

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43771-5 - Translations from Horace, Juvenal and Montaigne:
With Two Imaginary Conversations

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

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TRANSLATIONS *from*
HORACE
&c.

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TO BERNHARD BERENSON

*Here on this bank, warmed by the gentle autumn sun,
I sit gazing across the woodlands of the weald,
Through miles on miles of silvery haze, to where far off
I see, or fancy that I see, dim ghosts of downs.
So calm the air, so soft and tender is the light,
That easy it seems to half forget the fevered world's
Miseries and fears and broken hopes. And so my thoughts
Take wing and wander to far lands whither I now
May never go. But most I wish myself with you,
Dear friend, amid those cypress-wooded hills that mount
Beyond Vincigliata and quarried Ceceri
To where by San Clemente we so often have seen
Tuscany spread its grave and gracious landscape out
From Vallombrosa to the far Carraran peaks;
A vision of enchantment, a delight more deep
Than ever elsewhere spirit or sense may hope to know.*

*Near fifty years have passed since I, a youthful pilgrim
From this remote barbarian isle of mists and cloud,
That Horace and Catullus shuddered when they named,
First wandered downward from the Alps and found myself
In Italy; found too that ancient proverb false:
"They change their sky who travel far, but not their soul."
Nay for me thenceforth changed were mind and spirit; sown
Were golden harvests of delight. Mid terraced hills
I loitered, and through shadowy gardens, by whose streams
The classic Muses yet might haunt, or Faunus lurk
Spying the bare-limbed Dryades. Long time alone,
A restless half-initiated proselyte,
I strayed at happy random on from town to town
And shrine to shrine, till kindly fortune led me at last
To you and to your friendliness; as once perchance
Youthful Odysseus, wandering into Cheiron's cave,
Found there the master he so long had sought in vain,
Whose guiding wisdom might school and enrich his mind
With arts and knowledge unknown in boorish Ithaca.*

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*Yet in that dim unlettered age, ere Homer sang,
The wisdom of the world was young, the memory brief
Of human fate: but infinite since then has grown
The record of our heritage, in art and thought
Embodied, an ungarnered harvest waiting still
For loving industry to reap and bind.
Happy indeed beyond the common lot of men
Has been your life, on such a task so nobly spent.
For who with vision wider and deeper, friend, than yours,
More subtly sensitive, has surveyed the fading realms
Wherein reborn and perishing from age to age
The spirit of man has dwelt and waxed and waned?
To seek such vision your example first it was
That taught me. And were I what I now shall never be,
Had power of intellect been mine to range in thought
Throughout the whole recorded annals of our race,
In vast inveterate sorrow, its folly and heroism,
Visiting each dark crypt of superstition's hell,
Each bright delectable paradise of the human mind,
Or lofty citadel where once Reason sat enthroned,
And thence returning with victorious alchemy
Into fit words transmute the knowledge I had won . . .
But for me long since faded are such hopes, though not
The wonder and love whence they sprang—whereof be thou,
Virgil, the symbol, thou in whom together meet
The charm of the Sicilian Muses, and the strength
Of Homer and father Ennius; thou whom Dante hailed
As master, glorying in the long and studious love
That made him search thy poem, whereby disciplined
He learnt that noble style that brought him honour.
But now to easier labours have I turned, and strive
As best I may into our uncouth English tongue
To convey somewhat of that classic grace that flowered
In ancient Italy. Though to lay barbarian hands
On Virgil's delicate loveliness, that were a task
Beyond my powers, a mere foolhardy sacrilege,
Yet have I dared with patient zeal to clothe anew,
In ruder speech and measure, the pedestrian Muse
Of Horace. May his gentle ghost indulgently
Smile on these pages, which to you I dedicate.*

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PREFACE

FEW poets have been so fortunate in their posthumous fame as Horace. His very limitations have always found him friends. Whether through laziness or self-knowledge, he never attempted to write poetry on a large scale, or to impose on his readers, didactically or dramatically, any definite personal interpretation of life and experience. His aim was to give delight; and as he himself delighted above all else in words and phrases and rhythmical felicities, he wisely confined himself to such themes as were in no danger of tempting him into difficult sublimities or abstruse raptures. He could be exquisitely, and at times even grandly lyrical, and the poetical forms he adapted from the Greeks were novel and surprising enough in their day; yet his sentiments and subject-matter were always acceptable to the cultivated man of the world. No poet indeed has ever been so great a master of the commonplace; but at his touch even the obvious becomes golden, a true *aurea mediocritas*.

Horace has been praised and loved for his urbanity and for his sense of humour, qualities which he shares with Montaigne. Yet, though a greater artist, he has little of Montaigne's psychological acuteness, or of his humane indignation at men's injustice and folly. In one respect the resemblance between the two is very notable: they are both supreme masters of the art of autobiography. Montaigne's "portrait of himself" was the more deliberate and the more minutely elaborated; but Horace in his casual way is no less candid, and perhaps more lovable.

The Odes are by their nature untranslatable. Even Milton's experiment seems clumsy and graceless compared with the original, though it comes nearer to success than any other known to me. But it may not be altogether impossible to give some idea in translation of Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*, to which he himself refused the name of poetry, speaking of them as *Sermones* or "Discourses", inspired by his "Pedestrian Muse".

To the *Epistles* and the *Ars Poetica*, I have added four of Horace's *Satires*, and the *Third Satire* of Juvenal. The *Epistles* are Horace's later and more mature work; but such autobiographical *Satires* as I, 6 and II, 6 have much the same self-revealing charm as the *Epistles*.

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I have also included, by way of contrast, a version of two of Montaigne's Essays, *Of Repenting* and *Of three kinds of Intercourse*. Lovers of Montaigne will no doubt find more of his spirit, and of the flavour of his archaic French, in the Elizabethan quaintness and felicities of Florio, and will easily pardon his frequent blunders and redundancies. But it is natural and proper that I should conform to the literary standards of my generation, and make scrupulous accuracy my aim, rather than colour and picturesqueness.

In translating Horace and Juvenal I have used the ten-syllabled blank verse line, because its rhythmical flexibility allows of a closer translation than is possible in any other metre; but I have in a few cases used the more difficult fourteen-syllabled verse, which has the advantage of making a line for line translation possible.

The *Third Satire* of Juvenal has perhaps more charm, and is less of a rhetorical exercise than any other of his pieces. But even so, if it be compared with the best work of his predecessor, it will, I think, show how consummate the art of Horace was, and how unique his personality.

I have added at the end of the book two "Imaginary Conversations" of my own, between Horace and his friends, Tibullus and Maecenas. These are supposed to take place in the Spring and Autumn of the year 18 B.C.

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