

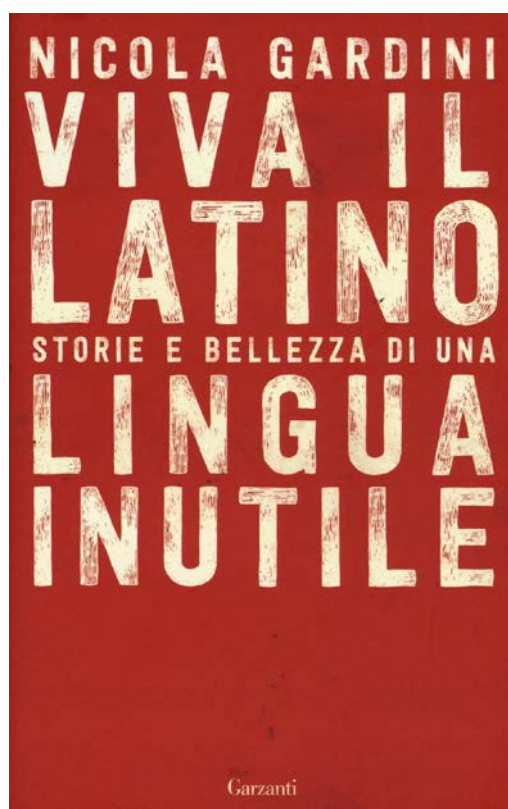
## **EULOGY FOR THE UNNECESSARY LANGUAGE. HOW TO BE USEFUL WRITING ABOUT A USELESS LANGUAGE?**

**Review of the volume *Viva il latino. Storie e bellezza di una lingua inutile* by Nicola Gardini, Milano, Garzanti, 2018**

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**FIG.1** Nicola Gardini, *Viva il latino. Storie e bellezza di una lingua inutile*. Front cover.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

*Viva il latino. Storie e bellezza di una lingua inutile* [Long Live Latin. The History and Beauty of an Unnecessary Language], written by the well-known Italian philologist, is a bestseller in Italy. The first edition of the book was reprinted eleven times to meet the demand of the Italian book market, and the second edition also has remarkable success.

Latin language opens the gate, in the mind of the passionate philologists, towards balanced and rational discourse, selection of pertinent meanings, discursive harmonization with the context and verbal expression of the interiority.

Latin language opens the paths to linguistic pragmatics. Latin language is also, for the *connoisseurs*, the language of discourse by excellence, and the language of civilization.

Cruelly and inadvertently considered a dead language, Latin remains, for Gardini, a living language by what it has changed in the world:

È pratica annosa associare al latino (e al greco antico) la brutta e imprecisa metafora di lingua morta; al contrario, il latino è vivo perché ci parla, perché esistono testi di straordinaria forza espressiva scritti in quella lingua, già influentissimi nel corso di molti secoli, che continuano a dirci cose importanti sul senso della vita e della società. Il latino è vivo perché senza tanto latino non sarei chi sono. Il latino ha formato la società e i sentimenti in cui tutti viviamo. Senza latino il nostro mondo non sarebbe quello che è (pp.25-26).

## 2. LANGUAGE TRANSFORMATIONS

Nicola Gardini analyzes Latin of Cicero, Ennius, Julius Caesar, Lucretius, Catullus, Virgilius, Tacitus, Ovidius, Titus Livius, Seneca, Petronius, Lucius Apuleius, Horace, Propertius and St. Augustine, surprising it in the dynamics of resettling, from the simplicity of the discursive pragmatics of the Roman administration to the self-awareness of the language in the Augustinian work. The Ciceronian Revolution, as Gardini named it, is the result of applying a thorough language program. This program consisted of the double transfer, from the administrative pragmatics to a language based on the aridity of signification, and from the linguistic artificiality without signification specific to pre-Cicero Roman orators, to the linguistic excellence, understood as spiritual excellence. Ciceronian Latin – language of truth and justice – has developed on vocabulary enrichment, on borrowings from Greek language (meaning from Greek linguistic and democratic experience, namely from linguistic semantics and pragmatics), becoming the classical Latin: standard Latin studied in Italian and Romanian schools, for example. It is true that the beauty of this language, in the Ciceronian ‘synchronous section’, is actually the beauty of its salvation and preservation.

In the long list of transformations exemplified by Nicola Gardini, Latin of the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar from *De bello gallico* is beautiful grace to its discursive organization and to its impeccable and functional syntax, “misurando i conquistando tutti i territori dei dicibile” (p.65). From this linguistic demonstration made by static instances of Latin language section named in honor of those who really modeled Latin, the birth of metaphor in Lucretius’ work cannot be omitted. In *De rerum natura*, Latin language, recording the observation, develops its ability to encompass and surprise. Understanding the power of Latin words, Lucretius extended their significations through ‘semantic saturation’ and ‘metaphorization’ (p.76). He proposed understanding life and nature as a functional organization, in accordance with language organization. The world’s image in the text and the exposure of entirety via language (at a small scale) are the transformations proposed by the Latin poet and philosopher.

In the picture of the significant Latin language development, Catullus’ sexual vocabulary is very important: *mentula, cunnus, culus, futuo, pedico* etc., in its use for the demonstration of force, for position superiority. Therefore, the social-political valences of sexual language: “L’oscenità in Catullo serve principalmente da strumento di protesta sociale” (p.82), the carnival character of the diction, and the suggestion (that is a satirical reflection of justice, human dignity and good practices) are the cornerstones of the Catullian reform. The enjambment of Virgilius is added to the previous analyzed enrichments and variations of the Latin language.

Virgilius' texts (especially *Eneida*) are characterized by the expression of the profound structure of the author's mind, by the semantic and expressive richness of language, as an extension of Lucretius' order at the level of understanding history: "Virgilio è davvero un maestro dell'*ordo verborum*" (p.90). The appeal to social memory in remodelling Latin – due to the one who took advantage of the posthumous glory conferred by Dante's work, *La Divina Comedia*, is completed by the personal memory of Ovidius, whose work is characterized by descriptive capacity. This, different from the Lucretian one, implies rhythm and richness of details in a succession of photograms in *Metamorphoses*, for example.

Neither in the poet's posture of a decayed and exiled individual in the Pontic Tomis (let's not forget that modern exile is identified and claimed from the Ovidian one), Ovidiu is not content with what his language offers. He introduces, in *Tristia and the Epistulae ex Ponto*, the repetition to give validity to content, to emphasize the passage and violence of transformation, to highlight injustice, and to relate to a universal order above any human order, "Luqubere nobis / luqebisque alias" or "amat et not sentit amorem" or "deceptaque decipit omnes" and so on.

And after the incursion at the (space) periphery of the expansion of the tongue, in the need of expressing the implacability of the Pontic sadness in waves, we return to Gardini's attempt to express Seneca's lucidity and inclination towards synthesis, but especially to the language self-conscious of the Augustinian discourse. St. Augustine, in the years of the decline of the Empire, witness to the fall of Rome, he moves the emphasis from syntax on the lexicon and its ability to expand meaning, store metaphorical images, symbolize, transform the figurative into diffuse scenes, hyperbolize, exploit the paradox, resort to analogies and parables. With St. Augustine, as Gardini underlines, the view of the scholar of Hipona, not the word-cup (signifier), the conceptual hole of the language bears the fault of misunderstanding, but the meaning, born from the interaction of the interpreter's mind with the reality, the wine filling the signified's cup: "at colpa non è delle parole, che sono i bicchieri; to the colpa è e del vino che ci and versa dentro" (p.164).

Latin suddenly faces itself with itself, stripped of signifiers, appealing to what Roman Jakobson would later call the poetic function of communication.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Stressing the effects of the society unable to contemplate its past, in a hurry to transpose immediately, to reduce the language (s) to a simple administrative exercise before Cicero, Gardini notes:

Il latino per molti è *inutile*. (...) Mi limito qui, accingendomi a congedare i lettori, a considerare che quei „molti” – gente comune, politici, professionisti di ambiti vari – hanno un'idea tristemente (e pericolosamente) limitata dell'instruzion e della formazione: credono, infatti, che la conoscenza si riduca alla traduzione immediata del sapere in qualche servizio pratico (p.207).

The effects of immediate pragmatism and misunderstood hedonism that substitute memory (especially the collective memory), imagination, creativity, depth, complexity gradually make room in the contemporary society. In our case the perception is more acute than compared to others.

As far as the judgment related to the dead language is concerned, its living character is given precisely by the huge legacy of Latin, and especially due to what Latin nurtures in the languages that are still spoken: Italian, Romanian, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, French and their dialects, through textual/ discursive organization that extended beyond the area of Romanic languages, through the knowledge that it spread.

The lively character of the language is given by the Latin literature and the literatures to which it gave birth in the languages that originate in it. Without Virgilius' Latin, Dante would not have existed, without Titus Livius's there would not have been Machiavelli, Nicola Gardini points out. Without the Latin of the ancient authors, there would have been no Transylvanian School and the natural settlement of the Romanian writing with Latin letters, and more, probably, the Romanian language would not have afforded (if it had survived) to claim that it originates in Rome. Latin is still alive through the church, through reading, and through history, so much denigrated in the past. Latin gives itself away, to the gain of the human being through science and religious knowledge, and, fortunately, it is not completely abandoned.

### REFERENCES

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