

Antiquity Matters!

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"You say I imitate the classics without cease; who then should I imitate, the wise or the ass?' Francisco Acuña de Figueroa and the Classical Tradition in Uruguay, 1810-1850."

The reception of classical literature in Latin America has received increased attention in the last few decades. In addition, historians have noted the importance of antiquity in the formation of nations. However, the influence of classical literature in the Rio de la Plata region after the independence has yet to be studied in detail. This presentation explores the role of antiquity in early 19th century Uruguay by focusing on its 'national poet,' Francisco Acuña de Figueroa (1791-1862), and how his works were received by contemporaries. His poems contain many allusions to ancient works and include several translations from Latin. Yet prominent contemporaries objected to his style and sometimes obscene humour. In discussions that spilled over into newspapers, Acuña de Figueroa and other writers argued over the role of literature in their emerging nation and the wisdom of imitating classical authors. A study of these discussions reveals that a persistent and lively interest in Greece and Rome existed within literary circles, and that the issues they discussed may have played a role in laying the foundations of the national literatures of the region