

Pliny the Younger

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus Minor

EPISTLE

(VII. ix. 1-6)

[1st Century]

You ask my opinion on how you should study during your retirement which you have enjoyed for some time now. As many advise, it is of primary importance to translate from Greek into Latin or from Latin into Greek. By this type of exercise one becomes sensitive to the properties and richness of vocabulary, to the wealth of figures of speech, to effective exposition; and moreover, by the imitation of the best models is learnt the power of writing on the same subject matter. And at the same time, a translator can not ignore the responsibilities of a reader. For from this comes understanding and critical sense.

When you have read closely enough to retain matter and argument, there is nothing to prevent you from writing like your author's rival and then comparing your work with what you have read. Then you should seek out what is better in your version and better in his. You will have great satisfaction if some of your work is better, and considerable embarrassment if all of his shows more skill. At times one can choose extremely familiar passages, and then seek to excel those you have chosen. Being private, this struggle is bold but not out of place: although we do see many who have taken on these contests with much credit to themselves, and who have shown enough self-confidence to surpass those they intended merely to follow.

You can revise what you have written after letting it lie, keep much of it, skim through much of it, add new material, rewrite a lot of it. This is laborious and tedious; but, because of its very difficulty, it bears fruit in bringing you new fire, and giving you new drive when your enthusiasm has flagged. For you will be weaving new members into the complete body without disturbing the balance of the original.
