

# *Lingua Latina, Lingua Mea*<sup>1</sup>: Creative Composition in Beginning Latin

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**Abstract:** Students learning what they perceive as a ‘dead language’ can feel a sense of distance from what they are studying. This paper offers an array of practical suggestions to bridge that gap and develop in students a sense of ownership as they study Latin. It offers examples of creative writing assignments suitable for students in their first year of language study: cartoon strips, letters, haiku poems, compositions practicing specific grammatical or vocabulary elements, inscriptions, and literary translations of Latin poetry into English. In addition to discussion of the rationale and learning outcomes of assignments, the paper includes assignment prompts and examples of student writing.

**Keywords:** beginning language, language as communication, creative writing, motivation, grammar and vocabulary reinforcement, haiku, translation.

The history of composition in Latin as a second language is a long and distinguished one. Isidore of Seville, Petrarch, William of Ockham, Dante, Erasmus, More, Copernicus, da Vinci, Galileo, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Milton and Spinoza are just a few of the most prominent thinkers who expressed complex and ground-breaking ideas in Latin. They developed proficiency in Latin not only by reading the works of their predecessors but also by speaking, listening to, and writing Latin. Until recently, prose (and to a lesser extent verse) composition was a regular component of the Latin curriculum and was seen as a valuable tool for developing language proficiency. Nowadays Latin composition has largely fallen out of favor; it conjures up in the minds of many Latin teachers visions of rote translation from English into Latin of set pieces from older textbooks such as *Bradley’s Arnold Latin Prose Composition* (1908), and North and Hillard’s *Latin Prose Composition* (1919), sentences and passages on military and parliamentary topics of little relevance and appeal to students.

This paper argues the value of integrating composition into the learning of Latin. It offers an alternative model of composition that focuses on creative writing assignments in which the students maintain full authorial independence; they are not translating predetermined sentences from English to Latin, but are creating their own compositions directly in the target language.<sup>2</sup>

1 A student in my beginning Latin class inspired the first half of this paper’s title: she had written *lingua latina, lingua mea* in a flowery script across the front cover of her folder. I would like to thank John Gruber-Miller, editor of Teaching Classical Languages, and the two anonymous reviewers, as well as Jeffrey Beneker and Douglas Clapp for their helpful comments that substantially improved this paper. I am very grateful to my colleagues in the classics department at Gustavus Adolphus College—William Friert, Seán Easton, Yurie Hong, Mary McHugh and Matthew Panciera—for creating a departmental milieu in which discussion of language pedagogy regularly occurs. Matthew Panciera has been especially instrumental in developing the haiku assignment.

2 Latin prose composition has received welcome scholarly attention recently: see, for example, the stimulating articles in CPL Online by M. Davisson (2004), J. Beneker (2006), and K. Lord (2006); also J. Fogel (2002). For a discussion of its pedagogical value in the face of critics, see A. Saunders (1993). What is here being proposed, however, is a radically different paradigm that gives students free rein to express their own creative impulses: it is not prose composition as it is usually envisaged, but creative writing.

Creative writing assignments promote active engagement with Latin by allowing students to invest of themselves (their humor, interests, emotions, ideas, creative imagination, and writing skills) as they learn a new language. Such assignments are a mainstay of second language acquisition methods in modern language teaching, and their value in improving language skills and motivating students is supported by a considerable body of scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

The value of writing in the target language has also been recognized by classicists. In a wide-ranging article, Gruber-Miller (2006) articulates a range of benefits that derive from writing in Latin and Greek, presented with reference to the tripartite division of composition into *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* found in classical authors such as Aristotle and Cicero: as well as reinforcing language skills in general and reading skills in particular (*logos*), composition invites students to express their ideas, develop their writer's voice, and consider aspects such as invention, arrangement, diction, genre and perspective (*ethos*); it also requires effective communication with an audience (*pathos*).<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the profession as a whole has endorsed the importance of composition. In the *Standards for Classical Language Learning*, communication is introduced as Goal 1 (of the five goals), and within this goal Standard 1.2 explicitly indicates that students are to "use orally, listen to, and write Latin or Greek as part of the language learning process."<sup>5</sup> The recently published *Standards for Latin Teacher Preparation* (2010) stress the importance of using active learning strategies in the teaching of Latin and promote active use of the target language.<sup>6</sup>

Many Latin classes focus primarily on reading skills. As a result, writing often takes a back seat, and is limited to translation from Latin—or, more rarely, into Latin—or grammatical exercises such as transformational drills. These certainly have their place, but when prac-

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3 For the importance of writing in SLA (second language acquisition) and its marginalization as a communicative modality see Harklau (2002). Swain (1985; 1995) argues that output (i.e. active production in a language, whether through writing or speaking) is a particularly valuable element of second language acquisition in that it pushes learners to process language more deeply and more consciously than is required during listening and reading (see also Swain and Larkin 1995). One of the top motivational factors in second language acquisition cited in empirical studies carried out in Hungary (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998) and Taiwan (Dörnyei and Cheng 2007) is the promotion of learner autonomy; such autonomy is a guiding principle of the writing assignments that I set. For a study of the motivational effects of encouraging writers to write about topics of interest and relevance to them and providing them with broader audiences, see Lo and Harland 2007. Among the most prominent theoretical frameworks for understanding motivation in second language acquisition are those of Gardner and Dörnyei. Gardner has developed a socio-educational model (Gardner 2001 offers a good introduction) that accounts for the impact of variables such as external influences (e.g. the social milieu and the student's family background), individual influences (e.g. the degree to which the student is motivated to gain access to the broader culture), language acquisition contexts, and outcomes (both linguistic and non-linguistic). Dörnyei's research (see Dörnyei 2001) focuses on the psychological factors that affect second language acquisition (e.g. individual differences and group dynamics).

4 See especially Gruber-Miller (2006): 191-194, in which the author lays out the reasons for writing and introduces relevant findings from recent studies on the role of writing in second language acquisition in modern languages.

5 The 1997 Standards for Classical Language Learning, jointly produced by the American Classical League and American Philological Association, in consultation with regional classical associations such as CAAS, CANE, and CAMWS, available for download [online](#).

6 The [2010 Standards for Latin Teaching Preparation](#), jointly produced by the American Classical League and American Philological Association, specify that "Latin teachers recognize that learning is fundamentally an active process, incorporate active learning strategies whenever possible, and promote active use of the target language." The supporting explanation for Standard 2.b (Instruction and Assessment) offers an example (having students create and perform a Latin skit that connects with the thematic and grammatical concepts introduced in the given chapter) that is consonant with the approach advocated in this paper.

ticed to the exclusion of other forms of writing, they hardly serve to expand students' sense of what it is possible to *do* with Latin. Simple creative writing exercises can provide needed grammatical reinforcement while also fostering a greater sense of investment in the language.<sup>7</sup> These two goals are not necessarily interdependent; in other words, a creative writing exercise may be a valuable assignment even if it falls short as a tool to reinforce grammar but succeeds in building in students an affinity for the language. With careful planning and execution, however, both goals can often be achieved.

Composition has a number of other positive outcomes. I discuss several of them in the body of my paper in relation to specific assignments. Here I will highlight four primary areas in which I have found composition to enrich student learning:

1. Reinforcement of cultural knowledge: the process of creative writing often arouses interest in and prompts reflection on Roman culture. Students incorporate particulars of Roman salutation, dress, and architecture into their pieces. Other aspects of Roman culture such as the injustices of slavery, gender inequality and class distinctions hit home: often compositions become a form of resistance to these conventions as students write the oppressed into the role of protagonist.
2. Reinforcement of the link between language and communication: none of the creative writing assignments are rote grammatical exercises. They are designed to foreground the primary purpose of language: as a vehicle for communication.<sup>8</sup> Once students are transformed into authors and peer editors, they realize how crucial small details such as word endings are for communicating sense in Latin.
3. Reinforcement of vocabulary: authors reflexively try to avoid stating the obvious. In seeking to achieve lexical variety, students will often review their vocabulary list. This process activates dormant vocabulary from earlier chapters (I discourage students from using dictionaries to look up words that the class has not yet encountered).
4. Greater awareness of how Latin works: in writing their own Latin sentences, students must actively engage with a multitude of grammatical, morphological and syntactical considerations. Should I use the imperfect or perfect tense of the verb in this instance? In what case should this noun be, based on the function I want it to play in my sentence, what declension does it take, and what is the case-appropriate ending? Should I put

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<sup>7</sup> When I introduce the intended learning goals of these writing assignments to students, I emphasize their value both in terms of affect and cognition. The assignments should help them develop confidence as writers, give them the satisfaction of being able to express themselves effectively in a second language, and provide them with opportunities to nurture their creative impulses. At the same time, they should improve language acquisition and retention and help them to notice differences (semantic, morphological, syntactical, stylistic, cognitive etc.) between Latin and English. These multiple goals are reflected in the criteria that I use to assess student compositions (see Appendix).

<sup>8</sup> My hope is to reorient students to appreciate Latin as a language that is meaningful in its own right rather than seeing it primarily as a means to an end such as improving their verbal skills on standardized tests. 82% of teachers in public high schools identified improvement of SAT scores as the most important reason why their students had chosen to study Latin, according to a nationwide survey of more than 1200 Latin teachers conducted by the Subcommittee on National Latin Guidelines of the Joint Committee on the Classics in American Education of the ACL and APA, published in S. Davis (1991) 6. For the value of Latin seen in terms of improvement in understanding of English grammar, see F. Moreland and P. Schwartz in R. LaFleur (1987) 89; for Latin study seen as a means to the end of reading Roman authors, see T. Hubbard in J. Morwood (2003) 51, and B. Gay in J. Morwood (2003) 79. With the proliferation of online social networking, the potential use of Latin as a lingua franca to communicate with Latinists from across the world has never been greater. See A. Reinhard (2009) for details of online social networks for students and teachers of Latin as well as for instructions on how to set up a network.

the adjective before or after the noun in this particular instance, and what determines word order in Latin sentences anyway? These are questions that are rarely confronted as consciously or directly in reading sentences from the textbook. Although in early written assignments many students fail to ask themselves many of these questions, with practice they increasingly start to internalize them and to ‘get’ how Latin works. Composition hones skills that translate into increased reading proficiency. For example students break away more quickly from the habit of tackling Latin words in non-sequential order and reinforce through active use words such as adverbs and conjunctions that otherwise fall through the cracks in learning new vocabulary.

This paper offers an array of examples of creative writing assignments that engage students in active learning, get them writing in Latin, and help them develop a sense of ownership as they study Latin. It focuses on assignments that can be incorporated into the first year of language study and that have already been implemented successfully. Although the assignments are created for the *Oxford Latin Course*, similar approaches can be taken with other textbooks.

In an appendix at the end of the article, I provide an overview of the classroom context in which I operate, describing practicalities such as the frequency with which the class meets, the ways in which I provide feedback and opportunities for revision, and my method of grading.

This paper will present the following composition assignments for use in a beginning Latin course, introduced in the order in which I set them:

- Cartoons
- Letters
- Haiku
- Mottoes
- Grammatical stories
- Inscriptions
- Translations

### CARTOONS: A SIMPLE FIRST COMPOSITION

Anyone who has taught from the *Oxford Latin Course* knows that its ham-handed cartoons are often a source of amusement and can help a class bond over a harmless bout of ribbing. Here, for example, is a parodic cartoon drawn by one of my students, a portrait of Publius Fannius Synistor, the rich owner of a *villa rustica* at Boscoreale (see chapter 46):



Cartoons are, however, an important part of our culture. Like few other literary genres, they bridge the divide between literature and personal expression, inhabiting as they often do both the realm of mythical heroes and the everyday world. When we reach chapter 8, I ask students to create their own set of Latin cartoons: only five weeks into the first semester of Latin, cartoons—with

their short sentences and penchant for the vivid present—are well suited to the limited range of vocabulary and grammar that the students know. Here is the prompt:

*Create a set of cartoons using the words that you have learnt so far. You can use the cartoons in the book (e.g. on p. 49) as a guide, but you can be much more creative and off-the-wall (don't use sentences and story-lines from the book -- —invent your own). See if you can compose a whole sequence of 4-6 cartoons using only words that we have learnt so far. Your cartoons will be graded on creativity as well as on grammatical accuracy (check your endings carefully). They will be collected in on Thursday (Oct.5).*

Below is an example of a particularly creative submission. It offers a whimsical feminist response to the so-called Homeric question, though until I mentioned this when showcasing her work, the author, Nicole S., was unaware that she was engaging with a topic so central to Homeric scholarship.<sup>9</sup>



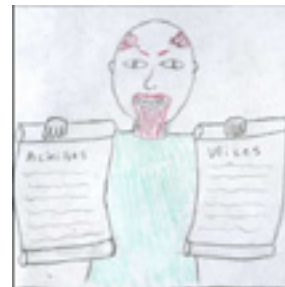
Circa ad multas terras navigat et multas fabulas narrat. omnes pueri, puellae, feminae et viri Circam audire cupiunt.



Homerus paucas fabulas narrat et multas fabulas scribit; non navigat, sed in Graecia manet.



una nox, Homerus Circam audit. illa duas magnas fabulas narrat.



Homerus duas fabulas rapit et illas Achillem et pugnam et Troiam scribit; Ulixem et navem et laborem scribit.

<sup>9</sup> Permission for including their work has been secured from all student authors. Few of the student examples are fully polished final versions, though in most cases students have already made some adjustments (e.g. to case endings etc.) in response to underlining. I underline what should be adjusted, and students make some but rarely all of the necessary changes. I reproduced the revised version as it was submitted. For example, on p. 10 Emma did not make *igitur* postpositive; on p. 21 Sarah should have written the dative of *alter* as *alteri*; and on p. 24 Mariah forgot to use *ab* with the ablative of agent.



in fabula, Circa mala femina est.  
Circa videt et non laeta est;  
misera est.



Circa a Graecia navigat. multi viri fabulas  
a Homero emunt. haec fabula non laeta est.

This cartoon strip, one of the best exemplars in the class, shows the limitations that students in their fifth week of Latin face: for example, they had not yet encountered expressions of time, and so “one night” was rendered incorrectly as *una nox*, a literal rendition of the English. Yet almost to a person, the students rose to the challenge and produced creative and entertaining work. Some resorted to stick figures; but many produced visual masterpieces. It became clear to me that most students devoted more time and effort to the artwork than to checking the grammatical accuracy of their Latin sentences. If efficacy were being measured purely in terms of the degree to which the exercise advanced their grammatical skills, then this exercise might be deemed a failure. But I believe it succeeded on other counts:

1. It made students more linguistically aware—for example, they became conscious of what they could and what they could not yet express in Latin, and of how idioms vary from one language to another. They engaged with such issues as word order: the author of the Circe cartoon strip, for example, had taken on board the tendency in Latin of the infinitive to precede the main verb (*feminae et viri Circam audire cupiunt*).
2. It made them more grammatically aware—through the process of revising their cartoons, they became aware that in an inflected language endings are more crucial to sense construction than word order.
3. It reinforced vocabulary—students combed through eight chapters of vocabulary to find words that they could use in their story.
4. It gave students a sense of achievement—even though they only knew a few words and one tense, they already could express themselves creatively.
5. Finally, it put an end to complaints about the cartoons. Drawing cartoons and writing captions using such limited vocabulary is tougher than it looks!

The cartoon assignment was a good initial creative writing assignment since the genre is familiar to all and readily conveys a sense of fun and quirkiness, thereby lowering students’ anxiety about having to put their creativity on display. Since simplicity is a badge of honor in cartoon captions, it is a very doable first creative writing assignment, and actually encourages students to work within the parameters of what they know rather than become overambitious and try to write complex sentences. Nevertheless, assignments for which artwork is an integral component should

be used sparingly, since it is human nature to choose the easier task over the more difficult—and most find greater instant gratification in coloring in cartoon figures than in checking case endings.<sup>10</sup>

### WRITE ME A LETTER, SEND IT BY MAIL

We progress from the telegraphic sentences of cartoons to the epistolary genre, which calls for continuous prose. Unlike cartoon strips, letters were a compositional form used by the Romans, and this assignment allows us to begin noting differences in ancient and modern conventions. These differences come to the fore when we return to the epistolary genre in the second semester with an assignment in which students try their hand at paleography, each working with a different text from the Vindolanda online collection (<http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/>) of correspondence with members of the Roman garrison. I introduce the first letter-writing assignment in chapter 12, because the personal nature and emotional intensity of the chapter's readings (*Infelix Dido* and *Mors Didonis*) seem well suited to the epistolary genre—and Ovid's *Heroides* offers a fascinating ancient precedent for our exercise. Here is the prompt:

*Write a letter to someone in Latin. You could write it to someone whom you know and love (e.g. to your mom, significant other etc.), or you could write a fictional letter to someone (e.g. Dido writing a love-letter to Aeneas or vice versa).*

*Here is how Roman letters often begin: Marcus caro fratri salutem [dicit]—"Marcus (in nominative case) to his dear brother (in dative case) [gives] greetings." And they often end with a farewell such as vale ("goodbye") or cura ut valeas (literally "take care to be well"). But you can depart from this formula if you want.*

*Everything in between is up to you. Be creative; also be very careful with your endings, checking every noun, adjective and verb to make sure that you have the right form. As well as writing the letter in Latin, also provide an English translation of it lower down the page. Hint: this is again an assignment that will use your Latin skills to the full. Try to think of ways that you can say things only using the words that we have learnt. Try to avoid long sentences with multiple clauses, as these often use grammatical constructions that we haven't yet learnt. And have fun!*

Here is the letter written by one student (Emma E.) to her younger brother Alex:

*Emma caro fratri salutem.*

*te amo, parve Alexander. semper a puero ad virum meus frater es. semper amica tua sum. ubi ego misera sum, laeta me facis. ubi ego fessa sum, surgere me facis. te igitur curo. cupio te terram videre,*

<sup>10</sup> S. Davis (1991) 16 acknowledges the dilemma faced by teachers who seek to incorporate creative projects into their pedagogy: "research... shows students learn better when they are actively and emotionally involved, participating in group work, games, performance activities and imaginative projects... Teachers say that it takes time to teach children how to learn in group, to pursue research projects and to create art projects; they also sometimes feel that this time is stolen from their grammar lessons."

*montes ascendere, mare audire, in silvis currere, et in undis iacere.  
nunc parvus es, sed mox ventus tuum nomen vocabit ignotum petere.  
de periculis timeo. amorem tibi mitto, quod cum amore omnia vin-  
cere potes.*

*cura ut valeas!*

Emma's composition shows that she has internalized important features of the Latin language such as the use of cases, the formation of endings, and postponement of the verb. But beyond that, it has allowed her to express her own feelings: her fondness for her younger brother, and her love of travel (she went on to study art history in Florence). I collect in these writing assignments and circle problem areas. When I hand them back, I have students work on corrections in class. They compare notes with their neighbors and I circulate among them to provide help, as do my two Latin tutors (advanced level Latin students) if they are in class on that day.<sup>11</sup> Where students are unlikely to be able to self-correct (e.g. when a construction has not yet been introduced) I will provide a grammatically correct alternative (e.g. replacing *vocabit ignotum petere* with *vocabit ad terram ignotam petendam*) or simply explain that a different construction is used (e.g. subjunctives are needed to express Emma's hopes for her brother). Over the course of the year, students become more aware that Latin expresses things such as prepositional phrases differently.

Research conducted by both language teachers and faculty in composition and communication studies has confirmed what common sense would suggest: assignments that call for communication in real-life situations with actual people are generally more effective than purely hypothetical scenarios.<sup>12</sup>

Although we may not be able to get our students out on the streets of ancient Rome ordering *garum*, we can still create assignments that result in real-life communication: a letter which the student can actually send to her brother via Facebook (even if he ends up reading the English translation to understand what is being said). When students write a letter to a family member—or, in the second semester, when I get them to write a letter of appreciation to a dear one on Valentine's Day—many attest to having actually sent it to the addressee.

Letters are, however, a very personal form of communication, and some students may not be comfortable bringing their private world into the classroom, especially since these compositions are made public in a variety of ways: I sometimes ask students to exchange compositions with their neighbors, I often put up an example or two on an overhead projector for us to read as a class, and some compositions may end up as examples in a paper such as this (with permission from the author, of course). That is why I included the second option of writing a fictional letter; I find that certain students consistently prefer the less personal option. In some cases, I believe it is a matter of reserve, while in other cases it may simply be that a given student is more interested in engaging with the past than dwelling in the present. In the following example the idea of rewriting history seems to have captured the author's imagination:

<sup>11</sup> One or two advanced Latin students serve as language tutors for the beginning Latin class. They are chosen on the basis of their language proficiency and communication skills; they are paid for their work as part of the work-study program. If their class schedule permits, these tutors attend class once or twice a week, helping students in small group activities or through one-on-one interactions. This also allows the beginning language students to get to know the tutors; as a result, they are more likely to visit the tutors for help during evening tutoring hours. Although the participation of the tutors is certainly a help, it is certainly not necessary for any of the activities highlighted here. For a discussion of the benefits of near-peer tutors in the beginning Latin classroom see Argetsinger (2006).

<sup>12</sup> See M. Mansfield (1993) for an analysis of the shift towards real-world writing in composition classes, and J. Cooper (1993) for a case study of its impact on student motivation.



*Aaronus carae Didoni, salve!*

*ego te amo quod tu bellissima de omnibus feminis es; ego tristis sum quod te reliqui; cupio te. tibi meum amorem mitto. semper in animo adsum. meum amorem tibi do. aliis feminis resisto. tuum amorem quaero. sine via erro. te in meo animo fero. amor meus hostis est quod tu non ades.*

*cura ut valeas.*

*meo amore,*

*Aaronus*

*Postscript: If she had read this, she would not have killed herself!*

Students find it hard to keep to the vocabulary they have learnt. Sometimes they cannot resist using an online English to Latin dictionary to find a word they don't know—often with disastrous results! Since I regularly put up examples using an overhead projector, this allows me to articulate to the class what I appreciate in a successful composition—and simplicity is a virtue that I stress. In this case, the author really wanted to complement Dido on her beauty, and none of the adjectives that had been introduced in the first twelve chapters of the book fit the bill. So he ended up with *bellissima*, presumably by looking up the word “beautiful” in an online dictionary and then forming the superlative. I also let him get away with using the perfect tense *reliqui* (familiar in form to the class, since they memorize all four principal parts from the start, but not yet officially introduced by the textbook). Other than that, all words used have been learnt in the first twelve chapters. If I were to put this composition up for the class to admire, I would usually highlight one or two adjustments that could be made—for example, I might mention that Latin more often uses the genitive case (a partitive genitive) than the preposition *de* to express “most beautiful of women”, and would invite the class to adjust *semper in animo adsum* to *semper in animo ades*. I would, however, resist the urge to rewrite every sentence until it reads like a Ciceronian sentence and bears no resemblance to the original composition. If I do that, then Aaron will no longer feel that the composition is his.

### UNLEASHING THE POET: LATIN HAIKU

By the second half of the first semester, students have acquired a broad enough range of vocabulary to begin writing poetry (any earlier, and the poems that they could produce might seem trite). The haiku is well suited as a first assignment: its brevity allows novice poets to hone their compositions and reinforces my mantra for beginning language students of doing more with less. Although haiku is a poetic genre that is more nuanced than is readily apparent to the layperson, its essential form is readily understood and requires only brief introduction. The haiku that students compose may not all comply with a narrow definition of the genre's characteristics,<sup>13</sup> but many succeed in capturing its spirit. Below are some examples.

<sup>13</sup> Japanese haiku have traditionally comprised seventeen on (the Japanese on are what English phonologists refer to as morae: these are units equivalent to short syllables; long syllables are bimoraic); writers of haiku in English have usually counted syllables as the unit of measurement. Haiku are traditionally written in three lines, divided into lines of 5, 7, and 5 on respectively. They generally include a seasonal reference (kigo), and two ideas or images that

*iam fumus surgit;  
amor Didonis errat  
tristis ad caelum.*

*David G.*

Providing a feedback loop for creative assignments is vital. I collect all creative writing projects (even if I don't do so with all other written homework). This allows me to give feedback to each author, thereby acknowledging the greater degree of personal investment that creative writing generally engenders. Although grammatical accuracy is always important, I take particular pains to convey my appreciation for artistic quality even if an imaginative composition is riddled with grammatical errors. Thus I separate feedback on artistic quality from feedback on grammatical accuracy, and also give a separate grade for each.

I also take time in class to showcase examples of student work. I make sure to show at least one example from every student over the course of the semester. If I were presenting Dave's example, I would read out the Latin, slowly and lovingly. After someone in the class translated it, I would then ask the class to comment on the poem; I too would pitch in. I don't remember what we said in class. Reading it now, I particularly like how the first and second lines come together in the third: the smoke rises heavenward even as Dido's spirit leaves the earth; like the bond of love that seemed so secure, it vanishes into thin air. It is too late: the deed has already been done, though only now as he looks back does Aeneas notice the smoke on the horizon—thus the ambiguity of *iam* (both “now” and “already”) is used to powerful effect. A Roman audience would appreciate the artistry of *tristis*, grammatically dependent on *amor* yet contributing through juxtaposition to the image of smoke rising from the pyre. It would also appreciate the multivalence of the second line, equally appropriate to Dido's ill-fated love, so tragically thrown off course, and to the transgressions of Dido's lover as he continues on his wanderings.

I also provide opportunities for the writer to share his or her own comments about the piece—what inspired it, and what it sets out to do. For this assignment, I asked students to include a written artist's statement. This is what David wrote:

*Artist's statement: With this poem I tried to create a poignant image of Dido's emotion and death in a succinct manner, such that it fit the pattern of a haiku. I thought that the simple image of the pyre's smoke rising in the distance best conveyed Dido's lost love, fading sadly into the sky.*

Here is another haiku about Dido, whose fate seems to have struck an emotional cord:

*Dido se occidit*

are juxtaposed through comparison, contrast or association, separated by a cutting word (*kireji*). Haiku are often suggestive, pithy and fleeting glimpses of human emotion or experiences of life. Modern haiku poets have, however, expanded the conception of what the genre comprises. A helpful introduction is found at Jane Reichhold's website: <http://www.ahapoetry.com/haiku.htm>. I ask my students to read the Haiku Rules That Have Come and Gone essay on this webpage to introduce them to the rules and possibilities. Then students can decide for themselves which rules to follow and which possibilities to explore.

*quod non cupit vivere  
sine Aenea.*

*Lindsey T.*

Purists would be quick to point out that that in the above haiku there is no seasonal word or image from nature, and that the three lines comprise a single sentence. To such sticklers I have only one thing to say: pish! What I like about the poem is its simplicity and the way its final line unlocks the poem. Dido commits suicide *not* because she is tired of living, as the first two lines taken on their own would suggest. Quite the opposite: when Aeneas arrives at Carthage, Dido has everything going for her. But once she falls in love, this *dux femina facti* (Verg. *Aen.* 1.364) cannot live without him.

Here is a poem about the death of Hector, described in chapter 8:

*pater Priamus  
fert mortuum filium.  
patria luget.*

*Anna S.*

And below is another about the fall of Troy and its rebirth as Rome, the subject matter of chapters 9 and 10:

*Roma phoenix est  
quae ex ardenti Troia  
surgit et vincit.*

*Kevin O.*

Here are two poems inspired by the myth of Cupid and Psyche, narrated in chapter 13:

*amor divinus  
in terra non ambulat;  
cum ventis volat.*

*Anna S.*

*dea amoris  
invidet formae Psyche  
dea se amat.*

*Marissa B.*

And here a more traditional nature haiku:

*unda in mare  
semper ad caelum clamat.  
in aquam redit.*

*Christine B.*

What struck me about the poems that students wrote is how many responded on an emotional level to the readings. Many showed that the authors had also taken on board cultural components that we had discussed in class: Troy's fall reversed in Rome's conquest of Greece in 146 BC, the nexus of ideological associations between fatherland and heads of families evident in terms such as *pater* and *patria*, the metaphysical dimensions of the Cupid and Psyche myth, and the narcissistic tendencies of love. Designed to help students connect with the language and culture that they are studying, these assignments seem indeed to serve their intended function.

Another encouraging sign was the degree to which students seemed to view this particular assignment as I had hoped they would: as a genuine piece of creative writing. One author submitted her poem to the college literary magazine, *Firethorne*, and had it published—the Latin original with English translation below it as follows:

*in hieme animi,  
floris formam colo;  
specta hortem mei.*

*In the mind's winter,  
I cherish the flower's poise;  
behold, my garden.*

Nicole S.



Every word in the above poems—except for *phoenix*—is from the vocabulary encountered in the first 19 chapters of the *OLC*. Eventually (perhaps after the publication of the new college edition), I would like to put together a downloadable haiku reader that follows the course through each stage, using new vocabulary and constructions as they are introduced. I would hope that it could be a useful resource for teachers: they could pull out a haiku for the day as a warm-up exercise to get the class started.<sup>14</sup>

### SIMPLY THE BEST: MOTTOES RULE!

Creative writing assignments can be a helpful way to reinforce individual grammatical concepts or specific vocabulary. Mottoes, for example, are a great way to practice agreement in comparative and superlative adjectives (introduced in chapter 24 of the *Oxford Latin Course*). They are also a great opportunity to showcase the continuing role of Latin in the modern age. We begin by looking at some state mottoes. *Excelsior* (the state motto for New York) suggests the competitive aspirations of New Yorkers—and perhaps the shortage of real estate in NYC. *Labor omnia vincit* (Oklahoma) borrows a phrase from Virgil's *Georgics*; after I introduce the strong cultural connection that Augustan poets felt to the land, we then discuss why in 1907 this might have been seen as an appropriate state motto for Oklahoma. Then there are the anti-monarchist sentiments of West Virginia (*Montani semper liberi*) and Virginia (*Sic semper tyrannis*)—the latter is particularly intimidating. *E pluribus unum* (United States of America) and *Cedant arma togae*

<sup>14</sup> D. Sacré and M. Smets (1999) have published a collection of Latin haiku composed by a Belgian group of experienced haiku poets; the frequent use of relatively recondite vocabulary and the printing of an accompanying English translation, however, limits its usefulness in the beginning classroom.

(Wyoming) are more welcoming, though it is hard not to smile at the thought of settlers roaming around Wyoming in togas. The state motto of Minnesota (*L'etoile du nord*) is not in Latin at all, but in French, while that of Washington State (*Al-ki*) is in Chinook. Why is this? And why, perhaps more surprisingly, are the mottos of most other states in Latin? What is it about Latin that makes it the language of choice for everything from a school motto to the tattoos of David Beckham and Angelina Jolie? These questions can provoke an interesting discussion about the status of Latin and of Roman culture in the modern age. Admittedly not many of these state mottoes contain comparatives or superlatives, but they *do* offer simple Latin phrases using familiar words, and students can figure most of the Latin out on their own. One of the assignments for homework that evening is the following:

*Make up a motto (it could be a mantra for your life, a tag-line for a company, or a fight-slogan for a sports team etc.) that uses a comparative or superlative in a short phrase. As well as providing the Latin and its translation, indicate whom the motto is for:*

*Example: frigidior quam ceterae terrae*

*colder than other lands (motto for Minnesota)*

*Remember to think about number, gender, and case when you create your Latin.*

The next day, students pair up and look at each other's mottoes, suggesting revisions where they identify problems, while I circulate answering questions. Where grammatical adjustments are still necessary (here indicated with italics), I get the class to suggest the revisions. Here are some examples:

*neque bonae neque meliores: nos solum optimae sumus! Laska L. (motto for me and my friends)*

*nemo melior quam me. Yulia L. (motto for Yulia)*

*fortior quam ceteri. Matt H. (motto for Nemo)*

*melior quam ceteri. Matt S. (motto for the swim team)*

*nemo surdior est quam is qui non audit. Mark*

*duo est melior quam unus. Marissa B. (sibi, nam gemina est)*

*celerior quam lucis celeritas. Sean H.*

*ubi hostes pessimi sunt, ille ingeniosissimus est. Nicole S. (motto for Odysseus)*

*res manibus civium meliores sunt quam manibus regis. Debi L.*

*carior quam omnes aliae feminae. Sarah H. (of mother)*

*diligentior lude quam laboras. Christine B.*

The excitement generated by this exercise was palpable. However, I would also argue that an exercise of this sort underscores key grammatical issues associated with comparison more effectively than set exercises can. Simply put, students are more invested in getting their mottoes right than they ever would be in exercises found in the back of the book. The mottoes that the class came up with illustrated the difficulties of securing agreement of case and number as well as the difference between comparison of adjectives and adverbs. And they were a great way for the class to get to know each other—we learned that Marissa is a twin, and that Matt is on the swim team.

### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS THAT FOCUS ON GRAMMAR

Teachers may be hesitant about setting free composition over set English into Latin translation exercises because of a concern that students will shy away from the more complex grammar or vocabulary that the teacher is hoping to reinforce and gravitate towards the simple and familiar. Assignments can be devised, however, that direct students to incorporate specific grammar or vocabulary into their compositions while still giving them authorial independence.

For example, *alter*; *altera*, *alterum* (one or other of two), *uter*; *utra*, *utrum* (which of two?), *uterque*, *utraque*, *utrumque* (each of two), *utrum . . . an* (whether . . . or) are all introduced in chapter 29. Even after they have translated the sentences in the back of the book, most students still find that these words all blur together. So for this chapter, I developed the following assignment:

*Write a story in Latin that tells the tale of two brothers or sisters who live very different lives or are perhaps even separated from each other at birth; your story will want to use words like alter, uter, uterque, and utrum . . . an; otherwise it is up to you what you write about. Remember that Latin is quite particular about its cases, declensions and conjugations. A story that is more polished and more elaborate will score higher than a rushed or boringly elementary affair; but no need to write more than four or five sentences.*

Here the goal of the exercise is very focused and requires use of a specific set of words. To make it as easy as possible for students to find a context in which these words can be used, I suggest a plot line. The scenario also allows me to mention Roman comedy, its use of the plot of twins separated at birth, and its influence on works such as Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. Here is an example of a composition written in response to this prompt and inspired by Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*:

*Iosephine, filia magistri, amabat nautam pauperem quendam, nomine Ralph. sed pater eius nolebat eos nubere. ille cupiverat filiam alicui divitiori nubere. Iosephine misera fiebat. utrum Ralph an altero homini nubet? "alter me amat, alter divitior est." femina quaedam ei dixit "cum Ralph et magister nati fuerunt, gemini erant, et ego eos permutavi." Ralph igitur magister erat, et magister nauta erat.*

*Sarah G.*

Creative writing assignments can also serve to practice grammatical constructions. Chapter 45 introduces independent uses of the subjunctive—jussive, optative, deliberative and potential. These kinds of grammatical constructions are, in my estimation, best grasped through examples, and students are more likely to internalize these examples if they have come up with them themselves. They are also more likely to pick up on markers such as the use of *utinam* in optatives or of interrogatives in deliberative questions if they have had to stop and think how to form these constructions. Here is the prompt:

*Create four short sentences in Latin to illustrate the four types of subjunctive being practiced in this chapter (see pp. 158-9). Your sentences should pick up on the following story: Quintus amico suo Pompeio epistolam misit in quo scripsit: "tristis sum quod Argum perdidit..." (perdo here meaning 'lose'.) Think of your own examples; don't simply copy phrases from the examples given in the book. Extra credit for creativity and accuracy.*

And here are some student responses:

*(Optative): utinam ne ianuam aperuissem.  
(Deliberative): utrum hic quaeram an in agris quaeram?  
(Jussive): Horatia dixit, "Agrum in agris quaeramus."  
(Potential): dixi, "velim hic quaerere."*

*Julie T.*

*(Jussive): loquamur de vita Argi.  
(Deliberative): quomodo vivam sine cane?  
(Optative): utinam cum Argo luderemus.  
(Potential): non velim flere.*

*Tom L.*

*(Optative): utinam Argus nunc adesset; nam eum iam desidero.  
(Deliberative): quid faciam? ubi eum quaeram?  
(Jussive): domum quam celerrime veniat.  
(Potential): velim eum mox iterum videre.*

*Jill S.*

### LATIN INSCRIPTIONS

As the year progresses and students get more confident as writers, they can take on more ambitious projects. For example, the third volume of the *Oxford Latin Course* contains the text of the inscription on the triumphal arch commemorating Claudius' invasion of Britain, and also includes a number of funerary inscriptions. In the following assignment (accompanying chapter 48), I set the two genres side by side; my hope is that doing so will convey in a vivid way that the triumph of the victor is often the death knell of the defeated.

*EITHER compose a triumphal inscription for Octavian to celebrate his victory at Actium OR create a sepulchral inscription for Cleopatra. Your composition should be in Latin, of course, and should ob-*

*serve the norms of your chosen genre, whether it be a triumphal or sepulchral inscription. For formulas commonly found on tombstones, see pp. 154-5. Remember to use the dative case when making a dedication to someone. Points will be given for grammatical accuracy, for fitting the expectations of the genre, and for creativity).*

Here are examples of triumphal inscriptions for Octavian:

*SENATUS POPULUSQUE ROMANUS  
GAIO IULIO CAESARI OCTAVIANO AUGUSTO  
QUOD APUD ACTIUM CLEOPATRAM ANTONIUMQUE VICIT,  
CORONAM CIVICAM ET TRIUMPHUM HABUIT.*

*Kevin O.*

*OCTAVIANO, IULII CAESARIS FILIO CARISSIMO,  
PRINCIPI ROMAE QUI, CUM PUER ERAT,  
REGNUM IMPERIUMQUE ACCEPIT ATQUE  
TERRAS ALIENAS ET VALDE POTENTES REGES VICIT  
SENATUS POPULUSQUE ROMANUS  
QUOD CEPIT AEGYPTUM ET BENE NOTAM REGINAM  
EIUS CLEOPATRAM.  
HOC FACTO NON SOLUM POPULUS ROMANUS  
SED ETIAM DEI ROMAE DOMINI SUNT TERRARUM*

*Marissa B.*

*C. IULIO · CAESARI · OCTAVIANI  
IULIO · CAESARI · FILIO  
TRIUMVIRO · COS III · IMPERATORI  
PRINCIPI · PONTIFICI · MAXIMO  
SENATUS · POPULUSQUE · ROMANUS  
QUOD · DUOS · QUI · CAESAREM  
PRODERANT · VICIT  
ET · BELLUM · CONFECIT*

*Tyler W.*

And here are funerary inscriptions for Cleopatra:

*D.M. SACRUM. CLEOPATRAE MAGNAE REGINAE AEGYPTI  
QUAE SUAM PATRIAM AMAVIT  
ET MORSU SERPENTIUM SUAQUE MANU  
CUM HONORE SE OCCIDIT. SUI FIDELES SERVI*

*Erin A.*



*D.M. CLEOPATRAE PULCHRAE REGINAE AEGYPTI  
MATRI CAESARIONIS AMATORI CAESARIS UXORI ANTONII  
QUAE VIXIT ANNOS XXXVIII  
CLEOPATRAE AMICA FECIT*

*Debi L.*

*D.M. SACRUM. CLEOPATRAE REGINAE AEGYPTI  
VIXIT ANNOS XXXVIII  
ET CAESARE ET ANTONIO AMATA EST  
FEMINA CUM AMBITIONE ET ARTE  
AEGYPTO DESIDERATA ERIT.*

*Mariah B.*

This exercise gets students to step out of their usual writing practices: LOL, BFF and other abbreviations specific to text-messaging are abandoned in favor of those peculiar to the genres of Roman dedicatory and funerary inscriptions.<sup>15</sup> They have also clearly read and assimilated the biographical details presented in the background readings, which they might otherwise have skipped over.

### THE ART OF TRANSLATION

Even the daily act of translating passages into English can become part of the creative process as students start to see the difference between the paraphrase that seeks to render the rough gist of the Latin without really understanding how it fits together, the literal translation that fails to make the transition into English, and the idiomatic translation that takes as its point of departure a rock-solid grasp of the Latin and then goes a step further by creating a new version that is elegant in its own right. The *Oxford Latin Course* is especially well suited to this engagement with the art of translation given its focus on the life of the poet and literary critic Horace and its inclusion of real Horatian odes in volume 3. Here is the final writing assignment of the second semester, a translation of *Odes* 3.26 (introduced in *OLC* chapter 50) in which Horace claims to be retiring from the campaigns of love:

*Write out a translation of the poem of Horace on p. 101 (i.e. lines 10-21 of the passage). Consider this your gift to Apollo, god of poetry, so give it some loving attention.*

*As you think through this poem, ask yourself what the poet is trying to communicate. What are some of the words that he emphasizes? What are some of the clever aspects of the poem? Is Horace being autobiographical here, do you think? Why does he refer to the barbiton etc. as his arma? And why is he hanging them on the wall of Venus' temple?*

<sup>15</sup> For the benefits of incorporating funerary inscriptions into Latin teaching, see B. Carpenter (2006). Carpenter notes especially the interest generated and information gleaned from introducing authentic cultural artifacts as well as the value of repeated exposure to formulaic sentences that breaks students of the tendency to expect Subject-Verb-Object syntactical patterns based on long habituation from English.

*Your translation should read gracefully in English while accounting for the Latin. Note that the two translations on pp. 102-103 may be of help in understanding the literary qualities of the poem. But don't copy these versions; create your own original (and hopefully better!) version.*

In class, we compare notes on how we dealt with certain problems that crop up in translating the poem; it is interesting for students to see just how many possible solutions there are, some clearly better than others.<sup>16</sup> As an optional extra, students can enter their version into a translation competition adjudicated by the Latin tutors. Assignments such as these encourage even beginning language students to take themselves seriously as linguists and as writers.

### CONCLUSION

Creative writing assignments can be incorporated into beginning Latin study from an early stage. With careful planning, assignments can be designed that reinforce key grammar and vocabulary. They are an effective tool to raise student interest, drawing not only on students' language skills but also on their imagination. Students are more invested in such assignments than in more passive exercises such as 'fill-in-the-blanks'. Creative writing assignments also foster camaraderie within the class as students learn about each other's interests through their compositions. The process of composition confronts students with morphological and syntactical decisions; the heightened degree of investment in getting their compositions 'right' raises their interest in aspects of language such as word order and idiom. Students are more likely to revise creative writing assignments than set grammar exercises in the textbook or accompanying workbook. Creative writing exercises can also be an effective way for students to assimilate aspects of Roman culture such as conventions of literary genres such as letters and inscriptions. They can result in a greater sense of personal engagement both with the language and its cultural contexts (ancient and modern). They can also serve to promote Latin to the broader public when students send letters to family members or have their Latin poems published in the college or high school literary journal.

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<sup>16</sup> Recent articles explicating the pedagogical value of getting students to subject the process of translation to critical analysis include S. Perkins (2006) and G. Starikovskiy (2011). For a stimulating overview of a translation project in a fourth semester college Latin class that takes students from literal to literary translations of Catullus poems, see M. Lindgren et al. (2010).

## APPENDIX

The assignments outlined above are all used in the beginning Latin sequence, and are suitable for use in both the high school and college classroom. Although they have been designed with the *Oxford Latin Course* in mind, teachers can adapt these assignments or devise corresponding ones of their own to accompany different textbooks, especially those using the reading method. I teach in a liberal arts college in which we teach the rudiments of Latin over two semesters<sup>17</sup>; this allows students to start reading original Latin texts in their third semester of language study.

Because of the accelerated pace of our program, the number of creative writing projects that I assign is limited and I do not usually incorporate any pre-writing activities, though I will usually explain the assignment in class ahead of time and occasionally get students to brainstorm in class about potential topics and vocabulary. Teachers in schools and colleges in which the beginning language sequence is not as heavily compressed could no doubt incorporate creative writing on a more frequent basis. Adopting creative composition is not, however, an all or nothing proposition. Just as I incorporate a moderate amount of oral and aural Latin into my lesson plans, so too I build writing into them wherever possible. My hope is that this paper will encourage others to add creative writing assignments to their classroom repertoire. Most of the creative writing exercises are set as homework to be completed out of class. Composing the drafts of these writing assignments usually takes students somewhere in the range of 15-40 minutes, depending on the particular student and the assignment<sup>18</sup>. Before I collect the drafts, I get students, in pairs or groups of three, to read each other's compositions. Doing this provides an audience other than the teacher to appreciate clever plot twists, jokes, and sophisticated ideas. It also serves to reinforce the importance of clarity and accuracy for comprehension: while a seasoned teacher might be able to read between the lines and understand the gist of a garbled sentence, peers are likely to draw a blank. A certain amount of self-correction of drafts usually results out of this process.

I then usually collect the drafts and correct them. I underline words or phrases in which there are grammatical or syntactical mistakes, but do not provide the correct version. I then return the marked-up scripts to students and ask them to make the necessary corrections.<sup>19</sup> Often I build this into class time. If students cannot figure out how to emend their own errors, they consult their peers. I also circulate offering hints or providing answers if they are stuck. If a phrase or sentence is grammatically correct but does not represent Latin idiom, I indicate this with a wavy rather than a straight underlining. Students are less likely to be able to self-correct problems of idiom than grammatical errors, so I often have to provide the idiomatic alternative.

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17 The Latin 101 course (taught in the fall semester) meets five days weekly, the Latin 102 course (taught in the spring) meets four times a week; each class is 50 minutes in duration. A 3-year average (2008-10) of 33 students completes the first year Latin sequence, divided into two sections. For LAT 101, the average class size is 21 students per section; for LAT 102, it is just over 16 per section.

18 Information gained from learning logs, in which some students keep track of how long assignments take to complete.

19 Chandler (2003) presents the findings of studies that demonstrate the value of student self-correction of errors; students report learning more from the process of self-correction than from having errors corrected by the teacher. Ferris (2004) offers an overview of research into error correction, suggesting that the empirical evidence for its efficacy is mixed; this article presents the results of a number of studies investigating specific aspects and techniques of error correction (e.g. the efficacy of direct vs. indirect feedback, of keeping error logs, of supplemental grammar instruction accompanying error correction etc.). For a less sanguine assessment of the impact of correction on writing skills in L2 (second language) see Truscott (2007).

I grade the revised compositions using two sets of letter grades: one for creativity, the other for grammatical accuracy. The grade for creativity measures factors such as inventiveness, plot line, humor, and incorporation of cultural knowledge. The grade for grammatical accuracy factors in the complexity of the constructions attempted by the writer: the adventurous composition that has used recently introduced grammatical constructions and forms, advanced vocabulary, and complex sentence structure receives a higher grade than one that has played it safe by sticking to the present indicative, basic vocabulary, and simple sentences even if the former contains more grammatical errors than the latter. This approach combats the natural inclination to prefer the familiar. I also provide brief written comments highlighting aspects of the composition that I especially appreciate. Turning a minor character in the textbook into the story's protagonist, effective use of a tricolon or of a complex construction such as an ablative are likely to prompt exclamations of delight (*euax! belle! lepide!*) in my marginalia.

It is important also to celebrate the final, polished compositions. There are many ways to do this. They can be used as reading material in class. They can be distributed as photocopied handouts—or, if more advanced technology is available, they can be projected using an overhead projector or document projector. To save time and avoid tedium, I showcase only a handful of exemplars and spread them out over several class periods. Projecting a cartoon or a haiku as students are filing into the classroom can be a good opening gambit to instantly raise energy levels. Compositions can also be published in the department newsletter or posted on the department bulletin (with the author's permission, of course).

Creative writing is also featured on some of the quizzes and examinations that I set in beginning Latin classes. It commonly occurs as a tailpiece to a passage of continuous, unseen prose that they are asked to translate from Latin into English. They are then asked to compose one or two sentences of their own in Latin to continue the story.

Although I have chosen to focus on assignments for the beginning language level, creative writing can be built into intermediate and advanced level classes as well. The four students in my advanced level Cicero class (Cynthia Lee, John Birkland, Bill Kunze, and Josh Dwyer), for example, composed a *salutatio* in Ciceronian Latin welcoming our new college president to campus; the president, whose first teaching job included a Latin class, responded in kind, and the exchange was published in the department newsletter. They are pictured below in the doorway of the Borgeson pioneer cabin in which we secluded ourselves to think and write without distraction. In this case the composition was a group endeavor; this prompted spirited discussions as students selected the *mot juste* or debated what Cicero would have written.



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