

BOOK REVIEW

Orazio, Epistole I. Translated by ANDREA CUCCHIARELLI. Pisa PI, Italy: Scuola Normale Superiore Pisa, 2019. Pp. 625. Paperback, 25,50 €. ISBN: 978-88-7642-632-2.

Horace's *Epistles* are well served in English by the Cambridge "Green and Yellow" of Mayer,¹ but this expansive Italian commentary by Cucchiarelli offers numerous gems, an exhaustive up-to-date bibliography, helpful and erudite lemmata and a strong introduction, which make it an informative and valuable investment. This volume reworks and expands his previous edition of the *Epistles* for Marsilio, bulking up the introduction, offering a new prose translation and fleshing out details as well as increasing entries in the notes.² There is no doubt that this will be *the* commentary for scholars to consult for future work on the *Epistles*.

The introduction opens by stressing how Horace's decision to return to hexameters deliberately evokes his previous *Satires* and allows him (and the reader) to reflect on similarities and differences in world view as well as philosophical, political and poetic motivations. Cucchiarelli is particularly good in his discussion of the various ramifications of writing poetic *letters* and the way in which Horace manipulates his poems to capture the potential of this generic form. He goes far beyond previous worries about whether the corpus is "fictional" or "real" and emphasizes instead the philosophical and literary *varietas* that this genre allows him. Cucchiarelli discusses the philosophical underpinnings of a number of the *Epistles* but cautions, "Certo, Orazio è un poeta, o quanto meno da poeta scrive le *Epistole*" (28). That being said, his introductory material on Horace's Academic leanings, including the possible influence of Plato's letters on this work, makes up the bulk of the introduction and is an intriguing direction with tangible results. Such Academic resonances reappear throughout the commentary itself and are detailed with a conviction that leads to persuasive suppositions. While others

¹ Mayer, R. 1994. *Horace, Epistles Book 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Cucchiarelli, A. 2015. *L'esperienza delle cose (Epistole, Libro I)*, Venice: Marsilio.

have noted Horace's Socratic modeling in the *Epistles*,³ Cucchiarelli takes this persona further and his section on the ancient audience of the *Epistles* points out both how the elite were primed for these poetic philosophical musings and how the possible Republican overtones of such *sermones* would be received by that elite. Cicero thus becomes an important *exemplum* for Horace's work, and Cucchiarelli details the various ways in which Cicero's works inform the *Epistles'* ethical perspective, generic form and irony. His coverage of Horace's style, language and the manuscript tradition are rather brief (one might want to turn to Mayer's illuminating section on Horace's style), but ultimately the introduction is a rewarding read with many revealing insights.

The meat of the volume, as one would expect, is the commentary itself. At 371 pages, it offers thorough and nuanced readings of each poem (an appendix to the volume notes articles and chapters pertinent to each poem – a nice touch). One finds the expected *loci communes*, textual criticism and intratextual connections between letters of the collection, but Cucchiarelli adds more explicit interpretations of significant terms, imagery and passages.

In the interest of space, I'll restrict my comments to the first *Epistle*, but I want to stress that I learned a great deal throughout this commentary and found it to be a lively and meticulous guide to these poems. As might be expected from Cucchiarelli's previous writings,⁴ he is especially good at pointing out moments in which Horace is reimagining the *Satires* and teases out the implications for such reworkings. Philosophical matters are stressed throughout; so the *lemma* for *Ep.* 1.1.7: *purgatam ... personet aurem* highlights how Horace refashions the Socratic inner voice (Pl. *Apol.* 31d2-4) into a medium for poetic *exempla* and ethical reflection, which can also touch upon the idea that philosophy is medicine for the soul and remind the reader of comedic applications (Plaut. *Mil.* 774). If Mayer's note on *Ep.* 1.1.10: *et versus et cetera ludicra pono* was a concise ten lines long, Cucchiarelli spreads his wings and gives us a strong page and a half with copious parallels, remarks on the irony and authorial modesty on display, as well as analysis of the metapoetics of the phrase. One may have expected more reference to Panaetius with the note on *decens* (*Ep.* 1.1.11), but I appreciated how Cucchiarelli uncovered the irony of *omnis in hoc sum* where Horace, the neophyte

³ E.g. Morrison, A. 2006. "Advice and Abuse: Horace, *Epistles* 1 and the Iambic Tradition." *MD* 56: 29-61; Moles, J. 2007. "Philosophy and ethics" in S. Harrison (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 165-80 (and see his other articles and chapters on the *Epistles* for a view of this work that underscores its philosophical doctrine).

⁴ Cucchiarelli, A. 2001. *La satira e il poeta*. Pisa: Giardini.

philosopher, is “all in” (like one of our undergraduate students) and espouses the school that fits his current thinking with zealous fervor. He rightly sees Aristippus behind the allusion of *Ep.* 1.1.15 and strong in his explication of the Aristippean flavor of *Ep.* 1.1.15-19. Horace’s use of *regam* at *Ep.* 1.1.27 probably deserves a note in that it foreshadows other forms of *rex/regere* in this poem as well as the obvious connections between being a *rex* and acting *recte* (expertly examined by Cucchiarelli at *Ep.* 1.1.59-60: *rex eris... / si recte facies* and reinforced at 1.1.63: *regnum recte facientibus*). In notes dealing with what it is to be *liber* (1.1.69, 1.1.106-8) I missed the work of Johnson and McCarter, both of whom stress how Horace’s personal definition of freedom vis à vis slavery or patronage or political entanglements underlies many of these poems.⁵ Cucchiarelli, however, does offer a strong reading of the ramifications for Maecenas’ laughter at *Ep.* 1.1.95 and how it indicates a difference in perspectives that helps to define Horace’s sense of independence. His final notes on the ironic Stoic “sage” who can’t take a head-cold go well beyond a precis of Stoic philosophy and delve into the mirage of the *sapiens* in Horace’s Rome.

This is the work of a scholar at the top of his game. Cucchiarelli fathoms the power of Horace’s poetic language and the real philosophical work he is attempting to get across in the *Epistles*. I’d also like to note that we owe the publisher thanks for making a paperback commentary of this breadth and heft available for only 25 €. There is certainly a lot of bang for the buck!⁶

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⁵ Johnson, W.R. 1993. *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom: Readings in Epistles 1*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; McCarter, S. 2015. *Horace between Freedom and Slavery: The First Book of Epistles*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

⁶ Readers may be interested to know that there is a commentary to selected *Epistles* aimed at intermediate Latin students available at www.oberlinclassics.com.