

2021 Latin Summer School Writing Competition

“Diem aestivum ibi conterimus!” Here, on that historic peninsula of philosophy, of medicine, of poetry, of civilisation. Here, at Pharsalus, not so far from the place where democracy began and now, the site where it ends. In Macedonia, neighbour of Greece, whose craggy slopes and rough-cut hills are coloured in patchwork by the dull green of Achaean scrub, and the dusty grey of ancient limestone. Here, resting on the laurels of absolute victory, absolute power, and absolute peace. Here, on blood-soaked turf, on the field of battle, at the site where the Roman senate, in all its chaotic rabble, in all its pomp and arrogance fell prey to its ultimate dysfunctionality, and gave way to a new Rome, a strong Rome, a prosperous Rome, bound and united under one, under me, under Gaius Julius Caesar.

“Vir tenero vegetoque ingenio pollens,” indeed, I will build the most glorious culture since the heroic age of Hesiod. My subjects will know that, I, Caesar, am a man who knows “patriae suae dulcissimae decus atque delicias.” City of Romulus, city of blood, city of gold, city of marble, city of politics, city of mayhem, city of mobs, glorious city. Rome.

However, amongst that foolhardy gaggle of senators, bellies plump with luxury, hands soft with underuse, there are those who loved Rome, who grew Rome, and who tried, solemnly, to save her from the corruption which festered in her very government. For one, there was Cicero, who loved the Republic, but, like me, despised what it had become. With admirable tenacity, with astounding bravery, he fought to restore balance and honesty to the Roman political system. I knew, before he knew, that nothing could save the Republic from its own constituents. Cicero denounced the degeneration he was witnessing. As a result of his rigid values, he wholeheartedly disagreed with the Gallic war, not recognising, that it was not degeneration, but necessary to dispel that deep rooted corruption and incessant failure in the senate. Of war, I heard him say, “Haec ars non silvas et feras, sed criticos, sed ‘horribiles Britannos’ tenet.”

“Neque quisquam oratori veniam denegabit” for harbouring these views, for war, indeed is a gruesome, bitter business. But my war was necessary, if not *directly* for the good of Rome then for the good of my coffers, which will, of course, fund her regeneration.

Tragedy and slaughter can be the cost of victory, the cost of happiness and the cost of security. I hope there will come a day for righteous Cicero “cum Melpomene placido lumine vidisset.”

Cicero has before known such turmoil, such as Sulla’s proscriptions, and Cataline’s murderous mischief. “Quin etiam ipse veterum fabellarum modulator,” stories, histories which detail Rome’s violent past and the uprisings of old. So even he, the greatest and purest of the senators, should know the inevitability, the necessity of my sacrifice, my war and my victory.

The silence and calm now is like a gentle music, a soft, sweet melody wrought of Apollo’s lyre. After decades of raging tumult, decades of fear, decades of blood, peace settles upon the land, and birdsong replaces the groans of dying men. “Difficile est Latino sermone illustrare,” the exhilaration, the jubilation, the relief, the enthusiasm with which I sit and ponder at the prospects, possibilities and prosperity that awaits my fatherland, that awaits that eternal city, the city that is Rome.

-Hugo Sharkey