The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

Nihil in Ovid

A. E. Housman

The Classical Review / Volume 33 / Issue 3-4 / May 1919, pp 56 - 59

DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00012518, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00012518

How to cite this article:

A. E. Housman (1919). *Nihil* in Ovid. The Classical Review, 33, pp 56-59 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00012518

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

pears, the epigram was not composed before 27 B.C. The author was probably a Greek of Alexandria. The poem contains some bold and striking expressions, such as εἰρήνης εὐώπιδος, and αἰῶνος στόμασιν βεβηγμένε.

A Papyrus at Hamburg, published by Wilamowitz in *Sitzungsb. preuss. Akad.* 1918, p. 736, of the middle of the third century B.C. Seventeen mutilated lines of an elegiac poem giving the account of the interview of an envoy with a king. Since θούρος ἀνὴρ Γαλάτης is mentioned, with a description of the Gauls' hardy life, the poem seems to have narrated some incident of the Gauls' invasion of Asia and their settlement. These references point to Attalus I., and, if one may conjecture the name of the author, it might be Musaeus of Ephesus, who, according to Suidas, wrote poems on Eumenes and Attalus (not necessarily Attalus II., as Susemihl suggests). Wilamowitz however thinks that the pressure of some danger points to the king being a Seleucid. The style is vigorous, but not quite as polished as the best Alexandrian. Since we know so little of this period of Greek history, this fragment is particularly tantalising.

P. Petrie ii. XLIX. (a), p. 157; in the British Museum. Fragments of a Hellenistic poem, called by O. Crusius in *Philologus*, 1894, p. 12, 'ein Hochzeitsgedicht?' It exhibits all the signs of the Callimachean school, recondite allusion, rare words, polished metre.

P. Oxyrh. 15, third century. Short songs for the flute ending with the note αἰλεῖ μοι, as Wilamowitz has rightly divided αὐλεῖ μοι: *Gött. Gel. Anz.* 1898,

695. The lines appears to be ἐξάμετροι μεϊούροι. W. Crönert in *Archiv f. Pap.* I. 113.

Additions to Class 3; 6: Fragments of Epigrams of the τύπας ἀν εἰποι λόγους type, *P. Oxyrh.* 671. 'The abbreviations *ω* or *νι* may give the name of the poet, e.g. Nicarchus' (Grenfell and Hunt).

Mélanges Nicole, p. 615 = *P. Heidelberg* 1273, edited by G. A. Gerhard and O. Crusius; of the sixth century. Six exercises on mythological subjects, 'the most trivial school mythology.' With them may be compared the seven Hexameters in *Philologus*, 1905, 145, of Nonnus' time = *Bull. Corr. Hellén.* 1904, p. 208.

Addition to Class 4: *P. Freiburg* 4, of the first century B.C.; W. Aly in *Sitzungsb. Heidelb. Akad.* 1914, p. 58, containing fragments of the Epigram of Posidippus in *Anth. Pal.* XVI. 119. The author's name is conjecturally inserted by Aly; it is a pity that it has disappeared from the text, since it might have thrown light on the question who the author was, for in the view of P. Schott, the editor of *Posidippus*, p. 53, it was not Posidippus.

Addition to Class 4, 3: Fragments of Meleager's Epigram in *Anthol. Pal.* V. 151 (152 Paton); Wilamowitz in *Sitzungsb. preuss. Akad.* 1918, p. 750. It is a small fragment which joins on to the end of the Epigrams by Meleager published in the *Berlin Klass. Texte*, V. 1, 75. It is interesting as confirming the conjecture of Pierson and Graefe, accepted by Mr. Paton, but not by Stadtmueller or Duebner, δορᾶ, for δοραῖς of *Pal.*

J. U. POWELL.

NIHIL IN OVID.

IN the *Classical Quarterly* for 1916, vol. X pp. 138 f., I considered Lachmann's doctrine of the Ovidian prosody of *nihil* together with the evidence alleged against it, and concluded that judgment on the controversy must be held in suspense. Before proceeding further let me rehearse the facts and contentions. It is Lachmann's precept,

delivered in *Kl. Schr.* II p. 59 and at *Lucr.* I 159, that Ovid used only *nīl* and *nīhīl*, not *nīhl*. For *nīhl* he adduced

met. VII 644 in superis opis esse *nīhl*. at in aedibus ingens,
trist. V 1441 morte *nīhl* opus est pro me sed amore fideque,
ex Pont. III 1 113 morte *nīhl* opus est, n(īh)il Icarotide tela;

to which I added

met. XIV 24 fine *nil* opus est ; partem ferat
illa caloris,

where the main tradition of the MSS is corrupt and gives *fineque nil* or rather *et neque nil*. The one instance of *nihil* which he found,

her. XIX 170 exiguum, sed plus quam *nihil*,
illud erat,

he reckoned among the features assigning that epistle to another hand than Ovid's. Merkel opposed him with

trist. V 8 2 te quoque sim, inferius quo *nihil*
esse potest,

and Lucian Mueller with

trist. IV 8 38 mitius inmensus quo *nihil* orbis
habet ;

but I remarked that the distich containing the former of these two examples is on other grounds suspect, and that the latter could, if need were, be removed by an easy and even plausible transposition. Wherever else in Ovid's text the form *nihil* is followed by a vowel, the metre allows *nil* ; and the spelling of MSS, which often offer *nihil* where only *nil* is metrical, has no claim to represent the spelling or pronunciation of the author.

I can now settle the question by means of an observation which I ought to have made before, and so indeed ought Lachmann. I have collected all the verses in which this word, call it *nil* or *nihil*, constitutes the latter half of the first foot. There are twenty examples, or, if a suspected epistle is included, twenty-one ; and they are these.

her. XVII 127 sed *nihil* infirmo.
art. I 519 et *nihil* emineant.
art. II 280 si *nihil* attuleris.
remed. 410 et *nihil* est.
met. VI 465 et *nihil* est.
met. VII 830 quod *nihil* est.
met. IX 628 ut *nihil* adiciam.
met. X 520 et *nihil* est.
met. XIII 266 at *nil* inpendit.
fast. I 445 sed *nil* ista.
trist. I 8 8 et *nihil* est.
trist. V 5 51 si *nihil* infesti.
trist. V 14 26 et *nihil* officio.
ex Pont. II 2 56 an *nihil* expediat.
ex Pont. II 3 33 te *nihil* ex.
ex Pont. II 7 46 et *nihil* inueni.
ex Pont. III 1 47 ut *nihil* ipse.
ex Pont. III 1 127 qua *nihil* in.

ex Pont. IV 8 15 at *nihil* hic.

ex Pont. IV 14 23 sed *nihil* admisi.

Ib. 284 cui *nil* rethet.

Eighteen where the MSS have *nihil*, three where they have *nil*. But, with the single exception of the last instance, the word, however spelt, is always followed by a vowel ; and that exception is of the sort which proves a rule. In the couplet

nec tibi subsidio praesens sit numen, ut illi
cui *nil* rethet profuit ara Iouis,

rethet, which can only be interpreted *Rhoetei*, is rejected by the sense, which demands *Hercei* ; and so vanishes the consonant. Now this perpetually attendant circumstance can be no result of chance. Words having the metrical properties of *nil* are often placed by Ovid in this part of the verse with a consonant after them : *remed.* 138 'haec sunt iucundi', 426 'non sunt iudiciis', 507 'nec dic blanditias', 694 'nec dic quid', 701 'nec nos purpureas'. *nil* itself is so placed by other poets : *Lucr.* II 7 'sed *nil* dulcius', 673 'si *nil* praeterea' (in both of which instances the MSS have *nihil*), *Hor. serm.* I 1 49 'qui *nil* portarit', *Mart.* I 98 2 'sed *nil* patrono', III 61 2 'si *nil* Cinna'. Ovid must have had a motive for saddling himself with this restriction ; but if he meant the word for a monosyllable he can have had none. His only imaginable motive was to procure a dactyl instead of a spondee for the first foot. *nihil* therefore in the eighteen verses where it occurs is a pyrrhic, and *nil* in the three others should be changed to *nihil*. This may be done without scruple ; for although scribes are less prone to write *nil* for *nihil* than *nihil* for *nil*, the error is both common and early : B and R are two of Horace's best and oldest MSS, yet the one at *carm.* I 28 12 and the other at IV 2 37 gives *nil* where the metre proves that Horace wrote *nihil*. And *nihil* was printed in all our three verses by Heinsius, who carried into practice the rule which Seruius tried and failed to formulate at *Virg. Aen.* VI 104,¹ and

¹ 'si pars sequens orationis a uocali inchoet, *nihil* dicimus, ut (II 402) "heu *nihil* inuitis fas quemquam fidere diuis"; si autem a consonante inchoet, *nil* ponimus, ut Iuuenalis (IV 22)

read *nihil* wherever metre gave him the chance, without regard to the spelling of the MSS. Merkel's practice on the other hand was to preserve the spelling of the MSS unless metre forbade him; and at *met.* XIII 266 and *fast.* I 445 he has been followed by all subsequent editors in retaining *nil*, which Guethling and I retained also at *Ib.* 284 when changing *rethēi* to *Hercei*, because it was irrational to introduce *nihil* in this verse and not in the other two. But the facts which I have just set forth put a new complexion on the case, and show that Ovid wrote *nihil* in all three places.

In the second and third and fourth foot of the hexameter the case stands otherwise, and Ovid unquestionably admitted *nil*, as at *met.* XV 92 'terra creat, *nil* te nisi tristitia mandere saeuo', *amor.* II 1 19 'Juppiter, ignoscas: *nil* me tua tela iuuabant', *ex Pont.* I 1 7 'a quotiens dixi: certe *nil* turpe docetis'. But yet verses where a vowel follows and leaves the form of the word in doubt are much more numerous: *met.* VII 567 'utile enim *nihil* est', XV 177, *trist.* II 195, III 4 51, *ex Pont.* I 2 65; *amor.* III 8 29 '*nihil* esse potentius auro', *art.* II 365, 599, *met.* V 221, VI 25, 305, VII 67, XIII 100, XIV 730, XV 165, 629, *fast.* VI 177, *trist.* I 2 23, II 23, II 259, III 1 9, 13 23, *ex Pont.* III 1 113, *her.* XX 99; *met.* III 590 '*nihil* ille reliquit', V 273, VI 685, IX 148, *ex Pont.* I 1 21, 7 25. The MSS or the best part of them (except that at *met.* XV 165 authority is about equally divided) give *nihil* in all these verses, and so does Heinsius; Merkel and his followers diverge at one place only, *trist.* III 13 23 '*nihil* exorantia diuos', where all of them except Guethling print *nil*, though four out of the five best MSS have *nihil*. In two verses *nihil* is certainly to be preferred, *met.* V 273 'sed (uēt)itum est adeo sceleri *nihil* omnia terrent' and VI 685 'ast, ubi blanditiis agitur *nihil*, horridus ira', where *nil* would create a rhythm less acceptable to Ovid. Some might say

"*nil* tale expectes: emit sibi. multa uidemus". One sees what he wants to say, though he has not said it: he does not really mean that he writes or pronounces 'te sine *nihil* altum mens incohat' in *georg.* III 42, nor 'ille *nil*, nec me quaerentem uana moratur' in *Aen.* II 287.

that at three other places we have guidance for our choice: that in *met.* XIII. 100 'luce *nihil* gestum, *nihil* est Diomede remoto' and XV. 629 'temptamenta *nihil*, *nihil* artes posse medentum' the one *nihil* defends the other, and that in *art.* II 365 '*nil* Helene peccat, *nihil* hic committit adulter' *nil* in the first place recommends *nil* in the second. But any such expectation of uniformity is shown to be fallacious by Catull. 17 21 '*nil* uidet, *nihil* audit', 42 21 'sed *nil* proficimus, *nihil* mouetur', 64 146 '*nil* metuunt iurare, *nihil* promittere parant', Virg. *buc.* II 6 f. 'o crudelis Alexi, *nihil* mea carmina curas? [*nil* nostri miserere?]', Sen. *Med.* 163 'qui *nil* potest sperare, desperet *nihil*', Mart. II 3 1 'Sexte, *nihil* debes, *nil* debes, Sexte', Iuu. VI 212 f. '*nil* umquam inuita donabis coniuge, uendes| hac opstante *nihil*'; and it is manifest that nothing, neither *nihil* nor *nil*, can bring about uniformity in *ex Pont.* III 1 113 'morte *nihil* opus est, *nihil* Icarotide tela'.

Ovid's practice in respect of the first foot appears to be that of most dactylic poets later than Lucretius. Even in Horace and Martial, who allow a consonant to follow, a vowel is much more frequent, and it is invariable in Catullus, Virgil, Tibullus, Propertius, Manilius, Persius, Calpurnius, the Aetna, Lucan, Silius (if I can trust a rapid examination)¹ and Juvenal, though in many of them the number of examples is too small to establish a rule.

About Juvenal I have a short story to tell. The disputed word forms the latter half of the first foot in three verses, VI 331 'si *nihil* est', VII 54 'qui *nihil* expositum', XIII 18 'an *nihil* in melius'. In all three the MSS, or most of them, give the form *nihil*, and so did the editions down to 1886. In that year Buecheler introduced *nil* from the Pithoeanus at VII 54, leaving *nihil* in the two other verses; and his sheep followed him as their tails did them. He was disregarding authority as well as reason, for *nihil* is given at VII 54 not only by the most and best of the inferior MSS but by the lemma

¹ In Valerius Flaccus and Statius I have noticed no example of *nihil* or *nil* in this situation.

of the ancient scholia, which is as good a witness as the Pithoeanus itself; but reason and authority together are no match for that passion of love which is inspired in modern scholars by MSS whose names begin with a P. In my edition of 1905 I made a brief remark on the circumstances and restored *nihil*. The result of my action deserves to be put on record as exemplifying the customs of classical scholarship in the twentieth century. Buecheler, though

placing *nihil* in his text, had exhibited in his apparatus criticus and in his excerpts from the scholia the facts which I have stated, '*nihil* S ω', 'qui nihil expositum'. It was safe to print this evidence so long as nobody took any notice of it; but as soon as I gave it effect by promoting *nihil* to the text, the case was altered. The fetish was in danger, the facts must be suppressed, and Leo in his edition of 1910 suppressed them.

A. E. HOUSMAN.

PHAEDRUS AND QUINTILIAN I. 9. 2.

A REPLY TO PROFESSOR POSTGATE.

IN the February—March, 1919, number of the *Review*, Professor Postgate writes as follows:

'We can hardly doubt that the poet of *Inst. Or. I. 9. 2* who composed "Aesopi fabellas . . . sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente" and whose "gracilitas" is to be reproduced in the school exercises, was Phaedrus. The Fables then, or rather a selection from them, were a schoolbook at Rome towards the end of the first century A.D.'

With the implied interpretation of the passage in question I entirely disagree. The question whether Phaedrus was used as a school-book at Rome is another matter. On this, too, I differ from the writer, but I speak with less confidence. I may add that the whole of the ninth chapter is important in the history of ancient schools and well worth elucidation.

The whole passage runs thus:

'igitur AESOPI FABELLAS, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt, narrare sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente, deinde eandem gracilitatem stilo exigere condiscant: VERSUS primo solvere, mox mutatis verbis interpretari: tum paraphrasi audacius vertere, qua et brevare quaedam et exornare salvo modo poetae sensu permittitur. quod opus, etiam consummatis professoribus (? profectibus) difficile, qui commode tractaverit, cuicumque discendo sufficiet. SENTENTIAE quoque et CHRIAE et ETHOLOGIAE [(? aetilogiae) subiectis dictionum rationibus apud grammaticos scribantur, quia initium ex lectione ducunt: quorum omnis similis est ratio, forma diversa.'

This ninth chapter deals with the 'progymnasmata' or forms of exercise in original composition, of which we have full accounts in Hermogenes (with

Priscian's translation), Aphthonius and Theon. All these exercises were, strictly speaking, 'rhetorical,' being preparations for the full dress declamation. But Quintilian complains that through the laches of the 'rhetores' they had fallen into the hands of the 'grammatici,' and his object in this chapter is to suggest a compromise by which the more elementary exercises, and these only, might be retained in the lower school. From the dozen or more in vogue we may say that he selects two as suitable for this purpose. The first is the *μῦθος* or, more exactly, *μῦθος Αἰσώπειος*, for our Greek authorities are careful to say that what we call fables are all known by the name of Aesop, whether they were attributed to Aesop or not. The other is the 'Chria' and its varieties, the *γνώμη* or 'sententia' and the doubtful 'ethology.' All these are evidently little moral essays, founded on some saying or significant action, and it will be convenient to speak of them under the single name of 'Chria.' Another exercise, the *διήγησις*, he only accepts under the limitation 'narratiunculas a poetis celebratas notitiae causa non eloquentiae tractandas puto.' That is, if we come across an allusion to Orpheus in our books, the 'grammaticus' may set the boy to write out the story of Orpheus, in his own words, to see that he knows it, but it should not like the other two be used as a set composition. From this point of view it is reserved for the higher school.