

Early Modern Oxford's Lenten Act Verse: Contemporary Thought in Ancient Form

1. This exercise is intended by the Statute to be performed with great dignity and solemnity every Lent. It opens on Ash-Wednesday. On this day, after prayers and sermon at the University Church, the Dean of every College is to go in procession with his Determining Bachelors to the Schools, and there to hold a disputation of four hours. He is to read a copy of verses and to propose arguments upon three questions to every Determiner of his house.

([Napleton], *Considerations on the public exercises*, p. x.)

2. *De natura Epigrammatis proprie dicti in genere, si quaeratur; peculiare illi ingenium in sale, argutia, acumine, facetia, potissimum consistit. Mixtum, vel multiforme, esse non debet; sed ad unum duntaxat scopum collimare, unum et simplex ingenii punctum attingere, quod fortiter, et acute, ultimo versiculo, semper exprimendum est. [...] Est haec generalis natura Epigrammatum; a qua tamen excipienda forsitan sunt nonnulla, quae non tam acuta vel faceta, quam dulcia et mollia vel alio aliquo modo elegantia censentur*

(Trapp, *Praelectiones poeticae*, pp. 181–182)

3. *Multa etiam, quae a vobis, Academici, Tempore Quadragesimali in quaestiones philosophicas facta sunt carmina, non sine insigni vestra laude componuntur; neque in honorem vestrum mediocriter cederet, delectum eorum probe fieri, et typis evulgari. Horum pars maxima verissime sunt Epigrammata: acuta cum sint, et faceta. Alia sunt Descriptiones, Allusiones, vel Fictiones poeticae, perquam elegantes et venustae; Epigrammata appellantur, necne, parum refert. Neque est cur mirum hoc videatur: nec jure objici potest, materiam vos ideo affectare Poeticas ineptam atque inhabilem, ut ingenii vestri sagacitatem ostentetis.*

(*ibid.*)

4. *Neque est cur mirum hoc videatur: nec jure objici potest, materiam vos ideo affectare Poeticas ineptam atque inhabilem, ut ingenii vestri sagacitatem ostentetis; [...] Nam utcunque inter se dissidere videantur Poesis et Philosophia; haec illi materiam praebet foecundissimam: cum mentem tanta, et tam varia, idearum supellectile instruat, cogitationes etiam tot novis et diversis modis reflectat.*

(*ibid.*)

5. *Quo Natura parens, telluris inutile pondus,
Formarit montes, impia turba rogat.*

(CQ, vol. 1 pp. 74–75: 1–2)

6. *Nimbosa informes ostendunt culmina montes,
Praeruptosque inter squalida saxa specus.*

(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 71–72: 1–2)

7. *Demens! Quam varia terras gentesque per orbem
Aeriae rupes utilitate beant!*

(CQ, vol. 1 pp. 74–75: 3–4)

8. *At tamen hic virides saltas, silvaeque nigrantis*
Caerulea acclivi procubat umbra iugo.
At tamen hic medicae surgunt felicius herbae,
Et libata aegris gramina blanda feris.
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 71–72: 3–6)
9. *Mitescunt fluctus per saxea cola marini,*
Arvaeque percurrunt flumina dulcis aquae.
Quid referam medicas herbas, undasque calentes,
Omniaque arcano clausa metalla sinu?
(CQ, vol. 1 pp. 74–75: 7–10)
10. *Hic gelidi erumpunt per lenta foramina fontes,*
Inque humilem saliens decidit amnis agrum.
Intus secreti lucescit vena metalli,
Fumidaque undanti sulfure fervet aqua.
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 71–72: 9–12)
11. *Ut juvat hinc longos metiri lumine valles,*
Subiectasque urbes, oceanique minas!
(CQ, vol. 1 pp. 74–75: 11–12)
12. *Vinsoriae en sedes amplas, montisque superbi,*
Quod rura aspectat desuper ampla, jugum!
Stant altae circum sylvae, quas inter, amoenum
Flumen agens, Musis sacra Lodona, nites.
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 98: 1–4)
13. *At procul obscuri montes, urbesque remotae,*
Nimbosi tractus, coeruleumque nemus.
Quis fuci nitor egregius, calamique potestas,
Quantum Naturae daedala dextra, valet!
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 98: 11–14)
14. Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats,
At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats,
Invite my lays.
(Pope, *Windsor Forest*, 1–3)
15. Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,
Here earth and water, seem to strive again,
(Pope, *Windsor Forest*, 11–12)

16. Here blushing *Flora* paints th' enamel'd ground,
Here *Ceres'* gifts in waving prospect stand,
And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand;
(Pope, *Windsor Forest*, 38–40)
17. Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades:
Here in full light the russet plains extend,
There wrapt in clouds the blueish hills ascend.
(Pope, *Windsor Forest*, 23–25)
18. If we consider the works of *nature* and *art*, as they are qualified to entertain the imagination, we shall find the last very defective in comparison of the former; for though they may sometimes appear as beautiful or strange, they can have nothing in them of that vastness and immensity, which afford so great an entertainment to the mind of the beholder.
(Addison, *The Pleasures*, no. 414)
19. *Cantu fallit iter rediens sub vespere messor,
Cum posita in tergum falce remisit opus.*
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 100–101: 1–2)
20. *Immemor anteacti curarum operisque diei,
It lento vacuus laeta per arva pede:
Occiduo fervent cum nubes sole coruscae,
Et declive rubet per juga summa jubar:
[...]
Summo agnae errantes balant de culmine montis,
Jam grege confestim se referente domum.*
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 100–101: 2–5; 9–10)
21. By *greatness*, I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece. Such are the prospects of an open champaign country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature. Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehension of them.
(Addison, *The Pleasures*, no. 412)
22. A marsh overgrown with willows, or a mountain shaded with oaks, are not only more beautiful, but more beneficial, than when they lie bare and unadorned.
(Addison, *The Pleasures*, no. 414)

23. That rocky pile thou see'st, that verdant lawn
Fresh-water'd from the mountains. Let the scene
Paint in thy fancy the primaeval seat
Of man
(Akenside, *The Pleasures*, 1)
24. Ere the radiant sun
Sprung from the east, or 'mid the vault of night
The moon suspended her serener lamp;
Ere mountains, woods, or streams adorn'd the globe
(Akenside, *The Pleasures*, 2)
25. [...] then in light divine
Disclose th' Elysian prospect, where the steps
Of those whom nature charms, thro' blooming walks,
Thro' fragrant mountains and poetic streams
(Akenside, *The Pleasures*, 1)
26. *Omnia laeta nitent circum, mentemque tuentis
Plurima ruricolae pacis imago subit.
Felix, cui certo redeunt sua gaudia cursu,
Tranquilli quoties vesperis hora venit!*
(CQ, vol. 2 pp. 100–101: 11–14)

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