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HORACE *CARM.* 4.7 AND THE EPIC TRADITION

ABSTRACT: *The paper examines closely the last four lines (25–28) of Horace Carm. 4.7. Initial discussion centers on the connection between Horace’s stanza and the simile at Aeneid 11.492–497 as well as on the latter’s sources in Ennius and Homer. The paper turns to the irony in Horace’s nomenclature—we find, for instance a Hippolytus who is confined rather than serving as a releaser—and then to the differences between Horace’s treatment of Aeneas, Theseus, and Hippolytus and that of Vergil. Finally it looks at meter as metaphor, and asks why Horace used the second Archilochian, which combines epic and elegiac elements, only here.*

My focus will be on the last four lines of one of Horace’s greatest lyrics, *Carm.* 4.7, a meditation on the difference between human temporality, with its stringent circumscriptions and concentration on mortality, and that of nature, possessed of the ability ever to renew itself in an eternal cycle.

Our own struttings across the stage of life come to quick conclusions, as death eliminates any individuality and uniqueness to which we might lay claim. Even gods and heroes cannot free their lovers from the trammels of the Underworld (25–28):

infernus neque enim tenebris Diana pudicum
liberat Hippolytum
nec Lethaea valet Theseus abrumpere caro
vincula Pirithoo.

For Diana does not release chaste Hippolytus from nether dark, nor does Theseus’ strength shear Lethaeian shackles from his beloved Pirithous.¹

In lines 26–28, Horace is alluding to a simile from book 11 of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, where Turnus, readying himself for a return to battle, is compared to a horse that breaks loose from its stabling (492–497):

qualis ubi abruptis fugit praesepia vinclis
tandem liber equus, campoque potitus aperto
aut ille in pastus armentaque tendit equarum
aut adsuetus aquae perfundi flumine noto
emicat, arrectisque fremit cervicibus alte
luxurians luduntque iubae per colla, per armos.

just as, when a horse, bursting his tether, has fled the stalls, free at last, and, lord of the open plain, either he makes for the pastures and herds of mares or, accustomed to bathe in a familiar river, he dashes away and, with head held high in wanton joy, neighs, while his mane plays over neck and shoulder.²

¹ The translation is my own.

² H. Rushton Fairclough, tr., *Virgil: Aeneid VII–XII; Appendix Vergiliana*, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Mass., 2000) 271.

As noted long since by Macrobius,³ Vergil's simile itself has a distinguished literary background, extending from earlier Latin epic (Enn. *Ann.* 535–539Skutsch) to Homer's *Iliad*, where it occurs twice (6.506–511 = 15.263–268).⁴ First Ennius:

et tum, sicut equos qui de praeseptibus fartus
vincla suis magnis animis abrumpit et inde
fert sese campi per caerula laetaque prata
celso pectore; saepe iubam quassat simul altam
spiritus ex anima calida spumas agit albas.

And then just as a horse which, full fattened from the stalls, bursts his tether in his high fettle, and away with breast uplifted bears himself over the rich grey-green meadows of the plain; and withal again and again tosses his mane on high; and his breath born of his hot temper flings out white froth.⁵

Clearly Vergil knew and admired his great predecessor's simile. He adopts six words and one cognate directly into his lines. But it is Homer, even more particularly, against whom we can test Vergil's originality as we seek out the special tone the Latin poet lends to his imitation:

ὡς δ' ὅτε τις στατὸς ἵππος, ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ,
δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας θείῃ πεδίῳο κροαίνων,
εἰωθὼς λούεσθαι ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο,
κυδιῶν ὑψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαῖται
ῶμοις αἰσσοῦνται· ὁ δ' ἀγλαίῃφι πεποιθὼς,
ρίμφα ἐ γούνα φέρεי μετά τ' ἦθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων.

Even as when a stalled horse, full-fed at the manger, breaks his tether and speeds at the gallop across the plain, being wont to bathe him in the fair-flowing stream, exultingly; and holds his head on high, and his mane floats about his shoulders, and he trusts in his glory, and nimbly his limbs bear him to the haunts and pasturage of mares.⁶

³ *Sat.* 6.3.7–8.

⁴ For detailed analysis of Vergil's lines and their poetic inheritance, with full bibliography of past criticism, see N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 11: A Commentary* (Leiden 2003) 292–96. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.1259–1261, though part of the mix, is less important than Homer for my purposes, but I will draw *Ver. Geo.* 3.193–195, the fifth of Horsfall's parallels, into the discussion shortly. G. Williams (*Technique and Ideas in the Aeneid* [New Haven 1983] 82) speaks of Vergil's "skillful rearrangement" of Homer. D. A. West ("Multiple-Correspondence Similes in the *Aeneid*," *JRS* 59 [1969] 40–49 = S. J. Harrison, ed., *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid* [Oxford 1990] 429–44), 47 = 440, details the connections between the simile and the situation of Turnus.

⁵ E. H. Warmington, ed. and tr., *Remains of Old Latin*, vol. 1: *Ennius and Caecilius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) 195.

⁶ The translation is modified from A. Lang, W. Leaf, and E. Myers, trs., *The Iliad of Homer* (London 1883).

Let us follow Vergil's changes to Homer's text, and adaptations from Ennius and from his third *Georgic*, in the order of the lines from *Aeneid* 11. *Abruptis vinclis*, along with Ennius' *vincla abrumpit*, is a close translation of Homer's *δεσμὸν ἀπορρήξας*, but *fugit* adds a dimension lacking in Homer's *θείη*: Vergil's horse is not galloping but in flight, to escape a world apparently foreign, or even repellant, to it. *ἀκοστήσας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ*, though incorporated by Ennius (*praesepeibus fartus*), is left by Vergil simply as *praesepeia*, the place in which the animal has been penned. Mention of feeding is postponed until *in pastus* (494), and therefore is reserved for the list of desires that the horse can satisfy, after he has broken his bonds.

And there is a sense of power attached to the animal through the word *potitus* missing in Homer's concentration on speed (*θείη . . . κροαίνων*). Likewise *tendit* conveys a forceful purposefulness that Homer's *ρίμφα ἐ γούνα φέρει* lacks. Vergil twice over has us enter the creature's mind, to watch the change from negative to positive, from the presumed anxiety that accompanies flight to the decisiveness oriented at goals renewed.

The phrase that follows, *tandem liber*, has no parallel in Homer, with the adverb adding emphasis to what has apparently been the animal's long-cherished desire for freedom.⁷ Homer's *πεδίσιο* suffers a double change. Ennius elaborates his predecessor's single word into *campi per caerula laetaque prata*. Vergil, with his wonted understatement, adds only *aperto* to *campo*. Given its context, however, the word speaks on several levels.⁸ It looks to topographical spaciousness, but it also enhances the implications of *liber* by suggesting the openness now available to the horse after a period of restriction.⁹

With the word *equarum* (494) Vergil gives sexual particularity to what Homer leaves as common *ἵππων*. But since Homer's simile, at its first appearance, serves to qualify Paris after donning his armor, the reader easily extrapolates the sex of the horses into whose haunts he makes his way.¹⁰ Vergil's analogy explicitly puts erotic yearning as another desire that the horse can now fulfill after being

⁷ On this point see M. v. Albrecht, "Ein Pferdegleichnis bei Ennius," *Hermes* 97 (1969) 333–45, esp. 340–41; R. R. Schlunk, *The Homeric Scholia and the Aeneid* (Ann Arbor 1974) 26 and 29.

Vergil's horse, at *Geo.* 3.194, is also "free" (*ceu liber habens*), but in fact he is a colt being trained, whose independence is only apparent (see W. W. Briggs Jr., *Narrative and Simile from the Georgics in the Aeneid*, Mnemosyne Supplement 58 [Leiden 1980] 47). For the horse of *Aeneid* 11, liberty is full and apparently long-awaited.

⁸ Once again Vergil is thinking back to his horse in training, "flying over the open plains" (*per aperta volans . . . aequora*, *Geo.* 3.194–195).

⁹ The point is made by Horsfall (above, n.4) on 11.493.

¹⁰ The case for the animals' female sex is strongly argued by Horsfall (above, n.4) 293–94. I used the translation of Homer by Lang, Leaf, and Myers (above, n.6) to show that even then there was no hesitation in Englishing *ἵππων* as "mares." We should note that Ennius' portrayal shows no interest in the affective situation of the steed, erotic or otherwise.

freed from confinement. As in the case of one of the two referents of Homer's simile,¹¹ Vergil's application to Turnus is appropriate, given what we know to be his attachment to Lavinia.¹²

The third desire that the stallion aims at satisfying is for a good bath. Here, too, Vergil makes an important, typical, alteration to his model as *ἑύρρειός ποταμοῖο* becomes *aquae . . . flumine noto*. We move from a quality of the stream itself—it flows steadily—to the horse's reaction to his familiarity with it. He is returning to what he knows and appreciates. But the phrase *flumine noto* also has a Vergilian history. Vergil puts the words *flumina nota* (*Ecl.* 1.51, likewise ending an hexameter) into the mouth of the soon to be exiled shepherd Meliboeus.¹³ In so doing he stresses what remains confirmed and assured for his fortunate colleague, Tityrus. The latter is blessed by Rome with stability while the former must bitterly venture into exile and into the unknown. In *Aeneid* 11 Vergil reverses the pattern. A period of repression in the horse's life—reference, perhaps, to Turnus' time spent at the Latin council, where words, not deeds, are the controlling factor—has been replaced with the independence to follow out his own instincts. One aspect of that freedom is a return to exulting in one's own territory—what Tityrus possesses and Meliboeus must lose.

Both Homer's and Vergil's steeds glory in their newly returned power: the sheer physicality of the descriptions speaks of an abundance of energy at last released. But Vergil adds a nuance missing in Homer by allowing his horse a series of alternatives (*aut . . . aut*), drawn from the details of Homer's portrayal.¹⁴ He has the option of going in quest of food and sex, or of a nice bath. But the mere fact that there are choices to be made furthers the notion of freedom enjoyed after a period when the making of such discriminations was prohibited.

But there may be a price. And here we have a final, this time ethical, distinction from Homer. Vergil's equivalent for the Greek poet's *κυδιόων* is *luxurians*, but the translation urges the reader to ponder the difference between *κῦδος* and *luxuria*. Homer's horse "glories" in its situation, perhaps, proleptically, in anticipation of the honors that we would ordinarily expect to accrue to the armed hero in battles to come. Vergil's creature, to quote the dictionary, is said "to behave skittishly, frisk, gambol." But a further definition helps us enter

¹¹ The other is Hector at *Il.* 15.263–268.

¹² It is the suggestion of L. R. Kepple ("Arruns and the Death of Aeneas," *AJP* 97 [1976] 344–60) that Turnus is compared to Paris, "the *Iliad*'s idle warrior" (346), because he will now for a period relinquish to Camilla his role as leader of the forces opposing Aeneas.

¹³ The connection is not mentioned by recent commentators (e.g., R. Coleman, ed., *Vergil: Eclogues* [Cambridge 1977] 83; W. Clausen, ed., *A Commentary on Vergil: Eclogues* [Oxford 1994] on *Ecl.* 1.51).

¹⁴ On this point see W. S. Anderson, "Aeneid 11: The Saddest Book," in C. Perkell, ed., *Reading Vergil's Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide* (Norman 1999) 202–3.

more deeply into the personification of Turnus as horse: "to revel immoderately, or luxuriate . . . become intoxicated, run riot."¹⁵ There is a hint, one that Homer does not directly admit to his simile,¹⁶ that Turnus' chance to return to his true nature, and to the world of physical enterprise, may in part help to spell his doom in the immediate future.¹⁷ We learn of the hero's rejoicing in his freedom, and in the choices that it offers him. But we also take note of the tragic consequences implicit in whatever hubris might accompany such an expansive moment.¹⁸

Let us turn now to Horace's lines and to the importance of Vergil's words for furthering their significance. The connected use of forms of *abrumpere* and *vinc(u)lum* occurs, in classical Latin poetry before the publication of Horace's fourth book of odes, only in the lines cited from Ennius and in two Vergilian passages, the lines from *Aeneid* 11 and an earlier description of the Trojan boats breaking their moorings.¹⁹ But the use of *liberat* associates Horace's text explicitly with the Vergilian simile through the earlier poet's novel use of *liber*. And the connection is further confirmed by Horace's etymological play on the adjacent name, Hippolytus. We are dealing with someone whose nomenclature connects him not only with horses but also with their release.²⁰

¹⁵ *OLD* s.v., #2 (where *Aen.* 11.497 is the first citation) and 3.

¹⁶ To be sure, Homer may simply be allowing his reader to sense an implicit irony about Paris that Vergil makes more explicit in the case of Turnus, by the ambiguity of *luxurians*. Paris has to be summoned by Hector away from Helen's bedroom to return to a field of war where, not long before, he had been sheltered from vengeful Menelaus by the intervention of Aphrodite. But see also Schlunk (above, n.7) 30 on the much later usages of *κροαίνω* in Philostratus to mean "luxuriate," "wanton" (the translations of *LSJ ad verbum*)

¹⁷ For descriptions of Turnus' passional side, especially his impetuosity, we think, for example, of *Aen.* 12.1–4, 46, 666–671. Vergil allots *violentia* as a characteristic only to Turnus (*Aen.* 11.376, 12.9 and 45).

¹⁸ See W. S. Anderson, "Vergil's Second *Iliad*," *TAPA* 88 (1957) 17–30, esp. 28 (repr. in P. Hardie, ed., *Vergil: Critical Assessments of Classical Authors* [London 1999] 3.74–86); Briggs (above, n.7) 47–48.

Vergil is being suggestive in another way by limning a parallel between Paris and Turnus. Paris possesses in actual fact the wife of another man. Turnus, by contrast, goes into battle with the presumed consideration, to him at least, that Lavinia will become his wife, and not that of Aeneas, should he defeat his Trojan foe. But for him merely to imagine such a circumstance is to go against what he, and the reader, know is fated. That Lavinia is destined to marry a non-Latin has been bruited even before Aeneas' arrival in Italy (see *Aen.* 7.96–101). For Turnus to expect otherwise, which is to say to imagine in some way that Lavinia will be his Helen, smacks of potentially destructive overreaching.

¹⁹ *Aen.* 9.118 (*puppae abrumpunt vincula*). Otherwise in classical poetry we have the combination only at Sil. *Pun.* 14.524 and 16.264. Appearances in prose, in chronological order, are Livy 37.30, Sen. *Ep.* 70.12, Tac. *Ann.* 1.66, and Apul. *Met.* 9.1. Not unexpectedly, the citation in Tacitus is closest to Vergil (*equus abruptis vinculis* . . .).

²⁰ For the etymology see *LSJ* s.v. and under *λύω*, I.2.a. For further discussion of the title "breaker of horses," applied, ironically, to one finally "broken" by them,

This intimacy between texts helps point up the pervasive irony of Horace's concluding stanza. Far from being released—or serving as a releaser—Hippolytus is confined by the chains of death forever, as is Pirithous. And this imprisonment means the end of the individuality that humans possess while still alive in their sublunar environment. The lyric's preceding quatrains had told us that *pius* Aeneas and *dives* Tullus, along with Ancus, would be but dust and shade in the Underworld, which is to say that piety and the accumulation of wealth matter not at all after death. Torquatus, the poem's addressee, will gain no help from ancestral background, from rhetorical prowess or, like Aeneas, from piety, when confronted with mortality.

Horace is therefore responding to Vergil and his simile. Whatever freedom the horse, or we humans, have in life, will be lost in death along with whatever special characteristics we possess that distinguish us from our fellow beings. This is soon to be true for Turnus as it has long been the case for Horace's Aeneas, Hippolytus, and Pirithous. Horace lays special stress on the loss of eroticism. We have seen that aiming for *armenta equarum* was one of the goals of Turnus as stallion. But his pursuit of Lavinia in life will be as futile as the attempt of Diana to release "chaste" Hippolytus or of Theseus to unfetter his "dear" Pirithous from the bonds of death. The horse may revel in a return to the stream that figured in an earlier part of its life. All that remains for the denizens of the Underworld is the water of Lethe. They forget, even if they are not forgotten. Consequential deeds and essential human eroticism will be both valueless and incapable of reciprocation, once we are dust and shade.

Horace plays with his inheritance from Vergilian epic in two other ways. In the *Aeneid*, we remember, though the titular hero's piety earns him entrance into the world of the dead, he can still return to the living, to fulfill a destiny that will ultimately lead to apotheosis.²¹ Earlier in Horace's poem, however, we are told that Aeneas, for all his piety, will still be found in the realm below, when he passes from life. The final stanza also twice alters Horace's Vergilian inheritance. Hippolytus, whom Vergil sees as restored to life and deified under the name Virbius, is once more a mortal who has become subject

see J. J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor 1996) 1, 100, and esp. 198. M. Paschalis (*Virgil's Aeneid: Semantic Relations and Proper Names* [Oxford 1997] 271–73) treats the etymology as strictly passive (*distractus equis*). For more general treatments of the name, see F. Bechtel, *Die historischen Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit* (Halle 1917) 220; L. Dubois, "Hippolytus and Lysippos: Remarks on some compounds in Hippo-, -ippos," in S. Hornblower and E. Matthews, eds., *Greek Personal Names: Their Value as Evidence* (Oxford 2000) 41–52, esp. 48–52. Dubois translates the name as "(the man) whose horses are unyoked" (48; compare 51).

²¹ Such are the implications of Jupiter's words at *Aen.* 1.259–260 and 12.794–795.

to death.²² And Theseus, who in the *Aeneid* is the victim of eternal torture,²³ is now by contrast treated as parallel to Diana, which is to say as partaking in divinity to whatever degree.

The lyric poet moderates or changes his epic inheritance to suit his own purposes. Theseus cannot now be sentenced to everlasting torture with Pirithous in the Underworld anymore than Hippolytus, become the god Virbius, can have an ever-enduring connection with the goddess Diana. The double coupling that Vergil suggests in the *Aeneid*, whether the duo be placed among the eternally damned or incorporated within the pantheon of gods, can have no part in Horace's design. Separation and consequent sorrow are what must be the continuing experience of those who live on.

Finally, there is the question of meter as metaphor. Horace uses the second Archilochian only this once.²⁴ It consists of a line in dactylic hexameter followed by a hemiepes, half a hexameter.²⁵ But this last might be more imaginatively, as well as more honestly, characterized as the first of the two segments that form a pentameter.²⁶ Horace has put to use for his extraordinary poem a metrical pattern of two lines, the first of which consists of the meter of epic and the second of half the pentameter that forms the second line in the meter of the elegists. Repeated, this arrangement shapes a stanza that in turn is iterated seven times to constitute the poem.

Seen metaphorically, this scheme could be said to form odic fluency out of a combination of epic and elegy. It complements what Horace has accomplished in his text's narrative. We move, in the course of the poem as abetted by its meter, from expansive deeds and personal prowess, whether historical or the stuff of myth, to the contractions of lamentation or, at best, resignation.²⁷ Whatever

²² *Aen.* 7.761–782.

²³ *Aen.* 6.617–618. At 6.393 Theseus is linked with Pirithous as a pair who entered the nether regions and yet were allowed to return to the world of the living. But at 6.601 Pirithous is placed by Vergil, along with Theseus, among the damned. In his comment on *Aen.* 6.617 Servius takes note of the differences between Horace and Vergil on this point.

²⁴ We know from Terentianus Maurus (*GLK* 6.379; re. Gerber *test.* 51 [see below, n.27] = West 198) that Archilochus indeed used the meter, but no examples survive.

²⁵ See F. Klingner, ed., *Q. Horati Flacci* (Leipzig 1959) 319.

²⁶ A true half of a hexameter would consist of one more syllable than the seven that make up a pentameter. For hemiepes in particular see Marius Victorinus (*GLK* 6.73, where Simonides is mentioned as a frequent user) and Marius Plotius Secundus (*GLK* 6.544).

²⁷ What a reference to Archilochus, even through meter, might mean to Horace, and through him to his readers, might be suggested by fr. 11 of the Greek poet's elegies, as translated by D. Gerber (*Greek Iambic Poetry* [Cambridge 1999] 86–87): "For I shall cure nothing by weeping nor shall I make matters worse by pursuit of pleasures and festivities." Appropriate yielding to circumstances, tinged with a touch of bitterness, characterizes both poets here. I thank Deborah Boedeker for this reference and am grateful to her and to René Nünlist for helpful advice in the preparation of this note.

our excellence in life, whatever our desires, they are nullified in death's prison. That we then and there become nothing, and leave only mourning to those who yearn for us, is suggested even in the meter of Horace's powerful lyric meditation on the passage of time and its consequences.

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