

Paradise and Performance in Virgil's Underworld and Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*

This paper traces the reception of Greek traditions of choral performance as archetypes of civic society in Virgil's Underworld and in Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*. The role of religion and eschatology in *Aeneid* Six has been much studied, but the performance of ritual choruses, an important aspect of Virgil's description of Elysium (*Aen.* 6.642-678), has been little discussed. This scene can tell us much about both Virgil's response to Greek performance traditions and how this reception shaped Horace's closely contemporary *Carmen Saeculare*, which Michael Putnam (2000: 375) has called "the first great milestone on the road over which the *Aeneid* was to travel through the centuries." I consider *Aeneid* 6 and the *Carmen Saeculare* as two related points in the Roman reception of Greek choral traditions, arguing that in his re-shaping of Virgil's archetypal Elysian chorality, Horace deepens the relationship in Roman poetry between civic harmony and communal song.

Beginning with Virgil, I trace how his heroes, who "stamp out dances with their feet and sing songs" (*pedibus plaudunt choreas et carmina dicunt*, 644) and "sing a happy paean in a chorus" in the grove of Apollo (*laetumque choro paeana canentis*, 657), respond to Greek traditions of group song and dance and form part of the *Aeneid*'s broader exploration of communal chorality (cf. Evander's primitive Salii at *Aen.* 8.285-8). Choral song and dance, representative in Greco-Roman thought of society at its most communal, is here performed by the mythical founders of Troy alongside the archetypal singers Orpheus and Musaeus in a Golden Age setting. These features create a paradigmatic ideal of human social and ritual activity. The "ancient race of Teucer" (*genus antiquum Teucris*, 648) is juxtaposed with Anchises' prophecy of a new Roman world order, lending it exemplary force.

Several aspects of Virgil's Underworld point forward to Augustus' celebration of the *Ludi Saeculares* in 17 BCE (Miller 2009: 97, 148), and allusion to *Aeneid* 6 is embedded within the *Carmen Saeculare* (51-2). Virgil's Elysian choruses, I suggest, provides one model for Horace's emphasis on

choral song and dance—now realized on the civic stage, not merely imagined—as a reflection of civic harmony in the *Carmen Saeculare*. The song’s very form recalls the paean sung in Virgil’s Elysium: the Sibylline oracle decreed the performance of “Latin paeans” (Phlegon of Tralles, *FGrH* 257 F 37.149-50), to which Horace responds by creating an Apolline poetics reminiscent of Virgil’s Elysium. The performers of Horace’s choral song (*chorus*, 75) are archetypal for Roman civic order, but with an important difference: they are not ancient heroes but rather children who represent the future promise of society. Virgil’s Elysium, inhabited by the heroes of past “better years” (*melioribus annis*, *Aen.* 6.649) is re-founded by Horace as an ongoing Golden Age that will be “always better” (*meliusque semper*, *CS* 67). Traditions of communal song and dance, rooted in Greek thought and viewed through the lens of the *Aeneid*’s most foundational book, provide a model for Roman society.

Works cited:

Miller, J. F. (2009) *Apollo, Augustus and the Poets*. Cambridge.

Putnam, M. (2000) *Horace’s Carmen Saeculare: Ritual Magic and the Poet’s Art*. New Haven, CT.