so it seems, ἡέρα . . . ὑγρόν

1 Apart from a few quotations in other ancient texts this poem, which is held to have concluded the fourth and last book of Callimachus' *Aetia*, was unknown until the publication of two papyri, *P.S.I.* 1092 by G. Vitelli in 1929 and *P. Oxy.* 2258 by E. Lobel in 1952. For a convenient description of the two papyri, see Pfeiffer 1953, ix; xxiv-xxvi.

(fr. 110.55). Instead of ἠέρα . . . ὑγρόν the fourteenth century manuscripts O, G and R, our primary witnesses to the text of Catullus, transmit *etherias . . . umbras* (O) and *ethereas . . . umbras* (GR).² If the reading in the manuscripts is correct, Catullus seems to have changed ‘the wet air’ of Callimachus’ poem for ‘the aetherial shadows’.

This phrase has seemed somewhat mysterious to a number of scholars. Ioannes Calphurnius suggested in his 1481 edition the reading *aethereas . . . auras*,³ which finds a parallel in Catullus’ contemporary Lucretius’ *aetheriae . . . aurae* (3.405). Giancarlo Giardina has recently without a reference to Calphurnius suggested the reading of *auras* anew.⁴ In 1884 Alexander Riese wrote *aetherias . . . umbras* in his text, but discussed in his commentary the reading *aerias . . . umbras*,⁵ which would match the first half of Callimachus’ ἠέρα . . . ὑγρόν. This reading was (prior to Vitelli’s publication of the first papyrus) condemned in 1925 by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in a note to his translation of the poem,⁶ but it has recently been defended by J.M. Trappes-Lomax on paleographical grounds.⁷

In 1987 Otto Zwierlein suggested that Catullus wrote *aetherias . . . undas*, which partly finds a parallel in Lucretius’ *aerias . . . undas* (2.152) and matches the latter half of Callimachus’ ἠέρα . . . ὑγρόν.⁸ This reading has won favour from Nino Marinone who used it in his double edition of the two poems.⁹ Zwierlein argues for the reading of *aetherias* by showing that *aerius* and *aetherius* could

2 O = Oxoniensis Canonicianus class. lat. 30; G = Parisinus lat. 14137; R = Vaticanus Ottobonianus lat. 1829. The manuscript T = Parisinus lat. 8071 is a ninth/tenth century witness to poem 62 (see note 12).

3 Calphurnius 1481, 41 (unnumbered pages).

4 Giardina 2012, 225-228; 226: “Io ritengo che sia in Catullo 66,55 che in *Ciris* 215 la lezione tramandata *umbras vada* corretta in: *auras*.”

5 Riese 1884, 207: “*umbras*: man vergleicht *Aen.* 5, 838, aus welcher Stelle aber hervorgeht, dass entweder *aerias umbras* oder *aetherias auras* zu lesen ist. Der klare Äther kennt keinen Schatten.”

6 Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1925, 216 n. 1: “*Per aetherias umbras* ist nicht gut übersetzt, denn *aether* und *umbra* vertragen sich nicht; was Kallimachos sagte, war etwas wie *σκοτειο δι’ ἠέρος*, Apoll. Rhod. 3, 1379; aber man soll nicht *aerias* einsetzen.”

7 Trappes-Lomax 2012, 643: “*aerias* written as *erias* might well be bulked out to *etherias* by a dangerously alert scribe.”

8 Zwierlein 1987, 280-284.

9 Marinone 1997, 68.

be used as synonyms in Latin poetry,¹⁰ just as ἀήρ and αἰθήρ could be used as synonyms in the Hellenistic poets.¹¹

However, Catullus does not appear to use the adjective *aetherius* anywhere else in his preserved poetry.¹² Instead he uses the adjective *aerius* six other times, once in poem 66 itself.¹³ The apparent absence of *aetherius* from the Catullan corpus cannot, of course, in itself be used as a decisive argument against the reading of *aetherias*. But since Catullus does not appear to use *aetherius* anywhere else, but does use *aerius* six other times, and since the Greek text has ἠέρα, it seems to me that the most obvious reading would be *aerias*. I suggest that we combine the readings of Trappes-Lomax and Zwierlein and that we thereby read *aerias* . . . *undas*. This reading is in accordance with the rest of the Catullan corpus, it matches Callimachus' ἠέρα . . . ὑγρόν, it is easily corrupted in manuscripts, and it finds full support in Lucretius' *aerias* . . . *undas* (2.152). I therefore suggest that Catullus wrote:

isque per aerias me tollens auolat undas 55

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- 10 Zwierlein 1987, 283: "Wie αἰθήρ und ἀήρ schon im 3. Jh. synonym gebraucht werden können (. . .), so auch *aerius* und *aetherius*. Bei Ovid etwa ist kein Unterschied zwischen der Junktur *aerias* . . . (*per*) *auras* (met. 4,700; 9,219; 10,178; 14,127) und *aetherias* . . . (*per*) *auras* (am. 2,14,41; ars am. 2,59)."
- 11 For ἀήρ and αἰθήρ in Hellenistic poetry, see Harder 2012b, 804.
- 12 *OGR* do not transmit *aetherius* anywhere else. However, *aetherius* has in fact been suggested by scholars in two other places (62.7 for *Oetaeos*: oeta eos *T*, hoc eos *OGR*, aethereos *A. Guarinus* 152r; and 66.6 for *aerio*: aerio *OGR*, aetherio *Meineke* 186i), but both of these conjectures are universally held to be wrong.
- 13 Catul. 30.10, 64.142, 64.240, 64.291, 66.6, 68B.57. *OGR* do not transmit alternative readings in these places.

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