

The Ivy Ode Revisited



By Rowan A. Greer

Rowan Greer, a Classics major at Yale, has spent most of his career as a professor at the Yale Divinity School; retired now, he still lives in New Haven. Few if any of our classmates have had such a long run at Yale. As our Ivy Ode poet, he planted the Class Ivy in a courtyard at the Sterling Memorial Library. The Reunion Yearbook editors asked Rowan to return to the courtyard and check on the health of our springtime sprig, which by now surely would have a gnarled trunk a foot thick and cover an entire Library wall. Would you believe, Rowan reported back, that our vernal vine, planted in the first flush of our youth, is gone? Uprooted, cut down, or consumed by aphids? Clearly it is time for an updated Ode! For those whose Latin is rusty, Rowan has provided a trot below.

WHILE THE LATIN may well conceal a doggerel with the banal message that the paths of glory lead but to the grave yet live in our memory, the attempt is to use the Horatian meter known as the minor Sapphic.

olim crevit hic hederacea radix
moeniis tenax viridisque speres.
nunc recessit stirps et reliquit verna
praeteriens iam.

victor candidas hederæ coronas
cepit fortiter iuvenalis florens.
lucide dies pueros adornans
gaudium duxit.

venit nunc hiems violenta turbis,
tempus occulte iam diu statutum.
transeunt anni, senices nam fimus
respicientes.

vix coronatos simul persequentes
 nos beatae aut miserinae sortes.
 plena praemiis via longa vitae
 suppliciisque.

simus tranquilli memores iuventae
 unde gaudium inimicum fraudi
 spem amicis dans decorem et certam
 semper fidelem.

pereunt palmae hederaeque stirpes,
 vanitas mundi brevis transeunda.
 mens serena stans, memorans beata,
 temperat tempus.

The Ivy Ode Revisited: A Paraphrase in English, or the Doggerel Revealed

Long ago there grew a small sprig of ivy,
 Climbing ramparts high with a springtime promise.
 Now its stock has failed and has left no green trace,
 Gone from our midst now.

Bright the ivy crowns won by hopeful victors,
 Taken boldly up when our youth then flourished.
 Daytime splendor came to adorn its children,
 Bringing them hope's joy.

Winter now is here with its violent storms;
 Secretly decreed was the season long since.
 Years pass by for us; we are now indeed old,
 Looking behind us.

Scarcely crowned are we, and there follow at once
 Fates that give us joy and that bring us sorrows.
 Life's long path is filled with abundant rewards,
 Also with hopes lost.

Let us be content by remembering youth,
 Where we found a joy that could brook no deceit,
 Giving friends a hope that was sure and pleasant,
 Counted on always.

All success can fail, just as sprigs of ivy.
 This world's vanity is but brief and passing.
 Standing calm, the mind by remembering the good
 Tempers all seasons.