

Zitierhinweis

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STEPHEN HARRISON, *Victorian Horace: Classics and Class*. Classical inter/faces series. London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, ix+200 pp., \$114.00, ISBN 978-1-4725-8391-8.

This is the final volume in a series designed to deal with ‘the intersection and interaction between classical antiquity and modernity.’ (p. 155) Modernity, in this case, comprises an engagement with the theories of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu on the subject of cultural capital. The poetry of Horace having been unarguably familiar to members of the male elite as a result of its centrality in their education, ‘A fundamental assumption of this book is that this familiarity consistently served as a means by which the members of that elite engaged (consciously or unconsciously) in self-definition and self-fashioning, and in claiming their elite status: this is fully consistent with the way in which Horace’s works and allusions to them are appropriated with varying degrees of creativity in all forms of literary reception in this period.’ (p. 1)

Preliminaries begin with pre-Victorian poems. Although Horace asserts without apparent irony that he writes ‘virginibus puerisque’ (Odes 3. 1 4), it has always been a problem that in some of the epodes and satires there is material deemed in time past by moralists and educators as indecent and unsuitable for the ears of women and children, which has more often than not troubled the ‘adult male elite’, and therefore sometimes been glossed over in commentaries and omitted in translations. Discussion of extracts from the frank versions of an epode and one of the satires published by Vincent Brome in the 1660s illustrates this indecency as well as raising the question of attitudes to women and love in the poetry of Horace, topics returned to in later discussion of the Victorians. Versions of the eighteenth century translation by Philip Francis show a nervousness about the homoerotic element in two of the Odes (4. 1 and 4. 10) featuring Ligurinus, one of which, in the contemporary imitation by Alexander Pope, is discussed in the next section, ‘Rochester, Dryden and Pope: Versions in context’, where the purpose is ‘to show how closely Horace is built into contemporary English intellectual culture.’ (p. 9) The first of these is an extract from ‘An Allusion to Horace’ in which Rochester adapts Horace’s criticism of Lucilius in Satire 1.10 to provide a critique of his contemporary Dryden, the impact of which ‘is especially strong for the elite readership with a close knowledge of the original’ (p. 11). This poem is one of the earliest examples of the Imitation, a mode imported from France, which deliberately seeks to modernise a classic original and appeal to a readership that could appreciate parallels and differences, a modernising mode popular throughout the eighteenth

century and into the nineteenth, a mode surviving, in some sort, in the case of Byron's 'Hints from Horace'. Some discussion of theories of imitation and translation in this period and in the Victorian period might have been expected but is not provided. There follows an extract of Dryden's adaptation of Odes 1.3, addressed in the original to Virgil, which Dryden addressed to his contemporary the Earl of Roscommon: 'Once again the deployment of an Horatian original has further meaning for an elite readership.' (p. 12) Finally comes an explication of the contemporary context of Pope's Imitation of Ode 4.1. which ends with the concluding comment 'Once again the Roman poet is appropriated into a modern setting in such a way to appeal to a coterie of elite male readers'. (p.12) Once again, this unsurprising and less than profound point is repeated without development and made again and again remorselessly throughout the volume.

On the Romantics, there is a brief account of Byron's tribute to Horace as moralist and satirist given in *Childe Harold* as the narrator passes Mount Soracte made famous by Horace in the opening lines of Ode 1.9. 'For Byron, Horace is to be appreciated for his satirical, moral and didactic content, not as an inspired lyric poet, in which he did not match Romantic ideals, and his scattered quotations from Horace's various works seem once again to be markers of gentlemanly education and status in employing the common intellectual material of elite male society.' (p. 16) Wordsworth's appreciation of the ode in praise of the fount of Bandusia and in praise of his life away from the city on his Sabine farm is fully illustrated and summarised as follows: 'Here as elsewhere Wordsworth (like many poets) constructs Horace in his own image as the poet of nature and country retirement, wary of the city and the demands of the great, but leaves a trail of specific allusions to be picked up by elite male readers.' (p.18) As suggested, Wordsworth follows in a long line of poets and readers from Ben Jonson and the Cavalier poets through to the Augustan period and the later eighteenth century who identified with his life of rural retirement as represented in his poetry and made their own version of it in print and in life. The section on the Romantics concludes with what recent scholars have identified as an allusion to one of Horace's less familiar Epodes in the opening lines of Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale':

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk ...

Mollis inertia cur tantam diffuderit imis
 oblivionem sensibus
 pocula Lethaeos ut si ducentia somnos
 arente fauce traxerim ... (Epode 14. 1-4)

‘Though more modest in background and education than Byron and indeed Wordsworth, Keats is eager to claim the prestige of Horatian allusion here and to appeal to a similar elite readership.’ (p. 19) With the exception of Epodes 2 ‘The Happy Man’, to give the poem an English title, the Epodes are said to be ‘an unusual source in the Victorian period’ (p. 140), so it may be doubted whether the more modestly educated Keats who may or may not have recalled the origin of the allusion in his reading is signalling anything at all to his readers in this recall, let alone ‘is eager to claim prestige’, a most infelicitous way of expressing the creative impulse and poetic design at the opening of this magnificent ode.

The final section of the Preliminaries ‘On Horace and the Victorian gentleman’ begins with the summary remark on the period from 1660 to 1830, noting that Horatian allusion ‘functions as cultural capital for these poets and their readers, evoking a shared world of masculine elite education and its social prestige.’ (p. 19) What follows on Horace’s place in the formation of the English gentleman could equally well be exemplified by similar material drawn from the literature of the eighteenth century too. The Victorian period hardly represents a significant cultural shift in respect of the rather narrow claims relating to the main argument about cultural capital, which has been widely available to the classically educated world in England since the time at which the Tudor grammar schools adopted the curriculum of Erasmus.

Substantial chapters follow on ‘Horace in Victorian Commentaries, Literary Criticism, Translations’, ‘Horace and the Victorian Poets I: Tennyson, Arnold, Clough, Fitzgerald’, ‘Horace and Victorian Poets II: Other Imitations’ and ‘Horace in Victorian Fiction’. The illustration of translations usefully cites different translations of the same extracts enabling easy comparison. There is helpful comment too throughout on metrical matters. The variety of translations cited, including versions by Gerard Manley Hopkins and A.E. Housman, and adaptations by Tennyson and Arnold, serves to make available a wide-ranging anthology of poetic renderings and responses to Horace, an attractive overall feature, even if we are inevitably presented for the most part by short extracts. The Odes feature most prominently but allusion to Horace’s Epistles in the poetry of Clough adds variety and extends the range, as do parodies and humorous adaptations. The identification of allusions can be problematic and sometimes, for example, the argument about ‘two possible allusions’ in *The Christian Year*, is a little tenuous (p. 111), even if thought-provoking. But overall, we are presented with an *omnium gatherum* of Victorian Horatiana industriously culled from a variety of sources, always scrupulously acknowledged, with additional material from the author. Taking into account also the treatment of material before and after the Victorian core, the volume will be of great interest to all Horatians, whether or not they appreciate the garnish of French theory.

The section on Tennyson is the longest and in this is sensitive treatment of 'In Memoriam' which is not overtly made to serve the main argument. A contrast in this respect is the section on Arnold which concludes with a discussion of 'To Marguerite, Continued', the last stanza of which is said to be 'a neat inversion' of lines of Horace [Ode I. 3. 21-4]:

Who order'd, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?-
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplum'd, salt, estranging sea.

nequiquam deus abscedit
prudens Oceano dissociabili
terras, si tamen impiae
non tangenda rates transiliunt vada.

In vain did the wise god sunder
The lands from the unsocial ocean,
If yet impious vessels cross
The seas that are not to be touched. (p. 77)

The parallel is cited by an editor of Arnold yet this is by no means an obvious allusion. The author comments: 'the central theme of Arnold's poem, the regrettable isolation of human beings from each other as if islands in a separating sea, is a neat inversion of the main topic of Horace's ode, the regrettable way in which humans have crossed the seas to no good purpose and brought trouble and danger upon themselves in violating the paradisiacal isolated conditions of the golden age.' Even if we follow the editor in seeing a parallel, surely the two poems are too far apart in their main themes for the English to be a neat inversion of the Latin. 'Once again we can see the argument of an Horatian poem driving the content of an Arnoldian one, making poetic capital from the results of an elite education.' (p. 77) The first part of this sentence, on a charitable estimate, is overstated - perhaps Arnold's wonderful final line was ultimately inspired by the memory of Horace's 'Oceano dissociabili' (who can say?) - but once again in the second part of the sentence resort to the superficial shorthand of Bourdieu's thesis proves to be reductive. The central monetary metaphor of the sociologist's thesis ill accords with the language of literary analysis. Imagine the disdain of the author of *Culture and Anarchy* and his dismissal of such a claim as is made here in relation to his poem.

'Horace in Victorian Fiction' is the thinnest chapter. Discussions of translations and adaptations can always be rewarding as they certainly often are in this monograph. An allusion in a short poem can be consequential in illuminating thematic content or a tonal effect, which can be indicative of a real dialogue between ancient and modern. Such a dialogue can be a central concern in the novel, as in the case of the fiction of Henry Fielding or the basic use of allusion to Homer in *Ulysses* or Derek Walcott's *Omeros*. But the little scraps and snippets culled from Dickens (a mere two from his vast corpus suggests absence rather than presence), Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope and Hardy are peripheral and incidental doing little more than reiterating the rather limited overall thesis about the male elite. Admittedly, there is something a little more substantial in the discussion of allusions in Thackeray to 'mox reficit rates / quassas indocilis pauperiem pati' and 'o matre pulchra filia pulchrior', which are related to 'central moral ideas (how to cope with misfortune) and plot-elements (the hero's choice between two women).' (p. 131) But this is very thin gruel. There is an interesting unpicking of two allusions in *The Mill on the Floss* which illustrates the author's sophisticated knowledge of and allusion to Horace but strangely there is no mention of her gender - perhaps there is a chapter, or even a book, yet to be written digging out allusions to Horace in women's writing more generally - nor, more understandably, is there any reference here to the 'elite', a word that otherwise resounds like a clanging bell throughout and which occurs either as adjective or noun some twenty times in this chapter alone.

An 'Epilogue - Modernising Horace' treats of post-Victorian poets, said to be modernist, and shown to be modernising Horace; of course, Horace has always been modernised, this being the nature of reception, as previously demonstrated in the cases of Rochester, Dryden and Pope in the opening chapter. In the final remarks of the conclusion it is said that 'Access to Horace no longer requires an elite male education or close knowledge of Latin' (p. 153). Perhaps it has never always required close knowledge of Latin. Surveying the reception of Horace over the centuries, it may be thought that a little often goes a long way with the same tags from the same few poems cropping up time and again. However, that changing patterns in education and social arrangements particularly after the 1960s have radically affected access to Horace cannot be denied. His poetry can no longer be said to be the exclusive possession or distinguishing mark of an educated elite. But elites have a habit of clinging on if in a transmogrified form. On the testimony of the author who in this instance evidently has insider knowledge the elite has indeed not entirely vanished: 'every year the members of The Horatian Society and their guests meet in a prestigious London location such as the Old Hall of Lincoln's Inn to celebrate the poet with a high class dinner and speeches, usually one from an Horatian scholar and one from a lay fan.' (p. 153) Here the laity can enjoy the benefits of their modest investment while

distinguished academics exhibit their more considerable cultural capital demonstrated for this occasion through the medium of Horace.

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