

VATES

The Journal of New Latin Poetry

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Editorial

A plea to *Vates* readers:

I have been so astonished, so delighted and, frankly, so humbled by the variety, quality and sheer amount of wonderful Latin poetry submitted to this journal – see this issue *passim* for proof – that I am issuing an unusual plea to all readers. Increasingly I feel that my haphazard amateur efforts can no longer do justice to the talent of our contributors. This is the seventh instalment – and I might add, the best so far – of a journal that, when I began it, seemed destined to limp on for no more than two or three issues before petering out for lack of material. But – *mirabile dictu* – as each issue goes by, the flow of new Latin poetry submitted for publication only increases.

Hence, it is surely time to take this eccentric little project to (forgive the expression) the next level. If I can continue as editor, then I will do so gladly; but with or without me, what *Vates* needs now, I believe, is for a proper journals publisher to take it on and produce it as a ‘proper’ publication – either in print or as an e-journal or both, but carrying the *imprimatur* of a professional publishing house, with all that such a move entails: creating a regular publication schedule, promoting the journal to a significantly wider range of readers, commissioning a wider range of articles and book reviews, organising seminars, establishing an international subscriber base, attracting advertising, and perhaps – well, we can dare to dream – even paying contributors for their efforts!

To which end I am asking readers to get in touch with me. Can you think of a specific publisher – perhaps but not necessarily a University Press – that might take on such a project as *Vates*? Do you know someone at a publishing house who might respond positively to the idea? What do *you* think is the best way forward? Do please let me know your thoughts about how we can make *Vates* even more successful.

Don’t forget: 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.)

Euitans Euitatus

(a Pub Poem)

Brad Walton

Brad Walton writes: I think you might call this a slice-of-life poem, in the tradition of Catullus 10. It is based on an experience at my neighbourhood pub. It is written in Phalaecian hendecasyllables, but without the elegant regularities usually observed by later poets, such as Martial and Statius. These just don't seem to me appropriate in a tipsy atmosphere. Perhaps I should add that, since writing this poem, the gentleman and I have become good friends and have found enough common interests to furnish topics of conversation, though classical literature isn't one of them.

*est uir qui celebrat meam popinam
nequaquam rudis aut ineptus, illis,
quae gratos bibulis solent amicis
sermone agitare, disciplinis
(hocceio, pedifolio, palaestra,
harpasto, patinatione) doctus,
hactenusque reconditis nouarum
tinctus munditiis scientiarum, ut
potores adeat seueriores.
fertur praeterea esse luculentus
re mathematica peritus, olim
qui nummaria cum negotia obiret,
tantis quaestibus auxerit crumenam
ut quamuis iuuenis pedem referret*

iam praediues in otium senile.
 turbatus dubio tamen furore
 indefessus inambulat taberna;
 secum mussitat et sibi iocatur,
 cacchinans salit et salit solutus,
 iactans brachia seque agens in orbem,
 quaerens sollicitus quibus perennes
 aspergat pluuias suae loquelaes,
 nec, donec parat hostiam, quiescit.
 sed neglexerat usque segregatum
 me cum Castaliis in angulo, dum
 potores coluit facetiores.
 at nuper, solitis, quibus fauebat,
 cum caupona bibentibus uacaret,
 hic furore magis magisque motus,
 in me lumina coniicit. sed aures
 contritas metuens mihique uires
 ablatas animae superfluente
 lymphatae fluuio loquacitatis,
 contractis humeris, meum in libellum
 demitto caput et recondo ocellos.
 frustra! “quid legis?” audio rogari.
 sic respondeo ut ille terreatur,
 “nonnihil Senecae tragoediarum.”
 felix consilium satis superque.
 nam retro saliens “eho!” profatur.
 se statim recipit, fero per ora
 contemptu studiique peruetusti

emicante uirique inelegantis.
“me quidni meritum putat,” requiro,
“quocum naufragus ille colloquatur?”
iratus sedeo, dolens repulsam,
quadam spe latitante destitutus.

* * *

Metre: Phalaecian Hendecasyllables.

Translation:

The Avoider Avoided: There is a man who frequents my pub, by no means uncultivated or absurd, well-informed on subjects usually of interest to drinking companions (hockey, soccer, gymnastics, rugby, skating), and sufficiently familiar with the stylishly intriguing aspects of recent science to approach the more serious-minded drinkers. Moreover it's said that he is a brilliant mathematician, who had made so much money working in finance that he retired very well-off while still a young man. However, he paces the pub incessantly, unsettled by some indeterminate lunacy. He mutters and jokes to himself, laughs, jumps up and down uninhibitedly, gesticulating, turning himself in circles, agitatedly looking for someone to drench with the interminable downpour of his chatter, and can't calm down until he has found a victim. But he had always ignored me, secluded as I was in a corner with my literary pursuits, while he cultivated the more elegant drinkers. Recently, however, when the pub was deserted of his usual favourite imbibers, increasingly agitated by his madness, he cast his eyes on me. I, afraid of having my ears worn out and my vital energy swept away by an inundating flood of his looney loquacity, hunched my shoulders, dropped my head and buried my eyes in my book. In vain. I hear the question, “What are you reading?” I replied in a manner to discourage him, “Something from Seneca’s tragedies.” My strategy worked – and all too well. With a backward jump he exclaimed, “Oh ho!” He beat an immediate retreat, a fierce disdain flashing over his face for an antiquated study and a complete nerd. I ask, “Why does that wreck of a man think me not worth talking to?” I sit there resentfully, smarting at the rejection, disappointed of some lurking hope.

* * *

Laetitia

Valentina DeNardis

Valentina DeNardis writes: When I began my study of Latin, my first love was elegy. I delighted in Tibullus' picture of rural bliss, Propertius' passion, and Ovid's clever wit and charm. It was a fun topic, too – who doesn't like a good love song? (I imagined these poets to be the rock stars of their time, with one book of poems being the equivalent of a hit album.) We see a variety of aspects of love in these poets: young love, jealousy, faithfulness and its opposite, and every manner of dealings which people in a relationship may encounter, from fussing over physical appearances to fighting with rivals of one's affection. My poem portrays those earliest parts of a relationship when things are fresh, simple and seem like pure *laetitia*. I chose a setting in nature, since there the young lovers can be apart from the real world and are free to be together alone. They run because they can't wait to get there. They sing songs (which is something my husband and I enjoyed when we first began dating – grad students by day, budding rock stars by night at various open-mic sessions in New York City). They laugh and enjoy the unspoiled joy that is new love.

*currunt in silvas puer – en! – et deinde puella,
in saltus solos qua licet agere eos.
carmina nunc cantant, rident nunc semper amantes;
laeta puella ipsa est, laetus et ipse puer.*

* * *

Metre: Elegiac couplets

Translation:

They run into the woods, the boy—look!—and then the girl,
into the (solitary) groves where it is permitted for them to
spend time alone.
Now they sing songs, now they laugh, always loving;
the girl herself is happy, happy himself also is the boy.

Two notes on the Latin.

1. *solos* can be taken both with *saltus* and with *eos*. The setting is empty and they can be alone there.
2. The chiasmus in the third line and mutual feeling, parallelism and anaphora in the fourth were inspired by aspects of these lines:

Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 1.99:
spectatum ueniunt, ueniunt spectentur ut ipsae.

Propertius 2.7.19:
tu mihi sola places, placeam tibi, Cynthia, solus.

Propertius 1.12.20:
Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit.

* * *

Mus Apud Me

Patrick Paul Hogan

Patrick Hogan writes: In the Fall of 2012 I took up writing Latin poetry, mostly because of my experience at the *Inter Versiculos* Conference at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in the summer of 2011, where David Money led many neophytes on their first steps in this arena, but also because of the new venues like *Vates* that have appeared of late. This poem is based on a recent incident at my mother's house – although I must admit that the affair ended rather fatally for the mouse. We are still waiting to see if his *amici* will come by too.

*plus cibi et melius libens parassem
sed O muscule te futurum apud me
nesciui. mea mensa pauperata est
et penaria cella plena solis
tenebris (bene scis) araneisque.
est opus mihi liberalitate
siue aduenerit inuocatus hospes
siue sit coquus aeger ebriusue
siue putrida sit caro uel absens.
praesens es meus hospes et saluto
te. nec Iuppiter hospitum deus sit
iratus feriatque me seure
claro fulgure nec lupum ferocem
memet efficiat nefas ob atrum
ut est passus et impius Lycaon.
ipsum autem rapuisse frustulum te
aequum aduerto animum sed hoc remitto;
bene hoc est: fruire et tua rapina
et magna nimiaque comitate*

*mea, sed precor O gulose noli
amicis facere hanc palam tabernam.
nonne caseoli satis tibi est nunc?
an panis satis? estne sic? beate
cenandum est, sed agas mihi pusillas
gratias aliquasue liberali.
eccum! ianitor it meus celox ut
te deducat honore curioso;
feles officio suo uidetur
perfungi cupida esse. quam fidelis!
uale, bestia cara; si redibis,
amabo; modo nuntium antemittas.*

* * *

Metre: Hendecasyllables

Translation:

I would have willingly prepared more food, but little mouse, I did not know that you would be at my house. Mine is a pauper's table and my pantry is full of only shadows and cobwebs, as you well know. I must be generous whether a guest will show up uninvited, or the cook is sick or drunk, or the meat is rotten or missing. You are here as a guest and I welcome you. May Jupiter, the god of guests, not be angry and strike me down severely with a bright thunderbolt nor turn me into a wild wolf because of black sin, as impious Lycaon once suffered. Now I calmly notice that you have snatched a bit for yourself, but I let this go; it is all right: enjoy both your plunder and my great and perhaps overmuch friendliness, but I beg you, O glutton, do not reveal this tavern to your friends. Is there enough cheese for you now? Enough bread? Yes? Dine quite well, but do give small or at least some thanks for my generosity. Behold! My doorkeeper comes quickly so that she might lead you out carefully in honor; my cat seems to be eager to enjoy her duty. How faithful! Goodbye, dear beast; if you return, I will be happy; just send a messenger ahead.

* * *

6 Cantilenae

uel

sententiae cottidianae frequenter repetendae

Mark Walker

Mark Walker writes: The Italian musical term *cantilena*, related to Latin *cantus*, indicates a smooth-flowing melodic line. But the Romans employed that same word to describe an oft-repeated refrain, like the chorus of the annoying pop song you heard on the radio this morning that you just can't get out of your head. Hence it was also used to describe an overly familiar aphorism, a commonplace, a platitude. For example, in *De Oratore* (I.105) Cicero writes of youths *qui non Graeci alicuius quotidianam loquacitatem sine usu, neque ex scholis cantilenam requirunt*, 'who don't need the daily chatter of some useless Greek, nor a platitude from the schools'. Seneca (*Ad Lucillum*, XXIV.18) makes explicit the word's philosophical context, an all-too-familiar maxim propounded by one or other of the competing schools of thought: *non sum tam ineptus, ut Epicuream cantilenam hoc loco persequar et dicam uanos esse inferorum metus*, 'I am not so daft at this point to follow the oft-repeated Epicurean maxim and say that the terrors of death are idle'.

(Lest you feel awed by my scholarship at this point, note that both those examples are found under the entry for *cantilena* in the OLD!)

Seneca himself was a master of the *sententia*, a striking thought pithily expressed – what we would now call a sound-bite – as distinct from the well-worn *cantilena*. But such hackneyed aphorisms designed expressly for repetition have their place in philosophy, too: think of the Buddhist practice of reciting mantras over and over again as a way of fully absorbing their religion's tenets. Likewise, the ancient philosophical schools of Athens and Rome understood that reasoned argument alone is not sufficient: our brains need something more readily accessible and easy to remember if we are fully to internalise their teachings. Epictetus advocated regular recitation of Stoic *praecepta*, and his *Enchiridion* ('Handbook') is a collection of just such stock phrases, tailor-made for frequent repetition by his students; his most devoted follower, Marcus Aurelius, filled his *Meditations* with similar self-admonitory precepts. (Curious readers could do worse than to acquire a copy of Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life* [Blackwell, 1995], a lucid exposition of these and other practical aspects of ancient philosophy.)

What follows below, however, are not clever Senecan *sententiae*, nor are they erudite Epictetan *praecepta*, they are simply my attempt at casting some everyday animadversions on impatience,

vanity, anger and the like, into easy-to-remember couplets addressed to myself in the hope that by writing them down then reciting them I will not only better be able to absorb the lesson, but also more easily call them to mind in times of need – and that’s the real point: to make them simple enough to recall under duress. As well as being determinedly unoriginal in content, they make no claims to much poetical merit either. The English paraphrases capture their prosaic nature.

(1) *iam culpas alias animo patientius aequo
ferre tibi liceat, nec tolerare tuas.*

* * *

(2) *natura aduersa, rationeque mente neganti,
ne capias uanas consilia atque uias.*

* * *

(3) *non tibi non umquam circum te uoluitur orbis;
uel te uel non te uoluitur orbis item.*

* * *

(4) *est puerilis se flammare frequenter ad iram;
sit se contentus tempore maior homo.*

* * *

(5) *quod potes, hoc facias bene, fortiter atque libenter;
nec te paeniteat quod nequit illud agi.*

* * *

(6) *res ipsae modo res, rerum modo motus inanis;
mens solus regnumst imperiumque tuum.*

* * *

Metre: Elegiac couplets

Translations:

- (1) Be patient of people's faults, but not your own.
- (2) Don't make plans that can't be realised.
- (3) You are not the centre of the universe.
- (4) Anger is a sign of immaturity – grow up.
- (5) Do the best you can and don't worry about the rest.
- (6) Shit happens – you are only responsible for yourself.

* * *

Alliterative Achilles

Hanna Mason, Samuel Howell and Chris de Lisle

Chris de Lisle writes: The Latin poetry composition group at Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand), which contains students from second year to postgraduate level, meets every Wednesday to write verse. Sometimes we produce something with which we are (not so) quietly chuffed. The current piece, inspired by the story of Niobe at *Iliad* 26.603 and fragments of Ennius, is one example:

*Pelides Priamo ploranti poplite prono:
 ‘Annuto. nemo nescit Niobae necopina
 dis duo dona decem. di, Delius atque Diana,
 Tantalides transfixerunt telo terebrante.
 in luteum lapidem lacrimosa illiberis illa
 mutata est. maeres modo motus imagine mortis
 sed satis est solaminis in saxo Sipyleo?’*

* * *

Metre: Alliterative Hexameters

Translation:

Peliad Achilles to Priam, prone, begging on his knees:
 ‘I assent. None know not Niobe's unexpected
 dozen gifts from the gods. Those deities, Delian Apollo and
 Diana,
 thrust through the Tantalides, her children, with tearing
 arrows.
 Childless, crying, she was converted into a crusty crag.
 Now you mourn, moved by the image of mortality,
 but is there solace enough in Sipylean stone?’

* * *

[See also *Communal Composition*, p.34 below]

Elegia Cohensis

James Houlihan

James Houlihan writes: This is my Latin version of a Leonard Cohen poem, using a Horatian meter [e.g. 1.11]. The Cohen original follows, after which is a literal translation.

*hunc ne quaesieris fluctibus in – quam gelidis! – altis
 qui cantu crepitant suaviter in montibus bratteae.
 sed caelestibus est non gradiendum ad loca frigida.
 ne circumspicias reliquias, mollia corpora,
 iratis in aquis. non lapides dant tibi sanguinem
 ullo littore vasto. in calido tu sale tumido
 amissum invenias qui cecidit per scopulos tardae
 virescentis aquae. illum basiant agmina piscium
 qui nidum peregrinum aedificant in corpore abs hieme
 trito et aequora quod fugiat – heu mobile! – brandeum.*

* * *

Metre: Fifth Asclepiad

English original:

Do not look for him
 In brittle mountain streams:
 They are too cold for any god;
 And do not examine the angry rivers
 For shreds of his soft body
 Or turn the shore stones for his blood;
 But in the warm salt ocean
 He is descending through cliffs
 Of slow green water
 And the hovering coloured fish
 Kiss his snow-bruised body
 And build their secret nests
 In his fluttering winding-sheet.

Literal translation:

You should not search for him in streams – how icy – high
that sweetly rattle with a song of gold foil in mountains.
Gods cannot walk to cold places.
You should not search for remains, a soft body,
in angry waters. Stones don't give you his blood
on any vast shore. You might in warm swelling saltwater
find the lost one who fell past rocks of slow
greening water. Formations of fish are kissing him
and building a peregrine nest in his winter-bruised body
and a funeral shroud – ah, wavering – to escape the sea.

* * *

Dormi, Mater

Lorenzo Viscido

Lorenzo Viscido writes: This poem is a short elegy in memory of my mother, who passed away last July.

*non iam pocillum, mater dilecta, cafei
te poterit somni soluere compedibus.*

*namque in perpetuum tua pallida lumina clausit
potio caelestis, dulce parata tibi.*

*nunc dormi, mater; numquam sed sola manebis
aeterna requie languida membra leuans.*

*cernere quam laeto cyparissus corde solebas
iamdudum tandem sit tua grata comes.*

* * *

Metre: Elegiacs

Translation:

No more, beloved mother, will a cup of coffee be able to
unchain you from the bonds of sleep.
In fact a heavenly drink, sweetly prepared for you, closed for
ever your pale eyes.
Now sleep, mother; but you'll never remain alone restoring
for all eternity your weak limbs.
A cypress, that for long time you used to watch with joy, will
finally be your lovable companion.

* * *

Iter Nauticum

(A polymetric poem)

Brad Walton

Brad Walton writes: This is an experiment at writing a poem which shifts from one metre to another. I have observed synaphea throughout, though I am not sure it was entirely necessary, except in the anapestic bit. The final section recalls those innumerable photographs, taken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of sailors dancing with each other on a boat deck, there being no women available.

*iam tergum trepidat maris.
 rauco gutture subdolae
 replent flamina gauiae,
 dum solis tremulum iubar
 frangunt pectore candido
 pendentes super undas.
 hoc pelagus scatet omnis originis
 aequoreis beluis: acipensere,
 mugile, pistrice, murice, sidere,
 locusta, polypo, testudine,
 balaena, thynno, torpedine,
 delphinis et hirudinibus.
 secat altum cita nauis
 patulumque radit aequor.
 salis aurae redolentes
 faciem comasque uerrunt.
 tenui tollitur aestus
 nebula ruente prora,*

*sociatur pluuiali
croceo phaselus arcu.
pedibus nudis tabulata premunt
nautae properi. tremulos funes
alii laxant, alii intendunt.
caua uela trahunt. malos superant
et ab aeria quaerunt specula
scopulos, syrtes, dubios latices.
celeramus per hiatus
ad Apollinem cadentem.
ferus aster in ocellos
iacit ultimas sagittas.
sub aquas numine merso
petimus uagas tenebras.
mare subter micat ater,
super ater alget axis.
nauta sub arcturo choreas agit,
expromptis citharis et carmine,
profuso Bromio et Cerealibus.
est gena iuncta genae, manui manus,
et medium leuiter corpus tenet
indiga palma nouae Cythereidos.
hic clausis oculis sui
saltat melliculi memor.
hic gaudens tenera premit
praesens delictum manu.
hic liuore dolens graui
diro saeuit amore.*

* * *

Metres:

- Lines 1-5: glyconics
- 6: pherecratean
- 7-11: dactylic tetrameter
- 12: dactylic tetrameter catalectic
- 13-20: alternating ionic dimeter and anacreontics
- 21-26: anapestic dimeter
- 27- 34: alternating ionic dimeter and anacreontics
- 35-40: dactylic tetrameter
- 41-45: glyconics
- 46: pherecratean.

Translation:

Sea Journey: Now the spine of the sea shivers. The crafty sea-gulls fill the wind with their strident cries while they break the shimmering sun beams against their white breasts, hovering over the waves. The ocean teems with marine creatures of every kind: sturgeon, mullets, sharks, murex, star fish, lobster, octopus, turtles, whales, tuna, sting rays, dolphins and leeches. The swift craft cuts the deep and skims over the surface of the sea. Salty breezes sweep one's face and hair. The swell is lifted into a fine mist by the speeding prow. The vessel is accompanied by a saffron rainbow. The busy sailors press the deck with their bare feet. Some relax the quivering ropes, others pull them tight. They draw in the billowing sails. They climb to the top of the masts to spot the rocks, shoals and doubtful waters from the crow's nest. We speed over the ocean chasm toward the west. The fierce sun fires his last rays into our eyes. With the god sunk beneath the water we head for the shifting darkness. Beneath us the black sea sparkles. Above us the black pole grows cold. Under Arcturus the sailors dance, having broken out the guitars and the songs, having poured out the wine and beer. A cheek is pressed to a cheek, a hand to a hand, and a palm aching for fresh romance lightly holds a waist. One dances with eyes closed, remembering his sweet heart. One ecstatically presses his love in person with his fond hand. One, smarting with oppressive jealousy simmers with ominous passion.

* * *

Tría Carmina

Paul Murgatroyd

Paul Murgatroyd writes: The second and third of these three poems need no comment. I got the inspiration for the first from the famous scene in the film *Spartacus* where, after the big battle, Spartacus is demanded by the victorious Romans and before he can identify himself many of his men get up and say “I’m Spartacus” – I’ve taken that down to his grave(s)!

(1) *Ego Sum Spartacus*

*Spartacus hic situs est, immiti marte peremptus;
praedator, miles, dux, gladiator erat.*

*Spartacus hic situs est, immiti marte peremptus;
praedator, miles, dux, gladiator erat.*

*Spartacus hic situs est, immiti marte peremptus;
praedator, miles, dux, gladiator erat.*

* * *

(2) *Medusa*

*cum nitido clipeo Perseus incedit et ense,
sed grauis horrendam Gorgona somnus habet.
illius in somnis incedens pulcher amator
letiferam faciem conspicit et superest.*

* * *

(3) *Anus*

*deflet anus ueneranda legens Nasonis Amores,
quae quondam placuit, quaeque Corinna fuit.*

* * *

Metre: Elegiacs

Translations:

(1) Here lies Spartacus, killed by cruel war; he was a robber, soldier, a leader, a gladiator etc.

(2) With his bright shield and sword Perseus advances, but a deep sleep holds the dreadful Gorgon. In her dream a handsome lover advancing [=comes to her and] looks at her deadly face and survives.

(3) While she reads Ovid's *Amores*, tears are shed by a venerable old lady, who was once attractive, and who was Corinna.

* * *

Q. Horatii Flacci Lyra Limerica

Timothy Adès

Timothy Adès writes: This is an extract from an after-dinner speech I gave to the Horatian Society in September 2012, the year of the bicentenary of Edward Lear. Lear and Horace had much in common. They were not tall or thin, they were close to the head of state, they lived modestly, they wrote about food and drink. Above all, the alcaic metre is rather like the limerick. T. E. Page says in the Little Red Schoolbook: 'It is especially used when a lofty and dignified tone is assumed.' More of these alcaic limericks can be found on the Brindin website, <http://www.brindin.com>.

*'heus, nonne no? no! nat mea trabs,' ait
uir lintre uectus; praetereuntium
cui turba: 'tu non nas'. recessit
deficiens miserandum in alueum.*

There was an Old Man in a boat,
Who said 'I'm afloat! I'm afloat!'
When they said 'No! you ain't!'
He was ready to faint,
That unhappy Old Man in a boat.

* * *

*Icenus, annis nempe senilibus
marcens, 'id hoc est', inquit, 'et hoc id est.'
cum 'quid, quod?' aut 'quod, quid?' rogarent,
desiluit capiturque fossa.*

There was an Old Person of Diss,
Who said, 'It is this! It is this!'
When they said, 'What?' or 'Which?'
He jumped into a ditch,
Which absorbed that Old Person of Diss.

* * *

*raucis cothurnis, improbe Cornoui,
crepide crocis. 'num corio crepis?
quonamue?' sic horrent canoras
carbatinas Viroconienses.*

There was an Old Man of the Wrekin
Whose shoes made a horrible creaking;
But they said 'Tell us whether
Your shoes are of leather,
Or of what, you Old Man of the Wrekin?'

* * *

FEATURES

Who? What? Where?

Barry Baldwin has been finding Anglo-Latin poets in the unlikeliest of places

As adumbrated in my début *Vates* piece [I:22], any consideration of the history of Anglo-Latin poetry must start with the *Musae Anglicanae* (1940; repr. 1966, ‘digitized’ 2009) of American Leicester Bradner (1899-1953), who also (1953, with C. A. Lynch) edited the Latin poems of Sir Thomas More. Especially his 27-page Appendix listing published Anglo-Latin poems, both by individuals and in collections from Eton, Oxford, and a host of other sources.

Bradner began with the cheery aim of treating this genre as ‘a branch of the literature of England’, but ended gloomily: ‘We may safely conclude that its course is finished’, his obituary for what a *TLS* reviewer (April 10, 1992) dubbed ‘that peculiarly English phenomenon’. *Vates*, of course, triumphantly refutes this Cassandra-like prophecy.

Start, but not finish. Bradner’s boundaries were 1500-1925, thus ignoring the rich vein of mediaeval Latin verse. Women are also notably absent. Two gaps admirably filled by Jane Stevenson’s *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2005), in particular the chapter on ‘Women and Latin in Early Modern England’.

Talking of the Eighteenth Century, Edward Cave’s *Gentleman’s Magazine* played host to countless Latin verses (less frequently, Greek), ranging from big names like Samuel Johnson to Anonymous (how many women concealed here?). In the journals (*Thraliana*) of Johnson’s long-time and long-suffering hostess and friend Hester Thrale, bits and bobs of Latin verse are frequently

included, being sent or shown to her by young gentlemen of the town – nowadays, one hopes they'd offer these to *Vates*.

Likewise, nowadays bits and bobs of Latin verse may crop up anywhere. In one of her famous *Times* blogs, Mary Beard's (*All in a Don's Day*, 2012, 238) disquisition on causes of the Trojan War provoked the comment *Unde malum? a malo* ('The source of the evil? An apple') from one Oliver Nicholson. This in turn generated the following gem from a Michael Bulley:

*De malo bonus est iocus hic quem scripsit Oliver
Nam malus peperit mala tulitque mala.*

'This Apple joke by Oliver is a good one, for the apple tree produced apples and brought evils.'

– a heady combination of metrics and puns, one leading me to speculate that, had Roman kiddies gone out on Halloween Night, their cry would have been *Aut mala aut mala!*

Bradner (who indeed edited her poems) might have started with a royal flush, Queen Elizabeth I's riposte to the poetic address by German humanist/poet/musician Paul Melissus, who sportingly included it in the 1580 collection of his own Latin verses. No space here for his effort, which along with the full story can be read in James E. Phillips' 'Elizabeth I as a Latin Poet', *Renaissance News* 16 (1963), 289-298 (available on-line).

Her Queenly elegiacs, headed *Reginae Responsum* runs thus:

*Grata Camena tua est, gratissima dona, Melisse:
Gratior est animi dulcis imago tui
At quae tanta movet te causa, quis impetus urget,
Es homine ingenuo servus ut esse velis?
Haud nostrum est arctis vates includere septis,
Aut vel tantillum deminuisse caput.*

*Tu potius liber fieres, laxante patrona
 Vincula, si famula conditione fores.
 Sed vatum es princeps; ego vati subdita, dum me
 Materiam celsi carminis ipse legis.
 Quem regum pudeat tantum coluisse Poetam,
 Nos ex semideis qui facit esse deos?*

Your song is welcome, Melissus, most welcome your gift, more welcome is the sweet image of your spirit. But what cause so great moves you, what impulse urges, that you, a free-born man, desire to be a slave? It is by no means our custom to keep poets within narrow confines, or to restrict their rights even in the smallest degree. Rather, you would be made free, if you were a slave, your patroness loosening the bonds. But you are prince of poets, I a subject to a poet when you choose me as the theme of your lofty verse. What king would it shame to cherish such a poet, who makes us from demigods to be gods? [Phillips' translation.]

Does the second Elizabeth's Latin extend beyond *annus horribilis*?

Another lady Bradner might have included was Samuel Johnson's blue-stocking friend Elizabeth Carter, praised by him for being as good at making puddings as translating Epictetus, equally adept at trading Greek and Latin epigrams with him in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*; cf. for details my Johnson edition (London, 1995, 45-52). also her notice in the *Dictionary of British Classicists* (Bristol, 2004, vol. 1, 156-157).

Assessing Herbert Huxley's *Musa Hodierna Carmina: MCMLXIII*, (Manchester, 1963), C. W. Baty (*Classical Review* 14, 1964, 334-345) pointed out the absence of women from its twenty-six contributors, observing that this is 'probably no inherent defect, but the result of a later start and shorter teaching time in girls' schools that makes feminine distinction in metrical study very rare, though when it occurs it can be outstanding' – how many women have contributed to *Vates*? [A respectable few, I think – Ed.]

In my aforementioned essay, I talked about Huxley's later solo effort, *Corolla Camenae* (Victoria, 1969), also the extraordinarily versatile and witty verses of A. D. Godley (too briefly treated by Bradner, 344), including his macaronic poem 'The Motor Bus'. I here take the chance to subjoin Huxley's succulent 'Mars Bar', dedicated to Godley, published in the *London Association of Classical Teachers' Newsletter* (1975):

*Est praedulcis esu Mars-Bar,
 Nil est cibo tuo, Mars, par.
 Tunc vis beatum larem?
 Habe promptum Martem-Bartem.
 Captus dono Martis Baris
 Helenam liquisset Paris.
 Dum natabunt ponto scari,
 dentur laudes Marti-Bari.*

'The Mars Bar is very sweet to eat, nothing can equal your food, Mars. Do you want a divinely lovely treat? Go grab a Mars Bar. Had Paris been seduced by the gift of a Mars Bar, he'd have dumped Helen. As long as the parrot-wrasse shall swim in the sea, All Praise to the Mars Bar!'

I now hope to see in *Vates* a cognate tribute to Kit-Kat.

In his warm reception (*Classical Review* 55, 1941, 98-100), noted Petronian bibliographer and epicure Sir Stephen Gaselee approvingly observes 'Calverley is not neglected', before gently taking Bradner to task for omitting the Latin poems of the fourth Lord Lyttleton, Gladstone's translation of *Rock of Ages*, the verses of Sir Henry Halford (physician to Charles II), and *Lucretilla*. In fact, Bradner gave somewhat short thrift to Calverley (1831-1884), who ranged from satire on Cambridge life in his Horatianly-titled *Carmen Saeculare* to an hexameter epic on Australia, not (I dare say) a source for the recent epic film of that name – quick, what's

the Latin for ‘Fair Dinkum’? There was a good deal more to be said, the place to find it being the on-line essay ‘A Few Still Later Words on Translating Homer (and Horace, and Tupper, and Tennyson, and St. Thomasius), or C. S. Calverley and the Victorian Parodic’ by Patrick Scott – not the snappiest of titles, I agree.

The Latin verses of Halford, Lyttleton, and many more can be read in two massive anonymous survey articles (unmentioned by Bradner), ‘Modern English Latin Verse’ in *The Dublin University Magazine* 48 (August 1856, 189-203) and ‘Recent Latin Verse’ in *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 37 (June 20, 1874, 781-792): two journals rescued from obscurity by electronic reproduction. Thanks to Ms Google, one can also trawl around other recondite collections, e.g the large number of Latin verses held in the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office.

Gladstone’s Latinised *Rock of Ages* is also easily available on-line in *Littell’s Living Age* 155 (2004). First published in *The Guardian*, reprinted 20 years later in *The Spectator*, it was said by the latter’s editor to have been ‘almost an impromptu’. Far too long to quote in full, it kicks off *Jesus, pro me perforatus*. When Canadian linguist Silus Tertius Rand (not a common style of name in these parts) opened his version with *Rupes Saeculorum te*, Gladstone at once wrote him a letter saying ‘I at once admit that your version is more exact than mine’.

Lucretilis: Pleasant Hill of Horace (full title) means the collection of William Johnson Cory’s Latin verses. There’s a 1982 paperback translation by Don Wilson, also the 1951 edition by celebrated (not least for his exegesis on buggery at the trial of *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*) Warden of All Souls, John Sparrow. Hardly a coincidence that in 1963 (‘digitized’, 2009) Eton College should produce *Lucretilis: an introduction to the art of writing Latin lyric verse*.

In my début essay, I also alluded to the ‘Apology for the Practice of Latin Verse Composition,’ originally published by C. J.

Ellingham in *Greece & Rome* 4 (1935), 151-159, of which he was then joint editor, now electronically brought into the public domain, thus allowing me to quote the central passage in its eloquent entirety:

‘As I battled with this wind, miserable and blue-nosed, I reflected that if – which heaven forfend – I had had to write a copy of verses about it, I should have called it *Eurus*, coupled with the most horrific epithet to be found in the *Gradus*; further, that it was a pity that no one had ever thought of names for the golfing winds. The names of the winds, that one used in doing Latin Verses, gave one a distinct picture of their different personalities, even if it were not quite the same picture that a Roman young gentleman would have had. One thought of them, I am afraid, not as blowing from any particular quarter, but as fitting into a particular part of those jig-saw puzzles called Hexameters and Pentameters. Thus those two entirely opposite characters, *Boreas* and *Zephyrus*, seemed to me rather like one another in that they were both sulky, disagreeable creatures who declined to help one in one’s utmost need, namely, in getting the end of the line first. They would do no more than fill some position in the middle. That is to be a fair weather friend indeed, since every one knows that when you have got your tag for the end the deuce is in it if you cannot fit in the rest somehow. *Eurus* and *Auster* were far more obliging; they were good, willing fellows, who would lend a hand anywhere in reason if you were not too fussily particular about the sense. *Favonius* was not trustworthy. As long as he was only wanted to serve in a hexameter he was friendly and useful, but try to use him in a pentameter, and he would plant his four feet firmly on the ground like an obstinate mule so that nothing could be done with him.’

Phew! One feels positively winded after all that. For a sometimes similarly exuberant approach, compare C. Granville Gepp’s *Progressive Exercises in Latin Elegiac Verse* (London, 1904 – online). Actually, you could squeeze Mister Favonius into a pentameter by planting him between a trochee and a monosyllable. Ellingham taught Classics and English at the City of London School, as did the distinguished Greek metrician F. R. Dale. He was the favourite teacher of Kingsley Amis, albeit the latter sensed in later years that this feeling was not reciprocal. Amis did Greek

and Latin to a high level at school, planning to read Classics at Oxford until a last-minute switch to English. But Greek and Latin stayed with him all his life, suffusing his novels; cf. my ‘Classic Amis,’ *Classical & Modern Literature* 26 (2006), 1-11; electronic version on the *Shattercolors* (literary magazine) website. Amis will have written many a Latin verse. Any chance some may be kicking around in old exercise books? One wonders the same about P. G. Wodehouse who says in a letter that at Dulwich he ‘did reams of Greek and Latin verse and enjoyed it more than any other work’. Likewise with Raymond Chandler, also at Dulwich (though never crossing paths with Wodehouse), who attributed his acclaimed English prose style to the school’s classical training. It would be hard to think of more persuasive horses’ mouths for the value of verse composition than the creators of Lucky Jim, Jeeves, and Philip Marlowe.

Retreating to the nineteenth century, we are on surer ground with the author of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass*, and all those other unforgettable stories and verses. On November 25, 1844, when he was a twelve-year-old schoolboy at Richmond Grammar, Master Charles Dodgson copied into his Diary these verses on the subject of Evening:

*Phoebus aqua splendet descendens, aequora tingens
 Splendore aurato. Pervenit umbra solo.
 Mortales lectos quaerunt, et membra relaxant
 Fessa labore dies; cuncta per orbe silet.
 Imperium placidum nunc sumit Phoebe corusca
 Antris procedunt sanguine ore ferae.*

‘Phoebus glows as he sinks in the water, colouring the seas with his gilded splendour. Darkness comes upon the earth. Mortals seek their beds and relax their limbs wearied by the toil of the day; all things around the world fall silent. Now shimmering Phoebe wields her restful power, the blood-flecked wild animals emerge from their caves’.

Vates readers need no help from me in pointing out Master Dodgson's howlers.

And so, by deliberate finale, to Dodgson-Carroll's acquaintance-cum-friend, Alfred Lord Tennyson. I cheerfully admit to some bias here, Tennyson being the greatest (and only?) poet produced in my native Lincolnshire – passing by Lincoln Cathedral everyday on my way to school, I saw his statue with (in best HMV style) faithful dog His mature poetry was steeped in the Classics, as well shown in A. A. Markley's *Stateliest Measures: Tennyson and the Literature of Greece and Rome* (Toronto, 2004). Tennyson must have had his fill of Latin verses at Louth Grammar – I'd like to think he read them aloud in his distinctive and carefully preserved Lincolnshire accent. You won't find any in Bradner. Peter Levi in his 1993 biography of Tennyson (p. 35) writes:

'His 1820 Notebook was 64 pages labelled Vol.1 The Poetry of Tennyson, Vol. 2 The Lyrical Poetry of Tennyson, Vol. 3 The Prose Writings of Tennyson, but (my emphasis) *its contents were all Latin elegiacs*. Levi does not make it clear whether these were Tennyson's schoolboy efforts (he was eleven at the time) or transcriptions of classical poems. Neither does Philip Henderson, *Tennyson, The Poet and Prophet* (London, 1978, p. 7) who says 'The Notebook is in Latin, with Greek and English headings, in various metres: elegiacs, Sapphics, Alcaics.'

Note the discrepancy over metres between Levi and Henderson (both deceased, hence unavailable for comment by normal methods of communication, and I am no hand at séances). Original compositions are surely the better bet. As said, they will have (typically) dominated the curriculum at Louth Grammar, and Tennyson did own an 1815 manual for tyro versifiers entitled *Exempla Moralia, or third book of new English examples to be rendered into Latin, adapted to the rules of Latin grammar, lately printed for the use of youth*.

It may be subjoined here that E. C. Wickham, eventually Dean of Lincoln Cathedral, enclosed in his 1877 edition of Horace sent to Tennyson as a gift a letter containing his Latin and Greek renditions of the latter's *Frater Ave atque Vale* – a Lordly compliment, indeed.

Levi acknowledged help from Dr G. A. Knight of the Lincolnshire Archives, and from the 'hard-worked' librarian of the Tennyson Research Centre, Miss Gates. I have been kindly informed (e-mails, October 17 & 22, 2012) by Grace Timmins, Collections Access Officer at the Lincoln-based Tennyson Research Centre that this Notebook is probably among the Tennysonianana held in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. So, I next e-mailed there for information. Mr Jonathan Smith advised me that they do not have it. He suggested that it could be in the Houghton Library at Harvard. Its archivist, Heather Cole, thought it might be there, but could not immediately find any trace. She suggested Yale's Beinecke Library, but no sign in the on-line inventory of its Tennysonianana, these being mainly the poet's correspondence. Of course, as a few minutes of 'Googling' shows, Tennyson's papers are strewn across many other institutional libraries, and we should not forget private collections.

So, thanks to the insouciance of Henderson and Levi – both imply they had seen this Notebook but neither bothered to say where – we are left with a right little palaeo-Tennyson, neo-Latin mystery, perhaps suitably concluding an article with three question marks in its title.

NB: After writing this, Grace Timmins passed on a suggestion by fellow-expert Aidan Day that the source for this Notebook may be the 1949 biography (page 33) by Charles Tennyson. It certainly seems to be Henderson's, whose account is a close (unacknowledged) paraphrase. Charles Tennyson further describes the thing as, 'an early relic, an MS volume, an unbound quarto notebook of about sixty-three pages'. This does not explain Levi's different metrical information. Perhaps, a simple error. Levi was frequently criticized for his slap-dashery. I

have found many errors (some crass) in his books on Horace and Virgil, on whose re-issues (2012) I have just written a detailed review-article for the American *Classical Bulletin*. Blast his eyes, as Henderson and Levi, Charles Tennyson does not tell us where this elusive Notebook was.

* * *

Communal Composition

Chris de Lisle on the collective art of Latin poetry composition at
Victoria University of Wellington

Since February of 2012, a dozen or so students of Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand) have met weekly to compose Latin poetry. While we are strongly supported by the university faculty, the group itself is entirely student-run and voluntary: the members range from second year undergraduates, through to Master's students and junior Latin tutors. This article explains what we do, how we do it, and why it's worthwhile.

Every Wednesday afternoon, as many of us as can make it gather in a room with lots of whiteboards, lots of dictionaries and lots of snacks. I bring along a sheet outlining the week's metre, and another with a summary of a short myth and vocab which has struck me as potentially useful. Recent examples include Bacchus and the pirates, the story of Niobe, and Horatius Cocles's stand on the Sublician Bridge. Once we're all gathered, we sit down, and think about what sort of thing we would like to write based on the myth of the day, sketching out a basic plotline. Then we draw the metre for a first line up on the board and start trying to fit things in. Suggestions are made, holes are poked and prodded, new suggestions are made, victory is declared ... prematurely, as a new hole is noted. Once the first line is finally done, we move onto the second, starting with everything that we couldn't fit into the first line, and the process continues. Progress tends to be very unpredictable; sometimes a whole line or more flows out at once, such as this Sapphic stanza, which took forty-five minutes or less:

*Ut leaena agrestis in aspera ora
conspicit ceruum, tremula sub ulmo,*

*sola Cadmeium iuuenem spicit Di-
-ana recumbens.*

‘As a wild lioness in rough country
spies a deer, under a quivering elm,
is the Theban kid seen by lone
Diana at rest.’

(Sapphic: Hanna Mason, Chris de Lisle)

At other times, we might stall on a single foot for an hour, as occurred in the case of this elegiac couplet, which took hours and hours:

*Codiculis elephas minimis puditus lacrimabit
cum mus immensum penem iterum reteget.*

The elephant, ashamed of its tiny tail, wept
when the mouse revealed its enormous appendage once more.’
*(Elegiac Couplet: Cameron Stanton, Zach Smith, Hanna Mason,
Christabel Marshall, Sam Howell, Dan Diggins, Chris de Lisle)*

The latter experience is very frustrating. Since the whole process runs on enthusiasm, if a foot has the group beaten and people don't want to be there any more, it is time to stop. Even without a recalcitrant foot, the group's enthusiasm rarely lasts more about two hours. If the group tries to soldier on after this point, things just stop happening and people get increasingly less happy – it is better to stop and let the poem rest, to be reviewed with fresh eyes the next week, at which point, sometimes, it all just falls into place. If that means that only one or two lines get written, then that is ok (When working on the *Georgics*, Vergil himself managed only a line a day!). If calling it a day means that the lines written aren't very good, then that too is ok. The point is not to write a lot, the point is just to write in Latin.

To begin with, we all worked on each poem together, as a single group. As the group grew, this stopped working – some would

cluster all around the board, and the rest would all get bored. The elephant and mouse poem above was one such. To avoid that issue, we began to split into multiple smaller groups of about three or four, each focussing on their own whiteboard. I try to split these up so that each group has people at a range of levels. The more advanced students have more vocab, and generally more experience of Latin, but the less advanced students often have specific declensions and quantities fresher in their minds. Together they're able to work rather efficiently, with the advanced students serving as the furnace, and the less advanced ones chucking things in, or noticing problems, as they are able to – which quickly turned out to be quite a bit. This sort of group arrangement is, therefore, mutually beneficial – the advanced students get to revise basic grammar and explain concepts, while the less advanced students can get to terms with complex concepts like metre through practical application.

When all is done, we proudly hand a copy to a particularly enthusiastic member of the faculty, Dr Simon Perris, and ask him to take a look through for mistakes grammatical and quantitative. He returns our erstwhile ‘masterpiece’ with effusive apologies for comments which crush whole lines, such as, ‘*vir* scans short’, ‘*malo homini* is going to elide’, or ‘present participles are *i*-stems’. Fixing these things up is an educational exercise in itself – and tends to make the errors memorable, particularly when they are silly ones like, *transibat Tiberis mares fluentes* ‘he was crossing the flowing men of the Tiber’, where, in our excitement at finally completing a difficult hendecasyllable line, we have forgotten that *mare* is neuter.¹

Initially we made use of a couple of old verse composition manuals, but we found them problematic. They often have a very narrow view of what qualifies as ‘good Latin’; Lupton's *Lyric Verse*

¹ I must note that we have been known to skip this step – if any infelicities remain in the exemplars in this article, then the blame for that must lie with us.

Composition, for example, limits ‘weight of authority’ for Latin lyric not just to Horace, but to those later books of his *Odes*, which ‘bear the sanction of his riper judgement’². Such books do have their uses, however; their prescriptive outlines of scansion, intended for a composer, can be much more convenient than more descriptive modern analyses, generally intended for readers and analysts. On the other hand, the exercises in these books, which usually expect the student to translate eighteenth-century English pastoral poetry into Latin, did not work for us at all. The ‘correct’ answers were often rather unlikely: Lupton wishes that Wordsworth's ‘the snow hath retreated, and now it doth fare ill’ be translated with ‘the snow... has managed its affairs badly’. More seriously, we found these books constricting. Their subject matter – odes to the English countryside – is not very interesting to a group of New Zealand Latin students. We found ourselves having much more fun once we started writing poetry our own poetry which reflected our own particular concerns:

*Nestore garrulior, probior sapiente Ithacense,
fortior et Phrygio, fecit iter tenebras.
occaso tumido, malas nolite notare,
caedere uestitus dilacerare comas!
et tu, tam tenebris tacitis tantis, terebrate
per nubes humiles nunc cade tartareas!
fracte supinabis cum Ixione Aeolidaque,
at uerbis, tecum illic sumus, O Cicero!*

‘One more talkative than Nestor, more honest than that wise Ithacan,
braver than even the Phrygian, has made the journey to the
shadows.

With the bombastic one fallen, don't scratch your cheeks,
cut your clothes, or tear your hair!

As for you, in such great silent shadows, torn apart,

2 Lupton, *Latin Lyric Verse Composition*, xxiii.

now fall through low clouds to Tartarus!
 Broken, you will lie with Ixion and Sisyphus,
 but through your words, we are there with you, O Cicero!
*(Elegiac Couplets: Hanna Mason, Sam Howell, Dan Diggins,
 Chris de Lisle)*

... Our particular concerns aren't necessarily always very nice, I suppose.

But why work in groups at all? Poetry is not traditionally a communal activity. Neither is Latin learning: particularly at the university level, the student prepares texts alone, studies vocab alone, and writes essays alone. As a student progresses through Latin courses the writing exercises increasingly take a back-seat, and Latin study becomes more and more of a passive activity – reading texts and responding to them. Our poetry composition group bucks both of these trends: it is group work and it is creative activity. Among other things, the group forces action; where an individual working alone might well give up on a difficult foot or postpone verse composition indefinitely under the weight of his or her studies, a group which has gathered specifically to compose poetry has more reason to keep trying. Such enthusiasm is contagious – what was initially intended to be a one-time meeting has lasted all year and seems set to continue indefinitely; there has even been talk of a Greek poetry composition group to mirror it.

Has the group been a worthwhile use of two hours a week? We've certainly had fun, but whether it has been good for our Latin is perhaps best judged by some of our recent pieces. At the start of this year, many of us did not know what metre was, or how it worked. By the end of the year we were producing pieces with which we were not-at-all-quietly chuffed, such as the alliterative hexameter featured in this issue, or this little homage to Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, produced by two students who only began studying Latin in 2011:

*O Caesar vincis non victus. lenior ullo
Pompeiano tu es, ut narras omnibus vero.
ac mihi gavisus, vos clementes, ut amicis,
hostibus, hinc potes, ignoto a te, fīdere Bruto!*

‘O Caesar, you win and are unbeaten.
More lenient than any Pompeian you are, as you tell to all truly.
And in me (who has rejoiced that you are merciful to enemies
as to friends having been pardoned by you) you may trust – Brutus.’
(Dactylic Hexameters: Zach Smith, Chris de Lisle)

* * *

[See also *Alliterative Achilles*, p.13 above]

Geoffrey's Marvellous Merlin

Mark Walker on how a twelfth-century Anglo-Latin epic might provide some unexpected inspiration



Merlin dictating to Blaise, from an ms. of Robert de Boron's *Merlin en Prose*, c.1300

A work that on first reading has been judged to be 'incoherent, uncertain in mood, unaccountable ... and baffling'¹, might be an odd choice to adopt as one's model for how to write Latin verse, but Geoffrey of Monmouth's little-known and still less appreciated *Vita Merlini* has much to teach us aspiring Latin poets about how to find our own style while remaining within the hallowed tradition of classical versifying.

Geoffrey's was an original voice and his 1500-line epic poem *Vita Merlini*, written in generally correct hexameters (probably sometime around the year 1150), is not obviously indebted for either style or content to its Roman predecessors. Unlike much Neo-Latin verse of later centuries, which set out consciously to imitate classical models, Geoffrey's poem is a true one-off. As A. J. Rigg puts it,

The *Vita Merlini* is a remarkable work. Geoffrey has created setting, characters, and plot almost *de novo*, an unusual achievement for a medieval writer².

We can perhaps better appreciate Geoffrey's achievement if we contrast his work with that of a near-contemporary, Joseph of Exeter (fl. 1184), who modelled his own epic poetry on ancient

sources: Joseph's *De bello Troiano*, in six books, commences with the Judgment of Paris and chronicles the familiar events of the Trojan War. But, as F. J. E. Raby notes, his work never escapes from the constraints imposed by this choice of subject and by his Silver Latin style³. Geoffrey on the other hand, though he may not have been as fine a stylist as Joseph, manages to provide his readers with something quite fresh:

The whole poem is written solely for the delight of the reader. This is its virtue; it is a collection of tales, not too carefully composed, but presenting matter which is a blessed change from imitations of classical tales or outworn moralizings⁴.

In an age such as ours that prizes innovation in artistic endeavour, Geoffrey's originality is probably the poem's chief recommendation for modern critics:

It is so original that it is hard to point to any precedent, certainly not in 'mediaeval romance'. This is all later than the *Vita*, which also is without the love element. It is assuredly very unlike the Germanic epic, and equally unlike the *chansons de geste*, even the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*; or the classical epic or Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and their mediaeval posterity⁵.

Uniquely Geoffrey drew inspiration instead from native British (i.e. Welsh) sources, specifically the so-called Lailoken Fragments and the tales of Myrddin Gwyllt, 'Mryddin the Wild'⁶.

He does introduce a certain amount of classical learning into the poem, much of it derived indirectly from later sources⁷ – Isidore of Seville's encyclopaedic *Etymologiae*, for example – using whatever resources were available at Oxford, where he spent most of his life, a place which was, 'no doubt well furnished with such helps to learning as were available in England in those times'⁸.

But although in his far more famous prose *Historia Regum Britanniae* Geoffrey quotes occasionally from classical authors, for

example Lucan and Juvenal, the *Vita Merlini* itself is largely devoid of specific classical references – there are, in fact, only two direct quotations, both from Ovid¹⁰. He does, however, include some indirect classical allusions. Tatlock¹¹ notes that the opening lines of the *Vita*:

*fatidici uatis rabiem musamque iocosam
Merlini cantare paro ... [1-2]*

'I am preparing to sing of the madness of Merlin and his mischievous muse ...'

may echo Horace *Odes* III.3, specifically lines 69-70, *non hoc iocosae conueniet lyrae / quo, Muas, tendis?* ... ('This subject does not suit the playful lyre / What are you aiming at, Muse?'). And I can't help wondering if Geoffrey was also recalling, albeit faintly, Ovid's witty beginning to *Amores* 1.1:

*arma graui numero uiolentaque bella parabam
edere ... [1-2]*

'I was preparing to tell in solemn measure of arms and violent wars ...'

Geoffrey's unexpected *iocosam* at the opening of a hexameter epic certainly promises something playful in the Ovidian line. We could perhaps read Geoffrey's *musam ... iocosam Merlini* as 'a facetious poem about Merlin'. As Tatlock also observed, this phrase might very well be the key to understanding Geoffrey's purpose – he is not to be taken too seriously:

In contrast with the unique condensation and organization of the *Historia* and its serious factual claims, the *Vita* is loose and rambling, states in its very first line that it is to be entertaining, and with its irresponsibility and freedom from tendency throughout, is as good as its word¹².

I am not quite so sure that the *Vita* is as loose and incoherent as claimed, nor that the various disquisitions on the wonders of nature that occupy much of the poem's second half are the 'irrelevant' digressions that some commentators (including Tatlock¹³) have assumed them to be. Structurally the poem falls into a number of discrete episodes – for my own English verse translation (see Bibliography) I subdivided the poem into chapters – but there is, I think, an overarching narrative purpose. Rather like Lucretius before him, Geoffrey gives us pages of didactic 'scientific' discourse, but he is also careful to balance these with episodes that advance the narrative. That narrative is not, as in the *Odyssey* or *Aeneid*, a literal journey – though Merlin does wander around rather a lot it has to be said – instead it is more a spiritual and philosophical journey of one man's soul from grief and madness at the outset to enlightened contentment at the end, contentment achieved through the acquisition of knowledge, specifically knowledge about the wonders of the natural world.

Geoffrey's is a humanist perspective, with a humanist emphasis on learning and what we would today call empirical science – there is very little either of a specifically Christian or even a sacred character in the work. Even Merlin's apparently 'magical' prophetic gifts are set in the context of other miracles of nature, as detailed in discourses with the equally learned bard Taliesin. Such knowledge is the key to unlocking the secrets of the universe, and hence these discussions have an important role to play in the poem. Merlin's madness gives him an abnormally heightened understanding of God's design for the world and hence an ability to make prophecies. For if the world and everything in it is indeed ordained by God, then by a careful study of nature it should in principle be possible to discover God's plan. And this is precisely what Merlin, his senses magnified by madness, seems able to do. And when Merlin is at last cured by drinking the waters of a

spring, this preternatural sensitivity deserts him, much to his relief: there is, it seems, such a thing as *too much* knowledge¹⁴.

But what of Geoffrey's Latin – which is, after all, our main interest here? As a specimen, the following brief extract will give a taste. It occurs near the opening of the poem: Merlin, who is described as a king now as well as the prophet of the earlier prose history (*rex erat et uates*, 21), after engaging in battle with the Scottish king Gwenddoleu, is driven mad by grief having witnessed the death in battle of three brothers:

deplangitque uiros nec cessat fundere fletus, 65
pulueribus crines sparsit uestesque rescidit
et prostratus humi nunc hac illacque uolutat.
solatur Peredurus eum proceresque ducesque,
nec uult solari nec uerba precantia ferre.
iam tribus emensis defleuerat ille diebus 70
respueratque cibos, tantus dolor usserat illum,
inde nouas furias, cum tot tantisque querelis
aera complesseset, cepit furtimque recedit
et fugit ad siluas, nec uult fugiundo uideri,
ingrediturque nemus gaudetque latere sub ornis 75
miraturque feras pascentes gramina saltus;
nunc has insequitur, nunc cursu preterit illas.
utitur herbarum radicibus, utitur herbis,
utitur arboreo fructu morisque rubeti;
fit silvester homo quasi siluis deditus esset. 80
inde per estatem totam nullique repertus
oblitusque sui cognatorumque suorum

delituit siluis obductus more ferino.
at cum uenit hiems herbasque tulisset et omnes
arboreos fructus nec quo fruere haberet 85
diffudit tales miseranda uoce querelas:
 ‘Celi Christe Deus quid agam, qua parte morari
 terrarum potero cum nil quo uescar adesse?’ [65-88]



The image of *Merlinus Silvestris*, Merlin of the woods, survives in later versions of the story.

‘And [Merlin] mourns the men, nor ceasing to pour out tears, he sprinkled his hair with dust and ripped off his clothes and lying flat on the ground he rolls now this way now that. Peredur comforts him, as do the nobles and dukes, but he desires neither solace nor to endure their supplicatory words. By now he had lamented for three days entire and had refused food, such great grief had consumed him. From that time on, after he had filled the air with so many and such great laments, he suffered a new madness and stealthily withdrew and fled to the woods, nor does he wish to be seen while fleeing, and he enters the forest and rejoices to skulk beneath the ash trees and marvels at the beasts grazing on the grass of the glade; now he follows them, now he passes by them at a run. He consumes the roots of plants, he consumes the plants, he consumes the fruit of the trees and the blackberries from the bramble bush; he becomes a man of the woods as though devoted to the woods. From then on during the whole summer he was discovered by no one and forgetful of himself and of his own kindred he hid himself in the woods, clothed in

the manner of a wild beast. But when winter came and it had carried off the plants and all the fruits of the trees and he could not enjoy what he had, he poured forth such complaints as these in a pitiable voice: “O Christ God of heaven, what shall I do? In which part of the earth will I be able to remain since there is nothing here that I can eat?”

This is vivid storytelling, but with abrupt shifts in both narrative and tone. Merlin is stricken with grief over the death of three young brothers on the battlefield – but why his grief should lead to madness and a precipitate flight to the forest is not clear. The slain knights are *tresque ducis fratres* [34], presumably the brothers of Merlin’s ally Peredur, king of North Wales (*dux uenedotorum*, 26), though again this is not entirely clear. Merlin mourns excessively for three whole days [70] even refusing food [71], until a new

madness [72] seizes him suddenly and he flees from his companions to live the life of a Wild Man of the Woods [80]. Once there his rejoicing in the delights of nature proves short-lived as the onset of winter deprives him of sustenance.

The novelty of Geoffrey's treatment is apparent in this unexpected shift of scene. We are expecting a war narrative as the poem opens – *iamque dies aderat bello prefixa* [28], 'and already the day appointed for war was at hand' – but after only a few lines of battle description in which the three youths are summarily killed, the focus becomes fixed on Merlin and his extreme grief leading to the onset of madness. No sooner is he in the forest than his former role as king and leader of his people (*iura dabat populis*, 22) is forgotten and he becomes a feral creature (*obductus more ferino*, 83). Initially Merlin rejoices and rushes about in the forest with the wild animals [75-77], but Geoffrey is careful to specify exactly what he has available to eat [78-79] and soon Merlin finds that winter has robbed him of his brief contentment [84-85].

Here, then, is Geoffrey's *iocosam musam* in action: Merlin, introduced in dignified fashion as *rex* and *uates*, now transformed into a wild creature (*silvester homo*) clothed only in animal skins, picking berries from the bushes, forgetful of himself and all his kin [82] – a bizarre and whimsical scene that Geoffrey terminates as abruptly as he introduced it: sylvan idyll to wintry desolation in two lines [84-85]. Poor mad Merlin is not the master of his own destiny but is wholly at the mercy of external forces, not the least of which is the author of the poem himself.

Geoffrey's metre is the classical hexameter with remarkably few false quantities and without any obvious 'medievalisms' such as the Leonine rhyme, though he is strict about avoiding elision and hiatus in accordance with the rules of prosody as laid down by medieval theorists. Also in accord with medieval orthography he contracts the classical diphthong 'ae' to 'e' (in *preterit*, 77, *estatem*, 81, and *celi*, 87) although his scansion preserves their classical

quantity¹⁵. Clauses have a tendency to occupy a single line each, linked simply by *-que* to form longer sentences. But monotony is avoided by occasional use of enjambement such as *cum tot tantisque querelis / Aera complesset ...* [72-3] and *omnes / Arboreos fructus nec quo frueretur haberet* [84-5].

His is a straightforward style that does not rely on ‘epic’ poetical conventions such as extensive use of metaphor and simile. He achieves some poetic effect nonetheless by a variety of devices: assonance and alliteration, for example the ‘e’s and ‘s’s in *pulueribus crines sparsit uestesque rescidit* [66]; verbal echoes in *solatur Peredurus ... nec uult solari* [68-69] and *et fugit ad siluas nec uult fugiendo uideri* [74], where we have both *solatur-solari* and *fugit-fugiendo* as well as *nec uult solari-nec uult .. uideri*; and repetition (epanalepsis) in *utitur ... utitur ... utitur* of 78-79. Similar verbal effects can be found in Geoffrey’s prose history – examples from Book 1 include: *in cathedra celsior ceteris positus* [1.14.244-5] and *Miratus Brutus, mirantur socii, mirantur etiam hostes* [1.18.362-3]¹⁶.

Elsewhere, Geoffrey has some unusual lines, as, for example, when he lists the names of Morgen’s sisters, whom she is said to have instructed in science:

*hancque mathematicam dicunt didicisse sorores
Moronoe, Mazoe, Gliten, Glitonea, Gliton,
Tyronoe, Thiten cithara notissima Thiten.* [926-928]

‘And they say that she taught her sisters this science, Moronoe, Mazoe, Gliten, Glitonea, Gliton, Tyronoe, Thiten, Thiten famous for her lyre.’

This odd list of alliterative almost rhyming names seems to be unique to Geoffrey – note how he fits them into the dactylic structure in almost alphabetical order; clever, too, is the repetition at the end, ... *Thiten cithārā nōtissimā Thiten*, still avoiding any

elision, and preserving that important caesura in the middle of the third foot.

One more passage – one of Geoffrey’s best I think. Merlin’s sister, Ganieda, returns from visiting her mad brother in his astronomical observatory/palace in the woods (yes, really) only to find that her husband King Rhydderch has died. This incident prompts Ganieda to abandon worldly things and seek studious retirement with her brother. But before she does so she gives eloquent expression to her grief in an extended meditation on *sic transit gloria mundi*:

*heu mihi qui fueras, inopinis uermibus esca
nunc datus es corpusque tuum putrescit in urna.
sicne cubile tibi post serica pulchra paratur? 705
siccine sub gelido caro candida regia membra
condentur saxo nec eris nisi puluis et ossa?
sic equidem, nam sors hominum miseranda per eum
ducitur ut nequeant ad pristina iura reduci.
ergo nihil prodest pereuntis gloria mundi 710
que fugit atque redit fallit leditque potentes.
melle suo delinit apes quod postmodo pungit,
sic quos demulsit diuertens gloria mundi
fallit et ingrate collidit uerbere caude.
fit breue quod prestat, quod habet durable non est
more fluentis atque transit quodcumque ministrat.
quid rosa si rutilet, si candida lilia uernent,
si sit pulcher homo uel eques uel cetera plura?
ista Creatori non mundo sunt referenda. [703-719]*

‘Alas for me, you who were, now untimely given as food for worms and your body rots in the grave. Can it be so, after your bed has been prepared with fine silken sheets? Can it be that your fair flesh and regal limbs will be buried under cold rocks, and you become nothing but dust

and bones? It can indeed, for the unhappy fate of men throughout the ages is such that they may never return to their former position. The glory of the passing world, which flees from and returns to, deceives and injures the powerful, gives no succour. The bee daubs with its honey what it afterwards stings, and so too the diverting glory of the world caressed those whom it deceives and lashes with the ungrateful blow of its sting. What is excellent is brief, what lasts does not exist, whatever provides for us passes away like a stream. So what if a rose is red, the lilies bloom white, if a man or a horse or everything else be beautiful? Such things ought to be referred not to the world but to the Creator.'

Notice the use of repetition, as in *sicne ... siccine ... sic equidem ... sic quos*; the repeated *gloria mundi* of 710 and 712; the delight in alliteration (not overdone) – *pulchra paratur, caro candida, prodest pereuntis, postmodo pungit, demulsit diuertens* – the occasional rhyming line endings – *membra / ossa, reduci / mundi, plura / referenda* (not enough to suggest any deliberate attempt at regular rhyming, more in the way of assonance I'd suggest) – and line 715's rare final foot, *non est* – a splendidly emphatic placement.

The simile of the bee with its deceiving honey and sting in its tail is a homely one, just such as might occur to someone used to a cloistered, quasi-monastic life. Not for Geoffrey the extended similes of mythological strife among gods and heroes that are the stuff of the traditional epic. Perhaps the very fact that his poetic muse is of a homelier sort, coupled with the novelty of the subject-matter, explains the poem's lack of success: it survives from only one thirteenth-century source, whereas his celebrated *Historia* survives in at least 217 manuscripts¹⁷.

For all its oddities of structure and content, though, the *Vita Merlini* provides a fascinating case-study for contemporary Latin poets. The uniqueness of the narrative and Geoffrey's sometimes irreverent, picaresque treatment, is, I suggest, a liberating example of how to construct a Latin epic that (aside from its metrical form) owes little to any classical predecessor, that uses correct classical vocabulary while preserving its own distinctive 'regional' accent, and that stands (or falls) solely on its own merits.

* * *

Notes:

1. Tatlock (1943), p. 265
2. Rigg (1992), p. 46.
3. On Joseph of Exeter, see Raby (1934), pp.134-7. Raby praises Joseph: 'No one had understood the rules of the game better since the days of Lucan ... No one had so fully assimilated the Latin of the Silver Age; for with Joseph there was no mere imitation or wholesale borrowing of phrases. He was a master of his language and of his material' (p. 137).
4. Raby (1934), p. 138.
5. Tatlock (1943), p. 270.
6. Curley (1994), pp. 113-118. For Geoffrey's sources see also Clarke (1973).
7. Curley (1994), p. 118.
8. Lloyd (1942), pp. 465.
9. In the Reeve & Wright (2007) edition of Geoffrey's *Historia*, the Lucan and Juvenal quotes occur at 4.62 (line 229) and 4.69 (lines 367-8) respectively. As Reeve establishes, the *Historia* should more properly be called *De gestis Britonum*.
10. *Life of Merlin*, ed. Clarke (1973), p. 62. These Ovidian references are pointed out by several commentators.
11. Tatlock (1943), p. 266.
12. Tatlock (1943), pp. 286-7.
13. Tatlock (1943), p. 265, 'two-thirds of the poem being irrelevant discourses on this and that'.
14. Much of this paragraph is taken from the Introduction to my English translation (Walker, 2011), in which the subject of Geoffrey's humanism is discussed at greater length.
15. The short list of Geoffrey's false quantities is given in Tatlock (1943), p. 267. For the rhymed Leonine hexameter, see Norberg (1958), pp. 32-34 and Rigg (1992) p. 319. On the medieval aversion to elision and hiatus, see Norberg (1958), pp. 26-27. For notes on medieval orthography, Sidwell (1995), p. 373-5.
16. All quotes from Reeve & Wright (2007). The elegiacs which occur at 1.16 employ similar effects.
17. *Vita Merlini* MS, Curley (1994), p. 111; *Historia* MSS, Reeve & Wright (2007), p. vii-viii.

* * *

Bibliography:Geoffrey's *Vita*:

- (ed. B. Clarke, 1973), *Life of Merlin*, Cardiff University of Wales Press. This is the best edition of the text, with a facing-page English translation and extensive notes. Sadly it is long out of print.
- (ed. J.J. Parry, 1925) *Vita Merlini*. Still available in "print on demand" format, but also *gratis* online (Latin text and Parry's translation) here:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/vm/index.htm>

- (trans. M. Walker, 2011), *Geoffrey of Monmouth's Life of Merlin: A New English Verse Translation*, Amberley Publishing. This is my own rendering into English hexameters, for a non-Latin reading audience.

Geoffrey's *Historia*:

- (eds. Reeve & Wright, 2007), *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press. – a 'definitive' edition of the Latin text derived from various MSS. with a facing-page English translation.

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<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2853704>

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De Gustibus non est Disputandum
Letters to the Editor

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

Dear Editor,

Vates#6 is here, and there with you is my gratitude. I have much to read, much to learn from its pages, but I have already noticed something that compels me to tell you that my last two hexameters [VI:3] contain a higher and larger praise of your work than your translation suggests. I meant: 'If you can obtain so much by the sole power of Poetry, willingly, dear Mark, I nominate you for the Nobel Prize for Peace.'

And I still do. Let meanwhile fools debate whether neo-Latin should magnanimously be granted the grace of existing in our nuclear society.

With cordial regards,
Joseph Tusiani

* * *

Dear Editor,

Your review of Platnauer's *Latin Elegiac Verse* in the last issue [VI:63], and specifically your worry about whether Ovidian couplets must necessarily be the model for all prospective writers of elegiac verse, put me in mind of a similar comment about Lucretian vs. Vergilian hexameters in the Introduction to their edition of Lucretius by W.E. Leonard and S.B. Smith (University of Wisconsin Press, 1942). Leonard makes the following observation:

It is customary to judge all Latin hexameters by the Vergilian. If they lack some of the peculiar devices introduced by Vergil, or betray effects discarded by Vergil, they are assumed to be somehow relatively imperfect, even when they rush and sing like those of Lucretius. ... Scholars ever since the Renaissance and, for all I know, ever since Asinius Pollo, have had intermittent spells of horror over a certain hexameter of Ennius which – had no caesura: it bobbed and bounded along famously, nevertheless. Vergil would not have been Vergil with Lucretius' hexameters; nor

would Lucretius have been Lucretius with Vergil's. One might as well ask Marlowe to exchange his blank verse with Tennyson – and remain the author of *Tamburlane*. I have more than once been amused, after naively enjoying a line of Lucretius, to read in some editor's notes that its caesura is un-Vergilian, or that some of its word endings coincide with foot endings – that, in short, it is a bad line.'

I think there's a lesson here for Latin poets of today, a point that (if I read your review right) Platnauer seems to have missed. Let us all agree that Ovid's couplets are indeed perfect – for Ovid. But so are Catullus' – for Catullus, and Martial's – for Martial. That doesn't mean any of them are perfect – for you. So stop worrying about copying Ovid or anyone else and just write something!

Sincerely yours,
Peter J. Calamy

* * *

Contributors

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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.

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Valentina DeNardis earned her Ph.D. in Classics at New York University and currently teaches at Villanova University, where she serves as Director of the Graduate Program in Classical Studies. Her interests include Greek and Latin poetry, ancient astronomy and astrology, gender studies, and the legacy of the classical world. She can't decide what she enjoys more: writing Latin and Greek poetry or writing and performing songs in English. She has been known to bring her guitar to class once a year or so for a brief diversion when her students are looking particularly weary. Perhaps she will think about following Mark's suggestion of combining the two worlds to write a song in Latin or Greek.

Patrick Paul Hogan is an independent Classical scholar in the United States. A graduate of the PhD program in Classical Philology at the University of Michigan, he has taught at colleges and universities in Michigan and serves on the board of *Amphora*, the outreach publication of the American Philological Association. He is also an active member of the Byzantine Studies Association of North America.

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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

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Lorenzo Viscido was born in 1952 at Squillace, Southern Italy. He obtained his Doctor's Degree in Classical Literature from the University of Salerno in 1976 and for a few years taught Italian and Latin in some High Schools. He also was a researcher at the Department of Classics of the same University from 1979 to 1980 and at the University of Calabria from 1980 to 1981. In 1981 he left Italy in order to teach Italian and Latin at the "Scuola d'Italia" in New York City. He is the author of several books on Cassiodorus and many articles about the same author, as well about Clemens of Alexandria, Saint Jerome, Paul the Deacon and Byzantine hymnography. Several of his Latin poems have been published in *Vox Latina*, *Meander*, and *Latinitas*. He received *publicae laudes* at the *Certamen Vaticanum* of 1983 and 1986, the Gold Medal at that of 1985 and the Silver Medal at the *Certamen Catullianum* of 1984.

Mark Walker is the editor of *Vates*. His last book was *Hobbitus Ille*, a Latin translation of Tolkien's classic (HarperCollins, 2012). He has also translated Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Life of Merlin* from Latin into English verse (Amberley Publishing, 2011). www.pineapplepubs.co.uk

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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