VATES

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Editorial

I am constantly astonished and gratified by the generosity, enthusiasm, invention and skill of the contributors to this journal. Such a variety of stimulating poetry, and writing about poetry, appearing in these pages each issue surely bodes well for the future of new Latin verse. Amid an embarrassment of riches this issue, there are poems from some of the most experienced and distinguished practitioners in the field, alongside contributions from a first-timer. Latin poets both experienced and aspiring ought to find much that is inspiring in Laura Gibbs' survey of distichs, Barry Baldwin's assessment of Samuel Johnson's Augustan verse, and Brad Walton's eloquent introduction to the very modern angst of Ericus Livonius.

Frank Lelièvre

It is with sadness that I record the passing of Professor Frank Lelièvre, an admirable modern Latin poet who generously contributed his poem *For a Beginner* to the very first issue of this journal [I:3]. Professor of Classics at Magee College in Londonderry and then at the University of Ulster in Coleraine, he first began to write Latin poetry while lecturing at Bedford College, London in the late 1940s. In retirement he published three volumes, subtitled 'Latin poems in various metres', which include both translations from English originals and new Latin poems. These are *Across Bin Brook* (1992, with H.H. Huxley), *Serus Vindemitor* (1995) and *Rarae Uvae* (2009). *Francisce, sit tibi terra leuis.*

Vates needs you!

This journal cannot exist without your contribution. So if reading this inspires you to compose some Latin verses of your own, please don't be shy – share them with us. And tell all your friends about us, too.

If you missed previous issues, please visit the *Vates* webpage to download your free copies.

Mark Walker, Editor
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Carmina Latina

(*n.b.* Latin spellings follow the orthography of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Only proper names are capitalised.)

Ad Marcum Editorem

Joseph Tusiani

Joseph Tusiani writes: These few hexameters sound quite facetious, but to me they are quite serious.

Marce, labore tuo, quo Vates colligis omnes,

ignotos homines socios facis atque sodales,

ex istis unus, Robertus Zisk tibi carus,

nunc meus est subito factus pretiosus amicus.

nil de illo nosco: si felix uiuat in urbe

an uiridi in prato plantas numeret sibi notas;

si magnum ostentet corpus plateae populosae

an parvus gracilisque inter celsos uideatur.

sed totum de illo scio: uir pius est si in terra

prompte consimilis lacrimas uult tergere nati,

si tantum sola uirtute Poeseos affers,

PRO PRETIO PACIS te nuncupo, Marce, libenter.

* * *

Metre: Hexameters

Editor's translation: Mark, by your work, in which you bring together every unknown poet and make them friends and companions, one dear to you, Robert Zisk, has now suddenly become my cherished friend. I know nothing about him: whether he lives happily in a city, or counts as his own the well-known plants in a green meadow; whether he exhibits a large body on the crowded street, or seems small and gracious among the lofty. But I know everything about him: he is a worthy man if he desires unhesitatingly to wipe away the tears of a fellow being on this earth. If you only elicit Poetry with this one virtue, AS A REWARD FOR PEACE, I urge you, Mark, gladly.

* * *

Nurses – an epigram

David Money

David Money writes – A Brief Dissertation on Muses:

(*Muse*: Emma; *Vates*: David Money)

We are used to Muses as fictional sources of inspiration: Melpomene and her crowd are unlikely to mean much to contemporary poets, however 'real' they may or may not have seemed to Horace. That is why, when there is a real Muse involved, I feel she deserves equal billing with the 'Vates' – especially when she and her colleagues have other valuable skills, such as the ability to poke various devilish devices in one's arm, with the minimum of bloodshed and unpleasantness, and the maximum of good humour.

This epigram, then, was composed on a topic suggested by Emma, during the poet's temporary residence (7-13 August 2012) in Addenbrookes' hospital, Cambridge, ward C4, bed 19; a stay enhanced by a 'room with a view', agreeable room-mates (for which many thanks to Vinod, bed 17, and Steve, bed 18), excellent room-service, and free catering that can match many colleges (at least at lunch-time; dinners perhaps slightly below some high-table standards). Should readers be unfortunate enough to take a tumble in the Cambridge area, I can thoroughly recommend the nursing: and while Latin may not be the first language in use (while English is widely understood, perhaps try out your Polish, Italian, Slovakian, Tagalog, Glaswegian), as you can see, there are Muses available for the Latin poet who asks nicely.

Funnily enough, the issue of 'modern' Muses had previously arisen, during my Latin lectures on verse-composition at Terence Tunberg's 'conventiculum', 2010 and 2011. We settled, I recall, on 'Brenda' of Kentucky, a name chosen by the learned Scottius to represent modern America. And by coincidence – Romans might have called it fate – a real woman named Brenda was indeed inspirational (though not for this particular epigram) during my recent vacation in ward C4. Similarly, visitors to our American verse-writing website, 'Inter Versiculos', may encounter Mildred, our invented rustic Muse of Michigan (and any real Mildreds are invited to step forward with their ideas). Readers of *Vates* are warmly encouraged to visit 'Inter Versiculos', which I very much hope you may find of some interest (and your comments would be most welcome): http://www.umich.edu/~rclatin/iv/index.html

The epigram intends, naturally, to praise nurses; and perhaps slightly to tweak the tail of the more humourless kind of doctor. This should not be taken as any criticism of actual physicians I

encountered: whose response to any emergency appeared superb, although it also seemed impossible to find one for non-emergency purposes at the weekend (presumably on the golf-course: a convenience less easily available to the nurses, health-care assistants and so on, who are obliged to work unsocial hours, and deserve our deep thanks for doing so). The epigram contrasts the archetypal nurse, Florence Nightingale, the 'lady with the lamp' of the Crimean war, with another character nicknamed 'bringer of light', the anti-hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (the literal meaning of 'Lucifer' is 'bringer of light' – obviously pejorative in the case of Satan, but not generally so in other Latin contexts). *Lucifera*, the feminine form, here elides into the following vowel, so sounding almost identical.

Lucifera ad stellas bello tua munera tollit;

Lucifer e stellis doctior arte ruit.

* * *

Metre: Elegiac couplet

Translation:

She bore a lamp, in wartime, raising up
Her task, and most who take it, to the stars;
Learned 'light-bringer', doctored, over-proud:
He sped the other way, from stars to hell.

* * *

Three Sea Poems

Brad Walton

Brad Walton writes: These three poems are all related, however loosely, to the sea. This is a good theme in Latin since the language has so many synonyms for sea: *mare, aequor, altum, profundum, pontus, fretum, salum, gurges, undae, pelagus, marmor, oceanus, Neptunus, Thetis, Nereus, Tethys*. In the last poem, *Piscatores*, the sea referred to is, of course, the Sea of Galilee. I had to resist the temptation of referring to it as *oceanus*, in spite of the metrical convenience of that word. I thought it probably too small to pass convincingly as an 'ocean'.

(1) Naufragi Formosi

aequoreo demersus Apolline

quisque suis in litoribus iacet

naufragus indomitisque soporibus

restituit quae robora sorbuit

immensum pelagus. ceruicibus

sub lepidis deiecta cubilia

e tenui sabulone, rudentibus,

retibus, euersae trabibus ratis,

sole dealbatis ramalibus,

couraliis ornata rubentibus,

taeniolis algae, lolligine,

electro, stella, testudine.

rore maris trepidi manat coma.

sparsa cutis, cilium, mollis gena,

labra procacia marmoreo sale.

litoreus subter scapulis calor,

et porrecta gracillima brachia

formoso maris in purgamine.

* * *

Metre: Dactylic tetrameter

Translation: *The Beautiful Castaways*

Immersed in the ocean sun light, each shipwrecked sailor lies on his beach and with irresistible sleep restores the strength swallowed by the vast sea. Cast beneath their graceful necks are beds of fine stones, ropes, nets, the timbers of their sunken ship, branches bleached by the sun, (beds) adorned with red corals, ribbons of seaweed, cuttle-fish, amber, starfish, tortoise shell. Their hair drips with the dew of the unquiet sea. Their skin, eyelids, soft cheeks, wanton lips are sprinkled with sea salt. Beneath their shoulder blades is the warmth of the beach, and their slender arms are stretched over the beautiful refuse of the sea.

* * *

(2) Neptunus Iuuenis

olim caeruleo fuit

Neptuno nitor aureus,

pingui caesarie caput,

nigritudo supercili,

fulgentes oculi nouis

optatis et amoribus,

purae mollities cutis,

imberbisque rubor genae,

labri puniceus tumor,

ceruix lactea, turgidae

pectoris calyces rosae,

neruorum teretum rigor,

planum uentris aheneum,

contractique uenustulus

et lentus medii sinus.

nec raro iuuenis deus,

fratre uictus Olympico,

maerens Palladis Atticam,

spretus frugifera dea,

prolixos cilii pilos

largis imbuit imbribus

et sparsit nitido rudem

se dolens faciem uitro.

* * *

Metre: Glyconics

Translation: *Young Neptune*

Once blue Neptune had a golden sheen, a head of thick hair, black eyebrows, eyes blazing with new desires and passions, soft, unblemished skin and a red flush on his beardless cheeks, a purple fullness to his lips, a white neck, nipples like swelling roses, the firmness of well-turned muscles, a bronze flatness to his stomach, and a graceful and supple curve to his slender waist. It was not unusual for the young god, defeated by his Olympian brother, lamenting Attica possessed by Minerva, scorned by the fruit bearing goddess, to soak his long eye lashes with plentiful showers and, grieving for himself, to sprinkle his callow face with sparkling glass.

* * *

(3) Piscatores

fulget lineus aether.

flagrant aequoris undae.

celso sidere cocta

torret litus harena.

iuxta somniculosum

bini marmor ephebi,

par praestabile, fratres

et piscator uterque,

duplex fulmen, acuto

nudae lumine formae

sciti retia curant.

consorbinus in oram

prodit datque salutem.

neuter perspicit ille

quis sit quidque loquatur,

ast uterque suopte

frater more calescit:

maior dicta perardet,

dicentem minor ipsum.

* * *

Metre: Pherecrateans

Translation: *Fishermen*

The flax-blue sky shimmers, the waves of the sea blaze, the beach burns with sand baked by the noon-day sun. By the drowsy sea two young brothers, an exceptional pair and both fishermen, a double thunderbolt, skilfully mend their nets in the keen lustre of their naked beauty. Their cousin appears on the shore and greets them. Neither fully understands who he is and what he is saying, but each brother in his own way grows hot: the older is afire for his words, the younger for the speaker himself.

* * *

Meditations

Paul Murgatroyd

Paul Murgatroyd writes: These verses take as their starting point various snippets from the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. All are elegiac couplets.

3.10

parua quidem uita est, post mortem famaque parua:

non homines norint te neque se stolidi.

Translation: Life is certainly a small thing, and fame after death is a small thing: dull human beings won't know of you and won't know themselves either.

* * *

5.17

non adeunda sequi summa est insania certe;

cogunturque mali non adeunda sequi.

Translation: To pursue the unattainable is surely supreme insanity; yes and bad men are under a compulsion to pursue the unattainable.

* * *

2.2

affectus famulus facilis, uacuus rationis,

deplorat praesens, fata futura pauens.

Translation: The tractable slave of passion, devoid of reason, deplores the present, while fearing his future lot.

* * *

7.21

mente cadent hominesque tua cito cum moriere,

mortuus atque hominum tu cito mente cades.

Translation: You will soon forget humanity when you die, and when you're dead humanity will soon forget you.

* * *

4.3

per spatium breue fama patet, stat per breue tempus;

sunt plausus, laudes, praemia nempe nihil.

paruulus est orbis, paruusque hic angulus orbis;

hic quanti, quales te celebrant homines?

Translation: Fame spreads over a little area, lasts over a little period of time; applause, praise, prizes are assuredly nothing. The world is small, and here is a small corner of the world; here how many, what type of men praise you?

* * *

4.48

uita sunt functi reges qui mente maligna

uitam uix dederant ciuibus ante suis;

mortuus est medicus qui mortes arcuit aegris;

perditus est dux qui perdidit innumeros.

quam fragiles sunt res humanae quamque caducae!

qui modo semen eras, tu cito puluis eris.

Translation: Finished with life are the kings who in the past reluctantly granted life to their subjects in a grudging spirit; the doctor who fended off death from the sick is dead; the general who destroyed countless men is destroyed. How flimsy and transient are things human! You who were just now semen will soon be dust.

* * *

O Mensa

Iambics addressed politely 'To a Table'

David Money

David Money writes: This poem was one of several composed at Lexington, Kentucky, in 2010: the inspiration for this reflection on the vocative of *mensa* is the oft-repeated story (most recently seen in a film commemorating the late, distinguished Danish linguist, Hans Ørberg, who pioneered the teaching of Latin as a living language, which was shown at the Accademia Vivarium Novum, Rome, 2010) of the young Winston Churchill's puzzlement at the vocative case (Churchill, *My Early Life*). The boy asks his teacher what *o mensa*, in the grammar book, means; the teacher answers, "'o table', used when addressing a table", to which the boy replies, "but I never *do* address a table". I thought the table, to whom no one ever does seem to say anything, might be feeling a little sorry for itself, so I composed this to cheer it up ...

o mensa: plana, comis, utilis comes,

modesta uirgo: rarius quisquam uocat

te uoce clara; rusticos passim pudet

uidere mores, nec politioribus

circumdari (mi mensa) collegis domi.

misella mensa, maesta ne fias, locum

honoris amplum praebeo domestici.

nam crura laudo semper aequali modo

bene ordinata: sic et exemplum potes

monstrare nobis, mensa docta, commodum.

si corda uiolens nostra tempestas quatit,

uiuenda uita semper est aequaliter.

* * *

Metre: Iambic trimeter.

Translation: O table, level, kind, useful companion, o modest female: rarely does anyone address you openly; I'm ashamed to see such poor manners, and that you are not, my dear table, surrounded by politer colleagues at home. Poor little table, don't be sad: I offer you an ample place of domestic honour. For I praise your legs, always well-ordered, in an equal manner – and thus you are able to show us a worthwhile example, o learned table: if a violent storm shakes our hearts, life must always be lived levelly.

* * *

Ad Lunam

Mark Walker

Mark Walker writes: The great *Requiem* sequence, *Dies Irae*, has long exercised a special fascination for me – this in spite of, or possibly because of, my unbelief in matters spiritual (psychologists, discuss). Considered purely as poetry it has, I think, a passion and a power unrivalled in the whole *corpus* of not just medieval and sacred verse, but all Latin poetry. An opinion not entirely without precedent: Lord Macaulay once remarked that he thought *Quaerens me sedisti lassus* was 'the saddest line of poetry' he had ever read – this from a man who had read pretty much every known line of Latin and Greek verse. And when Dr. Johnson once protested to Mrs. Thrale that all religious verse was 'cold and feeble' she reminded him that he invariably became choked up whenever he read that same line – Johnson, too, knew a thing or two about Latin poetry (see Barry Baldwin's article below). Clearly this is a poem capable of inspiring deeply personal reactions; only consider its innumerable musical settings down the ages.

Hence – at last the point of this long preamble – when I am at times moved to write something *de profundis* I am often drawn to the outward form at least of the *Dies Irae*, with its extraordinarily succinct rhythmic trochaic scheme and rhyming stanzas. Almost by default the resulting lines assume the form of a prayer.

Luna mane lucens clare,

gaudens Sole nunc micare,

nequit umbra te uelare.

Luna lucis Solis plena

labens super me serena,

neque tractat te catena,

quae retractat me submissum

ex Olympo nunc demissum,

uinctum sine spe amissum.

Luna lenis, me precatum

iuues scire meum fatum

terra non in caelis natum.

* * *

Metre: Rhythmic trochaic

Translation: O morning Moon shining brightly, now delightfully sparkling with the Sun, no shadow can hide you. O Moon full of sunlight gliding serenely over me, no chain drags you, which now drags me back, thrown down from the heights, submissive, defeated, lost without hope. O gentle Moon, help me who addresses [you] to understand that my place is on the earth not in the heavens.

* * *

Lesbia ad Catullum

James Houlihan

James Houlihan writes: The two poems in Sapphic stanzas imagine Lesbia/Clodia, *docta puella*, responding as a poet to Catullus, translating a Sappho poem and writing a *renuntio amoris* also in Sapphics.

Claudia translationem sapphicam ad catullum mittens altera cum carmine

hos uere iam castra iuuant equorum,

et naues illos, alios et agri,

sed res mi pulcherrima terra opaca

quiquid amatumst.

perclarum cognoscere num prophetem:

quae eminebat in decore et fortuna

coniugem diuum Helene reliquit

enauigans,

liberorum et progenitorum oblita,

ridens inter Iliades abacta,

dum cito rorat species fulgore

luminibusque

quae monent Anactoriae meae nunc

euectae, eheu mihi, cuius chorea

anteponenda est Lydia formosa

conchyliata.

* * *

Translation (*Sappho* 16):

It's true that encampments with horses please some,
and ships others, and farms yet others,
but to me the most attractive thing on the dark earth
is whatever you love.

It's clear I'm saying something true:
preeminent in beauty and fortune
Helen abandoned her godlike husband,
sailing away,

forgetting children and ancestors, laughing
among Trojan women, though she'd been seduced,
beauty dripping from a quick gleam
from her eyes

which remind me of Anacatoria now
sailing away from me—whose dance
in all its shapliness I prefer to all Lydia
dyed purple.

* * *

Ad Catullum

uoui, mihi si restitutus ille
Catullus nunc, diua mari creata,
si fuisset mi probus omnium, pro
candida amore,

desissetque si trucibus iambis
longa bella, me Volusi daturam
Vulcano laetam—lepide, putasne?—
carmina sacra.

sic ludis non nunc, et ego quoque aeque.
nunc scelus tuum retegam, dum imago
non uenit nostri pietatis umquam
immanioris.

eram thesaurus tuus et per undas
nauis stellata! o uenit ulla imago
ut ab ignoto bene fulgeat—mi heu
candida quondam—?

nec mi respectes simulans furorem.

ultima flos, Lesbia sum, uolabo

uiuans in meo carmine, urbe mortua

cum tacet orbis.

* * *

Translation:

I swore if that Catullus were restored
to me now O divine sea-formed god
if he got right with me
for our candour-bright love

if he stopped hurling poems harsh
as war I would burn—happy me!—
the taboo songs of Volusius
clever don't you agree?

but if you won't play I too won't
I'll unroof your crime while no image
of our devotion ever comes
more immense

I was your treasury and starred ship
through waves. O one image comes flashing out of the Unknown—
was it ever brilliant?

Don't look back pretending madness
the last flower I am Lesbia ascendant
in my song alive when
urbs and orbis are dead

* * *

XLIV Magnum

Lucius Alter

Lucius Alter writes: These hasty, merry little hendecasyllables spring from that well of rollicking, irrepressible optimism which is my soul.

hoc plumbum inspicias, amice, paruum

quod mihi minimum uidetur esse,

etsi sufficit ut cere uacet brum

plumbo iam fatuum meummet isto.

* * *

Metre: Hendecasyllables

Translation: *44 Magnum*

Look at this little piece of lead.
It doesn't seem like very much.
Yet I think it's quite enough
To empty out my silly head.

* * *

Dua Carmina

Frances Bernstein

Frances Bernstein writes: I wrote both of these poems as part of my Senior Comprehensive Project during my last few months in high school (April-May of 2012). I drew inspiration for the first poem from Catullus 1, while the second poem is inspired by a few similes in the *Aeneid*. This project was my first experience in writing Latin verse, and I hope to continue writing in the future!

1. Tibi, de longe

illi condere sic poema amoris

numquam ullum meditata nec dare ipsa

sic munuscula dedicata inane.

mihi quidque abiturae erat nimis sed

in corde studium represso habitu.

uerba de dubia manu salerunt.

tibi iam nihilominus libellum

audeo offere denique expolitum

qui me falso aliquem putabas olim.

* * *

Metre: Hendecasyllabes

Translation: *For You, From Afar*

I never intended to write a love poem for him,
Nor did I plan to give these little gifts in this way,
Dedicated in vain.

But for me, about to go away, it was too much
To hold this eagerness in my restrained heart:
Words dance down from my uncertain hand.

Nevertheless, I now dare to offer this little book,
Finished at last, to you
Who once falsely thought me to be someone.

* * *

2. Patientia

silua uelut deflagrata igne florida uago

quo uiuans herba ex cinibus certe orta adulescens;

sic neue incolumis neue immutata dolore

demum sed coalesco ad solem spe rediuiua.

* * *

Metre: Hexameters

Translation: *Endurance*

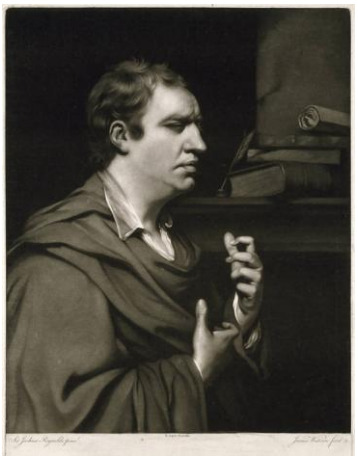
Just as a flowery forest burned down by a wandering flame
Where living grass surely rose, fresh from the ashes;
But just so, neither unharmed nor unchanged by sorrow,
I finally grow toward the sun, revived by hope.

* * *

FEATURES

Samuel Johnson

Barry Baldwin on a *Great Cham*-pion of Latin Verse



From schooldays to the last year of his life, Samuel Johnson wrote many Latin and a few Greek verses in various metres on various topics, of which I much enjoyed producing an edition (texts, translations, commentary), *The Latin & Greek Poems of Samuel Johnson* (Duckworth, London, 1995), kindly selected by David Sexton in *The Sunday Telegraph* as one of his Books of the Year. I here pillage therefrom; for permission so to do, I am very grateful to myself.

In his day, as in ours, verse composition had its detractors. Boswell records a conversation in which Johnson had to 'vigorously combat' someone who, 'found fault with writing verses in a dead language, maintaining that they were merely arrangements of so many words, and laughed at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge for sending forth collections of them'. It was said (*Porsoniana*, ed. Alexander Dyce, London, 1887, p. 345) of the great Cambridge Greek scholar Richard Porson (1759-1808): 'For all modern Greek and Latin poetry he had the profoundest contempt. When Herbert produced the *Musae Etonenses*, Porson said, after looking over one of the volumes, "Here is trash, fit only to be put behind the fire".'

Johnson himself on the one hand more than once excoriated Boileau for his 'peevish and injudicious contempt of modern Latin'.

On the other, he remarked of some Addisonian efforts that, 'When the matter is low or scanty a dead language affords great conveniences, and by the sonorous magnificence of Roman syllables the writer conceals penury of thought and want of novelty, often from the reader, and often from himself'.

His contemporary John Courtenay in a *Poetical Review of the Literary and Moral Character of Dr. Johnson* contrasted Johnson's Latin poetry with the usual inferior products of the age:

> Let college verse-men trite conceits express,
> Trick'd out in splendid shreds of Virgil's dress;
> From playful Ovid cull the tinsel phrase,
> And vapid motions hitch in pilfer'd lays;
> Then with mosaic art the piece combine,
> And boast the glitter of each dulcet line.

Boswell, tactfully declaring himself 'not competent to decide on a question of such extreme nicety', quoted Courtenay against unspecified 'critical objections' to Johnson's undergraduate translation of Pope's *Messiah,* 'and other specimens of his Latin poetry'. Despite the casual remark of R. W. Chapman, the distinguished editor of Johnson's *Letters*, 'Some of his best verse is in Latin', modern critics have not been particularly kind. Leicester Bradner (*Musae Anglicanae: A History of Anglo-Latin Poetry 1500-1925*, 1940, repr. New York 1966, pps, 250-252) commends the three poems written in Scotland but is otherwise condescendng and dismissive:

> 'Although Johnson wrote very few poems of distinction, his facility of composition, especially in his old age, was remarkable. To maintain such a ready command of classical metres, he must have had a life-long habit of writing such verse for his own amusement.'

Bradner is in general following Croker, Boswell's early nineteenth-century editor, who preferred 'the superiority of taste and Latinity of Johnson's later *poemata* over his early ones'. The Oxford and Yale editions take the same tack. Unkindest cut of all was his omission from J. W. Binns' otherwise excellent *The Latin Poetry of English Poets* (London, 1974) on these meagre grounds:

> 'Some famous names even, such as Dr. Johnson and Thomas Gray, wrote Latin verses [*sc.* in the eighteenth century], but these are definitely eclipsed by their English writings. Scarcely any of Dr Johnson's Latin poems, which he wrote for his private amusement, were known before his death.'

Ultimately, it is *chacun à son gout*, a maxim preferable to the Roman *de gustibus non est disputandum* which, if strictly followed, would abort all literary criticism – perhaps a tempting prospect, looking at much of the trendy rubbish going under its name, but not really to be desired. One reason for the relative contemporary obscurity of Johnson's Latin poems was that they were not collected before his death. It is anyway quite beside the point: it is a matter of merit, not *éclat*. And it is simply not true that Johnson dashed them off for his private amusement. Some, yes, notably the nearly hundred or so translations from the Greek Anthology, done through the winter of 1783-4 to while away his insomnia. This was, and had long been, a popular activity; *cf*. my edition, pps. 198-263, plus the two collections by James Hutton (Ithaca, 1935 & 1946). When editing these, I offered up a prayer of gratitude that Johnson was not moved to emulate the sixteenth-century schoomaster John Stockwood who ground out not less than 450 versions of a single poem (5. 224).

Johnson also used Latin verse to express his profound thoughts and emotions. Above all, the three composed on his Scottish jaunt with Boswell, along with *Gnothi Seauton* – his great hexametric sigh of relief on finishing the fourth edition of his *Dictionary* – and the Stowe Mill elegiacs recalling how his father there taught him to swim and lamenting – how very modern! – its human despoliation by chopping down the surrounding trees. His numerous devout Christian Latin poetic prayers fall into the same deeply felt category.

Not that any of this guarantees poetic skill or success, if you believe old Etonian, amateur classicist Cyril Connolly who drew this mournful conclusion from being encouraged at school to put one's innermost thoughts into Latin rather than English verse: 'Consequently, no one who did his verses well could write poetry afterwards. There would be one slim Eton-blue volume with a few translations, a *Vale*, a couple of epigrams, then silence.' Porson, for one, would have agreed. Of course, with somebody like Connolly you can never be sure how firmly tongue was in cheek; see for more on this the delightful discussion by Humphrey Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation: Evelyn Waugh and his Friends* (London, 1990), pps 24-25.

Both at school and college, Johnson will have turned in reams of Latin verses (and proses). Few have survived. Most probably went straight into the gubbins after being marked and returned. In at least one case (*Aurora est Musis Amica*, a set of elegiacs), editors disagree over where it was composed. If at school, as I and some think, this may have been the poem for which Johnson was given a guinea by the Earl of Berkshire, no small sum in those days, especially for a lad. Whether his class' average performance was higer or lower than Crocker-Harris' dismal Lower Fifth in *The Browning Version* we cannot say.

There is similar uncertainty over a lost poem on the glow worm, a creature that has played a small but agreeable role in literature,

right down to the 1952 song *Say Little Glow Worm* by the Mills Brothers. Also lost is a short piece entitled *Somnium*, which Johnson dashed off as recompense for neglecting to turn in the verses on the Gunpowder Plot prescribed for its November 5 anniversary by Pembroke. According to Boswell, 'the versification was truly Vergilian'.

One certain Pembroke production was the following *jeu d'esprit*, suffixed to a Latin prose exercise based on Horace, Odes 1. 20:

> *Quid mirum Maro quod digne canit arma virumque*
> *Quid quod putidulum nostra Camoena sonat?*
> *Limosum nobis promus dat callidus haustum,*
> *Virgilio vires uva Falerna dedit.*
> *Carmina vis nostri scribant meliora poetae?*
> *Ingenium jubeas purior haustus alat.*
>
> (Is there any wonder that Maro sings worthily of arms and the man, any wonder that our Muse sounds so wretched? The crafty steward gives us a muddy draught, the Falernian grape gave Virgil his virtuosity. Do you want our poets to write better verses? Then order a clearer drink to lubricate their talent.)

Croker's 1831 editorial remark, 'It may be surmised that the college beer was at this time indifferent', was no great feat of detection. Perhaps this is why Johnson and his friend Oliver Edwards did their drinking at a alehouse near Pembroke College gate. But it was good enough for their fellow-student Phil Jones, apostrophised in the college buttery books for over-indulgence, of whom Johnson later recalled, 'Jones loved beer and did not get very far forward in the church'.

Full details and analysis in my edition (pps. 9-17). The poem is clearly influenced by various Martial epigrams, especially 8.56. *Inter alia*, the latter provides justification for shortening the *-o* in *Maro*, also the very rare adjective *putidulum*. Martial was a major

influence on Neo-Latin versifiers (cf. T. Whipple, *Martial and the English Epigram*, Berkely, 1925), although too 'dirty' for some: Elizabeth Carter's father warned about Johnson, 'I a little suspect his judgement if he is very fond of Martial'. There is no obvious classical parallel for applying *limosus* to a potable. An Englishman nowadays would say something along the lines of 'cloudy pint'. The expression is neatly balanced by the concluding *purior haustus alat*, the choice of verb (given the Horatian context) possibly influenced by *Ars Poetica* 307, *quid alat formetque poetam*.

The theme of the treacherous innkeeper who waters the wine or gives short measure is a common classical one. Some *Vates* readers will recall the student-cum-revolutionary song with its refrain, 'Oh, I'm the man, the very fat man, who waters the workers' beer'. Instead of *caupo* (innkeeper), Johnson has correctly used *promus*, which in good Latin designates a household steward responsible for supplies of food and drink. Here, he can be identified as the college servant John Hopkins, hexametrically stigmatised in the college buttery books thus: *Est Croeso diti solers vel ditior Hopkins* ('Crafty Hopkins is even richer than Croesus the rich'). One doubts his type is yet extinct in our ancient universities. Johnson's first published Latin poem, *Ad Urbanum*, appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (May 1738, p. 269), extravagantly praising Edward Cave, founder-publisher of the *GM*, a prime outlet for Latin verse. (It is incumbent upon all *Vates* contributors to essay a comparable *Ad Marcum*). Johnson's performance is meretricious in that he was looking to Cave for paying work. Not a consideration for *Vates* scribblers, though how many of us could suck up to an editor in elegant Alcaics (a metre hereafter rarely used by Johnson)?

It worked. Johnson became a regular *GM* contributor of Latin (and a handul of Greek) verses. Some are short squibs addressed to women, e.g. Blue Stocking Elizabeth Carter (Johnson was

equally fond of her Greek and her puddings) and the formidably Whiggish 'Molly' Aston. Others range from a couplet honoring his young friend, the doomed poet Richard Savage, to lines on Aexander Pope's Twickenham (not yet a temple of Rugby football) grotto. Full details on these and the others in my edition.

In 1739, Johnson turned his Latin Muse to politics, issuing *Post-Genitis,* now better known as 'The Norfolk Marble', a pseudo-inscription in rhyming couplets castigating the government of Robert Walpole – a similar one applied to contemporary British politicians would suit the *New Statesman* or *Spectator* competition page. Boswell regrets that it cut little ice at the time. Modern Johnsonians' verdicts range from 'unreadable' (John Wain) to 'genuinely satirical' (Donald Greene) and 'a minor *tour de force*' (Thomas Kaminsky).

For present purposes, this effort concludes Johnson's Grub Street drudgery. Not so his output of Latin verse, equally if not more diverse in matters and metres. A little favourite of mine is this couplet on the pet goat of Sir Joseph Banks (I here salute a fellow Lincolnshire man) which had accompanied its master around the world in Captain Cook's *Endeavour* (a name given somewhat different modern currency as the *praenomen* of classicist-novelist Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse). It had previously sailed the Pacific in Captain Allis' *Dolphin*. This peregrinating creature died at Mile End in London on April 28, 1772.

> *Perpetui, ambita bis terra, praemia lactis*
> *Haec habet altrici Capra secunda Jovis.*
>
> ('The goat, second only to the one that suckled Jupiter, having twice sailed round the globe, has this reward of everlasting milk.')

This couplet shows Johnson's capacity for adapting a classical model to a contemporary theme. He was inspired by a poem (9.224)

in the Greek Anthology extolling a she-goat rich in milk that accompanied Augustus on a sea voyage. The classical allusions both in Johnson's distich and in another possible source, Horace (*Odes* 3.7.6) to infant Zeus' suckling with goat milk by the princess Amalthaea makes me wonder if Banks' goat itself bore this royal name.

One cannot but be impressed also by *In Theatro*, Johnson's earliest extant venture into the Sapphic metre, which he extemporised during a performance of probably (Donald Greene thought it was Arne's *Love in a Village*) Handel's *Messiah*, to which he had been taken or dragged by Mrs. Thrale. Boredom may have been a factor, Johnson (whose hearing and sight were famously poor) being (as reported by Boswell), 'very insensible to the power of music,' albeit that was not in fact always the case. Too long to quote here, this poem is essentially a *jeu d'esprit*, hardly deserving one editor's (E.V. Mohr) commendation as, 'a splendid tribute to the dignity of old age and the dignity of life'.

By general consent, Johnson's greatest Latin poems over this later period are the aforementioned *Gnothi Seauton* and the three written during his Scottish Tour, variously hailing Mrs. Thrale, Skye, and Inchkenneth in (respectively) Sapphics, Alcaics, and Elegiacs. I don't disagree, but they are too long and complex for a short survey, so I shall instead highlight the following:

Errat adhuc vitreus per prata virentia rivus,
Qua toties lavi membra tenella puer;
Hic delusa rudi frustrabar bracchia motu,
Dum docuit blanda voce natare pater.
Fecerunt rami latebras, tenebrisque diurnis
Pendula secretas abdidit arbor aquas.
Nunc veteres duris periere securibus umbrae,
Longinquisque oculis nuda lavacra patent.
Lympha tamen cursus agit indefessa perennis,

Tectaque qua fluxit, nunc et aperta fluit.
Quid ferat externi velox, quid deterat aetas,
Tu quoque securus res age, Nise, tuas.

('The glassy stream in which as a boy I so often bathed my tender limbs still flows through the green meadows. Here I thrashed around with my arms, uselessly in unskilled motion, while my father with a calm voice taught me to swim. Branches made a secret refuge, and a bending tree kept the waters hidden in daytime shade. Now those old shadows have fallen victim to hard axes, and the bathing spots lie exposed to faraway eyes. The unwearied stream, for all that, continues its regular course; where it once flowed hidden, now it flows in the open. Whatever swift-rolling time may bring in from the outside, whatever it may wear away, make sure, Nisus, that you calmly continue to do whatever it is you have to do.')

The poem is undated. It is usually (*pace* Mohr's reservations) connected to one of Johnson's frequent visits to Lichfield in his later years. Two of the most distinguished Johnsonians, David Fleeman and Donald Greene, are confident it was written on his last return in November 1784. I hope they are right. It is congenial to think that this was Johnson's final secular piece (his last extant Latin one is a prayer), produced in one of the last happy moments of his life.

Mohr sneered, 'As poetry this particular piece is respectable, but cetainly not distinguished. It has no real personality. One may even suppose that the rather idyllic picture of the Lichfield stream was written as a poetic convention merely.' I bite my lip and hasten to Tucker and Gifford ('On the Literary Value of Samuel Johnson's Latin Verse', *Neophilologus* 41, 1957, pps. 215-221) for whom it is 'a good introduction to Johnson's personal poetry in Latin'. It combines a warm childhood reminiscence of his father, with whom he was not always on the best of terms, celebration in Virgilian and Horatian-tinged language (especially in the opening) of natural beauty, and sadness at human despoliation of same. The final

couplet dispenses a combination of Epicurean and Stoic advice to a friend. *Nisus* is usually taken to be Johnson's Birmingham friend Edmund Hector. I suggest it may be his old classical comrade Bennett Langton (another good Lincolnshire man!), the only source for this poem, subsequently published by him. A third possibility is that *Nisus* is Jonson himself. *Nisus* is a pun, effective in the context of *securus res age*, on the Latin noun *nisus*, meaning 'struggle' or 'effort'. There may also be a sly allusion to Virgil's hope (Aeneid 9.446-49) that his poetry will forever keep alive memories of the friendship of Nisus and Euryalus.

Father taught him well. Langton once told Boswell of an occasion when Johnson deliberately swam into a dangerous pool near Oxford. Stowe Mill was demolished in 1856. Boswell attests to his deep interest in trees and afforestation. Johnson's sadness at the cutting-down of the trees may roughly be compared to the affecting lament for the spoiling of the pool at Lower Binfield in Orwell's *Coming Up For Air*.

For finale, an encouraging example of the Micawberish principle that something may turn up. Whilst working on my edition (pps. 264-68 for full details of this story), I read in (of all places) the business section of *The Observer* (January 19, 1992) of the discovery of a hitherto unknown six-line Latin poem by Johnson in Belton House, Lincolnshire, family seat of the Brownlows. Thanks to the kindnesses of various people, I was sent a photocopy and transcript of the original (which I have never seen) by Mr C. P. C. Johnson of the Lincolnshire Archives record office where the manuscript now resides.

The handwriting looks like Johnson's and the signature 'Sam: Johnson' is characteristic in its form, but there are cases elsewhere of his name being added to a document from another quarter, fraudulently used, or confused with a homomym, as well as examples of verses composed by someone else and taken down in

his own hand by Johnson. Hence, I attached a question mark to its place at the end of my edition.

Miles, cum telo venienti sibilat aer
Elapsus celeri corpore fata fuget;
Sic vigiles oculos intendas undique vulnus
Ne fortuna arcu missa sagitta ferat.
Instantem mortem vitasse est gloria major,
Quam nigrum temere praecipitasse Diem.

('May the soldier, when the air hisses with the approaching spear, evade his doom by slipping away with quick-moving body. Thus should you keep your eyes peeled on every side, lest by chance an arrow shot from a bow bring a wound. It is a greater glory to have avoided impending death than rashly to have hastened on the black day.')

This is as transcribed by Mr. Johnson. My eyes are not what they were, the photocopy is not always clear, and Johnson's handwriting is often (*experto credite*!) very hard to decipher. It is possible that the last word in v. 2 is *fugat* or *fugit* rather than *fuget*. The vowel is far from certain; there is at least one other undotted *-i* elsewhere in the text. An indicative may be preferable to a subjunctive. A generalising statement of fact is a better and more standard opening to an epigram, and in the present case comports more logically with the meaning and punchline of the rest of the poem. In v. 4, *fortuna* might actually be *fortunae*, making it either a genitive with *arcu* or a dative with *vulnus*; *fortuna* makes the best sense but in the photocopy the ending looks more like *-ae* than *-a*. Furthermore, I was advised in a letter of July 10, 1993, by the late, great Johnsonian scholar David Fleeman that in the first line after *venienti* he does not see *sibilat* but *ubi* followed by a verb beginning with *-l*. Any *Vates* reader in the Lincoln area is hereby invited to step in, examine the manuscript, and report their findings.

Mr. Johnson further informed me that overleaf there is a further couplet in a different hand, which he thinks is probably that of Sir John Cust, the Third Baronet, Speaker of the House of Commons from 1761 to 1770:

> *Ad Quantas culpas paupertas excitat omnes*
> *En pauper quoties per scelus omne ruit.*
>
> ('To what faults does poverty drive all men, Lo how many times does a poor man succumb to every crime.')

I have not seen the original or transcript of this. Exclamation marks may perhaps be presumed or added after *omnes*, *en*, and *ruit*. Mr. Johnson also warned than *per scelus* is to be regarded as a dubious reading.

Johnson's poem is titled *Non Cito Perit Ruinam Qui Primum Timet* ('He who first fears destruction does not quickly perish'). *Ruinam* came out as *ruina* in *The Observer*'s story. *Cito* is very common in classical maxims. From the title on, Horatian influence pervades, along with posible echos of Propertius, Silius Italicus, and Virgil.

Is the poem a mere squib or something produced to make a contemporary point, general or particular? If Cust's distich is seen as a direct rejoinder, the latter possibility may be enhanced. It is worth subjoining Boswell's report of Johnson's defence (how serious?) of cowardice and its absence from Christian lists of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Is the poem original, or a translation? If the latter, one thinks first of a Greek source. Especially our old friend the Greek Anthology, albeit I have turned up nothing there. Translations from other languages cannot be ruled out: eighteenth-century versifiers often put French into Latin. Mr. Johnson detected (in his words) a slight Homeric feel to it. That leads me to think Johnson had in mind the disquisition on cowardice versus courage in *Iliad* 13.275-94. It is

also pretty clear that the reader is meant to think of Horace's self-deprecating account (*Odes* 2.7.9-12) of throwing down his shield and decamping from Philippi: words common to the two pieces include *aer*, *celer*, and *diem*. Elsewhere (*Epistles* 2.2.49-52), recalling this flight and his subsequent career of impoverished versifier, Horace wrote *paupertas impulit audax / ut versus facerem*, words that look likely to have inspired Cust's rejoinder.

Why should this poem turn up in Lincolnshire? I advanced various notions in my edition, too complex to spell out here. Some may be suspicious as to why I left out my county's reputation as the home of 'Yellow-Bellies'. Answer: Captain Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (3rd ed. 1796) makes no accusation of cowardice in his defiinition: 'Yellow Belly. A native of the fens of Lincolnshire: an allusion to the eels caught there'.

If this mini-survey tempts any *Vates* reader to sample more Latin Johnsoniana, they will find them *apud me*, also in the Oxford and Yale editions of his complete poetry.

* * *

Ericus Livonius (1937-2004)

Brad Walton surveys the life and work of a fascinating contemporary Latin poet

Ericus Livonius, one of the finest Latin poets in the second half of the twentieth century was a somewhat mysterious figure. Even among his intimates there was considerable confusion about his personal history. However, the main facts of his life were established in the years following his death by the painstaking researches of Jack Hickey.[1]

His English name was Eric Johnson. Though widely believed to have been born in Latvia, orphaned during World War II, and relocated to the United States, he was in fact born in Decker, Indiana, on October 22, 1937, and grew up in Fort Wayne. As a boy he demonstrated a precocious ability in languages, achieving an early mastery of French and German, and later attaining an excellent knowledge of Attic Greek, Russian, Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, and Latvian. Musically gifted, he was also an accomplished pianist. He also developed an early interest in religion and philosophy, which he maintained throughout his life.

Brought up a Methodist, Johnson converted to Roman Catholicism at age 12. After graduation from high school in 1955, he visited the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani, in Kentucky, to explore the possibility of a monastic life. After a visit of two weeks the monks discouraged his interest on the grounds of 'intellectual pride'. He remained at least nominally a Catholic for the rest of his

[1] The results of his researches were communicated to me in a private email of June 23, 2008.

life, with occasional periods of religious renewal. In the 1980s his spirituality was to shift from Roman Catholicism to Stoicism.

From 1955 to 1958, Johnson served in the United States Army, where he attained the rank of Sergeant. He specialized in military intelligence and spent most of his enlistment on a small island off Korea, monitoring North Korean military radio communications.

Through boyhood and adolescence, Johnson had received training in Ballet. During 1961-1962 he danced with the Chicago Opera Ballet. He then moved to New York City, where he performed on a freelance basis with various companies, including American Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet. By 1964, however, an old injury forced him to give up dancing.

After a year spent at Indiana University Bloomington, where he concentrated on Ural and Altaic languages, Johnson traveled to Malta where, in 1965, he met the Hungarian poet, George Faludy, then living in exile. The two formed a close friendship, and for the next thirty-six years Johnson acted as Faludy's literary collaborator, ghost-writer, translator, secretary and general manager. The two lived in various places around the world, their longest residence being in Toronto from about 1970 to 1988.

It was in Toronto, about the year 1980, that Johnson undertook the study of Latin, in which he soon achieved a remarkable facility. His favorite authors were Horace, Tibullus, Petronius and Seneca, whose *Epistulae Morales* he read exhaustively. During the mid-1980s, a period of feverish creativity, he produced the poems which constitute *Cantus Cicadarum.*[2] Some of the poems later appearing in the collection were first published in *Vita Latina, Ziva Antika,* and *Latinitas*. At that time he usually published under the names Eric Iovannovich or Ericus Iohannides.

[2] The dates appearing on the title page, 1955-1988, do not refer to the period during which the poems were written, but the period of his life on which they reflect.

With the collapse of Stalinism, Faludy's exile was at an end, and Johnson accompanied him to Budapest, where they continued to work together. It was in Budapest, in 1989, that Johnson published *Cantus Cicadarum* at his own expense and in an edition of 300 copies. After publishing the book, Johnson put down his pen and never wrote another poem.[3]

When his association with Faludy was dissolved in 2002, Johnson left Hungary and moved to India, where he lived mainly in Dharamsala. He spent much of his time enjoying the company of the Tibetan exiles and admiring the beauty of the Himalayas. He died in Kathmandu, Nepal, in February, 2004.

As a poet, Johnson took as his prosodic models the great rhythmical poets of the twelfth century, especially such artists as Hugh Primas, the Archpoet of Cologne, and Peter of Blois. He also attained a similar mastery of medieval rhythmical forms. Another of his favorite forms was the sonnet, borrowed from the Renaissance vernacular poets and rarely used in Latin.

Johnson adopted the name 'Ericus Livonius' for his 1989 collection. For him Livonia[4] is less a real place than a spiritual landscape, an Arcadia of idealized youth, natural beauty and hopeless love.

Redibo verno tempore
Gauiense meum rus,
ut spatier in nemore
gemmato floribus

dum tegit verna pratula
tapeta viridis

[3] Around 1990, Johnson wrestled out some verses in Phaeacian hendecasyllables, the only poem he ever wrote in a classical meter, so far as I know. It seems to have been a mere experiment, which was never repeated.

[4] Strictly, Livonia refers to the region comprehending modern Latvia and Estonia. When used by Livonius, however, the name more narrowly refers to Latvia.

et exardescit betula
candelae similis,

bibamque lac Livonicum
e muctra lignea
et tectus ibo cubitum
lodice lintea

sub qua longinquam audiam,
cicadis tacitis,
vibrantem oram Balticam
sub undis Balticis.

('In spring I shall return to my fields by the Gauja River to stroll in the woodlands bejeweled with flowers, while a green carpet covers the spring meadows and the birch tree blazes like a candle. I shall drink the Livonian lake from a wooden pail and go to bed covered with a linen sheet. Under it, when the cicadas are silent, I shall hear the distant Baltic shore shaking under the Baltic waves.')

Within the generalized Arcadian environment of the poems, and not unlike Virgil in the *Eclogues*, Livonius' principal themes are erotic passion, memory, loss, the onset of old age, the natural world and the seasons. Several poems also deal with philosophical themes, usually with a light, ironic touch.

The poems of erotic passion dominate the collection. The epigraph of the book, borrowed from Ovid, gives the reader fair warning:

Quidquid Amor iussit, non est contemnere tutum.
Dicere quae puduit, scribere iussit Amor.

('It is not safe to disregard the commands of Love. What is too embarrassing to say, Love has ordered me to write.')

Livonius' love poems include frank descriptions of events and candid revelations of feeling.

The erotic atmosphere of Livonius' love poems is loosely bisexual. The principal object of the poet's passion is 'Alexis'. Poetic lovers are often based on real people (such as Catullus' Lesbia, Petrarch's Laura, Shakespeare's Fair Youth and Dark Lady). Alexis is probably an amalgam based on several real-life lovers. However, the chief inspiration for this figure was a young Serbo-Croatian who, in his early twenties, had accompanied Johnson, then in his late-forties, while traveling in South Eastern Europe, and for whom Johnson, feeling the irrevocable loss of youth and the onset of old age, conceived a devastating passion. Though Livonius normally refers to Alexis as a *puer*,[5] Alexis, like the young man on whom he was based, is clearly in his twenties and sexually quite experienced. The situation described in the poems, that of an older lover impassioned for a younger and somewhat unsuitable person, therefore belongs loosely to the tradition of Maximianus. Livonius shares some of the humour of Maximianus, but Maximianus lacks the intensity and genuine feeling of Livonius.

The poems describe a triangular relationship between Livonius, Alexis and Laura. Addressing Laura, he says,

> *Amas me et amat te Alexis:*
> *tota sic abutimur aestate,*
> *omnes taciti morositate*
> *aut in propriis gementes lectis.*
>
> ('You love me and Alexis loves you. This is the way we are misusing the summer, all of us in a sullen silence, or sighing in our own beds.')

[5] In Latin *puer* usually refers to a male no older than seventeen and only occasionally to a *iuvenis*. Livonius is following the convention of North American English, where a "boy" can in the appropriate context refer to any male under the age of thirty.

Alexis has a friendly but not a physical intimacy with Livonius. With youthful thoughtlessness, but entirely without malice, he wounds him repeatedly. Here Alexis has been describing a delightful dream of the previous night to Livonius:

> *….hanc ergo deam formosissimam*
> *in thalamum deduxi laetus, tum—*
> *tum tintinnavit horologium*
> *et apud te, heu, experrectus sum.*
>
> ('… so I brought the gorgeous goddess into the bedroom and then —then the alarm-clock went off and I woke up, unfortunately, here with you.')

And of course Livonius is constantly stumbling upon Alexis engaged in other loves:

> *…spatians sub luna imminente*
> *gemitus in ripa subaudivi*
> *puellamque amplectantem vidi*
> *corpus notum etiam in caligine.*
>
> ('Strolling beneath the overhanging moon, I overheard some moans on the beach and I saw a girl hugging a body recognizable even in the darkness.')

For Livonius, Alexis' beauty has a numinous power which is not only mesmerizing, but also terrifying:

> *….et in litus algis ceu smaragdis*
> *redimitus deus nudus repit*
> *qui subridens arborem accedit*
> *victimamque, oculis aestatis*
> *feris scintillantibus fulgoribus.*

('…and onto the beach crawls the naked god, wreathed with seaweed like emeralds. Smiling he approaches the tree and the victim, his eyes glowing with the wild lightening of summer.')

As also:

Cum taedet eum Veneris
Alexis redit domum
metumque mihi inicit
iam simulanti somnum

('When he is tired with sex, Alexis returns home and fills me with dread as I pretend to sleep.')

And elsewhere:

Eum contemplabar, nec libido
illic me invasit, sed formido:
meo in amplexu dormît Amor
sub manu respiravit marmor.

('I was gazing on him, and it was not desire that seized me, but terror: Love slept in my embrace, and beneath my hand breathed marble.')

Memory is another theme that pervades the collection. It is generally seen as benign, a source of happiness:

Ampulla vini et memoriae
lautissimae sint tibi epulae.

('Let a bottle of wine and memories be your finest banquet.')

The memory of youth is particularly pleasurable:

O noctes plenas visionum, o memorias
vigiliasque mysticas cum mille digitis
conscribere videtur pluvia in tegulis
de iuventutis nostrae gaudiis historias.

('O nights, how full of visions! O memories and vigils, how mystical, when the rain seems to write the stories of our youthful joys with a thousand fingers.')

Connected to the theme of memory, and about as frequent, are the much more disturbing themes of time and loss. Youth is remembered as a 'time outside of time', now relegated to memory:

Statne adhuc casa illa?
stabat olim alio in aevo
atra viridi in silva
illo extra tempus tempore….

Dum dormivimus in cella
coniactentes, nil suspicientes,
illustrante nos candela
ultimo iuventae lumine.

Exstat, puto, casa illa:
micat nunc alicubi candela
in aeterna mentis silva
in aeterna solitudine.

('Is that cottage still standing? Once, in another time, in that time outside of time, it used to stand in the dark green forest…. while we slept, lying together in our room, suspecting nothing, the candle illuminating us with the last light of youth. I suppose that cottage still

exists: now the candle flickers somewhere else in an eternal forest of the mind, in an eternal solitude.')

Eruptive memories carry the sting of loss, as for a lost lover:

…Venit nunc autumni
vesperi, cum pluit:
me exspectans stat caligine
vestitus, pulsans dum
ex domo propero;
tum sentio—putares vento—
manu eius genas
tangi meas, per quas
manant pluvia et lacrimae.

('Now he comes on autumn evenings, when it is raining: he stands there, waiting for me, dressed in the darkness, knocking [on the window] until I rush from the house. Then I feel—you'd think it was the wind—my cheek, streaming with rain and tears, touched by his hand.')

Part of the poet's vocation is to save what is being lost from absolute oblivion, as he wrote in a poem dedicated to the Latin poet Genofeva Immé[6]:

Nobis munus est cantare
gaudiaque celebrare
semper vanescentia—
inter astra volitare
conarique sublevare
calamo labentia.

[6] The dedication was prefixed to the poem when published in *Latinitas*. It does not appear in *Cantus Cicadarum*. Similarly, the poem *Exegi parvum mihi tumulum* was originally published as in memory of Ton Smerdel. But this *in memoriam* does not appear in *Cantus Cicadarum.*

('Our task is to sing and celebrate joys forever vanishing, to fly among the stars, and to try to hold up what is falling away.')

Closely associated with the theme of loss is that of approaching old age. This theme is sometimes treated with humour:

Cum habebis undequinquaginta
annos vel fortasse quinquaginta,
ut soles nunc, sic voles semper
pratula perambulare,
te nudare
et sub sole exsultare—
sed mensis erit tum November.

('When you are forty-nine, or maybe fifty, you will still want, as you used to, to strip and dance in the sunshine—but then it will be November.')

Advancing age, and the shadows accompanying it, fall on the poet with seeming suddenness, just as he has almost freed himself from the frustrations of youth (no longer idealized), and is learning to rejoice in the gift of life.

Optabam suffundi praecordia luce
ut solverem mentem affixam in cruce,
volebam praeterita iam sepelire
et viam ad gaudium tandem inire
sed venerat nox.

('I wanted to steep my heart in light, that I might free my crucified mind. Now I wanted to bury the past and finally embark on the road to joy—but night had fallen.')

With late middle age the poet enters a kind of emotional and intellectual *via negativa*, which he calls *nihil*. In a poem based on one by Attila Joszef he writes,

> *Ille solus versus meos legat*
> *qui me noverit et me defendat,*
> *qui per Nihil possit navigare*
> *resque vatis ritu divinare.*
>
> ('He alone should read my poetry who understands me and defends me, who can sail through Nothingness and divine reality like a prophet.')

And in a poem addressed to George Faludy he writes,

> *Per obscura atque dura*
> *perge, o mi anime,*
> *me ex nihilo in nilum*
> *comitari placide….*
>
> ('Through darkness and affliction continue, my heart, to accompany me peacefully out of nothingness into nothingness.')

Nature and the seasons are probably the most pervasive themes of *Cantus Cicadarum*, though neither furnishes the principal theme for many poems. Rather, they are the almost ubiquitous backdrop against which the other themes are played out. The descriptions of nature are extraordinarily vivid:

> *… Immoto*
> *vento, cadit imber tamquam plectro*
> *lacum lente, spatiose verrens*
> *dum in caelum quasi atramento*
> *plenum albus Cygnus plus albescens*
> *alis surgit raucis cum clamoribus.*

('When the wind is still, the shower falls, sweeping the lake like a plectrum, slowly, expansively, while the white swan, growing whiter, rises on his wings into a sky bloated as with ink, with hoarse cries.')

Livonius' favorite seasons are summer, the time of a now lost youth, and autumn, the season of passing time and of late middle age. In a poem entitled *Autumnus* he compares the season to a clepsydra, a device for measuring time by water, the universal solvent:

Quam breves tempestates sunt,
quam rapide praetereunt
serena et calores:

tegebant heri mortuum
pruina gravis hortulum
tum nives graviores—

et hodie trepiduli
sub floribus cuniculi
iam latent trembundi

dum prima stillicidia
labuntur in viridia
de clepsydra autumni.

('How brief the seasons are, how quickly the fair weather and the warmth pass: yesterday a thick frost covered the dead garden, then a thicker snowfall—and today the timid rabbits are hiding under the flowers while onto the greenery fall the first drops of rain from the water-clock of Autumn.')

In the poem *September* autumn is the season of bereavement and regret. By the grave of a dead lover he says,

> *Cantabo nocte tibi carmina*
> *cum rore immadescent gramina,*
> *et id quod tacebamus, corculum,*
> *iam sero te docebo mortuum.*
>
> ('I shall sing songs to you in the night, when the grass grows wet with dew, and what we kept in silence, sweetheart, I shall tell you now, too late, in death.')

The comparison of autumn to a water clock is only one of the many striking metaphors, similes and images that meet the reader at every turn:

> *Tum risit, mamillaeque magnae tremuere*
> *Sicut aqua clavo rupta,*
> *Sicut terra vomere.*
>
> ('Then she laughed, and her big breasts quivered like water cleft by a rudder, or earth by a plough.')

Cantus Cicadarum also includes a large number of poems which engage philosophical themes and questions, usually with humour. Livonius is particularly fond of proverbs and aphorisms. His poem *Praecepta* includes nothing else:

> *Ad res iucundas manus porrige:*
> *devitans spinas, rosas collige.*
> *olfac laetandi causa virginum*
> *fragrantem ac sanantem spiritum,*
> *at cole saepius libidines*
> *quas sophiae incendit species….*

('Reach out your hands to pleasant things: avoiding the thorns, pluck the roses. For the sake of joy, smell the fragrant and healing breath of young maidens, but oftener cultivate the desires which the beauty of wisdom kindles …' etc.)

Elsewhere he translates and versifies a string of his favorite quotations from Epictetus. These philosophical poems vary the flavour of the collection and are an interesting contrast to the poems of love and loss. Another source of variation are poems translated from other authors, including Esenin, Joszef, Faludy and Strato. One of the most delightful is his translation of the ninth-century Irish poem *Pangur Bán*:

Ego atque meus catus,
Pangur ut est nuncupatus,
consectamur sub lucerna
mures illa, ego verba.…

('My cat—Pangur by name—and I go hunting by lamplight: he for mice, I for words …')

To conclude this brief introduction to the poems of Ericus Livonius, I quote his 'five good reasons for writing Latin poetry'. They are:

1) You do not have to worry about the intelligence of your readers. They're bright.
2) Having gone to the trouble of learning a dead language, they are likely to be people who can think for themselves, not part of any herd.
3) Latin is at least sixteen centuries older than English, and may yet outlive it.

4) Small is beautiful. Crafting a Latin poem is like carving an intaglio. The result, if successful, is exquisite and permanent.

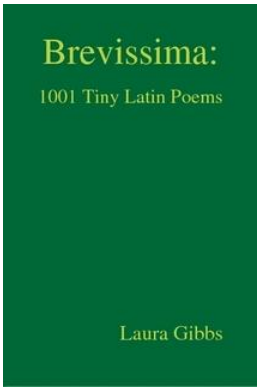
5) It is intellectual resistance against the general rot. Like the Hasidim and the Amish, one is saying *No* to all the trivial crap of modern life.[7]

* * *

[7] Quoted in George Faludy, *Notes from the Rainforest* (Willowdale: Hounslow Press, 1988), 45.

Brevissima

Laura Gibbs on the making of her free book of distichs, subtitled *1001 Tiny Latin Poems*



Without a doubt, the most famous Latin distich poem of all time must be the agonizing exclamation by Catullus:

Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris.
Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

(Catullus 85: 'I hate and I love; perhaps you want to know why I do this. I don't know, but I feel it happening and I am torn apart.')

Students of Latin might also be familiar with some classical distichs in Martial's prodigious corpus of epigrams. One of my personal favorites this little poem on the subject of wealth:

Semper pauper eris, si pauper es, Aemiliane;
Dantur opes nullis nunc, nisi divitibus.

(Martial 5.81: 'If you are a poor man, Aemilianus, a poor man you will always be; nowadays wealth is bestowed on no one except for the rich.')

Tiny poems like these are ideal for Latin students. Distich poems are short and focused, conveying a meaning – often a powerful meaning – in just a few words. The author of a distich poem knows that every word counts and must contribute to the message of the poem; there's little room for fluff in a distich. Within the confines of just two lines, both syntax and vocabulary are kept under control.

Given the demonstrable value of distich poetry for Latin students, I decided to spend my summer vacation exploring the vast range of Latin distichs, including classical, medieval and modern sources, in order to assemble a collection of distich poems intended specifically for students of Latin. My goal was to find poems with easy Latin vocabulary, relying on the *Latin Core Vocabulary List* prepared by Christopher Francese and freely available online at the Dickinson College Commentaries website. Thanks to the abundant resources supplied by Google Books and other digital libraries online, I collected approximately 8000 Latin distichs drawn from a wide range of sources, and I then parsed the vocabulary, looking for poems that had at most two words not on the Dickinson *Core Vocabulary List*. I was able to find approximately 1,700 poems which met the vocabulary criterion (the Catullus poem did not, but quite a few Martial distichs made the cut), and I then selected 1001 poems for the book, favouring those poems that were especially memorable, wise, funny or otherwise commendable for use by students of Latin.

The result is a book, *Brevissima: 1001 Tiny Latin Poems*, which is available as a free PDF at the *Bestiaria Latina* website, *Brevissima.bestlatin.net*. I've also prepared a blog at that same address where each distich is a separate entry, illustrated, along with additional information about the poem. Readers can make comments or ask questions there at the blog to which I will do my best to reply.

Meanwhile, in this article, I'll provide a sampling of poems from the book, exploring what I see as the joys of distich poetry. I hope the poems included here will entice you to take a look at the book and, if you are a Latin teacher, to find some poems to share with your students. The book is organized by topical themes and I have followed that same organization in the article here. For each poem below, there is a *Brevissima* number that you can use to look up the specific bibliographical reference for each poem in the book.

TEMPUS - Time

John Owen, a remarkable poet of the Latin Renaissance, contributed many poems to the book; here is an Owen poem on the subject of time:

> *Omnia fert aetas secum, aufert omnia secum;*
> *Omnia tempus habent, omnia tempus habet.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 3: 'Time bears all things with it, time bears away all things; all things have their time, time has all things.')

Inspired by the famous words from Vergil's *Eclogue* 9, *Omnia fert aetas, animum quoque* ('Time takes all things, even the mind'), Owen has created his own meditation on time and existence, with parallelisms and word play that are typical of the Latin distich tradition - but with very easy vocabulary!

FORTUNA - Luck

The goddess Fortuna, Lady Luck, is another favorite topic of the distich poets, as in this poem by Joachim Camerarius. This particular poem is part of an emblem and the illustration that accompanies the emblematic poem shows a snail, a natural symbol of the happy man who carries all his things with him:

> *O felix, secum sua quicumque omnia portat,*
> *Fortunae vivens liber ab arbitrio.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 144: 'O happy man, whoever carries all his own things with him, living free from the power of Lady Luck.')

To see the illustration for the emblem, visit the blog post for this poem at Brevissima.bestlatin.net.

AMOR and *AMICITIA* - Love and Friendship

There are naturally many distich poems about love, both happy and unhappy. In this classical distich, for example, Martial is mocking a certain Faustus, whose love life is not *faustus*, fortunate, at all.

> *Nescio tam multis quid scribas, Fauste, puellis;*
> *Hoc scio: quod scribit nulla puella tibi.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 150: 'I do not know why you write to so many girls, Faustus. This I do know: no girl writes to you.')

For the related theme of *amicitia*, here is a medieval distich about friendship, with rhyme in the second line, *plene-tene*.

> *Qui dare vult aliis, non debet dicere: Vultis?*
> *Sed dicat plene: Dulcis amice, tene!*
>
> (*Brevissima* 13: 'When someone wants to give something to others, he should not say: Do you want it? Instead he should say loud and clear: Dear friend, take it!')

Such rhyming verse was very popular in the Middle Ages and, for students who want to memorize some Latin poems, the presence of rhyme can be a great aid.

VIRTUTES - The Virtues

Given the moralizing dimension of distich poetry, there are naturally many poems in praise of virtue. This particular poem, for example, comes from a fascinating collection by the 16th-century poet Georgius Carolides entitled *Farrago Symbolica Sententiosa*.

The titles of the poems are Latin proverbs (that's what makes it a 'sententious' anthology), which Carolides then expands into distich form, as here:

QUOD PARAVIT VIRTUS, RETINEBIS

Et Natura suum repetit, Fortunaque tollit
Quando libet; Virtus quae dedit, illa manent.

(*Brevissima* 21: 'That Which Comes From Virtue, You Will Keep. Nature takes back what is hers and Luck removes her own whenever she feels like it; those things which Virtue has bestowed remain.')

In addition to poems about *virtus* in general, there are distichs dedicated to the specific virtues. Consider, for example, this distich by the 16th-century poet Georg Fabricius which is spoken in the first person by *Prudentia* herself:

Ingeniis addo lucem, Prudentia, cernens
Quod fuit atque quod est, quaeque futura trahunt.

(*Brevissima* 212: I, Prudence, add light to men's minds, discerning what was and what is and what things the future is bringing.)

The following poem about the virtue of *Temperantia* is a Latin translation from the *Greek Anthology*; translating poems from the *Greek Anthology* into Latin was a popular pastime for neo-Latin poets and this particular translation is by the Dutch humanist Hugo Grotius:

Nec cupio, nec opes opto mihi: sit mihi parvo
Laeta, sed a duris libera vita malis.

(*Brevissima* 42. 'I have no desires, nor do I crave wealth for myself; let my life be happy with only a little, but free from grievous evils.')

The most famous collection of Latin distichs are the poems of the so-called 'Cato' whose moralizing distichs were standard fare during the Middle Ages and the centuries following; here is one of Cato's poems in praise of the virtue *Spes*, Hope:

Tranquillis rebus semper diversa timeto;
Rursus in adversis melius sperare memento.

(*Brevissima* 239: 'In serene situations you should always be apprehensive of changed circumstances; on the other hand, in difficulties, remember to hope for something better.')

As you can see here, Cato's distichs use two dactylic hexameter lines, as opposed to elegiac couplets. Most of the 1001 poems in the *Brevissima* book are elegiac couplets, but in addition to Cato, there are other authors, especially medieval authors, who write dactylic distichs.

INVIDIA and *IRA* - Envy and Anger

In addition to inculcating virtues, the poems also warn about the dangers of the vices. Here, for example, is a distich by the 16th-century poet Achilles Bocchius which offers a remedy for envy:

Quo mage quisque suae virtuti fidit, honores
Hoc aliis meritos invidet ille minus.

(*Brevissima* 676: 'The more someone trusts in his own worth, the less he envies others the honors they have won.')

The vice of anger is also a popular theme in distich poetry, as in this medieval poem which features end-line rhyme, *volentem-latentem*.

> *Irritare canem noli dormire volentem,*
> *Nec moveas iram post tempora longa latentem.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 271: 'Do not bother a dog who wants to sleep, nor should you stir up an anger that has been safely hidden for a long time.')

The vice of greed, especially of greed for wealth, is another popular theme, as in this medieval poem with internal rhyme in both lines, *dives-vives* and *vivis-si vis*:

> *O dives, dives, non omni tempore vives!*
> *Fac bene dum vivis, post mortem vivere si vis.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 86: 'O rich man, rich man, you will not live forever! Do right while you live if you want to live after death.')

DOCTRINA - Learning

Given that many of the neo-Latin distich collections were written with the needs of students in mind, it is not surprising that the poems are full of praise for a life of learning, as here in this poem from the *Silva Distichorum*, published by François Oudin in 1719:

> *Quid tibi de lusu superest, cum luseris? At quas*
> *Legeris e libris, mens tibi servat opes.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 761: 'What do you have left from a game when you have finished playing? On the other hand, your mind saves up for you the wealth which you gather from reading books.')

FABULAE and *AENIGMATA* - Tales and Riddles

Erudite readers can test their familiarity with myths and legends of the ancient world in the many distich poems which tell or, rather, allude to an episode from mythology or history. For example, here is a poem by the great French humanist Marcus Antonius Muretus describing a fountain adorned with a statue of Bacchus. Bacchus himself speaks to us in the poem, recalling the fiery incident when his mother Semele was burned by the celestial brightness of his father, Jupiter:

> *Nondum natus eram, cum me prope perdidit ignis;*
> *Ex illo fontes tempore Bacchus amo.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 457: 'I had not yet been born when fire almost killed me; from that time on, I, Bacchus, love fontains.')

There are also riddling distichs to test the readers' wits. This particular riddle comes from the 16th-century poet, Nicolaus Reusnerus; can you guess the answer?

> *Dum nihil ipse vides, facio te multa videre;*
> *Lumina ni claudat, me quoque nemo videt.*
>
> (*Brevissima* 127: 'While you yourself see nothing, I make you see many things; so too, unless a person closes his eyes, no one can see me.')

And the answer is . . . *Somnus*, Sleep.

AD LECTOREM - To the Reader

Finally, there are many distichs on the subject of distich poetry itself. Martial, for example, points out an irony that was much on my mind as I compiled a big book made up of little poems:

Disticha qui scribit, puto, vult brevitate placere;
Quid prodest brevitas, dic mihi, si liber est?

(*Brevissima* 984: 'Someone who writes distichs, I suppose, wants to please by means of brevity; what good is brevity, tell me, if the result is a book?')

Undeterred by Martial's witty observation, I thoroughly enjoyed the process of collecting 1001 distich poems and then, as I wondered just who on earth might want to read such a book, I found some consolation in this distich by the 17th-century poet, Johann Volkmar Bechmann:

Si terit atque probat nemo mea scripta, sat esto
Quando terit libros blatta probatque meos.

(*Brevissima* 999: 'If no one visits and approves my writing, let it be enough when the bookworm visits my books and approves them.')

I suppose the digital equivalent to Bechmann's hungry bookworms would be the search engine spiders who have dutifully read and indexed my book online, mechanical readers for the electronic age! Still, I am hoping that the book might be of interest to human readers too, especially to students and teachers of Latin. So, *lectores cari*, I invite you to get your PDF copy of *Brevissima* and see what you think: *Brevissima.bestlatin.net* awaits you.

* * *

Book Review

Latin Elegiac Verse

by Maurice Platnauer

Cambridge University Press, (reissued Oct. 2012)

ISBN: 9781108053716

RRP £14.99

What a curious business the study of Latin poetry is. In what other subject would a book devoted entirely to 2,000-year-old metrical practices be thought of as a manual for aspiring modern poets? But thanks to an offhand comment in his Preface, where Platnauer expresses the hope that his work will be of use to, 'those not yet quite extinct *genera*, composers of Latin elegiac verse', more than a few readers have taken this to mean that his book offers advice for contemporary practitioners. John F. C. Richards, for example, in his 1952 review of Platnauer's book (*The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 46, No. 4, pp. 60-61) remarked that the work will be, 'especially useful … to those who still like to compose Latin elegiacs'. How so?

Originally published in 1951 and now reissued by CUP, *Latin Elegiac Verse* is a well-chosen title, for this is an exhaustive study of the *metrical* habits of the Augustan elegists. It is not, however, (and nor does it ever pretend to be) a study of Latin Elegiac *Poetry*. I think the distinction tells us a lot about both Platnauer's project and the way Latin poetry is regarded by those who read it as well as those who write it.

Platnauer scrutinises, analyses and quantifies pretty much every aspect of the versification of Tibullus (including the *Corpus Tibullianum*), Propertius and Ovid, serving up an almost overwhelming wealth of statistics that compare the frequency of

various usages among the three authors. Thanks to this careful analysis, anyone with a mind to do so will learn a great deal about how the Roman elegists constructed their verses.

For the narrow purposes of *Vates*, though, I'm less interested in wondering why Platnauer restricted himself to these poets (what, not even Catullus?) or noting his occasionally inconsistent approach to the tricky question of the *caesura*, say, and am far more intrigued instead by wondering precisely how a study of Latin prosody and versification is going to make us better poets. For it cannot be the case that versifying is synonymous with poetry. If that were true, then the 'Eureka' machine that mechanically churned out metrically correct Latin verses, described by Barry Baldwin in the last issue [V:42], would have to be admitted to the pantheon of Latin poets! And even when it comes to the ancients, the former does not necessarily guarantee the latter: as J. A. Harrison observed (*Ovid on Himself*, 1965, p. 6), even the great Ovid's work, 'is polished and technically perfect but only occasionally rises to the level of poetry'.

This is not to deny the importance of Platnauer's study for editors trying to decide whether a particular line requires emendation, or if a poem is incorrectly attributed. How often does a weak caesura occur in the third foot of the hexameter? (pp. 9-10 – rather more frequent in early Tibullus, far less so in late Ovid); what is the percentage of sense-pauses between hexameter and pentameter? (p. 25 – 27.5% in the *Amores* and *Heroides* combined); what is the most common type of elision at the end of the fifth foot? (p. 85 – only short 'a' and 'e' are elided here); what is the statistical evidence for the elegiac poets' aversion to the pronoun *is, ea, id*? (p. 116 – quite marked, apparently). And so it goes on.

Where I become uneasy, though, is the further temptation – encouraged by that comment in his Preface – to treat Platnauer's statements as *de facto* prescriptive for the aspiring elegist. The fundamental assumption hiding somewhere in the background is

that strict imitation of ancient models is the only acceptable method for a modern Latin poet to follow. The implicit argument runs something like this: to say 'x is how Ancient Poet Y did it' automatically entails the conclusion, 'therefore, x is how *you* ought to do it too'. As a result, Platnauer's statistical statements seem to define the acceptable boundaries of our own poetical compositions – and I don't mean scansion, but questions such as what kind of word ought to be placed in which part of the line: if, for example, you wish to have a spondaic fifth foot in your hexameter, you will be best advised to employ a quadrisyllabic Greek word (p. 39), as per Ovid's practice. But what poet worthy of the name would willingly accept such a restriction?

This assumption that we ought to be imitating the ancients as closely as possible may turn out to be quite legitimate, but it needs to be argued for, not just accepted *a priori*. Once upon a time such strict imitation, enforced by easily applied rules and wanton plundering of tags from the *Gradus*, was presumably useful in the Latin classroom where – *Tom Brown's Schooldays* comes to mind – pupils were marked according to their proficiency at stringing together 'longs and shorts'. Platnauer tells us, for example, that Ovid has only three tri-syllabic pentameter endings in some 10,000 pentameters (p. 15). Whence arises the one-size-fits-all rule that we Latin poets must always end our pentameters with a disyllable. This despite D. S. Raven's remark (*Latin Metre: An Introduction*, 1965, p. 106), that the effect of all those disyllables in Ovid is to produce lines of 'depressing rigidity'.

If I seem to be rather hard on poor old Ovid, it is only to make the point that Platnauer's book is a purely technical one. And that strikes me as odd in itself. For how can statistical quantification of such things as epanalepsis and enjambment constitute an appreciation of a poet's work? Only in the field of Latin (and maybe Greek) verse studies would anyone even dream such a thing. We would think a book about Shakespeare's Sonnets concerned with

nothing but statistics of word use to be rather missing the point; yet somehow this is perfectly normal when it comes to Latin poetry. Here at *Vates* I like to think we are at least as interested in what constitutes actual poetry. And that's a far harder thing to define.

There are, of course, many other books devoted to literary appreciations of Latin verse. In this context, *Latin Erotic Elegy* (2002, ed. P.A. Miller, Routledge) is an obvious choice, since it deals with the very same poets Platnauer discusses (and includes Catullus, too); interestingly, it in turn devotes a scant two pages or so of its Introduction to matters metrical. It is as if the mechanics of versifying and literary content constitute two entirely separate disciplines, and for some reason they must not be discussed together. It may indeed be the case that these two elements are quite distinct, at least when it comes to quantitative verse; but if so, it is yet another point that needs to be established, not assumed as axiomatic. If Miller's anthology would have benefited from greater discussion of the contributon prosody makes to poetical effect, then Platnauer's would be far more impressive and thought-provoking if his pages and pages of statistical charts had been employed as the foundations of a thesis about the contribution versifying makes to literature.

Platnauer's book is the place to look to answer the prosodic and metrical question 'how', but it does not offer any clues as to 'why' – the far more numinous aesthetic question. As a result it doesn't give the aspiring modern poet much guidance about how to bridge that curious gap between form and content. Once you have learned to be a good Ovidian and always end your pentameters with a disyllable, you are on your own as to whether your metrically correct lines count as poetry or not.

Mark Walker

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De Gustibus non est Disputandum

Letters to the Editor

email your thoughts to us at: vates@pineapplepubs.co.uk

* * *

(*Editor's note*: In the last issue, I asked for thoughts on the use of the words *confraternatur* and *peribile* in Jan Křesadlo's poem *Diuisio Palaeontologica* [V:3])

Dear *Vates*,

Although one has to be careful and respect the spirit of a language, whatever that is, I can see no reason why one should not use prefixes and suffixes that reflect their use in the main body of words. The danger could be that the resultant Latin might be turned into a kind of Esperanto or Volapük, where affixes are a significant part of the way that the language works, more perhaps than in other languages.

Perhaps, although I am reluctant to use another language as an example, particularly English and the American propensity to coin new words, one can look at how it is possible to use affixes there. Will you find, say, 'examenable' even in the big *Oxford English Dictionary*? What about the commonly used word 'eatery'? The prefix 'pre-" can get stuck in front of any words as an alternative to 'before', e.g. 'pre-*Vates*' for the era when there was no *Vates*.

I think we should remember that the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and others of comparable size and intention include words that have so far been found in writings from Classical times. There are also some that include Renaissance usages, Alexander Souter's *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.*, and Bacci and Mir-Calvano and *Calapinus novus* among 'Neo-Latin dictionaries'; but, again they aim to include words that have been found. There are many, many writings that they cannot have included in their scope, without considering ephemeral spoken usage. It is by definition not possible to include words not yet created. Moreover, Latin is not a code, such as the old hôtel telegraph code or semaphore codes, where the words need to be looked up in and remembered from a collection of codes called a dictionary.

Nor should back-formations from Romance or any other languages be entertained without due care. They might give a possible solution; but the question remains as to whether it is 'good' Latin. German is good at compound words; but, even so, a

German concept so formed cannot be translated into English by a similar compound. Nonetheless, Cicero did not hesitate to use new words imported from Gallic (for vehicles) or Greek (for philosophy), or Virgil from Carthaginian (dwellings), and the very Roman *gladius* and its name were imported from Iberia.

Therefore I cannot see any reason why accomplished users of and feelers for Latin, a language that demands the same care and respect in its use as any other language, should not create new words (?neologisms) to fit their specific, and by definition new, thoughts. It should be remembered that words are the means of transmission, and strong consideration must be given to whether and how they appear in the receiver. It should also be remembered that Latin was and is very conservative in the way that it can be used, reference usually being to 'How would Cicero say it?'. Such words will deserve to remain, so long as they are understandable by and useful to other language users. Otherwise they will join the large pit of words used once and never again.

In particular, I believe that there is a perfectly good and frequently used Latin metaphor for *confraternare* in *geminare*, which on personal taste, and without denying what I have just said, I would prefer in this particular context. Also, now that I come to examine it, I am not sure that *peribile* is not an echo of the English 'perishable', whereas in Latin, especially as a new word, it would have more stress on the possibility of perishing, although in this context, with other forms of *perire*, the point seems to be that it would perish.

A last thought: could a Latin equivalent of Gerard Manley Hopkins" word creations, or Joyce's *Ulysses*, or the French *concrete* novels, or Góngora's latinate Spanish verse be written?

Best wishes,
Brian Bishop

* * *

Dear *Vates*,

Thanks for *Vates* 5 in which there is a lot to enjoy, as usual.

I have to take issue with Dag Norberg's assumption, cited in your *Verba Modulata* article [V:32], that the *Te Deum* was written to be sung by a choir. To judge by internal evidence it was not actually composed for the use to which it has been put for well over a millennium, i.e. as a canticle. In the beginning it formed part of one of the many early West European eucharistic prayers. It would have been chanted, largely on a single tone, by the priest alone. I shan't bore you with more than one reference available on

the net: *http://psallitesapienter.blogspot.se/2009/01/te-deum%20-or-canon.html*. Later these varying eucharistic prayers were replaced in region after region by a single form, what came to be known as the Roman Canon.

The eucharistic prayer is the highest point of the Mass, situated in its second part, at which the priest alone enunciates the wish that the bread and wine may be changed into Christ's Body and Blood. Psalmody, which includes psalms and canticles, forms a quite distinct genre and is found in the first part of the mass and in many other services. The two genres are quite distinct.

Stephen Coombs

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Contributors

Lucius Alter currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He has been a restauranteur, and has taught *World Religions* and *Classical Languages*. He has also taught courses on planning and zoning issues and construction and design topics as they relate to community based low income housing development. He was a proposal writer for not-for-profit community organizations involved in poor peoples' housing and in ex-offender training and reintegration, and he did stints as a community organizer, an advocate for the homeless, and Director of Technical Services for New York City's now defunct Division of Homeless Housing Development.

Barry Baldwin was born a true 'Lincolnshire Yellowbelly', but emigrated first to Australia, thence to Canada, where he is Emeritus Professor of Classics (University of Calgary) and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He has published 12 books and c.1000 articles/reviews *apropos* Greek, Roman and Byzantine history and literature, Neo-Latin Poetry, Samuel Johnson, Modern English Literature, and the more arcane field of Albanian history, language and literature. Has also published c.70 short stories, mainly mysteries, and freelances on a farrago of subjects for various magazines. He remains a far-off fan of Lincoln City and Nottingham Forest.

Frances Bernstein hails from Philadelphia and is currently a first-year student at the University of Chicago, planning to major in Classics. She has been been studying Latin for a little bit over six years and hopes to study it for decades to come!

Laura Gibbs teaches online courses in mythology and folklore at the University of Oklahoma, and she blogs at the *Bestiaria Latina*. www.MythFolklore.net

James Houlihan was born in Michigan, moved to Libya at nine months; then Weisbaden, Bethesda, the Mojave Desert, Dayton, and Santa Barbara. He currently lives and works in Houston. Ph.D. in Comparative Literature; M.A. and B.A. in Classics (University of California, Santa Barbara; all). Recent poems in *Metamorphoses, InTranslation, RiverSedge, moria, Monkeybicycle*. Previous publications: *Thirty-One Superior Poems of Our Time* (Inleaf Press, 2004) and *Driving Cabeza* (Inleaf Press, 2000). "Incorporating the Other; the Catalogue of Women in Odyssey 11" [*Diotima*]. Translation: (with F. Fagundes) Jorge de Sena, *The Art of Music* (University Editions, 1998).

David Money is Director of Studies in Classics at Wolfson College, Cambridge, where he is keen to encourage applications from mature students with an interest in Latin verse! He also teaches some Neo-Latin for the Modern Languages Faculty, and involves himself in international Neo-Latin activities, for example as a Visiting Professor at Leuven in Belgium; in April 2010 he was admitted as a Fellow of the *Academia Latinitati Fovendae* in Rome.

Paul Murgatroyd is a professor in the department of Classics at McMaster University in Canada. He is the author of ten books and over 60 articles on Greek and especially Latin literature, and is at present working on a critical appreciation of Juvenal *Satire* 10. He has also published original Latin poetry and translations, a collection of which was issued by the Edwin Mellen Press in 1991 as *Neo-Latin Poetry A Collection of Translations into Latin Verse and Original Compositions*.

Joseph Tusiani was born in Italy but emigrated to the USA in 1947. Before his retirement he taught at the City University of New York (Herbert H. Lehman College), at Fordham University, and was Director of the Catholic Poetry Society

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Brad Walton lives in Toronto. He did a BA in Classics and graduate work in Theology, which seems to have been a dreadful mistake. His study of Jonathan Edwards (*Jonathan Edwards,* Religious Affections, *and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion)* was published in 2002. More recently an attempt at Menippean satire, *Peripedemi Perigesis*, was serialized in *Melissa*. His day-job is in the University of Toronto Library. In his spare time he plays theorbo for the Toronto Continuo Collective, directed by Lucas Harris.

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Look out for the next issue of *Vates* in 2013

***Vates* is available for free download here**

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