

At GA and UM: "Learning Latin as a Real Language: Why and How?"

At CAM: "Perennial Latin in the Modern World: Where should we now be heading and why?"

Latin, the language of Latium in central Italy, was the native language of the ancient Romans. Although we do not possess a written record of all forms of Latin up through Cicero, we do have enough to see a development from a more archaic form, found especially in early inscriptions and quotations of religious formulas and the like, all the way to what has long been considered the “classical” form of the language that we observe in such first-century writers as Sallust, Caesar, Cicero, and Livy; Catullus, Vergil, Ovid and Horace. Some modern Latinists, like Prof. Wilfried Stroh, pointing out the unusual, nay, wholly unnatural petrification of Ciceronian grammatical features in the Latin of subsequent centuries, have asserted that, after the death of Augustus, the formal Latin of these later times, though often quite remarkable in its quality, was in fact a dead language. In other words, as Stroh would maintain, the Plinys, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Ammianus, not to mention all the later poets, were essentially doing something akin to what happened in much later times and is in fact again happening in our time. That is, they were speaking and writing a technically dead language!

Personally, I tend to follow the precept of *aurea mediocritas* both in general and specifically with regard to Stroh’s theory. Yes, the fact that even very late writers like Ammianus and even Augustine still adhered to the specific rules of Ciceronian grammar, if not always to his somewhat Asianistic style, is a clear indication that we are dealing with an increasingly artificial language that must have seemed increasingly “dead” if compared what the non-intelligentsia were speaking at the time. But as we all know, what we call “classical Latin” was in fact an artificial language even in it’s own time. Relatively few people spoke like Cicero. Most Romans spoke the popular form of Latin—referred to, perhaps unfortunately, as “vulgar Latin”—from which the Romance languages eventually descended. The writers of the late Republic and the Age of Augustus created and shared a formal language that, for various linguistic, social, and esthetic reasons, so deeply impressed subsequent Roman writers that most of them continued to imitate it, more or less successfully, until the very end of the Empire. This is especially remarkable since, when these writers walked onto the street, they heard and must often have had to use a very different language. Perhaps silver writers would have been basically bi-dialectal but

much later ones like Augustine could have actually been bilingual according to today's measurement of the dividing line between dialects and languages. In any case, despite the generally strict adherence to Cicero's rules of syntax, later Roman writers did feel free—some more than others—to adopt words and expressions from the language of the people if they felt the need. In fact, there clearly must have been a certain amount of linguistic contamination between classical and vulgar Latin...perhaps even elevating to a certain degree the language of the middle and lower classes. In fact, linguistic “contamination” of classicistic Latin is largely the reason that so many of the entries in the Latin lexicon are qualified as both “pre- and post-Augustan.” Of course, Petronius is a special case, as he specifically intended to color his characters by varying the register of their, mostly “vulgar,” Latin.

So in short, I don't exactly agree with Prof. Stroh that the classical Latin known to us simply became a “dead” language upon the death of Augustus. I do think that this process was gradual and that classical Ciceronian Latin would have to be considered increasing “dead” during the subsequent history of the Roman Empire. In contrast to our natural tendency to categorize, languages, like the rest of the natural world, tend to present us with mostly gradations and *continua*...and even paradoxes.

With the fall and geopolitical mutilation of the Empire, classical Latin was not only long “dead” in the technical sense that it was no more anyone's natural native language, it was in fact no longer in active use. What tended to be actively used in monasteries churches during the Dark Ages was most likely, in the very best cases, based on Jerome's Vulgate Bible, which was essentially a blend of both vulgar and classical elements retaining, at least, the full morphological panoply of classical Latin though not all of it's semantic, lexical, and syntactic niceties.

The first renaissance of Latin letters and learning, the beginning of what can be called a genuine medieval Latin, was carried out by Bishop Alcuin at the court of Charlemagne. The quality of the Latin in medieval texts emanating from this period and later varies widely, although the better examples tend to adhere to Jerome's estimable example. Many of the sonic qualities of Latin had of course been completely lost. People now pronounced Latin basically according to the phonetic system of their native languages, which meant, among other things, that vowel and syllable lengths were not correctly observed. Poets now organized their metrics according to stress accent instead of syllable length.

Rhyming came to the forefront, although some of the so-called “rhymes” would not have sounded as such to Cicero or Vergil.

In the Middle Ages, Latin was used mostly in the liturgy and in religious music and in discussions of theology and philosophy. Most Latin letters were devoted to these subjects as well as to history and the lives of the saints. Isidore of Seville, who lived before the Carolingian Renaissance, wrote about language. Roger Bacon, the 13th-century Franciscan Friar who can be said to have invented or at least rediscovered the scientific experimental method, wrote about the natural world and was famous for railing against Thomas Aquinas, the scholars of the University of Paris, and all others who looked only to writings of the past, like the Bible and Aristotle, to learn about the world of the present.

In the Renaissance proper of the 14th and 15th centuries, the works of classical Latin, copied and stored over the centuries by monks, were rediscovered and increasingly used by important literary figures as a basis upon which to reform the Latin of their time. These writers were especially rebelling against the highly specialized, entirely unesthetic, or even anti-esthetic, scholastic Latin of the late Middle Ages.

The intellectually expansive spirit of the Renaissance was the engine that powered the expansion of Latin literature into literally all current areas of human interest. In the 14th century, for example, Petrarch wrote in Latin of mountaineering...in addition to his own *De Viris Illustribus*, a history of famous men, and both bucolic and epic poetry based on classical models. He considered Seneca to be the model for his prose. Jean Buridan not only wrote on theology and philosophy but he also, preparing the way for Galileo, published books on physics and astronomy which ended up being placed on the famous *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. William of Ockham developed principles of philosophy and physics that are still used today. Dante Alighieri, in addition to his famous Italian works, also wrote much in Latin, including his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, a linguistic-literary treatise inspired by Cicero's *De Inventione* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

Just a few examples of the breadth of 15th-century Latin literature can be given here: Leone Battista Alberti's *De Re Aedificatoria*, ten books on architecture; Antonio Beccadelli's *Hermaphroditus*, a masterful collection of epigrams à la Catullus and Martial; Lorenzo Valla's influential stylistic treatise

De Elegantiss Linguae Latinae; the astrological and Neoplatonic works of Marsilio Ficino, the first head of the new Platonic Academy at Florence; Rodolphus Agricola's extremely anti-scholastic works on logic and dialectic; Poliziano's delightful *Rusticus*, which celebrated the country life.

New Latin or Neo-Latin literature is generally seen to start around the year 1500, that is in the time of Erasmus and More, a period that, with respect to Latin at least, can be considered the capstone of the Renaissance. If there was a Cicero for the rebirth of classical or at least classicistic Latin, it was surely Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, a man who spent most of the 70 or so years of his lifetime speaking and writing in Latin about virtually every subject and concern of his time, whether important or simply interesting or merely amusing. In fact, although he was Dutch, there is no actually record of him speaking or writing in Dutch except for a tradition according to which he said something in Dutch on his deathbed. As an influential intellectual and public figure of his own time, Erasmus weighed in, in Latin, on all the most significant philosophical, religious, and political issues of the day, and he helped to shape the public discourse on matters as serious as the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Like his British friend Sir Thomas More, Erasmus remained ever faithful to the Catholic Church even though one of his most famous works, the "In Praise of Folly" or *Stultitiae Laus* satirized the corruption and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church of his time. Erasmus' letters give us, in the most polished Latin imaginable, a picture of the daily life of his time and at various levels of European society from top to bottom. We see him traveling around Europe confronting good fortune, misfortune, and challenges of all sorts; and, in the depictions of his relationships with those of his own social and intellectual class, we are given a taste of what it was like to move around in a continent-wide network of Latin speakers. Most interesting of all for Latinists are his works on the Latin language, especially the *Colloquia* and the *De Vtraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia* in which he demonstrates the incredible wealth of his adopted tongue as a linguistic vehicle based far less than our vernaculars on idioms and much more on the principle of *variatio*. ...And of course all this is to say nothing of Erasmus' famous writings—in Latin, of course—on the Greek language and the New Testament and his brilliant extrapolation of the authentic sounds of ancient Greek!

To those of us involved in the current Perennial Latin movement, the 16th and 17th centuries are

inevitably something of a beacon. If one is of the opinion that any civilization really worth its salt should have not only vernacular languages at its disposal but also a perennial one, then these two centuries pretty much show us the ideal sort symbiosis of the fleeting and the timeless; for in this period vernacular languages increasingly flourished in their corresponding countries whereas anything important enough to share with the whole world was published in Latin by the likes of Nicolaus Copernicus, Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo Galilei, Sir Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, John Milton, and Baruch Spinoza. True, Galileo composed his more informal notes in Italian; true, Descartes actually composed the *Discourse on Method* in French before it was translated into Latin for universal consumption; but the general feeling was that, if it wasn't in Latin, it was ephemeral, it wasn't there for the ages. Modernists might scoff at this apparently ultra-conservative obeisance paid to the dead language of a long defunct imperial power; but, at the time, the feeling must have been, in most cases at least, just the opposite, since Latin was largely the vehicle of humanism, the liberal arts, and scientific and technical progress. At the same time, though, it did also remain the language of the Roman Catholic Church which notoriously made so much trouble for the more revolutionary thinkers.

Beyond the late 17th century, the ideals of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution gradually circumscribed the realm of Latin letters. Outside of the area of the physical sciences, where Latin flourished more than ever, Latin works increasingly tended to be either religious or else highly specialized and academic: the language of the ivory towers. One major exception to this is Ludwig Holberg's fantastic novel *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum* about a journey to strange lands and civilizations underneath the earth. Nevertheless, to say that the sciences were still explored in Latin is to say very much indeed. It is no exaggeration to say that the modern science and technology of Western society is rooted in Latin writings. The most fundamental of the sciences is physics, and modern classical, that is non-quantum, physics is Einsteinian-Newtonian. Actually, although Einstein's relativistic emendation of Newtonian physics is important for the modern world of super-high speeds and incredibly minute calibrations, classical physics is still for the most part Newtonian. In the area of biology, in turn, there can be no more seminal a figure than Carl Linnaeus, who established—entirely in Latin of course—the theoretical framework and nomenclature for his field.

Indeed, in the 18th century and even to some degree in 19th century, books, treatises, and compendia in all sorts of scientific and technical fields tended to be written in Latin. Part of the reason for this was that the scientific language developed by men like Galileo, DaVinci and Newton was precise and clearly understandable to one's foreign colleagues. If you wrote in your native tongue, there might be misunderstandings. Another reason was that at universities Latin was very often the language of instruction well into the 19th century, and in some places even into the early 20th. It is in fact quite common to find dissertations and academic treatises, not only on the physical and social sciences but even on literature and philosophy, written in Latin even in the teens and twenties of the past century. You will then understand why to me, as a Latin speaker and writer, it seems ironic that one of the questions I am most often asked is how we are able to talk about modern sciences and technology in Latin, since this of course is precisely the area in which Neo-Latin has mostly recently been enriched. About four years ago, I published short book in Latin on the philosophical and educational implications of quantum mechanics and found that I was only extremely rarely forced to coin my own terms or phraseology. In fact, although I did read much of Newton and Galileo and selections from a few other Latin scientific works like Leonhard Euler's *Mechanica Sive Motus Scientia* and his *Theoria Motus Corporum Solidorum*, nevertheless much of the terminology had already been made available to me by those who had gone to the trouble of combing the sources for useful linguistic material. Most helpful of all was Christian Helfer's *Lexicon Auxiliare*, which also provides the exact provenance of each lemma. The Vatican's *Lexicon Recentis Latinitatis* was also somewhat useful, and now the Latin version of the Wikipedia is providing more and more articles on science.

In this brief talk, it would be impossible to do justice to the body of scientific, technical and other academic writings written in the 18th through early 20th centuries. I can only mention a few, such as Ladislaus Jeszenszky's pioneering work on electricity,¹ A F J C Mayer's observations on the electrical

¹ *Tractatus criticus de electricitate et aliquibus physicae capitibus*, Ladislaus Jeszenszky 1804.

properties of biological organs,² Cornelius Hubertus Carolus Grinwis's studies of electrically conducting fluids,³ A Vrolik's and Angelus Carlotto's important work in meteorology,⁴ and Anders Sandberg's significant contributions to metallurgy.⁵

This of course is to say nothing of the fact that throughout this whole period people, at least certain people, continued to write poetry and deliver speeches in Latin as well as to create Latin versions of children's stories and the like. In fact, after Western science and technology had been taken over by certain prominent vernacular languages, 20th-century Latin literature was pretty much confined to this: occasional poetry and oratory and writing specifically designed to entice young people into reading Latin...not to mention the scholarly prefaces to Oxford and Teubner texts.

The so-called cultural revolution of the 1960s and 70s no doubt helped open up our societies to diversity, new ways of thinking, and new perspectives on civil rights and social justice. Its effect on Latin education, however, was devastating. That period occasioned massive closings of Latin programs not only in most middle and high schools but even in many colleges and universities...not only in the US but also in Europe and elsewhere. Sometime in the 80s, though, there seem to have been the beginnings of a grass-roots movement. Those Latin programs that had managed to survive the bloodbath were shrinking. Even when the teacher attempted to reduce the elements of paradigm regurgitation and wearisome preparation for decoding copiously annotated Caesar and Cicero, the pedagogical methods they had inherited were so unnatural that students couldn't help but notice this...and vote with their feet. When students of Spanish, French, or German would tell Latin students how you said something in the language they were studying and ask the Latin students how you said it

² *Spicilegium observationum anatomicarum de organo electrico in raiis anelectricis et de haematozois*, A F J C Mayer 1843.

³ *Specimen physico-mathematicum de distributione fluidi electrici in superficie conductoris*, Cornelius Hubertus Carolus Grinwis 1858.

⁴ *De calore telluris infra superficiem augescente*, A Vrolik 1836. *De aere atmosphaerico*, Angelus Carlotto 1835.

⁵ *De reductione metallorum per metalla in solutionibus salinis concitata disquisitio*, Anders Sandberg 1823.

in Latin, the Latin students were usually clueless because, of course, they basically learned Latin passively. Any attempts that the teacher made to add some level of Latin conversation to the class were limited both by their own total lack of experience in this area and by the highly front-loaded structure of the Latin curriculum in which it was not really the language that mattered but rather the reading, beginning already in the second year, of a prescribed body of important and relatively difficult works. The motto for Latin education could have been “No time for fun!” or *Oblectari non vacamus!*

Reform-minded Latin teachers did what they could and increasingly armed themselves with studies showing the value of Latin such as the British one reporting that 7-year-olds taking Latin moved quickly ahead of their peers in spelling, grammar, history, and European languages. There was also research done in this country showing that high school Latin students tend to score an average of 150 points higher on the SAT and that their college grades are typically higher.⁶

For me, the most important argument for Latin is its amazing durability, its over-two-millennia-long history as a vehicle for large components of Western civilization. As much as I truly love some of the vernacular languages, I have to say that the unquestioned perennial status of Latin makes it unparalleled among European languages. You can pick up something written yesterday or two hundred years ago or a millennium ago or two millennia ago and *just read it...* with no necessity of translating to “modern Latin” and no dated quality to the language, at least if the writer is competent. The average theater-goer understands about one third of a Shakespeare play. In another century or less, Shakespeare will no longer be at all viable in the original. That’s what it is to be a vernacular language: a beautiful flower that will inevitably wilt and die. Perennial languages are different. And even among perennial or quasi-perennial languages, Latin holds a truly unique position. Sanskrit, Latin’s chief rival, is still written, spoken, and used for mostly religious purposes, but it’s history as the major literary vehicle of Indic culture pretty much ended in the 11th century, when writers began composing their important work in their native languages. Classical, or at least classicistic Greek, despite its venerable history, survived at best into the Middle Ages as a highly specialized language used only in a very few places:

⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, Monday, May 18, 1998, E4 f.

basically in Constantinople before its fall and perhaps a bit on Mount Athos. Elsewhere it was dead, completely replaced by newer Greek dialects or, in churches and monasteries, by a petrified form of Biblical koine that was nevertheless not used much at all outside the liturgy. Since the Middle Ages, Greeks have basically spoken the Greek of their time, although occasional puristic revivals have managed, for the most part, to make later forms of Greek not classical but at least fairly conservative. Likewise Koranic Arabic has a considerable history as a perennial language, although it is a much shorter history than that of Latin. Despite an important, largely Greek-based, renaissance of scientific and speculative writing in the Middle Ages, Koranic Arabic has been, since the 12th century, largely confined to the area of religion. In fact, the extraordinary, though not entirely homogenous, burst of vitality of Latin and especially of Latin letters in the 16th through 19th centuries is probably what makes Latin so absolutely unparalleled.

(I should mention that the Chinese ideographic script *is* and Egyptian hieroglyphics *were* of course perennial...but only as scripts. The languages they represented evolved. Finally, the revived Celtic languages as well as Icelandic and the Hebrew now spoken in Israel, though modeled on historical ideals and though obviously remarkable, are nevertheless evolving and clearly vernacular languages. Even in the elite group of perennial and revived languages, then, Latin holds a unique position.) And so it does not seem inappropriate to repeat Wilfried Stoh's favorite saying: *Latina Linguarum Regina!* Obviously it would seem at the very least ill-considered to abandon this wonderful language on a whim, because of the transitory conceit that we are somehow now truly "modern"! A genuine perennial language, if you take care of it, is *always* modern!

To get back to the 1980s and 90s, a comparison of Latin pedagogy with that of the modern languages made the problem quite obvious. Modern linguistic research had clearly shown that the key factor in learning a language was that the learner acquire a sense of "ownership" of the target language. It was seen that the old behavioristic "audio-lingual" methods of the 50s and 60s, according to which learners merely learned dialogs and rote responses to programmed questions, did not bring this sense of ownership. The emphasis began to be placed on free communication and on addressing the learner's areas of personal interest. Not only was it necessary for the learner to communicate verbally as much as

possible, but it was also crucial that the learner talk and write about his or her own life and interests. In this way even the student who was already too old to become actually bilingual—that is, for the new language to become his/her second mother tongue—it was nevertheless quite possible for the student to begin to feel that the language did in some sense “belong” to him/her and to feel very comfortable using it. Upon reflection, all this seems perhaps quite obvious. But then, has education ever really kept pace with what seems intuitively right? In any case, although I do not agree with the precept of orthodox communicative pedagogy that the study of grammar must be virtually banished from the classroom, I do find that a healthy communicative component should be an integral part of the study of ANY vernacular or perennial language...including Latin.

Certain people—like Professor Terence Tunberg, Father Caelestis Eichenseher, Father Reginald Foster, and Professor Wilfried Stroh—who had cultivated the skills of speaking and writing excellent Latin almost *in vacuo* were now called upon to help teachers get up to speed. You can’t teach a language communicatively, as a living language, unless you are fluent or at least semifluent in it yourself. In the mid-90s, various types of spoken-Latin workshops and *conventicula* began sprouting up, and since the year 2000 they have been rapidly proliferating. In the US, there are currently regular annual workshops in Kentucky, Washington state, Virginia, and Florida as well as occasional ones in California, Massachusetts, Michigan and elsewhere. We are even talking about starting one in Minnesota. In Europe there are many more, and there are now even some popping up in South America. Although some of these are targeted to specific audiences, most accept all who have taken at least a year of Latin and can read Latin at least with the assistance of a dictionary. Our *Conventiculum Vasintoniense* in my state, now looking forward to its seventh year, was the first to be mostly activity-based. Every day we prepare for a field trip, take the field trip, and then debrief each other in the evening...all in Latin of course. Recently the Melissa Foundation workshops based in Brussels have been organizing Latin-language Mediterranean excursions, and last summer Professor Nancy Llewellyn gave a tour of Rome in Latin. In Washington, in order to keep up our spoken Latin, we have about five activity-based “Latin Days in Seattle” (or *Commorationes Seattlenses*) at which you can speak nothing but Latin from about 11:00 am until after dinner. Latin speakers in the SF Bay Area hold

frequent Latin dinners or *cenae*, and the Los Angeles area Latin speakers are even forming a kind of Latin-speaking book club.

So then, how do we manage to speak Latin anyway? There are two principal issues here: (1) the purported difficulty of Latin and (2) the question of vocabulary. To dispatch the first issue first, I have to say that, as far as difficulty is concerned, for speakers of Western languages, at least, Latin is somewhere just above the middle: about a 6.5 or 7 on a scale of 10. Because it has more cases than German and because Latin word order is more unpredictable, it seems to be a little harder than German, which I would put at about a 6. However, anyone who has read Thomas Mann in the original knows that neither Cicero nor any other ancient Latin author wrote longer, more complex sentences than the author of the *Magic Mountain* and *Doktor Faustus*. So let the myth of Latin's extreme difficulty be laid to rest. It's really nothing compared to languages like Finnish and Czech and Sanskrit. (I did study Sanskrit and can give those of you who didn't an earful!)

So then why does Latin seem so hard? Two reasons: first, we don't really learn to use it and, second, we don't really learn to use it. All languages seem hard if you just kind of half-learn them. Well, I have to admit that English speakers have the added difficulty of being speakers of an almost totally uninflected language. Germans and Russians and Finns obviously have a bit of an advantage. But still, languages, inflected or not, are created by humans and used by humans. There is no such thing as a "genius language." The ancient Romans weren't all geniuses—not even most of the 5% or so who were literate and spoke the formal language. You don't even have to be a genius to speak Czech or Finnish or Sanskrit. You just have to *live* the language! Actually, I find that the difficulty of Latin depends entirely on how you use it. As with other languages, once you have internalized the paradigms and formed enough useful speech habits, conversing in Latin is fairly simple. Unlike in German, the mostly free word order of Latin lets you just say things in the order that they occur to you. The lack of formal pronouns and verb forms makes it feel democratic! The lack of articles make it go faster.

Issue number two with regard to speaking Latin is vocabulary. Word usage is important. We don't want the Latin we use to devolve into just another Romance language. The Vatican, through its *Latinitas* periodical and otherwise, has continuously attempted to keep on top of the task of developing

a consensus with respect to Latin terms for new things and ideas. Often these suggestions are very useful. Sometimes they are long, awkward, and frigid. Resources for modern Latin vocabulary and usage are proliferating apace, both in print and online. Forthcoming works are eagerly awaited. The ideal in this very formative period is for every group of to be lead by at least one competent speaker who attends important seminars and knows which are considered to be the best words for new things. Notice that I didn't say "the best neologisms." That is because inventing new words is rarely necessary. Since almost nothing really new is ever said, it is almost always possible to find the right word or phrase if one does enough reading. Here, of course, is where our lexicographers are invaluable. They can do much of this research for us.

In the true lack of an appropriate expression, though, the ideal is to come up with a Latin formulation that isn't too wordy and that Cicero himself would understand if he were exposed to the corresponding concept. It is permissible to form new adjectives, adverbs, diminutives and the like, as long as these are based on classical or at least Latin roots and as long as the classical principles of word derivation and formation are followed. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to use Latinized Greek, just as the ancient Romans themselves often did. This should not be done in excess, but it turns out to be very useful in technical and scientific areas where the Greek ability easily to form compound nouns is highly advantageous.

Of course philological disputes arise. Which word is really better? Here, as a writer, I must say in all honesty that, within reason, it is not a bad thing that there should be competing terms for the same thing or idea. Some will be found to be better or more elevated than others. In fiction and documentary literature, the less elevated or less "correct" terms can sometimes be used to distinguish the social and intellectual levels of different characters. ...And yes, although our primary goal in teaching Latin will always be to introduce new generations to the ancient classics, I do think that there will have to be a new Latin literature. In all periods during which Latin has flourished, there has been new and important literature in Latin. Literature provides context and models for contemporary dialog. It also motivates those people to learn the language who would not otherwise be all that interested. Just imagine what it must have been like for the Latin students of former times to know that, say, Galileo or

Erasmus or Thomas More or Descartes or Newton had recently published a potentially world-changing book!

At this point, since I have more time than I did in my talks at Gustavus Adolphus and UM, I would like to add a few more words specifically about Latin education. The writers of the 15th and 16th centuries, not only the luminaries but even the minor writers, wrote an amazingly correct Latin. You occasionally find a usage that seems unusual; but, when you really look into it, you invariably discover that the writer you are reading knew more about Latin than you do. Granted, there are sometimes strange spellings, like *coelum* for *caelum* and *inficior* for *infitor*, but a little research reveals that the given writer is merely being faithful to the standard spelling conventions of his academic school or to those of his time in general.

Now, yes, it can certainly be the case that the great writers of those times were so intimidating that no one else would publish anything without a hundred proof-readings, revisions, and consultations; but clearly the main cause for the astounding quality of the Latin written in the Renaissance and the subsequent century or two was the nature of the Latin education of the time. Good Latin pedagogues all over have begun to suspect this. I quote from an essay by Claude Pavur of Saint Louis University:

What was it that Renaissance pedagogues had methodologically that we seem to lack? It seems to me that we can find the most helpful clue in the short sketch of the history of Latin teaching given at the end of George Ganss's book, *St. Ignatius's Idea of a Jesuit University*.⁷ There he speaks of how medieval and Renaissance methods were superior to our own insofar as those eras provided that "constant practice which begets automatic recall."⁸ Young students were not given the classic works of Cicero or Livy until after they had "thoroughly established and practiced the memory associations to the point of spontaneous recall, and had benefitted from four to six years

⁷ George Ganss, S.J., "A Historical Sketch of the Teaching of Latin," Appendix 1 in *St. Ignatius's Idea of a Jesuit University* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Marquette University Press, 2nd ed., 1956), pp. 218-258.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pag. 222

of constant practice in speaking Latin.”³ At that point, such classics were far more approachable, and they could be appreciated as meaningful works in themselves rather than merely as challenges for one’s translation-powers.⁴ (My underlining.)

And later in the same essay we find this:

It does not seem to me utopian to suggest the development of introductory textbooks that would help students to read and to produce many times what they might tend to average in most programs today. Many short, simple, phrases and sentences can get us there, perhaps in conjunction with something that will increase linguistic experience considerably: using Latin as the language of communication in class. Even if few of us are ready to leap into such a practice, it is an avenue that needs to be explored if we really do take language-mastery as our goal. It matters little that we can not reproduce exactly what a Roman might say in a contemporary setting or that our sentences will be brief and our vocabulary strange: the point is that patterns of meaning and verbal structures are being reinforced and mastered. Later on, the students’ progressive understanding of the language will include precisely that realization that the ancient Roman might not speak of what a Renaissance writer might. In all such experiments language as a living means of communication must be allowed a certain “play.”⁵

Professor Pavur’s slightly defensive tone here is of course justified. The last few centuries have, as I would maintain, warped Latin education. Unlike German, French, or Spanish pedagogy, Latin pedagogy has become passive and inert. As I mentioned before, the real focus nowadays is not to teach a language per se but rather to move students as quickly as possible to the point of being able to decode certain works of literature. In fact, my friend Christopher Brown, a Latin speaker at Ohio State

³ Ibid., pag. 222

⁴ <http://www.slu.edu/colleges/AS/languages/classical/latin/tchmat/pedagogy/ulp-ea.html>, p. 4: Claudio Pavur, Saint Louis University, Missouri, USA. First composed September 1996. Republished with emendation in *Electronic Antiquity* 4:2 (April, 1998).

⁵ Ibid., p. 5

University,⁶ has done some research on the history of Latin pedagogy and tells me that our current methods are rooted in decisions made by Jansenist and Jesuit educators in the 17th and 18th centuries. He believes that the gradual decline of Latin since those times is a direct result of these decisions. He lays the principal blame at the door of the protestant Jansenists—and perhaps they were indeed the first ones to take this tack. But it has long been known that there was a great deal of competition between the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in the area of education. The whole idea of preparing students as quickly as possible to read a given corpus of Latin writings is apparently not so new, although in the time of the Jansenists and Jesuits the reading list would have focused more specifically on religious writings.

So today we find ourselves teaching the language we love in a clearly unnatural way, pushing our students on to read at levels far beyond the level of their actual knowledge of Latin language and culture...and we find that this unfortunate state of affairs, now institutionalized and rigid, has probably been inherited from another, very different age. Yes, we know intellectually that it would be highly preferable to teach Latin somewhat the same way as it is taught in modern language departments, where the first two years are given over to perfecting both passive and active language skills and to teaching the cultural contexts that enable the students to approach literature with some level of critical understanding without the need for footnotes on every fifth word. But we find ourselves locked in to a system that does not permit this.

To this is added the fact that most Latin teachers, even great scholars and authors of admirable studies, despite all we owe them, are nevertheless *Latine muti*! Some professional Latinists immediately see this problem and begin to do what they can to learn Latin more actively. Many others approve of what we are doing but simply do not have the time—and are given no professional development credit—for learning to speak Latin. Still others are simply not “language people” and probably would not even have entered the field of Latin if they had known that it would be a wholly language-based discipline. Of course there is undoubtedly a host of other impediments preventing us

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from doing what we ultimately know is right; and a meaningful transition, if there is one, will take at least decades if not longer. There are also undoubtedly many ways to go about solving this problem and there will be many suggestions. My own modest proposal is as follows.

There are currently Latin instructors who can teach in Latin. Soon there will be more. These people are in a position to teach Latin the way modern languages are taught: pure language study, conversation, and composition in the first year; more language and cultural studies and some easy literature in the second year; less difficult great works in the third year; and the more and important and/or more difficult works in the fourth year...plus perhaps even more advanced study of grammar and composition. Although the teacher will not have native-level fluency, he/she will be able to do this teaching credibly and creditably if he/she makes it clear to the students that both teacher and students are on a learning adventure. It is important never to pretend to know what you don't know. If I don't know a word for something, I either look it up in class or tell the class I will bring the word in the next day. Students know when you're "faking it." They have more respect for you when you admit your own limitations. After years of doing this, the teacher will get better and better and will be better able to predict what sort of linguistic material will be most useful in class.

If this is done...and done right, even though the students will be introduced to the great literature at a later point in their studies, I *absolutely guarantee* that, when they do get to that point, they will be able to read the great works both more quickly and with more understanding. The process will start out slower, but the result will be better...far better. Virtually everyone who learns to speak Latin and who keeps at it for a few years says that their reading comprehension shoots up. I can give a similar testimonial for myself. Another good example of this phenomenon is a young woman who, as an undergraduate at the University of Western Washington, faithfully attended all our local spoken-Latin events in Washington for about three years and also twice attended the *Conventiculum Latinum* in Lexington, KY. Although she was not taught Latin in Latin, she nevertheless had a professor, Diane Johnson, who could speak Latin and who encouraged her to develop her speaking. The student then transferred to a large and prominent graduate Classics program and found, to her absolute amazement, that her reading comprehension level was beyond that of even the most advanced graduate students.

Naturally, what I am proposing will be easier in some places and in some situations than in others. A good candidate institution would be, say, a smaller four-year college with only two or a few willing Latin instructors, all of whom were capable of teaching in Latin. At such a college, the problem of students transferring in and out and being “out of sync” would be reduced. The students would probably not be doing lots of Cicero in their second year, but in their fourth year they would be turning into fairly fluent speakers and readers able to read Cicero, Caesar, Catullus, Horace, and Vergil with a relative speed and degree of comprehension that would far surpass those of students at their level who were taught the traditional way. When these students transferred into graduate schools, the superiority of the so-called “living Latin” method would be obvious. *Sic incipiant res novae!* The revolution would begin!