

## Two Kinds of Textual Conjecture in One: Horace, *I.* 12.12

Horace's 12<sup>th</sup> Epode (or better Iamb) includes this sordid scene (7-12):

qui sudor vietus et quam malus undique membris  
 crescit odor, cum pene soluto  
 indomitam properat rabiem sedare, neque illi  
 iam manet umida creta colorque 10  
 stercore fucatus crocodili iamque subando  
 tenta cubilia tectaque rumpit.

The only variants in the manuscripts (*qui* and *quis* in 7, *crescit* and *crescat* in 8) do not affect my point, which concerns the third-to-last word: *tecta*.<sup>1</sup> Recent commentators agree that it must mean 'canopy', but some are uncomfortable doing so. Cavarzere (*Il Libro degli Epodi*, Marsilio, 1992) translates "baldacchino" with no further discussion. Mankin (*Horace, Epodes*, Cambridge, 1995) says: "usually interpreted as a 'canopy' (*aulaeum*, *uelum*, cf. *RE* I 2156), although there seems to be no parallel for the use of *tectum* in this sense. Perhaps H. means that in her frenzy the woman 'hits the roof'." Lindsay Watson (*A Commentary on Horace's 'Epodes'*, Oxford, 2003) says: "This must, it appears, refer to a bed-canopy. The evidence for the use of canopied beds by the Romans is admittedly exiguous." After nearly a page on the sparse, late, and difficult evidence, he adds: "It should, finally, be noted that *rumpit* involves a mild zeugma, since the verb suits *tecta* less well than *tenta*: in her frenzied thrashings about she not only bursts the webbing but brings down the canopy."

Surely what we want is some word for bedclothes – sheets and blankets – that can be torn while the webbing is being broken.<sup>2</sup> Orelli and Baiter (4<sup>th</sup> edition, revised by Hirschfelder, 1886) dismiss unnamed "alii" who "minus recte integumenta s. stragula lecti

<sup>1</sup> Bentley recommends *qui*, states the issue of *crescit* vs *crescat*, but then breaks off indignantly: "Sed taedet harum sordium: et sane hoc carmen indignum est, quod aut emendetur, aut legatur." I disagree, concurring with what Housman said on Horace's other filthy Iamb (8): "If this precious piece was worth writing I suppose it is worth emending: we need not have it more corrupt than its author sent it forth" (*Classical Papers*, Cambridge, 1972, 1.103).

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's Doll Tearsheet illustrates the concept in her name (as long as actors do not pronounce the first syllable to rhyme with 'beer' instead of 'bear', as if she were prone to crying in bed).

interpretantur”. They are no doubt right in thinking that *tecta* cannot mean bed-clothes, but what if there is a palaeographically plausible word that can?

I am almost embarrassed to propose what seems the obvious solution to this textual problem: *texta*. The primary meaning of the word is ‘woven cloth, fabric’, which would obviously include sheets and blankets – or even a nightgown, if the *mulier* in this poem is wearing one.<sup>3</sup> There is far more evidence that Roman beds had sheets and blankets than that any of them had canopies.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the error posited is an easy one, simplifying a difficult consonant combination from CST to CT, as the usual English pronunciation of Wednesday simplifies DNSD to NSD.

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<sup>3</sup> Horace’s narrative leaves that entirely unclear. A nightgown, especially if made of Coan silk, would be much easier to tear than a sheet or a blanket.

<sup>4</sup> Do I really need to provide the evidence? Orelli’s reference to *stragula* is a good place to start, but I will probably not live long enough to see the article on *texta* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*: it’s possible that the meaning ‘bedclothes’ will get its own sub-sub-sub-paragraph, especially if future editors are persuaded by my argument here.