

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

PSEUDO-VERGIL'S *ULTRIX FLAMMA*: A PROBLEM IN LINGUISTIC PROBABILITIES

“ . . . animumque explesse iuvabit
ultrix flammae et cineres satiasset meorum.”
taliam iactabam et furibunda mente ferebar.

flammae N: *famam, famae* codd. Serviani

[*Aeneid* 2. 586–88]

The recent studies of G. P. Goold and C. E. Murgia have shown convincingly—to those who can be convinced—that the “Helen episode,” *Aeneid* 2. 567–88, is not the work of Vergil.¹ These verses, preserved by Servius alone, not the direct Vergilian tradition, have been printed in the text of Vergil for centuries and will continue to be so printed. This is as it should be, provided that their spurious character be signaled by the conventional square brackets. Since this passage is a permanent part of our traditional “Vergil” and since some fundamental principles of wider application in the interpretation of Latin texts are involved, it seems to me *pretium curae* to re-examine verse 587, a verse described by Murgia as “the most troublesome line textually” in the entire Helen episode. Here *ultrix flammae* was for long the vulgate lection. Recent editors (Mynors, Austin) reject it, as does Goold;² only Murgia essays a defense.³ I shall argue that Murgia is correct in accepting the vulgate reading, but that no one hitherto has provided a fully adequate explication of the syntax and meaning.

The first duty of anyone who supports *flammae* here is to make perfectly clear from the outset that, in so doing, he is defending not a genuinely transmitted *lectio*, but a *coniectura* found in a tenth-century Servian MS (N); most Servian MSS read here either *famae* or *famam*.⁴ Those who would for this reason

automatically dismiss *flammae* without a hearing only reveal their own misconception of the proper use of MS evidence. Genuine readings corrupted in transmission have been recovered *e coniectura* by scholars in the tenth century no less than in the twentieth.

Perhaps the most widespread objection to *flammae* (and to *famae*) is the syntax; the genitive case with *explesse* is widely regarded as either impossible or at least extraordinary: “It is very doubtful whether ‘*explere animum flammae*’ would be Latin, no instance being quoted of ‘*explere*’ with the gen.” (Nettleship). “*Flammae* is a stopgap . . . *ultrix flammae* is impossible Latin . . . the genitive phrase of which *ultrix* is a remnant cannot be connected grammatically with *animumque explesse iuvabit* . . .” (Austin⁵). “Critics have embarked on a hopeless course in explaining *ultrix fama* or *flammae* as a genitive after the verb *explesse*. Since the composer could have written *ultrix fama* (or *flamma*), the regular construction, without affecting the metre, it is virtually certain that he intended something else” (Goold⁶).

The “proof,” therefore, that *animum explesse . . . flammae* is impossible Latin consists in the fact that *explere c. gen.* is unattested elsewhere. To this Goold adds the (correct) observation that the poet could have used the “regular” construction *c. abl.*⁷ I consider this latter objection first. If it is to have any

1. G. P. Goold in *HSCP*, LXXIV (1970), 101–168; C. E. Murgia in *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, IV (1971), 203–217. For the earlier scholarship see these two papers.

2. Goold, pp. 144–45.

3. Murgia, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 209–213.

4. For details see Goold, pp. 140 ff.; Murgia, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 210; and especially Murgia’s earlier paper in *HSCP*, LXXII (1967), 311 ff.

5. In his edition of *Aeneid* 2 (Oxford, 1964), pp. 227–28, summarizing his earlier discussion in *CQ*, LV (1961), 192–94 (where he writes in part, “*Explere* occurs nowhere else with a genitive, and it could only be explained here by analogy with the genitive use after *implere*”).

6. Pp. 144–45.

7. Some may wish to explain the genitive here as a “Grecism”; compare, e.g., *Od.* 19. 117: *μη μοι μάλλον θυμόν*

validity at all, one must concede a fundamental premise implicit in this objection, to wit, that poets in general and Latin poets in particular do not affect variety. In fact, the reverse is the truth. That good Latin poets consciously strove to fashion new creations within the tradition of their inherited poetic diction is common knowledge. That our poet did this ὄλω τῷ θυλάκῳ is more than adequately demonstrated by his much-discussed innovations *sceleratas sumere poenas* (576) and *sumpsisse merentes . . . poenas* (585–86). The existence of the construction *explere c. abl.* is in itself no argument against the possibility of *explere c. gen.*, if it can be shown that this latter construction is unobjectionable syntax.

Compounds of *-pleo* may govern either an instrumental ablative or a partitive genitive; the same is true of other verbs of kindred meaning, e.g., *abundo*. For particulars one may consult Hofmann-Szantyr, *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik*, pp. 82–83, where *compleo*, *impleo*, *repleo*, *oppleo*, and *expleo* (from this passage) are documented *c. gen.* Before *explere c. gen.* was pronounced “impossible” solely on the grounds that it is attested only once (I leave to the reader’s imagination the consequences of extending that principle systematically to all extant Greek and Latin), a much more fundamental question should have been asked: what is there inherent in the meaning of this particular compound of *-pleo* which would isolate it syntactically from other compounds of *-pleo* and prevent it from governing a genitive? The answer is, nothing. Certainly not the preverb *ex-*, which is merely intensive here; *explere* differs little in meaning from *compleo*, *implere*, *repleo*, all of which are found with the genitive. Indeed, *repleo c. gen.* is little better attested than *explere*. Two examples survive in the literature, one apiece in Plautus and Livy; Hofmann-Szantyr

also cite it from inscriptions. Livy’s treatment of *repleo* is particularly instructive. He uses this verb twenty-seven times; seven times it appears with neither case, nineteen times with the ablative. The sole occurrence with the genitive is 6. 25. 9, “ac repletas semitas . . . puerorum et mulierum.” Twenty-seven examples is an adequate sampling for one author; consistency requires that the same principle which condemns *explere c. gen.* because it is unique should at least raise serious doubts about the soundness of *repleo c. gen.* in Livy, for whom it is unique. Editors do not tamper with *repletas* here, because it is the statistical principle which is faulty, not Livy’s Latin. (One need only remind oneself that Livy affects the genitive with such verbs; it is mere accident that but one case of *repleo c. gen.* has survived in this author.)

The fact that competent scholars were prepared to reject *explere c. gen.* simply because it does not recur in extant Latin suggests to me that it may serve some purpose to give a few examples of comparably isolated constructions, from passages in which the syntax has never been questioned.

(1) Hor. *Odes* 3. 27. 69–70: “‘abstineto’ / dixit / irarum calidaeque rixae.”

Abstinere does not occur elsewhere with the genitive. (The participle *abstinens c. gen.* is of course another matter; that is merely a regular usage of participles in *-ns*, *-ntis* to denote a “constant disposition.”)

(2) Hor. *Odes* 3. 30. 10–14:

dicar, qua violens obstrepit Auidius
et qua pauper aquae Daunus agrestium
regnabit populorum, ex humili potens
princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos
deduxisse modos.

Regnare c. gen. is not found elsewhere in classical Latin;⁸ a scholium here remarks, “adnotanda

ἐπιλήσις ὀδύων. This seems to me wholly unnecessary. Murgia, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 213, suggests that the poet used the genitive, which clearly connotes fullness, to avoid the ambiguity which might arise from an instrumental ablative: “A reading ‘it will please me to sate my mind by means of avenging flame’ might be misconstrued as an indication that flame would be Aeneas’ weapon. With the genitive, the metaphorical use is clear.” This possibility occurred to me independently and it may be correct. In theory the distinction is valid; in actual

usage I am not now so sure of this explanation. Contrast Hor. *Odes* 2. 19. 6 *pleno* . . . *Bacchi pectore* and *Odes* 3. 25. 1–2 “quo me, Bacche, rapis tui / plenum” with Vergil *ap. Sen. Suas.* 3, 5 *plena deo*.

8. For a possible example in Ennius *Ann.* 157, *Romae regnare quadratae*, see Hofmann-Szantyr, p. 83 (with references); the syntax is disputed. Hofmann-Szantyr (*loc. cit.*) refer to *Didasc. Apost.* 27. 26 and 27. 29 for *regnare c. gen.* in late Latin.

locutio per genetivum figurata.” The genitive is clearly a Grecism.⁹

(3) Hor. *Sat.* 1. 6. 127–28: “pransus non avide, quantum interpellet inani / ventre diem durare, domesticus otior.”

Interpellere governing an infinitive clause is found only here. The scholiast comments, “‘interpellet’ pro eo quod est ‘prohibeat’ posuit.” It is a natural construction, the infinitive clause functioning substantively as the accusative object of the verb. On *domesticus otior* in the following verse, the scholiasts observe: (a) “domi otiosus maneo; notandum ‘otior’ fictum verbum”; (b) “verbum finxit quod significat ‘otium ago.’” In fact, *otior* is found also in Cic. *Off.* 3. 14. 58, a passage which is instructive: “C. Canius, eques Romanus, nec infacetus et satis litteratus, cum se Syracusas atiandi, ut ipse dicere solebat, non negotiandi causa, contulisset, dictitabat se hortulos aliquos emere velle,” etc. The context shows clearly that *otior* here is Canius’ coinage, intended to contrast comically with *negotior*. The statements of the scholiasts to Horace, while technically inaccurate, are actually pertinent. Obviously *otior* formed no part of Latin poetic vocabulary in Horace’s day; Canius and he coined the word independently (compare below).

(4) Hor. *Sat.* 2. 6. 83–84: “neque ille / sepositi ciceris nec longae invidit avenae.”

Invidere c. gen. is found only here in classical Latin; there is a second, post-classical example in the fourth-century ecclesiastical author Hilary of Poitiers. The scholiasts are silent; see, however, Quint. *Inst. orat.* 9. 3. 17.

(5) Hor. *Sat.* 2. 7. 43–44: “aufer / me voltu terrere.”

Aufero c. inf. is not attested elsewhere; the scholiast remarks, ‘*aufer*’: *desine*.

Such instances could be multiplied many times over, but these should suffice to show

9. The poetic delicacy of introducing a Greek construction into this sentence, in which Horace is anticipating his future fame specifically in the environs of his local Italian birthplace, seems to have escaped the commentators. (I follow E. Fraenkel, *Horace*, pp. 304–305, in the interpretation of these verses.) The Greek, that is to say literary, syntax may appear, at first glance, out of place in this context; in fact it serves as a unifying link of the Greek and Roman elements in the poem (“princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos”). Compare Fraenkel, *op. cit.*, p. 265: “The cultural world in which the mind of an educated Roman moved was composed of a Greek and a Roman sphere. No picture of man’s experience was complete unless both spheres were viewed together.” See also Fraenkel, pp. 388–89.

that syntactical singularities cannot be condemned as impossible *ohne weiteres*.¹⁰ Accordingly, I beg the reader’s indulgence, if I discuss one more passage in order to make my own position perfectly clear. Bentley in the *Praefatio ad lectorem* of his edition of Horace owned that this work was sent to the printer “sine lima curisve secundis . . . sic tamen, uti spero, ut nec sermonis puritatem . . . in his *αὐτοσχέδιοις* desideres.” One of his small detractors, best left unnamed (although the name which he bore was appropriate enough), pointed out that the phrase *sermonis puritas* was itself impure Latin. That is to say, *puritas* does not occur in extant classical Latin. No scholar to my knowledge has disputed this allegation, and there the matter now stands. I am prepared to state that Bentley’s *sermonis puritas*, despite its lack of attestation,¹¹ is correct classical Latin. *Purus* is used frequently of style by the “best” writers and *puritas* is the corresponding noun formation; compare, for example, *parvus/parvitas*. It happens that *parvitas* has survived in Cicero—once. It is not attested before Cicero and first occurs after him in that model of pure Latinity, Valerius Maximus. The closest synonym for the expression *sermonis puritas* is *sermonis integritas*. This too has survived in Cicero—once. It is found in no other classical writer.

It remains to examine the meaning of *animum explesse ultricis flammae*. Earlier defenders of the vulgate reading tended to render *ultricis flammae* by such phrases as “avenging flame” or “fire of vengeance” and let it go at that. Small wonder that many balked at this apparently vague locution. Murgia¹² provided the first real breakthrough in the understanding of these verses by

10. I have deliberately included examples where there is a possibility that two instances of a particular usage may have survived. Those who would seize upon this to argue that such cases differ essentially from the unique *explere c. gen.* had best put this paper aside here and now and read no more. Their comprehension of the use of probability in evaluating limited evidence differs too widely from my own.

11. Lewis and Short cite *sermonis puritas* from St. Jerome. To infer from this, as some doubtless will, that the phrase is specifically “church Latin” is the mark of an *ἀναλόγητος* in Latin letters.

12. *Op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 210–12.

pointing out that the poet has here employed ring composition; verses 586–87 answer to verses 575–76: “*exarsere ignes animo; subit ira cadentem / ulcisci patriam et sceleratas sumere poenas.*”¹³

One of Austin’s objections to *flamma* was that it never means “anger” in classical Latin. Murgia counters by observing that “*ignis* in 575 can refer to anger because it is amplified by *ira*, and *ultricis flammae* here can include ‘the anger of vengeance,’ because it recalls *ignes* in 575, which was an anger of vengeance.”¹⁴ Murgia goes on to reveal a certain uneasiness about this: “The phrase *ultricis flammae* is loosely used however. Although the vengeful flame with which Aeneas feeds his mind includes anger, it is more the vengeance than the anger which will satisfy him and his ancestors.”¹⁵ The difficulty seems imaginary to me. *Ultricis flammae* must connote primarily vengeance; the adjective *ultricis* places that beyond doubt. Anger is necessarily included in this concept; it would not occur to an ancient to seek revenge except in anger. Conversely, in verses 575–76, where *ignes* suggests primarily anger, the notion of vengeance is surely present as well. *Ulcisci patriam eqs.* shows that clearly enough. If Murgia’s ring composition is valid here, as I believe, we should interpret the earlier verses in the light of the later ones as well as vice versa. Any attempt at a rigid distinction between “anger” and “vengeance” in such a context would be un-Roman. Granted that in the one passage *ira* is more prominent and in the other *ultio*, nevertheless both concepts are present in both passages. This may be loose ring composition, but ring composition it remains.

There perhaps cannot be full agreement on such refinements. Nor is it necessary, since the poet of the Helen episode elsewhere gives abundant proof of a certain looseness of expression. The real achievement of Murgia is the demonstration that *flammae*, however understood, is almost certainly what the poet wrote; the “ring” balance of these two sets of

verses cannot be comfortably dismissed. What I should like to suggest here is that *ultricis flammae* is not quite so vague an expression as it has seemed. In this verse Aeneas wishes to avenge his kin (*cineres . . . meorum*); in Roman belief the deities who presided *par excellence* over such vengeance were the *Furiae*. The constant accompanying symbol of the *Furiae* is the flaming torch:

Nolite enim ita putare, patres conscripti, ut in scaena videtis, homines consceleratos impulsu deorum terreri furialibus taedis ardentibus . . . hae sunt impiorum furiae, hae flammae, hae faces
[Cic. *In Pis.* 20. 46].

Eos agitant insectanturque furiae, non ardentibus taedis, sicut in fabulis, sed angore conscientiae
[Cic. *Legg.* 1. 14. 40].

dumque pavent illi, vergit furiale venenum pectus in amborum praecordiaque intima movit. tum face iactata per eundem saepius orbem consequitur motis velociter ignibus ignes
[Ovid *Met.* 4. 506–509].

. . . cum his furiis et facibus [Cic. *Har. resp.* 2. 4].
. . . tamquam furiam facemque huius belli
[Livy 21. 10. 11].

In Vergil (the primary inspiration for the poet of the Helen episode) such thought-clusters are easily documented:

Eumenidum veluti demens videt agmina Pentheus et solem geminum et duplices se ostendere Thebas, aut Agamemnonius scaenis agitated Orestes, armatam facibus matrem et serpentibus atris cum fugit ultricesque sedent in limine Dirae. ergo ubi concepit furias evicta dolore . . .
[Aen. 4. 469–74].

Compare also the language in Book 7: “*furiisque accensas pectore matres*” (392); “*facem iuveni coniecit et atro / lumine fumantis fixit sub pectore taedas*” (456–57). See also “*heu furiis incensa feror!*” (4. 376) and “*furiis accensus et ira*” (12. 946—note the collocation of <avenging> furies and anger; compare above). It is on the basis of such expressions as these that our poet seems to have forged a new phrase.¹⁶ It is a bold one.

13. Note that *sceleratas sumere poenas* in verse 576 responds to *sumpsisse merentes . . . poenas* in verses 585–86.

14. *Op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 212.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ultrix flamma* recurs in Stat. *Theb.* 11. 4. It has been correctly observed that there it is used of lightning, as if that were a refutation of its use here. It has not been observed that in that very passage of Statius *furias* occurs (11. 1).

Both of its components, *ultrix* and *flamma*, suggest the *Furiae*; *ultrix* refers to their function, *flamma* to their symbol. Of course, the *furiae* suggested by *ultrix flamma* are a synecdoche for *ultio*; Aeneas is not to be thought of as stuffing his *animus* full of Eumenides! Just possibly the poet of the Helen episode, in ascribing the avenging flame of the Furies to a human being, took his cue from the phrase describing Clytemnestra in *Aeneid* 4. 472, *armatam facibus matrem* (quoted more fully above). “Animum explesse ultricis flammae” may be thought an extravagant expression, but it is not really so far removed from such a locution as “[Allecto] fixit sub pectore taedas” (*Aen.* 7. 457, a passage which our poet may have recalled).

That this interpretation involves a high degree of allusiveness I should be the last to deny. Such allusiveness, however, is in keeping with the style of this poet, so far as it can be traced.¹⁷ Moreover, he seems to have given us a clue to his meaning in the very next verse: “*talia iactabam et furiata mente ferebar.*”

Furiare is the denominative verb from *furia*. The history of this word has been preserved by ancient scholarship and it can be shown that *furiata* here should be taken in a literal sense. (That is, *furiatus* here has not yet become a faded metaphor, as in the English “infuriate” *vel sim.*) Horace (*Odes* 1. 25. 13–15) writes, “*cum tibi flagrans amor et libido, / quae solet matres furiare equorum, / saeviet circa iecur ulcerosum.*” There are several scholia to this passage: (1) “‘furiare’: novo verbo usus est quasi in furorem libidinis urgere”; (2) “‘furiare’ verbum fictum videtur quod significat: cum furore concitare.” The verb *furiare* therefore was introduced to Latin poetic diction by Horace. If earlier writers had used it (and we cannot know), it did not gain currency before Horace. Compare above, my remarks on *otior*. The phrase *furiata mente* occurs twice in the second book of the *Aeneid*, in our passage and in 2. 407. At 2. 407 Servius comments: “‘furiata’: ‘furius’ est a quo furor numquam recedit, ‘furiatus’ qui furit ex causa . . . quidam sane participium volunt ‘furiata’ a verbo figurato apud Horatium

furiare.” It is obvious that the ancient commentators saw nothing faded about *furiata*; it was a new and vigorous word to them.

We can perceive now the meaning of the passage: in verses 586–87 Aeneas states that it will please him to fill his spirit with *ultrix flamma*, that is, with the vengeance which the Furies send. Then in verse 588 *mente* answers to *animum* and *furiata* to the connotations of *ultricis flammae*. It is a mistake to attempt a rigid distinction between the connotations of *furiae* / *furiare* and *furor* / *furere*; the scholiasts are not helpful on this point. To a Roman all these cognates would tend to be interwoven. The reader will recall that the normal means of punishment employed by the Furies was madness (*furor*) and that a widely current definition of *ira* was *furor brevis*. A striking example of the looseness of expression typical of the Helen episode may be seen in verses 572–73. Despite the fact that throughout this passage Aeneas is represented as the potential avenger and Helen as the potential recipient of vengeance, that is, as the object of the Furies’ wrath, she is described in verse 573 as an *Erinyis*—immediately after she has been depicted as “*Danaum poenam et deserti coniugis iras / praemetuens*”!

Silius Italicus *Punica* 17. 292–94 is also instructive for our passage: “*dux, vetus armorum scitusque accendere corda / laudibus, ignifero mentes furiabat in iram / hortatu decorisque urebat pectora flammis.*” This passage, incidentally, is telling against Austin’s claim that *flamma* never means “anger” in classical Latin.

I may close by hammering home (as Goold puts it) one more nail in the coffin of Vergilian authorship for these verses. We have seen that *furiata mente* occurs at *Aeneid* 2. 407 and 2. 588; it is not found elsewhere in the *Aeneid*. 2. 588 is part of the Helen episode, a passage which does not come down in the Vergilian MSS (except for a few which took it over from Servius). At 2. 407 the ancient commentators found the phrase sufficiently striking to merit discussion; the reference to Horace reveals that some learning lies behind their comments. There is not the slightest indication in these

17. As has been admirably done by Goold and Murgia.

comments that these scholars were aware that *furiata mente* was to reappear some one hundred and seventy verses later in the same book. Of itself this *argumentum e silentio* would have little weight; however, the many cogent objections already raised by others do

suggest that any attempt to discount this silence as mere coincidence may not be fully adequate.¹⁸

R. RENEHAN

BOSTON COLLEGE

18. For a comparable case, see Hes. *Theog.* 218–19 and 905–906. These two sets of verses are almost identical; editors generally delete 218–19 (omitted by Stobaeus) as an inter-

polation. M. L. West, *ad loc.*, aptly observes as one of the arguments against their genuineness that “there are no scholia on the lines here, but there are on 905–6.”

THE AUTHORITY OF THE ELDERS: A NOTE

The pattern-seeking analysis of the *Agamemnon* by Mae J. Smethurst (“The Authority of the Elders [The *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus],” *CP*, LXVII [1972], 89–93) highlights the problems associated with the use of this form of literary criticism to interpret Greek tragedy. It is not that Greek tragedians did not use verbal patterns and repeated images; on the contrary, as Anne Lebeck has recently demonstrated, such things form an important aspect of the *Oresteia*. But there is a danger that the pattern which we find may be of our own making rather than something which is really there in the text. Miss Smethurst has clearly recognized the danger (p. 92), but I believe that she has not wholly avoided it.

The discovery of patterns which are purely subjective is probably a risk inherent in this type of criticism; but Greek tragedy appears to be particularly vulnerable to such misinterpretation, perhaps because the conviction that it has contemporary relevance, though right in itself, unfortunately encourages critics to forget that it was composed in a world remote from us in time, environment, and habits of thought. Under these circumstances, any patterns discovered specially need to be checked against external controls. I suggest three of these (the list is not necessarily exhaustive). (1) The pattern discovered must be compatible with the natural sense of the Greek, and in particular must not be explicitly contradicted by other verbal evidence. (2) It must not negate more essential, and more certain, structural features of the play. (3) It must be compatible with what we know about the circumstances and mental attitudes existing at the time the play was written.

Tested against these controls, Miss Smethurst’s analysis is unconvincing on certain points. I should like to take two examples.

First, the idea of dichotomy. No one with the slightest acquaintance with the *Oresteia* will doubt that the conflict of rival claims is a basic theme, but it does not therefore follow that it must be traceable in every detail of the trilogy, and the attempt to find it in the twin kingship of the Atreidae is, I believe, demonstrably erroneous. Miss Smethurst draws attention to the series of δι- compounds in line 43, and interprets them as symptomatic of dichotomy. But “twoness” is an ambivalent idea: it may stress dichotomy, but it may also, on the contrary, be used to convey *σύν τε δὴ ἔρχομένω*; and more than a subjective impression is needed to decide between them. In fact, the necessary “controls” are available here. The genitives *διθρόνου* and *διακῆπτρου* of line 43 are in fact dependent on the next line, *τιμῆς ὄχυρόν ζεύγος Ἀτρειδᾶν*, and the phrase *ὄχυρόν ζεύγος* most naturally suggests that the two kings work closely together. And this interpretation is confirmed by the very similar language of lines 109–110, where Aeschylus refers to *διθρόνον κράτος* and then immediately paraphrases it by *ξύμφρονα ταγάν*. This contradicting verbal evidence, not discussed by Miss Smethurst, surely invalidates her claim that dichotomy is being suggested.

But even if this verbal proof were not to hand, there is the economy of the play as a whole to consider. Discord, though a basic theme, need not necessarily be omnipresent; and there is no obvious cause for its appearance here, for discord between the Atreidae is