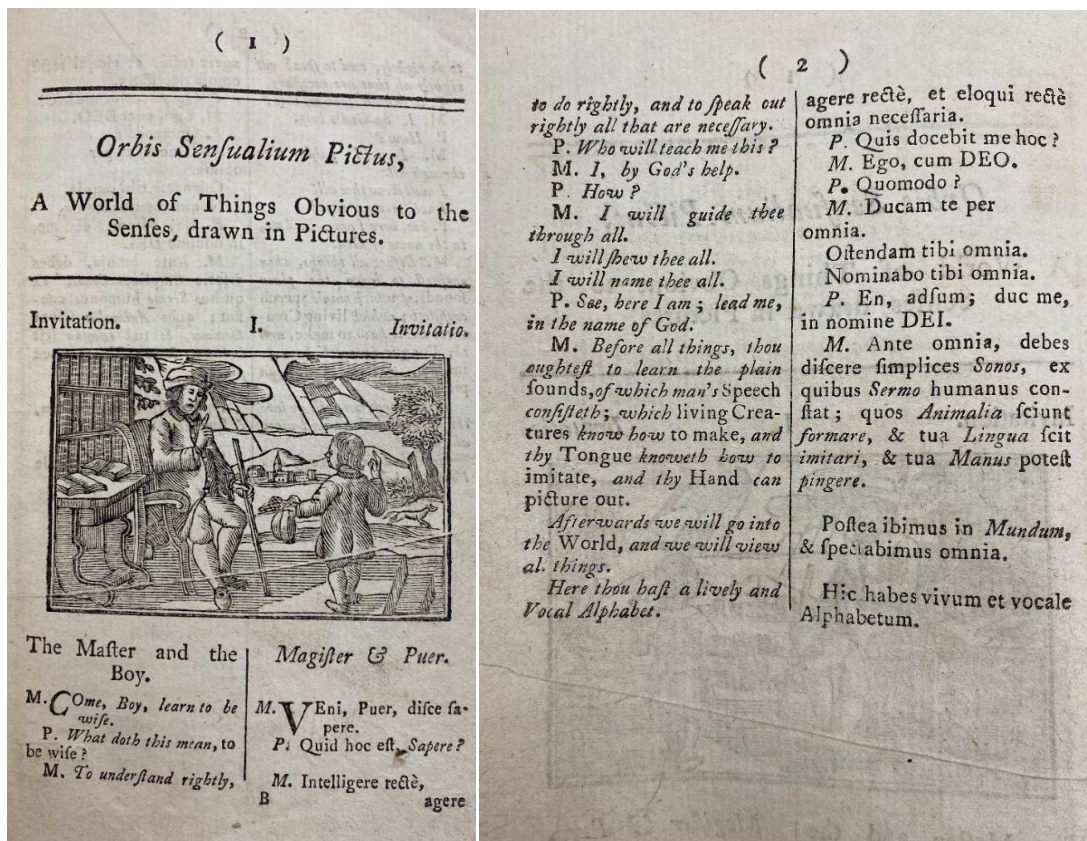


Tumblr Post I

Lyonas Xu

How would a child learn Latin in the 18th century?

The first book I read for my Latin Internship is the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (“Visible World in Pictures”) by Czech educator John Amos Comenius. The edition I have is the twelfth, published in 1777. Interestingly, the previous owner of this book practiced his signature on both endpapers (more than twenty times) and in this way, I know both his name and presumably the date he got the book, which is on May 21st, 1779 (thank you, Edward Borrer!).



Above is the first section of *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, the “Invitation/ Invitatio”. As we can see, it illustrates a master and a boy, wearing 18th century breeches and coats, talking face to

face. The text for this picture is in the form of a dialogue: the master asks questions and teaches the boy to be wise. From a broader perspective, we perceive that this book, “the master”, will guide its young readers, “the boys”, to wisdom by enriching them with all those “things obvious to the senses”. However, before introducing the world to them, “the boys” need to begin with “the plain sounds”, the ABC’s.



How did you learn the alphabet? With ABC songs or picture cards? Comenius, instead, presented a surprising method on how to learn the alphabet, which he described as “a lively and Vocal Alphabet”— through the sounds of nature. He found associations for all letters: when the wind blows, we hear it whispering “fi (f)”; when we walk pass an owl in the wood, we hear it hoots “ù (u),” et cetera.

As you may have noticed, there're no letter J and V on the chart. Not because Comenius was out of inspirations to match them with any sound, but because J is written as the consonant version of I (which is both a vowel and a consonant in Latin) and semi-vowel V is either softened into U or omitted.

These alphabets are just the beginning. The rest of the content of the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* literally covers biology, craftsmanship, Christianity, and so on. Altogether, the book invites its readers, children or adults, into a colorful world with all walks of life through Latin and English. Even when you put this work into the 21st century, the pedagogy of Comenius is still constructive and worthy of further exploration.

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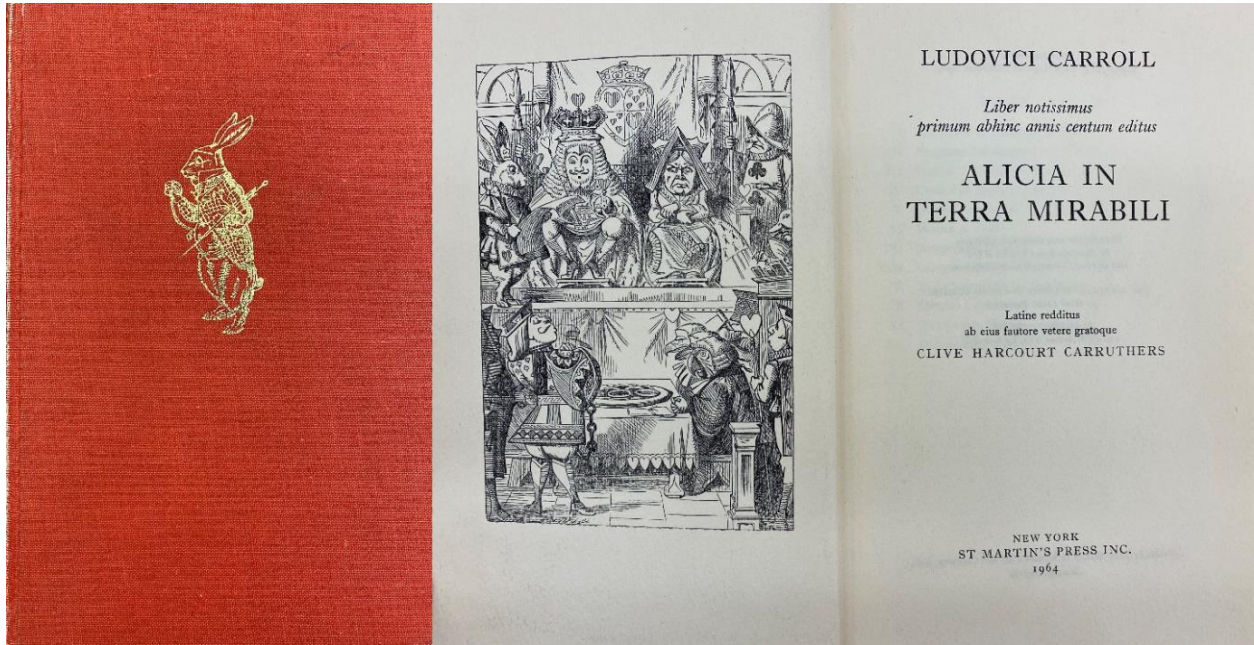
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Tumblr Post II

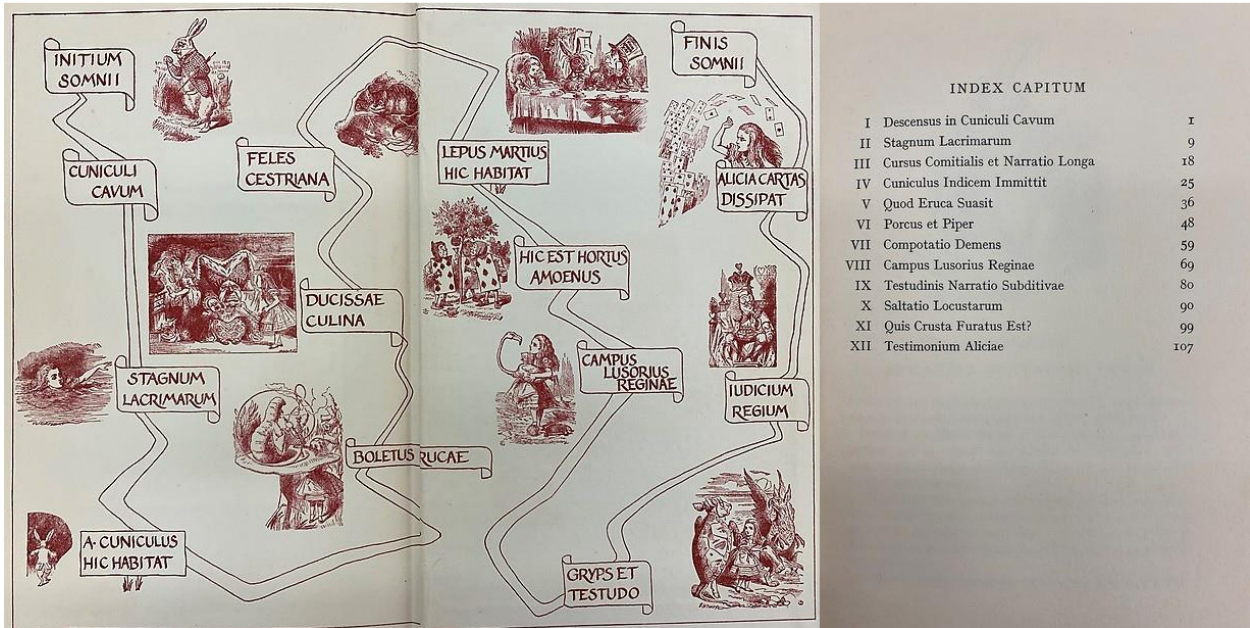
Alice & Latin

Recently, I have been wondering how many people are suffering from a miserable life like I do. Sleeping or staring at the ceiling to kill the time, while this coronavirus grounding everyone with a lethal excuse. Though I am physically restrained, my mind is free, daydreaming to wherever I wish. Speaking of daydreams, we all know the mistress of this specialty who unveiled a wondrous dreamland to the world—Alice, the most remarkable character designed by Lewis Carroll (or specifically, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson).

Alicia in Terra Mirabili, is the Latin translation of *Alice in Wonderland*. The first Latin version of this worldly renowned childhood's book was translated by Canadian translator Clive Carruthers and published in 1964. It is not modern scholars' first attempt to translate English classics into Latin, but this is definitely one of the most delightful ones. Just think about reviving both the wonderland characters and an ancient language—what a spark they light!



Beginning with the book cover (left), an exquisite illustration of the iconic figure in wonderland, the white rabbit, is embossed in golden color. I was captivated by the delicacy of the cover already, but the inner artworks are on another level. For example, the picture adjacent to the title page (right) depicts the courtroom in wonderland, with all sorts of living things. The appearances of the king and queen of hearts resemble their classic designs in the playing cards and the readers can even tell the “flatness” of the attendant’s garment at the bottom left.



Another notable setup is the end papers (left), which are printed with a mind-map of Alice's adventure. Following the thread and starting with the upper right corner, there are "initium somnii" (the beginning of the dream), "cuniculi cavum" (the rabbit hole), "stagnum lacrimarum" (the pool of tears) and so forth. Although the "index capitum" (right), the table of contents (distinct from the mind-map), is provided by Carruthers, I personally enjoy the game-board-like one, which is more playful as well as enables its readers to easily connect the Latin title and the picture aside.

I never expect quarantine to be interesting, but neither does it mean I will surrender to boredom. Surely, I can find great pleasure through spending time with Alicia and her terra mirabili!

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