

# JOLCEL

JOURNAL OF LATIN COSMOPOLITANISM AND  
EUROPEAN LITERATURES.

## CURRENT CONTRIBUTION

Alejandro Coroleu, “Beyond Europe, beyond the Renaissance, beyond the Vernacular,” *JOLCEL* 2 (2019): 73–77. DOI: 10.21825/jolcel.v2i0.11556.

## NOTE

This contribution is the response piece to a larger dialogue of three articles that form the current issue of *JOLCEL*. The other contributions are “From the *Epistolae et Evangelia* (c. 1540) to the *Espejo divino* (1607): Indian Latinists and Nahuatl religious literature at the College of Tlatelolco” by Andrew Laird (pp. 2-28), “Latinidad, tradición clásica y *nova ratio* en el Imperial Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Santiago Tlatelolco” by Heréndira Téllez Nieto (pp. 30-55) and “Nordic Gods in Classical Dress: *De diis arctois* by C. G. Brunius” by Arsenii Vetushko-Kalevich (pp. 57-71).

# Beyond Europe, beyond the Renaissance, beyond the Vernacular

ALEJANDRO COROLEU

*ICREA—UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA*

The three articles clustered in this second issue of *JOLCEL* take us on a very long journey from sixteenth-century Mexico to nineteenth-century Scandinavia. Though restricted to two distinctive geographical areas and chronological periods, the panorama that is evoked by the three pieces gathered around the topic of Latin in the margins is extremely wide-ranging. The texts by Andrew Laird, Heréndira Téllez Nieto and Arsenii Vetushko-Kalevich illustrate the significance of Latinity for understanding the (early) modern world from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Moreover, they testify to the ubiquity of the Latin language, omnipresent across (early) modern society for educational purposes and written communication. They also constitute a clear proof of the increasing scholarly interest in the vast world of Neo-Latin in its global dimension and research potential.

The focus of Laird and Téllez Nieto's contributions is the world of learning in the Imperial College of Santa Cruz at Santiago Tlatelolco, where Latin was integral, alongside Nahuatl, to the culture of the institution. As explicitly acknowledged by their authors, both pieces complement each other in their examination of the central role played by Latin in sixteenth-century Mexico. Moreover, the two essays by Laird and Téllez Nieto successfully present the writings of indigenous scholars as fascinating examples of the cross-fertilization of Latin and Nahuatl rhetorical patterns. In her article Téllez Nieto challenges traditional paradigms and long-established ideas of the scholarship concerned with the College of Santa Cruz, which has tended to overemphasise the substratum provided by pre-hispanic education. By contrast, Téllez Nieto draws the reader's attention to the dialogue between Mesoamerican forms of knowledge and Renaissance European humanism, upon which the curriculum adopted at Tlatelolco was based. She shows how the plan of studies prescribed for the Nahua collegians at Tlatelolco was modelled on the pedagogical methods in use at the Colegio de la Santa Cruz in Valladolid, where several distinguished members of the ruling classes of post-conquest New Spain had been trained. The guidelines for Latin instruction at Tlatelolco virtually echoed those of Valladolid; teaching would include the precepts of Antonio de Nebrija's *nova ratio*, the reading of Cicero and Quintilian's rhetorical works, and regular translations exercises from Latin into the vernacular. As argued by Laird in his own investigation of the pedagogical routines prescribed for the indigenous scholars educated at Santa Cruz, the bulk of Latin texts rendered into Nahuatl stemmed from the body of Biblical literature and of Christian

humanism. This is not surprising, given that the Franciscan friars who founded the College in 1536 required “precise translations from Latin of the religious texts that were needed for the conversion and ministry of indigenous populations”.<sup>1</sup> The profile of the institution examined by Laird is that of an academic setting in which Latin culture was vitally important to the evolution of Nahuatl literature, in a manner reminiscent of the development in the early modern period of whole new forms and genres in the various European vernaculars through translation and the Renaissance techniques of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*.

Imitation and translation continued to provide a key to the progress of Neo-Latin literature, chiefly poetry, in the centuries to come. Vetushko-Kalevich’s article takes us to Sweden, the nation under the noble Arctos, i.e. the Great and Lesser Bear, signs that revolve around the Pole star (see Virg., *Georg.* I, 245-46). Although Latin held its strong position in Sweden up to the end of the Great Nordic War in 1721, indeed with a special tenacity, by the mid eighteenth century it had lost its status as Swedish politics’ and education’s main language, overtaken by the vernacular. Despite the general decline, verse production in Latin was still encouraged at academic institutions such as the University of Lund. As late as 1822, the Lund-educated architect and antiquarian Carl Georg Brunius (1792-1869) published an epic on northern gods entitled the *De diis arctois*, which was modelled both on collections of Old Norse anonymous poems and on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Indeed, as shown by Vetushko-Kalevich’s thorough examination of the dense base of hypotexts underlying Brunius’ six books on Nordic mythology, imitation of the classics (above all, Virgil, Ovid and Lucretius) was at the heart of Brunius’ highly refined verse technique. As with so many Neo-Latin authors he expected his allusions to and borrowings from earlier Latin writers to be recognised and valued.

\*\*\*

In nineteenth-century Sweden, appreciation of Brunius’ compositional technique was, however, rather meagre. In the last paragraphs of his paper Vetushko-Kalevich reviews (mostly negative) contemporary responses to the *De diis arctois*. In spite of the occasional praise received from fellow Neo-Latin writers, Brunius’ poetic endeavours came under virulent attack from the quarters of Romantic literary criticism, which dismissed his skill merely as the result of painstaking application, rather than the product of innate genius. Brunius’ choice of language, therefore, placed him firmly in the margins of the literary canon of his age. His fate is, in this respect, not different from the one befallen to so many practitioners of Neo-Latin verse and prose, whose craft was very often deemed artificial and fruitless or went simply unnoticed to critics.

Needless to say, Neo-Latin has its roots in the first humanists’ opposition to the Latin of late medieval intellectuals. Inevitably, scholars have tended to pay almost exclusive attention only to the major intellectual figures of the time. But if we wish to understand fully what Latin really meant during the (early) modern period, our inquiry should also include minor individuals equally engaging with the tenets and literary genres of Latin humanism. These are most commonly schoolmasters confronted with the harsh reality of teaching the rudiments of the Latin language, who are rarely afforded the part they deserve in accounts on the “dynamic role of Latin as a cosmopolitan language within European literary history”, to quote the premise of this journal. On this point this respondent concurs with Juliette Groenland, who has argued persuasively for the need to bring the contributions of more lowly-ranked Latin humanists to the fore in order to assess how humanist ideals were put into practice

<sup>1</sup> See Laird, 3

in the Renaissance classroom.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the academic recognition of Latin humanism knew no institutional or social hierarchy. It took place at university and school level, and it was fostered by high-ranking individuals and by less celebrated printers, humble grammar masters and even humbler elementary teachers alike.

\*\*\*

Despite noble calls to cross academic boundaries and to avoid linguistic divisions, approaches to the literary culture of Renaissance, Baroque and modern Europe have tended to concentrate exclusively on vernacular literatures, to the detriment of the vast corpus of Latin literature produced between ca. 1450 and 1800. In many European countries the rich output of Latin literature during these centuries did not emerge in a setting in which Latin was the only written language. Rather, the development of Neo-Latin poetry, prose, and drama was inextricably linked to (and usually in competition with) the inevitable spread of the vernacular in all spheres of life. Throughout the period the relationship between the two literary traditions was, however, never one way. Though several authors shunned the vernacular tongue altogether or decided to use it reluctantly and rarely, even their literary output was heavily influenced by the tastes and styles of the dominant vernacular culture. Conversely, those authors writing almost exclusively in the vernacular inevitably looked to their Latin counterparts for models and inspiration. Together the three articles published here reveal how, well into the eighteenth century, the school and university curriculum guaranteed that even prose writers and poets who could not write as confidently in Latin as they did in the vernacular could at least trot out the odd Latin elegiac for their friends or compose the occasional letter in Latin; alongside rudimentary exercises in Latin verse and prose composition, they were also schooled in the reading, interpretation, translation and imitation of the classical and humanist authors considered suitable literary models for their own writings. Loath to make any distinctions between ancient and modern—or Latin and vernacular—texts, they regarded literary imitation as a process that transcends the boundaries of time and language.

If the language selected by Brunius may have resulted in his exclusion from the canon of Swedish literary culture, the temporal and spatial coordinates he occupied have undoubtedly reinforced his marginal status within the historiography of Neo-Latin literature. Although scholarly interest in Neo-Latin literature has increased exponentially in recent years, there is still a tendency to restrict the study of Neo-Latin letters to works written in the fifteenth- and sixteenth centuries, certainly for those countries that generated a conspicuous amount of Latin writing at that time, such as Italy, France, and the German-speaking territories. Yet, while the Renaissance as a cultural movement produced by far the greatest number of Neo-Latin texts, Neo-Latin literature ran well beyond the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> Stretching the chronological scope of Neo-Latin studies must go hand in hand with geographical expansion. As the three essays gathered in this second issue of *JOLCEL* aptly demonstrate, Latin was a prestige language even in those countries that produced far fewer Latin works in terms of quantity (as in the Americas and Asia), thus confirming Paul Gwynne and Bernhard Schirg's *dictum* that "we no longer talk of the 'lost Renaissance of Latin literature', but instead of

<sup>2</sup> Juliette A. Groenland, "Humanism in the classroom, a Reassessment," in *The Making of the Humanities. Volume 1: Early modern Europe*, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 199–229.

<sup>3</sup> Ingrid De Smet, "Not for Classicists? The State of Neo-Latin Studies," *The Journal of Roman Studies* LXXXIX (1999): 208.

the ‘Empire of Latin’”.<sup>4</sup> The conclusion drawn from the three pieces under review is that in these areas Latin itself came to assume very similar functions to these it possessed in (early) modern Europe.

As with exploration of the ‘otherness’ of women’s Latinity or the construction of the non-European in Latin humanism, research into the Latin writings produced in the New World or in other regions beyond Europe should not be only a methodological *desideratum*. Rather, examination of this corpus has an intrinsic value and may prove extremely rewarding. The essay contributed by Andrew Laird, who in the past has written extensively on the symbolic value of acquiring Latin for indigenous Mexicans of the sixteenth century, has in this respect important implications.<sup>5</sup> Among other things, it shows how attention to the periphery, where new ideas were very often adopted in the educational curricula in a less resistant or conservative manner than sometimes acknowledged, may challenge our ideas on the intellectual and social context in which a given Latin work was created.

Let me illustrate this with an example. Among the texts discussed by Laird in his essay are Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Colloquios y doctrina christiana* (1564) and two incomplete but distinct Nahuatl translations of Thomas à Kempis’ *Contemptus mundi* or *Imitation of Christ* dating from the 1560s. Whereas the title of the former clearly evokes Erasmus’s *Colloquia familiaria*, the two versions of Thomas à Kempis are related to the dissemination in New Spain of the *devotio moderna*, a quasi-monastic movement based on a personal relationship with God and an active demonstration of love towards Him, which is known to have exerted considerable influence upon Erasmus. The high degree of exposure enjoyed by Erasmus’s views on the Bible and by the principles of the *devotio moderna* in Mexico during the second half of the sixteenth century contrasts with the careful path contemporary Spanish Biblical scholars were forced to tread between their orthodox views (or the demands imposed on them by the ecclesiastical authorities) and the high praise which Erasmus’s philological and historical approach to the study of the Holy Writ after all merited. The Valencian historian Pere Antoni Beuter (1490/1495–1554), professor of Scripture at the local university, constitutes a good case in point. In 1547 Beuter published a tract entitled *Annotationes decem ad Sacram Scripturam*, aimed at his own students. When discussing the authenticity of a sample of biblical passages Beuter shows his acquaintance with Erasmus’ edition of the New Testament. He recognises the value of Erasmus’s Biblical scholarship but does not—cannot—fully endorse it. Beuter’s ambivalent attitude towards Erasmus is at its most obvious when—after advocating the collation of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts in those cases where the Latin text appears to be corrupt—he takes precautions and adds carefully, “as long as pure manuscripts may be found which are not suspect of having been forged by heretics or perfidious Jews” (fol. 167r). Contrary to the more permissive and dynamic state of affairs prevailing on the other side of the Atlantic, in a Spain which was gradually leaning towards the Counter-Reformation praise of Erasmus’s scholarly endeavours proved far too dangerous since it may have been misinterpreted as an endorsement of his religious views.

\*\*\*

<sup>4</sup> Paul Gwynne and Bernhard Schirg, eds., *The Economics of Poetry: the efficient Production of Neo-Latin Verse, 1400–1720* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018), 7.

<sup>5</sup> See Andrew Laird, “Latin in Cuauhtémoc’s Shadow: Humanism and the Politics of Language in Mexico after the Conquest,” in *Latinity and Alterity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Yasmin Haskell and Juanita Feros Ruys (Tempe/Turnhout: Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages / the Renaissance / Brepols, 2010), a volume which explores some of the themes discussed throughout this response.

The contributions submitted to the second issue of JOLCEL offer a truly cosmopolitan map of (early) modern Latinity and shed light on a range of questions closely intertwined with the topics covered by this journal. First and foremost, they explore the symbiotic relation between Latin and the vernacular. In his piece Vetushko-Kalevich illustrates the dynamism demonstrated by Latin in nineteenth-century Sweden even at a time when a vibrant modern language was already prevailing. The two essays on the Imperial College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco show that translation from Latin at Santa Cruz—an academic institution imbued with the principles of Christian humanism—was the main outcome of the indigenous' acquisition of the language. Translation led in turn to creation of literature in Nahuatl, and there is no question that Laird and Téllez-Nieto's articles will hold the greatest interest for scholars in the field of colonial studies and the study of the native tongues of New Spain. Moreover, together the three pieces help rehabilitate textual traditions which, until very recently, have been displaced from the canon of Neo-Latin studies. They also constitute a potent reminder of the perils of distorting European literary identity by ignoring the rich Latin tradition which ran in tandem with the achievements of the vernacular. It might be expected, then, that a great many scholars will discover much of value in the studies presented here.

## References

- De Smet, Ingrid. "Not for Classicists? The State of Neo-Latin Studies." *The Journal of Roman Studies* LXXXIX (1999): 205–9.
- Groenland, Juliette A. "Humanism in the classroom, a Reassessment." In *The Making of the Humanities. Volume 1: Early modern Europe*, edited by Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn, 199–229. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010.
- Gwynne, Paul, and Bernhard Schirg, eds. *The Economics of Poetry: the efficient Production of Neo-Latin Verse, 1400–1720*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018.
- Laird, Andrew. "Latin in Cuauhtémoc's Shadow: Humanism and the Politics of Language in Mexico after the Conquest." In *Latinity and Alterity in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Yasmin Haskell and Juanita Feros Ruys, 169–99. Tempe/Turnhout: Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages / the Renaissance / Brepols, 2010.