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The Nature of Latin Culture

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Abstract
At the end of Virgil's *Aeneid* there occurs an episode in which the goddess Juno finally agrees to stop fighting. Her position, however, is far from abject. Speaking to Jupiter and sounding more like a conquering general than the patron of a defeated people, she dictates the conditions under which she will stop opposing the Trojan effort to settle in Italy. The native Latins must not change their ancient name, or become Trojans, or be called Teucrians, or alter their speech or dress. Their country should keep the name of Latium and be ruled by Alban kings forever. The strength of their Roman offspring should consist in their Italian manhood. Troy, having fallen, should remain fallen, even to the memory of its name. Jupiter readily accepts these terms, assuring Juno that "The people of Ausonia will keep their ancestral speech and culture, their name be as it was. Sharing bloodlines only, the Teucrians will subside ... " (12.823-36).

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CHAPTER I

The nature of Latin culture

Coming to Latin culture

At the end of Virgil's *Aeneid* there occurs an episode in which the goddess Juno finally agrees to stop fighting. Her position, however, is far from abject. Speaking to Jupiter and sounding more like a conquering general than the patron of a defeated people, she dictates the conditions under which she will stop opposing the Trojan effort to settle in Italy. The native Latins must not change their ancient name, or become Trojans, or be called Teucrians, or alter their speech or dress. Their country should keep the name of Latium and be ruled by Alban kings forever. The strength of their Roman offspring should consist in their Italian manhood. Troy, having fallen, should remain fallen, even to the memory of its name. Jupiter readily accepts these terms, assuring Juno that "The people of Ausonia will keep their ancestral speech and culture, their name be as it was. Sharing bloodlines only, the Teucrians will subside..." (12.823–36).

This Virgilian episode enacts a central Latin myth—a myth that concerns the power of latinity to establish its sway over non-Latins. Throughout history this power has been linked to the role of Latin as a civilizing force: an instrument for ordering the disorderly, standardizing the multiform, correcting or silencing the inarticulate. In these essays I shall explore this myth and other myths that have grown up around latinity or become attached to it throughout its long history. This exploration will take us into some areas where many readers, medievalists and neolatinists, will be more at home than I, and into others that, if not entirely unfamiliar, are seldom thought of as the home turf of any
latinist. The Virgilian myth, I suspect, will be familiar to anyone who has been curious enough to pick up the book and read even this far. But if it is unfamiliar, no matter. This is a tale of initiation, and new initiates are always welcome.

The "universality" of Latin culture

The *Aeneid* is a foundational text. It tells about the beginning of Latin culture. When Juno stipulates what character this culture is to have, she speaks hardly at all of governmental forms or religious institutions, but of the most ordinary, and yet enduring aspects of daily life: what people wear, what they call themselves, and, most important for our purposes, what language they speak. Despite or because of this focus on the quotidian, Virgil represents Latin culture as almost monstrously potent, capable (through Juno’s sponsorship) even in defeat of absorbing and occluding other cultures – here, especially, that of Troy. Just as Ascanius must change his name and become Iulus, founder of the Julian clan, so must Aeneas’ followers put aside their Trojan language and customs so that their descendants, if not they themselves, may become fully Latin.

This seems to be how Virgil and his contemporaries regarded Latin culture, and later ages have tended to follow suit. For much of its history, latinity has been seen as a powerful weapon in Rome’s arsenal, an instrument, in Virgil’s words again, of sparing the conquered, warring down the proud. From a modern perspective, the idea of Latin as *the* imperial culture par excellence is widespread, and is constantly linked to the civilizing agency of the language itself. This idea was eloquently expressed by Edward Gibbon, who wrote,

So sensible were the Romans of the influence of language over national manners, that it was their most serious care to extend, with the progress of their arms, the use of the Latin tongue. The ancient dialects of Italy, the Sabine, the Etruscan, and the Venetian, sunk into oblivion … The western countries were civilized by the same hands which subdued them. As soon as the barbarians were reconciled to obedience, their minds were opened to any new impressions of knowledge and politeness. The language of Virgil and Cicero,
though with some inevitable mixture of corruption, was so universally adopted in Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Pannonia, that the faint traces of the Punic or Celtic idioms were preserved only in the mountains, or among the peasants.\(^1\)

The policy is also attested in our ancient sources. Roman officials were expected to use Latin in their dealings with alien peoples; some thought that allowing even Greek to be spoken in the Senate bordered on the scandalous. Eventually, even in such a center of Greek culture as Antioch, Libanius would complain about the necessity of knowing Latin.\(^2\)

If Virgil celebrates the moment when it was settled that Latin would be spoken at Rome, other poets were happy to represent the language's extension throughout the world as a vehicle for their poetry. Ovid predicts that his masterpiece, the *Metamorphoses*, "will be recited wherever Roman power extends over conquered lands" (15.877). Martial, too, revels in the idea that his poetry is read throughout the empire (traveling, often enough, along with the army); but it is in the capital that he finds the strongest symbolic contrast between Latin and barbarian speech. Martial celebrates the emperor Titus' dedication of the Colosseum by speaking of the immense arena as encompassing the entire world: "What race," the poet asks, "is so remote, so barbarous, Caesar, that no spectator from it is present in your city?" (*Spect.* 3.1–2). Moving around the circle of the great amphitheater, he catalogues the races represented there in a way that conducts the reader on a geographical circuit of the empire: Sicambrians and Thracians from the north; Sarmatians, Cilicians, Arabs, and Sabaeans from north to south in the east, Egyptians and Ethiopians to the south; and the dwellers along the shores of Ocean in the west (3–10). All of these peoples are distinguished by their different customs and characteristics, or by the exotic products of the lands they inhabit. But the poem, like the circuit of empire that it describes, also moves in a ring: the point of *barbara* in

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1 Gibbon (1909–14), 1.41. Gibbon's position is upheld by linguist Jorma Kaimio, who writes that, to prove that the Romans followed a definite language policy, "it is only necessary to point to a linguistic map of modern Europe." Kaimio (1979), 327.

2 Libanius, *Orat.* 1.234, 255.
line 1 is finally brought home at poem’s end as Martial caps the theme of diversity by turning to the matter of speech:

Vox diversa sonat populorum, tum tamen una est, cum verus patriae diceris esse pater.

These peoples speak in different voices, then with one, when you are called true father of your country. *Spect.* 3.11–12

Foreign speech is thus acknowledged, but is represented as multiform, inarticulate, and confused – *diversa* (11). Against this babbling, Martial allows the crowd one intelligible utterance in the one language that could render them intelligible: the poem concludes with the hailing of the emperor, in Latin, by that characteristically Roman and nationalist title *pater patriae*. The barbarian crowd thus reenacts in speech their own political subjugation by Titus and by Rome.

The effects of Roman linguistic imperialism were real. On the other hand, ancient and modern beliefs about the power of Latin are based on ideological constructs, not universally valid, objective truth. We know for instance that Latin culture took firm root in the west; but Gibbon, in the passage I have cited, goes on to observe what everyone knows, that failure to establish Latin in the eastern provinces was an important factor that led to the eventual disintegration of the empire. What he does not say is that this failure betrays as wishful thinking the imperialist claims of Latin culture generally, as well as the basic fictiveness of these claims. Stories emphasizing this fictiveness tend to be less often told than the imperialist kind rehearsed above. This is unfortunate on two counts. First, these “other stories” are interesting in themselves. Second, and paradoxically, the wishful, triumphalist tales about an all-powerful linguistic and cultural force may actually have contributed to the marginalization of latinity within modern intellectual discourse, and to the perception that Latin is, or wants to be, everything that a modern language is not: that it is the paradigmatic “dead language.”

What “other stories” does Latin culture have to tell? If latinity was no monolith, even in its ancient capital, it was certainly subject to the same pressures as the languages that it encountered along the permeable cultural frontier. The case of Ovid is instructive. When official displeasure relegated him to the very limit of the empire, he got the opportunity to reflect on his earlier boast that he would be recited “wherever
Roman power extends.” Writing in his exile poetry about conditions at Getic Tomi, he returns over and over to the absurdity of composing or even thinking in Latin so far from Rome, suggesting that removal from the native seat of Latin culture has actually weakened his grasp on the language. We need not take this claim seriously to believe in the anxiety on which it depends. Against the Virgilian model of universal extension and absolute potency we can set the countervailing Ovidian model of an outpost culture barely maintaining a degree of integrity against a much more powerful and numerous barbarian Other. The exilic myth, in fact, is the story that was told more often and more openly as Latin political power waned and the language itself was left as the chief embodiment of the culture that survived, eventually becoming virtually coterminous with it.

Ovid’s excursion to the spatial limits of empire anticipates later developments along the axis of time. With political change came cultural evolution, facts that are reflected with clarity in the mirror of language. By late antiquity, Christian policy makers were vigorously debating whether to observe classical pagan usage or to cultivate a distinctively pietistic latinity. Centuries later the British courtier Alcuin considered the Latin spoken and written in Charlemagne’s realm so corrupt that he instituted a thoroughgoing reform of orthography and pronunciation, and thus played a role, possibly a decisive one, in distinguishing Latin from the Romance languages. The Renaissance humanists fought over the question of whether modern Latin should be based exclusively on a ciceronian model. Examples could be multiplied, but the point is clear. Latin culture tends to imagine itself and its language as universal and powerful beyond all competitors. It constructs an image of the Latin language as possessing similar qualities, along with definite canons of correctness conferring a stability that other languages lack. Though the language does change, these canons remain, and the history of latinity is marked by various “renascences” during which the language is “reformed” on an ancient, “classical” model. Of course, “reform” always involves the rejection as “vulgar,” “rustic,” “provincial,” “late,” “ecclesiastical,” “medieval,” “effeminate,” or simply as “barbaric,” of linguistic habits and protocols that do not conform to the proposed standard. It is as if not power, but anxiety about its ability to resist the forces of linguistic “debasement,” drove Latin culture to marginalize the linguistic Other and to claim an overweening potency and value for
itself. But ultimately, latinity has become a victim of its own success. By promulgating and subscribing to a relatively one-dimensional linguistic caricature, Latin culture – and particularly the classicizing element of that culture – has paid the price for cutting itself off from sources of diversity and energy that might have ensured a more vibrant state of health.

**Latin culture in the modern world**

The *Aeneid* is, of course, famously untranslatable. The episode cited above in which Juno delivers her terms of “surrender,” lacks when read in English or indeed any language other than Latin, much of its effect – but for a reason that, in this case at least, has nothing to do with Virgil’s celebrated mastery of Latin as an expressive medium. Reading the passage in translation, one misses none of the semantic content. A deal has been cut. Its terms and its consequences are clear. It is the impact of the narrative event as much as any prosodic virtuosity that most impresses the reader. But if one does read the episode in Latin, a whole range of additional responses comes into play.

What sort of responses? First, perhaps, there is the consciousness of employing a skill that has been acquired at some personal cost. For many, part of this cost is years of effort and submission to a pedagogical system in which the student must try every day to construe specimens of Latin under the watchful eye of a teacher who will respond by pointing out and discussing at length and in meticulous detail each and every one of the student’s mistakes. This is a type of education that teaches humility as well as Latin and that equates humility with ignorance of Latin, pride with knowing it well. Understandably, few willingly put themselves through this process for long. Some, however, persist until one day they arrive at the end of the *Aeneid*. The sense of youthful accomplishment that might well attend any reader approaching the end of the epic in Latin for the first time is understandable, almost inevitable. Indeed, it can be expected to recall earlier sensations. I can still remember clearly how I felt when a teacher encouraged my classmates and me not to abandon Latin after the tedium of Caesar and Cicero, because after all that hard work we were poised to reap the rewards

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3 On this passage see Johnson (1976), 114–34, especially 124–27.
offered by Virgil. Some who took this advice lived to wonder about a reward that meant spending a semester or a year slogging through a few thousand lines of poetry parcelled out in snippets that were truly minuscule compared to what they could handle in their own, or even in other, foreign languages. But to those who stuck it out, the accomplishment seemed all the greater. Simply reaching the end of the poem, having endured the tedium, the labor, and the seemingly endless deferral of gratification that this process entailed – for to the novice, the task seems truly heroic – even these apparently extraneous elements of the experience helped put the young reader in touch with the emotions Aeneas himself must have felt in his hour of glory.

Viewed from this perspective, the text of the Aeneid becomes not merely a narrative, but a kind of script for the establishment of Latin culture, a script that might support a limitless series of performances, each with its own variations, but all sharing certain crucial features. The series begins on the mythic level with the labors of the founder, Aeneas. It includes the political level and the establishment of stable government by the princeps, Augustus. And, I suggest, it extends to the education of the neophyte who by acquiring the skills necessary to read the national epic gains full membership in Latin culture.⁴

But what is the culture into which the young modern reader of the Aeneid is received? The culture of latinity is not the same thing as a hermeneutics of reception, not a sum total of "influences," direct and indirect, upon modern encounters with the latinity of the past.⁵ It may indeed be related to this. But even more, it is the culture embodied by the language, to which all who study and value latinity belong. It is concerned in the first instance with the language itself: its character, its qualities, its capacities, its limitations. The business of learning Latin, reading Latin, studying and writing about Latin, even remembering (with whatever emotions) one's school Latin or thinking of the language only occasionally, is bound up in shared experiences, patterns of behavior, common rituals, and also in differences of opinion, parallel oppositions, persistent prejudices. To encounter Latin nowadays is to belong to this culture, which is larger and more heterogeneous than one might expect it to be. In fact, even now, as one looks back on a century

⁴ On this aspect of Latin education in the Renaissance see Ong (1959).
⁵ Important arguments about this problem in Martindale (1993).
that, judged superficially, has been fairly inhospitable to Latin studies as an institution, Latin culture is not in bad shape; for, while the language itself lies at the heart of this culture, ideas about the language are not confined to professional latinists. One of the beauties of this culture is that it is something to which latinists belong, but it is not something anyone can control. Most of all, it is something from which everyone can learn.

Just as social anthropologists have come to appreciate the unavailability of an objective vantage point on the contemporary, so, I would suggest, should Latin studies abandon any pretense to a disinterested perspective on a past culture that is wholly Other. Indeed, the latinist’s implication in his or her “material” is much tighter than the anthropologist’s or the ethnographer’s. Visiting another culture, an investigator cannot help but have some impact on it, and frequently will attempt to assimilate it to the greatest extent possible, but always with the understanding that the process takes place across cultures that are, ultimately, strangers. The ethnographer’s interest in and understanding of other cultures depends upon intervention; but those cultures exist independent of one’s own. They may change as a result of the ethnographer’s intervention, but they would continue to exist even without it. This is not true of Latin culture. The latinist cannot work by traveling to a foreign land. Access to the past is rooted in the here-and-now. The latinist’s subject, unlike the ethnographer’s, would not exist without the interest and activity of contemporary scholars, students, enthusiasts, dabblers, even opponents. In an important sense, then, Latin culture is a creature of the modern world. More than any anthropologist can be, we, too, are natives here.

**Continuity and rupture**

Nativism of course is an extremely complex issue in Latin culture, ancient or modern, and I shall return to it at the end of this chapter. Related to it is another problem raised by my reading of the *Aeneid* as an initiation rite. Juno’s insistence that Aeneas’ people become linguistically and culturally Latin, I suggested, draws a line from the hero himself through Augustus and then to generations of novices who by reading the poem prove themselves as Latins. This raises the question of continuity. Is the Latin culture to which I have referred perfectly con-
tinuous with that of the ancient Romans? I can easily imagine some readers, for various reasons, answering “No! Latin culture belonged to the ancient Romans, and it died with them. If there really is a ‘modern Latin culture’, it is not the same thing as, nor is it even continuous with, the culture of Roman antiquity.” Fair enough; but the issue of continuity cannot be dismissed so easily. To put the matter in perspective, let me reply with a different question: if ancient Latin culture did indeed meet its end, when did this happen? The answer, I believe, is far from clear.

To get some purchase on this question, let us consider, what is a “latinist?” In theory, someone called a latinist might be a student of Hildegard, Petrarch, or Sweedenborg instead of Cicero or Virgil, and might make a professional home in a department of History, Philosophy, Religion, Comparative Literature, Romance Languages, or even English rather than in Classics. But for some reason, a person whose professional interests lie beyond antiquity will usually be called a “medievalist,” a “comparatist,” or something more descriptive (or differently descriptive) than “latinist” – which, as matters now stand, normally denotes the classicist who specializes in Latin. Such a latinist’s area of expertise, as fixed by such documents as graduate school reading lists and histories of literature, extends little farther in time than Juvenal (†127?) or at any rate than Apuleius (†170?), Fronto (†175?), and Aulus Gellius (fl. 170), if we are speaking of authors; or, if we prefer to speak of more definite landmarks in political history, than the death of Marcus Aurelius (180). This is a particularly useful landmark because on July 17th of the same year there occurred at Carthage a hearing followed by the trial and execution of several people from the town of Scillium who were ordered to swear their loyalty by the Genius of the Emperor and to offer sacrifice for his health, but who refused on the grounds that they were Christians; and the text that informs us about this event, the *Acts of the Martyrs of Scillium*, is the earliest Christian text in Latin that we possess. The oldest Latin translations of the Bible are thought to date from this time as well. And it is from this point that Gibbon dates the “decline” that led inevitably to the “fall” of the Roman empire.

In any case, we are speaking of a process rather than an event. It was a long time before pagan culture lost its ascendancy to the new religion. If we insist on some sort of terminus, perhaps we should look for a more
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decisive event more firmly linked to the history of the language. What we are seeking may in fact be a nonevent: between the years 254 and 284, no Latin literature that we know of was produced, of any kind. This is a remarkable, possibly unparalleled occurrence in the history of literature. The language continued to be spoken, of course; but since we have no real access to the spoken language, the conditions that made possible such a complete lapse in the production of “literature” appear as an actual tear in the fabric of Latin culture. After this disastrous period, new imperial administrative structures were created by new Augusti and a new senatorial aristocracy came on the scene to cultivate a classicizing literature of their own, while grammarians codified the language along classical models. But all of this activity could be motivated by nostalgia, even perhaps denial: by a desperate longing to resuscitate what was, in fact, a dead body.

These points on the timeline have an undeniable appeal, but it is difficult to trust them implicitly. Certainly there are authors on the modern side of this rupture who, like Servius and Macrobius, are valued partly because they are considered native speakers of a living Latin, and thus unlike ourselves. Still, one hardly thinks of them as breathing the same air as Cicero or Virgil. Rome was no longer the seat of power. The time was approaching when there would be no senatorial aristocracy to speak of. Claimants to the title “Augustus” persisted (the last one resigned in 1806); but in late antiquity, the most powerful person in the west came to be the king of the Franks, a people who coexisted in the same territories with the more Romanized Gauls. These Gauls cherished the idea that they were the true inheritors of Latin culture, and modern historians often dignify them with the name “Gallo-Roman.” The Franks, or at least the Frankish court, aspired to this condition as well. Both groups were obsessed with a form of identity politics that has become all too familiar nowadays, and both coveted validation of the right to call themselves Roman, to see themselves as members of a living Latin culture.

Classical poets were in short supply in those days, but anyone who could function as such could make a good career for himself. Venantius Fortunatus, a young man born and raised in the Veneto, arrived in this

6 On this rupture see O’Donnell (1994).
milieu not too long after the mid-sixth century.\textsuperscript{7} In the preface to his collected poems, he announces himself, however playfully, as a second Orpheus, singing in the wilderness to barbarians. It is worth bearing this passage in mind when we read his praises of patrons such as the kings Charibert and Chilperic or the duke Lupus. These Frankish noblemen offered the poet patronage and preferment, and the man who arrived at the Burgundian court a wandering poet died Bishop of Poitiers. The native tongue of these noble patrons was Germanic: if Venantius was an ersatz Orpheus, they were authentic barbarians. But they aspired to membership in Latin culture, which by this time had become so much a matter of language that to a wandering poet fell the power to confer it upon them by writing conventional Latin panegyrics in their honor.

The forms taken by Venantius’ praise are instructive. Descending from a long tradition of regal panegyric in prose and verse, they adapt tradition to current realities in telling ways. We have seen Martial praising Titus as singular ruler of the entire world by celebrating the occlusion of plural, inarticulate, barbarian languages by a universal latinity. Venantius invokes a similar motif in his encomium of Chari-bert, but with an important difference:

Hinc cui Barbariae, illinc Romania plaudit:
diversis linguis laus sonat una viri.

On this side Barbary acclaims him, Rome on that: in different tongues sounds the man’s unique praise. \textit{Carm. 6.2.7–8}

Here Latin does not occlude barbarian speech, but is forced to share the stage. Indeed, Latin voices explicitly take second place, as in a later passage that comments on the king’s bilingual eloquence:

Cum sis progenitus clara di gente Sigamber,
floret in eloquio lingua Latina tuo;
qualis es in propria docto sermone loquella,
qui nos Romanos vincis in eloquio?

\textsuperscript{7} Auerbach (1965) is dated but remains an important assessment of many of the problems with which we are concerned here, including Venantius’ place in literary history. Godman (1987), 1–37, offers a stimulating defense and a challenging reading of Venantius’ occasional poetry. For a more comprehensive introduction to the poet and his work see George (1992).
Though born a Sicambrian (of famous lineage), it is in your eloquence the Latin tongue flourishes; what must you be like in learned speech in your native language, you who better us Romans in eloquence?  

_Carm. 6.2.97–100_

Not only does Charibert outshine professional Latin rhetoricians like Venantius, but he beats them at their own game, outdoing them in Latin, leaving the poet – evidently not bilingual like his patron – to wonder what a spellbinder the king must be in his native Germanic, itself praised here as a medium of polished eloquence. In a related move, Venantius combines these two motifs in his encomium of Chilperic, Charibert’s half-brother and dynastic rival:

Quid? quoscumque etiam regni dicione gubernas,  
doctor ingenio vincis et ore loquax,  
discernens varias sub nullo interprete voces:  
et generum linguas unica lingua refert.  

Why, whomever you govern under the sway of your kingship you surpass, well-schooled of mind, eloquent of tongue, understanding various languages with no interpreter: your tongue alone answers the tongues of nations.  

_Carm. 9.1.91–94_

And, in the same poem, the motif of the interpreter appears again to provide a learned gloss on the king’s name:

Chilperice potens, si interpres barbarus extet,  
“adiutor fortis,” hoc quoque nomen habes:  
non fuit in vacuum sic te vocitare parentes:  
praesagum hoc totum laudis et omen erat.  

Mighty “Chilperic” – or, had we a barbarian interpreter, “Strong Advocate” (for this is your name as well) – not in vain did your parents call you thus: all this was a presage and an omen of your fame.  

_Carm. 9.1.27–30_

Once again the poet disavows personal knowledge of barbarian speech, displacing authority for the learned bilingual etymology onto the absent figure of the Frankish translator, skilled in Latin as well as Germanic.  

8 For more on “Roman” and “barbarian” in Venantius see Szöverffy (1977).
Granting these diplomas of linguistic skill was not Venantius’ most lasting or, perhaps, his proudest achievement. Not long after the poet’s arrival in Burgundy he looked elsewhere, seeking the patronage of Radegund, former queen of Lothar I but since 544 the leader of a religious community at Poitiers. Radegund was at the time of Venantius’ arrival in Gaul involved in a diplomatic effort to obtain a relic of the True Cross from the Byzantine emperor Justin II and the empress Sophia. To this end she enlisted the services of Venantius, who composed a trio of learned Latin poems to help make her case. The effort was successful and the relic was installed in 569; a fourth poem, a gratiarum actio, also survives. These along with the rest of Venantius’ oeuvre are, rightly or wrongly, not much read or esteemed nowadays by most of those who identify themselves simply as “latinists.” But two of his works, Vexilla regis prodeunt (2.6) and the exquisite Pange lingua gloriosi (2.2), both written to celebrate the installation of the relic at Poitiers, are still sung by thousands, perhaps millions, in their monodic settings as part of Holy Week observances in the Roman Catholic Church. They have been fairly widely recorded as well; several performances of them could be purchased today in any reasonably well-stocked record store. There would seem to be few artifacts of the ancient world of which anything like this can be said; and yet there are few that are considered less representative of Latin culture than these Christian hymns composed for a female patron of Germanic extraction living in a convent in Gaul. That Venantius’ work should be denied a place in the canon of classical poetry is perhaps understandable. How vital was the language in which he wrote or the culture that he conferred on his barbarian and Christian patrons? We are forced to infer from the successful trajectory of his career that Venantius’ patrons wanted to be praised in Latin, even as the poet repeatedly defers to Frankish cultural superiority. Nevertheless, the desire of the Frankish nobility for praise of this type is rather difficult to understand. Isn’t such poetry in itself compelling evidence that latinity was already not merely dead, but a fossil?

**Grammatical and vulgar speech**

This commonly-held position remains surprisingly hard to establish. By the sixth century, the Latin language and Latin culture had reached the
point at which scholars stop looking for the death of Latin and start searching for the birth of Romance. But the more we learn about medieval Europe, the more difficult it is to discern the moment when Latin dies and Romance is born.

To begin with, we do not know when the Franks, who began to occupy the Roman provinces of Europe from the fourth century on, adopted Latin and abandoned Germanic as their "native" language. Indeed, we do not know to what extent this is even an accurate model of what happened. Did they, in fact, abandon Germanic, or did the Franks consider both languages their own? Are we speaking of the nobility only, or did the phenomenon transcend distinctions of class? When did Latin begin to evolve into Romance, and how long did this process take? Did Latin survive as a written language long after the spoken language had ceased to be recognizable as such? Where it used to be assumed that the process whereby Latin became Romance took place at the latest during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, it is now thought by some that two different languages cannot be clearly distinguished until two or more centuries later, and not finally distinguished even then.⁹

On one view, the distinction between Latin and Romance was the artificial creation of Alcuin's previously mentioned attempt under Charlemagne to reform the orthography and pronunciation of Latin on (what he thought was) a classical model. This argument rests partly on the notion that Alcuin, a Briton, would have come to Charlemagne's court speaking an insular Latin, a language different from the vernaculars that surrounded it, one that was taught to Britons very much as a foreign tongue constructed on conservative grammatical principles. Under such circumstances, one infers, Latin would have been more resistant to corruption than on the continent, where vernacular influence would have been inevitable. In his attempt to enforce a uniform standard of spelling and pronunciation, then — an attempt based on contemporary insular practice — Alcuin can be argued not to have restored classical Latin, which was his goal, but to have "invented" medieval

⁹ This is an enormous, difficult, and much-debated topic fraught with problems related to nationalism and modernist ideology. Important contributions include: Bardy (1948); MacMullen (1966); Norberg (1966); Millar (1968); McKitterick (1989).
Latin as an artificial and mainly literary entity distinct from spoken Romance, which then developed into French, Spanish, Italian, and so forth.\textsuperscript{10}

It is a good story. It may even be, in some sense, true. But true or not, it is a spectacular vehicle for thematic analysis. At issue in this as in other stories of Latin's demise is a strong element of teleology that appears to work like this: it is "known" that Latin is now a "dead" language, the exclusive preserve of academic specialists, unsupported by a living culture. The task is to discover when this situation first came about. One feels sure that this is in fact what happened, just as the Roman empire "fell," but the coroner's certificate contains a blank space labeled "date." Alcuin's reforms are as good an event as any on which to blame Latin's demise—which is to say, not very good at all. Long after Charlemagne, scholars, clerics, and diplomats throughout Europe continued to write and converse fluently in Latin, many of them perhaps exclusively or nearly so. That this can be said only of a cultural elite is true enough. But the same view can be taken of the rise of any official modern vernacular, such as Italian, which in its "official" form was spoken by only a tiny fraction of the total population of Italy until late in the last century.\textsuperscript{11} It is further striking that we find in the story of Alcuin the pre-echo of a characteristic still operative in modern Latin culture. First, his classicizing objectives awaken the sympathies of the modern (classical) latinist, who sees in the presiding intelligence of the Carolingian "renascence" a kindred spirit. Second, though Alcuin did not "restore" latinity to its ancient form, by marking a boundary between classical and medieval Latin on the one hand, and between Latin and the vernacular on the other, he performs a service of great importance by ratifying linguistic and cultural categories that latinists hold dear. Third and last, it is significant that the individual credited with performing this service is figured as an interloper, the product of a culture in which Latin was already cultivated as a learned language so different from the vernacular as to be immune from contamination or confusion with it. The linguistic situation in Francia we imagine as much more fluid, so much so that we cannot draw a line between Latin and Romance. In Britain, we imagine that Latin existed only among certain social groups as a highly constructed idiom that had no rela-

\textsuperscript{10} On this theory see Wright (1982). \textsuperscript{11} De Mauro (1972), 36–45.
tionship to or interaction with the vernacular; and it is therefore, paradoxically, the British arriviste who, appalled at the condition to which the language has descended among native speakers, sets things straight. What makes this story so intriguing is its resemblance to situations both in the ancient world, as when it fell to Greek slaves to organize and operate a system of education and a national literature for native speakers of Latin, and in the modern world, in which scholars raised speaking languages that are not descended from Latin have occasionally, in their own minds at least, tried to assume over speakers of the Romance languages a certain hegemony with respect to Latin studies. It is as if the status of the linguistic foreigner were actually an essential qualification for full membership in Latin culture.

Alcuin’s example points out the crucial fact that one can hardly conceive of Latin as anything but an “other” language. Indeed, it is essentially impossible to point to a single specimen of Latin written at any time or place that can stand as a witness to the existence of a sincere, nativist Latin culture. In each period and every form through which Latin speaks, it has demonstrably internalized its “othered” status.

The most influential statement on this aspect of Latin is Dante Alighieri’s essay On Eloquence in the Vernacular. In book 1 of this work, Dante divides all the world’s languages into two categories: the natural, which are the original and more noble sort, and the “artificial” or “grammatical,” which are later human constructs. In the former category he places the vernacular speech used every day in different forms in different places; in the latter such languages as, preeminently, Latin. His argument is remarkable in that Latin was in the late Middle Ages a language of great prestige as compared with the vernacular. Dante acknowledges this fact by referring to Latin’s enormous utility as a “grammatical” language, one based on a rational system rather than on natural usage and thus impervious to change across time, national boundaries, or any similar factor. Latin for Dante is Latin, one and the same, always and everywhere. The vernacular, on the other hand, is capable of extensive and confusing variation over time and from place to place. Typically, he explains this property of natural language with reference to a Judeo-Christian view of history, tracing the mutability of natural language to God’s punishment of humankind for constructing the Tower of Babel. The pristine state of the original human speech — probably some form of Hebrew — gave way to a degraded condition in
a way that mirrors precisely the contrast between the Edenic and post-
lapsarian conditions lived by the original humans Adam and Eve. 
Artificial language based on grammar is thus but a synthetic expedient, 
like clothing, a cultural institution that enables humankind to cope with 
the degraded life that is the wages of sin. But natural language, ac-
cording to Dante, retains its inherent superiority and greater “nobility,”
despite its mutability and the confusion to which this gives rise, as a 
matter of ontology. If one were to plot their places on a Platonic line 
of authenticity, Latin would be found to be a mere representation of 
vernacular speech; and Dante is clearly working with some such notion 
in mind.

An important element of Dante’s position is the remarkable argu-
ment that Latin and the vernacular are more or less entirely unrelated. 
In particular, it follows from the fact that he regards the vernacular as 
the more ancient language that it cannot be descended from Latin. If 
anything, the opposite would on Dante’s account be true, Latin being a 
stable form of the vernacular constructed along grammatical principles. 
It was over a century after Dante’s essay before humanist scholars 
reached a consensus that ancient culture was not bilingual, writing the 
Latin that survived in classical literature while speaking a vernacular of 
which no record survived, but that it rather spoke and wrote a plural 
Latin that, far from being impervious to change, underwent many 
changes over time and in different places, emerging as the various forms 
of the vernacular spoken in contemporary Italy, Provence, France, 
Spain, and Romania. This conclusion anticipated the findings of later 
comparative philologists, which are the basis of modern historical lin-
guistics. But neither Dante’s position nor the terms of the humanist 
debate have failed to leave their mark on the Latin and vernacular 
cultures of today.

Relevant to this discussion is the idea that the Latin of classical liter-
ature was effectively walled off from other kinds of Latin – from the 
spoken language, regional dialects, and so on. It is an open question 
how well most ordinary speakers uneducated in the elite dialect could 
have understood a public literary performance during the early empire: 
whether the performer was, in effect, speaking one language and the

12 See, variously, Tavoni (1984) and Mazzocco (1993), especially pp. 189–208 (a 
vigorous critique of Tavoni).
man in the street a quite different one – almost the situation Dante describes in hypothesizing an ancient spoken vernacular that coexisted with an exclusively literary Latin. Linguists stress that modern Romance descends not from the prestige dialect of the Roman elite, but from "vulgar" Latin of the masses. A member of the former group, wishing to tell a friend that he had bought a horse, would have said "equum emi," whereas his lower-class or less-educated counterpart must be presumed to have said something like "ego habeo comparatum unum caballum." It is thus not unusual to employ Latin in its common modern role as a technical language to coin terms such as *sermo cotidianus* or *sermo plebeius* for what an English speaker would call "everyday speech" and to treat an adjective like *harenosus* ("sandy"), when it occurs in serious poetry, as a "borrowing" from the vulgar tongue almost in the same way as if it were a loanword from Greek or Persian. There is, so far as I know, nothing to suggest that Dante's views on this matter have actually influenced modern scholarship; but it is intriguing that linguistic investigation has produced something not altogether unlike Dante's idea that the Latin we still read was not the language that the Romans actually spoke, the language that did produce the vernacular of Dante's own time. Furthermore, it is difficult not to recognize in Dante, in humanist linguistics, and in the work of modern philologists a common theme – namely, that that Latin we know from the written record is a strange and unusual thing, a language so artificial that it cannot serve the purposes of transient, everyday speech – that it is an artificial language, and not a natural one.

The return of the native

The conflict with respect to nature that we find in Dante is not just a quirk; it is a recurring theme, even a defining characteristic of Latin culture. The conflict appears with great clarity and significance in Cicero's dialogue on *Laws*, where the leading idea is that Roman law – or, for the purposes of the dialogue, human law – is based on natural law. Here the idea of natural law gives rise to a discussion that defines in a surprising way just what constitutes a Roman's fatherland.¹³

¹³ The main issues of interpretation and source criticism are well covered by Rawson (1973); see further Salmon (1972), Bonjour (1975), 78–86, and Eichenberger (1991).
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The dialogue on Laws, uniquely, is set at Cicero’s ancestral villa in Arpinum; the participants are Cicero himself, his brother Quintus, and their friend Atticus. Near the beginning of book 2, Atticus waxes enthusiastic about the setting: “Nature is supreme in matters that concern spiritual repose and diversion,” he says, “just as you were saying before with regard to law and justice.” He then launches into a spirited encomium of the villa’s natural beauty. Cicero replies that he comes whenever possible, since the place is dear to him for a personal reason as well: because it is his patria, his “fatherland.” His family has lived here for generations; it is still the seat of their ancestral religion. His father spent almost his whole life in a house that still stands, and the place is full of family memories. He compares his paternal homestead to that of the ancient Sabine, Manius Curius Dentatus, and his desire to return to it to that of Odysseus, who preferred his homecoming to Calypso’s offer of immortality (2.3).

It is here that the discussion takes an especially interesting turn. Atticus happily admits his complete empathy with Cicero’s nostalgia for Arpinum: he too now loves Arpinum, knowing that it is the birthplace of his friend, just as he loves Athens not so much for its “stately and exquisite works of ancient art” as for the great men who lived there (2.4). Note how Atticus appears to miss the point entirely. The expected reply to Cicero’s encomium of his birthplace would be, “Yes, I feel just the same way about my own hometown.” Instead, Atticus inscribes himself within a triangular erotic relationship: Cicero’s love for Arpinum produces in Atticus, who loves Cicero, a similar love for Arpinum. Similar, but different, in that Cicero loves Arpinum “naturally,” because it is his birthplace; Atticus’ love is predicated on a prior social relationship. His comparison of the love he feels for Arpinum to the love he feels for Athens confirms this point. Atticus actually takes pains to deny that he loves Athens as a center of culture, but rather insists that he loves it because, like Arpinum, it was loved by men he loves. The parallelism that Atticus sees between Cicero and himself is false, because the love that Cicero feels for his birthplace is natural, whereas the love felt by Atticus is an acculturated love, something learned – the kind of attachment that an individual might feel to a place with which he has no natural connection at all.

This position makes Atticus a convincing spokesman for the idea that follows. “What did you really mean by the statement you made a while
ago, that this place, by which I understand you to refer to Arpinum, is your fatherland?” The reader might be forgiven for wondering, has Atticus been listening? Arpinum is Cicero’s birthplace: what other fatherland could he have? Atticus turns out to be thinking much the same thing, but from a different perspective: “Have you, then, two fatherlands? Or is our common fatherland the only one? Perhaps you think that wise old Cato’s fatherland was not Rome but Tusculum?” This is of course just what any modern reader would think. Cato was born in Tusculum. He moved to Rome and made his career there, but Tusculum remained his fatherland. Or didn’t it?

In what follows, Cicero enunciates the doctrine of the two fatherlands. According to this doctrine Cicero, Cato, and all natives of Italian municipia have two fatherlands, one by nature or birth and one by citizenship or law – unam naturae alteram ciuitatis – “just as the people of your beloved Attica, before Theseus commanded them all to leave the country and move into the city (or astu, as they call it) were at the same time citizens of their own towns and of Attica, so we consider as our fatherland both the place where we were born, and also the city into which we have been adopted.” Cicero’s comparison is telling. Taking his cue from Atticus’ well-known love of Athens, which Atticus himself had just made the vehicle of a similar comparison (and which is the source, after all, of his cognomen), Cicero explains the condition of modern Italy by appealing to that of ancient Attica. That is to say, the modern custom is justified not by an appeal to nature, as Cicero’s derivation of the legal order from the natural order might suggest, but by a paradigm drawn from another culture. Further, the culture to which Cicero appeals is distant, the particular usage that interests him no longer in force. After Theseus’ organization of Attica, everyone became a citizen of Athens alone, and presumably lost any tie to a second fatherland. This is not the usage that Cicero has described as obtaining in modern Italy: “so we consider as our fatherland both the place into which we have been born, and also the city into which we have been adopted.” But Cicero then in a sense validates his previous comparison between Rome and Athens and shows that his conception of “fatherland” is in fact much closer to Atticus’ than to ours. “But that fatherland must stand first in our esteem in which the name of republic signifies the common citizenship of us all. For this fatherland it is our duty to die, to give of ourselves entirely, to stake and, as it were, to
consecrate everything we have. But the fatherland that begot us is not much less sweet than the one that adopted us. Thus I shall never deny that my fatherland is here, though my other fatherland is greater and includes this one within it” (2.5). Atticus finds these arguments completely convincing and admits as much in what can hardly seem to us other than a jarring paradox: “I think I have been brought around to the view that this town that gave you birth is also your fatherland” (3.6).

What is most striking here is the way in which the entire conversation, despite the interlocutors’ occasional protests to the contrary, systematically privileges the claims of culture over those of nature. Atticus cannot really understand the natural affection that Cicero feels for his birthplace. Furthermore, Cicero, whose attitude seems much closer to ours, understands Atticus’ confusion, and seems almost to acknowledge that the natural affection he feels for Arpinum requires some explanation. But the dichotomy represented here between nature and culture, while clear, is obviously complicated by Cicero’s claim throughout the dialogue that the basis of human law and culture lies in nature. This exposition takes place under an ideological assumption that the cultural institution being discussed is grounded in nature, while the specific terms in which the discussion is framed relegate nature to a clearly inferior position vis à vis the cultural force of law.

In Cicero the need to contain and redeem nature and turn it to the purposes of culture is reflected in all the interlocutors’ praise of the natural beauty that surrounds them. As noted above, book 2 of the Laws begins with Atticus expressing his enthusiasm for the setting in which he finds himself. It is easy for a modern reader to share in his enthusiasm; but Atticus is no Thoreau. When he compares the natural beauty of Cicero’s villa to the grandiose piles of other rusticking aristocrats, he heaps scorn on their penchant for marble floor tiles, paneled ceilings, and aqueducts built to feed artificial “Niles” and “Euripuses,” so called. Having once thought that the entire district of Arpinum was merely an uncultivated wilderness, Atticus is now surprised to find how much he enjoys it, and even expresses wonder that Cicero ever cares to go elsewhere – “when you are not at Rome” (2.2). It would seem that the main fault of those other estates is that they use cultural means to counterfeit nature, whereas at Arpinum nature has been improved by culture. Naturalizing culture, counterfeiting nature by sophisticated
technical means, it would seem, is bad; but acculturating nature, turning an unspoiled environment to cultivated ends, is good.

This bias comes out in many details. For instance, when Atticus suggests that the threesome continue their conversation on a small island in the Fibrenus, Cicero heartily approves, but not because he wants to enjoy the natural setting per se: rather because it is an excellent venue for various cultural activities — or, as Cicero puts it, “that island is a favorite haunt of mine for meditation, writing, and reading” (2.1) — and thus for conducting a philosophical dialogue on law. Later, when they arrive on the island, Atticus indulges in a brief ecphrasis:

Ah, here we are on the island! What could be more pleasant? The Fibrenus is split by this beak, as it were, and then, divided equally in two, washes over these sides, flows quickly past, speedily comes back together, and so embraces just enough space for a small wrestling floor. This done, as if its raison d’être were to provide us with a place for our discussion, it plunges immediately into the Liris and, as if it were being adopted into a patrician family, loses its less famous name and chills those waters considerably; for I have traveled and never felt a colder stream than this: I could hardly dip my foot into it, as Socrates does in Plato’s Phaedrus. (2.6)

The ecphrasis in Latin literature is never a simple thing, but it is remarkable that Atticus is unable to manage this brief description of a very small island without employing three distinctly different similes. Merely describing the physical shape of the place does not satisfy him. Instead, he finds it necessary to load the island with a variety of over-determined cultural markers. But this need not surprise us. Students are still taught that among the other remarkable features of the famous first simile in the Aeneid is the fact that it illustrates a natural phenomenon, a storm at sea, by employing a vehicle from the cultural realm, namely, a political riot — thus reversing the usual Homeric procedure whereby a warrior fights like a lion, weapons fall like hail, and so forth. Atticus’ similes are like Virgil’s in this respect. The point of the island that splits Fibrenus’ stream he calls a “beak” (rostrum). The word does of course mean a bird’s beak, but in this aquatic locus it seems rather to denote the metaphorical “beak” or prow of a ship: thus the island, a natural formation, is assimilated to the condition of a boat, a product of human technology — and, it may be worth noting, a potent symbol in primi-
tivist, "golden age" thought of nature violated, of life in an age when humankind could no longer live in deep harmony with the natural world, but chose or was forced to use technology to make its living: to live in a cultural, and not a natural world. At any rate, given the context and the *dramatis personae*, it is difficult to believe that the word *rostrum* does not also look to those famous prows erected in the Roman Forum as monument to a naval victory over the people of Antium in 338 BC. In the context of Atticus’ ephrasis, the meaning of these *rostra* lies not in their historical significance, but in the fact that they had come to be used as the main speaker’s platform in the Forum, a place from which Cicero had addressed the public on many occasions, including several on which he proposed new laws to the people. So, in as much as Cicero in the dialogue is about to promulgate an entire law code in the style of those venerable documents of Roman law, the Twelve Tables, perhaps it is appropriate that Atticus should depict this humble island in terms that recall the very center of Roman civic culture.

But he does not stop at this. Soon he describes the way in which the Fibrenus, as if it existed only to create this island, feeds into the much larger Liris and then disappears, just as a man adopted into a patrician family loses the name to which he was born and assumes that of his adoptive father. Again culture illustrates nature, and the parallel contrasts between on the one hand natural and adoptive fatherlands earlier in the discussion (Italian and Roman respectively), and on the other hand natural and adoptive families (plebeian and patrician respectively), can hardly be missed.

Like the Fibrenus feeding the Liris, this simile quickly flows into another. But it is worth turning back to see how the transition soon to take place is anticipated. The very same sentence in which Atticus figures the island as the Roman Forum goes on to call the little plot of ground that rises from the stream a "wrestling floor" or *palaestra* that looks almost as if it were designed to provide the three friends with a place for their discussion. The metaphor by which dialectic is figured as an athletic contest is common, but we should not for that reason overlook its specificity here. In the first place, *palaestra* is a loanword from the Greek. Latin is full of Greek borrowings; but a sentence in which an unnamed place of no special significance, a place so small that it hardly exists except as a setting for the imaginary dialogue that is the only document even suggesting that the place ever did exist – a sentence in
which such a place is figured first as the center of Roman culture and then as a *palaestra*, one among many centers of Greek culture, deserves to be taken seriously. And in fact, the same movement from Rome to Greece occurs earlier, when Cicero compares his paternal homestead to that of Dentatus, and his desire to return to it to that of Odysseus.

The same movement from Roman to Greek is repeated within the epigraph when Atticus comments on the chill waters of the Fibrenus. First, he says, they are so cold that they cool the larger stream of the Liris, into which they flow and then lose their name, like a man of humble birth who is adopted into a patrician family. Then, he says, they are so cold that he could hardly stand to test them with his foot, as Socrates tests the waters of the Ilissus in the Platonic dialogue *Phaedrus* (230b5–8). Of the many observations that could be made about this remarkable transition, I note only that the shift from patrician (and thus *a fortiori* Roman) to Greek, and to the *Phaedrus* in particular, brings the entire movement of this extraordinary passage to a close: for Cicero has of course been thinking of Plato all along. In a general sense, his entire project of writing philosophical dialogues is inspired by Plato’s example; more specifically, his earlier dialogue on *The Republic* and this one on *Laws* are explicitly modeled on the Platonic dialogues of the same names. In particular, the idea that nature is the source of human law is an important theme in Plato’s *Laws* (especially in book 10), even if Cicero has other sources in mind as well. And finally, the prominent thematic role allotted to nature in Cicero’s proem is inspired by Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which informs the entire passage under discussion, as Cicero at last discloses by having Atticus cite as his own model the behavior of the Platonic Socrates in that very dialogue.

In so many of the examples I have discussed in this chapter, the claims of culture are clearly privileged over those of nature. This much should by now be obvious. But the line of interpretation I have been following leads to a further conclusion as inescapable as it is surprising. Time and again, the appeal to nature conceals a much stronger discursive move, a form of self-fashioning that is practiced by one culture – namely, Latin – taking as its model another culture – namely, Greek. Cicero’s natural law is a Greek concept that in fact has little to do with the law code that he eventually promulgates. Similarly, the appeal to nature in Latin grammar, along with the very idea of systematic grammar and most of its actual details, is borrowed from the Greeks. And
Aeneas, as Virgil’s script of national identity reaches its denouement, finally ceases to be Trojan and begins to become Roman by taking on more exactly than ever the characteristic traits of the greatest Greek cultural paradigm, the hero Achilles. Again and again, when Latin culture confronts itself and inquires into its nature, it sees Greek.

Indeed, these ingredients – a nativist or naturalist impulse, manifested either as the worship of Trojan Aeneas in the guise of Pater Indiges or as praise of a Frankish king for his command of Latin; a coming together through triangular desire, whether in conflict over Lavinia, or in mutual affection for a particular landscape; a scene of initiation, by which the barbarians’ acclamation of Titus as father of their second fatherland and Jupiter’s capitulation to Juno provide the script for countless iterations played out across the centuries by thousands of readers, students of Latin, students of grammar; these ingredients may be said to define an important strand in the master narrative by which Latin culture continues to write itself.

To conclude, let me draw attention to one further feature shared by Atticus and Cicero, by Aeneas, by the spectators at Titus’ games, by Venantius’ Frankish patrons, by Dante, and by ourselves. It is worth remembering that someone like Atticus is that rarest of creatures in Latin culture: a native Roman, Roman by birth, or, as the phrase goes, “a Roman of Rome.” None of Atticus’ own literary works survives. If one were to appear, Cicero’s friend would join Julius Caesar in a very select group, doubling the number of native Roman authors whose works still exist; for Atticus, as his biographer Cornelius Nepos tells us, was from a very old Roman family. His confusion in the dialogue I have been discussing is thus the more readily understandable. Atticus did not have two fatherlands, one natural and the other cultural. His only patria was Rome.14 It is therefore at least intelligible that he should be unfamiliar with the idea that many Romans have two fatherlands. But in other respects, Atticus’ position remains strange and allows further interesting observations.

First I would note that Atticus does not have the affective relationship for Rome, his natural fatherland, that Cicero has for Arpinum. Rather, he has the very feelings towards Rome that he expects Cicero to

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14 For important observations on Rome as a city of aliens and exiles, see Edwards (1996), 15–18, 110–35. On affection for Rome, see Bonjour (1975).
have, and that Cicero insists he does have: feelings of duty, responsibility, and so forth. But in neither case are these really feelings of affection, such as Cicero (and Atticus following Cicero) expresses for Arpinum. But Atticus does have an affective relationship for his adoptive fatherland, Athens. His situation is thus the inverse of Cicero’s: a sense of duty rather than affection towards his birthplace, and a sense of affection for adoptive homes deriving from his love for various non-Romans, friends and cultural exemplars, whom he admires.

It is also worth noting that Atticus, a native Roman, requires Cicero, an arriviste, to interpret his own position for him.\textsuperscript{15} As a Roman he has no sense of a natural fatherland as distinct from an adoptive one, and he regards his natural fatherland almost as if it were not his birthplace at all. Cicero’s position is fraught with complementary ironies: a consular, he was also a new man, reaching the highest annual office in the government but unable to penetrate the inner circle of the ancient aristocracy. He was not a native Roman, but became, if anyone, the exemplar of latinity for future generations. As such he is heir to a long line of foreigners who won their places in the pantheon of Latin culture, a group that includes the Greek Livius Andronicus, the Campanian Gnaeus Naevius, the Messapian Quintus Ennius, and many others; and he is the progenitor of an even longer line that includes the Iberians Quintilian and Martial, the Africans Augustine and Apuleius, Britons like Alcuin … The list could be infinitely extended.

Finally, I would note that there is an interesting ambivalence in Atticus’ position, one that is not, however, made explicit in the dialogue. Atticus was a member of an old Roman family, the Pomponii; but the name Pomponius is not Latin. If it were, it would be Quintilius (an older form, Quinctilius, is also attested). Pomponius is a Sabellian form of the same name, rather like such variants as Anderson and Anderssen. Many other ancient Roman families bore Sabellian names as well. Indeed, tradition even records that the first king, Romulus, murdered his twin brother Remus rather than suffer diminution of his kingly prerogative, and yet accepted as coregent for a time the Sabellian Titus Tatius. The biological twin is removed only to be replaced by a cultural one who is, moreover, foreign. So Sabellian and Latin culture existed side by side in archaic Rome, as Germanic and Latin culture did

\textsuperscript{15} On the related issue of Cicero’s position as a \textit{novus homo} see Bonjour (1975), 79.
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in medieval Francia, and became in many ways indistinguishable. Officially the oldest Latin family in Rome was that of the Julii; but to claim this distinction even the Julii, with several other families, had to claim Trojan ancestry. The point is, there are no native Romans, no national myth of an autochthonous people. All members of Latin culture must journey to Rome, each in his or her own way; we modern Latins are in this respect no different from any other member of our culture at any time, in any place.
Latin Language and Latin Culture
from ancient to modern times

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