

# NOTES ON HORACE'S EPISTLES

*Abstract:* Debated passages of Horace are explained.

*Key words:* Horace: Textual criticism.

*Resumen:* Se explican pasajes controvertidos de Horacio.

*Palabras clave:* Horacio: Crítica textual.

I, 1, 28:

*non possis oculo quantum contendere Lynceus*

*oculo* : *oculos* v. l.

Fairclough<sup>1</sup> translated as follows: “You may not be able, with your eyes, to see as far as Lynceus”. I would like to point out that the variant reading *oculos* makes perfect sense. Horace states that you may not be able to stretch (*contendere*<sup>2</sup>) your eyes as far as Lynceus.

I, 1, 77-78:

*sunt qui  
frustis et pomis viduas venentur avaras*

line 78 *frustis* : *crustis* v. l.

Fairclough translated as follows: “some with titbits and fruits hunt miserly widows”.

I would like to suggest that the correct reading in this passage is *crustis*. Horace states that some men hunt miserly widows “due to the rinds of apples (*crustis*<sup>3</sup> *et pomis*)”. Horace means that the widows are so mean that they will save even the rinds of apples.

I, 2, 30-31:

*cui pulchrum fuit in medios dormire dies et  
ad strepitum citharae cessatum ducere curam.*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H.R. Fairclough, *Horace, Epistles*, Loeb edition 1970, reprint, page 253.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *contendo*: “To stretch... strain... *oculi contendunt se* (Lucr. 4, 810)”.

On the reading *oculos* cf. Villeneuve’s apparatus.

<sup>3</sup> For the *hendiadys* cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius* (Athens 2002), page 12.

On the reading *crustis* cf. Villeneuve’s apparatus.

Scholars<sup>4</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of line 31. I would like to suggest that we should translate as follows: “whose pride it was to sleep until midday and to cheat (*ducere*<sup>5</sup>) a mistress (*curam*<sup>6</sup>) to the rested (*cessatum*<sup>7</sup>) sound of the lyre”. Note the employment of adjectival *enallage*<sup>8</sup>. The man who sleeps until late in the day is himself rested (*cessatum*).

I, 2, 37-39:

*nam cur  
quae laedunt oculum festinas demere; si quid  
est animum, differs curandi tempus in annum?*

Horace states that if you do not devote your mind to honourable studies, envy or passion will keep you awake in torment. I would like to suggest that *oculum*<sup>9</sup> means here “darling”. We should translate as follows: “Why are you in a hurry to remove things which hurt your darling (*oculum*), while if anything hurts your soul, you put off the time for a cure until next year?”

I, 3, 9-13:

*quid Titius, Romana brevi ventura in ora?  
Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus,  
fastidire lacus et rivos ausus apertos.  
ut valet? ut meminit nostri? fidibusne Latinis  
Thebanos aptare modos studet auspice Musa,*

Horace states that Titius has drunk from the Pindaric spring. Similarly Hesiod was said to have drunk the water of Hippocrene<sup>10</sup> in order to become inspired. Horace asks whether Titius intends to fit Theban measures to the Latin lyre. He is referring to the fact that Pindar<sup>11</sup> was a Theban.

I, 3, 25-27:

*quod si  
frigida curarum fomenta relinquere posses,  
quo te caelestis sapientia duceret, ires.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fairclough’s note *ad loc.*

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *duco* II, B, 2, b: “To cheat, deceive”.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *cura* II, B, 2: “mistress”.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *cesso* II, A: “To be inactive, idle, at leisure”.

<sup>8</sup> For adjectival *enallage* cf. my *Studies*, page 164.

On the problems presented by the words in this passage cf. Villeneuve *ad loc.*, note 6.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *oculus* (1): “As a term of endearment, the apple of my eye, my darling”.

Villeneuve’s translation (“ôter de ton oeil ce qui le blesse”) seems contextually incongruous to me.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. my *Studies*, page 49.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Myrtia* 19, 2004, page 168.

Scholars<sup>12</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of line 26. Perfect sense can, however, be restored to this passage if we translate as follows: “But if you could abandon the cold kindling-wood (*fomenta*<sup>13</sup>) of your love (*curarum*<sup>14</sup>), you would rise to where heavenly wisdom would lead.”

Horace means that Florus should not try to rekindle his old love-affair.

I, 6, 49-52:

*si fortunatum species et gratia praestat,  
mercemus servum, qui dictat nomina, laevum  
qui fodicit latus et cogat trans pondera dextram  
porrigere*

Scholars<sup>15</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of line 51. I would like to suggest that *pondera*<sup>16</sup> means here “the privy parts”. The slave nudges the man and reminds him to stretch his hand across his privy parts, in order to cover them whenever they are exposed to view in public places like the baths.

I, 10, 19:

*deterius Libycis olet aut nitet herba lapillis?*

Horace refers here to life in the country. Fairclough translated as follows: “Is the grass poorer in fragrance or beauty than Libyan mosaics?”

Scholars (Fairclough, Villeneuve, etc.) take *Libycis lapillis* to refer to mosaics. But *Libycis lapillis* cannot refer to a mosaic, because grass made of mosaic stones does not smell (*olet*), and because, in the whole passage, comparisons are made only with natural items (*vivere naturae*, line 12), not artificial ones, like a mosaic. Here *Libycis lapillis* is used in reference to *Libya sicca* (Forcellini-Perin, *Onomasticon*, s. v. *Libya: aridior*, etc.). The poet means that the grass of the country-side where he lives is better than that which grows in *Libya sicca* (*Libycis lapillis* is a locative ablative).

On *Libya* being *arenosa* cf. Forcellini-Perin, *Onomast.*, s. v. *Libya* (Virg. *Aen.* 4, 257 *litus arenosum Libyae*); cf. Thes. s. v. *lapillosus = arenosus*.

I, 10, 47-48:

*imperat aut servit collecta pecunia cuique,  
tortum digna sequi potius quam ducere funem.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Fairclough *ad loc.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *fomentum* I, B: “Transf., for *fomes*, touch-wood, kindling-wood”.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *cura* II, B: “In partic. the care, pain, or anxiety of love”.

Villeneuve takes *frigida fomenta* to mean “compresses réfrigérantes”, which seems improbable to me.

For metaphors concerning fire cf. Horace, *Odes* 2, 1, 7 and Page’s note *ad loc.*, quoting *A. P.* 12, 139 (Callimachus).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Fairclough *ad loc.*

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *pondus* I, B, 2, a and Forcellini, s. v. *pondus* II, 2, b.

*Pondera* is here a poetic plural. On the problems presented by this passage cf. Villeneuve *ad loc.*, note 4.

Fairclough translated as follows: “Money stored up is for each his lord or his slave, but ought to follow, not lead, the twisted rope”.

Fairclough notes that Horace is probably referring to “some story of an animal being led by a rope and running away with its keeper”. I would like to suggest that Horace is alluding to the fact that men were bound by ropes when they were led in triumph. Thus personified<sup>17</sup> Money is imagined to be paraded in triumph, like a foreign slave.

I, 18, 56-57:

*sub duce qui templis Parthorum signa refigit  
nunc et, si quid abest, Italis adiudicat armis.*

line 57 *abest Italis* : *abest aliis* v. l.

Horace refers here to the fact that in 20 B. C. Augustus removed from the Parthians the standards which they had taken from Crassus. I would like to suggest that the correct reading in line 57 is *aliis*. Augustus is said to take down the standards from the Parthian temples, and if anything is missing, Augustus will allocate it (*adiudicat*<sup>18</sup>) by means of other soldiers (*aliis*<sup>19</sup>... *armis*).

I, 20, 1-2:

*Vertumnum Ianumque, liber, spectare videris,  
scilicet ut prostes Sosiorum pumice mundus.*

line 2 *mundus* : *nudus* v. l.

Fairclough noted that “there is a *double entendre* in *prostes pumice mundus* and in other expressions in ll. 1-8”. He explained that “pumice was used to smooth the ends of the roll”, and that the Sosii were “well-known as booksellers. “I would like to suggest that the correct reading in line 2 is *nudus*. Horace states that his book will prostitute itself (*prostes*) when it is nude (*nudus*) due to the pumice of the Sosii (*Sosiorum pumice nudus*). Horace’s book is going to prostitute itself like a *pathicus*. Pumice<sup>20</sup> was used to smooth the skin of effeminate.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Horace, *Epist.* I, 6, 37 *regina Pecunia*. For personification cf. my *Studies*, pages 34 and 157.

*Philippi* is personified at *Epist.* 2, 2, 49.

Cf. also Villeneuve *ad loc.*

<sup>18</sup> For the use of the present tense instead of the future cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 157.

<sup>19</sup> The variant *Italis* is a truism, and therefore a trivialization. The correct reading is *aliis*: the sense is that, if anything was still absent (*abest*: i. e. had been captured and was still retained by the Parthians), the Emperor would adjudicate it (i. e. would assign it) to the Romans by means of other troops (*aliis armis*: cf.

Tac., *A. I.*, 63 *alii*), i. e. troops other than, different from, those who had returned, as war-worn veterans, from Parthia. *Adiudicat* is a *praesens pro futuro*: Horace at one stroke stresses the vastness of the Roman army and elegantly predicts future victories by the Emperor.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *pumex* (1). Cf. also Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *coma* II, b: “The wool or hair upon parchment”. For the depilation of *pathici* cf. my *New Studies In Greek Poetry* (Amsterdam 1989), page 77.

Villeneuve understands the allusion to the depilation of the “efféminés”, but fails to see that *nudus* is the correct reading.

2, 1, 28-33:

*Si quia Graiorum sunt antiquissima quaeque  
scripta vel optima, Romani pensantur eadem  
scriptores trutina, non est quod multa loquamur: 30  
nil intra est olea, nil extra est in nuce duri;  
venimus ad summum fortunae, pingimus atque  
psallimus et luctamur Achivis doctius unctis.*

Fairclough notes that Horace compares Greek and Roman writers to olives and nuts. I would like to suggest that better sense can be made of this passage if we place a full stop after *nuce*, in line 31, and translate as follows: “There is nothing less due to the olive (*olea*), nothing more (*extra*) in the case of the nut (*in*<sup>21</sup> *nuce*). We hardy men (*duri*<sup>22</sup>) have come to the summit of fortune”.

In other words, Horace compares the hardy Romans with the well-oiled Greeks: cf. line 33 *Achivis... unctis*.

2, 2, 79-80:

*tu me inter strepitus nocturnos atque diurnos  
vis canere et contracta sequi vestigia vatium?*

line 80 *contracta* : *cantata* v. l.

Fairclough translated as follows: “Would you wish me, amid noises by night and noises by day, to sing and pursue the minstrels’ narrow pathway?”

I would like to suggest that the correct reading in line 80 is *cantata*<sup>23</sup>. Horace refers to the “celebrated track of poets”. Note that Horace has employed adjectival *enallage*<sup>24</sup>. The poets are themselves “celebrated”, i. e. famous<sup>25</sup>.

2, 2, 81-84:

*ingenium, sibi quod vacuas desumpsit Athenas  
et studiis annos septem dedit insenuitque  
libris et curis, statua taciturnius exit  
plerumque et risu populum quatit.*

line 83 *curis* : *Curii* v. l.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *in* I, C.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *durus* II, A, 2.

Note the elegant *enjambement*: *duri* / *venimus*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *canto* II, B:  
...*illa meis multum cantata libellis* (Mart. 9, 50, 1).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. my *Studies*, page 164.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Borzsak’s apparatus, with much information. The *enallage* was not understood by whoever replaced it with the banal *contracta* (the way of poetry was topically “narrow”).

It should be noted that the variant reading *Curii* makes perfect sense. When the gifted man (*ingenium*) goes out, he is more silent than a statue of Curius Dentatus<sup>26</sup>, and makes people shake with laughter.

2, 2, 122-123:

*luxuriantia compescet, nimis aspera sano  
levabit cultu, virtute carentia tollet*

line 123 *carentia* : *calentia* v. l.

Horace describes here the good poet. I would like to point out that the variant reading *calentia* makes perfect sense. The good poet will remove due to virtue (*virtute*) what is inflamed (*calentia*<sup>27</sup>), i. e. lust.

2, 2, 183-184:

*cur alter fratrum cessare et ludere et ungui  
praeferat Herodis palmetis pinguibus*

The text has been misunderstood by both Fairclough and Villeneuve. The palm trees belonging to Herod were used to produce unguents (*balsamitis*: Forcellini-Perin, s. v. *Jericho*; Forcellini, s. v. *palma*, 10; RE, s. v. *Phoenix*, d), and the brother in question is imagined by the poet to live in the *palmetis pinguibus* so that he might anoint himself (*ungui*) with such unguents.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *Curius* (2).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *caleo*: "To glow in mind, to be roused, warmed, inflamed... *femina calere*, to become enamored of, Hor. C. 4, 11, 33".

Cf. also *O. L. D.* s. v. *caleo*, 6.