

Palace Life: The Year of a TLL Fellow (2005-6)

A fortunate interloper, a voyager cast up on Phaeacian shores—such would characterize my state of mind while working at the TLL in Munich. This venerable philological enterprise is housed in the vast, palatial *Residenz*, formerly home to the ruling family of Bavaria. I had worked in pleasant surroundings before, but it had never been anything quite like my alcove looking over the fountains of the colonnaded *Hofgarten* and out to the towers of the *Ludwigskirche* at the edge of the *Englischer Garten*, one landscape giving way to the next in a pleasing rendition of nature. An even more acute sensation of having wandered though a wrong door, or stumbled into a new world, came upon me at times in my office upstairs, when I supposed, as though an intruder, that I might be standing where the royal nursery once stood (though this upper wing, it turns out, is a recent addition).

Whatever the past, new occupants now hold the place of honor: the august family of Latinity. Weighty verbs and hoary nouns have picked up where the former residents left off, for they too retain a personal staff, receive travelers from across the seas, and enjoy an elegant library stocked with their own histories and genealogies. Where words command such respect, one begins to associate with them in unusual ways. During my happy term of service to *pontifex* (along with near relations *pontificalis* and *pontificatus*), this meant that colleagues greeted me with an occasional bow in the corridor and even called across the cafeteria table for my solemn judgment one afternoon. At which point, I began to feel somewhat concerned for a good friend who had moved from *rana* to weeks of nothing but *rapina*. A word also exerts an influence upon the mind of the lexicographer, as when *radiare* (with *radiatus*) buoyed my spirits day after day by leaving me to linger over ancient descriptions of the splendor of gems, the glow of youth or virtue, the brightness of the blue sky. I'll call it serendipity that at this very time there happened to be a solar eclipse; and that my editor, John Blundell, after supplying me with invaluable advice on my article, passed me an envelope containing a pair of cardboard sunglasses. Later, with my term at the TLL running toward its end and my final deadlines bearing down, I raced to finish none other than *raptim*.

My other words included the rare specimens *popa* and *porceo*, which sent me to curious sources: difficult fragments of Roman tragedy, the satires of Persius alongside their scholia, and a mysterious inscription referring to a woman who once lived on the island of the Tiber. I requested to do *rabbi*, *rabboni*, and *racha*, Semitic words transliterated but left untranslated in the Latin Bible (both *Vetus* and *Vulgata* versions) and then discussed and used in later Christian writings, on account of my interest in the thought of the Fathers upon the nature and history of language. My work on these particular words has not only yielded three short articles for the Thesaurus, but will also enrich a publication presenting some of my own research in Patristics.

Things begin with a box holding paper slips, on which a century ago scholars and their assistants patiently transcribed every passage from the Classical authors and a good selection of later passages (up to 600 AD) in which a given word appears. In the case of *radicitus*, the passages numbered somewhere around one hundred. The first tasks were to read through and check the texts against newer editions while also keeping an eye out for ways of dividing the material that might prove useful later on. The excitement at this stage lay partly in solving problems, such as the need to deal with a mutilated text on papyrus, or to orient myself in the labyrinth of Roman legal documents. But, even more, one embarked upon an unpredictable tour that also became a trial of sorts, since I had to restrain myself against the call of many voices in order to proceed. To slip into a heated council of bishops, only to duck out again before hearing the resolution of the issues! To leave Cicero in the middle of an excursus on the life of the mind! I jotted

notes, reminding myself to return another day. In the second phase of the work, I would propose to my editor a structure of divisions and subdivisions intended to account for all occurrences of the word, and he would scour it for weaknesses and inelegancies before suggesting directions for improvement. This alternation continued until the exacting standard had at last been met and the final writing done (though he will edit my article thoroughly yet again before it goes to print).

In this endeavor, one must keep the philosophical impulse at arm's length, for the aim is not to offer a grid on which every meaning of a word is thoroughly plotted down metaphysical and logical lines, but rather to provide a useful philological guide by making readily and simultaneously apparent all the most important semantic, linguistic, and historical facts about a word. Consequently, convenience and balance loom large as principles of ordering. The chronological imperative calls for the oldest occurrences, whatever their character, almost always to head the outline; and a reader's needs require that potential divisions be assessed by the wholly extrinsic rule of their size on the page. Nor could the competing demands of the project and the messiness of language be negotiated without frequent recourse to open categories such as *varia* or *quaelibet exempla* and to qualifiers such as *fere* and *sim.*—however much these frustrate the urge to definition. In the case of *radicitus*, however, both the philologist and the philosopher in me gained satisfaction. Beneath the lemma and assorted information of a more technical nature, an overarching definition or heading reads in Latin to the effect that this adverb is generally used to describe actions that pertain to the root (or deepest, innermost part) of something. Moving down the page, the first level of the outline presents the most important conceptual division: that either the involvement of a thing's root indicates the involvement of its totality (“roots and all”), or else the root itself is singled out; and, in the latter case, there follows a subdivision between actions taking place at the root, such as clinging or breaking, and actions taking place from the root, such as nourishment. Further down still, there are groupings according to the classes of verbs modified by the word, and the types of things, whether vegetable or other, whether corporeal or incorporeal, whose roots are said to be affected.

There is more to Germany than Latin, though. I made friendships and professional connections that I will maintain with pleasure in the years to come. And when the massive portals of the *Residenz* swung shut for the evening, I could find myself very soon in the balcony of an opera house, or strolling between the giant churches of Munich down to the banks of the Isar, or seated at a cozy dinner with locals who befriended me and helped me along with their language. My personal life and general culture benefited every bit as much as my philological skills during my year as TLL Fellow. I offer my warmest thanks to the APA and its TLL Committee for making possible a unique adventure from which I have returned with many riches.

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