

MANILIUS' SOLITARY CHARIOT-RIDE (*ASTRONOMICA* 2.138–40)*

In the proem to *Astronomica* 2, Manilius reflects at length on his role as a poet. After reviewing the history of poetry from Homer onward (2.1–48), he comes to the depressing conclusion that all topics have already been used up (49–52)—a conclusion that does not, however, prevent him from claiming absolute originality for himself (53–9). His unique subject matter is the orderly working of the universe according to fate (60–104), whose exploration Manilius describes as a near-religious enterprise, stressing that the divine cosmos is voluntarily revealing itself both to mankind as a whole and to the poet in particular (105–35). He ends the proem with a triumphant assertion of his mission, which, being sanctioned by fate (149), sets the poet apart from the common crowd (136–48). The first, carefully crafted sentence of this finishing paragraph runs as follows:

haec ego diuino cupiam cum ad sidera flatu
 ferre, nec in turba nec turbae carmina condam,
 sed solus, uacuo ueluti uectatus in orbe
 liber agam currus non occursantibus ullis
 nec per iter socios commune regentibus actus, 140
 sed caelo noscenda canam, mirantibus astris
 et gaudente sui mundo per carmina uatis,
 uel quibus illa sacros non inuidere meatus
 notitiamque sui, minima est quae turba per orbem. (136–44)

The text printed is that of Housman, which has been accepted by Goold in his Teubner and Loeb texts.¹ In this paper, my intention is not to challenge Housman's admirable textual choices (I shall therefore not discuss in detail other editions and the sometimes somewhat different readings found in them), but rather to call into question the editor's analysis of the syntax of 138–40. By raising points of grammar, I shall arrive at a novel interpretation of the three lines, which will, I hope, contribute to our understanding of the entire passage and of Manilian poetics in general.

At first sight—and I shall argue that this first impression is correct—the main clause of the period appears to consist of three future verbs in the first-person singular, with the second and third, both introduced by *sed*, parallel to one another: . . . *nec in turba nec turbae carmina condam, sed solus . . . liber agam currus . . . sed caelo noscenda canam* . . . ('. . . I shall compose songs neither in the crowd nor for the crowd, but alone, I shall freely drive my chariot . . . , but I shall sing for the sky to hear . . .'). However, Housman, as he explains in his commentary *ad* 138–141, and as is apparent from his punctuation, understands the second verb, *agam*,² not as a future but as a present

* The idea for this paper grew out of the work on my book *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius* (Oxford, 2002), in which I briefly mention the problem discussed in the following on pp. 203–4, n. 16. My thanks for comments and suggestions go to Robert A. Kaster and to *CQ*'s anonymous reader. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Fondation Hardt pour l'Étude de l'Antiquité classique (Vandœuvres, Switzerland), where I was able to engage in Manilian research during an enjoyable stay in the summer of 2001.

¹ A. E. Housman, *M. Manilii Astronomicum liber secundus* (London, 1912); G. P. Goold, *M. Manilii Astronomica* (Stuttgart, 1998²); and id., *Manilius, Astronomica* (Cambridge, MA, 1992²).

² It should be pointed out that *liber agam* (139) is actually an—in my eyes ingenious—conjecture by Bentley (*M. Manilii Astronomicum ex recensione et cum notis Richardi Bentleii* [London, 1739] *ad* 2.139) for the clearly corrupt *ubera tam* and *umbrato (curru)* of the manuscripts. My argument in this paper is based on the assumption that *liber agam* is indeed what Manilius wrote.

subjunctive, thus taking *uacuo ueluti . . . regentibus actus* (138–40) as a subordinate clause (with *ueluti* having the same force as *uelut si*). On this interpretation, the first *sed* (138) belongs already with *canam* and is simply repeated in 141. The Loeb edition of Housman's follower Goold makes it clear how—on this analysis—lines 137–41 are to be translated: 'Not in the crowd nor for the crowd shall I compose my song, but alone, as though borne round an empty circuit I were freely driving my car with none to cross my path or steer a course beside me over a common route, I shall sing it for the skies to hear . . .'.³

A first objection to Housman's interpretation is that it is counter-intuitive to take the second one of the three first-person singular forms in *-am* as belonging to a different grammatical category from that of the other two, especially since understanding all three verbs as futures is grammatically straightforward, while the construction suggested by Housman is anything but (witness the awkwardness of the repetition of *sed* and of the hyperbaton between *ueluti* and *agam*⁴). Second, given that elsewhere the poet presents himself as literally directing a chariot through the skies (2.58–9, 5.1–11)—not to mention his fondness for the metaphor of celestial travel in general—it would be surprising if in this instance he were to use the solitary chariot-ride described in 2.138–40 as a mere point of comparison ('as if I should drive . . .') instead of painting a grand image of himself as an actual charioteer ('I shall drive . . .').⁵

However, Housman has his reasons for the interpretation outlined in his commentary, the most important of which appears to be Bentley's athetesis of 138–40

³ It is telling that other translators, even if they adhere to Housman's text and punctuation for these three lines, tend to render *agam* as a future and thus as part of the main clause. For example, W. Fels (*Marcus Manilius, Astronomica: Astrologie* [Stuttgart, 1990]), whose text is identical to that of Housman, translates, 'allein wie ein Fahrer im einsamen Rennwagenrund will ich frei meinen Rennwagen lenken'. Likewise, R. Scarcia in S. Feraboli, E. Flores, and R. Scarcia, *Manilio: Il poema degli astri (Astronomica), vol. 1, libri I–II* (n.p., 1996)—translating the text of his co-editor Flores, who departs from Housman only in reading *gerentibus* instead of *regentibus* in 140—writes, 'ma da solo, come trasportato lungo una pista vuota libero spingerò il mio carro'. That Flores himself interprets the syntax of the three lines instead exactly like Housman (or at least did so up to 1991) is clear from his translation 'ma da solo canterò come se, trasportato lungo un'orbita vuota, spingessi liberamente il carro' in 'Dal fato alla storia: Manilio e la sacralità del potere augusteo fra poetica e ideologia', *Vichiana* 11 (1982), 109–30 at 126 (repr. in *Synesis: Studi su forme del pensiero storico e politico greco e romano* [Naples, 1991], 89–111 at 107).

⁴ Housman (n. 1) quotes Man. 2.84 as a parallel for the hyperbaton, but in this line, unlike in 2.138–9, only one word separates the two terms; also, again unlike in our passage, the sentence does not allow for ambiguity, and it is obvious that *quamquam longo* belongs with *summota recessu*. What makes the supposed hyperbaton *ueluti . . . agam* additionally unlikely is the alliteration *uacuo ueluti uectatus*, which points to a strong semantic and syntactic connection among these three words.

⁵ On the image of the heavenly journey in Manilius, see most recently L. Landolfi, 'OYPANOBATEIN: Manilio, il volo e la poesia. Alcune precisazioni', *Prometheus* 25 (1999), 151–65, as well as K. Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius* (Oxford, 2002), 225–34. Note, though, that some scholars take 2.138–40 as referring not to a celestial but to a regular terrestrial chariot-ride; thus, Housman writes ad loc., '*orbe non caelum significat sed circum, gyrum equestrem*' (similarly H. W. Garrod, *Manili Astronomicon liber II* [Oxford, 1911] ad 138 and Fels [n. 3] in his translation). This interpretation seems highly unlikely (cf. Flores [n. 3, 1982], 125–6 with n. 63 = *Synesis* [n. 3], 107 with n. 63), given Manilius' use of chariot imagery elsewhere in the poem, as well as the fact that immediately following the three lines, the poet describes himself as singing to the audience of sky and stars (141–2)—which would make much better sense if he were, at this point, actually up in the celestial realm. I present further arguments below for taking the chariot-ride as an instance of the heavenly journey-metaphor.

(Housman ad loc. stresses explicitly that his analysis would do away with his famous predecessor's objections to the passage). Bentley's main argument is that 141 follows naturally on 137:

. . . omnes tres [sc. versus] sunt irreptitii. Hoc plane apparet, ex ipsa verborum serie, quae his demptis sic se habet;

nec in terram nec turbae carmina condam;

Sed caelo noscenda canam.

Contra, tres istos intersere, et totam sententiam conturbas: non *turbæ condam carmina*, sed *solo curru vectabor*. Quid, malum, currus ad carmina pertinet? Deinde duplex redditio est, hinc metaphora, illinc nulla, *sed solo curru vectabor*, *sed caelo noscenda canam*: plane contra morem et sensum communem. Ut ne addam illud *veluti* manum adulteram plane prodere. Quorsum enim *veluti vectatus*? Aut vectare, aut, si non potes, cade.⁶

By declaring *uacuo ueluti . . . regentibus actus* a subordinate clause, Housman manages to save the text, while at the same time following Bentley's understanding of 141 as the logical continuation of the main clause of 137. However, is it in fact true that these two lines are closely connected while what comes in between is either a parenthesis (Housman) or an interpolation (Bentley)? Bentley greatly helps his argument along by reading *in terram* in 137, thus creating an attractive contrast between *in terram* and *caelo* (141). However, there is no textual evidence for this version, and once we follow Housman and other editors in accepting Schrader's emendation *in turba* for the manuscripts' *in turbam*, Bentley's case appears rather less strong. As a matter of fact, line 137, . . . *nec in turba nec turbae carmina condam*, holds the key for the interpretation of the lines that follow: Manilius will compose his songs neither 'in the crowd nor for the crowd', and while the second proposition is taken up in 141–4, the second *sed*-clause (*sed caelo noscenda canam . . .*), the first finds its answer in the first *sed*-clause, that is, lines 138–40 (*sed solus . . . liber agam currus . . .*).⁷ The poet sings not for the *turba*, but for a restricted audience which consists of, on the one hand, the sky and the stars themselves (*caelo, astris*, 141, *mundo*, 142) and, on the other, the *minima . . . turba* (144) of those initiated in the secrets of the universe (143–4); likewise, he composes not in the *turba*, but rather alone (*solus*, 138), driving his chariot in an empty circle (*uacuo . . . uectatus in orbe*, *ibid.*).

This brings us to Bentley's next objection, 'Quid . . . currus ad carmina pertinet?' My suspicion is that in asking this question, the critic is being ever so slightly disingenuous: as his next sentence shows (see the quotation above), he is well aware that the chariot is a 'metaphora',⁸ and it is fairly obvious that the image is a combination of the heavenly journey-metaphor mentioned above and the more general notion of the poet as a charioteer.⁹ Driving a chariot on one's own, on a route not

⁶ Bentley (n. 2) ad 139.

⁷ Housman (n. 1) ad 137 also notes the semantic correspondence ('inter se respondent *in turba* et u. 138 *solus*, *turbæ* et u. 141 *caelo noscenda*'), but does not, as we have seen, allow for grammatical parallelism as well.

⁸ Bentley's additional argument that the juxtaposition of the poet's chariot-ride with the assertion *sed caelo noscenda canam* would be redundant ('duplex redditio est') as well as an unbearable combination of metaphorical and non-metaphorical speech ('hinc metaphora, illinc nulla . . . plane contra morem et sensum communem') is fairly weak. As shown above, the two *sed*-clauses by no means express the same thought but have a rather different force, and if the chariot-ride is a poetic image, so is the notion of the poet's singing for the sky (*sed caelo noscenda canam*, 141) while the stars marvel (*mirantibus astris*, *ibid.*) and the universe rejoices in the songs of its poet (*et gaudente sui mundo per carmina uatis*, 142).

⁹ The literature on the poetic chariot-metaphor in antiquity is enormous; see especially R. Nünlist, *Poetologische Bildersprache in der frühgriechischen Dichtung* (Stuttgart, 1998), 255–64.

frequented by other cars, clearly stands for composing original poetry, and it is in this sense that Manilius uses the same metaphor, though in a far less elaborate way, about 80 lines earlier, where he asserts the novelty of his work with the words, *soloque uolamus / in caelum curru* (58–9). In picturing himself on such a solitary chariot-ride, the Roman poet shows himself indebted particularly to *Aetia* prologue fr. 1.25–8 Pfeiffer, where Apollo famously advises Callimachus to drive his chariot on a route not frequented by other vehicles.¹⁰ That Manilius is conversant with Callimachean poetics is apparent from other places in the *Astronomica*, especially from an earlier passage in the proem to Book 2, where he describes the dire situation that faces a poet in search of an original topic by means of the Callimachean images of the trodden path and the dirty river (2.49–52).

Still, the Callimachean injunction against busy poetic highways can only partly explain the imagery of Manilius 2.138–40. The Apollo of the *Aetia* prologue warned merely against ‘roads where carts drive’ (fr. 1.25–6 Pfeiffer), while the poet of the *Astronomica* stresses especially that on his route, no one moves either in the same direction as he does (*nec per iter socios commune regentibus actus*, 140) or in the opposite one (*non occursantibus ullis*, 139); also, he describes his empty path as a ‘circle’ (*uacuo . . . uectatus in orbe*, 138), which is not, one assumes, the kind of road that Callimachus, hater of the cyclic poem (*Epigr.* 30.1), had in mind. I suggest that to understand Manilius’ diction in these three lines, one has to keep in mind that the chariot-ride described functions not solely as a metaphor for poetic activity, but is also an instance of the image of the heavenly journey. The poet presents himself as actually driving his chariot in the heavens, and I would argue that he has a quite concrete idea of his route.

When Manilius describes his moving ‘in an empty circle’, *uacuo . . . uectatus in orbe* (138; I ignore for the moment the problematic *ueluti*, to which I return in the next paragraph), I propose that he imagines himself as circling the earth (the centre of the geocentric cosmos depicted in the *Astronomica*) in an orbit not shared by any other stars. The Latin word *orbis* is indeed the technical term for the ‘curved path of a heavenly body in space, orbit’ (*OLD* s.v. ‘orbis 15’) and is used in this sense by Manilius in 1.187, 514, 527, 3.221, 369, and 479.¹¹ If the poet is thus figuratively driving his chariot in a *uacuo orbis*, he is clearly not following the ‘normal’ route around the earth, the one used by the other heavenly ‘travellers’ or ‘wanderers’, the planets, which all move along the same orbit, namely that described by the zodiac. Manilius’ lack of travel companions, *nec per iter socios commune regentibus actus* (140), thus refers to the fact that he is not sharing the road with the planets, of which at least the sun and the moon were also typically imagined as charioteers (including in Man. 1.198, 668–9, 2.96, 4.218, and 5.3).¹² As for the absence of anybody moving in the opposite direction, *non occursantibus ullis* (139), this has to do with the fact that on their orbit around the earth (the road not taken by Manilius), the planets move in a direction contrary to that of the zodiacal signs (and the fixed stars in general), which are, from the point of view

¹⁰ We may also discern the influence of Manilius’ model Lucretius, who pictures himself as wandering on Callimachean ‘untrodden paths’ in 1.926–30 (= 4.1–5) and uses the poetic chariot metaphor in 6.47 (see also 6.92–5).

¹¹ On *orbis* in an astronomical sense, see esp. A. Le Bœuffe, *Astronomie, astrologie: lexique latin* (Paris, 1987), s.v.

¹² Note also that, as pointed out in passing by D. Liuzzi, *M. Manilio, Astronomica, libro II* (Galatina, 1991) *ad* Man. 2.140, Manilius elsewhere uses the word *actus* specifically of the path of the sun (1. 573, 3.595); cf. *OLD* s.v. ‘actus 2b’.

of the planets, *occursantes*.¹³ This type of two-way traffic is avoided by the poet, who, in a stunning combination of Callimachean poetics and astronomical knowledge, presents himself as moving in a *uacuis* . . . *orbis*, far from the *turba* of both the other poets and—a fanciful touch—the planets.¹⁴ By thus describing his poetic activity in terms of the movements of a heavenly body,¹⁵ Manilius artfully blends the—strictly speaking distinct—realms of his poem and his subject matter.¹⁶ In addition, he may be alluding to the theory of the harmony of the spheres, according to which (as described, for example, by Plato, *Resp.* 617b4–7) the planets produce music by means of their revolutions around the earth:¹⁷ on this assumption, the planets themselves would constitute a *turba* of artists, but one whose company the poet eschews, bent on absolute originality and preferring to compose his own song.

The one remaining question in the interpretation of the passage concerns the force of *ueluti* in 138. Bentley puts his finger on the problem when he points out caustically that in charioteering, the notion ‘as if’ makes precious little sense: either you drive a chariot, or you don’t (‘Aut vectare, aut, si non potes, cade’). As we have already seen, Housman’s solution of taking *ueluti* as equivalent to *uelut si* is not particularly attractive since, as I hope to have shown, it is far preferable to understand the poet as, on the level of metaphor, presenting himself as actually driving a chariot rather than take his solitary ride as a mere comparison. I suggest understanding *uacuo ueluti uectatus in orbe* as something like ‘since (I would be) driving in an empty orbit’, that is, taking *ueluti* not as introducing a comparison, but as giving a (presumed) reason, a function that the adverb assumes especially in connection with participles (in this case, *uectatus*):¹⁸ it is *because* Manilius drives his chariot in a *uacuis orbis* that he is able to avoid both parallel and oncoming traffic and thus sustain absolute poetic originality.

¹³ Manilius uses the verb *occursare* only in this passage, but elsewhere describes the contrary movement of planets and constellations with the adjective *aduersus* (e.g. *aduersos stellarum* . . . *cursus* [1.15] and *aduerso pugnantis sidera mundo* [1.805]; cf. also 1.259, 670, 2.119, and 5.2). To judge from the examples in Le Bœuffe (n. 11), s.v., *aduersus* is indeed the Latin term most commonly used in describing the phenomenon, but individual writers employ more original expressions, including, crucially, *occurrere*, used by Lucan in 10.200 (*occurruntque polo* [sc. *sidera*, i.e. the planets]). In reality, the constellations are, of course, far removed from the planets and by no means ‘coming to meet’ them on the same ‘road’. Still, the language of ancient astronomy and esp. astrology typically evokes actual contact between the planets and signs of the zodiac; on this way of thinking, cf. A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L’Astrologie grecque* (Paris, 1899), 105 and F. Boll, C. Bezold, and W. Gundel, *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie* (Darmstadt, 1966⁵), 45.

¹⁴ Note in passing that Manilius’ insistence, in this passage, that he is *not* moving together with the planets does not prevent the poet from describing himself in another instance of the heavenly journey-metaphor (4.119–21) as actually following the path of the zodiac, as I argue in ‘“Heavenly steps”: Manilius 4.119–21 and its background’, in R. Abusch and A. Y. Reed (edd.), *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Imagined Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

¹⁵ Not just *orbis* and *actus*, but also *uectatus* and *iter* evoke stellar, esp. planetary, motion; cf. Le Bœuffe (n. 11), s.vv. ‘iter’ and ‘uehi’.

¹⁶ Cf. Flores (n. 3, 1982), 126 = *Synesis* (n. 3), 107. Similar blurring of boundaries between signifier and signified occurs again and again in the *Astronomica*; cf. Volk (n. 5), 233–40.

¹⁷ According to P. H. Schrijvers, ‘Le Chant du monde: remarques sur *Astronomica* I 1–24 de Manilius’, *Mnemos.* 36 (1983), 143–50 at 148–50 and A. M. Wilson, ‘The Prologue to Manilius 1’, *PLLS* 5 (1985), 283–98 at 293–4, Man. 1.22–3, where the *mundus* resounds (*circumstrepit*, 23) around the poet, likewise refers to the music of the spheres (on this passage, see Volk [n. 5], 235–6).

¹⁸ This is the *uelut(i)* listed in the *OLD* s.v. ‘uelut’ as ‘6 (giving the justification for an action, etc.) As being’. On its use with a participle, see R. Kühner and C. Stegmann, *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache: Satzlehre* (Leverkusen, 1955³), 1.790–1.

In light of these considerations, I suggest one single alteration of Housman's text of *Astronomica* 2.136–44: the deletion of the comma after *solus* in 138 in order to make clear that what follows (*uacuo ueluti . . . regentibus actus*, 138–40) is not a subordinate clause but rather a continuation of the main clause.¹⁹ A correct (if pedestrian) translation of the passage would thus be the following:

Since I desire to carry these things to the stars with inspired breath, I shall compose my songs neither in the crowd nor for the crowd; but alone—as one carried in an empty orbit—I shall freely drive my chariot with no one meeting me or steering a friendly course along the same route; and I shall sing for the sky to hear, with the stars marveling and heaven rejoicing in the songs of its poet, or for those whom they have not begrudged knowledge of the sacred motions and of themselves, which is the smallest crowd on earth.

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HOT OR STRONG? A TEXTUAL NOTE ON SENECA, *PHOENISSAE* 254

¹⁹ Alternatively, a second comma could be added after *orbe* (138), to create, as it were, parentheses around the participial construction with *uctatus*.

Seneca, *Phoenissae* 253–5 (Zwierlein's OCT) :

illo teste damnavit parens
calidoque teneros transuit ferro pedes
et in alta nemora pabulum misit feris . . .

Here the blinded Oedipus narrates the piercing of his ankles as a baby by his own father Laius as a result of the response of the Delphic Oracle. My concern is with *calido . . . ferro*. In his commentary Hirschberg cites as parallels *Aen.* 12.99–100 *crinis / vibratos calido ferro* and Lucan 4.511 *calido fodiemus viscera ferro*,¹ but neither the heating of irons for hair-curling nor the warming of a sword through contact with flesh (a Homeric idea: cf. *Il.* 16.333, 20.476) seem to be relevant here. *Transuit* suggests the piercing of flesh as with a spit (cf. *Ov. Fast.* 2.363–4 *veribus transuta salignis / exta*), and the image seems to be of passing an iron peg or rod through the thin flesh between the heel proper and the Achilles tendon, a point famously pierced at *Il.* 22.396–7. But there seems to be no point here in the iron being heated; merciful cautery is unlikely to be relevant to this brutal disabling given the rhetoric of the passage which seeks to condemn Laius' action, but torture with red-hot metal (for *calidum ferrum* in this sense, cf. Lucilius fr. 291 M, 318 W *calidum e furnacibus ferrum*), as in the apparent preparation for inflicting pain in Novius' *Lignaria* (= *Atellanae* 42 Ribbeck) *signare oportet frontem calida forcipe*, seems hyperbolic in this context. In Seneca's other two descriptions of the piercing of Oedipus' feet the verbs suggest a brutal piercing like that of an iron weapon cutting through flesh—cf. *Oedipus* 812–13:

forata ferro gesseras vestigia
tumore nactus nomen ac vitio pedum

¹ T. Hirschberg, *Senecas Phoenissen* (Berlin, 1989), 82.