

## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS NEO-LATIN LITERATURE?

*In successive lexical and grammatical guises, Latin continues to be central to European law, politics, philosophy, science, and literature from the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire to the later nineteenth century. [. . .]*

*It is scarcely possible to interpret coherently the rhetoric of European literatures, the key notions of sublimity, of satire, of laughter which they embody and articulate without a just awareness of the Latin 'implication', of the unbroken, often almost subconscious negotiations of intimacy or of distance between the author in the vulgate and the Latin mould.*

**George Steiner, 'What is comparative literature?' (*Comparative Criticism*, 18, 1996)**

This anthology defines 'neo-Latin' as post-classical, post-medieval Latin, on the understanding that 'classical' Latin was written between the first century BCE and the fifth century CE, and that 'medieval Latin' refers to the period between c. 500 and c. 1400 CE. During the period covered here, from the fifteenth until well into the twentieth century, across the time-span that Steiner outlines, the status and use of Latin changed considerably.

In her influential history of the Latin language, Françoise Waquet addresses the question of Latin's shifting cultural significance; she asks how its value might be assessed, and explores whether the use of Latin – which she terms the 'Latin question' – has rested solely on its educational and rhetorical purposes; or whether the language reflected more strongly the period in which it was produced, and even proved capable of expressing certain ideas and arguments more effectively than was possible in the vernacular:

*Was the 'Latin question' in the modern west a purely linguistic matter that should be seen solely in terms of competence and performance? Might it not refer to a more complex order of things, crystallized around the status attributed to this language by the people of the time? If so, Latin may have derived its authority and duration not so much for what it said or could say, but from what it wanted to say: from what it meant.*

**Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign* (2001)**

The Latin texts included in this anthology collectively make the case for Waquet's 'complex order of things, crystallized around the status attributed to this language'. When studying a neo-Latin text it is important to recognize that Latin held different meanings for different people at different historical moments. Across the five centuries represented here, and especially during the early modern period (c.1500-c.1700), debates about the continuing relevance and value of Latin were lively and deeply-felt. Latin's status during the half-millennium covered in this anthology altered according to a complex, shifting 'order of things', and its function within the literature, education, politics, religion and law-making processes of the different cultures represented in this anthology also changed frequently and fast. Waquet's question provokes other, related questions:

- Is a neo-Latin text merely an expression of linguistic competence, or a rhetorical performance?
- How intimate and tangled is a neo-Latin text's relationship with the culture that produced it?
- Does an author choose to write in Latin because of what he or she can express within this language commonly perceived to be both rigid and logical?
- Does an author choose Latin to reach a wider readership than would be reached through writing in the vernacular?
- What cultural weight does a Latin – rather than a vernacular – text possess?

These are the questions that we would like users of this anthology to consider.

It is important to remember that all of the authors writing Latin in the period covered by this anthology did so as a conscious *choice*, not just because – as in ancient Rome – Latin was the main means of expression across every sphere of life. Instead, during the Renaissance and afterwards, Latinity was associated with *institutions*, both official (church; university; school; legal system) and unofficial (the country-less 'Republic of Letters'; academies; informal coteries) rather than with family homes and informal conversation. Latin's status became 'crystallized' within these various institutions, and its associations with political and religious power, with scholarship and intellectual or social élites, meant that writing in Latin communicated a certain degree of erudition and skill on the part of the author. Authors within this anthology deal differently with this perceived cachet, this 'crystallized' status of Latinity. Every effort we make in reading their work in Latin rather than in translation brings us closer to the worlds that they inhabited and the habits of thought that they adopted.

#### **WHY DID AUTHORS CONTINUE TO WRITE IN LATIN DURING THIS PERIOD?**

Almost from Latinity's very beginnings, when the language was spreading across the ancient Roman Empire, writers have been lamenting Latin's decline and its apparently accelerating slide into barbarism. In the first century BCE Cicero, the lawyer and exemplar of what would one day be known as 'Golden Age' Latin, criticized a group of poets as 'neuterioi' – 'modernists' – for what he viewed as their gimmicky, newfangled verse: these poets included Catullus, who himself was busy criticizing other authors such as Volusius for *his* bad Latin, which Catullus memorably characterized as 'toilet paper'. Half a millennium later, Isidore of Seville lamented that the flow of immigrants into the Roman Empire was corrupting 'pure' Latin, rendering it barbaric. The idea of corruption has always coloured neo-Latin, and its practitioners regard themselves as separate from the 'Golden Age' of ancient Rome. Writers respond to this sense of belatedness in various ways: by a painstaking reconstruction of an idealised 'Golden' Latin as they imagine it; or, conversely, by accepting distance and difference and responding with new linguistic and literary practices and forms. So, while some writers in this anthology aim in their own Latin works either to scrub away the tarnish inflicted by centuries of Latin barbarisms – and particularly the ravages of medieval, scholastic Latin – in order to restore, as new, Latin as Cicero or Virgil would have written it, others demonstrably aim to justify their 'neo-' prefix by producing something new, either by incorporating innovative trends from the contemporary literary vernacular, or by pushing older Latin idioms into startlingly modern, unprecedented directions.

Some writers use their skill in Latin composition to comment on contemporary politics, as in Thomas Campion's late Elizabethan comment on the Earl of Essex's failed military enterprises, Antony Alsop's ironic pessimism about the new Hanoverian government, and Walter Savage Landor's account of the savagery and gruesome fatalities of the Crimean war. Others use Latin to address a particular audience, perhaps in an institutionally specific context: Latin was still the dominant mode of discourse and instruction at the European universities until the eighteenth century at least, and so when the Jacobean Oxford don Robert Burton wanted to criticize his fellow scholars' bad habits, particularly their greedy pursuit of wealth and patronage, he wrote pointedly *for* or *at* them in Latin; when the Flemish/French humanist Josse Bade (Jodocus Badius Ascensius) wanted to communicate how Terence should be read, not just for his own pupils' benefit, but for the enlightenment of his colleagues, students in other lands, in fact the whole European *respublica litterarum*, he wrote in Latin.

The history of neo-Latin cannot be separated from individual countries' cultural and intellectual histories: as these examples show, neo-Latin was not some recondite inhorn pursuit, not just a cameo-polishing act of connoisseurship. Instead, neo-Latin authors from various countries forged robust, dynamic, often creatively neologistic idioms for the articulation of complex, current ideas. A reader's pre-emptive rejection of a neo-Latin text because it is *not* Cicero, *not* Virgil, is akin to refusing to read *Rebecca* because it is not *Jane Eyre*. The neo-Latin authors in this anthology inhabited cultures in which vernacular languages were starting to displace Latin as the mainstream mode of linguistic communication, and, in addition, the more realistic among them accepted that they could never be as intimately, all-encompassingly steeped in Latin as their classical Roman antecedents had been. The best neo-Latin writers produce texts that are much more innovative than mere Golden Age pastiche, or than acts of *imitatio* so slavish that the reader wonders why she didn't just stick to the original classical Latin source: they employ various strategies to render their Latin up-to-date, relevant, original. This anthology offers a range of representative neo-Latin texts that demonstrate all of these literary characteristics, and several debate the status of Latin at their moment of composition, whether directly or obliquely.

#### EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The anthology is designed to include a broad (and widening) range of texts, both in their time and place of origin, and in their form and content. Existing anthologies of neo-Latin material have tended to focus upon works of particular literary merit. While we have made a point of including such 'classics' of neo-Latin (examples include the Latin verse of Buchanan, Milton and Landor), we also aim to offer examples of the various genres and forms in which a research student is most likely to encounter early modern Latin texts: this includes occasional epigrams, commentaries and dedicatory epistles, many of which are formulaic rather than original in terms of literary quality, but which nevertheless present a range of challenges to the inexperienced reader. In practical terms, a student working with early modern printed books, for instance, is likely to encounter material of this kind more often than work of great literary distinction.

#### CHOICE OF TEXTS

Within this wide remit, all the texts have been presented in a consistent fashion, given in alphabetical order of the author's name. Each text, or group of texts (such as two poems by the same author) has an introduction giving relevant historical and contextual information, and some further bibliography; the Latin text itself is followed by a close translation intended to be of assistance to students, and a commentary on points of literary, linguistic or historical interest. All verse extracts include a note on the metre used and some consideration of the associations of that metre.

The imagined audience for the anthology is chiefly that of graduate students, scholars, and perhaps advanced undergraduates. The editors have therefore assumed in their commentaries some basic familiarity with classical Latin syntax and grammar, and focused instead upon glossing unusual or difficult constructions and unfamiliar or distinctive vocabulary. Translations have intentionally been kept close and literal, however, to open up the anthology even to those with limited or beginners'-level Latin. It is likely that postgraduates or advanced undergraduates with an interest in neo-Latin will have a background either in post-medieval history or literature, or else in classical studies, but almost certainly not both. With that in mind, contributors have provided useful and suggestive comments both upon points of historical or cultural interest (such as contemporary political references, current iconography or religious allusions) and upon matters of classical form and intertextuality. Taken as a whole, the anthology aims to cultivate in readers a feeling for the genres, forms and range of reference they are likely to encounter when reading independently in neo-Latin printed texts or manuscripts.

#### **HOW SHOULD THE ANTHOLOGY BE USED?**

Practically speaking, all the texts are selected to be reasonably self-contained, and their length has been limited to allow a group to study a single extract completely in the course of a seminar or reading class. Individual teachers or students could of course choose to hold back the translation and work with the Latin text and commentary alone, if appropriate. Each extract gives details of the edition used, and the availability (if any) of published texts, translations and commentaries: interested readers or groups can use this information to read more of a given work, or to locate other Latin texts by the same author.

In addition, the editors hope that the anthology may itself prove a starting point for future work: so many of these extracts are taken from important texts that remain untranslated, unedited and in some cases entirely unpublished. We would be very pleased to know of any such projects! Moreover, there is no doubt that authors from different nations write Latin differently, and we have acknowledged this in the texts included. This anthology is still growing, but for the meantime we have included texts from as many different countries as we have been able to gather: France, Spain, Scotland, South America, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and England are currently represented, and we are confident that even more nationalities and regions will be added as the collection develops.

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**Suggestions for further reading:**

James W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1990)

James Clackson and Geoffrey Horrocks, *The Blackwell History of the Latin Language* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007)

Joseph Farrell, *Latin language and Latin culture from ancient to modern times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Philip Ford (†), Jan Bloemendal and Charles Fantazzi, eds., *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). 2 vols.

Dorothy Gabe Coleman, *The Gallo-Roman Muse: Aspects of Roman Literary Tradition in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986)

Sarah Knight and Stefan Tilg, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Jozef Ijsewijn and Dirk Sacré, *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies*, 2 vols. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990-98)

Victoria Moul, ed. *The Cambridge Guide to Neo-Latin Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

George Steiner, 'What is Comparative Literature?', *Comparative Criticism* 18 (1996), pp. 157-71

Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 2001)