

The evolution of God, Man and Word
Notes on the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae 2003-2004

The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move...Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you.

J.D. Salinger

It may seem strange to begin the 2003-2004 TLL report with a quote from Salinger, yet those who have worked there will probably understand. Begun in the late 19th century, the TLL is now situated in the Residenz. The main hall, decorated with a bust of Wöflin, paintings of august scholars and cases stuffed with antique documents and articles, maintains a certain *gravitas*. Mitarbeiter might find themselves speaking with scholars who worked at the TLL before the Second World War, back when the Thesaurus was on the E's. The Thesaurus is steeped in history, and the only thing that seems to change there are the visiting Mitarbeiter. But such an environment, one of stasis, is best suited for examining the evolution of words and the culture of those that spoke them.

Thanks to the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, one American classicist is able to spend a year working and learning at the TLL as a visiting Mitarbeiter. Last year I had that honor. I did not go as a Lexicographer or a Latinist, but rather as a Romanist. I make this distinction because the lessons of language should not be confined to the Linguist since words are an integral part of a culture and a primary means in the transmission of its values. Each word one is assigned at the TLL has the potential to reveal copious clues pertaining to the use and meaning of that word in the ever-evolving Roman society. The chronological focus taken by the TLL facilitates identifying evolutions in words. When assigned a word, one gets a set of cards; each card provides a reference, a use of that word. These cards, like the library, are arranged chronologically. Each author is provided a number based on their date (Cicero is 10, Vergil 19, Festus 28, Tacitus 54, Servius 130, and so forth) and their works are arranged in the library according to their number. Thus one 'moves' temporally through the authors as they work through their cards. This system enables the scholars to experience the evolution of their word.

Consider *prospero*. When dealing with early Roman uses of *prospero* we find the word more frequently transitive and active (except in the ablative absolute when dealing with auspices such as VAL. MAX. 7, 2, 5 *non –antibus avibus*). Someone may 'prosper' another person giving them what they want or granting them a request, though we also find humans imploring the gods to grant them something (LIV. 8, 9, 7 *vim victoriam*, APVL. Socr. 16 p. 156 *bona*) or bring something to a successful outcome (TAC. ann. 3, 56, 3 *consilia*. hist. 4, 53, 2 *coepta*). As we move into Christianity (basically 'change gods') and begin to deal with different scholarly and linguistic traditions (i.e., traditions and translations from Hebrew and Greek), we find a change in the use of *prospero*. First we find more use of the word in the active sense following the latter meaning mentioned above, god brings something (generally an action) through to a prosperous or successful conclusion. Here we frequently find *dirigo* as a variant. God was often asked to prosper *viam meam* (VET. LAT. gen. 24, 42 for example) or we hear he prospered the actions of

a pious man, *quaecumque faciebat ... in manibus eius* (VET. LAT. gen. 39,3). And, as in the form chosen to report auspices, we find that most things were done *domino/Christo – ante*. Also interesting is the move to the use of the passive. It is under Christian authors that we find the greatest use of the passive. It is god who makes things flourish, whether they be the *res humanas*, an *opus*, someone's *salus* or *iter* or the person themselves. *Prospero* is commonly chosen to translate *εὐδὸν* from the Greek and *tzlch* from the Hebrew. One could, of course, write a dissertation on the use and evolution of *prospero*, but a simple overview alone can detect some of the changes in the perception and use of a word as it evolves with a changing religious system. Under the influence of Christianity, *prospero* loses the strength of its meaning as 'to grant' and turns more towards the meaning of 'to foster' or 'flourish'. The power to prosper something falls into god's hands and humans become objects acted upon.

The chronological scheme set down by Wölfflin enables the scholar to focus on the evolution of a word and approach the myriad of its uses and meanings from a consistent framework. Of course chronology is not the only issue considered by the lexicographer -- Wölfflin's system also focuses on dichotomy. The articles of the TLL are all structured on dichotomies, indicating use and development by articulating differences. Each word contains a dizzying array of potential dichotomies (in meaning, tense, voice etc). Finding the appropriate dichotomy from which to construct one's article is one of the skills a new Mitarbeiter must strive to develop. An obvious dichotomy (and one which may seem rather important to the personal interests of the Mitarbeiter) may not be the most efficient means of revealing the development of that word. And the act of categorizing this dichotomy, particularly when dealing with a clever pun, can leave a new Mitarbeiter in a state of aporia! Working on framing the TLL article is excellent training approaching a problem (or word) from a variety of angles and discerning which approach will be most effective in presenting the pertinent issues and details specific to that word.

It would be difficult to voice all the advantages gained from working at the TLL in this short essay. Aside from the endless potential of discovering the evolution of Latin words and Roman culture, the stipendiat(in) has access to a fabulous Latin library where they can discover authors they probably never would have heard of and breeze through commentaries that would be locked in rare book rooms back in the States. Working in an international environment with scholars whose interests span all of Latin literature gives the Mitarbeiter a chance to interact and share ideas with others who contribute a great deal of experience and knowledge. The scholars at the TLL are wonderful, kind and constantly willing to help and teach; having the opportunity to work with them was truly a gift. Even the physical writing of the articles provides a lesson in patience, diligence and attention to detail [who would have ever thought anyone cared if the space before a word is italicized or not?].

A year at the TLL provides new Ph.D.'s with many important cognitive and research tools they will exercise for the rest of their careers. They will also have access to a phenomenal amount of material which they can use in their own work. A visiting TLL scholar may not, however, be able to produce much while they are working at the TLL. Much of the time spent there will be spent writing the articles, acquiring new skills and researching their own interests. On the positive side, searching for jobs is not difficult now that the Akademie has installed a fabulous internet system. I do suggest Mitarbeiters bring their own laptops, as the dusty old computers provided by the TLL are not adequate

for working on-line. The system of having a 12 month contract (with two months off) enables the stipendiat(in), if they come in June, to take off sufficient time for the APA conference in January.

But caveat emptor! The rising cost of living in Munich and the falling dollar will leave the Mitarbeiter feeling like a character in a Dicken's novel. Finding housing in Munich is near impossible -- so expect an exorbitant rent that will consume close to half of your salary. The only other option is to live far out from Munich and taking an hour commute each way. The dollar's brutal decline will leave the stipendiat(in) reminiscing over the 'gravy' days of their graduate student salary, when their fiscal future did not rest in the fickle hands of the Asian market and unrelentingly bad Labor Statistic Reports (they come out at 8:30 am on the first Friday of every month so look out). Theoretically the salary provided by the APA/NEH is generous, but given the realities of the situation (an unforgiving exchange rate around 1.30:1.) it is not really enough. A possible solution might be for the APA to secure housing in Munich at a fixed rate and to provide the stipendiat(in) a position with a smaller salary but one that includes housing.

While the dollar remains so weak, the financial situation is the only complaint one could make about working for a year at the TLL. I am grateful for the year I had there, the many things I learned and the kind people I met. I hope the APA/NEH continues to offer this important fellowship and that scholars continue to be enriched by this experience for years to come. Hopefully an American Mitarbeiter will remain as one of the unchanging aspects of the TLL, just as Cicero will always be 10.

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