Tongue Breaks: Teaching Ancient Greek and Latin to Neurodivergent Students

This paper presents strategies for teaching ancient Greek and Latin to neurodivergent students through a reading of Sappho fr. 31 Voigt, Iliad 2.488-292, and Aeneid 7.641-6 and 12.908-912. Sappho fr. 31 and Aeneid 12.908-912 both describe the tongue 'breaking," an experience too often that of a student experiencing sensory overload and breakdown leading to silence while learning ancient Greek and Latin grammar. (Anjos et al. 2021) Accounts by autistic and neurodiverse authors frequently underscore a disordered sensory experience captured in Sappho fr. 31. This sensory disregulation occurs in the wake of the poem's speaker's seeing a woman she loves "speaking and laughing" with a man (κῆνος, ὤνηρ), a sight which leads to a breakdown of the senses in the speaker such that γλῶσσα ἔαγε, her "tongue breaks/is broken" (9). (Bonanno 1996, Telò 2020) Sappho's phrase is reminiscent of the "ten tongues" and "unbreakable voice" that Homer evokes before the catalogue of ships (Iliad 2.489-90). (Budelmann 2018) In undertaking the catalogue of Italian heroes (Aeneid 7.641-6), Vergil's mention of the collapse of the tongue, of the physical organ of speech, occurs much later in the poem, in a simile as Aeneas pursues Turnus, … non lingua ualet, non corpore notae / sufficiunt uires nec uox aut uerba sequuntur (12.911-912). Language breaks down with a violence parallel to Aeneas' slaying of Turnus. (Bartsch 1998, Hahn 1961)

The experience of sensory disintegration and loss of a sense of the self in these three poets exemplifies the difficulties that students, neurodiverse as well as "neurotypical," encounter in learning ancient Greek and Latin. (Ramsby 2020) To support students' learning, in-person teaching can be combined with online activities, to offer students with differing and diverse

learning abilities (e.g., students on the autism spectrum) an effective classroom environment along with guidance outside the classroom. (Chown 2021, Reinhard 2012) Online resources can

be created so the teacher's assistance is present even outside of the classroom, a boon for students who are at ease with online interactions, and who at times prefer it for their learning.

A pedagogical practice in teaching ancient Greek and Latin classes can start with neurodivergent students' learning as the baseline around which to build a learning environment. (Hipólito et al. 2020) This curricular design is similar to that used in integrating special education students among "typical" peers in primary and secondary school classrooms. (Dixon 2005, Obiakor et al 2012.) An environment created for individuals with disabilities is one in which those who are not, or rather not yet, disabled is one accessible to all. (Belmonte 2020)

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