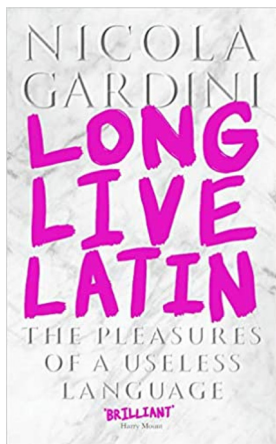


Book Reviews

Long Live Latin. The Pleasures of a Useless Language

Gardini (N.) . Pp. viii + 246. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2019 (first published in Italian by Garzanti as *Viva il latino*, 2016). Cased, £14.99. ISBN: 9781781259399.
<https://profilebooks.com/work/long-live-latin/>

James Watson



In the words of its author, ‘This book, in short, is a defense of Latin and a tribute to it and to the literature that has been written in that language since antiquity, as well as an invitation to study Latin’ (p. 12).

An introduction, entitled ‘Ode to a Useless Language’ (pp. 3–13), rejects arguments made by those who consider Latin to be either ‘useless’ or ‘useful’, and offers the view that Latin should instead be seen as ‘beautiful’; the idea that Latin is a ‘dead language’ is also dismissed. In the first three chapters, the reader is introduced to the range of what has

been written in Latin and familiarised with the intentions of the book; we are told that the ‘focus is on literary Latin, the Latin that helped form my character as a man and as a writer, the Latin I continue to read and that I still believe must play a central role in any serious and historically conscious pedagogy’ (p. 28).

A discussion, in the fourth chapter, on the myth and reality of Latin’s origin, includes discussion of both Cato and Plautus; the following 17 chapters each take an author (or, occasionally, more than one) as their focus. Although one could read individual chapters as standalone units, in doing so one would miss the way that they work together to survey the breadth and depth of Latin literature. Furthermore, many chapters contain wider reflections not only pertinent to the author around whom each discussion is focused. The fifth chapter, for example, is overtly centred on Catullus, but also contains some thoughts about teaching and learning. Similarly, the first of two chapters centred on Virgil – which begins with the claim ‘In the event of a global catastrophe, the book to salvage would be the *Aeneid*’ (p. 95) – considers the significance of the placement of words and discusses the importance of ‘imitation’ within ancient literature, noting that ‘The essence of literature... is tradition. Literature is a handing-down, a reservoir of memory, a genealogical system’ (p. 103). That in itself helps to emphasise another reason why the book is best read as a whole: authors and

texts relate to one another, as Gardini shows throughout. The seventh chapter, for instance, principally discusses Ennius, but in doing so makes reference also to Virgil, Silius Italicus, Lucretius, Cicero, Naevius, Catullus, Propertius – and indeed to Homer, Hesiod, Callimachus and Petrarch. Throughout the book there are also very interesting comments on the etymologies of individual words, some of which would be missed by someone choosing to read only individual chapters.

Cicero, Caesar, Lucretius, Livy, Seneca, Augustine, Juvenal and Horace each provide the focus for a chapter, whilst Catullus and Virgil each receive a second chapter in which they are the principal subject. Two pairs of authors – Tacitus and Sallust, and Apuleius and Petronius – each receive a shared chapter. The chapter on Ovid mainly discusses the *Metamorphoses*, with remarks on his love poetry to be found in a later, thematic chapter on love elegy (which particularly studies Propertius). Although – perhaps inevitably – this reviewer most enjoyed the chapters relating to texts and authors that he has read, each contains much that is of interest. Among the highlights of the book are the memorable ways in which Gardini encapsulates the style of an author or text. Of Tacitus, for example, he notes that ‘Every observation is worth two, because lurking behind what little he tells us is a broader discourse, a hidden commentary on the complexity and ultimate unfathomability of human reasons and purposes’ (pp. 118–119). More briefly, he notes that ‘Livy becomes an artist of *episodes*’ (p. 133).

An author about whom we discover much in this book is Gardini himself, as the text often reads as a very personal account of his own encounters with Latin literature. At an early stage in the book Gardini notes that ‘without Latin I would not be who I am, and I’m sure there are others who could say the same’ (p. 29). Later we read that ‘Of all the ancient authors, Seneca is the one who’s taught me most how to live. Virgil moves me; Tacitus leaves me aghast at cruelty; Lucretius sends me whirling and drifting and sinking; Cicero has me dreaming of perfection in all – thought, speech, behaviour. Seneca teaches me happiness’ (p. 155). As this example shows, the autobiographical remarks often illuminate ancient literature as well as giving an insight into Gardini’s own views and opinions – which as well as being interesting in their own right also help to remind the reader that Latin texts are literature to which personal responses are appropriate.

Extracts of Latin are quoted throughout the book, and are almost always translated. Whilst the book is relatively free of typographical errors, a few are apparent in the quoted Latin: *tempa* appears for *tempora* (p. 78), *hic* for *huc* (p. 149), *morten* for *mortem* (p. 161), *germine* for *germina* (p. 207) and *fedelis* for *fidelis* (p. 213). The comment that Philip ‘attempts to name Antigonid as his heir’ (p. 140) should presumably have referred to Antigonus, whilst the comment that Tacitus tells us that Petronius was ‘proconsul, and later consul, in Bithynia’ (p. 176) might mislead the reader into thinking that a consul served in a particular province. None of these issues, however, really detracts from the book.

The book concludes with a ‘Conclusion as exhortation: study Latin’ (pp. 229–234), which contains arguments those of us seek-

ing to promote the subject might use – including the useful reminder that ‘studying Latin is an extraordinarily rewarding experience in itself. To put it quite simply: Latin is fun’ (pp. 229–230). Gardini also notes that ‘I cannot make you love Latin, nor can any teacher. But I can try to impart some of my own passion, show you why I love it, and try to spark a similar interest in you’ (pp. 232–233). In this book Gardini certainly shows us why he loves Latin; whilst it is likely that the interest of those who choose to read this book will already have been sparked before they read it, its contents could certainly help to re-ignite or sustain a love of the language and its literature.

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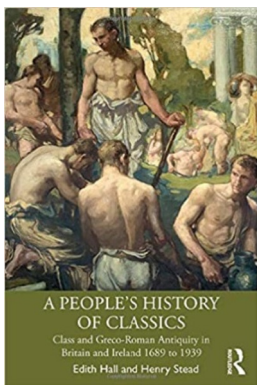
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A People’s History of Classics. Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain and Ireland 1689 to 1939

Hall (E.), Stead (H.). Pp. xxviii + 642, ill., maps. Oxford: Routledge, 2020. Cased, £120 (Paper, £29.99). ISBN: 978-1-138-21283-1.

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Edith Hall, a Professor of Classics at King’s College London and author or editor of 30 volumes of Classical literature and history, has in recent years been actively engaged in the ACE programme, Advocating Classics Education. This programme has both historical interests and pedagogical commitments; it is interested in how Classics has been taught in Britain and has been advocating for the accessibility of Classics throughout the British secondary education system. Henry Stead, Lecturer in

Latin at the University of St Andrews, author of *A Cockney Catullus* and co-editor of *Greek and Roman Classics in the Struggle for Social Reform*, brings the people to this history of Classics. This comprehensive volume will no doubt come to underpin efforts to encourage and enhance the teaching of Classics wherever it is being discouraged or cut.

As a scholarly project, *A People’s History of Classics* is an exemplary contribution to both Classical Reception and Cultural History. Being interested in the extension of the reception, it commits

itself to the broadening of the concept of culture to cover more than conventional ‘cultivation’. The study of Classics, historically – or, at least, historiographically – has been the preserve of elites, and a preserver of elitism. Mastery of Greek and Latin took time and money, and so was accessible only to gentlemen of leisure; but where Hall and Stead’s historical survey puts the *class* in Classics, it plots the inclusive as well as the exclusive implications. The category of the Classics was enlarged early on to include Greek and Latin works in translation, and then to histories of Greece and Rome written in English. This development is reflected in today’s ACE programme, which acknowledges that most students will not have the opportunity to study the ancient languages, but that all students should still have access to Classical Civilisation.

The book is organised into four parts, comprising 25 chapters. Part I sets forth the ‘Big Picture’ of the history, and sets up the rather elaborate analytical categories of its study. It also indicates the pertinent source materials. Part II surveys working-class communities (the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh among them), but begins with Dissenters. Part III focuses on individuals (the more or less well-known, the heretofore obscure, and the inevitably eccentric). Part IV focuses on particular trades (miners, potters, and shoemakers), and on those who were not only working class but Communist. The book surveys and essays a huge quantity and variety of historical stuff, and there is a fair amount of overlap and reiteration among the parts and chapters. But then that reflects the lived experience that any People’s History will want to represent.

One of the most fascinating and edifying features of this history is its focus on people who, while not of the leisured and learned classes, nevertheless applied themselves to the study of Greek and Latin, and mastered them. The same autodidactic impulse sent others to Pope’s Homer or Gibbon’s *History*. As these people came to be the People, print culture and the publishing industry began to accommodate them. In addition to *Latin Made Easy* and *Lessons in Greek*, Hall and Stead tell us about *Cassell’s Popular Educator*, ‘Bohn’s Classical Library’ and Dent’s ‘Everyman’s Library’. We visit second-hand book shops, libraries, and museums, and attend lectures. We learn of, and from, the Institutes and Colleges that furnished a liberal education to artisanal and industrial workers. Hall and Stead are always interested in how the working classes got access to the Classics, and in what they did with them. In some cases, a classical education was the way to bourgeois respectability; in other cases, it fortified and intensified working-class identities and activities. Many popular classicists left their own writings, which are among this history’s most telling sources. The narrative is illustrated by many striking images, a number of them from Hall’s personal collection. Hall has a particular interest in theatre; here we can see everything from the highbrow to the burlesque. Classical antiquity furnished a number of stories, like that of the Gracchi, which lent themselves to proletarian dramatisation. By the end of the period covered, theatre was one of the most popular sorts of working-class activism, and the classical scholarship informing it was being done by Communist dons.

The authors of this book can persuasively claim that it is ‘the first substantial enquiry into the presence of ancient Greek and Roman culture in British working-class communities ever to have been conducted’. It should be of interest to Classics teachers of today, because it is the history of that endeavour.

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