

**‘His feet stunk out of cry’:
Ben Stone’s Satirical Manuscript Verses on Thomas Coryate**

In the last issue Will Poole wrote a piece on ‘Benjamin Stone, Dead Poet (c.1612)’, who, as you may remember, was a New College fellow whose untimely death occasioned punning epigrams by Richard Zouche and others. One may also remember that Stone himself devised several poems, most of which were collected in Bodleian Library MS Malone 19 (and reproduced for readers of *New College Notes* in Poole’s article). An additional Stone poem has come to light. Also collected in MS Malone 19 (but there unattributed), ‘On Tom Coriatt’ is a satire in the vein of ‘Ben. Stone on Samburne, Sheriff of Oxford’. But it targets a much more infamous seventeenth-century English figure, the ‘tombstone traveler’ Thomas Coryate (1577?–1617) of Odcombe, Somerset (whose father George Coryate, incidentally, was a Latin poet and fellow of New College). Represented by at least six textual witnesses, all of which I have collated, this poem satirizing the ‘Odcombian Legstretcher’ is attributed to ‘Stone’ or ‘Ben: Stone’ in two seventeenth-century manuscript miscellanies.¹ One could hardly say Stone’s verses sport the most accomplished poetry, yet the piece is nonetheless interesting for what it reveals about the circulation of manuscript verse and the seventeenth-century reception of Thomas Coryate’s voluminous European travelogue, *Coryats Crudities* (1611).

The vogue for satirizing Thomas Coryate and his travels commenced with the expansive preliminary material compiled for *Coryats Crudities*. Dozens of ‘Panegyricke Verses’ contained therein—with contributions from Ben Jonson, Laurence Whitaker, John Donne, and others—held Coryate up for playful mock commendation, ridiculing, among other things, the decrepitude of his shoes, the lousiness of his cloak, and the comically massive size of his printed travelogue. Poems and plays written throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century persisted in their comic allusions to Coryate’s travels, typically in dismissive one-liners and jesting couplets. Ben Stone’s ‘On Tom Coriatt’ is unique in that it sustains a satirical view of Coryate for the entirety of its twenty-four stanzas, hearkening back to the mock commendations originally packaged with *Crudities*. Stone’s piece seems to have been the most popular seventeenth-century poem inspired by Coryate, circulating in several poetical miscellanies associated with Oxford University in the 1630s.

What follows is the text of ‘On Tom Coriatt’, taken from one of the two manuscript miscellanies containing the poem that were probably associated with New College. I have indicated some of the more substantive textual variants in the footnotes and will discuss the text of the poem more broadly below.

Abbreviations of Textual Witnesses (used in footnotes):

<i>Har</i>	Harvard University MS Eng 686
<i>Fol</i> ¹	Folger Shakespeare Library V.a.345
<i>Fol</i> ²	Folger Shakespeare Library V.a.162
<i>Bod</i> ¹	Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. e. 14

¹ Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet. f. 10, fol. 120 (‘Ben: Stone on Tom: Coriat’) and Folger Shakespeare Library V.a.345, pp. 93-5 (‘Stone on Tom Coriats ascending y° Alps’). The poem also appears in Harvard University MS Eng. 686, fols. 21-2 (‘On Tom Coriatt’), Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet. e. 14, fols. 79-80 (‘On Tom Coriat’), Bodleian Library MS Malone 19, pp. 89-92 (‘On Tom Coriatt’), and Folger Shakespeare Library V.a.162, fols. 64v-65v (‘On Tom Coriatt’).

*Bod*² Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. f. 10

*Bod*³ Bodleian Library, MS Malone 19

On Tom Coriat²

Tom coming near the Italian coast
Of all his journeys³ past began to boast
For travel was his fate:

He could not give himself to ease,
A greater journey than all these,
His heels did meditate.

I fear not these proud rocks said he
Alps Apennines what e're they be:
I fear nor wind, nor weather.

To those proud mountains will I go
And try whether heaven yea, or no,
Be worth the coming thither.

Thus lifting⁴ up his heels aloft
He for good luck the Gods besought,
In taming⁵ of that rock,

With resolution stout & brave
As swift⁶ as did that cripple knave,
That stole Paul's weathercock.

He had not passed half a mile
His dauntless courage 'gan to quail
And erst he back did look,

It's not for naught, that men do talk
'Vor God⁷ (quoth he) a vengeance walk
As ere I undertook.

His feet were so bedecked with corns
That he did seem to tread one thorns
At each steppe which he tread,⁸

² Bodleian Library MS Malone 19, pp. 89-92. I have modernised spelling and silently expanded abbreviations.

³ journeys] labors *Bod*²; travels *Fol*¹

⁴ Thus lifting] Thus mountinge *Bod*²; Then lifting *Fol*¹

⁵ taming] climing *Bod*¹; clyming *Bod*²

⁶ swift] stout *Bod*²

⁷ 'Vor God] In troth *Fol*¹ *Fol*²; Vore God *Har*; this is *Bod*¹; Fore God *Bod*²

His laziness did think it fit,
Therefore a little down to sit
 To view the works of God.

Then he began the state⁹ to chide
Because they never did provide
 Some pretty odd device,

To pluck up such as weary were
As for himself he did not care,
 And mount them in a trice.

Up to the top at length he got
With very much a doe God wot
 And eagerly desired,

That mighty Jove would take the pains¹⁰
To dash out¹¹ the unworthy brains
 That offered to be tired.¹²

What pin-clouts, or what sparrow-bills
Could overcome these mighty hills
 Had not *Tom. Cor*: done it.

Had any wager then been laid
Upon his heels, or on his head,
 He certainly had won it.

His feet were chafed, & through some chink¹³
Crept into heaven a vengeance stink
 Which bred no simple¹⁴ odds,

It made Jove rise up from his seat
Whiles he sat merry at his meat
 With all the *Minor* Gods.

Jove swore in verse, Jove swore in prose
And whilst he swore he held¹⁵ his nose

⁸ 'His feet ... which he tread' missing from *Bod*¹.

⁹ state] states *Har Fol*² *Bod*¹; fates *Bod*²

¹⁰ pains] raines *Bod*¹

¹¹ dash out] knock *Bod*¹

¹² The previous two stanzas, from 'Up to the top' to 'offered to be tired', are missing from *Bod*².

¹³ through some chink] as some thinke *Bod*²

¹⁴ simple] little *Bod*¹ *Bod*²

¹⁵ held] stopt *Bod*¹

And verily did think,

That *Ganimede* had let a scape
And mixt it with the juice of grape
And gave it him to drink,

I verily am of an opinion
(Quoth he) that you have played the minion
But with a modest face,

(Quoth he¹⁶) I have no such vile quality
But tis the stink of some mortality
That is about this place,¹⁷

But *Venus* knew of all this quarrel¹⁸
And left the Gods in equal parle
And wot you why?

Venus did look amongst her smocks
For some old rags to make him socks
His feet stunk out of cry.

As one might notice from the patterns of textual variance, Bodleian Library MSS Eng. poet. e. 14 and f. 10 offer some of the more disparate readings of the poem, and both witnesses lack at least one stanza present in the other versions. On the other hand, the texts of Bodleian Library MS Malone 19, Harvard MS Eng. 686, and Folger V.a.162 resemble one another quite closely. In his *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts*, Peter Beal associates both MS Malone 19 and Harvard MS Eng. 686 with New College, while describing Folger V.a.162 as 'probably associated with the University of Oxford'.¹⁹ Beal dates each of the miscellanies to the c. 1630s, except for Folger V.a.162, which he dates to the mid-seventeenth century. That a poem about Coryate should circulate exclusively at Oxford (at least in the surviving witnesses) should come as no surprise, as Coryate attended Gloucester Hall (without taking a degree), his father George was a fellow of New College, and several of the poets contributing 'Panegyricke Verses' to *Crudities* were Oxford graduates.

Despite the poem's metrical deficiencies, its mock-heroic treatment of Coryate's transalpine journey is quite funny, even if that humour stems primarily from fart jokes and references to stinky feet. Its low treatment of the classical gods, from Jove accusing Ganymede of 'letting a scape' (i.e., breaking wind) at dinner to Venus' perspicacious knitting of socks for

¹⁶ he] she *Har*

¹⁷ The previous two stanzas, from 'I verily am' to 'about this place', are missing from *Bod*². In *Fol*², the 'quotations' from Jove and Ganymede are transposed.

¹⁸ knew of all this quarrel] quicly gaust the cause *Bod*¹; ken of all this quarle *Bod*²; knew al ye quarle *Fol*¹; knew of his great quarrell *Fol*²

¹⁹ He associates the other miscellanies with Oxford as well: Bodleian MS eng. poet. f. 10 was 'probably compiled by Simon Sloper (b. 1596/7) of Magdalen Hall, Oxford'; Bodleian MS. Eng. poet. e. 14 is 'probably associated with Oxford University'; and Folger V.a.345 is 'associated with Oxford University, possibly Christ Church'.

Coryate, seems to come straight out of Lucian's dialogues, and in that regard the verses have much in common with poems like Ben Jonson's 'On the Famous Voyage'.

But Stone's playful version of Coryate's Alpine ascent does not quite match the traveller's own account in *Crudities*: becoming faint part of the way up Mt. Aiguebelette, though he 'would even break [his] heart for striving', Coryate decides to hire 'certain poor fellows' to carry him the rest of the way via sedan chair. Indeed he reaches the mountain top and conquers the rocky landscape, but not by virtue of his own physical endurance:

This was the manner of their carrying of me: they did put two slender poles through certain wooden rings, which were at the four corners of the chair, one before, and another behind. But such was the miserable pains that the poor slaves willingly undertook for the gain of that cardakew,²⁰ that I would not have done the like for five hundred. The ways were exceeding difficult in regard of the steepness and hardness thereof, for they were all rocky, *petricosae* & *salebrosae* [rocky and rugged], and so uneven that a man could hardly find any sure footing on them. When I had *tandem aliquando* [at last] gotten up to the top, I said to myself with Aeneas in Virgil:

—————*Forsan & haec olim meminisse juvabit.*²¹

then might I justly and truly say, that which I could never before, that I was above some of the clouds. For though that mountain be not by the sixth part so high as some others of them, yet certainly it was a great way above some of the clouds. For I saw many of them very plainly on the sides of the mountain beneath me.²²

Given the author's own account, then, it seems unlikely if 'any wager then been laid / Upon his heels, or on his head' that Coryate 'certainly had won it'. In *Crudities* Coryate does in fact secure the 'pretty odd device' (i.e., the sedan chair), which in Stone's poem he chides the state for neglecting to provide for weary Alpine travellers. The episode is mentioned briefly in a few of the 'Panegyricke Verses', depicted on the *Crudities*' engraved title page, and further glossed by two sets of preliminary couplets by Laurence Whitaker and Ben Jonson. Whitaker's 'Opening and Drawing Distiches' build upon Coryate's description of clouds to devise a joke on the four elements—'He hath crossed Sea and Land, now the cloudes (saith the text) / Of th'Ayre he is climbing; 'ware Tom, Fire is next'—and in his set of verses Peter Alley mentions Coryate's 'fearfull climbing of the steepy Alpes; / Above the clowdes through the middle region, / With adventures more then beyond a legion', while Richard Badley commends how 'Th'Italian rarities are here depainted, / So are their Alpes, on which thou never fainted'.

There is a clear disconnect between the myth of Coryate's ascent as treated in the 'Panegyricke Verses' or Stone's poem and the reality of that ascent as related in *Crudities*. But that's all part of the joke. This is a text, after all, that thrives on the comic possibility of ironic distance: Coryate insists again and again that he never slept with a Venetian courtesan, for instance, despite the suggestive engraving of his encounter with 'Margarita Aemiliana' and some panegyrists' insistence that in Venice he 'trod a tough hen of thirty years of age'.²³ Ben Stone's manuscript verses thus riff on these satirical traditions while also creating new myths about England's first

²⁰ Cardecu, French coin worth ¼ of an ecu.

²¹ One day it will please us to remember even this. Virgil, *Aeneid* I. 203.

²² *Coryats Crudities* (Glasgow: MacLehose & Sons, 1905), I. 216-17. I have modernised spelling in this excerpt.

²³ From Inigo Jones's poem on Coryate in the 'Panegyricke Verses'; Coryate responds to Jones's comment with a printed marginal note that begins 'Beleeve him not Reader ...'

Grand Tourist, perhaps explaining why the poem was so popular in the literary circles of seventeenth-century Oxford.

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