



## Enlivening Wit

*The Spectator* through Latin epigrams

Andrea Lombardinilo

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# ENLIVENING WIT

## *The Spectator* through Latin epigrams

Andrea Lombardinilo 

*The birth of such innovative newspapers as The Tatler and The Spectator enables the readers to observe and join the public debate through a new intellectual lens. The use of Latin epigrams opening every issue of The Spectator emphasizes not only the close interest in classical literature and culture, but also the communicative strategy focused on the celebration of wit through the moral paradigms of ancient Roman poets, at a time of the rise of modern public opinion. The poetical and rhetorical choices of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, along with other Latin poetry enthusiasts such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, bitingly denounce social hypocrisies and contradictions through parody and mockery. Their purpose was to rebut conventional behavior through the permeating force of Enlightenment wit inspired by cleverness, satire and sarcasm.*

**KEYWORD** sociability; journalism; public opinion; Latin language; literature

### Introduction: Wit, Satire and Communication

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's journals are unanimously considered two highly-innovative journalistic products that improved the techniques of construction of the public sphere and the development of modern sociability in the United Kingdom and specifically in London, a time characterized by the increasing mechanization and technical reproducibility of contents. In this view, the relationship between social innovation and cultural improvement also relies on the exaltation of knowledge, wit and allegory through the retrieval of ancient Greek and especially Roman authors, whose epigrams, maxims and aphorisms express a strong moral and ethical meaning to be shared within the imaginary club in which Addison and Steele's essays and debates fictitiously take place.<sup>1</sup> The Latin mottos opening every issue of *The Spectator* can be considered not just an intellectual demonstration, but also a cultural strategy pivoted on the understanding of Latin as a trait of civil identity and literary heritage.<sup>2</sup>

This aspect has been exalted by the numerous translations from Latin poets that John Dryden, Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison published, along with lyrics and poems written in imitation of the great Roman poets such as Virgil, Horace and Ovid. In particular, the discovery of a new Latin poem by Joseph Addison, known as the author of *The Spectator* and *Cato*, sheds new light on the extensive use of Latin by Addison and Steele during their journalistic enterprise which revolutionized the way to inform and seduce the readers. Far from being a mere anecdotal and intellectualistic display, the Latin epigraphs opening every issue of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* emphasize both the moralistic and informative paradigms chosen to select the numerous ancient writers and texts centered just below the title of the paper. Within this relationship, epigrams are transformed into original, evocative subheadings destined to become the trademark of Addison and Steele's newspapers.

Furthermore, the profound knowledge of Latin of some poets collaborating with *The Spectator*, e.g. Alexander Pope, highlights the purposes that both Steele and Addison wanted to achieve through the accurate research of Latin maxims in line with a process of literary recollection painstakingly pursued by Addison in his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705).

To the fore is the construction of a new form of journalism that Addison shapes through his moralistic, mordant criticism which relies on the development of social observation, at a time characterized by the diffusion of clubs, urban shows and crowded coffee houses.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the proposal of highly emphasized Latin epigrams complies not only with cultural patterns, but also with communicative paradigms exploiting the meta-temporal meaning of Latin literature with the aim to express human complexity and the unsolvable fallibility of human beings.

As a result, journalism matches information and progress, a few years before the fashion of sentimental and cultural journeys in Italy by European writers and artists to admire the ancient ruins of the Roman empire.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the communication of wit through ancient wisdom can be interpreted as a communicative cornerstone of the editorial strategy of *The Spectator*, assuming that 'politeness is a key word in Addison's vocabulary', and that 'tempering savage wit was key to Addison's polite reformation of manners'.<sup>5</sup>

In this account, the Latin mottos opening every issue of *The Tatler* (April 1709–January 1711) and *The Spectator* (March 1711–December 1712) are the popular proof of the communicative impact of Latin epigrams, especially when inspired by human wit and knowledge. The retrieval of Latin authors and the emphasis on their expressive and moral immortality endows every issue of *The Spectator* with a high intellectual flair not aimed at displaying the aesthetic fashion of Latin verse, but functional to the development of a new form of sociability. The republic of letters investigated by Marc Fumaroli needed to widen its boundaries and gain a meaningful social interest.<sup>6</sup> Correspondence, as well as ancient texts and epigrams, contributed to the transition from a 'humanist model of Latin men of letters to a more socially diffuse model of learned and vernacular communities of men and women writing, traveling, reading, and publishing'.<sup>7</sup> Increased travel enabled the epistolary networks to expand and be maintained thanks to social institutions where individuals could meet face-to-face, such as the salons, coffeehouses, and masonic lodges. Hence follows the construction of a journalistic vision triggered by the cohabitation of present and past communicative insights filtered by the literary force of ancient poets.

This intent is quite clear in a number of intellectual reflections inspired by the Latin mottos indicating the central role played by knowledge, as in the case of the motto opening *The Spectator*, no. 61 (Thursday, May 10, 1711), focused on the communicative power of puns and quibbles: 'Non equidem hoc studio, bullatis ut mihi nugis / Pagina turgescat, dare pondus idonea fumo'.<sup>8</sup> The motto, retrieved from Persius's Satire no. 5 (vv. 19–20), expresses the inconsistency of false and futile debate especially when lacking in intelligence, as Addison underlines at the very beginning of the issue:

There is no kind of false Wit which has been so recommended by the Practice of all Ages, as that which consists in a Jingle of Words, and is comprehended under the general Name of *Punning*. It is indeed impossible to kill a Weed, which the Soil has a natural

Disposition to produce. The Seeds of Punning are in the Minds of all Men, and tho' they may be subdued by Reason, Reflection and good Sense, they will be very apt to shoot up in the greatest Genius, that is not broken and cultivated by the Rules of Art. Imitation is natural to us, and when it does not raise the Mind to Poetry, Painting, Musick, or other more noble Arts, it often breaks out in Punns and Quibbles.<sup>9</sup>

Punning is one of the linguistic devices allowing writers and intellectuals to endow communication with wit and shrewdness, in line with the ancient habit of rhetoric creativity. The eighteenth-century communicative innovations are closely related to the evolution of print culture, as Marshall McLuhan points out: 'The first great change in style came early in the eighteenth century, when the famous *Tatler* and *Spectator* of Addison and Steele discovered a new prose technique to match the form of the printed word. It was the technique of equitone'.<sup>10</sup> This innovative communicative flair implies a profound stylistic innovation supported through the new informative awareness created by the press and public relevance gained by poets and intellectuals collaborating with journals and newspapers: 'Newspaper rivalry was an economic imperative that ignored political affiliations, such that newspapers with similar political views competed with each other. Indeed, a characteristic feature of most newspapers was the centrality of commercial purpose. Profit was the key means and mode'.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, the transition from *The Tatler* to *The Spectator* is in line with the need to overcome explicit political aims and avoid the rigid division of separate topics characterizing the first paper, as Donald Bond points out: 'In place of this medley of topics Steele and Addison designed the new paper as a single unified essay, and in no sense a sheet of news, though successive issues might afford as much variety as had been suggested by the names of the different places of resort in *The Tatler*'.<sup>12</sup>

The exaltation of wit is one of the most pressing purposes of *The Spectator*, to be pursued through the retrieval of classical wisdom. Apparently, as per the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, wit is 'the ability to say or write things that are both clever and humorous'. The convergence of journalism, literature and criticism appears to be one of the most significant factors inspiring the public representation of intelligence, in accordance with the exaltation of skillful and well-rounded characters. From this perspective, the new journalistic model fostered by Addison and Steele with *The Spectator* appears to be the result of a new social consciousness, as Steele underlines in *The Spectator*, no. 1: 'I shall endeavour to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality, that my readers may, if possible, both ways find their account in the speculation of the day'.<sup>13</sup> The diffusion of coffeehouses and clubs speeds up the sharing of political opinions and cultural activities, in conjunction with the ethical and social issues publicly debated: 'As instruments of institutionalized art criticism, the journals devoted to art and cultural criticism were typical creations of the eighteenth century'.<sup>14</sup>

Inevitably, press innovation interlaces with the construction of new forms of the public sphere, in which cleverness and sagacity are necessary features, in a political scenario of juxtaposition between Whigs and Tories. It is no coincidence that morality and ethics are so relevant in such a process of social renovation, in which religion, criticism, education and economics inspire an on-going debate on the future of mankind. Thus, many witty journalists and writers appear as the most reliable witnesses of the new

forms of sociability triggered by the burgeoning industrial revolution, along with improvement of the print industry. *The Tatler*, *The Spectator* and *The Guardian* are the expression of a new representative tenet, inspired by the metaphor of the journal as a mirror, as Habermas argues: 'Addison viewed himself as a censor of manners and morals; his essays concerned charities and schools for the poor, the improvement of education, pleas for civilized forms of conduct, polemics against the vices of gambling, fanaticism, and pedantry and against the tastelessness of the aesthetes and the eccentricities of the learned'.<sup>15</sup>

Satire extensively denounces the hypocrisies and contradictions of society through parody and mockery, for the purpose of debunking the conventional standards of thought and behavior through the corrosive power of Enlightenment wit. Hence follow new forms of sociability which are not only sophisticated and refined, but also innovative and clever, in accordance with the better circulation of ideas and statements.<sup>16</sup> Assuming that 'in the late Stuart period, public opinion emerged as a powerful and unpredictable force',<sup>17</sup> intelligence, cleverness and wit have to be considered as three social keystones, along with the communicative power that well-defined rhetorical ruses can achieve from a psychological point of view.

The acknowledgment of wit requires cleverness, irony and imagination, in the context of shifting communicative patterns of public sociability. While dwelling on the convergence of wit and similitude, Roger Lund underlines that 'notions of wit as a cognitive faculty came inevitably to be conflated with the functions of imagination'.<sup>18</sup> Not only imagination, but also judgement is necessary to wit to be socially effective, as Pope argues in his *Essay on Criticism* (1711) (ll, vv. 80–83): 'There are whom heav'n has blest with store of wit, / Yet want as much again to manage it; / For wit and judgment ever are at strife, / Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife'. The proper use of metaphors and similitudes even retrieved from ancient classical authors, shows the cleverness of the good rhetorician, in line with the proper use of wit in everyday life.

### ***The Spectator*, Latin Heritage and Public Sphere**

Every single issue of two of the most innovative newspapers in media history, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, provided readers with an opening Latin quote retrieved from Latin poets, historians and play-writers, whose maxims were set just below the headline, without translation. What was the reason for such an intellectual choice, both communicative and cultural? First and foremost, the reason can be found in the literary engagement of the founders of the newspapers, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, who were very fond of Latin literature and used to write verse.' in Latin, in line with a very common literary tendency in England starting from the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, other 'periodical essays were commonly headed by untranslated Latin and Greek mottos, which created a sense of belonging to a reading community sharing the same culture. [...] Yet, the lack of translation could also be a strategy to trigger and cement social relationships between the less educated and the more enlightened readers, with the latter explaining the meaning to the former'.<sup>20</sup>

Addison and Steele's journalistic endeavor is interpreted as a revolutionary editorial accomplishment in England, in a time of the development of newspapers and the increasing involvement of writers and poets in the process of shaping the public sphere. Jürgen

Habermas cleverly emphasized the role played by *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* within the process of innovation of the public sphere in the representation of private and daily life: 'In the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and the *Guardian* the public held up a mirror to itself; it did not yet come to a self-understanding through the detour of a reflection on works of philosophy and literature, art and science, but through entering itself into "literature" as an object'.<sup>21</sup>

Hence follows the strategic function of newspapers in the stimulation of public information and the cultural convergence with politics, also in the reading of Latin poets, historians and philosophers, in line with the ethical patterns and strategies of sociability in the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

Alexander Pope's *Imitations of Horace* and the translation of the *Iliad* can effectively highlight the role played by classical writers within the process of cultural renovation also regarding the dispute between classicism and anti-classicism and the recovery of the pastoral inspiring the Arcadian movement. Pope's Latin poem *Messiah*—a sacred eclogue in imitation of Virgil's *Pollio*—was translated into English by Samuel Johnson, thus confirming the literary inclination to exploit Latin in a communicative and creative way. Pope's collaboration with *The Spectator* can be seen as a demonstration of the close relationship between literature and journalism at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in line with the construction of new forms in the public sphere. Jonathan Swift's *Anglo-Latin Games* are a pure demonstration of linguistic, intellectual wit connected to political satire: 'Quibbles in Latin, or more especially in English, and sometimes in both languages, intrude not unsuccessfully into many of Swift's major works in prose and verse. In his hands the pun was eventually developed into a weapon of political and personal satire'.<sup>23</sup>

Pope and Swift were also journalists fully conscious of the role played by public opinion in a political context; they cleverly recognized the intellectual action triggered by newspapers, clubs, salons and coffee-houses. It is no accident that Greek and Roman authors were exploited as cognitive and mimetic spokespeople, especially thanks to their moral and behavioral legacy. Addison was highly regarded throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a Latin poet, as Paul Davis points out in his analysis of Addison's unpublished hexameter poem, *Arcus Triumphalis*: 'its main thematic concerns - secrecy and reticence, urban spectacle, and the aesthetics of looking - are ones that connect it with Addison's definitive writings, above all in *The Spectator*'.<sup>24</sup>

The convergence of literature and journalism confirms the innovative communicative process coping with the informative and cultural patterns of the Enlightenment, as newspapers and journals gain a strategic public dimension thanks to the constant commitment of writers and intellectuals: 'Defoe's *Review*, Tutchin's *Observer*, and Swift's *Examiner*, were discussed in clubs and coffee houses, at home and in the streets. Walpole and Bolingbroke themselves addressed the public. Men like Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, and Swift combined literature and politics in a peculiar fashion comparable to Addison's and Steele's combination of literature and journalism'.<sup>25</sup>

The permanent presence of a Latin epigram under the headline, set in the middle of the front page without translation, is a distinguishing feature of *The Spectator*, which Addison and Steele conceived as a public medium capable of shaping public sociability and exalting refined wit through a well-rounded comparison with the ancients. In this sense, the motto opening *The Spectator*, no. 111 (Saturday, July 7, 1711), retrieved from Horace's *Epistle* no. 2, can be considered as a programmatic declaration inspired by a

harsh criticism of academic snobbery: '... Inter Silvas Academi quaerere Verum'.<sup>26</sup> The motto is an insightful, ironic reflection on the cultural obstacles hampering the human exploration of wit and intelligence, as Addison seems to express from a philosophical and existential point of view: 'The Course of my last Speculation led me insensibly into a Subject upon which I always meditate with great Delight, I mean the immortality of the Soul'.<sup>27</sup>

The stylistic variety of Latin quotations and references disseminated throughout the issues of *The Spectator* are the demonstration of an intellectual sensitivity that is of course connected to the Arcadian flair of the time, but also to Addison's proficiency in Latin, as not only his Latin writings confirm, but also his translations from Virgil's *Georgics* and essays on Latin literature.<sup>28</sup> His wide and profound knowledge of the classical world is frequently set out in a moralistic way, since the public dimension of the debate that *The Spectator* was able to trigger was focused on the exaltation of wit and its social impact, as Addison underlines in the beginning of *The Spectator*, no. 10:

It is with much Satisfaction that I hear this great City inquiring Day by Day after these my Papers, and receiving my Morning Lectures with a becoming Seriousness and Attention. My Publisher tells me, that there are already Three thousand of them distributed every Day: So that if I allow Twenty Readers to every Paper, which I look upon as a modest Computation, I may reckon about Threescore thousand Disciples in London and Westminster, who I hope will take care to distinguish themselves from the thoughtless Herd of their ignorant and unattentive Brethren. Since I have raised to myself so great an Audience, I shall spare no Pains to make their Instruction agreeable, and their Diversion useful. For which Reasons I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both Ways find their Account in the Speculation of the Day.<sup>29</sup>

The quotation from the *Georgics*, book 1, opening the first issue of *The Spectator*, introduces the programmatic assessment just reported. This is one of the several samples of the quotation strategy pursued by Addison and Steele in their newspaper, in which Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Seneca, Terentius, Plautus, Livy, Juvenal, Martial and Persius, with their immortal wisdom, take turns in allegorically introducing themes and contents provided by Addison and Steele in every single issue of the newspaper. This is the quotation from Virgil in Number 10 issued on Monday, March 12, 1711: 'Non aliter quam qui adverso vix (famine lembum / Remigiis subigit, si bracchia forte remisit, / Atque ilium praeceps pronò rapit alveus amni—Virg.)'<sup>30</sup> The Latin lines are an effective introduction to the declaration of journalistic engagement that Addison shares with his readers at the very beginning of the issue, in which the focus on the audience turns into a public declaration of journalistic strategy pivoted on the search for potential readers: 'Under this Class of Men are comprehended all contemplative Tradesmen, titular Physitians, Fellows of the Royal Society. Templers that are not given to be contentious, and Statesmen that are out of Business. In short, every one that considers the World as a Theatre, and desires to form a right Judgement of those who are the actors on it'.<sup>31</sup>

In all likelihood, the lack of translation complies with the communicative aim of the editors, who were conscious of the linguistic proficiency of their readers. The great number of English translations of ancient masterpieces carried out by poets such as Dryden and

Addison himself certified the intense editorial engagement concerning the circulation of classical authors among the readers. It is no coincidence that Addison translated the whole of Virgil's poem: 'The Aeneid's status as one of the core texts of Western literature, culture, and even politics allows translators who feel marginalized in their own cultures to write themselves and their opinions literally into the centre. It is left to their readers to determine to what extent this has occurred and how they wish to interpret the text themselves'.<sup>32</sup>

More specifically, Virgil and Horace belong to the upper echelons of Latin poets whose immortal wisdom is fully functional to Addison and Steele's epigrammatic journalism whose essay style resorts to a rhetorical strategy exploiting metaphors, allegories and symbols often retrieved from the ancients, as in the case of Horace's verses opening *The Spectator*, no. 1, issued on Thursday, March 1, 1711: 'Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem / Cogitat, ut speciosa dehinc miracula promat—Hor'.<sup>33</sup> This motto gains a clear metaphorical meaning in Addison and Steele's perspective, as it is an invitation to shed light on human life and contradictions, in a time of the exaltation of reason and the spread of Enlightenment thought throughout Europe.<sup>34</sup> What Addison explains in *The Spectator*, no. 1, is a sharp declaration of journalistic poetics:

After having been thus particular upon my self, I shall in tomorrow's Paper give an Account of those Gentlemen who are concerned with me in this Work. For, as I have before intimated, a Plan of it is laid and concerted (as all other Matters of Importance are) in a Club. However, as my Friends have engaged me to stand in the Front, those who have a mind to correspond with me, may direct their Letters To the Spectator, at Mr Buckley's in Little Britain. For I must further acquaint the Reader, that tho' our Club meets only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, we have appointed a Committee to sit every Night, for the Inspection of all such Papers as may contribute to the Advancement of the Public Weal.<sup>35</sup>

Journalistic innovation implies the improvement of mixed sociability involving both male and female readers, as confirmed by the format of the journals. The strategic placing of the essays within the page was subject to the choice of untranslated Latin mottos, which strengthened the sense of cultural sharing and introduced different levels of understanding of the essays. They reflected the subtle distinctions of ranks and intellectual authority: 'While male readers had easy access to all levels of meanings and could discuss them, female readers, who were rarely literate in the classical languages, constituted a separate community of readers who could socialise with the main group only up to a certain extent'.<sup>36</sup> Paradoxically, the lack of translation of Latin aphorisms could be functional to a strategy of interaction between the less educated and the more enlightened readers, since the latter often translated them to the former. Latin wisdom supports 'the advancement of the public weal'<sup>37</sup> so that the heritage of the past can be successfully known and interpreted on a large scale.<sup>38</sup>

### 'Nos duo turba sumus'. True and False Wit in *The Spectator*, no. 62

'Scribendi recte sapere est & principium & Fons. - Hor'.<sup>39</sup> The epigram introducing *The Spectator*, number 62 (Friday, May 11, 1711), is a sample of the communicative strategy



pursued by Addison in his journalistic endeavour, in line with a discourse technique that at times resorts to imagination and fancy. In most of his articles, Addison aims at debunking the expressive ambiguities deceiving and confusing social life. In this sense, the knowledge of ancient and modern authors can be functional to true wit and the development of cleverness, also through the study of ancient rhetoric and the way to rebut puns and conundrums, as Addison points out in *The Spectator*, no. 61, soon after the references to Aristotle and Cicero: 'I must add to these great Authorities, which seem to have given a kind of Sanction to this Piece of false Wit, that all the Writers of Rhetorick have treated of Punning with very great Respect, and divided the several kinds of it into hard Names, that are reckoned among the Figures of Speech, and recommended as Ornaments in Discourse'.<sup>40</sup>

As Horace underlines, knowledge is the fundamental requisite of our social acting, since the forms of talk and writing are inextricably embedded in the 'encyclopaedic baggage' that rules and influences individual and collective behavior.<sup>41</sup> In particular, Addison's endeavor resides in the exaltation of wit through the analysis of expressive blemishes and blunders that differentiate well-rounded and approximative men. According to Horace, knowledge is the *principium* and source of good writing and speaking, as Cicero and Quintilian insistently remarked in their rhetorical treatises, as the expert use of figures of speech attests in conversational contexts. This is what Addison argues in *The Spectator*, no. 62, in which he provides a clear sample of an argumentative technique pivoted on the retrieval of ancient learning:

Mr. Lock's Account of Wit, with this short Explanation, comprehends most of the Species of Wit, as Metaphors, Similitudes, Allegories, Enigmas, Mottos, Parables, Fables, Dreams, Visions, dramattick Writings, Burlesque, and all the Methods of Allusion. As there are many other Pieces of Wit (how remote soever they may appear at first Sight from the foregoing Description) which upon Examination will be found to agree with it.<sup>42</sup>

Not only figures of speech, but also mottos and visions belong to the sphere of expressive wit. Consequently, the distance between true ideas and misleading words depends on the cognitive and expressive skills of every single actor. Addison and Steele's choice reveal a neo-humanistic attitude that Norbert Elias investigates in *The Civilizing Process*: 'The humanists were representatives of a movement which sought to release the Latin language from its confinement within the ecclesiastical tradition and sphere, and make it a language of secular society, at least of the secular upper class'.<sup>43</sup> In this view, the convergence of ideas and words can be interpreted as a sign of politeness, intelligence and wit, as Addison emphasizes with recourse to the literary authority of modern authors:

As true Wit generally consists in this Resemblance and Congruity of Ideas, false Wit chiefly consists in the Resemblance and Congruity sometimes of single Letters, as in Anagrams, Chronograms, Lipograms, and Acrosticks; Sometimes of Syllables, as in Echhos and Doggerel Rhymes; Sometimes of Words, as in Puns and Quibbles; and sometimes of whole Sentences or Poems, cast into the Figures of Eggs, Axes or Altars; Nay, some carry the Notion of Wit so far, as to ascribe it even to external Mimickry; and to look upon a Man as an ingenious Person, that can resemble the Tone, Posture, or Face of another.<sup>44</sup>

Addison's rhetorical proficiency is very close to Pope's rhetorical irony inspiring *Peri Bathous, or the Art of Sinking*, in which he imitates Longinus' system for the purpose of ridiculing contemporary poets through the comic use of figures of speech.<sup>45</sup> Ancient rhetoric is not a static heritage, but a source of communicative insights that may find place in a newspaper destined to revolutionize the technique of construction of the public sphere.<sup>46</sup> The modern republic of letters finds its foundations in the ethical and moral learning of the ancient poets, as the renewal of classical culture may become a social attraction for contemporary readers. In those years, newspapers provide an intellectual and informative boost that contributed to the construction of a new cultural model shaped by the new communicative opportunities of the eighteenth century: 'The Republic of Letters provides a model of a transnational and transatlantic community, dispersed across different societies and united only thanks to the modern innovations of increased travel and correspondence which enabled the virtual existence of this abstract early modern community'.<sup>47</sup> It is no coincidence that the exaltation of reason conforms to the celebration of wit as it is described not only by Swift (*The Battle of the Books*) and Pope (*The Dunciad*), but also by other French and Italian poets engaged in the retrieval of classical linguistic and moral wisdom:

As true Wit consists in the Resemblance of Ideas, and false Wit in the Resemblance of Words, according to the foregoing Instances; there is another kind of Wit which consists partly in the Resemblance of Ideas, and partly in the Resemblance of Words; which for Distinction Sake I shall call mixt Wit. This Kind of Wit is that which abounds in Cowley, more than in any Author that ever wrote. Mr. Waller has likewise a great deal of it. Mr. Dryden is very sparing in it. Milton had a Genius much above it. Spencer is in the same class with Milton. The Italians, even in their Epic Poetry, are full of it. Monsieur Boileau, who formed himself upon the Ancient Poets, has every where rejected it with Scorn.<sup>48</sup>

The distinction of true and false wit supports the journalistic investigation of the social act as it ought to get rid of all the ambiguities and perversions lurking in the incessant search for success, power and self-gratification. Ancient and present times share the same urgency to express the human need for eternity that the works of intellect can feed and sometimes assure, as William Blake states in *The Marriage of Hell and Heaven*: 'Eternity is in love with the productions of time'. This is why Joseph Addison dwells on the communicative models shaped by Virgil and Ovid, whose literary engagement is strongly inspired by the social and moral principles of the Augustan age:

Dryden makes a very handsome Observation on Ovid's Writing a Letter from Dido to Aeneas, in the following Words: 'Ovid (says he, speaking of Virgil's Fiction of Dido and Aeneas) takes it up after him, even in the same Age, and makes an Ancient Heroine of Virgil's new-created Dido; dictates a Letter for her just before her Death to the ungrateful Fugitive; and, very unluckily for himself, is for measuring a Sword with a Man so much superior in Force to him, on the same Subject. I think I may be Judge of this, because I have translated both. The famous Author of the Art of Love has nothing of his own; he borrows all from a greater Master in his own Profession, and, which is worse, improves

nothing which he finds Nature fails him, and being forced to his old Shift, he has Recourse to Witticism. This passes indeed with his soft Admirers, and gives him the Preference to Virgil in their Esteem'.<sup>49</sup>

The distinction between wit and witticism legitimates the difference between culture and erudition, in a time featuring the increasing impact of newspapers, novels and correspondence on the infrastructure of the public sphere: 'The Press became a fundamental social medium. Thus, authoritative opinions might forge individual and collective orientations. The importance of journalists and writers was destined to grow, since print communication was about to become a profitable business which papermakers, printers and booksellers wanted to safeguard from piracy and smuggling'.<sup>50</sup> Both proverbs and aphorisms became a successful form of literary communication, especially when retrieved from ancient Roman poets and published without translation in newspapers, so as to stimulate a form of collective reflection on the celebration of wit as a moral and cultural heritage to be shared and understood by the patrons of coffeehouses and clubs. In this view, Ovid is the prophet of a communicative modernity inspired by epistolary paradigms and social innovation destined to be censored by the emperor. Wit and witticism are two different faces of the same coin, since the author and the reader belong to the same public dimension, as declared in the aphorism opening *The Spectator*, no. 68: 'Nos duo turba sumus -, Ovid'.

## Conclusion

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan celebrates Addison and Steele's communicative revolution pivoted on the technique of 'equitone': 'By this discovery, Addison and Steele brought written discourse into line with the printed word and away from the variety of pitch and tone of the spoken, and of even the hand-written, word'.<sup>51</sup> The Latin language is no exception, since it gains a new cultural impact thanks to the diffusion of the printed word. Through his Latin poetry Joseph Addison seems to trigger a 'Romanitas recreated', as is shown in his puppet theater depicted in *Machinae gesticulantes*: 'An essential part of the poem's realism lies in its faithful description of those technical aspects of puppeteering that would later be attested by several contributors to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* papers'.<sup>52</sup> Despite their intense poetical and literary production, Addison and Steele owed their fame to the creation of *The Spectator*, whose innovative framework found a sensible balance between political and social criticism also through the choice and publication of Latin mottos expressing cultural and moral meanings.<sup>53</sup> The *Spectator* project contributed to the shaping of a new model of sociability and journalism. Addison converted the essay into a leading article and developed Defoe's insight in merging novels and essays, thus contributing to the emancipation of both genres. As a journalist, Defoe knew that popularity increased by caring little or nothing about politics. 'He combined pungent, persuasive political criticism with domestic news and bright social excursions. He made the newspapers an organ of initiative and reform and attempted complete independence'.<sup>54</sup>

At that moment, privacy, subjectivity and the family dimension became 'appealing to a wide public of readers'.<sup>55</sup> Lounges and salons contributed to promote public information and the companionable enjoyment of private life. The availability of newspapers

turned coffeehouses and clubs into ‘sealed spaces’<sup>56</sup> where people debated political, social and cultural issues. This is what Sennett expressed in *Flesh and Stone*: ‘The advent of modern newspapers in the later eighteenth century sharpened, if anything, the impulse to talk; displayed on racks in the room, the newspapers offered topics for discussion – the written word seeming no more certain than speech’.<sup>57</sup> The retrieval of Latin maxims and epigrams complies with the cultural endeavor boosted by Joseph Addison, as confirmed by his dramas and poetry written in Latin. The epithet of ‘Vergilius redivivus’ happily expresses the intensity of his literary engagement supported by a cognitive and communicative task concerning the construction of an original and personal linguistic style: ‘Such, it will be argued, reveals much more than the germ of that mannered erudition of the *Spectator* and *Tatler* papers’.<sup>58</sup>

The recent discovery of Addison’s unpublished hexameter poem, *Arcus Triumphalis*, is further evidence of the linguistic interest transferred to the journalistic context within *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, where untranslated Latin language quotations turn literary witticism into cultural wit, thus strengthening a journalistic model also found in Venice in Gasparo Gozzi’s *L’Osservatore Veneto*, in which Latin mottos are duly translated, in line with the cognitive needs of eighteenth-century Venetian society and confirming the European impact of Addison and Steele’s journalistic challenge: ‘The Bible, Locke, and Mr. Spectator – there must have been many young men of the time who found this triad a source of strength in becoming more virtuous and more agreeable members of society’.<sup>59</sup> To the fore is the role played by wit both in social life and journalistic strategies starting from the knowledge of the great Latin and Greek writers, that may still talk to contemporary readers through the art of epigrams, as Addison writes in the conclusion of *The Spectator*, no. 62: ‘For not only the Resemblance but the Opposition of Ideas does very often produce Wit; as I cou’d shew in several little Points, Turns, and Antitheses, that I may possibly enlarge upon in some future Speculation’.<sup>60</sup>

## Notes

1. For further information see Bowers, “Universalizing Sociability,” 150–174.
2. On Joseph Addison’s unpublished hexameter poem, *Arcus Triumphalis*, see Davis, “A New Latin Poem by Joseph Addison,” 502–517.
3. On the social and cultural impact of coffeehouses and newspapers see Cowan, “Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere,” 345–366.
4. On this topic it may be useful to read the essay by Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour*, 94–163.
5. For a biographic and intellectual profile of Addison see Cowan, “Joseph Addison”.
6. See Fumaroli, *The Republic of Letters*.
7. Edelstein et al., “Historical Research in a Digital Age,” 413.
8. Motto, Persius, *Satires*, 5, 19–20: ‘Indeed, it is no aim of mine that my page should swell with pretentious trifles, fit only to give solidity to smoke’. The translation retrieved from Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, 259. All Latin mottos and their translations are retrieved from the edition of *The Spectator* edited by Donald Bond.
9. Page 259.
10. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 277. This is an aspect effectively investigated by Archer-Parré and Dick, *Pen, Print and Communication in the Eighteenth Century*.

11. Black, *The English Press: A History*, 26.
12. Bond, "Introduction," xix.
13. *The Spectator* 1 March 1711.
14. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 41.
15. *Ibid.*, 43.
16. Capdeville and Kerhervé, *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 4: 'Clearly, the spreading of a new kind of sociability does not require everyone to follow suit, it just needs a critical mass, or general awareness, to reach a state of widespread acceptance and emulation to establish itself as the dominant mode of procedure in social situations'.
17. Baker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society, 1695–1855*, 128.
18. Lund, "Wit, Judgment, and the Misprisions of Similitude," 53.
19. See Binns, *The Latin Poetry of English Poets*.
20. Boulard-Jouslin, "Essay Periodical".
21. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 43.
22. On the social function of newspapers and periodicals see Ellis, "Sociability and polite Improvement in Addison's Periodicals," 142–163.
23. Mayhew, "Swift's Anglo-Latin Games and a Fragment of 'Polite Conversation' in Manuscript," 133–159.
24. Davis, "A New Latin Poem by Joseph Addison," 503.
25. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 59.
26. Motto, Horace, *Epistles*, 2. 2. 45: 'To search for truth in groves of Academe'.
27. *Ibid.*
28. On the proliferation of Virgilian English translations see Adkins, "The Mirror's Reflection: Virgil's *Aeneid* in English Translation," 55–64.
29. *The Spectator*, no. 10, March 1711.
30. Motto, Virgil, *Georgics*, I, 201–3: 'As if one, whose oars can scarce force his skiff against the stream, should by chance slacken his arms, and lo! headlong down the current the channel sweeps it away'.
31. *The Spectator*, no. 12, March 1711.
32. Adkins, "The Mirror's Reflection: Virgil's *Aeneid* in English Translation," 14.
33. Motto, Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 143–4: 'Not smoke after flame does he plan to give, but after smoke the light, that then he may set forth striking and wondrous tales'.
34. On the journalistic and rhetorical paradigms of that time see Randall, *The Conversational Enlightenment*, 168–225.
35. *The Spectator*, no. 1, March 1711.
36. Boulard-Jouslin, "Essay Periodical".
37. *Ibid.*
38. Bond, "Introduction," lxxxiii: 'There is abundant testimony to the astonishing success which *The Spectator* achieved in contemporary London, and elsewhere. Whatever the circulation of the daily issues was, 4,000 perhaps, many of the essays were certainly read aloud to frequenters of the numerous coffee-houses which were then a prominent feature of London, so that there was an even wider reading public for the paper'.
39. Motto, Horace, *Ars poetica*, 309: 'Of writing well the source and fount is wisdom'.
40. *The Spectator*, no. 61, 10 March 1711.

41. On the interpretative fluctuation of daily and literary texts see Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, 23–43.
42. *The Spectator*, no. 62, 11 March 1711.
43. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 171.
44. *The Spectator*, no. 62, 11 March 1711.
45. On Pope’s communicative and literary innovation see McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 155–263.
46. On the public relevance of *The Spectator* see Mackie, “Being Too Positive About the Public Sphere,” 81–104.
47. Edmondson, “Republic of Letters”.
48. *The Spectator*, no. 62, 11 March 1711.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Lombardinilo, “Public Opinion (Journalism and Communication)”.
51. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 277–78.
52. Haan, *Vergilius Redivivus*, 72.
53. For further investigation see McCrea, *Addison and Steele Are Dead*, 23–35.
54. Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 144.
55. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 51.
56. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, 347.
57. *Ibid.*, 345.
58. Haan, *Vergilius Redivivus*, 13.
59. Bond, “Introduction,” lxxxvii. This aspect is attentively explained by Boulard and Klaus-Dieter, *Addison and Europe / Addison et l’Europe*.
60. *The Spectator*, no. 62, 11 March 1711.

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### ORCID

Andrea Lombardinilo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0321-1295>

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**Andrea Lombardinilo**, Department of Legal and Social Sciences, Gabriele d'Annunzio University, Chieti-Pescara, via dei Vestini 31, Chieti, 66100, Italy. E-mail: andrea.lombardinilo@unich.it