

## Two Problems in Persius 2.61-68

I quote Braund's Loeb text and translation with Clausen's OCT apparatus (his text differs only orthographically):

O curvae in terris animae et caelestium inanis,  
 quid juvat hoc, templis nostros inmittere mores  
 et bona dis ex hac scelerata ducere pulpa?  
 haec sibi corrupto casiam dissolvit olivo,  
 haec Calabrum coxit vitiato murice vellus,                   65  
 haec bacam conchae rasisse et stringere venas  
 ferventis massae crudo de pulvere jussit.  
 peccat et haec, peccat, vitio tamen utitur.

61 terris Ω : terras *codices Lactantii Div. Inst. ii 2. 18 praeter Bon.*

O souls bent earthwards and void of celestial thoughts, what help is it to unleash our ways upon the temples and to infer the gods' values from this wicked flesh of ours? It is this flesh that has polluted our olive oil by mixing in casia, this flesh that has misused Tyrian purple for dyeing Calabrian fleeces, this flesh that has commanded us to scrape the pearl from its shell and strip the veins of glowing ore from the raw dirt. It does wrong, it does wrong, yet it gains from its weakness.

The first problem is apparent in Clausen's apparatus. In 61, neither *in terris* nor *in terras* satisfies, and I suspect, though I cannot prove it, that Persius wrote *in tenebris*.<sup>1</sup>

In 65, *vitiato* seems a bit off, and looks like an anticipation of *vitio* directly below in 68. I suggest that Persius wrote *violato*, for three reasons:

1. It would have been more logical to say that the fleece has been damaged by the purple-dye, but Persius puts it the other way around. As Kibel notes, Van Wageningen emended to *vitiatum* (1892) and convinced Némethy (1924), though he had withdrawn the conjecture in his own edition (1911), but this damages the balance of the line. Kibel also notes that Courtelle suggested *vitianti*, which removes the parallelism with *corrupto* in the previous line. My conjecture seems better than

<sup>1</sup> Fontein presumed the same error in Propertius 2.6.31: *a, gemat in terris ista qui protulit arte / orgia sub tacita condita laetitia!* and has been followed by Goold and (more tentatively) Heyworth.

either. It is more natural and more vivid to say that a living creature hiding in a shell and murdered by human hands for profit has been ‘molested’ than that it has been ‘damaged’ or ‘spoiled’, and that helps justify the emphasis on the mollusc.<sup>2</sup>

2. It is a very minor point, but *violato* is more alliterative with *vellus*.
3. Best of all, my conjecture introduces a pun on the color purple that works in English as well as Latin: the purple-dye beast has been *violated* to turn the wool *violet*.

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<sup>2</sup> An amusing sidenote: replying in his edition to Conington’s argument that “The evil done is brought out more forcibly when it is asserted that *both* the natural products suffer from the violation of their natures”, Van Wageningen writes “quomodo enim muricis natura violatur?”. Neither one of them manages to avoid using forms of ‘violate’ or *violare* in discussing *vitiato*. I had not read either passage when I first thought of my conjecture, so this coincidence, though not exactly a confirmation, is perhaps another point in favor of it.