

BOOK REVIEW

Latin in Modern Fiction: Who Says it's a Dead Language? By HENRYK HOFFMANN. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2021. Pp. 306. Hardback, \$61.00. ISBN: 978-1-62273-949-3.

Henry Hoffmann's *Latin in Modern Fiction: Who Says it's a Dead Language?* is not a book on literature but a reference book on the Latin language as presented in samples of modern fiction. In producing such a work, Hoffmann has both capitalized on his many years of teaching Latin in the US and played to his literary wheelhouse, since thus far he is the author of six other such works all of which, unlike the volume under review, focus on various aspects of the movie industry. In his conclusion Hoffman states that "The goal of this publication was to prove the prevalence of the Latin language in modern fiction by presenting pertinent references encountered in fiction books written in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries and set in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries" (255). By the terms "prevalence" and "pertinent" Hoffman means that the sheer number of his references, their presence in multiple genres and literary forms produced over so many years help to prove that Latin is not a dead language due to its ubiquity, popularity and hence importance. Hoffmann gathered these references over twenty-five years of reading (1995-2020) ca. 1200 works—approximately 220 of which contained Latin references—either chosen at random or for use in his other projects, and thus Hoffmann's own literary taste is the key limiting factor.

Those people familiar with James Joyce's use of Latin references to embellish his prose can rest easy. This project does not duplicate the comprehensive coverage provided by R. J. Schork's book, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce* (1997). In addition, Hoffmann considers it a modest supplement/addendum "offering numerous examples and further evidence in support of" the "amazing" conclusions Professor E. Christian Kopff sets forth in his book, *The Devil Knows Latin: Why America needs the Classical Tradition* (1999) (xviii-xix). The effect(s) of this last point will, of course, depend on how each individual familiar with Kopff's book views the ideas expressed therein. As this reviewer has not yet read *The Devil*

Knows Latin, I can say nothing further on this topic.

After a list of figures and a preface Hoffmann presents his most pertinent references in forty-five entries subdivided by genre into three main parts: Latin in Mainstream Literature; Latin in Crime and Detective Fiction; and Latin in Frontier and Western Fiction. Each entry is a whole unto itself but linked by helpful cross-references to other entries where necessary. Each one also contains erudite explanations and interpretations of the relevant Latin quotations. An appendix listing fiction books by other authors with minor/few Latin references and then a conclusions section follows the main parts. Acknowledgements, a bibliography and an index of only the Latin references quoted in the book itself close out this volume. It should be noted that there are neither footnotes nor endnotes and, as Hoffmann states in his acknowledgements, he made ample use of Wikipedia and IMDb to find and/or verify information regarding the authors of the books included in the entries.

The three genre-driven main parts are where Hoffmann most clearly articulates his evidence. Part I, Latin in Mainstream Literature, contains twenty-one entries beginning with Samuel Hopkins Adams (1871-1958), ending with Dermot McEvoy (1950-) and including such well-known authors as F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), John Steinbeck (1902-1968) and Umberto Eco (1932-2016). Part II, Latin in Crime and Detective Fiction, contains twenty entries starting with Raymond Chandler (1888-1959), stopping with Dennis Lehane (1965-) and including other important authors such as Brett Halliday (1904-1977), Tom Kononis (1930-2018) and Elizabeth George (1949-). And Part III, Latin in Frontier and Western Fiction, is comprised of only four entries: Emerson Hough (1857-1920), Paul Horgan (1903-1995), Will Henry/Clay Fisher (1912-1991) and Larry McMurtry (1936-). This impressive range of authors (totaling forty-six in all) and their texts—all of which contain significant Latin quotations—is made even more remarkable by the addition of the 108 authors and their works listed in the appendix.

Overall, *Latin in Modern Fiction: Who Says it's a Dead Language?* achieves its goal, at least as much as any book with this particular goal could. It is a solid reference work and, therefore, a useful resource for students and educators at both the high school and secondary level, as well as for any other person with an interest in the Latin language. This work also benefits from having been written in very readable prose. All the Latin references are fully translated and cogently explained. Furthermore, Hoffmann raises two particularly important points. First, he questions the correctness or fairness of classifying Latin as a dead language simply

because no nation on the planet uses it as its official language; “i.e., if Latin deserves to be included among some obscure languages spoken in the remote past by some forgotten tribes that ceased to exist for one reason or another.” (xiii). Should Latin so prevalent in science, law, medicine, art, architecture and a good swathe of literature be classed with Abipon of the Mataco-Guaycuru family or Kitan of the Altaic? Second, is that the book under review is just “one of the many options available to illustrate/prove the unique nature of Latin” with projects on Latin in movies, TV shows, the internet, etc. offering endless possibilities (263). Or, as this reviewer likes to think of it, even the Black Widow and Loki *Latīnē loquuntur*.

KRISTIAN L. LORENZO

The Meadows School, klorenzo@themeadowsschool.org