

## Wild Nothing: Teaching Latin Intertextuality

Musicians are always building upon, responding to, referencing, and even sampling songs that have come before. The advent of music videos in the 80s allows for an additional layer of visual allusions and an origin for the genre. With these connections in mind, this paper focuses on the pedagogical use of a modern music video for teaching Latin intertextuality.

The video “Paradise” by the band Wild Nothing features Michelle Williams flying from Australia to Niagara Falls, reading a book, and listening to her Walkman. What does this have to do with Latin intertextuality? In the course of the song, Williams has a spoken word piece in which she conjugates the verb *amare* and muses on its definitions and larger meaning. It turns out this moment is a quote from the very book she was reading on the plane, *A Word Child* by Iris Murdoch. This spoken word piece redefines the song, “Paradise,” whose refrain is “Love is paradise.” This is similar to way that intertexts will inform the larger meaning of a poem, supplementing the language to explode its very referentiality. If before the song seemed to be a 80s throwback dance floor description (“Dancer in the night / Playing with my eyes / Velvet tongue so sweet / Say anything you like”), the Murdoch quote explores love as forgiveness and as a connection with the universe. This is spoken as clouds disintegrate outside the window of the airplane, a visual reminder of the god’s-eye view explored in the quotation. Another witty visual clue of the intertextual nature of the song is the tote bag that Williams carries, which says “Shoplifters of the World Unite.” This itself is referring to the famous song of that title by The Smiths, another band who often explores allusion and intertextuality (especially in “Cemetery Gates”). By understanding these references, one

can see how this video provides poetic and filmic signposts for intertextuality (highlighting the various influences for the songwriter), and these signposts can help students pick up on Latin intertextuality as well.

The conclusion of the paper discusses the results of this strategy and illustrates how students in one of my advanced classes were able to take what they learned from this video and apply it to a short Latin poem. Specifically, the students analyze Propertius 1.12, which is chock-full of intertextual signposts, from tags of Vergil (*felix, qui potuit*, 1.12.15 ~ Verg. *G.* 2.490) to metapoetic language (e.g.  *fingere, translato*). By recognizing the poetic antecedents for Propertius' poem, it becomes more than a simple reaffirmation of his devotion to Cynthia; it becomes a defense of his conception of love elegy. Through the use of one music video, the students easily come to this sophisticated realization and appreciation of Propertius.