

International symposium – “Latin and the 19th Century”

Over recent decades, scholars have highlighted the role, preponderant, yet often little known, that Latin was summoned to play in Europe from Antiquity until the present¹. By inverting the usual perspective, which tells the story of the long and difficult conquest of the fields traditionally reserved to Latin by the national languages, they have helped us to understand the degree to which Latin, despite gradually losing ground over the course of history, nevertheless maintained a select place in societies in which it was no longer anyone's mother tongue.

In this respect the 19th century constitutes a watershed. Of course, the challenge then mounted to the functions still performed by Latin was in no way a novelty: we need only mention the debates about the language of inscriptions that took place in France from the 17th century onwards. But the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Nationalism in Europe, perhaps also the desire, often expressed during the Enlightenment, to make literature and the sciences accessible to the greatest number, dealt a further blow to Latin, which it appeared unable to fend off. In education, the “humanities” had to meet new competition from education of a “professional” or “professionalizing” kind. Even within the humanities curriculum, the number of hours allotted to Latin was constantly reduced, to the point of making the language what it is today: an option.

Apart from the evolution of mentalities in general, that is probably the greatest contributory factor to the breathtakingly rapid drop in status to which Cicero's language has been subjected over the course of the last two centuries.

However, it would be an exaggeration to posit a radical rupture in linguistic usage between the 18th and the 19th centuries. For one thing, as we have pointed out, the

¹ Let us mention here Françoise Waquet, Jürgen Leonhardt, Wilfried Stroh, Manfred Fuhrmann, Tore Janson or Nicholas Ostler.

relevance of using Latin had already been questioned in more than one field for several centuries. For another, Latin and, more generally, classical Antiquity, were still the foundation of education in the 19th century, and retained enough prestige to secure prestigious positions in the social hierarchy to those who had studied them.

This permanence of Latin could not fail to leave its mark on literature. First of all, classical Antiquity influenced the literatures in “modern” languages. Thus, Romain Vignest has recently shown the importance of ancient Latin poetry as an intertext in the literary production of Victor Hugo during his period of exile². We may also mention the works of Marie-France David-de Palacio, who has studied the central place of Roman Antiquity in the literature of the fin de siècle. Moreover, it is well known that literary activity in Latin did not come to an end³. The case of the school works of Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and the latter’s *Franciscae meae laudes*, or the Latin poems of Giovanni Pascoli, represent only a small part of this activity. Dirk Sacré and Romain Jalabert were able to compile an 82-page “Bibliographie intermédiaire des poètes et versificateurs latins en France au XIX^e siècle” (“Provisional Bibliography of the Latin Poets and Versifiers in France in the 19th Century”). The website *Pantoia* (<http://www.pantoia.de>) offers an inventory (and the texts) of German literary works translated into Latin and Greek, the bulk of which date from the 19th century. And Vito R. Giustiniani supplied a rich survey of the situation in Italy between 1850 and 1950, demonstrating once again how lively the Neo-Latin tradition remained during and after Romanticism.

This symposium intends to examine the links between the 19th century and the Latin language in three areas:

1. Latin language and “modern” society

2 Romain Vignest, *Victor Hugo et les poètes latins. Poésie et réécriture pendant l’exil*, Paris, Classiques Garnier (« Études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes », 17), 2011, 433 p.

3 The practice of literary composition in Latin, by the way, is alive and well at the present time.

The aim is to examine the respective uses that were made of Latin and of the national languages, or more generally the social place conferred on Latin in the nineteenth century, as well as the debates concerning the applications and the importance of that language. The question is all the more interesting in that it involves symbolic issues of considerable importance, apart from the “practical”, “efficient” side of this or that language.

2. Latin literature and national literatures

It is also possible to investigate relations between (Neo-)Latin literature and the vernaculars in the 19th century. Papers in this field will question the way in which literature written in Latin was received (integrated, assimilated, rejected, even vilified) by the vernacular writers of the 19th century.

3. Neo-Latin literature

Finally, the congress aims to make known the literary production in Neo-Latin, largely forgotten nowadays (and probably, for the most part, already little-known at the time). The fact is that the considerable growth in Neo-Latin studies over recent decades has scarcely extended to Latin works written after the 18th century. Papers in this field may address both the question of the (non-)reception of these texts and that of the modes and issues of neo-Latin writing in the 19th century.

The congress will take place at the Academia Belgica in Rome on 17, 18 and 19 September 2014. Thirty minutes will be attributed to each paper. Please send a proposal (ca. 350 words), provided with a title, to both addresses Dirk.Sacre@arts.kuleuven.be and cbertiau@ulb.ac.be, by 10th May 2014. The scientific committee will reply before June 10,

2014.

The languages of the congress are Italian, English and French.

Scientific committee : Paul Aron (Université libre de Bruxelles, F.R.S.-FNRS), Christophe Bertiau (Université libre de Bruxelles, F.R.S.-FNRS), Wouter Bracke (Université libre de Bruxelles), Romain Jalabert (Université Paris IV – Sorbonne), Dirk Sacré (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)

Organizing committee : Paul Aron, Christophe Bertiau, Dirk Sacré