

## NOTES ET DISCUSSIONS

### The Deserted Village and Book 8 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

In Book 8 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter and Mercury go in search of human hospitality, and, disappointed in their quest, curse the country in which they find a thousand homes 'bolted and barred against them':

*Haud procul hinc stagnum est, tellus habitabilis olim  
nunc celebres mergis fulicisque palustribus undae.  
Iuppiter huc specie mortali cumque parente  
uenit Atlantiades positus caducifer alis.  
Mille domos adiere locum requiemque petentes,  
mille domos clausere serae. Tamen una recepit,  
parua quidem stipulis et canna tecta palustri,  
sed pia Baucis anus parilique aetate Philemon  
illa sunt annis iuncti iuuenalibus, illa  
consenuere casa paupertatemque fatendo  
effecere leuem nec iniqua mente ferendo*<sup>1</sup>.

Not far off is a stagnant pool: once it was habitable country, but now it has become a stretch of water, haunted by marsh birds, divers and coots. Jupiter visited this place, disguised as a mortal, and Mercury, the god who carries the magic wand, laid aside his wings and accompanied his father. The two gods went to a thousand homes, looking for somewhere to rest, and found a thousand homes bolted and barred against them. However, one house took them in: it was indeed a humble dwelling roofed with thatch and reeds from the marsh, but a good-hearted old woman, Baucis by name, and her husband Philemon, who was the same age as his wife, had been married in that cottage in their youth and had grown grey in it together. By confessing their poverty and accepting it contentedly, they had eased the hardship of their lot<sup>2</sup>.

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1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. TARRANT, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004, p. 239-240.

2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. M. INNES, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1955, p. 212.

Goldsmith seems to have recalled this passage in *The Deserted Village*, overlaying his economic analysis of enclosure with the mythological tone of his source. In his view, the values exemplified by Baucis and Philemon – simplicity and contentment – have been displaced by luxury, and luxury in turn has *inhospitably* effaced the village life that once flourished in Auburn. The only ‘guest’ at the mansion of acquisitiveness is a bittern:

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,  
 Thy sports are fled and all thy charms withdrawn;  
 Amidst thy bowers the tyrant’s hand is seen,  
 And desolation saddens all thy green:  
 One only master grasps the whole domain,  
 And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain:  
 No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,  
 But, choked with sedges, works its weedy way.  
 Along thy glades, a solitary guest,  
 The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;  
 Along thy desert walks the lapwing flies,  
 And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.  
 Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,  
 And the long grass o’ertops the mouldering wall<sup>3</sup>.

Goldsmith would have had other biblical *loci maledicti* at his disposal, not least the passage in Isaiah 13.19 ff that predicts the fall of Babylon:

**20** It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

**21** But the wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.

**22** And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

But instead of drawing this celebrated desertscape, cast in the gloating prophetic future, he turned to the marshy landscape in *Metamorphoses* 8. Ovid, unlike Isaiah, and like Goldsmith, begins with the prosperous past and cuts to the unproductive present, tracking the result of the gods’ commination. In precisely the same way, *The Deserted Village* shows how the ‘curse’ of enclosure has been realized in a wasteland, populated only by aquatic or semi-aquatic birds – bitterns and lapwings, *vice* ‘mergi’ and ‘fulicae’. The reversion of a canalized river to a natural marsh, ‘choked with sedges’ and ‘weedy’, registers, as in the Latin poem (and with the same anthropocentric emphasis – *tellus habitabilis*), as a vision of judgement. Goldsmith strikes a ‘Philemon and Baucis’ note – in a tradition that extends at least as far beyond him as Schumann’s *Fröhlicher Landmann* – when he gives the reasons for this tableau of desolation:

3. THOMAS GRAY, *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Roger LONSDALE, London, Longman, 1969, p. 677.

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,  
 When every rood of ground maintained its man;  
 For him light labour spread her wholesome store,  
 Just gave what life required, but gave no more:  
 His best companions, innocence and health;  
 And his best riches, ignorance of wealth <sup>4</sup>.

## An Allusion to Horace in Thackeray's *Adventures of Philip*

The first in Horace's third book of *Odes* looks ahead to Henry IV's meditation on his vexed wakefulness, noting that, even for those powerful enough to reclaim land from the sea, *post equitem sedet atra Cura* ["black Care ... takes her seat behind the horseman"] <sup>5</sup>. Thackeray has made free use of this line to depict the resilience of a painter in *The Adventures of Philip*:

Though Ridley has had his trials and troubles, as we shall presently learn, his art has mastered them all. Black care may have sat in crupper on that Pegasus, but has never unhorsed the rider <sup>6</sup>.

Here "art" means both general life-skills and a specific proficiency in figural depiction, and so justifies the portmanteau-ed presence of Pegasus, which we more readily associate with verbal than with plastic inspiration. He serves to remind us of the challenge of mastery posed to Bellerophon. A certain sprezzatura (not unlike Ridley's own) arises from the half-modernizing metonym of a saddle strap. Although the Romans certainly used cruppers – *postilena* – Horace had been concerned to focus on a menacing, faceless phantom, not the technicalities of harness. But in Thackeray's paraphrase, one senses the ridged pressure of the leather upon her buttocks, and a further loss of *color Romanus* to the noun which, though Anglo-Norman in origin, rhymes with the Germanic adjective 'upper'. A feeling of airy freeness also arises from the nonce idiom, 'in crupper', which is not to be found in the *OED* – though the latter *does* list an eighteenth-century phrase (signifying 'in the rear' rather than 'on the rear part') with reference to Defoe: "The king follows them on the crupper with thirteen troops of horse".

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 678.

5. Horace. *The Odes and the Epodes*, trans. C. E. BENNETT, London, William Heinemann, 1968, p. 170-171.

6. William Makepeace THACKERAY, *The Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World Showing Who Robbed Him, Who Helped Him, and Who Passed Him By to Which is Now Prefixed A Shabby Genteel Story*, 2 vols, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1887, vol. 1, ch. 6, p. 170.

## Matthew Arnold's "Shakespeare" and *Odes*, I, 1

The mountain that "to the stars uncrowns his majesty"<sup>7</sup> in the octave of Matthew Arnold's "Shakespeare" is equated in the sestet with the writer whose knowledge of "stars and sunbeams" derives from the same sort of spatial affinity. So far as I can tell, the debt for this magnification of a poet into a demigod conversant with the stars has not been recorded, but it's clear that Arnold drew on Horace's first ode (*Maecenas atavis edite regibus*), which ends with his claiming:

*Quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseris,  
Sublimi feriam sidera vertice.*

But if you rank me among lyric bards, I shall touch the stars with my exalted head<sup>8</sup>.

### An Allusion to *Aeneid* II in Lyly's *Endymion*

In Act 3, Scene 4 of Lyly's *Endymion*, Eumenides remarks in Geron a 'A strange humour' and proceeds to 'enquire the cause'<sup>9</sup>. He receives the following reply:

You must pardon me if I deny to tell it, for, knowing that the revealing of griefs is, as it were, a renewing of sorrow, I have vowed therefore to conceal them, that I might not only feel the depth of everlasting discontentment, but despair of remedy<sup>10</sup>.

Annotating this passage, David Bevington observes that it contains 'A proverbial-sounding idea, though Dent R89 [*Proverbial Language in English Drama Exclusive of Shakespeare*] cites no other instances'. His sense of the sentiment's

7. Matthew ARNOLD, *Poems*, sel. Kenneth ALLOT, intro. Jenni CALDER, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, p. 123.

8. *Op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 4-5.

9. John LYLY, *Endymion*. Ed. David BEVINGTON, Manchester, University Press, 1996, p. 132.

10 *Ibid.*

'proverbiality' (which is to say its familiarity) clearly arises from Lyly's having generalized Aeneas' response to Dido when she commands him to narrate his story (*Aeneid*, II, 3-8):

*Infandum, regina, iubes renouare dolorem,  
Troianas ut opes et lamentabile regnum  
Eruerint Danaï quaeque ipse miserrima uidi  
Et quorum pars magna fui. Quis talia fando  
Myrmidonum Dolopumue aut duri miles Ulixi  
Temperet a lacrimis*<sup>11</sup>?

'A renewing of sorrow' directly translates *renouare dolorem* and out of *infandum* [...] *dolorem* Lyly has paraphrased 'the revealing of griefs' and the resolution 'therefore to conceal them', a paraphrase that redefines *infandum* from 'unspeakable' to 'unspeakable'. The point about proverbs is their universality, their capacity impersonally to apply to all human experience, and Lyly has found inspiration in the way Aeneas opens up the privacy of his grief to all comers – even putatively to his sworn enemies – through the generality of *quis* (*Quis talia fando* [...] *temperet a lacrimis*). Virgil's strategy no doubt inspired the author of the *Stabat Mater* to voice the same confidence in the universality of the grief he relays to the world (*Breviarum Romanum, Pars Verna*, p. 749<sup>12</sup>):

*Quis est homo, qui non fleret,  
Matrem Christi, si uideret  
In tanto supplicio?  
Quis non posset contristari  
Christi matrem contemplari  
Dolentem cum filio.*

Working from the same assumption, Geron extrapolates a proverbial corollary, viz. that a narrative of grief were better suppressed than articulated, and then given it a further perverse twist. Aeneas breaks the self-imposed ban of a *dolor infandus*, sharing his grief with a Carthaginian audience, and converting it, even in the solitude of his narration (*unus fata renarrabat*) into something communal:

*Sic pater Aeneas intentis omnibus unus  
fata renarrabat diuum cursusque docebat*<sup>13</sup>

There is a therapeutic value in giving verbal shape to otherwise formless feeling, but Geron chooses rather to keep silent about his grief, hoping thereby to keep it unique, and therefore available only to himself for a perpetual private savouring.

Rodney Stenning EDGECOMBE

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11. *Virgil*. With an English Translation by H. Rushton FAIRCLOUGH, London: William Heinemann, 1967, 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 294.

12. *Breviarium Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini Restitutum S. Pii V Pontificis Maximi Jussu Editum Aliorumque Pontificum Cura Recognitum Pii Papae X Auctoritate Reformatum cum Nova Psalterii Translatione Pii Papae XII Jussu Edita*, Turin, Sumptibus et Typis Mame, 1949, 4 vols.

13. *Op. cit.* (n. 11), vol. 1, p. 394.