

Eduard Fraenkel on Horace and Servius, or, Texts, Contexts, and the Field of “Latin Studies”

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SUMMARY: This essay traces the recent trajectory of the field of “Latin Studies” using the example of interpretations of Horace’s *Carmen saeculare* and showing, in particular, the increasingly comprehensive relevance attributed to historical context. It sketches a shift away from formalist interpretation and, to an even greater degree, away from practices, such as textual criticism, that once virtually defined the field.

ONCE IN A JOB INTERVIEW I was asked one of those questions that define the very genre of job interview: Which of the great scholars of the past did I most admire? Every candidate has a ready answer for such questions. But on this occasion it was posed in a rather alarming way: “Who are your gods?” The theological implications thus raised surprised me so that for a moment I couldn’t say anything. Luckily, I was saved by one of the other interviewers, who remarked that I couldn’t answer the question because I was an atheist. Later, I learned from my rescuer that the other interviewer’s interest in my pantheon was not casual, and that the invocation of divinity was no rhetorical flourish. The question actually had a right answer, and the name of the individual in question, whom my interrogator really did revere almost as a god, was none other than Eduard Fraenkel.

I don’t know whether in the intervening years I have found religion, but there are two reasons why I want to take my bearings in these remarks from Fraenkel. First, I think it is fair to say that Fraenkel commanded the entire field of Latin studies in a way that is probably impossible nowadays because the field has become bigger and more diverse. So, in speculating on where it might go from here, it seems to me useful to look back a bit in the hope of gaining some additional perspective on the trajectory that we are following. The second reason has to do with two positions that Fraenkel articulated,

many years ago by now, that have struck me upon rereading them in connection with my own research during the past few years. The issues involved seem to me quite relevant to the question of where the field of Latin studies is and where it is going.

1.

The first of Fraenkel's positions has to do with a perennial methodological problem, the relation between texts and contexts. Not too long ago I became interested in a short sequence of Horace's *Odes* (1.15 *pastor cum traheret*, 1.16 *o matre pulchra*, and 1.17 *velox amoenum*) as a kind of mini-cycle based on the figure of Helen.¹ In surveying the secondary literature, one of my first stops was Fraenkel's *Horace*—a work for which the word “magisterial,” had it not already existed, would have had to be invented. Fraenkel, as it happens, takes a view incompatible with the possibility that interested me, arguing specifically against any perceived connection at least between the second and third of these odes as “artificial” (207). In stating his opposition to the idea, he takes the opportunity to state forcefully the general principle that “every Horatian ode is self-contained” and that “Horace's odes are complete in themselves and consequently never rely on any additional information” (208). The immediate object of this comment is the once-prevalent tendency to affix titles or superscriptions to individual odes, such as *ad Tyndaridem* to 1.16, in which the name Tyndaris does not appear, in order to “establish” its connection to the next poem, which of course is addressed to Tyndaris. But in a larger sense, Fraenkel is denying the idea that a hypothetically unifying lived experience (here in the form of a love affair between Horace and a particular woman) is relevant to the interpretation of these odes on the grounds that Horace does not tell us enough about any such affair to make it relevant.

Fraenkel is insistent on this point. In discussing the significance of Mevius in *Epode* 10 very early in the book, Fraenkel maintains that the poem itself tells us all we need to know about this character, stating programmatically (26) that

Those kind readers who from time to time feel tempted to supplement a Horatian poem by reading into it what in their opinion the poet has failed to say himself are respectfully but firmly asked to shut this book and never open it again; it could only disappoint and distress them.

It is significant that Fraenkel makes this point specifically against those who would adduce evidence from Vergil's third eclogue and from the ancient ex-

¹ The connections are well summarized in Santirocco 49–52.

egetical tradition that eke out the information that Horace gives in this epode. Significant and, at first glance, a bit puzzling, because one of the most impressive aspects of Fraenkel's scholarship is the way in which he draws together apposite testimonia, often from widely-separated and lesser-known sources, to piece together a rounded portrait of an individual, such as his account of the poet's life in chapter 1 of *Horace*, or to fashion an authoritative account of a particular institution, poetic device, or what have you. Here, however, he takes a different approach, insisting that the interpretation of Horace's poetry, and by implication all poetry, must respect the autonomy of the individual literary artifact and resist the urge to encumber it with extraneous information drawn from other sources. Thus I was amused to find Fraenkel the contextualist—inadvertently, no doubt—advocating what looked from my perspective like an orthodox New Critical approach to literature: the poem is self-sufficient, the critic's task is to interpret what is on the page. It is a little as if, in these passages of *Horace*, Fraenkel were channeling John Crowe Ransom or Cleanth Brooks.

I found this perception interesting as well as amusing, for the following reason. By the time I began graduate studies in the late 1970s, New Critical methods of analysis were no longer new but had become a kind of *lingua franca* among literary-minded Latinists, even as more recent critical approaches were coming into play. And of course Fraenkel was an important model for what was regarded as a more traditional kind of scholarship, one grounded in nineteenth-century German philological traditions rather than in twentieth-century literary and cultural theory. At the time, these two approaches seemed to have little in common, and the relationship between them, particularly in the eyes of the older generation, was often conceived as antithetical.² New Criticism was often charged with being ahistorical; Fraenkel was the historicist *par excellence*. New Criticism focused on poems as autonomous artifacts, paying little explicit attention to social or other sorts of context; Fraenkel's *Horace* is in many ways still the most impressive performance of contextual reading that any Roman poet has yet received. But if we look back from today's vantage point, Fraenkel's insistence on the autonomy of the literary artifact does appear to place him nearer to the New Critics who were his contemporaries than to the historical and contextual studies more common today.

² I would not want this statement about generational differences to be taken as a comment on my own teachers, who were in fact quite open-minded to a variety of critical approaches and not at all hostile to new interpretive strategies as such.

The contemporary Latinist benefits from this dual heritage of formalist and contextual analysis. Certainly the kind of work that I find most useful partakes of both traditions in a way that illuminates both text and context. To illustrate this point, I want to consider a third passage from Fraenkel's *Horace* together with some contemporary analogues.

In his discussion of the *Carmen saeculare*, Fraenkel sides with Johannes Vahlen against Theodor Mommsen's approach to the poem, which was dominated by Mommsen's interpretation of the (then, in 1905) newly-discovered inscription recording the *acta* of the secular games of 17 B.C. Mommsen's understanding of what the ceremony demanded led him to criticize Horace even to the point of outlining the kind of poem that Horace ought to have written. Vahlen took quite a different approach by advancing an interpretation that, in his words, "will not lead from the document to the poem but in the opposite direction, from the analysis of the poem to the new information that is furnished by the document."³ In a footnote, Fraenkel comments pointedly on the greater difficulty and the greater interpretive power of Vahlen's approach, which he clearly approves, as compared with what he sees as the more facile method adopted by Mommsen.

To the approach advocated by Fraenkel I would compare three more contemporary readings of the *Carmen saeculare*.

The first of these is a brief but rewarding section in Denis Feeney's book on religion as a context for the interpretation of Roman literature (32–40). Feeney is particularly concerned to understand the many specific points of connection between the hymn and the event for which it was composed. In at least one respect, he shows, the connections are so tight as to belie Fraenkel's belief in the autonomous nature of the text. Before the discovery of the *acta* inscription in 1890, as Feeney explains, everyone thought that the section of the poem that begins with line 37, *Roma si vestra est opus*, addressed Apollo and Diana. The *acta* however make it plain that the actual addressees must be Jupiter and Juno (33–34). Fraenkel, who gives a detailed account of how the *acta* came to light, does not put the matter in these terms. Instead, he states that the identity of the addressees is of "fundamental" importance because it is on this fact that "the understanding of the structure of the poem depends to a large extent" (370). Clearly in this case at any rate, the poem is not utterly autonomous, and the effective line of reasoning begins with external, epigraphical evidence and uses this evidence to shed light on the text. Feeney recognizes this and, in contrast to Fraenkel, is much more interested in moving back and forth between text and ritual, and is open to acknowledging those

³ I quote Fraenkel's translation (369–70).

places, such as the one I have just mentioned, where the connection between them cannot be severed. At the same time, he shows that the pageant and the poem are not the same thing, stressing that "the *carmen* insistently calls attention to the fact that it is not the rite, that it is not tautologous. It accomplishes this, above all, by marking out a space for poetry as a distinctive discourse" (36). That is to say, Feeney's interpretation is at once committed to explicating the extremely tight relationship between pageant and poem and determined to maintain the idea that poetry cannot finally be reduced to the status of documentary evidence, that it is not totally homologous with analogous forms of cultural production in other realms. The claims of text and context are given their due weight.

My second example is a book by Michael Putnam, who has been known for forty or more years as one of the very best close readers of Latin poetry. Putnam's work has always been notably "literary" in the sense that it focuses mainly on texts and regards poetry as (in Feeney's words) "a distinctive discourse" or a kind of specialized language governed to some extent by interpretive rules of its own. Putnam is always well aware of the contextual issues—especially of history and politics—that can limit or inform literary interpretation, but I think it would be fair to say that the poetry itself is the main object of his research. Nevertheless, as the collective interest of our profession has shifted from texts as such over to texts as social documents, Putnam too has modified his approach. His decision to write on the *Carmen saeculare* would seem to reflect this process: the first sentence of his book's introduction reads, "The *Carmen Saeculare* is unique in the corpus of Horace's writings and in the remains of classical Latin literature because it was written for, and performed at, a public ceremony" (2000: 1). The book's subtitle, as well—*Ritual Magic and the Poet's Art*—points to the mysterious relationship between literature and social practice. And Putnam's attentiveness throughout the book to the circumstances and purposes of the original performance goes beyond anything I can think of in his previous work. On the other hand, it is also possible to regard this book from another point of view. Putnam begins his preface—before the introduction quoted above—by stating, "My purpose in the following book is to bring closer critical attention to one of the neglected masterpieces of Augustan Rome ..." (vii). And the book's concluding sentence as well comments on the poem as a component of a complex social event and as a work of literature that long survives the event: "The *Carmen Saeculare's* reconciliation of past, present, and future is the vatic poet's greatest exercise of his charm's potency, lifting the singularity of a unique public performance to the level of universal work of art" (150). From this angle, then, the book bears more than a passing resemblance to Putnam's Townsend Lectures on

Odes 4, which were also written with the avowed intent of bringing to an undervalued part of Horace's *oeuvre* the appreciation that it deserves. That book as well contains readings that are sensitive to clues within the poetry that align Horace's artistry with the political circumstances that prevailed in the years between 17 and 8 B.C., when they were written. But the *Carmen saeculare* offers a particularly good opportunity to practice close reading of the kind at which Putnam has always excelled, in tandem with increased attention to the social and cultural contexts in which the poem is (or originally was) embedded. I would not want to conjecture about the extent to which such considerations were on Putnam's mind as he planned his approach to Horace's later lyric production, but in retrospect it seems clear that these two books illustrate impressively what happens when a close reader—perhaps the close reader *par excellence* among American classicists of the last half-century—confronts the issues raised by a text that is uniquely implicated in the various contexts that shaped its production.

My final example is an essay by Alessandro Barchiesi that confronts many of the same issues as do the contributions of Feeney and Putnam, but from a somewhat different line of attack (2002). For Putnam, as we have seen, the poem's embeddedness in the contexts of its original performance is balanced, and perhaps even outweighed, by its transcendence of those circumstances *sub specie aeternitatis*. Barchiesi takes a different view of the poem's *Nachleben*, and adduces a particular context of reception to explain the general modern lack of appreciation for it: "... the poem was performed in a context that for a long time, and for some time to come, can be perceived as pre-Fascist, and was mostly admired in the moral climate of European twentieth-century nationalism" (107). Reception as such is not the burden of the paper, however; close reading again, refracted this time through the lens of "Generic Identity" in particular, forms the backbone of the discussion. The analysis is on the whole quite recognizably "literary," but repeatedly Barchiesi brings out the social and cultural dimension of literary devices such as genre and metaphor, particularly when they undergo translation from one culture to another; that is to say, from Greece to Rome. In this case, he emphasizes that the *carmen* is a *paean*, a genre that is "'seasonal' or 'periodical' ... and so is at home in communal song-and-dance culture," whereas "the setting of the *Ludi* guarantees that for Horace, as a Latin poet of communal lyric, the sun will shine only once" (123). In this way, Barchiesi returns productively to the idea of uniqueness, that scandalous property of the *Carmen saeculare* that has no doubt always been a contributing factor to its neglect. Characteristically, he frames the issue in "literary terms" by invoking again the concept of genre: "Common sense has it that you cannot have a genre *just once* But here

again it is wrong to separate the *Carmen* from its social setting" (123). But the paradox, he concludes, that is involved in imagining a genre of one is paralleled by the very idea of *Ludi saeculares*, a serial and (theoretically) periodic celebration that, because it takes place so seldom, renders each instantiation, for practical purposes, unique.

These three contributions are easily distinguished, but they also have important things in common. What I chiefly admire in them is how they negotiate the demands of both text and context. Rather, I should say, "the ways," since the approaches represented are hardly identical. It would be easy to place them, together with Mommsen, Vahlen, and Fraenkel, on a spectrum. On one end we would place the most purely formalist of the essays, on the other the least literary and most historical. Clearly the latter pole would be occupied by Mommsen. And though I have shaped my entire discussion so far in such a way as to place Mommsen—unfairly, no doubt, in light of his fundamental discoveries about the relationship between pageant and poem, to say nothing of his myriad other contributions—outside the pale of what I consider the most productive approaches to Latin poetry, in reality this entire discussion has been a preface to this question: Are we about to enter, have we indeed entered, an age of neo-Mommsenian interpretation?

In some ways Mommsen would seem a rather odd champion for the kind of interpretation that I have in mind. But the point is that Mommsen is simply not very interested in literature as such. If it matters to him at all, it matters as social document. When it is put that way, it becomes clear that Mommsen has something in common with those scholars who today study Latin poetry out of a concern not with any belletristic properties that it may possess, but for what it can tell us about the historical, political, social, and anthropological realities of Roman experience. Those scholars whose work I have cited so far are typically concerned, as I have said, to negotiate between the not always compatible virtues (and shortcomings) of formalist and non-formalist methods of analysis, and they are very successful in doing so. All three of them agree in regarding the text itself as an important form of expression with a status that sets it somewhat apart from other kinds of social evidence. But if I had time to trace the development of their work over the last twenty years or so (as I have barely suggested in the case of Putnam), I think I could show that their interests have moved in varying degrees from the formalist end of the spectrum in the direction of the historical. And of course this movement is in keeping with a general trend not just in our field but in the Humanities as a whole. The question I ask now is, How far will it go?

2.

Let me leave this question for the moment and turn to my second, briefer line of argument. As with the first, my point of departure is Fraenkel; but this time the source is his review of the “Harvard Servius,” which I recently had occasion to reread when I was invited to take part in a Servius *convegno* in Rome.⁴ This must be one of the most famous and efficacious reviews ever written and is a major work of scholarship in its own right. As everyone knows, Fraenkel’s review revealed so many fundamental problems with the edition of Servius that progress on the remaining volumes slowed considerably, and the edition is still not complete.⁵

Exactly how much of this sad result is owed directly to Fraenkel’s review is a moot point. What really concerns me is not so much the fate of this individual project but rather a more general issue that Fraenkel does not raise openly until the end of the review, although it clearly underpins everything he has to say. It involves the kinds of expertise that one might bring to such a project. After demonstrating his own command of the many different areas about which the editor of Servius, or of any collection of Latin scholia, needs to be well informed, Fraenkel comments on the specific qualifications of the team that launched the Harvard edition. By the end of a very long and, with the exception of a few bits of preliminary praise, very negative review, his view of the editors’ basic skills seems low indeed. It seems evident, however, as Fraenkel waxes morose about “the decaying study of Latin” (1949: 154), that he does not view the editors as exceptional in this regard.

What would Fraenkel say today? Half a century later, the Harvard Servius remains quite incomplete; very unfortunately two expert editors who joined the project long after any rethinking that was caused by Fraenkel’s review, George Goold and Peter Marshall, both died in 2001 without having published the volumes that they were preparing (*Ecl.–Geo.* and *Aen.* 6–8, respectively); and there seems to be no prospect of posthumous publication. Charles Murgia’s volume on *Aen.* 9–12 is expected to appear, but it is very much open to question how much farther the project will advance.⁶ There are many rea-

⁴ Fraenkel’s review appeared in two parts. I would like to thank Sergio Casali and Fabio Stok for inviting me to participate in their investigations of Servius. The proceedings of that conference are in preparation.

⁵ The volume reviewed by Fraenkel contains the commentary on *Aen.* 1–2 (Rand). The second and, so far, only other volume published covers *Aen.* 3–5 (Stocker and Travis).

⁶ Many of these issues were aired at a panel at the APA annual meeting on 5 January 2004. As of this writing, several of the papers presented on that occasion could be downloaded from <http://www.socrates.berkeley.edu/~pinax/servius/>.

sons for this uncertainty, including the sheer magnitude of the task, the complexities involved in the Servian tradition, and the ill-starred history of this particular project. But a major factor is the paucity of scholars qualified to step into the breach. This is a problem that has been attracting more and more comment in recent years, not just with respect to the Harvard Servius but in the context of the profession as a whole. Michael Reeve, in a particularly well-informed and compelling survey of "recent and future editing" of classical texts, has identified the underlying problem as one of "contact with primary evidence, and the ability to evaluate it" (206). It is sobering to confront what seems to be the fact that a profession once virtually defined in terms of specific sorts of philological expertise is now producing so few scholars skilled in these areas.

3.

I see these two issues as linked. The common element is concern for the text. In literary studies, there seems now simply to be less interest in the text as such, whether we understand the text to be a particular kind of literary artifact that speaks in a privileged sort of language, or the document that must be constructed out of flawed witnesses to what that artifact might be and to what, in its privileged language, it has to say. Our collective ability to understand and appreciate texts in literary terms may be greater at this moment than our collective ability to edit those texts from primary sources in a satisfactory way. But if the interests of our students is any indication of the future, I wonder if the balance between textual and contextual interpretation that I admire in the work of many of my contemporaries is not fated to tilt in the direction of context. And when we speak about editing, regardless of student interest, the PhD job market, at least in this country, seems to place a much higher premium on cultural studies than on textual criticism.

The examples that I have been discussing involve perceptions that occurred by chance as I was working on two different projects. Beyond that, I have not had much to say about my own work. So I will conclude with just a few words about that.

On the issue of text and context, I have tried to find a balanced way of doing justice to both; no surprise there, in light of what I have said about the work of others. A current book project exemplifies this: I am studying a formal issue, the intertextual design of the *Aeneid*, as a correlative of a social or cultural issue, the ways in which Augustan discourse handles dissent. Having described this project in sufficient detail elsewhere (Farrell 2001b), I will not repeat myself here. I will say, though, that in future I am quite likely to emphasize formal analysis, simply because of the concerns that I have expressed here.

On the issue of editing, I have less to say, not having worked in this area before. I may venture to say that the majority of us who, like myself, work mainly on Augustan poetry feel relatively little need to make editorship as such a major area of concern. But perhaps this is misguided. I do not expect to offer my services to the APA in their search for new contributors to the Harvard Servius.⁷ But it might not be a bad idea if experienced scholars who do not have to face the vicissitudes of the job market undertook a bit of retooling and became more active in editing and textual criticism. The point would be to keep the necessary skills alive, but not only that. Reeve points out that “For editing unpublished pagan texts from Antiquity there is almost no scope.” But when it comes to improving our texts, he notes that the appropriate tools and techniques for systematic study of our witnesses have not “yet been applied more than patchily.” One reason is that to apply these tools properly requires a combination of disciplines: “few classicists know enough medieval history and the last thing that many historians or codicologists study about a manuscript is its text” (197).

This last remark relates in a curious way to a remark that Fraenkel makes at the very end of his Servius review, one that has not aged very well. “Perhaps it is asking too much,” he says (1949: 154),

if a scholar who knows all about the debased Latin of certain semi-educated writers in the sixth century, or one who is intimately acquainted with the scriptoria of Carolingian Gaul—if such a scholar is expected also to be able to find his ways through the intricacies of the schools of Alexandria and Pergamon But whatever the practical solution, in no circumstances must the fact that we happen to be specialists, or regard ourselves as such, blind our eyes to the indivisible unity of Greco-Roman civilization and all its manifestations in literature. Tempting though it is to run away from the complexity with which the Greeks have once and for all stamped the life of the European mind, anyone who attempts such an escape will fail sooner or later.

Fraenkel then goes on to question “whether the so-called Latinist really represents a genuine species of scholarship.”

⁷ Subsequent to the public discussion mentioned above, the APA publications committee issued a request for proposals (http://www.apaclassics.org/Publications/RFP_Servius.html) from prospective editors of the remaining volumes of the *Aeneid* commentary and, “secondarily and optionally, those on the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*.” It should be noted that Giuseppe Ramires has recently produced editions of two books of the *Aeneid* commentary in single-column format. So there may be hope for Servius yet, whatever becomes of the Harvard project.

We thus are confronted with two dichotomous views of Latin studies. According to one model—which has been the dominant one for a long time—Latin culture, or perhaps I should say, Roman culture, is a successor to and a continuation of Greek culture. This connection is viewed as deeper and more fundamental than any sense of continuity between classical Roman culture and the Latin culture (or cultures) of the Middle Ages and later periods. The other view also regards the relationship between Greece and Rome as fundamental, but is perhaps more concerned to defamiliarize our understanding of this relationship, partly by emphasizing the continuity between the ancient Romans and the Latin culture of later periods. Tradition and institutional structures overwhelmingly favor the continuation of the first model. But it seems obvious that we have an obligation not to allow the future of our field to be dictated by mere inertia.

In a recent book (Farrell 2001a), I advocated a version of the second approach. I based my argument on factors other than those that Fraenkel and Reeve are addressing; but it seems to me that from the perspective of the editor as well as the critic, there is much to be gained from further integration of Latin studies along the axis of time. This does not mean abandoning the study of Greek, as Fraenkel seems to have feared. Although I would not state things in such extreme terms as Fraenkel does—"almost everything in Latin literature can be properly understood only against a large Greek background" (1949: 154)—I do not fundamentally disagree. Again, it is a question of balance. And I suspect that we have more to gain than to lose, with respect to all the issues that I have addressed, if we remain focused on the text, in every sense, and if in doing so we integrate the Latin texts of the postclassical period into our work.

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