

# Adventures of a Monoglot

A short excerpt from an after-dinner speech by Geoff Page  
for the AFMLTA Conference, University House, ANU,  
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8.

Five years' grammar, day by day,  
was what our Latin master taught us.  
Mainly though, I think of Caesar  
"moving into winter quarters"

on the run from pesky Gauls.  
No Catullus, Horace, Martial.  
I got a B eventually  
despite my datives being partial.

9.

He is a man I've long forgiven.  
All those cognates proved a guide  
to see me happily through Europe —  
or, at least, the under side.

Latin tags are great for show-offs.  
*Amor vincit omnia*  
can win a certain sort of woman

if she's not quite *onto ya*.

10.

*Amo, amas, amat* maybe  
might help to woo another sort.  
I did not quite *amare* Latin  
but far far more detested sport.

Our private little would-be Eton  
couldn't manage Ancient Greek.  
We got some in the chapel though,  
New Testament, five times a week.

11.

French, alas, was not my *forte*  
(and there's another Latin word).  
We sang some rounds of "*Frère Jacques*".  
No doubt, our accents were absurd

since all our French was *sur la page*  
Five years, we used a single book,  
or so it seemed, with our *devoirs*.  
We hardly knew the French could cook.

12.

We had a Belgian teacher once  
who won't escape this short *hommage*.  
His smart moustache evoked Poirot's.  
I failed my oral. *Quel dommage!*

In fact, I failed the whole damn lot  
and still don't know the full *pourquoi*.

It helped though with *la nouvelle vague*,  
those French *auteurs*. Pretentious? *Moi?*

13.

My son, as if to compensate,  
was sent, at three, for 'full immersion'.  
His parents thought their Louis should  
endure a more substantial version.

Half the day in full *français*  
left him in a cranky daze.  
At length, he proved just too rebellious  
even for "*La Marseillaise*"

14.

French, *c'est clair*, is not for Pages.  
His accent when compelled to speak  
was quite mysteriously perfect  
and heard, at most, just once a week.

Four years we left him there but, no,  
the school and he were not congruent.  
Three years later, on the Loire,  
he proved ungrateful — and quite fluent.