Introduction
Imitation, allusion, translation:
reading Jonson's Horace

To the admired Ben: Johnson to encourage
him to write after his farewel to the stage. 1631
alludinge to Horace ode 26. Lib: 1
Musis amicus &c

Ben, thou arte the Muses freinde,
greife, and feares, cast to the winde:
who wins th’Emperour, or Sweade
sole secure, you noethinge dreade.
Inhabitante neer Hyppo-crene,
plucke sweete roses by that streame,
put thy lawrel-crownet on.
What is fame, if thou hast none?
See Apollo with the nine
sings: the chorus must be thine.

John Polwhele

Benjamin Jonson, born in 1572, worked under, and latterly for, three successive monarchs before his death in 1637. A close contemporary of Shakespeare, he wrote in almost every important literary genre of his age, from the satires and epigrams fashionable in the 1590s to the elaborate court masques of the early seventeenth century. His influence in most of these forms – including lyric, epigram, stage comedy and verse epistle – continued to be felt for several generations. A Catholic for a substantial portion of his adulthood, his personal life was colourful, including imprisonment, murder, high patronage and poverty. He befriended (or alienated), rivalled and collaborated with many of the great men of his
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day, both in England and abroad, including Shakespeare (who took a part in his 1605 play Sejanus), John Donne, Inigo Jones and the classical scholars Thomas Farnaby and Daniel Heinsius. But at almost every turn of this long, varied and highly public career his chief literary model, the man whose memory he honoured and whose achievement he claimed to outdo, was not any one of his talented contemporaries, but a Roman poet of the first century bc: Quintus Horatius Flaccus; ‘thine Horace’.2

That Jonson liked to think of himself as Horace, and that this identification was considered realistic enough to be accepted by many of his followers, has often been acknowledged in passing in the scholarly literature.3 Jonson has, moreover, long been recognised as a poet of classical imitation in general, for whom ‘imitation’ carries a moral as well as aesthetic force.4 Several of these critics have offered helpful and intelligent readings of individual ‘Horatian’ poems, but none have developed a sustained account of Jonson’s Horatianism, and no monograph exists devoted to Jonson’s appropriations of Horace.5

This book aims to fill that gap, discussing all of the more significant instances of Horatian allusion, imitation or translation in Jonson’s verse (and the satirical comedy, Poetaster, which stages Jonson as Horace himself).6 Such a survey demonstrates the extent of Jonson’s Horatianism,

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3 Jonson’s ‘classicism’ is a critical commonplace, and by ‘classicism’ is meant, among other things, self-conscious imitation of the style and form of Greek and Roman writers, including Juvenal, Seneca, Tacitus, Martial and Cicero among the Romans, and Lucian, Homer and Pindar among the Greeks. A great deal has been written on Jonsonian imitation in its many senses. Of particular importance are: Thomas M. Greene, The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 264–93; Peterson, Imitation and Praise; Katharine Eisaman Maus, Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind (Princeton University Press, 1984).
5 A list of passages discussed, in both Jonson and Horace, is given in a separate index.

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but also its importance to Jonson’s literary persona: Jonson used Horace, and his relationship to the Roman poet, to model his own self-conscious poetic ‘authority’ (a well-established topos of Jonsonian criticism), to mark his laureate role as a poet of courtly panegyric, and to insist upon his artistic freedom despite the network of patronage and financial dependence within which he was compelled to operate. That these functions are sometimes in conflict is testimony to the subtlety and depth that Jonson found in Horace, and to the attention with which he read the Latin poet: in several respects Jonson’s response to, and appropriation of Horatian themes anticipates much more recent developments in classical criticism.7

The relationship between Jonson and Horace was widely noted – and sometimes mocked – by his seventeenth-century contemporaries.8 In time the association between them, and so between a certain kind of Horatianism and the royalism of Jonson’s Stuart career, became central to the reception and perception of Jonson and Horace alike in the troubled years of the mid seventeenth century. This book is focused upon Jonson’s work, not his Nachleben, but I have at several points discussed instances of his own reception among friends and followers (often from unpublished manuscript sources). This largely untapped material is important supplementary evidence, shedding light on the various associations and identifications between Horace and Jonson in the minds of his seventeenth-century readers.


8 Thomas Dekker calls him ‘Horace the Second’ in the Dedication to Satiro-mastix or The vntrussing of the humorous poet. As it hath bin presented publikely, by the Right Honorable, the Lord Chamberlaine his servants; and privately, by the Children of Paules. (London: Edward White, 1602), 4o, STC (2nd edn)/6521, and the play makes much of this connection throughout.
When I write of Jonson’s ‘Horatianism’, I do not mean to imply that Jonson’s English poetry regularly sounds like Horace’s Latin (whatever that might mean), or that the experience of reading Jonson always or often resembles that of reading Horace’s work. Even a very detailed and extended allusive interaction with another text is not the same thing as a reproduction: Virgil alludes constantly to Homer in the Aeneid, and an awareness of that conversation is crucial to the reader’s experience of Virgil, and of his or her pleasure in it. But that is not to say that Virgil is always very much like Homer. On the contrary, the pathos and beauty of Virgil’s text arise in part from the ways in which the reminiscences of Homer draw our attention to the unHomeric features of the Aeneid: we are moved by Aeneas’ austere farewell to Ascanius, for instance, because of what it lacks in comparison with the scene between Hector, Andromache and the baby Astyanax in Iliad 6.

Some of the difficulty we find in reading Jonson’s Horace emerges from this distinction between intertextuality and resemblance: to follow an intertextual conversation, a reader must know well the text, or texts, that form the ground of the engagement – well enough to note divergences from the model. She must also expect to make such connections and comparisons, and enjoy making them. Even the well-educated modern reader does not necessarily find it easy to read in this way. This is partly because modern education, unlike the Renaissance schoolroom, does not encourage us to know a narrow range of texts extremely well (to the point of extensive memorisation). But it is also because even if we

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9 Perhaps the single most useful discussion of Renaissance modes of imitation is to be found in George W. Pigman, ‘Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance’, Renaissance Quarterly, 33 (1980), 1–32. He suggests three primary ‘modes’ of intertextuality, which he terms ‘transformativc’, ‘dissimulative’ and ‘eristic’. We can, I think, see traces of all three in Jonson’s appropriation of Horace, but the most directly relevant is the ‘eristic’ mode, by which a ‘continual insistence on conflict [in the imitative relationship] suggests that a text may criticize, correct, or revise its model’ (27). Jonson’s texts very often cite Horace, for instance, only to ‘cap’ the Latin text – to go one better.

10 The best recent overview of early modern education and its effect upon the reading and interpretation of classical texts can be found in the introduction to Craig Kallendorf, The Other Virgil: ‘Pessimistic’ Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture, Classical Presences (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1–16. Kallendorf’s notes are an invaluable guide to further bibliography on the topic. For more detailed information on the Elizabethan schoolroom in particular, see T. W. Baldwin, William Shakspeare’s Small Latine and Lesse Greeke, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944).
have read closely in classical literature, the texts in which we read Virgil or Horace do not generally encourage us to make these sorts of connection or comparison.

By contrast, the classical editor of the Renaissance – such as Thomas Farnaby or Daniel Heinsius, with both of whom Jonson corresponded – was naturally concerned to establish the Latin or Greek text upon which he was working, but also to point out connections between texts: one aspect of what we would now call ‘intertext’.11 He also, typically, makes judgments about these comparisons – that is, editorial comment not only sets up parallels or points out differences between passages but also adjudicates between them, on both moral and aesthetic grounds. Early modern editors are not squeamish about stating their preference, or claiming (for instance) that Horace is better than Pindar – to name one example which is, as we shall see, directly relevant to Jonson’s experiments in English lyric form.12

It is often remarked that Jonson’s printed texts – even, or especially, the texts of the masques, that most ephemeral of genres – closely resemble contemporary editions of the Latin and Greek classics, complete, in many cases, with extensive notes upon the classical parallels or sources of his work. In the case of the 1616 folio of Jonson’s Workes, this resemblance extends even down to the type used for its setting.13 This quirk of Jonsonian self-presentation, aptly dubbed ‘editorial authorship’ by Joseph Loewenstein stresses the extent to which

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11 These editorial interventions are also literally ‘paratextual’, surrounding the text densely on three sides in many early modern classical editions.

12 Examples of such debates, with which Jonson would certainly have been familiar, appear in several contemporary editions or works of criticism. See, for instance, Julius Scaliger, Poetices libri septem ([Lyons]: Apud Antonium Vincentium, 1561), 2o, Book 5. Roger Ascham describes Pindar and Horace as ‘an equall match for all respects’ (Roger Ascham, The Scholemaster, ed. John E. B. Mayor (London: Bell and Daldy, 1863), Book 2, p. 155). For further information on this topic, see: Stella P. Revard, Pindar and the Renaissance Hymn-Ode: 1450–1700, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 221 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), pp. 33–9.

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Loewenstein, has been much discussed in recent years, most richly and convincingly by Loewenstein himself. But although Loewenstein speaks perceptively of *imitatio* and its place in Jonson’s poetics, he locates it – and its significance – within the emergent rhetoric of the ‘possession’ of intellectual property. I want to take on board much of Loewenstein’s excellent work; but this book is not primarily concerned with Jonsonian ‘possessiveness’. Rather I am interested in the way in which Jonsonian intertextuality itself, especially in the juxtaposition of competing classical ‘voices’, invites the reader, as surely as Jonson’s sometimes hectoring prefaces, prologues and dedications, to construct an authorial voice that compares, judges and even claims to outdo his classical sources.

Of course Horace is not the only classical author whom Jonson read with attention. His works are filled with references to, and imitations of, Tacitus, Juvenal, Martial, Seneca, Pindar and Lucian as well as the poets of the Greek Anthology and many neo-Latin authors. Horace is not a major presence in all of Jonson’s works – he is of less importance, for instance, to his later comedies (which are in any case not the subject of this book) – and the 1605 play *Sejanus*, which, like *Poetaster*, is built substantially from translation, is based not upon Horace but Tacitus. What is striking about Jonson’s Horatianism is that even when Jonson uses his poetry to think about and engage with other authors, he so often does so in juxtaposition, contention or conversation with an Horatian voice.


15 ‘Jonson had long since made the ethics of imitation his own proper problematic. His unrivalled importance for the historiography of intellectual property stems from the centrality of this problematic not only to his professional and intellectual career, but also, it seems, to his very sense of self’ (Loewenstein, *Possessive Authorship*, p. 111).

16 Even in *Sejanus*, however, Jonson defends the form of his play in the prefatory letter with a reference to his forthcoming edition of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*: the implication is that even if this is not an Horatian play at a textual level, it is the kind of thing a modern Horace might have written.

17 Loewenstein comes close to what I mean when he writes that ‘one way of mapping Jonson’s creative development would be to follow the process by which other literary models – Aristophanes, Lucian, Cicero, but above all, Martial – jostle Horace’, although he makes this observation in passing and does not follow up his own suggestion (Loewenstein, *Possessive Authorship*, p. 120). The difference between the list of ‘rivals’ to Horace suggested by Loewenstein here and those with which this book is concerned probably stems from the fact that his book is concerned primarily with Jonsonian drama, this one with Jonson’s verse; although Loewenstein does in general underplay Jonson’s Horatianism.

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KINDS OF CONTENTION: RIVALS TO HORACE IN JONSON’S VERSE

Recent work on classical (especially Latin) literature, making use of – if not wholly adopting – post-structuralist theories of the wide-ranging scope of intertextuality, has expanded our sense of the ways in which one text may evoke another (or several others). Focusing in particular upon the poets of Augustan Rome, these critics have explored the extent to which not only the content but also the context of a source text may be evoked by a range of allusive strategies; and, most significantly, how these activated sub-texts and sub-contexts contribute to the creation of meaning in the literature – of Virgil or Horace, for instance – under consideration.18 The subtlety and potential scope of this kind of reading has not been much applied to Jonson. This is the case despite the acknowledged density of classical (especially Roman) material in Jonson’s work, the centrality of close textual study of Roman authors to Renaissance education, and the fact that classical editions of Jonson’s own day were typically concerned to point out instances of ‘imitation’ between one ancient text and another. A broad understanding of intertextuality – including imitation, allusion and translation – is fundamental to my discussion of Jonson’s Horace. Although the specific terms and texts of the allusive ‘dialogue’ with Horace (and, especially, the political and cultural force they bear) varies in the course of Jonson’s career, and between different poetic genres, the relationship itself is a constant feature of his work, and the central topic of this book.

Both early and late, in poems dating from the 1590s just as in late odes of the 1630s, we find Jonson’s relationship to Horace played out in the negotiations between Horatian and Pindaric lyric models and their associated modes of praise and poetic power. This aspect of Jonson’s Horatianism is discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 is concerned with Jonson’s epigrams and epistles and, more widely, the poetics of his address to patrons and noble friends. In these poems, an analogous ‘dialogue’ emerges between the ambiguous ‘freedom’ of Horatian hexameter verse.

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(the *Satires* and *Epistles*) and rival models of address found in Martial’s epigrams and Seneca’s philosophical letters. In Jonson’s satiric poetry, explored in Chapter 3, a related kind of ‘freedom’ – to criticise rather than to praise – sees both Horatian and Juvenalian models of satiric verse invoked and allowed, as it were, to ‘compete’.

In *Poetaster* – a play very explicitly about imitation, both aesthetically and morally – the Horatian voice contests and finally, in its pervasiveness, triumphs over Ovidian, Virgilian and even Homeric models, as well as a wide range of contemporary dramatic material (including references to plays by Marlowe, Marston, Dekker, Chapman and Shakespeare). The bravura demonstration of *imitatio* in the play ranges from structural resemblance, through extended allusion or imitation, to close translation and even outright borrowing (or ‘plagiary’). *Poetaster* is the main subject of Chapter 4.

**Manuscript Circulation**

But it is not only the details of printed presentation that invite the Jonsonian reader to enter into an assessment – an editorial ‘adjudication’ – of the competing models (Horace and Pindar, or Horace and Martial, for instance) that stand behind a text. Jonson’s work was circulated widely in manuscript, both before and after his death; and contemporary verse manuscripts and miscellanies are filled, too, with examples of classical imitation and translation – especially of Horace – which are in varying ways and to varying degrees ‘Jonsonian’. The epigraph to this introduction, Polwhele’s consolatory ode on the failure of *The New Inn*, is an example of just this kind of thing. Polwhele uses a version of Horace to honour and console Jonson: by doing so, he flatters Jonson, but also implies and acknowledges the success of Jonson’s own project of self-presentation as Horace.

Manuscript evidence of various kinds, including copies of Jonson’s own poetry as well as the translations and imitations of others, reveal a great deal about how Jonson’s ‘Horatianism’ was read by his contemporaries and immediate successors. In manuscript miscellanies, individual choices in the editing, titling and ordering of poems are often suggestive in this respect. In Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poetry 31, for instance, *Forest 3* (‘To Sir Robert Wroth’) is titled ‘To Sir Robte Wroth in / praye of a Countrye

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99 There has been very little work on such material in relation to Jonson’s classicism, though Riddell’s notes on marginalia are a useful starting point (James A. Riddell, ‘Seventeenth-century Identifications of Jonson’s Sources in the Classics’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28 (1975), 204–18).
Whose Horace?

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lyfe: / Epode'. The subtitle ‘epode’ invites the reader to associate the poem with Horace, Epodes 2; and that association is further strengthened when we compare the title of Forest 3 with the titling of Jonson’s own translation of Épodes 2, which appears a few pages earlier in the manuscript: ‘An: Ode in Horace in Praye / of a Countrye lyfe, Translated:’. If we read the Wroth poem as primarily a response to, or version of Épodes 2 – that is, if we prioritise the Horatianism of the poem over, say, its models in Martial – our interpretation of the piece may be significantly altered. Details of this kind reach behind Jonson’s own powerful, almost obsessive, attempts to control his readers’ responses, and give some indication of the extent to which his Horatianism was noted by his contemporary readers, and what significance they attached to it.

In addition to evidence of this kind, which points to how Jonson was read and his poetry understood by his contemporaries, manuscript material offers a wealth of information about the broader literary culture to which Jonson responded and which he in turn helped to shape. Surviving verse manuscripts testify, for instance, to a culture of classical translation and imitation that extended to the imitation and even the translation (into Latin) of Jonson himself. This cultural context, in which the practice of translation, a paradigmatic school exercise, remained a focus of literary energy and creative response in adulthood is essential background for an understanding of, for instance, Jonson’s un-fashionably ‘close’ translations of Horace (such as the Ars Poetica) as well as the many explorations of close translation that are embedded in his works. That broader culture is not the main focus of this book, but it informs and supports my readings of Jonson’s Horatianism, and I discuss various examples of Jonson’s own reception alongside his close translations in Chapter 5 (‘Translating Horace, translating Jonson’).

WHOSE HORACE?

If Horace is indeed so important to Jonson, why has the relationship gone relatively unremarked? The answer is in part, I think, to do with the ‘version’ of Horace most alive to Jonson and his contemporaries. For the modern well-educated reader – even the classicist who does not specialise in Horace – the most familiar features of Horatian style, his ‘signature

20 Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poetry 31, 34’.
21 Bodleian MS Rawlinson Poetry 31, 28’.
22 The implications of this manuscript evidence for our reading of the poem in question is discussed in Chapter 3, pp. 122–6.
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elements’, are probably a certain notion of Stoic ‘resignation’, a perception of (sometimes discomfiting) political loyalty, and above all a beautifully expressed commitment to ‘wine, women and song’ in the face of time and death. Other possible strong associations are his social position as a friend of Virgil, a favourite of Maecenas, and finally also of Augustus; and perhaps the peculiar concentration and elusive force of his lyric style. In each of these cases, the perception of Horace is founded upon the Odes.

With a couple of exceptions – ‘Drinke to me, onely, with thine eyes’ (Forest 9); or perhaps ‘My Picture left in Scotland’ (UW 9), with its rueful pose of aging self-deprecation – these are not likely to be the first associations we have with Jonson’s verse. The so-called ‘Cavalier Poets’, the self-consciously imitative ‘Sons of Ben’ are by these criteria much more Horatian than Jonson himself, and criticism has to some extent reflected that perception. Jonson’s Horatianism, by contrast, has been undernoticed and inadequately described partly because his version of Horace is quite different to ours: his ‘favourite’ passages – the individual poems and sections of poems to which he returns most frequently over the course of a long career – are drawn largely from the hexameter verse, the Satires and Epistles (currently mainly thepreserve of professional classicists) and the unfashionably panegyric Odes IV. Jonson took Horace’s moral authority – like his own – seriously.

It is not just a matter of genre. The themes with which ‘Jonson’s Horace’ are most prominently concerned are also unfashionable – of the Odes, for instance, he concentrates upon Horace’s boldest and least ironic declarations of the poet’s power to immortalise (Odes I.1, III.30, IV.8 and IV.9). Amongst the hexameter verse, the favoured passages are concerned with male friendship (the Epistles, plus a few epistolary odes), or with the negotiation of freedom and power, in politics and art alike (the Satires, Epistles

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14 The Song. To Celia (‘Drinke to me, onely, with thine eyes, / And I will pledge with mine’) is actually modelled upon sections of the Epistles of Philostratus. ‘My Picture left in Scotland’ does have many elements of the lyric Horace: an aging authorial voice, an ironic awareness of physical decline, a sense of real humour as well as convincing pain and desire. It is however unusual among Jonson’s lyric.

15 Joanna Martindale gives an excellent, albeit brief, account of the relationship between Jonson’s Horatianism and that of his successors (J. Martindale, “The Best Master of Virtue and Wisdom”).

16 Certainly included in this list are: Odes I.1, III.30, IV.1, IV.8 and IV.9; Satires I.4, II.1 and II.7; Epistles I.5, I.11 and I.18; portions of the Ars Poetica. A list is included in the index of passages discussed.