

Three Adeodatean Odes (and two ex Ad Sororem) by Andrew Tithoneus

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At long last, I have the pleasure of bringing to a wider reading audience the work of not one, but two distinguished poets and scholars. These odes which follow are a translation by Sir Solomon Stitch MA (Oxon¹), one of

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¹ The "Oxon." honorific designation normally denotes one who has matriculated from the University of Oxford, but in this case, although Sir Solomon was a noted scholar who lectured at Oxford numerous times, it was bestowed not due to any degree he may or may not have obtained, but because of a peculiar accident of history which caused it to be granted to his family line in perpetuity. In the year 1156, one of the Stitch ancestors was strolling by the University church, perhaps memorizing Latin hexameters, when a tremendous terracotta statue of a Bovinus castratus tumbled off the roof and onto his corpus, soon rendering it his corpse. In lieu of a financial settlement, the University settled upon granting the honorific to his line, which has ensured the continuity of the legend, as

Northumbria's leading scholars of late Latin Antiquity and composer of English verse. I met Sir Solomon in the course of a trip to Holy Isle in which, while crossing the causeway, we happened to see a donkey crossing the road. Following my chance comment on a related work of Apuleius, Sir Solomon took a liking to me, issuing an invitation to his sea-side estate near Berwick-upon-Tweed. We spent many long afternoons tipping at tea-times and discussing poetry both ancient and modern; he was at that time in the middle of expanding his scholarly range, reading fragments he claimed to have unearthed near Thebes and believed to be the lost Letters as if to the gods of the Gadaran Menippus. It is a true misfortune for us that, as of yet, I have not located either the fragments or the translation-in-progress which I had seen him composing; his translation of Samosatana Lucian's *Νεκρικὸὶ Διάλογοι* is likewise lost, although hopefully these two works will be discovered among his vast estates. However, upon his making me his literary executor in the days in which he expected his death, namely October 1992, he bequeathed to me with the express purpose of publication his translation of these three odes, found originally in a codex dated to the rule of Gratian and Valentinian II, which he believed to have been written by Adeodatus Carthaginensis, natural son of St. Augustine of Hippo.

Naturally, such authorial attribution seems curious; although we know the young Adeodatus to have been an insightful philosopher, and following his father, a rhetor (cf. *De Magistro* X, beginning *Ego vero etiam atque etiam*), we have little poetic reputation concerning him, albeit that the names of poet and rhetor were not always conferred separately in those days. Additionally, these verses appear as if composed to one's beloved, and we have little evidence that would suggest Adeodatus was an amorous poet. However, as Sir Solomon reminded me as I brought up this objection, mouth tastily tucked full of crumpet, we must remember the perennial truth that *homo sapiens* is *homo amans*; we know from Holy Writ that *Deus caritas est* and that Man and Woman were made in the divine likeness, ergo human persons are by nature united in love. So it is no folly to suppose either the young Adeodatus was possessed of a pure love for a tender maiden or he had written under the form of amatory

each Stitch is reminded upon its bestowal that no matter how ill-seeming events portend, the worst could be yet to come: there could fall an Oxon their heads.

verses some depiction of divine love, such as is the case in *The Song of Solomon*, which, when protested by some remnants of the Sadducees at the Council of Jamnia, was defended by Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef in such strong words as "If this is not the love of God for his people, let us be accursed."

This notwithstanding, it is difficult if not impossible to perform any textual archaeology and confirm Adeodatan authorship without the original codex, which has been misplaced. In his last days, Sir Solomon speculated various places wherein he may have deposited it, but whether in the Pavian Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro (cf. Dante, *Paradiso* X.127-129), in the Vatican Archives, or in the Palmyran Temple of Bel, converted to a Byzantine church before more recently being demolished by some of our contemporary iconoclasts, we were unable to determine. My own concern about the authorial attribution had less to do with historical concerns and more with the linguistics of the work: judging from the translations (a dangerous task, for although Sir Solomon was a scrupulously literal translator, he was also a poet), the work's rhetoric seems quite different from the Ciceronian eloquence inherited by St. Augustine and his son. If I were to estimate, without the original Latin, a date and author, the work would be ascribed to some late-medieval imitator of Amadis de Gaul, who, like a precursor to the gentleman of La Mancha, praises a woman he yearns to know better and barely knows.

That being said, I am not nearly a scholar of such echelon as Sir Solomon Stitch, and so I defer to his better judgement. The reader may herself judge the worth of these Adeodatan Odes; for those of Sir Solomon's quality, I have left his Latin notes² at the beginning of each ode, not wishing to, in translation, miss a poetic allusion which this great man, now lost to us but perhaps gained by heaven, carefully placed as in a treasure chest one places bars of gold.

P.S.—as I prepared these three odes for publication, I discovered two others left imprinted as if on a palimpsest on the apparently blank

² Upon further research into Sir Solomon's notes in my preparations for publication, I found a short note that identified a "Father Tub Casker" as a collaborator for these descriptive titles; I have been able to identify no Roman or Eastern priest of such a name, nor any Anglican curate. I can only surmise that "Father" may refer to a scholastic or familial rather than a religious title and that Mr. Casker's skill at Latin composition currently rests in humble obscurity as he teaches or perhaps raises a family.

bottom halves of the pages Sir Solomon used for his translation, by an accident so surprising I am tempted to name it Providence. As I was finishing my preprandial meal, an excess of piper nigrum in my strapazzata ova gallinarum domesticarum caused that condiment to expectorate forth from my nasal cavities, and thus lightly dusted the paper, revealing these additional two odes with the title Ad Sororem Tuam. I can only surmise that they are translations from the same codex, but addressed as if to the sister of the beloved addressed in the first three odes, the latter the 'nightingale,' (cf. prima 3) and the former the 'little lark.' Why Sir Solomon might have erased them I cannot surmise, for they are in my judgement of the same magnificent quality as the first three odes and even in some way serve to complete them, both in terms of poetic image and in rounding out the character of the poet's love.

PRIMA EX ODIS ADEODATI

poetam nominare non posse unde datum sit sibi hoc desiderium
amicae suae, dignissimae amoris

A certain slant of light
Illuminates you, head to toe.
What is it? I cannot say;
I struggle to name it, to know
What constant, vestal fire
Stirs up those fluttering wings, my soul,
Leads it to dance, desire
Heat and light and to be made whole.

SECUNDA EX ODIS ADEODATI

poeta canit de suo consuetudine cum amica hac et cum sororibus
suis, condignis noscendi, adiciens autem maiorem esse delectationem
suam in amica sua ipsa.

I feel like I've known you since we were kids:
Not flowers, but mud, and leaves, and twigs wreathèd
Your blessed, forest-creature head. Your mom
Complains, "Why won't you read and write and dress

Up, the princess you are, like those two" —here
 She points, no, gestures with her whole, small frame
 To your sisters. One day I will meet them,
 A swan and a wood-hen, and I'll observe
 How your feathers and your nest delight me
 Best—you too-modest, or moderately
 Modest pea-hen—for you must be, to draw
 Such a foolish, raucous looking creature
 Who tries his best to unfurl, unveil, what?
 A mystery: your too-good, too-excellent glory.

TERTIA EX ODIS ADEODATI

o miraculum!
 quid miraculum! illa visio mirabilis a poeta nostro visa: apparuit
 amica amata quasi mater

To see you seeing a child is to know
 You a mother, who so loves her own
 That blessedness is their inheritance—
 to know you have been a mother since birth—
 Or at least from a young age, when you cared
 For all children, who with their parents, needed
 You. Who knows, not I, God above, what kids
 You'll have someday—whether fructus ventris
 tuis or His—that's not for me to say.
 What a weird way, a warped weave to weft, to wander
 Verbally into God's womb. But Christ figured
 Himself a hen-mother, brooding upon
 Her chucks; and of the Father, natum, was
 born. So—seeing this—an image divine.

PRIMA EX AD SOROREM TUAM

poeta noster cum sorore amicae amatae suae loquitur. quae soror
 utrum una de genere scolopacum an cygnorum sit, (ignoscere mei, lector),
 nescio. labor poetae est ad animos sororis aedificandos, eam hortans ad
 cantationem illam quae est ei soli propria.

Oh, little lark! Music melodious
From your mouth moves me, although I only
Oft heard it echoed, in the nightingale's
Nocturnal, moonlit musings upon your
Darling daydreams. Your song, from her praises,
Must be a sunlight-liquid, Olympian
Nectar, on which sup blessed gods, heroes.
But in the winter, faint grow the day-hours.
Too many a day have I seen dawning
Too soon—not you, little lark!—you, sing on,
Bring your joyous hearth to suffering places.
As you perch on limbs above hospital
Beds, whistle—hum—whirr: your unique voice yawns
Over an abyss. But beauty's own jaws—
Jonah's whale—ragged teeth—are salvation.

SECUNDA EX AD SOROREM TUAM

ad quem finem soror patitur? responsum dat poeta: ut passioni
amatoris supremi humani generis conformetur.

Oh little lark, what wounded wings stumble
Your ceaseless singing? Where blind baby birds
Balter, heedless Prince Hals, all, you stricken
Stagger: staccato—step by step by step.
Your sight sluggards your stride, now a viscous
Syrup's ooze where once—soon again!—you whirled
Whimsically, a dancing dervish amid
Festivals of fall. You see suffering,
Little lark—one prays that beings made for
suffering should suffer well—but out-see!
Beckon beyond, to that last and lingering
Lover, whose feet faltered under tree's freight,
Whose temple by thorns was threshed and torn, whose
Wings—glorious! for you, little lark—wears wounds; thus won.