The Latin language is popularly imagined in a number of specific ways: as a masculine language, an imperial language, a classical language, a dead language. This book considers the sources of these metaphors and analyzes their effect on how Latin literature is read. It argues that these metaphors have become *idées fixes* not only in the popular imagination but in the formation of Latin studies as a professional discipline. By reading with and more commonly against these metaphors, the book offers a different view of Latin as a language and as a vehicle for cultural practice. The argument ranges over a variety of texts in Latin and texts about Latin produced by many different sorts of writers from antiquity to the twentieth century. The author's central aim is to provoke more new readings that would both extend and complicate those that it offers, in order to catalyze revisionist thinking about Latin texts of all periods and about the general contours of the discipline of Latin studies.

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ROMAN LITERATURE
AND ITS CONTEXTS

Latin Language and Latin Culture

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Latin Language and Latin Culture

from ancient to modern times

Joseph Farrell

University of Pennsylvania

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For Ann, Flannery, and Kai

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Preface

I would like to have written this book in Latin. On the other hand, had it been reasonable to do so – if such a book could have found an audience; if any publisher would have taken it on; if indeed I had full confidence that what I wanted to say could be expressed in a modern, idiomatic Latin style, supple and nuanced, not the stuff of composition exercises, critical editions, and public monuments – I would probably have seen no need to write it.

I offer this essay in the belief that certain ideas about the Latin language pervade modern intellectual life and color the ways in which most of us latinists carry out our professional responsibilities of teaching and research. These ideas affect us whether we work in antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or more recent times; whether we study literature, history, or any other area; whether the language itself is central or peripheral to our concerns. They include the idea of the "dead" language; the closely related idea of the "classical" language; the strong association between latinity and male speech; the structuring of the various disciplines within which latinists work according to discrete chronological periods; the relationship between the language itself and a multitude of social institutions, religious and secular, at different times, in different places. It is inevitable that these factors should influence the ways in which nonlatinists think about the most familiar of all ancient tongues; equally inevitable, perhaps, that such beliefs should affect the ways in which we latinists work as well.

At the same time, unexamined assumptions can have unexpected and unintended effects. For instance, I cannot imagine that many nonlatinists, if they think about it, doubt that Latin is a masculine lan-

guage. Of course, very few latinists today would openly endorse this idea; but it runs strong through the history of thinking about the language, and is therefore deeply ingrained in the institutional culture of latinity. For such reasons it influences the latinist's work and is worthy of frank examination and discussion. One point I shall argue is that the gender of the language itself takes on a different appearance when classicists and medievalists look across disciplinary boundaries at one another's material: how one thinks about the gender of Latin turns out to be deeply implicated in assumptions about periodicity. Similar relationships exist among the other beliefs listed above, and no doubt among many more that I have either failed to identify or did not feel able to handle adequately. Hence this book and, I hope, other books by other latinists on related themes.

My training is that of a classicist and a pretty conventional one at that. Virtually all my work to date has taken me down the most well-traveled paths over the most canonical terrain. My ulterior motive in writing this book was to create an excuse to roam around in neighborhoods that I had seldom visited and, in some cases, had only heard of. I am all too conscious that there are others much better qualified than myself to explicate authors like Perpetua, Venantius, Ekkehard, Dante, Woolf, and Stravinsky. I therefore address myself in the first instance, I suppose, to fellow classicists about the pleasures that come from straying outside the syllabus. Again I realize that many colleagues have been there before. From all who know these areas better than I let me beg their indulgence and offer this excuse: I wrote because no one else had come forward. My general idea, simply stated, is that all latinists, especially classicists, and especially those of us who are accustomed to working in the most familiar areas of Latin studies, should not only get out more often, but should make excursions to adjacent areas a more regular part of our work. Classicists owe a heavy debt to students of later periods, such as Ralph Hexter, Christopher Baswell, Thomas Greene, David Quint, Leonard Barkan, Susanne Wofford, and Michael Murrin, whose work goes far beyond treating antiquity as the raw material with which later ages had to work, but presents fresh and important perspectives on classical literature. Charles Martindale and Philip Hardie are perhaps the most prominent classicists who have taken seriously the need to read ancient texts in terms of their reception. But much more work remains to be done. Thinking about latinity just

as a very small collection of familiar, world-class texts mostly produced at Rome over a relatively brief span of time by elite pagan men writing in the most rarified dialect of what is now a long-dead language, is neither an inevitable nor a preferable perspective. It is in fact more realistic to think of latinity as a vast and largely unexplored region of linguistic and social pluralism extending from remotest antiquity *down to the present day*. I would even suggest that, because this conception of latinity does extend to our own day, we who are interested in it might give more thought to the ways in which our discipline resembles a culture, and thus regard our studies not as the contemplation of a completely external, independent, objective reality but as a hermeneutic engagement with a developing entity in which we ourselves are inextricably involved.

So much for explanations; now on to the more pleasant task of giving thanks. The early stages of research and writing took place during a sabbatical leave supported by the University of Pennsylvania. The inordinate pleasures I have experienced in making this book have come not only from engagement with some wonderful material, but from the opportunity to work with and learn from many delightful individuals. To my colleagues and students in the Department of Classical Studies at Penn, my gratitude for their contributions to a rich and stimulating intellectual environment. Particular thanks to Jim O'Donnell, who read and commented on a draft of the entire book and, at a crucial early stage, downloaded what seemed like an enormous portion of his vast knowledge about topics in which I was and remain a mere novice. In addition to practical help, this experience inculcated a much better understanding of just what I was getting myself into, along with an extra measure of humility and respect for the subject. Several others have read parts of the book in draft or have fielded specific questions and discussed individual points, some very briefly, some at length, but all to good effect; these include Anna Morpurgo Davies, Judith P. Hallett, Cristle Collins Judd, Robert Kaster, Maud McInerney, James J. O'Hara, Donald Ringe, Joseph Schork. The example of those whose works have previously appeared in this series provided inspiration and a standard that I have tried to meet and uphold. My best thanks to the series editors whose vision provided a forum for this essay, and whose uncanny combination of learning, judgment, enthusiasm, and encouragement did so much both to launch and sustain the project and to im-

prove it at many stages along the road to completion. The result would probably have been better if I had simply followed slavishly the advice of all these friends and helpers; for what blemishes remain, the responsibility is mine.

Finally, it is a pleasure to amplify the record, entered on the dedication page, of a more personal debt: to my wife, Ann de Forest, and also to my daughter, Flannery, and my son, Kai. All three of them helped shape the book, always for the better; and without them, it would probably not have been worth writing at all, in English, Latin, or any language.

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