

SATIPS

Support and training in Prep, Primary and Senior Schools

Classics

A message from the editor

Now that 2018 is upon us – but before the mixed blessings of the Easter term are laid at our feet – I should like to take this opportunity to wish everybody in the world of Classics teaching a very Happy New Year and all the best for the coming months.

I am also glad of another chance to thank all those who have contributed articles for the past few editions and provided such fascinating reading. Further entries would be welcomed, and I wholeheartedly encourage readers to send in their efforts on any Classics-related matter.

The last week of the Christmas term

As the festive season draws to a close, I thought I might dedicate the first part of this edition to the business of teaching in the run-up to Christmastime.

Few of us can have taught in mid-December and escaped the inevitable “Are we going to do something fun today, sir?”

It can be difficult to resist the temptation. My prep school Latin master blithely ploughed on with Wilding’s *Latin Course for Schools* irrespective of the time of year, but it takes firm resolution in the 21st century to marshal one’s students in that final week, beset as they are with videos and raucous quizzes in other lessons. Even if one endeavours, as I do, to continue with proper teaching into the last days of term, the problem then arises of umpteen children being absent, owing to carol services, preparations for Chapel readings, winter illnesses and so forth.

It is therefore inevitable that many teachers reluctantly turn to classically themed movies – but even then, there are slim pickings. Offerings in the vein of *Troy* or *300* bear offensively little relation to the original stories, or prove too R-rated for a prep school audience. (Alas, this puts pay to *Life of Brian* as well.) Once I have exhausted *The Odyssey* (1997), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and *Clash of the Titans* (1981), I find myself sunk. Besides which, the modern schoolchild is so inundated with video clips that films can be met with the same ennui as a stodgy unseen.

Thus I have taken to concocting prose composition exercises based on pop songs and movie quotations. Take this Queen classic, for

example – a useful exercise in passive infinitives, gerunds and participles.

estne haec vita vera, aut solum somnium? capi lapsu in terrae, nulla e veritate effugiendi spe. verte oculos apertos ad caelum et circumspice!

Other songs can be constructed so that they may be sung to the original tune.

*primum timebam, perterrita eram,
me posse vivere sine te nesciebam...*

*nove, noli desperare,
dixi, nove, adtolle ipsum te,
dixi, nove, nam in oppido novo es,
noli esse miser...*

*media nox accedit,
quoddam nefas in tenebris latet,
sub lunae luce,
conspectum qui cor paene sistit vides,
clamare conaris...*

My full collection of Latin lyrics is available upon request, and I would welcome any corrections or critique of the above!

Modern-day unseen translations

I have also developed a number of unseen translations which work both as handy revision materials and entertaining diversions – I enclose a few below.

My latest concerned the various doings of Donaldus Trump.

habitat hodie in America vir clarus et pecuniosus, Donaldus nomine. Donaldus negotium administrabat et multas divitias comparabat. iam tamen incolis Americae regnat. corium Donaldi aureum est; comam flavam quoque habet. dextram parvam saepe vibrat et ita dicitur. ‘o incolae’ inquit ‘murum mox aedificabimus. magnum erit. magnum erit! sic advenas a patria arcebimus. cur Sinis plus pecuniae est quam Americae? Sinae! Donaldus mandate imperium et advenas fugate; deinde patria magna iterum erit.’ Donaldus numquam tacet. etiam nuntios parvos notat et multis discipulis communicat. 🐾

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This is one of the subject Broadsheets published termly by The Society of Assistants Teaching in Preparatory Schools limited by guarantee and not having a share capital.

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Registered Charity
no. 313688

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nunc contra Koream bellum movere in animo habet; praefectum enim terrae non amat. quod autem clava pilam diu cotidie iactat, saepe occupatus otio quam magisterio est.

(Note the presence only of the 1st and 2nd declensions of nouns and conjugations of verbs – this passage is based on the grammar covered in the first nineteen chapters of my *Variatio* Latin course.)

Others are more eclectic in their subject matter. This one tells the story of the classic sitcom ‘*Allo ‘Allo!*’ and the characters’ endless pursuit of Van Klomp’s *Fallen Madonna with the Big Boobies*.

Renatus in Gallia habitat, ubi tabernam administrat. Renatus amicique magno in periculo saepe sunt. quamquam cotidie multi Germani tabernam intrans et vinum potant, Renatus duos incolas Britanniae pro perfugis celat.

feminam, nomine Edetam, habet. Edetam non amat. ambas tamen ancillas magnopere amat; Edeta ignorat. si femina Renatum cum una ancillarum spectat, verba irata clamat; ‘o Renate, cur ancillam in brachiis tuis tenes?’ ita semper respondet; ‘tu femina stulte!’ deinde explicat ‘ancillae, quod misera forte erat, solacium dabam’ aut aliqua se excusat. Edeta, quod credula est, maritum valde laudat. ‘o Renate’ inquit ‘quam benignus es!’

Another, featured after the present tense of *amo* and the six cases of *mensa* in volume I of *Variatio*, explains the brilliance of Hercule Poirot.

Belga, Hercules nomine, Britanniam habitat. si homicida aut oppugnat aut vulnerat, Hercules explorat. non festinat; sed putat. diu et spectat et cogitat; deinde incolis Britanniae homicidam subito monstrat. Hercules non vi sed sapientia laborat. scriba Citra saepe iuvat. postquam homicidam culpat, incolae Belgam semper magnopere laudant; nam bene laborat et patriam iuvat.

Citra for “Miss Lemon” is perhaps a slight liberty, but I have tried where possible to employ Ciceronian Latin.

Other possibilities include *Harrius Potter et Philosophi Lapis*, which I hand out along with a glossary, as well of course as some real Latin literature. Last year’s scholars enjoyed some (carefully chosen!) Catullus poems and the odd Martial epigram. Once again, I should be delighted to pass on glossed copies of any of the above to interested parties.

The contemporary usage of Latin

Even as the fall of the Roman Empire fades into the mists of time, Latin remains in the headlines today. I try to put its appearance in current events to occasional use in the classroom.

The last Pope’s resignation speech proved a helpful translation exercise, even if it was composed in remarkably clunky prose. I also recall Boris Johnson not long after condemning one of the EU’s fiscal policies on the grounds that it had been tried before – with disastrous consequences – by the Emperor Diocletian.

An unlikely champion of everyday Latin has recently emerged in the form of rising Tory star Jacob Rees-Mogg. Already well-known for remarking “*vox populi, vox dei*” while on the campaign trail, as well as popularising the word “*floccinaucinihilipilification*”, he more recently gave “*tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*” as his opening Twitter salvo. On the day that Article 50 was triggered, he summed up the post-Brexit zeitgeist in the phrase “*salve, festa dies, toto venerabilis aevo!*” Sentiments bound to stir up strong feelings on all sides of the staffroom but also, I hope, to pique the interest of some brighter pupils.