

## Reading an Authentic Text Through a Modified Version in a Third Semester Latin Class

The challenges inherent to third semester Latin for both students and teacher are well known. The students' foundational knowledge of Latin has eroded over the summer and needs extended time to be reestablished. Yet the teacher wishes to move students as quickly as possible to the reading of authentic texts, especially if many of them will soon be concluding their study of the language. Authentic texts, however, present a level of complexity and variety of word order, grammar, vocabulary, and cultural reference that the students rarely encountered in their readings during the first year. In order to bridge this gap, the teacher typically makes use of a textbook that provides a commentary with targeted grammatical and cultural notes and a glossary specific to the text. The students learn to use the textbook in varying degrees, and, if we are honest with ourselves, many of them also resort to a translation to "read" the authentic texts.

I have taught third semester Latin a half-dozen times and it was mostly a painful and unsatisfying educational experience for both the students and myself. The best students and those intent on becoming majors soldiered on through, but many concluded their study of the language having never learned to read real Latin with a level of understanding and speed that we normally associate with the idea of reading. Most of their work in the third semester course centered around making sure that they could connect the meaning that they saw in the translation, or from my explanation of the text in class, to the rules they had learned about Latin in their first year. By the end it seemed to me and them that there was little added value to their having learned Latin in order to read an authentic text in this way.

I came into my third semester course this fall wanting to make a change. First, I wanted the students to have more of an experience of actually reading the Latin, understanding meaning

as they read the words without constant consultation of a grammar and dictionary. Second, and maybe even more importantly, I wanted them to be able to see things in the Latin of an authentic text that would give them insight and insider knowledge that was inaccessible to someone coming to the same text through a translation.

In this presentation, I will lay out the new assignments and different approach I have adopted to bring about these changes. My department has recently shifted the content of this course from an adapted reading based on Petronius to authentic texts from the Augustan Age. First, I abandoned the multi-week review of grammar that had been the dominant focus of the beginning of the semester. Instead, we began by reading real texts and I developed worksheets that accompanied each reading and taught (or retaught) the grammar as needed. Second, I made quizlets for each day's reading that I asked the students to review before they attempted to translate the reading. Third, I rewrote each authentic text so that the students would be able to understand them.

This last assignment has been the most significant development. The students first encounter the rewritten text piece by piece in the form of a worksheet which reminds them of useful grammatical rules and asks them to answer various questions about the rewritten text. By and large I have rewritten the authentic texts with minimal changes in vocabulary and grammar. I have done some reordering of words within clauses and between clauses. Finally, I have expanded the text in places where the original is ambiguous or difficult to understand. The worksheets conclude by asking the students to reread the rewritten version presented at the end as one uninterrupted text and to consider more complex interpretive questions. In the presentation, I will take the audience through my worksheet for Horace, Odes 1.11.

On the day that the students had prepared this rewritten text we began by working through it together in class. This went quickly and the students showed solid understanding of the grammar and how it came together to construct the basic meaning of the poem. The real revelation came when I passed out what Horace had actually written. After their work on the rewritten version, they were able to read the authentic text. More significantly, by comparing the modified and original versions of this ode, they could identify various nuances and subtleties of meaning, especially in the word order, but also in the concision, ambiguity, and overall artistry of the authentic text. On the whole, their ability to interpret and appreciate what Horace had actually written was much higher than I had ever experienced in a third semester course.