

## *BELLARIA XXXIX*



Colin Sydenham

### *The Sydenham Latin Verse Challenges*

Many will know of Colin through his close association with the Horatian Society over many years, and thereby have come to know of his enviable skill at verse composition. Thanks to the encouragement of Dr David Butterfield (Queen's College, Cambridge), this has borne fruit in the publication of his translations into Latin of some 120 poems, mostly from English, but also Greek, French and Italian, poets.

The range is huge: from Belloc to Betjeman and Byron, Callimachus to Cope, Larkin to Lehrer, Pinter to Plato and Tennyson to Tolkien, Jennings, Gunn, Wyatt, Duffy, Millay ... The metrical complexities are equally impressive: alongside elegiacs, hexameters, alcaics and sapphics, as many asclepiads as you could shake a stick at, together with archilochians, hendecasyllables and glyconics.

They were originally composed as a challenge to a group of about twenty classical friends. Every few months a batch of five or six would arrive, and the job would be to identify the originals. Terrifyingly, scores were kept and winners regularly announced.

This *Bellaria* offers a taste of the delights on offer, with a concession to readers—i.e. a heading to each of the Latin versions—which was not on offer to the original readers. Each version is followed by its original, but separated on-screen by means of a relevant picture, far enough from the Latin to prevent instant peeping.

At the end, details of the book and how to purchase it can be found.

## Nightingales

*te quanto didici luctu, Heraclite, perisse:  
donec nos pariter condere saepe diem  
colloquio memini, non te deflere pudebat:  
heu quater antiquus puluis, amice, iaces. 4  
uox sed adhuc uiuit uolucris, tua uerba canora,  
quae mors omnirapax non rapuisse ualet.*



They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,  
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.  
I wept as I remembered how often you and I  
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest, 4  
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;  
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

*Callimachus/William Johnson Cory*

## Loving-cup

*ex oculis tantum monstra mihi pignus amoris;  
ex oculis pariter mutua signa dabo.  
oscula sin summo calici subiungere mauis,  
infundi calici non ego uina petam.  
ardenti quicunque sitit sub corde, liquorem* 5  
*non nisi diuinum quo satietur auet;  
sin etiam ipsius louis immortale daretur,  
nescirem nectar posthabuisse tuum.*

*commisi roseam nuper tibi, Phylli, corollam,  
non decus ut decori iungeret illa tuo,* 10  
*sed potius (nam sic tecum sperare licebat)  
marcida ne tecum, ne moribunda, foret.  
te tamen in sertam semel exhalare iuuauit,  
et mihi retrorsum mittere deinde rosas,  
quas reuiescentes (Venus hoc testetur) odore* 15  
*miror sed redolere tuo.*



Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss within the cup,  
And I'll not ask for wine.  
The thirst that from the soul doth rise                   5  
Doth ask a drink divine;  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honoring thee                   10  
As giving it a hope, that there  
It could not withered be.  
But thou thereon didst only breathe,  
And sent'st it back to me;  
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,                   15  
Not of itself, but thee.

*Ben Jonson*

### Time flies

*flosculos decerpe novos rosarum,  
temporis semper properat volatus;  
si rosae flores hodie reident  
cras morientur.*

*sol polum ascendens speciosa lampas                   5  
altius quanto properat per axem,  
ocius tanto poterit diurnam  
tangere metam.*

*prima, crede, aetas superat sequentes  
dum iuventutis calor acris ardet.                   10  
peius at tempus cito pessimumque  
rite propinquant.*

*ne voluptatem timeas amoris,  
dum uires prudens reperi maritum;  
mortuo post flore tuo moratur                   15  
longa senectus.*



Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flying:  
And this same flower that smiles to day,  
To morrow will be dying.

The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the Sun, 5  
The higher he's a getting;  
The sooner will his Race be run,  
And neerer he's to Setting.

That Age is best, which is the first, 10  
When Youth and Blood are warmer;  
But being spent, the worse, and worst  
Times, still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time;  
And while ye may, go marry:  
For having lost but once your prime, 15  
You may forever tarry.

*Robert Herrick*

### The Guest of Love

*dulce salutat Amor, retro sed spiritus horret,  
consciis heu scelerum.  
me tamen assiduus uidit dubitare, morantem  
introitum celerem,  
et ueniens propius miti me uoce rogauit 5  
numquid abesset Amor.*

*'hospes abest' refero 'qui dignus adesse probatur.'*

*'tu bene dignus eris.'*

*'improbis, ingratus? sed te spectare, sodalis*

*care, pudor prohibet.'*

10

*deinde manu capta respondet 'lumina fecit*

*quis tua? quis nisi ego?'*

*'laesa tamen per me; iam dedecus exeat oro*

*quo meret, o Domine.'*

*leniter inquit Amor 'quis poenam sustulit illinc?'*

15

*'En tibi seruus ero.'*

*'iam sedeas, escamque meam tibi sumere fast est'*

*esuriens sedeo.*



Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning  
If I lacked anything. 5

'A guest,' I answered, 'worthy to be here':

Love said, 'You shall be he.'

'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,

I cannot look on thee.'

10

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame

Go where it doth deserve.'

'And know you not,' says Love, 'who bore the blame?' 15

'My dear, then I will serve.'

'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'

So I did sit and eat.

*George Herbert*

### Heavenly textiles

*Si caelestia texta possiderem,*

*argenti fabricata luce et auri*

*glauco caeruleo nigro colore*

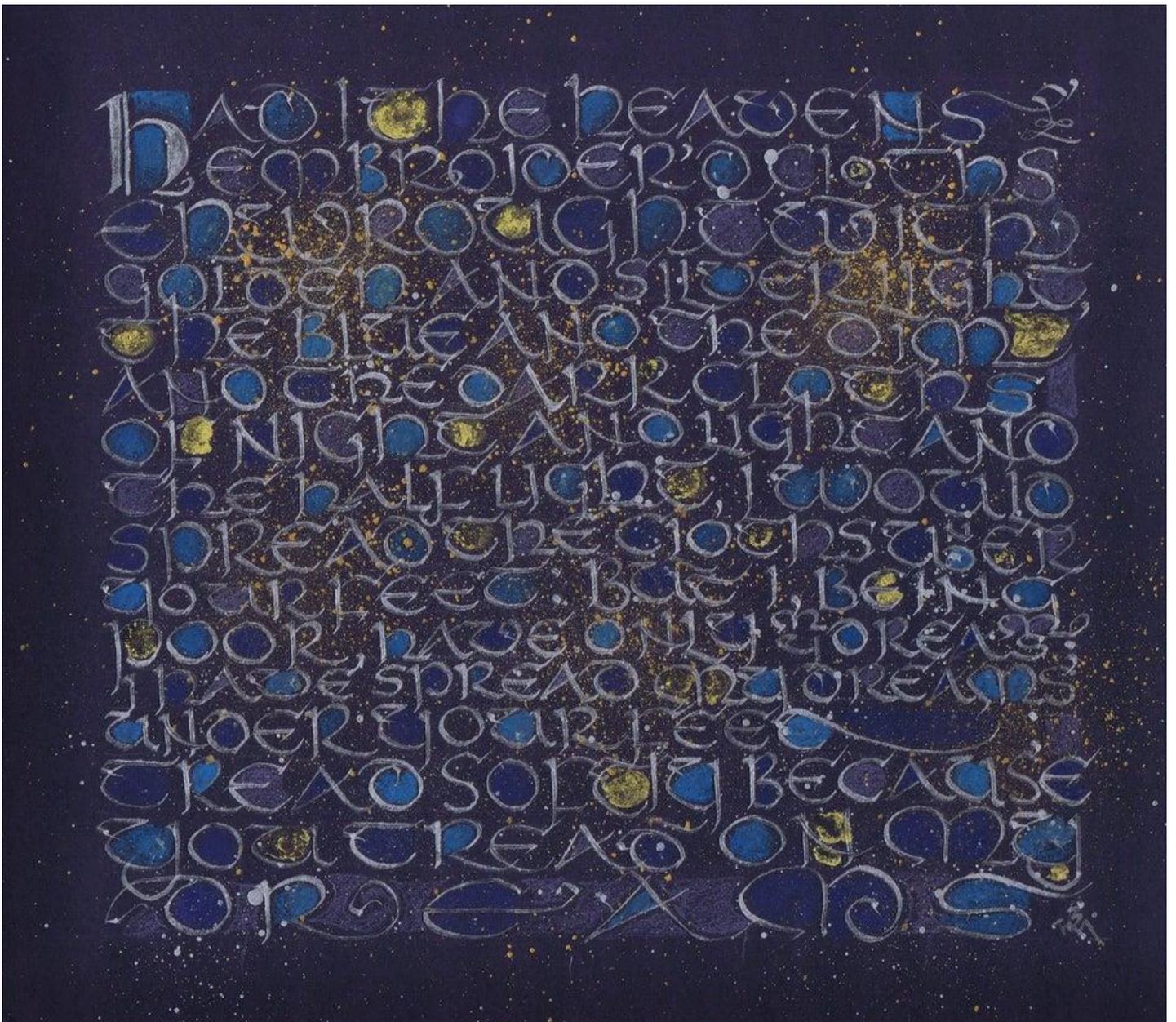
*noctis luminis aut crepusculorum,*

*plantis porrigerem tuis tapetam. 5*

*tantum at somnia sunt mihi offerenda,*

*quae pauper pedibus tuis tetendi;*

*o per somnia lene transeatur.*



Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half-light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet: 5  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.  
W.B. Yeats

### Into the Unknown Future

*seruat adhuc proprium decus officiumque senectus;  
omnia mors finit, uitam tamen ante peractam,  
forte quibus contra superos pugnauimus olim  
sors erit insignem sera effecisse laborem.  
multiplici incipiunt rupes iam luce micare. 5  
exit longa dies, ascendit Cynthia sensim,  
raucisoni oceani circumgemit undique fluctus.  
eia agite, o comites, alienam adit hora petendi  
tellurem, pinum deducite. rite sedentes  
tundite aquae sulcos, stat enim mea firma uoluntas 10  
ante ultra occasum stellarumque Hesperiarum  
balnea quam morior procedere. forsitan undae  
nos mergent, tamen Hesperides contingere forsan  
Pelidenque iterum dabitur uidisse sodalem. 15  
deest multum sed adest multum; non robur habemus  
quod terramque prius caelumque mouere solebat.  
at quodcumque sumus, sumus: una heroica turba,  
mente et corde pares, senio fatisque grauati,  
sed certi cupidis animis urgentibus una 20  
quaerere coniti reperire, recedere nunquam.*



## Ulysses

.....

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;  
Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.  
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:                   5  
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep  
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,  
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds                   10  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all the western stars, until I die.  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.                   15  
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will 20  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

*Lord Tennyson*

## The Sum of Things

*tempore quo penitus caeli conuexa ruebant,  
                  imaque telluris dum labefacta tremunt,  
haec manus officio iuuenum conducta peracto  
                  debita ceperunt praemia, iamque iacent.*

*Hi poterant umeris suspensum tollere caelum;  
perstiterunt; tellus illabefacta manet.  
quod di deseruere hi defendere; supremum  
auertisse malum suaserat aeris amor.*

5



These, in the day when heaven was falling,  
The hour when earth's foundations fled,  
Followed their mercenary calling,  
And took their wages, and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;  
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;  
What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.

*A.E. Housman*

5

### When the good times end

*adueniet, mea uita, dies ubi tempora laeta  
exierint nullo reditu, forsanique repente;  
aegrotare etenim si nos discemus utrumuis  
nec refici certum, nos quomodo deinde geremus?  
an nostrum sat erit constans et amicus uterque  
uocibus et factis, si non ignoscere promptus?  
nare laborandum est in fluminis agmine, quamuis  
iratis fessis pauidis: fidamus amori,  
ut lintri ualidae. multos qui seruiit annos  
sat bene, credentes superatis posse procellis  
denique nos una traducere in ostia tutos.*

5

10



One day, my love, the good times will be over,  
Never to return. And it could come  
Quite suddenly - the news that either one  
Of us is ill, unlikely to recover.

How will we deal with that - day after day  
of grief and sickness? Will we both be brave  
And kind in everything we do and say  
And, failing that, be able to forgive?

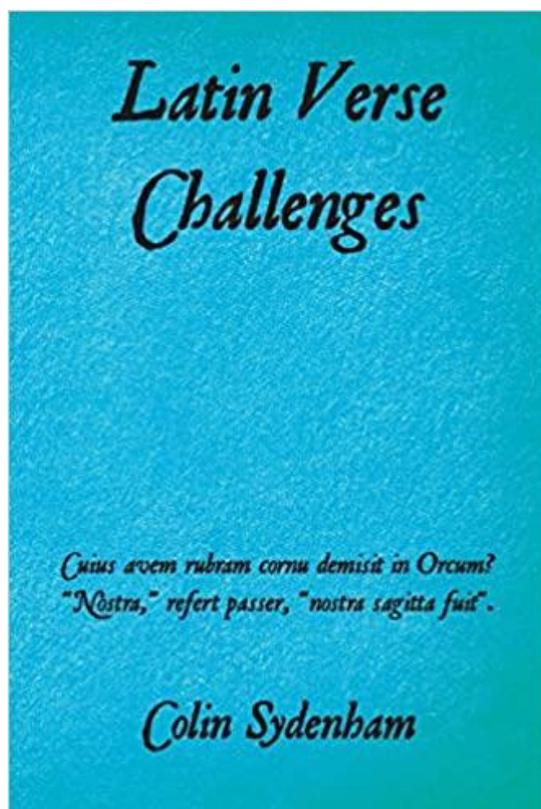
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We'll have to do our best to stay afloat,  
Despite our anger, tiredness and fear,  
Trusting in our love, a sturdy boat

10

That's served us pretty well, year after year.  
We'll hope it can survive the stormy weather  
And bring us safely into port, together.

*Wendy Cope*



David Butterfield's 'Foreword' is followed by Colin's account of his background and how he came to compose these verses. The first half of the book consists of the 'challenges' in their original format, and the second half of their sources, with the same numbering. There are an index of authors and appendices on metres, the scansion of *neutro*, errors and improvements.

Colin's taste was very sound and wonderfully eclectic, and the book is worth buying for the selection of poems alone, however shaky one's Latin.

*Latin Verse Challenges* is published by Grosvenor House. It can be found on Amazon (148pp, £9.36, ISBN 9781839750229). Since it is print-on-demand, it may take a little time to arrive.



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/)