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Articles

Horace *c.* 3.27 and Virgil, *Aeneid* 9

MICHAEL C. J. PUTNAM

Abstract: This essay examines the imaginative connection between *c.* 3.27 of Horace, one of the poet's longest and most intense odes, and a salient episode in book 9 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In particular it searches out the multivalent appearances of the concept of *pietas* in the descriptions of Europe's behavior toward her father and of Nisus and Euryalus. In their case we attend both to the association between the two *innamorati* themselves and to that between Euryalus and his mother. I take it for granted that the two Latin masters knew and valued the work of each other.

Keywords: Horace, Virgil, *pietas*, Europe, Nisus, Euryalus, *Aeneid*

Odes 3.27 is one of the most challenging of Horace's expansive *carmina*. It begins by addressing unnamed *impii* whose departure on a trip elicits a series of ill omens. These immoral folk are then particularized in a woman with the name Galatea. The speaker fails to explain the reason for her treachery but most readers assume that it refers to a lover's oath of loyalty, sworn but repudiated by her and by others guilty of similar acts of impiety.¹

What follows, as the poem's core, is an elaborate description of the myth of Europa or, as Horace calls her, Europe. She abandoned her father in order to yield to her attraction for a handsome, but apparently deceiving, bull: Jupiter in disguise.² His daughter's impetuous action, in the poet's incisive phrase, exemplifies "piety conquered by madness" (*pietas...victa furore*, 35-36). In the lines that follow the protagonist imagines parent rebuking child at length for her perfidious behavior. But an epiphany of Venus brings the poem to a positive conclusion with the announcement that Europe's name has been applied to a grand sweep of territory. Her sobs, that offered evidence of the varied feelings to which she had been prey, should now cease.

Even given its ample emotionality, *c.* 3.27 still stands out from the rest of the Horatian corpus for the very span of its exposition. To be specific, out of a grouping of one hundred and three odes, it is surpassed in length by only a single poem and equaled by but one other. The first of these is *c.* 3.4, a remarkable meditation on the moral dimensions of political power and their relationship to poetry and the workings of the imagination. The second, *c.* 4.4, is devoted to a catalogue of the martial accomplishments of Augustus's stepson, Nero Claudius Drusus. The reader of *c.* 3.27 might well be driven to ask why,

¹ For help in elucidating *c.* 3.27 the commentaries by Nisbet and Rudd and by Woodman are indispensable. I have also found the following discussions most helpful: Clay; Commager, esp. 310-11; Fraenkel, esp. 192-98 (at 196 he labels the ode "heavy"); Harrison (2007), 193-97; Lowrie, esp. 297-316; Santirocco, esp. 145-46; West, 222-39; Williams, 134-41.

² Moschus, in his poem 2 (*Europa*), Horace's major Greek predecessor in telling her tale, and fully preserved, mentions Europe's father (7) and mother (40-42). At line 131 the poet refers to her fatherland, and at lines 146-7 we find the girl herself lamenting her departure from the home of her father. But whatever sadness may lie in her leaving her native land, it is left to Horace to develop, with special nuances, the theme of *pietas*, or its lack, between parent and offspring. Nor does Ovid, in his two descriptions of the rape of Europa, note any absence of *pietas* on the part of daughter toward father (Ovid *M.* 2.833-874 plus 3.1-9; *F.* 5.603-20). The same holds true of two further narrations of her story: Apollodorus *Bib.* 3.1 and Hyginus *Fab.* 178. Fraenkel treats of the influence of Moschus on *c.* 3.27 at 194-96 as do Nisbet and Rudd at 318-19.

in at least one crucial dimension, an ode, whose primary content is an extended narrative of the myth of a love-sick girl in the process of eloping with a bovine, finds placement in the company of poems devoted to the world of Roman political mastery and its multi-dimensionality.

Horace hints at a major reason behind this epicizing of lyric in his first word, *impios*.³ Our ode will have piety, and its varied guises, as a central theme. This will initially be visualized in the disloyalty of lovers toward each other. But its central subject will consist of an elaborate demonstration of the lack of filial *pietas* on display in Europe's want of respect for her father, the result of her infatuation for an attractive animal. Horace's ode can stand on its own for the brilliance of its presentation, the spacious retelling of an anomalous adventure-story myth with the study of an abstraction, of particular interest to the Romans, at its moral center. But, as so often in appreciations of the *Carmina*, the presence of Virgil's poetry looms large in any discussion of Horace's quality and originality as versifier.

In this case it is the *Aeneid*, in particular its ninth book, whose presence permeates, and helps elucidate, major aspects of the virtuosity of c. 3.27. Since these two geniuses of the Latin language are at work nearly contemporaneously on their masterpieces, we will probably never know the chronology and developing complementarity of their mutual interest in one another's accomplishments, though each colleague's work was clearly of importance to the other. To further illustrate their interaction I propose as a goal here, as we attend especially to the reciprocity between Horace's wide-ranging lyric and the ninth book of Virgil's challenging epic. It contains some of the poem's most pronounced meditations on the practice and meaning of *pietas*, an abstraction of special importance to Roman thought.

I will look first at details which suggest the interpenetration of the two texts. My essay will then examine in more detail the presence of *pietas* as pivotal abstraction for the elucidation of each work. Let me begin by offering four brief examples of how the two poems reflect each other linguistically. First we can trace the name Galatea. It appears in Horace only at c. 3.27.14 as the appellation given the poet's apparently absconding mistress. Virgil uses it in the *Aeneid* only at book 9.103 to designate one of the goddesses into whom the Trojan ships are transformed:

...qualis Nereia Doto
et Galatea secant spumantem pectore pontum.

...like the Nereid Doto and Galatea who with their breasts
sunder the frothing sea.⁴

The suggestion of interplay through the commonality of the name is strengthened by the fact that the final words of the Virgilian hexameter sonically echo a phrase in Horace where we watch how bold Europe grew pale at "the sea swarming with beasts" (*scatentem / beluis pontum*, c.3.27.26-27). The word *pontum* is in each case qualified by a similarly sounding present participle from which it is separated by a trisyllabic noun.

I offer three briefer examples which bolster the suggestion of mutual interaction between our poets. The first concerns the rare adjective *sublustris*. It appears once only in each of our authors. In Horace we find it at line 31 of our ode where the phrase *nocte sublustris* characterizes the gloomy twilight in which the sea-travelling Europe views only

³ The influence of Catullus on c. 3.27, especially of poems 11 and 64, in which the themes of journey and piety are also joined, deserves separate treatment.

⁴ The name Galatea appears as early as Homer (*Il.* 18.15) where it belongs to a Nereid (it therefore retains its appropriateness for a sea-voyager). In the *Eclogues* Virgil uses it of a *puella* on six occasions.

stars and waves. The single occurrence in Virgil puts us at line 373 of *Aeneid* 9 where we watch Euryalus near the sad ending of his nocturnal misadventure, the description of which we'll return to later:

et galea Euryalum sublustri noctis in umbra
prodidit immemorem radiisque adversa refulsit.

...and in the dimly-lit shadow of the night his helmet
betrayed the unthinking Euryalus and flashed back the
light from the [moon]rays.

For a second example of interaction between the two texts I turn to the phrase *pendulum...collum*. It is to be found in the middle of Europe's imagined rebuke from her father, urging her to commit suicide as an appropriate finale to her ill-considered conduct (c. 3.27.57-60):

'vilis Europe,' pater urget absens,
'quid mori cessas? Potes hac ab orno
pendulum zona bene te secuta
laedere collum...'

"Tawdry Europe," presses her father from afar, "why do you hesitate to die? You can maim your neck as it hangs from this ash tree with the girdle that did well in following you..."

The parallel here, in *Aeneid* 9, is the phrase *pendentia colla*. It is to be found at line 331 as description of the "drooping necks" of the several victims of the rampage on which Nisus embarks during his nocturnal mission with Euryalus. The fact that there is no similar phraseology elsewhere in either author serves further to suggest that the poets were thinking of each other's words and contexts, whether dealing with Europe's potential self-slaughter or with the actual human prey of Nisus' martial frenzy.⁵

I propose the uncommon word *singultus* as a third manifestation of the interaction that we have been tracing. The noun's unique appearance in Horace occurs at c. 3.27.74 where epiphanic Venus commands Europe to forego her lamenting and honor the fact that Jupiter himself has chosen her as lover. We find it in *Aeneid* 9 at line 415, during the conclusion of Nisus' bout of killing. His victim is Sulmo (*Aen.* 9.414-5):

volvitur ille vomens calidum de pectore flumen
frigidus et longis singultibus ilia pulsat.

As the man spews a warm flow from his chest, he rolls over in a chill and strikes his sides with long gasps.

Horace's singular usage, after Europe has been made to contemplate the possibility of suicide, finds its sole counterpart in Virgil's epic during the description of the convulsions

⁵ We should also note the parallel between the use of the word *pensum* (plausibly cognate with *pendulum* and *pendentia*) at c. 3.27.64 and of *pensa* at *Aen.* 9.476, of the wool-weights that Europe might have to work, were she to become a slave, and those of Euryalus' mother as she goes about her weaving. Both are to be found at line endings. The phrase *carpere pensum* in c. 3.27 sonically echoes *laedere collum*, found four lines earlier (60), adding emphasis to each phrase. This is the only use of *pensum* in Horace. Other appearances in Virgil occur at *geo.* 1.390 and 4.348.

of a victim of war's violence. Horace's is a calmer vision, with death's brutality circumvented and a worthy future for Europe pronounced.⁶

I have offered this list of verbal echoes in support of my contention of the mutual influence of Virgil and Horace upon each other as they wrote the *Aeneid* and the *Carmina*. My focus has been in particular on the ninth book of Virgil's epic and c. 3.27 of the lyric bard. My hope is that the preceding record can serve as supportive prelude to corroborate a further thesis of this essay, namely that the complex workings of *pietas* are an essential ingredient of both these excerpts from their grander wholes.⁷

Even from line 10 of the epic's initial book, where its hero is depicted as "a man outstanding for piety" (*insignem pietate virum*), we know that this complex abstraction, which combines notions not least of duty, loyalty and affection, will play a major role in the evolution of events in the manifold narrative to follow. That *pietas* has its ambiguities, that the practice of *pietas* can possess negative as well as positive aspects, is particularly well illustrated by its manifestations in *Aeneid* 9. It is a defensible interpretative posture that nowhere else in the epic does Virgil ask his reader to analyze, especially so emotionally, the pros and cons of pious allegiance, especially when the erotic plays a major role in the events as they evolve.

Let us begin where the poet starts, with the figure of Euryalus whose person and actions are central to the two major manifestations of *pietas* in *Aeneid* 9. It is first called directly to our attention by Iulus at line 294. The young warrior has been asked by his companion, the more mature Nisus, to embark on a nocturnal foray through enemy lines to bring news of the Trojans' peril to Aeneas at Pallanteum. For Euryalus to accept the challenge would mean leaving behind an aged mother who has companioned him from Troy. His deep concern, clear to his colleagues, for her safety and security, as he prepares to leave, is remarked upon by the poet who singles out the reaction of Aeneas' son:

...atque animum patriae strinxit pietatis imago.

...and his being was touched by the picture of devotion
to his own father.

Euryalus' clear affection for his mother rouses in Iulus an image of his own allegiance to his father. What Virgil doesn't remark upon is the fact that the youth's finally willing departure on a hazardous military undertaking suggests that the bond of *pietas*, apparently linking him with his mother, is not as strong as his protestations of their shared loyalty might suggest.⁸

Elucidation of Euryalus' situation here is further complicated by Virgil's depiction of his relationship with his older companion, Nisus. We first hear of the latter's emotional attachment to his friend at *Aen.* 5.296 where the narrator tells of the *amore pio* in which Nisus holds the handsome young man. The intensity of feeling between the two is reinforced at line 334 where we are told that during the subsequent footrace he was "not forgetful of his love" (*non...oblitus amorum*) as he helped Euryalus on his way to victory. The implicit comparison of Euryalus with *amor* and the change of single noun to plural help further convey the magnitude of the older protagonist's affection.

⁶ The only other use in Virgil of the noun *singultus* occurs at *geo.* 3.507. We note the subtle, retrospective emphasis that the poet gives to the appearance of the cognate verb *singulto* at *Aen.* 9.333 (*singultantem*), as Nisus kills Rhamnes, an earlier prey.

⁷ As further evidence of mutuality let me offer the intense lexical concatenation at *Aen.* 9.396-97 and c. 3.27.17-32. We first find the repetition of *tumultu* at 3.27.17 and 9.397, each at line ending. Between 3.27.17 and 32 we have *vides* (17), *fraudes* (27), *nocte* (31) and *vidit* (32). Between 9.396 and 397 we find *videt* (396), *fraude* (397), and *noctis* (397).

⁸ The comments of Hardie on this complex line are particularly enlightening. See also his pages 126-27 and 165 on the meaning of *pietas*, with bibliography.

We have earlier examined some of the language, exploited by Virgil in relating the adventure upon which the two heroes now embark, in common with *c.* 3.27. In the present context of the emotional and moral nexus between them I would like to look further at the language of *Aeneid* 9. I think of the word *imprudens*, for instance. Virgil uses it at line 386 to characterize Nisus as he makes his way clear of the enemy forces without Euryalus accompanying him (9.384-86):

Euryalum tenebrae ramorum onerosaque praeda
 impediunt, fallitque timor regione viarum.
 Nisus abit; iamque imprudens evaserat hostis...

The darkness of the branches and his burdensome spoils hamper Euryalus, and fear leads him astray in regard to the route of the pathways. Nisus breaks clear; and now, heedless, had escaped the enemy...

The adjective seems implausible, even inept, when applied to a warrior succeeding in an escape from hostile territory. But it fits perfectly with the behavior of an unthinking lover who has acted carelessly toward his partner, now become enmeshed in the very danger from which he has just broken free. Happening upon good fortune has caused him to ignore, and therefore in a way to scorn, the *pietas* that the poet had earlier used to distinguish the emotional covenant that ties them.

Given the lexical complementarity we have traced between the two poems, I would also suggest that we hear a sonic echo between *imprudens* and *impudens*, the adjective that Horace has Europe employ to describe her ill-conceived behavior toward her father (*c.* 3.27.49-50, *bis*). Both words receive stress from their respective authors, the first for an initial implausibility, given its context, that makes the reader pursue a deeper meaning, the second by the very fact of its repetition as the initial word in adjacent lines. Both suggest variations on the central theme of *pietas* and its resonances. In the case of *imprudens*, as we have seen, the designation intimates a certain heedlessness on the part of Nisus in his conduct toward his beloved Euryalus, which is to say a disregard of the *pietas* that here should serve as link between the two friends. In Horace's magnificent ode Europe is "shameless" in allowing the duty she owes her parent to be superseded by an irrational passion for a beast, even though the creature be the king of the gods in disguise. The resemblance between the names Europe and Euryalus is not without significance in helping further illuminate the liaisons between the two texts on the moral level, supported, as we have seen, by careful parallels on the lexical plane as well.

Finally let us turn in more detail to Virgil's treatment of the, relationship between Euryalus and his mother, a key element in our review of the connection of *c.* 3.27 with *Aeneid* 9 and the parallel with Europe's questionable treatment of her father. Both episodes deal with hazardous journeys on the part of child away from parent, journeys that threaten to weaken or even sever the implicit but powerful affiliation between close family members. She voices her strong feelings about his heedless action upon first hearing rumor of his death. She imagines the sight of him (9.481-87):

'hunc ego te, Euryale, aspicio? Tune ille senectae
 sera meae requies, potuisti linquere solam
 crudelis? nec te sub tanta pericula missum
 adfari extremum miserae data copia matri?
 heu, terra ignota canibus data praeda Latinis
 alitibusque iaces! Nec te tua funere mater
 produxi...'

“Is this you that I see, Euryalus? Could you, that last respite of my old age, be able, cruel one, to abandon me to loneliness? Was an opportunity not given you, directed toward such great dangers, to address a final word to your sad mother? Alas, you lie in an unknown land, a prey to the dogs and birds of Latium! Nor did I, your mother, attend you at your funeral rites...”

The near repetition of forms of the word *mater* at line-endings centers the reader’s attention powerfully on the abandoned mother and her feelings of anguish, particularly on what she considers his departure on a perilous mission without some display of affectionate faithfulness.⁹

This emotional outburst anticipates the final appearance of piety (and of the word *pietas*) in the episode and arguably its most extraordinary manifestation in the whole poem. As she concludes her speech, with its intense display of sorrow, the mother of Euryalus, unnamed so as to call particular attention to her maternal role, turns to the Trojan enemies, the Rutuli, and to the father of the gods himself (9.493-97):

‘figite me, si qua est pietas, in me omnia tela
conicite, o Rutuli, me primam absumite ferro;
aut tu, magne pater divum, miserere, tuoque
invisum hoc detrude caput sub Tartara telo,
quando aliter nequeo crudelem abrumperem vitam.’

“Pierce me, if you have any sense of respect, hurl against me, O Rutulians, all your javelins, destroy me with your steel first, or you, mighty father of the gods, take pity, and with your bolt thrust this hated head down to Tartarus since I cannot in any other way break off life’s cruelty.”

Virgil poses for us one the most ironic moments in the poem as he projects an extraordinary example of *pietas*, a *pietas* that promotes death instead of enhancing life’s relationships. The manifestation of piety for which she prays would be the killing of a defenseless old woman by battlefield warriors. By adhering to her wishes and slaying Euryalus’ mother, the Rutuli would put into heartless practice the very virtue that parent had expected from child and been denied. High theater, yes, but a potent reminder of the many sides to this abstraction at the core of the epic, in particular of its ninth book.

In sum, we have been examining the close relationship established, through word and idea, between c. 3.27 and the *Aeneid*, book 9. We have given special attention to the notion of *pietas* as it is individually treated in these contexts by masters of two diverse genres, lyric and epic. The plot endings are equally dissimilar. In Virgil Nisus and Euryalus both die in the course of their martial exploits and the latter’s mother suffers the consequent sadness of the bereft. Europa, whom we’ve seen Horace name Europe, by contrast learns that she has been the consort of Jupiter and that the immortality that she implicitly gains from being the subject of an Horatian ode will have a literal component in the fact that her name will now be attached to an impressive area of the known world.

But Virgil is not to be outshone. Even before we learn of the grief in store for Euryalus’ parent the poet informs us, in four famous hexameters (*Aen.* 9.446-49), of her son’s ever-enduring renown:

⁹ Euryalus’ *mater* is also mentioned at 474. For a discussion of Greek tragedy in the background of the Nisus and Euryalus episode see Pavlock.

Fortunati ambo! Si quid mea carmina possunt,
nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo,
dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.

Pair blessed by Fortune! If my songs have any power, no day will ever erase you from time's memory, so long as the house of Aeneas will dwell on the steadfast rock of the Capitolium and the father of Rome will possess supreme power.

We enjoy one final but brilliantly forceful interconnection between the two texts. Nisus and Euryalus are honored by fortune (*fortunati*), being immortalized in words as enduring as Rome itself. But Europe, too, will receive a form of deathless repute. "Learn your good fortune" (*disce fortunam*, c. 3.27.25) Venus commands her, at the conclusion of Horace's grand lyric. Both poets have the power to immortalize, whether it be through the magic of *carmina* – a word Virgil might have bestowed on Horace's odes themselves – or through an act of nomenclature that grants permanent endurance both on namer and named. We thus take pleasure in a final example of interplay between great poets as they ask us to ponder the creative paradox of two quite different but closely associated texts, each with its own individual richness.

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