

# OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT OF HORACE'S ODES (BOOK 4)

*Abstract:* Several passages of Horace are explained.  
*Key words:* Horace, textual criticism.

*Resumen:* Se explican diversos pasajes de Horacio.  
*Palabras clave:* Horacio, crítica textual.

4, 1, 4-8:

*desine dulcium  
mater saeva Cupidinum,  
circa lustra decem flectere mollibus  
iam durum imperiis: abi,  
quo blandae iuvenum te revocant preces.*

The poet states that he is no longer interested in love. According to Page<sup>1</sup>, Horace refers here to his age, and *lustrum* is put “for a space of five years.” I would like to suggest, however, that *lustra*<sup>2</sup>, in line 6, means *meretriciae domus*. We should translate as follows:

“O cruel mother of sweet Cupids, strive no more in the region of ten (i.e. numerous: cf. *OLD* s.v. *decem* 1, b, b) brothels (*circa*<sup>3</sup> *lustra decem*) to bend one now callous to your soft commands.”

For *lustrum* meaning “brothel” cf. *Odes* 2, 4, 22 ff.:

*fuge suspicari,  
cuius octavum trepidavit aetas  
claudere lustrum.*

Translate as follows:

“Suspect not one<sup>4</sup> whose youth (*aetas*) hastened to cause eight *domus meretriciae* to be shut.”<sup>5</sup>

The poet managed to visit no fewer than eight *meretriciae domus*. Similar numerical boasts are found in the Greek Anthology: cf. *Veleia* 15, 1998, page 395 f.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T. E. Page, *Q. Horatii Flacci, Carminum Libri IV*, London 1970, reprint.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *lustrum* II, B: “A house of ill-repute.”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *circa* II, A, 3: “in the region of, near to.”

<sup>4</sup> *Scil.* of being a *pathicus*.

<sup>5</sup> The verb *claudere*, which has puzzled scholars, is now clear: it is used in the causative sense by the poet. When a client occupied a *domus meretricia*, the door was closed. For the employment of verbs in a causative sense in Latin cf. *Veleia* 23, 2006, page 271 (note 24).



to know. But the hordes long victorious in all ways (*omnia*<sup>8</sup>) far and wide were vanquished by the young man's wisdom."

4, 4, 29-32:

*fortes creantur fortibus et bonis;  
est in iuvenis, est in equis patrum* 30  
*virtus, neque imbellem feroces  
progenerant aquilae columbam.*

Horace states here that brave men are created due to brave men. I would like to suggest that we should place a full stop after *fortibus*, and translate as follows:

"Brave men are created from brave men. And the merits of their fathers appear in noble youths (*bonis ... in iuvenis*<sup>9</sup>) and in horses."

In other words, both men and animals inherit the noble qualities of their fathers.

4, 4, 37-44:

*quid debeas, o Roma, Neronibus,  
testis Metaurum flumen et Hasdrubal  
devictus et pulcher fugatis*  
*ille dies Latio tenebris,* 40  
*qui primus alma risit adorea,  
dirus per urbes Afer ut Italas  
ceu flamma per taedas vel Eurus  
per Siculas equitavit undas.*

line 41 *alma* : *arma* v.l.

Horace refers here to the Carthaginians. Keller-Holder, Klingner, Page and Wickham prefer the variant *alma* in line 41 (= "cheering" Page): *alma* and *adorea* are of course taken to be ablatives. However, the variant *arma* (cf. Keller-Holder's apparatus) would seem to indicate that Horace (cf. Page, page xxvii footnote) has exceptionally not lengthened the fifth syllable, following his Greek model. In this case, the sense would be: "the day which first derided arms (in this case the arms of the Carthaginians), since the time when the Carthaginians invaded Italy with glory (*adorea*)." This interpretation fits with the meaning of *ut*, which means here "since when": cf. Page *ad loc*. The contrast is between the glory obtained by the Carthaginians until the first day

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *omnia*: "adverbially altogether, entirely."

*Sed* occupies the second position, after *omnia* (cf. OLD, s.v. *sed*: "not infrequently postponed in poetry").

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *iuvenis* II, 2: "Sc. *homo*, a young man."

For the debated punctuation of this passage cf. Wickham *ad loc*.

when the Romans could laugh at them because they were defeated. Note the enjambement of *adorea* with the following line. Moreover, the epithet *alma* with *adorea* would be otiose. I need hardly add that Horace's versification offers many examples of metrical rarities. It seems to me that, if my reasoning is correct, the reading *arma*, attested in very many manuscripts, is not a corruption, but the *lectio difficilior*.

The prosodic parallel between 4. 4. 41 *armă* and 3. 5. 17 *perirēt* is perfect.

4, 4, 65-68:

*merses profundo, pulchrior evenit;  
luctere, multa proruet integrum  
cum laude victorem geretque  
proelia coniugibus loquenda.*

line 66 *luctere* : *ductore* v.l.

Horace mentions here the Roman race: cf. line 53 *gens*. I would like to point out that the variant reading *ductore* makes better sense. We should translate as follows: "Drown it in the depths. It comes forth nobler due to its leader (*ductore*)."

Horace explains that the Roman race, led by its military leader (cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *ductor*), will conquer its enemies with great renown. Note the *asyndeton* between *ductore* and *multa*. *Luctere* was introduced in order to establish parallelism with *merses*, but is contextually inapposite.

Horace is talking of the Roman *gens* when already defeated (*merses profundo*), so that the subsequent mention of a struggle would be contextually incongruous. Note the perfect parallel with lines 23f. *victrices catervae consiliis iuvenis revictae*.<sup>10</sup>

4, 4, 73-76:

*nil Claudiae non perficient manus,  
quas et benigno numine Iuppiter  
defendit et curae sagaces  
expediunt per acuta belli.*

Scholars<sup>11</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of line 76. I would like to suggest that *peracuta*<sup>12</sup> is an adverb. We should translate as follows:

"which counsels experienced in war (*sagaces*<sup>13</sup> ... *belli*) prepare (*expediunt*) very keenly (*peracuta*)."

<sup>10</sup> Note the enjambement between *evenit* and *ductore*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Page *ad loc.*

<sup>12</sup> For the adverb *peracuta* cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *acuta*: "*canis ululat*, Enn." and Forcellini, s.v. *acuo*, II B 3

"*adverbiorum more*". For *peracuta* = "very keenly" cf. e.g. *perfacile* = "very easily."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *sagax* II: "With gen."

4, 5, 9-14:

*ut mater iuvenem, quem Notus invido  
flatu Carpathii trans maris aequora      10  
cunctantem spatium longius annuo  
dulci distinet a domo,  
votis ominibusque et precibus vocat,  
curvo nec faciem litore demovet.*

line 14 *demovet* : *dimovet* v.l.

Horace describes a mother who awaits her son. I would like to point out that the variant reading *dimovet* makes good sense. We should translate as follows:

“she invokes him with vows, with omens and with prayers, and she does not thrust aside (*dimovet*) his appearance (*faciem*) from the curving shore.”

In other words, the mother is keen to see her son again, and does not thrust aside his memory, of which she is dreaming.

For *facies* “as seen in dreams and visions” cf. *OLD* s.v. 5. The mother cannot be said to “avert her face from the shore”, because she, insofar as expecting her son sailing back from the high sea, would look at the horizon, just as Theseus’ father did, not at the shore.

4, 5, 21-24:

*nullis polluitur casta domus stupris  
mos et lex maculosum edomuit nefas,  
laudantur simili prole puerperae,  
culpam poena premit comes.*

Page explained that Horace is referring here to the “*lex Julia de adulteriis* which had been passed B.C. 17.” I would like to suggest that we should place a full stop after *domus*, and translate as follows:

“the chaste home is polluted by nobody (*nullis*<sup>14</sup>). Custom and law have stamped out sin tainted by lewdness (*stupris*).”

4, 6, 25-26:

*doctor argutae fidicen Thaliae,  
Phoebe, qui Xantho lavis amne crinis,*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *nullus* B: “Subst.: *nullus*, *ius*, m., for *nemo*, no one, nobody.”

For the plural *nulli* cf. *OLD* s.v. *nullus*, 2.

*Nefas* is left unexplained if we take *stupris* to agree with *nullis*.

*Maculosum* governs the ablative *stupris*: cf. *OLD* s.v. *maculosus*, 3. Note the elegant enjambement between *stupris* and *maculosum* – a feature exceedingly frequent in Horace’s style.

Apollo is said to be the lyric (*fidicen*) teacher of melodious Thalia (*argutae ... Thaliae*). The Muse Thalia<sup>15</sup> was loved by Apollo, and became the mother of the Corybantes.

4, 6, 37-40:

*rite Latonae puerum canentes,  
rite crescentem face Noctilucam,  
prosperam frugum celeremque pronos  
volvare menses.*

Scholars<sup>16</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of lines 38 ff. Perfect sense can, however, be restored to this passage if we translate as follows:

“duly singing Latona’s son and the favourable Moon waxing (*crescentem*) duly with light (*face*), and swift to speed the easy (*pronos*) months (*menses*) of the fruits of the earth (*frugum*).”

4, 10, 1-2:

*O crudelis adhuc et Veneris muneribus potens  
insperata tuae cum veniet pluma superbiae*

Scholars<sup>17</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of lines 1-2. Perfect sense can be restored to the transmitted text if we place a comma after *muneribus*, and translate as follows:

“You who are indeed still cruel due to the gifts of Venus, when unexpected down (*pluma*) arrives, which has power over (*potens*<sup>18</sup>) your pride (*tuae ... superbiae*) ...”

Horace means that the arrogant boy will be punished when hairs<sup>19</sup> spoil his youthful beauty.

4, 12, 5-8:

*nidum ponit, Ityn flebiliter gemens,  
infelix avis et Cecropiae domus  
aeternum opprobrium, quod male barbaras  
regum est ultra libidines.*

line 5 *Ityn* : *Itys* v.l., cf. Keller-Holder and Borzsak’s apparatus

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, London 1972, reprint, vol. 1, page 78.

Critics are puzzled as to why Thalia should be mentioned here (cf. Villeneuve *ad loc.*). They failed to note, however, that Thalia was beloved by Apollo.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Page and Wickham *ad loc.*, who both take *prosperam* to govern the genitive *frugum* – a construction not elsewhere attested. But here *menses* governs the genitive *frugum* (cf. *Thes.* s.v. *mensis* 748, 11 f.: *mense novarum frugum*), the sense being “the months of the fruits

of the earth”. *Que* is in the second position (= *frugumque celerem*).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Wickham, new edition, *ad loc.*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *potens* B, 1 : “Having power over ... with gen.”

<sup>19</sup> For the fact that the beauty of a *pathicus* is soon spoiled by the hairs which grow with adolescence cf. my *New Studies In Greek Poetry* (Amsterdam 1989), page 73.

Note the enjambement between *potens* and *insperata*.

Horace refers here to Spring. Scholars, who accept the reading *Ityn*, are at a loss to decide whether the bird who is crying (*gemens*) is a swallow or a nightingale (cf. Wickham and Page *ad loc.*). I would like to suggest that the correct reading in this passage is *Itys*. Horace is referring to the fact that *Itys* was turned into a pheasant. Translate as follows:

“Making tearful lament, *Itys*<sup>20</sup> makes a nest, an ill- fated bird, the everlasting disgrace of the Cecropian house, since it avenged too cruelly the barbarous lust of kings.”

Horace, in overtly alluding to the well-known Tereus legend (Roscher, s.v. *Itys*, 572 ), wants to emphasize that not three of the protagonists of the legend (Procne, Philomela and Tereus) were changed into birds, but all four of them, i.e. including *Itys*.

The reading *Ityn* came into being because the fact that *Itys* was changed into a pheasant was not well known (only one mythographer mentions it): a reader, not knowing this, changed *Itys* into *Ityn*, and took *gemens* to be transitive, thereby banalizing the text and bringing it into line with the numerous passages where Procne or Philomela bewailed *Itys*.

Pheasants make their nests in spring, and the males have a very loud voice.

Horace has adopted a typically Hellenistic allusive technique: cf. *Mus. Phil. Lond.*, 10, 1996, page 51.

If the reading *Itys* were a *lapsus calami*, we would have to conclude that it is by accident proved absolutely correct by the legend to which Horace alludes, which hypothesis would be hardly tenable.

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<sup>20</sup> For the fact that *Itys* was turned into a pheasant cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *Itys*. Cf. also Lewis-Short, s.v. *Phasis, idis* ... poet. Colchian: *volucres*, i.e. pheasants, Mart.

13, 45, 1.” *Itys* died lamenting his fate: cf. Ovid, *Met.* 6, 640 *clamantem*.