

HORACE C. 1.34: THE CONVERSION

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Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens,
insanientis dum sapientiae
consultus erro, nunc retrorsum
vela dare atque iterare cursus 4

cogor relictos: namque Diespiter,
igni corusco nubila dividens
plerumque, per purum tonantis
egit equos volucremque currum, 8

quo bruta tellus et vaga flumina
quo Styx et invisi horrida Taenari
sedes Atlanteusque finis
concutitur. valet ima summis 12

mutare et insignem attenuat deus,
obscura promens; hinc apicem rapax
Fortuna cum stridore acuto
sustulit, hic posuisse gaudet. 16

Two provocative recent discussions, by Kenneth Reckford and by N. K. Zumwalt, make another examination of this poem a *desideratum*. Both interpret the poem symbolically; both regard a literal interpretation as unacceptable. This, then, is the main question. Is a literal interpretation of the poem persuasive? Second, are the particular interpretations of Reckford and Zumwalt plausible? For a poem may be significantly meaningful on both literal and symbolic levels. Finally, presuming that the poem makes satisfactory sense on the literal level, how is this to be understood? For instance, does Horace confess here a genuine change in his religious outlook? Does he, perhaps, give us a piece of whimsy, not expecting to be taken seriously? Are there other possibilities? This question of attitude of course cannot

be answered with certainty or precision. Nevertheless, granted at least the possibility that the poem is not just another *Gelegenheitsgedicht* but a serious statement of some importance, it should be worth an effort to understand as closely as possible what the poet is saying. I will first discuss the interpretations of Reckford and of Zumwalt. Then follows a sustained systematic exegesis of the poem. Last, I will discuss several major questions which cannot be conveniently dealt with earlier.

I

Kenneth Reckford ("Horace, *Odes* 1.34: An Interpretation," *Studies in Philology* 63 [1966] 499-532. Cf. Reckford, *Horace* [New York 1969] 60-65, 150-51.) contends that far from returning to an earlier, less perilous attitude, as an initial impression might indicate, Horace launches forward, partly joyfully, partly by constraint, to abandon himself to a life of "holy insecurity." This interpretation rests on a misreading of the sailing metaphor. Reckford (505 f.): "*vela dare atque iterare cursus relictos* means not to sail backwards along an earlier course that had been abandoned, but to give sail and (the ideas should be taken together) to set out again on the sea." True, *vela dare* does not mean "to sail backwards," but *retrorsum* / *vela dare* does, or more precisely, "to turn around and sail back." In a study of some thirty-two pages, Reckford ignores *retrorsum* entirely. Consequently he introduces into the sailing metaphor a spurious antithesis between land, with its association of security, and the sea, with its insecurity, and then takes the notion land/security as symbol of Horace's Epicureanism, which he now abandons, and the notion sea/insecurity as symbol of the new life on which he now embarks. In the face of *retrorsum*, however, it is clear that the metaphor does not involve a contrast between land and sea, but only one between two different courses of sailing. By this fact Reckford's interpretation is invalidated.

N. K. Zumwalt's interpretation of the poem is equally untenable ("Horace C. 1.34: Poetic Change and Political Equivocation," *TAPA* 104 [1974] 435-67). She argues that it expresses a poetic conversion. "Horace is forced to give up a poetic voyage which he had begun

(*retrorsum vela dare*) and to return to abandoned poetic courses (*iterare cursus relictos*), songs of wine and love, light lyric" (453). And: "It seems likely that the . . . undertaking which Horace was forced to abandon was an encomiastic poem about Caesar" (466).

In support of her thesis, Zumwalt appeals to Horace's use of some of the same or similar words and phrases elsewhere in his poetry in *literary* contexts. For *retrorsum vela dare*, she adduces as parallels: *animum reddere* (C. 1.19.4), *rursus bella moves* (C. 4.1.2), and *iterum . . . includere* (Epist. 1.1.3); for *cursus . . . relictos*: *relictis . . . iocis* (C. 2.1.37), *finitis . . . amoribus* (C. 1.19.4), *intermissa . . . diu . . . bella* (C. 4.1.1-2), and *antiquo . . . ludo* (Epist. 1.1.3); for *cogor*: *vetuit* (Serm. 1.10.32), *vetat* (C. 1.6.10), *iubet* (C. 1.19.2), *iniussi . . . cogere* (Serm. 1.3.3-4), and *et egere vetes et scribere cogas* (Epist. 2.1.228); for *insanientis dum sapientiae consultus error*: *error . . . insania* (Epist. 2.1.118), *sapere . . . insanire . . . error* (Epist. 2.2.128, 134, 140), *error . . . sapiunt . . . errat* (A.P. 454, 456, 457), *sapere* (A.P. 309), and *sapientia* (A.P. 396). Of these, *pace* Zumwalt, C. 1.19.2-4, C. 4.1.1-2, and Serm. 1.3.3-4 are *not* used in literary contexts. In all remaining cases, the literary context is indicated *expressis verbis*. In C. 1.34, on the other hand, there is no hint of it. These were, after all, common, non-technical words, not literary terms, and their precise force depended wholly on the context in which they were used. I trust there is no need to cite all passages in Horace in which they are used in non-literary contexts, and where they accordingly have no literary force whatever. One look at Staedler's *Thesaurus Horatianus* will make the point sufficiently.

Most important for Zumwalt's view are the *topoi* of the voyage and the bolt. And it is here that the *error* of her interpretation is most apparent. First, the voyage. In addition to C. 1.34, I have counted twenty-five references in Horace to sea-faring. In only *one* of these is the voyage used in a poetic sense, as a symbol of poetic endeavor, and this is made clear *expressis verbis* in the context: *Phoebus volentem proelia me loqui / victas et urbes increpuit lyra, / ne parva Tyrrhenum per aequor / vela darem. Tua, Caesar, aetas / fruges et agris rettulit . . .* (C. 4.15.1 ff.). Thus, this passage does not offer a valid parallel to the voyage in C. 1.34. There is one other case in which sea-faring is used in a literary context, not, however, as a symbol or metaphor for poetic activity, but in the literal sense, as illustration of the claim that the

poet is everywhere protected by the Muses: *Utrumque mecum vos eritis, libens / insanientem navita Bosporum / temptabo et urentes arenas . . .* C. 3.4.29 ff.). Neither of these passages, then, provides a parallel to the voyage in C. 1.34.

It may be worthwhile to identify and briefly label the remaining twenty-three references to sea-faring in Horace: C. 1.1.13-18—literal: some men hazard the sea as merchants; C. 1.3—literal, and symbolic of man's sinful daring; C. 1.14—ship of state; C. 1.28—literal, and symbolic for life's vicissitudes; C. 1.31.13-15—literal: the lucky man hazards the ocean repeatedly unscathed; C. 1.32.7-8—literal: Alcaeus played and sang to the lyre after battle or a stormy voyage; the sea storms perhaps symbolic of political storms; C. 2.10.1-4, 22-24—voyage of life; C. 2.16.1-4—literal: the perils of sea-faring, and perhaps symbolic of life's turmoils; C. 3.1.26-28—literal, and symbolic of life's avoidable hazards and ambitions; C. 3.2.25-32—literal, and symbolic of life's hazards; C. 3.7.1-8—literal: Gyges' return voyage delayed by winter storms; C. 3.24.40-41—literal, and symbolic of man's sinful daring; C. 3.27.18-20—literal: the hazard of sea-faring, and perhaps symbolic of life's hazards; C. 3.29.57-64—literal: the hazard of sea-faring; *Ep.* 10—*propemptikon* for Maevius: may he perish at sea; *Ep.* 16—exhortation to embark for the islands of the blessed; *Sat.* 1.1.6—literal: the hazard of sea-faring; *Sat.* 1.1.29-30—literal: merchants hazard the sea for profit; *Epist.* 1.1.15—Horace is tossed from one philosophical position to another (like a sailor) in a storm; *Epist.* 1.2.20-22—Ulysses unsinkable by the waves of adversity; *Epist.* 1.11.15-16—literal: the vicissitudes of sea-faring, and perhaps symbolic of the vicissitudes of life; *Epist.* 1.18.87-88—symbolic of the vicissitudes of life; *Epist.* 2.2.200-202—the moderation of Horace's voyage of life. No doubt, someone else might see the nuances of these passages slightly differently and therefore give them slightly different labels. What is certain, however, is that none of them have anything to do with poetry. There is, then, not a single parallel that can be adduced in support of the conception of the voyage in C. 1.34 as a symbol for poetic endeavor.

The matter is even more clear-cut with respect to the thunderbolt. In addition to C. 1.34, I have counted seven references in Horace to thunderbolts, and not in one is there a connection with poetry: C.

1.2.1-4—Jove's anger against the fratricidal Romans; C. 1.3.38-40—Jove's anger against the sinful daring of man; C. 1.12.59-60—Jove's punishment of impiety; C. 1.16.11-12—Jove's power; C. 3.3.6—Jove's power; C. 3.4.42-44, 74-75—Jove's punishment of the impious titans and giants; C. 4.4.1—the eagle, bearer of the thunderbolt, as simile for Drusus. It simply is not true, *pace* Zumwalt, that in C. 1.3 and 1.12 the bolt "is directed against potential acts of poetic impiety" (459; cf. 455). Nor, we may add, does the bolt in C. 1.34 have anything to do with poetry.

As for the rest, it is not surprising that Zumwalt fails to make the details of the poem fit her interpretation. One example. In the first line, she lumps the two adjectives *parcus* and *infrequens* together to designate Horace as a "humble sacrificer," that is, as a writer of minor poems (447 and 453). Even if *parcus* can mean "humble"—and in this poem it does not—*infrequens* certainly will not do. Is a "humble" sacrificer an "infrequent" one? Did Horace write minor poems only infrequently?¹

According to Professor Reckford's interpretation the poem means almost the opposite of what it appears to mean, and according to Dr. Zumwalt, something radically different. If either interpretation were right, Horace would deserve censure for having written a poem whose real meaning remained undetected for 2000 years.²

II

The opening verse presents an independent thought unit, the main theme and dominant concern of the whole poem, Horace's relation to the gods. The substance of this theme is expressed by the central phrase *deorum cultor*. The framing epithets *parcus* and *infrequens*, as the following words show, characterize the poet's veneration of the gods up until now. It has been "niggardly" and "infrequent." This, we presently observe, is a confession of error. The *homo religiosus* speaks. At least so it appears.

Parcus and *infrequens* are intrinsically antithetical to *cultor*, and thus

¹ This observation was made by my student, Mr. Carl A. Huffman.

² Nevertheless, both papers contain a number of valuable observations which have enhanced my appreciation of the poem.

they indicate the wrongness, a lack of the right measure, in the poet's former relation to the gods. This notion is developed in the next line. Horace was a niggardly and infrequent venerator of the gods while (*dum*) he adhered to an *insanientis sapientiae* (2). The oxymoron is made the more emphatic because the two words occupy one metrical unit, separated and balanced only by the conjunction *dum*, and the alliteration of the sounds *sanienti* and *sapienti* places the words into even more direct, antithetical juxtaposition. What the poet thought to be "wisdom" is in fact "mad, foolish, defective."³ What is this counterfeit "wisdom," and in what sense is it "mad, foolish, and defective?" The first line indicates that it is a doctrine or creed which encourages a disregard of the gods, and this means almost certainly the philosophy of Epicurus. In contrast to Lucretius, who celebrated it as *sapientia* par excellence (5.8 ff., cf. 2.8), Horace now labels it *insaniens*. But Epicureanism is not actually named. We infer from the first line that Horace's concern here is not with the philosophy as a whole, whether in its physical or ethical aspects, but in so far as it taught that the gods are powerless to interfere in the world and therefore in effect encouraged a disregard of them.⁴ It is for this reason, and in this sense, that Horace now regards the Epicurean "wisdom" as "mad, foolish, defective" and, by implication, "dangerous."

The irony of *insanientis sapientiae* increases in the following line (3). *Sapientiae / consultus* is modelled on the well known legal phrase *iuris consultus*, someone who has become an adept, an expert in the law, and as such may be consulted by others for instruction and guidance (cf. Nisbet-Hubbard, *Comm.*, *ad loc.*). Because of this reference the phrase *sapientiae*—even without the qualifier *insanientis*—*consultus* is rendered unmistakably sarcastic and self-deprecatory. In our jargon it is roughly like saying, "I'd obtained a Master's degree in Philosophy and thought I knew what life was all about." The irony is extended by the additional oxymoron *consultus erro*. Imagining himself an "expert," Horace actually was "in error." The first line of the poem,

³ *Insaniens* means "foolish, insane, crazy," but it indicates also the negation of *sanum*, of the healthy condition of body, mind, or spirit, and hence may be rendered as "defective, unhealthy."

⁴ Cf. Cic. *N.D.* 1.2.3: if the Epicurean doctrine of divine impotence be granted, *quid est quod ullos deis immortalibus cultus, honores, preces adhibeamus?* See also Sen. *Ben.* 4.19; Lucr. 2.1090-1104; 5.82-90.

parcus deorum cultor et infrequens, and the concluding word of the initial (*dum*) clause, *erro*, pinpoint Horace's concern. His neglect of the gods was wrong!⁵ *Erro* is followed by a caesura and then sharply contrasted by *nunc retrorsum* / . . . The thought is completed in the following line (4) and a half with the introduction of the sailing metaphor, which retrospectively includes the words *erro*, *nunc retrorsum* (3). The metaphor says, basically, that Horace is forced to abandon the wrong course and return to the right one. But the details have caused difficulty. Does Horace turn back and resume the right course at the point where he had left it (so, e.g., Kiessling-Heinze, *Komm.*, *ad loc.*), does he turn and go back to the point from where he had originally started the right course, in order to resume it from there (so J. Gow, *Comm.* [Cambridge 1932], *ad loc.*), or does he turn and move in reverse direction along the course on which he previously had moved forward (so Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*)?⁶ I do not think the metaphor allows of such precise differentiations. It specifies only that Horace turns back from the wrong kind of course in order to take up again the right kind. The poet is not concerned with the *direction* of this course, that is, the development of his attitudes and beliefs, but with the *kind* of course on which he travels, the right as against the wrong kind. If this is appreciated, the metaphor is quite clear. Horace has been on the wrong course (*erro*), but now he turns his craft around (*retrorsum*

⁵ The irony is compounded if we recall Lucretius' use of *errare* for non-Epicureans (2.9 f.), *despicere unde queas alios passimque videre / errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae*.

⁶ Nisbet-Hubbard are the latest editors to adopt Heinsius' conjecture *relectos* for the MSS *relictos*, on the grounds that *relegere* occurs frequently in comparable contexts (is this really relevant?), and that *relictos* does not suit the context of 1.34. They think that *iterare cursus relictos* could not mean "to resume the right course where it had been left" because this does not suit *iterare*. But if we take *cursus* not as the actual course or route, but as the "kind of course" Horace travels (the plural supports this interpretation), there is no real difficulty. Cf. C. 1.7.32: *cras ingens iterabimus aequor*. They reject "to go back to the beginning of the course in order to repeat it" as being too obscure. This is insufficient grounds for an emendation. They think "to repeat the former course in reverse direction" fits *iterare* but not *relictos*, and so they substitute *relectos*. Surely this is demanding too much logical precision of a poetic metaphor. These objections to *iterare cursus relictos*, in short, are not serious. Moreover, *relectos* is poetically inferior. It is redundant with *iterare*, as well as clumsy, since it has to be understood proleptically: after Horace has gone over his course again, it will have been "retraced" (*relectos*). *Relectos* adds nothing to the poem, but *relictos* does. Reference to the abandonment of the right religious course adds to the confessional and regretful tone of the poem.

vela dare) to sail again on the kind of course on which he had moved previously (*iterare cursus*), before he had abandoned it (*relictos*) and gotten onto the wrong kind (*erro*). The erroneous course, obviously, is that of neglect of the gods under the influence of Epicureanism (*parcus deorum cultor et infrequens, insanientis sapientiae*), and the correct course is that of piety toward the gods which he had followed before turning indifferent (*deorum cultor*). Horace is "compelled" (*cogor*, 5) to turn back. Why? The second sentence and central part of the poem (5-12) explains.

We should note at the outset that there is no good reason to question the authenticity of Horace's experience on the ground that thunder in a clear sky is impossible (but so Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*).⁷ In a southern latitude it is quite possible for an isolated, convective storm, that is, a single thunderstorm cloud, to produce a formidable thunderclap. Someone may well find himself at that moment in a location where he does not see the cloud, because of the obstruction of a wall, a hill, or the like, and thus he experiences thunder in a clear sky. Horace does not mean that the thunderclap proved to him the existence of gods, and that this forced his change, for the existence of gods had not been in question. Nor does he necessarily mean that he took the thunder as rationally compelling proof of divine power, and that this has forced the change. At least we cannot be sure. It is true that Lucretius, in his arguments for natural law and against divine interference, had declared that thunder in a clear sky is impossible (6.99, 246-48, 400-401). Thus an Epicurean *adynaton* had become for Horace a *factum*. But this did not force him to conclude that the phenomenon was caused by god. He knew the Epicurean tenet that whatever strange phenomena occur, they should be attributed to natural causes and not the agency of the gods (*Sat.* 1.5.101-103; D.L. 10.97, 104). And a natural explanation for the bolt from the blue had already been excogitated (see *Sen. Q.N.* 1.1.14-15; 2.18, attributed to Anaximander). On the other side, there was the fact, of considerable psychological force, that a thunderbolt was traditionally attributed to Iupiter, and a bolt from the blue was considered a par-

⁷ What is important is not so much whether the incident actually occurred, as whether the majority of Horace's audience could really *think* that it did. In other words, is Horace's experience plausible? If not, one can more easily take the poem as facetious.

ticularly significant event, a *prodigium*.⁸ Lucretius had challenged Jupiter to prove his power by sending, against the laws of nature, thunder and lightning in a clear sky (6.400-401): *denique cur numquam caelo iacit undique puro / Iuppiter in terras fulmen sonitusque profundit?* This is precisely what Horace had now witnessed. Further, it was commonly believed, and expressed elsewhere by Horace (see above), that Jupiter sent his bolts not only to show approbation but also displeasure, to admonish, to warn, and to punish man.⁹ Because of these emotionally disconcerting associations, it is reasonable to suppose that thunder and lightning, when it happened, disturbed even people of a scientific persuasion, and the unexpected occurrence of it in a clear sky must have been frightening to anyone who experienced it (cf. *Lucr.* 5.1218-25). Augustus, for one, was so terrified of thunder and lightning that he holed up in an underground chamber whenever it occurred (*Suet. Aug.* 90).

In the balance, we can readily accept that the thunderbolt caused a very real emotional shock in Horace, that he was, so to speak, "shaken up" by it (cf. *concutitur*, 12), and that this aroused in him a sense of his own human impotence, insecurity, and anxiety, and a realization that man's *ratio* (*sapientia*) is insufficient to account for the mysteries of nature and deal with the vicissitudes of life. In this state he reconsidered his attitude toward the gods. He was a man of intelligent common sense, not a philosophical doctrinaire or zealot. We may well believe that he concluded that it was as reasonable, and certainly more circumspect, to accept that the gods can interfere in the world, as that they can not, and that accordingly they must be given their proper due of respect and worship. He knew that even the most assiduous piety gave no assurance of security and happiness, but it could at least reduce anxiety in the face of life's hazards and uncertainties.¹⁰

The account of the thunderbolt and its effect occupies the precise center of the poem, longer (by two and a half lines) than the two framing parts (four and a half lines each), the heart, so to speak, of the poem.

⁸ A. B. Cook, *Zeus* III (Cambridge 1940) 945 f., and Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad* 1.34, with references.

⁹ Perhaps it is no accident that in Horace's model for this passage, *Hes. Th.* 839-41, Zeus hurls his bolts to punish and destroy.

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., *Cic. Off.* 2.3.11: *deos placatos pietas efficiet et sanctitas*.

The texture of this emotionally charged center, in contrast to the greater compactness of rational statement in the two framing parts, is appropriately more loose, expansive, imagistic. While Diespiter, god of the sky and celestial phenomena, with his vibrating fire-brand divides the clouds most of the time (*plerumque*, 7), this time he drove his thundering steeds and fleet chariot through a clear sky. Now that Horace has accepted again the reality of divine power in the world, he takes it for granted that god is able to act *παρὰ φύσιν*, and thunder in a clear sky, denied by Lucretius, is a dramatic expression of this power. The appreciation of divine power provides the dominant emotional motif in this section, and indeed the whole remainder of the poem. The image of the great god, hurling a bolt as he drives through the open sky in his swift-moving chariot drawn by thundering steeds, effectively conveys a sense of his might, and the following description of the effects of the divine action is designed primarily to reinforce and magnify this impression.

Through the thunderbolt the world is shaken to its foundations (*concutitur*, 12). The traditional nature of the imagery¹¹ suggests that just as Horace does not mean that Jupiter literally drove through the sky in a chariot, so he also does not mean that the whole world was literally shaken to its foundations by the thunderclap.¹² Further, while the thunder occurred at some time in the past (*egit*, 8), the shaking of the world as a result is presented as happening even now, in the present (*concutitur*, 12). This could be taken as a historic present, and as such its effect is epic and grand (cf. Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*). Nevertheless, within the scope of the image the "shaking" is happening now, some time after the thunderclap. As with Jupiter's chariot, this is metaphorical, not observed reality. The poet is not concerned with an accurate realistic account of his experience, with the thunderbolt and its effect for its own sake; he is concerned with it rather as a manifestation or symbol of divine power. Accordingly, while three and a half lines are given to the account of the divine act (5-8), another three and a half lines are spent to proclaim its effect (9-12).

¹¹ The main model is Hes. *Th.* 839-41. See further Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*

¹² Here the reader may be tempted to add: "And so he also does not mean the thunderbolt literally." Perhaps so (see below). But while no one had ever seen Zeus driving through the sky in a chariot, thunder was a fact of experience, even in a supposedly clear sky.

In this passage (9-12), "the bound of Atlas" (*Atlanteus finis*, 11) is usually understood with reference to Euripides *Hipp.* 3 and similar expressions (see Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*) to mean the end of the earth in the west.¹³ But if the phrase is limited to this meaning, it is poetically awkward, since it is not balanced by another, corresponding "end of the earth," as for instance in the expression of Euripides, and it does not really add anything to what is already conveyed by *tellus* and *vaga flumina*. In the context of the whole passage, the phrase can be understood also as indicating "the peak of Atlas" holding up the sky.¹⁴ The expression then forms part of the image which encompasses the whole world. Horizontally, there is "the earth" and "the waters," that is, everything there is in all directions, north, south, east, west; vertically, it reaches from the underworld (*Styx* and *Taenarus* here mean "the underworld;" cf. Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*) all the way up to the threshold of heaven (*Atlanteus finis*). This image of total spatial comprehensiveness serves to illustrate the comprehensiveness, that is, the ubiquity and totality, of divine power.¹⁵ This conception is forcefully summed up in the concluding word of the passage, *concutitur* (12). The hard alliterative sound of the word and its position, enjambement, reinforce the meaning: the whole world is

¹³ Aphrodite in Eur. *Hipp.* 3-4: "All men who look upon the light of the sun, all who dwell between the Euxine Sea and the boundaries of Atlas (*Πόντου τερμώνων τ' Ἀτλαντικῶν*) are under my sway."

Commentators disagree on whether *Atlanteus finis* refers, specifically, to the mountain (so, e.g., Nisbet-Hubbard), the range (so, e.g., Shorey-Laing), the Pillars (so, e.g., Kiessling-Heinze), or the ocean (so L. Mueller [St. Petersburg and Leipzig 1900], taking it as equivalent of *aequor Atlanticum* in C. 1.31.14).

¹⁴ Note the root-meaning in *Atlas* of "carrying, supporting" (*ἀ copulativum* and *τλάω*). H. Frisk, *GEW* s.v. *Ἀτλας*.

¹⁵ This interpretation finds support in the Hesiodic model, *Th.* 839-41: *σκληρόν δ' ἐβρόντησε καὶ ὄβριμον, ἀμφὶ δὲ γαῖα / σμερδαλέον κονάβησε καὶ οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ὑπερθε / πόντος τ' Ὠκεανοῦ τε ῥοαὶ καὶ τάρταρα γαίης*. There is nothing here to suggest "the end of the earth," but *γαῖα* (earth) to *tellus* (earth), *πόντος Ὠκεανοῦ τε ῥοαὶ* (the sea and the streams of the Ocean) to *vaga flumina* (the roaming rivers), *τάρταρα γαίης* (the nether parts of the earth) to *Styx* and *Taenari sedes* (*Styx* and the seat of *Taenarus*), and *οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ὑπερθε* (the wide heaven above) suggests *Atlanteus finis* (the Atlantean bound) in the sense of the peak of Atlas holding up the sky. Thus Hesiod provides the same kind of image of spatial comprehensiveness as illustration of the comprehensiveness of god's power. The coinage of the phrase, for this context, possibly was inspired by Eur. *Hipp.* 746 f., *σεμνὸν τέρμονα κύρων / οὐρανοῦ, τὸν Ἀτλας ἔχει*.

"shaken violently."¹⁶ *Concutitur* (12) in its stanza is parallel to *egit* (8) in the preceding stanza, and the two words and their associated ideas reinforce each other and pinpoint the poet's concern: god has acted (*egit*), and the whole world is profoundly affected by it. Again, both *egit* and *concutitur* as initial words in their respective lines parallel *cogor* in line five, and this correspondence in turn pinpoints the cause behind the poet's conversion. He is *forced* to change his attitude and behavior toward the gods because of his renewed recognition and acceptance of their *power*. The experience of the thunderbolt has been, if not the direct cause, then at least the occasion, the emotional catalyst, for the change.

In the third and final part of the poem (12-16), the theme of divine power in the world is developed further and applied more specifically to human beings. After *concutitur* (12), which evokes a sense of dread and trembling before god's might (see *L&S*, s.v.), the introductory word of the concluding section, *valet*, reemphasizes this motif of divine strength. The polarity of *ima summis* at the end of the line (12) suspends the thought of the sentence but emotionally sustains the theme of god's efficacy, and the resulting sense of human impotence and anxiety. In the following line (13) the thought of the sentence is made clear. God is able to work total revolutions in human affairs. The concluding word of the line, and subject of the sentence, *deus*, along with the initial word, and predicate, *valet*, pinpoints the idea of divine power ("powerful is god") in its application to human beings, and this power is felt as harmful more than as beneficent to man (*insignem attenuat*). In the following line (14), the phrase *obscura promens* brings out, in addition, the idea of the unexpected and paradoxical, already implicit in the account of the thunderbolt, and intensifies the over-all emotional effect of the passage, the sense of human insecurity and anxiety. The theme continues with the words *hinc apicem rapax*, after which the end of the line again causes a short pause, to reinforce the emotional atmosphere of man's *Angst* before god's might. *Apicem* takes up the *insignem* of the preceding line, but *rapax* not only increases our apprehension of the potential destructiveness of god's power (*insignem attenuat*) and the mysteriousness and unexpect-

¹⁶ *Concutitur* is emphasized by the fact that it is the only choriamb in the poem consisting of a four-syllabic word.

tedness of his ways (*obscura promens*), but adds to it a suggestion of aggressive harshness and even cruelty. *Fortuna* in the following line (15) as subject of the sentence comes at first as a surprise, since we expect *deus*, but this surprise itself increases our sense of the frequent unpredictability and apparent capriciousness of divine behavior. We quickly surmise that *Fortuna* is somehow equivalent with *deus*, *Diespiter*, and *deorum*, that is, *Fortuna* appears to be the deity in the particular manifestation of the unexpected, the inscrutable, and the capricious. The picture introduced by *apicem rapax* continues and concludes the poem. The phrase *cum stridore acuto* (15), with its jarring assonance, increases the impression of harshness, capriciousness and cruelty introduced by *apicem rapax*, and thus intensifies the feeling of human anxiety. The next line (16) completes the picture and the poem. Harsh, aggressive, even merciless (*rapax*) *Fortuna* with a shrill whizzing (of her wings?) removes the crown (of man's power and happiness) and rejoices in placing it elsewhere.¹⁷

The concluding word of the poem, *gaudet*, adds an important nuance to the overall statement. *Fortuna* "takes pleasure" in her capricious ways, in bringing catastrophe to one man and fame and fortune to another. I believe the word is not merely metaphorical but signifies the personal nature of divine action (so also Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*). Thus the poem ends with emphasis on the awesome power of god not as an impersonal force but as a personal, sentient being, and this suggestion of divine personality increases our feeling of anxiety before god, and so our awareness of the necessity to come to terms with him, to worship him properly. But beyond this, there is perhaps some ambiguity in *gaudet*, and we linger a bit longer. Syntactically, *gaudet* governs only *posuisse*, not *sustulit*, and this might be seen as a suggestion that *Fortuna* "takes pleasure" in her beneficent more than in her harmful effects on men (so Kiessling-Heinze, *ad loc.*). If this is not being overly subtle, the suggestion somewhat softens the impression of *Fortuna's* cruelty and capriciousness. It encourages the thought, already suggested by *Diespiter*, and perhaps also *obscura promens* in the sense of "raising the humble," that all too frequent appearances

¹⁷ The correspondence of the three main images of the poem also has an intimidating effect. Man (the poet) in his boat sailing alone on the open sea; *Diespiter* driving his chariot through the open sky hurling his thunderbolt; rapacious *Fortuna* with a shrill clangor swooping through the air (toward some victim?).

notwithstanding, the nature of god ultimately is rational, just, and even benevolent, rather than irrational and malevolent toward man.

But whatever god's ultimate nature and intent toward man, his power is real, and it is unescapable. Horace's recognition and appreciation of this fact have forced him to renounce his previous indifference and neglect, and to become once again a proper *cultor deorum*. The poem itself is the first demonstration of his new *pietas*. The statement of the poem, the confession of conversion, is presented in a balanced, symmetrical form consisting of three main parts, with the first and last focusing upon the center, the appreciation of god's might. Stylistically, the chariot as symbol of god's power substitutes for the name of the god, and the modifying clause as well as the anaphora of *quo* unmistakably evoke the traditional form of a hymn. Thus the poem constitutes a sacrifice, an act of worship and praise of the deity.

III

Several matters remain. Is it possible to say anything more specific about the deity in the poem? What grounds are there for the opinion that the conversion is not meant seriously, and how persuasive are they? Can the thunderbolt be taken symbolically? How does the poem fit in with what we know of Horace's life?

There have been repeated attempts to pin down the identity of the deity. The main disagreement is whether it is, essentially, the Stoic Fortuna identified with a providential Jupiter, or at any rate Fortuna as executor of Jupiter's will,¹⁸ or whether it is rather the unprovidential and capricious Hellenistic *Tyche*, who leaves little room for belief in a rational and providential love.¹⁹ In as much as these identifications,

¹⁸ So, e.g., R. Hanslik, "Die Religiosität des Horaz," *Das Altertum* 1 (1955) 236; R. Heinze, *Die Augusteische Kultur* (Stuttgart 1960³) 53 f.; F. Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion* (Engl. tr., New York 1938) 532, note 2; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* II (Berlin 1932) 437 f.; G. Pasquali, *Orazio lirico* (Florence 1920) 600-602; H. Trümpner, "Die Umkehr des Horaz," *Didactica Classica Gandensia* 6 (1966) 65 f.

¹⁹ So, e.g., H. P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz* I (Darmstadt 1972) 301 f.; K. Abel, "Horaz auf der Suche nach dem wahren Selbst," *Antike und Abendland* 15 (1969) 40 f.; V. Pöschl, *Horaz und die Politik* (Heidelberg 1963²) 17; H. J. Rose, "Horace, *Od.* I 34-35," *CR* 30 (1916) 192; A. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age. Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (New York 1965, repr. of the ed. of 1892) 159 f. Similarly W. Jaeger, "Horaz C. I 34," *Hermes* 48 (1913) 448.

and any variants, are mutually exclusive, they are all inadequate. The fact is that Horace leaves his conception of the deity significantly elusive and ambiguous. The first reference, *deorum* (1), is of course completely general. Then, the archaic *Diespiter* (5) is more remote and elusive than Jupiter would be with his host of specific mythological associations. Nevertheless, the sky god *Diespiter* is the supreme god Jupiter, "father of gods and men," lord of the universe, and the prevailing conception of Jupiter (Zeus) among Romans and Greeks, and found also in the *Odes*, was that he is rational, providential, and even benevolent to man.²⁰ Then *deus* (13), itself neutral, receives some qualification from *Diespiter*, but most importantly, it provides the bridge, the common denominator between *Diespiter* and the following *Fortuna* (15), and thus it shows that these two conceptions are essentially synonymous, in the sense that they are two different labels, or forms of appearance, of god. *Fortuna* cannot simply be identified, in the Stoic fashion, with a providential Jupiter, for her behavior, as depicted, and also found elsewhere in Horace, is characteristic rather of the Hellenistic *Tyche*, irrational, capricious, even cruel.²¹ Nor, on the other hand, can Jupiter be subsumed under *Fortuna*, despite her greater prominence in the poem. There is, after all, the possibility that the irrationality and capriciousness of her ways is only apparent, that there lies behind it an ultimate divine reason and purpose.²² Jupiter and *Fortuna*, then, with their different denotations and associations, balance and complement each other as different forms of appearance, or manifestations, of the divine, and while the element of mere chance appears to be particularly prominent in the life of men, the ultimate character of god is elusive, and perhaps unknowable. At least the poet leaves the question open. He presents no specific conception of god, no particular creed, and recommends no particular

²⁰ Cf. C. 1.12.13-16, 49-52, 57-60; 3.4.41 ff.; 4.4.74. Differently, 3.3.1-8. Generally, A. B. Cook, *Zeus* II (Cambridge 1925) 852 ff.; III (Cambridge 1940) 946 ff.

²¹ Cf. C. 3.29.49-52; 2.1.3; *Sat.* 2.8.61-63; *Epist.* 1.1.68. Differently, C. 4.14.34-40; *Epist.* 2.3.201. Generally, L. Ruhl in Roscher's *Lexikon d. griech. u. röm. Mythologie* 5 (1916-24) 1319 ff., and the authorities cited in note 19, above.

²² While this poem, like every Horatian ode, is a self-contained entity, it may also be regarded as preparatory to the prayer to *Fortuna* that follows (1.35). With respect to this relationship, it is perhaps significant that the character of *Fortuna* in that poem also is ambiguous. It was probably composed some four or five years after 1.34, in 26 B.C.

forms of worship. He is concerned not with a metaphysical, philosophical question, the *nature* of god, but with a fact of human experience, at least his own experience, the *power* of god. He professes that there are gods, or a god, a *numen*, who has great power, and can use this power at will both for man's benefit and destruction, and who does so frequently in ways that are least expected. Therefore it behooves man, if only for reasons of intelligent self-interest, to venerate the gods, in whatever ways, to demonstrate *pietas*.

But there are those who believe the poem is not serious.²³ Their arguments can be summarized as follows. If Horace meant to be taken seriously, he would not allege so puerile a reason for his conversion as a bolt from the blue because, as Lucretius had said, the phenomenon is not possible, and a natural explanation was available for those who believed that it was. More specifically, it is unlikely that he would so pointedly cast himself in the role of the Epicurean fool, who from ignorance of the true causes of events is reduced to a fearful acceptance of the power of the gods (Lucr. 5.82-90; 6.50-65). Also, since Horace became an Epicurean early in his career (cf. *Sat.* 1.5.101), the conversion, if taken seriously, meant a return to the naive faith of childhood, which is unlikely in the case of one so sophisticated and sceptical as Horace. Further, the designation of himself as an Epicurean in *Epistles* 1.4.16, *after* this poem, also argues against the conversion. And there is no external evidence for it. In the poem itself there are, in addition to the allusion to Epicurean doctrine and the Epicurean fool, indications of humor and self-irony, or self-mockery, in the phrase *deorum cultor*, the "mock-heroics" of the two central stanzas, and the force of *plerumque* (7).

How persuasive are these arguments? As for the thunderbolt, we have noted that Horace could well have believed sincerely that he had witnessed thunder in a clear sky, and the prevailing belief, past and present, that the phenomenon did occur, would support his belief.

²³ E.g., Nisbet-Hubbard, *Comm.*, *ad loc.*; K. Büchner, in Bursian's *Jahresbericht über die klassische Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. Bd. 267 (Leipzig 1939) 14; cf. Büchner, *AU* 2 (1951) 11; E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 253-57, with reservations. See further the discussions in G. E. Lessing, *Rettungen des Horaz, ad finem*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. P. Rilla, III (Berlin 1955) 586 ff.; A. Delatte, "La conversion d'Horace," *AC* 4 (1935) 293 ff.; and K. Reckford, "Horace, *Odes* 1.34: An Interpretation," *Studies in Philology* 63 (1966) 499 ff.

We have also noted that in the belief of most people, past and present, thunder and *a fortiori* thunder in a clear sky was caused by divine agency. The thunderbolt then was, if not an actual demonstration, at least a time-honored symbol, of divine power in the world. As for playing the Epicurean fool, since the poet's objection to the Epicureans is precisely their assertion of divine impotence, far from mocking himself as a fool who believes, or who has believed momentarily, in divine interference, he turns the tables, as it were, on the Epicureans by opposing to their "foolish wisdom," and his own former beliefs, the true wisdom of acknowledging divine efficacy in the world and, as we have said, the thunderbolt was the classic expression of it. Further, the conversion does not involve the change of a religious creed or philosophy, but a change from indifference to *pietas* toward the gods, in recognition of their power over men. This constitutes a return not to the naive beliefs of childhood but to an attitude considered as reasonable now as it was in Horace's time. We note, in addition, that Horace came under direct Epicurean influence probably *c.* 39 B.C. (see below), at age twenty-six, and few people are likely to characterize the religious notions they had in their mid-twenties as the naive beliefs of childhood.

As for the Epicureanism of *Epistles* 1.4, Horace is here making a joke. He wishes to cheer up his friend Tibullus and exhorts him to enjoy life. So he tells him that if he wants to have a good laugh sometime, to visit him (15-16): *me pinguem et nitidum bene curata cute vides, / cum ridere voles, Epicuri de grege porcum*. Horace is saying that, like most Epicureans, according to the popular image of them, he enjoys "good living," food and drink, and his corporeal rotundity and well-being attest to it, as they did, according to popular tradition, in Epicurus' case (Kiessling-Heinze, *ad Epist.* 1.4). He does not seriously identify himself as an adherent of Epicurean philosophy, much less subscribe to the particular doctrine of divine non-interference. We do well to recall Horace's stated philosophical eclecticism (*Epist.* 1.1.13-15): *ac ne forte roges quo me duce, quo lare tuter: / nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri, / quo me cumque rapit tempestas deferor hospes*.²⁴

²⁴ This accounts for the sentiments expressed in *C.* 3.3.6-8 (27 B.C. ?); 3.29.43 ff. (26 B.C. ?); *Epist.* 1.6.3-5 (20 B.C. ?); 2.2.208-209 (18 B.C.). See also J. F. D'Alton, *Horace and his Age* (London 1917) 97, and Pöschl (above, note 19).

Odes 1.34 was written c. 30 B.C., and the letter to Tibullus probably some ten or eleven years later, in 20 or 19 B.C. (Kiessling-Heinze, *ad Epist.* 1.4). It can tell us nothing about the attitude of *Odes* 1.34.

With respect to the claim that there is no external evidence for the conversion, one might say that this argument, like its corollary, the claim of Epicureanism in *Epistles* 1.4, involves the biographical error in confusing poetic with biographical sincerity, which needs to be validated by external evidence. But in any case, the objection could carry weight only if the conversion were from Epicureanism to some other specific set of beliefs, such as Stoicism, since for this there is indeed no evidence. As it is, the change is from neglect of the gods to piety, in recognition of their power over men, and of this attitude other poems do in fact bear witness.

As to specific indications within the poem itself that Horace does not mean to be taken seriously, *cultor* is said to be "humorous" on the ground that the word at this time was "rare and grandiloquent" (Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*). If it was in fact rare, one could suppose that just for this reason Horace considered the phrase *deorum cultor* stately and dignified, well suited to express the central concern of the poem, Horace's relation to the gods, and in accord with other elevated, poetic vocabulary in the poem (*Diespiter, coruscus, brutus, Taenarus*). Similarly, the alleged "mock-heroics" in the central stanzas (Nisbet-Hubbard, *ad loc.*) can be better appreciated as traditional imagery providing the poetic sublimation and validation of a personal experience.²⁵ It is not satisfactory to regard the imagery in this section of the poem as evidence for Horace's facetiousness, and yet to consider the last stanza, which contains the same kind of traditional imagery, as serious (but so Nisbet-Hubbard).

As for the word *plerumque* (7), it has been said to "cancel" all seriousness ("das doch alles aufhebt," K. Büchner, [above, note 23]). One wonders why unless, like many earlier scholars, we attach *plerumque*

²⁵ Note the pertinent remarks of U. Knoche, "Erlebnis und dichterischer Ausdruck in der lateinischen Poesie," *Gymnasium* 65 (1958) 157: "Bei einem lateinischen Dichter wird man grundsätzlich gerade dann am ehesten ein echtes Bekenntnis erwarten dürfen, wenn er sich einer vorgeprägten Form bedient, sei es, dass er sich auf einen Mythos beruft, auf ein anerkanntes Dichterwort oder sonst ein poetisches *Exemplum*; gerade erst von einem solchen Verweis erwartet er die wirkliche Gültigkeit seiner eigenen poetischen Aussage, weit über das Selbsterlebte hinaus."

not to *nubila dividens* (6) but to the following *per purum tonantis / egit equos* (7-8). But this would be violating common sense, by making near-nonsense out of a straightforward and reasonable statement, and the whole poem would indeed be rendered facetious. As far as I know, all modern editors have taken *plerumque* with the preceding words (as shown by the punctuation), and we can safely agree. But then the word does not cancel the poem's seriousness.²⁶ We may add that the acknowledged seriousness of the last stanza argues for the seriousness of the whole poem, since the alternative is to accept an unlikely rupture in the poem's tone and attitude. Finally, the poem's form, a monologue confession, which is unique in Horace's *Odes*, may be seen as further evidence of the poem's seriousness. In sum, these considerations are perhaps not conclusive, but the burden of proof, finally, lies not with those who take Horace at his word, but with those who claim that he does not mean what he says.

Methodologically, then, we are justified in accepting the poem as serious and sincere throughout.²⁷ It is possible, however, that the thunderbolt is not a real event but a metaphor for some incident or experience which brought to Horace suddenly the realization that he must change his relation with the gods, and this realization may be understood as culmination of a gradual and largely unconscious spiritual reorientation, a gradual change in Horace's religious attitude. He may have chosen the thunderbolt as a classic and dramatically effective symbol of divine power, and a warning to men, and because it showed him, with his renewed belief in divine power, pointedly at variance with the Epicurean assertion, as proof of divine powerlessness, that thunder in a clear sky is impossible. It is also possible, as Heinze

²⁶ In a fascinating discussion of the poem, Lessing (above, note 23) noted that most editors before him took *plerumque* with the following rather than with the preceding words. But Lessing said all that needs to be said on the matter, and it is very difficult to think that a scholar of Büchner's *sensus veri* should have resurrected the error. Perhaps his reasoning is, rather, that any event which occurs "usually" (*plerumque*), *ipso facto* allows of exceptions, that thus Horace himself indicates that there is no real reason to assign this particular exception to divine agency, and that therefore the whole statement is *facetious*. But we have seen that there is no necessity to think that Horace took the thunder as rationally compelling proof of divine agency.

²⁷ So also, e.g., Heinze in Kiessling-Heinze, *Komm.*, *ad loc.*; H. Hommel, *Horaz: Der Mensch und das Werk* (Heidelberg 1950) 45 ff.; T. Zieliński, *Horace et la société romaine du temps d'Auguste* (Paris 1938) 43 ff.; A. Campbell, *Horace. A New Interpretation* (London 1924) 122; A. Delatte (above, note 23).

suggested (Kiessling-Heinze, *ad loc.*), that Horace chose the thunderbolt in recognition of the frequency with which in the ancient world religious conversions were thought to be caused by visual or acoustic experiences. In any case, given the prevailing beliefs of Horace's contemporaries, he knew that most would accept the thunderbolt as real, and therefore we can be sure at least that he did not mean to exclude the literal interpretation. But whether we take the thunderbolt as real or symbolic, the meaning of the poem remains essentially the same.

How does the poem, as here interpreted, fit in with what we know of Horace's life? First, it is not necessary to view the poem as a biographical document. We can regard it as a serious statement in the poetic rather than the biographical sense, and speculate that early in his career as lyric poet, Horace found it artistically and ethically desirable to abjure the scepticism and disbelief of his earlier period, and to assume an attitude of religious piety, as being more in accord with the spirit and tradition of the lyric muse.²⁸ As it is, however, the poem fits in well with what we know or surmise about Horace's life. Keeping in mind, at the same time, that our knowledge of Horace's life derives almost entirely from his poetry, we may, with due diffidence, make the following observations. Like most people, he experienced fluctuations in his religious attitudes throughout his life, and his inner freedom was too important for him ever to become the follower of any one school of thought (cf. *Epist.* 1.1.13-15, quoted above, and note 24). While he never was interested in Epicurean science, he continued throughout his life to be interested (but not exclusively) in Epicurean ethics, which he found personally congenial (e.g., *C.* 3.29; *Epist.* 1.4; 1.18.96-112). Beyond this, we may perhaps distinguish two or three major changes in Horace's religious attitude, one probably late in 39 B.C., another one in c. 30 B.C., and a third one in c. 23 B.C.²⁹ The first change came in the wake of the battle at

²⁸ This is, essentially, the view of Sellar (above, note 19) and of Syndikus (above, note 19). But Syndikus goes further and argues, 302 ff., that Horace not only did not believe what he said in the poem, but found the attitude he expressed distasteful. It is difficult to believe that Horace stated as a serious poetic manifesto what he privately disowned and rejected.

²⁹ See esp. R. Hanslik, "Die Religiosität des Horaz," *Das Altertum* 1 (1955) 230-40 and, more generally, H. Oppermann, "Das Göttliche im Spiegel der Dichtung des

Philippi, when Horace apparently came to despair of the *res publica* and lost faith and interest in religion. At this time, also, he perhaps came under direct Epicurean influence by joining the circle of Philodemus in Naples (but this is very uncertain). While Vergil, also a member of this group, was never much affected by Epicurean doctrine, Horace was influenced to the point where in c. 37 B.C. he wrote (*Sat.* 1.5.101-103): *namque deos didici securum agere aevum, / nec siquid miri faciat natura deos id / tristis ex alto caeli demittere tecto*. But subsequently, in the circle of Maecenas and Vergil, and through the influence of Octavian, Horace regained interest in the state, and then also in religion, with a renewed belief in the relevance of the gods to human affairs. As *Odes* 1.14, written (probably) in 33 B.C., may seen as a statement of Horace's political conversion, so *Odes* 1.34, written probably in 30 or perhaps in 31 B.C., can be seen as expression of his religious conversion.³⁰ Whether or not the thunderbolt was real, and the direct occasion for the change, we may assume that the change had been prepared unconsciously for some time by the same personal experiences which had led also to a change in his political outlook.³¹

Odes 1.34, then, may properly be regarded, in the biographical as well as poetic sense, as preparatory not only to the prayer to Fortuna that follows in our collection (1.35), but to all the other poems, as well, which are informed by the spirit of religious *pietas*, as *Odes* 1.2, 3, 10, 12, 17, 31; 2.7, 17, 19; 3.2, 4, 6, 8, and the *Carmen Saeculare*. Among these poems, the attitude of 1.34 is perhaps most clearly reflected in the second and sixth Roman *Odes* (29 B.C.):

saepe Diespiter
neglectus incesto addidit integrum;
raro antecedentem scelestum
deseruit pede poena claudo. (3.2.29-32)

Horaz," *AU* 9 (1956) 54-67, and F. Altheim *A History of Roman Religion* (Engl. tr., New York 1938) 369-93. On the religious import of Horace's panegyrics of Augustus, see now E. Doblhofer, *Die Augustuspanegyrik des Horaz in formalhistorischer Sicht* (Heidelberg 1966) 109-62.

³⁰ Note that in both poems Horace uses a nautical metaphor, in 1.14 the ship of state, in 1.34 the ship of his life.

³¹ As early as 33 B.C. Horace expressed solicitude for the ruined temples of the gods. *Sat.* 2.2.103 f.

Delicta maiorum immeritus lues,
Romane, donec templa refeceris
aedesque labentes deorum et
foeda nigro simulacra fumo.

Dis te minorem quod geris, imperas;
hinc omne principium, huc refer exitum:
di multa neglecti dederunt
Hesperiae mala luctuosae. (3.6.1-8)