Latin in Modern Fiction

Who Says It's a Dead Language?

Henryk Hoffmann

Series in Literary Studies

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To my wife Betsy

and

my friends Les Sekut and Patricia Wendland–
three people most instrumental in and most supportive of
my Latin teaching career;

and

to my friends Lidka and Krzysztof Samolej,
the hosts of the Skrzynki Mansion,
where my multi-level, thirty-year-long journey has been repeatedly enriched
through their amazing cordiality and encouragement

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Preface

"Magna est . . . vis humanitatis".
("The effect of liberal education is great.")
- Cicero

"Rident stolidi lingua Latina."
("Fools laugh at the Latin language.")
- Ovid, Tristia, Book V, Poem 10

When asked what made them take Latin, most students quote their parents, who told them that Latin would help them on the SAT exams. Others say it is important to take the language because they want to be doctors or scientists, and some have decided to take it because of their hope to become lawyers. While all of this reasoning is more or less correct, there are many other, more substantial, reasons why Latin should never be abandoned from school curricula in both Europe and the United States. In order to establish cogent arguments in support of such reasoning, let us, first, have a brief look at the history of the language.

Originated from the spoken tongue of a nomadic tribe wandering north of the Caucasus Mountains around 6,000 B.C., Latin is rightly considered to be one of the "grandchildren," or rather "great-great-great-(…)-children," of Proto-Indo-European, a language thus labeled by historical linguists due to the location where it had appeared (somewhere between Europe and Asia/India) and the lack of a better name. Also influenced by the local language of the Etruscans, Latin took the shape as is known to its past and present students around 1,000 B.C., when some of the descendants of the previously mentioned nomadic tribe, after growing considerably in numbers and repeatedly splitting into smaller groups, moved far west from the Caucasus Mountains and eventually decided to settle down on the Apennine Peninsula and form a nation they themselves called 'Latium.' While the pure and very complex form of the language, which had adopted its grammar system (along with the concepts) from Greek, survived in the Catholic Church, its simplified version, also known as "Vulgar" Latin, gradually, through a blend of different ethnic groups, developed into a number of derivative languages, such as Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian and a few others—the Romance languages which, by using the already applied family metaphor, we can also refer to as the "children" of Latin. By the same token, we can refer to

the other modern European languages as the "cousins" of the Romance languages or the "nephews" or "nieces" of Latin.

But the influence of Latin was not limited to the nations where Romance languages developed. Due to the enormous Roman conquests of some other European areas, especially by the army of Julius Caesar, and to the expansion of the Roman-Catholic religion, many other European languages were impacted by Latin, its alphabet, lexicon and syntax. While English vocabulary incorporates over 70% of lexical items derived from Latin, the concept of cases and the system of tenses, along with some vocabulary, were adopted by some other Germanic languages and, even more, by some Slavic languages, Polish being one of them. In fact, Latin had a major impact in Poland between the tenth and eighteenth centuries, first being the only written language (of historical documents, chronicles, scientific publications—e.g., Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, i.e., *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*, 1530—and even literary works) and later becoming the second spoken language among the Polish gentry, which is creatively evidenced in Henryk Sienkiewicz's trilogy, consisting of *Ogniem i mieczem* (*With Fire and Sword*, 1884), *Potop* (*The Deluge*, 1886) and *Pan Wołodyjowski* (*Sir Michael*, 1888).

Figure 0.1. The Latin sign meaning "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will" above the altar of Peter and Paul Church in Potsdam, Germany. Photo by Betsy Hoffmann.

The presence of Latin in the Catholic Church had been strong over many centuries, the Latin Tridentine Mass, also known as the Traditional Latin Mass or *Usus Antiquior*, lasting between 1570 and the 1960s as the most widely used Mass liturgy in the world. Nowadays, Latin can still be traced in religious hymns and Christmas carols—phrases like *Gloria in excelsis Deo* ('Glory to

God in the highest') used repeatedly—as well as on many old buildings in most European countries (the city hall in Poznan, Poland, e.g., is practically one big plaque of Latin inscriptions). Modern languages, both written and spoken, brim with Latin words, phrases and clauses, not only where people expect them the most, i.e., in the sciences, medicine and law, but also in everyday communication, public speaking and, what is to be demonstrated in this book, in fiction.

However, there is no nation anywhere in the world that currently communicates exclusively by means of the Latin language. And that criterion itself turned out to be decisive for some scholars that have labeled Latin a dead language. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves if the criterion is correct or fair; i.e., if Latin deserves to be included among some obscure languages spoken in the remote past by some forgotten tribes that ceased to exist for one reason or another. Yes, the only place where Latin can still be extensively heard in a discourse is the Vatican, and the people that use it there do not belong to one nation only. But this should not diminish the importance of the language and make people ignore many obvious facts related to its broad and complex impact in many aspects of modern life. Just to show one illustration, the word 'computer,' made up to describe probably the most important modern invention, is derived from the first-conjugation Lain verb *computo computare* ('to reckon together/calculate').

It is impossible to list here all the English words that have Latin roots. Below are some examples that I am especially fond of, divided into groups according to the three basic parts of speech:

Nouns: 'agent' (from *ago agĕre* – 'to do/act'), 'benefactor' and 'beneficiary' (both derived from *bene* – 'well,' and *facio facĕre* – 'to do/make'), 'factotum' (meaning 'do-it-all' or 'Jack/master of all trades' from *facio* in the imperative form and the neuter form of the adjective *totus, tota, totum* – 'whole/all'), 'gladiator' (from *gladius* – 'sword'), 'tradition' (from *trado tradĕre* – 'hand over');

Adjectives: 'belligerent' (from *bellum* – 'war'), 'cordial' (from *cors cordis* – 'heart'), 'eloquent' and 'loquacious' (both from *loquor loqui* – 'to speak') 'malevolent' and 'malicious' (both from *malus* – 'bad/evil'), 'pugnacious' (from *pugno pugnare* – 'to fight');

Verbs: 'accelerate' (from *ad* – 'to/toward' and *celer* – 'quick'), 'deposit' (from *de* – 'down to' and *pono, ponĕre, posui, positum* – 'to place'), 'procrastinate' (from *pro* – 'forward,' and *cras* – 'tomorrow'). (Note: Here and henceforth in the entire book, Latin nouns are usually listed only in the nominative singular form unless it is sensible to include also the genitive singular form to show the similarity between the base and a given derivative or to indicate its declension number; two principal parts of the Latin verbs are listed unless it is necessary

to list all four, occasionally three, in order to show the stem used in the derivative. For similar, practical, reasons, in my explanations, I use diacritics—signs that were not used in the original Latin texts—only when they are grammatically significant: a 'macron,' distinguishing long or heavy vowels/syllables, over the 'a' in ablative singular nouns of the first declension and over the 'u' in genitive singular and nominative and accusative plural nouns of the fourth declension, as well as over the penultimate 'e' in the infinitive of the second-conjugation verbs; and a 'breve,' indicating short or light vowels/syllables, over the penultimate 'e' in the infinitive of the third-conjugation verbs.)

The English language has adopted numerous abbreviations, phrases and some clauses (sentences) without any spelling change. There are a number of abbreviations—such as 'a.m.' (*ante meridiem* – 'before noon'), 'p.m.' (*post meridiem* – 'after noon'), 'A.D.' (*Anno Domini* – 'in the year of our Lord'), 'i.e.' (*id est* – 'that is'), 'e.g.' (*exempli gratiā* – 'for example') and 'etc.' (*et cetera* – 'and others')—that are commonly used in English without any questions asked. All or some of them, just like a host of unabbreviated words or phrases—such as 'alibi' (literally 'elsewhere,' implying the impossibility of committing a crime), 'alma mater' ('nourishing mother,' in fact, referring to 'an educational institution one graduated from'), 'modus operandi' ('manner of operating'), 'quorum' (literally 'of whom,' i.e. 'the minimum number of people required to be present'), 'quota' ('portion/part/share' or 'a fixed minimum or maximum') or 'status quo' ('the existing state')—constitute a normal part of either spoken or written English and, in fact, some other European languages. Their users automatically include them in their vocabulary, frequently unaware of their literal meaning (occasionally—when used metaphorically or as a different part of speech—somewhat dissimilar to the one assumed in their native languages) and sometimes even oblivious of their Latin origin. Because those abbreviations, words and phrases are deeply incorporated in those modern languages, they are not even italicized when used in writing. In addition to these, however, there are many Latin phrases (usually italicized in print) borrowed by English with a higher level of awareness but still without any changes in the Latin spelling; thus, they should be considered to be Latin lexical items widely used in the English language rather than Latin-derived English phrases. Here is an incomplete list of such phrases, divided into categories:

a) general: *ad hoc* (literally 'for this,' i.e. 'for a particular purpose' or 'only when necessary or needed'), *ad infinitum* ('again and again/forever'), *ad nauseam* (something going on for too long, as a result, 'causing a bad taste'), *bona fide* ('genuine/real'), *de facto* ('in fact/in effect/in reality'), *in memoriam* ('in memory of'), *in situ* ('in position/in original place'), *in toto* ('as a

whole/in all/overall'), *persona non grata* ('an unwelcome person'), *post facto* ('after the fact'), *quid pro quo* ('one thing for another'), *sui generis* ('one of a kind' or 'unique');

b) medical: *post mortem* ('after death/of a dead body'), *rigor mortis* (literally 'stiffness of death' or, better, 'postmortem rigidity');

c) legal: *corpus delicti* ('the dead body of the victim'), *habeas corpus* (literally 'that you have the body,' a recourse allowing to report an unlawful detention), *in flagrante delicto* ('in the act of wrongdoing'), *in loco parentis* ('in place of a parent'), *pro bono* ('out of good will/free of charge'), *pro forma* ('as a matter of form or politeness');

d) scientific: *deus ex machina* ('a god from a machine,' i.e. 'an unexpected/miraculous power'), *in vitro* ('in a test tube'), *in vivo* ('in a living organism');

e) religious: *Dominus vobiscum* ("Lord be with you"), *mea culpa* ('my fault');

f) statistical: *per capita* (literally 'per heads,' i.e. 'for each person');

g) literary/art/music criticism: *deus ex machina* (again, this time referring to 'a plot device capable of solving a seemingly unsolvable problem'), *in medias res* ('into the midst of things'), *magnum opus* ('a large and important work'), *pars pro toto* ('a part representative of the whole,' a poetic device also known as 'synecdoche').

And here are some of the most common Latin quotations/proverbs—phrases/clauses/sentences (which definitely should be italicized in writing)—that one can quite frequently encounter in both written and spoken language, be it English or any of the Romance, Germanic or Slavic tongues:

a) *Ab ovo usque ad mala.* ("From the egg all the way to the apples." Or simply "From soup to nuts.")

b) *Ad astra per aspera.* ("Through thorns/hardships to the stars.")

c) *Alea iacta est.* ("The die has been cast.")

d) *Amor vincit omnia.* ("Love conquers all/everything.")

e) *Carpe diem.* ("Seize the day!")

f) *Cogito ergo sum.* ("I think; therefore, I am.")

g) *Errare humanum est.* (“To err is human.”)

h) *Et tu Brute contra me.* (“And you, Brutus, against me!”)

i) *Festina lente.* (“Rush slowly.”)

j) *Gladiator in arena consilium capit.* (“Gladiator makes a plan in the arena.”)

k) *Homo faber suae quisque fortunae.* (“Every man is the artisan of his own fortune.”)

l) *In vino veritas.* (“In wine lies the truth.”)

m) *Ipsa scientia potestas est.* (“Knowledge itself is power.”)

n) *Manus manum lavat.* (“One hand washes the other.”)

o) *Mens sana in corpore sano.* (“A sound mind in a healthy body.”)

p) *Morituri te salutamus.* (“We, about to die, salute you.”)

q) *Nemo malus felix.* (“No bad man is happy.”)

r) *Nihil sub sole novum.* (“Nothing new under the sun.”)

s) *Otium sine litteris mors est et hominis vivi sepultura.* (“Leisure without literature is death, or rather the burial of a living man.”)

t) *Stultum est timere quod vitare non potes.* (“It is foolish to fear what you cannot avoid.”)

u) *Sursum corda.* (“Lift up your hearts.”)

v) *Tempus fugit.* (“Time flies.”)

w) *Ubi concordia, ibi victoria.* (“Where there is unity, there is victory.”)

x) *Ubi opes, ibi amici.* (“Where wealth is, there friends are.”)

y) *Veni, vidi, vici.* (“I came, I saw, I conquered.”)

z) *Virtus mille scuta.* (“Courage is a thousand shields.”)

In addition to appearing on American bills (e.g., *Novus ordo seclorum* – “A new order of the ages”) and coins (e.g., *E pluribus unum* – “One out of many”), besides constituting mottos of states, universities, schools and other civilian or military institutions, Latin words, phrases and sentences have “invaded” numerous books published throughout the centuries in other than Latin languages, including English. Books from previous eras (by Geoffrey Chaucer, Christopher Marlowe, Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde, just to

name five authors) or novels about ancient Rome written within the last 130 years (e.g., *Quo Vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Spartacus* by Howard Fast, *The Antagonists* and *The Triumph* by Ernest K. Gann) constitute evidence of an extensive impact of Latin amongst numerous writers. However, since they are either too remote in time or too obvious because of the setting, they cannot be used as convincing examples testifying to the fact that Latin is alive TODAY, and, consequently, they are excluded from the scope of this publication. James Joyce, who wrote in the first half of the twentieth century, frequently embellishing his prose with Latin lexicon, is also excluded here for a different reason: his case has already been discussed in a serious book—*Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce* (1997) by R. J. Schork—an excellent and comprehensive work, which cannot be improved and should not be plagiarized. Thus, the scope of this publication covers all the other writers actively popularizing Latin in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, mostly representing three genres: mainstream, crime and detective, and frontier and western. In order to fit all those genres in the scope, the setting restrictions are somewhat less strict than those of the publication time, allowing books set in the nineteenth century to be included as well.

Latin words, phrases, clauses and extensive quotations have been found in approximately 220 modern works of fiction (published between 1900 and now) by more than 150 authors, the discrepancy in the two numbers indicating the fact that many writers have quoted the language of Vergil in multiple works. Those that habitually include Latin in their prose include such prestigious authors of mainstream fiction as Aldous Huxley, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, John Steinbeck, Julio Cortázar, Saul Bellow, Flannery O'Connor, Umberto Eco, John Updike and John Irving; such remarkable mystery writers as Erle Stanley Gardner, Ellery Queen, John Dickson Carr, Ross Macdonald, William X. Kienzle, Joe Gores, Sara Paretsky, Paul Levine, Elizabeth George and Joseph Finder; and such distinguished western writers as Emerson Hough, Paul Horgan and Larry McMurtry. These and some other writers (with a moderately impressive number of Latin references)—altogether forty-five—constitute the main body of the book, divided into three parts, each corresponding to one of the genres. All the Latin quotations, as well as the word 'Latin' itself, are put in **bold print**; the English translations and other marginal comments in the main text appear in parentheses; my own translations of the Latin text within the quotations, which are consistently moved to the right (creating thus a double margin on the left), are put in brackets, just like the page numbers in the book from which a given quotation was extracted.

The individual entries on the writers do not aspire to be complete portraits of the authors' lives and works, nor do they try to present the writers'

contributions to the thesis of the book comprehensively. While in some cases a given author's bibliography has been researched in an extensive or even, in a few cases, complete manner, most of the entries resulted from random or accidental findings, and no further studies of a given author's work followed. It would be absolutely impossible to conduct thorough research of all modern fiction or even of all the works by the writers included in the Bibliography. Consequently, it needs to be understood that the scope of the database is not precisely defined, but rather instrumental in or conducive to the goal of this project: to present as many examples of Latin references as possible, by as many writers as possible and by writers representing more than one genre (the last assumption, however, somewhat restricted by my individual literary taste). It is not, after all, a book on literature; it is a book on the Latin language as presented in samples of modern fiction. Thus, the reason behind the bio-bibliographical introductions in each entry is, on the one hand, to provide data for establishing the authors' validity/prestige, and, on the other, to offer information that will either tie the quotations with the authors' images or help, at least to some extent, explain their content.

It is a reference book; thus, each entry is a whole in itself. It does not need information presented in other entries to explain what is in it. Hence, repetitions of translations and explanations of the same or similar lexical items, along with comments regarding their cultural or grammatical context, are to be expected, my sincere intention to avoid them notwithstanding. But, if there is an interesting aspect of the data worth addressing but ignored in one entry, it is more than likely that it is discussed in another. Consequently, if someone is interested in obtaining here as much information as possible about a certain Latin word, phrase or clause, the person should look up each of the page numbers listed next to that item in the Index, which is a comprehensive lexicon of all the Latin references discussed in the book. On the other hand, the Index does not include the contributors of the quotations; thus, it needs to be clarified that the basic biographical information about each of the famous people behind the references—especially the Roman poets, historians, philosophers and politicians—can be found in the entry where they are quoted for the first time, and, if mentioned again later in the book, for the second, third or fourth time, their names are followed by a note in parentheses referring the reader to the appropriate entry.

Professor E. Christian Kopff, in his excellent work *The Devil Knows Latin: Why America Needs the Classical Tradition* (1999), offers an abundance of comprehensive and convincing arguments in defense of tradition in general, of Western culture and of the classics, and provides a model of an ideal curriculum for secondary and higher education institutions. The book you are looking at can, thus, be treated as a modest supplement or an

addendum to Kopff's masterful treaty, an addendum offering numerous examples and further evidence in support of his amazing, if sometimes wrongfully ignored, conclusions.

I would like to finish the preface with three Latin quotations dear to me not only because they are closely related to my life in America. I spent the first eight years as an immigrant in North Carolina, the state whose motto is *Esse quam videri* ("To be rather than to seem"), a clause interesting from the grammatical standpoint because of the present infinitive of the deponent (passive in form, active in meaning) verb 'to seem' at the end, related to the normal verb *video, vidēre, vidi vidum* ('to see'). The motto of The Asheville School, where I taught the last six years of the twentieth century, is *Vitae excelsioris limen*, which needs to be translated backwards as (literally) "A threshold/gateway of a better life" or (better) "A threshold/gateway to a better life." The motto is also of interest due to the comparative form *excelsioris* of the adjective *excelsus* (meaning 'high,' 'lofty' or 'elevated') in the middle of it. Finally, the motto of Perkiomen School, where I taught in the years 2000-2020, is *Solvitur vivendo* ("It is solved by/through living."), alluding to the Aristotelian theory of 'learning by doing.' This motto is definitely the most interesting out of the three because, in order to explain why the two words in Latin need five in the English translation, one must explain a few grammar problems—such as the passive third person singular ending (*-tur*) of the Present/Imperfect/Future Tense: the Present Tense determined by the infix *-i-* (applied between the present stem *solv-* of the third-conjugation verb *solvo solvĕre* – 'to loosen/untie/solve' – and the ending), as opposed to *-eba-* in the Imperfect Tense and *-e-* in the Future Tense; the implied subject (the neuter pronoun selected by elimination as being the only choice that makes sense); the concept of 'gerund' (*vivendo*); and the ablative of means/instrument, which explains why the preposition 'by/through' (absent or implied in the Latin version) is physically present in the English translation.

The Preface would not be complete without referring to one of the possibly most famous Latin songs, the anonymous and over 700-year-old *"De Brevitate Vitae"* ("On the Shortness of Life"), also known as *"Gaudeamus Igitur"* ("So Let Us Rejoice"), popular, especially in the past (not very remote, though), in many European countries, Poland in particular, and sung during university ceremonies. Judging by the significant role the song plays in at least a couple of Hollywood movies—Howard Hawks's *Ball of Fire* (1941; starring Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck) and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *People Will Talk* (1951; featuring Cary Grant and Jeanne Crain)—it must have been known or even popular also among the American academia. Let me quote several of its captivating lines—without translation, in order to make it a little mysterious or, maybe, to challenge the potential readers of the book:

Gaudeamus igitur
Iuvenes dum sumus.
Post iucundam iuventutem
Post molestam senectutem
Nos habebit humus.

Ubi sunt qui ante nos
In mundo fuere?
Vadite ad superos
Transite in inferos
Ubi iam fuere.

Vivat academia!
Vivant professores!
Vivat membrum quodlibet;
Vivant membra quaelibet;
Semper sint in flore.

PAGES MISSING

FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

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