

What Use is Poetry?

Chasing the Ivy (a collection of poetry),

and

**What Use is Poetry? (the role of poets and poetry with particular
reference to Horace and the combination of use and beauty)**

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Abstract

The thesis comprises a collection of poems and a dissertation.

Chasing the Ivy is a collection of poems inspired by Horace and his belief (expressed in the *Ars Poetica*) that the highest form of poetry combines usefulness and beauty. The collection is not a translation but a recontextualisation of the thirty eight odes which comprise *Horace Odes I*. The collection also includes eleven poems written in the voices of those women who frequently appear in the poems of Horace. *Chasing the Ivy* addresses the contemporary poetic career, the difficulties involved in publication and the establishment of a literary career. It uses a variety of voices both male and female; the poems invariably have addressees and in order to replicate Horace's approach use, irony, comedy and self-deprecation. The poems also contain the recurring Horatian themes of impotence, death, relationships and the simple life.

The dissertation represents a study of the attitude towards the combination of usefulness and beauty in poetry today as compared with the views expressed by the Roman poet, Horace (see Chapter One). In Chapter Two some major defences and views about poetry and the role of the poet in Britain from the time of Sir Philip Sidney to modern times is examined, concentrating most specifically on usefulness and beauty. The Romantic approach to poetry as an art for its own sake is challenged and it is argued that the proponents of that approach had still to acknowledge its usefulness.

Chapter Three, the largest section of the dissertation concerns my personal practice, how I interpret usefulness and beauty, how I use it for educational, social and political reasons as well as for literary ones, I recount how and in what ways my practical poetry residencies have been used by individuals and communities to broaden, educate and enlighten whilst at the same time providing enjoyment and I comment on the use of my poetry by academics and classical scholars. I also reflect on the ways in which my approach to poetry mirrors that of Horace, thereby prompting this research. My conclusions following this research are contained in Chapter Four.

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Chasing the Ivy (a collection of poetry)

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Ode to Horace

(after Horace Ode 1.32 Poscimus si quid)

Whenever I've toyed with you before,
I pray, as I curl up with you in my still bed,
and play with words to outlive me,
come and drop your flaccid thoughts
into my ears to make them flap,
my Roman poet

first turned on for me by a man of Latin
who, whether battling with students
or relaxing by the oar-sprayed Isis,
still emails on Archilochus and Virgil,
On Ovid and Alcaeus,
on you, with your lyrical spirit
your lyrical tongue.

I glorify you, Horace, my bed-time book,
welcome at mind feasts;
poet who's lit up my efforts:
Give me your worldly insights
whenever I think of you.

Ode to God and Man

(after Horace Ode 1.12 Quem virum aut heroa)

Is everything I am a gift from God
and should I sing his praises for my lot?
Or maybe thanks are due to Mr. Davies
my Titan teacher for the scholarship.

Perhaps it's down to you, great-granda Bernard,
that fiddling echoes round inside my head;
and songs play out through you, great-grandma Bridget,
from Donaghmoyne to Durham to the Tees.

This hybrid, small-p poet-politician
who swerves from forked-tongue talking when she can
should probably thank Patrick and the Green Fool
whose words were brought across from Monaghan.

Poteen helped make our Hamill-poesy sweeter.
No matter how it happened I thank God
that mother's fire combined with father's lyrics
has meant ancestral music can live on.

Ode to My First Poetry Tutor

(after Horace Ode 1:17 Velox amoenum)

Denise, you gave up England's northern coast
to go down under where the surfers play.
Your Grove Hill voice has moved in as my muse -
her mithering fills the block at Clockhouse Wood.

Beyond these iron gates there's no false coupling.
Our verse will trickle, free; it won't be damned.
Our wet-behind-the-ears-kid poems will ripple
the sluggish surface of that speechless Tees.

Remember how you nudged my writer's arm?
I'm glad to say it goes from strength to strength.
So come back home and share in my contentment.
Come on, Denise; we've suffered for our art.

Be molly-coddled in my wood, it's safe.
I'll keep the poet dog-eat-dogs at bay.
Complete your script and toast your oeuvre with Asti:
We'll not make cock-brained, piss-heads welcome here,

or ratbag critics to crush your confidence
with bad reviews. You've no need to be scared
of back-biters who'd sink their poison in -
there's no one here to dress you down to size.

Ode to An Arvon Course Writer
(after Horace Ode 1.9 Vides ut alta)

Mist creeps up on Lumb Bank like a sly old fox
and the valley shivers.
Death-curved leaves clack against branches brittle as bone,
to settle on the narrow, lonely path.

Bring in the logs, fill the scuttle
my precious young writer,
drop your money into the honesty box;
draw whites from the kitchen
and reds from the dining room rack.

During this special week,
forget everything you've left behind.
Don't worry about the poems whirling in your head
or the ones left floating over editors' desks.
Your work will settle in its own good time.

Stop thinking about tomorrow and its needs,
live for today. You have no ties, look around,
enjoy yourself while you're young.

Now's the time to pour the wine
and leave the experience of my grey hair, my little protégé.
Look at all the bright young things around you;
find a new life with them.

It was good while it lasted,
but now, join our young tutor over there,
the one who's been giving you the eye,
and fly.

Ode to Naïve Poets

(after Horace Ode 1:22 *Integer vitae*)

We genuine poets don't have to take the flack
that other writers take from jealous peers.
We're never crushed by critic profiteers
who just can't wait to stab us in the back

and even when we stray beyond our limits
into topics never visited before,
our talent is described as *fresh and raw*
we're not dismissed as *just a bunch of dim-wits*.

In fact when I express myself from Teesside
and leave my comfort zone to head down south,
the famous fear what might come out my mouth:
they grit their teeth while swallowing their pride.

And yet that Hughes' wild dog creeps in and howls.
With ears pricked and razor teeth he blocks
my mind and keeps it blank before he locks
ideas down to consonants and vowels.

Put me with those certain, sexy women,
your Shapcotts and your Duffys and your Olds.
Though what I have to say won't be as bold
I'll use the little gift that I've been given,

to crack this nut and make my writing ring.
I want to get my feet under the table:
dear tutor, tease my words then I'll be able
to love my poems at last and make them sing.

Ode to a Community Arts Worker
(after Horace Ode 1.13 *Cum tu, Lydia*)

Robbie, what's she got that I don't have,
this latest little protégée of yours?
The way you keep on bigging up her poetry
makes me sick.

And if I have to hear you one more time
say, *bet we haven't heard the last of her*
I promise you I'll scream because believe me,
I'm fed up to the back-teeth.

Quite literally my own words start to choke me
watching hers impress you. It seems a flash
of pen or a well-thrown line and that's you sunk.
She'll eat you for breakfast.

Why do you never listen to me, you pillock.
The bitch is using you to suit her ends.
What makes you think she'll want the likes of you
when once she's made it?

Whereas you and me, Robbie, we've grown together.
We've scratched each other's backs, you get my drift!
We should try to get to know each other better.
Nothing dodgy though!

Ode to 22nd November, 1990

(after Horace Ode 1.37 Nunc est bibendum)

At last we breathe a huge sigh of relief.
Now let's sit back and watch the fun and games.
Time to stock committee rooms with claret:
till lately just one glass was out of reach,

the birch-keen crazy woman saw to that.
Power-mad, she tanked-up on the Falklands
then with her rotten cronies took our capital,
and poll-taxed poor pensioners and poets.

Now she's brought to heel: (though having once
survived like Cleopatra and her ships),
rejected by her own, a sober thought,
she sees the proper battle on her hands.

While in the wings the hawkish Michael waits
to peck this honourable monster carcass clean.
But the Carlton Club's most honorary member
stares her crushed society in the face.

She chose her poison, took it like a man
enjoyed defeat and didn't do a U-turn.
The media didn't march the Iron Lady
before us as a rusty washed-up has-been.

Ode to Seamus Heaney

(after Horace Ode 1.10 Mercuri, facunde)

Seamus, spiritual descendant of Patrick,
the Green Fool who showed us in fireside rhythms
and the glowing embers of his cindered words
the starkness of his land;

I write of you, king of all living poets,
music-maker of everything that happens,
for you are the mischievous assuager
of our stolen lives.

When you were young, some people ranted on
about how you moved south, taking their histories,
wanting whatever you said, to be *nothing*.
You taught the tick tick

of a constable's bike; *arithmetic and fear*.
Now you're my guide, tempting me out of my shell
with forlorn ideas of success and fame.
You teach me my place.

Having gathered up my insubstantial words,
in your own golden hand, you write; *a woman
dabbles in verses and finds they are her life*.
Keep fiddling, you say.

Ode to the Poetry Establishment

(after Horace Ode 1.8 Lydia, dic, per omnis)

For God's sake you lot have you never heard
of killing someone softly with your love!
That Ricky-Rhymer hangs on every word
since being told he's guided from above.

And now he won't set foot inside our schools,
won't dip his toe in residential waters;
They're just a bunch of comprehensive fools
he says of would-be rhyming sons and daughters.

He used to roll his sleeves up with the rest
but now he's fat on complimentary grapes.
You've made him soft by telling him he's blest
and dropping all those goodies on his plate.

What happens if he's bruised by bad reviews?
What if, poor lad, he's beaten in the chase?
You coddle him and keep him in the news;
it's your fault if he falls flat on his face.

It's down to you if he can't take the heat,
you made him feel ethereal and unreal.
You never let him stand on his own feet.
It's you he'll see as his Achilles heel.

Ode to the S.S. Poetry

(after Horace Ode 1.14 O navis, referent)

You call yourself a Flagship! a literary liner
for such as me to cruise away their days.
Don't make me laugh, you're listing on new waves.
You make me sick.

Your passengers have stripped you bare. It seems
a re-fit's what you need, and while you're here
best drop the erotic colours from your flagpole;
they've led you astray!

Crippled by a cargo of translation
that drags you down below the water line
you creak and whine and make your invocation,
to the god Obscure.

Iced quatrains and measured Canberra couplets
help me ride the storm, but even so
concrete fore and aft is not enough
I'm tossed like a cork,

and bounced about by sexy stanza makers
with ropey rhymes that skim along your decks.
Unrated prats like me with no commission -
We keep you afloat.

Plot a middle course between the rocks
of old volcanic form and swirling spume.
I'm sick to death of sailing round in circles.
Cut me some slack.

Ode to the Possible Future Laureate

(and his current hot girlfriend)

(after Horace Ode 1.5 *Quis multa gracilis*)

Who is she making up to now,
that long-haired redhead,
that blarney-kissed girl,
that temptress in the red dress?
And in a jealous rage,
will he too,
end up firing her big, hard lines,
along with her mascara?

She's such a smooth talker;
great at pouring oil on troubled water,
and he just can't see through it.
He really believes this golden-tongued girl
is all his;
that she'll always be there, at his beck and call -
naïve fool!
Is he blind or what?
Can't he see what's brewing – God help him?
She's never going to give him her rhythms for nothing,
or donate her verse and stilettos to Oxfam!

As for me,
I'm done with her sort once and for all.
I've given up life in the fast column,
hung up my epics with my motor-bike clips
and slipped into something more comfortable:
suitable sonnets to drop gently
in the Poetry Society's lap.

Ode to the Editor

(after Horace Ode 1.1 *Maecenas atavis edite*)

By now my work and you are quite good friends;
 You canon-maker, sweetheart, darling Ed!
 Some people use their voice to bill and coo,
 or make hot sounds to stick inside your head.

Some lofty academics make their names
 by spreading out their great iambic feet.
 They catch you up in wild syllabic storms;
 they put their plumped-up verse beyond your reach.

Some gravitate towards you at a gig
 to drop their latest project in your ear.
 They say they simply want to test the water
 but meanwhile, *would you like another beer?*

Some dangle their awards before your eyes:
 you're hypnotized by Gregories on chests,
 and when they say they're willing to perform
 stark naked in your slush-pool, you accept!

So still the wild exotic sucks you in
 with word gymnastics, double pun and worse.
 With sexy mouths some put you on a promise -
 increased sales for publishing their verse.

My *mind* is all *I* open by the way.
 You need to know that *my* words aren't just verbals.
 And as for me I'm not prepared to lie
 to earn my laurels.

Ode to a 'Proper' Poet

(after Horace Ode 1.3 *Sic te diva*)

God help her now she's joined *our* little ship.
 She'll need her charms to help her ride the storm;
 best flash her eyes and pout her poetry lip.

This favoured girl, dear friends, is yours and mine.
 With sycophantic words she earns her laurels.
 She wants the stars: let's hope they help her shine.

She fights sestina storms and haiku hell,
 but when she finds she's dashed against a rock-
 hard editor, her sonnets twist and swell.

She'd rather turn her back on simple rhyme.
 For her the breath is king, and yet she scans
 pedantically till each foot toes the line.

The girl's got form. She stresses everywhere.
 Hot property, she rushes in with lies.
 Creative thought comes naturally to her.

So like us all she flies too near the sun.
 One day her fuck-me words will melt like wax.
 She'll plummet to the depths, her free flight done.

Or else her lusty need for recognition
 will see the monstrous oeuvre she's conceived
 entangled in a maze of definition.

And all of us keep adding to the mess,
 so many poets thrusting at the stars.
 Wars are made of less.

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Ode to Poets (as a last resort)
(after Horace *Ode 1.2 Iam satis terris*)

Thundering boots have echoed round us twice
and once a man, by stretching out his arm,
stirred such an angry storm the whole world shook.

A fragile, stuttering king coughed over rubble
while fear took root and countries changed their shapes.
Though Vestas kept fires burning hearths were lost.

More recently a bolt out of the blue,
made ivory towers collapse. The city fell.
Our sixty years of nearly-calm was past.

We talk of valour, right and friendly fire
supposedly to make us feel less dead.
Our texted, unsaid love-words float on dust.

What sort of God can let us fight like this?
A tender god could quickly spike our heels
with love and turn us all away from war.

Who else is there to trust except our poets?
And if there's use in art, what better use
than civilizers writing protest verse?

Ode to George and Tony

(after Horace Ode 1.6 Scriberis Vario)

If only *we* had Owen or Sassoon:
such fighting poets keep an eagle eye.
They'd see two nations going it alone
and knock our bare-faced courage into line.

Tony, I'll never claim to understand
nor try to write in praise of your success.
Our views ignored, we soldier up with George;
put mass destruction theories to the test.

But me, I'm just a mediocre poet,
I scratch out words on scraps of information.
I leave important issues to the 'biggies'
and marvel at the topics put in motion.

Were *I* to try and honour you, with say
a sonnet, well it wouldn't help a bit.
My baby-rhymes would likely undermine
your triumphs, and I'd make you look unfit.

The daily grind of husbands, wives and poets,
I'll peck around at those, that's more my class.
Then sometimes when I'm out and on the razzle
I'll ditch the dead and raise a victory glass.

Ode to the Poet in His Own Little World
(after Horace Ode 1:26 Musis amicus)

I've thrown my worries in the River Tees
and I'm off to join the fairies yet again.
I couldn't give a damn which Imam rules
the oil supply nor what financial whiz-kids

cocooned inside the City's one square mile
drone on about; forget them. But I ask
that those who see things through a writer's eye
praise poets like Katrina, Jackie, Cynthia.

These women are my source of inspiration.
Without such feisty poets I'd be lost.
They plummet hidden depths to pluck out words
and make them burn forever in our souls.

Ode to the North

(after Horace *Ode 1.7 Laudabunt alii*)

Let others bull up poncey southern culture
or pussy-foot about on Po Soc. ground.
Ignore them when they brag about their capital
with slimy little words; they earn their crowns.

So what, big deal. I've mouthed off at the *Voice Box*.
I've surfed the latest academic waves.
I've chewed the fat at A-list poetry places
but give me dead-end bars where *Jesus Saves*.

And all you strictly top-drawer magaziners
who sing Arts Council tunes with rounded vowels,
best cock an ear for northern-sounding voices
we've no plans yet for throwing in the towel.

Get yourselves up north where Tyne and Wear
and Tees, all overflow with gritty words.
Don't tie yourself in knots with sweet-tongued small-talk,
impress *New Writing North* with simple verse.

Look my friends, I'm offering a gift-horse.
Don't look it in the mouth, lift up your hearts
and come with me behind my northern shield
to help me fire our straighter literary darts.

Let's build a prize-land we can call our own.
I'll take the risk if you will. Let's make hay.
Go get yourself a lager – better still
Newcastle Brown to help you seize the day.

Ode to Fortune

(after Horace Ode 1.35 *O diva, gratum*)

Chance guides everything in Ironopolis.
 Round here, we say, *that's life; it's just a fluke.*
 You make it or you end up on the scrap heap.
 All we ever ask's an even break.

Old ironmen just want a fighting chance,
 and so do those who're not of steely stock.
 All of us who live here by the Tees
 pray we'll have another stroke of luck.

We all got on our bikes in nineteen fifty
 and pedalled way beyond our cast-iron world.
 We left the north in droves; the intelligentsia
 and the workers and the bosses. Everyone

needs Fortune, even poets. That's the reason
 they huddle close together in a scrum
 of seething academic literati
 in case scholastic posts should tumble down.

And always here, the mother of invention
 with hand-me-downs, and let's make-do-and-mends.
 Her *never-mind, we'll make the best of it;*
 her *let's-forget-it* shrugs black-lead her eyes.

Fortune's left the North-East coast, it seems,
 but loyal to old ways, we still have hope,
 (if only in small pockets). We hang on,
 we stand and watch while chance flies out the door.

The good-time-girls and entrepreneurial chancers,
 the short-term do-good-Johnnies, all have gone:
 Even friends who shared each other's burdens
 have disappeared now the trough's run dry.

God bless our Teesside poets and politicians
 Who stick their necks out trying to spread a word
 of optimistic caution about the north.
 Let's hope along the line, they shake things up.

And shame on us up here who dump our own,
 then join the trendy set of dog-eat-dog.
 We rifle what we can and leave the scars;
 forget what makes us great and run away. /

Our young fear nothing now, not consequence
nor fate nor God, so, Fortune, please come back
from oily eastern shores. Re-hone us all.
Re-fabricate your workers and your bards.

Ode for a Maker of Performance Poets
(after Horace Ode 1.15 Pastor cum traheret)

When a DJ drags me off into the floodlights,
 (a traitor to his own poetic cause),
 and drops me, his *class act* onto the deck
 to grope around the half-lit stage in fear

I admit I'm flattered; wouldn't you be?
 Then I hear the mutterings from the floor,
 how *her sort are the thin edge of the wedge*;
 how *she'll kill this place and ruin Davey's cred.*

A boy-band on before me gets applause
 that brings the house down; I begin to shake.
 Too late to run and hide, I've burnt my bridges,
 I sense I'm going to end up on my arse.

Now the DJ, silly bugger's terrified;
 despite the cheapo beer he's organised
 it's dawned on him he's serving neither cause:
 by playing away we'd had it from the start.

He's well and truly caught, pathetic dope,
 between the usual rock and poetry's hard place.
 Too scared to sing my praises he lopes off
 to find himself a safer watering hole.

I shouldn't have submitted to this coupling;
 and the masters of the web have barely started.
 Miles from poetry and everything it means
 they'll YouTube me and stick me up on Face Book.

Ode to the Mate of a Wandering Poet

(after Horace Ode 1.36 Et ture et fidibus)

This round's on me, come on, lads, name your poison
and pass the ciggies round. Who wants pork scratchings?
Let's all enjoy ourselves. I've sweated blood –
to get this little shindig off the ground.

As soon as Dave comes in we'll give three cheers.
Thank God he's back on the northern scene again
He'll read some poems and have high-fives especially
for our mate Danny, here, his boyhood hero –

the two of them cut poetry teeth together
in Boro pubs. We've all turned out tonight
so make the most of it. Let's have a slam
and blast our voices way beyond the Tees.

We mustn't let these Geordies or the Mackems
outdrink us Smoggies on a night like this.
Scatter poetry pamphlets on the benches
and pile our hard-back words up on the table,

then feast your eyes on all the Tyne and Wear boys
they'll slap our writing buddy on the back.
Because he packed his poems and played away
they'll cling to him like ivy, just you watch.

Ode to the Poet Deserting His Roots

(after Horace Ode 1:29 Icci, beatis)

So, old mate, you want to make your name.
To see yourself as one of the elite?
You think you'll conquer Hooray Henry hearts
by buffing up your scruffy state-school vowels?

You've no chance pal. Your glottal-stops will slip.
No poet-scholars will ever big you up
when scripts by them are hijacked and killed off.
They'll tease you but they'll keep you in your place.

Academic poetry boys still rule OK!
They flex their lyric muscles on the canon.
You think they want to hear what's in *your* mouth
even though you watch your p's and q's?

Now you cross your t's and dot your i's
you think you've cracked it do you – think you're in?
Well better think again you silly sucker,
you'll find your novelty will soon wear thin

and we won't want you either once you trim
your verse like them, on Sunday afternoons.
When you escape your accent then the Tees
will trickle up towards the Cleveland Hills.

Ode to New Voices

(after Horace Ode 1.4 Solvitur acris hiems)

Now the cool beat's ended, things are heating up.
All sorts of wordsmiths crawl from the paperwork
to graze upon erotica. Their lines are galvanised.
They stir us with hot text, they burn our eyes.

The time's come for the rest of us to gel our hair,
Lynx up, and sacrifice our fawning wishes.
What's more, dreamers among us can reveal,
we no longer diss those chasing two-book deals.

But then, what does it matter in the end?
Death kicks the writer's door as hard as any.
We're not Falernian. We won't be savoured.
And our few poor words? They'll be remaindered.

Let us remember, as we make our pitch:
Not one of us will have the final say.
Come on! Which pricked-up youth, laid in his bed,
which girl, will dwell on anything we've said?

Ode to the Poetry Professor at the End of Term
(after Horace Ode 1:27 Natis in usum)

All right, don't let the beer go to your heads –
just enjoy a drink but keep the noise down.
Good poets would hold their booze better than this,
you're not some engineering air-heads on the lash.

I've come in here to have a quiet pint
not bandy beered-up words with all of you.
Show your class and lose the traffic cone
and if you want me here at chucking out,

then stop this fighting talk. You, Abby's brother,
why don't you fill us in about your love life.
No ale for me unless you dish the dirt;
don't be shy, your secret's safe with me!

Whoever she is she's got her claws in you,
best not to fight it, lad, that's my advice.
Once they've got you wrapped around their finger
you might as well give in, there's no escape.

Ode to Young Poets

(after Horace Ode 1:21 Dianam tenerae)

Girls, don't be scared to fantasise, sex sells,
you boys as well, erotica is hot.
Use basic instinct: that's what hits the spot.

Young women watch Madonna light the stage.
She revels in her form, gets in your head
to stir things up that otherwise were dead.

Lads, why not take the pop stars as your models?
Their stubbled sex appeal is ripe for books.
Arouse with rhyme what Robbie does with looks.

Those two could break your block, stuff empty words
with promise, give your editors a ball
and drive the weakling-writers to the wall.

Ode to Michael*i.m. Michael Donaghy**(after Horace Ode 1:24 Quis desiderio)*

There's competition for elegy
and why not for this much loved poet,
called to sing by the Muse of Tragedy
too long before his time? But then that's fate.
Not even Michael's creative wit,
his warmth and care for fellow poets
could conjure a way out of this one.
All who knew him grieve and weep: he lit
our rooms. You, Simon, aim to recall light:
with your *Patent* and try to make
everlasting bulbs; dull the sun.
But light can't fill a Jupiter shape.
Might Michael illuminate death for our sake
if we work into the night?

Ode to Death

(after Horace Ode 1:28 Te maris et terrae)

Your metre was meticulous, dear Horace;
as fine as sand, and yet you trickle through
the minds of a just a sprinkling of scholars.
What did verse gain you?

With brilliance you read the universe,
showed how we are, but yet your tongue is stilled.
And Ovid's too, despite his god-like skill
and metamorphic hands.

Poor Sappho died before her thirst for verse
was quenched, so she's in bits. Lucilius' fresh
eleven hundred unconnected lines
are distant trails.

The words of Alcaeus used to crash and bang
like thunder and lightning in the public ear.
He penned ten Hellenistic scrolls; so what?
they're sound bites now.

In my own time dear Brendan, man of rain,
whose heart stopped once and yet came back to beat
the shadowlands of life and death - he too
will die one day.

One writer's lost in conflict; while another
drowns in slush piles. Others briefly shine
before they burn. Our poets too will dim.
Death catches all,

including me! When breath fades and my flesh
is eaten up by worms, then I'll be speechless.
So grant me shelf-space, please, since there are many
ways of dying.

You up-and-coming writers, thrown around
on crashing poetry waves, best play it safe.
Prosper and grow famous in the hands
that guard the canon.

But don't forget that by ignoring me
you're robbing those who might admire my words.
Be fair, or I may haunt you when I turn
my final page. /

I know how busy literary folk can be
but how long would it take you, honestly,
to read me one more time before I'm laid
gently in the archive.

Ode to the Non-Poet Partner

(after Horace Ode 1.11 Tu ne quaesieris)

Just don't ask about it, love. God
decided death should surprise us.
Let's not bother reading the stars.
They'll tell us – nothing.

Look at our border conifers
see how they reduce tidal waves –
angry words to a slight rustle,
and keep on growing.

Those mighty trees are home to birds
on both sides of the fence. The wind
gives them their rhythm, puts things back
on nodding terms.

Think how those trees, despite bent limbs
seize each day and reach for the sky.
Break out the cans, we'll live today.
Tomorrow never comes.

Ode to Demon Writers

(after Horace Ode 1:18 Nullam, Vare, sacra)

Danny, mate, enjoy your amber nectar,
a special pint of brown at friendly fringes.
The tipple of the gods, a one-off binge
is fine because creative life is hard
and even harder still if stone-cold sober!

Who ever saw a canny two-pints writer
get lover's block or cry into his beer?
A drop of good stuff helps unlock ideas.
Know when to stop but don't be lost for words.
Drop your fighting talk, don't diss your peers.

Up here we're all supposed to hold our ale:
Just bear in mind our northern pride's at stake.
Don't make that Gazza no-holds-barred mistake
of gloves-off free-for-alls that end in tears.
Incestuous worlds like ours will see you fail.

First you blow your trumpet then your mind
especially when you've liquor down your neck.
You bandy stanzas, you're a total wreck,
and as for bringing poets down to size -
Talk about the country of the blind!

You'd better keep a tight tongue in your head.
Don't view things through the bottom of a glass.
I've shared a toast or two myself and gassed
with great and good; with famous and unknown.
Let others praise your work: don't praise your own.

Ode to an Offended Fellow Poet

(after Horace Ode 1.16 O matre pulchra)

Ignore my email, trash my sarky poem.
 Don't forward junk, it just makes matters worse.
 My God, but you're your father's son all right.
 Shred the bloody thing!

No women's writing groups, no gender mags
 cause laddish authors' droop: they still perform.
 No one-too-many, washed-up poetry coach
 bangs on quite this much.

Your anger's grabbed you firmly by the balls.
 No heated row or threat of sharp reviews,
 no casting you adrift from writing circles
 makes you shut your trap.

What's said about your poetry isn't true
 despite the buzz. If God's name doesn't calm you
 nothing will because you've got yourself
 into a write frenzy.

I've warned you lots of times about the critics,
 the freaks who make and break us at a stroke,
 but *you* can't wait to take things to the line;
 fire everything up.

The spicy sauce you drizzle on their plate
 is not enough to hide your thinned-out verse.
 They'll bring you down and tear you limb from limb
 then hang you out to dry.

They'll make you eat your words: And this idea,
 this view you hold, that most things go my way,
 for me the sun will literally reverse,
 it drives you red with rage.

Your work is strong, but fury grinds you down.
 You plumb the depths and turn your students off.
 You need to warm your words or see your class
 razed to the ground.

I'll dump the worst of verse, (that's yours, not mine!)
 Recycle poems, take back all I've said.
 We must be friends again: bad blood got me
 when I was your age too!

Ode to the Net-worker

(after Horace Ode 1:23 *Vitas inuleo*)

I see that you're avoiding me again,
as if our friendship posed some sort of threat
(or is it that you know I'm useless to you?)
Whatever, mate, don't panic that *my* work

has topped the slush pile earlier than yours.
Just because somebody's script is rustling
on editors' desks, or brilliant gift-packed poems
are quickening, you're ruffled head to toe!

Trust me Jo, I wouldn't put the boot in,
wouldn't steal your lines or cast a shadow
of doubt on your good words – no need to network.
Your verse is ready; it can hold its own.

Ode to a Love-Sick Fellow Poet

(after Horace Ode 1.33 Albi, ne doleas)

Forget it, Phil, just ditch the fiery redhead.
Stop writing endless poems to *dear sweet Ann*.
Her sort are all the same: they let you down,
her new bloke's not good-looking, but he's strong.

I tell you, lad, all this, it's just a game.
You must remember Ricky, how he worshipped
Bella's form and how he hung on every word.
But Dave was in her sonnets and her bed.

Remember how we said '*it'll end in tears,*
Bella's going to get what's coming, that's for sure'.
We knew back then how love hurts and how Venus
throws most unlikely pairs into the sack.

And surely you remember *my* fiasco
how I chose a so-called hero who was strong
enough to give me space and let me breathe,
yet decided night and day and tied my tongue.

Ode for Myself

(after Horace Ode 1:19 *Mater saeva cupidinum*)

Of late, I seem driven by Cupid.
Feelings that had died have struck like lightning,
unexpectedly, again,

ignited, perhaps, by a nightly tippie,
and the idea of having rubbed shoulders
with the T.S. Eliot list.

Such notions set me on a slippery slope.
There's not a hope that Carol Ann or Sheenagh
would see anything in me.

And yet I find I have to toy with them;
swirl them around for flavour as you do
a delicious mouthful of red.

Desire has taken over: when at last
my sturdy pen *is* ready to perform,
idle thoughts are curdling the ink.

Folk keep telling me to act my age. OK!
I'll sacrifice my wilder plans, but please
give me a poet to embrace.

Ode to the Wrinkly Writer

(after Horace Ode 1:25 Parcius iunctas)

The rampant literati seem less keen
to finger scripts or rouse you with their praise.
You used to spread your lines across the page:
now they're locked and frigid.

Young scribes were once among your greatest fans:
these days they never email for your verse
and while you romp round daily with your muse
they write you off.

Soon your skin will wither, and your words
will wrinkle on some Oxfam bargain rack
remaindered by indifference. Mates step back:
your groupies leave you cold.

By looking for acclaim your hopes and dreams
will drive you like the rest of us insane.
Frustration bouncing round inside your brain,
you'll feel neglected: you'll moan

about the happy wannabees who follow
new hot shoots of fame, but what's your quarrel?
You'll have had your time, and so your laurels
grow brittle in tomorrow's frost.

Ode to the Student Returning

(after Horace Ode 1.30 O Venus, regina)

Venus, Muse of lovers everywhere,
why not dump the eloquent well-served south?
Join me here by the Tees' untutored mouth.
This wrinkly writer needs your lyric care.

Bring Eros with his band and Youth: I've heard
that with their help I'd capture hearts and minds;
seduce the academics on the Tyne,
till they embraced me, every thought and word.

Ode to Ambition

(after Horace Ode 1.31 Quid dedicatum)

So what should poets ask of academia
once erudite façades have all been built?
What honours do they seek, what aspiration
ferments their thought until new words pour out?

Not the flowery praise of scholar-poets;
not fruits of southern fame meant as a lure
to so-called fertile ground where poetry houses
are slowly starved of funding, that's for sure!

Let those with sponsors labour on their epics,
let them trim verse back not let it roll.
Let them toast their dry nouveau-success
gained from emptying hearts and baring souls.

I've no desire to ride their trendy wagon,
go celestial, have strange places for my head.
I'd rather have a cocoa then rest easy
in my loosely-sprung, uncontroversial bed.

So let me keep my common-grounded lyrics,
my colloquial tone, my gritty northern voice.
Let me prize these gifts in ripe old age.
Simple talent; good reason to rejoice.

Ode to an Agnostic Poet

(after Horace Ode 1.34 Parcus deorum cultor)

I do still pray, but like a little kid
I only shut one eye to think of God:
The other eye's possessed by poetry
and glaring at my mates who're obsessed too.

Being Catholic, mea culpa, I retrace
my steps across familiar ground, although
you'd get a coach and horses through the hole
in faith that until now has served me well.

The creative course I've taken makes me reel
then shakes me to the core. I'm being crowned
by the tidal wave of knowledge in my head.
Yes, I've gained an insane wisdom, but I'm lost

and the instability's led me straight to hell
where I'm dizzied in a labyrinth of learning,
by the twists and turns of too much information.
It's more than I can bear without God's help.

For only God has power to ring the changes
ensure the first is last and last is first.
With one shrill cry, sweet chance can snatch the ivy
from the laureate's head and crown the little man.

Ode to a Simple Poet

(after Horace Ode 1.38 Persicos odi)

What's with all this fancy talk m'dear?
Stuff your silver words they leave me cold.
I don't need measured lines, well-formed and folded,
or accents buffed until they all but shine.

For goodness sake stop fussing over lyrics;
admittedly exotic lyrics suit you
and me as well, but still I think we two
should make sweet music, have ourselves a break.

Ode to Stephen

(after Horace Ode 1:20 Vile potabis)

Don't just pore over my meagre emailed words,
come up and get ratted on my hard lines
knocked back with Newcastle Brown
in proper bottles I bought from Yarm offy
especially for you Stephen,
distinguished, kindly scholar,

while you're applauded by ranks of students
 on the banks of the Isis;
and lecture theatres, shaken by your knowledge,
echo your professorship.

You can savour vintage Latin poems
and enjoy classics from the Italian grape,
but no Sicilian vines, Roman hills or conjugations
will flatten my Northern beer
or soften my rough voice.

Anon

(arising from Horace Ode 1.14, O navis, referent)

I'm having an affair (just of the heart);
 Windswept yes, but not at all at sea.
 Truth be known, we're better off apart.
 Ships passing in the night, that's you and me.

I've trimmed my sails; I'm heading out to sea:
 back on course with little thanks to you.
 We passed some time together, let it be.
 Get over it, that's what I plan to do.

Mine's a brand new course. I'd say it's you
 who's gone adrift and made me stronger.
 Get over it, that's what I plan to do
 I won't be kept at anchor any longer.

Surely you must see you've made me stronger
 truth be known, we're better when apart.
 I won't be kept at anchor any longer
 I'm having an affair, just of the heart.

Cinera's Message to Venus

(arising from Horace Odes 4:1, Intermissa, Venus)

Dear girl, come up and see me any time.
Your reputation's safe: I'm still on fire.
Ignore the snowy roof, look in the grate.
In any case I wanted to enquire

about your trip and how things went with Horace.
I hope he's fit and well and full of beans.
He reckoned once to love me, did you know?
(I doubt he even knows what true love means).

Looking back I really don't recall
his lust for me was ever sweet as such.
I know he never moved the earth for me.
Some things I forget, but not that much!

Is it true he's searching round for his libido?
Has he asked you if you'd like to give a hand?
Good luck old girl, you're surely going to need it,
he'd problems carrying out your hard command.

I wish him all the best, don't get me wrong
but obviously I have more staying power.
So as I say, just pop in when you want.
I'll buy the wine. Don't bother bringing flowers.

Just one more thing, you'll find me wearing purple.
It's not a sign of mourning or of age.
It's such a sexy colour don't you think,
for girls who just can't wait to turn the page?

Leuconoe's Ultimatum

(arising from Horace Ode 1.11, *Tu ne quaesieris*)

Again you throw that old familiar line,
saying we should live but for the day.
I fall for it and let you have your way:
I shelve my plans and tell you that it's fine.

You play it cool, and joke, *who needs a ring*.
No promises are made, perhaps you think
there's no need for commitment as I sink
my head down on your chest and bite my tongue.

But listen up, my dear, my softer side
is dying. You're the one who'll end up worn
by lust that ebbs and flows just like the tide.
Seize the night, my love, you've earned my scorn.
This time, like you, I'm here for the ride.
White waiting days will vanish with the dawn.

Lydia

*(arising from Horace Odes 1:8, Lydia, dic, per omnis,
1:13, Cum tu, Lydia, and
1:25, Parcius iunctas)*

From the start, you had your eye on me.
Like some sort of rabid voyeur
you looked on while I nibbled necks
and others bruised my white shoulders.

My horseplay made your stomach churn
yet you imagined stroking my hips.
Jealousy burned you up; you pretended
yours were the teeth marks on my lips.

As for my making men soft,
soft they were not – nor womanlike!
I never put a man off his stroke
or stopped one throwing beyond his mark.

You were wrong, I've not aged, I've matured.
I'm rounded, fuller-bodied with a fruity whiff.
I've a good nose. You'd like to seize the day,
wouldn't you; take a little sip?

This playgirl, her face lifted regularly
by the eternal youth she clings onto
is no old rag. She's up to her eyes in toyboys.
They bang her door, ring her bell, form a queue.

Myrtale

(arising from Horace Ode 1:33 Albi, ne doleas)

If I had loved you would I have felt shackled?
Would I have cursed Venus' sense of humour?
Did you ever think I might just have settled
for the best I could get at the time?

and later, when we were alone in the dark
did you realise I had other offers on the table?
Yes I was wild; perhaps I even had the mark
of madness. Maybe that's why I tried to cling on.

Had you done the same, you'd not be alone now.
You make me laugh, the way you give advice.
Why on earth should anyone listen to how
you, a confirmed bachelor, managed your life?

I, on the other hand, have found myself a lover.
When I wrap around him he knows he's been
chained; but get this, honey, he loves it!
Turns out I wasn't forever green.

Pyrrha

(arising from Horace Ode 1:5 Quis multa gracilis)

Acting on advice my mother gave,
my aim in life's to be an old man's darling:
I've no desire to be a young man's slave.

So when I get it on, stop all your snarling
because the time I spend with those young bucks
is nothing more than practice, mere harling

for experience that doesn't come from books.
Don't waste your pity those lads know the score.
I'm hooked in by their lifelines not their looks.

So ponder this: it's you I'm coming for.

Chloe's Reluctance to Love

(arising from Horace Ode 1:23 Vitas inuleo)

You insist that it's time to be bolder,
saying, *little green shoot, please don't weep.*
I feel myself squirm and my skin starts to creep,
as you settle your hand round my shoulder.

Then you tell me, *stop running to mother*
you should leave young-girl habits behind.
I wonder, what is it you have on your mind,
what you mean by forsaking all others.

I hate how you can't seem to look in my eyes,
how you focus instead on my breasts.
I object to the way that you try to impress
with your numerous sweet lyric-lies.

Whatever you're hoping to gain by your charms
I'm just not disposed to fall into your arms.

Lalage Talks of Love

(arising from Horace Ode 1:22 Integer vitae)

You hear me sweetly laughing; sweetly speaking,
my name is carried to you on the breeze.
Inside the deep dark woods you sing my praises.
Your own voice echoes back between the trees:

you celebrate your purity of heart.
Your love is in the clouds and there it hovers;
you practice gentle kisses on your arm
and hope to finally seal our fate as lovers.

And then it starts; the bragging to your mate:
You ramble on and boast how you'll protect me.
You tell him that unarmed you scared a wolf.
I hear you now. I've got you to a t.

You'd swim the widest rivers for my sake
and march across the desert thirty days.
You'd leave your home and trundle in the sun.
You love me in a thousand different ways.

(And I'm supposed to be the chatterer!)
I know, I know, you'll shout it from the houses.
Perhaps my lamb, you're not a sheep dressed up.
Forgive me love; you're not all mouth and trousers

The Devil in Glycera

*(arising from Horace Ode 1:19 Mater saeva cupidinum, and
Horace Ode 1.30 O Venus, regina)*

Cut your pathetic chat-up line.
I'm not your sweet thing
and well you know it!
This glow that sets you alight
is nothing to do with love -
everything to do with instinct -
mine!

I'm hot; who needs your heart
or Cupid cards, or flowers?
Who needs your fine fancy words?
You don't have to put me on a pedestal,
or sacrifice your lads' nights.
I'm no more interested in the long term
than you are, pet.

Rambling on about love – get a grip:
you're such a wimp.
Look into my eyes, for goodness' sake;
Don't you recognise a 'come-on'
when you see it?

With Love to Horace from Canidia

*(arising from Horace Epode 3, Parentis olim,
Horace, Epode 5, At, o deorum, and
Horace, Epode 17, Iam iam efficaces)*

Go on, admit it, Goths, they turn you on,
and I'm the wicked bitch who got you hooked;
bewitched you with my scary green-gelled spikes,
my street-wise ways; my secret night-life looks.

I'm the hag who used black-lacquered nails
and raised the man-blood in your boyhood veins.
Remember when the time came to unzip me,
you got entangled in my jacket chains?

Then there was that grassy afternoon, when
unable to resist my snow-white skin,
you traced the tattooed feathers on my shoulder
and twirled my silver nose ring with a grin

'til I promised you an afternoon a week
for your fetishes. You treat me like a whore.
I curse your love life. May you have no wife
or children then you'll come to me for more.

Tyndaris Accepts Horace's Nightcap
(arising from *Horace Ode 1:17, Velox amoenum*)

This face, darling, could bring wise men to war,
it doesn't need your macho-man protection.
I'm used to being the centre of attention,
it's jealousy I seek, not country air.

The smell of goat's best sampled from afar,
as for lyre-skills, dear, that's pure invention,
a ruse, to make you think it's my intention
to sooth your muse, not follow my own star.

I'll gladly join you in a glass of red,
but I'm not for interweaving through the night.
By ten I'm usually ready for my bed,
to dream of Cyrus' passions at their height.

And turning men to pigs: that's in your head.
You do it to yourselves – put out the light.

Poem Notes

Ode to God and Man (p.10)

Hamill is the family name of the author.

Poteen, an Irish alcohol made from potatoes.

The Green Fool is a novel by Irish Poet, Patrick Kavanagh, who was, as is the author's family, from County Monaghan.

Ode to An Arvon Course Writer (p.12)

Lumb Bank, at Heptonstall, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, was the home of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath and is now a writing centre owned and run by the Arvon Foundation.

Ode to Naïve Poets (p.13)

The 'certain, sexy women' referred to here are the acclaimed contemporary poets, Jo Shapcott, Carol Ann Duffy and Sharon Olds.

Ode to Seamus Heaney (p.16)

The Green Fool is an autobiographical novel by the Irish Poet, P.J. Kavanagh,

Ode to the S.S. Poetry (p. 18)

Canberra here refers to the cruise liner which was said to have had concrete poured into the fore to keep it level in the water.

Ode to the Editor (p. 20)

The Eric Gregory Award is open only to people up to the age of 30.

Ode to the Poet in His Own Little World (p. 24)

The poem refers to Jackie Litherland and Cynthia Fuller, Wearside poets and Katrina Porteous, from Northumberland. All three are gritty, determined yet gentle women poets who work vigorously at their art.

Ode to the North (p. 25)

Po Soc is a popular shortened way of referring to The Poetry Society

The Voice Box is a reading venue in the Festival Hall, London.

Lumb Bank (see earlier note in respect of 'Ode to An Arvon Course Writer')
Sylvia Plath is buried in Heptonstall Cemetery not far from the Lumb Bank Centre.

New Writing North is based on Tyneside and supports the work of artists and writers.

Ode to the Mate of a Wandering Poet (p. 29)

Middlesbrough in Teesside is known locally as The Boro

Geordies is a colloquial term for people from Tyneside and Mackems is a colloquial term for those who live in Sunderland. Smoggies is a colloquial name for those from Teesside.

Ode to Michael i. m. Michael Donaghy (p. 34)

Michael Donaghy was an accomplished musician as well as a poet. Simon Armitage's poem, 'Patent', is in memory of Michael Donaghy. One of Michael Donaghy's collections is called 'Conjure'.

Ode to Death (p. 35)

Brendan is the Irish poet Brendan Kennelly, who following quadruple bypass surgery, wrote a collection called 'The Man Made of Rain' which tells of the shadowlands between life and death.

Ode for Myself (p. 42)

The T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist for 2005 was Polly Clark, Carol Ann Duffy, Helen Farish, David Harsent, Sinéad Morrissey, Alice Oswald, Pascale Petit, Sheenagh Pugh, John Stammers and Gerard Woodward.

The Women Poems (pp. 49-59)

The author acknowledges the scholarly argument that these women may never have existed as individuals, but has chosen, nevertheless to give the characters a voice.

Anon
 Cinera's Message to Venus
 Leuconoe's Ultimatum
 Lydia
 Myrtale
 Pyrrha
 Chloe's Reluctance to Love
 Lalage Talks of Love
 The Devil in Glycera
 With Love to Horace from Canidia
 Tyndaris Accepts Horace's Nightcap

What Use is Poetry?

**(the role of poets and poetry with particular
reference to Horace and the combination of use and beauty)**

Introduction

This thesis aims to combine a scholarly understanding of what the Roman poet Horace says about poetry and the poet in his *Ars Poetica* and *Epistles, 2.I* with my own experiential reflections and those of other contemporary poets. Throughout the thesis I am concerned particularly with Horace's proposition that poetry should combine beauty and usefulness.

Horace gives poets a choice. He advises them when writing that: 'The aim of a poet is either to benefit or to please'¹ Yet in the lines which follow, Horace urges poets to offer a mixture of help and delight² and expresses the view that the best and highest form of poetry will instruct at the same time as it gives pleasure.³ The blending of instruction and delight is an enduring problem for poets and scholarship. In this thesis I aim to demonstrate that the two elements are inseparable and I recommend contemporary poets to embrace the power and accountability which is part of their chosen art.

In Chapter One I examine the role and status of the poet and the social status and function of poetry according to Horace. I also consider the poet as magician/seer⁴ educator, servant of the State⁵ and the poet as founder and civilizer of society.⁶ In Chapter Two I discuss other significant writers, poets, commentators and poet-theorists such as Dante, Sidney, Shelley and Arnold who have written about the role, function and status of poetry and poets. I also discuss written commentaries and interviews with contemporary poets. Personal reflection is a powerful way of thinking about poetry and in Chapter Three I reflect on my own poetic practice, including my creative work in *The Works* and *Chasing the Ivy*, poetry residencies and my place in classical reception linking them to Horace. Finally, in Chapter Four (Conclusions) I suggest a role and status

¹ Horace, 'Ars Poetica' lines 333-4 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.199

² See Ibid, lines 343-4

³ See Richard Rutherford, 'Politics and Literary Criticism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.259-60

⁴ See Horace, 'Epistles, 2.I' line 212, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.181

⁵ Ibid, lines 124-128, p.178.

⁶ Horace, 'Ars Poetica' lines 391-407, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.201

for poetry and the poet in contemporary society based on my reading of Horace, my own poetic practice and my experience of poetry and community residencies.

Reflecting on some of the ways in which Horace uses poetry as a social and literary tool, I ask to what extent contemporary poets share his view that good poetry should be useful as well as beautiful. I consider the role and status of the contemporary poet, and the cultural and social status of poetry. I discuss how I have come to appreciate the way in which I am able to straddle the broader community and the world of academia and in this way attempt to improve the cultural status of poetry. I make reference to the political function of poetry, and in particular poetry by Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, from whose poems, interviews and essays it is clear that their appeal reaches into communities outside academia. Their poetry not only possesses the physical elements of poetry, but has the added emotional dimension that creates in the reader a powerful wish to connect.

In an attempt to clarify the role and status of the poet in contemporary society this thesis does not propose a lofty mission for contemporary poetry nor an elite position for the contemporary poet; and though it focuses on the idea of usefulness, it does not argue that the primary or only justification for poetry is that it be useful. Rather, it proposes that contemporary poets, as members of an imaginative community with shared preoccupations, could, by giving fresh consideration to the idea of usefulness, improve the cultural position of poetry,

This thesis advocates that contemporary poets have a value to the community; that they have the ability to move people on an individual basis; to arouse emotion and desire; to instruct, illuminate, facilitate and empower. In support of my proposition that poets have the kind of value to the community described above, I cite some of my own practical experiences of poetry residencies, because my belief that poetry can and should combine beauty and usefulness is based on personal experience as well as on my subsequent reading of Horace. During my early residencies I was unaware of *Ars Poetica*, indeed unaware of Horace, but I became increasingly aware of the possibility of poetry as a facilitating medium through which people could express themselves. I am not

suggesting that self-expression is art but if engagement with an art, (in this case poetry), facilitates self-expression, then the experience is moving and pleasurable both for the creator and the facilitator. Poetry is useful if it enables personal growth and development. In an interview with Deborah Ross for *The Independent Magazine* in March, 2008 the choirmaster Gareth Malone expressed similar sentiments in relation to music:

There are people who are interested in nothing but musical excellence, only working with the very best, and that is a wonderful thing, but for me, when somebody makes a note for the first time or connects with it for the first time, that is really fascinating, endlessly fascinating⁷

I am sure Gareth Malone is not suggesting that all the boys he encouraged to sing for the BBC2 documentary series, *The Choir and Boys Don't Sing*, became musicians or that what they produced was the best music, any more than I am suggesting that using poetry in community residencies produces poets or best poetry. But I am suggesting that Malone's approach and my own, results in increased inclusivity by giving more people the opportunity to experience art in its various forms. I will expand on these experiential findings later when I examine more closely the idea of the usefulness.

The particular ways in which a contemporary poet might be of value to the community are not the same as those outlined in *Epistles 2.I* and many contemporary poets do not regard themselves as fulfilling a societal role. Nevertheless they want to affect their audience, not necessarily in a moralizing way, but by influencing how that audience sees and thinks. In *Horace on Poetry* C.O. Brink states, 'Satire concerns itself with society...satire has, and should have, a moral effect.'⁸ I believe that Brink's statement also applies to other poetic modes. Poets can and do have a value to the community. This belief is based on my own experiential understanding of the effects of poetry residencies and since

⁷ Gareth Malone, 'Note Prefect', *Independent Magazine*, 15 March 2008, p.17

⁸ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) p.221

this research is practice-led, it follows that the experiential is a strong component. In attempting to establish a contemporary definition for usefulness I reflect not only on my own writing practice but on some of my residencies; primarily on three carried out during the period between 1999 and 2007 when I was poet-in-residence for Stockton online, North Lodge Park in Darlington and the Museum of Antiquities at the University of Newcastle.

The creative element of my thesis, *Chasing the Ivy*, is comprised of thirty-eight poems directly inspired by the thirty-eight odes in *Horace Odes, Book I*, plus eleven poems which can be regarded as replies from some of the women mentioned in Horace's writing, to whom he gives no voice. My versions attempt to combine Horace, whose work remains contemporary with our own preoccupations, and my own views on the purpose and value of poetry. I consider too, how my own versions of Horace could be regarded as useful to the academic community. Reflecting on the power of poetry to influence, persuade, illuminate, exhort, question and console I make comparisons with modern commentaries on the role of poetry and on personal experience gained during poetry residencies and I suggest some possible reasons for the changed role of poetry in society.

It was my intention when creating versions (which are written mostly in hearing distance of iambic pentameter) for the creative element, not only to try and write beautiful poems, but to combine some historical fact and philosophy in the sense of highlighting knowledge and right conduct. I attempt, as Horace advises, to combine beauty and usefulness. Horace refers to the poet as "doctum imitorem" (learned imitator) (*AP*. 318). The poet 'has been trained to represent life and manner... A person who has been thus taught will be predisposed to temper poetic sweetness with moral principle, like the ideal poet.'⁹

The theme for the E-seminar discussions and the 2010 conference, *Classics in the Modern World: A 'Democratic Turn'* hosted by The Open University, has led me to believe that my versions could be seen as adding to such a democratic turn in classical reception in that they encourage broader access to texts, and try to counteract elitism and exclusion. I consider that this process of contemporising the classics is two-directional and will discuss this further in a

⁹ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) p.223

later chapter. It is argued that since, ‘by the second half of the twentieth century, any acquaintance with Latin at all had ceased to be regarded as essential to education’¹⁰, the interpretations and versions of contemporary poets, (though we amend and revise for our own purposes), can provide additional insight and understanding of classical texts. As Eliot said, it is ‘...not preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.’¹¹

The highly popular contemporary poet Adrian Mitchell famously wrote that: ‘most people ignore poetry because most poetry ignores people.’¹² His statement suggests that most people are ignorant of, or alienated from poetry, and throughout my engagement with poetry, particularly during poetry residencies, I too have detected such distancing, especially within the broader community outside academia. Discussing this in later chapters I suggest one reason for this distancing might be that the link between beautiful and useful so favoured by Horace in his *Ars Poetica* and *Epistles 2.1* no longer seems to find favour among contemporary poets.

This research is significant in that it suggests ways in which contemporary versions and interpretations can inform the classics. It urges a new definition for usefulness, and acceptance of the notion of usefulness combined with beauty. It invites contemporary poets to reflect on the persuasive power of poetry by examining their writing practice in the light of Horace’s recommendation that poetry should be both beautiful and useful to life, and further invites them to reconsider their own role and status as poets in society.

Reading Horace has strengthened my views about poetry, about what it can and should do, and has led me to consider the reception of my own creative

¹⁰ British Poets of the eighteenth century, *Musæ Anglicanæ Anglicè Redditæ*, trans. by John Gilmore (Coventry: The Derek Walcott Press, 2007) p.xi

¹¹ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. 1922

<<http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>>

[accessed 14 January, 2008] (para.4 of 18)

¹² Adrian Mitchell, ‘Most People...’, in *Heart on the Left: Poems 1953-1984* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1997) p.110

work and the position accorded it by critics. Horace advises:

When a skilful collocation renews a familiar word,
that is distinguished writing. If novel terms are demanded
to introduce obscure material, then you will have the
chance to invent words which the apron-wearing Cethegi
never heard; such a right will be given, if it's not abused.¹³

This advice from Horace encouraged me to write versions of *Odes, Book I*, to place my versions in a different context whilst maintaining Horace's familiar wisdom and themes. In other words I have sought to use Horace as a model to contemporise classical themes, bearing in mind that he himself uses Greek methods and practice to contemporise themes for his Augustan audience. I have been persuaded to create modern versions because despite his advice to follow tradition ('You'd be well advised to spin your plays from the song of Troy rather than introduce what no one has said or thought of...')¹⁴ Horace urges writers not to '...circle the broad and common track' (*AP* 132), not to '...render word for word like a loyal translator...' (*AP* 133) And in *Epistles 2.1* he talks of his impatience when work is criticised purely on the basis of being new.

My versions of Horace's texts, whilst maintaining the traditional themes, are modern. They try to create a skilful setting and not to tread the same tracks as other versions. As well as a desire to create beautiful poetry it was my wish when writing these versions that they would not only appeal to a modern poetry audience, but that they would prove useful by increasing accessibility to Horace's classical texts. I believe that my poems bring Horace's insights into the present whilst at the same time allowing my insights to shape the reading of Horace by others. In this way I hope to offer a refreshing sense of dialogue between past and present.

¹³ Horace, 'Ars Poetica' lines 47-51, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.191

¹⁴ *Ibid*, lines 129-139, pp.193-4

Chapter One: Horace

Around 38 BC, thanks to his friends, Virgil and the Roman poet Varius, Horace was introduced to Maecenas who was to become his patron (as was Augustus himself). Horace, having fought on the wrong side at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC was nevertheless pardoned and managed to purchase a position as a high-ranking treasury clerk. Under the Emperor Augustus and following the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Rome had settled down to a period of relative stability after years of turmoil and wars.

Horace wrote four volumes of *Odes*, the *Carmen Saeculare* (a national hymn composed for the Secular Games and commissioned by Augustus), *Ars Poetica* and the *Epistles* and *Satires*. It is in *Ars Poetica* that the combination of usefulness and beauty becomes a central theme: ‘an appeal to moral ‘values’ and the social efficacy of poetry. The poet must carry in his mind the values and categories taught by the philosopher. He must ‘know’ before he can start writing as he ought.’¹⁵ Clearly the aspirations and desires Augustus had for his Empire, which included a moral code for the Roman people, were supported by Horace in his poetry.

What Horace meant by beauty and usefulness

In relation to beauty, Horace is specific. The poem must have unity of form and content. Whilst acknowledging that poets have the right to hazard anything, he warns, ‘...but not to the point of allowing wild to couple with tame, or showing a snake and a bird, or a lamb and tiger as partners!’¹⁶ Horace urges consistency and cautions us not to ‘...set a human head on a horse’s neck...’¹⁷ In other words Horace recognises that to have unity a good poem needs to possess the physical elements that make it look, feel and sound like a poem as well as a good choice of subject. The implication here is that if it is not consistent in terms of content and form then it risks becoming something ugly rather than being

¹⁵ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Prolegomena Literary Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) p.223

¹⁶ Horace, ‘Ars Poetica’, lines 12-13 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.190

¹⁷ *Ibid* lines 1-2

something beautiful. (My own ideas about beauty are developed in Chapter Three).

Much of what Horace means by usefulness can be gleaned from his work. In the *Ars Poetica*¹⁸ he considers the office and duty of the poet (lines 304-308) recommends that poets should both instruct and delight (lines 333-346) how they are inventors/discoverers (lines 55-58) and how they are founders and civilizers of society. (lines 391-407) In *Epistles 2.1*¹⁹ he spells out how poets serve the State (lines 124-5) and how they are educators (lines 126-128) Horace details the value of the poet to the community, explaining how he (the poet) shapes the young, warns against vice and bad behaviour, recounts noble actions, gives consolation and comfort, trains choirs to sing, and asks, 'Where would innocent boys and girls who are still unmarried have learnt their prayers if the Muse had not vouchsafed them a poet?'²⁰ In *Ars Poetica* Horace is not only looking 'at some select aspects of poetry as he is in other works, but he is bringing his personal opinions to bear on a consistent, and in a sense systematic critical philosophy... it combines two qualities which are too often dissociated - personal and traditional.'²¹ In the *Satires* he advises individuals²² in the Epistle to Florus and his friends (*Ep. 1.3*) 'Horace deals with real people and offers more explicit advice on poetry.'²³ Horace consistently upholds the moral code favoured by Augustus to the extent that he is 'hostile to verse which breeds dissension or malice'²⁴ and even goes so far as to endorse 'the constraint of literature by law.'²⁵ There is no doubt that as far as Horace is concerned 'The poet has a duty to his art but also a responsibility to society.'²⁶

What I mean by usefulness is expanded upon in Chapter Three, where I

¹⁸ See 'Ars Poetica' in *Horace: Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) pp.190-203

¹⁹ See 'Book II: Epistle 1' in *Horace: Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) pp.175-182

²⁰ Ibid pp.178-9

²¹ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) p.155

²² See Richard Rutherford, 'Poetics and Literary Criticism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.258

²³ Ibid p.259

²⁴ Ibid p.260

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid p.258

explain that my own ideas, whilst they relate to Horace's, differ in detail and practice. For example contemporary poets whilst not communicating State policy, challenge it via their poetry. Not all poets today are teachers in the formal sense, but they do enlighten, inform and make a difference. I now wish to expand further on Horace's view of usefulness.

Poetry as a Social and Literary Tool

The future fame and status of Horace is, as Stephen Harrison says, a common topic²⁷ for the poet in his poetry (though in this thesis I primarily limit examples to *Odes Book I*, which links with my own creative component, and to *Epistles 2.1* and *Ars Poetica*). Horace uses his writing not only as a literary tool as in *Ars Poetica*, where it could be argued he provides a blue-print for writing and writers' behaviour, but also as a social tool. His public is comprised of his social equals. He wants the *Odes*, as Alessandro Barchiesi says, 'to express a consistent sense of the self, and even a sense of a career,'²⁸ a career which according to Harrison, Horace 'is able to joke about'²⁹ with a 'combination of self-deprecating humour and enthusiasm in conveying his philosophical interests'.³⁰ In the first book of *Epistles*, Horace renounces poetry in favour of morality, 'which is strongly stated but cannot be literally true'³¹ By embracing morality Horace demonstrates public commitment to the Augustan project (the ideal of placing common above private good, setting standards for moral behaviour and marriage, and the rebuilding of Rome) He is aware of the prevailing political climate of the time and knows that he has to embrace it to gain and retain his social status. On the other hand he is aware of the need to maintain the good will of his public and his contemporaries, hence the use of 'self-depreciation as a *captatio*

²⁷ Stephen Harrison, 'Horatian self-representations' in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 28

²⁸ Alessandro Barchiesi, 'Carmina: Odes and Carmen Saeculare' in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.148

²⁹ Stephen Harrison, 'Poetry, Philosophy and Letter-Writing in Horace Epistles I' in *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp.47-61

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

benevolentiae'³² (legacy hunter via the use of goodwill) Referring to R. Heinze's article, 'The Horatian Ode' (1923) Barchiesi points out that the Horatian ode 'frequently strives to influence and modify the addressee [and] there are almost always addressees.'³³ In other words Horace uses his *Epistles*, particularly *Ars Poetica* and *Epistle 2.1* to effect change and convey his literary ideas.

Horace embraces the idea that his poetry should contain a moral message, that it should help citizens work out how to live, inform them about what is expected of them by the State. Contemporary poets on the other hand, resist being regarded as a mouthpiece of the State, hence their reluctance to undertake the role of Poet Laureate (discussed in more detail in Chapter Two) but Horace is a pragmatist; he manages to keep his head and, unlike some of his contemporaries, he is not exiled from Rome. At the same time, however, he finds ways to express his distaste and proffer warnings as in Odes 1.14:

O ship! Will new waves carry you out to sea
again? What are you doing? Make boldly
for the harbour. Don't you see how
your side is stripped of its oars,

your mast is crippled by the swift sou'wester,
the yards are groaning, and without roping
the hull has little chance of holding out
against the mounting tyranny.³⁴

The orthodox view of Horace's poem is that he uses this nautical allegory to reveal his concerns about the State. The storm is thought to represent war and the new waves are renewed outbreaks of war. Horace is not only anxious and distressed about the continuing civil war itself, but about the fabric of the State

³² Stephen Harrison, 'Poetry, Philosophy and Letter-Writing in Horace Epistles I' in *Ethics and Rhetoric: Classical Essays for Donald Russell on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp.47-61

³³ Alessandro Barchiesi, 'Carmina: Odes and Carmen Saeculare' in the *Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.155

³⁴ Horace, 'O navis, referent' in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.37

and its ability to survive.³⁵ I have similar concerns about the poetry establishment; about its apparent readiness to publish gratuitously sexually explicit material and its increasing acceptance of obscure and exclusive language. This is not to say that I object to all sexual references (Horace made plenty of those in his odes) nor do I believe that all poetry should be simple, but neither should it be deliberately obscure. My concerns about these two issues in particular and the fear that by embracing them the poetry world continues to isolate itself, are expressed in my version of this Ode, ‘Ode to the S.S. Poetry’ (q.v.) It should be noted that not all “adult” poetry is “grown up”, hence my reference in this poem to sexy stanza makers using ropey rhymes.

Who but Horace, having been invited by Augustus to join him officially as his secretary, could have rejected the offer and yet kept favour with Augustus? Some commentators regard Horace as a servant of the State (as McClatchy says referring to the first six odes of Book Three, ‘Horace addresses himself rigorously to the history and ambition of Rome, or the Augustan vision of it’³⁶) but I believe that Horace is a realist; he wants his position among the great poets. His status as a poet and his social position is important to him and only with the approval of Maecenas and Augustus can he achieve such status. Horace, along with other poets of his time, had little choice other than to write poems in celebration of public figures and events, given that social, cultural and political activity was centred around the *principes civitatis* (leading men of the State). If they wanted to take part they had to gather around the *principes* especially if they were educated but of modest means. Obviously Horace did want to take part and he like other poets had a practical reason for wanting to attach himself to the rich and famous.³⁷ ‘It was through their connections that they found readers. Poets depended on well-to-do *amici* to sponsor their recitations, to praise and circulate their books, and to acquaint them with other useful friends.’³⁸

Evidently what we might now call social networking was alive and well in

³⁵ See David West, *Horace Odes I: Carpe Diem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) pp.68-9

³⁶ J.D. McClatchy in the Introduction to *Horace: The Odes*, ed. J.D. McClatchy (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002) p.12

³⁷ See Peter White, ‘Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome’ in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol.68 (1978) 74-92 (p.85)

³⁸ Ibid

Augustan Rome. Then as now, publicity was all important. Indeed it may well have been the most important element provided for a poet by his patron.³⁹ Despite this level of dependence, however, literary figures had a degree of self-sufficiency, they were not regarded as employees; they had time to pursue their writing and many ‘... seem to have been Roman knights’⁴⁰ The relationship between poetry and equestrian status was familiar enough for Horace that he ‘had only to invert it in order to find a useful irony’⁴¹ saying in *Ars Poetica*, ‘The fellow who is useless at writing poetry still attempts it. Why not? He’s free, and so was his father; his fortune is rated at the sum required of a knight; and his heart’s in the right place.’⁴²

Clearly Horace uses poetry as a social tool to gain for himself the place in society and life style he wants. The results of causing displeasure could be serious (Ovid was unlucky). Maybe this in itself can be taken as a measure of the importance attached to the words of poets! Horace holds no great altruistic desire to improve the lot of the masses. If anything, reading the opening of Odes 3.1, ‘he could in fact be seen as elitist or at least an advocate of an aristocracy of talent.’⁴³ ‘I hate the profane mob and keep them at a distance. / Maintain a holy silence.’⁴⁴

Horace, then, takes a rather pragmatic view of the social and national value of poetry. For him it is very definitely ‘above all a social and literary tool rather than a sublime art’⁴⁵ which probably explains his self-undermining whenever he tends towards pretentiousness. Despite this endearing habit of self-deprecation however, Horace is never shy to demonstrate his ambition, but rarely, as Harrison says, does he demonstrate his ambition without some form of self-deprecation.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he clearly wants to be part of the literary canon and uses his poetry as a medium to express that desire. The first poem, (addressed to

³⁹ See Peter White, ‘Amicitia and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome’ in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol.68 (1978) 74-92 (p.85)

⁴⁰ Ibid p.88

⁴¹ Ibid p.89

⁴² Horace, ‘Ars Poetica’ lines 382-4, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p. 201

⁴³ Stephen Harrison in personal correspondence [e-mail 1 October, 2007]

⁴⁴ Horace, *Horace Odes III: Dulce Periculum*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.11

⁴⁵ Stephen Harrison in personal correspondence [e-mail 1 October, 2007]

⁴⁶ See Stephen Harrison, ‘Horatian self-representations’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.28

his patron, Maecenas), in the first book of *Odes* specifically asks that Maecenas place him in the canon:

as for me, it is ivy, the reward of learned brows,
that puts me among the gods above. As for me,
the cold grove and the light-footed choruses of nymphs
with Satyrs set me apart from the people

if Euterpe lets me play her pipes, and Polyhymnia
does not withhold the lyre of Lesbos.
But if you enrol me among the lyric bards
my soaring head will touch the stars.⁴⁷

He wants to be made immortal by his verse. I make a similar plea to the editor in my version of this Ode, 'Ode to the Editor' (q.v.)

Evident in the *Ars Poetica* Horace certainly uses his poetry to further the Augustan ideal⁴⁸ mentioned earlier:

This was the wisdom of olden days: to draw a line between sacred
and secular, public and private; to bar indiscriminate sex, and
establish laws of marriage; to build towns and inscribe legal codes
on wood.⁴⁹

In his praise poems to Augustus and his patron Maecenas he has in mind his own social standing and status as a poet. In his letter to Augustus (*Ep. 2.1*) Horace is '...scathing in his attack upon the cult of the old poets at the expense of living poets...' ⁵⁰ Horace complains that only the writer '...who sank to his grave a

⁴⁷ Horace, 'Maecenas atavis edite' in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp.25-6

⁴⁸ See page 71

⁴⁹ Horace, *Ars Poetica* (396-399) in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.201

⁵⁰ Kenneth Quinn, 'The Poet and his Audience in the Augustan Age' in *Principat: Dreissigster Band (1. Teilband) Sprache und Literatur*, ed. by Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1982) pp.75-180 (p.107)

century back'⁵¹ is honoured and makes a plea that modern poets (presumably himself in particular) be honoured in their lifetime just as Augustus is:

But you are honoured in good time while still among us.
We build altars on which to swear by your divinity,
declaring your like has never been and never will be.⁵²

It makes me annoyed that a thing should be faulted, not for being crudely or clumsily made, but simply for being recent,
and that praise and prizes should be asked for the old instead of
[forbearance].⁵³

Having achieved the status he wants for himself and his poetry does not prevent him from raising a disapproving eyebrow, as in 'O navis referent', referred to earlier. This kind of difficult balance can still be achieved in the present day and in Chapter Three for example, I detail one of my own community residencies in North Lodge Park, Darlington, commissioned and financed by Darlington Borough Council (q.v.)

The *Ars Poetica* (itself based on Greek criticism⁵⁴) continued as a defining influence on the art of poetry for hundreds of years and whilst Horace has in mind a particular kind of usefulness (*prodesse*) meaning the didactic passages in a play⁵⁵ this idea of utility is commonly taken to extend to Horace's definition of poetry.⁵⁶ The idea of combining poetic instruction with delight might seem strange to the modern mind, they 'are closely related to ancient thinking about poetry.'⁵⁷ 'If a poem divorces the two aspects, it will leave the public divided in

⁵¹ Horace, 'EP. 2.1' lines 36-7 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.176

⁵² Ibid, lines 15-17, p.175

⁵³ Ibid, lines 76-8, p.177

⁵⁴ See J. Tate 'Horace and the Moral Function of Poetry' in *The Classical Quarterly* (London: The Classical Association, April, 1928) p.65

⁵⁵ *Horace: Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones ('Ars Poetica')*, ed. by Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p.204

⁵⁶ See Tenney Frank, 'Horace's Definition of Poetry', in *The Classical Journal* (Middle West and South Inc: The Classical Association, December, 1935) Vol. 31, No.3, p.167

⁵⁷ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The 'Ars' Poetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) p.504

taste and judgement... Hence Horace's concern with a synthesis... the ideal poets achieved a unity of content and form, talent and art.'⁵⁸

The *Ars Poetica* is controversial, sometimes seen as a literary treatise and sometimes as a literary epistle addressed to the Pisos.⁵⁹ Whilst 'rarely read in its entirety nowadays, even by students of literature... In spite of this, its influence lives on...'⁶⁰ In a 2008 lecture, the classicist Rita Copeland suggested that whilst it had had an impact on teaching and had in fact served as a first passage into Latin Studies for decades, it was not until the Middle Ages that it 'grew up', one reason being that it was translated into European languages and so began to achieve authority as a meta-text. In other words the *Ars Poetica* itself started to be useful as literary theory. 'Lifted up', Copeland says, 'it rose above the classroom; to become the poet's poem.'⁶¹

The Poet as Educator/Teacher

In wishing to both please and be of service, Horace clearly sees one of his duties as that of educator/teacher/prophet. Whether his motivation was a matter of expediency or morality⁶² is open to question, but given that he followed the Greek example⁶³ (which was 'concerned for the moral influence of literature'⁶⁴) we can assume he embraced his role as educator. R.O.A.M. Lyne observes that, 'Early and late Horace endorse this traditional role: the poet as moral teacher. We should infer that it genuinely, though of course not exclusively, appealed to him.'⁶⁵ Lyne refers to Horace's 'later publicly educative Odes' as being 'designed to inculcate a civic sense of obligation.'⁶⁶ Phillip Hills refers to Horace's

⁵⁸ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The 'Ars' Poetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) pp.504-5

⁵⁹ See Phillip Hills, *Horace*: (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005) p.135

⁶⁰ Phillip Hills, *Horace*: (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005) p.140

⁶¹ Personal notes taken at Rita Copeland's Poetry and Translation lecture, University of Stirling, 18 July, 2008

⁶² See J. Tate, 'Horace and the Moral Function of Poetry' in *The Classical Quarterly* (London: The Classical Association, April, 1928) p.68

⁶³ For a more detailed commentary see Archibald Y. Campbell, *Horace: A New Interpretation* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1924) p.28

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.29

⁶⁵ R.O.A.M. Lyne, *Horace: Behind the Public Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p.23

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

‘worldliness’,⁶⁷ his practical way of looking at the world and at human interaction. In the *Ars Poetica* as well as advising on appropriate subject matter for poetry, he gives advice about how to receive criticism, whose views to value; he warns against poets who attract toadies and mocks those writers who aim at an unkempt image thinking it to be a sign of literary genius. His observations of human behaviour and especially the behaviour of writers and others involved in the literary scene feel familiar to me and I echo them in *Chasing the Ivy* (q.v.) Not only does Horace use his poetry to establish his cultural and literary status in society by writing what might be referred to as State poetry, but through both his satires and poetry he helps achieve moral regeneration by presenting individuals with examples of how they might live their lives in a more general sense. In other words, via *sermo* (discourse generally containing a moral and often allowing for questions and conversation)⁶⁸ in *Ars Poetica* and in his satires, Horace attempts to pass on his wisdom and philosophy of life. ‘Of proper writing,’⁶⁹ he says in *Ars Poetica*, ‘moral sense is the fountain and source.’⁷⁰

As well as providing a kind of code of practice for writers Horace provides guidance and advice about love and what kind of love to avoid for example, as in Odes 1.5:

What slim youngster soaked in perfumes
is hugging you now, Pyrrha, on a bed of roses
deep in your lovely cave? For whom
are you tying up your blonde hair?

You’re so elegant and so simple. Many’s the time
he’ll weep at your faithlessness and the changing gods,
and be amazed at seas
roughened by black winds,

⁶⁷ Phillip Hills, *Horace* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005) p.149

⁶⁸ See *Oxford Latin Desk Dictionary*, Ed. by James Morwood (London: Oxford University Press, rev. Edn 2005) p.298 and <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sermon>> [accessed 9 November, 2012]

⁶⁹ Horace, ‘Ars Poetica’, line 309 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.198

⁷⁰ Ibid

but now in all innocence he enjoys your golden beauty
and imagines you always available, always lovable,
not knowing about treacherous breezes –

I pity poor devils who have no experience of you

and are dazzled by your radiance. As for me,
the tablet on the temple wall announces
that I have dedicated my dripping clothes
to the god who rules the sea.⁷¹

In my version of this Ode, ‘Ode to the Possible Future Laureate (and his current hot girlfriend)’ (q.v.) I proffer similar guidance, by pointing out to the aspiring poet that his girlfriend is probably attracted to him because she sees his literary potential and not for reasons of true love.

Horace displays great wisdom about the inevitability of death, how it is a great leveller as in Odes 1.4:

Pale death kicks with impartial foot at the hovels of the poor
and the towers of kings. O fortunate Sestius,
the brief sum of life does not allow us to start on long hopes.⁷²

He provides constant reminders in several poems about the importance of *carpe diem* – seizing the moment, as for example in Odes 1.11 ‘...Harvest the day and leave as little as possible for tomorrow.’⁷³ (my version of this Ode is ‘Ode to the Non-Poet Partner’ (q.v.)

It is Horace’s general approach; the self-deprecation, the recognition of impotence, the wisdom, wit and irony, his philosophical acceptance of old age and death, that appeal to me (though I do address political/State topics as in my version of Odes 1.6, ‘Ode to George and Tony’ (q.v.)) These, combined with his

⁷¹ Horace, ‘Quis multa gracilis’ from ‘Odes, Book I’ in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by D. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.30

⁷² Horace, ‘Solvitur acris hiems’ from ‘Odes, Book I’ in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by D. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.29

⁷³ Ibid, ‘Tu me quaesieris’, p.34

insight and observations about human interaction, are the elements that inspire me to create versions of his poems and relate them to contemporary times. It was the desire to capture in poetic form the world of contemporary poetry, with all of its successes and failures, frustrations and sycophancy that led to my writing *Chasing the Ivy*, (q.v.) my recontextualisation of *Horace: Odes Book I*. I did so not only because I wanted to reflect on my own poetic experience and career, as Horace himself did, but also to proffer a word of warning for aspiring poets. In other words, like Horace, I wanted to write pleasing poetry, poetry that would delight because of its form and musicality, but that could also be regarded as useful for writers and academics.

Whilst Horace is a poet who unashamedly knows how to manipulate the system to his own advantage – an accomplished networker – nevertheless, he has a convivial nature, a way of relating to his fellow man, a kind of warmth that is irresistible as for example in Odes 1.9 where he addresses his slave, cupbearer, perhaps boy lover, Thaliarchus:

Thaw out the cold. Pile up the logs
on the hearth and be more generous, Thaliarchus,
as you draw the four-year-old Sabine
from the two-eared cask...
Don't ask what will happen tomorrow.
Whatever day Fortune gives you, enter it
as profit, and don't look down on love
and dancing while you're still a lad.⁷⁴

My version of this Ode, 'Ode to an Arvon Course Writer' (q.v.) similarly tries to capture conviviality, warmth and friendship, and again in Odes 1.27, Horace, (speaking of Megilla's brother), says:

...no need to blush
about your burning passion. Your lovers

⁷⁴ Horace, 'Vides ut alta' from 'Odes, Book I' in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by D. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.33

are always well-born. Whatever it is, come, tell me
your secret. It's safe with me...⁷⁵

A similar convivial tone is captured in my version of this Ode, 'Ode to the Poetry Professor at the End of Term' (q.v.)

Horace further emphasises the role of educator/teacher in *Epistles 2.1*:

Although he's idle and inefficient as a soldier, yet he is beneficial to the city, if you grant that major ends can be assisted by minor contributions. The poet shapes the tender, lispng speech of a child, already turning the ear from dirty talk. Soon, too, he moulds the character with kindly teachings, correcting harshness, envy and anger. He relates soundly-principled deeds, furnishes each stage in life with noted examples.⁷⁶

In his interpretation of this Gordon Williams refers to the poet as 'a splendid teacher and trainer of youth, especially in morality [someone who] provides patterns of conduct'.⁷⁷ Whilst Horace appears to accept the soldier's role as more important to the city than that of the poet, he nevertheless places importance on the role of the poet as educator and teacher; a role which I consider continues to apply. Horace envisages 'education through poetry.'⁷⁸ I accept that Horace's *Satires* are more 'typically concerned with private 'morality',⁷⁹ than are the Odes which are more 'publicly educative',⁸⁰ nevertheless I believe that in *Odes Book 1*, Horace reflects on both public and private patterns of conduct. For example in 'Ode 1.6', Horace says, (employing the device of *recusatio*; a type of

⁷⁵ Horace, 'Natis in usum' from 'Odes, Book I' in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by D. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.47

⁷⁶ R.O.A.M Lyne, Extract from Horace: *Epistles 2.1* in *Horace: Behind the Public Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p.21

⁷⁷ Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford at Clarendon, 1968) p.74

⁷⁸ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Prolegomena Literary Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) p.223

⁷⁹ R.O.A.M Lyne, *Horace: Behind the Public Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p.23

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

counterplea)⁸¹ that he is not good enough to comment and must leave praise to the poet, Varius on the public achievements of Agrippa and Caesar: ‘We are too slight for these large themes. Modesty and the Muse who commands the unwarlike lyre forbid us to diminish the praise of glorious Caesar and yourself by our imperfect talent.’⁸²

In my version of ‘Ode 1.6’, ‘Ode to George and Tony’ (q.v.), I comment on public patterns of conduct. Indeed as will be seen throughout Chapter Three my versions seek to observe and reflect on public and private patterns of conduct within the world of contemporary poetry. In connection with private conduct, in ‘Odes 1.18’ Horace warns about the over-use of wine and indulgence in self-praise. Similar advice about private conduct is contained in my version of ‘Ode 1.18,’ ‘Ode to Demon Writers’ (q.v.) Extracts from Horace’s ‘Odes 1.18’ and my version of it are provided in Chapter Three where I go into further detail about how Horace and I use poetry (see Poet as Civiliser). Lyric poetry in particular is associated with ‘admonition, persuasion, greeting, farewell, praise and consolation’⁸³ Despite the fact that Horace’s *Odes* are directed at individuals it is my view that the content of his poems applies not only to individuals but to types of individuals, therefore they have a significance beyond the individual and the particular circumstances contained in the poems. For example, ‘Ode 1.11’ addressed to Leuconoe:

Don’t you ask, Leuconoe-the gods do not wish it to be known-
 what end they have given to me or to you, and don’t meddle with
 Babylonian calculations. How much better to accept whatever
[comes,
 whether Jupiter gives us other winters or whether this is our last

 now wearying the Tyrrhenian Sea on the pumice stones

⁸¹ See *Oxford Latin Desk Dictionary*, Ed. by James Morwood (London: Oxford University Press, rev. Edn 2005) p.159

⁸² Horace, *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.30

⁸³ Alessandro Barchiesi., ‘Carmina: Odes and Carmen Saeculare’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.151

opposing it. Be wise, strain the wine and cut back long hope
 into a small space. While we speak, envious time will have
 flown past. Harvest the day and leave as little as possible for
 [tomorrow].⁸⁴

This ode contains the famous phrase '*carpe diem*', '*harvest the day*'. According to David West 'His proposal is that they should drink together and make love.'⁸⁵ The poem is a 'dramatic monologue..... it encourages us to make deductions about the characters and situation of Horace and Leuconoe.'⁸⁶ But surely in a more general sense it is as much to do with the 'the shortness of human life, [and] the vast energy of elemental forces against the impotence of human beings'⁸⁷. Just as my own version, 'Ode to the Non-Poet Partner' (q.v.) whilst addressed to one individual, aims to set up a contrast between nature's continual renewal and the short-lived nature of mankind.

The Poet as Civiliser of Society (and the question of patronage)

Horace was certainly concerned with criticising life. 'He involved himself in the problems of his time'⁸⁸. Despite the variety of poetry produced under the patronage of Maecenas and Augustus, the Augustan poets accepted serious political themes as suitable for poetry and by so doing changed the conception of the poet in society. By borrowing from the religious, the title of *vates* (a priestly figure to whose words were attached special significance) Horace and other poets were afforded dignity of a semi-religious nature and great importance was attached to their words.⁸⁹ Leaders looked to be honoured by poets in their writing. Augustus himself supposedly chided Horace for failing to address him in his poetry, to which Horace answered with his Ep. 2.1. It could be argued that as such, the poets were no more than servants of the State. But I would take issue

⁸⁴ Horace, 'Ode 1.11, Tu ne quaesieris' in *Horace Odes I Carpe Diem: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.51

⁸⁵ Ibid, David West, p.52

⁸⁶ Ibid, David West, p.50

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1968) p.31

⁸⁹ Ibid, see p.47

here. Being in receipt of patronage does not automatically result in becoming merely a mouthpiece for the patron. For example, Horace's first serious poem (Epode 16) was 'a rebel's manifesto issued to the whole of Rome to cease fighting and to go in search of a land of peace.'⁹⁰ '...Rome is falling, ruined by the might of Rome'⁹¹ he warned. Although this was quite likely a pre-Maecenas poem, these were surely civilizing words.

In *Ars Poetica* Horace quite openly presents poets as civilizers of society. Endowing them with wisdom he says; 'Song was the medium of oracles, song showed the way through life.'⁹² He builds up an 'imposing picture of the poet as the civilizer of mankind, the founder and preserver of human society.'⁹³ In the society in which Horace lived, poetry was inextricably linked with affairs of state; military leaders, even Augustus himself, looked to poets (including Horace) to affirm their greatness, so maybe Horace saw the role of civilizer as yet another means of establishing his own social status.

The Poet as Prophet/Seer/Magician

Take the playwright who fills my heart with imaginary grief,
illusive rage or fear, and then with peace; to me
that's as hard as walking a tightrope; like a magician
he whisks me away – one day to Thebes, another to Athens.⁹⁴

Earlier in this chapter I made reference to Horace's belief that the source of good poetry is wisdom. He uses his wisdom, his gifts as a poet, to prophesy on the state of the nation (as in Odes 1.14) as well as on human interaction. Those poets who accepted the title *vates* were not only expected to celebrate Roman

⁹⁰ Tenney Frank, 'Horace's Definition of Poetry' in *The Classical Journal* (Middle West and South Inc: The Classical Association, December, 1935) Vol. 31, pp.169-170

⁹¹ Horace, 'Epode 16' in *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by D. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.18

⁹² Horace, 'Ars Poetica' lines 403-404, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.201

⁹³ C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The Ars Poetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) p.510

⁹⁴ Horace, 'Epistles, 2.1' lines 210-13 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.181

History,⁹⁵ but the title also implied a ‘semi-religious prophetic ideal’⁹⁶ Horace himself embraces the prophetic role in the opening to *Odes, Book 3*:

...As priest of the Muses
I sing for girls and boys
songs never heard before.⁹⁷

It is obvious that the poet is a priest of the Muses, with a message addressed to boys and girls. It is a significant message for the State which demonstrates that hope for the future rests with the younger generation. All of this is implied in proud, almost arrogant words, ‘which express a novel conception of the place and function of the poet in society’.⁹⁸

It may seem strange under this heading of *Poet as Prophet/Seer/Magician* to refer to Horace’s *Odes* 1.2. Written after the assassination of Julius Caesar, the Battle of Actium and Augustus’s supposed threat to retire into private life, we find Horace talking of the devastation of war, presenting Augustus as a kind of saviour figure, ‘praying that similar portents will not lead to similar results and that Augustus, the contemporary Julian, the first Princeps, will be spared to govern Rome for many long triumphant years.’⁹⁹ In fact Horace’s prediction came true. Augustus lived into his seventies and under his reign civil wars subsided. Under Augustus young men would merely hear of rather than take part in civil war. This poem feels political; warning against war, against civil war:

Young men will hear that citizen sharpened against citizen
swords that should have slain our Persian enemies. They will hear
what few there are, thanks to the sins of their fathers –

⁹⁵ See Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1968) p.47

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ Horace, *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epode*, trans. by D. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.76

⁹⁸ Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1968) p.48

⁹⁹ David West, in notes to *Horace The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.141

of the battles we fought.¹⁰⁰

The poem ends in high praise of Augustus, making him almost god-like:

Here rather celebrate your triumphs.
 Here delight to be hailed as Father and Princeps
 and do not allow the Medes to ride unavenged
 while you, Caesar, are our leader.¹⁰¹

Yet one of the main strengths of this poem, for the purposes of examining the qualities required of poets, is that it demonstrates an ability to see the future based on observations of the past and present; a point later made by Shelley (referred to in Chapter Two). This poem, as does much of his work, demonstrates Horace's ability to think and predict based on past knowledge and experience; in other words his poetry shows wisdom while at the same time supplying 'a sense of direction, a spiritual grounding, a place to stand where the pressure of reality will not overcome the imagination, thus limiting possibilities'¹⁰²

As I mention in Chapter Two, Aristotle believed in the truth both of what would and what might happen., Seamus Heaney dreamed of alternative worlds and in Michael Longley's poem, 'The Helmet' referred to in Chapter Four he suggests we learn nothing from past experiences in relation to war. I employ the same tactic in my version of *Odes 1.2*, 'Ode to Poets (as a last resort)' (q.v.) by linking the Second World War and the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York.

Thundering boots have echoed round us twice
 and once a man, by stretching out his arm,
 stirred such an angry storm the whole world shook.

...More recently a bolt out of the blue,

¹⁰⁰ Horace, *Horace: The Complete Odes and Epode*, trans. by David. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp.26-27

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p.27

¹⁰² Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) p.21

made ivory towers collapse. The city fell.
Our sixty years of nearly-calm was past.

Chapter Two: Beauty and Usefulness from Horace to Today

In the introduction I said that I was particularly concerned with Horace's proposition that poetry should combine beauty and usefulness, and in Chapter One I describe what Horace might have meant by these terms. I will discuss the development of beauty and usefulness, what they mean to me and how I combine the two in both my writing practice and poetry residencies in Chapter Three, but in the present chapter I want to consider whether enthusiasm for usefulness in poetry can be seen to have waned as we move towards the present day. I will also address the role of the poet and poetry including the use of poetry as a social and literary tool. It has proved necessary to be selective in the treatment of this theme: I consider the views of some significant commentators from the past (most of whom knew and read Horace) and some contemporary poets, paying particular attention to their ideas about the combination of usefulness and beauty.

The combination of usefulness and beauty is a Greek tradition advocated by Plato, Simonides and Aristotle and continued by Cicero and Horace. That tradition is described by Gerald F. Else and Leon Golden in their article 'Classical Poetics':

poetry is a serious, public concern, the cornerstone of education and of civic life, and a source, for good or for evil, of insight and knowledge... it is also a delightful thing endowed with a fascination that borders on enchantment... it is not merely terrestrial and utilitarian, but somehow divine.¹⁰³

With Virgil and Ovid, Horace is regarded as one of the great Augustan Age poets, by far 'the greatest transmitter'¹⁰⁴ of classical influence. His purpose is either to profit or please, but at best to do both:

To the Italian critics of the Renaissance, Latinists and stylists

¹⁰³ *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan and others (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.205

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid* p.208

all...Horace was in their bones. And they learned more from him than rules. He encouraged them in the proud belief that poetry is an honourable and exacting craft, fit to offer serious counsel and occupy a high place in the culture of a nation.¹⁰⁵

It is Horace who provides the template for Sidney and many later writers including myself.

Reflecting on comments made by some contemporary poets (referred to later in this chapter) I have no doubt that the majority of those poets share the belief that poetry is an exacting craft and I am equally confident that they see it as an honourable profession. However, it seems unlikely that they view poetry as a fit place to offer serious counsel. As to whether poetry occupies a high place in the nation, they seem uncertain, regardless of whether they think it should.

Poet as Educator/Civilizer

Almost three hundred years before Horace was born Plato banished poetry from his ideal world, his *Republic*. Plato's attack can be seen partly as a reaction against the moral authority and cultural prestige of poetry. He intends to replace poetry by philosophy as the central educational discourse in Athenian society.¹⁰⁶ As Penelope Murray says, Plato's attitude to poetry is 'neither simple nor consistent'¹⁰⁷, but he recognises the power and magic of poetry. He 'writes about poetry like no other philosopher, before or since; for he is deeply imbued with poetry, and deeply attracted to it, yet determined to resist its spell.'¹⁰⁸ Despite Plato's attempts to displace poetry as a vehicle for education, Horace saw it as such. When, during the early modern period, interest in classical learning rekindled, Horace's work was prominent. Jay Parini expresses the view that: 'One of the big ideas about poetry...that it [can] both "teach and delight" its

¹⁰⁵ *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan and others (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.209

¹⁰⁶ See Penelope Murray, introduction to *Classical Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p.xxiv

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.xxix

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.xxiii.

readers'¹⁰⁹ was earlier espoused by Sir Philip Sidney in his *An Apologie for Poetrie*, based upon his belief that the poet's true role is that of teacher:

it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet...but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by.¹¹⁰

Clearly influenced by classical tradition and by Horace's *Ars Poetica* in particular ('A poem is like a picture'¹¹¹) Sidney says: 'Poesy ... is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically; a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight.'¹¹² In his 'Introduction' to *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)* by Sir Philip Sidney, R.W. Maslen summarises Sidney's argument but makes a further point about the usefulness of poetry:

poetry is the most efficient persuasive force available to human beings. The poet is the man...who exploits the resources of language most freely and fearlessly for what he considers the common good – or for the good of his class or political faction. Poetry, in other words, is useful, and its usefulness makes it dangerous.¹¹³

Maslen also tells us that Sidney further developed the notion of the poem as a speaking picture and that he (Sidney) considered these speaking pictures to be: 'as delightful as they are instructive, and their delightfulness is what makes them instructive. They "move men", arouse their emotions and desires, as strongly as

¹⁰⁹ Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (United States of America: Yale University Press, 2008) p.8

¹¹⁰ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, third edition, 2002) p.87

¹¹¹ Horace, 'Ars Poetica' line 361, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.200

¹¹² Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, third edition, 2002) p.86

¹¹³ R.W. Maslen, 'Introduction' to *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)* by Sir Philip Sidney (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.2

they appeal to their rational understanding of what constitutes goodness. By moving men they stir them to action.’¹¹⁴ A clear connection can be made here between Sidney’s view of poetry and painting and Cicero’s view of rhetoric.¹¹⁵ The connection between painting and poetry is nothing new. Both Horace and Aristotle made such a connection, seeing both art forms as imitation. Aristotle believed that ‘imitation comes naturally to human beings...so does the universal pleasure in imitations.’¹¹⁶ The arousal of emotions posed no great problem as far as Aristotle was concerned. He did not regard emotion as irrational, but rather as being ‘grounded in our understanding.’¹¹⁷ In his introduction to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Malcolm Heath reminds us that a ‘fundamental premise of Aristotle’s understanding of what it is to be human’¹¹⁸ is the belief that all human beings desire and draw pleasure from knowledge. Aristotle saw it as the poet’s job to ‘produce the pleasure which comes from pity and fear’¹¹⁹. For Aristotle there is an inextricable link between poetry and philosophy. Both reflect what is probable or necessary, that is, they possess universal truths. He makes a distinction between the historian and the poet. The one, he tells us, ‘says what has happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen.’¹²⁰ Aristotle believes it is ‘for this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars.’¹²¹ It is not surprising therefore that Sidney defines a “right” poet as someone who ‘brings together the examples of the historian and the principles of the philosopher to construct his ideal world.’¹²²

Sidney was one of the many English poets writing between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries for whom Roman authors were greatly significant. Others included Ben Jonson (1572-1637) Lord John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

¹¹⁴ R.W. Maslen, ‘Introduction’ to *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)* by Sir Philip Sidney (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) pp.50-1

¹¹⁵ See Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric; The New Critical Idiom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) p.13

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Books, 1996) p.6

¹¹⁷ Malcolm Heath in the introduction to *Aristotle: Poetics* (London: Penguin Books, 1996) p.xxxviii

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.ix

¹¹⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Books, 1996) p.22

¹²⁰ *Ibid* p.16

¹²¹ *Ibid*

¹²² Salman Phillips, ‘Instruction and Delight In Medieval and Renaissance Criticism’, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No.3 (autumn, 1979) pp.303-332

(1647-1680) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Translating Cicero, Ben Jonson (the first to translate Horace's *Ars Poetica* into English) says, 'The Poet is the nearest Borderer upon the Orator,'¹²³ and Brian Vickers points out that there is 'Massive continuity between ancient Rome and England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'¹²⁴ when English literature was regarded 'as a fundamentally practical one, whose object throughout was to persuade.'¹²⁵ In their adherence to the classical tradition, English poets were expected to offer moral guidance just as Horace did in his own country. Horace denounces the pretensions of wisdom and high intellect by the Pest, in 'Satire ix', 'Get me *out of here!*'¹²⁶ he says to a passing friend. So too, in his poem, 'A Satyre against Reason and Mankind' Rochester denounces human nature with all of its pretensions about wisdom and virtue, 'Man differs more from man, than man from beast.'¹²⁷ Just as Horace claims to hate the profane mob (see Chapter One)¹²⁸ in 'An Allusion to Horace', Rochester criticises other poets, Dryden in particular and again, like Horace, indicates those whose approval he values:

I loath the Rabble, 'tis enough for me,
 if Sidley, Shadwell, Shepherd, Witcherley,
 Godolphin, Buttler, Buckhurst, Buckingham,
 And some few more, whom I omit to name
 Approve my Sense, I count their Censure Fame.¹²⁹

This closing stanza from 'An Allusion to Horace' demonstrates Rochester's

¹²³ See 'Rhetoric' by Brian Vickers in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*, ed by Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, this edn. 1997) p.103

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Archibald Y. Campbell, *Horace: A New interpretation* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1924) p.27

¹²⁶ Horace, 'Satire 1.9' line 66, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.77

¹²⁷ Lord John Wilmot, 'A Satyre against Reason and Mankind' <http://www.ealasaid.com/fan/rochester/satire.html> [accessed 2 February, 2012]

¹²⁸ See Horace, 'Odes 3.1' in *Horace Odes III: Dulce Periculum*, tr. David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.11

¹²⁹ Lord John Wilmot, 'An Allusion to Horace' < <http://www.sanjeev.net/poetry/wilmot-john/an-allusion-to-horace-182072.html> > [accessed 2 February, 2012]

concern for his own literary status; a concern very much at the forefront of Horace's mind.

Pope, as well as being concerned about aesthetics (his *Essay on Criticism* presents rules of composition and a manual for writing poetry) is also concerned for his own literary status (discussed later). Pope was a moralist. His most ambitious enterprise in this respect is the *Essay on Man*¹³⁰ in which he gives advice about how man should relate to the universe, to himself as an individual, to society and to happiness. The term 'Augustan' was used to characterize the work of eighteenth century English writers such as Pope, who adopted the style, themes and structure of classical texts, and of Horace in particular. In his *Imitations of Horace*, Pope, 'fully aware of Horatian precedents and analogies, contends with Horace...'¹³¹ Pope, in his 1737 version of Horace's Epistle 2.1, 'while proud of the place he has earned in society, is strident in his assertions of independence'¹³². In this, his mock expression of praise addressed to King George II (who was antagonistic towards learning and the arts) Pope points to the same failings in England's literary culture as existed in Horace's Rome, namely the continuing practice of honouring only the ancients. In an epigrammatic couplet he sets up his case – 'Authors, like Coins, grow dear as they grow old; / It is the rust we value, not the gold.'¹³³ He shows his impatience with the situation much as Horace did: 'I lose my patience, and I own it too, / When works are censur'd not as bad, but new.'¹³⁴

The importance of self presentation is emphasized by Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, where he talks about the character of the speaker and the establishment of credibility.¹³⁵ It is one of poetry's rhetorical devices and as such was important to Pope and Rochester as it had been to Horace (I seek to emulate Horace in my own work). Pope's poems were designed to 'present a carefully adjusted self-

¹³⁰ See W.W. Robson, *A Prologue to English Literature* (Great Britain: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1986) p.111

¹³¹ John Butt, in Introduction in *Imitations of Horace*, ed. John Butt (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966) p.10

¹³² *Ibid*, p.12

¹³³ Alexander Pope, *Imitations of Horace* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966) p.69

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.73

¹³⁵ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (USA: Dover Thrift, 2004) p.7

portrait of the poet...¹³⁶ Indeed it could be said that Pope took the use of self-representation ('which Aristotle lists as the first of the three requirements of persuasive address'¹³⁷) further than Horace. For example, in Horace Ep. 1.7 Horace, having been taken to task by his patron, Maecenas for staying too long in the country, praises moderation by ascribing that quality to Telemachus:¹³⁸ 'Small things for the small. It isn't royal Rome/that attracts me now, but quiet Tibur or peaceful Tarentum'.¹³⁹ Pope on the other hand, attaches the quality of modesty to himself:

I can trust that sinking Fund, my life.
Can I retrench? Yes, mighty well,
Shrink back to my Paternal Cell,
A little House, with Trees a-row,
And like its Master, very low,
There dy'd my Father, no man's Debtor,
And there I'll die, nor worse nor better.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless there is still present in Pope's work, as in Horace's, a self-deprecatory tone – a tone which whether genuinely felt or not, is persuasive, not only in terms of a general lesson in modesty but, because it carries biblical overtones¹⁴¹ (which are perhaps also intended to assist his position in the canon). As R.E. Hughes points out in his article, 'These *Imitations of Horace* provide a fine example of the care Pope took throughout his writings to present himself in the best possible terms and thus to provide himself with both an attack and a

¹³⁶ John Butt, in the Introduction to *Alexander Pope: Imitations of Horace* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966) p.14

¹³⁷ R.E. Hughes, 'Pope's Imitations of Horace and the Ethical Focus' in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.71, No.8 (Dec., 1956) p.569

¹³⁸ Ibid, see p.573

¹³⁹ Horace, 'Epistles, I.7' lines 44-5, in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.145

¹⁴⁰ R.E. Hughes, 'Pope's Imitations of Horace and the Ethical Focus' in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.71, No.8 (Dec., 1956) p.573

¹⁴¹ See the International Standard Version of the Bible (2008) Luke 18:14, "...everyone that exalts himself will be humbled, but the person who humbles himself will be exalted."

defense.’¹⁴² Clearly self-representation in literature, and in poetry in particular, is being used to establish literary and social credentials.

The Declining Dominance of Classicism

Another dominant figure in the discussion of poetry in the second half of the century, Samuel Johnson (1709-84) upholds the ‘...Horatian dictum that poetry must provide moral instruction through pleasure.’¹⁴³ The importance of persuasive language and power over the audience was a key principle up to the Romantic era.¹⁴⁴ ‘...A poet, like an orator, was supposed to delight, to teach and to persuade, three interlinked goals.’¹⁴⁵ Ideas concerning the usefulness of poetry where poets *intended* useful teaching (following the Latin poets who ‘gave priority to instructing citizens and artists in a variety of subjects’¹⁴⁶) prevailed until around 1800 when ‘didactic aims and methods underwent radical transformations’¹⁴⁷ There was a shift away from the poet as educator/teacher towards the poet as artist. ‘Romantic artists often appeared to stand on the edge of society, offering critiques and bold counterexamples.’¹⁴⁸ Their critiques (whilst in themselves useful) given from a position (chosen or otherwise) on the edge of society, perhaps contributed both to the subsequent decline of classicism and the marginalisation of poetry and poets. Horace’s popularity soared between 1660 and 1700 and his translations remain popular in current poetry in English¹⁴⁹ nevertheless, Romanticism is regarded as having ‘...usurped the dominance of Classicism...’¹⁵⁰ and ‘William Wordsworth (1770-1850) – among the most

¹⁴² R.E. Hughes, ‘Pope’s Imitations of Horace and the Ethical Focus’ in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.71, No.8 (Dec., 1956) p.570

¹⁴³ *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan and others (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.1081

¹⁴⁴ See ‘Rhetoric’ by Brian Vickers in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, this edn. 1997) p.102

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.103

¹⁴⁶ Sholom J. Kahn, ‘Didactic Poetry’ in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan and others (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.293

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.294

¹⁴⁸ Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (Yale University Press: United States of American, 2008) p.11

¹⁴⁹ See Stephen Harrison, ‘The Reception of Horace in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.344

¹⁵⁰ Philip Hills, *Horace* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005) p.149

influential of the English Romantic poets – puts forward a few essential ideas about poetry, ideas that have hardly shifted in two centuries.’¹⁵¹ From the Romantic period onwards poets are seen as outsiders rather than representatives speaking on behalf of society.

In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth defines poetry as: ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity’¹⁵² He also emphasised that poetry should give pleasure, excite the mind; conjure up passions ‘(especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful)’¹⁵³ even so he believed that ‘the understanding of the reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.’¹⁵⁴ If Wordsworth was an artist standing ‘on the edge of society’, commenting and critiquing rather than seeing himself formally as a teacher/educator (as Horace might have done) nevertheless he recognised that via poetry people could be enlightened. Surely Wordsworth, by enlightening readers, by strengthening and purifying their affections, resulting in an increased personal realisation, is educating them, albeit in an informal sense. Wordsworth did not wish via his poetry to move men into action, but rather to influence them. Similarly in my own work, I try to affect the way my readers think. Poetry makes a difference whether by moving men to action or influencing their thinking, Horace believed that – so do most poets, including myself. Furthermore Wordsworth, like Horace (see Chapter One) recognises the prophetic nature of poetry when in his *Preface to The Lyrical Ballads* he writes:

Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, “that he looks before and after.” He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love...the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread

¹⁵¹ Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (Yale University Press: United States of American, 2008) p.11

¹⁵² William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800)

< <http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html> >

[accessed 14 January, 2008] paragraph 6

¹⁵³ Ibid paragraph 15

¹⁵⁴ Ibid paragraph 6

over the whole earth, and over all time.¹⁵⁵

However, as Jane Stabler comments, ‘The invocation of Horace’s name has been a mortification for the many writers who felt bound to fulfil the ‘utile dulci’ ideal of the *Ars Poetica*.’¹⁵⁶ In fact the Romantic poet, Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) jokes about it in *Don Juan* (XIII, 81)¹⁵⁷ Writing about the reputation and morals of English ladies, Byron uses line 343 of Horace’s *Ars Poetica* as the concluding line to his stanza 81: ‘omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci. (He gets every vote who combines the useful with the pleasant.)’¹⁵⁸ From this example it becomes clear that Byron had a ‘complex attitude to Horatian critical orthodoxy’¹⁵⁹ one that involved a degree of irreverence. Nevertheless, despite this joke at Horace’s expense, Byron goes on to compose his own version of the *Ars Poetica*, called *Hints from Horace* in which he sets about describing how to write good poetry:

Two objects always should the Poet move,
Or one of both – to please or to improve.
Whate’er you teach, be brief, if you design
For our remembrance your didactic line;
Redundance places Memory on the rack,
For brains may be o’erloaded, like the back.¹⁶⁰

This reveals the complex attitude that I suggest later in this chapter, many contemporary poets have towards the role and function of poetry.

¹⁵⁵ William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads in *Famous Prefaces. The Harvard Classics. 1909-14* < <http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html> > [accessed 14. January, 2008] paragraph 20

¹⁵⁶ Jane Stabler, ‘The Genesis of Byron’s Hints from Horace’ in *Translation and Literature*, Vol 3 (Edinburgh University Press, May, 1994) pp.47-65

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, see pp.47-65

¹⁵⁸ See Peter Cochran, ‘Hints from Horace’ <http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/hints_from_horace.pdf> [accessed 21 February, 2012]

¹⁵⁹ Jane Stabler, ‘The Genesis of Byron’s Hints from Horace’ in *Translation and Literature*, Vol 3 (Edinburgh University Press, May, 1994) pp.47-65

¹⁶⁰ See Peter Cochran, ‘Hints from Horace’ <http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/hints_from_horace.pdf> [accessed 21 February, 2012]

The Romantic Distaste for Moralising

In the generation subsequent to Wordsworth, the Romantic poet Shelley (1792-1822) in his *A Defence of Poetry* says a poet 'would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong.'¹⁶¹ Clearly this is an objection to the didactic approach of classical poetry. Despite expressing strong views on right and wrong Shelley states that the effect of the poetry of those poets who seek to affect a moral aim 'is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose.'¹⁶² Nevertheless he does not deny the power of poetry to educate and civilise but makes a subtle point about the 'manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man'¹⁶³ observing that: 'It awakens and enlarges the mind itself rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought.'¹⁶⁴ He too recognises that poets not only have an ability to 'behold intensely the present as it is, and discover those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but [also to] behold the future in the present...'¹⁶⁵ Shelley, far from rejecting the moral nature of poetry, proposes that 'The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.'¹⁶⁶

Romantic artists rediscovered Dante, indeed Shelley regarded Dante as '... the first awakener of entranced Europe...'¹⁶⁷ his poetry bridging time between the modern and ancient world. He describes Dante's collection *La Vita Nuova* as: 'an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language: it is the idealized history of that period, and those intervals of his life which were dedicated to love'¹⁶⁸ Although Dante's collection *La Vita Nuova* was not referred to as an *ars poetica* it was nevertheless 'a treatise by a poet, written for poets, on the art of

¹⁶¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry' in *English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay*: The Harvard Classics. 1909-14. paragraph 13 < <http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>> [accessed 13 January, 2008]

¹⁶² Ibid

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry' in *English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay*: The Harvard Classics. 1909-14. paragraph 4 < <http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>> [accessed 13 January, 2008]

¹⁶⁶ Ibid paragraph 13

¹⁶⁷ Ibid paragraph 29

¹⁶⁸ Ibid paragraph 26,

poetry.’¹⁶⁹ It was innovative because of the ‘...increasing admittance of reality...Dante had learnt to draw directly on experience.’¹⁷⁰ He interpreted the universe in terms of his own self-exploring¹⁷¹, dramatising sins and punishments, yet even when he gives us portraits of people as in the *Inferno* he says little of particular sin and there is ‘little or no moralising...’¹⁷² It is not surprising then that the Romantics of the nineteenth century, with their deep interest in emotion and individualism, greatly relished Dante.¹⁷³

Shelley, despite his obvious distaste for overt moralising and didacticism, recognised that ‘the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct or habit.’¹⁷⁴ That poetry and rhetoric, as persuasive forms of address, are closely aligned is clear. Shelley saw poets as more than authors of language and music, regarding them as the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society;¹⁷⁵ the ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world’¹⁷⁶ in the same way as Cicero saw great orators as lawmakers via their use of rhetoric,

Heavily influenced by the Romantic poets Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was regarded as the voice of his age. Poet Laureate to Queen Victoria, he was poet of patriotism and statesmanship.¹⁷⁷ Tennyson was aware of his social and literary status in Victorian England and was the first poet to receive a title for his services to poetry. He never wrote a defence of poetry, but as well as poems about landscape and the representation of his times he wrote about faith. His great poem ‘In Memoriam’, from which come the famous words: ‘Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at

¹⁶⁹ Barbara Reynolds, Introduction to *La Vita Nuova* by Dante Alighieri, trans. by Barbara Reynolds (London: Penguin Books, 1969) p.11

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* p.17

¹⁷¹ See Dorothy L. Sayers, Introduction to *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri The Florentine: Cantica I Hell (L’Inferno)* trans. by Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1953) p.10

¹⁷² *Ibid* p.16

¹⁷³ See A. Braid, in the Introduction to *Dante and the Romantics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

¹⁷⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘A Defence of Poetry’ in *English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay: The Harvard Classics*. 1909-14. paragraph 16 <<http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>> [accessed 13 January, 2008]

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid* paragraph 4,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid* paragraph 48

¹⁷⁷ See W.J. Blyton, ‘Victorian Poetry’ in *English Language and Literature* (London: Odhams Press Ltd, 1947) p.151

all',¹⁷⁸ could be regarded as useful; a 'cardinal document of that period'¹⁷⁹ it was a great source of consolation and hope, but it was beautiful too; in my view one of the best examples of the combination of beautiful and useful.

The Romantic Distaste for Instruction

Didacticism and instruction are seen as distasteful by the Romantics. In an article on Robert Browning (1812-1889) Michael Schmidt says that Browning lacks 'a systematic philosophy or world-view... sufficiently original to instruct and yet not so original as to intimidate...'¹⁸⁰ A great admirer of Shelley, Browning 'reveals himself an inheritor of the wealth and traditions of the Romantic period'¹⁸¹ He is primarily interested in people and he uses dramatic monologue. Equally significant, his poems often have addressees. In his introduction to Browning's poetry H.A. Needham comments that Browning was conscious of truth and keen to discover and illuminate life.¹⁸² Needham goes on to say that whilst Browning 'delights in the technique of music or painting, as of verse, for its own sake ... he is far from believing technical skill to be the most important element in art.'¹⁸³ Browning says that art 'opens our eyes to the beauty of the world around us',¹⁸⁴ and though he defends art vigorously he 'never loses sight of the fact that life is greater than art, or that life itself is the greatest art of all.'¹⁸⁵

..... Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,

¹⁷⁸ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam* < <http://www.online-literature.com/tennyson/718/>> [accessed 3 January, 2012]

¹⁷⁹ See W.J. Blyton, 'Victorian Poetry' in *English Language and Literature* (London: Odhams Press Ltd, 1947) p.153

¹⁸⁰ Michael Schmidt, *Robert Browning*, (London: The Independent, 2008) p.7

¹⁸¹ Robert Browning, *Selections from the Poems of Browning*, Ed. H.A. Needham (London: Ginn and Company Ltd. 1953) pp.xviii-xix

¹⁸² *Ibid* see p.xxiv

¹⁸³ *Ibid* p.xxvi

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid* p.xxviii

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid* p.xxix

Lending our minds out.¹⁸⁶

I believe that Browning saw use in art, saw it as a means by which to help each other as is apparent from this extract from his poem 'Fra Lippo Lippi'.

The leading poet and critic Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) though writing during the Romantic era, was a firm classicist. He stated that in: 'the best art and poetry of the Greeks ... religion and poetry are one'¹⁸⁷ and in his essay 'The Study of Poetry' that 'the strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry'.¹⁸⁸ He recognised that the Greeks, though they embraced beauty, harmony and human perfection, embraced 'moral fibre too.'¹⁸⁹ In respect of poetry Arnold advised that:

We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.¹⁹⁰

Of the opinion that good poetry is a "criticism of life"¹⁹¹ Arnold concerns himself 'about how best to make a mark and have a tangible social and moral influence'¹⁹² and he maintains that it is a noble aspiration to '...leave the world better and happier than we found it...'¹⁹³ Having established poetry's place as part of culture, Arnold reminds us that culture is not a frivolous and useless thing but that it has 'a very important function to fulfil for mankind.'¹⁹⁴ It is a civilising element helping to prevent anarchy.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Browning, *Selections from the Poems of Browning*, Ed. H.A. Needham (London: Ginn and Company Ltd. 1953) p.136

¹⁸⁷ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.41

¹⁸⁸ Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry' <http://www.bartleby.com/28/5.html> [accessed 22January, 2012]

¹⁸⁹ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.41

¹⁹⁰ Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry' <http://www.bartleby.com/28/5.html> [accessed 22January, 2012]

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Introduction to Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.xi

¹⁹³ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p34

¹⁹⁴ Ibid p.37

In contrast, W.B. Yeats (1865 – 1939) spoke disparagingly of those who believed that painting and poetry exist for the purposes of instruction¹⁹⁵ saying, that at all times such people ‘...fear and even hate the things that have worth in themselves, for that worth may suddenly, as it were a fire, consume their Book of Life...’¹⁹⁶ Yeats, though he led the movement for an Irish National Theatre and actively promoted a sense of identity and nationhood, maintained that he never wanted to elevate or educate people but that he did want them to understand his vision and he recognised that ‘what moves natural men in the arts is what moves them in life.’¹⁹⁷ He felt that the test of poetry ‘...is not in reason but in a delight not different from the delight that comes to a man at the first coming of love into the heart.’¹⁹⁸ He goes further: ‘Only that which does not teach, which does not cry out, which does not persuade, which does not condescend, which does not explain, is irresistible.’¹⁹⁹ I disagree with this assertion because I believe that the work of poets like Tony Harrison,²⁰⁰ Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley (discussed later in this chapter) does indeed cry out and attempt to persuade – it teaches those of us prepared to listen.

In his essay ‘Hopes and Fears for Irish Literature’²⁰¹ Yeats acknowledges that poetry has ceased dealing with complicated events: ‘If we can take...history and...legends and turn them into dramas, poems and stories full of the living soul of the present, and make them massive with conviction and profound with reverie, we may deliver that new great utterance for which the world is waiting’²⁰² and in the same essay: ‘When I talk to people of literary ambition here in Ireland, I find them holding that literature must be the expression of conviction, and be the garment of noble emotion and not an end in itself.’²⁰³ He was commenting on the

¹⁹⁵ See William Butler Yeats, ‘Poetry and Tradition’ in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961) p.251

¹⁹⁶ Ibid

¹⁹⁷ Ibid p.265

¹⁹⁸ Ibid p.279

¹⁹⁹ William Butler Yeats, ‘J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time’ in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961) p.341

²⁰⁰ Not discussed but acknowledged as a poet whose work cries out, e.g. his film poem, *Prometheus*

²⁰¹ William Butler Yeats, ‘Hopes and Fears for Irish Literature’ (*United Ireland*: 15 October, 1892)

²⁰² William Butler Yeats, *Hopes and Fears for Irish Literature in Poetry and Ireland Since 1800* ed. by Mark Storey (London: Routledge, 1988) p.76

²⁰³ Ibid p.75

state of Irish literature at the time and clearly had sympathy with those views. His plea for less moralising whilst at the same time wanting poets to deliver great utterances, once again appear to be contradictory.²⁰⁴

Reaction against Horace's notion of poetry; against the Augustan Age, continued, largely, according to T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965) because of the approach 'initiated by the Lake Poets',²⁰⁵ though in his introduction to the *Literary Essays* of Ezra Pound (1885-1972) written in 1918, Eliot remarked that: 'Mr. Pound is more responsible for the XXth Century revolution in poetry than is any other individual',²⁰⁶ Pound's essays were not a defence of poetry but a kind of *ars poetica*:

He has always been, first and foremost, a teacher and campaigner. He has always been impelled, not merely to find out for himself how poetry should be written, but to pass on the benefit of his discoveries to others; not only to make these benefits available, but to insist upon their being received.²⁰⁷

The essays are detailed and specific and contain advice from Pound about how poetry should be read and written. Pound describes Horace as a specialist to read if one wants to find out what can and cannot be learned about writing²⁰⁸ but dismisses him as being 'the perfect example of a man who acquired all that is acquirable, without having the root.'²⁰⁹ He does, however, accept that literature has a function in the state. Not a coercing or bullying function that enforces one view and suppresses another, but a function relating to clarity and vigour of all thought and opinion.²¹⁰ Pound claims that 'Beauty in art reminds one what is worth while.'²¹¹ He likens art (particularly poetry and literature) to medicine in

²⁰⁴ Yeats's changing position on the role of poetry later in his career is acknowledged and can be seen in his political poems, e.g. 'Easter 1916'

²⁰⁵ T.S. Eliot, introduction to the *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1968) p.xi

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ Ibid p.xii

²⁰⁸ Ibid see pp.27-8

²⁰⁹ Ibid p.28

²¹⁰ Ibid see p.21

²¹¹ Ibid p.45

that both possess ‘the art of diagnosis and the art of cure.’²¹² It is apparent both from the essays themselves and from Eliot’s introductory remarks that Pound not only enthusiastically embraced the role of teacher, but also recognised that it has utility.

For Eliot himself it was the poem not the poet that was important. As far as Eliot was concerned the poet’s mind was merely a medium in which ‘special or very varied feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.’²¹³ His ‘Impersonal Theory’ of poetry²¹⁴ was widely influential. Eliot believed that poetry, especially modern poetry, ‘is supposed to be difficult’²¹⁵ He believed poetry was difficult not only because of the limitations on individual talent and the inability of some people to express themselves adequately, but also because some of what was being said was new and therefore open to ridicule, or simply because a reader had been told a poem was difficult and therefore perceived it to be so. Eliot embraced the difficulty of poetry, saying that some of the poetry to which he is most devoted is that which he does not understand.²¹⁶

Eliot tries to avoid using the terms Romanticism and Classicism and is concerned only with his contention ‘...that the notion of what poetry is for, of what is its function to do, does change...’²¹⁷ He recognised that ‘...each age demands different things from poetry...no one age can be expected to embrace the whole nature of poetry or exhaust all of its uses.’²¹⁸ He recognised too that ‘the poet is vitally concerned with the social uses of poetry and with his own place in society’²¹⁹. It seems he felt the doctrine of ‘art for art’s sake’ to be ‘...mistaken...more advertised than practised...’²²⁰ Feeling that he would like to write for an audience that could neither read nor write, his view was that ‘...the

²¹² T.S. Eliot, introduction to the *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1968) p.45

²¹³ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ in *The Sacred Wood : Essays on Poetry and Criticism, 1922*, paragraph 11 < <http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>> [accessed 14 January, 2008]

²¹⁴ Ibid

²¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, first published 1933, this edn. 1980) p.150

²¹⁶ Ibid see p.151

²¹⁷ Ibid ‘The Modern Mind’, p.129

²¹⁸ Ibid p.141

²¹⁹ Ibid ‘Conclusion’ p.150

²²⁰ Ibid p.152

most useful poetry, socially, would be one which could cut across all the present stratifications of public taste...²²¹

Despite arguing strongly that the poet should write poetry ‘not defined in terms of something else’²²², Eliot nevertheless concludes that every poet ‘would like...to be able to think that he had some direct social utility...’²²³ that he (the poet) would like to be something of a popular entertainer... to ‘convey the pleasures of poetry not only to a larger audience, but to larger groups of people collectively.’²²⁴ So it seems that Eliot, whilst not wanting poetry to be defined by its uses, nevertheless believes that poetry has use and connection to society.

Whilst in Britain and Ireland poets like Eliot were conceding that poetry had a connection to society, nevertheless their poetry was less overtly political than that of some of their continental counterparts. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), who was heavily influenced by Marxism, wanted as David Constantine says ‘to do more, to make people act and change the world.’²²⁵ Echoing Horace’s criteria of usefulness and beauty when adjudicating a poetry competition in 1927 Brecht found the five hundred poems (which included poems from Rilke, George and Werfel) to be neither useful nor beautiful²²⁶ and so refused to award the prize and went on to assert that it should be possible to examine lyric poetry in particular for its usefulness.²²⁷ Brecht was making his own political commitments and saw his writing as a means of expressing his political views.²²⁸ Whatever his motive he must have felt that poetry had connection to society to have used it in that way.

Poetry may well have a connection to society but for W.H. Auden (1907-1973), for whom art has ‘civic obligations, however indifferent the citizens might be’²²⁹, the idea of poetry as propaganda was detestable as it was to John Keats (1795-1821) who hated the idea that it might have some “palpable design upon

²²¹ T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, first published 1933, this edn. 1980) p.153

²²² *Ibid* p.154

²²³ *Ibid*

²²⁴ *Ibid*

²²⁵ David Constantine, ‘The Usefulness of Poetry’ in *Brecht’s Poetry of Political Exile*, ed. by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.44

²²⁶ *Ibid* see p.29

²²⁷ *Ibid*

²²⁸ *Ibid*

²²⁹ Sean O’Brien, ‘Ice Cream Tests’ in *TLS* No. 5502, 12 September, 2008 pp.3-5

us”²³⁰. Auden, whilst accepting that ‘Some writers, even some poets, become famous public figures...’²³¹ believes that ‘writers as such have no social status, in the way that doctors and lawyers, whether famous or obscure, have.’²³² Auden wrote: ‘Every artist feels himself at odds with modern civilization ... The relation of a poet, or any artist, to society and politics is, except in Africa or still backward semi-feudal countries, more difficult than it has ever been...’²³³ He asserted that in cultures like ours the poet no longer writes as a member of the community:

[The poet] has an amateur status and his poetry is neither public nor esoteric but intimate. That is to say, he writes neither as a citizen nor as a member of a group of professional adepts, but as a single person to be read by other single persons.²³⁴

Auden argues that since ‘the so-called fine arts have lost the social utility they once had...they have, consequently, become “pure” arts, that is to say, gratuitous activities.’²³⁵ The interests of speed, economy and quantity result in workers becoming detached from the object being produced, thereby making them merely labourers (the Greeks regarded labour as slavery)²³⁶ and he further argues that in societies like ours labour is valued over work and the artist is regarded as someone who does not labour; a ‘parasitic idler[s]’²³⁷ or at best what he does is regarded as trivial, a ‘harmless private hobby.’²³⁸ Little wonder, if, as Sean O’Brien says in a discussion of Auden’s prose, ‘religion, history, philosophy, music and (most of all) poetry...no longer occupy the same securely central place in contemporary discourse’²³⁹ that poetry is seen as something outside and beyond

²³⁰ John Keats in his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds dated 3 February, 1818 in *John Keats: Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, reissued 2009) p.58

²³¹ W.H. Auden, ‘The Poet and The City’ in *The Dyer’s Hand* (New York: Vintage International Vintage Books, 1989) p.74

²³² W.H. Auden, ‘The Poet and The City’ in *The Dyer’s Hand* (New York: Vintage International Vintage Books, 1989) p.74

²³³ *Ibid* p.88

²³⁴ *Ibid* p.54

²³⁵ *Ibid* p.74

²³⁶ *Ibid* see p.73

²³⁷ *Ibid* see p.75

²³⁸ *Ibid* p.75

²³⁹ Sean O’Brien, ‘Ice Cream Tests’ in *TLS* No. 5502, 12 September, 2008, pp.3-5

everyday life.

Those ‘who think poetry can and should play no part in political culture’ says Blake Morrison, ‘are fond of quoting Auden in his elegy for Yeats: “Poetry makes nothing happen”’,²⁴⁰ and yet, just as Wordsworth believed that poetry could enlighten, strengthen and purify and so change people, similarly:

in *The Poet’s Tongue* [Auden] acknowledges its role in influencing political and ethical choices: while “poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do”, it can, he [Auden] argues, be a way of “extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear”. Poetry must never bully but it can make people think again.²⁴¹

If poetry has such power how can the poets who write it have no social status? In his essay Morrison tells us that he has always resisted Auden’s claim that poetry makes nothing happen; partly because he cannot bear as a writer, to believe that what he writes is useless and partly because he has ‘seen poetry have a demonstrable impact on people’²⁴². This will be discussed in the light of my own residencies and poetic practice in Chapter Three.

In his preface to *Modern Poetry* Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) makes ‘a plea for impure poetry...for poetry conditioned by the poet’s life and the world around him.’²⁴³ Whereas Auden addresses his poems ‘to an individual reader, not to an audience, culture, class or any other plural and collective category’²⁴⁴ MacNeice sees the poet as ‘primarily a spokesman, making statement or incantations on behalf of himself or others – usually for both...’,²⁴⁵ laying strong emphasis on the importance of writing as a member of the community; someone

²⁴⁰ Blake Morrison, ‘How Poetry Can Make Things Happen’ in *Poetry Review*. Vol. 98:3 (Autumn 2008), p.50

²⁴¹ Ibid p.51

²⁴² Ibid

²⁴³ Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edition 1968)

²⁴⁴ Edward Mendelson, ‘A Note on Auden’ in *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) p.xvii

²⁴⁵ Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edition 1968) p.1

with ‘consciousness of himself as a man.’²⁴⁶ This plea from MacNeice suggests he recognised the potential for poets to separate themselves from other men. ‘The modern poet’²⁴⁷ he says is ‘often both a ‘rebel’ against and a parasite upon his community.’²⁴⁸ MacNeice goes further, suggesting that the modern poet takes great pride in the fact that he holds different values and views from his community whilst at the same time expecting support from that community. It is for this reason, MacNeice suggests, that: ‘poets and artists developed the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake. The community did not appear to need them, so, tit for tat, they did not need the community.’²⁴⁹

I maintain that the themes of “teach” “delight” and “move” embodied within the Ciceronian writings on rhetoric and so loved and promoted by Horace and English Augustan writers such as Sidney in relation to poetry, are present in poetry today. Taking a lead from romantic poets like Wordsworth, the emphasis is different. Contemporary poets prefer to think they might be able to influence rather than “teach “and change minds rather than actually “move” people to action.

The Poet as Educator/Civiliser and the Public/Political Status of Poets

Two of the finest poets of our time, Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, have acknowledged their public status in relation to The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Indeed The Troubles have raised important questions about the public/private role of the poet. In *The Redress of Poetry* Seamus Heaney concludes that all of us involved in poetry, professors and practitioners alike, will sooner or later be ‘tempted to show how poetry’s existence as a form of art relates to our existence as citizens of society – how it is “of present use”’²⁵⁰ Heaney suggests: ‘in the activity of poetry [too] there is a tendency to place a counter-reality in the scales – a reality which may be only imagined but which

²⁴⁶ Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edition 1968) p.1

²⁴⁷ *Ibid* p.2

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*

²⁵⁰ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) p.1

nevertheless has weight.²⁵¹ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Aristotle believed in the truth both of what would and what might happen. It is evident that Heaney too believes that poetry exists as much in the possible as the actual.

As a practising poet, I hold what Heaney calls ‘the dream of alternative worlds.’²⁵² In my work in the community as well as in my writing I want to present alternative worlds. I want to believe – I have to believe – that my work can play a part, no matter how small, in effecting change, both for individuals and in the wider community. Change might be something as simple as helping individuals develop higher aspirations or an ability to express views in writing, which if shared or broadcast or published results in a feeling of having been heard. On a community level it might mean that as a poet I have been able to act as catalyst, enabling a community to work together to bring about improvement in the life of that community, as for example in North Lodge Park in Darlington (discussed in Chapter Three) Heaney puts it like this:

I wanted to affirm that within our individual selves we can reconcile two orders of knowledge which we might call the practical and the poetic; to affirm also that each form of knowledge redresses the other and that the frontier between them is there for the crossing.²⁵³

Speaking of his poem, ‘Ceasefire’ (inspired by *Iliad* 24) Michael Longley explains: ‘I wanted to compress this scene’s two hundred lines into a short lyric, publish it and make my minuscule contribution to the peace process.’²⁵⁴ Longley sent his poem to the *Irish Times* which published it on the first Saturday following the IRA’s declaration of a ceasefire from midnight on 31 August, 1994. Longley could not fail to acknowledge this public status, this intervention, when as he himself tells us:

²⁵¹ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) p.3

²⁵² *Ibid* p.1

²⁵³ *Ibid* p.203

²⁵⁴ Michael Longley, ‘Lapsed Classicist’ in *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. by S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.104

Priests and politicians quoted from it. In her survey of Irish Poetry in the 1990's for the anthology *Watching the River Flow* Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill says: "Its effect was dynamic and rippled right through the community, both North and South"²⁵⁵

Heaney encountered a similar situation. He knew when he was commissioned by the Abbey Theatre at the beginning of 2003 to write a version of Sophocles' verse play, *Antigone* that that play 'had a deep and abiding purchase on me and my generation in Ireland.'²⁵⁶ Heaney's version, 'The Burial at Thebes' was premiered by the Abbey Theatre in 2004. Indeed it was partly because of the 'long-standing concern with *Antigone* as our own special allegory...'²⁵⁷ (the IRA ceasefire occurred in late August, 1994) that Heaney resisted writing his version for a while. In addition things had changed somewhat in Ireland by that time. But as Heaney said: 'if the local row has abated, the global situation has worsened.'²⁵⁸ Reflecting on the staying power of Sophocles' play, which presents both the domestic and civic troubles of ancient Thebes, Heaney sees it as inextricably linked to the after-shocks of September 11 and concludes that Sophocles' play 'functions in the way Wallace Stevens said poetry functions, as the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality.'²⁵⁹ This ability to relate the private to the public is an important part of this thesis and one I attempt to replicate in the creative element, *Chasing the Ivy*. It could be argued that Heaney battled with himself: he did not want to write a version of *Antigone* that could be regarded as purely political. Only when he was able to demonstrate that Antigone's gesture in burying Polyneices was as much to do with anthropology as politics, was Heaney able to accept the invitation to write a version of *Antigone*.²⁶⁰ Heaney had to be able to connect the human pity and terror of that play with his witnessing of the

²⁵⁵ Michael Longley, 'Lapsed Classicist' in *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. by S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.105

²⁵⁶ Seamus Heaney, 'Title Deeds: Translating a Classic' in *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. by S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.132

²⁵⁷ Ibid

²⁵⁸ Ibid

²⁵⁹ Ibid p.133

²⁶⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Title Deeds: Translating a Classic' in *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. by S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) see p.134

return of the body of Francis Hughes (who died on hunger strike in the Maze Prison) and whose body, for the first leg of the journey, was regarded as state property, and therefore accompanied by the security forces. As Heaney himself said:

The eye of the needle I passed through in order to re-enter the kingdom of Thebes was an Irish one and I found it in the nick of time, the night before I was due to give my decision to the Abbey Theatre's artistic director.²⁶¹

Heaney felt entitled to write a version of *Antigone* because of the political and cultural resonances of the text in Ireland; as he said, it 'constituted my title deeds'²⁶², but he adds:

the real title deed was written when I changed the name of the play from *Antigone* to *The Burial at Thebes*...It reminds us of death, the sacredness of life and the need to allow in every case the essential dignity of the human creature.'²⁶³

Heaney takes care to distinguish between the obligations of a citizen to consider the meaning of public events and the obligation of the ideologically committed writer to view them from a political perspective. He demonstrated his reluctance to be commanded²⁶⁴ when confronted during a train journey by the Sinn Féin spokesman Danny Morrison who asked Heaney 'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write / Something for us?'²⁶⁵ Heaney answers the criticism in the poem itself; 'If I do write something, / Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself.'²⁶⁶ Clearly Heaney refuses to act as a public spokesman through his poetry.

²⁶¹ Seamus Heaney, 'Title Deeds: Translating a Classic' in *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. by S.J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) see p.134

²⁶² Ibid p.139

²⁶³ Ibid

²⁶⁴ See Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) p.258

²⁶⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'The Flight Path' in *The Spirit Level*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.25

²⁶⁶ Ibid

Nonetheless much of his work is a social commentary which therefore affords public status to the role of the poet, though at no time does he sacrifice beauty of language and thought.

Some Contemporary Views

When I interviewed Ruth Padel at the University of Newcastle on 30 May 2008, she expressed the view that what was important was the poem rather than the poet: “poets should not take themselves seriously as having a role... poets let themselves down by talking about it too much,” she said. Padel described the poet as “witness” whose responsibility it is to “bring out things” – to be a “witness of what is”. When asked whether she had any purpose beyond the creation of art when she was writing her poems, Padel said “no... I have a responsibility to make good poems, to keep reading and remain open to poems”. Padel believes that the poet “can notice things that are wrong and bring them to attention – they can think about what is happening and must remain open to everything, but must make it new, and first of all into good art.”²⁶⁷ This suggests that whilst Padel sees poetry as primarily a beautiful art, it is useful in that it challenges thought.

Perhaps reluctance to attach role and status to the occupation of poet by contemporary poets themselves has contributed towards the perceived loss of status for both poets and poetry observed by Dana Gioia. For example, when I asked how she would define her job/duty/responsibilities as a poet, Cynthia Fuller replied simply, ‘To write what feels important to me – to be true to what I feel – to communicate.’²⁶⁸ And when further questioned about whether she felt she had a duty to educate/enlighten/illuminate, expressed the view: ‘it feels a bit presumptuous to put it like that – but it would be good to illuminate – to open hearts and minds.’²⁶⁹ Gioia, whilst accepting that ‘poets are not without cultural status, [and] still command a certain residual prestige,’²⁷⁰ claims that American poetry now belongs to a subculture: ‘No longer part of the mainstream of artistic

²⁶⁷ Ruth Padel, in an interview at the University of Newcastle, Friday, 30 May, 2008

²⁶⁸ Cynthia Fuller, questionnaire dated, 3 September, 2009

²⁶⁹ Ibid

²⁷⁰ Dana Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter?* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press 1992), p.1

and intellectual life, it has become the specialized occupation of a relatively small and isolated group.²⁷¹ Despite Gioia's assertions however, I believe that even if a poet sets out with no practical aim to educate and civilize, good poetry is so focussed, so persuasive, that it will always make a difference. Its power to make a difference is part of its beauty. In his article, 'How Poetry Can Make Things Happen' Blake Morrison writes that poetry's saving grace is that 'the poem stays aloof, making sweet music and paring its fingernails'²⁷² but yet recognises that the subject is more complicated:

It's perfectly reasonable to concede that poetry plays little or no part in the lives of the majority of the population. But it's important not to concede too much. Poetry might be a minority interest but that doesn't make it powerless.²⁷³

Damian Gorman, recognising the power of poetry, says in the introduction to his verse film, *The Skull Beneath the Skin*²⁷⁴ that he had a desire to "put the dream back together" and goes on to explain that by "the dream" he means a time when the world felt right and safe. Specifically, when he talks of his poem about the destruction of the twin towers in New York, he says that the event "took the good out of us". He was driven to write the poem by a desire to try and put that good back. This must surely demonstrate that Gorman too, wanted to do more than create a beautiful poem.

Poetry as a Social and Literary Tool and the Social Status of Poets

Discussing the literary canon in the later twentieth century, Sean O'Brien observed:

²⁷¹ Dana Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter?* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press 1992), p.1

²⁷² Blake Morrison, 'How Poetry Can Make Things Happen' in *Poetry Review*. Vol. 98:3 (Autumn 2008), p.50

²⁷³ Ibid

²⁷⁴ Damian Gorman, *The Skull Beneath the Skin*, <http://houseofhoney.org/mediaplay/play.php?id=20> [accessed 2 October, 2011]

...the idea of the canon came under attack on the grounds that it was a club for dead white males, that it excluded much other work of value and interest, that it must be dismantled or at any rate radically revised.²⁷⁵

O'Brien points out that '...a good deal of additional material has been brought to light in recent years, often from women or non-white writers,'²⁷⁶ further arguing that 'The terms of reference have shifted and expanded.'²⁷⁷ O'Brien comments that 'literature is dynamic and perpetually in debate with itself and the times.'²⁷⁸ The canon is not the 'tables of the law'²⁷⁹ he says. Nevertheless it continues to be a 'focus of attention.'²⁸⁰ It would seem that literature goes on being a social tool, or at least a social measure. As O'Brien says:

objectors in pointing out that canon formation is an impure activity see it as inseparable from the effort to define nationhood.

Englishness, given a literary back-story, becomes a measure of difference and superiority.²⁸¹

Such views clearly attach a certain social status to the role of poetry and the poet, but I detect a reluctance by contemporary poets (overtly at any rate) to attach role and status to the occupation of poet; questioning whether poetry has any function outside that of being an art, and irritation with the idea that utility in poetry continues to be discussed at all. One of the points Dana Gioia makes in his 1991 essay, *Can Poetry Matter?* is that poets do not have a role 'in the broader culture.'²⁸² Without a public role he argues, 'talented poets lack the confidence to create public speech.'²⁸³ In an interview with Open University in June 2003, the then Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion, expressing the belief that poetry is on the

²⁷⁵ Sean O'Brien, 'Read poetry: it's quite hard' in *The Guardian*, Saturday, March 8, 2008

²⁷⁶ Ibid

²⁷⁷ Ibid

²⁷⁸ Ibid

²⁷⁹ Ibid

²⁸⁰ Ibid

²⁸¹ Ibid

²⁸² Dana Gioia, *Can Poetry Matter?* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992) p.11

²⁸³ Ibid

whole “healthy” and enjoys a “good-sized audience”, nevertheless feels it necessary to “protect” and “promote” poetry within our schools.²⁸⁴ Presumably Motion believes that the protection and promotion of poetry in schools by poets constitutes part of their having a role in the broader culture – a view I share. My own experience carrying out school and community residencies leads me to believe that a large number of people in this country today feel alienated from poetry. The appeal of predominantly visual digital media offers an attractive alternative to reading and this surely plays a part in the reduction of poetry’s role generally. The common culture is television and computer games, not the great tradition of literature. Despite the fact that poetry has moved out of the middle class ghetto a little, due in part to the community work undertaken by many writers, myself included, it seems obvious when confronted by comments like ‘You don’t look like a poet’ (what a poet is supposed to look like I am not at all sure; a tweedy Oxford male perhaps, or a sixties drop-out lookalike?) that poets are often seen as outside the mainstream of society.

The social status of poets may still, as Gioia suggests, carry a certain residual prestige, but beyond that there seems to be no understanding or agreement as to the poet’s role in society in the way that we all know the role of doctors, teachers, cleaners, car mechanics etc. Maybe part of the reason, apart from the reluctance to embrace ideas of utility mentioned earlier, is that those of us who count ourselves as poets have such a diverse understanding of where we fit and what our role is (if we see ourselves as having a role at all beyond the provision of art, which some of us do not). Maybe as O’Brien says there are too many of us writing poetry before having first “paid our dues”²⁸⁵ by which I understand he means without first mastering the craft; serving an appropriate apprenticeship. I can fully appreciate O’Brien’s views: this backdoor into poetry can be seen as weakening the art, though I would not want that back door barred and bolted, because there may be people behind it who are prepared to serve their apprenticeship in as serious a way as they can, albeit late. Or maybe part of the perceived loss of status for poets and poetry is due the way societies develop and

²⁸⁴ Andrew Motion, ‘Poetry and Life’ interview with Open University, June, 2003
<<http://www.open2.net/historyandthearts/arts/andrewmotion.html>> [accessed 12 August, 2010]

²⁸⁵ See Sean O’Brien, ‘Vocation, vocation, vocation’ in *The Guardian*, October 13, 2007

divide into specialisms, resulting in an expectation that teachers will teach, cleaners will clean, doctors will make us well, religious leaders will give us moral guidance and psychologists will help us come to terms with life. In Horace's time poets fulfilled many of those roles as well as providing beautiful art. Particularly they tried (Horace more than most) to adopt a vatic role by taking on the mantle of priest. It is my contention that they still do but for some reason some contemporary poets seem much less inclined to acknowledge it openly.

From the outset Horace's work contained 'The theme of searching for one's proper role...'²⁸⁶ I was delighted recently to hear the poet Bernard O'Donoghue in an interview for the BBC say, 'I think it's ridiculous for writers to say they're not interested in the public world, but only what happens in their heads.'²⁸⁷ In answer to the interviewer's comment that his work seemed always to contain a moral, O'Donoghue felt it necessary to apologise, 'yes' he said, 'yes, I'm sorry, but yes, my poems always do contain a moral'²⁸⁸. Whatever the reasons, there is now no common understanding among poets as to their role nor any understanding of the role of poetry itself in the United Kingdom; perhaps there never was, but up until around 1800, there was a common expectation among poets that poetry would, continuing the theme of poetry in Augustan Rome, provide some sort of moral guidance and principles for living.

According to Stephen Harrison, Horace certainly saw poetry as 'socially situated rather than an aesthetic trip for the lofty.'²⁸⁹ Horace's position is in stark contrast to the views of many contemporary poets. As for the role of poetry itself, Harrison asserts that the ritual function of poetry in ancient society 'still survives in some sense, for example Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* is recognisably similar to Christian hymns and even perhaps to modern national anthems'²⁹⁰

Vates and Poet Laureate

Our nearest figure to that of *vates* (prophet/guide) might well be the figure

²⁸⁶ David H. Porter, *Horace's Poetic Journey: A Reading of Odes 1-3* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) p.240

²⁸⁷ Bernard O'Donoghue, in 'Start of the Week', BBC Radio 4, 14 April, 2008

²⁸⁸ Ibid

²⁸⁹ Stephen Harrison, in personal correspondence [email dated 1 October, 2007]

²⁹⁰ Stephen Harrison, in personal correspondence [e-mail dated 2 November, 2009]

of poet laureate, but conversations with contemporary poets leave me with the impression that the holder of the post is seen as the bearer of a poisoned chalice. This is purely anecdotal evidence, but in the period leading up to Andrew Motion's replacement as Poet Laureate in 2009 three of the leading female contenders expressed serious doubts about taking on the role. They did so in spite of the fact that an 'impassioned appeal to the Queen to break with tradition and appoint a female laureate' was made by the Ledbury Poetry Festival director, Chloe Garner.²⁹¹ Wendy Cope expressed the view that '...it is an archaic post and means nothing. It's simply not important'²⁹². Ruth Padel, chair of the UK Poetry Society, said '...most talented writers would give the post a wide berth ... I think every good poet would have the same answer: you'd be wary about your work ... My impulse would be to turn it down.'²⁹³ Rejecting Cope's claim that the job is outdated Padel said:

There are other things to consider, such as what it would mean for a woman to do it, and what it could do for poetry in the community to make it more loved, but you'd be worried you wouldn't be able to write what you wanted to.²⁹⁴

The poet Fleur Adcock said, 'The Poet Laureate is fine as an institution, as long as I don't have to do it.'²⁹⁵ Nevertheless there is still some kudos attached to the Poet Laureate's role, some "residual respect" as Gioia might have put it. The Laureate is expected to meet with the Head of State and other major political figures and some poems receive media attention and publication because they are written by the Poet Laureate. As Andrew Motion said of his poem, 'Causa Belli' it '...wouldn't have been on the front page of *The Guardian* if I was just Joe

²⁹¹ See Emily Dugan, 'Who Wants to be Poet Laureate' for the *New Zealand Herald*, July, 20th, 2008
<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501119&objectid=10522067>
[accessed 12 August, 2010]

²⁹² Ibid

²⁹³ Ibid

²⁹⁴ Ibid

²⁹⁵ Ibid

Soap.’²⁹⁶ There is the expectation that poems related to certain public events will be produced that might otherwise not be written, sometimes resulting in poems of disputable quality. Motion accepted that he had to ‘...respect the tradition of writing about royal events, but...’²⁹⁷ he said, ‘I also try to write poems that are part of a larger national narrative, hence the poems I wrote for the TUC about liberty, for Childline about bullying and, in a sense, the one about the Iraq business.’²⁹⁸ From Andrew Motion’s comments one might conclude that he sees poetry as both a social and literary tool – one for which it is worth bearing that poisoned chalice despite some contrary views.

During the course of this research only one contemporary poet, Andy Croft, made no apology for having as one of his stated aims the desire to “change things”²⁹⁹ and who in answer to the question, *Do you feel you have a duty to educate/enlighten/illuminate?* replies emphatically, “Yes, yes, yes!”³⁰⁰ and when asked, *To what extent if at all, do you see yourself as being a civilizing influence on society?* says, “In a barbarous age it may be left to art – even poetry – to defend civilized values. Who else is going to do it?”³⁰¹ In my interview with Ruth Padel about the usefulness of poetry, she expressed what seemed to me to be a kind of warning about the danger of holding false ideas about the nature of poetry and the ways it works for our good, “Then there’s useful in society” she said, “and that’s something I’m very very suspicious of”.³⁰² There seems, as Brian Phillips says, to be an anxiety about poetry:

divided between those who are uneasy over its status and over its chances of survival and those who sense that we do it injury by holding false ideas about its nature and about the ways in which it

²⁹⁶ Andrew Motion, ‘Poetry and Life’ interview with Open University, June, 2003
<<http://www.open2.net/historyandthearts/arts/andrewmotion.html>> [accessed 12 August, 2010]

²⁹⁷ Andrew Motion, ‘Poetry and Life’ interview with Open University, June, 2003
<<http://www.open2.net/historyandthearts/arts/andrewmotion.html>> [accessed 12 August, 2010]

²⁹⁸ Ibid

²⁹⁹ Dr. Andy Croft, in answer to my research questionnaire, ‘What Use is Poetry?’

³⁰⁰ Ibid

³⁰¹ Ibid

³⁰² Ruth Padel, in an interview at the University of Newcastle, Friday, 30 May, 2008

works for our good³⁰³

Some Personal Views about the Role and Status of Poetry and Poets

I do not see it as my mission to save poetry, nor do I have a burning ambition to make poetry relevant to society.³⁰⁴ I have no wish to debase it so as to make it appeal to society or treat it as purely commercial.³⁰⁵ That would be as J.D. McClatchy accused the Poetry Foundation of doing, of seeking ‘to promote poetry, the way you’d promote cereal or a sitcom’.³⁰⁶ But nor do I want to see ‘poetry’s isolation, its decent separateness...[as] one of its tangible assets’³⁰⁷ or see it kept deliberately ‘aloof from the degrading triviality of mass culture’³⁰⁸. Morrison says that most poets he knows: ‘feel themselves to be living on the margins, helpless to stop the forces that sweep us towards global conflict and environmental disaster.’³⁰⁹ He goes on:

...but to be marginal is not to be negligible. The margin is sometimes a good place to be. In the space at the edge of the received text, one can annotate, correct, improve, reflect, mock, exclaim and protest. And perhaps, in a modest way, help make things happen³¹⁰.

Commenting on American poetry (which has some similarities with Britain) Dana Gioia indicates that poetry has become the concern of the ‘small

³⁰³ See Brian Phillips, ‘Poetry and the Problem of Taste’
<http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0907/comment_180021.html>
[accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁰⁴ See Brian Phillips, ‘Poetry and the Problem of Taste’
<http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0907/comment_180021.html>
[accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁰⁵ Ibid

³⁰⁶ J.D. McClatchy, in ‘Poetry and the Problem of Taste’ by Brian Phillips
<http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0907/comment_180021.html> [accessed 12 August, 2010]

³⁰⁷ See Brian Phillips, ‘Poetry and the Problem of Taste’
<http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0907/comment_180021.html>
[accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁰⁸ Ibid

³⁰⁹ Blake Morrison, ‘How Poetry Can Make Things Happen’ in *Poetry Review*, Vol. 98:3 (Autumn 2008) p.53

³¹⁰ Ibid

and isolated group'³¹¹. I do not want to be a poet who writes only for other poets – I want as wide an audience as possible to be able to enjoy and find my poetry beneficial to their everyday lives if they choose so to do. If they reject it that is fine, but that rejection should spring from a conscious choice they have made rather than from the fact that they feel excluded from the world of poetry.

Though (unlike Horace) they may not see themselves as civilizers I believe that contemporary poets continue to be civilizers of society in the sense that they too question the status quo and aid social engagement by enlightening, educating and facilitating the development of others. They can and do receive patronage from bodies such as the Arts Council of England and local authorities without becoming mouthpieces for their patrons (in Chapter Three I describe a personal example of one such experience of patronage).

If poets have an ability to look before and after, and I believe they do, if they are able to bind together passion and knowledge, then poets in society have something worthwhile to tell us. In his essay 'The Lyric Principle' Don Paterson suggests that this very ability to predict is largely what gives human beings superiority over other species.³¹² Perhaps poets have simply honed the natural talent we all of us possess.

My encounter with Horace, with what he has to say in *Ars Poetica* and in his *Epistles* (and the creation of my own versions of some of his poems) subsequently led to my enquiry into the role of poetry and the poet, and enabled me to analyse not only my own motives in carrying out residencies, but also the impact such residencies have on the participants.

Through the use of his own work Horace positions himself in the canon, as for example in Odes 1.1 where, addressing his patron Maecenas, he asks to be placed in the canon (referred to in Chapter One) In re-versioning Horace's *Odes Book 1* I too, am attempting to position myself in the canon (though in a rather more tongue-in-cheek way.) In her introduction to *Classical Literary Criticism*

³¹¹ Dana Gioia, 'Poetry and the Problem of Taste' by Brian Phillips
<http://www.poetrymagazine.org/magazine/0907/comment_180021.html>
[accessed 20 July, 2010]

³¹² See Don Paterson, 'The Lyric Principle' in *Poetry Review*, Vol.97:2 Summer 2007, p.56

Penelope Murray emphasises:

...the importance of the Art of Poetry lies not so much in the originality of its ideas as in its memorable expressions, its vivid images and vignettes, and in its evocation of the lived experience of poets at work in the Rome of Horace's day.³¹³

It is apparent to me through my lived experience as a poet at work in contemporary Britain that enthusiasm for usefulness in poetry has waned. There still exists among poets today the desire to create something beautiful (as previously defined). There is a willingness to accept poetry's ability to persuade and influence, particularly on an individual basis, but the idea that it educates, that it can or should contain lessons by which people should live is resisted. Many poets, whilst acknowledging that poetry is a very powerful medium at the same time make a plea for poets not to take themselves too seriously, or feel it presumptuous to regard themselves as educators and civilizers. This seems to be a rejection of the responsibility that comes with the acknowledged power.

Despite views expressed from the Romantic era onward, poetry is a useful social and literary tool: the poet is still educator/civiliser/magician and prophet.

³¹³ *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. by Penelope Murray and T.S. Dorsch (London: Penguin Books, 200) p.xliii

Chapter Three: Personal Practice

In this chapter I address my own development as a poet and my practical poetic practice as it relates to some of my writing residencies. My own early encounter with poetry at school was narrow and delivered with little enthusiasm. I was never encouraged to write poetry, or to see it as a means of viewing and understanding the world around me. I was expected to appreciate it for its own sake but there was no suggestion that poetry might in any sense be helpful to life.

As a practising poet who has carried out many community residencies I have become acutely aware of poetry's ability to move people both on an individual basis and at a community level. A number of contemporary poets (whose opinions I outline in Chapter Two), express the view that at the time of writing their poetry they have nothing in mind other than to produce the best and most beautiful poem they can. This is an argument proffered by Oscar Wilde: 'the artist can fashion a beautiful thing: and if he does not do it solely for his own pleasure, he is not an artist at all.'³¹⁴

When I write poetry it gives me pleasure, but this is not the sole reason I write. I believe that it can and does instruct, illuminate, facilitate and empower. Nor do I shy away from the words 'instruct' and 'useful'. Personally I have received much in the way of instruction via poetry, whilst at an academic and community level I have observed its usefulness. A comment by Yeats about the theatre applies equally to poetry: 'We must make a theatre for ourselves and our friends, and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity, what we understand from scholarship and thought.'³¹⁵

As a democratising poet I find this elitist approach disappointing because it excludes people who could benefit from the illuminating power of poetry. I do not want poetry reserved for my peers and a few simple people who might understand from sheer simplicity. This suggests an inability to engage with poetry when in fact it may well represent a lack of opportunity to engage.

³¹⁴ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of man under Socialism*,
<<http://grace.evergreen.edu/~arunc/texts/literature/wilde/soulOfMan.pdf>>
[accessed 4 March, 2008] p.8

³¹⁵ William Butler Yeats, 'The Theatre' in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961) p.166

During my research I discovered that though some contemporary poets revealed a willingness to accept that poetry can, on an individual basis, move, motivate and illuminate, there was a reluctance to accept the terms ‘instruct’ and ‘useful’. Maybe that reluctance stems from the belief that as soon as usefulness is attached to art then it is no longer an art. For others, however, an aesthetically pleasing poem may not be enough. Furthermore, I believe this approach may be one reason why engagement with the arts remains a minority occupation.

Towards a Personal Definition of Beauty

For the purposes of this thesis I attach to beauty, as Burke did, a ‘social quality’³¹⁶, a quality which when we meet it in poetry, excites our approval; makes us want to ‘enter willingly into a kind of relation(ship)...’³¹⁷ I interpret beauty as a whole thing; something which combines the various physical elements of poetry, namely form, metre, music and use of language, with its emotional elements, by which I mean its content and truth, which lead us to a willingness and desire to become involved with it.

Towards a Personal Definition of Usefulness

In the introduction I made reference to what Horace meant by “useful”, how he regarded poetry as a means of both instruction and delight, how it might serve the State, how poetry educates and civilises. Like most poets writing today I do not see poetry as a means of communicating State policy, nor do I see it as the prime method by which we educate, civilise and instruct, but I do think it can contribute in these areas, both individually and at a community level, particularly via community residencies. The Collins English Dictionary defines ‘useful’ as ‘that which is able to be used advantageously, beneficially or for several purposes; helpful or serviceable.’³¹⁸ That poetry can be used in such ways does not in my view make it less of an art, but rather turns it into a higher art. My reading and

³¹⁶ Edmund Burke, ‘Of Beauty’, in ‘On the Sublime and Beautiful’ in *The Harvard Classics*, Vol.24, Part 2

< <http://www.bartleby.com/24/2/110.html> >

[accessed 13 January, 2008] (Introductory Note, Section 10)

³¹⁷ Ibid

³¹⁸ *Collins English Dictionary: Complete and Unabridged New Edition* (Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers, Seventh Edition, 2005) p.1768

writing of poetry and my practice as a community poet and more latterly my engagement with academia in relation to reception of the classics have made and are making a difference. The main differences I have observed in relation to community residencies is that through the medium of poetry individuals and community groups have become empowered because their levels of self-expression and general communication have improved. I have also observed a growth in self confidence and a definite degree of satisfaction in having achieved something they believed to be beyond their abilities. In relation to reception, I know from comments made to me by classics students and tutors, that reinterpretation of the classics into a contemporary setting, aids a deeper understanding and enlivens the topic for them. (See Appendix 1 for results of Durham University classics student survey)

My Combination of Beauty and Usefulness

I believe that if poetry holds personal truth; if when we read it or become involved with the process of it (whether or not the end result on the page is disputable as art) there is an irresistible connection, then it possesses beauty. It is from beauty so defined that usefulness springs.

(i) Personal Writing Practice

This research has provided me with an opportunity to look for the first time, at the body of my published work to date. When I re-examine the contents of my first full collection, *Tailor Tacks*³¹⁹ there are several poems based on or inspired by classical writing. From a very early stage in my poetic career I had a need for literary tradition to inform my work and so add a sense of authority. Fiona Sampson describes this condition well when she says, ‘...you can feel connected to the wider world of poetry; a community of traditions in which you’re taking your place.’³²⁰ The opportunity for reflection provided by undertaking this study, by linking my writing practice with my experience of writing residencies and examining the role and status of poetry and poets, is part of my developing an

³¹⁹ See Maureen Almond, *Tailor Tacks* (Middlesbrough: Mudfog, 1999)

³²⁰ Fiona Sampson, *Poetry Writing: The Expert Guide* (Great Britain: Robert Hale Limited, 2009) p. 164

authoritative poetic persona and establishing my vision as a poet.³²¹ It has been immensely satisfying to rediscover that poems I wrote twelve years ago were the start of a journey I could not have predicted, as for example in this poem, 'Tiara', inspired by reading about the Greek goddess, Hera:

Tiara

From the photographer's couch
 where she sat like Hera,
 she watched him mouth,
 'I love you - you're beautiful.'

She wore a crystal diadem
 draped with a veil, white as the sun
 she could tell he worshipped her
 as if she were some sort of Goddess.

His ideal woman,
 someone with all the graces,
 someone faithful to represent
 the phases of feminine existence;
 the pinnacle of motherhood.

It's a lot to live up to.
 His bracelets bind her wrists,
 he's tied anvils on each ankle,
 suspended her in the mist.³²²

I wrote *Oyster Baby* as the creative element of my MA in Writing Poetry in 2002 and in a paper I submitted to The Open University in July 2010 I

³²¹ See Fiona Sampson, *Poetry Writing: The Expert Guide* (Great Britain: Robert Hale Limited, 2009) p. 62

³²² Maureen Almond, *Tailor Tacks* (Middlesbrough: Mudfog, 1999) p.56

described my choice of Ovid as ‘quite random’³²³. Many of the poems in *Oyster Baby* were inspired by my reading of the *Metamorphoses*,³²⁴ but on reflection perhaps this was not a random choice at all. I realised when I re-read *Oyster Baby* that by making strong connections between the original text and contemporary life and relationships, I was better able to appreciate the depth of wisdom in the original texts. I have no problem in finding advice, a lesson even, contained in those texts and I find particular delight in being able to recontextualise the ancient texts into modern settings whilst trying at the same time to maintain the original warnings and advice. Being able to do this within a poetic framework adds joy for me in the composition of the poems and I hope joy for those reading them. And if, like me, readers are able to derive wisdom from them, gain insight into life and relationships, and in these ways find that the poems make a difference to them, then I believe that is useful. Some of the poems in *Oyster Baby* were cited in a paper by Stephen Harrison in 2004.³²⁵ My versions are used by classical scholars, as for example on a new website developed by Dr. B. Graziosi, Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Durham. Describing the Higher Education Academy award scheme Graziosi says: ‘a project that develops new ways of using translations and creative adaptations/reworkings in teaching and learning classics. I am working together with Dr. Susanna Philippo of Newcastle University and Teesside poet, Maureen Almond on this project.’³²⁶ Along with work by Michael Longley, Ted Hughes and Carol Ann Duffy, two of my poems appear on the website; ‘Fake It’, inspired by the story of Pygmalion and Galatea, and ‘Woman at War’, inspired by the encounter between Hector and Andromache.³²⁷

Fake It

What you like, is the control at your fingertips

³²³ Maureen Almond, *Does My Treatment of Horace represent a Democratic Turn?* July, 2010

³²⁴ *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. by Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin Books, 1955)

³²⁵ Stephen Harrison, ‘Bimillenary Ovid: Some Recent Versions of the “Metamorphoses”’ in *Translation and Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Versions of Ovid (Autumn 2004) pp. 251-267

³²⁶ See www.dur.ac.uk/barbara.graziosi/grants_and_awards.html

³²⁷ See Homer, *The Iliad*, 6.369-502, trans. by E.V. Rieu (London: Penguin Books, 1950)

so you can tweak the volume till you hear soft words.
You think that if you freeze-frame and rewind
you'll see the girl you fell in love with.

It seems to be every man's fantasy,
this need to create a perfect woman
and turn her on when the mood takes him.
Try pressing the interactive button,
my skin might yield; my lips might part,
there may even be a softening of bones.
But I'm what you've made me; 2D
You'll have to imagine I'm kissing you back.

Woman at War

Men are born for death, you're no exception,
you'll die, my love, not in my dangerous arms.
The only wrong I did was bear a son,
who'll grow up like his daddy without qualms
when it comes to killing.

You're headed for a fight; it's what you do,
while men are kept away from loving wives
in case they hear a different point of view.
You're scared the lot of you not for your lives,
but of women's reason.

My big brave husband, you're the chosen one,
the one marked out, the one who'll never flinch.
Even as you rock your baby son,
your eye's on war, you never give an inch;

though he is crying.

You're everything I have, why act so big?
 Your *darling boy* (and me!), we're all that matters.
 Forget your bloody honour. Why do you dig
 your heels in? Though it leaves our lives in tatters;
 you'll die a man.
 Go win some glory; go on, off you go. Such
 waste, but war's your business and *I* know
 nothing as you say, except this much,
 best stab me now then hurry up and throw
 your bairn from the roof.

We'll serve the sentence; make the sacrifice:
 A husband dead, another orphaned son.
 Your stupidity is brave; a worthy price.
 Tell yourself you do what must be done.
 But don't do it in our name.

When I wrote the poems in *Oyster Baby* (of which 'Fake It' was one) I had no idea that my work would be adopted by classical scholars as a way of helping those studying the classics develop a wider and different perception of the source texts, but this is what is happening. By the time I wrote *The Works* I had learned that my versions were proving useful. This was not my main motivation for writing: I was attracted by the wit and wisdom of Horace, whose writing is often highly personal and many would argue highly autobiographical. In the paper I submitted for a forthcoming publication³²⁸ I said, 'For me Horace confirmed that within the personal are contained universal experiences.' I choose to write poetry influenced largely by classical texts 'because I recognise the past within the present and in so doing find it adds validation and affirmation to my writing. Being able, as a practitioner, to attach an ancient context to a modern

³²⁸ See *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn?* eds. Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Autumn 2013)

situation emphasises and confirms the continuity of the human state and as a poet, my interest first and foremost is in the human state'³²⁹ Whilst the idea of my poetry being useful to others was not my main motivation, I realised that I could hold in my head at one and the same time, the idea of trying to create beautiful verse whilst being aware that it was probably going to be useful to academics and scholars. Having read the *Ars Poetica*, I recognised that Horace had combined beauty and usefulness as a pre-requisite for good poetry and so I was drawn to the idea of usefulness and beauty in poetry as a subject for this thesis. It seemed appropriate therefore, for to me to use one of Horace's own texts and recontextualise it as the creative component.

By the time I came to write *Chasing the Ivy*, my version of *Horace: Odes Book 1* I knew that my poems were likely to be used by academia, particularly since *The Works* is included in the Primary Texts Reading List for Oxford University Course, 'The Reception of Classical Literature in Twentieth-Century Poetry in English' and *Oyster Baby* is included in 'Other Relevant Poetry with Classical Connections; (b) Living and Recent Poets for Oxford University Course, 'The Reception of Classical Literature in Twentieth-Century Poetry in English'. My work is cited in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*³³⁰ and I have contributed to *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, a publication in the Classical Presences series.³³¹ My help is also acknowledged in *Perceptions of Horace*, published in 2009.³³² On 17 December, 2007 I read two poems from *The Works* and two poems from my then work-in-progress (subsequently published in *Chasing the Ivy*) as part of BBC Radio 3 programme called *The Essay* aimed at offering 'listeners an accessible modern guide to some of the foundation texts of Western culture.'³³³ In the BBC Radio 3 press release about the programme the series was promoted as being:

³²⁹ See *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn?* eds. Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Autumn 2013)

³³⁰ *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.346

³³¹ *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp.19-42

³³² *Perceptions of Horace*, ed. by L.B.T. Houghton and Marie Wyke, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.vii Acknowledgements.

³³³ The Essay < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/speechanddrama/greekandlatinvoices.shtml>> [accessed 23 July 2010]

anchored by leading academics Professor Chris Pelling, Regius Professor of Greek Oxford University, and Maria Wyke, Professor of Latin University College London... and features wide ranging essays from contemporary novelists, poets, politicians and philosophers as well as leading classical academics providing their personal perspectives on Greek and Latin texts and insights into the connections between the classical world and contemporary writing and thinking.³³⁴

Referring to my contribution, the press release states that [Almond] ‘uses the model of Horace to describe contemporary life in northern England.’³³⁵ In June, 2010 I was invited to be poet-in-residence for the *Classics in the Modern World – A Democratic Turn? International Collaborative Research Conference*, hosted by The Open University which I think is further evidence that my poetry is being both enjoyed and used by classical scholars.

I decided, as I had done with my versions of the *Epodes*, that in my thesis poems, *Chasing the Ivy*, I would follow Horace’s advice and engage with a subject familiar to me:

You writers must pick a subject that suits your powers,
giving lengthy thought to what your shoulders are built for
and what they aren’t. If your choice of theme is within your scope
you won’t have to seek for fluent speech, or lucid arrangement.³³⁶

I also decided that I would not be a slavish translator:

If you want to acquire some private ground in the public domain,

³³⁴ The Essay

< http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11_november/29/essay.shtml >
[accessed 23 July 2010]

³³⁵ Ibid

³³⁶ Horace, ‘Ars Poetica’, lines 38-41 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p.191

don't continue to circle the broad and common track,
or try to render word for word like a loyal translator³³⁷

I try to make a familiar subject new in order that I might reach a dual audience: classical scholars who will appreciate both the main Horatian themes and the themes contained within each individual poem, and a more general poetry audience, most of whose members will have no knowledge of Horace, but for whom the contemporary setting will be meaningful.

My aim in recontextualising Horace's *Odes Book I* into the world of contemporary poetry, in addition to trying to write poetry for its own art's sake, is to provide enlightenment to readers. In his back page recommendation for *Chasing the Ivy* Stephen Harrison says:

In these modernizing versions of the thirty-eight poems of the Latin poet Horace's first book of Odes from two millennia ago Maureen Almond addresses the contemporary poetic career in lyric form, and casts a passionate, ironic and comic eye on trying to break into and advance through today's literary world. Horace comes alive again in this wry, entertaining and well-wrought collection.³³⁸

Throughout *Chasing the Ivy* I warn that poetry and the poetry world are difficult. It is a journey you undertake rather than a career path you choose to follow. In his Guardian article 'Vocation, vocation, vocation' Sean O'Brien explaining why in answer to a question from a journalist with the *Independent*, had described poetry as "more like an affliction than a career" said:

Poetry is an imaginative necessity for the poet, for good or ill. It provides many of the writer's greatest joys, but writing poetry is

³³⁷ Horace, 'Ars Poetica', lines 38-41 in *Horace Satires and Epistles: Persius Satires*, trans. by Niall Rudd, rev. edn. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) p lines 131-3, p.194

³³⁸ Stephen Harrison, *Chasing the Ivy* (Washington: Biscuit Publishing, 2009) and in private correspondence (e-mail 2 May, 2007)

often very difficult and frustrating, while not writing it can be intolerable... Publication may follow in time, but there are usually, and rightly, dues to be paid first, and maybe in perpetuity... if poetry were a god it would be pitiless and beyond appeal, and it seems wise to be aware of that before making a commitment you may live to regret.³³⁹

This statement by Sean O'Brien demonstrates not only the power of poetry over readers in the provision of beauty of form and illumination of life but also the power it exerts on poets, despite frustrations, leading them to continually explore, question, share and illuminate.

Of course I want readers of my contemporary versions to find delight in the poetry for its own sake, but I also want the poems to be useful in providing enlightenment about the particular context in which they are set (in this case, the world of contemporary poetry). Additionally, as is proving to be the case, I want to provide Horatian scholars and academics with a 'contemporary means of understanding and responding to the ancient work.'³⁴⁰ It is the combination of all of these elements, the total engagement with poetry as a lived experience as well as finding joy in engaging with language itself that continues to delight and instruct me.

(ii) *Some Writing Residencies (and why they have affirmed my belief about usefulness/making a difference)*

My practical experiences of poetry residencies have played a large part in developing my vision as a practising poet. Initially I had no particular views about the role of either the poet or poetry in society. Having discovered the joy of reading and writing poetry I had no thoughts other than a growing desire to bring poetry and its possibilities to more people, should they choose to embrace them.

Among the first community residencies I undertook were two with Stockton online, between July 1999 and February, 2001. Both schemes were supported by European structural funds; the second came under the Year of the

³³⁹ Sean O'Brien, 'Vocation, vocation, vocation' in *The Guardian*, October 13, 2007

³⁴⁰ Lorna Hardwick, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth, 2004) p.12

Artist Programme in 2000. In *Artblast*, the then Chief Executive of Northern Arts, Andrew Dixon, wrote:

Artists are at their greatest when connected with communities. Artists are all around us – they are what make a difference to a society – to a place, presenting society in a slightly different way by their interventions. The arts are about creating a sense of place and that’s what the artist can do. Artists make a huge contribution to our everyday lives. In this year of the artist they are being celebrated for what they can achieve in the community.³⁴¹

I acknowledge that this statement by Andrew Dixon is not supported by empirical evidence; it is more a statement of faith. Many artists work in isolation with no particular sense of being connected with a community. At that time I was carrying out my residency with Stockton online under the Year of the Artist Programme and I was able to observe that my personal intervention was making a difference. Group members grew in confidence and developed a greater sense of self-worth and so I was able to share Dixon’s statement of faith. I knew instinctively that if I could encourage people to embrace poetry they would experience not only a sense of enjoyment but some measure of personal growth in the way that I had myself. Again instinctively, I had come to the conclusion that involvement with poetry could be both useful and beautiful.

In an interview for *Eyeopener* in March 2001 I said that during the residency I had seen a community growing in its sense of self-worth, ‘finding out that they can shout very loud with quiet, ordered words and that there are people who want to listen and share their experiences.’³⁴² The group I worked with in the Portrack, Tilery and Swainby areas of Stockton did ‘readings at other centres, on radio and in other towns.’³⁴³ This experience with and through poetry had moved them on as people. I also expressed the view that the residency had been a two

³⁴¹ Andrew Dixon, in *Artblast*, an ‘International Media Production for Tyne Tees Television and Northern Arts’ filmed 2000

³⁴² Maureen Almond in Northern Arts’ Newsletter, *Eyeopener*, Issue Three 03.01, p.8

³⁴³ Ibid

way process:

This residency has done something for me too, as a poet. It is helping me to root my own work, to get a better sense of why I am writing, who I'm writing for, of what poetry means to me and what I want it to do. I want poetry to be as natural to people as music. I want everyone to feel included in it not excluded from it – I want them to laugh and cry and argue about their poems, to put a value on what they have to say. To discover the joy and sense of personal growth I myself have found.³⁴⁴

In other words I found this very practical way of using poetry was not only useful to the communities with which I worked but to me as a practising poet.

Unlike Horace who in *Ars Poetica*, '...argues for the public, moral-didactic function of the poet ...'³⁴⁵ my approach to the poet's role was neither formal nor didactic. I saw the role rather as that of enabler, animateur, enlightener. My brief was to offer creative writing and poetry sessions which would encourage self-expression and raise community awareness with the added purpose of increasing information technology skills and improving personal communication. The overall theme was that of 'inclusion'. The first residency was aimed simply at enabling communities in the Portrack and Swainby areas of Stockton to give voice to those matters of most concern to them within the context of community. The second aimed at ensuring those areas within the Stockton Borough Council district regarded as socially excluded were not also left in the position of being technologically excluded.

Two small anthologies were produced from these residencies, *Willow Talk* and *Sol Talk*, and I accept that the contents are not the best poems. Indeed many people could say, justifiably, that they are not poems at all, but I am proud to have brought at least a notion of poetry and an idea of what a poet does to these communities and to have removed some of the feelings of exclusion from poetry

³⁴⁴ Maureen Almond in Northern Arts' Newsletter, *Eyeopener*, Issue Three 03.01, p.8

³⁴⁵ See R.O.A.M. Lyne, *Horace: Behind the Public Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) p. 22

that existed there before my involvement. In an interview given to the programme 'North East Tonight' during the period July 1999 - January, 2000 I explained that I wanted to do all I could to bring art to as many people as possible. Looking back now it sounds like a pompous claim, but what has been interesting and satisfying for me since becoming involved in research for this thesis is the discovery that my own commitment to poetry, what it means to me and what I believe it can mean to others, has grown and continues to grow over time. My early experience of community residencies has aided and galvanised my academic study of the cultural and social status of poetry in society today. It has been particularly gratifying to have my largely instinctive views brought into sharp focus through the study of Horace. At the time I made this rather pompous claim I had never heard of Dana Gioia or his essay, 'Can Poetry Matter?'³⁴⁶ in which he expresses the view that:

Decades of public and private funding have created a large professional class for the production and reception of new poetry comprising legions of teachers, graduate students, editors, publishers, and administrators. Based mostly in universities, these groups have gradually become the primary audience for contemporary verse.³⁴⁷

Gioia's comments imply distaste that poetry is becoming increasingly exclusive, and in answer to the question 'What good are the arts?' John Carey expresses the belief: 'There is evidence that active participation in artwork can engender redemptive self-respect in those who feel excluded from society.'³⁴⁸ Commenting on the Nineteenth Century novel Carey says that value was given to people who were not wealthy or famous, but were unpretentious. He claims:

This disdain for ostentation had received a boost with the

³⁴⁶ Dana Gioia, 'Can Poetry Matter' in *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1991, < <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1991/05/can-poetry-matter/5062/> > [accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁴⁷ Ibid

³⁴⁸ John Carey, *What Good are the Arts?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) p. 255

Romantic revolution, which was a political as well as a poetic revolution dethroning grandeur and magnificence.³⁴⁹

Carey quotes from Wordsworth's poem, *Tintern Abbey* where Wordsworth praises, 'little, nameless, unremembered, acts / Of kindness and of love'³⁵⁰ as 'the best portions of a good man's life.'³⁵¹ Carey claims this to be 'a vote for obscurity, together with hostility to flamboyance and luxury [which would] reverberate through the literature of the next two centuries.'³⁵²

Influenced largely by my experience of residencies I have come, like Carey, to believe that 'literature is a mind-changer and an escape...it develops and enlarges the mind as well as changing it... it gives you ideas to think with. It stocks your mind. It does not indoctrinate...But it supplies the materials for thought.'³⁵³ Carey observes that if as parents 'we believe our lives have been enriched by any activity, artistic or otherwise, we will naturally want to ensure that our children share it.'³⁵⁴ I think many among us who recognise that our selfhood has been strengthened by poetry have the same desire to share, with children and adults alike, because 'whatever definition of poetry you find acceptable, poetry can transmit ideas, and always has done.'³⁵⁵

Maybe my approach to poetry has been more influenced by that of the Romantics, and views such as those expressed by Carey than I first thought. I do believe that good poetry should be, as Horace says, both beautiful and useful, but it should be reachable by those outside the professional class which produces and receives poetry. I hope that the sense of possibility I tried to offer during my time at Stockton online will have been sustained, but even if it were only fleeting and even if the work produced is arguably self-expression rather than poetry (I never aimed to turn people into poets, but merely tried to encourage them to view things as a poet might and express themselves more fully as a poet might) it was

³⁴⁹ John Carey, *What Good are the Arts?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) p.207

³⁵⁰ William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*, in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Wordsworth* (New American Library: New York and Toronto, 1970) p.101/6

³⁵¹ *Ibid*

³⁵² John Carey, *What Good are the Arts?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006) p.207

³⁵³ *Ibid* p.208-210

³⁵⁴ *Ibid* p.173

³⁵⁵ *Ibid* p.245

time *usefully* spent for the participants and for me. Linda, who had never been able to adequately express how she felt, wrote:

My kids should be wriggling like tadpoles
in clear water, but they're floundering in silt. I pine
for rock and shade, not waking to the noise of holes
being dug for someone else's lifeline.³⁵⁶

This poem was both an outpouring of emotion and at the same time useful to her as a means of working out her feelings and learning to exercise discipline in the way she expressed herself: It was one of the many examples (of poems written during the residency) of what Frost might have described as a 'momentary stay against the confusion of the world.'³⁵⁷ For me, as poet-in-residence, the beautiful moment came when I realized that via the medium of poetry I had enabled a community to have a voice and that community, seeing I had valuable help to offer, had taken me to its heart:

You started to value
your own stories – save everything.
And when they came
from a neighbouring community
to ask me about creative writing,
you told them straight,
“hey you! Don't you be thinking
you can nick our poet!”
Our poet!³⁵⁸

In 2004 I was contracted by Darlington Borough Council, who had secured funding from the New Opportunities fund to regenerate North Lodge

³⁵⁶ Linda Walker, 'Bailiff' in *Willow Talk* ed. by Maureen Almond, (Stockton-on-Tees: Stockton online, 2000) p.19

³⁵⁷ Robert Frost, Preface to *Complete Poems* (Henry Holt & Co, 1949)

³⁵⁸ Maureen Almond, 'Poet in Residence' in *Willow Talk*, ed. by Maureen Almond (Stockton-on-Tees: Stockton online, 2000) pp.47-49

Park, to undertake an eighteen month creative writing and public art project. The idea behind the scheme was to engage local people in the development of their green space and in promoting its future use. As well as facilitating creative writing in local schools and community groups and producing an anthology of writing, one of the aims was to generate public art in the park which would be a lasting legacy to be read and enjoyed by its users. Alongside this I was required to undertake my own creative writing as a celebration of the park. When I started the project at North Lodge Park the bandstand, which is a grade II listed building, had fallen into dilapidation. During the course of the residency I uncovered some hostility towards the Borough Council (my paymasters) in relation to the perceived low priority and expenditure given to the park. The Friends of North Lodge Park were unswerving in their efforts to have the bandstand refurbished. I believe, having raised funds from the sale of my pamphlet, *Tongues in Trees*³⁵⁹ and having edited and contributed to the community anthology, *Our North Lodge Park*³⁶⁰ along with many other events in the park, that I played a useful role. A poem of mine was displayed around the boarded-up bandstand for about two years and finally, on 18 September, 2010 the refurbished bandstand was officially re-opened.

In the community anthology I included poems which carried implied criticism about neglect of the park and the bandstand, as for example in this extract from a poem by Sue about the bandstand:

Sad and neglected,
 you've been rejected,
 lost in time,
 through vandalism.

Once you had grandeur;
 a riot of colour in hanging baskets,
 beautiful iron work,

³⁵⁹ Maureen Almond, *Tongues in Trees* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: New Writing North, 2005)

³⁶⁰ *Our North Lodge Park*, ed. by Maureen Almond (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: New Writing North, 2006)

rich red brickwork,
 steps and a balustrade
 leading to a musical stage
 where brass bands played.
 Today, laughing children
 and birdsong
 are the only orchestras we hear.

There is no red brick,
 no hanging baskets,
 just graffiti,
 shabby paint,
 steps in ruin.
 The dark empty shell of a stage.³⁶¹

In a poem by Yvonne about the park itself (of which the following is an extract)
 we find a similar point being made:

In this hot spot
 we sit and watch for needles
 by the old wall,
 yet we love this place.³⁶²

I was moved to write a chapbook, *Tongues in Trees*³⁶³ because I was so shocked by the number of trees condemned during the period of my residency with no commitment from the Council that they would be replaced. I arranged to accompany the Borough Arboricultural Officer while he identified every condemned tree. Subsequently I asked particularly that the chapbook be priced at one pound so as to achieve high sales. Over five hundred pounds was raised from

³⁶¹ Sue Strickland, 'Bandstand' in *Our North Lodge Park*, ed. by Maureen Almond (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: New Writing North, 2006) p.72

³⁶² Yvonne Richardson, 'North Lodge Park' in *Our North Lodge Park*, ed. by Maureen Almond (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: New Writing North, 2006) p.76

³⁶³ Maureen Almond, *Tongues in Trees* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: New Writing North, 2005)

the sale of this chapbook; I gave all the proceeds to the Friends of North Lodge Park for the purchase of new trees and on 20 March, 2008, along with the Mayor of Darlington, Marian Swift, I helped to plant some of those replacements. I was not hindered by the Borough Council from including whatever work I felt appropriate in the anthology. Nor was I discouraged from producing *Tongues in Trees*, which was my personal protest against the felling of trees. The money raised from the sale of the chapbook made things happen. Referring to my contribution, the annual report for 2006 by the Friends of North Lodge Park, contained the following:

She [Maureen Almond] accurately and sensitively recognised the value of the park to those who live here, and also as a thing of beauty in itself. For putting our feelings into words, her own lovely poems, and giving us something lasting to be proud of, we are so grateful.³⁶⁴

My growing engagement with the poetry of Horace and with what he had to say about its role in society has linked back into my own experiences gained during community residencies, which is gratifying and has resulted in an increased and ongoing interest in poetry's role. There have, however, been times during my research when I have felt as if I were swimming against the tide of popular thought among contemporary poets by trying to embrace the idea of usefulness.

In October 2006 I was engaged as writer-in-residence at the Museum of Antiquities, University of Newcastle. This was part of a larger project coordinated by New Writing North. The scheme, called 'Museum of My Life', was a creative writing, heritage and visual arts project involving six museums and their key community partners throughout the North East of England. The project was intended to encourage the use of creative writing in museums. Along with museum professionals I had to work with two community groups to help them engage with museum collections by writing creatively in response to them. The

³⁶⁴ *Fifth Annual Report 2006 (An Account of our work between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2006)*
Friends of North Lodge Park

second stage of the project was to encourage community groups to explore their own individual heritages by curating their own museums of their lives. The museum staff and I had to facilitate the first part of the project and were joined by a visual artist during the second phase of the project. The idea was to encourage people to engage more actively with museums and help them to get to know the objects. I had to deliver a training programme for museum staff focusing on the use of creative writing as a means of achieving that aim.

As evidence of a deeper engagement with objects I present two poems from the group; the first, 'A Son's Lament' by Jadzia Race, the second, 'To My Dear Departed Sister' by Brian Roberts:

A Son's Lament

It's a great leveller is bread;
 a necessity, like water.
 Didn't some wag call it,
The staff of life?
 Devoured equally
 in hallowed halls and hovels,
 when meat is scarce
 and fruit unripe,
 a good coarse loaf will satisfy.
 And when the miller's
 dusted lungs collapse,
 another will step up
 to take his place.
 Corn sifts through quern.
 Ovens are stoked, so
 men can eat to fight again.
 It's a great leveller is bread.

To My Dear Departed Sister

You came to this alien land, far away from home

with no thought that it would be your tomb.
I mourn your sudden death, so young.

Today we carved this stone under which you lie.
You lived for fifteen years; not long enough to die.
Your plans for the future cast away.
The pride of our parents, the love of my days,
Your spirit will live forever while all else decays.
You will be always in my thoughts.

Another effect of this residency was that it changed participants' perceptions of the classical world; of the people and their lifestyles. The majority of people from these two groups remained in touch with the Museum of Antiquities and did much of the archiving work in readiness for the movement of artefacts into the new Great North Museum.

The following year I was commissioned by the Director of the Museum of Antiquities, Lindsay Allason-Jones, to write a collection of poems inspired by some of the Roman artefacts in the museum as a celebration of the museum and its incorporation into the Great North Museum. Of my collection, *Recollections*³⁶⁵ the director said:

the book will stand as a lasting tribute to the Museum of Antiquities... Other museums have published poetry in the past, but I suspect we may be unique in commissioning an entire volume dedicated to our collections³⁶⁶

Recollections has been cited as a source of inspiration to those working in museums when writing about the ancient world. In an article on the Bembridge Scholars website, Abigail Baker says:

³⁶⁵ Maureen Almond (poems) and Glyn Goodrick (photographs) *Recollections* (Hexham: Flambard Press, 2008)

³⁶⁶ 'Museum Preserves its collections in verse' (6 March, 2008) See <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/press.office/press.release/item/1205319166> [accessed 25 July, 2010]

I first realised how important this was to me when I was working on a display of Roman grave goods...I constantly turn to her work to remind me that writing about the ancient world can be personal, vivid, humorous and relevant to the present without missing the differences...³⁶⁷

My Place in Reception of the Classics

Throughout this chapter I have made several references to publications, citing of my work, conferences, papers and readings delivered to classical scholars and students as evidence of how my poetry is useful.

In 2003 I gave a presentation at the University of Oxford, as part of the 'Versions of Ovid' Colloquium and another as a reader at, the 'Third Passmore Edwards Colloquium: Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English' conference, held in September, 2005.³⁶⁸ In 2006 as a member of the Classical Reception Studies Network Panel, 'Reception and Empire' I read some of my poems at the Classical Association Annual Conference at the University of Newcastle. I gave presentations to classical scholars at the University of Durham in 2006 and 2007 and I receive regular invitations to speak to classics undergraduates there. As part of the two day 'Perceptions of Horace' conference held at University College London in July, 2007, I read my versions of Horace and answered questions about the development of my poems and my study of Horace. Jointly with Stephen Harrison who spoke about the original Horatian texts, I carried out two presentations of my poems; the first at The Open University in 2007 as part of 'Current Debates in Classical Reception Studies',³⁶⁹ and the second at the Lit and Phil in Newcastle in 2007. In 2008 I presented my work to the Classical Association Annual Conference held jointly with The Classical Association of Scotland and hosted by the Department of Classics at the

³⁶⁷ Abigail Baker, *Inspiration: Maureen Almond* at <http://bembridgescholars.wordpress.com/2010/05/31/inspiration-maureen%C2%A0almond/> > [accessed 25 July, 2010]

³⁶⁸ Maureen Almond, 'The Reinterpretation of Horace Epodes, 'The Works' see <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/crsn/newsletter/crsnnewsletterMarch06.doc> [accessed 25 July, 2010]

³⁶⁹ See <http://www.acrsn.org/ClassicalDebates.pdf> [accessed 25 July, 2010]

University of Glasgow.³⁷⁰ I was convenor of a panel, ‘Social Function in Horace’ at the Classical Association Annual Conference hosted by University of Glasgow in 2009,³⁷¹ where along with professors Stephen Harrison (Oxford) and John Moles (Newcastle) I read my versions of Horace. In 2009 I was invited by the Horation Society to be a guest speaker at their Annual Dinner at Lincolns Inn and I read poems and spoke about my versions of Horace at the Oxford Archive in November, 2011. Within the last two years I have been interviewed/consulted by five Oxford undergraduates in relation to their dissertations on reception of the classics and my work has been cited in their subsequent submissions. I believe these undertakings demonstrate the place of my work in reception of the classics

How I use poetry

In Chapter One I discussed how Horace used poetry as a social and literary tool, how he used it to educate and civilise, how it helped him predict individual and civil behaviour based on the behaviours of the past, and how, whether or not he was a servant of the state, he used self-representation and gained status and authority as a poet through his writing. In *Chasing the Ivy* I use self-deprecation and self-representation to gain poetical status and to comment on individual and group behaviour.

The Usefulness of Poetry

(i) Poetry as a literary tool

In *Odes, Book I* Horace examines his position in comparison with other poets. I suspect that like me, Horace felt powerless, unable to affect what happened in the wider world around him. Impotence and self-doubt are clearly recurring themes for Horace, who was negotiating his way up the poetic ladder and making his (successful) bid for literary eminence. I had in mind, when I was writing *Chasing the Ivy*, that I wanted to write technically beautiful poems that would be useful to classical scholars and poets as well as a wider community

³⁷⁰ Maureen Almond ‘Rendering Horace’, see <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/crsn/confs/archive/crsnarchive.htm> [accessed 25 July, 2010]

³⁷¹ Maureen Almond, ‘The Usefulness of Horace (other Poets and Me)’ see <http://www.classicalassociation.org/Events/Glasgow%20Programme.pdf> [accessed 25 July, 2010]

audience.

The very term ‘lyricis vatibus’ at the end of the Horace, *Odes* 1.1 suggests that Horace sees himself in the great Greek tradition, *Lyricus* being a Greek word³⁷² (a songlike poem expressing personal feelings). Horace, by careful choice of words, is using his own verse to say that he will be the first of the lyric poets in Latin.³⁷³ Yet even here, whilst expressing his grand aim, he introduces a note of wit and self-deprecation; his head is not among the stars, but strikes against them.³⁷⁴ In my version, ‘Ode to the Editor’, which also contains a measure of self-deprecation, I suggest that I am banging my head against the brick wall (of achieving publication) rather than striking it against the stars of fame. There is an equivalent plea for publication to the editor, recognising him as canon-maker. My version plays largely on the priamel characterised by;

a series of seemingly unrelated, often paradoxical statements cleverly brought together at the end, usually in the final verse. It consists of two basic parts, “foil” and “climax” where the function of the foil is to introduce a number of instances, which then yield to a particular point of interest)³⁷⁵

This form whereby various possible actions are listed, which then lead to a climactic and opposing {and most often disapproving) point was very popular with Horace. It is clear from the poem that I do not see myself as an academic, that I am too old to enter my poetry for certain literary awards, that I lack social-networking skills and that I am well beyond the age where I can “bill and coo”, while even if I were not too old, I am too inhibited to use my sexuality:

So still the wild exotic sucks you in

³⁷² See Alessandro Barchiesi, ‘Carmina: Odes and Carmen Saeculare’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace* ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.146

³⁷³ Ibid

³⁷⁴ See Stephen Harrison, ‘Horatian self-representations’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*, ed. by Stephen Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.29

³⁷⁵ See *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.975

with word gymnastics, double pun and worse.
 With sexy mouths some put you on a promise -
 increased sales for publishing their verse.
 My *mind* is all *I* open by the way.
 You need to know that *my* words aren't just verbals.
 And as for me I'm not prepared to lie
 to earn my laurels.³⁷⁶

The priamel in this case serves two purposes; it lists the actions of which I partly disapprove in order to be published and ends with my preferred action, (following the Horatian pattern), whilst at the same time acknowledging that within the list lie some of my own shortcomings. In other words I use the poem itself as a literary tool not only to point out (ironically) some possible routes to publication, but on a more serious note to emphasise the unique and powerful position of editors in the making (or not) of a poet.

(ii) *Poet as Educator*

The whole point of Horace's *Ars Poetica* is to educate would-be writers and poets in the correct manner of good drama and writing, as well as in the appropriate subject matter to be covered. Additionally in his *Odes* Horace constantly advises on love and friendship, on how to live life and on the inevitability of death. When contemporary poets accept school residencies, they do not necessarily regard themselves as teachers, nor would many of them presume to instruct people in how to live, but they are acting as educators in a wider sense.

The National Association of Writers in Education, as part of a Writing Together Partnership, ran a 'Writers in Schools Research Programme, 2006-2009' which 'set out to explore and monitor the effectiveness of writers working in schools in a variety of ways, over a 3-year period.'³⁷⁷ During 2008 I took part in

³⁷⁶ Maureen Almond, 'Ode to the Editor' in *Chasing the Ivy* (Washington: Biscuit Publishing Ltd. 2009) p.24

³⁷⁷ *Writing Together: Writers in Schools Research Programme, 2006-2009* (National Association of Writers in Education)

that project, which ‘involved the placement of writers in nine schools over nine academic terms across three English regions (North, Midlands and South). One of the stated principles of the scheme was ‘that the process of “writing well” fundamentally matters for the emotional, intellectual and social wellbeing of its exponents’,³⁷⁸. The scheme aimed to collect ‘hard evidence in the form of statistics charting pupils’ development as writers and readers’,³⁷⁹ I embrace the idea that being exposed directly to practising writers has a positive effect. My views are largely experiential, based for example on my role not only as one of eleven artists-in-residence, but also as anthology editor for the Sunderland Education Action Zone in 2004. In her introduction to the anthology *Secrets of Sunderland* Jill Flanders, the then Project Director said, ‘We know that through this project children have developed a greater understanding of aspects of the area in which they live, and have been helped to express their thoughts and feelings.’³⁸⁰

Many of the poems written by children in my section of the anthology concentrate on people, what their values are and how they behave within their own community. In her poem ‘Hanging on’ which is about the seaside city of Sunderland, ten-year-old Ashleigh writes:

Black as the coalmines of olden days,
the streets of Sunderland are full
of people working in cafes and shops;
they shout and squawk and cry at each other
as if they were gulls looking for food.

But my family and my language are here,
I will hang onto my garden gate

<<http://www.nawe.co.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=24926&isa=Category&op=show>> [accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁷⁸ *Writing Together: Writers in Schools Research Programme, 2006-2009* (National Association of Writers in Education),

<<http://www.nawe.co.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=24926&isa=Category&op=show>> [accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁷⁹ Ibid

³⁸⁰ Jill Flanders in *Secrets of Sunderland* ed. by Maureen Almond (Sunderland: Sunderland Education Action Zone, 2004) p.1

by my arms and feet.³⁸¹

Commenting on the residency in the *Times Educational Supplement* on 1 October, 2004 one of the teachers involved in the project said she had been ‘amazed by her pupils’ creativity, and that she believed that working with me had enabled them to look at writing from a different perspective. “The poet worked with every child and taught them how to build up their ideas...She really got them working in groups, listening to each other, responding to what each other had written... [Site visits to the Wetlands] provided experience and stimulus that children from challenging backgrounds rarely get.”³⁸²

My overall aim with *Chasing the Ivy* was to set up a detailed and complex world of poetic patronage and relationships as a parallel for Horace’s interactions with his patron, Maecenas, and other literary figures in Augustan Rome. Although I am not a reader of Latin I do consider the Latin and try to glean extra nuance from it in terms of interpretation and additional colour. The world of contemporary poetry is a world I know quite well, a world of writing, reading, reflection, public readings, personal successes and failures, tutoring, residencies, Arts Council grants (patronage), admiration and jealousies, acceptance and rejection. I wanted to point out the pitfalls and disappointments, and the need for contemporary poets to maintain a sense of perspective and a sense of their own mortality.

(iii) *Poet as Civiliser*

In *Odes* 1.6 Horace writes about Augustus and the great soldier, Agrippa. He manages to praise both while at the same time moving ‘...from the business of war to the pleasures of peace...’³⁸³

We sing of drinking parties, of battles bought

³⁸¹ Ashleigh Jackson, ‘Hanging On’ in *Secrets of Sunderland* ed. by Maureen Almond (Sunderland: Sunderland Education Action Zone, 2004) p.69

³⁸² Nicola Kell, ‘Words, birds and flamingos’ knees’ in the *Times Educational Supplement*, 1 October, 2004, p.10

³⁸³ *Horace Odes I Carpe Diem: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.28

by fierce virgins with nails cut sharp to wound young men.
 We sing, whether fancy free or a little moved,
 cheerfully, after our fashion.³⁸⁴

In my version, ‘Ode to George and Tony’ (though here in mock-*recusatio* form, because unlike Horace, I *do* intend to criticise the political leaders) I say that I am not a good enough poet to comment on public patterns of conduct or to praise Bush and Blair:

But me, I’m just a mediocre poet,
 I scratch out words on scraps of information.
 I leave important issues to the ‘biggies’
 and marvel at the topics put in motion.³⁸⁵

And similarly (relating to private conduct), in *Odes 1.18 Nullam, Vare, sacra* Horace, whilst accepting that wine is a consolation and delight given by the gods, warns about over-indulgence:

And the fatal brawl Lapiths fought with Centaurs over unmixed
 wine gives warning that no man should go beyond the rituals of
 moderate Liber. Euhuis, too, gives warning, scourge of Thracians
 when in their greed for lustful pleasures they draw a narrow line
 between right and wrong.³⁸⁶

In my version, ‘Ode To Demon Writers’, the theme is similar:

First you blow your trumpet then your mind
 especially when you’ve liquor down your neck.

³⁸⁴ *Horace Odes I Carpe Diem: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.29

³⁸⁵ Maureen Almond, ‘Ode to George and Tony’ in *Chasing the Ivy* (Washington: Biscuit Publishing Ltd. 2009) p.27

³⁸⁶ *Horace Odes I Carpe Diem: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. by David West (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.87

You bandy stanzas, you're a total wreck,
and as for bringing poets down to size -
Talk about the country of the blind!³⁸⁷

(iv) *Poet as prophet/seer/magician*

In my version of *Odes 1.2*, 'Ode to Poets (as a last resort)' I point to what we have already seen in terms of two World Wars ('Thundering boots have echoed round us twice')³⁸⁸ and the aftermath of the destruction of the twin towers ('More recently a bolt out of the blue / made ivory towers collapse. The city fell.')³⁸⁹ I had in mind as a saviour figure Pope John Paul, who pleaded regularly for us to pray for peace, and towards the end of the poem I question our apparent need to continually be at war:

What sort of God can let us fight like this?
A tender god could quickly spike our heels
with love and turn us all away from war³⁹⁰.

On reflection I believe that all of my poetry tries to offer some sort of social commentary, about the relationship of individuals to society as well as to each other. I am not here suggesting that poets have stronger or finer feelings, but merely, as Jay Parini states, that poets '...have a knack for putting feelings into words and a gift for working within the conventions of poetic expression.'³⁹¹ Neither am I suggesting that contemporary poets (or ancient ones for that matter) choose poetry in order to champion particular political or social causes. Were that so, they would likely have become professional politicians. Parini believes that after the Romantic era, poets '...moved well beyond the classical idea that poetry should instruct the young in good morals'³⁹² but it is my contention that many

³⁸⁷ Maureen Almond, 'Ode to Demon Writers' in *Chasing the Ivy* (Washington: Biscuit Publishing Ltd. 2009) p.42

³⁸⁸ Maureen Almond, 'Ode to Poets (as a last resort)' in *Chasing the Ivy* (Washington: Biscuit Publishing Ltd. 2009) p.26

³⁸⁹ Ibid

³⁹⁰ Ibid

³⁹¹ Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) p.12

³⁹² Ibid p.11

poets find it impossible to stay outside politics.³⁹³ Adrienne Rich says: ‘...you, the poet, are responsible for the breath of your planet, and you simply cannot pretend that your time does not exist.’³⁹⁴ In other words when as poets we prophesy many of us are trying to be ‘useful’ whether we admit it openly or not.

Don Paterson describes poetry in its primitive form as a magical art that could ‘conjure from thin air the location of waterholes, hunting grounds and food-stores...’,³⁹⁵ putting poetry’s usefulness in primitive societies beyond question, but he also reminds us that part of that magical art was that it was a means by which stories and histories and genealogies could be passed on and thereby deepen the sense of community and tribe.³⁹⁶ We may no longer need to memorise poems in order to locate water holes and food stores, but poetry still provides an effective medium for capturing our stories, histories and genealogies and can, as my experience with the communities at Stockton online demonstrates, deepen that sense of community. In his preface to *New British Poetry* Paterson expresses the view that ‘when poetry is brought to inner cities, prisons and factory floors, it often arrives via some patronising mediation...’,³⁹⁷ but my experience of the Stockton online communities was that they could instantly recognise a patronising approach and would not tolerate it. They were disenfranchised and they knew it. The system for putting artists into communities might be seen as patronising, but artists who went into the Stockton online communities with the idea of teaching, quickly learned the location of the exit door. The communities I worked with were tough and proud; they reminded me who I was – by rekindling memories about community and myself that I had forgotten.

In his 2004 T.S. Eliot Lecture Don Paterson referred to poetry as a form of magic, saying he saw it in this way because ‘it tries to change the way we

³⁹³ See Adrienne Rich in *Why Poetry Matters* by Jay Parini, ((Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) p.127

³⁹⁴ Adrienne Rich, ‘North American Time’ (Part III), from *Your Native Land, Your Life 2002, 1986* in *Why Poetry Matters*, by Jay Parini, (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) p.127

³⁹⁵ See Don Paterson, ‘The Lyric Principle’ in *Poetry Review*, Vol.97:2 Summer 2007, p.56

³⁹⁶ *Ibid* p.56-7

³⁹⁷ *New British Poetry* Ed. by Don Paterson and Charles Simic (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2004) p.xxvi

perceive the world...'³⁹⁸ This is precisely what I meant when earlier in this chapter I said I try to encourage people to view things as a poet might. The reason I do this is because learning to view things as a poet might helped me to order my thoughts and gave me a sense of delight, both in relation to reading and writing. Paterson suggests that poets exploit this fact by trying to burn their poems into the minds of others and change their perception. He describes the magical qualities connected with the practice of poetry as an occult science. The sheer joy of discovering connections between things, between peoples, between historical times and learning to express those connections aids understanding and increases knowledge. It is, as Wordsworth says:

knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which, without any other discipline than that of our daily life, we are fitted to take delight...³⁹⁹

Paterson suggests that it is the 'insistence on poetry's auxiliary usefulness – for example in raising issues of cultural identity, as a form of therapy, or generating academic papers – that has encouraged it to think far less of itself, and so eroded its real power to actually inspire readers to think or live differently.'⁴⁰⁰ This is a powerful statement: why should poetry need to justify itself by proving that it can be useful? Is it not enough as Paterson suggests, that a poem 'possess an intrinsic cultural value of absolutely no use other than for its simple reading?'⁴⁰¹ Horace obviously did not think so and neither do I. The problem as I see it is that the combined elements of beauty and usefulness advocated by Horace have somehow become divided. In other words we are looking at poetry as being either primarily beautiful (art for art's sake) or we are, as Paterson suggests, insisting on its auxiliary usefulness. I do not believe that the two elements should or indeed can be divided and the reason is this: let us say there is a beautiful poem (a technically

³⁹⁸ Don Paterson, 'The Dark Art of Poetry' in *Poetry Scene News*, <<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/news/poetryscene/?id=20>> [accessed 20 July, 2010]

³⁹⁹ William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800) <<http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html>> [accessed 14 January, 2008]

⁴⁰⁰ Don Paterson, 'The Dark Art of Poetry' in *Poetry Scene News*, <<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/news/poetryscene/?id=20>> [accessed 20, July, 2010]

⁴⁰¹ Ibid

competent poem that demonstrates an awareness and use of metre, musicality, and form) the sheer magic (or perhaps a more appropriate word might be power) of it is so concentrated and intense that it renders itself useful, almost despite itself. Paterson says it does this by ‘seeding and planting things in the memory and imagination of the reader with such force and insidious originality that they cannot be deprogrammed.’⁴⁰² Yeats makes a further point about power and its connection with those things that appear to be useless when he says: ‘Poets and painters and musicians...are continually making and unmaking mankind. It is indeed only those things which seem useless or very feeble that have any power...’⁴⁰³ Paterson called the paper in which he expressed his views, ‘The Dark Art of Poetry’. Dark or not, when I read it I was reminded of Plato’s banning of it from his Republic. For the great philosopher, Plato, truth is the most important thing of all. He regards art and poetry as mimesis; mere reflections of the truth. So far as he is concerned poetry is rhetoric aimed at the lower elements of the mind to the detriment of reason and is therefore dangerous.⁴⁰⁴ Horace also likens poetry to painting saying in *Ars Poetica*;

Most of us poets...deceive ourselves by the semblance of truth...
The man who tries to vary a single subject in monstrous fashion, is
like a painter adding a dolphin to the woods, a boar to the waves.⁴⁰⁵

and later, Sidney too in considering the effect of paintings on the mind;

describes the visual experience produced by poems and paintings
as a form of physical assault: they ‘strike’, ‘pierce’ and ‘possess
the sight of the soul’...Painters and poets operate on the body as

⁴⁰² Don Paterson, ‘The Dark Art of Poetry’ in *Poetry Scene News*,
<<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/news/poetryscene/?id=20>> [accessed 20, July, 2010]

⁴⁰³ William Butler Yeats, ‘The Symbolism of Poetry’ in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961) p.157

⁴⁰⁴ See *Plato: The Republic*, tr. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1974, revised second edition) p.435

⁴⁰⁵ Horace, *The Art of Poetry in Horace Satires Epistles Ars Poetica*, tr H.R. Fairclough (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2005) p.453

well the mind. This is what links them.⁴⁰⁶

Plato, Horace and Sidney, all link poetry and painting and more crucially all emphasise the power those two art forms possess. My argument throughout is that poetry, even that written by poets whose primary or only stated aim is to create something beautiful, is powerful and therefore useful whether for good or ill.

More recently the role of poet as prophet is further argued by Jay Parini who has begun each day in the last forty years with a book of poems before him, commenting that poetry is ‘the kind of language one studies for insights and inspiration, for spiritual direction, for correction.’⁴⁰⁷ ‘Poets’ he says, ‘write in the line of prophecy; and their work teaches us how to live.’⁴⁰⁸ It would seem for Parini that the poet is a *vates* (quasi-priest); Horace would agree, for he saw himself as such.

(v) *The Cultural and Social Status of Poetry in Contemporary Society*

In my introduction I referred to Adrian Mitchell’s now famous comment that ‘most people ignore poetry because most poetry ignores people’.⁴⁰⁹ I was certainly untouched by poetry until I was in my early fifties. What slowly became apparent to me as I began to make my own personal journey into poetry was the number of other people who were similarly untouched by it. Furthermore my involvement in trying to bring poetry to a wider audience confirms that poetry is not part of everyday life for the majority of people, despite the growth in creative writing courses, and the promotion of poetry via The Poetry Society and numerous poetry magazines. Auden claims that ‘the sophisticated “highbrow” artist survives and can still work as he did a thousand years ago, because his audience is too small to interest the mass media.’⁴¹⁰ What the mass media offers

⁴⁰⁶ R.W. Maslen, Introduction in *An Apology for Poetry (or The Defence of Poesy)* by Sir Philip Sidney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, third edition, 2002) p.49

⁴⁰⁷ Jay Parini, *Why Poetry Matters* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) pxiv

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid

⁴⁰⁹ Adrian Mitchell, ‘Most People...’ in *Heart on the Left: Poems 1953-1984* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1997) p.110

⁴¹⁰ W.H. Auden, ‘The Poet and The City’ in *The Dyer’s Hand* (United States: Vintage Books, 1989) p.83

he says, ‘is not popular art, but entertainment...This is bad for everyone; the majority lose all genuine taste of their own, and the minority become cultural snobs.’⁴¹¹

We cannot all be involved in everything but what began to interest me as I talked to people and particularly as I began to undertake community and school residencies, were the reasons given for not being involved. “I’m not clever enough to do poetry” was one of the most frequent responses I heard when I tried to take poetry into communities and more often than not I was told: “I don’t understand poetry”. It became obvious to me that in most cases the reason for lack of involvement was not that having tried it a conscious choice not to be involved had been made, but rather that many of the people to whom I was trying to bring poetry actually felt excluded from it in a way that they did not feel excluded from music, for example. The more I experienced the beauty and pleasure of poetry not just in terms of aesthetics, but as a means to help me think, make connections and express myself, the more sad I became that it was being denied to so many others.

During my community residencies practical outcomes were achieved; trees were purchased and planted, books were produced, words on sculptured leaves were permanently placed in a park, but above all I witnessed the growth of self-worth and self-respect among the people in those communities with whom I worked. Whilst remaining convinced and committed to my thinking, I have nevertheless felt pressured by the argument for beauty – of poetry for poetry’s sake. To read Blake Morrison’s comments after I had made the decision to focus on my own ideas of how poetry can be useful is reassuring. Morrison points out that in fact the last three stanzas of Auden’s elegy for Yeats recognise a ‘vital role for poetry ... [an] injunction to the poet to put poetry to humanising ends – to make things happen with it.’⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ W.H. Auden, ‘The Poet and The City’ in *The Dyer’s Hand* (United States: Vintage Books, 1989) p.83

⁴¹² Blake Morrison, ‘How Poetry Can Make Things Happen’ in *Poetry Review*, Vol. 98:3 (Autumn 2008) p.51

Follow poet, follow right
 To the bottom of the night,
 With your unconstraining voice
 Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
 Make a vineyard of the curse,
 Sing of human unsuccess
 In rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
 Let the healing fountain start,
 In the prison of his days
 Teach the free man how to praise.⁴¹³

My own experience of balancing ‘fidelity to poetry’⁴¹⁴ with fidelity to the masters who paid me a salary for being a writer-in-residence at North Lodge Park related to a much more modest set of circumstances. Nevertheless, as I said earlier, I did make things happen through poetry and I believe that my work as poet-in-residence helped towards the restoration of the bandstand.

When I produce my versions I do so not because I am an ‘activist’ who ‘look[s] back to a time when poetry had an engaged audience and was held in high cultural esteem’⁴¹⁵, but merely because I see poetry as a beautiful art form by which means I can express what I see as a fundamental truth. My aim, as Robert Frost might have put it, is that my poetry “begins in delight and ends in wisdom”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ W.H. Auden, ‘In Memory of W.B. Yeats’ in *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (Great Britain: Faber and Faber, 2007) pp.246-7

⁴¹⁴ See Blake Morrison, ‘How Poetry Can Make Things Happen’ in *Poetry Review*, Vol. 98:3 (Autumn 2008) p.52

⁴¹⁵ See Brian Phillips, ‘*Poetry and the Problem of Taste*’

<<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/print.html?id=180021>> [accessed 20 July, 2010]

⁴¹⁶ Robert Frost, in ‘*Poetry and the Problem of Taste*’ by Brian Phillips

<<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/print.html?id=180021>> [accessed 20 July, 2010]

Chapter Four: Conclusions

Usefulness as a legitimate Aim

I believe usefulness in poetry is a legitimate aim. Were I unsure of it before undertaking this thesis I have no doubt about it now. And whilst many critics and poets (from the Romantic era onwards) would appear to reject usefulness they have, nevertheless, made statements to the contrary. My definitions of usefulness are different in some aspects to those of Horace, but I have been able to relate his conviction about the combination of beauty and usefulness to my own literary journey. During this time I have witnessed the effects on communities and individuals, as well as having experienced personal development and the acceptance of my work by academia.

A question of Style

I find as I read Horace that there is something about his pragmatic approach to poetry, about the way in which he writes about life, ageing, death and the conduct of human relations which chimes with my own approach. He addresses important questions I had been formulating myself about the persuasive nature of poetry and whether those of us who write it fully appreciate its power and/or feel any sense of accountability for its affects. Horace dispensed wisdom and gave the benefit of his life experience and his style assured him both social and literary status.

My poems have addressees and whilst these most often represent character types rather than particular individuals they tend to lend additional authenticity as well as greater immediacy. Contrary to my previous practice I frequently switch the gender of the narrator and I have discovered genres and devices I was unaware of, for example, curse poems and *recusatio*. I have adopted a more formal style and it has become apparent to me from poems written subsequently, that this experimentation with form will continue to be a strong driver within my own work. Whether Horace's poems are autobiographical is open to debate, but they read as if they are. My versions certainly contain a strong autobiographical element. As well as bringing poems into my own time and place (much as Horace

did)⁴¹⁷ producing poems for this thesis⁴¹⁸ has provided an opportunity to reflect on my own poetic career. I use the collection to comment on the conduct of individuals and organisational bodies within the poetry world in the way Horace uses the *Ars Poetica* and his Epistle to Augustus (*Ep. II.i*) to comment on the literary scene of his time. Horace claimed to write ‘in the spirit’⁴¹⁹ of poets like Sappho and Alcaeus, Callimachus and his Roman descendants, but making the originals thoroughly Italian. I try to write in the spirit of Horace, transforming his original models, but giving them an independent life of their own by positioning them in the North East of England. As well as points of symmetry there are obvious distinctions. Whereas Horace is very much a public poet representing the State, my poems, though self-deprecating and ironically presented, (by which, like Horace, I hope to ensure the good will of my audience) tend to be more overtly protest poems; poems speaking out against rather than in favour of the order of things.

The Public Status and Role of Poets and Poetry

The methodology used by contemporary poets in order to gain acceptance, publicity, publication and an audience remains much the same as it was for Horace. It is merely the nature of patronage that has changed. Poets (with the exception of the Poet Laureate) no longer have to position themselves alongside leading figures of State, but they must establish connections with reputable publishing houses, editors and, increasingly, with academia if they wish to be published and thereby heard. Contemporary poets are not called upon publicly for advice, nevertheless, in times of crisis and uncertainty, poetry continues to provide solace and alternative views of events. This research revealed no evidence to suggest that contemporary poets use their poetry specifically as a means of achieving social status, though it could be argued that those poets who achieve publication and win prizes, may be regarded as having improved their place in the pecking order in literary if not in social terms. The

⁴¹⁷ See Michelle Lowrie, *Writing, Performance and Authority in Augustan Rome*, (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2009) p.254

⁴¹⁸ Maureen Almond, *Chasing the Ivy* (Washington, Tyne & Wear: Biscuit Publishing, 2009)

⁴¹⁹ See David O. Ross Jr. *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry:Gallus Elegy and Rome*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p.136

need to write things down suggests that like Horace, poets desire a kind of immortality, a wish for their work to be seen as part of the literary canon to be revisited over time, for something to be continually drawn from it. There is an interesting commonality of approach between Horace and many of today's poets in that neither Horace nor they seem concerned to play to the masses, preferring rather an élite audience. That said, the difference in content, style and approach is notable, primarily because Horace insisted that usefulness was an integral part of good poetry. His approach can be regarded as didactic and he accepted a public role for poetry, whereas many poets today reject didacticism and question whether poetry has any sort of public role. (for example in Chapter Two Fuller confirms that she has no purpose beyond the creation of art other than a desire to communicate and be understood and Padel gives what amounts to a warning that poets should not take their roles too seriously)

None of the poets referred to in this thesis explicitly claimed to be civilisers and yet they are often among the first to express their contempt for war and atrocity and to speak out against social injustice and inequality. Their poems demonstrate their disapproval and a desire to make a difference. The obvious conclusion here is that they are writing from a wish not only to create something beautiful, but something useful. One of the starkest and most beautifully expressed anti-war poems by a living poet is "The Helmet"⁴²⁰ by Michael Longley. The poem presents in very few words the personal price of war and reveals the tendency for mankind to repeat the same mistakes throughout history. That being the case it is difficult to conclude that Longley's only aim was the achievement of beauty.

None of the poets questioned openly accepted the title of teacher; some were embarrassed by the suggestion; but the evidence is that many poets work in academic institutions. Regardless of the motives of poets at work in the academy, which may be varied and numerous, it is undoubtedly easier to gain status and an audience from inside rather than outside academia. Today's tutor-poets tend not to take a moral stance or attempt didactically to convey a sense of right and

⁴²⁰ See Michael Longley, 'The Helmet' in *Michael Longley: Selected Poems*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998) p.117

wrong. Nevertheless they give instruction on the technicalities of poetry and demonstrate a delicacy of thinking, which enlightens and reveals a way of seeing.

None of the poets questioned and/or interviewed for this research acknowledged their public status and with only one exception (Andy Croft, who declared his purpose as a desire to change things) all rejected the role of instructor/teacher and civilizer though they do embrace the idea that through their poetry they can make people think again. Given continuing inconsistencies of view and the results of this research, I conclude that there is no such thing as pure poetry, that is poetry with no purpose other than to be a piece of art. Horace certainly never regarded poetry as sublimely detached and today even those who refuse to acknowledge their roles (as defined by Horace) have to accept the power of poetry and there is an argument that would suggest they fulfil those roles.

The Waning Enthusiasm for Usefulness

The Greek idea (strongly embraced by Horace) that poetry is pivotal in terms of education and civil life, has lost favour in England. Poets such as Wordsworth, Yeats, and Eliot clearly had a strong distaste for the idea that poetry be used as a vehicle for instruction and/or moralising and by the time we get to Auden there is general acceptance that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ - perhaps a sense that it should not do so either. It is therefore possible to conclude that the English Romantic era of the nineteenth century is the significant time for the rejection of the classical tradition.

My Examples of Usefulness

Undertaking this thesis has required deep reflection. Like many poets, part of my desire to write is driven by a desire to make things right. But poetry has also proved useful as a means of personal development and acceptance by academia. Achieving an awareness of the educative and empowering nature of poetry led to a desire to share, though in truth that connection was obscure at the time of undertaking the early community residencies. As well as raising community awareness my residencies have provided opportunities for individual social and educational development. For a time during my research, the argument

against usefulness in poetry began to be persuasive (especially given Wilde's views)⁴²¹ but always I return to Horace and through him I am able to recognise and affirm that poets, despite their reluctance to openly admit it, want no less than Horace did from their poetry.

Some Questions for Contemporary Poets Arising from this Research

There are perhaps other questions to be asked of those contemporary poets ill-at-ease with the idea of wider consequences and responsibilities beyond the creation of beauty: does such reluctance contribute to poetry being seen as irrelevant and mediocre? Should contemporary poets be content to produce poetry merely for other poets, or do we have a responsibility to develop public reception? Despite Walt Whitman's view that great audiences are necessary if we are to have great poets⁴²² anecdotal evidence gathered during this research suggests a distinct reluctance among poets to define a desired audience. It is precisely because the wider public cannot see itself reflected in modern poetry that it has become disengaged from it. In a world full of despondency, poets might do well to produce poetry as an antidote, so long as that poetry is beautiful (as earlier defined). If poetry is made to answer to a broader public it will be memorable. I believe that the purpose of poetry (whether widely acknowledged or not) goes beyond the self and that this has been amply demonstrated in this research.

This thesis is not as Auden might have put it, a 'nostalgic [yearning] for a past when poets had public status'⁴²³ but is it not the responsibility of poets (because they are the ones who can) to seek beauty and truth with vigour? During the course of this research some poets are shown to minimise their worth. This leads to two possible conclusions: either they fear their work is not good enough or there is a degree of false modesty, due perhaps to the fact that we have become so dependent upon one another for affirmation.

⁴²¹ See Chapter Two and Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of man under Socialism*, <<http://grace.evergreen.edu/~arunc/texts/literature/wilde/soulOfMan.pdf>> [accessed 4 March, 2008] p.8

⁴²² See Walt Whitman, 'Ventures, on an Old Theme' in *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Prose*. Volume II Collect and Other Prose, ed. Floyd Stovall, (New York: New York University Press, 1964) p.521

⁴²³ W.H. Auden, 'The Poet and The City' in *The Dyer's Hand*, (Vintage International, 1989) p.76

Ruth Padel distinguishes between usefulness for the individual and usefulness for society (Chapter Two) and this is perhaps the key difference. Contemporary poets like to make individuals think again but are reluctant to have their poetry regarded as a public tool and so are unwilling to accept the term 'useful' in relation to their poetry. I conclude that many contemporary poets overtly accept only half of Horace's definition of good poetry, namely that it needs to be beautiful. The word 'overtly' is important here because of the inconsistencies in views mentioned earlier. Compare Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry, 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings...'⁴²⁴ with his letter to George Beaumont in 1808 when he wrote, 'Every great poet is a teacher... I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing.'⁴²⁵ Similarly, compare Padel's cautionary words about poets tending to take themselves too seriously with her view that she has a responsibility to listen and help.

Establishing Cultural and Literary Credentials

Heaney and Longley appear to accept their public roles and acknowledge some responsibilities. Heaney quotes from Robert Pinsky's essay, *Responsibilities of the Poet*, because he says: 'it meshes in general very interestingly with my own notion of 'the redress of poetry''⁴²⁶ Heaney acknowledges that something is 'owed' by poets and goes on to say that much of the learning of himself and his contemporaries:

went towards getting down in words what it was we grew up with, establishing cultural and literary credentials, being able to say to ourselves with some satisfaction, well there's a bit of psycho-political matter that has been got into the language, there's something new on the page which this audience will recognise as

⁴²⁴ William Wordsworth, *Preface of Lyrical Ballads* (1800) <<http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html>> [accessed 14 January, 2008] paragraph 6

⁴²⁵ See *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice 1780-1832* by Alan Richardson. Cambridge University Press, 2004) P.262

⁴²⁶ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995) p.xiv

something old.⁴²⁷

The ‘getting down in words’ in order to ‘establish cultural and literary credentials’ was one of my aims in *The Works*.⁴²⁸ I had a desire to present poems which would resonate with people who could identify with living in the kinds of communities represented, so that they could make those poems theirs; to voice, as Heaney put it, something they knew. But by the time *The Works* was half-written I had become aware of another kind of usefulness, namely that those poems might be useful in relation to the ongoing reception of Horace and that classical scholars and academics were prepared to accept these versions and regard them as helpful to their university students in the study of the classics.

What Poets Owe and the Journey Towards Truth and Beauty

By arguing for serious poets to consider whether they might have a role in society this thesis is by no means advocating that this be their *raison d’être*, but Heaney makes a strong point when he acknowledges that something is ‘owed’. Reflecting on personal practice and experiencing the power of poetry I sensed that I too owed something and I realise now that it was that sense of owing that resulted in my undertaking community residencies. Poetry is powerful by its very nature – part of its power is its beauty, which cannot be separated from it; therefore it becomes an excellent medium for exposition and change, it cannot help itself. Good poetry is focussed, persuasive and makes a difference.

Horace knows that ‘poetry cannot stand entirely on its own in the world...knows he needs the world for the reception of poetry...The world is degrading, but Horace is well aware there is no alternative.’⁴²⁹ I believe there need be no dichotomy between beauty and usefulness; as Yeats says:

We who care deeply about the arts find ourselves the priesthood of
an almost forgotten faith, and we must, I think, if we would win the

⁴²⁷ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995) pp.193-4

⁴²⁸ Maureen Almond, *The Works* (Washington, Tyne & Wear: Biscuit Publishing, 2004)

⁴²⁹ Michelle Lowrie, *Writing, Performance and Authority in Augustan Rome*, (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2009) pp.257-8

people again, take upon ourselves the method and the fervour of a priesthood. We must be half humble and half proud. We see the perfect more than others, it may be, but we must find the passions among the people. We must baptize as well as preach.⁴³⁰

What this research has demonstrated is that Horace is the man whose template for poetry is still being followed despite unease with the idea of usefulness and unwillingness to accept a public role. Most poets do not want their poetry described as rhetoric (which is precisely what it is; words being used to persuade) but I accept that my poems are rhetorical. I want to challenge the way individuals and organisational bodies think and act. I want to achieve this through the construction of beautiful poetry, but I want to achieve it nevertheless. I do not believe that poets should be apologetic or diffident about their poetry being regarded as useful. That is what I want for my own poetry and I am proud when this is achieved. Good poetry is both useful and divine, just as Horace and the ancients suggest.

⁴³⁰ William Butler Yeats, *Ireland and the Arts, in Essays and Introductions*, (London :Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1961) p.203

Appendix

After a reading and lecture I gave to classics undergraduates at the University of Durham on 29th April, 2008 relating in particular to two poems inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, 'Fake It' and 'Woman at War' (see pages 126-128) I asked students to complete a questionnaire which posed the following three questions:

Q.1 Do you think that Maureen Almond's versions provide a new and different way in which to consider original classical texts?

Q.2 What do you feel about the way Maureen Almond recontextualises classical texts into contemporary settings? (Does this 'kill' the original text for you or make it easier to engage with?)

Q.3 How do you think Maureen Almond's versions compare with other contemporary versions of classical texts?

There were thirteen responses to the three questions and these are summarised below:

Summary of Responses to the work of Maureen Almond by University of Durham Classics Undergraduate Students (survey taken 29th April, 2008)

Responses to Question 1:

Do you think that Maureen Almond's versions provide a new and different way in which to consider original classical texts?

(1) The versions take a feminist stance which really does make you consider the original differently because this is not a theme that runs through the ancient poems in general. The fact that they remain anonymous really makes you think about what is being said in the poem in a wider context and also allows you to

completely involve yourself in this new version because you do not think of how a certain character was in another piece of work.

(2) Yes. These versions make the original texts timeless. There is no reference to the time or era that the versions are set in. This provides the reader with the pure message of the originals.

(3) Definitely. Also makes classical stories seem more exciting/interesting and this provides incentives to study classical texts more.

(4) Yes – they provide a different perspective on the classical texts (which some people might not normally even read). They inspire the reader to go back and look at the original text, which helps keep it ‘alive’. However, at the same time, they show Maureen to provide her own view on the story and even talking from the point of view of a character who wasn’t prominent in the original, (e.g. Death)

(5) Any text that is produced in a different version provides a different way of viewing the text merely due to every author being different in themselves. For example, these versions are interesting in that they offer a contemporary moral judgement on the actions of their subjects and a slightly feminine one as well. They turn the ‘standard’ interpretations on their head by removing them from their own temporal morality and location.

(6) Helps you look at them in a new light, even if you don’t agree on her standpoint. I enjoyed the work, but I don’t think they are particularly ‘new’ – I think some of them follow on quite naturally from the original, not hugely surprising.

(7) Yes, there is an element of ‘newness’ in terms of approach – there is a direct appeal to the reader, with the narrator and/or the reader as one of the characters present.

(8) I don't know whether they are entirely original but they certainly are not as many of such 'opposite' poems, i.e. looking from often widely different perspectives. They provide another person's view of the idea that original poet considers – interesting as original should not be considered as final. OK it can't be changed (the original) but it should not be seen as disrespectful to take more radically different views e.g. war music – much criticism.

(9) Yes – they show the way in which attitudes have changed over time. Instead of getting into the mindset of Roman/Greek, the poem gets into a modern mindset. Interesting how some topics are still applicable.

(10) They seem to convey very different points of view to the originals. They allow you to consider the poems in a contemporary context but not necessarily in the original context.

(11) The poems challenge themes from the original text, and in doing so bring to life the light in which the original was written. After all, the Greeks challenged Homeric texts through the medium of theatre.

(12) Yes, though I've been made aware recently how I seem to conceive translations in two categories: of faithful to the original translations and responses – I'm still not sure it's right to classify this way it does mean that the new way seems to inform the original primarily as opposed to supersede it.

(13) Yes, 'Woman at War' in particular does this well. I personally had not considered this point of view.

Responses to Question 2:

What do you feel about the way Maureen Almond recontextualises classical texts into contemporary settings? (Does this 'kill' the original text for you or make it easier to engage with?)

- (1) It neither 'kills' the original text nor makes it easier to understand, I feel it actually enhances the original text by allowing you to form your own views that relate to one modern context and then refer back to the classical texts and see them in a new light. The classical text will still remain and Maureen Almond's poems add to current thinking about these texts.
- (2) It makes it easier to engage with. However, I would argue that there is little recontextualising in her pieces. She attempts to make the pieces timeless – and, I believe, she does.
- (3) No it does not 'kill' the original, it just offers different perspectives of a classical story. It is actually very interesting to see possible new angles of looking at classical stories/events.
- (4) It certainly doesn't 'kill' the text – it's not a translation, it's an adaptation. I feel if readers want the original text then they should pick up a Penguin edition etc. but if they want something 'new' then they turn to adaptation and these adaptations allow for a new perspective/approach.
- (5) Whilst I acknowledge the value of these recontextualisations as laid out above, I will always prefer the originals as a baseline, admittedly flawed, from which to work.
- (6) I don't think she places them in contemporary settings – I think she makes them universal – could be just about original story or any other similar situation – easier to engage with – easier to make comparisons.
- (7) I think MA contemporises them too much – found 'Fake It' to have missed the point of Pygmalion – the Gods are absolute and we shouldn't forget that that is how they were perceived so comparing them to Nazis (?) is flawed.
- (8) Neither really. It certainly can't 'kill' the original though it may make us

question it and reconsider ideas – opens up the issues of poem – makes us see the original poet more, whereas sometimes we might just consider it a finite resource as itself – can provide insight into original poet’s methods and stances.

(9) Classical poems were written with a completely different backdrop and to completely different audiences. Therefore the same ideas and attitudes have much different connotations. These versions go some way to bridge the gap which I think is unbridgeable proving the same reaction in modern audiences as the one experienced by classical audiences.

(10) I think that for a modern audience they will be a lot easier to engage with. However, personally, I feel that certain aspects of the original texts are lost as they are transposed into both a modern and feministic context.

(11) It makes the text adaptable to many situations, rather than just a single one. You would ‘kill’ the original text if it wasn’t recontextualised.

(12) It is interesting and applies distant truths and history to modern truths and history. Brings forth the contemporary equivalents, therefore bringing attention to the application of classical texts to knowledge, wisdom and how we live.

(13) As above, ‘Woman at War’ does this well. However I feel ‘Fake It’ goes too far. It is much further from the literal translation (although intended as one). It provides a good work alongside the original but I do not personally like it as much. However, this is due to me spending lots of time on this particular work and having my views formed already – I took a more literal approach!

Responses to Question 3:

How do you think Maureen Almond’s versions compare with other contemporary versions of classical texts?

- (1) There are some similarities with Carol Ann Duffy through the feminine stance taken but they seem to use more of a modern historical context and have a deeper, more personal meaning. They compare very well with other contemporary versions and perfect additions to new ways of looking at the classical text. Thank you.
- (2) There is a strong element of humour in these versions compared with others.
- (3) I have no idea; as much as it pains it to say so, I have not read nearly enough contemporary versions!
- (4) They're very good – and certainly seem as interesting as Ted Hughes etc. The fact that they expose new versions of the tales of Ovid from unusual perspectives, make them unexpected/unique.
- (5) No comment left by this interviewee to question number 3.
- (6) More one-sided – from a specific stand point rather than just putting it into your own words.
- (7) Similar to other feminist versions
- (8) The following comment was made and then crossed out: They can't really be compared they add more to the issues rather than the text.
- (9) No comment left by this interviewee to question number 3.
- (10) These versions are, to some extent, similar in response to Duffy's style. However, these versions also seem to be more contemporary in setting.

(11) They are fairly similar in the way that a specific theme or idea is concentrated on more strongly than others. However the almost complete anonymity of character/setting provides a wider scope for interpretation than many contemporary versions.

(12) My knowledge of other versions is limited but of the sampling, yes.

(13) All work along a theme – not many mentions of specific events and involve dialogue. A different style which I personally had not seen before. Obviously not intended as a ‘translation’ but very clever if you know of the original. Thank you, I have enjoyed the work very much!

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