

## BOOK REVIEW

*Horace: Epodes, Odes, and Carmen Saeculare*. Translated by STEPHANIE MCCARTER. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020. Pp.581. Paperback, \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-8061-6487-8.

“Then finish, Dear Cloe, this Pastoral War;  
And let us like Horace and Lydia agree:  
For Thou art a Girl as much brighter than Her,  
As He was a Poet sublimer than Me.” – Matthew Prior (*A Better Answer*)

“Horace’s streaming style  
Exhorts me never to pause ...” – Donald Davie (*Wombwell on Strike*)

At the conclusion of 2020, there may have been no better way to spend a week than deeply engrossed in a new translation of Horace. One finds not just the escape one might expect, but also strange points of contact, whether political, personal, social, emotional or philosophical. The anger of the *Epodes*, the longing for human contact found in certain *Odes*, the feeling that there are better days ahead with a capable new leader, even if scars persist. But, you may ask, do we need another translation of Horace’s *Epodes, Odes* and *Carmen Saeculare*? After all, there are fine recent versions by translators as renowned as David Ferry, Stanley Lombardo and David West, let alone those of previous translators from John Dryden to C. H. Sisson.<sup>1</sup> Stephanie McCarter’s first book showed her fine instincts, strong scholarship and perceptive readings of Horace’s *Epistles*,<sup>2</sup> and these are on display in her translations as well. This is a solid volume that will be very useful for students and teachers, and McCarter’s iambic renderings of Horace’s lyrics have an appealing rhythm and flow. While others may prefer the lyricism of Ferry or the contemporary flair of one of the versions found in

<sup>1</sup> *The Odes of Horace* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), *Odes: With Carmen Saeculare* (Hackett, 2018), *The Complete Odes and Epodes* (Oxford World’s Classics, 2008). The compilation, *Horace In English* (Penguin, 1996) provides a wonderful survey of Horace and the editors words ring true – “we shall cease to need Horace only when we no longer need poetry” (xvi).

<sup>2</sup> *Horace Between Freedom and Slavery: The First Book of Epistles* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

McClatchy's edition,<sup>3</sup> McCarter's sensible and sensitive word choices and line-by-line translations provide an accurate glimpse of various facets of Horace's poetry.

McCarter's introduction blends a clear historical introduction to the Age of Augustus with more nuanced interpretations of Horace's *Epodes* and *Odes*. From a political perspective, she stresses that, "It is best to consider how Horace fashions a complex and nuanced dialogue between his poems and the principate rather than to attempt to uncover the unambiguous mind of the man writing the poems" (13), while also highlighting the primary themes of his poetry such as the ethical life (*carpe diem*, the golden mean, etc.), friendship and patronage, wine and the symposium, death and the passage of time, poetry and aesthetics. She explains her translation methodology (attempting to translate every word, keeping iambic rhythms throughout and adding nothing extraneous to the Latin), the page layout with facing Latin and explanatory notes and wisely advises her readers that "Horatian lyric demands a slow reading" (31). In the volume, the footnotes do a good job balancing the needed explication of difficult phrases or Classical references without giving away too much (as Servius says: *artis poeticae est non omnia dicere*). At selected moments, McCarter will underline or italicize words that are part of a rhetorical device so one finds, **sacrum** *vetustis* exstruat *lignis* **fozum** ("and heap the **sacred hearth** with *ancient wood*," *Epod.* 2.43) to highlight the golden line (ABVBA). I think these moments will be helpful for Latinless readers (and, perhaps, encourage them to learn some Latin). There were some poems which, in my view, featured too many notes, but such notes will be useful for students and readers who do not have a thorough knowledge of Greek mythology, poetic devices and ancient geography.<sup>4</sup>

In order to get a sense of her style, here is her translation of the opening of *Epode* 7:

Where, where are you depraved men rushing? Why  
do your right hands hold swords just sheathed?  
Upon the fields and over Neptune has

<sup>3</sup> *Horace, The Odes: New Translations by Contemporary Poets* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Each poem has a short introduction in the notes that points out the setting, major themes and meter of the poem. In addition, some of these introductions cite previous scholarship or point out connections between the poem and the rest of the book (e.g. a note on *Odes* 1.35 mentions how Fortuna, though never mentioned by name in the hymn, was mentioned at the conclusion of the previous poem, so would be in the mind of the reader).

too little Latin blood been spilled?  
 Not so the Roman might ignite the pompous  
     citadels of resentful Carthage  
 nor so the undefeated Briton might  
     descend the Sacred Way in chains,  
 but so, fulfilling Parthians' prayers, this city  
     might perish by its own right hand!

*Quo, quo scelesti ruitis? aut cur dexteris  
     aptantur enses conditi?  
 parumne campis atque Neptuno super  
     fusum est Latini sanguinis  
 non, ut superbas invidae Carthaginis  
     Romanus arces ureret,  
 intactus aut Britannus ut descenderet  
     sacra catenatus via,  
 sed ut secundum vota Parthorum sua  
     urbs haec periret dextera?*

McCarter catches the breathless quality of the poet's plea to his people with the anaphora and rhetorical questions of the opening lines (West simply translates it "Why this mad rush to join a wicked war?"). The focus on the "right hand" put to use in sinister civil war is repeated in the translation as in the Latin (whereas West eschews any repetition in his translation). While "pompous" rings a little false to my ear, it certainly can be a translation of *superbus-a-um*, but does not catch the play with *super* and the general movement from level land and sea in line three to the heights of Carthage to descent along the Sacred Way.

Turning to the *Odes*, here is her translation of the conclusion of 1.4, to Sestius:

Pale death with her impartial foot pounds huts of paupers  
     And kingly towers. Happy Sestius,  
 the short extent of life keeps us from taking up long hope.  
     Night will oppress you soon, the fabled Shades,  
 and Pluto's meager house, where you, as soon as you've  
     arrived,

won't win by dice dominion over wine  
 nor marvel at young Lycidas, for whom now all the youth  
 are hot and soon the virgins will grow warm.

Ferry's translation is as follows:

Revenant white-faced Death is walking not knowing whether  
 He's going to knock at a rich man's door or a poor man's.  
 O good-looking fortunate Sestius, don't put your hope in the future;  
 The night is falling; the shades are gathering around;  
 The walls of Pluto's shadowy house are closing you in.  
 There who will be lord of the feast? What will it matter,  
 What will it matter there, whether you fell in love with Lycidas,  
 This or that girl with him, or he with her?

*Pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum  
 regumque turris. O beate Sesti,  
 vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam.  
 iam te premet nox fabulaeque Manes*

*et domus exilis Plutonia; quo simul mearis,  
 nec regna vini sortiere talis,  
 nec tenerum Lycidam mirabere, quo calet iuventus  
 nunc omnis et mox virgines tepebunt.*

One can see how McCarter chooses to replicate the alliteration of *pulsat pede pauperum* with her demanding Death, in a way Ferry's rather gentlemanly Death abjures. McCarter's ability to pick out the contrast between "short life" and "long hope" helps to lead to the underworld description and the warmth of life and passion now lost in cold death. In contrast, Ferry makes *nox* and *Manes* appear to be the workings of time more than underworld qualities, but I appreciate his "what will it matter" repetitions and the rather anonymous hook-ups of "this or that girl with him or he with her." After all, who cares when you are dead?

Horace is difficult to translate, but his ideas are usually clear once one puzzles out the Latin. These translations will help those trying to figure out *what* Horace is saying, but it only scratches the surface of showing *how* he creates that meaning. While that is more the job of a philologist than a translator, I kept finding my eyes

drifting to the left side of the pages to the Latin to really enjoy what Horace does in his poetry: the varied meters, the *callidae iuncturae*, intratexts, surprising *sententiae* and intertexts with his Greek and Latin predecessors. That is not to take away from McCarter's hard work and the results of her labor, but simply part of the reason why we (as Classicists) need to continue to stress the importance of learning and reading Latin.<sup>5</sup> In conclusion, this is a successful and compelling volume of translations and the various notes, circumspect introduction and glossary of rhetorical and literary terms will be of especial use to non-Classical students, teachers and scholars.

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, in *Epode 7*, the problematic reciprocity of crime, guilt and punishment is found in the *scelesti* of line 1 and the mention of the *scelus...fraternae necis* in line 18, but it can be hard to draw attention to this in the translation.