

SUPPLEMENTA
HUMANISTICA LOVANIENSIA
XXVI

SYNTAGMATIA

ESSAYS ON NEO-LATIN LITERATURE IN HONOUR OF
MONIQUE MUND-DOPCHIE AND GILBERT TOURNOY

Edited by Dirk SACRÉ & Jan PAPY



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CUI BONO?
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE AIMS OF TEACHING
POST-CLASSICAL LATIN*

Ingrid A.R. DE SMET

When in 1990 the ‘Second, entirely rewritten edition’ of Jozef IJsewijn’s *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies* came off the press, the volume featured a new, second preface, written in Latin. In it the author defends even more vociferously than in the first preface his choice of English as the *Companion*’s medium of instruction — for that was a criticism levied against the first edition. ‘*Saeculum est* — it is a sign of the times’, shrugged the professor. ‘The Latin language is rich enough for such an undertaking, and I would have been quite able and willing to write in Latin’, we may paraphrase his argument. ‘But who would finance the printing of such a book, and who would buy it?’ Moreover, ‘if the *Companion* is to serve a broad audience, who are not necessarily all fluent readers of Latin, then English may at least favour access to the field.’¹ Indeed, when Jozef IJsewijn wrote these words, the days when full-blown academic books and university theses (including IJsewijn’s own prosopography of the priests of Ptolemaic Egypt) could be written in Latin as a matter of course had long gone. (The last stronghold of academic Latinity is perhaps the Pontifical University in Rome where the list of recently deposited *Tesi universitarie* includes the occasional Latin title amidst academic writings in Italian and other

* A draft version of this paper was presented at the ‘Colloquium on the Teaching of Post-Classical Latin and of Latin to Non-Classicists’, organised by the Society for Neo-Latin Studies and held at Clare College, Cambridge, 23 September 2006. It is my pleasure to offer this revised version to the honorands of this volume, Prof. Dr Gilbert Tournoy — my own teacher of Latin from Antiquity to the Renaissance — and Prof. Dr Monique Mund-Dopchie, assiduous promoters both of the rightful place of the study of the Ancient heritage beyond the Classics. I use the term ‘post-Classical’ to refer to Latin that does not belong to Antiquity, *i.e.* to include both Medieval Latin and Neo-Latin.

¹ Jozef IJsewijn, *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies. Part I. History and Diffusion of Neo-Latin Literature*. Second entirely rewritten edition, *Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 5 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters Press, 1990), p. IX.

European vernaculars, but even this trend seems to have become increasingly rare²).

Readers of this volume will be all too familiar with these signs of the times, the threats posed to the Classical languages, to Latin and even more so to Ancient Greek. We have long been deploring the decline in the provision of the subject in schools and universities, and the waning standards of proficiency. In the shrinking number of British schools (mostly in the independent sector) where Latin is still offered, it is often the first item on the curriculum to yield to the imposition of, or demand for, 'trendier' subjects such as Information Technology or (in the latest developments) Mandarin, Japanese and Arabic,³ which are believed to be more relevant and hence more valuable to living in the world of today. The arguments used to justify this culling have changed little since the educational reforms of the Sixties and Seventies. Meanwhile, the mushrooming administration and the reorganization of university curricula not infrequently rings the death knell for subjects that are regarded as economically uninteresting — with disastrous consequences for the academic researchers and tutors involved: 'In an era of managed resources, every faculty position on the books in a classics department is at least notionally a position denied to other departments,' wrote the editor of the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* in 1993.⁴ It is nevertheless not the purpose of this essay to bemoan the loss of a Golden Age when Latin was a prerequisite to embark on medical studies. Nor do I wish to denounce in one fell swoop all and any challenges and innovations brought to the school curriculum: the adage that 'times do change, and we inevitably change with them' (*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*) holds true, even for the teaching of Latin.

It does not mean, however, that we should impassively allow any further erosion to Latin as a school subject — to the point where, if one considers the situation in Great Britain, a vague and limited knowledge of Latin may only be the happy by-product of a chorister's training at a Choir School⁵ (thus bringing grist to the mill of those who view the study of Classical languages as elitist). But I shall leave the lance-breaking for

² An exploration through the on-line catalogue of University Theses at the Università Pontificia Salesiana yielded one Latin title in 2007, 2005 and 2001, as opposed to three for both 2000 and 1999.

³ Liz Lightfoot, 'Speaking up for Arabic', *The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, 16 September 2006 (supplement on Independent Schools).

⁴ <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/1993/04.05.15.html>

the reinstatement of Latin language teaching at secondary-school level — be it as an intra-curricular Option or an extra-curricular ‘Club’ — to others or, at least, to another occasion.⁶ As for the closure of Classics departments or indeed, as at Cambridge the ‘suspension until further notice’ of undergraduate papers on Medieval Latin,⁷ let us just ask: ‘Who will teach the teachers?’

Thankfully, it is not all bad news: evening classes and the *ab initio* teaching of Latin may in the long history of universities emerge as a relatively recent phenomenon, but it has brought Latin on a par with other languages such as Sanskrit, Hebrew, Modern Greek, Dutch, or even Italian, Spanish and German *etc.* which are routinely taught from scratch. One likes to think that Latin Studies thus attract the truly interested. There have been also press reports of a revival of Latin in American schools, and Classical Latin insofar as it is still taught benefits from a healthy, pedagogical revision.⁸ More to the point for our present purposes, it is almost paradoxical that precisely in the period when Classical Latin came under threat, that post-Classical Latin, and Neo-Latin in particular, managed to establish itself as a respectable field of study, and it is gaining terrain as enterprising tutors turn the demand for greater optionality and roll on ‘Introductions to Neo-Latin Literature’ for undergraduates and taught postgraduates. Neo-Latin language and literature have long been on the menu at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and the Université Catholique de Louvain (the home institutions of the two scholars celebrated with this Festschrift). And the trend has been spreading: apart from the Neo-Latin papers offered to undergraduates of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages of Cambridge

⁵ Cf. Francesca Nelson, ‘Choral Tradition in Good Voice’, *The Daily Telegraph*, Saturday, 16 September 2006 (supplement on Independent Schools).

⁶ For an example of an eloquent public defence, see Alexander Tulloch, ‘What could learning Latin ever do for us?’, *The Scotsman*, Wednesday 15 October 2003.

See: <http://news.scotsman.com/education.cfm?id=1138052003> [accessed 19 September 2006].

⁷ <http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/courses/part2/papers#la> (accessed 24 July 2008)

⁸ The journal *The Classical World*, to name just one example, regularly contains contributions destined at teachers. For new teaching strategies, see amongst others, Donka D. Markus and Deborah Pennell Ross, ‘Reading Proficiency in Latin through Expectations and Visualization’, *The Classical World*, 98 (2004), 79-93 (where further references). See also the downloadable conference papers on the topic of ‘Meeting the Challenge: European Perspectives on the Teaching and Learning of Latin’ (Cambridge UK, 22-24 July 2005) [http://www.cambridge.org/uk/education/secondary/classics/eu_classics/default.htm (accessed 4 September 2008)]

University,⁹ it is worth mentioning the Summer Workshop in Greek and Latin, held at the University of Lampeter, which not only offers modules on Classical Latin at different levels, but also Medieval Latin and Neo-Latin.¹⁰ The University of Western Australia offers an ‘Introduction to Neo-Latin Literature I (and II): From Cicero to Syphilis’, which is aimed at Classicists, whilst in the United States the UCLA offers a course on ‘Latin Writers in the Classical Tradition’ of which the ‘eventual emphasis [is] on post-medieval “Neo-Latin”’. Whoever wishes to study for a ‘BA in Classical Philology’ at the University of Latvia, will find that ‘[t]he mandatory elective part includes also courses of “vulgar” Latin, *Neo-Latin of the Baltic area and West Europe*, Modern Greek’ (my emphasis).¹¹

So let us, in full consciousness of the restrictions and possibilities which face Latin as a subject of study, consider what the place, scope and *raison d’être* of teaching a post-Classical Latin reading corpus might be.

Why learn Latin? I should like to begin by rehearsing very briefly the main benefits of learning Ancient languages, for to some extent they are analogous to the benefits that can be reaped from reading, or should we say decoding, later Latin texts. Before doing so, I should make it clear that I shall gradually abandon any consideration of Ancient, Byzantine, or Modern Greek because it would lead us too far down a sinuous path which requires its own mapping. Moreover, I start from the assumption that most readers of post-Classical texts will come to these after at least some Latin language acquisition based on the normative last of Classical Latin (Cicero, Julius Caesar, Virgil and Ovid), although I am also fully aware that the study of Medieval and Neo-Latin texts is perhaps more often than not undertaken by students in disciplines other than Classics (e.g. theology, philosophy, history of science, romance linguistics, modern European languages, even Islamic Studies) and that there are many Classicists who entertain no desire whatsoever to venture beyond the boundaries of Antiquity.

⁹ *Viz.* ‘NL1: Introduction to Neo-Latin literature, from 1350 to 1700’, and newly introduced in 2007-08, ‘NL2: A special subject in Neo-Latin literature: Marullus, Poliziano, Bèze, Buchanan’ (http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/other/courses/ugrad/neo_latin.html [accessed 24 July 2008]).

¹⁰ See <http://www.lamp.ac.uk/classics/summer/modules.htm> for the programme of 2006 (accessed 22 September 2006).

¹¹ <http://www.ceebd.co.uk/ceed/un/la/la001001.htm> (accessed 22 September 2006).

Firstly, the ability to read, translate, and from a certain level upwards write, complex languages such as Latin and Greek sharpens the learner's capacities for memorization, analysis and intellectual rigour. That is to say: just as top-athletes undertake a full fitness programme to improve their performance in their chosen sport, training not just the limbs most affected by that sport but also other parts of their body, so the study of Latin or Greek can impart valuable, transferable skills to underpin a person's capacity for retaining information, for problem-solving and for marshalling and expressing one's thoughts effectively in other areas. If this has a utilitarian ring to it, then we may draw attention to the fact the national French curriculum for Latin in secondary schools adds to such general outcomes also that the learner should discover the pleasures of reading... Nonetheless, these transferable skills feature high on the career advice pages of Classics departments world-wide.¹² There is no reason that the teaching of non-Classical Latin would not teach the same flexible skills.

Secondly, learning about Ancient culture first-hand, *i.e.* through direct contact with that culture's texts, opens a gateway into understanding the roots and heritage of Western culture. This is the broad subject-specific learning outcome of teaching Latin (and Greek), and its scope and efficiency will of course vary with the level, interests and age or intellectual maturity of the learners. Thus in school children, it ought to lead to the acquisition and understanding of a common culture, and (according to the French curriculum for the *collège*) to a better understanding of one's place in history. At university level, it should lead to a good understanding of the key features of the Greco-Roman past, to the extent that at graduation the student may either move on to postgraduate study in the area or use his knowledge in employment areas, such as teaching, museum and archive-work, academic publishing and so on. Evidently, this Greco-Roman past pulsates right through to the present in a variety of ways and degrees, but it does so very noticeably, when Latin serves as a vehicle for engaging with, or even reacting to, that past. So the teaching of post-Classical Latin ticks this box too: we shall come back to it in greater detail later.

Thirdly, knowledge and understanding of Greek and Latin vocabulary and word-formation is a useful aid to the comprehension and command

¹² The Australian National University, for example, claims that 'Classics graduates are employed in a great variety of areas, for example as university teachers and administrators, members of the clergy, theatre producers, museum curators, company secretaries, teachers, journalists, and human rights advocates.' http://arts.anu.edu.au/languages/classics/classics_homepage.asp (accessed 23 July 2008).

of the lexis of modern European languages. The inflectional nature of the Latin language and its workings with Indo-European grammar patterns should similarly improve the learner's understanding and command of his/her own native tongue (if it is an Indo-European language) and facilitate the acquisition of further foreign languages presenting some of the same features (one thinks of the Romance languages in the first instance, but also those of the Germanic language group), though the exact correlation may be difficult to measure and quantify. Could it not be said, without going into the complexities of linguistic evolutions or intruding on the terrain of Anglo-Saxon, Provençal, etc., that the teaching of later Latin fills in some of the 'gaps' between the Ancient and Modern languages?

Be that as it may, the active, practical use of Latin does not feature very prominently on this list: it has become the attainment of a talented and dedicated few, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, despite a recent revival in this area. At present, the large majority of those who have ever studied Latin possess a reading knowledge — or a level of passive comprehension — which can range from just 'notional' to 'excellent'. Any training in the active use of the Latin language is usually seen as a tool to speed up and embed a passive command of the language. Such training also mostly pertains more to writing than it does to speaking, although a number of Latin language courses, especially those designed for young children, encourage the latter. So although the dissemination of a Latin newspaper on the web or the monthly meetings of Latin-speaking clubs are welcome and valuable aids to sustain buoyancy, if not survival, of the active use of Latin, this has become more of a method than an actual aim.

The native speakers of Latin in the true sense of the word disappeared with the transition from Vulgar Latin to the Romance languages (barring quirky exceptions such as Montaigne). This did in no way stymie the language's creative and pervasive capacity — as (to name just one example among many) the linguistic meanderings of the noun *mumpsimus* demonstrate.¹³ But it is the continuing, broad cultural commitment to the active use of Latin within the spheres of religion, education, government, law and administration, as well as applied sciences such as medicine, or trade and leisure which spawned that vast array of tracts and theses, poems, songs, letters and proclamations, inscriptions, bills, testaments

¹³ G. Tournoy, 'Erasmus, Tyndale, and Shackleton Bailey: From Latin into English and Again to Latin', *Notes and Queries*, 49/2 (2002), 201-203. See also Peter Marshall, 'Mumpsimus and Sumpsimus: The Intellectual Origins of a Henrician *Bon Mot*', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52/3 (2001), 512-520.

and registers, that we call post-Classical (*i.e.*, written in Medieval Latin or Neo-Latin). There is no need to recall to what extent the Latin literature of the Medieval and Renaissance period has shaped Western thought and culture: positively (think of a Thomas Aquinas, an Erasmus, a Newton...), but also, sadly, damagingly (if we think of the papacy's calls for the crusades or of the witch-hunter's manual, the *Malleus maleficarum*).

It follows then that at the very least the overarching goal of teaching post-Classical Latin is to give readers the linguistic capacity to unlock texts written in post-Classical Latin. It may seem obvious to say that the prime aim of teaching Medieval Latin and Neo-Latin would be to instill an adequate grasp of Latin idioms and structures as well as a good grasp of the creative and cultural mechanisms that are at work in these later texts. Moreover, given the language's range of shades and variations according to period, geography, register, genre, and linguistic flair (or absence thereof) of the individual authors, and given the changing cultural landscape in which the texts are produced, this goal inevitably requires increasing levels of specialization. At postgraduate level, on the other hand, we would expect students to produce reliable as well as creative analyses in well-determined fields of expertise, be it twelfth-century Anglo-Latin satirical poets, scholastic theology, fifteenth-century northern Italian humanism or manuscript Latin rhetorical treatises produced in 18th-Century Quebec.¹⁴ It is vital, therefore, that at least a substantial core group of Latinists retain the ability to read — it is the modern equivalent of the humanists' return *ad fontes*...

The ability to produce text editions and high quality translations is another outcome that is dependent on this linguistic prowess, though of course ancillary disciplines such as palaeography, codicology, the history of the printed book, have a major role in this too. Sadly, the specialist teaching that could equip new scholars with the knowledge and methodology for such analyses and editorial work also feels the squeeze of a culture which demands fast and preferably sensational results and justifies its impatience with the excuse of seeking value-for-money. Text editions, as one knows, are often slow and painstaking exercises; they are also expensive to produce and publish, especially if the text is not canonical

¹⁴ On the latter, see Dominique Péloquin et Marc André Bernier, 'L'enseignement de la rhétorique au Québec au XVIII^e siècle: présentation bibliographique et critique', *The Canadian Rhetorical Studies Review/La revue canadienne d'études rhétoriques*, 9 (septembre 1998), 111-140.

See: <http://www.unites.uqam.ca/arche/hermes/activites/rcr2.htm> (accessed 20 Sep. 06).

and of some complexity. Advances in modern technology are an enormous help: one thinks of word-processing, on-line dictionaries, and the digitization of rare books or manuscripts. The down-side is that the accelerated, performance-driven outlook of the world we live in today can lead to shortcuts such as the unjustified, complacent acceptance of watered-down material just because it was conveniently available on the internet. But we are straying from the point of aiming for linguistic command.

Languages and texts, it should be remembered, do not operate in a void, but in historically, sociologically and culturally defined conditions. So a further aim, which goes hand in hand with the former, must surely be to enable readers to interpret Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern texts imaginatively (but correctly) in terms of their literary, historical, intellectual values, and as cultural creations in their own right. 'The critic, today,' wrote Perosa and Sparrow in the introduction to their anthology of *Renaissance Latin verse*, 'wants to get inside the writer's study, to watch him actually at work, to see what it was that determined his choice of subject, of imagery, of form, of metre; to identify the memories, the experiences, the fantasies, that are the stuff of his verse — to find out, in a word, what it was that made the 'neo-Latin' poets write as they did'.¹⁵ The sentiment is *mutatis mutandis* applicable to other areas of post-Classical Latin, and it is as true today as it was in 1979.

Rather than continue too much in the abstract, let me illustrate the poignancy of the need to equip readers properly by referring to a polemic that raged very recently within the pages of the *Historical Journal*.¹⁶ Scholars were at each other's throats over the correct interpretation of the *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos*, one of the most influential but also controversial political tracts of the later part of the French sixteenth century, written in Latin. Two issues lie at the heart of the debate: the first is the level to which Quentin Skinner and George Garnett were right to insist on the pervasiveness of Roman law references in the text, a foundation which can be detected through a careful identification of the pamphlet's sources, both acknowledged and unacknowledged. Whether one calls it *Quellenforschung* or intertextuality, the correct assessment of the lacework of allusions, echoes, and borrowings and so forth (it does not matter

¹⁵ Alessandro Perosa and John Sparrow, *Renaissance Latin Verse. An Anthology* (London: Duckworth, 1979), p. xxi.

¹⁶ Anne McLaren, 'Rethinking Republicanism: *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* in Context', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 23-52; George Garnett, 'Law in the *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos*: A Vindication', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 877-891.

whether they are legal, literary, mythological or historical in nature) is an issue of textual analysis which is not unique, but certainly intrinsic, to the vast majority of Latin writings produced in the wake of Classical Antiquity. Skinner and Garnett's critic Anne McLaren claims that because the legal allusions in the text were less often tagged in the tract's marginal annotations than the many scriptural allusions, the legal conceptual framework was overemphasized and the text misread as elitist. Like all astute readers of sixteenth-century texts McLaren acknowledges that allusiveness can play at several levels of transparency and opaqueness, but she does not seem to concede to what extent the largely Latinate world of scholarly jurisprudence (one thinks of Baudouin, Cujas) held sway over the vernacular world of politics and governance — the prime target audience of the author of the *Vindiciae*.

The second and related sore point in the polemic is indeed directly linked to the Latinity of the text, that is: the question whether, in order to make valid statements about the immediate impact of the *Vindiciae*, one takes the Latin text, published in France in 1579, as one's point of departure and authority (as Garnett does), or (as the critic has done) the seventeenth-century English translations with their mistakes, omissions and adaptations which allow the text to operate in a very different national and political text than that from which it was first issued. Admittedly these are highly specialized debates, requiring insight and knowledge at doctoral or postdoctoral level, not *just* of Latin, but crucially *also* of Latin. This brings us to our final aim of teaching post-Classical Latin, which is to shed light on the literary, historical, intellectual and social interpretation of vernacular cultural expressions through comparison or contextualization in relation to cultural expressions in Latin

Evidently, there must also be room for a more general instruction of post-Classical texts in a variety of contexts, in order to raise a broad awareness of the existence, range, riches and historical significance of literature written in Latin after Antiquity. My own teaching experience has shown that students who approach the Renaissance (or indeed the Middle Ages) without a background in Latin tuition at school or university are not always aware of the widespread nature of post-Classical Latinity. They may be vaguely conscious that Latin was, and still is, the language of the Catholic Church. But in today's multicultural society one cannot (nor should one) even assume that. Admittedly, for youngsters today studying Medieval or Renaissance history or literature requires an enormous adjustment of their value system, and that is certainly true

when one brings Latin into the equation, even in translation: whereas decadent, toga-clad Roman Emperors handling wax tablets exercise a certain popular appeal, men in furry doctoral gowns or wigs writing Latin do not — and women writing Latin even less so. So raising awareness through a broader dissemination of our research and through the gentle introduction of appropriate material in contexts other than Latin classes (mathematics, religious education, English) is a worthwhile didactic aim.

In conclusion, it appears that once this awareness is in place, it is easier for the benefits of teaching post-Classical Latin to be recognized and valued. There is scope for such teaching at secondary school level, but much depends here on individual teachers, who are already under much pressure to complete their mandatory programme and who may not always be able to initiate collaborative projects with colleagues in other disciplines such as history, English, French and so on. It is more at university level, and through dedicated options or intensive courses that we should hope to reap the most success: the combination of a good product and some clever marketing, could turn the teaching of post-classical Latin into a sexy subject, for consenting adults.

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