

Reminiscing about Latin: Cases of Life-writing and the Classical Tradition

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**David Andrew Porter**

**"Reminiscing about Latin: Cases of Life-writing and the Classical Tradition"**

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 20.5 (2018)**

Thematic Issue ***Voices of Life, Illness and Disabilities in Life Writing and Medical Narratives.***

**Ed. I-Chun Wang, Jonathan Locke Hart, Cindy Chopoidaló, and David Porter**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss5/8>>

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**Abstract:** In his article "Reminiscing about Latin: Cases of Life-writing and the Classical Tradition," David Andrew Porter examines the life of Latin and life-writing in Latin while drawing on other languages. He argues that post-classical Latin writing is vital to many modern writers and offers a challenge to post-Romantic conceptions of literature. He explores how Latin literary traditions affect professional and accidental writers, from the Renaissance scholar Isaac Casaubon to the Jamaican poet Francis Williams, in order to draw attention to the humour, irony and conflict in such lived experiences and writing.

**David Andrew PORTER**

### **Reminiscing about Latin: Cases of Life-writing and the Classical Tradition**

In a recent assessment of the status of bilingual writers in the discipline of comparative literature, David Damrosch wrote: "Even in the case of a major canonical writer such as Milton, only his English-language works are commonly studied: no survey anthology of English literature that I know of includes any of Milton's Latin poetry. Milton was fluent in Latin and proud of his poetic ability in the language of his epic forebear Virgil, but we take it for granted that his Latin poems aren't worth our while. This is a judgment that most of us have made without ever having read any of them" (135). This judgement reflects how Latin has been regarded as a classical, universal, but secondary language. Although the study of medieval and neo-Latin literature has flourished, especially in the past half century, outside of specialist studies the idea of Latin as a classical language has remained largely unchanged since at least the nineteenth century, as post-classical Latin is tacitly or explicitly dismissed as ephemeral or artificial or unimportant in contrast to living, national and vital vernacular writing. In theory, Comparativists should have no trouble conceptualizing the importance of Milton's Latin poetry, but in practice, acquiescence to its assumed insignificance remains.

Historically, post-classical humanist Latin is perceived (with some justice) as imitative, and imitation is conceived as in opposition to creativity, lending itself to the judgement that Milton's Latin is uncreative and derivative, and therefore worth less than his vernacular compositions. The absurdity of maintaining this historical assessment surfaces in Damrosch's assessment, but it is acquiesced to; comparative literature moving into world literature offers many more languages and literature than any scholar can hope to master, and there is often little appeal in studying a forgotten corpus of writing that is perceived frequently as Eurocentric, dead and dated. But Latinity is not tangential to Milton's poetry, and its absence from critical inquiry affects world literature. The purpose of this paper is to offer some ways in which Latin writing is vital to modern writers and thus to modern literature, as well as a challenge to post-Romantic conceptions of literature.

On one hand, in spite of the evolution of the field in most respects, in the context of comparative literature the treatment of Latin literature is still rooted in the conventions of earlier centuries. Classicists have historically regarded post-classical Greek and Latin as barbarous and corrupt; the nineteenth-century creators of national literature departments had little interest in challenging these assumptions while advocating the study of vital vernacular languages over "dead" classical ones. On the other hand, those defending against the assumptions that medieval or humanistic Latin is dead or uninteresting and deploring its neglect have often emphasized its role as a key or a binding element in the tradition of European literature, conceived in a holistic sense as one unified tradition:

Die europäische Literatur als Ganzes zu sehen, ist nur möglich, wenn man sich ein Bürgerrecht in allen ihren Epochen von Homer bis Goethe erworben hat. Man kann das aus keinem Lehrbuch gewinnen, selbst wenn es ein solches gäbe. Man erwirbt das Bürgerrecht im Reiche der europäischen Literatur nur, wenn man viele Jahre in jeder seiner Provinzen gewohnt hat und viele Male die eine mit der anderen vertauscht hat. Man ist Europäer, wenn man *civis Romanus* geworden ist.

To see European literature as a whole is only possible if one has acquired the right of citizenship in every period from Homer to Goethe. You cannot gain this from any textbook, even if such a book did exist. One acquires the right of citizenship in the kingdom of European literature only when one has lingered for many years in each of its provinces, and has many times moved about from one to the other. One is a European, when one has become a *civis Romanus*. (Curtius 22; my translations unless otherwise noted)

But this appeal has limited resonance: most students of literature are cultivating a mastery of Greek and Latin as well as the literatures of the major western European languages such as English, German, French, Italian and sometimes Spanish. Preserving European culture held vitality for Curtius in the context of the aftermath of its destruction during the Second World War. It must lack some of that vitality where the study of world literature and even the literature in European languages extends well beyond European cultural spheres. Thus, it is necessary both to look at the special place of the Roman tradition in the European context and to explore its extension beyond that context. Literary studies have exploded canons and given rise to world literature and cultural studies; even European literature has incorporated minority languages, popular works, and authors indebted to non-European literary traditions. In a global context, the rights of a *civis Romanus* appear as far less reaching, at least in the context of wider literary studies. Both medieval and neo-Latin studies are developed specialist disciplines, albeit still connected to national literatures. This is of necessity, as most scholars hold positions in History, English, French or

other language departments, but with the result that monographs focusing on the Latinity of one country or region are common and, for example, a Medieval Latin text is more likely to be the object of study if Chaucer appears to have read it than on any of its own independent merits. The Comparativist is accustomed to violating the natural borders of literary departments, but there is still a need to reason why Milton's Latin works are worth attention, aside from obsolete moral and cultural imperatives of preserving European literary traditions. From the perspective of comparative literature, it is necessary to break free from the tradition of classical pedagogy and engage with the complexities and interrogations of Latin literature, and, furthermore, to explore both the Latin tradition at the center of European culture as well as how that tradition extends to the peripheries and beyond.

Karl A.E. Enekel's extensive study of early modern Latin autobiographical writing has illustrated its multiplicity of forms and models, and has also emphasized that although much early modern Latin writing is autobiographical, there is no fixed Latin autobiographical genre, and the common term *vita* can refer to both autobiography and biography (1-36 *et passim*). In light of the variety and complexity of life writing, the focus here is on unusual cases of use of the classical (with emphasis on Latin) tradition, attempting to highlight and compare their individual character rather than attempting a complete categorization or catalogue. One aspect of the study of classical literature is often expressed in terms of the lofty ideals of a lifelong undertaking; that is, it is often represented as a means of cultural and character formation. As the study of classical languages has been, for an extended time, started in a pedagogical context, it emphasized the importance of its lessons, which can be extended throughout one's life. Heraclitus (fl. 1st c. A.D.) expressed this in his *Allegoriae homericae* on the importance of reading Homer:

εύθους γάρ ἐκ πρώτης ἡλικίας τὰ νήπια τῶν ἀρτιμαθῶν παιδῶν διδασκαλία παρ' ἐκείνῳ τιθεύεται, καὶ μονοουκ ἔνεσπαργανωμένοι τοῖς ἔπεσιν αὐτοῦ καθαπερεὶ ποτὶ μω γάλακτι τὰς ψυχὰς ἐπάρδομεν• ἀρχομένῳ δ' ἐκάστῳ συμπαρέστηκε καὶ κατ' ὀλίγον ἀπανδρουμένῳ, τελείοις δ' ἐνακμάζει, καὶ κόρος οὐδὲ εἰς ἄχρι γήρωι, ἀλλὰ παυσάμενοι διψῶμεν αὐτοῦ πάλιν• καὶ σχεδὸν ἐν πέρας Ὁμήρω παρ' ἀνθρώποις, ὃ καὶ τοῦ βίου.

Right from the first stage of life, the childishness of infants just beginning to learn is nursed on the teachings of Homer. Swaddled in his epic verses, we refresh our souls with them as though they were fresh milk. Homer stands beside each of us as we set out and little by little become men. He flowers as we reach maturity, and not once until old age is he exhausted. As soon as we put him down, we thirst for him again. One might say that for men to finish with Homer is to finish with life. (I.5-7)

Or, as expressed by Juan Angel González, a Renaissance professor of poetry at Valencia, around 1525, who celebrates the worth of classical poetry to the young and old in all walks of life:

Quod, si tantus honor, si tanta est gloria Phoebi,  
Si tot virtutes alma poesis habet,  
Divinum ingenium, si mens divina poetis,  
Divinum si os est, si proba vita, puer,  
Et Latios vates simul et venerare Pelasgos,  
Quo tua frons hederas undique cincta gerat.  
Dorica Martigenis primos dedit unda liquores;  
Fontibus ex Graecis verba latina cadunt.  
Discito utrosque igitur, res est non parva, poetas.  
Hinc patet ad doctas ianua aperta deas.  
Denique, sive forum secteris sive senatum,  
Disce puer vatum carmina, disce senex.

If there is such honor, if such is the fame of Apollo, if propitious poetry holds so many virtues, if there is divine genius, a mind inspired by poets, an inspired voice and a superior life, boy, then both the Latin and Pelasgian bards together pay homage, with which your brow be completely covered in ivy. A Doric wave gave the first draughts to the Mars-born; Latin words fall from a Greek spring. Therefore, study both the Greek and Latin poets. This is no mean thing. Here the open door grants access to divine wisdom. Indeed, whether you are one who pursues commerce or one who pursues politics, study poetry, young boy and old man alike, learn the bards' songs. (Rovira 50-51 [365-76])

The words *puer* (boy) and *senex* (old man) emphasize tacit limitations to the apparent universality of classical learning in that Latin education was often limited to male students. Although this limitation is real, it has often been unjustly emphasized in Latin scholarship, so that female Latin poets have been unduly neglected, even as one considers that there are fewer of them than male Latin poets. Jane Stevenson's *Women Latin Poets* has shown that the number of female Latin writers, although few in

comparison with men, number in the hundreds, a number that would appear far less if one attempted a cursory search through the major reference works of Latin scholarship (5). Early modern education often idealized and attempted to create a space where Latin was lived. As school rules prescribed for the students in the grammar school of the Dutch city of Alkmaar by Johannes Murmellius (c.1480-1517), which were common for Renaissance schools: "Bene vivere et latine loqui assuescunt" ("They [students, boys] will accustom themselves to live and speak in Latin well"; van Gelder I, 151). The formative years of many were lived in Latin, with the pedagogical aim that this Latin living would continue throughout their lives.

The words of Heraclitus are further resonant with the advice on translating Lucretius offered by Italo Calvino to the Latin scholar Luca Canali:

Caro [Luca] Canali,  
tu vuoi avere il contratto per tradurre Lucrezio. Ma come può uno che vuole tradurre Lucrezio aver bisogno d'un contratto? Tradurre Lucrezio può essere inteso solo come la missione d'una vita, una vocazione irresistibile, un *otium* cui uno dedica i momenti di grazia durante un seguito d'anni; si trovi egli in cattività, nel lusso o nell'inedia.

Dear Luca Canali,  
You want to have a contract to translate Lucretius. But how can one who wants to translate Lucretius need a contract? Translating Lucretius can be understood only as the mission of a lifetime, an irresistible vocation, an *otium*, which one devotes the moments of grace during over the course of many years, should one find oneself in captivity, opulence or starvation. (230).

Reading Homer and translating, and therefore reading, Lucretius is treated as a lifelong task but nevertheless an *otium*, an activity for one's leisure time, a pleasure. Whether idealized or realized, classical education has been conceptualized as an education, part of one's cultural and moral formation and a lifelong journey. This is an ideal, but one that has been actualized by many throughout the centuries. The ways in which the classical tradition has affected the lives of those with an intimate or passing familiarity with it are multiple and varied. One important scholarly record of life writing was left unpublished until the nineteenth century. The classical scholar Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614), regarded by many of his contemporaries as one of the most learned academics of his time, from his thirty-eighth birthday until his death kept a private diary recording daily his experiences, frustrations and reading. At the commencement of his diary he provides a learned rationale for this activity:

Cum sit πάντων πολυτελέστατον ἀνάλωμα τὸ τοῦ χρόνου, vereque dixerit Stoicus Latinus unius rei honestam avaritiam esse, temporis: quo mihi constaret ratio tam pretiosae rei, nec sera poenitudo unquam invaderet, hanc ἐφημερίδα et totius mei temporis rationarium istud visum instituere, ut et bene collocato gauderem, ac Deo Opt. Max. gratias agerem; et siquid, nihil, aut aliud agenti periisset, id quoque scirem, et meam infelicitatem aut imprudentiam agnoscerem.

Since the most extravagant outlay of all is of time [attributed to Antiphon, see Plutarch, *Ant.* 28.1], and Seneca said truthfully that avarice is virtuous in one case only: when it is avarice for time, I have determined to provide an account of so costly a thing, and never fall into late regret. I have decided to keep this diary and schedule of my whole life, so that I might rejoice and give thanks to God when my time is well spent, and if time is wasted doing nothing or spent on something trivial, I might also know it, and acknowledge my misfortune or impudence. (I, 1).

This diary, and its nineteenth-century publication, is partly responsible—and unjustly so—for Casaubon's reputation as a pedant, as famously characterized by his fictional namesake in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. His record of his own daily routine provides a unique account of a Renaissance scholar's life and world, the difficulties and interferences with his world, and a catalogue of his reading. Yet his account is not without its highlights and humor, as the following passage illustrates in an account of the author's illness:

In hoc morbo cum curis vacuum animum haberemus, et Deo nos nostraque omnia permitteremus, scripsimus in ipsa febris quae διάρροϊαν comitabatur hoc ad Patrem caelestem epigrammatium non felicitis ingenii sed piaie mentis testimonium.

τήκομαι ὁ τλήμων, καὶ φθειρόμαι ἢ δὲ νυ νοῦσος

Ἄ στυγερά στυγερώς σάρκας ὄλας κατέδει.

Πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ γίνομαι ὄλος• ὦν τὸ μὲν αἶθει,

Τοῦτο δὲ ἀνάου ρεῖ ποταμοῖο δίκην.

Ἔμμη, ὦ σῶτερ, πλὴν τοῦδ' ἐνός, οὐ δέομαί σου,

Ποιησόν με θέλειν σόν τὸ θέλημα μόνον.

During this illness, with effort I kept a clear mind and I entrusted myself and all that is mine to God. I wrote this epigrammatic testimony, not of a lucky nature but of a pious mind, to the heavenly Father during the same bout of fever accompanied with diarrhea:

Miserable I melt away and go to ruin, now loathsome

Sickness hatefully devours all my flesh.

I am entirely fire and water; partly for burning,

And partly gushing out the torment of an ever-flowing river.

Yet, O Saviour, save for this one thing, I am not in want of you,

Make me willing to do your will alone. (I, 34-35 [XIX. Kal. Sept. 1597])

Although the focus of this essay is on the Latin tradition, this Greek epigram is worth reflecting on. The entreaty for divine aid during painful illness can be sincerely felt, but the Homeric mock epic diction highlights the comic effect of the absurdity of writing Greek poetry about one's sickness. Yet there is also a stoic sense of putting one's mind to good use, the Christian concern with submitting one's will to God during a period of suffering, the academic aim of practicing poetic composition and maintaining one's Greek scholarship even during discomfort, consistent with the purpose of the diary, which is to record and assist the author in making use of his time. Aside from the combination of seriousness of the exercise and comic nature of the poem, this passage offers a moment of authorial intimacy in a way that exposes the deep internalization of the author's classical education. Casaubon utilizes mock epic Greek verse to reflect on his personal frustrations and ailments, and in doing so uses his mastery of the ancient language to challenge his physical ailments, celebrating the triumph of the scholarly mind over the flesh.

There is an ancient connection between playfulness and pedagogy. In ancient Rome, Latin schools were *ludus*, which also means (among other things) "play," and the school master was a *ludimagister*, a "master of play." The classical Greek for "school," σχολή, means literally "leisure." But this aspect of classical education is encapsulated in the life writing of those who have experienced it. Casaubon's epigram illustrates the wry playfulness that is one common element of writing about and autobiographical reflections on classical education. In the following anecdote, a Latin scholar relates his renewed enthusiasm for Horace:

For many years to my present regret I almost lost touch with Horace of the *Carmina*. I think really I owe it to a church organist friend and to another absurd incident that my thoughts were turned once again to Horace and to the music in his lyrics. For some reason this friend had his knife into that august body of reason this friend had his knife into that august body of Kensington Gore, London, the Royal College of Organists. I forget the reason for his displeasure and it matters not now. But one day he suddenly burst in on me with an impatient — "Odi profanum vulgus et RCO"! (The Arnoldian pronunciation of Latin usual in those days is of course necessary to the quip.) Strange to say, this did the trick. (Bonavia-Hunt xiv)

The wordplay depends upon comprehending the line "odi profanum vulgus, et arceo" ("I hate the impious mob and repel them away") as well as older Italianate pronunciation of Latin in which the soft "c" of "arceo" was pronounced like "see," which reformers in the Victorian period sought to replace with a hard "c" as in "key," which linguistic research demonstrated to be closer to the ancient Roman pronunciation. James Hilton's best-selling novella *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1934), which has been adapted many times including four films and television serials, relates the life of a schoolteacher whose resistance to the reform of Latin pronunciation marks "Mr Chips" as a representative of the old Victorian era and a certain nostalgia for it. Jokes and nostalgia relating to shared educational experiences have a means of unifying people who share them. Latin jokes are often inside jokes as they rely on shared pedagogical experience, here not just the learning of Latin but the learning of Latin at a time when it was taught in a certain way.

But language learning also encourages linguistic game. The line between education and game is reflected in a rhyming macaronic poem, Herbert H. Huxley's "Mars Bar":

Est praedulcis esu Mars-Bar.  
Nil est cibo tuo, Mars, par.  
Tune vis beatum larem?  
Habe promptum Martem-Barem.  
Captus dono Martis-Baris  
Helenam liquisset Paris.  
Dum natabunt ponto scari,

### Dentur laudes Marti-Bari!

The Mars Bar is sweet to eat. No snack is your equal, Mars. Do you want a happy home? Have a Mars Bar handy. If Paris had been seduced with the gift of a Mars Bar, he would have jilted Helen. So long as parrotfish swim in the sea, praises shall be given to the Mars Bar! (40)

Though of hardly serious pedagogical intent, the poem illustrates the grammatical construction of the English "Mars Bar" as if it were a Latin noun of the third declension. Thus this poem imitates the tradition of mnemonic verses, utilized in Latin education for centuries. Huxley dedicated this poem to A. D. Godley, a classical scholar known for his humorous poems, including "The Motor Bus," which also makes fun of Latin noun declensions. Often Latin facilitated an aesthetic impulse to experiment or play as well as poke fun at the experience of classical education and, from the nineteenth century onward, often at its loss: the Victorian literary critic Arthur Tilley once lamented, "No longer is the skilful emendation of a Greek play the royal road to a bishopric; no longer do grave statesmen and men of learning beguile their leisure moments with doing *Humpty Dumpty* into Latin verse; a classical quotation in the House of Commons is almost an event; a false quantity falls there on unheeding ears" (163).

Tilley's lament is sincere and comical. His complaint about the decline in classical learning has been reiterated in many nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of the displacement of Classics at the crown and center of scholastic life, but the practical absurdity of high attainments in Latin and Greek as a qualification for high offices is marked. Yet as Latin learning has an inclusive function to invite shared cultural and educational norms and experiences, or bewail their loss among the social and political elite as in Tilley's quotation, its modern use is also marked by an element of exclusivity. But there is another side to the collegiality of shared Latin learning. It is said that Francis Williams (1702-1771) was a free black Jamaican who studied in England at a grammar school and at the University of Cambridge, sent there by the Duke of Montagu as a social experiment to discern whether a black man could be educated, and who later returned to Jamaica to take up a position as a schoolmaster. There is much reason to distrust this account. Williams inherited substantial wealth from his father, and had no need for either the dependency on the Duke or the reliance on such a position of schoolmaster (Caretta 221-22). These related details of his life come from Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*, which devotes an entire chapter to Francis Williams. Long's explicit purpose is "with the impartiality that becomes me" (Long 475) "to prove the inferiority of the Negroes" (Carretta 226), and to this end, he aims to denigrate Williams' scholarship and achievements as well as his dress, appearance, treatment of other blacks in Jamaica, and all else about him. As a consequence, much of the biography of one of the first black writers of the British Empire is adversarial and hostile. Williams is mostly remembered now for his 46-line Latin ode in elegiac couplets to George Haldane, who was briefly governor of Jamaica from 1756 to 1759, which has often been anthologized and studied as an early example of a poem written by a black Caribbean writer. However, the text most often used is the eighteenth-century translation by Edward Long, preserved in his hostile account of Williams, as it is in a contemporary poetic style of heroic couplets and it is in English. This critical reliance on Long's translation (Gilmore 92-93) has been in spite of the problematic nature of an English translation by someone who aimed to denigrate the author of the original poem. Even Long's footnotes to Williams' poem providing references from Virgil, Horace, and Juvenal all suggest plagiarism, although the use of such allusions to classical poetry was an ubiquitous practice in neo-Latin writing (Gilmore 100).

The opening of Williams' ode celebrates George Haldane's arrival in Jamaica in welcoming panegyric verses, which are followed by Williams' plea that his poem be accepted by the new governor. The theme of offering poetry to one's patron and entreating its acceptance is a tradition in Latin verse.

Flammiferos agitante suos sub sole iugales  
Vivimus; eloquium deficit omne focus.  
Hoc demure accipias, multa fuligine fusum  
Ore sonaturo; non cute, corde valet.  
Pollenti stabilita manu, (Deus almus, eandem  
Omnigenis animam, nil prohibente dedit)  
Ipsa coloris egens virtus, prudentia; honesto  
Nullus inest animo, nullus in arte color.  
Cur timeas, quamvis, dubitesve, nigerrima celsam  
Caesaris occidui, scandere Musa domum?  
Vade salutatum, nec sit tibi causa pudoris,  
Candida quod nigra corpora pelle geris!  
Integritas morum Maurum magis ornat, et ardor  
Ingenii, et docto dulcis in ore decor;

Hunc, mage cor sapiens, patriae virtutis, amorque,  
Eximit e sociis, conspicuumque facit. (27-42)

We live under an Apollo driving his own frame-bringing team. Every kind of eloquence is lacking to slaves. Receive this at any rate. Though poured forth from one very black, it is valuable, coming from a sonorous mouth; not from his skin, but from his heart. The bountiful Deity, with a hand powerful and firm, has given the same soul to men of all races, nothing standing in his way. Virtue itself, and prudence, are free from colour; there is no colour in an honourable mind, no colour in skill. Why dost thou fear or doubt that the blackest Muse may scale the lofty house of the western Caesar? Go and salute him, and let it not be to thee a cause of shame thou wearest a white body in a black skin. Integrity of morals more adorns a Moor, and ardour of intellect and sweet elegance in a learned mouth. A wise heart and the love of his ancestral virtue the more remove him from his comrades and make him conspicuous. (Translation by E. J. Chinock, qtd. in MacDermot 158)

Long's English version mistranslates lines 27-28 with the couplets: "We live, alas! where the bright god of day, / Full from the zenith whirls his torrid ray. / Beneath the rage of his consuming fires, / All fancy melts, all eloquence expires" (Carretta 219). Chinock translates "*focis*" in line 28 as "slaves," as it literally means "hearth" but can refer metaphorically to a "household," which in ancient Rome would include one's household slaves. "All eloquence is lacking in [our] homes" would also be a sufficient translation of this line. Long avoids translating the word "*focis*" entirely, perhaps uncertain how to construe it. Although "*flammiferos iugales*" is a perfectly comprehensible epithet, referring the team of horses that pulls the chariot of the sun across the sky, Long remarks in his footnotes to the Latin poem: "I apprehend Mr. Williams mistook this [*iugales*] for *jubara*, sun beams" (Carretta 235). Long's suggestion of *jubara* is not only unnecessary but also unmetrical. Yet it highlights the problematic nature of using Long's translation to interpret Williams' poem: not only is the historian Long hostile to Williams, he is also an incompetent translator and interpreter of his Latin ode. So that, although an understandable concession to modern readership, it is unfortunate that several anthologies, such as *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English Speaking World of the 18th Century* (72-76), offer the readers only the English text of Long's translation without Williams' Latin, as it preserves the eighteenth-century misreading and attempts to deny the author's voice. Williams' poem is an explicit and personal assertion of his own educational and poetic attainments. Long's pro-slavery history of Jamaica attempts to obscure and denigrate these attainments under the superficial pretense of impartiality. Jocular references to classical learning examined previously appeal to an audience with a shared social and cultural background. Williams, through his poem, asserts his own membership in those shared attainments. Records preserve Williams' other efforts to assert the same, as although Long omits any mention of this, Williams was involved in legal and political efforts in Jamaica to preserve his own rights and those of other "free negroes" (Carretta 222-25; Ogborn 16-17). Williams' unique poetic voice and the context of its preservation highlight the problem of interpretation and translation, the inclusivity of Latin amongst a select group contrasted with the exclusivity of higher learning, and how gatekeepers preserve that exclusivity. It is a form of irony that the written record proves Williams a better Latin scholar than Long, but it amplifies the problem of using Long's translation to represent Williams' voice.

As the example of Francis Williams demonstrates, Latin often comes to light on the peripheries. Latinity is instructive and affective, but its manner of affecting literature can occur in unusual and unpredictable ways. For example, fifteenth-century comic stories, such as one novella by Franco Sacchetti, relate anecdotes about ignorant interlocutors' mistaken belief that a Lady Bisodia is referred to in the Lord's Prayer, based on the mishearing of the Latin *da nobis hodie* ("give us today") as Italian *donna Bisodia* (Gillet 68). In the twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci could still relate how his aunt Grazia believed in a Donna Bisodia, a lady pious enough to be mentioned in the Lord's Prayer (157), suggesting that the learned joke had a curious afterlife in the vernacular oral tradition. Gramsci's aunt Grazia is in a way an incarnation of a late medieval jest, but also a living twentieth-century woman, if Gramsci's account is correct. On the periphery of learned and ecclesiastical Latin, its cultural affects must have been curious and unpredictable. Latin must be somewhat familiar to an Italian speaker but its familiarity invites confusion and misinterpretation. Between Sacchetti's and Gramsci's jocular remarks about the unlearned with Latin, there must have been many incarnations and stories told of the Donna Bisodia. These accounts raise the question of the depths and ranges that common encounters with Latin had in the minds of those who heard them. In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Sir Walter Scott relates a fictional account of attempting to apply the tenets of ancient poetry to modern agriculture:

But Reuben, naturally reserved and distant, improved none of these advantages; and only became more attached to Jeanie Deans, as the enthusiastic approbation of his master assured him of fair prospects in future



life, and awakened his ambition. In the meantime, every advance that Reuben made in learning (and, considering his opportunities, they were uncommonly great) rendered him less capable of attending to the domestic duties of his grandmother's farm. While studying the *pons asinorum* in Euclid, he suffered every *cuddie* upon the common to trespass upon a large field of peas belonging to the Laird, and nothing but the active exertions of Jeanie Deans, with her little dog Dustiefoot, could have saved great loss and consequent punishment. Similar miscarriages marked his progress in his classical studies. He read Virgil's *Georgics* till he did not know bere from barley; and had nearly destroyed the crofts of Beersheba while attempting to cultivate them according to the practice of Columella and Cato the Censor. (Scott 89)

This account can be delightfully compared with Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722-1793), an influential South Carolina agriculturist, who remarks:

I have got no further than the first vol of Virgil, but was most agreeably disappointed to find myself instructed in agriculture as well as entertained by his charming penn, for I am persuaded 'tho he wrote for Italy it will in many Instances suit Carolina. I had never perused those books before, and imagined I should immediately enter upon battles, storms and tempests, that put mee in a maze, and make mee shudder while I read. But the calm and pleasing diction of pastoral and gardening agreeably presented themselves not unsuitably to this charming season of the year, with wch I am so much delighted that had I butt the fine soft Language of our Poet to paint it properly, I should give you but little respite 'till you came into the country, and attended to the beauties of pure Nature unassisted by Art. (35-36)

Where Sir Walter Scott jests about the scholar setting to agricultural work, the accomplished eighteenth-century plantation manager reports the practical benefits of poetic inspiration. Life and literature come together in curious parallels. As Curtius noted, Latin literary culture is central to the Western literary experience. However, it is necessary not only to recognize allusions and read classical texts but also to understand how this experience was lived and recorded and how these experiences manifest themselves in unique and interesting, lived and literary ways. Often more unusual encounters and uses of classical languages can be illuminating. Encounters with Latin, jokes meant to include, or translations meant to exclude and denigrate, act as gate-keeping for the classical tradition. In her autobiography, the Irish poet Eavan Boland discusses her learning of Latin:

Then one day in my last year—although this is a figurative use of time—I began to understand something. It was something about the economy of it all: the way the ablative absolute gathered and compressed time. One day, again figuratively, it was a burdensome piece of grammar. The next, with hardly any warning, it was a messenger with quick heels and a bright face. I hardly knew what had happened. I began to respect, however grudgingly the systems of a language which could make such constructs that, although I had no such words for it, they stood against the disorders of love or history. They had described bridges and defined governments. They had left the mouth of the centurion and entered the minds of a Sicilian farm worker. They had forged alliances and named stars. And at that point of my adolescence, where the words I wrote on a page were nothing but inexact, the precision and force of these constructs began to seem both moving and healing. (74-75)

Boland's epiphany focuses on the realization that Latin is a lived and literary language, rather than a fossilized set of grammatical rules. It can be asserted in many ways that Latin is not a dead language, but its vibrancy in life and letters is merits further attention. From poetic quips to Mr. Chips, and in contrasting the actions of fictional characters with biographical accounts, we can discover how the Latin literary tradition affects the lives and experiences of professional and accidental writers. There are myriad forms of life writing, and though there is no lack of new avenues for world literature to explore, there is much to gain from being a *civis Romanus* and a world citizen. To acknowledge the seriousness with which many who write in Latin (or, for that matter, classical Greek) took their work, and to appreciate the humor, irony and conflict that such language usage creates, is to be schooled in neglected Latin writings and the lives of its authors, and also to appreciate the playfulness and vitality of the texts.

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