

## *BELLARIA XXVII*



Virgil, flanked by the Muses Clio and Melpomene (3rd CAD mosaic)

### *VERSE COMPOSITION*

There was a time when the ability to compose in Greek and Latin verse was seen as the *ne plus ultra* of the classical scholar. Now it is rather sniffed at, however much pleasure it brings to those who try it. That said, to do it really well requires a broad and deep technical mastery and feeling for verse far beyond the reach of most of us.

This one-off *Bellaria* showcases the extensive work of two modern masters of the art, Colin Leach (Emeritus Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford) and Armand D'Angour (Jesus College, Oxford), and individual contributions from David Butterfield (Queen's College, Cambridge) and Ronald Knox. Armand has also provided some of his own translations of others' compositions.

The Betjeman version was specially commissioned for this *Bellaria*.

## SUN AND FUN

John Betjeman

Note: 'baby 'pollies' are small bottles of Apollinaris water



*I walked into the night-club in the morning;  
There was kummel on the handle of the door.  
The ashtrays were unemptied.  
The cleaning unattempted,  
And a squashed tomato sandwich on the floor.* 5

*I pulled aside the thick magenta curtains  
—So Regency, so Regency, my dear—  
And a host of little spiders  
Ran a race across the ciders  
To a box of baby 'pollies by the beer.* 10

*Oh sun upon the summer-going by-pass  
Where ev'rything is speeding to the sea,  
And wonder beyond wonder  
That here where lorries thunder  
The sun should ever percolate to me.* 15

*When Boris used to call in his Sedanca,  
When Teddy took me down to his estate  
When my nose excited passion,  
When my clothes were in the fashion,  
When my beaux were never cross if I was late,* 20

*There was sun enough for lazing upon beaches,  
There was fun enough for far into the night.  
But I'm dying now and done for,  
What on earth was all the fun for?  
For I'm old and ill and terrified and tight.* 25

heus redeo Phoebos squalentem oriente tabernam  
et video putri limina inuncta mero;  
sordibus asparsas patinas sine lege repletas  
aspicio et foedo fusa alimenta solo. 5  
continuo currit trans limen aranea multa 10  
dum resero solita vela superba manu.  
aestas, quo refugis, quae me vitare videris,  
omnia dum currunt ad freta salsa maris?  
plaustra ruunt requiem sonitu: cur, Phoebe cruenta,  
lumina deflendam me tetigisse vetas? 15  
Gallus habet bigas, ingentia jugera Marcus  
possidet, et me illuc unus et alter agit.  
excitat os flammam, vestis solet esse cupita;  
tarda feror? veniam dat mihi cunctus amans. 20  
sol nitet ut lenta quondam spatiabar arena;  
nocte Venus lusus dux erat ipsa mei.  
nunc moritura queror, 'quid profuit illa voluptas?'  
ebria quae timeo limina Ditis anus. 25

*C.L.*

## BORIS ON THE ZIPWIRE



*Boris dangling on a zipwire  
sets the media on fire;  
he'll do that per diem  
if he becomes PM.*

ἴδου κρεμαστὸν τῆδε δήμαρχον βαρύν,  
ὥσθ' ἡ πόλις γέγηθεν εἰσορωμένη·  
οὗτός γε δήπου κρεμάσεται καθ' ἡμέραν  
εἴ πως ὁ πρῶτος ἐν πόλει γενήσεται.

*A.D'A.*

*Indeed! All London praises Boris in the sky:  
Or will it soon be carrying/bringing sticks flying high?*

ναίχι, πόλις σύμπασα Βόριν μετέωρον ἐπαινεῖ·  
ἢ ταχέως οἶσεῖ σκῆπτρα πετεινὰ πόλις;

*C.L.*

Note: Professor Leach is sure the 'flying *skēptrā*' ['staff, stick, baton'] had some contemporary relevance, but cannot remember what! Were they to be thrown *at* him?

## GARDEN HAPPINESS



*Who plants a garden plants delight:  
its pleasant lawns enchant our sight—  
its fragrant flowers, and borders lined  
with thronging trees of every kind.*

hortum serentes laetitiā serunt:  
iucunda semper prata videbimus  
fioresque olentes atque silvas  
arboribus variis repletas.

*A.D'A.*

## SIR JEREMY MORSE

Memorial poem



*At first, you impress as a learned young man,  
and girded with praise, you win honours, and more.*

*Next, weighty, responsible work you conduct  
for the good of us all: what a burden you bore!*

*Then, back to the studies you loved—and support:  
we rightly now honour your life as we ought.*

5

imprimis iuvenis doctissimus esse videris;

laudibus accinctus praemia multa capis.

posthac pondus habens operosa negotia rerum

pro populo tractas: quale laboris onus!

denique tu revocas studiorum largus amorem:

5

iure tuam vitam nos celebrare decet.

*C.L.*

## HOW TO LEARN A LANGUAGE



As his very recent obituary in *The Times* (September 28 2020) explained, Derwent May was told by a ‘French lady acquaintance ... that to perfect the language he should change his mistress as often as his sheets. He achieved passable French’.

Lesbia ait: 'Graecam si vis ediscere, Gai,  
multa puellarum basia quaerere opus'.  
Gaius, a, periit, multis defletus amicis:  
Graece composuit carmina pulchra satis.

**A.D'A.**

*'Gaius, if learning Greek's your aim' (his Lesbia said),  
'Persuade Greek women by the hundred into bed'.  
Bewept by many now, he's passed away.  
His Greek was pretty good, is what they say.*

## **A BREXIT LAMENT**

*What does Brexit mean? What Brexit is actually an exit?  
How, where, when will Britain Brexit?  
Now, after 45 years, it's necessary to Brexit (if that's the verb):  
for wasn't the remain-supporting vote less than that for leave?  
Yes, the voice of the people is the voice of god; but a voice repeated becomes  
[an echo: 5  
surely referendums of the people shouldn't be referred back to them?  
Now it's much better for Britons to look to the future:  
what novelty will a life outside bring?  
I could ask more questions, but prefer to seek after better things:  
it doesn't befit Europhiles such as us to complain incessantly. 10  
For, after Brexit from Europe, our song in praise of them will retain thereafter  
no small drop of love, favoured by winds from the East.*

Quid sibi uult Brexit? qui Brexitus exitus ipse est?  
quomodo, qua, quando terra Britannia Bregat?  
nunc post lustra nouem Bregere—an Brexire?—necesse est :  
parsne fuit Remanens parte Abeunte minor?  
uox populi, diui est; at uox repetita fit echo : 5  
num referenda hominum sunt referenda retro?  
est grauius multo spectare futura Britannis :  
quid referet nobis extera uita noui?  
quaerere plura queam; meliora requirere malo:  
Europhilos ut nos dedecet usque queri. 10  
nam, Brecta EUropa, non paruam noster amoris  
stillam Euro paeon inde fauente teget.

**David Butterfield**

## MEMORIAL FOR XANTHE WAKEFIELD

μνήμα τόδε Ξανθῆς καλλισφύρου, ἧ ποτ' ἔδωκε  
Ζεὺς φρένας· ἀλλ' αὐτὰς ῥεῖ' ἀπόφερσεν Ἔρωσ.  
*Remembering lovely Xanthe, to whom once Zeus above  
Gave a mind, too easily swept away by Love.*

*C.L.*

## AN OLYMPIC EXCHANGE (2012)



*Men greet the Games with unrestrained delight,  
and give no thought to all the money splashed.  
For those now cheering looms an endless blight:  
impoverishment, debt — and London trashed.*  
πάντες Ὀλυμπιακοῖσι διηνεκὲς ἄνδρες ἀγῶσι  
τέρπονται, δαπάνης δ' οὐ τις ἔχει μελέτην.  
τοῖσι δὲ νῦν χαίρουσι μένει ποθὲν ἄσπετος Ἄτη—  
τὸ χρέος, ἡ πενία, χῆ πόλις οὐλομένη.

*C.L.*

*But those who triumph in the Muses' game  
will earn not money, but unstinting fame.*  
ἀλλ' ἐν Πιερίδων εὖ νικήσασιν ἀγῶνι  
ἔσσεται οὐ κέρδος γ' ἄφθονον ἀλλὰ κλέος.  
*A.D.A.*

## CENTENARY POEM

The Roman Society to the Classical Association

*Long-lived and venerable patron  
of the Latin language, we piously honour you,  
freely providing (as you do) fine  
precedents for our Society.  
Wherever the learned hold colloquia,  
it is organised with you, where  
frosts descend on the shivering Brits,  
or the sun warms  
grateful limbs in kindly regions.  
Ever unmoved 'in difficult times'  
in war, in peace, you stood fast.  
And now through ten times ten years  
you flourish. If the study of Latin thrives  
(though lacking the support of the Senate),  
it will be a fitting tribute to your learning  
to celebrate you in our song.*

longaeva faulrix et venerabilis  
linguae Latinae, te colimus pii  
    exempla nostro porrigentem  
    clara Sodalicio libenter.  
quacumque docti colloquium parant,  
tecum peractumst, sive ubi frigora  
    urgent rigescentes Britannos,  
    sive ubi sol calefactat artus  
gratos benignis in regionibus.  
immota semper 'rebus in arduis'  
    per bella, per pacem stetisti.  
    iamque decem decies per annos  
flores: Latinae si studium viget  
(quamuis senatus subsidio carens)  
    insigne doctrinae decebit  
    carmine te celebrare nostro.

**C.L.**

## SUTCLIFFE AND NIELSEN

τίς σύ; φονεύς. καὶ τίς σύ; φονεὺς ἐγώ, ὃς μάλα πολλοὺς  
ἔκταν'. ἐγὼ πολλάς; χαῖρε, φίλ' ἠδὲ φονεύ!

*'Who are you?' 'A murderer. And you?' 'A murderer too—  
who killed many men.' 'I, many women.' 'Dear murderer, toodle-oo!'*  
*C.L.*

## JOHN OWEN (1616-83)



An independent-minded theologian—‘The Calvin of England’ (and the Martial?)—he was made Dean of Christ Church by Oliver Cromwell. Here are some of his amusingly curmudgeonly squibs (*squibo squibere*), translated by *A.D.A.*:

‘tempora mutantur; nos et mutamur in illis.’  
quomodo? fit semper tempore peior homo.  
*‘Times change and we all change with them along’;  
How? Human beings just go from wrong to wrong!*

esse in natura vacuum cur, Marce, negasti?  
cui tamen ingenii tam fit inane caput.  
*‘Nature abhors a vacuum.’ Marcus, that what you said?  
Of course it does, and there’s no vacuum greater than your head.*

Orpheus uxorem raptam repetiuit ab Orco;  
duxit ab inferno femina nulla uirum.  
*Brave Orpheus brought his wife back from the Underworld, they tell:  
No woman that I’ve heard of ever spared her man from Hell.*

Libertas—carcer, pax—pugna, dolenda uoluptas.  
spes metuens, mel—fel, seria—ludus: Amor.  
*It's freedom-gaol, war-peace, hell-heaven above,  
Hope-fear, sweet-sour, a deadly game: that's Love.*

uno non possum, quantum te diligo, uersu  
dicere; si satis est distichon, ecce duos.  
*I love you so, one line of verse won't do;  
Perhaps a couple will? Well, here are two.*

## THE THREE FATES

Author Unknown



*I am grateful, genitive Lachesis, for thine having  
Chosen also me from myriad millions for the  
Precious gift of nascent living and life intending.  
To thee, Clotho, who allowed me to weave my little  
Thread into the Cosmic Tapestry, having lived a  
Life beyond my share and even my hopes transcending.  
Near life's close, I thank thee, Atropos, certain that thou  
Will bestow on me that last of all earthly blessings  
Shearing short the dreadful prospect of life unending.*

πρῶτον μὲν Λάχεσιν ζωήφορον αἰνέσω, ἥπερ  
πρόσθ' ἀπὸ μυριάδων κήμοι ἔδωκε βίον.  
Μοῖρα, γέρας παρέδωκας ἐμοὶ μάλα τίμιον, ὥστε  
νῦν ἐνὶ γηγενέταις ἡρέμας εὐθαλέω.  
εἶτα πρέπει, Κλώθω, δαῖμον πολύσεμνε, σ' ἀείδειν  
ἥπερ ἐμοὶ βίοτον μακρότερον παρέχεις

ἐνθάδε γηρασκόντι παρ' ἐλπίδας· ὥστε συνῆψας  
κῆμον ἐς ἀθανάτων νῆμά τι μικρὸν ὑφάς.  
νῦν δὲ καθιστάμενόν με μόρου πέλας, Ἄτροπε, λεύσσεις·  
ναιχί, πολύμνηστος σοὶ χάριν οἶδα, θεά,  
δωσοῦση μοι ἄριστα καὶ ὕστατα δῶρα· τὰ ποῖα;  
μὴ ζῆν ἀτλήτως αἰδίων βίοντον.

C.L.

ODYSSEUS TO PENELOPE: From inside the Wooden Horse  
Obviously Ovid ...



Mykonos Museum

*Dear Wife, This letter comes to you from near the Trojan shore,  
where I'm concealed inside a jerry-built machine of war.  
Excuse the awful handwriting, it's all over the place:  
the reason is, my elbow's jammed in Demophöon's face.  
You'll notice that the ink I'm writing with is mixed in blood; 5  
don't worry, it's his leg, not mine, that gives a steady flood.  
The fact is this: I'm stuck inside a giant wooden horse  
constructed by Epeus—'laced with oaken ribs', of course.  
We chose the crew by throwing lots, the hardest lads together;  
I only wish the hardest lads weren't all as tough as leather. 10  
To what should I compare the situation that we're in?  
It feels as if we're packed like bloody sardines in a tin.  
The tickle up my nose from Thoas' crest I can't abide,  
And now Thersander's quiver's poking holes in my backside.*

*The Trojans rolled us into town, they heaved us rough and quick;  
 I've always hated sailing; as you know, it makes me sick.  
 Right now they're throwing spears into the horse's flank to check;  
 at any moment soon, I'm sure, I'll get it in the neck.  
 Penelope, farewell. If I get out of here alive,  
 I'll only ever go by foot, I swear, and never drive.* 15  
 20

**A.D'A.**

hanc tibi Troiano chartam de litore mitto:  
 machina me belli sutilis, uxor, habet.  
 quod prave scribo, quod linea saepius errat,  
 urgebat cubitus Demophoonta meus:  
 neve atramentum timeas de sanguine factum, 5  
 hunc laticem illius, non mea, crura dabant.  
 scilicet in magno (nuper fabricavit Epeus  
 intexens costas ilice) condor equo:  
 corpora lecta virum sortiti immisimus illuc;  
 lecta utinam minus his corpora dura forent! 10  
 haud secus angustae conferti in finibus ollae  
 Sardinii pisces, squamea turba, latent.  
 titillat nasum misero mihi crista Thoantis,  
 Thersandri pungit tota pharetra latus:  
 hinc illinc mediam volverunt Troes in urbem; 15  
 pessimus, heu, semper (scis bene) nauta fui;  
 nunc etiam missis tentant hastilibus alvum:  
 haesura in braxis iam puto iamque meis!  
 Penelope, valeas; hinc me si fata benigna  
 protulerint, ibo tempus in omne pedes. 20  
 Ronald Knox (*Salopian* magazine, 1921)

**ETON'S 550TH ANNIVERSARY, 1990**



A classroom

*It will be a pleasure to celebrate your five hundred years  
to which ten lustra are now added.*

*If anywhere monuments to famous men arise,*

*The greatest share of glory will—believe it—be yours.*

*How many leaders, kind patron, did you nurture for us,*

*whom you steered with no harsh guiding hand?*

5

*It was a pleasure to see many boating triumphs on the river:*

*many a laurel was given to your crew.*

*Look! The game is on with bats on no unyielding pitch:*

*more often was Harrow laid low at your feet.*

10

*Here the devotion to learning had its own rewards:*

*More learned yourself, you moreover supplied the*

*[learned to the populace.*

saecula quinque tibi celebrare, Etona, placebit,

lustra quibus iam sunt accumulata decem.

sicubi clarorum surgunt monumenta virorum,

pars decoris semper maxima, crede, tuast.

quot proceres nobis, o fautrix alma, fovebas,

quos regis haud dura tu moderante manu?

5

flumine remorum placuit vidisse triumphos

multos; remigio laurea multa datest

luditur en! clava necnon glomeramine duro;

saepius ante pedes sternitur Herga tuos.

10

doctrinae studium hic habuit sua praemia: doctos

praeterea populis, doctior ipsa, dabas.

*C.L.*

## ON THE ELEVATION OF LORD KREBS

(Principal of Jesus College Oxford 2005-15):



olim Cancer erat, sed solum nomine prauus:  
nobilis, ecce, redit qui modo Cancer erat.

*There was a man whose name was Krebs,  
but crabby just in name.*

*He who was 'Crabby' once, behold,  
a noble Lord became.*

**A.D'A.**

## MOTTO FOR A HOME FOR RETIRED ACTORS

*uitae uela prius nemo scaenamue relinquat  
primas quam partes egerit arte sua.*

From life's bright stage let none release their soul,  
Till on the boards they've played a starring role.

**A.D'A.**

## THE MAD GARDENER'S SONG

Lewis Carroll



He thought he saw an Elephant  
That practised on a fife:  
He looked again, and found it was  
A letter from his wife.

'At length I realise,' he said,  
'The bitterness of Life!'

ἐλέφαντ' ἔδοξε μουσικὸν σκοπεῖν τότε  
αὐλοῦντα ταῖς σύριγγιν εὐηχὲς μέλος·  
ἔργω δ' ἐπιστολή τις ἦν ἀλόχου πάρα·  
'τέλος δ'', ὅδ' εἶπε, 'πικρότητ' ἔγνων βίου.'



He thought he saw a Buffalo  
Upon the chimney-piece:  
He looked again, and found it was  
His Sister's Husband's Niece.  
'Unless you leave this house,' he said,  
'I'll send for the Police!'  
ἔστηκεν ὡς ἔδοξεν ἐστίας ὕπερ  
ταῦρός τις. ἔργω δ' ἦν ἀπωτέρω γένει  
ἀδελφιδῆ. 'τόνδ' οἶκον ἐκλιπεῖν σε χρῆ,  
ἀλλῶς δέ,' φησί, 'δεῖ καλεῖν τοὺς τοξότας.'

He thought he saw a Rattlesnake  
That questioned him in Greek:  
He looked again, and found it was  
The Middle of Next Week.  
'The one thing I regret,' he said,  
'Is that it cannot speak!'  
ὄφιν νοσῶδη προσδοκᾷ σκοπεῖν ποτε  
ἐλληνικῶς λέγοντά θ' ἱστοροῦντά τε·  
ἔργω δ' ἀελπτῶς μῆν' ἐπιόντα πῶς ὀρᾷ.  
εἶπεν δέ, 'κείνου δυσφορῶ τῷ μὴ λαλεῖν.'



He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk  
Descending from the bus:  
He looked again, and found it was  
A Hippopotamus.

'If this should stay to dine,' he said,  
'There won't be much for us!'

ἔδοξ' ὄνειρῳ γραμματέως ὄρᾶν κάρα  
ἐκ τοῦ πορείου καταμολεῖν εἰς γήπεδον.  
πάλιν σκοπῶν εἰσεῖδε ποτάμιον μέγα  
δάκος. 'μεθ' ἡμῶν', φησίν, 'εἰ δειπνεῖν θέλει,  
σμικρ' ἂν τὰ λείψαν' ἡμῖν ἂν δήπου μένοι.'



He thought he saw a Kangaroo  
That worked a coffee-mill:  
He looked again, and found it was  
A Vegetable-Pill.

'Were I to swallow this,' he said,  
'I should be very ill!'

βλέπειν ἔδοξε θηρίου πηδήματα  
δεινοῦ νέμοντος μηχανὴν σοφώτατα  
ποτηματοποιόν· φάρμακον δ' ὄντως ἔφυ  
φυτικόν· 'νοσοίην κάρτ' ἂν εἰ ροφῶ τόδε,'  
ὁ φιτοποίησιν φησί, 'δυσθύμως πάνυ.'

He thought he saw an Argument  
That proved he was the Pope:  
He looked again, and found it was  
A Bar of Mottled Soap.

'A fact so dread,' he faintly said,  
'Extinguishes all hope!'

ἔδοξεν ἐνθύμημα σημαίνειν τόδε·  
ὑψιστος ἱεὺς ἐστὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας·  
ἔργῳ δὲ ῥύμμ' ἦν ποίκιλον. 'τὸ χρῆμ' ἀπλῶς  
δεινόν γε', φησὶ δυσκριτῶς, 'ἔλπις δ' ἐμοῦ  
φροῦδος τὸ πᾶν νῦν ἐστὶν· ὦ τάλας, τάλας.'  
C.L.

**Next week:** Our Graeco-Latin vocabulary



*This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website [classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/](https://classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/)*

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