

Engaging with Secondary Sources and Integrating Quotations into Assignments

General Guidance:

- While you should be regularly **referring to** and **engaging with** secondary literature, you should keep direct quotation from secondary sources to a **minimum**. Where appropriate, you should be quoting much more from primary sources.
- You should only quote directly from secondary sources when they say something **distinctive**, which **adds** to **your** discussion.

Example Excerpt from a Secondary Source:

Green, S. J. (2004), *Ovid Fasti I: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill), 7-8:

“This failure on the part of the calendars to disclose the finer details behind the festivals is symptomatic of the nature of Roman religion in general. In recent years, there has emerged a greater understanding of the unique way in which Roman religion operates compared to other religions. Roman religion was not based on any primary, readily-accessible religious document which might explain the true origin // of customs and the significance behind the festival days. As a result, Roman religion proved to be a very dynamic organism. With no orthodox religious interpretations of a given festival, the significance behind it was subject to change through time, particularly in the hands of the Emperors, who imposed their own (political) significance on days at will.”

BAD PRACTICE: CATEGORIES OF OFFENCE

Major Offences: Plagiarism



1. The calendars fail to disclose the finer details behind the festivals, and this is symptomatic of the nature of Roman religion in general. There is now a greater understanding of the unique way in which Roman religion operates compared to some other religions.

Excerpt 1 does not acknowledge the secondary source it is using, but is clearly heavily based upon it, in terms of both wording and structure (= paraphrase). Attempting to pass off the ideas of others as your own constitutes PLAGIARISM.

- Roman calendars do not give us information about “the finer details behind the festivals” (Green 2004: 7). This is because “Roman religion was not based on any primary, readily-accessible religious document which might explain the true origin of customs and the significance behind the festival days” (Green 2004: 7-8). Therefore, “the significance behind it was subject to change through time” (Green 2004: 8).

Excerpt 2 is, in some respects, better than Excerpt 1. It does not attempt to deceive the reader into thinking that this is the writer's own words: everything is properly acknowledged. But the result is that the student is saying very little for himself/herself. The essay is essentially a patchwork of someone else's words: which is, at least in theory, still a category of plagiarism. Even if it does not fall within a particular university's definition of plagiarism, it will receive a very low grade, because so little of the discussion can be directly attributed to the essay writer.

Moderate Offences: Ineffective Quoting



- We need to think about Roman religion in a different way to some contemporary religions. As Green explains, “Roman religion was not based on any primary, readily-accessible religious document which might explain the true origin of customs and the significance behind the festival days.” (Green 2004: 7-8).

Excerpt 3 represents a very common form of ineffective quoting: failure to integrate quotes into your own argument. The quotation is left hanging ('as' is not a good connective) and focuses away from the writer's own views. The reader/ grader is not interested in what Green thinks – what do YOU, the writer, think?

- The difference is that Roman religion has no underlying source to tell the Romans what the definitive meaning is behind a festival: “Roman religion was not based on any primary, readily-accessible religious document which might explain the true origin of customs and the significance behind the festival days.” (Green 2004: 7-8).

Excerpt 4 is an example of what I call 'repetition-of-point quoting'. In the first sentence, the writer effectively makes the central point in his/ her own words. The quotation adds NOTHING – it simply says the same thing in the words of someone else. It would be better to remove the direct quotation and just keep the reference to the secondary source.

5. Roman religion is very different to what we might understand today. In short, it did not possess any “primary ... religious document” (Green 2004: 7) to tell the “true origin of customs” (Green 2004: 7-8).

Excerpt 5 is an example of what I call ‘banal quoting’. The words quoted are quite unremarkable – why bother to quote them as if they were particularly special or illuminating? It would be much better for the writer to express the whole sentiment in his/ her own words.

6. As Roman religion did not have an underlying source, it was “a very dynamic organism” (Green 2004: 8).

Excerpt 6 might be a (facile) example of a writer quoting something simply because it looks sophisticated and clever. Be wary of doing this. Unless you show that you understand what it means, the reader/ grader may suspect that you really don't understand the quote at all.

AND FINALLY ... GOOD PRACTICE

7. Green argues that, because Roman religion did not have an underlying source that might tell the Romans the origins of their own festivals, the meaning behind the festivals was open to manipulation through time, especially by the Emperors (Green 2004: 7-8). This can indeed be seen from



Excerpt 7 is good! The writer has read the secondary source, understood it, put the argument into his/ her own words and acknowledged it appropriately. The focus is therefore maintained on the writer's own argument, as he/ she continues by assessing the merits of the secondary scholar's opinion (backed up with evidence from primary sources).

Uses and Abuses of Quotations in Essays

The following are examples lifted from real student essays from the UK many years ago. Without worrying too much about the thematic content (which is Roman epic poetry), assess whether or not you think the student has quoted effectively. If not, under which 'bad practice' category do you think it might be placed?

1. The principal reasons for viewing the second part of the poem as 'more grand' have been discussed by Williams¹: first, because of the development of Aeneas' character and the realisation and eventual fulfilment of his destiny; secondly, "because he now has to portray the character and achievement of the early ancestors of his own Italians"; and thirdly, "because the account of battles is ... more decisive and dramatic than the earlier books."
2. So "Aeneas was seen as developing through the poem into the ideal Roman hero of Virgil's age, a Stoic disciple learning to follow the will of destiny, and the poem was a sublime assertion of the might of Rome and Augustus." (Williams, 247).
3. Feeney comments that Lucan was "baffled at the defeat of the party with all right on its side", and suggests that as he did not understand the gods' motives behind the end result, Lucan refrained from including any such divine participation.²
4. Feeney believes "that the characterful narration of divine action is the irreducible line of demarcation between epic and history" (Feeney, 261). Lucan's poem "disowns its patrimony of knowledge" (Henderson, 136).
5. Cairns also believes that love motivates the whole story in saying, "of all the aspects of human life, it is centred most clearly on love and marriage" (Cairns, 105).
6. Yet we must remember that Lucan is a poet and not a historian and, as Lintott³ points out, Lucan never set out to make his work a historical reference.
7. Virgil, to make his hero successful, must present him as a new character type.
"The poet sought to exploit all that was memorable in Homeric epic to shape the theme of the Trojan arrival in such a way as to evoke the continuity of the traditional living of Rome, and to depict the concerns of Aeneas as being also the concerns of Augustus."⁴

The first half of the poem bears witness to Aeneas the man whose personal trials establish his piety on a more intimate level, as he sacrifices the love of Dido in his pursuance of divine will,

¹ Williams, 169.

² Feeney, 278-9.

³ Lintott, 25.

⁴ Farrell, 223.

before Book 6 sees the revelation of his destiny and Aeneas' fate sealed as the precursor to Augustus,

“There is no room for doubt or hesitation; Aeneas can now go on in the knowledge that one day his progeny will rule the world and beyond.”⁵

Also,

“It is fair to say that as we finish the *Aeneid*, we perceive that Aeneas' final act is connected to his first appearance, and that the latter reflects the first as much as the first anticipated the latter.”⁶

8. There is a recurring theme of Pompey's tendency to live in the past: he seems to live “in a hazy world fed by memories of former triumphs and by empty boastfulness.”⁷
9. Furthermore, the shield of Aeneas depicts “great moments in Roman history.”⁸
10. Otis continues by highlighting the fact that “the psychological and subjective emphasis of the first six books is gone: Aeneas is no more engaged in inner struggle ... but in great war with very tangible human opponents” (Otis, 313).

⁵ Bishop, 111.

⁶ Hornsby, 2

⁷ Deroux, 288.

⁸ Pattie, 46.