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## 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 “Avatars of Latin Schooling. Recycling Memories of Latin Classes in Western Poetry: Five Paradigmatic Cases” by Anders Cullhed (pp. 17-33), “Competition, Narrative and Literary *Copia* in the Works of Boncompagno da Signa and Guido Faba” by Jonathan M. Newman (pp. 35-54) and “The Morosophistic Discourse of Ancient Prose Fiction” by Erik Gunderson (pp. 56-80).

# Letters, Poems, and Prose Fictions in Cosmopolitan Latinity

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Paris of Troy, the son of Priam and Hecuba, importunes Helen of Sparta to leave her husband Menelaus for him. She replies coyly at first but comes to declare that she is prepared to elope. However, both Paris and Helen reveal a consciousness of later history that exceeds what is possible for them to know within the period of the Trojan War. As they make their plans, they also comment on the world of their later readers.

Dining together, a company of philosophers debates the Platonic questions of virtue and vice, knowledge and illusion, but their conversation is counterposed with mundane matters of bodily and social concern, such as who sits where and who is sleeping with whom. The climax of the banquet is not a philosophical illumination but a drunken brawl.

A university student in Bologna writes to his parents for money, having spent his allowance more quickly than he had expected. The parents reply first indulgently, then with alarm at the fresh news that he has been neglecting his studies for companions of low character. The young man responds with shock and grief at the clouding of his reputation, and affirms that he lives honorably.

The three episodes related here figure prominently in the articles by Anders Cullhed, Erik Gunderson, and Jonathan Newman gathered in this inaugural number of *JOLCEL*. Addressed broadly to the topic of schools as sites for the making of Latin cosmopolitanism, the three articles are concerned with highly distinct materials. Newman gives an account of letter-writing culture in late medieval Bologna, while Gunderson explores how late antique prose fiction stages its distance from the genres and ideals of the earlier ancients, and Cullhed reports on the durability of Latin pedagogy for later Western poets who seek in some measure both classical authority and vernacular autonomy. The three essays complement each other both in their congruent but discrete bases of knowledge and their common interests in proposing terms for understanding the afterlife of classical Latin in European culture. As every reader will see, they break new ground. As I will show, they converse and collaborate. And most salient, they reveal the power of story as a mode of

scholarly argument and literary criticism.

I begin my response with the three anecdotes in order to cast attention on the place of fiction in the three articles. As Gunderson shows, the banquet of the philosophers in Lucian's *Symposium* (after 160 CE) is an exercise in genre fiction, adopting the convention of Platonic debate over dinner to parody the schools of classical philosophy in a nearly post-classical world. Cullhed observes that the French poet Baudri de Bourgueil (ca. 1050-1130) wrote poems that might be counted as genre fiction of another kind, *contrafacta* in response to Ovid's *Heroides* 16 and 17, which concern Helen and Paris. Even Boncompagno da Signa, the thirteenth-century Bolognese authority on formal letter-writing or *ars dictaminis*, whom Newman discusses in his illuminating article, turns what might otherwise be a rote collection of models (a student to his parents and the parents' reply, among many other templates) into narratives. The three anecdotes might be replaced by a number of others from their respective articles, while the terms for fiction favored by Cullhed, Gunderson, and Newman show considerable variance, from 'story' and 'narrative' to 'prose fiction,' even within a single corpus as anatomized within one article (Gunderson: "Lucian's works are full of what one might think of as medial forms between philosophical engagement, erudite table-talk, and prose fiction").<sup>1</sup> Still, the range of anecdotes and more or less common vocabulary reveal a set of shared assumptions among the three articles.

One of these assumptions, of course, is given in the premise of the journal, that a classicism in vernacular European literatures might serve as a vehicle for cosmopolitan rather than antiquarian, nostalgic, or elitist desires, fostering a *lingua franca* rooted in a productive relation to the past. Much recent writing shares this assumption or something like it. Our three authors, however, would go further. Across the distinctive eras represented in their articles, from Imperial Rome to twentieth-century Malmö and the Cambridge of New England, the classical tradition becomes accessible through complementary conditions, what might be called scenes and modes. The principal scene is a school or another site of learning: as the three articles demonstrate, formal instruction according to models figured as somehow 'classical' was essential to the transmission of a cosmopolitan Latinity. We see these scenes of instruction in the attenuated belief of Imperial writers that "Greek education [can] act as a legitimate hegemonic discourse of a center that poses as the center" and, eleven centuries later, in the ambition of letter-writing *dictatores* in Orleans and Bologna to emulate "the urban patricians of the late Roman republic and early empire, reproducing their modes and the specific medium—letters—of enacting and advertising affiliation and association."<sup>2</sup> Together, the three articles invite us to visit an array of such scenes across two thousand years and to reflect on how 'schools' of several kinds have transmitted Latinity in many spirits—argumentative, reverent, transformative.

The articles show with striking clarity the mode that distinguishes the scenes they choose to investigate: that mode is fiction. And in view of the conviction and particularity with which Cullhed, Gunderson, and Newman address this mode, I must tarry for a moment over the implications. Some of the figures treated here, such as Apuleius, Petronius, and Dante, are plainly engaged in writing fiction. Others, hardly literary in the modern sense of the term, nonetheless resort to fiction as a way of making a disciplinary practice vivid and imitable: such is the case of the *dictatores* such as Boncompagno and his younger contemporary Guido Faba, who realize fabulation—Newman calls it 'the invention of stories'—in the model letters of their collections.

<sup>1</sup> See Gunderson, 65.

<sup>2</sup> See respectively Gunderson, 69, and Newman, 39.

Still others participate in a more ambiguous literary phenomenology. For instance, when the Baroque poet Francisco de Quevedo adapts an elegy of Propertius in an imitative process Cullhed calls accommodation, can we observe fiction? Quevedo's sonnet "Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postrera" evokes the problem and some of the attitude of Propertius 1.19 ("Non ego nunc tristis vereor, mea Cynthia, Manis"), how to attest that the ardor for a beloved will survive one's death. The elegy may be understood as a lyric fiction that evokes a lover's struggle to lend a temporality to the stasis of death. Quevedo makes the same argument but for his humanist readership also educes Propertius's poem: his sonnet transports us not only to a fictional occasion in which the speaker adjures his love for Lisi even after death but, at a remove, to the moment of its Augustan model—two lyric temporalities occupying the same poem, joined by a common stance despite local differences and held together with an emotional vocabulary of dust, shadow, and shore. By a process of creative appropriation of past poetry, the Golden Age commentator El Brocense observes in a passage quoted by Cullhed, "the verses and thoughts of other poets" are "no longer alien, but his [i.e., Quevedo's]."<sup>3</sup> Cullhed describes the "eclectic reconfigurations" by which a Baroque poet "accommodates" a classical model. If each poem alone offers a fiction of experience, these two poems suspended together enact a fiction of historical relation: early and late, Augustan and Hapsburg, classical and Baroque. Cullhed's five cases of classicism—paraphrase, allegory, accommodation, allusion, and quotation—should be understood as versions of such a fiction that embody different shades of relation, what he calls continuity, alterity, artifice, and deracination.

Classicism, then, depends on fictions that are activated in sites of learning, the mode emplaced within the scene. I decoct the common situation here to show that it arises spontaneously in three articles concerned with highly various materials. No doubt the situation itself warrants more attention. Cullhed, Gunderson, and Newman demonstrate in their own ways that fiction is central to what classicism accomplishes in late- and postclassical European cultures, that it mediates the contact between past and present in striking ways as though to render unmistakable the fallacy of unmediated contact. Some fictions are literary and explicit: Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* (ca. 100 CE) responds to Plato and Xenophon, while Baudri reworks Ovid. Others emerge out of non-literary practices. Regardless of their provenance, fictions appear in these cultures because the stories they tell are about not only separated lovers or contentious philosophers but the process of transmission of knowledge from past to present to future. In Gunderson's account, the 'novels' he treats are "worried about learning and literature"; and in Newman's words, the discipline of letter writing in Bologna not only demonstrates epistolary rhetoric but "has a more embracing meta-rhetoric persuading the reader of the collection about the value of its subject."<sup>4</sup> One might wonder how the functions of fiction in these contexts vary by period, genre, and other criteria. The three articles provide plenty of suggestions.

For instance, in one of their presumably chance collaborations, Cullhed, Gunderson, and Newman put into the foreground of their arguments something we might call the tone of late Latinity. Literary historians such as Thomas M. Greene and Ronald G. Witt have often striven to capture the tone of medieval and Renaissance Europeans' retrospective grasp of the classical past. In turn, each of the three authors in our issue reports on a surprisingly rich stock of tones that monitor the character of relations between past and present. In Newman's case, the Bolognese *ars dictandi* that draws most of his attention often depends

<sup>3</sup> See Cullhed, n. 26.

<sup>4</sup> See respectively Gunderson, 69, and Newman, 50.

on a narrative "summoned through a petitioning voice" that becomes concrete in the reader's own performance.<sup>5</sup> Tone enters here when we must decide how to personify the importunate student or the besotted lover as well as their correspondents. For its part, Cullhed's wide-ranging article offers up a palette of tones in which writers gather their classical models, from the jocosity and confidence of Baudri to the "irony, distance and, probably, nostalgia" of T.S. Eliot and Hjalmar Gullberg.<sup>6</sup>

Gunderson's essay is an especially bountiful register of tones as markers of difference. Already within the Greek-speaking classical world, he notes the palpable distance between Plato's *Symposium* and Plutarch's *Amatorius* ("Plutarch writes something that has Platonic beats and rhythms and melodies, but the song itself is not at all the same old Athenian tune").<sup>7</sup> When he arrives at the Greek 'novels' that begin to appear in the first century CE, Gunderson observes that *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and the handful of others that survive "offer a global synthesis of literary history that renders the discrete voices of different Greek times and places as segments of a new sort of comprehensive narrative form, a form that can encompass all other forms as mere moments of itself."<sup>8</sup> With the turn to the Roman novels, the distance widens again, while tone remains an index: "there is no such thing as a coherent culture. The contemporary world is too big and too heterogeneous for that. There are too many voices and too many people pursuing too many ends."<sup>9</sup> As with Newman and Cullhed's materials, we identify through tone the deepest purposes of these works: what authorizes them not merely to participate in a version of classicism that happens to be available in their time but to challenge and ultimately divert it toward their realities.

In classical Latinity as well as its Greek anticipations and vernacular outcomes, then, tone signifies well beyond its function as a feature of literary discourse. A reader schooled by these articles might say that tone demonstrates something often overlooked, that a cosmopolitan sensibility toward the classical past is widely distributed by standpoint. As we learn here, there is often a master tone that superintends works, corpuses, and even historical eras. Fictions, poems, and even collections of letters tend to strike a general, authorial attitude toward their models and the business of Latinate *imitatio*, while at the same time they are populated by subvening tones that may reflect the standpoints of "students, nobles, bankers, merchants, tailors, judges, wives, sisters" or "pirates, eunuchs, satraps, and slaves"—a "striking mix of stations."<sup>10</sup> There is never one version in play; there are always many.

A common but unspoken project of these articles is to disclose the productive tensions between a master tone and the variations of it that evoke social and other distinctions. The three authors realize the project in their own ways. Newman conveys how both Boncompagno and Guido establish a sense of their personal and institutional mastery of *ars dictaminis* while releasing a "verbal copiousness" that gestures beyond themselves toward a "lifeworld" of "satirical, novelistic, and legalistic modes of representation."<sup>11</sup> 'World' is the key concept that serves for Newman as a hinge between the authority of the *dictatores* and the richly circumstantiated experiences they evoke. Further study of how letter-writing makes way for the literary fictions of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer will surely demand

<sup>5</sup> See Newman, 50.

<sup>6</sup> See Cullhed, 17.

<sup>7</sup> See Gunderson, 62.

<sup>8</sup> See Gunderson, 70.

<sup>9</sup> See Gunderson, 75.

<sup>10</sup> See respectively Newman, 51, Gunderson, 66 and 65.

<sup>11</sup> See Newman, 37.

more attention to this term as a perhaps implicit but defining condition of the Bolognese culture anatomized so well here.

Cullhed and Gunderson are prepared to bring still more resources to the account of a master tone and its implications. While it seems unpromising to generalize about the five episodes followed by Cullhed, one must be impressed by the resourcefulness with which he summons terms for the stances of his principal figures such as the jocosity of Baudri's Ovid and the prudent seriousness of Dante's—tones that will come together and pull apart in the classicisms of the centuries to come, for example in what has often been called the 'jocoserious' quality of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* and More's *Utopia*. Gunderson's 'morosophistic' character of ancient prose fiction—that which "leverages a productive species of 'stupidity' relative to the cleverness of the wise"—is a triumph in the naming of a large-scale attitude that can be realized only by local versions according to their own interpretations of both wisdom and foolishness, yielding works as different as the *True History*, the Greek novels, and the *Satyricon*.<sup>12</sup>

I take it as a good sign that Cullhed, Gunderson, and Newman have little use for received literary theory as a template for the questions they want to pursue. I say this not because the canonical positions of M.M. Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, and others would not serve these questions. To the contrary, these theorists have much to offer at this crossroads of schools, voices, and stories. But I think one reason Gunderson holds Derrida at arm's length and Newman glances belatedly at Thomas Pavel is that the primary works here are ripe with their own speculative insights, which the three authors are prepared to harvest. Gunderson's Lucian and Cullhed's Gullberg, for example, are themselves theorists of their complex relations to language and the past. These arguments are built to permit them to be heard as such. Treating Bakhtin as no more than a foil, Gunderson teases out a raw insight directly from the Greek novels, that there is "a hesitation towards a radically ironic relationship to the question of style that would dethrone 'high style' as itself nothing more than a mere style among others."<sup>13</sup> All but hidden in a footnote, the observation is characteristic of the *sprezzatura* with which these essays address theoretical questions. Moreover, even as the articles participate in long-running conversations in their respective fields, this is foundational scholarship that sets fresh frames around well-known material and attacks basic issues. While twentieth-century and later theory has its place here, Cullhed, Gunderson, and Newman are right to enforce its practically programmatic removal to the margins of their projects (and sometimes to handle it parodically, as Gunderson does with Derrida and Bakhtin).

Together the articles reveal how in late classical, medieval, and early modern culture there are more ways to adopt a cosmopolitan attitude toward the classical past than we suppose from our historical distance. Meanwhile, their argumentative practice confirms that when we recover a range of tones or attitudes and develop a working sense of how these become the basis for locating oneself in history, we meet an obligation to the past that might be construed as nothing less than ethical. Often as I read and reread these articles, I found myself drawn to the ingenuity and tact with which they deduce the varieties of classicism, reconstruct scenes of learning, and expose a dependence on fictions—those that each cohort of writers receive from their forerunners as well as those they advance for themselves. Collectively they argue for what would amount to a poetics of cosmopolitan Latinity, a rigorous explanation of how past becomes present, learning becomes knowledge, and voice becomes fiction. That poetics would be a story too: our own version of how the classics live on now.

<sup>12</sup> See Gunderson, 59.

<sup>13</sup> See Gunderson, n. 54.