

VIII.—Crambe Repetita: Horace, *Od.* 1.1.28

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In *TAPA* 75 (1944) 15–19 I contributed a note on the phrase *teretis plagas* in Horace, *Od.* 1.1.28, in which I advanced the view that *teretis*, on the basis of meanings attached to the word elsewhere and of a significance which would fit this passage particularly, means “bulging,” “forced outward.” The Marsic boar, a powerful creature, drives straight and hard against the hunting nets into which the beaters have maneuvered him; the net first bulges before his weight and the force of his charge and then breaks. This seems to be what Sir Theodore Martin in his translation (*Works of Horace*: Edinburgh 1881) means when he renders the passage thus: “or by the meshes *rent* is seen / Where late a Marsian boar hath been.” At this Ernout and Meillet also hint in their *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (Paris 1939) 1031, suggesting that the poet goes etymological here, associating *teretis* with the *ter*-root seen in the verb *tero*, and assigning the value of “frayed, rubbed” to the adjective. The net is “frayed” either because it is old and worn and should never have been used at all, or because the boar, rolling and twisting in it, breaks through finally by fraying (*tero*) the cords. All of these suggestions are very graphic; they also fit in with Wickham’s observation in his *Horace* (Oxford 1904), note *ad loc.*: “27, 28 must mean ‘if the moment is sufficiently exciting.’ If no deer had been sighted, if the boar was still safe in the netted enclosure, the huntsman might go home for the night.” Why not accept this idea which all the above interpretations or explanations imply and let it go at that?

The reason for not doing so too lightly — and I feel this strongly even after ten years of comfortable settling down in a predilection of my own advanced so long since, viz., “bulging” — is that *teretis* does sound like a sort of stock epithet with *plagas*, the kind of term that the professional hunter or the keen amateur would regularly apply to a trusty and dependable net, “stout,” “substantial,” “the kind that doesn’t let you down,” “the good old type.” The reason for that confidence evidenced in such language is that the net is made of good material, “No. 8 twist,” “the good old brand.”

That seems to be what the pseudo-Acronian scholium has in mind (ed. Keller, Leipzig 1902, p. 18): *non plagas teretes sed de tereti ait fune factas*. The epithet shifts easily from the constituent thread to the object fashioned out of it. "Stout nets come from the weaving into them of stout cordage." Yet the moment you decide that the pseudo-Acronian scholium has the right point of view, up starts Professor C. D. Naylor (*Horace, Odes and Epodes*: Cambridge 1923) to make this remark *ad loc.*: "The adjective *teretis* goes closely with *rupit* and may mean either 'because slender' or 'though strong.'" That is to say: *either* "the boar has broken the nets because they are made of such slender material" *or* "the boar has broken the nets although they are fashioned of such strong twine." All this is really very confusing or, let us say, lacking in exact definition. Yet the *teretes laquei* of Seneca's *Hippolytus* 45 makes me lean to the idea of something woven out of stout and dependable cord; if you have really made up your mind to hang yourself, you don't want to attempt it at the risk of becoming publicly ridiculous through use of inferior material, and surely the *teretes laquei* of the *Hippolytus* reference means "stout-woven nooses."

But at that point we realize that we cannot overlook the cocksure view of the $\lambda\phi\psi$ scholia as given in H. T. Betschuyver's Amsterdam edition (1935): "*plagae sunt retia; dicuntur autem teretes plagae propter nodos rotundos*." This is, of course, an entirely different point of view; it asserts that the *plagae* are described as *teretes* because of the upstanding shape of the many tie-knots to be seen on their surface; every single knot forms a little rounded eminence of its own. There is no disputing the possibility of this; the nets may be called "rotunda-marked" because of the hundreds of little rotundas formed by the knotting of intersecting cords.

Now wherever *teres* is used of the human body, as by Horace himself, *Od.* 2.4.21, *teretis suras*, or by Catullus 61.174, *bracchiolum teres*, or by Ovid, *A.A.* 1.622, of the fingers, the impression is conveyed of a swelling of the flesh which is graceful and attractive by reason of the curvature involved; it may very well have been the case that the *nodi* of the nets, neatly tied by deft hand-workers, presented a whole prospect of rather prettily rounded eminences, perhaps the most outstanding (in every sense) feature of the nets to the casual observer. Thus the elucidation of the $\lambda\phi\psi$ scholia is not lightly to be disposed of.

One could ramble on in this fashion interminably, but I should

really at this point present my 1954 reflections for your consideration; they are not by any means unrelated to my 1944 offering, but are far less sure of having established values. I now feel that *teretis*, like almost any adjective in any language, is capable of being used merely as a stock epithet, but at the same time, as is again true of almost any adjective, it may gain a special application through contextuality, as Professor Naylor sought to show in associating it with *rupit*. In 1944 I laid strong emphasis myself on a value I thought it possible to assign the adjective through contextuality; to drive this doctrine home I went back a few words in the passage and sought to subject the innocent enough looking *fidelibus*, descriptive of the hounds, to the same treatment. Yet I must now admit that the *fidelibus* sounds dreadfully like the “trusty” of the English platitude “trusty hounds,” and if *fidelibus* is commonplace, *teretis* may by a natural parallelism be a commonplace stock epithet too: “stout nets and trustworthy hounds.”

But enough of all this. As the proverb runs in Suidas' *Lexicon* δὲς κραμβὴ θάνατος, and what a death! I hope that the second serving of this subject may not be quite as deadly as Suidas' cabbage.