

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Boy Who Crashed and Burned: Quintus Sulpicius Maximus and the Limits of Classical Literary Criticism

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Abstract

This is an exploratory reading of a distinctive text, a 43-line hexameter Greek poem composed for Domitian's Games for Capitoline Jupiter in 94 CE by Quintus Sulpicius Maximus, who was 11 years old. The following discussion considers the case of this talented but inevitably inexperienced poet, and its implications for our reading practices as classicists.

Introduction

This article is two things. On the one hand it is a sustained reflection on the principles that underpin contemporary classical criticism. On the other, it is an exploratory reading of a very distinctive text, a 43-line hexameter Greek poem composed by one Quintus Sulpicius Maximus in 94 CE, which was subsequently inscribed on a funerary altar for him. Sulpicius had improvised a verse ethopoeia at Domitian's Games for Capitoline Jupiter of 94 CE, on the theme *What Words Would Zeus Have Used to Castigate Helios for Giving his Chariot to Phaethon?*¹ The poem's forty-three verses appear on two columns on either side of the sculpted figure of Sulpicius (the final lines appearing on a scroll in his hand).

What is distinctive about Sulpicius is his age: he was a mere 11 years old at the time of the Games. This makes him a unique case: we know of other child poets, but

¹τίσιν ἂν λόγους χρῆσαιτο Ζεὺς ἐπιτιμῶν Ἡλίῳ, ὅτι τὸ ἄρμα ἔδωκε Φαέθοντι; On the title, see further below, n. 31. The inscription has been published as *IGUR* III 1336 = *CIL* VI 33976; *IG* XIV 1924; *SEG* 47: 1499 and 50: 1060 etc. The monument and text were first published by Visconti (1871); for other fundamental editions, see Henzen (1871), Sauppe (1871), Ciofi (1872), Kaibel (1878) 618 and Cougny (1890) 2.267. Where these editors' names are used without further specification, reference is to the relevant part of their edition or appended discussion. Important general discussions of the poem include Döpp (1996), Bernsdorff (1997) and Garulli (2018). Caruso (1999), Nocita (2000) and Cooley (2012) 131–2 focus more on the material artefact; Manieri (2014) considers the institutional setting of the games, and the political relevance of the Phaethon myth. Ventura, Garcia Barraco and Barraco (2017) offer a good general treatment of the overall themes. A book-length treatment by Kathleen Coleman is anticipated. I became aware of Garulli (2025) too late to take it into account.

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no other complete poem written by one survives from Graeco-Roman antiquity.² The following discussion considers the complex case of this talented but inevitably inexperienced composer, and its implications for our reading practices as classicists. My first section explores the question of what technical skill we can impute to our poet, the second his literary ‘meaning’ and the third the constitution of the text. In each case we shall see that the singular interpretative challenge presented by the boy-poet highlights the precariousness of our conventional scholarly practice. In brief: if our critical methods, underpinned as they are by assumptions about the indisputable sophistication of our authors, work equally well on the output of an 11-year-old child, what does that say about the robustness of those methods? A text and translation of the poem are given in the appendix.

What did Sulpicius know?

The literary criticism of classical texts, as is well known, operates according to a general principle of maximal charity: apparent errors, obscurities and infelicities can all be recouped as deliberate inconcinnities designed to cause specific effects. That principle is inevitably tested in this case. Sulpicius is a liminal figure. We cannot expect him to operate with the same level of sophistication as an adult Oppian or Dionysius Periegetes; but nor, conversely, can we deny his ambition to join that class. Reading this poem thus becomes a test not just of our skill as interpreters but also of the epistemic security of the parameters of conventional criticism. How much charity should we extend to the boy poet? How much knowledge can we presume for him? How much sophistication? If, what is more, conventional literary criticism presumes a bond of complicity, trust and camaraderie with the authors we study (for to impute sophistication and knowingness to poets is to arrogate the same to ourselves as critics), to what extent is that bond stretched and distorted when our dialogue partner is a child?

Poetic sophistication is the result of the interplay of manifold factors, including temperament, zeal and capacity. Fundamental, however, is technique, which comes only with learning and experience. Sulpicius was brilliant for his age, but inevitably he was not the finished article. In this first part of the discussion I consider three areas in which his technical skill can be assessed. As we move through them, assessment becomes increasingly difficult. First, and easiest, is metrics. It is not just that the poem is highly competent, it also displays neoteric features that can be read as signs of sophistication. Three statistics are particularly indicative: 77% (33/43) of the lines employ the trochaic caesura favoured by imperial poets; 65% feature the bucolic dieresis (28/43); and there is a high incidence (4 in total, just under 10%) of fifth-foot spondees (characteristic of late-Hellenistic avant-gardism).³ Metrics are a matter of

²Sulpicius is often compared to Lucius Valerius Pudens, the 13-year-old winner of the Capitoline poetry competition in the time of Trajan, but in his case we have only the monument dedicated in his hometown Histonium (*ILS* 5178 = *CIL* 9.2860). Auson. *Prof. Burd.* 5 celebrates the orator Attius Delphidius, who had been a poet ‘almost from when you rose from the cradle’ (*paene ab ipsis orsus incunabulis*, 5).

³On the predominance of the trochaic caesura in imperial hexameters, see West (1982) 177. Fifth-foot spondees: see lines 10, 15, 29 and 32, with Miguélez Caveró (2013) 88–9. On the other hand, Sulpicius is capable of violating some of the higher metrical rules, e.g. Meyer’s first law (West (1982) 38, 179) in lines 19 and 34.

rules, and hence relatively easy to assess: Sulpicius was clearly adept, well drilled and of his era.

My second area, style, is trickier: there are no hard-and-fast criteria here. Analysts of imperial poetry have tended to rely on Wifstrand's account, which diagnoses the degree of innovation against the template of traditional poetics (from the 'Homeric-Apollonian', at one end of the spectrum, to the 'Alexandrian' at the other).⁴ Thus for example Quintus of Smyrna is a strikingly 'traditional' poet in comparison with Triphiodorus;⁵ ps.-Oppian ramps up the experimentalism of his predecessor Oppian; Nonnus can be seen as the *non plus ultra* of 'Alexandrianism'.⁶

Sulpicius seems to have had at his fingertips a number of short phrases adapted from traditional hexameter verse, which were specific to a given *sedes* in the line; rehearsing these was no doubt an important part of his preparation for public improvisation. Crucially, these phrases are relatively banal, recurrent phrases that could be dropped into a poem on almost any mythological topic.⁷ For example, θεοὶ ποίησαν after the trochaic caesura in line 2 is found twice in the *Odyssey* (17.271, 23.258);⁸ the final πυρὸς ἀκ<α>μάτοιο (7) adapts the common Homeric line-end formula ἀκάματον πῦρ (*Il.* 5.4, 15.731 etc.); in line 19, Helios is invited to lament his son's λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον, a Homeric phrase (found in the same *sedes* at *Od.* 3.93, 4.323, 14.90); Διὸς νόον (21) is both Homeric and Hesiodic, used formulaically after the trochaic caesura (*Il.* 8.143, 14.160 etc.); Ζηνὸς νόον (40) is found in Hesiod (*Op.* 661; fr. 43a.52 MW, both in the same *sedes*), and in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (36, different *sedes*); initial ἔρχεο νῦν at 27 is also Homeric (*Il.* 15.54, 221; cf. *Od.* 10.320, 402); μέγαν οὐρανὸν in 36 might look to a solitary usage (in the same *sedes*) at *Il.* 1.497, although the phrase is unremarkable. Sulpicius' οὐ μὰ γὰρ αὐτήν/Ῥεῖν ἄλλο τ[ι] τ[οῦ]δε κακώτερον ἶδεν Ὀλύμπος (22), seems to adapt, again non-allusively, such unremarkable Homeric phrases as οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ γέ τι φημι κακώτερον ἄλλο (*Od.* 8.138; cf. 15.343, *Il.* 19.321).

Sulpicius' traditional material is also, however, intercut with non-traditional language; the contrast gives the poem a feel of stylistic modernity.⁹ This is evident from the very first line's φαεσφόρον ἀρμελατήρα: φαεσφόρος is not found in epic before the Hellenistic period,¹⁰ and ἀρμελατήρ is apparently a Sulpician coinage. The half-line ἐπ' ἀψίδεσσιν Ὀλύμπου (*bis*: 3, 33) uses the Homeric *hapax* ἀψίς (*Il.* 5.487, of the loop of a net) in the post-Homeric sense of a 'vault'. πρημενῇ (40) is an otherwise unparalleled Ionic form of a word (πρεμενής) elsewhere largely confined to tragedy. Sulpicius thus balances traditional phrasing with more contemporary stylistic and metrical features. On the Wifstrand scale, he registers as a moderate Alexandrian. What is striking for our purposes is that he has learned at such a young age both to use traditional language to

⁴Wifstrand (1933); see further Whitby (1994).

⁵Greensmith (2020) 98–9, with further references.

⁶For these last two points, see Whitby (1994); more generally on Nonnus' stylistic experimentalism, see Wifstrand (1933) 78–154.

⁷My list supplements VÉrilhac (1978) 71 and Döpp (1996) 112–13. As well as a number of individual words used in a Homeric sense, Döpp notes the phrases εὐρέα κόσμον (8), κάμψας ... γυῖα (16; Homer has γόνυ), οὐ μὰ γάρ (21), γαίης νέρθεν (37).

⁸Sulpicius' full phrase θεοὶ ποίησαν ἄνακτες is matched exactly by Theocr. *Id.* 25.78, but this is probably coincidence: there is no other indication that he has read Theocritus.

⁹For fuller lexical analysis confirming this point, see Döpp (1996) 112–14; Nocita (2000) 95–6.

¹⁰Ap. Rh. *Argon.* 4.885; cf. Call. *Hymn.* 3.204.

display his learning and to use innovations to stamp the poem with a distinctive poetic identity.

This is not to say that he has fully mastered poetic expression (another facet of style). Here we venture into much more subjective territory: what one reader perceives as clumsy opacity, another may in principle register as grandiosity. All the same, we can note a number of features that seem awkward or redundant. In the second line, Zeus notes the responsibility vested in Helios by the gods: they have made ‘none other than you’ (οὐχ ἕτερον πλὴν σεῖο) the charioteer of the cosmos. The phrase is seemingly pleonastic (Zeus simply means no more than ‘you’), ungainly and unparalleled in high poetry (where ἄλλος is regular in such expressions). οὐ τὰδε πιστὰ θεοῖς σέο δῆνεα (6) is bumpy Greek, which seems to mean ‘these plans of yours are not faithful to the gods’ (but πιστός in this sense is elsewhere used of people). The sentence at 25–6 (πῶλων γὰρ ἀπείριτον οὐ σθένος ἔγνω/ρύτῃρων οὐδ’ ἔσχε πολυφραδὲς ἔργον ἀνύσαι) should mean ‘he did not know the enormous strength of your foals/Nor could he achieve a famous deed with the reins’, but the position of conjunctive οὐδ’ obscures the fact that ρύτῃρων belongs in the second clause.¹¹ Lines 29–30 (μούνω σοὶ πυρόντος ἐπειγομένω κύκλοιο/ἀντολίῃ καὶ πᾶσα καλὸς δρόμος ἔπλετο δυσμή mean ‘To you alone as you yearn for your fiery cycle/Is vowed the rising and – a fine chase! – every setting.’ The phrase καλὸς δρόμος is best taken as a parenthetical interjection,¹² but it is odd phrasing, and to describe the setting as a δρόμος is odder still. πᾶσα seems to have been added for the sole purpose of filling out the hexameter. Also difficult is 37, ἥμισυ μὲν γαίης νέρθεν, τὸ δ’ ὕπερθε τανύσσας, of the sun’s course. To my eye ἥμισυ μὲν ... τὸ δ’ must mean ‘half of the time ... the rest of the time’, and νέρθεν is prepositional, governing γαίης (as in the Homeric phrase that is borrowed here).¹³ Others, however, have taken νέρθεν as adverbial and ἥμισυ as quasi-prepositional, meaning ‘half-way between’.¹⁴ Garcia Barraco, meanwhile, takes each of ἥμισυ, νέρθεν and ὕπερθε to refer to positions in relation to the earth.¹⁵ The natural response is to take these difficulties as signs of overreach by the young poet: in straining for metrical sophistication and a blend of traditionalism and innovation, he has sacrificed clarity for technical ostentation. This assessment seems to me plausible. But is there a double standard at work here? When such interpretative challenges present themselves in Pindar, Aeschylus, Callimachus or some other canonically ‘difficult’ poet, are we not likely to speak not of ineptitude but of sublime poetic intensity?¹⁶ Are we perhaps too charitable to ‘difficult’ poets?

¹¹Alternatively, ρύτῃρων might just about be taken with the first clause, so as to mean ‘he did not know [i.e. possess] the strength of the reins [i.e. the strength to wield them] of the foals’. A reader objects to the double genitive, but the sentence is difficult either way.

¹²Following Kaibel (1878) 254 (‘parenthetice dictum’; Coughy (1890) similarly prints brackets). Graziosi (2018) (‘The sunrise and the sunset and the whole beautiful course’) and Garcia Barraco (2017) (‘tutta la nobile corsa dal Levante all’Occidente’) improvise at this point.

¹³I.e. ‘Zur Hälfte unterhalb der Erde, zur Hälfte oberhalb den Weg’ (Döpp (1996) 107). The Homeric phrase is at *Il.* 14.204 (γαίης νέρθε).

¹⁴‘Aiming halfway between earth below and what is above’ (Graziosi (2018) 91; similarly Wright (2017) 58).

¹⁵‘Dal basso nel mezzo della terra, fino poi indirizzarsi in altro’ (Garcia Barraco (2017) 72).

¹⁶In Section 3 I discuss further difficult passages, where different textual readings may (or may not) help.

The picture painted so far is of a poet with a good technical command of metre and both traditional and neoteric language, who perhaps – though this is more subjective – struggled intermittently to write clear Greek within the constraints of the hexameter. This picture is (further) complicated, however, when we turn to my third category, allusivity. An ability to invoke and work creatively with the great poets of the past was of course *de rigueur* for postclassical poets, both Latin and Greek. At first sight Sulpicius shows little capacity in this regard. In the 150 years since its rediscovery, the poem has received extensive discussion in relation to the evolution of the Phaethon tradition and perceived allusions to earlier texts.¹⁷ Modern studies have often begun from the poem's supposed relationship with Ovid *Met.* 2.238–9, where Jupiter is said to have spoken unspecified words of both apology and threat to Helios after he had thunderblasted his errant son (*missos quoque Iuppiter ignes/excusat precibusque minas regaliter addit*).¹⁸ It is possible, as Döpp has suggested, that the topic of Sulpicius' poem was prompted by Ovid's reticence (just as e.g. Homeristae set themselves the challenge of expanding Homeric passages that were deemed elliptical).¹⁹ However, even if it was Ovid who inspired the theme, that does not mean that Sulpicius himself knew the *Metamorphosis* directly: the topic for these 'improvised verses' (*versus extemporales*), as the accompanying Latin inscription describes them, was surely chosen not by the poet but by the organisers of the competition.²⁰

This point matters, because it is often argued that Sulpicius derived his source material from Ovid.²¹ It is not *per se* implausible that a Greek poet of the late first century CE should have read Ovid: recent critics have been much more open towards Latin influence on imperial Greek literature.²² Quintus Sulpicius Maximus, in any case, is surely likely to have been a Latin speaker (the inscription also carries a Latin prose epitaph). The issue is rather that none of the evidence that has been presented is compelling. Even advocates of Ovidian influence have come close to admitting this: 'Für sich genommen, hätten diese Berührungen noch kein sonderliches Gewicht' writes Döpp, appealing instead to cumulative evidence.²³ But how many unconvincing individual examples does it take to build a convincing cumulative case? In the interests of economy, let us offer just one illustration of the kind of supposed parallel that has been advanced. Sulpicius 12b–13 ('and a farmer, standing beside his sickles, bewailed the monstrous dryness of the land')²⁴ has been compared to *Met.* 2.237–9a, where the Nymphs weep for the desiccation of their water-sources.²⁵ But there are no verbal

¹⁷ See the works listed in n. 3.

¹⁸ See esp. Diggle (1970) 201–2; Vérilhac (1978) 69–71; Döpp (1996) 110–11; Bernsdorff (1997) 105–7. There is no other antique source besides Sulpicius for any such speech to Helios (later Roman sarcophagi do, however, depict Hermes in the act of consoling Helios: Diggle (1970) 211–18).

¹⁹ As suggested by Döpp (1996) 109. On ethopoeic expansion of Homeric material, see e.g. Greensmith (2020) 69–76 (with Gangloff (2018) further on Homeristae).

²⁰ The parallel with sophistic improvisation suggests no prior knowledge on the performer's part (Schmitz (1997) 156–9).

²¹ See the works cited in n. 18.

²² Imperial Greek writers knowing Latin: see e.g. Jolowicz (2021); Carvounis, Papaioannou and Scafoglio (eds.) (2022).

²³ Döpp (1996) 111.

²⁴ καὶ τις ἄπλᾶτον / ἀζαλέην ἔκλαυσε παρὰ δρεπάναισι γεωργός. See below on the text here.

²⁵ Bernsdorff (1997) 108–9. Bernsdorff believes, moreover, that the farmer is trying to water the withered crops with his tears; I cannot see that in the poem. I am also unpersuaded by the claim that Sulpicius'

similarities, and even the contexts are different; all the two passages have in common is the idea of desiccation, an obvious consequence of the solar chariot crashing to earth. Ovid is, ultimately, a red herring when it comes to the details of Sulpicius' poem. The myth of Phaethon was very well known in antiquity, and will have existed in many different versions. It is simple misfortune that the *Metamorphoses* offers the only extended version of the story from the time before Sulpicius; we should not lend disproportionate weight to that fact.²⁶ The widespread belief that Sulpicius had Ovid at his fingertips tells us less about Sulpicius than about scholars' tendency to apply the charity principle overzealously, and their desire to connect disparate points on the landscape.

Sulpicius may or may not have read Ovid – we will never know – but he certainly does not engage with him allusively. There are no moments where knowledge of Ovid enriches our reading of Sulpicius (or indeed vice versa). Allusivity is more than the manipulation of source material: it is a sophisticated, higher-level technique generating extra resonance between two or more texts. Crucially, this is a skill that Sulpicius does not appear to have fully absorbed: I have found only occasional moments where Sulpicius might seem to be working in creative dialogue with the original text. One example is the phrase ἔρχεο νῦν (27), which (as mentioned above) is Homeric in origin. In two of the four Homeric usages (*Iliad* 15.54, 221) it is uttered by Zeus: Sulpicius may, then, have chosen the phrase on the grounds that it is characteristic of the king of the gods. *Iliad* 15.54, what is more, is arguably contextually relevant: here the god chides Hera for her deception of him, just as in Sulpicius he chides Helios. How do we decide if this is an allusion or not? On the positive side, there is a relatively close fit between the two passages, and we may wish to see Sulpicius as deliberately linking Zeus' speech of reproach to a famous precedent. On the other hand, ἔρχεο νῦν is a banal phrase that hardly pops out of its context: one would have to know Homer's text exceptionally well to recognise this as an allusion. Once again, Sulpicius' youth and inexperience significantly problematise the claim: can we trust him to have this level of recondite knowledge, and moreover to assume it in his audience? Is it not more likely that he had it to hand as one of a number of traditional-sounding phrases that he had memorised?

An interestingly different case is line 37, ἥμισυ μὲν γαίης νέρθεν, τὸ δ' ὑπερθε τανύσας (of the sun's course: the meaning of this line was discussed above). This looks very close to Galen's paraphrase of a dictum he attributes to Pindar: καὶ τὰ τῆς γῆς νέρθεν καὶ τὰ ὑπερθε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατὰ Πίνδαρον ἐπισκοπεῖ (*Adhortatio ad artes* 1). Maehler reconstructs the Pindaric line as τὰ <ς> τε γᾶς ὑπένερθε ... οὐρανοῦ θ' ὑπερ (fr. 292), which lessens the similarity to Sulpicius' line – but of course the reconstruction is entirely speculative. Did Sulpicius know a Pindaric original? It seems *prima facie* highly unlikely that the obscurer parts of the Pindaric corpus were among his bedtime reading. More plausible is the possibility that the prose paraphrase reported by Galen was in circulation as an apophthegm, and that Sulpicius has picked up on this. Ultimately, however, we find ourselves entirely in the dark: it is just as plausible that the similarity is entirely coincidental.

supposed adaptation of his source is unsuccessful, on the grounds that it is 'unpassend' to have a farmer distressed at drought and crop failure.

²⁶Bernsdorff (1997) 110–12 sees allusions to Apollonius; these strike me as similarly unproven.

By far the strongest case for allusion comes at 12–16. As V rilhac first noted, it reworks a famous passage of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.²⁷

καὶ σπόρος ἐς Δ μητρα καταίθετο, καὶ τις ἄπλατον
 ἄζαλέην ἔκλαυσε παρὰ δρεπάναισι γεωργός,
 σπείρων εἰς ἀχάριστα μάτην θ' ὑπὸ κυφὸν ἄροτρον
 ταῦρον ὑποζεύξας ὑπὸ τ' ἀστέρα βουλυτοῖο,
 κάμψας ἄρρενα γυῖα σὺν ἀχθεινοῖσι βόεσσι.

The seed sown for Demeter was aflame; a farmer
 Stood by his scythes and wept at the horrors of his parched field,
 Sowing with no joy, having yoked his bull in vain
 Beneath the curved plough, under the evening star,
 Flexing his masculine limbs along with his labouring bulls. (12–16)

οὐδέ τι γαῖα

σπέρμ' ἀνίει· κρύπτεν γὰρ ἐϋστέφανος Δημήτηρ·
 πολλὰ δὲ καμπύλ' ἄροτρα μάτην βόες εἴλκον ἀρούραις,
 πολλὸν δὲ κρῖ λευκὸν ἐτώσιον ἔμπεσε γαίῃ.

The land allowed

Nothing sown to come up, for fair-garlanded Demeter kept it hidden.
 Many were the bent ploughs that the oxen dragged in vain over the fields,
 And much the white barley seed that fell into the soil without result.
 (HH Cer. 306–9, trans. West)

Not only is the phrasing notably close (especially in the underlined parts),²⁸ but the situation as a whole is exactly comparable, both passages dealing with scenes of god-induced environmental disaster. Given the similarities, it seems plausible that Sulpicius had this passage firmly in mind when he composed, and knowingly aligned the two, to enhance the sense of cosmic catastrophe. Sulpicius' explicit mention of Demeter even seems to cue the allusion to the Homeric Hymn. Might the striking expression σπόρος ἐς Δ μητρα even be an 'Alexandrian footnote' (to risk that overused but still valuable phrase)? The transmitted title for the Hymn is ὕμνοι (*sic*) εἰς τὴν Δ μητραν: Sulpicius and his readers may well have known it simply as εἰς (/ ἐς) (τὴν) Δ μητρα(ν). In that case σπόρος ἐς Δ μητρα might mean, at the meta-level, 'the seed [from which this section of the poem grew] is the *Hymn to Demeter*'.²⁹ But are we prepared to tolerate this level of quasi-Callimachean sophistication in a poem that otherwise shows only the faintest trace of allusivity? Once again, the answer will

²⁷V rilhac (1978) 71; Agosti (2005) 36 n. 10 sees an additional reference to Hom. *Od.* 13.31–4, but this is at best more remote.

²⁸Curved ploughs are of course relatively common, though the earliest example is here in the *Hymn* (Richardson (1974) 260); μάτην however is distinctive in early epic (*ibid.*)

²⁹The *Hymn to Demeter* is transmitted in a single MS, known as M (Mosquensis). The poem itself uses the 3rd-declension ending Δ μητρα for the accusative (already in line 1). Athenaeus mentions a hymn to Demeter by Lasus, which he knows under the title ὁ εἰς τὴν Δ μητρα ... τὴν ἐν Ἐρμιόνη (455e; cf. 624e).

depend on how much knowledge and knowingness we are prepared to grant Sulpicius. And once again that question rebounds onto the critic. Can we bring ourselves to deny sophistication to an ancient poetic text when the opportunity presents itself? Or, conversely, do we want to risk the charge of overreading, of overinvesting—of overextending our interpretative charity?³⁰

What did Sulpicius mean?

I turn now to the second part of my discussion: what deeper meaning, if any, did the poem have? The poem is a versified ethopoeia, of a form familiar to students of ancient rhetoric,³¹ i.e. an imaginative recreation of the words of a given mythological or historical figure in a given situation. Such exercises were both set for advanced school students and indulged in by established literary writers (we have numerous examples composed by, for example, Libanius and Severus of Alexandria in later antiquity). The genre provided the expertise that underpinned second-sophistic declamation, and by extension the direct-speech sections of genres such as the novel and epic.

It is easy to assume that a given *ethopoeia* is simply a self-contained technical exercise with no wider significance. Recent scholarship on imperial declamation, however, encourages us to read more imaginatively, and more contextually. In particular, William Guast has argued for declamation as ‘a vivid medium, in that it restages history live and in a “controversial” format’.³² For Guast, declamation – in effect, as we have seen, an expanded, stylised version of the ethopoeia – gained its point and purpose from its capacity simultaneously to create an alternative imaginative space and to create a forum for rehearsing and exploring ideas that had contemporary purchase: ‘declamation’s distance from the world is one of the reasons it is such an attractive medium for thinking about the world’.³³

As Alessandra Manieri has argued, the Phaethon story will have been politically resonant in the context of the festival for Jupiter Capitolinus, particularly given the assimilation of the *dominus et deus* Domitian to the king of the gods, the cosmic imagery so favoured by Flavian propaganda and the widespread association in the

³⁰The same caveats can also be applied to claims that the poem influenced later writers in antiquity. Luc. *Dial. D.* 24 has been thought to refer directly to Sulpicius in sections 1 and 3 (Visconti (1871) 24, followed by numerous later scholars, e.g. Döpp (1996) 110–11; see however *contra* Kaibel (1878) 252 (‘ridiculum’) and Knaack (1886) 48–9, who posits a common Alexandrian source. At Philostr. *Imag.* 1.11, Earth ‘despairs and raises her hands’ (ἀπαγορεύει δὲ ἡ Γῆ καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αἶρει ἄνω) as Phaethon careers through the sky; similarly Ocean in line 10 of Sulpicius’ poem (Ὠκεανὸς χέρας αὐτὸς ἐς οὐρανὸν ἤερταξε). Pace Diggle (1970) 204, these passages do not derive independently from Ov. *Met.* 2.275–6 (where the hand covers the face rather than being raised to the skies). See also below, Section 3, for a further possible instance of allusion to Sulpicius’ poem in the *Orphic Hymns*. But do we really believe that a poem that apparently existed only in one non-portable copy in the city of Rome had such a wide influence across the Empire?

³¹For an overview, see Amato and Schampf (eds.) (2005). The form Sulpicius’ title (τίσιν ἂν λόγοις χρήσαιτο Ζεὺς ἐπιτιμῶν Ἥλιω, ὅτι τὸ ἄρμα ἔδωκε Φαέθοντι;) is standard for ethopoeiae; the phrasing is notably close to the titles for the analogous exercises of the *Codex Visionum*: τί ἂν εἴποι ὁ Καὶν ἀποκτείνας τὸν Ἀβηλ; and τί ἂν εἴποι ὁ Ἀβηλ ἀνηρηθείς ὑπὸ τοῦ Καὶν; (*P.Bodm.* 30–7 = *LDAB* 1106; Hurst and Rudhardt (1999)). On verse ethopoeiae in general, see Agosti (2005), with 36–7 on our poem; de Stefani (2014); Verhelst (2017) 221–73; Greensmith (2020) 60–7.

³²Guast (2023) 187.

³³*Ibid.* 188.

era of Phaethon with imperial misrule.³⁴ Manieri begins from the position that it is categorically impossible that Sulpicius' poem could have contained any criticism of the emperor,³⁵ and argues that the poem points instead optimistically to the imperial future. It is certainly possible to read the text this way, with Domitian in the role of the mighty guarantor of cosmic order.³⁶ The contents, after all, highlight the authoritative nature of Zeus' locutions: it transitions from the reproachful questions of 3–8, through statements about the effects of Phaethon's actions (9–18), to the imperatives that represent most of the rest of the poem (μύρεο ... ἔχε, 19; γίνωσκ', 21; οἰχέσθω ... κεῦθε, 24; ἔρχεο ... ἐποίχεο, 27; φείδεο, 32; ἴσχε, 33; μαίεο, 34; ὀδεύε, 36). There are numerous mentions of Olympian power and force that can do double-duty as political allegories (Θεοὶ ... ἄνακτες, 2; ἐπαρωγὴν, 5; θρόνον ... ἐμόν, 8; the thunderbolt alluded to at 18 and 20). The recurrent emphasis on Zeus' νόος might also suggest imperial will (21, 31, 40).

The Capitoline Games were of course propagandistic, and this environment could very well have steered audiences towards Manieri's reading. It is, however, in the nature of mythical allegory that it is unstable and multivalent. As Shadi Bartsch argued over thirty years ago, this was particularly the case in the first century CE, which saw an explosion in 'doublespeak', whereby readers and audiences repeatedly sought and found subversive and counter-ideological meanings, particularly in representations of myth and history.³⁷ Rather than reading Sulpicius' poem with Manieri as a simple political allegory, we might embrace Pramit Chaudhuri's analysis of the politics and poetics of theomachic myth in the Domitianic era (for the Phaethon story is a version of a theomachy), and move 'away from allegory and subversive criticism to the domain of interdiscursivity'.³⁸ The figure of the battler of gods, he argues, 'is a sign with multiple, and shifting, referents: he can be a serious and principled opponent, or a rough and ignorant brute'.³⁹ If we follow this lead, then it becomes less than self-evident that the poem celebrates Zeus' authority and his restoration of cosmic order. Might it be seen, rather, to expose the callousness and proprietorial arrogance of the king of the gods, as he revels in his extra-judicial murder of the young rebel (ἐγὼ πυρὶ φέγγος ἀπέσβεσα, 18), denies the father the opportunity to grieve (μηκέτι παιδὸς/μύρεο λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον, 18–19) and lays claim to sole ownership of the cosmos (ἡμετέρου κόσμοιο, 1; κόσμος ἐμός, 23)?

What is more, there is nothing that requires the association of Domitian with Zeus in the myth. Audience members might, alternatively, have read Phaethon instead as Domitian, and Zeus' chastisement as an indictment of the 'malign' (κακόφρονα, 3; κακόφρονος, 17) ruler, who has instituted the worst of all governments (οὐ μὰ γὰρ αὐτήν/Πείην ἄλλο τι τοῦδε κακώτερον ἶδεν Ὀλυμπος, 21–2). As Manieri notes, a passage in Dio's *Kingship Orations* implicitly associates Phaethon precisely with Domitian,

³⁴Manieri (2014), esp. 156–60. More generally on poetry and propaganda in the Capitoline Games, see Hardie (2003).

³⁵'... escludendo a priori che la rappresentazione mitica potesse in qualche modo risultare lesiva dell'autorità di Domiziano ...', Manieri (2014) 158.

³⁶On the representation of Domitian as Jupiter/Zeus in the propaganda of the era, see Chaudhuri (2014) 318–19.

³⁷Bartsch (1994), esp. 63–97.

³⁸Chaudhuri (2014) 300.

³⁹Ibid. 8.

in the context of praise of Trajan.⁴⁰ On this interpretation, Helios' εὐσταθὲς ἄρμα (7) symbolises the imperial power that Vespasian foolishly bequeathed his son. In sum: rather than functioning as a static allegory, the myth creates a fluid space into which current issues of power and order can be transposed, and where they can be explored from different angles that generate different interpretations. To paraphrase Guast, it is the very distance of the mythical world from the contemporary that legitimises its use for complex, experimental purposes.

Yet how plausible a reading of the poem is this? We must question – by now a familiar point – how likely it is that an 11-year-old boy devised any kind of political allegory, let alone a sophisticated, multifaceted one with a latent anti-Domitianic ‘edge’. We might argue instead that it was the myth itself that was politicised, not Sulpicius’ particular version of it, and that themes of regal power and subversion are inevitably packaged into this narrative. On this interpretation, any political overtones the audience detected in the poem will have been generated by the context rather than the poem itself.

The capacity of contexts to generate interpretative frames was spectacularly dramatised when the poem was relocated from the Capitoline Games to the commemorative altar after its author’s death. In this new context, the story became a sorrowful lament over the death of a precocious boy who died before his time.⁴¹ Valentina Garulli in particular has written insightfully on the ingenious ways in which the funeral monument reinterprets the poem in sepulchral terms.⁴² But this discussion as a whole might well lead us to wonder how much ‘meaning’ there actually is in the poem ‘itself’. Is it then simply a coat stand, on which readers, audiences and critics choose to hang their own preferred interpretations? Here we come close to the reception-orientated perspective championed by Martindale and others in the 1990s.⁴³ The difference is that Martindale believed it was a particular property of only the very best literature that it could reinsert itself meaningfully into new interpretative contexts: this was a sign of its distinctive textural richness and thematic complexity. In Sulpicius’ case, by contrast, it is the very presumed naivety of the author that leads us to question whether there is anything at all ‘there’ in the text. The bleakest conclusion is that this poem is simply the work of a child learning how to mimic how the adults play: it has no deeper signification at all. It can sustain multiple different interpretations because in itself it contains none. But this conclusion has wider implications. If we also accept that Sulpicius’ poem responds as well as any other to political interpretation, where does that leave the political interpretation of poetry as a whole? What criteria can we use to decide when a subtext is there and when it is not? How confident can we be that any given poet is playing the same game as we critics?

⁴⁰Dio Chr. 1.46; Manieri (2014) 157.

⁴¹The exemplum of Phaethon is commonly found in funerary inscriptions for young boys: see the list at SEG 50: 1060.

⁴²Garulli (2018) 95–8, arguing ingeniously that the accompanying epigrams respond to Sulpicius’ poem, contrasting his humane and peaceful precocity with that of the κακόφρονα (3; κακόφρονος, 17) Phaethon. See also Cooley (2012) 132 on the new sepulchral overtones of the poem.

⁴³Martindale (1993); see also Martindale and Thomas (eds.) (2006).

What were Sulpicius' words?

As was mentioned in Section 1 above, there are a number of points in the poem where the meaning is unclear. In this section I consider those cases where emendation in the light of parallels from other imperial Greek poets may help. As with the discussion above, however, any conclusions must remain tentative, and will depend on how much skill we are prepared to grant the boy-poet. We should be particularly cautious about changing an inscribed text, which survives (except where it is damaged) in exactly the same form in which it was created. Any emendation of the legible text must presuppose that errors were introduced in the process of transcription or transmission of the oral text, or in the carving. This is not *per se* implausible. It has been accepted since the poem was first published that there are a number of errors on the stone, usually consisting in the omission of one or two letters (I have accepted and indicated these editorial 'corrections' in my own text printed in the appendix). These cases are almost certainly not Sulpicius' own errors: it is hard to believe, for example, that the poet himself wrote σὺ σὸς ἔφου at 25 (editions read οὐ, surely correctly). But clearly when it comes to more substantial changes to the text we must tread very carefully. The urge to restore a perfect, pristine text – the text, in other words, that we as critics would want to read – should always be interrogated.

I focus on four cases of difficulty in the received text, as given in *IGUR* 1336 (= Moretti 1979: 189–93). Firstly, lines 36–7:

καὶ τὸν ἀπειρέσιον μέγαν οὐρανὸν αὐτὸς ὄδευε,
ἡμῖσι μὲν γαίης νέρθεν, τὸ δ' ὑπερθε τανύσσας

Guide the infinitely great universe yourself,
Extending your course now halfway between the earth below and the upper realm.

ἔδευε is legible on the stone at the end of 36.⁴⁴ Visconti's correction ὄδευε, however, is supported by the very close parallel of the line-end of *Orphic Hymn* 64.5 (to *Nomos*): ... μέγαν οὐρανὸν αὐτὸς ὀδεύει. It may indeed be that the author of the *Orphic Hymn* borrows directly from Sulpicius, given the near-identity of the two phrases (there is no other instance of this phrasing in extant Greek),⁴⁵ and indeed the fact that αὐτός is pointed in Sulpicius (Zeus wants Helios to take *personal* responsibility) but redundant in the *Orphic Hymn*. Sulpicius has in this case built his phrasing carefully: he replicates a Homeric phrase in the same *sedes* (ἡερίη δ' ἀνέβη μέγαν οὐρανὸν Οὐλυμπόν τε, *Il.* 1.497), and after dropping in the colourless αὐτός completes the line with a part of ὀδεύω, a *hapax* in Homer (ὀδεύειν at *Il.* 11.569, also at line-end). ὀδεύειν (always, again, at line-end) begins to be used from the first century CE onwards by poets of the sun's course (a use not found in earlier poetry).⁴⁶

⁴⁴See e.g. Nocita (2000) 90. Wright (2017) 56 argues unconvincingly for retention.

⁴⁵As Lucian and Philostratus are thought to have done (n. 33).

⁴⁶... μέγας Ἥλιος ἦλθεν ὀδεύων (Anubion, F3 col. ii.21 Obbink); ... μέγας Ἥλιος ἡνίχ' ὀδεύη (*De viribus herbarum* 5 = Heitsch 1964: 23–38); πρὶν μέγαν Ἡέλιον τὸν ἀτέρμονα κύκλον ὀδεύειν (ibid. 158 = 213). Lightfoot (2020), 895 suggests that the use of the verb by ps.-Manetho in connection with the planets may 'suggest autonomous and purposeful motion'.

Another case in which the inscribed text may be faulty is arguably the most difficult passage in the poem, and has already been cited:

καὶ σπόρος ἐς Δήμητρα κατὰίθετο, καὶ τις ἄπλατον
ἄζαλέην ἔκλαυσε παρὰ δρεπάναισι γεωργός...

The seed sown for Demeter was aflame; a farmer
Stood by his scythes and wept at the horrors of his parched field ... (12–13)

ἄπλατον is certainly the reading on the stone, although the circumstances are suspicious. As mentioned above, the majority of the poem is written out continuously on the two columns flanking the portrait of the boy. ΑΠΑΑ finishes the bottom of the left-hand column; ΤΟΝ is inscribed anomalously below it, in larger letters and in isolation from the rest of the script. As things stand, ἄζαλέην must be read as an adjectival noun ('parched field'), with ἄπλατον ('monstrous') as the qualifying adjective.⁴⁷ Quite apart from the orthographic oddities of the text, ἄπλατον is impossible to construe (and in any case ἄπλητος is the regular epic form). Sauppe tentatively suggested emending to ἄμαλλαν ('crop').⁴⁸ I suggest ἄρουραν, on the basis of Nonnus *Dion.* 13.374–5: ... οἱ τε ῥόον Χρεμέταο καὶ οἱ παρὰ Κίνυφος ὕδωρ/ῶκεον ἄζαλέης ψαμαθώδεα πέζαν ἄρουρης.⁴⁹ Sulpicius (I suggest) and Nonnus have taken the Homeric ἄρουρα, very common at the line-end,⁵⁰ and qualified it with ἄζαλέος, which is certainly found intermittently in Homer, but gained considerably in popularity in the Hellenistic period as a recondite adjective.⁵¹ How the familiar noun ἄρουραν might have become corrupted into ἄπλατον, on the other hand, is inexplicable, both palaeographically and cognitively.

A Nonnian parallel may also help with line 9:

μῖγνυτο καὶ κύκλοισιν ὑπερμενὲς ἄχθος ἀπ' εἴλης

The mighty burden from your glare mingled with the spheres;

Visconti and Henzen read ἀπειλῆς; it was Ciofi and Sauppe who (independently?) suggested ἀπ' εἴλης, which is read in modern editions.⁵² This is ingenious, but to my mind implausible. Even with the accentual distinction, it is hard to imagine an audience picking out the recondite word εἴλη in oral performance (let alone on an inscription

⁴⁷Visconti (1871) 23 takes both adjectives to refer to Demeter, but the absence of both pronoun and conjunction would seem to rule this out.

⁴⁸Sauppe (1871) 1039.

⁴⁹Simon (2004) 26 n. 4 notes some parallels between Nonnus' Phaethon episode (= *Dion.* 38) and Sulpicius, '[m]ême entre deux auteurs qui ne se connaissent pas'. See also Vêrilhac (1982) 69–70.

⁵⁰*Il.* 2.548, 3.115, 3.246 etc. *HH Cer.* 308, which (as we have seen) may be used in lines 14–15, ends with ἀρούραις.

⁵¹E.g. (very selectively) *Ap. Rh. Argon.* 2.59, 115, 4.144; *Nic. Ther.* 31, 37, 221.

⁵²Ciofi (1872) 10–11, Sauppe (1871) 1036 ('egregie': Kaibel *ap. IG* XIV 2012). Sauppe is concerned by the dependence of both ἐπ' εὐρέα κόσμον and κύκλοισιν on μῖγνυτο, but the former phrase is now usually taken with the previous sentence. I cannot follow Ciofi's objection.

without interpunctual space).⁵³ Sulpicius' vocabulary is occasionally ambitious but never obscurantist. ἄχθος ἀπειλῆς, on the other hand, finds a close parallel in Nonnus' metrically identical line-end formula ὄγκον ἀπειλῆς (*Dion.* 8.408, 16.27, 17.318). ἀπειλή regularly means 'threatening circumstance' in imperial Greek, both prose and verse; Sulpicius' ὑπερμενὲς ἄχθος ἀπειλῆς would therefore mean 'a mighty, weighty menace'. And once again we see the same technique at work: ἄχθος appears in its Homeric position in the line,⁵⁴ which is then completed by a word used in a non-Homeric sense. The result is a striking, extravagant expression.

Finally, at line 20 Zeus warns Helios not to shirk his duties in the future with a threat:

μή ποτε χειρὸς ἐμῆς φλογερώτερον ἔγχος ἀθροίσης

May you never be hit by a fierier weapon [sc. than Helios' own rays] from my hand!

ἀθροίσης – Visconti's transcription, which has made its way into modern editions via Cougny – cannot mean 'get' (i.e. 'be hit by'). The middle parts of the word are in fact not fully readable. ΑΘΡ is visible on the right-hand side of one row, and ΣΗΣ at the start of the left-hand row beginning the next line; but the letters following ΑΘΡ curve around the ridge that frames the right-hand column, and are not clear. Sauppe proposed αείσης (or at least an unspecified form of αείδω), and Kaibel ἀθρήσης. Kaibel's ἀθρήσης seems to me far preferable. There is in this case no strong parallel that I can find for the phrasing, but we clearly need an equivalent of Homeric ἴν' εἰδῆς/ὄφρ' εἰδῆς. In Lucian's 24th *Dialogue of the Gods* (which has been argued to show knowledge of Sulpicius' poem),⁵⁵ Zeus threatens Helios if he allows another to take his solar chariot: αὐτίκα εἴση, ὅποσον τοῦ σοῦ πυρὸς ὁ κεραυνὸς πυρωδέστερος (*Luc. Dial. D.* 24.2). A verb of seeing is of course a ready substitute for a verb of knowing (cf. ἴδεν at line 22 of our poem). ἀθρέω in this extended sense ('witness', 'come to see', i.e. 'realise') is again Nonnian, especially in similarly minatory contexts.⁵⁶

These readings seem credible to me, and have been incorporated into the revised text printed in the appendix. They are, however, subject to the same uncertainties that I have raised throughout. Philologists like to assume that errors and difficulties are introduced in the process of textual transmission alone, and that behind them lies a hypothetical original free from blemish (a different manifestation of the same principle of maximal charity). This is clearly not the case with Sulpicius, who was perfectly capable of writing garbled and tortuous Greek without the need for outside aid. My method above has involved, as is traditional in textual criticism, appealing to parallels, from the *Orphic Hymns* and Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*. But whether these sophisticated (and later) texts are appropriate *comparanda* for the boy poet is, naturally, an open question.

⁵³The word's obscurity is emphasised by e.g. Weissenberger (1996) 171 and Biles and Olson (2015) 324 (who point out that not even the breathing is certain: if the word was εἴλη then it cannot be read in Sulpicius).

⁵⁴5/6 usages begin a dactylic fifth foot (*Il.* 12.452, 18.104, 20.247; *Od.* 3.312, 20.379; the exception is *Od.* 9.233).

⁵⁵See n. 30.

⁵⁶*D.* 23.292–3 (καὶ ἀθρήσει με Κρονίων / χεύματι μορμύροντι κατακλύζοντα Σελήνην), 27.123–4 (αἰθαλόεις Ἥφαιστος ἐξ ὀλετῆρα γενέθλης / ἤμενον ἀθρήσειεν ὑπὲρ δίφροιο Καβεῖρων) etc.

Conclusion

We have seen throughout the methodological problems that arise when we treat Sulpicius' poem as a 'normal' classical literary poem. Questions around source material, interpretation allusivity, political subtext and the constitution of the text are unusually difficult to answer with any confidence when we are dealing with a child. Further complexities, indeed, present themselves when we acknowledge that there are other unknowns about the circumstances behind the poem. We know nothing about the mechanics of the competition, and specifically about what 'improvisation' meant in this context. Were the competitors handed their theme as they strode out, and expected to extemporise on the spot? Or were they informed in advance, and given time to prepare? If so, were they allowed help, in the form of notes, or tutors? Were all fifty-two poets given the same theme?⁵⁷ Nor do we know how the poem was recorded: were there note-takers at the performance, or did Sulpicius have it in his memory? Is the poem as we have it exactly as performed, or was it worked up subsequently (and if so by whom)? We have, in sum, no way of telling how much of the inscribed poem is Sulpicius' work. We are used to dealing with the idea that poems are authored by single individuals in a single creative act: with this poem that is possible, but far from certain. This puts further pressure on the question of how much knowledge and knowingness we can assume in the poem: can we even apply the same expectations to every passage in the text? Could, for example, the apparently sophisticated allusion to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* have been smuggled in by a *post-eventum* adult editor?

My aim in this article has been not to resolve such questions about this remarkable poem but to highlight their irresolvable nature – and, indeed, to ponder the implications for classical literary criticism in general. So much about our interpretation of Greco-Roman texts rests upon often unspoken assumptions about, and investments in, the literary ability, control of expression and intellectual sophistication of our subjects. Our ancient authors are fantastic constructions of our own devising, whom we craft to mirror our own flattering self-images. Should we always work with the strongest version of the principle of charity? What would it mean – both for our readings of ancient texts and for our self-definition as classicists – to start thinking of fallibility, naivety and gaucheness as endemic in ancient composition? Can we even begin to conceptualise a version of classical studies that is not centred on the cathexis of 'literary quality'?

Appendix

The following text is revised from *IGUR* 1336 (= Moretti 1979: 189–93), incorporating the suggestions made in Section 3. I have not given a full *apparatus criticus* (for which see Garulli (2018) 89), but I have marked instances where modern editions deviate from the readings on the stone, and where my text differs from Moretti's (there is an additional small change at line 38). My own translation of this revised text follows.⁵⁸

1. ἡμετέρου κόσμοιο φασσφόρον ἀρμελατῆρα
2. οὐχ ἕτερον πλὴν σεῖο θεοὶ ποίησαν ἄνακτες

⁵⁷Manieri (2014) 155–6 finds this unlikely. But we simply do not know.

⁵⁸Other recent English translations are Wright (2017) 57–8 (unreliable) and Graziosi (2018); see also Vêrilhac (1978) 119–20 (French), Döpp (1996) 106–7 (German), Nocita (2000) 90–2 (Italian) and Barraco (2024) 68–73.

3. τίπτε κακόφρονα θῆκες ἐφ' ἀψίδεσσιν Ὀλύμπου
4. υἷέα καὶ πώλων ἄφατον τάχος ἐγγυάλιξας,
5. ἡμετέρην οὐδ' ὅσον ὑποδ<δ>είσας ἐπαρωγὴν;
6. οὐ τάδε πιστὰ θεοῖς σέο δῆνεα· ποῖ Φαέθοντος
7. εὐσταθὲς ἄρμα φορεῖτο; τί σου πυρὸς ἀκ<α>μάτιο
8. φλόξ ἄχρι καὶ θρόνον ἤλθεν ἐμόν καὶ ἐπ' εὐρέα κόσμον;
9. μίγνυτο καὶ κύκλοισιν ὑπερμενὲς ἄχθος ἀπειλῆς.⁵⁹
10. Ὠκεανὸς χέρας αὐτὸς ἐς οὐρανὸν ἤέρταζε.
11. Τίς ποταμῶν οὐ πᾶσαν ἀνεξηραίνετο πηγὴν;
12. καὶ σπόρος ἐς Δήμητρα καταίθετο, καὶ τις ἄρουραν⁶⁰
13. ἀζαλέην ἔκλαυσε παρὰ δρεπάναισι γεωργός,
14. σπείρων εἰς ἀχάριστὰ μάτην θ' ὑπὸ κυφὸν ἄροτρον
15. ταῦρον ὑποζεύξας ὑπὸ τ' ἀστέρα βουλυτοῖο,
16. κάμψας ἄρρενα γυῖα σὺν ἀχθεινοῖσι βόεσσι.
17. γαῖα δ' ὑπέστενε πᾶσα κακόφρονος εἵνεκα κούρου·
18. καὶ τότε ἔγῳ πυρὶ φέγγος ἀπέσβεσα. μηκέτι παιδὸς
19. μῦρο λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον, ἐοῦ δ' ἔχε φροντίδα κόσμου
20. μή ποτε χειρὸς ἐμῆς φλογερώτερον ἔγχος ἀθρήσης.⁶¹
21. γίνωσκ' οὐρανίσι Διὸς νόον· οὐ μὰ γὰρ αὐτὴν
22. ῥεῖν ἄλλο τι τοῦδε⁶² κακώτερον ἶδεν Ὀλύμπος.
23. κόσμος ἐμὸς σὴ πίστις ἔφνυ μεγακυδέος ἔργου·
24. οἰχέσθω τὰ πάροιθε, τὰ δ' ὕστερα φροντίδι κεῦθε.
25. οὐ⁶³ σὸς ἔφνυ πώλων γὰρ ἀπείριτον <ο>ὐ σθένος ἔγνω,
26. ῥυτήρων οὐδ' ἔσχε πολυφραδὲς ἔργον ἀνύσσαι.
27. ἔρχο νῦν, πάλι κόσμον ἐποίχεο, μὴ τεδὸν εὖχος
28. ἀλλοτρίαις παλάμαισι πόρης ἀμενηνὰ πονήσας·
29. μούνῳ σοὶ πυρδεντος ἐπείγομένῳ κύκλοιο
30. ἀντολίῃ καὶ πᾶσα καλὸς δρόμος ἔπλετο δυσμῇ·
31. σοὶ τότε πιστὸν ἔδωκε φέρειν νόος ἄφθιτον εὖχος.
32. φεῖδεο γῆς καὶ παντὸς ἀριπρεπέος κόσμοιο,
33. ἴσχε δρόμον μεσάταισιν ἐπ' ἀψίδεσσιν Ὀλύμπου.
34. ταῦτα πρέποντα θεοῖς, ταῦτ' ἄρκια· μαῖεο, δαῖμον,
35. μιλίχιον πάλι φέγγος· ὁ σὸς παῖς ὤλεσε πολὺ.
36. καὶ τὸν ἀπειρέσιον μέγαν οὐρανὸν αὐτὸς ὅδευε,⁶⁴
37. ἡμῖσι μὲν γαίης νέρθεν, τὸ δ' ὑπερθε τανύσας.
38. οὕτω γὰρ πρέψειε τεδὸν⁶⁵ φάος Οὐρανίδαισι
39. καὶ φωτῶν ἀνάκτωτος αἰὲ λειψθήσεται εὐχή[ι].
40. πρηνυμένη δ' ἔξεις Ζηνὸς νόον· ἦν δ' ἑτέρη τις
41. λείπηται σέο φροντὶς ἀταρβ<έ>ος, ἴστορες αὐτο<ι>
42. ἀστέρες ὡς πυ<ρό>εντος ἐμοῦ μ<έ>νος αἶψα κεραυνο<υ>
43. κώτερον πώλων σε, θεός, δέμας ἀάσε<ι>εν.

1. The sovereign gods made you and no one else
2. The light-bearing charioteer of our universe.
3. Why did you set your malign son over the vaults

⁵⁹ ἀπ' εἴλης Moretti *et al.* (*vide supra*).

⁶⁰ ἄπλατον *lapis*, Moretti (*vide supra*).

⁶¹ ἀθροίσης Moretti (*vide supra*).

⁶² ἀλλότρι' οὐδέ *lapis*.

⁶³ σύ *lapis*.

⁶⁴ ἔδευε *lapis* (*vide supra*).

⁶⁵ I prefer Visconti's πρέψειε τεδὸν ('omissum ἄν neminem offenderet', Kaibel; cf. Ciofi (1872) 38–9) to Moretti's πρέψει ἐτεδὸν.

4. Of Olympus, and hand over to him the unspeakable speed of your horses,
5. With not the slightest fear of our opposition?
6. These plans of yours are not faithful to the gods. Whither was Phaethon's
7. Sturdy chariot travelling? Why did the flame of your tireless
8. Fire reach even to my throne, and over the broad universe?
9. A mighty, weighty menace mingled with the spheres;
10. Ocean himself raised his hands to heaven;
11. What river did not find its every source run dry?
12. The seed sown for Demeter was aflame; a farmer
13. Stood by his scythes and wept at his parched field,
14. Sowing with no joy, having yoked his bull in vain
15. Beneath the curved plough, under the evening star,
16. Flexing his masculine limbs beside labouring bulls.
17. The whole earth groaned, thanks to that malign boy.
18. Then I snuffed out the light with my thunderbolt. Lament no more
19. The grievous death of your son; have a care, rather, for your own universe!
20. Take care lest you witness a fierier weapon from my hand!
21. Know the mind of heavenly Zeus; for, by Rhea
22. Herself, Olympus has seen nothing worse than this.
23. My cosmos was your assurance of a glorious achievement.
24. Let the past be gone; hold the future in your mind.
25. He was not yours; he did not know the enormous strength of your foals
26. Nor could he achieve a famous deed with the reins.
27. Go now, travel the cosmos again; do not cede
28. This great boon of yours to another's hands by labouring over feeble things!
29. To you alone as you yearn for your fiery cycle
30. Is vowed the rising and – a fine chase! – every setting.
31. To you has my mind granted this trusted, immortal boon.
32. Spare the earth, and the entire glorious universe;
33. Hold your course in the centre of Olympus' vault;
34. That is what suits the gods; that is enough. Deliver, deity,
35. Your soothing light once more. Your son has caused terrible destruction;
36. Travel the infinitely great universe yourself,
37. Dividing your course between the earth below and the upper realm;
38. For in this way would your light shine on the children of Uranus
39. And the prayers of mortals will be left undefiled for ever.
40. You will appease the mind of Zeus; but if some other
41. Concern still remains in you, fearless as you are, the stars themselves
42. Know that the force of my fiery bolt (which is swifter than
43. Horses) would immediately blast your body, god.

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