David R. Slavitt, *Horace*, *Odes*. Translated with commentary, Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, xiv + 184 pp., ISBN 978-0-299-29854-8.

David Slavitt is a phenomenon. According to the catalog of my university library, since 1971 he has published forty-six volumes of translations of texts in a variety of languages, including Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, French and Italian. His body of original writing–poetry, novels, essays and memoirs–is equally large. (Slavitt has also published novels under a variety of pseudonyms; the best known is *The Exhibitionist* (1967) by "Henry Sutton," a steamy potboiler in the manner of Harold Robbins or Jacqueline Susann, which sold more than four million copies.) The present translation of Horace's *Odes* joins a corpus of Latin classical authors that includes Plautus, Lucretius, Virgil, ps.-Virgil, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, Senecan tragedy, Statius, Valerius Flaccus, Claudian, Prudentius, Avianus and Ausonius.

In addition to being uncommonly prolific, Slavitt (hereafter S.) is known for a distinctive approach to translation, one that often departs from the surface meaning of the text in pursuit of a deeper level of poetic expression. The results reflect S.'s own poetic personality to a degree rare in translations of the Latin classics. A small sampling of reviewers' comments (drawn for convenience from the archives of *BMCR*) reveals a high degree of unanimity on this point: "<S.> gives us a skewed reflection of the texts he translates, sometimes upside-down, often beautiful, but one that hides much of the depth and sense of the Latin from view" (Peter Heslin, *BMCR* 1998.11.16 on Statius' *Achilleid* and Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*); "The wording ... is rather free, and reflects more the style of the translator than that of Valerius" (A. J.Kleywegt, *BMCR* 2000.6.22); "Slavitt does not translate either the *Eclogues* or the *Georgics* in our usual understanding of the word. ... Instead of Vergil, we encounter Slavitt and his own poetic response to the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*" (James Clauss, *BMCR* 2015.02.02); "The text is hardly recognizable as a translation, for, as he says, 'I have tried to do the voice' ..." (Roger Wright, *BMCR* 1997.4.13, on hymns of Prudentius). While critics agree in describing S.'s method, they vary widely in their response to it, ranging from condemnation ("a tedious lesson on how not to render Latin verse into English," Lee Fratantuono, *BMCR* 2008.12.41, on Lucretius; "a highly compromised work of limited usefulness at best," William Levitan, *BMCR* 2003.05.22, on Seneca's tragedies) to warm acceptance ("clever, well-wrought translations that do much to capture the spirit of much of the *Appendix*," Holly Sypniewski, *BMCR* 2012.8.55).
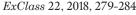
S.'s translation of the *Odes* is accompanied by what his publisher misleadingly calls a commentary; it is in fact a set of notes following each ode, many only a couple of paragraphs in length. The notes contain relatively little information about the odes themselves; their main focus is rather on the translations and on the choices S. made in producing them, and as such they offer valuable insight into the translation process. Many of S.'s observations pertain to a single issue, whether to retain Horace's numerous geographical and mythological references, gloss them in the translation, or leave them out. So the note on *Odes* 3.30 explains two of S.'s decisions: to keep Horace's reference to the river Aufidus instead of replacing it with its modern counterpart (Ofanto, judged too obscure to be helpful) and to leave Melpomene unglossed ("Readers may not be able to identify her as the Muse of music and tragedy, but they'll know she's a Muse, and that should be enough."). As those two examples suggest, the rationale S. offers for his choices is generally either persuasive or at least reasonable.

S.'s notes also characterize the relationship of his translations to the original in broader terms, and here a reader acquainted with S.'s usual approach is in for a surprise. While both the Introduction and the programmatic note to *Odes* 1.1 stake a claim for translations that "maintain the density of the linguistic event" (p. 5) rather than reproduce the literal sense, in a remarkable number of cases S. asserts the closeness of his versions to the original. The notes to nearly a third of the odes feature some variation on this theme, of which I cite a few examples:

1.4 My only departure from the Latin text worth any special comment is in the last line.

1.5 I have taken only a few liberties ... .

1.7 My only meddling is a slight transposition in the last two lines.

1.11 My only minor fiddle was to change Horace's *pumicibus* (pumice) to unspecified "rocks."

1.19 I haven't imposed any embellishments.

2.10 I did this pretty much as it comes.

3.24 I have stayed close to the Latin.

4.3 I followed along fairly scrupulously.

4.7 I have made only a couple of trivial alterations.

4.15 Otherwise, [i.e., apart from a couple of minor alterations] it is almost line for line, if not verbatim.

Many of those claims to fidelity do not stand up to scrutiny, but it must be said that the impression they give, of a translator striving to remain close to Horace, has some foundation in fact. These translations are for the most part recognizable as versions of Horace's Latin, rather than poems by David Slavitt loosely based on Horatian texts. Many individual lines and stanzas,

and some entire odes, can be read without offense by someone familiar with the original, and some of S.'s own touches are inspired (e.g., 1.9.3-4 "the iced-over rivers glint silver" for *geluque / flumina constiterint acuto*).

There are relatively few examples of the sort of intrusion that replaces Horace's voice with S.'s own. One instance comes in 1.3, where lines 27-33

> audax Iapeti genus
>   ignem fraude mala gentibus intulit;
> post ignem aetheria domo
>   subductum macies et noua febrium
> terris incubuit cohors,
>   semotique prius tarda necessitas
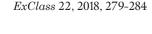> leti corripuit gradum.

are rendered as

> Prometheus brought fire
>   to the tribes of men and eagerly we ascended
> from the state of nature
>   to civilization with all of its imperfections
> including sickness and death.

Another mars the translation of 2.7, where Horace recalls leaving his shield behind at Philippi, following in the footsteps of Archilochus and Alcaeus. S. sees a reference "to the many Greek epigrams about coming back from the battle with your shield or on it" (as far as I know there are no such epigrams, only a statement in Plutarch that Spartan mothers so admonished their sons) and inserts this misunderstanding into the text: "I left my little shield behind, / despite all the Greek epigrams." This is a particularly unfortunate instance of S.'s recurring practice of spelling out allusions; two others are the opening of 1.18 "No tree could be more important, Alcaeus says somewhere, / than the god-given vine" and 1.34, where S. interpolates two references to Lucretius; the second of them borders on incoherence: "But I take it back, having seen the fire / flash as the god's horses thundered across / the blue heaven Lucretius says / cannot happen—although it does." S.'s expansion of the end of 3.14 is typical of the banality of many of his insertions:

> lenit albescens animos capillus
> litium et rixae cupidos proteruae;
> non ego hoc ferrem calidus iuuenta
>   consule Planco.
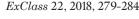> Years ago, I wouldn't have put up

with nonsense like that,
but the hot blood of youth cools, and quarrels
and fights seem less entertaining. I'm older now
and also at peace. That, too, is cause for relief
     and sober celebration.

S.'s most high-handed intervention is his relegation of the final stanza of 3.3 to the accompanying note. His justification? "There's another stanza, but it makes no sense there and it works well as the first stanza of the following ode. Figure it to be a copyist's error." The argument that the lines in question do not fit their context is hard to understand: Horace rebukes his Muse for overstepping her bounds and bids her "cease reporting the speeches (*sermones*) of the gods," referring to the speech of Juno that fills most of the poem (18-68); the pullback from grand themes is very similar to the last stanza of the ode to Pollio (2.1). In support of his notion that the lines could begin 3.4, S. alters the sense of the final words (*desine ... magna modis tenuare paruis*, "cease reducing great themes to your small measures") to something more introductory: "Let us resume our modest business."

But while wholesale rewriting may be relatively rare, S.'s versions depart from the sense of the original in hundreds of smaller but telling ways. I begin with some of the poems that S. claims to have translated closely.

In 1.5 (the Pyrrha ode) S.'s "few liberties" include turning the address to Pyrrha that occupies three of the four stanzas into a third-person statement and eliminating the sea imagery that lays the foundation for the final stanza. In 1.9, of which S. says "I didn't add anything or leave out anything," the metaphor in *lucro appone* (14-15) and the color contrast in *donec uirenti canities abest* (17) have disappeared, while the closing lines are a complete (and debilitating) invention: "a ring that you will return, / as she well knows, promptly enough." In 1.11, in addition to the "minor fiddle" mentioned above, S. renders the opening line "Don't try to figure out the plans the gods / may have for you," omitting the *quem mihi* of the Latin ("for you, for me") and thereby obscuring the strong suggestion that Leuconoe is a prospective lover trying to discover what the future has in store for her and Horace. Later in the poem S. omits *sapias, uina liques*, "be sensible, and strain the wine," removing another element of the poem's scenario. In 2.13 ("almost word for word from the Latin"), the rendering of lines 21-2 "some accident that carries us / off into the dark kingdom / where Proserpine rules and Aeacus judges" is some distance from a literal version ("how close we came to seeing the kingdom of Proserpina and Aeacus the judge"), and in lines 30-2 S. misses the detail that the shades listen more attentively (*magis*) to the subjects of Alcaeus' songs than to Sappho's. In 3.26 ("I left this almost untouched") S.'s

"when I was young" is the opposite of Horace's *nuper* ("recently"), and the painfully flat lines "I thank you, Venus, for all your gifts / which I now reciprocate" correspond to nothing in the Latin.

How are we to account for the disparity between S.'s description of his translations and the actual product? It seems at least possible that, after decades spent rewriting the work of other authors to suit his own notions of style or imagery or wit, S. can no longer readily distinguish between a rendering that preserves the sense of the original and one that departs from it.

Of many other examples I select a few. 2.11.5-8 "Beauty and youth / fade quickly enough, / and the hair on our heads turns gray, / so that we sleep better. Wild love affairs / trouble us no longer." Horace says that old age drives away both wild love affairs and easy sleep. 2.12.9-11 "as you, Maecenas, know having set down / accounts in earnest prose / of the battles of Caesar." Horace says that Maecenas will write such accounts (*dices*). 2.17.1 "Your gloomy predictions are not necessarily true, / for all your constant grumbles" hardly catches the exasperation of *cur me querelis exanimas tuis?* ("Why are you killing me with your complaints?"). 3.1.33-4 "The fish, meanwhile, are alarmed that the water is shrinking / as workmen lengthen the piers / for magnates' pleasure vessels." Neither piers nor pleasure vessels are in the Latin. 3.9.7-8 "I was delighted / the equal of any, as famous as the mother / of Romulus and Remus." The Latin has *clarior*, "more famous." The comparative is essential for the competitive nature of the exchange; the woman is capping the man's claim to have been happier (*beatior*) than the king of Persia. 3.20.5-6 "Nearchus / whose lady's not a lioness but a cougar." S.'s interpolation of the cougar (defined as "the woman of a certain age who likes boy toys") makes nonsense of Horace's subsequent lioness-like description of the woman. 3.29.44-8 "Tomorrow, Father Jove can cover the sky / with dark clouds or fill it with bright sunshine, / but he cannot revise the past or keep / the present from taking away what it pleases." I am not sure whether the final phrase makes sense on its own terms; it certainly does not reflect the sense of the Latin: "nor will he undo or render void what time in its flight has once carried off."

A number of the statements about the odes in S.'s notes are inaccurate. Several misstatements concern questions of meter. S. describes 1.1 (in asclepiads) as having "lines of five metrical feet"; in fact the line comprises four units: a spondaic base, two choriambs, and an iambic conclusion. On 1.4 (greater archilochian + iambic trimeter catalectic) S. writes "the alternation between longer and shorter lines is perfectly normal. This is the way elegiac poetry proceeds." That could be a mystifyingly elliptical statement (with the unsaid addendum "although of course this meter is not elegiac"), but the more straightforward reading would be that S. thinks the poem is in elegiac couplets, an impossibility for a collection of lyrics. I would not ascribe such a blunder to S. were it not for the fact that he unambiguously describes 4.10

(greater asclepiadean) as written in hexameters—another impossibility for the *Odes*. On 3.9 S. notes "nobody can be sure about Latin pronunciation, but my guess here is that the last two syllables in Calaïs' name should be pronounced separately." The asclepiad meter leaves no room for doubt on that score. S. interprets the absence of Tiberius' name in 4.14 as a snub meant to please Augustus (who allegedly disliked his stepson). The explanation is simpler: the three short opening syllables of Tiberius' name made it metrically inadmissible.

Finally, the standard of proofreading is not high. Proper names are especially vulnerable: 1.4 Sestus (for Sestius), 1.6 Rufinus (for Rufus), 1.8 Sybarus (for Sybaris), 1.16 Chorybantes (for Corybantes), 1.24 Quintillian (for Quintilius), 2.2 Proculus (for Proculeius), 2.4 Xanthius (for Xanthias), 2.10 Lucinius (for Licinius), 4.2 note Iullis (for Iullus), 4.8 Marcius (for Marcus) and Tyndarius (for Tyndareus). The four lines of Latin from 2.12 quoted as a dedication on p. vii contain two errors (*Licymnia* for *Licymniae* and *aoribus* for *amoribus*).

"Those who know the Latin can see easily enough what liberties I have taken to do Horace justice." (Introduction, p. xiv) That is true, and it suggests that those persons make up the most suitable audience for this book. Readers without that capability will not be given a false impression of the kind of poet Horace was, but much of the pleasure of his poetry resides in the details, and on that level Slavitt cannot be accounted a trustworthy guide.

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