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Note

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are "Writing in a World of Strangers: The Invention of Jewish Literature Revisited," by Irene Zwiep (pp. 1–20) and "The Ordeal of a Sixth-Century Josef K: Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* as a Modernist Drama" by Piet Gerbrandy (pp. 44–64). The response piece is "Ins and Outs and Opened and Closed" by Danuta Shanzer (pp. 66–77).

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A Critical Juncture: 'Later' Latin Literature, the Newest Late Antiquity, and the Period of the Western Classic

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ABSTRACT

With the appearance in 2020 of a long-awaited second 'late antique' instalment of the *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989–) and a new, collaborative *Cambridge History of Later Latin Literature* now at an advanced stage of preparation, there is an opportunity to re-evaluate the possibilities of scholarship in this field. What relation does such 'literary' research bear to current, globalizing styles in late antique and first-millennial historical and cultural studies? This essay attempts a preliminary framing of the issues with reference to a largely discredited but still powerful model of the western literary classic, while arguing for hermeneutical continuity between the breakthrough work of Peter Brown's half-century-old *World of Late Antiquity* (1971) and the critical-historical vocation of contemporary 'later' Latin literary studies.

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If there was once a time when "the Latin literature of late antiquity" was a "no-man's land" for classicists, it has not been ours.[1] The past fifty years have been a boom-time for 'late' or 'later' Latin literary studies, understood in most cases as an extension of 'classical' Latin literary studies beyond the customary limit of the Antonine era. If one had to name the place and moment where previously separate interests in such an extended late-to-post-classical franchise of Latin coalesced into a visible movement of international research, it would be natural to think of the symposium convened by Manfred Fuhrmann at Vandœuvres, outside Geneva, in August 1976, proceedings of which were published in the volume of Entretiens

[1] Fuhrmann, "Die lateinische Literatur der Spätantike," 65. The present essay is not a general survey of developments in this field; the best thing I know of that kind is Shanzer, "Literature, History, Periodization." See also McGill and Watts, *Companion to Late Antique Literature*.

de la Fondation Hardt entitled *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en Occident*.[2] Within a few years of that event, two of the symposiasts, Reinhart Herzog (then of the University of Bielefeld, later of the University of Konstanz) and Jacques Fontaine (of the University of Paris-Sorbonne), agreed to collaborate on the 'late antique' part of a multi-volume reference-work destined to replace the outdated *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* in the library-scale *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* published by the firm of C.H. Beck in Munich.[3]

Volume 5 of the new *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike* (HLL), covering the period from the accession of the emperor Diocletian in 284 CE to the consecration of Ambrose as bishop of Milan in the year 374, came out in 1989, with a programmatic introduction by Reinhart Herzog that presented the Latin writing of late antiquity as *die erste* lateinische*, die erste nachrömische Literatur Europas* ("the first *Latin*, first post-Roman literature of Europe").[4] For Herzog, as for his teacher Fuhrmann, the era of the "Latin literature of late antiquity" began with the restoration of the Roman empire under Diocletian in the late third century and was characterized overall by the progressively determining influence of Christianity on forms of literary reception and production.[5] A convenient endpoint for this "first post-Roman literature of Europe" was indicated, for the purposes of the new *Handbuch*, by the death of the Venerable Bede at Wearmouth-Jarrow in Northumbria, in the year 735.

The appearance thirty years ago of such a prospectus for a 'new' Latin literature might have been a threshold event for classical *and* literary studies. The ensemble of Volumes 5 to 8 of HLL, by unfolding a recognizably *post-Roman* 'literature' in Latin, could conceivably have undone one of the most robust constructions of early-to-mid-twentieth-century, European and Atlantic literary modernism. That construction we may perhaps call 'the western classic,' since it was a classic of *the West*.

1 The period of the western classic

The western classic was a work of many hands. In the Anglosphere, its most influential exponent was T.S. Eliot, who in a famous essay of 1919 on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," notified a readership that had seen the flower of European male youth cut down in Flanders and other fields of mechanized destruction, that "anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year" needed to develop "the historical sense" that would compel him to write "with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and, within it, the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous whole."[6] A quarter-century later, against the backdrop of a

2 Fuhrmann, *Christianisme et formes littéraires*.

3 See Fontaine, "Postclassicisme, Antiquité tardive, Latin des chrétiens."

4 Herzog, *Restauration und Erneuerung: Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n.Chr.* (= HLL 5), 1.

5 See n. 41 below and Vessey, "Literary History: A Fourth-Century Roman Invention?" 18–24 ("HLL: A Late Twentieth-Century Crisis of Literary History").

6 Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 14.

London sky still lit by fires from bombed-out homes and warehouses, the same poet-critic, addressing a newly founded Virgil Society, asked the question "What Is a Classic?" and answered for himself that *the* classic, "[o]ur classic, the classic of all Europe, is Virgil"—Virgil as supreme representative of Latin literature to and for "our several literatures," each of which had its particular greatness "not in isolation, but because of its place in a larger pattern, a pattern set in Rome"; Virgil, "the great ghost who guided Dante's pilgrimage" and who, "as it was his function to lead Dante towards a vision he could never himself enjoy, led Europe towards the Christian culture which he could never know."[7]

Eliot's historical-critical sense of Virgil had many sources, among them Theodor Haecker's 1931 manifesto *Virgil, Vater des Abendlandes*, the 1934 English translation of which was commissioned for a series edited by the Catholic historian Christopher Dawson, himself the author of a popular book on *The Making of Europe*: *An Introduction to the History of European Unity*, published in London in 1932 and quickly translated into French and German. On the dust-jacket of later editions, the period of Dawson's study was signalled as 400 to 1000 AD. At the core of Eliot's, Dawson's and kindred versions of the mid-twentieth-century, post-catastrophe, 'western' family romance was a providential genealogy in which medieval European Christianity assumed and, as it were, sublimed the inheritance of classical Graeco-Roman culture after the break-up of the Roman empire. (C.N. Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine*, published at Oxford by the Clarendon Press in 1940, was the outstanding Canadian contribution to the genre before Northrop Frye.) The groundwork for this master narrative had been laid by leaders of German and French romanticism, such as Novalis, Germaine de Staël and Chateaubriand. Further important contributions were made by other nineteenth-century enthusiasts for the poetry of Dante, including F.W.J. Schelling who, taking a hint from Hegel, gave the cue for most of the life's work of Erich Auerbach down to that scholar's last book, on *Literary Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, written at Yale University in the 1950s.[8]

The role played by American romanticism, especially American Danteism and associated medievalisms, in the making of the western classic would be hard to overestimate. Ernst Robert Curtius put his finger on it in a lecture on "The Medieval Bases of Western Thought" that he delivered at the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation in Aspen, Colorado in 1949, the text of which is handily printed in an appendix to the English edition of his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Curtius himself acknowledged a debt to Edward Kennard Rand, Harvard classicist, co-founder of the Medieval Academy of America, author of *Founders of*

[7] Eliot, "What is a Classic?" 130–31. For the intellectual milieu, see Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns*, 119–34; also 6–11 ("The Crisis of History"), esp. 11: "In sum, the postwar [i.e. post-1918] crisis of history, prepared by the increasing specialization of professional historians along with their rejection of the philosophy of history, and precipitated by the seemingly inexplicable sociopolitical events of the early twentieth century, produced in the public at large a longing for synthesizing accounts of history that would help them make sense of the world." See too the very pertinent remarks of Martindale, "Introduction: 'The Classic of all Europe,'" 1–18.

[8] See esp. Auerbach, "Discovery of Dante by Romanticism."

the Middle Ages (1928) and sometime teacher of T.S. Eliot.[9] The essentials of Eliot's Virgilio-Dantesque providentialism in "What Is a Classic?" were also laid out in Rand's book, which had chapters on major Latin church fathers as well as on Boethius and other early Christian poets, and exemplified a new, early twentieth-century vogue for Augustine's *City of God* as a diagnostic, in the age of Freud, not only of (western) civilization's discontents but also of its contents.

The western classic was a doubly temporal dispensation, setting out a scheme of civilizational development over nearly three millennia while being itself much more narrowly timebound, the product of an historical period ushered in by the First World War, stretching through the middle decades of the twentieth century and a second era of post-war (by then also Cold War) reconstruction, and with a range of credible end-dates within living memory for those of us now with long memories. Among university literary critics, the cut-off date should probably be placed within a few years of the publication in 1975 of Frank Kermode's *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change*, a book based on lectures given in honour of T.S. Eliot and premised on the case of Virgil. By then, an avant-garde of continental European classicists, mainly French and German but with one or two Anglophone scholars in the offing, was re-imagining patterns of literary permanence and change in Latin texts from late antiquity.

Although HLL, the literary-historical reference-work launched in 1989 by Reinhart Herzog and his colleagues, was called a handbook, not a history, the inaugural Volume 5 led readers to expect that it would, as it advanced to Volume 8 and the death of Bede, continue to furnish methodological and substantive prolegomena for future narrative and critical histories of a newly conceived post-Roman, Latin literature. The period to be covered by Volume 6 ran from the year 374, when Ambrose became bishop of Milan, to the death of Augustine in 430. This was the epoch known to ecclesiastical tradition as the golden age of the Latin church fathers. It also embraced the careers of two freak, Greek-speaking masters of Latin literary forms and idioms, the Alexandrian poet Claudian and the (possibly) Antiochene historian Ammianus Marcellinus. The volume's editor, Jacques Fontaine, was the outstanding twentieth-century scholar of the combined—and, as he saw them, all but indissociable—Christian and non-Christian Latin literature(s) of late antiquity. One of his specializations was in the Latin literary culture of the period that he called *le siècle de Théodose*, meaning the long half-century from the early 370s to the late 420s.[10] Fontaine died at the age of 93 in 2015, active as a scholar to the last. Yet neither Volume 6 of the *Handbuch* nor either of the other two (Vols. 7–8) that were and still are slated to complete an historical

[9] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, viii. Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T.S. Eliot*, 70: "It would be interesting to know whether Eliot already heard Rand speak at Harvard on the continuity of the Roman tradition into the Middle Ages..." Eliot had special praise for Rand's chapter on "St. Augustine and Dante" in his review of *Founders* for the *Times Literary Supplement* of March 14, 1929. See also Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 120.

[10] For this period-concept, less prejudicially classicizing than the widely favoured "Theodosian renaissance," see e.g. Fontaine, "Société et culture chrétiennes." Between the late 1960s and mid-'80s Fontaine directed a program of instruction at the Sorbonne under the heading "Langues et littératures de l'Antiquité tardive." For a concise placing of his work, see Vessey, "Literature, Patristics, Early Christian Writing," 51–55 ("The Literature[s] of Late Antiquity").

arc of Latin literature from 284 to 735 CE had by then appeared. Not until 2020 would there be a sequel to HLL 5.[11]

The scholarship reported and represented by the initial 'late antique' volume of the *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike* has been foundational for work done since 1989, as interest in that emergent sub-field of classics has continued to grow, not least but not only in North America, especially after the turn of the millennium, in the context of an increasingly global and globalizing concept and practice of late antique studies, and with more and more of the international conversation every year taking place in English. As one would expect, growth has brought with it both diversification of methods and new kinds of routinization. Over the past two decades, for example, a trend has been set for reading the more suitable 'later' Latin authors—as a rule, classicizing poets, historians and epistolographers—primarily if not exclusively for the *intertextual* relationships entertained by their works with those of their classical precursors and (more or less) classical or classicizing contemporaries, following a method popularized for Anglo-American Latin studies in the 1990s by an adroit adjustment of 1960s Parisian to 1970s Pisan literary-critical fashions—in the first place Julia Kristeva (after Mikhail Bakhtin), in the next Gian Biagio Conte (after Giorgio Pasquali)—and since then mainstreamed in studies of 'classical reception.'[12] The adjustment continues in Philip Hardie's eagle-eyed Sather Classical Lectures on *Classicism and Christianity in Late Antique Latin Poetry* (2019), a work that, from its title forward, has an oddly old-fashioned air about it, not only because 'classicism and Christianity' is such a time-worn formula, as hallowed as the western classic or the Sather Classical Lectures at the University of California, Berkeley (some of the earliest of which were given in 1919–20 by E.K. Rand), but also because Hardie's working sense of 'late antiquity,' like that of many another latergoing, classically trained literary Romanist and intertextualist, is only minimally responsive to the transformations of the wider field of late antique studies that have occurred since the 1970s.[13]

[11] Berger, Fontaine and Schmidt, *Die Literatur im Zeitalter des Theodosius (374–430 n.Chr.)* (= HLL 6, in two parts). No account could be given of HLL 6 in the present essay, which was complete and in the hands of the editors in December 2019, six months ahead of the publication date announced for those volumes. For my review of HLL 5, see Vessey, "Patristics and Literary History." HLL 4, which by the lights of that project treats material falling *before* the main literary-historical period of late antiquity, appeared in 1997: Sallmann, *Die Literatur des Umbruchs: Von der römischen zur christlichen Literatur, 117 bis 284 n. Chr.*

[12] Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext* marks a tipping-point in Anglophone classicism. See also Fowler, "On the Shoulders of Giants," and, for important critical re-considerations in a late antique context, Kelly, *ianus Marcellinus*, ch. 4 ("Ammianus' Intertextuality"), and Pelttari, *Space that Remains*, esp. ch. 4 ("The Presence of the Reader: Allusion in Late Antiquity").

[13] In the process of treating what he calls "this very important episode in the reception of earlier Latin poetry" (1), Hardie follows Kelly (see previous note) in critiquing the postulate of a distinctively 'late antique' literary aesthetic, a line of thought that was launched almost single-handedly for the Anglophone academy—and with suitable precautions, not always since observed—by Michael Roberts, building on the work of Fontaine and Herzog, in his *Jeweled Style* (1989). Elements of a revised manifesto for that kind of analysis, emphasizing issues of intertextuality and metapoetics, can be found in Elsner and Lobato, *Poetics of Late Latin Literature*, which I review in *Exemplaria Classica* 23 (2019): 477–84. On the field more generally and that approach to it, see O'Hogan, "Thirty Years of the 'Jeweled Style'."

2 Changing worlds of late antiquity

A recent study by Ben Hutchinson of *Lateness and Modern European Literature* shows how deeply European sensibilities have been and still can be imprinted by their subjects' sense of the belatedness of their own time in the long history-to-date of a civilization or tradition. The period covered by Hutchinson's book, from the aftermath of the French Revolution to the aftermath of the Second World War, is the one during which the cultural-historical concept of 'late antiquity' came to visibility. It is also the period of the gestation, birth and ascendancy of what I am calling the western classic, and of the emergence of the modern (European, western) idea of 'literature.' In literary-historical terms, the bridge of Hutchinson's modernity reaches from (late) romanticism to (late) modernism and has *fin-de-siècle* 'decadence' for its central span.

Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence, Verlaine wrote in 1883. The influence of neo-classical and romantic models of the decline of empires and civilizations on representations of (later) ancient Greek and Roman artistic and literary culture has been well studied.[14] As Hutchinson notes, Winckelmann's positing of "a fourth, decadent phase" of artistic production in classical antiquity, associated with the Roman imperial period and given over to those he dubbed "the imitators," was one of the earliest expressions of German interest in "forms of lateness." Countervailingly, it was the Viennese art historian Aloïs Riegl who, in a 1901 monograph on *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, gave fresh currency to the idiom of 'late antiquity' as a relatively non-prejudicial way of designating the artistic spirit (*Kunstwollen*) of an age no longer 'classical' and none the worse for it.[15] Very quickly, German-speaking historians in other fields adopted Riegl's usage and overlaid a time-frame for *die Spätantike* ('late antiquity') on the standard tripartition of Eurocentric world-time into Antiquity, Middle Age(s) and Modernity. Routinely used as a period-concept by such virtuoso romance philologists as Auerbach and Curtius, the idiom of 'late antiquity' was given a further twist by the French classicist, ancient historian and Augustinian specialist Henri-Irénée Marrou, who in 1949 used it tentatively as shorthand for an intellectual, literary, artistic, political and religious culture that would have been common to Christian and non-Christian subjects of the Roman empire in both East and West during the century

[14] Contributions relevant to later Latin literature in Formisano and Fuhrer, *Décadence*.

[15] Hutchinson, *Lateness and Modern European Literature*, 7 (Winckelmann), 11 (Riegl). On Riegl and "late antiquity," see Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad*, 26–44, with extensive references; Elsner, "Alois Riegl." Accounts of the emergence and development of the modern field of 'late antiquity' are now legion. For orientation, see James, "Rise and Function"; Markus, "Between Marrou and Brown"; Rebenich, "Late Antiquity in Modern Eyes"; Clark, *Late Antiquity*; Inglebert, "Introduction: Late Antique Conceptions of Late Antiquity." For a selection of responses to a perceived crisis in the field, see the essays in Muehlberger, "Late Antiquity and the New Humanities: An Open Forum," and Lizzi Testa, *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate*. Wood, *Transformation of the Roman West* at once advances the debate surrounding the transition from Roman to post-Roman polities in the regions of the former western empire and returns it to the ground mapped out by past masters, including (see following note) Marrou and Brown. None of the above studies, it should be emphasized, is primarily concerned with issues in *literary* history.

or so between Constantine and the Vandal invasion of North Africa.[16] In his last book, published in 1977, Marrou extended the range of *l'antiquité tardive* to take in the period between the third and sixth centuries.[17] In the meantime, as continental Latinists like Fuhrmann, Fontaine and Herzog staked out a 'Latin literature of late antiquity,' the Anglo-Irish, Protestant-raised, Oxford-trained (medieval) historian Peter Brown, in a stylishly written, attractively illustrated trade book of 1971, had pushed the temporal limits of the "world of late antiquity" back to the second century and forward to the eighth, flung its geographical boundaries far beyond the crowded "frog-pond" of the Mediterranean, and set within this enlarged historiographical frame a cluster of finely spun narratives of social and cultural continuity and change that left no space for the old one of Decline and Fall.[18]

Brown's upbeat, expansive vision of late antiquity has been hugely influential. As he himself has made clear, the optimism of that vision and its expansiveness were correlated from the start. At Oxford in the late 1950s, against a background of anxiety about the onset of a "new barbarism" in Europe—the same anxiety that elicited the most eloquent and strident manifestos of the western classic—Brown had settled down to "a dogged *guerrilla* against the dominant, melodramatic notion of the decline and fall of the Roman empire." As that personal *guerrilla* was enabled by new work on social mobility and the formation of elites in all periods of the empire, so it drew heavily on studies of its "Greek-speaking and oriental provinces." By the mid-1960s, lecturing on "Byzantium and its Northern and Eastern Neighbours, 527–700 AD" and rethinking Pirenne in the light of Braudel and others, Brown had found a vantage-point from which to compose *The World of Late Antiquity* (originally subtitled: *From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammed*), a book that—in the words of its introduction—would "gravitate towards the eastern Mediterranean" and find its natural end-point "at the Baghdad of Harun al-Rashid" rather than "at the remote Aachen of his contemporary, Charlemagne."[19]

There was something else too. By 1967, when Brown's biography of Augustine came out, its author had by his own admission "lived in harness too long with the greatest mind in Latin Christendom" and "wanted out."[20] *The World of Late Antiquity* knowingly skimped on "the West" in order to modify something that Brown on the last page of the book called "the western imagination." At that point in his narrative, the ideal "student of Late Antiquity" came forth as one "who realize[d] how much European culture," understood in a broad sense and over the *longue durée*, "owe[d] to the fruitful exchange between the populations of the Fertile Crescent," and who therefore recognized at how great a cost to itself a "western Europe" of the early Middle Ages had been left—as Brown put it,

16 Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (reissued with a "Retractatio," 1949), 694–96; Vessey, "Demise of the Christian Writer"; Wood, *Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*, 277–86.

17 Marrou, *Décadence romaine*. See too his important earlier statement in "Civilisation de l'antiquité tardive."

18 Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*. Brown's book was already decisive for the turn taken by Marrou's *Décadence romaine* (see previous note).

19 Brown, "World of Late Antiquity Revisited," 13–16; *World of Late Antiquity*, 9.

20 Brown, "World of Late Antiquity Revisited," 16.

shortly before the UK and Republic of Ireland joined the European Common Market—"to create an identity of its own."[21]

Appearing two years before Kermode's T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures on *The Classic* and seven years ahead of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Peter Brown's *World of Late Antiquity* ran discreetly yet decisively counter to the dominant and hegemonic discourse of mid-twentieth-century, western European, North Atlantic, collective cultural self-fashioning. While the western classic of literary modernism is not among Brown's habitual reference-points, there is no doubt that the mind-set crystallized in that conceit was the very one against which he had launched his *guerrilla* in the 1950s. A certain narrative positioning of Augustine was no less integral to the discourse that he set out to undermine than the role of Dante in the modernist constructions of Eliot, Curtius and Auerbach. "In the war years and post-war years," Brown recalls, Augustinian studies were still focused on "the relation between Augustine and the classical past."

> We were still encouraged to sit in on that most solemn and elevating of all track events: the relay race of the formation of Western Christian civilization. In this relay race, Augustine is seen to have picked up the baton brought to him by Plotinus—all the way from Plato and the ancient sages of Greece—and to pass it on triumphantly to Boethius, and thence to Thomas Aquinas, to Saint Bonaventure, and now, who knows, to an Étienne Gilson.[22]

Brown has always paid handsome tribute to the part played by mid-twentieth-century French liberal Catholic scholarship—including the all-important work of Marrou—in creating the conditions for a new science of late antiquity. He has also regularly protested against specious (Roman) Catholic narratives of long-term civilizational continuity. Turning Augustine the relay-runner for "Western Christian civilization" into Augustine "the late antique man," we now see, was one of the main tasks of his *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Brown's readiness, by the mid-1960s, to get out from under the weight of Augustine and explore a wider world of late antiquity was a corollary of his initiative in seeking to unharness "the greatest mind in Latin Christendom" from the burden of his ideological posterity, and so to unshackle posterity in general—or as much of it as was ready to be helped—from a certain, over-determined narrative of 'the West.'

To begin to account now for the variable forms taken by imagined 'worlds' of late antiquity in scholarship since 1971 is to enter a debate about historiographical aims and methods that has been going on for at least half of the half-century in question. An obvious point can be made straightaway. With each of the geo-political shocks to 'our' world that, since the early 1970s, have unsettled a majoritarian 'western imagination' such as might once have ventured on Brown's *World of Late Antiquity* or any other volume in the Thames & Hudson "Library of European Civilization," the soundness of Brown's intuitions in making his 'world' as culturally diverse, hospitable and rich in its futures as he did has been confirmed again. That is not to say that his approach has ever held universal sway. Far from

[21] Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*, 203.
[22] Brown, "Introducing Robert Markus," 183.

it. Other scholars have objected to the expansiveness of the Brownian conception of late antiquity and to its upbeat and transformationist—as opposed to downbeat and catastrophist—take on the historical transition to post-classical, post-Roman polities and cultures in the West.[23] Yet if there is a clear tendency in recent program-setting work in the field it is in favour of the globalizing, multicultural, comparatist option that Brown's *World of Late Antiquity* already advertised nearly fifty years ago and that Brown himself has continued to advance both as teacher and as impresario of the monograph series published since the early 1980s by the University of California Press under the banner of "The Transformation of the Classical Heritage"—a phrase still ironically redolent of the western classic.[24] In the spring of 2017, the same publisher brought out the first issue of a new online journal, *Studies in Late Antiquity*, which takes its bearings expressly from Brown's 1971 book.[25] More radically, in his manifesto-like *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (2014), Garth Fowden drew inspiration from *The World of Antiquity* to relaunch a cultural-historical periodization wide enough to contain a "mature" Islam as one of the formative presences—alongside rabbinic Judaism and patristic Christianity—for the western modernity that we now inhabit. In doing so, as he signals by his chapter-titles, Fowden takes us in time "Beyond Late Antiquity" and makes "An Eastward Shift" in space. In support of his case, he cites several examples of other recent historical projects that have carved out for their purposes a more than 'late antique' space-time in the first millennium.[26]

Something like a counter-example to Fowden's eastward-looking, millennial paradigm will be constituted by the new *Cambridge History of Later Latin Literature*, now in an advanced stage of preparation under the editorship of Gavin Kelly and Aaron Pelttari, both of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh.[27] While its main focus will be on what may be thought of as the central chronological area of late antiquity, and its lower terminus of 700 CE will be slightly earlier than the one chosen for the incomplete HLL, *CHLLL* will begin its coverage unusually early for an account of 'late' or 'later' Latin literature, ca. 100 CE. The aim of that early start, as the editors have explained to contributors, is to take advantage of the quantity and quality of evidence for the state of Latin literary culture around 100, so as then to be able to observe how the culture changed over the following centuries. At a moment in scholarship when long-held assumptions about the novelty and distinctiveness of a distinctively 'late antique' aesthetic or poetics are under increasing challenge from a more sweepingly classicistic and transhistorical theory of deep-woven intertextuality,[28] *CHLLL* proposes to historicize literary phenomena every step of

[23] See Wood, *Modern Origins*, 305–29.

[24] Eligible books in the series are published under The Joan Palevsky Imprint in Classical Literature, with a dedication "In honor of beloved Virgil" and a line from the *Inferno*: "O degli altri poeti onore e lume…"

[25] See the editorial statement launching the new publication, "Why Does the World Need a New Journal on Late Antiquity?" and the first article in the same issue: Humphries, "Late Antiquity and World History."

[26] Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad*, 87–90. For discussion of Fowden's book and a presentation by its author, see "The First Millennium Refocused: Eine Debatte," *Millennium* 13 (2016): 3–66.

[27] I write as a contributor to CHLLL and thank its editors for their encouragement of the present essay.

[28] See nn. 12–13 above.

the way from Pliny's panegyric for Trajan to the turn of the seventh into the eighth century in post-Roman, Latinophone realms, for the sake of discerning whatever narratives of continuity and change may now at length emerge or be found still to hold up to scrutiny.

Viewed against the background of today's globalizing, culturally comparatist, eastward-shifting late antique studies (and I have said nothing about the new ascendancy of Byzantinism), a project like *CHLLL* could look at first sight like a throw-back, and *not* because of its early date of historical departure. As a growing scholarly population opts, if not for the Rest ahead of the West then for a West more cognizant of the Rest, this new literary history would once again plot a course from the 'literature' of classical, Graeco-Roman antiquity to a place and time in history where the vernacular 'literatures' of the future modern western European nation-states can finally be discovered springing up. And how better, indeed, could a Cambridge history end such a journey than as *CHLLL* will, in 'The Post-Roman British Isles,' where—a little after its appointed cut-off date, ca. 700—Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* would give a Latin paraphrase of the opening lines of an Anglo-Saxon poem on Genesis thrown off in a fit of divine inspiration by a party-shy cowherd?[29] Forty years after the Latin volume of the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature* embarrassedly wrapped up its coverage for the Later Principate with a chapter on Apuleius, *CHLLL* will have brought its story comfortably down into the western Middle Ages.

It is of course too soon to say what *CHLLL* will do, let alone how it will be received. I wish to suggest, however, that one fruitful way for us to see that work when it appears would be as a timely enhancement of our existing means for pursuing, in *literary critical* and historical mode, a project of cultural reflection and collective self-critique launched half a century ago by Peter Brown.

3 'Later' Latin literature and the imagination of the West

Brown tells us that he almost missed the commission for *The World of Late Antiquity* when the letter of invitation "was blown into the prickly undergrowth of a neighbour's olive-grove… after it had been placed in the hole in the dry-stone terracing that served as a mail-box" for the house where he was holidaying in the south of France.[30] The letter was from Thomas Neurath, managing director of Thames & Hudson, and was sent at the prompting of Geoffrey Barraclough, general editor of that publisher's "Library of European Civilization" series, and soon to become Chichele Professor of Modern History at All Souls College, Oxford, of which Brown was a fellow. The title proposed for the book was already "The World of Late Antiquity."[31] The term "late antiquity," Brown has recalled, was then "relatively new" to him.

[29] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.24.

[30] Brown, "World of Late Antiquity Revisited," 17.

[31] Ward-Perkins, "Making of the *World of Late Antiquity*," 7 n. 6.

> It may well be [he goes on to say] that Barraclough himself suggested the title: his knowledge of German historiography, in which *Spätantike* already played a significant role, makes this likely. I had usually been content with "late Roman". It was the new geographical spread of my interests that eroded the traditional, political definition of the field.[32]

Although this hint has been floating on the *mistral* of scholarly gossip for nearly a quarter of a century now, Geoffrey Barraclough's role as midwife of Anglo-American 'studies in late antiquity' appears so far to have gone uncelebrated. As soon as we look, however, we discover that he was already a sharp critic of forms of the western imagination cognate with what I have been calling the western classic. "Scarcely a day goes by," he wrote in 1947, the year after his study of *The Origins of Modern Germany* was published,

> without our reading or hearing of "our inherited cultural tradition", the typical values of western civilisation", "the idea of European coherence"—or, more simply, "our western tradition", "our western values", "our western culture." No set of ideas has become more commonplace, none been more assiduously drummed into our ears, since the end of the war. In part, this new emphasis on the inherited traditions of our civilisation is a reflection of our awareness of crisis; it shows a tardy realization on our part that the dangers confronting the contemporary world… can only be averted if they are counterbalanced by a far more intensive knowledge than our generation seems yet to possess, of the enduring elements upon which the structure of civilisation rests. And that is all to the good. What is more dubious is the implication that the enduring values and traditions of civilisation are linked, in some unique way, with western Europe.[33]

Instrumental for Barraclough's critique of the contemporary construction of a 'western culture' was the period- and culture-concept of *die Spätantike* or 'late antiquity,' which he was the first Anglophone scholar, by a decade and a half, to use to any purpose. "[I]t seems to me," he wrote in another essay of around the same time,

> that we live in an age of change, in a sense different from that in which every age may be described as an age of change, and that there is therefore likely to be particular gain for us in studying and endeavouring to comprehend the other great ages of change in the history of our civilisation, the turning-points and periods of spiritual turmoil when Europe passed through a major crisis. For this reason I have devoted particular attention to the "seminal ages", *the period of late Antiquity*, the crisis at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the problem of the age of the Reformation, and the impact of the French Revolution… [I]t has seemed to me imperative *at this critical juncture in the history of European civilisation*, to re-examine afresh such concepts as "the European inheritance", "the values of European civilization", "the idea of European coherence", or, more simply, the limits and divisions of European history.[34]

How seriously Barraclough meant those claims appears already from the first of the essays quoted above from a 1955 collection of his, designed for a general

[32] Brown, "World of Late Antiquity Revisited," 17.

[33] Barraclough, *History in a Changing World* (ch. 2: "The Continuity of European Tradition"), 31. The timeliness of Barraclough's critical intervention is well seen by Federici, "God That Never Failed," 70-71.

[34] Barraclough, *History in a Changing World*, 12, 14 (emphases added).

readership and entitled *History in a Changing World*. His aim was to call in question the regnant, post-war conviction of "the continuity of European tradition" by looking again at the history of late antiquity as one of several "seminal ages." His conclusion—that a historically mistaken view of the emergence and continuity of "a common western European civilization" posed an obstacle to political progress in the Cold War era—was reinforced by another aspect of his historianship that is worth underlining here: its urgently global perspective. Historical research, he affirmed, should always have some constructive bearing on the discourse of the present. The history that was needed in 1955 had to be, or aspire to be, "a history that looks beyond Europe and the west to humanity in all lands and ages."[35] Although not all Barraclough's positions remain tenable from a scholarly point-of-view, his critique of the "parochialism" of mid-century assertions of the long-term continuity of the "classical tradition" and the providential role of Christianity in safeguarding such a tradition from the break-up of the western Roman empire makes for astringent reading even now.

"By general consent," Barraclough wrote, "three great problems dominate the history of Europe"—and the first of those was "the problem of late antiquity." Among leading historians who could at the time be credited with creating a consensus around late antiquity was the "great Belgian historian, [Henri] Pirenne," who "argued forcefully, and not without justification, that the Dark Ages belong in reality not to mediaeval history but to the last phase of the Mediterranean civilisation of Antiquity." Barraclough lamented how deftly "the writings of Pirenne, and the new perspectives they opened up" had been assimilated by his fellow medieval historians, when what the latter should have done, according to him, was "to scrap the traditional framework and erect a new one better fitted to house the results which Pirenne and others of his contemporaries won."[36] There was the delayed-action trigger for *The World of Late Antiquity*, a book that—no less by its attention to the early expansion of Islam than by its own expansive coverage of the East—would outflank Barraclough's critique of mainstream, post-war Occidentalism, and inaugurate a new, conscientious Orientalism in British and wider Anglophone late ancient and first-millennial studies.

Pirenne was no promoter of the western classic. Indeed, his narrative of the "closing" of the Mediterranean under Islam should have had the power to shut down any and every mystically accessionist view of the providential, long-term, classical-Christian continuity of European civilization before it could assume mid-twentieth-century shape. As Barraclough pointed out, however, Pirenne's peers had been quicker to metabolize his thesis than to grant its full disruptive force. Nor was the interwar epoch of the delayed *Mahomet et Charlemagne* propitious for dismantling myths of European cultural coherence over the *longue durée*. Worse, in a sense, was to come. In his 1948 masterwork, Curtius turned 'Romania'—Pirenne's occasional term for the (former) geographical orbit of Rome's

[35] Barraclough, *History in a Changing World*, 19.
[36] Barraclough, *History in a Changing World*, 159, 58, 62.

power—into the millennial dreamworld of a 'Latin' Middle Ages running all the way to Goethe.[37]

Having come back via *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* to the acme of the western classic, we may now observe that an alternative, updated version of Pirenne's postulate of a Dark Age belonging "not to mediaeval history but to the last phase of the Mediterranean civilisation of Antiquity" (Barraclough) is still called for in our present "critical juncture" to interpret the later-ness of the *Cambridge History of Later Latin Literature*. *CHLLL*, we have seen, will begin earlier than most modern worlds of late antiquity. But it is the work's sense of the (or an) ending of later Latin literature that will perhaps be most apt to raise questions. What sense—other than a merely pragmatic or prejudicially classicizing one—will it now make to arrest or even pause a history of Latin literature precisely where Pirenne set a term to what he called "the tradition of antiquity," a tradition represented by him as having been in steady decline for several centuries by then?[38] The *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike*, by prospectively identifying a "Latin literature of *late* antiquity" as the "first post-Roman, *Latin* literature of Europe," left open the question of how that and other post-Roman literatures of Europe, in Latin or other languages, might be related to each other. By the same stroke, HLL reserved (until later!) discussion of how a first post-Roman, Latin literature might be placed on a global-historical map of literature(s). Thanks to the work of the original HLL generation, born between the 1920s and 1940s, today's scholarly (re)producers of a later Latin literature in *CHLLL* and elsewhere have been free to take the demise of the old western classic and its ideological congeners for granted. What critical narratives and scenarios will they set in place of it for the mid-twenty-first century?

Early (western) medievalists in less literary disciplines, catching up on the agenda set by Geoffrey Barraclough in the 1950s, have spent the last fifty years reframing Pirenne's problem of the historical genesis of a post-Roman world order in a west before 'the West' of early twentieth-century western imagination. Like Barraclough, they have been actuated to do so by their sense of responsibility as historians, in an ever-changing world, to make narrative, comparative and other kinds of present sense of historical data from all periods and regions. During the long abeyance of HLL, 'literary' late antique studies have struck out in new directions too, some of them—especially in the last few years—consistent with the globalizing trend of late antique studies at large. However *CHLLL* may style and present itself, any future use of it as a work of reference may be expected to take continuous account of such developments.

At this point, a recapitulation that is also, and that turns into, a projection:

Recapitulation. The European, romantic-era promotion of national, post-classical, vernacular literatures set a disciplinary-ideological bulwark between Greek and Latin philology on the one hand and modern and medieval philologies on the other. The division of faculties was made easier by the expedient—dictated by

[37] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 34: "Only from within Romania does one obtain a true picture of the course of modern literature." See now Imbert, *Romania*.

[38] Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 118: "It is needless to insist on the increasing decadence of intellectual life and of the ancient culture after the 3rd century."

religion, good taste and Enlightenment secularism—of leaving a cordon sanitaire several centuries wide where the 'literatures' of apostolic, gnostic and patristic Christianity in Greek, Latin and other languages must have lain, along with those of rabbinic Judaism and the formative period of Islam, had their texts been thought to fall within the province of Literature as such. This academic carve-up of intricately entangled discursive realities entailed no risks for beneficiaries of the hegemonically Euro-Christian world order imagined by the Congress of Vienna, as long as that order was not itself existentially troubled. When trouble came, on an almost apocalyptic scale, a western literary classic, incubated in German and French romanticism, heavy with nostalgia for a European Christendom that predated Reformation confessionalism and the rise of modern nation-states, rose to meet the emergency. So it came to pass that, for more than half a century, the insular-cosmopolitan, American-medieval pseudo-historicism of T.S. Eliot served in place of a rationale for higher English literary studies in Britain, the United States and other Anglophone academic jurisdictions,[39] and the only widely authorized guides to the literary-historical underworld between Statius and Dante were the twin prodigies, typological and topological, of Auerbach's *Mimesis* and Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (both published in English in 1953 under the auspices of a US foundation dedicated to popularizing the work of Carl Jung). Now and again an Anglophone comparatist—C.S. Lewis, Northrop Frye or D.W. Robertson, Jr.— might drop in on an unnamed world of late antiquity,[40] but their interventions could no more shape a corresponding domain of literary research than could, say, the expository raids on Augustine's *Confessions* made by readers of all stripes who rightly took it for a text of extraordinary literary-historical and literary-theoretical interest. The shaping of a disciplinary or subdisciplinary field of late antique (Latin) *literary* studies could only be the work of specialists, the majority of whom would in due course be latergoing classical Latinists. By the end of the 1980s, a draft manifesto for such a field was to be found in the closely written early pages of Volume 5 of HLL. Those pages already pointed a way out of the pseudo-historical short-circuit of the western classic.[41] But only specialists read HLL 5, and few of them, so far, have followed where Reinhart Herzog led in attempting to situate work on late antiquity within literary studies at large. The upshot of this continuing disciplinary or subdisciplinary weakness can be seen at a glance in a new study that tries to place what it calls "late classical Latin literature" in a global-historical perspective. The arguments of the "late classical" section of Walter Cohen's meticulously researched *History of*

[39] See now Collini, *Nostalgic Imagination*, ch. 1.

[40] Sidelights on Frye's and Lewis's excursuses into that field in Vessey, "Boethius in the Genres of the Book." D. W. Robertson, Jr., an eminent Chaucer scholar, pioneered the modern study of Augustine's hermeneutical and semiological treatise, *De doctrina christiana*, by publishing an English translation of it in an American textbook series in 1958.

[41] See esp. HLL 5, 18: "Indessen hat immer wieder das Ausmaß verblüfft, mit dem die antiken Gattungen scheinbar bruchlos von christlichen Schriftstellern fortgesetzt wurden. Es paßte nicht zu der Vorstellung eines direkten und dramatischen Epochenwandels von der Antike zum Mittelalter, geprägt durch eine *Auseinandersetzung von Antike und Christentum*, und es hat wesentlich die Kontinuitätsthese Curtius'… veranlaßt. Freilich konnte diese die Konturen einer auch literarisch unverwechselbaren Epoche nicht hervortreten lassen," etc.

European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present, which is partly an overwriting of Curtius's (Christian) Latin Middle Ages, reveal an acquaintance with general historical treatments of late antiquity and the later Roman empire, including the work of Peter Brown, and with recent literary scholarship on… Apuleius and Augustine. Of literary-historical narrative or synthesis prior to Cohen's own there is scarcely a trace besides Auerbach.[42] But then what was there to be found, that Cohen missed? As far as most students of world literature are concerned, later Latin literature—the Latin literature of later antiquity, whether classically or otherwise defined—is still *terra incognita*, because specialists in that field have so far so largely kept it to themselves. *CHLLL* should change that.

Projection. One of the impulses for Cohen's book was given as far back as 1993 in an essay contributed by Franco Moretti to an Italian *History of Europe*. Entitled "Modern European Literature: A Geographical Sketch," the essay took issue with Curtius's vision of an enduringly Romanocentric, classical-Christian, European literary culture, seeking instead to explain "the greatness of European literature… by its relative distance from the classical inheritance."[43] One reference for Moretti was a statement by Geoffrey Barraclough in a 1963 lecture on *European Unity in Thought and Action*, where the British historian observed that "[t]he idea of Europe as a distinct unity [was] postclassical," "a result of the collapse of the universalism of the Roman empire," and more particularly of the collapse of the Carolingian empire, seen as the last attempt for several centuries to impose a Roman-style supranational order.[44] Barraclough's insistence on the historical *post-classicality* of an "idea of Europe" capable of bearing the symbolic weight laid upon it in the modern era is of a piece with his critique of mystificatory, post-war constructs of a long and unitary western culture—a critique that, as we have seen, lay somewhere behind the commission for Brown's *World of Late Antiquity*.[45] As cited by Moretti against Curtius, this line of argument not only drives another nail into the coffin of the modernist literary classic of western imagination but also serves to underline that when Herzog in HLL characterized the Latin literature of late antiquity as the first post-Roman, Latin literature of Europe, he too was trading in commodities that, on a hint from Fowden, we might think of as "visible futures."[46]

To discard the western classic is not, of course, to slip out of the historian's or literary critic's responsibility to make pasts meaningful in the present, and for others besides one's fellow specialists in a subdisciplinary field. Herzog, as a close reader of Gadamer, had perfect clarity on that point. But one need not be a paid-up Gadamerian in order to conform to the hermeneutical model of *Truth and*

42 Cohen, *History of European Literature*, 65–76. For Curtius, see 493–95.

43 Moretti, "Modern European Literature," 37.

44 Moretti, "Modern European Literature," 7 n. 8. Barraclough argued this thesis in detail in his *Crucible of Europe*.

45 Above, at n. 34.

46 Cf. Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad*, 3: "As with China and India, *an already visible future* in which Islam will be increasingly prominent has to be brought into play if historians are to formulate questions that elucidate our ongoing quandaries rather than reinforcing Eurocentric stereotypes about the past and present" (emphasis added).

Method, or something like it. Peter Brown, that (ostensibly) least philosophical of historians of the Roman empire and its after-states, again provides a telling instance. Having first played a leading role in recovering a lively, recognizably 'late antique' Augustine of Hippo from amid the encrusted 'Augustines' and Augustin(ian)isms of ecclesiastical tradition, and then in *The World of Late Antiquity* modelled an escape from the constraints of a Carolingian and post-Carolingian 'western imagination' of the history of civilization, Brown went on, after an interval for other projects, to devote some twenty years of nearly continuous scholarly labour to developing a revisionist account (in a book with that title, and two other books) of *The Rise of Western Christendom*.[47]

Ideally, critique of master narratives that are found wanting is prelude to a historiography that is rigorously of its own time and world, true to its own critical juncture. The 'non-literary' historiography of the newest late antiquity knows that. One of the opportunities presented by *CHLLL* is of belatedly deploying our study of the Latin literature of late antiquity—whatever we collectively or severally now take that literature to be—towards an account of the late-to-post-Roman (re)culturing of wests and of *the* West, 'literature' included.[48] Putting a period to the western classic will have been the first step in that direction.[49]

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[47] He gives his own account of this trajectory in "World of Late Antiquity Revisited," 23–24. See esp. his *Rise of Western Christendom*, 2nd edn. (2003), Introduction ("Western Europe in a Wider World," "The Making of Europe: 'A History of European Unity?'"...). See also Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle* and *Ransom of the Soul*.

[48] Cf. Derrida, *Demeure*, 21: "Does there exist, in the strict and literal meaning of the word, something like literature, like an institution of literature and a right to literature in a non-Latin-Roman-Christian culture, and, more generally, although things are indissociable in their history, non-European culture? Nothing is less certain." Derrida then critiques Curtius. See also Vessey, "Literature, Literary Histories, Latin Late Antiquity," with references there.

[49] My warm thanks to interlocutors at the "Winkelmann's Victims" symposium in Ghent in the fall of 2018, where this paper was originally read, to Andrew Faulkner and his colleagues and students at the University of Waterloo (Canada), where another version of it was aired a year later, and to David Ganz, Ian Wood and two superlative readers for JOLCEL (ahead of the present respondent, whom I also thank) for further improvements to the foregoing.

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