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Review Of "Selections From Horace Odes III: An Edition For Intermediate Students. Odes III.2, III.3, III.4, III.6" By J. Godwin

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Selections from Horace Odes III: An Edition for Intermediate Students. Odes III.2, III.3, III.4, III.6

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William Turpin

September 5, 2019

The UK edition (2018) of this work was “endorsed by OCR for use with specification OCR Level 3 Advanced GCE in Latin (H443),” which I take it means that these four poems were chosen as a set text for high school students. My own choices from book III would have been almost entirely different, but I defer to professionals with actual experience of British high schools. The focus on “Roman Odes” presumably fits with courses the Augustan regime, and indeed Godwin’s introduction is particularly good on the question of “Horace and Augustus.”

The edition is intended for students “who have mastered the basics and are now ready to start reading some Latin verse.” The commentary does a good job of helping such students with their translations, while also highlighting poetic techniques and raising more general critical issues. The book includes a Latin-English vocabulary (unfortunately without macrons), which is one argument for adoption by anyone wanting to teach these particular four poems. Most teachers not teaching to a set curriculum will probably prefer an edition of all the odes (and epodes), such as that of Daniel Garrison, intended for students at a similar level.

The focus on four particular poems does allow the editor to raise broad problems of interpretation. But my own experience is that even the most able and engaged students will need more specificity. The short essays by David West, for example, offer clear and provocative arguments about each poem as a whole, as well as snippets of alternative views; the students thus come to class with a clear sense of the broader issues at stake, and are often able to work back to the details of language to support their own arguments. Godwin’s comments tend to be more Socratic, suggesting interesting questions for an attentive reader, but requiring class discussion for fuller development. On *Ode* 3.2.26-29, for example, Godwin notes that Horace “neatly sidesteps the political resonance of ‘faithful silence’ with a reference to the famously secretive rites of Ceres.” My own students would need a fuller explanation of what this actually means, and, even more important, they would probably need to be told that Horace’s move from *virtus* (lines 17 and 21) to *fideli silentio* is central to understanding the poem, and requires further discussion. As teachers we are apt to forget that students find so many aspects of Latin poetry unfamiliar that they can miss the moments when an author does something creative or strange.

By the same token, my ideal commentary would do more to show students what Horace has meant to various readers over the years. It mattered to me, as a disaffected high school student, that the opening lines of 3.3 were, according to Shorey and Liang, “recited by

Cornelius de Witte on the rack,” and that “their repetition nerved Frederick the Great in his desperate struggle with all Europe.” Even today it will interest some students that *dulce et decorum est* has such an iconic status in poems about war. Godwin mentions Wilfrid Owen, to be sure, but most of my students don’t know the poem. More important, Owen’s quotation of Horace (and Ezra Pound’s, in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly*) has to be seen in the broader context of non-ironic quotations, in less well-known poetry of the time, and on war memorials even after World War I.

There are a few practical changes I would suggest, to render Horace as user-friendly as possible. First, and easiest, would be macrons; not just in the vocabulary, but in the commentary and perhaps even marking naturally long vowels in the text itself. Second would be access to good digital recordings; getting students to master the sounds of Latin poetry is an uphill fight, and the combination of internet and smartphones allows us to make help readily available.

The Latin text has the stanzas printed in a way that is new to me, and off-putting: the third and fourth lines are indented so that they line up with each other, which obscures the fact that the meter of the fourth line is in fact different. And in one case there is no separation between two stanzas. These are trivial points, of course, but one of the attractions of Horace’s poems are the way they are laid out onto the (modern) page.

Finally, it is confusing that the introduction uses Roman numerals to designate both the individual books of odes *and* the four poems from Book III included in this text; thus IV.26 refers to *Carm.* 3.4.26, while *Odes* II.7 is poem 7 of Book II. This is an edition for students new to Horace, most of whom will not be attracted automatically to these poems; it is important to remove at least the unnecessary obstacles to getting to know them.