

Old-World Chocolate (for Housman)

(TLL Fellow's Report 2006-2007)

A year at the *ergastulum*. More than once had I posed the question before shipping off to Munich: would Housman's scathing judgment of the TLL in his (in)famous diatribe on *aelurus* (*Juvenal XV.7*) prove true? His remarks include sardonic gems like the 'superabundant damage, inflicted by the mental habits of the slave'. They're not the unsettling propemptikon you'd want lurking in the back of your mind when traveling to the Mecca of Latin lexicography.

It would be easy enough to elaborate the range of intellectual challenges in Munich, or to catalog assigned words or reactions to them, such as: will I really spend the next few weeks researching 'god couches', *pulvinaria?* (*Pulvinar* turned out to be the most pleasurable, if vexing, article, as a few weeks stretched into many, perhaps to the dismay of a superbly patient editor.) The TLL's intellectual opportunities and rewards have been amply documented (see the testimonial from past fellows in the August 2007 APA newsletter), and the essence of the past year can in large measure be described through the *realia* and *memorabilia* of daily life at the Thesaurus. This is not to neglect the legendary shoe-boxes-cum-fold-down-flaps containing the *Zettel*, nor to overlook the glorious layout of Latin texts in the library, each author assigned a number and place according to relative chronology with other Latin authors or texts.

But in the end quotidian details overshadow grand constants. Ramón *minor*--there was a Ramón *maior* too--and I would often play *Nummern und Autoren*: one player chooses an author at random and the other attempts to divine the corresponding TLL library number: for beginner's, say, Germanicus (30), Celsus (33), or Pomponius Trogus (99). You eventually moved on to the more advanced (obscure) figures: Orientius (178), Fulgentius Ruspensis (201), or the 6th century osmotic philosopher, Secretius of Smyrna (234). This afternoon distraction typically alternated with the calculated distribution of chocolate, in order to effect a cacao-induced pseudo-narcosis, after which I could usually ask painful questions of an unsuspecting Mitarbeiter, like how to cite Oribasius (207).

As a visitor in a new environment certain elements occasioned inevitable confusion. There were, for example, in the library Two Religions as regards the regulation of climactic state: The Acolytes of the Window Open and The Faithful of the Heater On (agnosticism had me seated between rival factions). One can imagine the environmental complexities posed by this ecumenical dispute. The airy conflict was such that I often anticipated the rise of a spontaneous vortex somewhere between Minucius Felix (70) and Firmicus Maternus (98). I concluded, however, that this was merely a lack of logistical foresight in the layout of the Bavarian Academy. Consider the potential benefits if this imagined whirlwind were to disturb the inertia that settled invariably at 12:15 upon those gathered to debate prospective lunchtime cantinas, the daily outing that offered a chance to interact informally with colleagues.

Such outings often extended into weekends, like the hike just south of Munich one sunny Autumn Saturday. After two hours over the hills and into the woods on an empty stomach, I faced ignominious defeat against an immense Viennese Schnitzel in the village brewery at Aying.

These tongue-in-cheek examples are naturally not meant to downplay the serious opportunities, many of which I hadn't envisioned before arriving at Munich, like reading Bob Kaster's book on emotions, with its fascinating chapter on *pudor*, and speaking with Claudia about her methodology as she was writing the TLL entry; ditto for Tony Corbeill's book on gesture and Marijke's article on *pollex*. At Munich one can easily take for granted the collegial generosity of those always willing to lend an expert hand (such as Nigel's way of providing at least one good answer to any question). Daily *congiaria* of chocolates were small recompense for their good offices. In our home departments in the U.S., surrounded by colleagues

who may sit on the other side of a disciplinary fence, we're lucky to find one or two kindred minds. Munich boasted nearly twenty.

Past fellows or visitors will recall the antiquated state of some of the facilities (let's call it 'institutional quaintness'). This year ushered in a new elevator, a wireless network, new printers, computers, and Unicode fonts along with recent versions of Microsoft Word. A project from the late-19th century has made it to the early 21st. The improvements are not trivial: they make visiting the TLL much easier and, for APA fellows, facilitate job applications when in Munich.

The only feature that still bewilders me is the labyrinthine layout of the library's 'LEX' section (for dictionaries, lexical tools, and the like). How was it that a library so brilliantly disposed in every respect for the needs of lexicographers, was so bewildering in the organization and placement of its lexica? I imagined this to be a physical reflection of the TLL's implicit philosophy: go to lexica and you may quickly head down the wrong path; go to the sources, attempt to get away from the accrued sediment of recent centuries, and you may be on to something, possibly something surprisingly novel. Sure, you weren't discovering new Latin continents, but perhaps an as yet unrecognized landmark of Latinity would appear on the horizon for the first time. I say this not by way of *malignitas* for other milestones in the field, but rather to put into relief the TLL's continuing relevance, and to counter the occasionally overheard (and probably more frequently thought) claim that the TLL is too traditional, too behemoth, or too obscure.

Some obscurity hinders the uninitiated. But persistence with the TLL is repaid in the wealth of information that it conveys in such limited space. It soon becomes evident (sometimes painfully so) to anyone writing an article the extent to which considerations and concessions are made by authors and editors for the reader's sake. Yes, the project is massive and *celeritas* does not figure among its cardinal virtues, but pace reflects the formidable quality of the product. Rome's lexicon cannot be built in a day.

At this point frankness requires the admission that the final months were simply rotten: I had been assigned *putreo* and *putresco*. Four authors took center stage: Celsus, Columella, Pliny, and (interestingly) Augustine. Pliny's obsession with *ulcera putrescentia* (festering wounds) had me anticipating other distinct medical uses, and satisfaction was found: *si sanguine gingivae putrescant*. 'Oh good', quoth I, in the Academy's hallowed halls 'bloody festering gums'. The outburst, following hard upon distribution of the aforementioned chocolates, was likely not received by my nearest desk-mate in the spirit intended. This resulted, however, in a heated discussion between Friedrich, Theodore, and myself, on the semantic subtleties of Zahnfäule (dental decay) and Zahnfleischbluten (bleeding gums). As past fellows have often noted, a year in Munich can improve your German remarkably.

More than anything else, *putrescere* had me thinking about the 'conservative' reputation of the TLL. A single concept like 'putrefaction' brought you through a diverse landscape of *Weltanschauungen*. Different authors' lexical habits revealed a vivid genealogy in Roman patterns of thought. Combined with this was an approach that by design eschews more traditional timeframes, like early Republican, Classical, Silver, Late Antique, etc. This inclusive take permitted you to recognize a thread of meaning that, though barely visible in earlier authors, would develop a significant texture in later writers. Seneca's use of *putrescere* to indicate 'moral decay' only became entirely clear when examining the 4th and 5th century authors.

It is true that even a renowned undertaking like the TLL can no longer afford to lean blindly on philological justifications like Hope on her Anchor (the Housmanians will indulge the pilfering). The TLL will likely retain its central position in contemporary approaches to Latin language and culture, most prominently in understanding the social or ideological significance of particular concepts. But even

nascent sub-disciplines in the academy can profit from it. Translation studies come immediately to mind. Now that aesthetic and formalist approaches to literature--as opposed to currently dominant (new-) historical ones--are returning from lengthy relegation, the TLL can provide a unique perspective in understanding aesthetic vocabulary and values across different periods of Roman letters. Certainly other areas of our discipline could benefit equally.

Most TLL fellows probably find rewards far different from those they had anticipated. You learn a few concrete things about Latin, some thoroughly mundane. Most importantly you stumble across a methodological basis for innovative inquiry. That's a far cry from the slave mentality that Housman had so amusingly pilloried. TLL Fellows are more like emancipated disciples. I'll surely return, with some lingering questions and a lot of chocolate.

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