

Seneca, St. Paul, Synesius, and the Text of the *Europa Ode*¹

In the last stanza before the introduction of the Europa myth (C. 3.27.21-24), Horace warns (and perhaps teases) Galatea with a vivid curse:²

*hostium uxores puerique caecos
sentiant motus orientis Austri et
aequoris nigri fremitum et trementis
uerbere ripas.*

“May the wives and sons of our enemies feel the blind fury of the rising south wind and the roar of black waters and the shores trembling with the blow.”

The last three words have been found difficult. Bentley conjectured *gementis*, “groaning”, for *trementis*, “trembling, shuddering”, Shackleton Bailey *costas*, “ribs (of the ship)”, for *ripas*, “shores”.³ I hope to show that on this point both are wrong and the text is sound.

After disposing of a variant, Bentley states his objection to *trementis* as follows:⁴

¹ My text of Horace is quoted from *Horatius, Opera*, ed. F. Klingner (Leipzig, 1959³), translation from Gordon Williams, *The Third Book of Horace's Odes* (Oxford, 1969). Except as noted, other translations are my own. I offer no general interpretation of the Ode because I find myself in overall agreement with J. S. Clay's recent article, “*Providus Auspex*: Horace, Ode 3.27” (*CJ* 88.2, Dec. 1992/Jan. 1993, 167-77), in which she argues that Galatea is not an ex-lover of Horace, but a “young girl on the brink of womanhood”, and her voyage “a metaphorical voyage into adulthood” (177). On Clay's interpretation, the warning in these lines is far from serious, and rather teasingly than threateningly vivid. However, I mention this only here since my main point is not affected by acceptance or rejection of her interpretation, except insofar as it makes the reference of 21-24 more vivid and thus more hyperbolic, which perhaps better fits a teasing warning than a serious curse.

² E. Fraenkel (*Horace, Oxford*, 1957, 192) notes “the apparent seriousness with which the warning against crossing the treacherous Adriatic Sea (17-20) leads to a prayer, or curse, intended to ‘send off’ (ἀποπέμπειν) the disaster so that it may plague the enemy's wives and children (21-24)”. He also (410-11) provides a further discussion of the ἀποπομπή in general, with parallels and bibliography. C. Buscaroli notes how “Gli incontri dei suoni consonantici, soprattutto il frequente ricorrere dell'*r*, . . . fanno veramente sentire in questi mirabili versi . . . l'irata furia degli elementi” (*Perfidum Ridens Venus: L'Ode III 27 di Orazio*, Bologna, 1937, ad 21-24: “The combinations of consonant sounds, especially the frequent recurrence of *r*, . . . makes us truly feel in these marvellous verses . . . the enraged fury of the elements”).

³ Bentley actually conjectured *gementes*, but the orthographic distinction is unimportant here, and I will ignore it, as others have.

⁴ *Q. Horatius Flaccus ex recensione et cum notis atque emendationibus Richardi Bentleyi*, Amsterdam, 1728³, reprinted Berlin 1869 and New York 1978, vol. I, *ad loc.*: “Besides, although I would readily concede that sea-shores tremble with the beating of the waves; as in Seneca, *Hippolytus* 1013, ‘the rocks tremble with the waves, and white foam strikes the summit of Leucas’. Still, I would hardly receive with a tranquil ear that those sailing (as here) on the deep could feel such a trembling of the shores.

“Ceterum, etsi facile concesserim ripas marinas *tremere* pulsu undarum; ut Seneca Hippol. v. 1013. ‘*saxa cum fluctu tremunt, Et cana summum spuma Leucaten ferit.*’ Vix tamen aequa aure acceperim, ut in alto (quemadmodum hic) navigantes talem litorum tremorem sentire possint. Quare vide, annon facili mutatione *gementes* potius scripserit Horatius: siquidem gemitum litorum vel e longinquo sentiunt qui navibus praetervehuntur; tremorem vero nemo, nisi qui terra in ipso litore consistit.”

He continues with numerous parallels for *gementia litora*. In his Teubner text (Stuttgart, 1985), D. R. Shackleton Bailey keeps *tremētis*, but alters its noun to *costas*. He supports his conjecture as follows in the companion article:⁵

“Bentley was surely right in objecting to *tremētis* . . . *ripas* but his *gementis* is unsatisfactory diplomatically and otherwise. The people in the storm-tossed ship would scarcely be attending to the waves beating on the shore. I read *costas* sc. *navis*. Similarly *Epod.* 10.3 *ut horridis utrumque uerberes latus, | Auster, memento fluctibus*. The use of *costa*, though well established (see *OLD*), was sufficiently unexpected to provoke an interpolation.”

(He has since complained that both R. G. M. Nisbet and J. Delz continue to prefer Bentley’s *gementis*, despite its diplomatic implausibility.⁶) The two objections are not quite equivalent: Bentley considers the perception impossible, Shackleton Bailey irrelevant.

Bentley’s suggestion had already had a mixed reception, before Shackleton Bailey proposed his variation on it. Some have simply denied that there was a problem. Keller is quite brusque, particularly when we consider how much space he devotes to hundreds of other conjectures and variants, most of them of far less moment: “Bentley will *gementis*, ohne dass ich einsehe, was dadurch verbessert würde.”⁷ Others have attempted

Therefore consider whether by an easy change Horace has not rather written *gementes* (‘groaning’): inasmuch as those who are carried by in ships perceive the groaning of the shores even from far away; but the shaking no one [perceives], except one who stands on land on the very shore.” I have not attempted to correct Bentley’s idiosyncratic punctuation.

⁵ “Vindiciae Horatianae”, *HSCP* 89 (1985), 153-70, at 156-57.

⁶ “Horatian Aftermath”, *Philologus* 134 (1990) 226, referring to their reviews of his text in *CR* 36 (1986) 227-34 and *Gnomon* 60 (1989) 495-501, respectively. Nisbet rather recommends *uerbere* before rejecting it: “Voyagers would not be aware of the shaking shore, so S. B. prints his own *costas* (the ribs of the ship); this makes a pun with *verbere*, but without *navis* seems over-compressed” (231-2).

⁷ O. Keller, *Epilegomena zu Horaz*, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1879, reprinted in 1 vol., Hildesheim, 1976, *ad loc.*: “Bentley wants *gementis*, without my being able to see that it would be improved thereby.”

to explain the text without emending it. A good example of the latter is Keissling-Heinze:⁸

“Tonmalerei, wie I 2,1; der letzte Zug vervollständigt das Bild des Seesturmes ohne Rücksicht darauf, daß das Schiff und seine Insassen die Erschütterung der *ripae* nicht spüren.”

Orelli-Baiter also reject Bentley’s solution, and provide an explanatory paraphrase which, despite its vagueness, goes some way toward solving the problem:⁹

“Longe minus vividum est Bentley *gementes*. ‘Tales autem *ripas*, id est fractos ad eas fluctus summo cum vitae discrimine *sentiant*, qui ad eas undarum impetu alliduntur’, vel etiam simplicius: ‘quatenus litus radunt’.”

To some extent, my paper is an expansion and fortification of this statement. What vitiates Bentley’s argument is a pair of gratuitous assumptions: that the means of perception referred to in *sentiant* is purely tactile, and that the shores are solid rock.¹⁰ The combination of the two would indeed be impossible, but *ripae* (“shores”) are not *rupes* (“rocks”), and *sentire* (“to sense, perceive”) encompasses all five senses.¹¹ Although it is difficult to be certain, it looks as if Bentley may also be assuming (note *in alto*, “on the deep”, perhaps also *uel e longinquo*, “even from far away”) that the ship is quite far from the shore, which would again make perception (by any sense) that much more difficult. However, all we know is that the water is deep enough to float a passenger-ship, and that can be as close to shore as you please, if the slope of the shore is steep enough. The coast of Epirus, which is the area in question, is very steep indeed, and deep water is found quite close to shore.¹²

⁸ A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Horaz I: Oden und Epoden*, Hildesheim 1984¹⁴ = Berlin, 1930⁷, *ad loc.*: “Tone-painting, like 1.2.1; the last stroke completes the picture of the storm at sea, without regard for the fact that the ship and its passengers do not perceive the shaking of the shores”

⁹ I. G. Orellius, I. G. Baiterus, and G. Hirschfelder, *Quintus Horatius Flaccus I: Odae, Carmen Saeculare, Epodi*, Berlin 1886⁴, reprinted Hildesheim 1972: “Bentley’s *gementes* is far less vivid. ‘Those who are dashed against them by the force of the waves *perceive* such *shores*, that is, the waves broken against them with extreme danger to life’, or yet more simply: ‘insofar as they skirt the shore’.”

¹⁰ The second assumption reinforces the first. Although Bentley admits that even solid rock can vibrate in a storm, he denies that the vibration could be perceived from offshore. This would be a compelling argument, if there were any good reason to assume that these shores are made only of solid rock. The vague term *ripae* might just as easily include trees, bushes, houses, sand-dunes, and other things, and these can certainly be seen (and perhaps heard) to vibrate from some distance away.

¹¹ Bentley’s near-contemporary Alexander Cunningham is said to have conjectured *rupes* for *ripas* here. I do not have access to his edition (Leiden/London, 1721), and so have been unable to confirm whether this is true. However, it can hardly be very important, since the conjecture is not so much superfluous as positively harmful. If some conjectures are properly described as diagnostic, we might call this one ‘iatrogenic’, in that it introduces the problem Bentley is attempting to solve.

¹² The lines immediately preceding our passage (18-20, *ego quid sit ater / Hadriae noui sinus et quid albus / peccet Iapyx*, “I know well what harm the black gulf of the Adriatic is capable of and the

As we have already noted, Bentley considers it impossible, Shackleton Bailey irrelevant, that those on the ship should perceive the trembling of the shore. However, the answer to both is essentially the same. The people in the storm-tossed ship would be in a position to perceive the shore trembling under the blows of wind and waves if they were close enough to it, and they would have good reason to attend to it if they were that close to shore, because they would be in grave danger of shipwreck. This can be put more strongly. If the ship was previously out of sight (and hearing) of land, and is now in sight, then it is headed straight for the shore. Given the difficulty ancient ships had in sailing against the wind even in good weather,¹³ shipwreck is imminent and probably unavoidable.

Ancient sailors knew very well that a lee shore, “that sailor’s *bête noire*”,¹⁴ is deadly in a storm. Examples could be multiplied, but three should suffice:

1. When Seneca becomes seasick in a rising storm while crossing the Bay of Naples, as he says (*E.M.* 53.2):¹⁵

*Coepi gubernatorem rogare ut me in aliquo litore exponeret:
aiebat ille aspera esse et inportuosa nec quicquam se aequae in
tempestate timere quam terram.*

“I began to ask the captain to put me out on some shore or other: he kept saying that they were rough and harborless and that he feared nothing so much as land in a storm.”

Seneca’s report of the anonymous captain’s statement has a value quite in contrast to his own fatuous remarks in the sequel (3-4): as if seasickness or having to wade through the

cloudless Iapygian wind”, G. Williams) show that this ship, like Vergil’s in *Ode* 1.3, is headed from Italy to Greece. The passengers have particular reason to fear the “ill-famed cliffs of Acroceraunia” (*infamis scopulos Acroceraunia*, *C.* 1.3.20) and “the South Wind, stormy lord of the restless Adriatic” (*Auster, / dux inquieti turbidus Hadriae*, *C.* 3.3.4-5), which is precisely the wind which would blow their ship onto the Acroceraunian shore, on the coast of what is now Albania. This point also serves to refute Muretus’ emendation of *Austri* (“the South Wind”, 22) to *Haedi*, “the Kid”, the constellation at whose rising the seas were notoriously rough: that would specify a particularly dangerous time of year, whereas it is the rising of the South Wind at any time of year which endangers this particular voyage.

¹³ L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, Princeton, 1971, 273-74.

¹⁴ The phrase is quoted from Casson (note 13), 268 n. 1, and is just as true today as it was then. Taki, the ‘High Life’ columnist of *The Spectator* (London), treats it as a fact known to every sailor and yacht-owner, though it comes as a surprise to many a sea-sick landlubber: “Land is what sailors fear during a storm, not the open sea” (26 March 1994). The only difference is that modern ships, with their motors and navigational charts, are better able to avoid the shore in a storm.

¹⁵ Text from L. D. Reynolds, *L. Annaei Senecae Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, Oxford, 1965.

surf and clamber across the rocks behind the shore were the worst that could happen to one sailing in a storm!¹⁶

2. When the ship carrying St. Paul to Rome for trial is driven before a storm in mid-Mediterranean, as he says (*Acts* 27.27-31):¹⁷

Ἦς δὲ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτῃ νύξ ἐγένετο διαφορομένων ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ Ἀδρία κατὰ μέσον τῆς νυκτὸς ὑπενόουν οἱ ναῦται προσάγειν τινὰ αὐτοῖς χώραν. καὶ βολίσαντες εὗρον ὀργυιᾶς εἴκοσι βραχὺ δὲ διαστήσαντες καὶ πάλιν βολίσαντες εὗρον ὀργυιᾶς δεκαπέντε· φοβούμενοί τε μή που κατὰ τραχεῖς τόπους ἐκπέσωμεν ἐκ πρύμνης ῥίψαντες ἀγκύρας τέσσαρας ἠύχοντο ἡμέραν γενέσθαι. τῶν δὲ ναυτῶν ζητούντων φυγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου καὶ χαλασάντων τὴν σκάφην εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν προφάσει ὡς ἐκ πύργου ἀγκύρας μελλόντων ἐκτείνειν εἶπεν ὁ Παῦλος τῷ ἑκατοντάρχῃ καὶ τοῖς στρατιώταις Ἐὰν μὴ οὗτοι μείνωσιν ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ ὑμεῖς σωθῆναι οὐ δύνασθε.

“On the fourteenth night we were being driven one way and another in the Adriatic, when about midnight the crew sensed that land of some sort was near. They took soundings and found twenty fathoms; after a short interval they sounded again and found fifteen fathoms. Then, afraid that we might run aground somewhere on a reef, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. When some of the crew tried to escape from the ship and lowered the ship’s boat into the sea as though to lay out anchors from the bows, Paul said to the centurion and his men, ‘Unless those men stay on board you cannot hope to be saved’.”

The parallel with Horace is not perfect, in that it is not the perception of waves beating on the shore that tells the crew of Paul’s ship that land is likely to be dangerously near. At

¹⁶ He shows more knowledge of this aspect of navigation, and provides another parallel for my argument, in *Agamemnon* 575-76 (of the Greek fleet wrecked on Caphereus): *iam timent terram rates / et maria malunt* (“now the ships fear the land and prefer the seas”). In his note on that passage, R. J. Tarrant unnecessarily doubts the existence of our captain: “Seneca claims in *Epist.* 53.2 to have heard this piece of wisdom from a ship-captain”, *Seneca, Agamemnon* (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, 18), Cambridge, 1976, *ad loc.* The fact that Seneca fails to understand the advice he is given is itself a strong point in favor of the captain’s existence, unless he is going out of his way to underline his own foolishness for pedagogical purposes. The Petronian passage which Tarrant also quotes, *huic fuga per terras, illi magis unda probatur / et patria pontus iam tutior* (*Sat.* 123.218-19, “This man prefers flight by land, that one the waves, and the open sea is now safer than his own country”), is parallel rhetorically, but provides no help for our passage, since it compares the dangers of the open sea with the greater dangers of civil war, and has nothing to do with the state of the weather.

¹⁷ Text from K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger (edd.), *The Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart, 1968², translation from A. Jones *et al.*, *The Jerusalem Bible*, 1966. The whole chapter is worth consulting in this connection.

first, they merely suspect that they are approaching land, and confirm their hunch by taking soundings which show that the water is becoming shallower. However, Paul's evidence shows again that proximity to shore means grave danger, and it is the fact that land is evidently near and getting nearer that causes the crew to panic.¹⁸ It also shows that people in a large ship are in more danger rather than less in these circumstances, as compared with those in a small boat.¹⁹

3. In his best-known letter (4 Hercher = 5 Garzya),²⁰ Synesius of Cyrene recounts an eventful voyage from Alexandria to Cyrene, at the same time expressing his comprehensive and bigoted contempt for the Jewish ship-captain Amarantos, while displaying in full his own gross ignorance of navigation and quoting enough of Amarantos' words to make it clear that the worthy captain did not deserve such an annoying passenger. Synesius does not even understand the concept of tacking,²¹ and when the ship heads out to sea among the large freighters to avoid being caught on a lee shore in worsening weather, he cannot help asking “καὶ νῦν τοῦ πελάγους τί δεῖ;” (640, 161a H = 14.11-12 G = 82 F, “what do we want of the open sea?”). Even when Amarantos patiently, if boastfully, explains what he is doing (“τοιούτον τὸ ναυτίλλεσθαι τέχνη”, 640, 161c H = 15.2 G = 82 F, “See what it is to be a master of the art of navigation”), Synesius is completely clueless. Later on, when a storm appears and the ship is driven before the wind and runs onto a reef on the Libyan coast, just as Amarantos had feared, Synesius writes (643, 164d H = 21.5-10 G = 87 F):

βοῆς δὲ γενομένης ἐπειδὴ τις παρηγγύησεν αὐτῇ γῆ πελάσαι
 θροῦς ἤρθη πολὺς καὶ ἤκιστα ξύμφωνος τῶν μὲν ναυτῶν πεφρι-
 κίων ἡμῶν δὲ ἐξ ἀπειρίας τὸ χειρὶ ἐπικροτούντων καὶ

¹⁸ Perhaps in this case we should say rather shallow water in general, whether reef or shoreline. A mid-sea reef would be even more dangerous than a rocky shore, since there would be no place for the passengers or crew to swim, if they were lucky enough to survive the shipwreck in the first place. In fact, it is not clear that Paul's ship was ever near to shore, since it may indeed be a reef that the sailors detect with their soundings, one fortunately not quite shallow enough to catch and sink their ship. The other possibility is that they skirt some island or peninsula without seeing it.

¹⁹ Another partial parallel is Odysseus' approach to Phaeacia in *Odyssey* 5.390-423. Here, it is specifically the sound of the waves crashing on the rocky shore which causes him to lose heart (400), and the waves very nearly do kill him. Although he is not in a ship, it is clear that he would not be much better off if he were, except that he would be better able to steer away from the cliffs towards his eventual safe landing-place, and would not have to worry as much about being eaten by a huge sea-monster (κῆτος . . . μέγα, 421). As with Paul, it is only 'rough' shores that Odysseus worries about, but Horace's ship is headed for one of the roughest shores of all (note 12 above).

²⁰ Letter 4 in *Epistolographi Graeci*, ed. R. Hercher (Paris, 1873, reprinted Amsterdam, 1965), is number 5 in the more recent edition of A. Garzya (*Synesii Cyrenensis Epistolae*, Rome, 1979). My text is taken from Hercher, but references are given to both, Hercher ('H') by page and marginal numeration, Garzya ('G') by page and line number. Translations are taken from Augustine Fitzgerald, *The Letters of Synesius of Cyrene*, Oxford, 1926, where it is Letter 4, and are referenced (as 'F') by page number.

²¹ Casson (note 13 above, 268-69) corrects Synesius' various misconceptions and concludes: "Synesius everywhere brands him as incompetent, yet he emerges from even this hostile account as an able and experienced seaman" (268 n. 1). He covers roughly the same ground in "Bishop Synesius' Voyage to Cyrene", *The American Neptune* 12 (1952) 294-96.

περιβαλλόντων ἀλλήλους καὶ οὐκ ἐχόντων ὅπως χρησώμεθα τῷ
πλήθει τῆς χαρᾶς.

“Then a shout went up, for some one passed the word that we had gone aground on the shore itself. There was much shouting and very little agreement. The sailors were terrified, whereas we through inexperience clapped our hands and embraced each other. We could not sufficiently express our great joy.”

The passengers ignorantly rejoice at what the sailors fear most.²²

The authors quoted are all later, in one case much later, than the *Europa Ode*, but naval technology changed little in the four-plus centuries between Horace and Synesius. In so far as it did, changes were mostly for the better, so the evidence from the parallels is probative, *a fortiori*, for Horace.²³ It is also worth emphasizing that ancient sailors not only know better than some modern scholars, they know better than the ancient authors who quote them. Both Seneca and Synesius actually cite the words of their respective captains, while showing that they entirely fail to understand what they are told. St. Paul is only a partial exception: if he is able to overrule the professional sailors, it is only because he convinces the centurion of his privileged knowledge of the divine will.²⁴

To return to the *Europa Ode*, the stanza whose last three words we have been considering contains a tricolon crescendo of fearful sights and sounds. The women and children in the ship are to perceive first the wind shifting from west to south (*caecos . . . motus orientis Austri*), second the rising waves which are a result of that shift (*aequoris nigri fremitum*), third and last (in more ways than one) the shore on which they are about to be smashed (*tremetis uerbere ripas*). The fact that even the shore is quivering under the blows of the waves shows how little hope of survival a fragile human, or even a shipload of humans, could have. Horace interrupts the scene and ‘cuts’ to Europa, in an

²² The fact that Amarantos loses his ship might be taken to show that he is not entirely competent. On the other hand, the crew and passengers all survive, and the situation is clearly a very difficult one. The fact that they are all saved in the end is irrelevant to a calculation of the odds of survival in different situations. Calculation of relative dangers is skewed by the fact that, if Synesius had not been saved, we would not have his account. We do not, of course, have any first-person accounts of people who were actually lost in a shipwreck, so statistical analysis is inherently unreliable here.

²³ As much difficulty as Synesius’ ship had on a lee shore, Horace’s would have had at least as much, if not more, all other things being equal, since naval technology was that much less advanced.

²⁴ It does not appear that any of our surviving ancient authors had first-hand experience as a professional sailor. Perhaps Archilochus is an exception, but his exiguous remains do not seem to refer to lee shores. Whatever his qualities as an author, Herman Melville certainly knew his seamanship, and he devotes a short chapter to a comparison of one of his characters to “the storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward shore”. As he puts it, “in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship’s direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality; one touch of land, though it but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and through” (*Moby Dick*, chapter 23, “The Lee Shore”).

almost cinematic way, at the most dramatic moment.²⁵ Bentley's *gementis* is irrelevant and unnecessary, as well as diplomatically unsatisfactory, while Shackleton Bailey's banalizing *costas* removes the climax by making the ship merely storm-tossed rather than doomed. Sometimes *ratio et res ipsa* are on the same side as the hundred (in Horace, three hundred) *codices*.²⁶

²⁵ It might not be going too far to see some significance in the way Horace saves *ripas* for the very last word of his sentence (and stanza). This would help to imply the shore's sudden (and deadly) appearance in the path of the ship, looming up through the fog.

²⁶ Bentley's famous (or notorious) remark, *Nobis et ratio et res ipsa centum codicibus potiores sunt*, "to us reason and the facts of the case are stronger than a hundred manuscripts", comes in his note on line 15 of the *Europa Ode*. I wish to thank Tom Kovach, Elaine Martin, and Arthur Robinson for their editorial help, and Richard Rand for pointing out the parallel in Melville.