Writing around the *Aeneid*: Latin Prose Composition as Fan Fiction

Translation is not composition. This dictum is understood well enough in the field of Classics when it comes to evaluating scholarship or determining authorship, but in the Latin classroom, as Gruber-Miller laments, "too often what passes for writing is really another way to say translation" (2006a, 190). Actual composition in Latin or Greek not only helps students master the grammar and vocabulary of the target language, but also gives them the opportunity to express their own ideas, feelings and values in a way unique to each student, thus helping students make the language their own (Gruber-Miller 2006a; Dugdale 2011). In short, composition, in place of translation, permits communication, which should be one of the primary goals in language learning (*Standards* 1997, 7).

It was in accordance with this distinction between translation and composition that I designed my Latin prose composition class for winter 2017 as a writing workshop in which the students would engage in the creation of fan fiction based on the *Aeneid*. The overall concept of the class is a combination of Paule's gamified "Companions of Aeneas" approach with Gruber-Miller's model of a writing process based on ancient theories of rhetoric (Gruber-Miller 2006a; Paule 2015). *Bradley's Arnold Latin Prose Composition* was used to provide a structured path through the review of Latin grammar, around which the composition exercises were built. At the beginning of the semester, each student chose (or invented) a character from the mythological world of the *Aeneid* upon whom they would base their compositions throughout the course. Student choices included Creusa, Vulcan, Misenus, and Juturna, among others. I divided the 15 week semester into five units, each of which culminated in a final draft of a composition based on a given theme, such as character sketch, ethnography, and battle sequence. Within each unit, students were required to do prewriting, writing, and revision exercises that corresponded

roughly to the rhetorical categories of *inventio, dispositio,* and *elocutio.* For the prewriting exercises, students were assigned to read passages from Latin prose authors that exemplified the theme for the unit (e.g. for the ethnography unit students were assigned Caes. *BG* 6.13-14, Tac. *Agri.* 10-13, and Sall. *Jug.* 17-19). While reading these passages in Latin students were to identify common constructions, vocabulary, and themes that they could use in their own compositions and then discuss them together as a class. Students then produced rough drafts of their compositions that underwent two rounds of revision: a session of in-class peer review followed by detailed notes from the instructor. Since the assignments were mostly free compositions, in order to ensure grammatical complexity, students were required to include footnotes to passages in Latin authors that exemplified the vocabulary and constructions they chose. The final drafts were marked using a rubric that scored the compositions on grammatical accuracy, complexity, creativity, and response to feedback. Some stand-out examples of the students' work include the battle between Misenus and Triton, an ethnography of the mixed culture of Trojans and Latins (years after the *Aeneid*) from Juturna's perspective, and a psychological debate between Vulcan and his alter ego Hephaestus, à la Sméagol vs. Gollum from *Lord of the Rings.*

It is through the texts that have been preserved that ancient authors are able to communicate with us across the years. By engaging creatively with authentic Latin texts as part of a writing process, students are able to communicate with each other in Latin as well as make comparisons and connections to the past and ultimately form a vibrant community of Latin learning and composition in the classroom, thus achieving the primary standards for Latin language learning (Gruber-Miller 2006b; *Standards* 1997).

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