

An Interpretation of Horace's Eleventh Epode

GEORG LUCK

Petti, nihil me sicut antea iuvat
 scribere versiculos amore percussum gravi,
 amore, qui me praeter omnis expetit
 mollibus in pueris aut in puellis urere. 5
 hic tertius December, ex quo destiti
 Inachia furere, silvis honorem decutit.
 heu me, per urbem—nam pudet tanti mali—
 fabula quanta fui, conviviorum et paenitet,
 in quis amantem languor et silentium 10
 arguit et latere petitus imo spiritus.
 ‘contrane lucrum nil valere candidum
 pauperis ingenium’ querebar adplorans tibi,
 simul calentis inverecondus deus
 fervidiore mero arcana promorat loco.
 ‘quodsi meis inaestuet praecordiis 15
 libera bilis, ut haec ingrata ventis dividat
 fomenta vulnus nil malum levantia,
 desinet inparibus certare summotus pudor.’
 ubi haec severus te palam laudaveram,
 iussus abire domum ferebar incerto pede 20
 ad non amicos heu mihi postis et heu
 limina dura, quibus lumbos et infregi latus.
 nunc gloriantis quamlibet mulierculam
 vincere mollitia amor Lycisci me tenet;
 unde expedire non amicorum queant 25
 libera consilia nec contumeliae graves,
 sed alius ardor aut puellae candidae
 aut teretis pueri longam renodantis comam.

This curious poem was called by Friedrich Leo *plane elegia iambis concepta*—a very apt description. It sounds paradoxical, and the poem is

something of a paradox. Eduard Fraenkel¹ tried a slightly different approach. He thought that Horace here made full use of themes current in Hellenistic erotic poetry, especially erotic epigrams, as they are preserved in the Greek Anthology. Horace knew Asclepiades, Meleager, and Philodemus—no doubt about that—but in this particular poem, I think, he imitates, or perhaps parodies, the manner of a Roman poet. The themes may be Greek, but I think I can name the man who introduced them into Roman poetry and made them popular. It is the man who is known as the ἀρχηγέτης of the Roman love elegy. I should like to show that in his poem Horace alludes to Cornelius Gallus.

Though he never mentions him by name, Horace almost certainly was familiar with the work of Virgil's great friend. Horace's *Epodes* were written at about the time when Gallus' fame as a love poet must have reached its zenith. At about the same time, Virgil was at work on his *Eclogues*, two of which pay tribute to Cornelius Gallus.

The whole concept of love and the love-poet which emerges from the Eleventh Epode is so typical of Latin elegiac poetry that practically every line can be paralleled from Propertius, Tibullus, or Ovid. But none of them had published anything at this time. Catullus is entirely different.

I do not think it necessary to discuss our Epode together with nr. 15, although it is closely related. There, too, the poet seeks to end an unhappy love affair. Again, as Kiessling-Heinze point out, the themes can be traced back to Hellenistic love poetry. But in this case I would hesitate to connect them with Gallus.

Let us now isolate the various themes of nr. 11 and compare them to passages in the later elegiac poets. The commentaries give a few parallels, but a quick search in the *indices verborum* and concordances furnishes many more. I shall not give a complete list but select the more important ones, hoping to establish a catalogue of themes and ideas typical for Gallus:

I. The poet in love does not enjoy writing *versiculi* any more (1 f.). We should hardly compare Propertius 2, 16, 33 f., *tot iam abiere dies, cum me nec cura theatri/ nec tetigit Campi, nec mea Musa* (P, Volscus: *mensa cett.*) *iuvat*, because here the reading *Musa* is not absolutely certain. But we have an excellent parallel in Virgil, *Ecl.*, 10, 62, where Gallus himself says, *iam nec Amadryades rursus nec carmina nobis/ ipsa placent*. In the same context, Virgil's Gallus speaks of hunting as *nostrī medicina furoris* (60). The concept of love as *furor*, *insania*, or *malum vulnus* is characteristic of our Epode (compare *furere*, 6; *fomenta vulnus nil malum levantia*, 17). Horace seems to have chosen the word *versiculi* deliberately. Of course, he is not thinking of iambs. The

¹ Fraenkel, ed. *Horace*, 1957, p. 67. He draws attention to F. Jacoby's article on the origin of the Roman elegy, *Rhein. Mus.*, 60 (1905), 38 ff.

diminutive is typical for love poetry, hence for elegiac verse (compare *nugae*; *lusus*). The very word *versiculi* alone might indicate that Horace, in this Epode, deals with elegiac themes.

II. To be "wounded" or "smitten" by love (*amore percussus gravi*, 1) is another theme dear to the elegiac poets, though the closest parallel comes again from Virgil (*Georg.*, 2, 476), *ingenti percussus amore*, where it is the love of the Muses. *Gravis amor* is fairly frequent in Propertius (2, 30A, 7 f.; 3, 8, 10; 21, 2), and Tibullus uses the adverb *graviter* in an expressive way (2, 1, 70), *a miseri, quos hic graviter deus urget*.

III. The idea that the poet is the constant target of love (*amore, qui me praeter omnis expetit*, 3) is probably as old as Anacreon, but it is certainly typical of Propertius; compare 1, 6, 23 ff.; 2, 22A, 17 f., *uni cuique dedit vitium natura creato:| mi fortuna aliquid semper amare dedit*; 34B, 57 ff. He sees himself as the victim, the martyr of passion; but on this martyrdom he builds his fame as a poet. He suffers, but he suffers in a stylish pose.

IV. If he is not in love with a beautiful woman, he is in love with a handsome boy (*mollibus in pueris aut in puellis urere*, 4). Here, again, one thinks of Anacreon, but Gallus, too, may have written homoerotic poetry, for in Virgil, *Ecl.*, 10, 36 ff. he says, *certe, sive mihi Phyllis, sive esset Amyntas,| seu quicumque furor . . .| mecum inter salices lenta sub vite iaceret:| sarta mihi Phyllis legeret, cantaret Amyntas*. Tibullus' Marathus poems may indicate at least some passing interest in boys, but nothing suggests a similar taste in Propertius and Ovid.

V. Love is a kind of madness (5 f.). We have already mentioned this concept in the song of Virgil's Gallus (*Ecl.* 10). There is a very close parallel to Horace's *hic tertius December, ex quo destiti| Inachia furere, silvis honorem decutit* in Propertius 1, 1, 7, *et mihi iam toto furor hic non deficit anno*.

VI. The poet claims to be ashamed, humiliated, because he is the talk of the town (7 f.). This notion occurs frequently in Propertius; compare, for example, 2, 24, 1 ff., "*Tu loqueris, cum sis iam noto fabula libro| et tua sit toto Cynthia lecta foro?*"| *cui non his verbis aspergat tempora sudor?*| *aut pudor ingenuis aut retinendus amor*, etc. and 3, 25, 1 f., *risus eram positus inter convivia mensis| et de me poterat quilibet esse loquax*. Compare Tibullus 1, 4, 23; 2, 3, 31 f.; Ovid, *Amores*, 3, 1, 21. In some of these passages the poets express their embarrassment at being the subject of malicious gossip, but they also show a certain pride in being notorious.

VII. His behavior at a banquet shows his companions that he is in love (9 f.). This is the theme of Callimachus, *Epigr.*, 13 Pf. (*Anth. Pal.*, 12, 134), Tibullus 1, 2, and Lygdamus 6. In our text, the poet is embarrassed at having revealed too much. The symptoms are obvious.

VIII. A rich rival enjoys, temporarily at least, the favors of the lady

whom the poet loves. Ever since Callimachus, *Epigr.*, 7 (*Anth. Pal.*, 12, 148), the poet's poverty is a theme of erotic verse. It may have had some basis of fact in Callimachus' life; it probably has none in the life of Tibullus, but he follows the convention; compare 1, 4, 57 ff.; 9, 7 ff.; Prop. 2, 16, 1 ff.; 33 ff.²

IX. The wine motive (13 f.) is not used in the same way as in Tibullus 1, 5, 37 f. and Propertius 3, 17, 3f. These passages, quoted by the commentators, are misleading. A closer parallel would be Tibullus 1, 9, 25 ff., *ipse deus . . . permisit . . . | ederet ut multo libera verba mero: | ipse deus somno domitos emittere vocem | iussit et invitos facta tegenda loqui*. It is not the topos *vinum curarum medicina*, but the theme that wine favors *παρηγορία*. It loosens the tongue and gives the lover courage to talk freely about his sorrows, too freely, perhaps; for this reason Bacchus is called *inverecundus deus* (13). But it certainly helps to vent one's anger; compare Prop. 1, 1, 28, *sit modo libertas quae velit ira loqui*.

X. The poet seeks the help and advice, or at least the sympathy, of his friends (12, 16 f.; 25 f.). Compare Prop. 1, 1, 25 f., *at vos qui sero lapsum revocatis, amici, | quaerite non sani pectoris auxilia*.

XI. He decides to break with the woman and is told by his friend to go home; that is, not to stop at her house (19 f.), but he cannot resist. We find short-lived resolutions of this kind in Tibullus 1, 5, 1 f., *asper eram et bene discidium me ferre loquebar, | at mihi nunc longe gloria fortis abest* and Propertius 2, 2, 1 f., *liber eram et vacuo meditabar vivere lecto; | at me composita pace fefellit Amor*, both perhaps influenced by Gallus. The very same situation (the poet magically drawn to the door of the mistress) is found in Tibullus 2, 6, 13 f., *iuravi quotiens rediturum ad limina numquam: | cum bene iuravi, pes tamen ipse redit*; and 47 f. we have the *limen durum* of Horace.

There is a break between vv. 22 and 23. The love affair with that woman seems to have come to an end. He may have returned once or twice to the *non amicos . . . postis*, but now all this belongs to the past, and he is in love with a *puer delicatus*, the "little wolf" Lyciscus. The manner in which Horace describes the attractions of this boy, *gloriantis quamlibet mulierculam | vincere mollitia*, can hardly be said to represent his own ideal. A boy who is more feminine than any woman is a slightly absurd figure in Horace's work. This might support the view that our Epode has the character of a parody.

XII. The friends are likely to disapprove of this new affair. Their first reaction would take the form of *libera consilia* ("may I be perfectly frank with you?"), and only when he appears to be deaf to their advice will they

² In the lost elegy or elegies to which Horace, *Carm.*, 1, 33, refers, Tibullus seems to have complained that "Glycera" preferred a younger man to him, not a wealthier one.

switch to the harsher tone of *contumeliae graves*. But even that will be in vain.

XIII. He will always be in love (compare above, on 3 f.), and he can only drive out one love with another. This idea is familiar to us from Propertius 2, 3, 45 f. *his saltem aut (ut codd., corr. Luck) teneat iam finibus, aut, mihi siquis/ acrior, ut moriar, venerit alter amor*. Ovid makes a precept of this in *Rem.*, 462 ff. Love must ultimately triumph, there is no resistance, and this brings us back to Virgil's Gallus (*Ecl.*, 10, 69), whose song ends with the famous line *omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus Amori*.

The Johns Hopkins University