

EROTIC HARDENING AND SOFTENING IN VERGIL'S EIGHTH *ECLOGUE**

Vergil's eighth *Eclogue* depicts a singing match between the two shepherds Damon and Alphesiboeus. Damon performs first, presenting a pathetic love song in which an unnamed male speaker laments the marriage of his former girlfriend to another man and concludes with the announcement that he is going to kill himself out of grief. Alphesiboeus responds with a song (loosely based on the first half of Theocritus' second *Idyll*) in which an unnamed female carries out a series of magical acts designed to bring her unfaithful lover Daphnis back to her, an endeavour that is in the end apparently successful. Describing her actions as she goes along, the speaker comments on one part of her magical ritual as follows:

limus ut hic durescit, et haec ut cera liquescit
uno eodemque igni, sic nostro Daphnis amore. (80–1)

The interpretation of these two lines is not entirely obvious. Putting clay and wax into the fire is clearly intended to have some effect on Daphnis and his relationship to the speaker, but the precise purpose of these actions remains mysterious. The softening of the wax is generally agreed to refer to Daphnis' 'melting' with desire, but what is the point of the hardening of the clay? Things are not helped by the fact that the equivalent passage in Theocritus mentions only wax, not clay:

ὥς τοῦτον τὸν κηρὸν ἐγὼ σὺν δαίμονι τάκω,
ὥς τάκοιθ' ὑπ' ἔρωτος ὁ Μύνδιος αὐτίκα Δέλφης. (Id. 2.28–9)

As I melt this wax with the help of the goddess,
So may Myndian Delphis straightaway melt with love.

There are, broadly speaking, two approaches to the lines in question, both of which are found already in the ancient commentary tradition.¹ On the more common view, it is Daphnis who is supposed to grow both hard and soft: he is to melt with love for the speaker while hardening his heart toward other women. On this scenario, the clay and wax that are put into the fire may be actual images of Daphnis or otherwise mere lumps of material (both ideas have received support in the scholarly literature, but the matter is of no consequence to the present discussion). The second interpretation has been championed most vigorously by C. A. Faraone and takes the two substances as effigies of the speaker and of Daphnis. In the words of Servius, *se de limo facit, Daphnidem de cera* ('she fashions herself out of clay and Daphnis out of wax', *Serv. Dan. ad Ecl.* 8.80). The purpose of the magic would then be for Daphnis to soften

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¹ Compare W. Clausen, *A Commentary on Virgil, Eclogues* (Oxford, 1994), *ad* 8.80–1.

with desire but for the woman to 'grow hard', that is, achieve dominance and 'gain the upper hand in all her future dealings with him'.²

Each way of looking at the lines is problematic. If it is Daphnis who is supposed to harden, it requires a mental leap to understand this transformation as his growing insensitive to the charms of other women, who are, after all, not mentioned in the poem (quite unlike in Theocritus, where jealousy plays a central role: *Id.* 2.4–5, 44–6, and 150–8). It is also difficult to see how this indifference could arise *nostro . . . amore*: just as 'one and the same fire' (*uno eodemque igni*) affects the clay and the wax, so too is 'love for me (that is, the speaker)'³ the intended cause of Daphnis' hardening and softening, and it would thus make better sense for both changes to be directly connected with his desire for the performer of the ritual.

On the other hand, the assumption that the hardening and softening are supposed to happen to two different people is very difficult to reconcile with the Latin text. This is apparent from Faraone's own awkward paraphrase of *sic nostro Daphnis amore* as 'so too [may I harden and] may Daphnis [melt] in [the flames of] our [one and the same] love'.⁴ It is surely much more likely that both the burning of the clay and the burning of the wax concern Daphnis, just as the kindling of the bay, mentioned immediately afterwards, is explicitly presented as directed at him:

sparge molam et fragilis incende bitumine lauros:
Daphnis me malus urit, ego hanc in Daphnide laurum. (82–3)

Scatter barley-groats and kindle the brittle twigs of bay with pitch:
Evil Daphnis burns me; I [burn] this bay against Daphnis.⁵

Of course, bay is an especially appropriate substitute for Daphnis, whose name is derived from the Greek word for the tree, *δάφνη*. It is likely that Vergil chose the name Daphnis for this very reason (in Theoc. *Id.* 2, the unfaithful lover is called Delphis⁶), in addition no doubt to wishing to allude once more to the archetypal shepherd-poet prominent in other *Eclogues*.

Furthermore, the collocation *nostro . . . amore* poses a severe problem for the theory that the female speaker herself wishes to 'harden'. Faraone explains the phrase as 'the love shared by Daphnis and the unnamed speaker'⁷ rather than 'love for me' (compare above, with n. 3), but even if this is what it means, it seems unlikely that the woman would describe her desired position of dominance as something brought about by 'our love'. Finally, there is no evidence elsewhere in the song that the speaker

² See C. A. Faraone, 'Clay hardens and wax melts: magical role-reversal in Vergil's eighth *Eclogue*', *CPh* 84 (1989), 294–300, at 295.

³ The expression *nostro . . . amore* could conceivably also mean 'my (i.e. the speaker's) love (for Daphnis)' or 'our (i.e. the speaker and Daphnis' mutual) love', but given that this 'love' is supposed to be the cause of Daphnis' 'melting', it makes the most sense to understand *noster amor* as *amor nostri* and as referring to Daphnis' desire for the speaker; see also below in the text.

⁴ Faraone (n. 2), 300.

⁵ It is unclear whether *mola*, too, acts as a stand-in for Daphnis (compare A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* [Cambridge, 1952], vol. II *ad Id.* 2.18 [ἀλφίτα] and 33f. [πίτυρα]) or whether it is used simply to reinforce the (mock-)sacrificial setting.

⁶ Note that bay plays a large role in the *Idyll* anyway, beginning with the first line; Vergil's lines 82–3 are based specifically on *Id.* 2.23–4. On the *nominis similitudo* of *Daphnis* and *laurus* (spotted already by Serv. *ad Ecl.* 8.83), see R. Coleman, *Vergil: Eclogues* (Cambridge, 1977) *ad* 8.83 and J. J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 82, n. 338 and 250, with further references.

⁷ Faraone (n. 2), 300.

is endeavouring to change her own state (unlike Theocritus' Simaetha, she does not talk about herself very much) or that her magic has any purpose other than *coniugis . . . sanos auertere . . . sensus* ('to drive the mind of [her] husband to insanity', 66–7).⁸

There is in fact a third view of the lines in question (mentioned in passing by Faraone⁹), but scholars have not appeared very interested in it. More than forty years ago, Georg Luck in a brief discussion raised objections to the two principal theories and hinted instead at a 'derbrealistische[] Deutung'¹⁰: it is indeed Daphnis himself who is subject to both hardening and softening, but *durescere*, rather than connoting his lack of interest in other women, refers to an erection brought about by his desire for the speaker. In his 1977 commentary, Robert Coleman, seemingly independently, championed a similar interpretation.¹¹ The Luck–Coleman hypothesis fits the Latin perfectly, syntactically as well as semantically (Daphnis undergoes *both* intended changes, both of which are motivated by *love*), and in what follows, we attempt to bolster this reading by pointing to the close connection in the Greek and Roman imagination between erotic hardening and melting.

It is obvious that the act of burning and the concomitant spell uttered by the speaker present an instance of sympathetic magic, as a result of which Daphnis is to be affected in a manner analogous to what happens to the clay and the wax; comparable examples of so-called *similia similibus*-charms abound in ancient magic,

⁸ Faraone (n. 2), 296–9 (compare also id., *Ancient Greek Love Magic* [Cambridge, MA, 1999], 51–3 and 'The ethnic origins of a Roman-era *philtrokatadesmos* (PGM IV 296–434)', in P. Mirecki and M. Meyer [edd.], *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* [Leiden, 2002], 319–43) attempts to bolster his claim that the clay and the wax in Vergil are 'voodoo dolls' of the woman and Daphnis, respectively, with reference to three instances of the use of double figurines in ancient magic. None of these, however, presents an especially good parallel. The first, a Greek inscription from Anatolia, has nothing to do with love magic. The second and third (a Greek magical papyrus and Hor. *Sat.* 1.8.30–3) describe rituals in which effigies of a pair of lovers are arranged in such a way that the one is in a dominant and threatening, the other in a suppliant and victimized, position. There is no evidence that anything like this is happening in Vergil, where it is not even clear whether we have to do with figurines or simply with lumps of clay and wax. It would seem that Faraone's insistence on the theme of erotic dominance in the eighth *Eclogue* arises out of the importance—undue, in our opinion—that he accords these putative parallels.

⁹ See Faraone (n. 2), 295, n. 6.

¹⁰ See G. Luck, *Hexen und Zauberei in der römischen Dichtung* (Zurich, 1962), 9–10, with the quotation at 10.

¹¹ See Coleman (n. 6) *ad* 8.81. Coleman tentatively suggests that the wax and clay may be shaped respectively in the form of a heart and a penis, with *cera* alluding to Greek *κῆρ* and *limus* to a rare homophonous Latin word for a ceremonial apron. This is highly speculative, and the supposed anatomical meaning of *limus* in particular is not borne out by the evidence (the word refers to a garment that covers the genitals, never to the genitals themselves; compare *OLD* s.v. 'limus').

¹² Generally on sympathetic magic (now sometimes referred to as 'persuasive analogy'), see F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. F. Philip (Cambridge, MA, 1997 [French original 1994]), 118–74 and 205–15; on erotic spells, see J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1990), 71–98, with 226–30 (compare id., 'The constraints of Eros', in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink [edd.], *Magika hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* [New York, 1991], 214–43), J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York, 1992), 78–115, H. S. Versnel, 'καὶ ἐν τῇ λ[οιπὸν] τῶν μερ[ῶν] [ἔσ]ται τοῦ σώματος ὅλ[ο]υ[.]' (. . . and any other part of the entire body there may be . . .): an essay on anatomical curses', in F. Graf (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart, 1998), 217–67, at 247–64, and Faraone (n. 8, 1999), *passim*; and on the use of fire in (love) magic, see E. Kuhnert, 'Feuerzauber', *RhM* 49 (1894), 37–58 and E. Tavenner, 'The use of fire in Greek and Roman love magic', in [no ed.], *Studies in Honor of Frederick W. Shipley* (St. Louis, 1942), 17–37.

especially in erotic contexts.¹² As we have seen, readers of Vergil have never had any difficulty understanding, at least in general terms, what it means for Daphnis to be melting, in analogy to the wax: after all, melting is a typical symptom of love in Greek and Latin literature, as well as elsewhere. When we investigate this erotic topos further, we find that melting is frequently said to occur in a specific anatomical location, namely the marrow (Latin *medulla*, Greek *μυελός*).¹³ A classic example is Catullus 45.15–16, *multo mihi maior acriorque / ignis mollibus ardet in medullis* ('a much greater and harsher fire is burning in my soft marrow').

Why marrow? A mysterious substance inside the spinal column and other bones, marrow is situated in the innermost part of a person's body and is thus often considered a kind of life force. More specifically, both in widespread folk belief and according to a certain school of ancient medical thought, marrow was regarded as the same thing as semen. In the most fully worked-out versions of the so-called encephalo-myelogenic theory, semen is brain matter that descends from the head to the penis via the spine (cf., among numerous other testimonies, Alcmaeon A13 DK and Pl. *Ti.* 73B1–74A7 and 91A4–B7).¹⁴ Against the background of such a belief, it makes sense for Vergil's magical practitioner to try to affect her male victim with two physiologically closely related conditions, erotic melting (of the marrow), that is, arousal, and erotic hardening (of the marrow-filled penis), that is, erection.¹⁵

The artful structure of *Ecl.* 8.80, *limus ut hic durescit, et haec ut cera liquescit*, with its rhyming halves and syntactic parallelism, inevitably reminds readers of the rhythm of popular magical spells.¹⁶ In addition, however, the repetition of *-escit* is reminiscent of medical language: D. R. Langslow has shown that homoeoteleuton is a typical feature of Latin medical diction,¹⁷ and as Robert D. Brown points out apropos of Lucretius' discussion of sexuality, *-sco*-verbs in particular are often used to describe physiological processes.¹⁸ An especially vivid example is *De rerum natura* 4.1068–9, which, incidentally, also depicts extreme erotic desire:

ulcus enim uiuescit et inueterascit alendo
inque dies gliscit furor atque aerumna grauescit.

For the sore quickens and sets through nourishment, and from day to day derangement waxes and the affliction grows worse.¹⁹

¹³ For this and what follows in the next paragraph, compare the excellent discussion of P. A. Rosenmeyer, 'Tracing *medulla* as a *locus eroticus*', *Arethusa* 32 (1999), 19–47.

¹⁴ The most fascinating and culturally wide-ranging, though also in some sense the strangest, exploration of the supposed role of marrow in procreation is W. La Barre, *Muelos: A Stone Age Superstition about Sexuality* (New York, 1984). For the classical world, see esp. I. M. Lonie, *The Hippocratic Treatises "On Generation", "On the Nature of the Child", "Diseases IV"* (Berlin, 1981), 101–3 and Rosenmeyer (n. 13), 28–35 and the works cited therein, to which add notably M. L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart, 1990), 174 and J. T. Katz, 'Testimonia ritus Italici: male genitalia, solemn declarations, and a new Latin sound law', *HSPH* 98 (1998), 183–217, at 210–13 (on the etymology of Latin *masturbari* as 'to marrow (out)', originally suggested by C. Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* [New York, 1995], 535).

¹⁵ For what it may be worth, Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 15.52–3 reports that Vergil was a student of medicine; on medicine in Vergil, see F. Stok, 'Medicina', *Enc. Virg.* 3 (1987), 417–20.

¹⁶ See e.g. Coleman (n. 6) and Clausen (n. 1), both ad loc. Angelo Mercado points out to us that lines 80 and 81, taken together, form a sort of verbal 'magic square' (in the sense of Watkins [n. 14], index s.v.).

¹⁷ See D. R. Langslow, *Medical Latin in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2000), 269–376.

¹⁸ See R. D. Brown, *Lucretius on Love and Sex: A Commentary on De Rerum Natura IV, 1030–1287* (Leiden, 1987), ad Lucr. 4.1068–72 (esp. p. 209) and 1068 (esp. p. 210).

¹⁹ Translation by Brown (n. 18), 151.

It is perfectly possible that Vergil was influenced by these and similar Lucretian lines.²⁰

If taking Daphnis' envisaged hardening as his experiencing an erection makes good sense in the light of ancient beliefs about sexual physiology, it remains to be seen whether *durescere* could really have been understood *sensu obsceno* by Vergil's original audience.²¹ In Latin, unlike in English, 'hard' (*durus*) does not typically seem to have been applied to the erect penis, though the semantically similar 'stiff' (*rigidus*) certainly was (see *OLD* s.v. 3b).²² Still, there does appear to be at least one case in which a derivative of *durus*, namely a form of the verb *obdurescere*, refers to sexual excitement.²³ In Plautus' *Truculentus*, the frustrated Strabax, who has in vain been waiting for a courtesan, complains,

ubi mea amica est gentium?
neque ruri neque hic operis quicquam facio, corrumpor situ,
ita miser cubando in lecto hic exspectando obdurui. (914–16)

Where on earth is my girlfriend? I get nothing done, neither in the country nor here; I am decaying with inaction; lying so wretchedly in bed and waiting here, I have grown hard.

The phrase *exspectando obdurui* is typically understood as something like 'I have grown numb with waiting'.²⁴ However, in light of the erotic context and the overt sexual connotation of *neque hic operis quicquam facio*,²⁵ it is much more likely that

²⁰ Compare Clausen (n. 1), *ad Ecl.* 8.80, who sees a parallel in *Lucr.* 1.305–6.

²¹ In answer to the possible objection that Vergil does not use 'obscenities' in his poetry, we note that the offensive verb is not actually applied to Daphnis in the text, but carefully elided in the elliptical phrase *sic nostro Daphnis amore* (81). The same kind of sexual euphemism is employed in *Ecl.* 3.8, *nouimus et qui te*—('we know who—you'); see Clausen (n. 1), *ad loc.*, as well as J. N. Adams, 'A type of sexual euphemism in Latin', *Phoenix* 35 (1981), 120–8, with a wealth of further examples. Sarah Iles Johnston suggests to us that since actual erotic spells use very explicit language in referring to sexual acts and organs (compare the examples collected in Gager [n. 12], 85–115), Vergil may have wished to imitate or allude to this feature of the popular form, but without sacrificing poetic decorum. R. G. M. Nisbet, '*Adolescens Puer* (Virgil, *Eclogues* 4. 28–30)', in H. D. Jocelyn (ed.), *Tria lustra: Essays and Notes presented to John Pinsent* (Liverpool, 1993), 265–7 (repr. in *Collected Papers on Latin Literature*, ed. S. J. Harrison [Oxford, 1995], 381–5, with an addendum on 434) neatly teases out a reference to male sexuality in a passage in *Eclogue* 4 (see also n. 23 below); we owe this reference to the anonymous referee.

²² On the Latin vocabulary of erection, see the brief remarks in J. N. Adams, '*Ausonius Cento nuptialis* 101–131', *SIFC* 53 (1981), 199–215, at 202 and *id.*, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), 46 and 103.

²³ An additional instance of *durus* as part of a sexual metaphor may be *Verg. Ecl.* 4.30, *et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella* ('and hard oaks will sweat dewy honey'); see Nisbet (n. 21, 1993), 266 (~ Nisbet [n. 21, 1995], 383 plus 434).

²⁴ Thus e.g. P. Nixon in the *Loeb* (1938), 323 ('waiting till I'm numb'), A. Ernout in the *Budé* (1961, 2nd corr. edn), 161 ('j'ai les membres engourdis au point d'en avoir mal'), and W. Hofmann, *Plautus: Truculentus* (Darmstadt, 2001), 121 ('so geht mir . . . vom Warten . . . das Gefühl dahin'). T. Halter in the *TLL* lists the Plautine passage s.v. '*obduresco* A1: *de hominibus desidia vel terrore rigescentibus*'; since, however, the only two other examples quoted (*Prop.* 2.25.13 and *Tert. Ad Scapulam* 3.2) have to do with fear and horror, there is no parallel for a putative meaning 'grow rigid through sloth'. The *OLD* puts the passage s.v. '*obduresco* 2 (of persons) To become hardened, insensitive, or callous', but Strabax does not seem to be characterized by mental apathy or disregard.

²⁵ P. J. Enk, *Plauti Truculentus* (Leiden, 1953), *ad loc.*, provides a list of parallels for the erotic use of *opusl'ēpyov*.

Strabax' plight resembles that of the persona in Catullus 32, who, likewise waiting in bed for his *amica*, *pertund[it] tunicamque palliumque* (11).²⁶

We conclude that by burning clay and wax, the female speaker in Alphesiboeus' song intends to induce overwhelming physical passion in Daphnis, thereby making him experience the sexual desire for her that she, presumably, feels for him. This kind of transference or 'table-turning' is common in ancient erotic magic²⁷ and can be seen also in Vergil's simile a few lines later (85–9), in which the anticipated mad love of Daphnis is compared to the (frustrated) sexual fury of a *female* cow.²⁸ Unlike the unhappy lover of Damon's song, who remains passive in the face of betrayal and sees suicide as the only solution, Alphesiboeus' character takes matters into her own hands, actively attempting to put Daphnis into the state of being, erotically speaking, simultaneously hard and soft for her.

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²⁶ The double entendre of Strabax' words appears to be caught by J. Tatum, *Plautus: The Darker Comedies. Bacchides, Casina, and Truculentus* (Baltimore, 1983), 204 (repr. in D. R. Slavitt and P. Bovie [edd.], *Plautus: The Comedies* [Baltimore, 1995], 2.391), who translates, 'I've gotten all hard lying around in bed waiting.'

²⁷ See esp. Winkler (n. 12) and Gager (n. 12), 81–2. Note, though, that we do not think, as these scholars do, that this kind of love magic is largely therapeutic and meant to alleviate the practitioner's or client's own feelings by projecting them onto the victim (compare the salutary remarks of Versnel [n. 12], 252–8 and see also Faraone [n. 8, 1999], 82–4). In the case of Vergil's eighth *Eclogue*, at any rate, the woman clearly has no interest in freeing herself from her love for Daphnis, and there is no sign that she is somehow cured of her passion by going through the magical rite (compare also the next footnote).

²⁸ Compare Coleman (n. 6), *ad* 8.88: 'In depicting the pathos of Daphnis' plight . . . , she is unconsciously revealing her own feelings.' The vivid description of Daphnis' hoped-for suffering, coupled with the ominous *nec sit mihi cura mederi* ('nor may I care to heal him', 89), might seem to give support to Faraone's claim (see above in the text, with n. 8) that the speaker is aiming for a position of dominance *vis-à-vis* Daphnis. It seems to us, however, that she is using her magic not to make herself *superior* to Daphnis, but rather to put him in a state (of strong desire) that *equals* her own. In this context, it is best to understand *mederi* as Coleman does, namely as 'to cure him of the *insania* that her magic will have caused' (*ad* 8.89).