

Cozy in the Wolves' Cave: The Online Transition of Lupercal

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ABSTRACT

“Lupercal” is a Latin reading group that works to close the gender gap in spoken Latin by providing spaces for women and non-binary Latinists to learn from each other. Until February 2020, our nearly 20 groups met in-person across the world to discuss excerpts from Boccaccio’s *De Mulieribus Claris* and to address gender issues in the field of Classics. COVID-19, however, compelled us to move towards online meeting spaces such as the weekly “Cozy in the Wolves’ Cave” reading group. In this new world of social isolation, Lupercal has created a sense of community and continuity for our members through regular and free reading groups and spoken Latin hours as well as online events. Through our new internship program, Lupercal is now creating opportunities for its youngest members and creating new growth and contribution spaces. This paper discusses the various programs and initiatives that we have hosted in order to increase opportunities not only to learn and speak Latin but also to develop personal and professional relationships with one another. While in-person groups were geographically centered, this new online format has allowed members from around the world to participate. Moreover, we have seen a significant rise in membership in our Facebook Group and book requests, indicating that this new format has increased accessibility and interest. This paper ends by briefly discussing the specifics of the challenges that have arisen and the ways in which Lupercal has adapted and transitioned its lessons into an online format with a significantly larger attendance while staying committed to its mission of accessibility and growth. Through these efforts, Lupercal has allowed members from all over the world to get to know one another and build a new online learning community, while others, traditionally grounded in a physical location, have been put on hold.

Introduction

“Lupercal” is a Latin reading group that works to close the gender gap in spoken Latin by providing spaces for women and gender non-binary Latinists to learn from each other. Until February 2020, 20 groups met in-person across the world to read and discuss

excerpts from Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* and to address gender issues in the field of Classics. COVID-19, however, compelled us to move towards online meeting spaces such as the weekly "Cozy in the Wolves' Cave" reading group. In this new world of social isolation, Lupercal has created a sense of community and continuity for our members through regular and free reading groups and spoken Latin hours as well as other online events. Through our new internship program, Lupercal is now creating opportunities for its youngest members and fostering new growth and contribution spaces. This paper discusses the various programs and initiatives that we have hosted in order to increase opportunities not only to learn and speak Latin but also to develop personal and professional relationships with one another. It ends by briefly discussing the specifics of the challenges that have arisen and the ways in which Lupercal has adapted and transitioned its lessons into an online format with a significantly larger attendance while staying committed to its mission of accessibility and growth.

Before COVID-19/Pandemic:

Before the pandemic, Lupercal groups met once a month in person. Meetings took place in leaders' homes, in museums, in parks, and in coffee shops. We consciously chose spaces that were accessible in terms of cost and in terms of physical environment. At these meetings, we read excerpts from Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*. Our reading process includes: a pre-reading activity, meant to introduce vocabulary essential to the selected chapter; the actual reading of the text; and then a post-reading activity, in which members contextualize the woman in question, make connections between the text and modern-day, and discuss the chapter in light of gender issues.

As the groups were so spread apart, the community among leadership was tenuous, as befits a group who live in as far-flung locations as the Lupercal leaders do. Most leaders had only ever interacted with our foundress, Skye Shirley, before the pandemic, and some leaders would occasionally exchange emails with each other. The general consensus was that all the leaders were working toward the same goal, but we did not know each other very well, and so we had no sense of collegiality.

With the forced shift to completely online meetings, the sense of community among the leaders has grown exponentially primarily due to a recurring "leaders drop-in hour" every Wednesday evening. As we have started to meet each other every week, we

have come to know each other personally and personally. These weekly meetings have become an important time for leaders to see each other face-to-face, get to know each other's personalities, and support each other. One leader called them "an absolute lifesaver for me" and an "anchor through the chaos of COVID." As many leaders and participants are teachers, we have also continued to bolster each other through the school reopening discussion's stresses and anxiety. Because we have had more time to talk to each other face-to-face, we have also felt safe to discuss other aspects of ourselves, such as our gender and sexual identities, leading to such incredible initiatives as the Latin grammatical gender style guide and its committee.

In terms of professional growth, online meetings have been a space to explore new areas of interest, further plumb existing specialties, and teach others. These exciting offerings - such as LaNoWriMo (Latin Novella Writing Month), our internship program, and our beginners and advanced speakers hours - are further explored below in this paper, but are nevertheless the products of an industrious group of people who committed their time and labor to this organization. o that end, we have also been working on formalizing our mission and have formed a by-laws committee because of our leaders' passion.

Cozy in the Wolves Cave:

Although many members look forward to meeting in person again, online meetings have allowed for more participation from members that we previously had a harder time reaching and who faced barriers in attending in-person meetings. Rural living, inaccessibility due to transportation needs or having physical mobility issues, a tightly-booked schedule, and small children at home all can hinder attendance. Now that members can access meetings from anywhere, pop in and out quickly, and mute their video, they have more opportunities to attend meetings and feel much more comfortable participating. Since the pandemic began, we have had members join us on the digital conferencing application Zoom from hiking trails, poolsides, cars, city sidewalks, and nursing chairs. As a result, our online meetings quickly grew to well over 20 participants, and we realized there was so much enthusiasm for the group that we transitioned from monthly to weekly meetings.

We call these meetings the "Cozy in the Wolves' Cave" series, as many of us arrive in comfortable loungewear, sipping coffee, and ready for an engaging and relaxed spoken Latin event. These Saturday meetings provide consistency and community, as many

members as far away as France and Chile have become regular participants. Now that we have members from so many countries, we truly do need Latin to communicate with each other, as for many participants, their Latin outpaces their English. The conversations mostly take place in Latin, but we reserve the Zoom chat box for any language members choose to write in, and thus can provide translations or clarification when needed.

We continue to pick one biography of a woman each month but spend four weeks meeting on the text, which has led to deeper discussions and a richer appreciation of the Latin than we previously achieved in one meeting. For example, in July, a reading about Medusa expanded into conversational Latin prompts about beauty standards worldwide and reflected on our own relationship with our hair. These prompts connect us personally to each other and to women in mythology and history, and the diversity of our broadened membership enriches the conversation. We plan to return to in-person meetings after the pandemic, but Cozy in the Wolves' Cave will likely remain a fixture for us to strengthen connections between groups, to provide opportunities for members without a nearby physical group, and to use Latin once again as a *lingua Franca*.

Starting a New Group Online:

While the new weekly Cozy in the Wolves' Cave offered opportunities for members previously without an in-person group, we continued to explore options for groups, centered upon a shared location. A Washington, D.C. Lupercal group was in the works before the quarantine began. As a major hub of Latin secondary education, we wanted to provide an opportunity for local members to meet one another and discuss women in Latin literature together. The D.C. group leader, Alex Cleveland, began to collect the names of interested members and to plan where and when to start meeting. Soon, however, reports came in of a new pandemic that was sweeping across the nation. Schools and businesses began closing. The date of the first meeting was pushed back weeks and then months. The dream of a D.C. Lupercal group began to evaporate.

Despite the world seemingly collapsing, however, interest in a D.C. Lupercal group remained high. Local members continued to reach out with enthusiasm for a local meeting. With this in mind, we planned to hold an introductory meeting for Lupercal D.C. digitally via the Zoom platform. Since that introductory meeting, we have held two additional meetings and continued to reach out to more members. While we all look forward to the

opportunity to meet in person, the digital meetings have allowed us to support one another and build a camaraderie that will carry on even as the risks of coronavirus fade.

Beginning/Advanced Spoken Latin Hours

Many of our members have not been formally trained in spoken Latin and have lacked regular opportunities to speak Latin in community with others. As the Cozy in the Wolves' Cave sessions were held almost entirely in Latin and focused on a specific text, we wanted to offer additional opportunities for our members to speak and listen to Latin. The Advanced Spoken Latin Hour is hosted weekly by Abbi Holt¹, the Beginning Latin Hour by Stephanie "Iris" Buckler.² These hours also marked our first major departure from our foundational text of Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* to other Latin texts.

As noted early, Lupercal believes in having advanced women speakers as instructors as they are more likely to provide and cultivate spaces for the historically silenced and excluded members of underrepresented genders. Meanwhile, in the Beginning Hour, attendees discuss everyday topics and learn idioms, which can often be a daunting obstacle in spoken Latin spaces, and also play low-stake games in the target language. In both groups, a fair number of attendees come regularly, and this can be interpreted as the creation of spaces built not only for education but for community. In the Advanced Hour, the attendees both read authentic Roman texts with interesting perspectives on women and chat about everyday topics. Holt has most enjoyed the opportunity "to meet and converse with excellent speakers who I would never have otherwise."

LaNoWriMo (Latin Novella Writing Month):

WEEK 4: PUBLISHING JULY 27, 2020

LaNoWriMo

Latin Novella Writing Month

Syrta est
Medusa
Hominis Rex
Sacrificium
Furibus Favet
PUGIO BRUTUS
Temptum Romanum
PRO TRIBUS
CAMILLA
Furibus Favet

WHERE ARE BOOKS PUBLISHED?

Of the 69 novellas listed on Magister P's comprehensive list:

- 3/69: publishing house (e.g.: Fluency Matters)
- 3/69: are available exclusively on Lulu
- 43/69: are available through Amazon KDP

PUBLISHING

You've made it!

After your initial drafting, carefully outlining and drafting your novella, you've gone through numerous editors. You've checked and double-checked your Latin, crossing your P's and dotting your P's. Now it's time for the big moment — sharing

1 <https://sites.google.com/site/abbiholt/>

2 <https://sites.google.com/view/dorkly-effective-latin/home/what-to-expect>

As Lupercal is dedicated to promoting underrepresented voices in Latin literature, we decided that another worthy endeavor would be a month dedicated to writing Latin novellas. Beginning around 2016, there has been a flourishing of novellas, which shelter vocabulary to create comprehensible stories for modern Latin students. At the publication of this article, two-thirds of available novellas are written by men, with the other third written by women.³ Therefore, even the contemporarily written stories that teachers are able to supply their students are dominated by male voices and male perspectives. By taking inspiration from NaNoWriMo⁴ (National Novel Writing Month), Lupercal hoped to add greater diversity to the available narratives.

Some seventy women and gender non-binary members signed up for the series of weekly newsletters and in-person workshops, held over Zoom. The workshops were led by Vanderpool, who had self-published several novellas. These workshops also featured guest speakers Arianne Belzer-Carroll, Rachel Beth Cuning, and Amelia Wallace of Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers.⁵ Each week around 25 members attended the in-person workshops, which included a short lecture on the week's specified stage of the writing process before members were put into breakout rooms. At the end, attendees reported favorable experiences.

Lupercal's LaNoWriMo gave me knowledge and support I needed to navigate the novella-writing process for the first time. I am excited not only for my own project but also for all the brilliant books my colleagues are writing.

Writers need a community of people to be successful, and this event helps create that community! Writers need to bounce ideas off each other and give and get feedback from others.

The community was exceptional, and I felt totally free to take creative risks, admit struggles, and proudly share my accomplishments. I really looked forward to each meeting!

3 <https://www.lupercallegit.org/post/lupercal-announces-national-latin-novella-writing-month>; <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bF8hZuxTDtgNMSSdonEX112JJaVYqoPH-7w27Oju9ETs/edit#>; no data is currently available on gender non-binary authors.

4 <https://nanowrimo.org/>

5 <https://bombaxpress.com/>, <https://comprehensibilibuddy.wixsite.com/latin>, <https://www.bolchazy.com/>.

Internship:

In our transition to a digital space, we thought it would be worthwhile to initiate a variety of digital events so that our members could feel supported, inspired, and intellectually stimulated. We launched a summer internship program to create additional opportunities for our youngest members and invited more participation from secondary and collegiate students. More than forty dedicated female and non-binary students applied to this project-based internship.

We included a mentorship component to our internship to help support interns in their work, provide valuable connections to women and non-binary Latinists in the field, and serve as an extra inspiration to build on their internship experiences this summer. This mentorship has allowed high school and college-aged students, many of whom want to integrate Latin into their future professional lives, to connect with mentors and resources they would not otherwise have had access to. For example, one intern is digitizing texts written by women to make these texts more easily accessible. Many others are making valuable contributions to our blog.⁶ This is a project that they have been interested in working on for some time now, but through the network of Latinists we have at Lupercal, we could provide them with the resources necessary to carry out this project. Many interns were grateful for the opportunity to strengthen professional connections with adults who were already doing progressive work in their fields of interest. Other interns have expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn how to navigate collaboration in both internships and on online platforms. This internship involved secondary and post-secondary students in the Latin community and helped them see that it is more widespread and diverse than they had ever encountered or imagined.

We are looking forward to continuing to run internships in future years. The program enables students to meet and collaborate with peers who are just as passionate about Latin as they are. They are learning to navigate new ways of demonstrating history, language, and information through a variety of strategies that can reach diverse demographics. Their ability to inspire a love of Latin, classical history, and literature, is exciting and inspiring. By doing so, we can work towards our mission to close the gender gap in spoken Latin and learn from a new generation of diverse, enthusiastic Latinists who are committed to increasing accessibility and diversity in the field.

6 <https://www.lupercallegit.org/blog>

English Reading Group:

At Lupercal, we see first-hand the benefits of learning Latin through meaningful contexts, rather than through drills and repetition. We read Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* text in part because these women's lives are familiar to us already, and we, therefore, have the background knowledge to aid in the acquisition of new vocabulary. As we stayed at home more than usual, Lupercal decided to host a Latin book club conversation about an English book. Our first read in June was Madeline Miller's novel *Circe*, which follows Circe's story and her interactions with the Minotaur, Daedalus, Icarus, Medea, and, of course, Odysseus. What followed was a fascinating conversation about feminine power and the ways un-partnered women are stigmatized in society.⁷

For July, we read *Wake, Siren*, by Nina MacLaughlin, which is a collection of stories retelling Ovid's myths with a modern and feminist twist.⁸ Imagine our excitement when we connected with the author who agreed to join us for our discussion! MacLaughlin was incredibly gracious in answering our many questions and truly delighted to hear a Latin conversation about her book. Members loved the book so much and many of the teachers in the group mentioned wanting to include some of MacLaughlin's stories in their curricula to provide alternate angles on these frequently sexist myths. We plan to continue this event series in August with the book *Antigone Rising* by Helen Morales, and will either continue it throughout the coming year or have it return next summer as an enjoyable way to explore contemporary reception of mythology and practice Latin with each other.⁹

Conclusion:

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented groups worldwide from meeting in person, Lupercal has continued to flourish, almost benefitting from a "hydra-like" growth in membership, and has developed a variety of online spaces for community and herstory. We have been able to connect with more members and leaders through the "Cozy in the Wolves' Cave" series, new Lupercal virtual groups and meetings, advanced and beginner spoken Latin hours, a new internship program, book club, and novella writing program. We have found that the switch to virtual platforms has allowed more Lupercal members and leaders to meet, collaborate, and read Latin together. Lupercal has given many people

7 <http://madelinemiller.com/circe/>

8 <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374721091>

9 <https://www.boldtypebooks.com/titles/helen-morales/antigone-rising/9781568589343/>

much needed hope and connection during COVID-19 and will continue to do so. The interest and unity that Lupercal has witnessed in the last few months alone strengthens our belief that there is a need for spaces where women and gender non-binary classicists can come together and share ideas, now more than ever. We hope to continue strengthening and growing this community both virtually and eventually in-person to work towards closing the gender gap in the Classics and empowering female and gender non-binary classicists everywhere.