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"LET ME SUPPOSE THEE FOR A SHIP A-WHILE": NAUTICAL METAPHORS AND
CONTEMPORARY POLITICS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY TRANSLATIONS OF
HORACE'S ODE, I, XIV¹

Jens Martin Gurr, Universität Duisburg-Essen

I Introduction: Horace in the Eighteenth Century

While I originally intended to study renderings of Homer's, Vergil's, and Horace's sea passages in Creech, Dryden, and Pope in general, the sheer multiplicity of such passages and translations quickly forced me to limit my overview on two fronts. First of all, it became apparent that merely looking at translations of sea passages is not particularly interesting. If the sea is calm, it is calm, if it is blue, it is blue, if there are birds and fish, so much the better. It therefore occurred to me that the more interesting cases of translation are those that can be read as more than just relatively accurate translations, those that infuse the sea and the related nautical metaphors with astonishingly topical eighteenth-century subtexts, again affirming the relevance of nautical metaphors – the state as a ship to be carefully steered through dangerous waters – in political discourses of all times. And Horace alone furnishes enough examples of poems with a maritime theme or nautical metaphorical patterns and inspired quite enough translations and imitations throughout the ages. In the first book of the *Odes* alone, there are three poems consistently employing maritime and nautical imagery (I, iii; I, xiv; I, xxviii). Additionally, more than a third of the poems resort to nautical and maritime vocabulary, images, and metaphors occasionally.

But though there are several Sea Poems in Horace, Ode xiv from the first Book seemed especially appropriate. Given the analogy it establishes between the state and a ship, it easily lends itself to topical adaptations. After briefly discussing Horace's original, I will therefore look at the versions of Thomas Creech (1684) and of Christopher Smart (1767), before I discuss Swift's adaptation from the mid-1720s in greater detail.

The ubiquity of Horace as a cultural icon in the eighteenth century is overwhelming; as a poet whom every schoolboy had to translate and who was so frequently translated into English that one sometimes wonders whether Horace is not really a minor eighteenth-

century English poet, with flashes of greatness when masters of translation take up his cause and try their hand at his poems. Indeed, there are so many complete and partial translations of Horace from the Renaissance to the late twentieth century² – but especially in the Restoration and the Augustan Age – that H. A. Mason's comment that Horace should be seen as "an integral part of English literary experience" seems rather apt.³ Thomas Creech's translation alone, *The Odes, Satyrs, and Epistles of Horace*, which was first published in 1684, went through six editions between 1684 and 1743 and can therefore be said to be the dominant translation of Horace in the first half of the eighteenth-century.⁴ The second enormously successful eighteenth-century version, the *Poetical Translation of the Works of Horace* by Philip Francis, published between 1743 and 1746, went through nine editions until 1791. Carne-Ross and Haynes justly call Francis "the Horatian translator-general of the second half of the eighteenth century ... who has good claims to be considered the best translator of Horace," citing Johnson's praise that "Francis has done it best; I'll take his, five out of six times, against them all."⁵

Conceptually, one might distinguish five kinds of translation, imitation or adaptation, of Horatian poems – or of any classical poem, for that matter:

The first kind would be a close rendering of a text without any updated topical references. To a greater or lesser extent, these may do justice to potential political subtexts of the original. Most complete translations of Horace, such as those of Creech or Smart, are likely to fall into this group.

Secondly, there are more or less faithful translations of individual poems; quite often, these will have been chosen because the poem seemed suggestive in one sense or another. An interesting Victorian example is William Gladstone's translation of Horace's Ode, I, xiv, whose political subtext seems to have appealed to the Victorian statesman.⁶ If a poet chooses to translate one particular text, it is safe to suspect some kind of topical interest – unless, like Dr Johnson, one translates Greek poems into Latin to kill time during sleepless

²For a convenient anthology of samples, see D. S. Carne-Ross and Kenneth Haynes, eds, *Horace in English* (London, 1996). This is a fascinating collection of translations, imitations, and adaptations from the Elizabethan Age – the earliest translation is Surrey's version of Ode, II, 10 – all the way to the late twentieth century. The book also contains a wide-ranging and perceptive Introduction of some 60 pages. For Horace in the eighteenth century, see also Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge, New York, Sydney, 1985), pp. 84-118; and *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. Peter France (Oxford, 2001 [2000]), pp. 516-19, with further bibliographical references.

³Cited in *Horace in English*, eds Carne-Ross and Haynes, p. xv.

⁴For Creech, see in particular Bernfried Nügel, *A New English Horace: die Übersetzungen der Horazischen "Ars Poetica" in der Restaurationszeit* (Frankfurt, 1971); for Swift's and Pope's knowledge of Creech, see Pat Rogers, "Pope and Creech's Horace" as well as "Creech's Horace and Swift," *Notes and Queries*, 237 (1992), 468-69 and 469-70.

⁵*Horace in English*, eds Carne-Ross and Haynes, p. 23. *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. France, calls Francis's effort "one of the best single-handed translations of Horace," steering "elegantly between the conflicting demands" and maintaining "a balance between metrical elegance and solid sense" (pp. 517-18).

⁶Carne-Ross and Haynes remark upon the interest of a politician's translation of Horace's poem in the ship of state; see *Horace in English*, p. 228.

¹This essay is the revised and expanded version of a paper originally delivered at the International Conference on "The Sea in the Enlightenment" at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, in December 2004. I am grateful to the conveners, Dr Elisabeth Durot-Boucé, Professor Suzy Halimi, and Professor Serge Soupel, for inviting me. I am also grateful to Professor Hermann J. Real for accepting the essay for this anniversary edition of *Swift Studies*, for many helpful suggestions, and for the opportunity to do research at the Ehrenpreis Centre in November 2004.

nights. There are, of course, innumerable translations of individual Horatian texts.⁷

The third kind, and the one that interests me most in this essay, is the free adaptation that remains closely modelled on one specific classical poem but at the same time is infused with contemporary references. Such imitations of Horace with either veiled or explicit topical (political) references are frequent in the eighteenth century. Thomas Tickell, for instance, published a version of Ode, I, xv, which he applied to the Earl of Mar's Jacobite rebellion of 1715.⁸ Some of Pope's and Swift's imitations of Horace belong here, too, but apart from Swift's imitation of Ode, I, xiv, these are not Sea Poems.

To the fourth category belong poems that are loosely inspired by Horace without being patterned on one specific text. An interesting example is Samuel Johnson's 1773 Latin Ode to the Isle of Skye,⁹ a poem that has frequently been praised, though it has hardly received any scholarly attention.¹⁰

The fifth, and last, kind comprises poems loosely inspired by classical models without being adaptations of one specific text or even of one classical author. Edward Young's 1728 "OCEAN. AN ODE. OCCASION'D By His MAJESTY'S late Royal ENCOURAGEMENT of the SEA-SERVICE. To which is prefix'd, an ODE to the KING: And a DISCOURSE on ODE," is a case in point (Foxon Y94-96). Horace is one of the more obvious models; and in the accompanying "Discourse on Lyrick Poetry," he is praised with "Pindar, Anacreon [and] Sapho" [sic] as one of the "great Masters of Lyrick poetry among Heathen writers."¹¹ As far as Sea Poems are concerned, William Cowper's Latin and English "On the Loss of the Royal George" and "In submersionem navigii cui Georgius Regale nomen inditum,"¹² both written in 1782-83 and loosely based on classical patterns, deserve a mention.

⁷An example of an individual translation of a text with a maritime or nautical theme would be Cowper's translation of Horace, *Odes*, II, x, first published in 1782; see *Cowpers Poetical Works*, ed. H. S. Milford, 4th ed., with corrections and additions by Norma Russel (London, 1971 [1905]) pp. 315-16.

⁸See *Horace in English*, eds Carne-Ross and Haynes, pp. 162-63. See also the valuable commentary by Helgard Stöver-Leidig in her edition of *Die Gedichte Thomas Tickells: eine historisch-kritische Ausgabe mit Kommentar* (Frankfurt/M. and Bern, 1981), pp. 230-33.

⁹See *The Latin and Greek Poems of Samuel Johnson: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, ed. Barry Baldwin (London, 1995), pp. 97-102. Among the texts in this collection obviously modelled on classical sources are several poems with a "sea" theme; see, for example, Johnson's Epilogue to Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* (p. 120), as well as Johnson's translations into Latin from the *Anthologia Graeca* (see, for instance, pp. 208, 209, 211, 219).

¹⁰The only article I have been able to find is one on a potential error in the Latin grammar; see Paul Jeffreys-Powell, "A Grammatical Error in Johnson's Ode on the Isle of Skye ('Ponti profundis clausa recessibus')," *Notes and Queries*, 233 (1988), 190-91.

¹¹While the title-page announces a "Discourse on Ode," the title in the text (p. 14) is "On Lyrick Poetry." I am grateful to Dr Rudolf Brandmeyer for a photocopy of a first-edition copy in the *Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek*, Göttingen (Foxon Y94). See also Edward Young, *The Complete Works in Poetry and Prose*, ed. James Nichols (Hildesheim, 1968 [1854]), I, 410-27.

¹²Cowper, *Poetical Works*, eds Milford and Russel, pp. 344-45.

II Horace's Ode, I, xiv and the Versions of Creech and Smart

In Ode xiv of the first Book, Horace addresses a ship tossed about by floods and storms, oars torn away, sails rent, the mast broken, and admonishes it to seek a safe haven:

Ode, I, xiv

O Navis, referent in mare te novi
Fluctus! o quid agis? fortiter occupa
Portum! nonne vides, ut
Nudum remigio latus,

Et malus celeri saucius Africo,
Antennæque gemant; ac sine funibus
Vix durare carinæ
Possint imperiosius

Æquor? non tibi sunt integra lintea;
Non Di, quos iterum pressa voces malo.
Quamvis Pontica pinus.
Silvæ filia nobilis,

Jactes & genus, & nomen inutile:
Nil pictis timidus navita puppibus
Fidit. tu, nisi ventis
Debes ludibrium, cave.

Nuper sollicitum quæ mihi tædium,
Nunc desiderium, curaque non levis,
Interfusa nitentes
Vites æquora Cycladas.¹³

Prose Translation:

O ship, back into the sea new floods will pull you.
O what are you doing? Strive for
the port. Do you not see how
your sides are naked and bereft of oars,

and how the mast, struck by the African storm,
and the yards groan, and how, without cables
the keel can hardly withstand
the overwhelming

flood? Your sails are no longer whole,
no Gods you could call upon in your distress.
And though you are a Pontic pine,
noble daughter of the woods,

you boast your lineage and your name in vain:
the fearful sailor will not trust a painted ship.
You, if you do not want to be the
sport of the winds, beware.

Recently my unrest and my care,
now my desire and my burning worry,
between the glittering
Cyclades avoid the sea.

Allegorical interpretations of this Ode have always been common. As early as the middle of the first century, Quintilian noted in his discussion of "allegory" that "Horace here says ship for republic, floods and tempests for civil wars, port for peace and unity."¹⁴ Fraenkel adduces numerous Greek and Roman sources to make clear that nautical metaphors like this had long been established in political contexts. The Ode is strongly indebted to

¹³*Quinti Horatii Flacci Opera*, ed. James Talbot (Cambridge, 1699), pp. 22-23. This is one of two editions in Swift's library he is likely to have used; I have inspected the copy of the Ehrenpreis Centre for Swift Studies, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster. For Horace in Swift's library, see Passmann and Vienken, II, 905. I have collated Talbot's text with *Odes and Epodes*, ed. Paul Shorey, rev. Paul Shorey and Gordon J. Laing (Pittsburgh, 1989 [1919]) and *Quintus Horatius Flaccus: sämtliche Gedichte, Lateinisch-Deutsch*, ed. Bernhard Kytzler (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 36-37. Accidental apart, there are no variants.

¹⁴"Allegoria ... fit ... plerumque continuatis translationibus, ut O navis ... portum, totusque ille Horati locus, quo navem pro re publica, fluctus et tempestates pro bellis civilibus, portum pro pace atque concordia dicit" (VIII, 6, 44), quoted in, among others, Q. Horatius Flaccus, *Oden und Epoden*, eds Adolf Kiessling and Richard Heinze, 9th ed. (Berlin, 1958), p. 71, and Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), p. 154.

Alcaeus, one of the oldest Greek lyric poets, more specifically to a song about a ship in a tempest that has always been read as an allegorical reference to the state.¹⁵

Most scholars argue for a time of composition of Horace's Ode in either 35 or 33 B.C. Different situations within the Roman Civil War of the 30s have been proposed, it is true, but it is universally accepted that the poem must have been written in the last years before the establishment of the Empire under Augustus. It is important to observe that "Horace preferred not to lift at any point the veil of the allegory."¹⁶

Let us briefly look at the opening of Creech's 1684 translation of this Ode:

To the Common-wealth which was now ready to engage in another Civil War.
 AND shall the raging Waves again
 Bear Thee back into the Main!
 Oh what dost do! put close to shore,
 And never trust the Ocean more:
 5 Thy Oars are gon, and Southern blasts
 Have rent thy Sails, and torn thy Masts.¹⁷

It is interesting to see that Creech should have supplied an interpretative headnote that points to allegory; but his translation, not only in these first lines, is entirely free of any political overtones. As in Horace's original, at no point is the allegory lifted within the text. Had this translation been a separate publication, and had it been published only four years earlier, in 1680, one might have taken it as a veiled reference to the Exclusion Crisis. But as it stands, it is devoid of any political topicalization. As the editors of *Horace in English* aptly remark, "Students of translation looking for a forgotten master of the art will not find one in Creech. He is not a great translator, but he is a good one."¹⁸ I tend to agree.

Christopher Smart, interestingly, published a prose rendering of Horace in 1756 and a complete verse translation in 1767, with a heavily revised version of his earlier prose rendering at the bottom of the page.¹⁹ All in all, Smart thus prepared three almost independent translations.

His 1767 rendering of Ode xiv into octosyllabic couplets is a masterful translation, extending Horace's dense 20 lines to a mere 24 without losing anything significant:

¹⁵See Fraenkel, *Horace*, p.155. The fragment is known as 46a D. For an edition of the fragments, see Max Treu, ed., *Alkaios: Griechisch und Deutsch*, 3rd ed. (München, 1980); for this particular song, see pp. 42-43 and 161-62.

¹⁶Fraenkel, *Horace*, p.156.

¹⁷Thomas Creech, *The Odes, Satyrs, and Epistles of Horace: Done into English* (London, 1684), pp. 21-22. Copy in the Ehrenpreis Centre, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster.

¹⁸*Horace in English*, eds Carne-Ross and Haynes, p. 23.

¹⁹For Smart's version of Horace, see Karina Williamson's excellent edition of Smart's *The Works of Horace, Translated into Verse*, The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart, V (Oxford, 1996), p. 37; all references are to this edition. See also Arthur Sherbo, "Christopher Smart's Three Translations of Horace," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 66 (1967), 347-58; and the same author's *Christopher Smart's Verse Translation of Horace's "Odes": Text and Introduction* (Victoria, BC, 1979).

To the Republic of Rome, on the Renewal of the Civil War.

New floods of strife that swell the main,
 O ship, shall bring thee out again;
 O wherefore venture? 'tis your fort
 To keep your station in the port.
 Do not you see your sides bereft,
 Till not a single oar is left,
 And, wounded by the rapid blast,
 Groan the crack'd sail-yards and the mast?
 Nor are there scarcely farther hopes,
 10 That your old keel, despoil'd of ropes,
 Can longer hold it out to brave
 The fury of th' impetuous wave.
 Thy canvas is no longer tight,
 Nor Gods to sue in evil plight,
 15 Tho' once a Pontic pine you stood,
 And daughter of a noble wood,
 May'st boast a vain descent and form—
 The tim'rous seaman in a storm
 Trusts not the painted planks—be warn'd,
 20 Lest by the hissing winds you're scorn'd.
 Late my vexation and my care,
 Still my desire and constant pray'r,
 Yet may'st thou from these isles be free
 That glister in th' Ionian sea.²⁰

Like Creech, Smart prefixed his translation with an interpretative note, "To the Republic of Rome, on the Renewal of the Civil War." The translation itself, however, is free of any topical references and – with one exception – even free of any hint at an allegorical reading of the text. This exception occurs in the very first line, "New floods of strife that swell the main," "strife" being an interpretative insertion suggesting an allegorical reading of the storms and floods of the original. However, "fort" and "keep your station" (ll. 3-4) skilfully continue the military metaphors without breaking out of the nautical imagery,²¹ a subtle way of privileging an allegorical reading. Carne-Ross and Haynes rightly uphold the virtues of some of Smart's Horatian translations:

His treatment of the *Odes* is uneven but very often rewarding, sometimes a good deal more, and quite unlike anyone else's. It deserves far better than the neglect into which it has fallen, with no new edition after its first appearance in 1767 until the recent academic publication of 1979.²²

III Swift's Adaptation of Horace, Ode, I, xiv and Contemporary Irish Politics

In Passmann and Vienken's *Library and Reading of Jonathan Swift*, Horace has by far the longest entry of any classical poet, the authors presenting some seven densely printed columns of allusions, mottoes and epigraphs as well as quotations. No less than eight of

²⁰Smart, *The Works of Horace*, ed. Williamson, p. 37.

²¹See also Williamson's note, p. 387.

²²The reference is to Arthur Sherbo's edition (see note 19).

Swift's poems are imitations of Horace.²³ But while Swift's "Horace, Epistle VII, Book I: Imitated and Addressed to the Earl of Oxford"²⁴ and some of the other Horatian imitations have frequently been discussed, his imitation of Horace I, xiv, entitled "Horace, Book I, Ode xiv, *O navis, referent, &c.*, Paraphrased and Inscribed to Ir—d" has hardly been studied in any detail;²⁵ there is virtually no extended discussion of the poem, let alone one placing it within its historical contexts of mid-1720s Irish politics.²⁶ One reader, to be sure, has called it "one of the most beautiful, but hardly known poems of Jonathan Swift."²⁷ Like him, I would maintain that the poem does deserve some attention.

Although sometimes believed to have been written as early as 1724, the poem is most frequently thought to have been written in 1726. Based on my reading of the text, I will argue that 1726 is indeed the much more likely date. What we do know for certain is that it was first printed in a small octavo pamphlet in Dublin some time in 1730 (Foxon S859) and reprinted in *The Daily Post-Boy* in London on 14 August of the same year.²⁸

Let me address a number of key passages and suggest a reading:

²³See Passmann and Vienken, II, 912. See also Peter J. Schakel, *The Poetry of Jonathan Swift: Allusion and the Development of a Poetic Style* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1978), pp. 61-82, 157-66 and *passim*, as well as the annotations in *Poems*, ed. Rogers.

²⁴See, for example, Elaine Dolan Brown, "Approaching Swift through his Horatian Poems," *Critical Approaches to Teaching Swift*, ed. Peter J. Schakel (New York, 1992), pp. 290-96; William Kupersmith, "Swift and 'Harley, the Nation's Great Support': 'Horace, Epistle VII, Book I: Imitated and Addressed to the Earl of Oxford,'" *Swift Studies*, 1 (1986), 39-45; and the same author's "William Diaper and Two Others Imitate Swift Imitating Horace," *Swift Studies*, 10 (1995), 26-36. None of these studies mentions Swift's Ode, I, xiv.

²⁵There are, of course, a few interpretative and contextualizing remarks on selected aspects in Sir Harold Williams's and Pat Rogers's editions of the poems, and brief discussions in monographs on Swift's poetry. See *Poems*, ed. Williams, III, 769-72, and *Poems*, ed. Rogers, pp. 291-93, 752-53. Ehrenpreis does not even mention the poem in his magisterial *Swift: The Man, his Works, and the Age*, nor does Wolfgang Weiß, *Swift und die Satire des 18. Jahrhunderts* (München, 1992). Carole Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape* (Baltimore and London, 1982), pp. 68, 233, 234, merely makes passing references to it as does John Louis Digaetani, "Metrical Experimentation in Swift's Wood's Halfpence Poems," *Money: Lure, Lore, and Literature*, ed. John Louis Digaetani (Westport, Connecticut, 1994), pp. 217-25. Schakel, *The Poetry of Jonathan Swift*, pp. 161-64, mentions the poem, but does not discuss any specific reference to contemporary Ireland; A. B. England, *Energy and Order in the Poetry of Swift* (Lewisburg, London, Toronto, 1980), pp. 138-39, is almost exclusively concerned with Swift's technique of imitation and perceptively comments on the question of specific detail and "localized particularity" vs timeless "tone and spirit" and "sententious generality" in Swift's poem. His contextualization remains curiously vague, however.

²⁶For the contemporary Irish background, see, for example, Oliver W. Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (Urbana, 1962); Sabine Baltus, *The Pamphlet Controversy about Wood's Halfpence (1722-25) and the Tradition of Irish Constitutional Nationalism* (Frankfurt, 2003). Neither of these discusses the poem.

²⁷Eduard Stemplinger, *Das Fortleben der Horazischen Lyrik seit der Renaissance* (Leipzig, 1906), pp. 157-58 ("eine der schönsten, aber wenig bekannten Dichtungen J. Swifts").

²⁸For the publication history, see *Poems*, ed. Rogers, p. 752, and *Poems*, ed. Williams, III, 769.

HORACE. BOOK. ODE. XIV.

O navis, referent, &c.

Paraphrased and inscribed to Ir—d.²⁹

The INSCRIPTION.

*Poor floating Isle, tost on ill Fortune's Waves,
Ordain'd by Fate to be the Land of Slaves:
Shall moving Delos now deep-rooted stand,
Thou, fixt of old, be now the moving Land?
Altho' the Metaphor be worn and stale
Betwixt a State, and Vessel under Sail;
Let me suppose thee for a Ship a-while,
And thus address thee in the Sailor Stile.*

The quotation of the opening of Horace's Ode with the casual "&c." indicates that readers are assumed to be familiar with its text. The reference in the inscription is to Ireland as having long suffered from English oppression, with little hope of any change for the better. In its lack of stability and its being tossed about, Ireland is here cast in the role of a latter-day Delos, the "floating Island in Greek legend, eventually made fast by Neptune or Poseidon."³⁰

But the context and references can be specified even more precisely. In the aftermath of the infamous Declaratory Act of 1720, which had asserted the right of the English Parliament to legislate for Ireland, and which, simultaneously, had made the English House of Lords the Supreme Court of Ireland, several of the leading Irish politicians who where on Swift's side in the controversy about Wood's Halfpence and on the demand for greater Irish autonomy from England either had died or had to resign:

UNHAPPY Ship, thou art return'd in Vain:
New Waves shall drive thee to the Deep again.
Look to thy Self, and be no more the Sport
Of giddy Winds, but make some friendly Port.
Lost are thy Oars that us'd thy Course to guide,
Like faithful Counsellors on either Side.
Thy Mast, which like some aged Patriot stood
The single Pillar for his Country's Good,
To lead thee, as a Staff directs the Blind,
Behold, it cracks by yon rough Eastern Wind. (ll. 9-18)

This first passage is a good example of Swift's technique in the adaptation of alternating between very close Horatian paraphrase, even almost verbatim translation, and interpolated applications of the same passage to contemporary Ireland, which are frequently introduced by "so" (l. 49), "like" (ll. 14, 15, 55), "thus" (ll. 21, 35), or "as" (ll.

²⁹Text quoted from *Poems*, ed. Williams, III, 769-72. The text appears under "Irish Politics, 1724-1737." All references are to this edition.

³⁰*Poems*, ed. Rogers, p. 752. Swift would have found a similar description in "Dictionarium Poeticum, Historicum, & Geographicum," s.v., appended to Adam Littellton's *Latin Dictionary, in Four Parts* (London, 1684), which was in his library (see Passmann and Vienken, II, 1088-89).

25, 59). While lines 9 to 12 and half of line 13 are a close paraphrase of lines 1 to 4 of the Latin original, lines 13 and 14 appear to refer to the resignation of Viscount Midleton in 1725 who, after having been Lord Chancellor for over a decade, had to resign in 1725. Midleton was replaced by Richard West, an Englishman without any solidarity and interest in Irish autonomy. The second “faithful counsellor” who was lost is Thomas Lindsay, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland since 1714, who died in 1724.³¹ He was replaced by Hugh Boulter, another Englishman. Boulter, as everyone knew, “devoted himself to George I, complied blindly with the ministerial Whigs, and was determined to wipe out any smudge of independence in his new country.”³² Finally, the “Mast, which like an aged Patriot stood” (l. 15) is the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr William King, with whom Swift had a complex and rocky friendship that was probably at its most harmonious at about this time, the Wood’s Halfpence affair having brought them closer together.³³ King had been born in 1650 and had been in office since 1703. He was an old man in his mid-seventies by now, and in deteriorating health.³⁴ Another Englishman was made Lord Chief Baron, one of the highest judges. Swift regarded all of these newcomers as turncoats serving English interests.

While this identification has long been accepted, those who argue for a date of composition in 1724, before these losses occurred, have suggested that the Midleton parallel might be coincidental and that the reference is only very general.³⁵ But that is not likely, because a second reference to Midleton later in the poem is even clearer:

Weary and Sea-sick when in thee confin'd,
Now, for thy Safety Cares distract my Mind,
As those who long have stood the Storms of State,
Retire, yet still bemoan their Country's Fate. (ll. 57–60)

We know that Midleton after his forced resignation as Lord Chancellor in 1725 continued to express his discontent with the situation in Ireland. He was indeed someone “who long ha[d] stood the Storms of State,” who then “retire[d], yet still bemoan[ed his] Country’s Fate.”³⁶

³¹See D. W. Hayton, “The High Church Party in the Irish Convocation, 1703-1713,” *Reading Swift: Papers from The Third Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, eds Hermann J. Real and Helgard Stöver-Leidig (München, 1998), pp. 120, 121, 122 and *passim*.

³²Ehrenpreis, *Dean Swift*, p. 284.

³³See Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, pp. 212-16; *Dean Swift*, pp. 26-31, 187-219.

³⁴Ball, too, reads ll. 13-20 as referring “to the loss as primate of Lindsay and as chancellor of Midleton and to the decline of Archbishop King” (F. Elrington Ball, *Swift’s Verse: An Essay* [London, 1929], pp. 220-21). See also Philip O’Regan, *Archbishop William King of Dublin (1650-1729) and the Constitution in Church and State* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 324-31.

³⁵See, for instance, *Poems*, ed. Williams, III, 769.

³⁶Rogers glosses line 52 as follows: “Notably Midleton, who had been Lord Chancellor of Ireland for over a decade when forced to resign in 1725, and Archbishop Lindsay, primate for as long, until his death in 1724. Archbishop King, who had held office since 1703, was obviously near the end of his period at the head of affairs” (*Poems*, p. 753).

Returning to the early section of the poems, the next four lines provide another instance of Swift’s masterfully translating almost verbatim from Horace and then moving on to an interpolation that applies the passage to contemporary Ireland:

Your Cable’s burst, and you must quickly feel
The Waves impetuous entering at your Keel.
Thus, Commonwealths receive a foreign Yoke,
When the strong Cords of Union once are Broke. (ll. 19-23)

The first two lines closely translate Horace (6-8), while lines 21-22 proceed to apply them to Ireland’s present situation, in which it was obvious that Irish disunity opened the way for yet more control and pressure from England. We know that Swift constantly complained about this self-defeating disunity and Ireland’s internal quarrels. After the victory in the Halfpence Controversy,³⁷ it was quickly becoming apparent that the unique harmony in opposing Walpole’s plans was short-lived. On the other hand, the “strong Cords of Union” were indeed Ireland’s only safeguard against pressure from England. Boulter’s report on the coinage crisis plainly revealed that the major threat to English supremacy “was the unity of the nation, because if that held and was cleverly directed, no English government could force its measures on Ireland.”³⁸ And against this backdrop, lines 25-32, too, become very specific and also directly relate to the coinage crisis:

As when some Writer in a public Cause,
His Pen to save a sinking Nation draws,
While all is Calm, his Arguments prevail,
The People’s Voice expand[s] his Paper Sail;
’Till Pow’r, discharging all her stormy Bags,
Flutters the feeble Pamphlet into Rags.
The Nation scar’d, the Author doom’d to Death,
Who fondly put his Trust in pop’lar Breath. (ll. 25–32)

I would argue that these lines are a concrete reference to Swift’s success in the controversy about Wood’s Halfpence: if there is internal peace and the leadership and the people are united in their opposition, the writer’s “arguments prevail” – as they did with Swift’s *Drapier’s Letters*. In consequence, the following passage echoes the Dean’s exasperation with the Irish in many of his contemporary tracts:

A larger Sacrifice in Vain you vow;
There’s not a Pow’r above will help you now:
A Nation thus, who oft Heav’n’s Call neglects,
In Vain from injur’d Heav’n Relief expects.³⁹ (ll. 33-36)

³⁷For the history of the controversy and Swift’s role in it, see Ehrenpreis, *Dean Swift*, pp. 187-318; and, more recently, Baltus, *The Pamphlet Controversy about Wood’s Halfpence*, *passim*.

³⁸Ehrenpreis, *Dean Swift*, p. 296.

³⁹Schakel, *The Poetry of Jonathan Swift*, calls lines 33-36 “the central message of the poem.” He relates the motif of sacrifice to “the Israelites’ constant efforts to appease their God and to avert anticipated doom by sacrifice” (p. 162).

The same pattern of close paraphrase of Horace and its ensuing application occurs in lines 47–52. While lines 47 and 48 paraphrase line 16 of the original, lines 49–52 supply the application to people who allow themselves to be taken in by courtly festivities and forget the good of their country. Again, this could hardly be more topical in our context:

In Ship's decay'd no Mariner confides,
Lur'd by the gilded Stern, and painted Sides.
So, at a Ball, unthinking Fools delight
In the gay Trappings of a Birth-Day Night:
They on the Gold Brocades and Satin's rav'd,
And quite forgot their Country was enslav'd. (ll. 47-52)

The next lines continue the model of Horatian paraphrase and contemporary application: lines 53 and 54 – “Dear vessel, still be to thy Steerage just, / Nor, change thy Course with ev'ry sudden Gust” – vary or paraphrase lines 15 and 16 of the original, while lines 55 and 56 – “change thy Course with ev'ry sudden Gust: / Like supple Patriots of the modern Sort, / Who turn with ev'ry Gale that blows from Court” – can, I think, only be read as a reference to new dignitaries like Boulter, who were doing anything to please their English patrons, the “supple Patriots of the modern Sort” being precisely the successors of earlier “faithful Counsellors,” such as Midleton, Lindsay, and King. Boulter may indeed be seen as the archetypal representative of the opportunist and turncoat, who kept sending reports on the course of the Halfpence Controversy to Walpole, slavishly waiting for instructions.

It is difficult in this context not to read the second passage as a specific reference to Midleton, who continued to “bemoan [his] Country's Fate” (l. 60) even after he was forced to retire:

Weary and Sea-sick when in thee confin'd,
Now, for thy Safety Cares distract my Mind,
As those who long have stood the Storms of State,
Retire, yet still bemoan their Country's Fate. (ll. 57-60)

Again, the first two lines paraphrase Horace's lines 17 and 18. The ensuing lines 59 and 60 – characteristically introduced by “as”, indicating similarity and comparison – ascribe Horace's and Swift's “Cares” for the “Safety” of their country to contemporary politicians “who long have stood the Storms of State.” The tone of doom and warning in these final lines of course echoes the tenor familiar from Swift's prose tracts on Ireland:

Beware, and when you hear the Surges roar,
Avoid the Rocks on Britain's angry Shore:
They lye, alas, too easy to be found,
For thee alone they lye the Island round. (ll. 61-64)

These, I believe, are the crucial lines. What becomes apparent is a masterful adaptation: Swift closely paraphrases Horace, translating literally every single line and thought of the original. He then almost imperceptibly glides into an application of these lines – and these applications, which often sound like timeless sententious generalities, are strikingly topical

references to mid-1720s Irish politics which allow us to ascertain a precise *terminus post quem* for the poem's composition: May 1725, when Midleton resigned and was replaced by West as Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Most likely, however, as my discussion of lines 25–32 has shown, it was written after the summer of 1725, after Swift “in a public Cause” – Wood's Halfpence – “His Pen to save a sinking Nation dr[ew].” Although his arguments had prevailed, at the time of composition of the poem, Swift was no longer hopeful for the future of Ireland, as the tone of gloom and warning in the concluding lines indicates.

GUBERNANDO NON LOQUENDO.



Woodcut from Henkel-Schöne, *Emblemata*