



*Prehende
tuam
togam,
vulsisti**

Get your tongue around
the lingo of love: Latin.
Everyone's at it these days,
says Gavandra Hodge

When is a dead language not dead? When swaggering billionaire CEOs are quoting it at board meetings, fashionable new classes are sold out and celebrities are scrawling it all over their bodies. Mirabile dictu! Latin is back. As an early-adopting puella, I have long been aware of the life- and love-affirming benefits of the language of Caesar. For nearly a decade I have been attending a hedonistic salon of Latin speakers, all swanky graduates with MBAs and books published, where we indulge in the saucier gobbits of Ovid and Juvenal. I even had a 1BC-themed birthday party, attending as the great virgin, Diana the huntress.

But my passion for Plutarch no longer seems so esoteric. At the Idler Academy in Notting Hill, a new course run by the Latin mistress Miss Hislop and aided by parse master Harry Mount (whose memoir *Amo, Amas, Amat... And All That* was a publishing sensation in 2006) was filled to the rafters with novitiates hoping to discipline their brains. Furthermore,

legend has it that to celebrate the 100-millionth Facebook user, the cool cats in Palo Alto threw the of all toga parties. Imagine the scene: Mark Zuckerberg resplendent in a white sheet, pert nymph balancing on either knee, the finest Budweiser spurring even a programmer doing something unmentionable with a BlackBerry... But who could have conceived such decadence? My guess is Marcus Zuckerberg himself, for although he may look like the king of IT geeks, he listed Latin as one of his four languages on his Harvard application and has a fondness for the Virgil. Which suggests that the richest man under has a wilder, more bacchanalian side than David would have us believe.

For this, surely, is the reason for our renewed interest in Latin. Those crazy Romans just really knew how to party: lots of wine, girls in flimsy garments... and anyone who has mistakenly flicked onto the US TV series *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* knows, what the Romans liked to do most of all was have sex.

Remember that "Roma" is "amor" backwards. Something the Romans themselves were well aware of explains Mary Beard, Cambridge classics professor and media don extraordinaire. And reflect on the fact that Latin is the only language in the world where the verbal paradigm is "amo, amas, amat..." - "I love," so the erotic dimension is built into the language.

And reflect that without Latin we would miss such indispensable words as *fellatio* and *cumulus*. Roman history presents us with some of the world's most depraved characters: the empress Messalina, who gilded her nipples, wore a blonde wig and was so enthusiastic a whore (brothel name: *Wolf-Gate*) that she wore out her patrons; Tiberius, who filled swimming-pools with nubile teenagers and then dived in (Jeffrey Epstein, dream on). Romans spent much of their time naked, oiling each other up and then scraping each other off in the gym. This was a pre-Christian society and Roman religion did encourage people to be ashamed of their urges. We celebrated beautiful bodies. Jupiter/*Zeus*, lord of the gods, would ravish anything that moved, even swans. So when Chris Martin of Coldplay (first-degree in Latin and Greek at UCL) mused, 'I'm always trying to work out what He or She is, I don't know if it is Allah or Jesus or Mohammed or Zoroaster. But I'd go for Zeus,' knowing eyebrows were raised.

Of course, Latin has a greater champion than Bill Johnson ('Look at me! I know almost nothing but Latin and Greek for 25 years - now I am in charge of the bus in London!'). Our mayor may not be every cup of tea, but he sure is hot on ancient tongues. Talk of reintroducing Latin to the state-school system is

Latin chat-up lines

Succede videqueme aliquando
(Come up and see me some time)

Didici hunc ludum in Asiam!
(I learnt this trick in Thailand!)

Orgia sunt in tunica mea et invitavis
(There's an orgy in my trousers
and you're invited)

*Estne triremis in sinum tuum, aut
modo placet tibi me videre?*
(Is that a trireme in your pocket or are
you just pleased to see me?)

your toga, you've pulled