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Victoria Moul

## Translation As Commentary? The Case of Ben Jonson's *Ars Poetica*

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Victoria Moul

## Translation As Commentary? The Case of Ben Jonson's *Ars Poetica*

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- 1 Richard Stoneman describes the Elizabethan period as “perhaps the greatest age of translation in our history” (Stoneman, 1982: 5), and G. A. E. Parfitt remarks of Jonson himself that “such formal translations as [he] produced represent only one extreme of a habit of mind which, for good or ill, is constantly at work in his poetry” (Parfitt, 1973: 344). Translation and extended imitation of classical literature is found throughout his work, in poetry, prose and drama alike. But Jonson's close translations (as opposed to his imitative practice more generally) have not been the subject of much serious study, and are often dismissed as examples of “literal” or “word by word” translation of the most stultifying kind.
- 2 Jonson's engagement with the works of Horace is perhaps the most prominent, as well as long-standing, of his creative interactions with classical literature. His exploration ranges from generic imitation of a general kind, often marked out by the choice of titles for his works (including odes, epodes, epistles and satires), through many passages of extended imitation of Horace, to close translation. Of the close translations, several are incorporated into larger works (as in *Poetaster*), while others remain free-standing (as the translations of *Epodes* 2 and *Odes* III. 9 and IV. 1).
- 3 But by far the most significant such project is Jonson's translation of the whole of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, a verse treatise on poetic technique and the role of the poet in the state, in the form of a lengthy epistle addressed to the Piso brothers. Jonson's engagement with this, Horace's last epistle, was of long-standing. Although both versions of his translation were finally published in 1640 (one in the duodecimo edition of the *Poems*, the other in the folio), the former of these dates from 1604, while the latter certainly post-dates Daniel Heinsius' critical reorganisation of the text, published in 1610.<sup>1</sup> There is in addition evidence of a “preface” to the work, apparently read to Drummond in 1619, but lost in the fire of 1623.<sup>2</sup> Jonson's edition of Horace included the *Ars Poetica*, and he also owned a separate edition of the *Ars Poetica* with a commentary by Aldus Manutius the younger (Manutius [ed.], 1576). In the edition of Horace owned by Jonson and now in the Cambridge University Library, the *Ars Poetica* is heavily underlined (Parthenius [ed.], 1584).<sup>3</sup>
- 4 An interest in the *Ars Poetica* accords with Jonson's taste for Horace's literary-critical hexameter verse (*Satires* I. 4 and II. 1; *Epistles* I. 18, II. 1 and II. 2 all feature repeatedly in his work), but the translation itself has proved problematic and critically unpopular. Herford and Simpson condemn it as “wooden” (Herford and Simpson, 1925-1952: XI, 110) and Charles Martindale, in his defence of that which, borrowing from Dryden, he terms “metaphrase” remarks that this particular work “it may be conceded, is rather dogged” (Martindale, 1984: 54).<sup>4</sup>
- 5 Certainly, the style of Jonson's translation is very far from the scope or fluidity of Dryden's *Aeneid*, although Jonson's work was undoubtedly important to Dryden. As an English poem, read without reference to the Latin, it is sometimes hard to follow, but at its best Jonson's “metaphrase” of Horace's Latin produces a texture, poised between the two languages, of strength and interest.<sup>5</sup> This article is a very brief attempt to consider some of the ways in which this closest of translation styles can nevertheless include interpretation and even contention: a kind of implicit commentary which holds in balance both Latin and English, as well as the cultural and temporal space which at once divides and unites them.

6 The reading of the poem has been complicated by the reception-history of the Latin text itself. Heinsius' attempt to reorder the thought of the poem, although now universally considered misguided, reflects the difficulty presented by the Latin: the *Ars Poetica* is itself notoriously obscure in its intention and design, and has attracted relatively little critical attention compared to the rest of Horace's work. The "didactic" content is real (although, like other elements of Horace's use of philosophy, neither original nor especially consistent), but the poem is framed as an epistle. Ellen Oliensis describes the tone of the work as follows:

What Horace teaches the Piso brothers is finally not what to do or not to do but what he can do and they cannot. Horace's disquisition on the art which is the source of his authority (social and poetic) is addressed to an audience that boasts conventional social advantages Horace cannot claim, and this conjunction of subject matter and audience produces an extremely volatile blend of authority and deference: a 'masterwork' which is also a study in self-defacement, an educational essay which is also an exercise in antididaxis. (Oliensis, 1998: 198-199)

7 The "blend of authority and deference" which Oliensis reads in the original Latin poem is reflected and refracted by Jonson's project of translation, at once minutely close to the Latin, and contentiously different. Horace's mixture of "authority and deference" towards the Piso brothers (and to his powerful addressees more generally) is mirrored in Jonson's combined subordination to, and appropriation of, Horace's poetic manifesto.<sup>6</sup> Jonson's translation focuses upon, and opens up, not only his lifelong engagement with Horace, and the creative pressure exerted by Latin upon English, but also the challenge of maintaining freedom within patronage (or imitation), and the location of that linguistic "grace" (variously recognition, payment and a kind of divine sanction) which the poet seeks.

### Jonsonian metaphrase

8 Even a cursory reading of Jonson's *Ars Poetica* reveals the care that has been taken to preserve the details of Latin word order, sometimes to the extent of obscuring the meaning or movement of the English line. Jonson avoids, however, very literal translations of terms specific to Roman society, usually appending *our* to the gloss he provides: *centuriae seniorum* (358 of Latin, OCT 341) becomes *our grave men* (511).<sup>7</sup> The pronoun at once bridges, and draws attention to, the historical distance between the Latin and English texts.

9 Several passages of the *Ars* are marked by an extended kind of understated, but significant, expansion and alteration. Such passages often reflect Jonsonian preoccupations evident elsewhere in his work. The idea of a morally corrective literature which succeeds in combining "profit" with "pleasure" appears several times in Jonson; in the prologue to *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Asper's harsh Juvenalian satire is modulated by Cordatus and Mitis' promotion of this explicitly Horatian mixture, a more (satirically) effective weapon than invective. A close reading of Jonson's translation of the Horatian lines in question reveals the breadth of association gathered around these terms:

Ficta, voluptatis causa, sint proxima veris.  
 Nec quodcumque volet, poscat sibi fabula credi :  
 Neu pransae *Lamiae* vivum puerum extrahat alvo.  
 Centuriae seniorum agitant expertia frugis :  
 Celsi praetereunt austera poemata *Rhannes*.  
 Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci,  
 Lectorem delectando, pariterque monendo.  
 Hic meret aera liber *Sosiis* : hic & mare transit,  
 Et longum noto scriptori prorogat aeuum.  
 (355-363; OCT 338-346)<sup>8</sup>

Let what thou fain'st for pleasures sake, be neere  
 The truth; nor let thy Fable thinke, what e're  
 It would, must be: lest it alive would draw  
 The Child, when *Lamia*'has din'd, out of her maw.

The Poems void of profit, our grave men  
 Cast out by voyces; want they pleasure, then  
 Our Gallants give them none, but passe them by:  
 But he hath every suffrage, can apply  
 Sweet mix'd with sowre, to his Reader, so  
 As doctrine and delight together go.  
 This booke will get the *Sosii* money; This  
 Will passe the Seas, and long as nature is,  
 With honour make the farre-knowne Author live.  
 (507-519)

10 The successive transferral of grammatical subject from the work of art itself (*Fable*, 508), to the possible readers (*our grave men*, 511; *our Gallants*, 513), to the poet (*But he*, 514) and back to the book (*This booke*, 517) captures the lively movement of the Latin; and the playful suggestion of the artwork's own personification, established with *nec [...] poscat sibi fabula credi* (356; OCT 339) is well sustained, and even enhanced: the position of the adjective *alive* in line 509 suggests, at least temporarily, that what lives is not the child who had earlier been consumed, but the *Fable* itself, with its own voluptuous appetite. As English verse, however, these lines are difficult; the referents of the pronouns in the opening lines—especially *they* and *them* in 512-513—are only clear on comparison with the Latin text.

11 Moreover, despite the preserved personification, the overall tone of this verse paragraph departs significantly from the diction and texture of the Latin: Jonson's choice of more abstract terms increases the resonance of the central dichotomies (between youth and age, pleasure and instruction), and places a firmer insistence upon the artistic power of their successful resolution. Compare for instance the worldly-wise tone of Rudd's translation of lines 355-361 (OCT 338-344):

Make sure that fictions designed to amuse are close to reality. A play should not expect us to take whatever it offers—  
 like 'child devoured by ogress is brought alive from her belly'.  
 The senior bloc chases plays which haven't a message;  
 the haughty young bloods curl their nostrils at anything dry;  
 everyone votes for the man who mixes wholesome and sweet,  
 giving his reader an equal blend of help and delight.  
 (Rudd, 1973 : 199)

12 Horace employs a varied cluster of words and phrases, associated in context by the parallel thoughts, but rhetorically distinct: *voluptatis, proxima veris, expertia frugis, austera, utile and dulci, delectando* and *monendo* (meaning something like *pleasure, near to the truth, devoid of fruit[fullness], harsh, useful, sweet, by pleasing/giving enjoyment* and *by warning*). The variety of register and grammatical structure gives the lines a conversational movement. In Jonson's text these terms become: *for pleasures sake, neere / The truth, void of profit, want they pleasure, sweet mix'd with sowre* applied to the reader *so / As doctrine, and delight together go*. The collection of abstract nouns is starker and more uniform than the Latin modulation between nouns, adjectives and gerunds (the adjectives *sweet* and *sowre* in line 515 are likewise acting as, or very close, to nouns), and this uniformity in parts of speech helps to connect the series of contrasts as parallel to one another. Jonson's repeated term *pleasure* (tacitly implied a third time by the phrase *our Gallants give them none*, 513) adds to this effect.

13 Similarly, the terms *truth* and *doctrine* are much closer in tone than the Latin *proxima veris* and *monendo*, and the convergence heightens the solemnity of both. The general raising of the tone shifts, too, the implication even of the closest translations: whereas Horace's phrase *proximaveris* suggests, sensibly but slightly prosaically, that the reader's credulity shouldn't be stretched too far, Jonson's *truth*, in the context of *doctrine, command* and *precepts* (lines 503-504) becomes a more seriously ethical injunction.

14 The folio edition of Jonson's translation, on which this article is based, follows Heinsius (1610) in the reordering of the Latin text; as a result this section is displaced from its position in the Oxford Classical Text edition (Wickham, 1901). In the OCT, as indeed in Jonson's own edition of Parthenius, 1584, and in his earlier version of the translation these lines closely follow the passage that introduces the *utiledulci* theme (lines 330-334 in both the OCT and the reordered text, following Heinsius, given in the folio).<sup>9</sup>

15 A close examination of Jonson's translation of this earlier passage, the initial treatment of this central stylistic and ethical pair of terms, adds to, and reinforces the conclusions noted above. At this point in the *AP*, Horace has been celebrating the Greeks for their love of praise alone (rather than gain), in comparison to the Roman youth, who are swift and glib mental mathematicians, interested only in profit. Jonson's version continues:

O, when once the canker'd rust,  
And care of getting, thus, our minds hath stain'd,  
Thinke wee, or hope, there can be Verses fain'd  
In juyce of *Cedar* worthy to be steep'd,  
And in smooth *Cypresse* boxes to be keep'd?  
Poets would either profit, or delight,  
Or mixing sweet, and fit, teach life the right.  
(472-478)<sup>10</sup>

Ad haec animos aerugo, et cura peculi,  
Cum semel imbuerit, speramus carmina fingi  
Posse linenda cedro, & levi servanda cupresso ?

Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare Poetae,  
Aut simul & iucunda, & idonea dicere vitae.  
(330-334 in both Latin texts)<sup>11</sup>

16 According to the terms of these lines, minds (*animos*, 330) and poems (*carmina*, 331), can be subject to spoiling by rust or preservation by oil, in common with the metal (of money) and wood (of an expensive document-case) with which they are here associated. It is not the coins themselves that suffer verdigris (*aerugo*, 330; Jonson's *the canker'd rust*, 472), but the Romans' hearts and minds, when preoccupied by financial gain; and the phrase *linenda cedro* (332), meaning *fit to be smeared with cedar-oil* (i.e. as a preservative) is transferred from the box to the poems themselves. Jonson's choice of the similar verbs *stain'd* (for the minds, 473) and *steep'd* (for *linenda*) emphasises the connection, and with it the logic of the image: the rusted, and thus decaying mind is opposed to the preserved—and so lasting—possible product of that mind, poetry.

17 Jonson's text, unlike many modern translations, has no paragraph break at this point. The aphoristic, and well-known lines, 333-334, are thereby presented not as a new thought, but rather as the conclusion of the lines already discussed, and Jonson's translation likewise works to form an association between them. But this couplet accomplishes an important and interesting transition, typical of the side-stepping, conversational progression of Horatian argument. The first pair of oppositions attributed to poets, *prodesse* and *delectare* (333), seem in Jonson's version to map neatly upon the terms of the preceding lines: poets must choose between the desire to *profit* (477), a translation of *prodesse* that reminds us of the money-grubbing (and therefore unlasting) Roman youths, and to *delight*.<sup>12</sup>

18 Then, however, we discover that this apparent opposition can be reconciled and combined —*aut simul & iucunda, & idonea dicere vitae* (334). Jonson's translation at this point is also worthy of comment. Most translations read the two objects of *dicere* as *iucunda* and *idonea vitae*: something along the lines of *pleasant* and *useful for life*; Jonson's *sweet* and *fit* (which echoes, and reinterprets, the *profit* of the previous line) are clearly meant to translate these two Latin phrases, but his line reads *vitae* as a dative after *dicere*, and includes an additional term: *teach* (for the weaker *dicere*, *say*) *life the right*. The final impression is much stronger than the

Latin line: Jonson's translation suggests not only that the excellent poet combines elements of moral advice (with a lingering hint of financial advantage from *profit*) with aesthetic pleasure, but that this combination as it appears in art is itself instructive, shows *life* itself how to take shape for the best. This web of association prepares us for the surprising juxtaposition of the closing couplet of the verse paragraph, in which the triumphant Roman poet's blend of *delectando* and *monendo* leads to a second productive combination—not, in fact, ethical value and aesthetic pleasure, but rather financial gain and immortal glory:

Hic meret aera liber *Sosii*: hic & mare transit,  
Et longum noto scriptori prorogat aevum.  
(362-363; OCT 345-346)

This booke will get the *Sosii* money; This  
Will passe the Seas, and long as nature is,  
With honour make the farre-knowne Author live.  
(517-519)

- 19 The bluntness of *get the Sosii money* is an accurate rendition of the Latin's humourous matter-of-fact transition. But the translation of the second part of the sentence is rather different. Jonson has added the detail *honour*, of which there is no mention in the Latin: Horace's wry portrait of an author might equally be infamous. But most striking are the two expansions of *nature* and *live*.<sup>13</sup> The Latin has nothing corresponding to the forceful *live* at the end of the sentence, and the meaning of the lines is distinct. Horace's text claims that the book itself will grant the well-known author a long life, or an old age. The phrase *long as nature is*, ambiguously adverbial (with *make*) or adjectival (significantly, with either the book or the *Author*), is a substantial expansion of *longum [...] aevum*. Jonson's addition of *nature* extends the comparison of the author's immortality not to the empire (the terms of the extent of Ovid's fame at *Metamorphoses*, XV. 871-879), or even to Roman culture (*cf.* Horace *Odes* III. 30)—both of which will finally fade and which, for Jonson himself, have already done so—but rather to *nature* itself.
- 20 The very terms *utile* (360; OCT 343) or *idonea* (334 in both) have, in this translation, come to carry the weight of a resolved opposition, bearing the force of both *profitable* (in financial terms) and *doctrinal* (not only morally but almost religiously): the combination guarantees not only material success but also an artistic immortality that reaches out from Horace's Latin into Jonson's English. The translation constitutes a particular reading of the Latin lines, one alive to the combination of glory and worldly success; but that reading is also especially conscious of the act of translation—at once testimony to, and an instantiation of, the still "living" significance of Horace's own work.

## Virtue and grace: translation and divine inspiration

- 21 At several points, then, Jonson's translation of Horace's Latin incorporates a raising of tone, a reading of the Latin verse which emphasises and expands the scope of the poet's power and significance. This distinctive tonal heightening can be traced in the incorporation in this translation of the loaded term *grace*, one of Jonson's favourite words; resonant of inspiration as well as thanks (or even payment) it is repeatedly a key term at the conjunction of panegyric and literary criticism in his work. The intrusion of this word in his translation of a poem on literary style and technique is therefore of particular interest.
- 22 Consider for instance the passage from lines 53-64:

Take, therefore, you that write, still, matter fit  
Unto your strength, and long examine it,  
Upon your shoulders. Prove what they will beare,  
And what they will not. Him, whose choice doth reare  
His matter to his power, in all he makes,  
Nor language, nor cleere order ere forsakes.

The vertue of which order, and true grace,  
 Or I am much deceiv'd, shall be to place  
 Invention. Now, to speake; and then differ  
 Much, that mought now be spoke: omitted here  
 Till fitter season. Now, to like of this,  
 Lay that aside, the *Epicks* office is.

Sumite materiam vestris, qui scribitis, aequam  
 Viribus, & versate diu, quid ferre recusent,  
 Quid valeant humeri. Cui lecta potenter erit res  
 Nec facundia deserit hunc, nec lucidus ordo.  
 Ordinis haec virtus erit, & venus, aut ego fallor,  
 Ut iam nunc dicat, iam nunc debentia dici,  
 Pleraque differat, & praesens in tempus omittat.  
 Hoc amet, hoc spernat promissi carminis autor.<sup>14</sup>  
 (38-45 in both Latin texts).

- 23 Lines 56-58 render the Latin: *cui lecta potenter erit res, / nec facundia deserit hunc, nec lucidus ordo* (40-41). A literal translation might be: *as for him, whose subject-matter is suitably chosen—neither eloquence nor clear structure shall desert him*. The translation of *potenter* presents problems: Rudd suggests *within his capabilities*, but admits that this meaning has no exact parallel in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*; he offers *effectively* as a more defensible, if less satisfactory option (Rudd, 1989: 155).
- 24 Either way, Jonson's translation is a substantial expansion: the conversion of the adverb (*potenter*) to an abstract noun (*his power*) to balance the *res* is much more forceful than the Latin phrase. The past participle *lecta* has also become an abstract noun, *his choice*, and combined with the addition of the verb *reare* (which has no analogue in the Latin) creates a quite different connotation. *Lecta* (picked out, chosen) anticipates the judiciousness with which the fine poet of the following lines will choose his words and topics (43-44 of the Latin). Jonson's sentence suggests less a humble limiting of scope to that of which he is capable (albeit a trope which is always a double-edged suggestion in Horace, that lover of *recusatio*), but rather a *raising* of subject-matter—almost an education or inculcation of it—in view of the poet's potential.<sup>15</sup>
- 25 This intensification of the sense of the Latin continues. The translation of *facundia* (*ease of speech* or *eloquence*) as *language* adds to the generalising and aggrandising progression. *Language* is a much stronger and more widely-applicable term than *facundia*, and once again broadens the application of the line from a straightforward matter of stylistics (this is how to write smoothly and clearly) to something closer to: this is how to write at all; how to command language itself (remember that insistent *power*).
- 26 Horace continues his description of the *lucidus ordo*: *ordinis haec virtus erit, et venus, aut ego fallor, / ut iam nunc dicat, iam nunc debentia dici, / pleraque differat, et praesens in tempus omittat* (42-44). The balance of the male quality (*virtus*) against the female (*venus*) is, as Rudd points out, almost untranslatable (Rudd, 1989: 156); but an attempt at such a translation might opt for something along the lines of *strength and charm*.<sup>16</sup> Jonson's translation has: *The virtue of which order, and true grace* (59)—a line which fails fully to capture the delicate and almost gendered balance of the Latin abstractions, but imports a rather different element. Retaining *virtue* for *virtus*, and combining it with the weighted phrase *true grace* (the adjective without analogue in the Latin) adds a distinctly theological overtone. A passage which in Horace describes the importance of the careful and elegant, but ultimately solely aesthetic, positioning of individual words for maximum effect, is elevated by Jonson's diction into a mastery of language and form which hints at divine inspiration, and also at divine commendation of the poet's own moral excellence.<sup>17</sup>
- 27 In line with this persistent intensification, the verse paragraph concludes with one of the most explicit alterations. The phrase *promissi carminis autor* (45 of the Latin, Horace means the

author of a commissioned work) is translated with the striking phrase: *the Epicks office* (64). Once again, Jonson has added to the material he translates: there is no term for *office* (cf. Latin *officium*, *duty*) in the Latin verse; an explicit articulation of duty and obligation is an expansion of the implication of the subjunctive verbs in the Latin text (*amet [...] spernat*), which bear the sense of should. But the key term is that *Epick*: used only here, the noun means *epic poet* but conflates, in yet another aggrandising move, the great poet with his greatest poem.<sup>18</sup>

28 These lines noticeably jettison the subtext of that Latin *promissi carminis*, namely, that the poet composes to order, and in exchange for payment. Although elsewhere Jonson is fascinated by the financial realities of patronage, the translation of this passage carefully suppresses the day-to-day demands of composition, and with it the realities of payment, and replaces them with diction redolent of the vatic poet. The *Epick* [poet] of these lines owes a sacred duty to the state—perhaps even to humanity, or art, in general—rather than any one patron, however noble.

### On language: constancy, change and redemption

29 Moreover, the subtle but sustained pattern of alterations in this passage is an introduction to the important lines (65-104; Latin 46-72) in which Horace discusses the poet's right to verbal innovation—and in particular, the poetic prerogative to restore lost words to the language and to introduce new ones.

Licuit, semperque licebit, Signatum praesente nota producere nomen.  
 Ut silvae foliis pronos mutantur in annos,  
 Prima cadunt ; ita verborum vetus interit aetas,  
 Et juvenum ritu florent modo nata, vigentque.  
 Debemur morti nos, nostraque : [...](58-63 in both Latin texts)

It hath beene ever free,  
 And ever will, to utter termes that bee  
 Stamp'd to their time. As woods whose change appears  
 Still in their leaves, throughtout the sliding yeares,  
 The first-borne dying; so the aged state  
 Of words decay, and phrases borne but late  
 Like tender buds shoot up, and freshly grow.  
 Our selves, and all that's ours, to death we owe.  
 (83-90)<sup>19</sup>

30 These lines are the site of some substantial expansion and interpretation in Jonson's translation. The emphasis upon "freedom" (an important word for Jonson, and one frequently associated with artistic autonomy as well as freedom of speech), is a comprehensible, but not especially obvious, rendering of *licuit* and *licebit*.<sup>20</sup> The complex association of language, men and leafing or flowering trees is expanded in Jonson's lines. But of most interest is the extent to which, in this description of linguistic (and natural) change and decay, words for unchanging stability are oddly intrusive; even the metre of the line slows upon them. In Jonson's lines the woods do not *change their leaves* (*mutantur foliis*, 60); rather their *change appears*—appears, but then strangely remains: *Still in their leaves, throughout the sliding yeares* (86). *Still*, a word which recurs very frequently in Jonson, can mean at this period both *always* and *unmoving*. Clearly, the former meaning represents, as it were, the "translation" here; but we hear too the suggestion that somehow this distinctive *change* in fact does *not* move, *throughout* the years that precisely do (*the sliding yeares*). A similar, but smaller-scale effect is clustered around the resonant word *state*, rendering *aetas* (perhaps *generation*): *state* at this period means *grandeur* as well as *condition*—but a condition which is specifically a lasting (static) one. The logical truth of the epigrammatic final line of this extract, well translated here—*Ourselves, and all that's ours, to death we owe*—is in a kind of competition with a latent desire in Jonson's version to refuse to acknowledge this, at least in respect of (the poet's) language. Indeed, the act of translation itself, combined with the long literary pedigree of this comparison (with its

roots in *Iliad* VI, 146-149), serve to reinforce both aspects of the point: language does indeed change without ceasing—from Homer's Greek, to Horace's Latin, to Jonson's English—but the image, its resonance and truth, remains in some sense "the same."

31 Thomas Greene's influential discussion of modes of imitation in Renaissance literature takes as one of its exemplars this passage of the *Ars Poetica* (AP 60-72). He suggests that Renaissance imitation is marked by the search for what he calls "fixed linguistic ground" (Greene, 1982: 6) in the midst of the tendency of language to change and decay. He illustrates this awareness of linguistic mutability with Adam's comparison of human usage to leaves on a tree in Dante and its model in this passage of Horace (AP 60-72). Moreover, in his perceptive discussion of Jonson's own style of allusion and imitation, Greene uses the language of "redemption" to describe this search for stability: "The artistic problem in most of Jonson's ethical poems, which is to say the central, major poems in the canon, might be described as the problem of redeeming the necessary dynamism of existence" (Greene, 1982: 277).<sup>21</sup> Greene does not expand on the implications of his choice of word; nor does he discuss Jonson's translation of this passage of Horace in particular. But the tension described above between the continuous change (linguistically as well as temporally) evoked by Horace's lines, and the oddly resistant terminology of "stability" in Jonson's translation, is a telling demonstration of his point.

32 Even more revealing, then, that just a few lines later at the close of this verse paragraph a very similar cluster of adaptations reiterates these terms *state* and *still*, and adds the important theological term *grace*:

[...] Mortalia facta peribunt:  
Nedum sermonum stet honos, & gratia vivax.  
Multa renascentur, quae iam cecidere, cadentque  
Quae nunc sunt in honore, vocabula, si volet usus ;  
Quem penes arbitrium est, & vis, & norma loquendi.<sup>22</sup>(68-72 in both Latin texts)

All mortall deeds  
Shall perish: so farre of it is, the state,  
Or grace of speech, should hope a lasting date.  
Much phrase that now is dead, shall be reviv'd;  
And much shall dye, that now is nobly liv'd,  
If Custome please; at whose disposing will  
The power and rule of speaking resteth still.  
(98-104)

33 Horace is here defining language and its reference in terms of *use*, and the flow of the argument is clear: everything that is of man is eminently mortal; and what is more of man than speech itself? Although language will continue, individual words will always fall in and out of use. The sense of the Latin of 68-69 is something like: *Mortal things are made and will crumble; / so how can the glory and charm of speech remain alive?* But Jonson's translation, while faithful to the individual words, creates a rather different impression: *All mortall deeds / Shall perish: so farre off it is, the state, / Or grace of speech, should hope a lasting date* (98-100).

34 That *state* is a particularly clear example of Jonson's interest in stability. In its sense of *stateliness* it is a possible, if oblique, translation of *honos*, but Jonson has chosen the word to catch at *stet* too. *The state* is standing for *stethonos* (and in itself collapsing a verb and noun phrase into a single noun: a kind of miniature demonstration of his point).<sup>23</sup> Jonson then translates *gratia*—here something like *charm*—as *grace*. Again, the Latin could be rendered by *gracefulness* but *grace* in early modern English has a much wider range of meaning, among which the theological sense is prominent.<sup>24</sup>

35 Above all, the phraseology of these lines points us away from the literal meaning of the Latin. There is not one explicitly negative word in the English to correspond to the Latin *nedum*, and the logical connection (everything mortal perishes; so too therefore must speech itself) is

obscured. On the contrary, the *state and grace of speech* seems almost to be held up in *contrast* to the perishing of all that is mortal—something which is undoubtedly remote (*so farre off* [...]) but nevertheless in existence (*so farre off it is*). The final half of that line is not very clear. The final clause must mean something like: *so unlikely is it that speech's state or grace should hope for a lasting date*. But in the English the logical connection is elided almost beyond perception. In the Latin text, language will and must change and fade along with all that is mortal; in English, we glimpse the possibility of its redemption from that relentless mutation.

36 There is a similar tension in the translation of the final lines of this section:

If Custom please; at whose disposing will  
The power, and rule of speaking resteth still.  
(103-104; Latin 71-72)

37 Once more, the syntax is characteristically opaque. Without close reference to the Latin, the link between *custom* and *whose* is not immediately obvious. Jonson's translation of *quem penes arbitrium est et vis et norma loquendi* as *at whose disposing will / The power and rule of speaking* captures well the striking personification of *usus* as law-giver. Nevertheless the cluster of words *disposing will*, *power* and *rule* adds a theological tenor to this language of kingship. Moreover, the arrangement of the end of Jonson's line, like those examined above, works against its own ostensible meaning: *resteth still* is an interpolation to the Latin, and within the parameters of the Latin context can be read as *resides with now and always*. But the combination of two so deeply Jonsonian words suggests exactly the opposite: that the *rule of speaking* is in some—possibly religious or divine—sense in fact profoundly stable.

38 In his version of this passage, Jonson's Horace holds out a vision of the possible constancy of language, and the potential for poetic power that this entails. He is doing so between the lines, as it were, of Horace's declaration of the opposite; and he signposts this departure with a theological term, *grace*. But this constancy at once arrests, and draws its living energy from, continuous mutation. Moreover, the very act of translation—and particularly translating an already allusive passage—highlights this contradiction: despite the shift from one language to another, these lines have in some sense survived.

39 The *Ars Poetica* is itself a complex poem of subtlety and interest, both in style and content. It is also evidently of central importance to Jonson both as translator and, more generally, as a poet: his prose notes on moral and artistic matters, *Discoveries*, is indebted to it at many points. Nor is it the only substantial piece of classical, or even Horatian, translation undertaken by Jonson that survives and deserves greater attention. But in this short overview of his close engagement with Horace's text, I hope to have shown some of the ways in which translation even of this most precise and careful kind offered Jonson space, between the lines of the Latin, for creative interpretation. More than that, this "space" that opens between Jonson's English and his Latin text is repeatedly one concerned with, and occupied by, the stabilising, even immortalising, potential of translation itself. I have not in this essay been much concerned with the political force of this gesture, the consciousness of poetic power that lies behind it (as Oliensis might say: what Jonson can do and the king cannot), but I would like to end with a final extract which, in Jonson's translation, insists once again upon reading poetry at the centre of power; at the still point of lasting reward:

Dictae per carmina sortes,  
Et vitae monstrata via est, & gratia regum  
Pieriis tentata modis, ludusque repertus,  
Et longorum operum finis [...]  
(347-350; OCT 403-406)

The Oracles, too, were given out in Verse;  
All way of life was shewen; the grace of Kings

Attempted by the Muses tunes, and strings;  
 Playes were found out; and rest, the end, and crowne  
 Of their long labours, was in Verse set downe.  
 (497-501)

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## Notes

1 Jonson's translation is quoted from the folio version, unless noted otherwise. The Latin is quoted from the text printed on the facing page in the 1640 folio (although, since the volume was prepared posthumously, this was not necessarily the edition of the text that Jonson himself was using). Both are given in volume VIII of Herford and Simpson's edition of Jonson's poetry (Herford and Simpson, 1925-1952), from which all references are taken (including those to *Discoveries*, Jonson's prose work). Where there is a discrepancy between the Latin of the folio text, and the modern standard edition, a second reference is to the relevant line numbers in the Oxford Classical Text of Horace's works (Wickham, 1901). In quoting Jonson's text, I have preserved the spelling and italicisation as reproduced in Herford and Simpson, but modernised u/v and expanded some typographical contractions (e.g. for -que) that are now unfamiliar.

2 “[T]o me he read the Preface of his arte of Poesie, upon Horace Arte of poesie” (*Conversations with Drummond*, 82-83). See also the epistle *To the Readers* prefaced to *Sejanus* (1605): “But of this [that a playwright need not adhere to ancient laws of drama] I shall take more seasonable cause to speake; in my Observations upon *Horace* his *Art of Poetry*, which (with the Text translated) I intend, shortly to publish” (*To the Readers*, 15-18).

3 Jonson’s own copy is X. 9. 15 in Cambridge University Library. We cannot of course be certain that any particular underlining is his, although the marked passages very often correspond to the sections of translation of most interest or greatest diversion from the Latin. Where this is the case in a passage under discussion, I have remarked upon it in a footnote.

4 In his *Preface to Ovid’s Epistles* (1680), Dryden remarks: “All translation may, I suppose, be reduced to these three heads. First, that of metaphrase, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language to another. Thus, or near this manner, was Horace his *Art of Poetry* translated by Ben Jonson” (Dryden, 1962: I, 268-269). Reading Martindale’s work some years ago was an early spur to my thinking in these matters, and I remain indebted to it.

5 The printed presentation of the text alongside the Latin in the 1640 folio is apparently an invitation to close comparison, although we should remember that this arrangement was made posthumously, and we cannot be certain that it reflects Jonson’s own intention. Personally, I am convinced that Jonson intended and expected his translations to be appreciated by those who were themselves thoroughly familiar with the Latin text.

6 Brink remarks: “If the *Epistle to the Pisos* is the kind of poem I take it to be, it represents imaginatively, in a way no conceptual prose could, not only views on poetry but the ancient feeling for poetry [...] The *Ars* may well be seen as a poetic restatement of Horace’s in the original own poetry” (Brink, 1971: 521).

7 See also *our language* (82) for *sermonem patrium*; *our Italie* (411) for *Latium*; *Our Roman Youths* (464) for *Romani pueri*. Other glosses include *Roman Gentry* (160) for *Romani [...] equites peditesque* (113) and *The Roman Gentry, men of birth, and meane* (360) for the phrase *quibus est equus, & pater, & res* (254).

8 Lines 360-361 are underlined in Jonson’s copy of Parthenius, 1584. The terms *centuriae seniorum* and *Rhamnes* (now generally spelt without the *h*) refer to different groups of Roman citizens: *seniores* denotes men over 45, and the *Ramnes* were young men under 30.

9 Jonson’s own copy of Parthenius, 1584, which is heavily marked, has the same organisation as the OCT, as does the duodecimo edition of Jonson’s translation, in John Benson’s edition of the *Poems*, but almost certainly an earlier composition. It seems clear that this initial translation was working from Parthenius; and that the revisions of the folio edition of the translation can be traced to his return to the poem under the influence of Heinsius’s suggested reordering.

10 In the duodecimo edition these lines immediately precede 503 of the folio (“Be briefe, in what thou wouldst command [...]”).

11 The OCT text reads *an* for *ad* at 330. Lines 333-334 are underlined in Jonson’s edition of Parthenius, 1584.

12 Note too the translation of *frugis* (358, OCT 341) in the passage discussed above, as *profit* (511). Translations following the paragraph break of the modern text translate *prodesse* to align it more closely with *idonea*; Rudd for instance has *benefit* (Rudd, 1973 : 199).

13 Jonson’s *live* echoes several other famous Horatian lines. Compare for instance: *Epistles* I. 18. 107 (*ut mihi vivam / quod superest aevi*), *Satires* II. 6. 97 (*vive memor, quam sis aevi brevis*) and *Epistles* I. 19. 2 (*nulla placere diu nec vivere carmina possunt*). The final lines of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, themselves heavily indebted to Horace, also include both *aevi* and *vivam* in a similar context.

14 The OCT has *auctor* for *autor* here.

15 *Rear* is moreover a suggestive term in Jonson’s work. At *Forest* 12, the epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland, this verb echoes the combination of *feriam* and *sublimi* in Horace, *Odes* I. 1. 35: *There like a rich, and golden pyramede, / Borne up by statues, shall I rear your head* (*Forest* 12, 83-84).

16 Maryvonne Boisseau, in correspondence, has helpfully pointed out that part of the difficulty of translation resides in the prosodic elements of the Latin line, including the shift from the consonant -t to -n. Arguably, Jonson catches at something of this modulation in the shift of -r and -t from *virtue* to *true grace*. *Virtue* was certainly a “masculine” word for Jonson, conscious of its *vir-* element.

17 The association of the “ordering” of language with a kind of “grace,” and that in turn with lasting as opposed to fading meaning, recurs in *Discoveries*: “For Order helps much to Perspicuity, as Confusion

hurts [...] Whatsoever looseth the grace, and cleareness, converts into a Riddle; the obscurity is mark'd, but not the valew. That perisheth, and is past by, like the Pearle in the Fable." (*Discoveries*, 1989-1997).

18 This instance is the only reference given by the *OED* for *epic* as a noun meaning *an epic poet*.

19 Of these lines, 57-63 and 68-74 (next passage) are underlined in Jonson's edition of Parthenius, 1584.

20 A more literal translation might be: *It has been, and always shall be permitted*.

21 He rephrases this as "the artistic problem of redeeming existential dynamism" on the same page, and refers to "redeeming mobility" on p. 286.

22 I offer a less contentious translation for comparison: *Mortal deeds shall perish, / and no more shall the glory and charm of speech remain alive. / Many words which have now fallen away will be reborn, and many / which are now held in high esteem shall fall away, if common usage desires it. / Usage, to whom belongs the judgement, as well as the force and norm of speaking*.

23 *State* at this period can also mean *throne*. Compare the numinous line of Cynthia, which similarly revolves around the various senses of "state": *Seated, in thy silver chair, / State in wonted manner keepe, Cynthia's Revels*, V. 6. 3-4.

24 In Jonson's translation of the *AP*, the word appears on seven occasions, in four of which it is placed prominently at the end of the line. The term translates, in the order in which it appears, *venus* (59); *gratia vivax* (100, the *vivax* suppressed); *tantum honoris* (353); *veneris* (456) and finally *gratia* again (497, although here the Latin term has a sense close to royal *favour* or *gratitude*, whereas at line 100 it is closer to [*linguistic*] *charm*). At line 72, used as a verb (*all men will grace*), the word is an expansion of the Latin and does not correspond to any individual Latin term; at line 113 Jonson translates *gave grace* where the Latin has only the plain verb *dedit*.

### ***Pour citer cet article***

Référence électronique

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### ***À propos de l'auteur***

#### **Victoria Moul**

Victoria Moul est affectée à The Queen's College, Oxford comme jeune chercheuse post-doctorale. Sa recherche porte sur différents aspects de la réception et de la diffusion de la littérature classique dans l'Angleterre de la Renaissance, notamment la réception d'Horace et Virgile dans les œuvres de Jonson, Donne et Shakespeare. Elle s'intéresse tout particulièrement à la traduction de la poésie et est actuellement engagée dans une recherche sur la circulation de la poésie latine traduite dans des manuscrits de la période élizabéthaine tardive et de la période jacobéenne.

### ***Droits d'auteur***

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### ***Abstract / Résumé***

This article is a brief attempt to consider some of the ways in which Jonson's neglected translation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*—a project to which he returned over many years—is worthy of consideration as a major work of translation; a translation, moreover, which in its departures from and contention with the Latin text emerges as a kind of commentary. The reading of Horace that appears, as it were, from between the lines of Horace's own text itself reflects central Jonsonian preoccupations: the power of the poet and the durability of poetic language. By reading Jonson reading Horace with close attention, we understand more

deeply both Jonson's "Horatianism" and the centrality of classical translation to his influential understanding of the poet's role.

La traduction de Ben Jonson de l'*Ars Poetica* d'Horace, traduction remise sur le métier pendant de nombreuses années, n'a pas reçu l'attention qu'elle mérite. Cette brève étude s'attache donc à montrer en quoi la traduction de Jonson est digne de figurer parmi les traductions majeures ; de plus, dans ses écarts et zones de conflit avec le texte latin, elle apparaît comme une sorte de commentaire. L'interprétation qui surgit, pour ainsi dire, d'une lecture entre les lignes du texte d'Horace lui-même, réfléchit des préoccupations jonsoniennes essentielles, à savoir le pouvoir du poète et la pérennité du langage poétique. Lisant de très près Jonson lisant Horace, nous comprenons mieux à la fois l'« Horatianisme » de Jonson et l'importance de la traduction des classiques dans l'héritage de la conception jonsonienne du rôle du poète.

**Mots clés :** traduction, traductologie, translation, translation studies, commentaire, commentary, horace, poetic language, horace, langage poétique