



Latin Transition Primus: Week 1 Reading

Pliny, Epistula VII.27.6-12

The following spooky story comes from a letter written between 61-113 AD by Gaius Plinius Caecilianus Secundus (Pliny the Younger) to his friend Licinius Sura. Pliny's reason for writing this letter was not to prove the existence of ghosts, but rather to ascertain where his friend Sura stood on the matter from a philosophical standpoint. Pliny himself believed that ghosts were part of the human experience and he provided the following account and two other ghost stories as examples of this. We will leave the philosophizing about things that go bump in the night for another time and just enjoy the tale.

Erat Athenis spatiosa et capax domus, sed infamis et pestilens. Per silentium noctis sonus ferri et, si attenderes acrius, strepitus vinculorum longius primo, deinde e proximo reddebatur. Mox apparebat idolon, senex macie et squalore confectus, promissa barba, horrenti capillo; cruribus compedes, manibus catenas gerebat quatiebatque.

spatiosus, a, um (adj) – spacious

capax, -acis (adj) – roomy, able to hold much

pestilens, -entis (adj), unhealthy, pestilential (here “haunted”)

strepitus, -i (m) – noise, rattling

reddo, -ere, -didi, -ditum – give back, restore, return; we would use ‘heard’ here instead in English.

Two parallel constructions here to take together with *reddebatur* – *longius/ex proximo* and *primo/deinde*

vinculum, -i (n) – chain (band, cord)

primo (adv) – at first

idolon, -i (n) – ghost (borrowed from Greek)

macies, -ei (f) thinness

conficio, -ficere, -feci, -fectum – affect, cause, make

promissa barba & horrenti capillo – ablatives of description with *senex*

compes, -pedis (f) – shackle, fetter

crus, cruris (n) leg (specifically the shin bone)

catena, -ae (f) – chain

quatio, -ere, quassi, quassum - shake

Inde inhabitantibus tristes diraeque noctes per metum vigilabantur; vigiliam morbus et, crescente formidine, mors sequebatur. Nam interdiu quoque, quamquam abscesserat imago, memoria imaginis oculis inerrabat, longiorque causis timoris timor erat. Deserta inde et damnata solitudine domus totaque illi monstro relicta; proscribatur tamen, seu quis emere, seu quis conducere ignarus tanti mali vellet.

inde (adv) – therefore, *here it is causal*

inhabitantibus – dative of agent

dirus, a, um (adj) – fearful

vigilo (1) – be awake, keep awake, watch (pass. “spent in watching”)

vigilia, -ae (f) - insomnia

sequebatur – has two subjects *morbus* and *mors*; singular form is due to attraction of singular subject
cresco, -ere, crevi, cretum – increase
formido, -inis (f) – dread, terror
imago, -inis (f) – image, likeness, apparition
longior causis – ablative of comparison

proscribebatur – “was put up for sale” *domus* is the subject

seu quis = *si quis*

emere and **conducere** – complementary infinitives with *vellet* (subjunctive in indirect question)

Venit Athenas philosophus Athenodorus, legit titulum auditoque pretio, quia suspecta vilitas, percunctatus omnia docetur ac nihilo minus, immo tanto magis conducit. Ubi coepit advesperascere, iubet sterni sibi in prima domus parte; poscit pugillares stilum lumen; suos omnes in interioria dimittit; ipse ad scribendum animum oculos manum intendit, ne vacua mens audita simulacra et inanes sibi metus fingeret.

Athenodorus may have been the Stoic philosopher who was friends with the emperor Augustus

titulum, -i (n) – title of sale
audito pretio – *ablative absolute*
vilitas, -tatis (f) – cheapness, low price
percunctor – make inquiries
nihilo minus – none the less
immo (particle) – on the contrary; *immo tanto magis* – “on the contrary, even more eagerly”
conduco, -ducere, -duxi, -ductum – to bring or lead together, collect; *here: to rent*
advesperascere – to become evening, to grow dark (*impersonal*)

sterno, -ere, stravi, stratum – to stretch out, spread (*understood ‘bed’ as subject of sterni*)
pugillares (writing tablets), **stilum** and **lumen** are all direct objects of *poscit*. *Pliny will often list things like this without putting any connecting words between them (This is called asyndeton). You can assume et’s or que’s or ac’s between them; Assume ‘servants’ or ‘attendants’ with the suos omnes*

intendo, -tendere, -tendi, -tentum – apply, concentrate (*NB there is another list of three objects following this verb too*)

tingo, -ere, finxi, fictum – imagine, for

Initio, quale ubique, silentium noctis; dein concuti ferrum, vincula moveri. Ille non tollere oculos, non remittere stilum, sed offirmare animum auribusque praetendere. Tum crebrescere fragor, adventare, et iam ut in limine, iam ut intra limen audiri. Respicit, videt agnoscitque narratam sibi effigiem.

quale ubique – “as everywhere else”

*Hey! What happened to the main verbs? Pliny has switched to historical (not hysterical) infinitives here to up the excitement for the reader (are you feeling excited?) **concuti** (concutio – shake violently), **moveri, tollere, remittere, offirmare** (offirmo – fasten, make firm), **praetendere, crebrescere** (crebresco – become frequent, increase), **adventare** and **audiri** are all historical infinitives and should be translated as past tense indicatives keeping true to the voice indicated.*

fragor, -oris (m) – din, clanking

limen, -inis (n) – threshold

respicio, -spicere, -spexi, -spectum – look back, look behind

agnosco, -noscere, -novi, nitum – recognize

effigies, -ei (f) – apparition, image

Stabat innuebatque digito similis vocanti. Hic, contra ut paulum exspectaret manu significat, rursusque ceris et stilo incumbit. Illa scribentis capiti catenis insonabat. Respicit rursus idem quod prius innuentem, nec moratus, tollit lumen et sequitur.

innuo, -nuere, -nui, -nutum – make a sign, beckon
digitus, -i (m) – finger, digit
contra (adv) – here “on the hand”
paulum – a little, here “a short time”
ut...exspectaret – *indirect command following significat – the ghost is the subject of exspectaret*

incumbo, -cumbere, -cubbui, -cubitum – apply oneself to (+dat)
scribentis – *genitive with capiti*
nec moratus – “without any delay” lit. “not having delayed”

Ibat illa lento gradu, quasi gravis vinculis. Postquam deflexit in aream domus, repente dilapsa deserit comitem. Desertus herbas et folia concerpta signum loco ponit.

lentus, a, um (adj) – slow
gradus, -i (m) – step
deflecto, -flectere, -flexi, -flectum – bend down or aside, turn away
repente (adv) – suddenly

dilabor, dilabi, dilapsus sum – to vanish (deponent)
comes, -itis (m/f) – companion
concerpo, -cerpere, -cerpsi, -cerptum – tear, pluck
signum – *in apposition to herbas et folia concerpta*

Postero die adit magistratus, monet ut illum locum effodi iubeant. Inveniuntur ossa inserta catenis et implicata, quae corpus aevo terraque putrefactum nuda et exesa reliquerat vinculis; collecta publice sepeliuntur. Domus postea rite conditis manibus caruit.

effodio, -fodere, -fodi, -fossum – dig up
ut...iubeant – *indirect command following monet*
os, ossis (n) - bone
implico (1) – entwine, entangle
exedo, -esse, -edi, esum – to eat up, devour

putrefactum agrees with corpus and nuda and exesa agree with ossa – the subject sepeliuntur
sepelio, -pelire, -pelivi, -pultum – to bury
careo, -ere, -ui, -iturus – to lack, be without (+dat)
manes, -ium (m. pl) – spirits of the dead
condo, -dere, -didi, -ditum – put, place, bury