

The Prodigal Daughter

IN a note on Horace's Cleopatra ode, published in *University of Ceylon Review* for July 1951, I attempted a musical comparison, suggesting that a theme stated keeps coming back with variations, like the fugues in a musical composition. The purpose of this note is to suggest that another of Horace's odes, the 27th of Book III, 'To Galatea Undertaking A Journey', also has what may be called fugal passages—passages whose cumulative effect is not less powerful than in the Cleopatra ode.

In that ode, what recurs again and again is a theme of wine-drinking. The ode to Galatea has more than one recurring theme. In the third stanza Horace invokes the raven, omen of good weather, to forestall the crow's omen of stormy weather for Galatea's journey. Forty-four lines further on, Europē calls on hungry tigers to forestall devouring time in preying upon the crimson in her cheek. Each of these widely separated stanzas, the third and the fourteenth, opens on the word *antequam*. In the fourteenth is it recognizable as the same theme played in another key?

Distinct from this is the figure of an arrow's flight. The theme is stated in the second stanza, *per obliquum similis sagittae*. When it comes again, in the seventeenth stanza, it is not merely the likeness, but the very arrow. Though there is no direct mention of one, the arrow's flight has been swift and sure—*remisso filius arcu*.

When arrow-like a snake darts across the road, its effect is to break off an imagined journey. When Cupid's arrow has slanted across, Europē's lamentation goes no further. Here is poise and counterpoise.

While the snake's dart across the road is distinct from the crow's prognostication of foul weather, each of these themes is but a variation of a still earlier theme—the theme indicated by the words *omen ducat* in the opening stanza. The crow omen repeats that in one key, and the snake omen in another; each in turn is an offshoot of *omen ducat*.

That primal *ducat* is, moreover, the progenitor of yet another strain of sequences. The first verb in this ode is *ducat*. It is a verb in the subjunctive mood, and its outlook is concessive, subordinated to something beyond. Let such omens, it says, convoy the wicked; for Galatea there must be better.

It sounds again in the eleventh stanza, and this time it is *ducit*, in the indicative. Yet it tells nothing: it only questions: *an . . . ludit imago vana quae porta fugiens eburna somnium ducit?* Is she, Europē asks, the dupe of a vain phantom?

Duped she is: *ludit* in the eighteenth stanza answers the questioning *ludit* of the tenth. Here again is poise and counterpoise.

Europē is duped; yet what dupes her is no phantom vain: it is that which is most real when most it dupes. The answering *ludit* is potent, because in illusion lies the power of love. The world of prose subdued, the rational impulse hushed, Europē stands as one 'silent upon a peak in Darien'. Venus speaks only when her auditor is under the spell: *ubi ludit satis . . . dixit*.

The questioning *ludit* has been followed by an answering *ludit*. But waiting for answer still is Europē's questioning *ducit*. In the poem's end is the answer: when Venus speaks, her final word is *ducet*. *Ducet* brings back an echo of the forgotten, primitive *ducat* of line 2. *Ducet* answers the imploring *ducit* of line 42. And when the sad Europē hears it, she feels her journey's end is grander than she knows.

She has been prodigal of her affection—*modo multum amati cornua monstri*. As a prodigal's has been her parting from her father's home—*pater, o relictum filiae nomen pietasque*. Six stanzas have carried the prodigal daughter's despairing repentance; and two-and-a-half the rage of her absent father. In the broken seventeenth stanza are juxtaposed the royal-born, the barbarian mistress, the concubine—*regius sanguis, domina barbara, pellex*. Then the divine presence, the ambrosial utterance, briefer than the human has been, yet breathing a larger air.

'Larger' for several reasons, one of which is the altered diction. *Abs-tineto* following genitives, and *esse* without accusative subject, are not regular Latin constructions. What is the relevance of this Greek imitation at the close of the symphony?

What has Horace been driving at? Obviously Galatea is one for whom he wishes well. Playfully wishing her no ill omens, he reminds her of what befell Europē, and seems to be urging Galatea to let no such calamity overtake her. But he ends up by bringing in a goddess to tell Europē of her great **good** fortune. Could Galatea take **that** as a compliment?

Nocte sublustri, seeing darkly as through a glass, Europē sees *nihil astra praeter*. Beyond the furthest star Horace knew are now seen to be countless others. Worlds beyond worlds and suns beyond suns become apparent through a modern telescope. And bigger telescopes still, bigger perhaps than the pyramids, may yet be built to explore an even bigger universe. But what glass in what instrument can ever show aught *astra praeter*?

Nocte sublustri nihil astra praeter vidit et undas—does this fall far short of the famed 'pathetic half-lines of Virgil, with their broken gleams and murmurs

as of another world'?¹ Must the epithet 'Horatian' stand for ever synonymous of a poetry that 'consists in the versification, the tense, the neat, the witty, the felicitous versification' of what really is 'almost undiluted prose'?²

What is *scatentem beluis pontum mediasque fraudes*, the monster-bubbling sea where pales the bold beset with harms? Can it signify also the vicissitudes of this transitory life? Is it a *pontus* wide enough to cover all in sorrow, need, sickness, or other adversity, no matter what supposed taint of original sin or what supposed operation of karmic law has been their conduit hither? *Impios* is the word on which the poem opens: how far forward does it reach? And the last divinely spoken *bene ferre magnam disce fortunam*—how far does it extend?

Can the measure be formally defined? In Virgil's half-line the pathos hangs in the undefined. In this ode of Horace's, where fugue leads out winging fugue, what speaks more than its direct words is the orchestration, the inner harmony of developing themes. It is not that the meaning is unimportant. There certainly is for the gleaner a wealth of meaning in allegory beyond allegory. And it is not alien corn: it sustains the fugues in their homing path—from Hell and through Purgatory; from *impios ducat* through *somnium ducit*, on to *nomina ducet*.

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Parenthetically, may I take the opportunity of suggesting an amendment in the reading of the last two stanzas of the ode? Is *nescis* in the last stanza Horace's word, or a mistake of the copyists? My suggestion is to read *nosces* instead, and alter the punctuation accordingly. Is this too bold to merit consideration? If it can be accepted, the concluding passage—the 'Paradiso' of this symphonic poem—will read:—

*mox, ubi lusit satis: 'abstineto'
dixit 'irarum calidaeque rixae.
cum tibi invisus laceranda reddet
cornua taurus,*

*uxor invicti Jovis esse nosces;
mitte singultus, bene ferre magnam
disce fortunam; tua sectus orbis
nomina ducet'.*

Below is the ode—as printed in Professor Page's edition—on which this article comments. As regards the reading of *nescis* in the last stanza, there appears to be no variation in the extant manuscripts.

1. *Impios parrae recinentis omen
ducat et praegnans canis aut ab agro
rava decurrens lupa Lanuvino,
fetaque volpes.*
2. *rumpat et serpens iter institutum,
si per obliquum similis sagittae
terrui mannos: ego cui timebo
providus auspex,*
3. *antequam stantes repetat paludes
imbrium divina avis imminentum,
oscinem corvum prece suscitabo
solis ab ortu.*
4. *sis licet felix, ubicunque mavis,
et memor nostri, Galatea, vivas,
teque nec laevus vetet ire picus
nec vaga cornix.*
5. *sed vides, quanto trepidet tumultu
pronus Orion. ego quid sit ater
Hadriae novi sinus et quid albus
peccet Iapyx.*
6. *hostium uxores puerique caecos
sentiant motus orientis Austri et
aequoris nigri fremitum et trementes
verbere ripas.*
7. *sic et Europe niveum doloso
credidit tauro latus et scatentem
beluis pontum mediasque fraudes
palluit audax.*
8. *nuper in pratis studiosa florum et
debitae Nymphis opifex coronae
nocte sublustri nihil astra praeter
vidit et undas.*

1. *Latin Literature*, by J. W. Mackail, John Murray (1945), page 112.

2. *A New Study of English Poetry*, by Henry Newbolt, Constable & Co., Ltd. (1919), page 106.

9. quae simul centum tetigit potentem
oppidis Creten : pater, o relictum
filiae nomen pietasque, dixit,
victa furore !
10. unde quo veni ? levis una mors est
virginum culpa. vigilansne ploro
turpe commissum, an vitiis carentem
ludit imago,
11. vana quae porta fugiens eburna
somnia ducit ? meliusne fluctus
ire per longos fuit, an recentes
carpere flores ?
12. si quis infamem mihi nunc iuvenum
dedat iratae, lacerare ferro et
frangere enitar modo multum amati
cornua monstri.
13. impudens liqui patrios Penates,
impudens Orcum moror. o deorum
si quis haec audis, utinam inter errem
nuda leones !
14. antequam turpis macies decentes
occupet malas teneraeque succus
defluat praedae, speciosa quaero
pascere tigres.
15. vilis Europe, pater urget absens :
quid mori cessas ? potes hac ab orno
pendulum zona bene te secuta
laedere collum.
16. sive te rupes et acuta leto
saxa delectant, age te procellae
crede veloci, nisi erile mavis
carpere pensum,
17. regius sanguis, dominaeque tradi
barbarae pellex. aderat querenti
perfidum ridens Venus et remisso
filius arcu.

18. mox, ubi lusit satis : abstineto,
dixit, irarum calidaeque rixae,
cum tibi invisus laceranda reddet
cornua taurus.
19. uxor invicti Iovis esse nescis :
mitte singultus, bene ferre magnam
disce fortunam ; tua sectus orbis
nomina ducet.

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