

Horace, C. 3. 17: A Flawed Genealogy

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Carmen 3. 17 appears a simple invitation to take a holiday, but Aelius and his genealogy have proven to be anything but simple:

Aeli, vetusto nobilis ab Lamo, quando et priores hinc Lamias ferunt denominatos et nepotum per memores genus omne fastos	
auctore ab illo ducis ¹ originem, qui Formiarum moenia dicitur princeps et innantem Maricae litoribus tenuisse Lirim	5
late tyrannus: cras foliis nemus multis et alga litus inutili demissa tempestas ab Euro sternet, aquae nisi fallit augur	10
annosa cornix. dum potes, aridum compone lignum. cras Genium mero curabis et porco bimestri cum famulis operum solutis.	15

Peerlkamp, finding little sense in the ode, rejects the whole as being beneath Horace.² The main difficulty that troubles him, as well as editors before and after, is the incongruity between the lofty genealogy (marked by the documentation of the *fasti memores* in true antiquarian manner and the separation of the vocative from the verb, a typical practice of the Greek

¹ *Ducis*] *ducit* D. Heinsius (Bentley): *ducet* Shackleton Bailey. Excluding the restoration of the manuscript reading, *ducis*, the text is from Shackleton Bailey's Teubner edition (*Q. Horati Flacci Opera* [Stuttgart 1985]).

² P. H. Peerlkamp, *Q. Horatii Flacci Carmina* (Amsterdam 1862) ad loc: "Hoc carmen nemo poeta aetatis Augustae, nedum Horatius, pro suo haberi vellet. Argumentum dico ineptum." (Cf. R. Bentley, *Q. Horatius Flaccus* [Cambridge 1711] ad loc., who does not condemn the entire ode, but still remarks on the vulgate reading, "Vah, quam indignaretur Horatius, si ad vivos redire posset"; H. D. Naylor, *Horace. Odes and Epodes: A Study in Poetic Word Order* [Cambridge 1922] ad loc: "An unsatisfactory ode in both meaning and order. Editors may well reject it.") With the excision of lines 2–5, Peerlkamp reluctantly lets the poem stand.

hymn-form) and the mundane commands that the poet directs to the same Aelius in the last half of the ode: *aridum / compone lignum* and *curabis . . . porco bimestri / cum famulis* (13–16).³ This is not to mention the difficulty in the sense of lines 2–5: “since your ancestors took their name from Lamus, you trace your ancestry back to Lamus,” a tautology that caused Meineke to excise the lines from the ode.⁴

This discrepancy in the treatment of Aelius was reason enough for Bentley to follow the lead of Heinsius, who emended *ducis* to *ducit*. *Omne genus* replaces Aelius Lamia as the subject, which makes the lineage a parenthesis, so that, while the ancestry of the Lamiae is honored, the poet can direct Aelius to prepare the wood.⁵ Not only is the sense restored, by Bentley’s account, but further the ode reads more smoothly when *denominatos* does not have to do double duty with both *priores Lamias* and *omne genus* and the seemingly obtrusive second person is removed.⁶

Ducit satisfied Bentley, but not more recently Shackleton Bailey, and rightly so. Certainly the point of the lineage, even accepting *ducit*, is still the *nobilitas* of Aelius, stated in the first line; therefore, *ducit* does not close the wide gap between the solemnity of the first half of the ode and the domestic details of the latter. Further, Shackleton Bailey would disallow the “unseemly hyperbole” in the genealogy. Aelius Lamia, the son of a Roman knight, did not become consul until A.D. 3, twenty years after the publication of *Carmina* 1–3, and therefore *per memores fastos* implies a fame that is not appropriate to Aelius’ ancestors. To correct the difficulty, he proposes *ducet*, which transforms the genealogy into a prophecy of future greatness for Aelius and his family.⁷

The above objections are all predicated on Horace’s praising Aelius, but the pattern of convivial/*carpe diem* invitations (overlooked by all but

³ S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* (New Haven 1962) 261: “The grand roll call of Aelius’ lineage (1–9) founders upon the homely reminder of leaves, seaweed, and aging raven (9–13). After the lofty rhetoric of the first two stanzas, the repeated monosyllable *cras* (9, 14) and the mention of a pig, who can boast only a pedigree of two months (15), are shattering.”

⁴ J. Meineke (*Q. Horatius Flaccus* [Berlin 1854]) was not the first nor the last to do so; Dacier (*Oeuvres D’Horace* [Hamburg 1681]), Peerlkamp (above, note 2), H. Schütz (*Oden und Epoden* [Berlin 1874]), and L. Müller (*Q. Horatius Flaccus. Oden und Epoden* [Leipzig 1900]).

⁵ Bentley’s central argument: “Tu Aeli Lamia, a vetusto Lamo denominate; *tu, inquam, originem ducis a Lamo illo Formiarum rege*: *cras magna pluvia erit: ligna sicca, dum licet hodie, sub tecto reponere: cras enim domi bibes otiosus, quia ob pluviam foras exire non poteris. Nonne iam vides absurdum et ineptum esse, quod in medio inculcatur? Adeone directo et in os laudandus erat ob nobilitatem Lamia, ut rem leviculam de lignis inferret. . . Non illa putida iam interveniunt; neque enim προηγουμένως et ex professo, sed obiter et per parenthesis inferuntur, quae ad genus et nobilitatem Lamiae spectant.” Also accepting Heinsius’ emendation (*Q. Horati Flacci Opera* [London 1612]) are Peerlkamp (although he prefers to remove the lines altogether) and A. Y. Campbell (*Q. Horati Flacci Carmina cum Epodis* [London 1945] ad loc.).*

⁶ “Obtrusive” is T. E. Page’s adjective (*Horace. Odes and Epodes* [London 1883] ad loc.).

⁷ D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Profile of Horace* (Cambridge, MA 1982) 95.

Commager)⁸ is to criticize the addressee for reluctance to take advantage of the moment. One need only recall Sestius (1. 4), Thaliarchus (1. 9), the slave of 1. 38, Dellius (2. 3), Quintus (2. 11), Postumus (2. 14), and later Maecenas (3. 29) to realize that Horace's treatment of Aelius is likely to be negative,⁹ and that accordingly the hyperbole and faulty reasoning in the genealogy (enhanced by the rough syntax and the obtrusive second person, *ducis*), which editors have tried to remedy by emendation, change from inaccuracy on the part of the poet to intentional *komische Parodie*, joking that Aelius' genealogy is highly exaggerated.¹⁰ The greatest satirical force, therefore, is achieved by placing the overblown lineage in the mouth of Aelius, which is just what the manuscript reading *ducis* does.

The startling contrast of *nobilis* Aelius to the raven, to the pig with no pedigree, as well as to the company that Aelius will enjoy at the party, the household slaves unable to work because of the storm, all are intended to induce a satirical shock that will shake Aelius out of the past to the enjoyment of the present.¹¹ Shackleton Bailey's *ducet*, predicting a glowing future for Aelius, would lessen the punch by making *dum potes* insignificant, and is, in general out of character with *carpe diem* invitations in Horace, which advise against trusting an unpredictable future.¹²

C. 3. 17 is not inept once it is placed among its convivial counterparts. Its structure is similar to that of C. 2. 11, which divides itself into two equal parts, criticism of the addressee for not enjoying the present and insistence on a party. It recalls the initial summons to *carpe diem* in C. 1. 11 by setting aside the past and the future in favor of the present: The genealogy (past) is an extended distraction and the predictions of the raven are not to be trusted totally. Horace instructs Leuconoë to strain the wine (*vina liques*) and he tells Aelius to stock-pile the wood for a party (*compono lignum*); for

⁸ Commager, *Odes* (above, note 3) 261 and "The Function of Wine in Horace's Odes," *TAPA* 88 (1957) 70.

⁹ Cf. J. Orelli, *Q. Horatius Flaccus* (Berlin 1837) ad loc.

¹⁰ A. Kiessling and R. Heinze (*Q. Horatius Flaccus. Oden und Epoden* [Berlin 1898]) note the irony and humor of the genealogy in the introduction to the ode; cf. G. Williams, *The Third Book of Horace's Odes* (Oxford 1969) 104–05. Williams sees in line 5 the illogical argument from Aelius that he is descended from Lamus because his family estate is near Formiae, where Lamus by legend ruled. If correct, Williams also supposes that the realm of Lamus was extended to include Maturnae so that the estate of Aelius would lie in the territory assigned to Lamus. It is unnecessary to resort to any reading between the lines to demonstrate the exaggerated nature of the genealogy.

¹¹ True enough, there were occasions on which Roman masters prepared feasts for their slaves, most notably the Saturnalia, and even waited on them. Still, on these festival days the Romans often made sure to maintain the distinction between themselves and the slaves by various means, such as having their children instead of themselves wait on the tables (Athen. 14. 639b; for this and other examples, see J. H. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman Convivia," in W. J. Slater [ed.], *Dining in a Classical Context* [Ann Arbor 1991] 176–77). In any case, there is no particular holiday in this ode to explain why Aelius should prepare a feast for his slaves as well as himself. Horace must be lowering Aelius' nobility.

¹² Cf. C. 1. 11. 7 (*dum loquimur*), 2. 11. 16, and 4. 12. 26 (*dum licet*); cf. 1. 9. 9–14, 2. 3. 15–16, 3. 29. 25–40.

both, the advice behind the similarly domestic commands is the same, enjoy the present. The ode in comparison to other *carpe diem* invitations is rather typical, and suffers not from a lack of poetic craftsmanship, but from critics who have attempted to interpret it in isolation without reference to its wider context.

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