**Taylor Swift est in horto, how teachers are making Latin more accessible**

*A Cambridge University academic has written a guide suggesting that Latin should be taught more creatively.*

Latin. Most people think it’s boring, dated and constantly clutching at straws to find its relevance in the modern world. It’s biggest weakness, it’s grossly inaccessible. Latin is primarily taught in private schools, to classes of very few with a remarkably weak grip on how the rest of the country experience education. I mean, we were quite literally led through a pandemic by a Prime Minister with a degree in Classics from Oxford. As we can see from the shambles ensuing in the Commons, knowing Homer’s *Iliad* back to front doesn’t exactly prepare you for viral Armageddon. And he only got a 2:1.

So, whilst I love to bore people with how truly riveting the sex, drugs, and rock and roll of the ancient world actually is, it’s important to acknowledge this ‘hot take’ comes from a very privileged position. Latin, and its exclusive field of study, is quite frankly problematic. And those who teach it or, like myself, have a lasting interest in it need to work on decolonising the field.

But seriously. Don’t act like you didn’t love a bit of Percy Jackson when you were younger. How did we all go from knowing and loving the myths of the Underworld, Medusa, Zeus and Hercules as kids to our interest being completely lost? Leaving, for the most part, the suited and booted gentry on these Classics courses.

Getting to Latin A Leve I realised it is quite literally sex (gay and straight), rebellion, politics that looks remarkably like our modern-day politics, a ton of fires and a bunch of raunchy high-profile affairs. And I wished more people knew! Ok, so it’s in a dead language and nobody likes grammar. I’m also missing out the brutal wars, slave societies of Rome and grossly suppressed rights of women. However, it all comes together to make this fascinating, mythological, quirky, sexually explorational pocket of history. But the posh, droll teachers tend to put us off well before GCSE.

Latin has typically been taught, in its private school sphere, through Caecilius. If you don’t know him, he’s usually hanging out in horto. And if you took Latin you’ll know in book three he cheats on his wife, Metella… maybe it’s time for Taylor Swift to get involved?

A Cambridge University academic has put together a new guide that suggests Latin should be taught more like a modern foreign language. Students should be encouraged to speak, sing, and write creatively – even perform. Rather than just reciting grammar tables and cheating on vocab tests for three years until they can drop Latin at GCSE.

Stephen Hunt, a Latin teacher of 35 years, thinks a more open-minded and imaginative approach will widen the interest for the subject and also make it more accessible. This is perhaps the biggest challenge facing the Latin teaching community, yes it’s important to make sure this uniquely middle-class subject is accessible, but once there’s access how can they be sure there will be interest? This will involve picking apart the elitist and slightly ‘gatekeepy’ side of Classics teaching that puts so many students off.

There are currently less than 10,000 students who sit GCSE Latin and, as you can imagine, the overwhelming majority are from private schools. A recent British Council survey revealed that Latin is taught at KS3 at only 2.7% of state schools compared to 49% of independent schools.

Hunt had this eureka moment that a change was long overdue, as he details in one research paper, when he asked students who were struggling with Virgil’s poetry to translate a modern song instead. The Swifties among the class managed to turn Bad Blood into *quod, are, nunc malum sanguinem habemus.* My little nerdy Swifty heard might just have exploded.

Other examples of this strategy include 3D models of Rome being built on Minecraft by teachers, translating *Let it Go* from Frozen and even getting students to read and write fanfiction in Latin. Let me tell you now, the love poems and intermarital myths of the ancient world are remarkably similar to that Harry Styles fanfiction lying about in your Wattpad library from when you were 14. Dido and Aeneas’ relationship is almost perfectly personified in the All Too Well (Ten Minute Version) video.

Hunt explains that Latin and its discipline has never truly been subject to “thorough academic investigation. We tend to rely on anecdotal information about what seems to work.” Upon reflection, Hunt is now horrified that he once taught Latin using texts which didn’t truly acknowledge the horrors of slavery and stereotyped female figures.

“Because the human brain is hardwired for sound, it learns by speaking, listening and **using** language. Some Latin teachers are realising that this is the way to learn any language – dead or alive”

The Department of Education announced the launch of a £4m scheme to encourage Latin to be taught among secondary state students, starting in 40 schools across England, as part of a four-year scheme. I used to stay behind after school in sixth form to help out with GCSE Classical Civilisation lessons hosted at my school for local schools in Streatham. Don’t get me wrong, I do think £4m could be better spent on lowering the rising cost of living, and there are still some structural issues with the elitist nature of Classics in the example I just used. So, my suggestion is that teachers and students who are really passionate about expanding the discipline incentivise themselves to run creative spaces off their own backs where possible, either in person or online, where everybody is welcome.

I would implore any fanfiction enthusiast, Swifty, creative bisexual girl on campus who used to love a bit of Percy Jackson, local campus skateboarding soft boy to go give Dido and Aeneas’ love story a look. It’s all about Aeneas having to choose his duty over love and free will, dumping Dido for the ‘greater good’. I’m sure many of us can relate. Although Dido does fling herself onto a fire, so don’t get too carried away with seeing yourself in her.

Or for the feminists on campus, read about Camilla the female warrior in Virgil’s *Aeneid* Book II*.* Don’t fancy the obvious ‘girlbosss’ feminist trope? Women in antiquity are almost always portrayed as either sirens, virgins, whores, or meddling mothers by the men who wrote classical history and literature. Distractions or problems. There is so much to pick apart, and so many conversations to be had on how little we have evolved from this ancient perception in modern literature.

Politics students, Plato’s *Republic,* is the one for you. It’s probably even on your syllabus at some point. Plato, writing around 380 B.C., describe a tyrant who would emerge from the democracy. As democracy becomes more equal, the prospect for tyranny rises. A tyrant who overidentifies with the people and tarnishes the name of those in power, whilst being perhaps the furthest removed from any sentiment of the people at all. ‘The rich try to look just like the poor for power’ – a sentiment Donald Trump often tried to play on I would argue.

There really is something for everybody. And so many interesting conversations to be had about how many similarities we still see in modern politics, literature and speech making. It’s just up to those in charge and who are teaching to be a little more creative, a little less elitist and a lot more accessible.