

Holzberg, N. 2009. *Horaz. Dichter und Werk*. München, C.H. Beck. 240 pp. Pr. €24.90 (hb). ISBN 9783406579622.

In recent years, the German classicist Niklas Holzberg (München University) produced some fine general studies on genres of Latin literature. Probably best known is his textbook on *The Ancient Novel* (English edition 1994), and worthy of mention is also *The Ancient Fable* (English edition 2003). One may further refer to his studies in German on elegiac poetry, on Martial and ancient epigram, and others. In addition, Beck Verlag has published what seems to have become a series of monographs by Holzberg on individual Latin poets: *Ovid, Dichter und Werk* (1997; English edition 2002); *Catull, der Dichter und sein erotisches Werk* (2002), *Vergil, der Dichter und sein Werk* (2006). These three books have now been supplemented with a volume on that other important Augustan poet, Horace. Whoever is familiar with Holzberg's books and appreciates them will rejoice at this new publication too, which is full of information on Horace and his texts.

In an introductory chapter, Holzberg offers readers a subtle and contemporary view of Horace as a poet who plays various roles (*personae*) in different parts of his work: satirist, lyrical poet, and official poet of the emperor, to mention the most conspicuous ones. Of course, a brief outline of the various poetical works in their chronological order is given. Another important point which Holzberg underscores is that Horace wrote *Lesedichtung*, that is, poetry intended to be read by a relatively large readership, not primarily to be recited in a small circle. Hence, Horace's references to 'singing' and 'lyre' are not to be taken literally.

After the general first chapter, successive chapters deal with Horace's individual works. The *Satires*, the *Epodes*, the *Odes*, and the *Epistles* are each given a chapter of varying length (18 pages for the *Epodes*, 73 pages for the *Odes*).

In each chapter, Holzberg operates more or less along similar lines. After some brief introductory notes, he proceeds to a detailed analysis of the texts themselves, strictly maintaining the order in which they have been ordered by the poet. That is, Holzberg consciously advocates *linear reading*, both within individual poems and books, and within the four poetical genres adopted by Horace. Holzberg's close attention for matters of structure inspires many acute remarks, which invariably show Horace as a poet constructing his poems in an almost painstakingly conscious manner. Like many ancient poets, Horace too seems to be playing many little games with letters and numbers, which can easily escape our notice, but which come to the surface in Holzberg's reading. The general image of Horace as the poet in whose works every word is at its place seems confirmed time and again.

The attentive, linear reading in this book produces many good and interesting ideas about Horace's verse. To mention just one or two examples, *Satire* 1.5

(the *iter Brundisiacum*) is shown to illustrate some of the ideas from the programmatic 1.4, notably that Horace needs only 104 lines to describe a journey, thereby clearly avoiding the alleged ‘hack writing’ of Lucilius, who used an entire book of satire for much the same (p. 70). Book 2 of the *Satires* is argued to be dedicated indirectly to Augustus, who is explicitly mentioned in 2.5.62-4, that is, halfway through the book, much as Maecenas had been the addressee in 1.1 and 1.6.1, equally halfway through the first book (p. 62). A close analysis of the nine opening *Odes* (1.1-9) shows how Horace is effectively parading his various themes and metres (p. 115), ending on some nicely homoerotic notes in *Ode* 1.9 (p. 120). Likewise, when read in linear fashion the last odes (4.11-15) seem a carefully constructed farewell to lyrical poetry (pp. 181-6).

Not all of Holzberg’s suggestions are equally convincing. Close reading can, of course, also be exaggerated. Thus, *Ode* 1.28 is connected with *Ode* 1.7 because they are in the same, uncommon metre; where 1.7 ends with some brave words by a captain (Teucer), 1.28 is spoken by a shipwrecked person (p. 129). It seems difficult to take this as a consciously intended form of irony. Which ancient reader will notice the parallel after more than twenty intermediate poems? Moreover, most of 1.7 is actually spoken not by Teucer but by Horace himself, which makes the point even more complex and thereby less likely.

A clear advantage of Holzberg’s method is that it sharpens the reader’s eye for instances of Horace’s humor and self-mockery, even where these are unexpected. For instance, in *Satire* 1.7 the speaking ‘I’ is obviously that of Piraeus, but as ‘Horace’ has been speaking in the first person in the previous six satires, there is at least the suggestion that it is Horace who is talking here too. Some parallels between Horace and Piraeus keep the confusion effectively going on (p. 75-6). The invective of *Epode* 4 is said, rather surprisingly, to include some mockery of Horace’s own person (pp. 99-100). Irony and playfulness can also be seen in Holzberg’s study itself, notably in many funny paragraph titles (“Buchschluß mit viel Wein”, “Auch den Weisen plagt der Schnupfen”).

All in all, Holzberg is a helpful and stimulating guide in reading and interpreting Horace’s poems as well ordered works of art for an intelligent public.

He seems, however, rather less interested in more general lines and broader themes. For example, little is made of Horace’s changes between poetical genres, apart from some general observations in the introductory chapter. How to explain the radical shift from *Satires* to other poems? A suggestion we get is that at the end of the *Satires* it was apparently ‘enough’ for Horace, much as it is too for his readers (p. 95). As sympathetic as this may sound, it does not come close to an explanation. And why does Horace after four Books of *Odes* return to hexametrical poetry in his *Epistles*? What connection is there with the *Satires*? Holzberg

opens his chapter on the *Epistles* simply by stating that Horace wrote 23 letters in verse, and moves on to analyze them in turn (p. 187). And after this analysis, the book abruptly ends, without any form of synthesis or conclusion. Surely, some remarks on Horace's oeuvre as a whole, or its impact on Roman and later literature, could be expected here.

One wonders, accordingly, what specific target audience Holzberg envisaged. A general, non-Latin readership perhaps? The book contains hardly any Latin and no footnotes, and Horace's texts are normally given in Holzberg's own, German translations. Most of these are printed somehow like Horatian verse, to show something of the metrical diversity, but the German texts are technically prose. All of this seems less felicitous for the non-Latin reader, who cannot feel Horace's poetical qualities in this way, and who will perhaps even experience some difficulty in reading the book as a whole. Neither will the numerous added remarks on metre be of much help in this sense. The classical, scholarly reader, on the other hand, will miss the Latin as well as references to scholarly literature. Nonetheless, both groups of readers will certainly find enough in this study that will motivate them to take up and read, or reread, Horace.

To sum up: Holzberg's book on Horace is a welcome addition to his impressive scholarly output, and it will serve readers and lovers of Horace well, mainly on account of its close attention for the poet's words and the enlightening *linear reading* of his works. Especially classicists who have their edition of Horace lying opened beside this book will find Holzberg an inspiring and helpful guide, who opens up new layers in Horace's poems and helps to refine their interpretation.

An English edition (preferably tailored to the needs of a classical readership) would be most desirable.

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