



THE POOR PRINT



A Lifelong Saturnalia

Books, Conversations & Human Connection

Aidan Chivers

I barely had time to walk over to my seat, sit down, and look up nervously before my interviewer fired me the question:

‘So what’s the point of literature?’

Fumbling around frantically for a suitably profound response, I remember stammering something about its potential for uniting people and the common ground it can help us find with others. Needless to say, there was considerable relief on my part as the discussion moved on to something more specific and rather less abstract.

Yet there are few sensations more rewarding than discovering in someone else’s writing an aspect of something which you had believed to be personal, private, and unique to yourself.

Who could fail to recognise the early fires of Dido’s infatuation in the early part of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*? Or a touch of the jealousy so dominant in Shakespeare’s *Othello*? Who, indeed, has ever made it through the infamous ‘fifth week blues’ without feeling a tinge of the *spleen* evoked so beautifully by Baudelaire? For Alan Bennett’s character Hector in *The History Boys*, the discovery in

literature of one’s own thoughts and feelings is ‘as if a hand has come out and taken yours.’

A nicer answer to my perplexing interview question might have involved not just the common ground between reader and author, but also the differences in worldview which we can encounter through reading.

Literature is best when it not only reinforces our understanding of the world, but challenges it. It can pull us away into another, separate reality, before throwing us suddenly back into our everyday lives as the last page is turned, the last line reached, the end of the scroll unfurled. It can challenge our preconceptions, show us another way of thinking, and invite us to go out and see life from a totally new perspective.

With his *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley presents us with a futuristic, ostensibly perfect society which is orientated purely towards achieving superficial happiness, but which is ultimately devoid of all emotional experiences and connections. Yet even when stripped of anything meaningful to express by Huxley’s sanitised, emotionless utopia, one character, Helmholtz, still finds himself entranced by the potential power of words.

Turning to scientific vocabulary for his simile, he tells us that ‘words can be like X-rays, if you use them properly – they’ll go through anything. You read and you’re pierced.’

And in the world we inhabit, where we are blessed with the rich range of emotion which characterises human experience and is worth expressing, language can be the medium which binds us meaningfully to those around us and saves our soul from suffocation.

But it is not just the written form of language that can have this remarkable effect of influencing and helping mould our own personal conception of the world. Even the most casual of conversations can introduce us to another human being’s perspective on life. Speech allows us to communicate ideas, discuss abstract concepts, and share our own unique way of seeing the world.

Even on a subconscious level, the very way we speak can betray our geographical, social and educational backgrounds. And, if we wish, the complexity of human language can let us convey the deepest, most intangible aspects of our personality, opening us up so another person can see through our eyes.

During the latter part of every December, the whole of ancient Rome used to celebrate the Saturnalia. This was a religious festival like no other: usual social norms were disregarded, with slaves taking the positions of their masters, who in turn took orders from them.

Slaves were allowed a taste of the privileges their owners typically enjoyed,

whilst the richer strata of society acquired a fresh, vivid understanding of the lives of those who normally served them. Each returned to their respective realities with a newly enhanced sense of mutual understanding and insight into each other’s positions in life.

Any kind of human interaction can play a similar role. Engaging with people is all about seeing the same things around us in a wholly different light. The closer we get to someone, the better our ability to see the world they see.

It was the Roman playwright Terence who told us there are ‘tot homines, quot sententiae’ – as many different viewpoints as there are people to hold them. Meaningful interaction, and the constant small-scale switching of perspectives which comes with it, allows us to see more and more of these *sententiae*. And words are perhaps our best means of discovering them.

Alan Bennett’s metaphorical ‘hand’ from *The History Boys* need not take the form of a long-dead author. It need not be such a formal process as the ancient Roman festival dedicated to Saturn. Sometimes it is just a moment of mutual understanding, the sharing of a late-night cup of tea, or just the briefest exchange of smiles.

Every time we absorb a new piece of literature, every time we engage with someone on an emotional level, every time we look right into someone’s eyes and see the whole world reflected back in their pupils, we conduct our own intimate Saturnalia. ■

THE COLUMN

College Interviews

Giorgio Scherrer
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Kathy Goudman, 65, lodge porter receptionist, takes the rough with the smooth and doesn’t mind being a shoulder to cry on.



My mother was the Yorkshire girl, my dad the Londoner. He was too short for the army in World War II, so he was sent down the pit. In 1968 he wanted to get out and so we moved from Sheffield to Slough. I had finished High School in the North, but we went away before O-levels and I never did them. My father gave me the choice to go to work. And so I did.

I worked as a childminder for some time. One of the boys from back then actually tracked me down on Facebook recently. He wanted me to come to his wedding and now I’m his son’s godmother.

You see, I always liked to be the mummy. I have three daughters of my own, two here in England and one in Australia, and four grandchildren. And I like to give a mummy’s advice. I’m always here as a shoulder to cry on – I’d like to think that that’s how the students see me.

It’s been five years now that I’ve been working at Oriol, though I’ve lived in Oxford since 2001. My second husband, who’s from here, always says that some people think they’re better, just because they’re in Oxford – a bit posh, you know. But when people ask me if Oxford is a nice place to live, I say yes, it is, but no better than any other place because, in the end, there are good and bad things everywhere.

I don’t really have a favourite spot around college – in a way it is just a job here, you know. But I like the mix-up, the students and the atmosphere in the lodge. The people I work with are good fun. And I do like history, so I love the old buildings.

I also like city trips. And knitting. And I’m a real football fan, a Sheffield Wednesday supporter. I like most sports actually – apart from golf, tennis and cricket: they’re just boring!

And I like working. I get fed up with home. Working with this lot here keeps me sane – every day is different, we take the rough with the smooth and everybody’s what they are. And we’re the biggest mickey takers in the whole world, but in a good way. ■

Online Exclusives

Stay alert as *The Poor Print* continues to publish throughout the coming week. Here’s what’s in store:

Elephants in the Room: A Cartoon
Alex Waygood
Monday 8th February

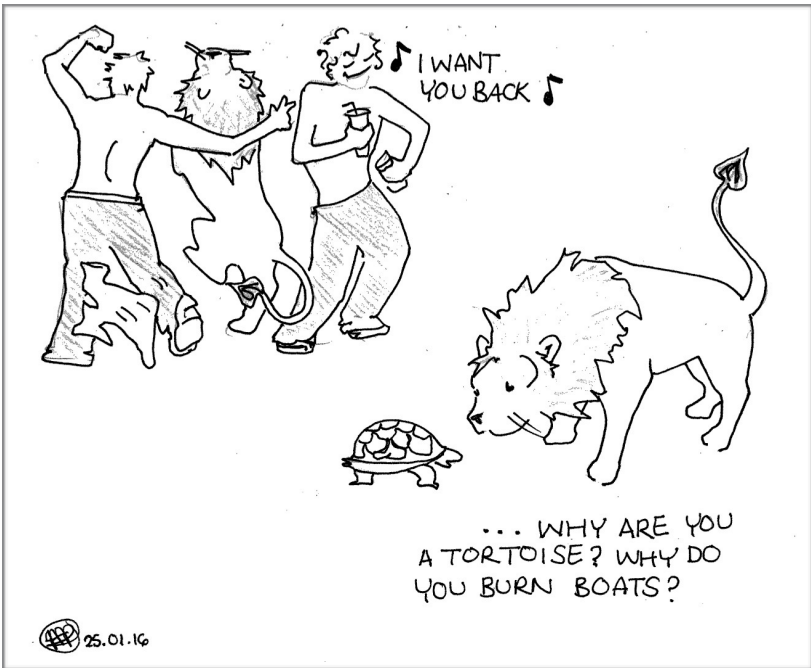
Slow Travel: Religious Rituals
Tobias Thornes
Tuesday 9th February

Stone Age Mousetraps and Roman Cat Carriers
George Prew & Elizabeth Stell
Wednesday 10th February

Upcoming Issues

Issue 7 - GREEN
14th February

Issue 8 - DECLINE & FALL
28th February



Tacita McCoy-Parkhill

‘Ritual of the Essay Crisis’

Alex Waygood

‘Twas in the early hours of Monday morn
That in the libr’y, one could plainly see
A boy: who, with hunch’d back and bended neck,
Didst type away on music theory.

The clock struck three, then four, then five!
The college soundly snored
– *Yet still the lad did keenly strive*
To understand that chord...

Yea, not for him, the sunlit hours of day,
The thrill of midnight being far too great.
The magick of that silent, dusky hour
Inspiring all of those who stay up late.

The clock struck three, then four, then five!
The quad now ghostly still
– *Yet still the student soldiered on*
Throughout the dusky chill...

Not till the sun had risen in the sky
Didst the scholar rise up to his feet
His weekly labours were at last now thru:
His ritualistic pilgrimage complete!

Pierre Boulez: Rituel *in memoriam*

David Maw

Thursday’s Child

Pierre Boulez was born on Thursday 26th March 1925 in the quiet provincial Loire town of Montbrison. His upbringing was a contented, middle-class, Catholic one, unremarkable in inter-war France. At school he was an industrious and able student with special aptitudes for physics and chemistry. Like his sister, he received piano lessons as a child. Unlike her, he was playing difficult Chopin by the age of nine.

Leon Takes Us Outside

Léon Boulez was a severe and strict character. An engineer and technical director of a steel works, he intended that his son should follow the same path into engineering. After the baccalauréat, Pierre was enrolled to study mathematics. He had other ideas, however; and after his sister interceded with the reluctant father, he went on to study at the Paris Conservatoire. “Our parents were strong. But finally we were stronger than they.”

(You Will) Set the World on Fire

During his studies with Messiaen in Paris, Boulez would often travel with his teacher on the Metro after class. “Musical aesthetics are being worn out. Music itself will die. Who is there to give it birth?” Messiaen replied, “You will, Pierre.” Boulez was as good as Messiaen’s word. By 1952, he was known in the United States as “the White Knight of the time... a genius who brought a tidal wave of the new.”

Rebel, Rebel

Boulez was the leading light of a group of composers centred on the music summer schools at Darmstadt. They sought to erase the past and reconstruct musical language from first principles. Boulez’s *Structures*, Book 1 for two pianos (1952) was initially subtitled after Klee “à la limite du pays fertile”. It brought all the elements of musical composition under the same strict formal organization. Boulez was outspoken in declaiming the situation: “Any musician who has not experienced ... the necessity of the dodecaphonic language is USELESS.”

A New Career in a New Town

Boulez left France in 1958 to settle in Baden-Baden, signing a conducting contract with Südwestfunk the following year. “I left Paris because, on the organisational level of musical life, stupidity was even more prevalent there than elsewhere.” By 1970 his international stature was such that Georges Pompidou asked him to help establish a centre for musical research (IRCAM) in Paris. Nonetheless, he continued to live at Baden-Baden.

Where are we now?

On the 13th May 1968, as the rest of France came out on general strike, Boulez returned to his old school to address a hall full of pupils on “Ou en est-on?” – Where are we now? With no concession for age or knowledge, he outlined a crossroads in contemporary music: “The discoveries we

made between 1945 and 1950 were comparatively easy.” Now we must “promote musical expression to a point at which it becomes a means of *general* communication.”

Heroes

Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Joyce, Char, Michaux, Artaud, Genet, Beckett, Messiaen, Webern, Schoenberg, Stockhausen – and, of course, Mallarmé.

Sex and the Church

There was a monkish quality to Boulez. He lived alone and worked with unremitting discipline twelve or more hours a day, a habit inculcated during his school days at the Catholic Seminary in Montbrison. His personal life seems to have been restricted to a short-lived and highly intense affair in 1946. It culminated in a double-suicide pact; but this lurid outcome was evaded in favour of such erotically charged works as *Le visage nuptial* and *Le soleil des eaux*.

Dollar Days

During an interview in 1969, Boulez dismissed the idea that he was being considered for the post of Musical Director of the New York Philharmonic, nor would he accept it if offered it. The following year the announcement of his appointment was made. He acted as a fifth columnist in the post: pandering to conservative concert-going tastes whilst introducing contemporary music at every turn. “I don’t think music is an entertainment product. It’s ... not for marketing, but to enrich lives.”

Slow Burn

The necessary consequence of his conducting career was a lessening of his compositional activities. The rapid fertility of his first decade led to a more measured rate of production: *Pli selon pli* emerged over five years and was then revised two decades later; *Figures, doubles, prismes* gradually took shape over ten years, *Eclat/Multiples* over five, *Répons* four, *Dérive* 2 eighteen, and the various versions of *...explosante-fixe*... more than twenty years.

I Have Not Been to Oxford Town

Boulez was the recipient of a large number of prestigious awards internationally as well as 26 Grammys. How could it be that he did not receive an honorary doctorate from Oxford University?

We Are the Dead

Boulez’s relationships with other composers were often strained; but with Bruno Maderna his friendship was uniquely constant and untroubled. He was, then, greatly saddened to learn of Maderna’s sudden death in 1973 and quickly set about composing a memorial to him. *Rituel in memoriam Bruno Maderna* is one of his most frequently performed and accessible works. It uses a seven-note musical figure representing the letters of Maderna’s name.

On 5th January 2016 Boulez was carried off by *un peu* profound ruisseau calomnié la mort.

This is an excerpt from the full article published online on thepoorprint.com. ■

All You Need is Change

Lucy Mellor

A common character description, be it in a novel, short story or play, is ‘doesn’t like change’. Whether said explicitly in the writing or, in the case of more crafty writers, implied by the character’s actions, it often seems to be an easy way of giving their personality that extra quirk, or of making them different somehow, as though none of us are like this in reality. I can only conclude that we all accept this in order to kid ourselves that refusing change is fiction, and that being stuck in your ways is fun to read about because it doesn’t happen all too often. In my limited experience, however, it seems to be the case that we’re not quite as ready to accept change as we like to think.

I was lucky in that I had a Sixth Form that pushed the idea of Oxbridge towards me. Certainly had I stayed at my secondary school for A Levels, I would not have applied. But whilst this university-focused approach was a godsend for me, I couldn’t help feeling irritated on behalf of my friends not going to university. All tutors seemed to talk about was personal statements, UCAS applications, and student finance. What with there already not being enough graduate jobs for the number of graduates, and with around 40% of young people entering higher education, I couldn’t help thinking that pushing people who didn’t want to go to university into applying wasn’t helping anyone.

I felt almost a sense of pride when my friends refused to give in to the pressure and got jobs after sixth form instead. Then overnight they turned into their parents.

Watching my parents get up in the morning, go to jobs they hate, come home and have dinner, then spend the evening watching TV before going to bed, I could convince myself that this was something that happened to old people. A ritual of mundanity. Even their supposed leisure activities were carefully scheduled and repeated each week: Friday 9pm-midnight at the local pub. But seeing it happen to my friends made it glaringly obvious that this was my life too. I’d simply delayed my ritual for another five years.

So I declared my ritual to be change. I never have the same cocktail twice.

I alternate pizza toppings. Sometimes I walk clockwise round the Rad Cam instead of anti-clockwise. This way I can kid myself that I’ll never live a life of monotony.

In all seriousness, I genuinely do like change, and I’m yet to figure out whether everyone else doesn’t or if they’ve simply resigned themselves to the fact that their lives aren’t likely to change for the better anytime soon. The latter is a depressing probability. The thought of anyone’s life becoming so routine is not a nice one, and I’d like to hope they’d take all the possible opportunities to make their little ritual a more exciting one.

But then who am I to judge? Maybe some people like routine. My grandparents have taken their summer holiday in the same hotel in the same resort for over twenty years. Perhaps it’s comforting in a world of disarray and chaos. Nothing stands still; a routine is an anchor in an otherwise changing world. Even my ritual of change is a carefully planned one: I’ll take a new route to the supermarket if I’ve looked it up on maps five times and I know how long it will take me. Planning the change is a ritual in itself for me.

I’m the person who reads the story about someone who refuses change and convinces myself that’s not me. Even now I tell myself I won’t become my parents. I’m optimistic about my future. But I’m the one advocating for change, so there’s plenty of time to become a pessimist yet.■

‘Morning’

Lizzie Searle

Coffee coffee
Coffee coffee coffee
Coffee
Fuck off everybody
Coffee

Chicken Run or Ritual Slaughter

Jacob Warn
SENIOR EDITOR

This article may be disturbing to some readers, particularly if they are meat-eaters.

To understand my story, you have to understand my perspective, which is, currently, about as dark as you can get.

Blind, bald, skin-seethed, dead. The action began just three hours ago, although life stretches back six whole weeks. I’m partial to a bit of Aristotle, so I won’t bore you with the pre-story, only this:

I liked the film Chicken Run, especially the pie-scene. The sadistic bastard that showed it to us must have been having a laugh, though. I blame it (and him) for all my future misconceptions.

Six weeks felt like a lifetime – it was a lifetime. Especially when you don’t know anything different. There were rumours, of course. We had a cock who claimed he’d known a chicken that had lived ten years. That’s five hundred and twenty weeks! But who am I to complain. six weeks is six weeks. Better than not living at all, right?

But we must get to the action itself. It began at night. Everything was quiet as we settled down to sleep in spite of the heat and the stink. It’s painful getting comfy at first, as the burns on your legs and feet become irritable. The excrement, the culmination of two weeks-worth of digested food offers some comfort. The ammonia that the dung produces has wrecked your windpipe, but by concentrating long enough, your shallow breathing slowly becomes regular.

But then, in the dead of night, men came pouring into the barn, shouting, braying, clapping. My neighbours scream back, flapping to get away. A fox in the house. Then a great noise. A beast of seven tonnes enters the enclosure, and - look! - chickens in front of me are whisked away. A tornado. It doesn’t take long. The *Vacuum2000* can notoriously suck up 7000 chickens in one hour. Waves of white birds are tak-

en, the percussive sound of bone-broken body hitting metal tubing rings in my ears, only moments before I too am snatched, whisked along. Into darkness. Up a chute. Then slammed into those with whom only moments ago I shared the thick, parched air of the enclosure.

The next nine hours pass in a haze. We are moving, somewhere outside, fast along a motorway. It’s freezing. And wet. Blood stains my feathers – not my own, but that of others around me. I call out for food, for water. Nothing.

The next thing I know is I’m being manhandled, hoisted, and then – pain. Pain, pain, pain as my ammonia-burnt legs are squeezed by rubber hands, twisted and split open, gashes rip through right to the bone. The sores burst with mucus and, then, before I know it, I’m vomiting and soiling myself. The man who holds me doesn’t like this, no, not one bit. He hits me on the side of a metal wall. I crawl. I flap. He tugs my wings and spits in my face. Then my legs slip into iron locks – not clean ones like those in the film I’d seen – but rusted, bloody ones, where I rub up against the wings of birds next to me. They lie there, motionless. Perhaps already dead.

My head falls down; my eyes see the floor. There, chickens lay sprawled, dead and alive. A man stoops and stuffs them into buckets. ‘This one’s too small,’ he says, looking up at me. I shriek. He rises, a great hand with feathers, gummy blood and shit stuck to it. He grasps the unconscious one next to me, piling her on top of the fidgeting corpses of others.

With a jolt, the conveyor begins to move. I twist my head, see what’s coming, and realise the worst. A long bath awaits me. One by one, chickens enter, flash blue as electricity pulses through the water, their heads, and their legs, forming a connection with the iron manacles on our feet. They flop down, sagging, limb, breathing.

But there’s hope. I watch as several chickens further down the line hold their heads up, missing the water, remaining conscious. I try to follow their example, doing just as they did. But I

mistime it, for just a moment I graze the water. Volts charge through me, not enough to paralyse, or stun, but by God enough to hurt. Then again, what does God care? Man has this right over animals. Course.

My very bones are chilled by what I see next, the necks and heads of my comrades incised, leaking red juices. Trails of blood cascade to the floor. That lucky number that missed the bath: some dodge, some get cut, the latter screaming out in pain – at their own self-inflicted folly. But they all disappear, and now I’m the one struggling to miss this neck-cutter. Still upside down, still conscious, I raise my head, darting to the side, avoiding its metal blade, and then I too am thrown into darkness. The machine stops. Silence. Nothing but the rhythmic tap of blood for ninety seconds. One or two chickens cry out. Someone moans gutturally. It was me, I think. Blood swirls beneath.

Those seconds passed and we rattle off. My eyes burn as we enter the light. Then a metallic rasping as the iron greaves open and chickens start falling into huge metal containers of seething water, a chicken’s Charybdis. As they fall in, their skins are burnt, rent; layers of parched skin reel up and disintegrate. Tufts of skin and feathers whirl about. This is all about making it easier for the pluckers next door.

Even I’m helpless to avoid this molten, molting fate. I wish for death. I wish only now that I’d let myself lose consciousness in the water bath. Instead, I am thrown into this boiling hell. All shrivels up, then it goes dark as the heat explodes my eyeballs and warm blood seeps out of their sockets. This continues far too long, and the pain is indescribable.

And after all this? After the bath is drained and my twitching carcass is plucked, as the vestiges of life trail out of me? I am dumped here, underground, wood laid on top of me.

They’d found a bird with avian flu. The bastard. And chucked away the lot. Now, here I lie, in pieces. Skin gone, eyes gouged, my burns burnt, my feathers torn.■

‘Till I Go Yonder...’

An Apology for the Traditional Latin Mass

Ben Koons

There is an absolute hush, and even kneeling as close as I am to the priest I can only barely hear his whisper, ‘Hoc est enim corpus meum.’ He speaks these words of consecration softly to what was mere bread and what is now Our Lord and then as he kneels a bell rings. He stands up and lifts the consecrated Host, the body of Christ, above his head for the congregation to adore and again the bell rings. He genuflects a second time as the bell sounds and everyone kneeling bow their heads in reverence.

These words of consecration over the Body and Blood of Christ are the essential act of the mass.

St John Chrysostom described the consecration as a moment of ecstasy:

For when you see the Lord sacrificed, and laid upon the altar...are you not straightway translated to Heaven, and casting out every carnal thought from the soul, do you not with disembodied spirit and pure reason contemplate the things which are in Heaven?

The loveliness of Chrysostom’s prose can only hint at the transcendent beauty and overflowing grace a person with a charitable and faithful disposition experiences during the mass.

This liturgical beauty, which represents the heavenly realities present with earthly signs visible, is beneficial for all who participate. This is the sense of the Catholic sacramental doctrine ‘ex opere operato’, when sacraments confer some grace that is entirely dependent on the mere performance of the sacrament rather than on the holiness of those participating.

Those of us who participate could speak of those ebullient moments in life where the presence of God is an exceeding joy or times of great anger at God over his absence, to which the liturgy

provides us with an emotional and spiritual anchor. We go through lulls of spiritual acedia where even the thought of prayer is tiresome. We find ourselves ‘in a desert land, where there is no way and no water.’

It is especially in these spiritually dry places that we require liturgy; we need the ‘muscle memory’ that develops through liturgical prayer and action. It is difficult to pour out one’s heart to God every day, but it is easier to participate in communal and consistent prayer especially when that prayer appeals to our natural sense of beauty.

When I first learned that Catholics only celebrated the mass in Latin before the 1960s, I was scandalised. I couldn’t imagine the Catholic Church using a dead language for so many centuries after the Protestants had switched over to vernacular liturgies, and it seemed to confirm all the stereotypes about medieval Catholics I had learned growing up as a Lutheran.

The traditional Latin mass or the Tridentine mass is what the Roman Rite of the Church before the 1960s has come to be called. It is called ‘Tridentine’ because following a decree of the Council of Trent (‘Tridentine’ refers to Trent) Pope St Paul V edited the various Roman missals that had been used in Rome since at least around the time of Pope St. Gregory the Great in the sixth/seventh century, and Pius V made it the standard form of the mass except in places with their own sufficiently ancient forms. In the 1960s, many significant changes were made to the mass, and the *Novus Ordo* - a new form - was promulgated.

The traditional Latin mass has experienced a resurgence in the Catholic Church in the past eight years as a result of Pope Benedict XVI’s *motu proprio* ‘Summorum Pontificum,’ which gave individual priests more liberty to celebrate this traditional mass. Since becom-

ing a Catholic, I’ve come to appreciate the greatness of this older form of the Roman Rite, and I’d like to explain something of its appeal to the ordinary person whether or not that person knows Latin.

Parishes provide little handouts and missals that provide a facing English translation for the Latin prayers, so even people without Latin can follow along. Most of the prayers in the mass are the same every day, and anyone who attends the Latin mass three or four times will begin understanding what is happening when.

Although the Epistle and Gospel are read in Latin, many priests will repeat them in English during the homily. The readings are more about honouring Holy Scripture and the ritual proclamation of God’s revelation than about catechesis. People in mass should already know the Gospel, and the mass is not an apologetic exercise or a means of evangelism (at least not primarily).

The Roman Catholic Church is not exceptional for using a special liturgical language for its liturgy. Christian churches use several different ancient languages: Latin, Greek, and even Aramaic. Other religions have their own liturgical tongues: Sanskrit for Hindus and classical Arabic for Muslims.

There should be no real worries about celebrating the mass in Latin, but what end does it serve?

Primarily it provides continuity both doctrinally and practically and through both time and space. The doctrines of the Catholic Church were developed and articulated in Latin and Greek, not in any modern language. Indeed even today the authoritative version of any papal statement is the Latin one. Maintaining the same language is important for maintaining the same beliefs.

The process of translation is an opportunity for ‘updating’ beliefs. One group will try to express the Latin as literally as possible creating clunky and inartful prayers, but the opposing temptation will be to express the traditional words (like ‘concupiscence’) in such a way that ‘the common man’ can understand them. Thus translation becomes a power struggle that provides a constant occa-

sion for division within the Church. We can see this in a recent controversy about the English translation of the mass, in which a looser translation from the ‘70s was replaced by a more faithful one causing some dissension because doctrinal issues were also at stake.

Latin is a beautiful language, and it sounds loftier than the stilted English prose of the 1960s. Its prayers were developed over centuries, whereas the *Novus Ordo* was formed within a decade, and it is difficult for a modern committee to approximate the beauty of an organically developed liturgy.

A preference among many Protestants for the more artful prose of the King James Bible shows that many people appreciate a liturgy that speaks in words and phrases estranged from our mundane conversations. We enter a different realm when we pray in a different language just as we turn a switch in our heads when we enter a language class. It is a different space, and when we enter a different space there is a chance for us to experience a separation from the everyday and a unity with the transcendent.

When my dad drove us to our Lutheran church on Sundays, he liked to play Gregorian chant from the classical music station, which always drove my mom crazy. I didn’t care either way about it at the time. Yet in my time at college, I’ve come to see the beauty of this relatively simple form of music.

It is easy to learn how to chant, and although I have no choral training I’ve been able to pick up the rudiments of chant. In many ways, chanting is easier than any form of modern singing because it is just sung prayer. Chant’s simplicity though does not prevent its becoming ethereal.

The old phrase ‘singing the mass’ mystified me because I thought the mass was said and one might sing at mass. Yet the standard mass is the *missa cantata*, or chanted mass, and every Sunday I have the chance to hear the mass sung. Even the Nicene Creed becomes music when it is chanted, and hearing the long narrative of the Passion sung on Palm Sunday is one of the most significant musical and liturgical experiences I have had.

Chant speaks first and foremost to the mind calling it to heavenly realities while calming our passions. In its very form, it teaches and enlightens, and it draws its words from the Psalms and Gospel and the pens of saintly Church Fathers.

In contraposition to the music of the mass is its silence. When I started going to the *Novus Ordo* after a childhood of Lutheran liturgy and evangelical worship services, I noticed the long moments of silence in the mass as the priest said prayers to himself.

I was uncomfortable in those moments, and among many people in our culture there is this same discomfort with silence. We find moments without chatter awkward in our conversations, and when we watch television we expect a constant stream of words. The moments of silence in the *Novus Ordo* pale in comparison to the minutes of silence in the traditional Latin mass.

This silence makes evident the focus of the mass.

The priest is not even looking at the congregation for most of the mass. Rather he faces towards the altar, towards the East, which is the direction of Jerusalem and but also of the rising Sun, which is a common symbol for Christ. He speaks most of his words after the homily in a low voice, so that only a few can hear him. It is to God whom he speaks and not us.

The mass is not primarily a dialogue between the priest and the congregation. It is first and foremost a dialogue between Christ, in whose person the priest acts, and the Trinity. We participate by uniting ourselves to Christ, which we have the ability to do by dint of our baptism into his life and passion.

The mass is a rent in the fabric of space-time as we witness the same sacrifice that Christ made on Calvary. We become like St John and the Blessed Virgin Mary standing at the foot of the cross, our station keeping. The intrinsic and extrinsic beauty of the mass and liturgy can help lift us up, but if we do not also rise to the heavenly sphere then we remain dead. We must keep our station and remain vigilant.■