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## HORACE'S REWRITING OF HOMER IN *CARMEN* 1. 6

CHARLES F. AHERN, JR.

IN THIS "elegant *jeu d'esprit*," as Nisbet and Hubbard describe it, Horace declines to celebrate the military achievements of Marcus Agrippa or of Agrippa's commander-in-chief, Augustus.<sup>1</sup> He names Varius, the epic and tragic poet and his friend in the circle of Maecenas, as better suited to these themes, and while testifying thus briefly to the stature of Agrippa he dwells at greater length on a contrast between heroic poetry, which he professes himself unable to compose, and the lyric verse, convivial and amatory, that he and poets like him favor.<sup>2</sup> The point of such a poem, as D. O. Ross has argued, is not to evade official pressure to commemorate the achievements of the Augustan regime.<sup>3</sup> It is, instead, more strictly literary: to evaluate competing possibilities in theme and style and to illuminate the type of poetry that a poet seeks to write.<sup>4</sup> In interpreting *Carmen* 1.6, however, we should not be satisfied merely to observe a contrast between warlike and peaceful themes,<sup>5</sup> or to note, in the allusive phrases *tenues grandia* (9) and *Musa . . . vetat* (10), Horace's allegiance to the Μοῦσα λεπταλέη of Callimachus. Of that allegiance there can be no doubt, but it provides only a starting point. The interpreter's job is to explore its expression in this poem. Such expression is to be found in the detail of Horace's language; and since Horace has chosen, in his governing antithesis between epic and lyric, to identify epic poetry in general with the poetry of Homer, it is relevant in particular to examine his shading of Homeric colors and to estimate their value in illuminating his literary position. That is the subject of this paper.

My thesis is that Horace has deliberately misrepresented, for humorous effect, the language and action of Homeric poetry. Distortion of Homer serves in the first place to demonstrate, with "characteristic slyness" (as S. Commager says of one phrase), Horace's self-proclaimed unfitness to write in praise of Agrippa;<sup>6</sup> but its further and deeper aim is to parody the

1. R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: "Odes," Book 1* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 83, 87.

2. On *nos* (5, 17) as a true plural, including the speaker and others like him, see A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: "Oden" und "Epoden"*<sup>7</sup> (Berlin, 1930; repr. Dublin and Zurich, 1968), p. 36; cf. J. B. Hofmann, *Lateinische Umgangssprache* (Heidelberg, 1936), pp. 135–36.

3. *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy and Rome* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 123–29.

4. Cf. W. Clausen, "Callimachus and Latin Poetry," *GRBS* 5 (1964): 189.

5. Cf. H.-P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz: Eine Interpretation der "Oden,"* vol. 1. (Darmstadt, 1972), pp. 93–94.

6. *The "Odes" of Horace: A Critical Study* (New Haven and London, 1962), p. 71.

efforts of latter-day Homerizing poets and to illustrate, in the amusing picture that results, Horace's own Alexandrian sensibility. Although the poem is formally addressed to Agrippa, it conducts, as it were *sotto voce*, a conversation with Varius on literary topics. Varius is the one poet in the circle of Maecenas who might be expected, given the genres he cultivated, to regard skeptically the depreciation of poems written on a grand scale. He serves here as a foil, supplying Horace with an audience alert to nuances of literary argument. Horace for his part executes oblique verbal maneuvers that illustrate the appealing and ironic spirit of Alexandrian wit. In fact, his revision of Homeric images may be seen as a mischievous variation on the "quintessentially Alexandrian" form of allusion or literary reference—*oppositio in imitando*, or "correction"—a practice of scholarly poets in which "the poet provides unmistakable indications of his source, then proceeds to offer detail which contradicts or alters that source."<sup>7</sup> Horace's technique in echoing Homer is correction, but turned on its head—"miscorrection," or correction at play.

The oddness of at least some of the phrasing in this poem has been observed as early as the fourth century, but neither its true extent nor its expressive value has been properly appreciated. On the contrary, a distinguished critic has gone so far as to adduce the phrase *Pelidae stomachum* (6), a clear misrepresentation of Achilles' anger in the *Iliad*, as evidence that Horace tended to slip accidentally, and culpably, into versified prose, that "dieser grosse Sprachkünstler trotz allem als Lyriker kein allzu sicheres Stilempfinden besessen habe."<sup>8</sup> The answer to this view is that Horace meant the phrase, but jokingly; and the proof that he meant it, and others like it, is that he elsewhere shows himself capable of rendering Homer with unexceptionable accuracy. Since the present paper analyzes distortions of Homer, it is useful to observe, as a counterpoint, the clarity with which Horace renders the opening verses of the *Odyssey* in *Epistle* 1. 2. 17–22:

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ  
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πολίεθρον ἔπερσε,  
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,  
πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὄντα κατὰ θυμόν,  
ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

rursus quid virtus et quid sapientia possit,  
utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen,  
qui domitor Troiae multorum providus urbis  
et mores hominum inspexit, latumque per aequor,  
dum sibi, dum sociis reditum parat, aspera multa  
pertulit, adversis rerum immersabilis undis.

7. R. F. Thomas, "Virgil's *Georgics* and the Art of Reference," *HSCP* 90 (1986): 185; cf. C. Giangrande, "'Arte Allusiva' and Alexandrian Epic Poetry," *CQ* 17 (1967): 85–97.

8. B. Axelsson, *Unpoetische Wörter: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der lateinischen Dichtersprache* (Lund, 1945), p. 112.

Horace wants to emphasize the philosophical benefits of reading Homer, and hence translates πολύτροπος somewhat tendentiously as *providus*, to suggest the virtue of foresight; he allows himself to add an epithet in one place, to compress two words into one in several others, and to change syntax elsewhere. Yet on the whole he represents Homer with remarkable precision: *domitor Troiae* = Τροίης . . . ἔπερσε; *multorum . . . hominum* = πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων; *urbis et mores . . . inspexit* = ἶδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνων; *latumque per aequor* = ἐν πόντῳ; *dum sibi, dum sociis reditum parat* = ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων; *aspera multa pertulit* = πολλὰ . . . πάθεν ἄλγεα.<sup>9</sup> If Horace could allude to Homer, indeed translate him, as closely and as plainly as this, then we must conclude that allusions to Homer that strike a false note have been made consciously and to a purpose. What seem to be errors derive not from inattention or insensitivity in matters of diction, but from their opposites, vigilance and a discriminating ear.

My argument will be conducted in two stages. In the first, where my aim is to demonstrate the specific distortions of Homer, I shall examine selected phrases, explicating their allusions and analyzing, by the consideration of parallel passages, their stylistic "touch and feel." In the second, I shall address broader questions about the tone of the poem and its character as a statement about poetry. The phrases to be examined come in several clusters: allusions to Homer in two stanzas, and a characterization of epic poetry in another. I begin with the allusions.

The first cluster comes in the second stanza (5–9), where Horace, to illustrate the kind of poetry that he does not write (but Varius does), summarizes the plots of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by alluding to their opening verses:

nos, Agrippa, neque haec dicere nec gravem  
Pelidae stomachum cedere nescii  
nec cursus duplicis per mare Vlixiei  
nec saevam Pelopis domum  
conamur, . . .

Here distortion of Homer has long been recognized. The phrase that summarizes the *Iliad*—"gravem / Pelidae stomachum cedere nescii"—contains at least three errors. As a translation of μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος / οὐλομένην, it distorts the first and last words, so as to convert the austere dignity of Achilles' μῆνις οὐλομένη into the nearly comical grumbling of *gravem stomachum*.<sup>10</sup> Charisius recognized it as an example of ταπεινώσις or diminution, and Axelson complained of a mysterious contrast between the solemn patronymic and the "gemütlichen

9. Cf. *Ars P.* 141–42 "dic mihi, Musa, virum, captae post tempora Troiae / qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbis."

10. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik*, 1:92, ascribes "einen recht kräftigen Ausdruckswert" to *stomachum*, as one of a series of words that evoke "wilde, kriegerische Vorstellungen von Kampf, Zorn und Morden." But the tone of the word is surely less dramatic; cf. Cic. *Att.* 16. 2. 3 "eo plus stomachi et molestiae est populum Romanum manus suas . . . in laudendo consumere," *Att.* 16. 16. 17 "non dubito quin . . . stomachare quod tecum de eadem re agam saepius."

Konversationalismus *stomachus*.”<sup>11</sup> But Horace loves to subvert solemnity, and he has done so here to a purpose: the incongruity “enacts, as it were in verbal pantomime, the poet’s reluctance to deal with such themes.”<sup>12</sup> There is, however, some subtlety in Horace’s choice of *stomachus* as a replacement for μῆνιν; it illustrates what I am calling “correction at play.” In *Iliad* 9. 678–79, a passage cited by Commager to show the inept tone of the words *cedere nescii*, Odysseus reports to Agamemnon on the results of the embassy to Achilles: κείνός γ’ οὐκ ἐθέλει σβέσσαι χόλον, ἀλλ’ ἔτι μᾶλλον / πιμπλάνεται μένεος.<sup>13</sup> The passage not only emphasizes Achilles’ will (as opposed to knowledge of any sort) but names two words for his anger, including one, χόλον, that Horace could perhaps legitimately translate as *stomachus*. Horace, lacking a proper word to translate μῆνιν, has substituted another word from the *Iliad* and translated it, but with humorous results—doubly humorous, if we also recall that the Greek word στόμαχος is itself used by Homer, but only in the anatomical sense of “throat.”<sup>14</sup> The substitution can be read in two ways. On the one hand it suggests a poet whose partial knowledge of Homer produces a travesty of Homeric language. On the other hand it can suggest the controlling and ironic intelligence of a poet who creates the un-Homeric images he needs out of Homer’s own elements. What would be a vice in an epic poem may be a virtue in a lyric poem. In any event, I wish to emphasize the process: Horace refers clearly to one text but brings a second text to bear on the representation of it, and ends up positively misrepresenting the first text. We shall see this process repeated.

The next phrase summarizes the *Odyssey*: “nec cursus duplicis per mare Vlizei.” Here the allusion is less emphatically to the first line of the poem, but the naming of Odysseus as *duplicis Vlizei* can hardly fail to recall by contrast ἄνδρα πολύτροπον. The distortion of the Odyssean Odysseus—“so ready at need” in the translation of Butcher and Lang, *providus* in *Epistle* 1. 2. 19—into the slippery, double-dealing Ulysses of the later Greco-Roman tradition is plain enough, but it is only part of the story. Bentley, who wished to read *reducis . . . Vlizei*, objected to taking *duplex* as properly equivalent to other pejorative epithets (e.g., *fallens*, *pellax*, *varius*) that Latin poets apply to Ulysses.<sup>15</sup> A man may be a διπλοῦς ἀνὴρ in Greek, he argued (cf. Eur. *Rhes*. 394–95), but not *duplex* in Latin, unless he has a double nature like a centaur (Stat. *Theb.* 4. 140 *duplex Hylaeus*). The evidence is not altogether clear. When Ovid (*Am.* 1. 12. 27) complains of a pair of writing tablets that have brought him an unwanted message, “ergo ego vos rebus duplices pro nomine sensi,” the adjective thus applied to the personified tablets seems to carry an ethical implication; so too when it is applied to the forked tongue of metaphoric

11. Charis. *Gramm.* 1:271 K.; Axelson, *Unpoetische Wörter*, p. 113.

12. G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), p. 759.

13. “*Odes*,” p. 71.

14. *Il.* 3. 292, 17. 47, 19. 266; the word is not attested in a metaphorical sense before the second century A.D. (*POxy.* 533. 14 στόμαχους μηδὲ φθόνον).

15. Q. *Horatius Flaccus*<sup>3</sup>, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1728), at *Carm.* 1. 6. 7.

serpents (Plaut. *Truc.* 780–81): “quamquam vos colubrino ingenio ambae estis, edico prius / ne duplices habeatis linguas.” Still, these examples both involve an object that is physically twofold in a way that Ulysses is not; and Bentley’s instinct, if not his conclusion, was right.<sup>16</sup> *Duplex*, in the sense “deceiving,” is a Grecism and slightly out of kilter in Latin. Here again, however, the process by which Horace came to choose the word is part of the story. The choice of *duplex* is another playful act of correction, designed to amuse on a second level readers, like Varius, who have philological interests. The scholiast at *Odyssey* 1. 1 refers to a discussion by the philosopher Antisthenes of the meaning, conceivably derogatory, of πολύτροπον: Homer, he said, did not make Achilles and Ajax πολύτροπους, but rather ἀπλοῦς καὶ γεννάδας.<sup>17</sup> Horace now, after the manner of Alexandrian scholar-poets, picks up on the philological controversy. Observing the antithesis between πολύτροπος and ἀπλοῦς, he ironically equates πολύτροπος with διπλοῦς, then renders it as *duplex*. What points the joke in the end, and makes clear its humorous design, is the simple error of translating πολυ- as *du-*. Not only is this conception of the epic Ulysses anachronistic and undignified; it is bad counting. Thus is a second hero diminished, by the same complex and ironic technique as in the previous line.<sup>18</sup>

The second cluster of errors comes in a rhetorical question in the fourth stanza (13–16), where Horace expresses his own, or any poet’s, inability to treat Homeric themes as Homer did:

quis Martem tunica tectum adamantina  
digne scripserit aut pulvere Troico  
nigrum Merionen aut ope Palladis  
Tydiden superis parem?

In this instance scholars have not been alert to Horace’s mismanagement of his source, still less to his humor. Most have taken the stanza as a composite picture of Homeric warfare based loosely on the fifth book of the *Iliad*. Some have then occasionally expressed puzzlement on a matter of detail (e.g., the naming of Meriones), and excision or transposition of the whole stanza has been proposed to remedy the unwanted implication that no one, not even Varius, could properly write on Homeric themes; but the conventional view sees no misstep here in Horace’s representation of

16. *TLL* 5. 1:2259. 57–80 gives fifteen instances of *duplex* = *mendax*: three times it is applied to a serpent’s tongue (Plaut. *Asin.* 695, *Truc.* 781; once in the Vulgate), and twelve times to persons or personified objects; nine of the latter instances occur in Christian authors, while of the remaining, classical instances two involve objects that are twofold (*Ov. Am.* 1. 12. 27, cited above, and *Cat.* 68. 51 *duplex Amathusia*, explained by Bentley as a reference to homosexual and heterosexual love), and the third is *Carm.* 1. 6. 7 itself.

17. W. Dindorf, ed., *Scholia Graeca in Homeri “Odysseam,”* vol. 1 (Oxford, 1855), p. 9. On the broader controversy and Homer’s own awareness of it, see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1968), pp. 4, 37.

18. A third phrase in this stanza (8 *nec saevam Pelopis domum*) perhaps alludes, as Heinze suggested, to the opening verses of Varius’ own *Thyestes*. The accuracy of the allusion, if there was one, cannot be gauged. Observe, however, that Horace’s paralleling of Homeric and tragic themes echoes the paralleling of heroes and kings in Callim. frag. 1. 3–5.

Homer.<sup>19</sup> Commager indeed praises the verses as Horace's demonstration of "the very ability he disclaims," and W. Wimmel admires the symbolic power with which the poet, moving from the literary to the moral world, exposes "die hinter jedem Stoffproblem gebietende Frage der erschreckenden jetzigen Wirklichkeit."<sup>20</sup> In my view, by contrast, the stanza does not envision Homeric warfare in general but alludes to a particular moment in *Iliad* 5, the confrontation between Ares and Diomedes; it then garbles the picture in a twist of epic tradition similar to, though more subtle than, the second stanza's garbling of the proems. The problems that I shall point to in the fourth stanza concern the appropriateness of its epithets and the relevance of naming Meriones. I shall argue that naming Meriones is as much an error as substituting *stomachum* for μη-νιν, and that when we discover the correct word—here the correct name—lying behind the error, the scene and its humor will suddenly become clear. It is a masterpiece of getting Homer wrong.

What, to begin with, is wrong with the phrase "quis Martem tunica tecum adamantina"? Commentators point out that Ares, like other figures in the *Iliad*, wears bronze, as when he meets Diomedes in 5. 866–67: τοῖος Τυδείδῃ Διομήδῃ χάλκεος ἄρης / φαίεθ'. Adamant, the hardest of all metals, is by contrast unexampled in Homer and therefore foreign to our passage—significantly so, for it occurs first as a metallurgical term in Hesiod, when Earth fashions a new element for the wounding of Uranus (*Th.* 161–62): αἴψα δὲ ποιήσασα γένος πολιοῦ ἀδάμαντος / τεῦξε μέγα δρέπανον (cf. *Op.* 146–48, *Sc.* 136–37, 231–32). To import a Hesiodic image into a Homeric context, in a poem that clearly alludes to Callimachus, is tantamount to importing the spirit of Alexandria into the world of heroes; in Callimachean poetics Hesiod serves as an anti-type to Homer, and in the literary polemics of Latin poets he prefigures Callimachus himself.<sup>21</sup> The substitution of adamant for bronze manages at once to misrepresent Homer and to suggest the provenience of Horace's own literary principles. But the phrase as a whole is un-Homeric in another dimension also: it renders, after its fashion, the compound adjective χαλκοχίτων;<sup>22</sup> but in the *Iliad* that word occurs only in the plural, applied to groups, and it is never applied to Ares.<sup>23</sup> The effect is an artfully contrived mistranslation of Homer, as if by an awkward poet who affects the language but cannot quite get it right—or, at another level, by a literate and ironic poet who

19. Excision was proposed by P. H. Peerlkamp, ed., *Q. Horati Flacci Carmina*<sup>2</sup> (Amsterdam, 1862), pp. 29–30, transposition (to follow lines 1–4, changing *quis* to *qui*) by A. E. Housman, "Horatiana," *JPh* 17 (1888): 303–5 = *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman*, ed. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 92–94.

20. Commager, "Odes," p. 114; Wimmel, *Kallimachos in Rom: Die Nachfolge seines apologetischen Dichtens in der Augusteerzeit*, Hermes Einzelschriften 16 (Wiesbaden, 1960), p. 190; cf. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik*, 1:92.

21. See Clausen, "Callimachus and Latin Poetry," p. 196.

22. On Latin renderings of Greek compounds, see A. Meillet and J. Vendryes, *Traité de grammaire comparée*<sup>4</sup> (Paris, 1968), pp. 420–23; cf., e.g., *Carm.* 3. 27. 34 *centum potens oppidis* = εκατόπολις (*Il.* 2. 649).

23. Cf. G. L. Prendergast, *A Complete Concordance to the "Iliad" of Homer*<sup>2</sup>, rev. B. Marzullo (Hildesheim, 1962), p. 402; the word occurs thirty-one times, twenty-nine times in the genitive, always at verse-end.

takes a sly pleasure in rewriting Homer so as to indicate his own commitment to writing a different kind of poetry. That slyness is confirmed by the etymology of *adamantinus*: it literally means "unconquered" (from  $\alpha + \delta\alpha\mu-$  /  $\delta\alpha\mu\upsilon-$ ), but Horace applies it to Mars at the moment of his confrontation with Diomedes, precisely when he will be wounded.

The next phrase I take out of order: "aut ope Palladis / Tydiden superis parem." The epithet clearly recalls the fifth book of the *Iliad*, in which Diomedes first wounds Aphrodite and then, with Athena's help, Ares himself, and it is perhaps meant specifically to echo Ares' complaint about Diomedes (*Il.* 5. 884):  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha\rho\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\iota\tau'\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\ \mu\omicron\iota\ \epsilon\pi\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\sigma\upsilon\tau\omicron\ \delta\alpha\iota\mu\omicron\nu\iota\ \iota\sigma\omicron\varsigma$ .<sup>24</sup> But it would better translate the Homeric formula  $\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma\ \phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ . This formula, however, is never applied to Diomedes;<sup>25</sup> and the latent paradox of the Latin words ("on a level with those above him") suggests a humorous detachment absent from the Greek. The phrase, then, has Homeric antecedents, but it is not quite accurate in rendering the original language. Its real importance is to point, in conjunction with the earlier reference to Mars, to the scene that Horace imitates: not Homeric battle scenes in general, or even *Iliad* 5 in general, but specifically the encounter between Ares and Diomedes within *Iliad* 5. These two characters flank the stanza, and together they define its central difficulty: allusion to their encounter is interrupted by a seemingly irrelevant reference to Meriones.

The presence of Meriones—"aut pulvere Troico / nigrum Merionen"—has long been thought to require explanation. J. G. Orelli tried to silence objections by pointing to the sonorous quality of the name, but Horace's admiration for the poet who despised "a song that makes a big noise" would seem to argue against his introducing an irrelevant character solely to hear the sound of his name.<sup>26</sup> Nisbet and Hubbard suggest, tentatively but reasonably, that Horace may have had a source other than Homer (just as his "adamant" has a non-Homeric source), but they do not discuss the implications of importing this alien material into a Homeric picture. Syndikus pronounces the problem insoluble: "Was Horaz hier und I 15, 26 bezogen hat, . . . is nicht mehr zu eruieren."<sup>27</sup>

The problem with the phrase, as I see it, is complex. In the first place, Meriones is found in the *Iliad* as the companion of Idomeneus, not Diomedes: he is the inferior co-leader of the forces from Crete (*Il.* 13. 304  $\tau\omicron\iota\omicron\iota\ \text{Μηριόνης τε καὶ Ἰδομενεύς, ἀγοὶ ἀνδρῶν}$ ), paired with his friend as Patroclus is paired with Achilles.<sup>28</sup> He is, moreover, conspicuous chiefly

24. Nisbet-Hubbard, *Commentary*, 1:88, point out that "a match for the gods" (referring to equality with Ares and Aphrodite) differs from "he rushed at me like a demi-god."

25. Cf. Prendergast-Marzullo, *Concordance*, p. 213; the formula occurs thirteen times, and is applied once, interestingly enough, to Meriones (16. 632) and once to Euryalus (2. 565) as the third commander (with Diomedes and Sthenelus) of the forces from Argos.

26. *Quintus Horatius Flaccus*<sup>4</sup>, rev. J. G. Baizer and W. Hirschfelder, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1886; repr. Hildesheim, 1972), p. 49; cf. Callim. frag. 1. 19–20  $\mu\eta\delta'\ \acute{\alpha}\pi'\ \epsilon\mu\epsilon\upsilon\ \delta\iota\phi\acute{\alpha}\tau\epsilon\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\alpha\ \psi\omicron\phi\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\upsilon\ \alpha\iota\omicron\iota\delta\eta\upsilon\ / \tau\iota\kappa\text{-}\tau\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ .

27. Nisbet-Hubbard, *Commentary*, 1:88; Syndikus, *Die Lyrik*, 1:92, n. 25.

28. *Il.* 23. 528  $\text{Μηριόνης, θεράπων ἔδς Ἰδομενῆος}$  (cf. 23. 113, 124, 860, 888); *Il.* 7. 165–66  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\omega\upsilon\ \text{Ἰδομενῆος / Μηριόνης}$  (cf. 8. 263–64, 10. 58–59, 17. 258–59); Roscher *Lex.* 2. 2:2936–37; W. Kroll, "Meriones," *RE* 15 (1932): 1031–35.



in Books 13 and 23, not in Book 5, and his brief appearance in the latter book (5. 59–68), though represented by Kiessling–Heinze as justifying his inclusion in the present stanza, has no bearing on the confrontation between Diomedes and Ares.<sup>29</sup> It belongs to an isolated series of vignettes, in which the fighting of each of six warriors receives roughly equal notice: Agamemnon (38–42), Idomeneus (43–48), Menelaus (49–58), Meriones (59–68), Meges (69–75), and Eurypolus (76–83). This action, encompassing the whole of Meriones' involvement in Book 5, takes place when Ares is absent from the battlefield; and it shows him, as usual, closely aligned with Idomeneus.<sup>30</sup> We can hardly fail to conclude that Meriones is out of place when Horace causes him to stand in the otherwise cohesive group of Mars, Athena, and Diomedes.

A second problem is the un-Homeric character of *pulvere Troico / nigrum* as a compound epithet. Κόνις and related words occur seventy-one times in the *Iliad*, chiefly in phrases that describe death: for example, the epitaph of Cebriones (Il. 16. 775–76 ὁ δ' ἐν στροφάλλιγι κόνις / κεῖτο μέγας μεγαλωστί, λελασμένος ἵπποσυνάων), or the grief of Achilles, symbolically a death, upon learning that Patroclus has died (Il. 18. 26–27 αὐτὸς δ' ἐν κόνιῃσι μέγας μεγαλωστί ταυνοσθεῖς / κεῖτο).<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere dust is raised by horses, or in athletic competition, or in the commotion of battle, where, on the single occasion when color is mentioned, it turns the army not black but white.<sup>32</sup> Nowhere, however, does it form part of a warrior's epithet, and nowhere is Meriones himself described as dusty. Horace's phrasing, then, even though it recalls language used elsewhere in the *Carmina* to describe fighting,<sup>33</sup> is not suited to Homeric language in general or to any particular action undertaken by Meriones in the *Iliad*. The epithet, like the name, is out of place, and the phrase as a whole therefore misrepresents Homer at several levels.

To solve the problem of Meriones, let us suppose that Horace, as he has earlier written *stomachum* for μῆνιν and adamant for bronze, has here deliberately substituted Meriones for another Homeric character. But for whom? My candidate is Sthenelus, the son of Capaneus, who as Diomedes' charioteer enjoys precisely the association that the passage requires. Sthenelus is named twelve times in the *Iliad*, always explicitly in conjunction with Diomedes, and is naturally most conspicuous in Book 5.<sup>34</sup> The specific locus of Horace's allusion, I suggest, is the scene in which Athena comes to aid Diomedes in his fight with Ares, when she takes the reins of his chariot, after first knocking Sthenelus to the ground (Il. 5. 835–37):

29. On Books 13 and 23, cf. Kroll, "Meriones," col. 1032; on Book 5, Kiessling–Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus*<sup>7</sup>, p. 37.

30. Note the interlocking of natural pairs: Agamemnon—Idomeneus—Menelaus—Meriones.

31. Cf. Kiessling–Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus*<sup>7</sup>, p. 37.

32. Il. 5. 502–3 ὡς τότε Ἄχαιοι / λευκοὶ ὑπερθε γέροντο κονισάλω (of dust raised by horses); Cf. Prendergast–Marzullo, *Concordance*, pp. 233–34.

33. Cf. *Carm.* 1. 15. 19–20 "adulteros / cultus pulvere collines"; 2. 1. 21–22 "duces / non indecoro pulvere sordidos."

34. Cf. Il. 2. 564; 4. 367, 403; 5. 108, 109, 111, 241, 319, 835; 8. 114; 9. 48; 23. 511.

ὣς φασμένη Σθένελον μὲν ἄφ' ἵππων ὥσε χαμᾶζε,  
 χειρὶ πάλιν ἐρύσασ', ὁ δ' ἄρ' ἐμμαπέως ἀπόρουσεν.  
 ἡ δ' ἔς διφρον ἔβαινε παρὰ Διομήδεα δῖον.

Horace's picture, with its four names, suddenly makes a kind of sense. Mars and Diomedes supply the framework. The immediate relevance of Athena (ἡ δ' . . . παρὰ Διομήδεα) is echoed by Horace's juxtaposing her name with that of Diomedes in *ope Palladis / Tydiden*. Sthenelus is alluded to, but by the wrong name. And the epithet *pulvere Troico / nigrum* emerges as a fanciful amplification of Homer's χαμᾶζε: it does not translate the word, but describes the result of being knocked to the ground. The whole stanza comes into focus: Horace follows the same principle of mistranslation that we have observed earlier, but now extends it to include even the translation, if we can call it that, of a name.

Have we reason, however, to think that Horace would joke in this manner with names, or could expect a reader to see the point? And why choose Meriones in particular as a substitute for Sthenelus? I suggest, after Nisbet and Hubbard, that he takes Meriones from a second source, much as he takes adamant from Hesiod.<sup>35</sup> I also suggest that a parallel is available to show both that Horace is willing to rewrite Homeric names and that a confusion specifically between Meriones and Sthenelus was easier for an ancient reader to recognize than it is for us. The evidence is twofold. First, the scholium at *Iliad* 2. 96 testifies that someone named Meriones was a herald of Diomedes.<sup>36</sup> This scholium, or the cyclic tradition of which it is likely a vestige, provided Horace with a means for "correcting" the scene in the *Iliad* in accordance with an Alexandrian affection for the byways of legend. The second, confirming piece of evidence comes from *Carmen* 1. 15. In that poem Nereus warns Paris about the consequences of abducting Helen, among them that he will find himself in flight before the attack of Greek heroes (23–28):

urgent impavidi te Salaminius  
 Teucer, te Sthenelus sciens  
  
 pugnae, sive opus est imperitare equis,  
 non auriga piger. Merionen quoque  
 nosces. ecce furit te reperire atrox  
 Tydides melior patre.

Nisbet and Hubbard remark the non-Homeric association of Meriones and Diomedes, but in truth Meriones is here equally associated with Sthenelus, if not more so: *quoque* (26) looks backwards, whereas *ecce* (27) announces a new threat. No matter the several possibilities of connection, however: the important point, from the perspective of *Carmen* 1. 6, is the joining of all three names in sequence. Taken together with the *Iliad* scholium, it suggests a tradition in which the roles of Meriones and Sthenelus, in relation to Diomedes, were in some measure conflated. We

35. *Commentary*, 1:88.

36. H. Erbse, ed., *Scholia Graeca in Homeri "Iliadem,"* vol. 1 (Berlin, 1969), pp. 197–98.

may therefore reasonably imagine an ancient reader as being disposed to link Meriones and Sthenelus more closely than we do, and that is all the opportunity that Horace needs. Notice also that Horace has here assigned to Diomedes a role played in the *Iliad* by Menelaus, in a scene no less familiar than the confrontation between Ares and Diomedes in Book 5. His reasons might be debated, but the fact itself is clear.<sup>37</sup>

The sum of the argument, then, is that Horace in *Carmen* 1. 6 uses a non-Homeric source to “correct” the Homeric scene, in the process creating a cockeyed picture of Homeric realities. The picture at once supports his posture of being unable to compose epic properly and provides evidence of Alexandrian learning—witty and ambiguous evidence, in fact, that makes play even with the process of correction itself. Nothing could be more in keeping with the Callimachean ethos of the poem.

Horace’s allusions to Homer cluster in the second and fourth stanzas, but a phrase in the first stanza, spoken directly to Agrippa, suggests a similar playfulness (1–2):

scriberis Vario fortis et hostium  
victor Maeonii carminis alite. . .

The words identifying Varius as an epic poet (*Maeonii carminis alite*) sound another false note, in their contrast with the adjacent *fortis et hostium* / *victor*. This contrast, between “brevity, worthy of an archaic *elogium*,” in the description of Agrippa and “flowery exuberance” in the description of Varius, points to an incongruity between the proposed subject and its epic vehicle.<sup>38</sup> One wonders what the dour Agrippa, “*vir rusticitati propior quam deliciis*” in the elder Pliny’s words (*HN* 35. 26), would have thought about entrusting his reputation to a bird of Maeonian song. One may even wonder whether Varius would have thought himself flattered by the description. In fact Varius is here portrayed in colors so gorgeous as to make him a figure of amusement: the phrase describing him derives from a literary sensibility that is worlds apart from that of Homeric poetry.

In the first place, to name Homer as Maeonides is a Hellenistic conception known from the poets of the *Anthology*.<sup>39</sup> The tone of Horace’s periphrasis, in this regard, is perhaps best caught by the description of Homeric poetry as *Maeoniae . . . chartae* in *Ciris* 62—that model of post-neoteric, hyper-Alexandrian verse, “obscure in thought and affected in expression.”<sup>40</sup> Then, too, the identification of Varius with a bird should come under suspicion. Such identifications are known elsewhere and are not necessarily humorous, but discrimination is required in evaluating

37. Kiessling–Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus*<sup>7</sup>, p. 79, suggest that Menelaus’ reputation had been too far damaged in post-Homeric poetry; Nisbet–Hubbard, *Commentary*, 1:199, suggest that Horace may be following Bacchylides.

38. Nisbet–Hubbard, *Commentary*, 1:84; cf. the Livian formula *vir fortis ac strenuus*, e.g., 38. 41. 3 “plurimum Q. Minucii Thermi morte damni est acceptum, fortis ac strenui viri.”

39. E.g., *Anth. Pal.* 9. 97. 5–6 (Augustan age) Μαιονίδεω διὰ μουσαν, ὄν οὐ μία πατρὶς ἀοιδὸν / κοσμεῖται; cf. 7. 2. 2, 7. 213. 6, 9. 192. 2, 9. 575. 5.

40. F. R. D. Goodyear,  *OCD*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “Appendix Vergiliana.”

them. In a reasonably straightforward example (*Anth. Pal.* 7. 19. 1–2) the poetry of Alcman is identified with the tuneful voice of the swan, where the epithet *χαρίεντ'* precludes reading the identification as humorous: *τὸν χαρίεντ' Ἀλκμᾶνα, τὸν ὕμνητῆρ' ὕμναίων / κύκνον*. And there is nothing ridiculous about Vergil's Lycidas (though there is some self-deprecating humor) when he compares his voice to the squawking of a goose in contrast to the swan-like voices of Varius and Cinna (*Ecl.* 9. 35–36): "nam neque adhuc Vario videor nec dicere Cinna / digna, sed argutos strepere inter anser olores." In this context everyone is a bird, and the only question is, "what kind of a bird is this poet or that?"

The situation is different, however, when a poetic bird is found sitting next to a *vir fortis*. A startling contrast emerges, the more so if we ask ourselves how else Horace might have referred to epic poetry, or how a historian or orator, such as could pen the phrase *vir fortis et hostium victor*, would refer to it. Consider the words of M. Aper, no particular friend of poetry, as he nonetheless concedes the high value of eloquence in all its forms (*Tac. Dial.* 10. 4): "ego vero omnem eloquentiam omnisque eius partis sacras et venerabilis puto, non solum cothurnum vestrum aut heroici carminis sonum, sed lyricorum quoque iucunditatem. . . ." "The high style of heroic song"—*heroici carminis sonum*—there is a vehicle for celebrating the glories of a *vir fortis* with proper dignity.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, "the bird of Maeonian song" is a born cliché that is protected from ridicule only by the consciously playful tone with which it is voiced. If Varius, epic and tragic poet that he was, warmed to this description of himself, he did so, I suspect, not because it paid him an enduring compliment, but because he knew how to take a joke. In the second and fourth stanzas Horace has distorted Homeric scenery; here he has done no less for the figure of the contemporary epic poet.

At this point we may turn from the analysis of specific phrases to broader questions about the tone and character of the poem as a whole. These questions bear first on the interpretation of Horace's own question in the fourth stanza, then on the tactfulness, or lack of it, in his treatment generally of Varius, Agrippa, and Augustus, and finally on the point of his humor in illuminating his own literary values.

The problem of the fourth stanza is that its question—*quis digne scripserit?*—would seem to invite the answer "no one," which would imply that not even Varius is capable of composing in Homer's vein. Such an implication, it has been thought, contradicts the sense of the opening verses and is, moreover, insulting to Varius in a way that can hardly be expected from Horace, who elsewhere expresses admiration for his poetry and appreciation of his judgment.<sup>42</sup> These considerations led Peerlkamp to excise both this and the following stanza and Housman to reposition it, as a

41. Cf. *Prop.* 3. 3. 16 *carminis heroici . . . opus*.

42. Cf. *Sat.* 1. 10. 43–45, conjoining Varius and Vergil for their achievement in opposite genres: "forte epos acer / ut nemo Varius ducit; molle atque facetum / Vergilio adnuerunt gaudentes rure Camenae"; in 1. 10. 81, Varius is linked with Maecenas and Vergil, among others, as readers whose approval Horace values.

relative clause, after the first stanza, where it would assert the fitness of Varius to write like Homer rather than deny the fitness of any poet to do so.<sup>43</sup> E. Fraenkel suggests, more temperately, that the poem is not concerned, after the first stanza, with Varius' abilities, but only with Horace's inability to write like Homer; the question may therefore be answered, without offense to Varius, "No ordinary poet, and certainly not I."<sup>44</sup> Even this formula does not satisfy Nisbet and Hubbard, who believe that "the poem falls apart if a broad hint at Varius is not intended here."<sup>45</sup> The integral interpretation of the ode that I have suggested, however, points to this conclusion: we ought to say "no one" and be done with the matter. In the first place, given the tone and content of the fourth stanza itself, we can hardly imagine that Varius would wish to accept its picture as characteristic of his own epic style—he himself should be the first to say, "no one, and certainly not I." The second reason for saying "no one" lies in the identification of Varius with the *ales*. That identification is an act of humorous aggression designed to put his friend on the defensive by representing his character as an epic poet prejudicially. But if the opening verses constitute a backhanded compliment, then to supply the answer "no one" in the fourth stanza poses no contradiction in sense or tone. Indeed, to speak solemnly of the friendship between Varius and Horace, as if friendship could brook neither competition nor wit, is to misconstrue the tone of the poem and the character of the friendship it implies.<sup>46</sup>

Under the heading of tactfulness, however, or the lack thereof, something should be said about the sensibilities not just of Varius, but of Agrippa and Augustus as well, the twin recipients of the poem (5, 11). If Varius can be imagined as appreciating Horace's play with Homeric language, even as sharing his enjoyment of it (with the pleasure of a professional, though in the opposition party), we may still wonder whether Agrippa or Augustus, from the nonliterary world, might have been offended at finding themselves thus used as foils for the amusement of poets. And if the poem would have offended them, can Horace have meant it to be read that way?

Augustus' views on literary portraits of himself are preserved in a condensed report of Suetonius, to the effect that, while he fostered intellectual accomplishment in every way he could, he did not want his own name to be treated lightly (*Aug.* 89. 3): "componi tamen aliquid de se nisi et serio et a praestantissimis offendebatur, admonebatque praetores, ne paterentur nomen suum commissionibus obsolescere." Horace will qualify as *praestantissimus*, but will he perhaps run afoul of the requirement to write of the *princeps* seriously? I think not. Nothing that he says about Augustus (or about Agrippa) is derogatory or even indiscreet, and the humor of the poem, though it undermines the efforts of contemporary epic

43. Cf. n. 19 above.

44. *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), p. 234.

45. *Commentary*, 1:88.

46. For a similar analysis of Horatian friendship, see E. A. McDermott, "Horace, Maecenas and Odes 2, 17," *Hermes* 110 (1982): 211–28 (esp. 227–28).

poets as anachronistic, does not expose contemporary warfare or its leaders to ridicule. Moreover, the situation envisioned in Suetonius' report differs markedly from the present situation. The second half of the sentence requires emphasis: Augustus was concerned with speech in public contests, where the presiding vice will not have been a light-hearted irony in the defense of a literary position, but a heavy-handed flattery of the *princeps* that would ultimately subvert his carefully nurtured reputation. Finally, we ought to remember that Augustus was familiar with the *recusatio* as a type of poem and with the broad outlines (at least) of the poetic creed that flourished among the poets around Maecenas. He might, as a politician, have preferred a more ingenuous poetry, amenable to the straightforward advertisement of Augustan virtues, but he knew enough to prefer great poets in their obliquity over fulsome hacks. It is safe to assume that he would have recognized *Carmen* 1. 6 as belonging essentially to a conversation about literary principles, to which contemporary names had been added as grace notes; and he may well have smiled himself at Horace's evasions and wit.

The response of Agrippa is harder to gauge. On the one hand, he does receive a handsome compliment in the opening verses; on the other, he might have been sensitive to any suggestion that Maecenas' poets were having fun at his expense. But if he was alert enough to notice Horace's florid idiom here, and his mismanagement of Homer later, then he was likely alert enough to see the lesson from Horace's perspective. Such may even have been his own perspective. It is worth considering whether Agrippa would have preferred to be glorified by any poet—Horace, Varius, or another—rather than be commemorated with oratorical dignity, as Agricola, for instance, was later commemorated by Tacitus. "Agricola posteritati narratus et traditus superstes erit": that is how to commemorate a Roman general.

A final question is left: how does Horace's mismanagement of Homer bear on his espousal of the Callimachean λεπτόν, to which he alludes in the programmatic antithesis *tenuēs grandia* (9)? It functions at two levels. At one level it is parody. If Horace's proclamation of his own incapacity for epic composition, supported by his errors in paraphrasing Homer, is in fact an oblique statement of his disinclination to compose on epic themes—as one might expect from a poet who admires Callimachean poetics—then those same errors may be taken to point obliquely to the characteristic vices of a now degenerate epic tradition. That tradition was represented by the enemies of Callimachus, poets who (if we convert his terms into terms that they might themselves have used) expected a heroic subject matter in poetry, a continuous narrative, and above all a resonant style, the quality that made a poem sound right.<sup>47</sup> To them Horace ascribes very different and less flattering qualities: the anachronism of importing

47. Cf. frag. 1. 19–20 μέγα ψοφέουσιν αἰοιδὴν and βροντᾶν οὐκ ἔμόν, where images of sound introduce, by antithesis, Apollo's commendation of the Μοῦσα λεπταλέη (24); cf. also the emphasis on sound in the words of Envy in *Ap.* 106: "οὐκ ἄγαμαι τὸν αἰοιδὸν ὅς οὐδ' ὅσα πόντος ἀείδει."

foreign materials, like adamant, into the heroic world; the more important anachronism of imposing onto heroic figures an alien moral framework such as reduces Odysseus to a paradigm of duplicity; the debasement of epic language into the clichés of Maeonian song; and, governing all, a real ignorance of Homer's poetry, betokened neatly by the misplaced Meriones, but extending beyond errors of fact to an ignorance of the essential differences between Homer's world and the poet's own. At a first level, then, as parody, Horace's errors support his preference for a Callimachean position by pointing a critical finger at detractors of the slender style.

At the second level, however, these same errors, paradoxical as it may seem, exemplify the virtues of the style to which Horace himself is committed. In a sense, he eats his cake and has it, too: he pokes fun at the errors of bad epic poets, but then shows how he himself, writing outside the epic tradition, can achieve a bracing and witty effect by a calculated distortion of Homer. His virtues are those of a sophisticated and pronouncedly literate imagination, alert to matters of tone, nuance, and context, and delighting in the playful re-imagining of a familiar literary reality. What distinguishes the amusing error from the ridiculous error is the poet's wit, his sense of place and congruity, and the sense he conveys of being in control of his materials—that is, of being up to his job as a poet. If straightforward imitation of the *Iliad* can hardly be expected to yield anything better than a second-rate epic poem, Iliadic materials may yet gain fresh life by being turned upside down, in a perspective of wit, as emblems of a world in amusing disarray. Intelligent delight in the contemplation of such a world lies close to the heart of Horace's Alexandrianism in this poem. It is a restrained and judicious Alexandrianism, deploying the technique of allusion and "correction" but declining to embroider the fabric too richly. Horace does write for a learned audience, but with a lightness of touch that mocks the pedant: it is, after all, learning gone wrong to convert *πολύτροπος* into *duplex* or to turn Sthenelus into Meriones. The constructive aim of *Carmen* l. 6 is not to be found in propositions that poetry ought to possess this quality or that; Callimachus had supplied an adequate theory in that respect. It aims, instead, to illustrate in the texture of its detail the literate and subtle pleasures of writing poetry, and of looking at the world, from a Callimachean perspective: *non praeter solitum leves*.<sup>48</sup>

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