

## On the Fifth Stanza of the *Carmen Saeculare*\*

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Modern readers have found the fifth stanza of the *Carmen Saeculare* noteworthy mostly for its perceived ineptitude, as if Horace had abandoned any semblance of art just so he could fit an obsequious reference to the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* of 18 B.C. into a Sapphic stanza:

diua, producas subolem, patrumque  
prosperes decreta super iugandis  
feminis prolisque nouae feraci  
lege marita.<sup>1</sup>

"Quattuor versus Horatio plane indigni," judged Peerlkamp, and others have been no more charitable.<sup>2</sup> There would seem little in the text of this stanza, with its "notorious evocation of Latin constitutional jargon,"<sup>3</sup> that could be considered poetic. It may be better appreciated, however, with regard to the context of the poem's performance at the *Ludi Saeculares* of 17 B.C., where it was sung by a chorus of twenty-seven *uirgines* and the same number of *pueri* in accordance with the decree of the Sibylline oracle.<sup>4</sup> Michèle Lowrie, for instance, analyzes the stanza as a site of the "mutual implication of human writing and performance," with the oral decision-making of the

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\* I would like to thank Joseph Farrell, in whose graduate seminar on Horace this paper first took shape.

<sup>1</sup> Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 17-20. As the adjective *maritus* often means 'married, wedded', PUTNAM (2001), p. 63 remarks that 'Horace coins a new sense for the adjective as "relating to marriage, conjugal, nuptial"' (like *maritalis*), but a comparable usage, as the scholium of Porphyryon notes, can be found as far back as Pl. *Epid.* 180 *Quae [dos] quidem pol non maritast*. More importantly, this usage was hardly unknown in the Augustan period: cf. Livy *Ab urbe cond.* 27.31.5 *maritas domos*; Catull. 67.6 [addressing the *ianua*] *postquam es...facta marita*; Prop. 3.20.26 *sacra marita*; Prop. 4.3.11 *marita fides*; Prop. 4.11.33 *facibus...maritis*; Ov. *Her.* 2.41 *toris...maritis*; Ov. *Her.* 11.103 *faces...maritas*; Ov. *Her.* 12.87 *sacris...maritis*; Ov. *Her.* 16.285 *Venerem...maritam*; Ov. *Ars* 2.381 *iura marita*; and Ov. *Pont.* 3.1.73 *foedusque maritum*. That elegy supplies the preponderance of these examples suggests *maritus* had a specifically elegiac association; if that is the case, Horace would seem to be appropriating the word for the purpose of praising the Augustan legislation from those who stood in cultural opposition to it (see HALLETT (1973) and GARDNER (2010)). Horace's differences with the love elegists were as much philosophical as political; as TOOHEY (1982), p. 115 argues, 'Horace's Epicureanism precluded any real sympathy for the elegiac mode.'

<sup>2</sup> PEERLKAMP (1834), ad loc. For similar judgments see PAGE (1883), p. 95; WARDE FOWLER (1910), p. 148; WILLIAMS (1962), p. 34; BALSDON (1962), p. 79; COMMAGER (1962), p. 229; GRIFFIN (1997), p. 58 n. 15; and THOMAS (2011), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> FEENEY (1998), p. 35. THOMAS (2011), p. 68 notes how the law's 'title's *disiecta membra* [are] easily found in *super iugandis feminis* and *lege marita*', with the former phrase 'close to the syntax of the law's title, *de maritandis ordinibus*, a severely prosaic construction (prep. + noun modified by gerundive)'.

<sup>4</sup> The Sibylline oracle calls for *Λατίνοι / παίδες* (18-19, preserved in Zos. 2.6). The unique status of the *Carm. Saec.* in the history of Latin literature as a poem known to have been written for a specific public performance has made the text a locus of critical debate, beginning shortly after the discovery of the *Acta* of the games with Mommsen and Vahlen; see FARRELL (2005).

senatorial *decreta* and its ratification by the reading aloud of the written *lex* bringing about the singing of a poem learned by script in response to the Sibyl's written verses.<sup>5</sup> For my own part I would like to consider this stanza specifically as it relates to the poem's nature as a ritual *carmen*.

The *Acta* of the games record: *carmen composuit Q. Horatius Flaccus*.<sup>6</sup> Though by the Augustan period the word *carmen* had come to be more or less a native Latin synonym for *poema*, it also retained an earlier and more charged meaning of charm, spell, incantation, or ritual song: to *dicere carmen*, in the words of the poem,<sup>7</sup> is to speak an authoritative utterance that may conjure or ward off evil, propitiate the gods, or codify the law.<sup>8</sup> The power of the *carmen* as a curse, for example, is evident in the Twelve Tables, where some legal measure is provided against someone *qui malum carmen incantassit*.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, *carmina* could refer to socially sanctioned ritual songs, such as the *Carmen Saliare*, which Varro called *Romanorum prima uerba poetica...Latina*,<sup>10</sup> the annual performance of which by the Salian priests as they bore the sacred shields of Mars that Ovid calls *pignora imperii*<sup>11</sup> was a ritual of renewed foundation and establishment, affirming the social order and Roman *imperium*.<sup>12</sup>

As for other ritual *carmina* of a similar nature, in addition to an earlier *carmen saeculare* performed at *ludi* that took place during the First Punic War,<sup>13</sup> we also have, among others, the report of Livy that amid troubling omens in 207 B.C. the senate ordered a *carmen* that Livius Andronicus composed and a chorus of twenty-seven *uirgines* performed.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the poet not only wrote the *carmen*, but through its magic averted disaster, *deis rite placatis*,<sup>15</sup> and *quia prosperius res publica populi romani geri coepta est*<sup>16</sup> the poet was honored with the establishment of a *collegium poetarum* at the Temple of Minerva on the Aventine.<sup>17</sup>

In the *Carmen Saeculare*, as well as in his later reflections upon it, Horace aims to take part in this tradition, not only to assume its authority, but also to invoke the magical power that such *carmina* can effect. As Michael Putnam shows, in the *Carmen Saeculare* the poet evinces

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<sup>5</sup> LOWRIE (2009), p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> *CIL* VI 32323.149.

<sup>7</sup> Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 8.

<sup>8</sup> My discussion of *carmina* draws from the chapter of PUTNAM (2001), p. 130-150. HABINEK (2005) makes a strong, if sometimes necessarily speculative, case for *carmen* as an indigenous Italic tradition, while FEENEY (2016), p. 218ff. instead emphasizes resemblances with Greek hymns. On law as *carmen* see MEYER (2004), *passim*, noting at p. 44 that "what was written on tablets...all displays a rhythmic formulaic quality that helps to identify these entities as formally related, a fact or relation also demonstrated by the ways in which Romans grouped them all into one conceptual category, that of the *carmen*." SCIARRINO (2011), p. 117-160 points to the influence of the *carmen*-style of law on the prose of Cato the Elder.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted at Plin. *NH* 28.17; on *mala carmina* see LAFLEUR (1981), p. 1816-1817.

<sup>10</sup> Varro *Ling.* 7.3.

<sup>11</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 3.422.

<sup>12</sup> HABINEK (2005), p. 8-33.

<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Acro on Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 8, citing Valerius (sc. Verrius) Flaccus.

<sup>14</sup> See Livy *Ab urbe cond.* 27.37. A similar *carmen* was commissioned seven years later and composed by P. Licinius Tegula (*ibid.* 31.12.8-9). PUTNAM (2001), p. 140 notes that similar signs appear to have prompted similar *carmina*, citing the *De prodigiis* of Julius Obsequens at years 119 and 117.

<sup>15</sup> Livy *Ab urbe cond.* 27.38.1.

<sup>16</sup> Festus L446.

<sup>17</sup> Given the timing, it would not be difficult to credit, as Ennius and Vergil seem to, Livius' *carmen* with the Roman victory at the Metaurus, and thereby ultimate victory in the war, by turning the favor of Juno from Carthage to Rome, as noted by, among others, FEENEY (1984), p. 193 and HARRISON (1984), p. 114-115. On the enigmatic *collegium poetarum* see HORSFALL (1976).

this concern with the ingenious movement of the verbs from subjunctive and imperative petition to indicative declaration, from request to fulfillment, as by the end the magical power of the *carmen* "has brought the previous prayers to fruition."<sup>18</sup> So too in his verse epistle to Augustus Horace writes that in his role as *uates* or divine bard his words can summon water, drive away disease, and bring a fruitful harvest, declaring that, like the ritual *carmen* of Livius Andronicus, the *Carmen Saeculare* has succeeded in propitiating the gods, the verses having worked their magical power: *carminē di superi placantur, carminē Manes*.<sup>19</sup> Whether Horace literally believes this – which should not be discounted out of hand – or is merely boasting of his poetic skill, the idea is that the verbal magic of the *Carmen Saeculare* has actually effected its intended aim.

Among other things, this includes the matter of the fifth stanza. What is it, then, that Horace purports to have effected? Horace frames the impact of the *lex marita*, which among other things incentivized large families with the *ius trium liberorum*, in terms of the reproductive function of marriage, first calling on the goddess *procuras subolem*, before marking the law itself as *prolisque nouae feraci*.<sup>20</sup> Marriage is intrinsically linked to procreation,<sup>21</sup> and the new law to the birthing of the next generation.<sup>22</sup> It is in this light that Eduard Fraenkel, one of the few admirers of this stanza, wrote that

the legislation which is the theme of these lines is not concerned with technicalities of private or public law but goes straight to the roots of the life of human society. I, for one, am not ashamed to confess that I am moved when I picture these handsome children, who represent Rome's finest youth, singing to the goddess *diva, procuras subolem, patrumque prosperes decreta*.... [...] If the race should die out, there would be no more secular games.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> PUTNAM (2001), p. 93, also noting at p. 63 how 'poetry's generative capability...mimics the fertility for which the verses pray,' with the wordplay of *procuras, prosperes, prolis* in this stanza, and *promis* (10) and *probas* (15) in the preceding two, as well as the *figura etymologica* of *prolis* and *subolem*.

<sup>19</sup> Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.132-137, 138. For an overview of the *uates* concept see NEWMAN (1967) and for its possible relation to the Indo-European role of the poet WEST (2007), p. 26-78. See also Hor. *Ars P.* 396-401, where the remit of the *uates* and his *carmina* includes *concubitu prohibere uago, dare iura maritis* (398).

<sup>20</sup> The alliteration of *feminis...feraci* and that of the address to the Parcae *uosque ueraces* (25) hints at the relationship between the fertility of women and the vatic power of the *carmen*. A full account of the scholarship on the family, marriage, and moral legislation in the Augustan period is unnecessary here, but some relevant works of cultural history are B. SEVERY (2003), MILNOR (2005), and MCAULEY (2015), p. 1-168.

<sup>21</sup> A perennial theme: cf. e.g. the report of Festus 258 that Ennius wrote of marriage being *liberum quaesundum gratia*; similarly Plaut. *Capt.* 889 *liberorum quaerundorum causa*. See also e.g. Livy *Ab urbe cond.* 1.9.14.

<sup>22</sup> At the same time, as MILNOR (2007), p. 11-12 writes, the role of women in this process is elided, with *feminae* having become the controlled subjects of the law (*decreta super iugandis / feminis*): 'The state itself is mother to the children that the senators will father. By erasing the real bodies of real women from the process, the poem elevates reproduction to the level of a national responsibility, one that guarantees a continuous and unchanging return to the virtues expressed in Roman history.' The use of *femina*, as opposed to the less respectful *mulier* (see AXELSON (1945), p. 53-55 and ADAMS (1972)) may be considered appropriate for the solemnity of the occasion of the *carmen*'s performance, but might also be an appropriation from the elegists, as with *marita* (see n. 1). See also COUTELLE (2012) and (2015), p. 142-144, 440-442, who argues that Prop. 4.1.99-102, with the astrologer Horos standing for the *uates* Horace, serves to mock Horace's call for fertility at *Carm. Saec.* 13-24.

<sup>23</sup> FRAENKEL (1957), p. 374.

Through his historical imagination<sup>24</sup> Fraenkel here finds an aesthetic worth in the stanza that others before and after have missed. But he also points to the vital necessity of the production of children which the law is supposed to engender. For a poem whose event of performance marks the transition from one *saeculum* to the next,<sup>25</sup> the *lex marita* stands out as a matter of the life or death of Rome itself. If, as Horace claims, his verbal art has indeed secured the favor of the gods, with the words of this stanza he can be said to have effected, through the Orphic magic of his *carmen*, nothing less than the very survival and continuation of the *gens Romana* – hardly unworthy of Horace, or for that matter any other poet.

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<sup>24</sup> I borrow this phrase from COLLINGWOOD (1994), p. 231-248.

<sup>25</sup> The matter of the poem is the *saeculum*, as distinguished from the more problematic concept of the golden age; see BARKER (1996) and ZANKER (2010).

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