

CLAY HARDENS AND WAX MELTS: MAGICAL ROLE-REVERSAL IN VERGIL'S EIGHTH *ECLOGUE*

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ALPHESIBOEUS' SONG in the second half of Vergil's eighth *Eclogue* presents us with a forlorn woman directing her servant girl in a magical ritual aimed at regaining her lover. The text of the poem alternates between imperatives addressed to the servant, Amaryllis, and magical incantations uttered by the unnamed speaker. At one point she says (80–81):

limus ut hic durescit et haec ut cera liquescit
uno eodemque igni, sic nostro Daphnis amore.

This is a common type of magical formula (often called a *similia similibus* formula), in which the magical practitioner seeks by means of a “persuasive analogy” to transfer a particular status or action from some material at hand (in this case clay and wax) to some other material or person.¹ The lines have caused some confusion because of the ellipsis in the second half of the formula. The intended action of the melting wax is easy to understand, because there is no ambiguity in Vergil's Theocritean model (*Id.* 2. 28–29):

ὥς τοῦτον τὸν κηρὸν ἐγὼ σὺν δαίμονι τάκω,
ὥς τάκοιθ' ὑπ' ἔρωτος ὁ Μύνδιος αὐτίκα Δέλφις.

With the addition of abundant parallels from Latin elegy and elsewhere to the lover “melted” (often unwillingly) by passion,² all commentators correctly assume that the melting of the wax aims at similarly softening the hardhearted Daphnis. But what about the hardening of the clay?

Since Theocritus does not mention clay, scholars have been forced to draw inferences based on their understanding of other Greco-Roman magical rituals. Two very similar interpretations have evolved to date. C. G. Heyne thought that Vergil was referring to a pair of images, one of clay and another of wax;³ others suggest a much simpler ceremony in

1. For the phrase “persuasive analogy” (preferable to the traditional but prejudicial terms “sympathetic” or “homeopathic magic”), see S. J. Tambiah, “Form and Meaning of Magical Acts: A Point of View,” in *Modes of Thought*, ed. R. Horton and R. Finnegan (London, 1973), pp. 199–229; and cf. G. E. R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 2–3, 7.

2. E.g., Ov. *Ars am.* 2. 85; *Anth. Pal.* 16. 80. 5–6; C. Weyman, “*Similia* zu Vergils Hirtengedichten VI: Ekloge VIII,” *WS* 46 (1928): 102, collects about a dozen more parallels.

3. P. Virgilii Maronis: *Opera*³, vol. 1 (London, 1798), p. 149, followed in, e.g., the commentaries of Ladewig and Schaper (Berlin, 1876) and Benoist (Paris, 1876), and by R. Dedo, *De Antiquorum Superstitione Amatoria* (Ph.D. diss., Gryphiae, 1904), pp. 24–25.

which two small lumps of wax and clay were set on a hot brazier.⁴ Nearly all commentators agree, however, that both activities (hardening and melting) are projected onto Daphnis: the hardening of the clay is to cause his heart to harden toward other women, while the melting wax aims at softening his heart toward the unnamed speaker.⁵ This interpretation is no doubt encouraged by the activities mentioned in Theocritus' poem, where all the materials mentioned (e.g., barley, bay leaves, wax) are heated and destroyed on a brazier and clearly aim at affecting the faithless Delphis. The clay mentioned by Vergil, however, is without parallel, and it is in fact not destroyed—rather, it is strengthened by the action of the fire. Even more troubling is the fact that I can find no parallels—either in the primary sources for ancient magic or in other literary treatments of magical rituals—for a spell that attempts simultaneously to change a victim into diametrically opposed states, such as hard and soft, or solid and liquid.⁶ Indeed, the *similia similibus* formulae used in the ancient Mediterranean basin were invariably simple, straightforward, and noncontradictory.⁷

I should like to revive an interpretation first suggested by Servius: there were in fact two effigies, one of wax and one of clay, but they did not both depict Daphnis.⁸ I begin with Servius' brief comment on line 80: "se de limo facit, Daphnidem de cera" ("She fashions [an image of] herself from clay, and [one of] Daphnis from wax"). I would then fill in the ellipsis as follows: "As this clay hardens and as this wax melts in one and the same fire, [so may I harden and] so may Daphnis [melt] in our [one and the same] love." I shall argue that the lovelorn female speaker aims to reverse her current, grossly unequal relationship with Daphnis and to gain the upper hand in all her future dealings with him. By using

4. See, e.g., the commentaries of Papillon and Haigh (Oxford, 1882), Conington and Nettleship (London, 1898), Page (London, 1898), Holtdorf (Munich, 1959); and A. Richter, *Virgile: La huitième bucolique*, Bibl. Fac. Lett. Lyon, vol. 20 (Paris, 1966), p. 149. Theoc. 2. 28–29, often cited as a parallel for this interpretation, does not exclude the possibility that a waxen effigy was being burnt. For wax dolls employed in Greco-Roman erotic magic, see D. Wortmann, "Neue magische Texte," *BJ* 168 (1968): 85–101, no. 4, and C. C. Edgar, "A Love Charm from the Fayoum," *BSAA* 21 (1925): 42–47; for literary treatments, see Ov. *Her.* 6. 91–92, Heliod. *Aeth.* 4. 14, and Hor. *Epod.* 17. 76.

5. Heyne's paraphrase (*Virgilio: Opera*, 1:149) is a bit more abstract: "liquescat molliaturque in amorem mei, obdurescat vero et obfirmetur animo ad constantiam amoris." It does have the limited advantage of omitting mention of other women.

6. R. G. Coleman, *Virgil: Eclogues* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 246–47, cautiously suggests that the practitioner makes a wax heart and a clay penis; the melting wax is supposed to melt Daphnis' heart, while the hardening clay is to stiffen his penis with desire. Although unsupported by parallels from actual magical practice and dependent on some rather implausible "symbolic" connections (*cera* with κῆρ; and *limus*, "clay," with its homophone *limus*, "apron used to protect the genitals" = "genitals"), this reading does at least attempt to explain the supposedly simultaneous softening and hardening of Daphnis by associating the effects of the spell with specific parts of his body. G. Luck, *Hexen und Zauberei in der römischen Dichtung* (Zurich, 1962), pp. 9–11, seems to have anticipated Coleman, though in explaining the "hardening" of Daphnis he stops short of spelling out Vergil's "derberrealistischen Deutung."

7. For a detailed discussion, see C. A. Faraone, "Hermes But No Marrow: Another Look at a Puzzling Magical Spell," *ZPE* 72 (1988): 280–82.

8. Servius' interpretation has been defended only twice in modern times: see W. H. Kolster, *Vergilis "Eklogen" in ihrer strophischen Gliederung* (Leipzig, 1882), pp. 174–75; and H. J. Rose, *The "Eclogues" of Vergil*, Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 16 (Berkeley, 1942), pp. 157 and 280–51, n. 55.

the polarity of hard and soft (drawn from the traditional language of erotic poetry) to signify the relative positions of dominance and subservience, Vergil deftly combines a traditional magical practice and a literary topos in the plaintive wish that the victim of unrequited love and the object of her affections might instantly change roles.

Such a reading of course necessitates a good deal of inference, but no more than the current *communis opinio*, which compels the reader to infer that the hardening clay is meant to harden Daphnis *toward other women*. In both cases the reliance on inference can be defended on the grounds that Alpheisiboeus' song is patently elliptical throughout.⁹ It is not a detailed narrative of a ritual but (like Theocritus' second *Idyll*) a series of often disjointed imperatives and incantations from which the reader is forced to infer the whole ceremony, drawing on his or her knowledge of popular magic. A similar task is laid before the reader by some of the mimiambic writers; compare, for example, Herodas' fourth mime, parts of which would be completely unintelligible without prior knowledge of contemporary Greek sacrifice and temple procedure.

The use of two effigies—one of the practitioner and another of the victim—can in fact be found in contemporary religious and magical practices. Perhaps the most interesting testimony to these rituals is a hexametric inscription of the first century B.C. that preserves an oracle issued by the Clarian Apollo. Plagued by the incessant attacks of pirates, the people of Syedra sought the god's advice and were told to erect a statue of Ares bound and supplicating another figure, of Dike:¹⁰

Πάμφυλοι Συεδρῆες ἐπίξυν[ον πάτριόν? τ]ε
 ναίοντες χθόνα παμμιγέων Ε- - - - ΑΤΑ φωτῶν
 Ἄρηος δέικηλον ἐναιμέος ἀνδροφόνοιο
 στήσαντες μεσάτῳ πόλιος [π]α[ρ]ὰ ἔρδετε θύσθλα,
 δεσμοῖς Ἑρμείῳ σιδηρείοις μιν ἔχοντες·
 ἐγ δ' ἐτέροιο Δίκη σφε θεμιστεύουσα δικάζ[οι].
 αὐτὰρ ὁ λισσομένῳ ἵκελος πέλοι· ὦδε γ[ὰρ ὅ] μείν
 ἔσεται εἰρηναῖος, ἀνάρσιον ὄχλον ἐ[λ]ά[σ]σας
 τῆλε πάτρης, ὄρσει δὲ πολύλλιτον εὐχθεΐαν.

Pamphilians of Syedra inhabiting . . . a land of the people of mixed race, set up an image of Ares, the blood-stained slayer of men, in the midst of your town and perform sacrifices beside it, while holding him [sc. the statue] in the iron bonds of Hermes. On the other side let Dike, giving sentence, judge him, while he himself is like

9. For discussion of some other, still more extraordinary ellipses in poetic texts, see A. E. Housman, *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 544–46 (my thanks to E. Courtney for this reference); and cf. H. J. Rose, "Some Passages of Latin Poets," *HSCP* 46 (1936): 5–8.

10. G. E. Bean and T. B. Mitford, *Journeys in Rough Cilicia in 1962 and 1963*, *Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akad. in Wien, philos.-hist. Klasse*, vol. 85 (Vienna, 1965), pp. 21–23, no. 26. L. Robert, *Documents de l'Asie Mineure méridionale* (Geneva, 1966), pp. 91–100, and J. Wiseman, "Gods, War and Plague in the Times of the Antonines," in *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi*, vol. 1, ed. D. Mano-Zissi and J. Wiseman (Beograd, 1973), pp. 174–79, have attempted to redate the inscription to the reign of Lucius Verus using numismatic evidence; for a refutation of Robert, see E. Maroti, "A Recently Found Versified Oracle Against the Pirates," *A AntHung* 16 (1968): pp. 233–38 (an article of which Wiseman was apparently unaware). I give the text of the editio princeps, but prefer Robert's restoration [π]α[ρ]ά at line 4 instead of [κ]α[ρ]ά.

a suppliant. For thus he will be peacefully disposed to you, after he has driven out the unholy mob far from your native land, and he will raise up much-prayed-for prosperity.

Although this text contains some ambiguities about the role of Ares, one can easily make out the basic form of the ceremony:¹¹ the creation of a statue of Ares bound and kneeling before a statue of Dike is expected to restrain and humble the hostile force of the pirates, who are depicted symbolically in a position subordinate to Dike.¹² As in many magical rituals, the tableau is a study in wishful thinking; tables have been turned and the previously unstoppable raiders are now held captive and contrite before the forces of law and order.

An elaborate erotic spell in a Greek magical handbook calls for a similar configuration of two images set in a dramatic relationship with one another (*PGM*² IV 296–336):¹³

Φιλτροκατάδεσμος θαυμαστός· λαβὼν κηρὸν <ἢ πηλόν> | ἀπὸ τροχοῦ κεραμικοῦ
πλάσσον ζῶδια δύο, ἄρρε | νικὸν καὶ θηλυκόν· τὸν μὲν ἄρσενα ὡς Ἄρεα | καθω-
πλισμένον ποιήσον τῇ ἀριστερᾷ χειρὶ || κρατοῦντα ξίφος, καταπλήσσοντα αὐτῆς
εἰς τὴν | κατακλείδα τὴν δεξιάν, αὐτὴν δὲ ὀπισθάγγωνα | καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ γόνατα καθη-
μένην. . . .

Wondrous spell for binding a lover: Take wax <or clay> from a potter's wheel and make two figures, a male and a female. Make the male in the form of Ares fully armed, holding a sword in his left hand and threatening to plunge it into the right side of her neck. And make her with her arms behind her back and down on her knees. . . .

The papyrus roll that contains this spell dates to the fourth century A.D., but its handbook-form and some of its contents can be traced back at least to the Augustan period.¹⁴ Here the effigy of the male practitioner of

11. In this inscription and in a series of other texts, images of Ares, Artemis, or baneful ghosts are said to be bound or otherwise incarcerated but are then offered sacrifice or similar acts of veneration. The supposed effects of this activity are similarly contradictory: on the one hand, the binding is thought automatically to restrain the destructive enemy depicted in the image; sometimes, however, the inhabitants of the city believe (or come to believe) that the trussed-up deity is a champion who actively brings the city benefits. For discussion, see K. Meuli, "Die gefesselten Götter," in *K. Meuli: Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1975), pp. 1035–81 (as amplified by R. Merkelbach); F. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte*, Bibl. Helv. Rom. 21 (Rome, 1985), pp. 81–96; and C. A. Faraone, "Talismans, Voodoo Dolls and Other Apotropaic Images in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford, 1988), pp. 155–222.

12. That Ares was to be depicted kneeling I infer from the participle λισσομένω (line 7), since supplication was traditionally indicated in Greek culture by kneeling; cf. J. Gould, "HIKETEIA," *JHS* 93 (1973): 74–103, W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), p. 164, n. 42, with figs. 3 and 4, and F. T. van Straten, "Did the Greeks Kneel before Their Gods?" *BABesch* 49 (1974): 183–84. Robert, *Documents*, pp. 96–99, argued that the tableau contained a third figure, of Hermes; but the only element in the Syedra inscription itself that could support such a view (line 5 δεσμοῖς Ἑρμείῳ σιδηρεῖσις μιν ἔχοντες) need signify only that Hermes was believed to have invented these δεσμοί or that they were within his traditional sphere of activity (cf. *Ecl.* 8. 78 *Veneris* . . . *vincula*, quoted below: surely we need not suppose that Venus made an epiphany during the spell). My interpretation here is indebted to H. S. Versnel, "A Twisted Hermes: Another View on an Enigmatic Spell," *ZPE* 72 (1988): 288.

13. The translation given here is that of E. O'Neil, in *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, ed. H. D. Betz (Chicago, 1986), p. 44. Many years ago H. S. Versnel pointed out to me the similarity between this spell and the ritual described in the Syedra inscription.

14. E. N. Lane, "The Date of *PGM* IV," *Second Century* 4 (1984): 25–27, argues for a late fourth-century date. A. D. Nock, "The Greek Magical Papyri," *JEA* 15 (1929): 219–29 = *Essays on Religion*

the spell plays the dominant role: armed like the god Ares, he holds his female victim bound and kneeling at knifepoint. Later in the spell the female doll is methodically inscribed, pierced with thirteen bronze nails, and placed beside a tomb together with an inscribed lead *defixio*; the male doll is not heard of again.¹⁵ In both the Syedra inscription and the present spell we see a pair of effigies set up to pantomime a desired future relationship, one image for the party seeking dominance (the city of Syedra or the male practitioner) and the other for the soon-to-be helpless victim (the pirates or the desired female).

These intricate tableaux of paired images find a further parallel in Horace *Satires* 1. 8, in which a statue of Priapus describes two voodoo dolls used by the witch Canidia in a magical spell (30–33):

lanea et effigies erat, altera cerea: maior
lanea, quae poenis compesceret inferiorem;
cerea suppliciter stabat servilibus ut quae
iam peritura modis.

Once again the rite involves the creation of two effigies set up in a dramatic relationship, one dominating and threatening the other.¹⁶ Each is fashioned of a different material, in this case wool and wax. Further along in the description of the spell Horace informs us that the beleaguered wax doll is consumed in the fire (43–44 *imagine cerea / largior arserit ignis*); as in the erotic spell on papyrus, we hear nothing of the fate of the dominant statue after the description of the initial tableau. Although this ritual of Canidia and Sagana contains a good bit of mock-epic necromancy in its prelude (e.g., 40–41 “singula quid memorem, quo pacto alterna loquentes / umbrae cum Sagana resonarint . . .”), its goal is clearly erotic.¹⁷ Horace does not indicate the genders of the

and the *Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), pp. 176–88, believed that prototypes for collections like *PGM* IV were put together sometime in the first century A.D. The discovery of a large fragment of a magical handbook from the Augustan period (*PBerol.* inv. 21243; see W. Brashear, “Ein berliner Zauberpapyrus,” *ZPE* 33 [1979]: 261–78 = *PGM* CXXII Betz) provides a firm *terminus ante quem* for such a compilation. *PGM* XX and *PMon. Gr.* inv. 216 (= *PGM* CXVII Betz) also date to the first century B.C. and, despite their very fragmentary state, clearly represent similar, pre-Christian testimonia to a handbook tradition. A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus*², vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 35–36, points out that parallels between the rituals prescribed in the magical papyri and those performed by Simaetha in the second *Idyll* are unmistakable and suggests that many of the individual recipes collected in the papyrus handbooks can be dated at least as early as the beginning of the Hellenistic period. Although we do not know if this particular magical spell dates to or before the time of Vergil, it is clearly similar to other rituals that are contemporaneous, e.g., the Syedra inscription discussed above and Hor. *Ser.* 1. 8 (see below).

15. Some of the actual apparatus for this spell was recently discovered in Egypt; see P. du Bourguet, “Ensemble magique de la période romaine en Egypt,” *Revue du Louvre* (1975): 255–57; id., “Une ancêtre des figurines d’envoûtement percées d’aiguilles, avec ses compléments magiques, au Musée du Louvre,” *MIFAO* 104 (1980): 225–38; S. Kambitsis, “Une nouvelle tablette magique d’Égypte, Musée du Louvre Inv. E27145, 3^e/4^e siècle,” *BIFAO* 76 (1976): 213–23; and D. R. Jordan, “A Love Charm with Verses,” *ZPE* 72 (1988): 247.

16. See esp. A. M. Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1976), pp. 302–5, pointing out that wool was often used in apotropaic rites and suggesting that the woolen image of the practitioner is intended to protect Canidia from harm.

17. On the mock-heroic tone, see E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 62–64; on the fusion of necromancy and erotic spell, see Luck, *Hexen*, p. 9.

two images, but nearly every commentator builds upon the suggestion (undoubtedly correct) of a medieval scholiast ("duae imagines erant ibi: una lanæ quæ erat muliebris, altera cereæ quæ erat virilis") and interprets the lines as follows: the dominant doll represents the female practitioner (Canidia), while the wax male figurine presumably depicts some unfortunate male victim.¹⁸

Let us now examine *Eclogue* 8 in the light of the preceding examples. The traditional approach to lines 80–81 ignores a crucial difference between Vergil's poem and its Greek model. Theocritus' spell is almost entirely a burnt-offering spell, in which herbs, spices, grains, wax, and bitumen are offered on a brazier under an open sky, along with prayers to Hecate.¹⁹ Vergil, however, adds two stanzas that describe a binding spell without parallel in Theocritus' poem (73–81):

terna tibi hæc primum triplici diversa colore
 liciâ circumdo terque hæc altaria circum
 effigiem duco. numero deus inpare gaudet.
 ducite ab urbe domum, mea carmina, ducite Daphnin.
 necte tribus nodis ternos, Amarylli, colores;
 necte, Amarylli, modo et "Veneris" dic "vincula necto."
 ducite ab urbe domum, mea carmina, ducite Daphnin.
 limus ut hic durescit et hæc ut cera liquescit
 uno eodemque igni, sic nostro Daphnis amore.

In lines 73–78 an image of Daphnis is bound in threads and paraded around the altar three times. Surely this *effigies* is the waxen image that (as in Hor. *Serm.* 1. 8) is subsequently destroyed by fire. The complete ritual can best be reconstructed as follows: a male figure of wax (representing Daphnis) is fashioned and then bound in multicolored threads; a clay female figure (representing the anonymous female practitioner) is also made; and both are then placed in a fire, which softens and destroys one figure while baking and hardening the other. The melting male figurine aims (as every previous commentator agrees) at softening the cruel Daphnis, while the hardening clay is supposed to stiffen the resolve of the woman and give her the upper hand in her future dealings with Daphnis.²⁰

18. For this scholium, see H. J. Botschuyver, *Scholia in Horatium*, vol. 4 (Amsterdam, 1942), p. 232; on the relation between this ritual and the spell in *PGM*² IV discussed above, see esp. Tupet, *La magie*, 1:302–5.

19. For a discussion of the ritual background, see Gow, *Theocritus*², 2:33–46, and Faraone, "Hermes," pp. 281–82, n. 8.

20. Though the practitioner's attempt magically to change herself may seem strange to the modern reader, it does—like nearly all the magical lore in *Ecl.* 8—have parallels in popular magical practices, esp. those aimed at healing; see, e.g., R. Kotansky, "A Silver Amulet for Pain," *J. P. Getty Mus. Jour.* 11 (1983): 122, for the use of *similia similibus* formulae on amulets. The desire for self-manipulation also fits well with the psychological portrait of the hitherto-helpless speaker, who like Theocritus' Simaetha recognizes her lovesickness and the need for a cure. The desire for role-reversal is also common in the fantasies of the lovesick; see, e.g., Sappho l. 21–23; cf. R. C. Monti, *The Dido Episode and the "Aeneid,"* Mnemosyne Supp. 66 (Leiden, 1981), pp. 59–61. J. Winkler, "The Constraints of Eros," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (Oxford, 1990), traces a similar desire for turning the tables in many of the erotic spells in the Greek magical papyri.

The existence of two images of different gender gives more point to the emphatic *uno eodemque igni* in line 81, and it is perfectly consonant with the traditional, twin themes in the lament of the abandoned lover: the cursing of the perfidious paramour and the “self-obduration” of the speaker.²¹ Vergil turns to this topos a few lines later, when he subtly reiterates the two-fold purpose of the ritual (85–89):

talīs amor Daphnīn qualis cum fessa iuven-
cum
per nemora atque altos quaerendo bucula lucos
propter aquae rivum viridi procumbit in ulva
perdita, nec serae meminit decedere nocti,
talīs amor teneat, nec sit mihi cura mederi.

The gender reversal in the simile is unquestionably significant (to paraphrase: “may he be gripped by such love as a heifer in heat has for a bull . . .”), and the subjunctives in the last line state succinctly the double intent of the magical ritual: may passionate love hold him, and may I be indifferent to his suffering.

This interpretation can also help explain the peculiar use of *nostro amore* in line 81. The handful of scholars who have bothered to comment on it suggest that *noster* here means *meus*, but Vergil does not use this sense of *noster* (or *nos*) at any other point in Alpheisiboeus’ song. Instead, the use of the first person singular is remarkably emphatic: for example, *mea carmina* is repeated nine times as part of the refrain, and *ego* is employed on four occasions (see 92, 97, 102, and esp. 83, two lines after *nostro amore*: “Daphnis me malus urit, ego hanc in Daphnide laurum”). I suggest that the phrase *nostro amore* is strictly parallel to *uno eodemque igni* and refers to the love shared by Daphnis and the unnamed speaker in the poem: “Just as this clay hardens and this wax melts in one and the same flame, so too [may I harden and] may Daphnis [melt] in [the flames of] our [one and the same] love.” The use of the first person plural here excludes any inference about Daphnis’ hardness toward other women and draws our attention to the couple at the center of the poem. If we can imagine a reader thoroughly familiar with the popular magical and religious rituals of the day (such as those documented above), we can better understand the ease with which Servius and other ancient readers could recognize the magical use of a pair of male and female effigies to reverse the roles of a painfully one-sided relationship.²²

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21. For the combination of curse and “self-obduration,” see, e.g., Ov. *Tr.* 5. 2. 7, Catull. 8. 11–12. The combination itself reflects the desire to change roles with the faithless lover, who is often described as *durus* or *dura*; cf. *OLD*, s.v. 5d.

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