OCTAVIAN AND ORESTES IN THE FINALE OF THE FIRST GEORGIC

> Saevit toto Mars impius orbe,
> ut cum carceribus sese effudere quadrigae,
> addunt in spatia, et frustra retinacula tendens
> fertur equis auriga neque audit currus habenas.　　(Virg. *G.* 1.511–14)

So ends the first Georgic, a horrifying image of civil war as a chariot careering out of control, threatening to destroy all in its path, its driver totally powerless.[1] But who is the charioteer? For one commentator he is 'Man... who can no longer guide his *own* course, and is consequently involved in moral chaos: "tam multae scelerum facies" (*G.* 1.506)'.[2] While accepting the legitimacy of this reading one would be grateful to be able to be more specific. Mars may seem the obvious candidate at first,[3] but comparing him to himself is hardly a logical, let alone a traditional, device of imagery. Perhaps the charioteer is Madness, and this possibility is strengthened if we consider the passage in the *Aeneid* which Virgil intended to recall and correct the cataclysmic vision of the first Georgic. The Golden Age is restored, the lunacy of civil war is over:

> Furor impius intus
> saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis
> post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento　　(*Aen.* 1.294–6)[4]

Such an interpretation is, moreover, corroborated if we accept that Virgil is alluding to the tragic topos of Madness (or the Furies) as a charioteer: see e.g. Eur. *El.* 1253, *Or.* 36, *IT* 79ff. esp. 82f. τροχηλάτου | μανίας and, above all, *HF* 880ff. βέβακεν ἐν δίφροισιν ἁ πολύστονος | ἅρμασι δ᾽ ἐνδίδωσι | κέντρον ὡς ἐπὶ λώβαι | Νυκτὸς Γοργὼν ἑκατογκεφάλοις | ὄφεων ἰαχήμασι Λύσσα μαρμαρωπός.[5]

Few readers, however, will be able to resist the temptation to identify the charioteer of Virgil's simile with Octavian, the young man who alone, the poet claims, can save the world from chaos ('hunc saltem everso iuvenem succurrere saeclo/ ne prohibete', *G.* 1.500f.).[6] The recognition that Virgil is thinking of tragedy allows us to take this further and to identify our simile as an imitation of one single and highly significant model. At the end of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, with his mother's blood on his hands,

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[1] In Latin literature cf. *G.* 3.103f., *Aen.* 5.144f., Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.114ff., though none of these passages can compare in its structural or thematic importance and complexity.

[2] B. Otis, *Virgil. A Study in Civilised Poetry* (Oxford, 1964), p. 161, comparing *G.* 1.202f. 'si bracchia forte remisit,/ atque illum in praeceps prono rapit alveus amni'.

[3] There is a fine description of Mars driving to war in his chariot at Statius, *Theb.* 3.420ff.

[4] As well as imitating the earlier simile this description is also modelled on a famous painting by Apelles, which Augustus placed in his new forum, apparently in the most prominent part of the temple of Mars Ultor (D. Servius 'non in aede Iani, sed in alia in foro Augusti', Plin. *N.H.* 35.27 'in foro suo celeberrima in parte'). The significance of this will become evident. Curiously, Pliny (ibid. 93) says it showed 'Belli imaginem restrictis ad terga manibus *Alexandro in curru triumphante*'.

[5] I owe these references to A. Garvie, *Aeschylus*, Choephoroi (Oxford, 1986), pp. 335f. (note on vv. 1021–5).

[6] Compare R. O. A. M. Lyne, in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry*, ed. T. Woodman and D. West (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 64f. 'The chariot begins to seem the state helpless in the grip of war – for there is no effective *auriga*. This there must be and of course it must be Caesar. He must – somehow – control the state, govern its warlike propensities: he must make sure that the *retinacula* are not unheeded.' More recently Lyne has made the stimulating suggestion that 'in the impotent "auriga" of 514 there is a whisper of the Sun's son Phaethon, figuring the "son" of the dictator as yet ineffective in managing the chariot of state': see *Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1987), p. 140 n. 63.

Orestes feels madness pressing in on him. As his wits slip from his control, he compares himself to a charioteer unable to keep his horses on course:

> ἀλλ' ὡς ἂν εἰδῆτ', οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπη τελεῖ,
> ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἡνιοστροφῶ δρόμου
> ἐξωτέρω· φέρουσι γὰρ νικώμενον
> φρένες δύσαρκτοι, πρὸς δὲ καρδίᾳ φόβος
> ᾄδειν ἕτοιμος ἠδ' ὑπορχεῖσθαι κότῳ.   (Cho. 1021–5)[7]

Virgil's acquaintance with the legend of Orestes and its prominence in tragedy is made clear by the reference to a theatrical performance of, it seems, the *Eumenides* in the *Aeneid*:

> aut Agamemnonius scaenis agitatus Orestes,
> armatam facibus matrem et serpentibus atris,
> cum fugit ultricesque sedent in limine Dirae   (Aen. 4.471–3)[8]

Pease *ad loc.* observes that the story was ' a favorite among the Romans' and inclines to the belief that Virgil has in mind one of the numerous Latin tragedies on the subject, suggesting the *Dulorestes* of Pacuvius as the most likely candidate. Surely there is no reason why Virgil could not have known the *Oresteia* directly: Highet, indeed, points to two possible imitations of Aeschylus' trilogy in the *Aeneid*.[9]

If the allusion is acknowledged, the parallel between Orestes and Octavian is an illuminating one. Orestes avenged his father, but to do so he had to murder his mother, and his punishment was the madness of guilt and sin inflicted on him by the Furies. Octavian's battle-cry was the avenging of the murder of his adoptive father Caesar, and with Antony he destroyed the 'Liberators' at Philippi. He celebrated his own piety both in words in the *Res Gestae*

qui parentem meum trucidaverunt, eos in exilium expuli iudiciis legitimis *ultus* eorum facinus et postea bellum inferentis rei publicae vici bis acie (*RG* 2)[10]

and in stone in the great temple of Mars Ultor.[11] Yet Octavian's hands, too, were stained with unlawful blood. This young but nonetheless 'chill and mature terrorist',[12] to obtain the money he needed for his campaign against the Liberators and to satisfy his other ambitions, pursued with savagery the proscriptions of the innocent which he had originally resisted,[13] and so precipitated the wholesale impious madness of the civil war:

> ergo inter sese paribus concurrere telis
> Romanas acies iterum videre Philippi   (G. 1.489f.)[14]

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[7] Compare also Aesch. *PV* 883f. ἔξω δὲ δρόμου φέρομαι λύσσης | πνεύματι μάργῳ, γλώσσης ἀκρατής.

[8] Line 471 is in part an imitation of *Od.* 1.30 τόν ῥ' Ἀγαμεμνονίδης τηλεκλυτὸς ἔκταν' Ὀρέστης. In both cases the sonorous patronymic is no doubt intended to draw attention to Orestes' role as his father's avenger.

[9] G. Highet, *The Speeches in Virgil's Aeneid* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 171 (comparing *Agam.* 747–9 and *Aen.* 4.573) and 229f. (comparing *Agam.* 1280 and *Aen.* 4.625).

[10] Compare Tac. *Ann.* 1.9. '*pietate erga parentem* et necessitudine rei publicae, in qua nullus tunc legibus locus, ad arma civilia actum'; 1.10 dismisses this claim as a 'fraudulent pretext' (R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), p. 157). Suet. *Aug.* 10 also hints at political expediency as the real motive: 'nihil convenientius ducens quam necem avunculi vindicare tuerique acta.'

[11] Vowed in 42 b.c. and finally dedicated in 2 b.c. Compare *RG* 21.1, and see also Suet. *Aug.* 29.2, Ov. *Fast.* 5.567ff.   [12] Syme, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 191.

[13] Suet. *Aug.* 27.1 'restitit quidem aliquamdiu collegis ne qua fieret proscriptio, sed inceptam utroque acerbius exercuit.' Suetonius also records various horror stories of both the proscriptions (*Aug.* 13) and the capture of Perusia (*Aug.* 15).

[14] Compare also 2.510 'gaudent perfusi sanguine fratrum.' Augustus later claimed (*RG* 3) that he had spared every citizen who had asked for clemency.

Orestes' piety, then, far from cleansing Argos, deepened its guilt and gave new life to an ancient curse. So too, Virgil may be suggesting, Octavian's zeal to avenge his father has prolonged the ancestral guilt of his people[15] through the sinful spilling of Roman blood by Roman on the fields of Philippi.[16]

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[15] To the curse of the house of Tantalus (Aesch. *Agam.* 1186ff.) cf. Virgil's allusion to the curse of Laomedon (*G.* 1.501f.; also *Aen.* 4.541f.).

[16] Pathos is also present for any reader who feels that 'fertur equis auriga' (*G.* 1.514) echoes Soph. *El.* 725 πῶλοι βίᾳ φέρουσιν (the false tale of the death of Orestes in a chariot race) or Eur. *Hipp.* 1224 βίᾳ φέρουσιν (the death of Hippolytus).

HORACE, *EPOD.* 6.16

At *CQ* 81 (1987), 523–4, S. J. Harrison takes exception to the transmitted text of Horace, *Epod.* 6.16:

> caue, caue; namque in malos asperrimus   11
>   parata tollo cornua,
> qualis Lycambae spretus infido gener
>   aut acer hostis Bupalo.
> an, si quis atra dente me petiuerit,   15
>   inultus ut flebo puer?

Harrison observes that commentators translate '"inultus" not "unavenged" but "without taking revenge", construing it with Horace as the subject of "flebo" and not with "puer"', and he then asserts 'This use of "inultus" is wholly unparalleled; the adjective is elsewhere always used passively of persons or objects unavenged and never in the active sense of "unavenging"'.

Harrison seems not to have observed that 'inultus' is used not only passively, but also reflexively: just as one may avenge another who has suffered some injury, one can also avenge oneself. The *ThLL* VII.2 (1959), 241.74 sqq., s.v. 'inultus', lists plenty of examples of the latter usage, e.g. Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 50 'atque ille [Marius] uitam suam, ne inultus esset, ad incertissimam spem...reseruauit', or Seneca, *Herc. Fur.* 1187 'ut inultus ego sim?'. Horace himself at *Serm.* 1.8.44–5 makes a wooden Priapus say 'ut non testis inultus | horruerim uoces Furiarum et facta duarum' and go on to describe how he avenged himself by loudly breaking wind and scaring off the two witches, and at *Serm.* 2.3.296–9 Horace makes Damasippus say

> haec mihi Stertinius, sapientum octauus, amico
> arma dedit, posthac ne compellarer inultus.
> dixerit insanum qui me, totidem audiet atque
> respicere ignoto discet pendentia tergo.

If any further confirmation of the received text is needed, one may cite Claudian's imitation at *In Eutropium* 2.208–10:

> ...tolerabis iniquam
> pauperiem, cum tela geras? et *flebis inultus*,
> cum pateant tantae nullis custodibus urbes?,

which is cited not only in the *ThLL* but also in Keller's standard edition.[1]

Even if there were not an abundance of direct support for the transmitted 'inultus

[1] O. Keller [ed.], *Q. Horati Flacci Opera* i[2] (Leipzig, 1899), 303, *ad loc.*