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OP-ED COLUMNIST

Are We Rome? Tu Betchus!

By MAUREEN DOWD

With modernity crumbling, our thoughts turn to antiquity.

The decline and fall of the American Empire echoes the experience of the Romans, who also tumbled into the trap of becoming overleveraged empire hussies.

As our sand-castle economy washes away under the tide of bad gambles and debts, this most self-indulgent society lurches toward stoicism (even bankrupt Iceland gives us the cold shoulder and turns to a solvent superpower). It's going to require more than giving up constant infusions of stocks, Starbucks and Botox.

As Seneca, the Roman Stoic who advised treating the body “somewhat strictly,” wrote in a letter: “Avoid whatever is approved of by the mob, and things that are the gift of chance. Whenever circumstance brings some welcome thing your way, stop in suspicion and alarm ... They are snares. ... we think these things are ours when in fact it is we who are caught. That track leads to precipices; life on that giddy level ends in a fall.”

The study of Latin and Greek, with illuminations on morality, philosophy, mob rule and chariot races, reached a nadir in the greedy '80s and '90s, when it seemed irrelevant for kids who yearned to be investment bankers and high-tech millionaires. But now we've learned the hard way that greed is bad — *avaritia mala est* — and the classics have staged a comeback. *Amo Latinam*, so I was happy to see last week's Times story about the soaring enrollment for Latin classes in New York.

In high school, I translated swatches of Julius Caesar's “The Battle for Gaul” from Latin to English while nibbling cheese crackers. To boost the felicitous new trend toward Latin, I enlisted Gary D. Farney, an associate professor of history at Rutgers University, to translate (loosely and creatively) from English to Latin “The Battle of Gall,” my take below on why the hyperventilating Republicans are not *veni, vidi, vici*-ing.

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Bellum Gallium

Manes Julii Caesaris paucis diebus aderant — “O, most bloody sight!” — cum Ioannes McCainus, mavericus et veteranus captivusque Belli Francoindosinini, et Sara Palina, barracuda borealis, qui sneerare amant Baracum Obamam causa oratorii, pillorant ut demagogi veri, Africanum-Americanum senatorem Terrae Lincolnii, ad Republicanas rallias.

Rabidi subcanes candidati, pretendant “no orator as Brutis is,” ut “stir men's blood” et disturbant mentes populi ad “a sudden flood of mutiny,” ut Wilhelmus Shakespeareus scripsit.

Cum Quirites Americani ad rallias Republicanas audiunt nomen Baraci Hussein Obamae, clamant “Mortem!” “Amator terroris!” “Socialiste!” “Bomba Obamam!” “Obama est Arabus!” “Caput excidi!” tempus sit rabble-rouseribus desistere “Smear Talk Express,” ut Stephanus Colbertus dixit. Obama demonatus est tamquam Musulmanus-Manchurianus candidatus — civis “collo-cerviliaris” ad ralliam Floridianam Palinae exhabet mascum Obamae ut Luciferis.

Obama non queretur high-tech lynching. Sed secreto-serventes agentes nervosissimi sunt.

Vix quisque audivit nomen “Palinae” ante lunibus paucis. Surgivit ex suo tanning bed ad silvas in Terram Eskimorum, rogans quis sit traitorosus, ominosus, scurrilosus, periculosus amator LXs terroris criminalisque Chicagoani? Tu betchus!

“Caeca ambitio Obamana,” novum rumore Palina McCainusque dixit. “Cum utilis, Obama laborat cum amatore terroris Wilhelmo Ayro. Cum putatus, perjuravit.” McCainianus bossus maximus Francus Keatinx vocat Obamam, “plebeium,” et ut iuvenum snifferendum cocaini minimi (“a little blow.”)

Cum Primus Dudus, spousus Palinanus, culpari attemptaret “Centurionem-Gate,” iudices Terrae Sanctae Elvorumque castigat gubernatricem Palinam de abusu auctoritatis per familiam revengendum.

Tamen Sara et Ioannes bury Obama, not praise him. Maverici, ut capiunt auxilium de friga-domina, hench-femina, Cynthia McCaina Birrabaronessa, (quae culpat Obamam periculandi suum filum in Babylonia), brazen-iter distractant mentes populares de minimissimis IV o I K.ibus, deminutione “Motorum Omnium,” et Depressione Magna II.o. Omnes de Georgio Busio Secundo colossale goofballo. “V” (because there’s no W. in Latin) etiam duxit per disastrum ad gymnasium.

Gubernatrix (prope Russia) Palina, spectans candidaciam MMXII, post multam educationem cum Kissingro et post multam parodiam de Sabbatis Nocte Vivo atque de Tina Feia, ferociter vituperat Obamam, ut supralupocidit (aerial shooting of wolves) in Hyperborea.

Vilmingtoni, in Ohionem, McCain’s Mean Girl (Ferox Puella) defendit se gladiatricem politicam esse: “Pauci dicant, O Jupiter, te negativam esse. Non, negativa non sum, sed verissima.” Talk about lipsticka in porcam! Quasi Leeus Atwater de oppugnatione Busii Primi ad Dukakem: “non negativus, sed comparativus.”

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