

The last sentence of Virgil's celebrated description of the entrance to the Underworld opens with the following line: *multaque praeterea variarum monstra ferarum* (*Aen.* 6.285). The language of this verse does not prompt any comment whatsoever from a philologist as distinguished as Austin<sup>1</sup>. Norden himself merely suggests that the line's word-order underlines the "Zahlbegriff"<sup>2</sup>. At the same time Norden's introduction to the whole passage devotes considerable attention to "die grosse Sorgfalt der Ausarbeitung"<sup>3</sup>, for which he finds evidence solely in stylistic elegances. It would however seem possible to show that the above-mentioned line is marked instead by a certain inconcinnity, which in view of the poet's demonstrable "Sorgfalt" can only be intentional. Classical aesthetics deemed acoustic inelegance to be appropriate for disagreeable content<sup>4</sup>, while Virgil's own attentiveness to auralty was sufficiently

<sup>1</sup>R. G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber sextus*, Oxford 1977, 121. On Austin's reputation for philological acumen, cf. (e.g.) the review of this commentary by N. Horsfall in *JRS* 69, 1979, 232: "Austin's contribution to our understanding of the *Aeneid* now stands comparison with ... Norden's; ... Austin's feeling for Virgil's ... language was unmatched".

<sup>2</sup>E. Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro. Aeneis Buch VI*, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1995 (= 1927<sup>3</sup>), 395. Of greater importance for the "Zahlbegriff" would however appear to be the occurrence in the next line (286) of *Centauri*: for its derivation from *centum*, cf. (e.g.) Fulg. *myth.* 2.14. Virgil's etymological intent here would seem to be corroborated by his use of *centumgeminus* in the ensuing line (287): three consecutive verses accordingly begin with a word that emphasizes the "Zahlbegriff" (*multa / Centauri / centumgeminus*). It is proposed to examine this hitherto unidentified piece of etymological word-play in greater detail elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup>Norden, *Buch VI*, 210.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. (e.g.) Quint. *inst.* 8.3.17: *rebus atrocibus verba etiam ipso auditu aspera magis convenient*.

well-known to be the subject of anecdotes<sup>5</sup>. It may accordingly be concluded that the auditory unpleasantness of the words quoted above is meant to suit the similarly unpleasant *monstra* they describe<sup>6</sup>.

Commentators note that the Virgilian phrase *monstra ferarum* means nothing more than *monstrosae ferae*<sup>7</sup>: hence this recourse to a nominal form of expression is unnecessary. The result is a series of homoeoteleutic genitive plurals: *variarum monstra ferarum*. It is therefore noteworthy that precisely such strings of genitive plurals should be censured as cacophonous by rhetoricians<sup>8</sup>. In the present text the acoustic impact is heightened by the long *a* in *-arum*<sup>9</sup>. Only one further case of the genitival collocation *-ārum -ārum* occurs throughout the entire second half of the *Aeneid*: since the passage in question would likewise appear to be intentionally cacophonous, it is discussed below. In

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Don. *vita Verg.* l. 96 (Brummer): *Seneca tradidit Iulium Montanum poetam solitum dicere involaturum se Vergilio quaedam, si et vocem posset et os et hypocrisin; eosdem enim versus ipso pronuntiante bene sonare, sine illo inanes esse mutosque.*

<sup>6</sup> The note on this line in H. E. Butler, *The Sixth Book of the Aeneid*, Oxford 1920, 146, asserts that Virgil avoids “the grosser ... features” of these *monstra*: the same commentator fails however to perceive the auditive “grossness” of the present verse. Despite the interest in aurality professed by R. D. Williams, *The Aeneid of Virgil. Books 1-6*, New York 1972 (cf. XXVI-XXVIII), his own note on this line (477) merely refers the reader to Butler’s afore-cited statement.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. (e.g.) A. Forbiger, *P. Vergili Maronis opera*, Leipzig 1873<sup>4</sup>, II, 687; J. Conington and H. Nettleship, *The Works of Virgil*, London 1884<sup>4</sup>, II, 463.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. (e.g.) Fortun. *rhet.* 3.11: *quae in structura observanda sunt? ... ne plures genetivi plurales iungantur.* For another instance of Virgil’s deliberate disregard of this aesthetic principle in order to generate a similarly appropriate inconcinnity, cf. the present writer, “I Am Tedious Aeneas”: Virgil, *Aen.* 1.372ff.”, *Arctos* 35, 2001, 9-11.

<sup>9</sup> For the particular plangency of *ā*, cf. (e.g.) L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry*, Cambridge 1963, 16. In this passage the effect is further accentuated by the prominent position of the genitives at the end of the opening line of the period.

this connection it is also significant that when Manilius, the *Ilias Latina* and Paulinus of Nola reproduce the Virgilian *monstra ferarum*, all three of them differ from their source in avoiding a second genitive plural that ends in homoeoteleutic *-ārum*<sup>10</sup>.

Norden observes that the opening of Virgil's line (*multaque praeterea*) has been borrowed from Lucretius<sup>11</sup>. Virgil's use of this Lucretian tag in conjunction with the afore-mentioned genitive plurals means that an *a* which is long by nature occurs in the arsis of the third, fourth and sixth feet of the line. It is accordingly noteworthy that of the eight Lucretian lines beginning with *multaque praeterea* only two have one other naturally long *a* in a stressed syllable, while not a single one of them has two. Virgil himself also begins a verse with *multaque praeterea* at *Aeneid* 4.464, 7.183 and 11.78: significantly none of these lines exhibits another naturally long *a* in arsis. In the present passage Virgil has accordingly "improved" his borrowing from Lucretius by making it reinforce the cacophony.

The above-mentioned genitive plurals also double the number of *m*'s in the line. This letter is characterized by Quintilian as *mugiens* (*inst.* 12.10.31): a bilabial nasal of such cacophonous animality is therefore ideal for the description of *monstra ferarum*. The same Quintilianic passage also draws particular attention to the occurrence of this sound at the end of a word: two such instances are produced by Virgil's genitive plurals (*variarum ... ferarum*). The first of these genitives also occasions a direct

<sup>10</sup> Viz. Manil. 4.662 (*diversaque monstra ferarum*); *Hom. Lat.* 875 (*horrendaque monstra ferarum*); Paul. Nol. *carm.* 19.565 (*ultricum monstra ferarum*). On the other hand Ovid (*met.* 14.414) deliberately retains the *Aeneid*'s cacophonous formulation (*variarum monstra ferarum*) for parodic purposes, as his callow youths are transformed into ugly monsters: here the acoustic effect is overlooked by F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso. Metamorphosen Buch XIV-XV*, Heidelberg 1986, 138-9.

<sup>11</sup> Norden, *Buch VI*, 218, where only *Lucretius* 6.903 and 6.1182 are adduced. The collocation *multaque praeterea* is however to be found at the beginning of no fewer than six further Lucretian lines: 1.400; 2.109; 3.358; 5.943; 6.588; 6.797.

juxtaposition of two *m*'s across a bucolic bridge (*variarum monstra*)<sup>12</sup>, while the second genitive means that the same letter *m* encloses the whole verse (*multaque ... ferarum*). Such tautophony of *m* was condemned as cacophonous<sup>13</sup>.

The same passage of Quintilian which discusses the acoustic drawbacks of *m* also describes the letters *v* and *f* as *tristes et horridae* (*inst.* 12.10.28). It is therefore interesting that the two genitives surrounding *monstra* should begin with precisely these two letters: *variarum monstra ferarum*<sup>14</sup>. Quintilian observes that the labiodental spirant *f* is uttered *paene non humana voce* (12.10.29): such an “inhuman” sound is again suited admirably to the description of “monstrous beasts”. The whole of this verse is accordingly composed of a series of hyperbatic nouns and adjectives, each one of which begins with a letter that Quintilian condemns: *multaque praeterea variarum monstra ferarum*. The line is particularly important, since it introduces “die zweite Klasse” of the catalogue that describes the creatures dwelling at the entrance to the Underworld<sup>15</sup>: this second class consists of monsters. For ancient lexicographers a *monstrum* is quintessentially *contra naturam*<sup>16</sup>: it is therefore appropriate that Virgil should introduce his description of *monstra* with acoustic effects that evince a correspondingly “unnatural” cacophony<sup>17</sup>.

The point was made above that there is only one other example of the genitival collocation *-ārum -ārum* in the remaining six

<sup>12</sup> Quintilian remarks (*inst.* 9.4.37): *consonantes ... in commissura verborum rixantur*. Three of his ensuing examples (9.4.39) involve *m*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. (e.g.) Mart. Cap. 5.514: *mytacismus est, cum verborum coniunctio m litterae assiduitate colliditur*.

<sup>14</sup> The additional point may be made that these genitive plurals also add two *r*'s to the line, which contains altogether seven. On the “harshness” of this sound cf. (e.g.) Ov. *fast.* 5.481-2: *aspera ... littera* (sc. *r*).

<sup>15</sup> So Norden, *Buch VI*, 214.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ThLL VIII*, 1446.50-7 (*s.v.*; cf. also 1446.61-4).

<sup>17</sup> Two further points of a textual nature can be clarified in the light of the foregoing discussion. In the first place the line's cacophony needs to be brought into relief by punctuation at the end of it: hence the terminal comma in the recent edition by K. Maclennan (*Virgil. Aeneid VI*, Bristol 2003, 52), which follows the *OCT* of R. A. B. Mynors (*P. Vergili Maronis opera*, Oxford 1969, 236), is preferable to the lack of punctuation in

books of the *Aeneid*. The line in question occurs at the start of the passage of book VII in which Juno sets about stirring up the war that occupies the rest of the poem: *luctificam Allecto dirarum ab sede dearum / ... ciet* (sc. Juno; *Aen.* 7.324-5). Recently Horsfall's massive and highly esteemed commentary has merely registered "the homoeoteleuton" here: he is however unable to offer any reason for it<sup>18</sup>. Similarly Williams, who devotes considerable attention to auditory effects, simply enjoins the reader of this line to "observe the strong assonance"; again no rationale is sought<sup>19</sup>. An explanation had earlier been attempted by Page, for whom the assonance "seems to suggest awe"<sup>20</sup>; it will however be argued below that this view is wrong. Finally Fordyce's commentary, which has been acclaimed specifically for its "sensitivity to Virgilian ... sound", fails to make any comment whatsoever on this line's acoustics<sup>21</sup>.

In this verse Virgil has once again flouted the rhetorical precept that deprecates homoeoteleutic genitive plurals<sup>22</sup>. Again the object of this calculated infraction is an acoustic disagreeableness

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Norden's own text (*Buch VI*, 66), which is followed here by M. Geymonat (*P. Vergili Maronis opera*, Turin 1973, 385). Secondly the transposition of *multa* and *monstra* in the emendation recorded by C. G. Heyne and G. P. E. Wagner (*P. Virgilius Maro*, Leipzig-London 1832<sup>4</sup>, II, 894: *monstraque praeterea variarum multa ferarum*) cannot be right, since it ruins the "monstrously" cacophonous syntagm *variarum monstra ferarum*.

<sup>18</sup> N. Horsfall, *Virgil. Aeneid 7: A Commentary*, Leiden 2000, 226. The review by E. Fantham (*BMCR* 2001) asks: "Who else could have written a work of such depth and breadth?"

<sup>19</sup> R. D. Williams, *The Aeneid of Virgil. Books 7-12*, London 1973, 192. For his concern with auralty cf. n. 6 above.

<sup>20</sup> T. E. Page, *The Aeneid of Virgil. Books VII-XII*, London 1900, 151.

<sup>21</sup> C. J. Fordyce, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos libri VII-VIII*, Oxford 1977, 124-5. The words quoted come from the review by R. J. Clark (*Phoenix* 32, 1978, 356); cf. also the one by J. Perret (*REL* 56, 1978, 479), who calls Fordyce "un latiniste hors de pair".

<sup>22</sup> No other instance of the collocation *dirarum ... dearum* is provided by the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina* database (Stuttgart-Turnhout 2002<sup>2</sup>).

appropriate to the description of the disagreeable Furies<sup>23</sup>. This time the first genitive stands before an initial vowel: *dirarum ab*. The result is the particularly awkward form of elision to which the term *ecthlipsis* is applied by grammarians: *ecthlipsis est consonantium cum vocalibus aspere concurrentium quaedam difficilis ac dura conlisis, ut "multum ille"*<sup>24</sup>. A similarly inconcinuous collocation marks the second genitive: *sede dearum*. The same paragraph in which Fortunatianus bans a sequence of genitive plurals<sup>25</sup> also contains the following interdict: *ne ultima syllaba prioris verbi eadem sit quae prima posterioris*<sup>26</sup>. Virgil's *sede dearum* is accordingly another deliberate breach of rhetorical precept for the sake of aural inconcinnity<sup>27</sup>: the inelegance is particularly obtrusive when as here it involves the last two words<sup>28</sup>.

Finally the syntagm that is enclosed by these two genitives would itself seem to call for comment: *ab sede*. The preposition *ab* was also felt to be somewhat unpleasing to the ear. Here reference may again be made to the afore-mentioned passage of

<sup>23</sup> Here too the effect is highlighted by the words' prominence at the end of the period's first line, in which they again bring the number of naturally long *a*'s in arsis to three.

<sup>24</sup> Don. *gramm. mai.* 3.4 p. 662.11-13. A second instance of the same phenomenon is found earlier in the line (*luctificam Allecto*), where the *ecthlipsis* occurs in diaeresis. On the other hand no elision of any sort is present in either the previous or the succeeding verse.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. n. 8 above.

<sup>26</sup> *Rhet.* 3.11. The injunction is already found in Isoc. *tech. fr.* 6 (Blass) δεῖ δὲ <έν> τῇ μὲν λέξει τὰ φωνήεντα μὴ συμπύπτειν (χωλὸν γὰρ τὸ τοιόνδε), μηδὲ τελευτᾶν καὶ ἀρχεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς συλλαβῆς, οἷον 'εἰποῦσα σαφῆ', 'ήλικα καλᾶ', 'ένθα Θαλῆς'.

<sup>27</sup> Significantly *sede dearum* is replaced by *sede sororum* a hundred lines later (7.454). No further attestation of the former syntagm is supplied by *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina*. The virtual infringement of the same rhetorical prescription in the reading generally accepted at *Aen.* 6.265 (*nocte tacentia*), where by contrast Virgil is not seeking cacophony, would seem to provide support for the alternative lection *silentia*; cf. the present writer, "Further Virgilian Etymologizing: *Aeneid* 6.432-3", *AC* 71, 2002, 150.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Mart. Cap. 5.515-6.

Quintilian in which he points to the auditive shortcomings of the letters *m*, *v* and *f*. He then continues: *quid quod syllabae nostrae in b litteram ... innituntur adeo aspere ut plerique non antiquissimorum quidem sed tamen veterum mollire temptaverint, non solum "aversa" pro "abversis" dicendo, sed et in praepositione b litterae absonam et ipsam s subiciendo?* (*inst.* 12.10.32). In the present verse of the *Aeneid* it is precisely this *absona s* that begins the next word: *ab sede*<sup>29</sup>. Virgil eschews *ab* before *s* apart from the present collocation<sup>30</sup>, which he would seem to have taken from an earlier writer<sup>31</sup>. The syntagm is avoided by later poets. In conclusion it may accordingly be observed that every word of this line contributes to an acoustic unpleasantness suited perfectly to the sentence that inaugurates the war which engrosses the second half of the *Aeneid*<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Again the effect is accentuated by the bucolic bridge.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. C. Rolfe, "A, ab, abs", *ALLG* 10, 1898, 470.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. H. P. Syndikus, *Catull. Eine Interpretation*, Darmstadt 1987, III, 45, n. 9, where the writer in question is identified as Ennius.

<sup>32</sup> As was the case with the other passage discussed in the present article, the considerations adduced in connection with this one would again appear to shed light on a point of textual criticism. A penchant for the variant *sororum* instead of *dearum* has recently been expressed by E. Paratore, *Virgilio. Eneide*, Milano 1981, IV, 173 ("saremmo tentati di accettare la lezione *sororum*"). This reading must however be rejected on the grounds that it is insufficiently cacophonous.