



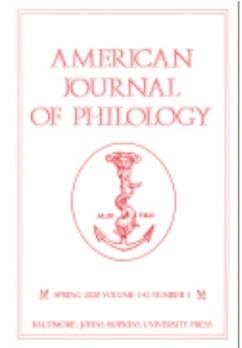
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Antiquities and Classical Traditions in Latin America ed. by
Andrew Laird and Nicola Miller (review)

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ANDREW LAIRD AND NICOLA MILLER, EDS. *Antiquities and Classical Traditions in Latin America*. London: Wiley, 2018. 240 pp. Paper, \$35.00.

Recent trends in classical reception studies have begun to shift beyond Europe and the culture of its elites, with Latin America as one area of especially energetic scholarly interest. This volume, the result of a 2016 colloquium hosted at the Warburg Institute in London titled “Classical Traditions in Latin American History,” advances this burgeoning discourse by presenting discrete studies in the classical traditions present throughout Latin America. The ideological approach that is the organizing principle of the volume is especially progressive for its concerted interest in decolonizing the legacies of classical antiquity and its reception. Where classical reception studies have established robust lines of inquiry concerning the “different ways in which early modern views of antiquity shaped European responses to the New World,” as summarized in the preface, this volume focuses on the traditions that emerged from within Latin America itself, shaped by or adapting classical antiquity.

The scope of the contributions, taken altogether, is admirably ambitious and exceptionally rich, especially for how slim a volume it is at 240 pages: the studies included in the volume, arranged chronologically, variously examine material beginning in the 1500s and culminating in the 20th century, with a wide-ranging geographic span that includes Argentina, Puerto Rico, Paraguay, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Chile, to name just a few countries. This sprawling overview of time period and geographic area provides convincing testimony of the “many vibrant classical traditions all over Spanish America” and its relevance for classicists (Cañizares-Esguerra, “Envoi,” 198), thus firmly establishing the premises required for further research and, consequently, accomplishing one of the tasks set out by the editors in the preface to the volume, namely the integration of Latin American cultural production into global intellectual and cultural history. Such breadth of scope runs the risk of flattening the rich distinctions between Latin American cultures and time periods, but because the majority of the contributions are focused in subject and concise in argument, a sense for various distinct classical traditions and for subtle differences between regions and cultures emerges from the case studies. The volume simultaneously generates a view for some of the general characteristics common to a pan-Latin American engagement with the classics that can be set in contrast to other global regions and a trajectory of a diachronic evolution between earlier and later stages of engagement.

There is a clear prioritization throughout the volume of bringing attention to historically marginalized presences while acknowledging that encoded behind the scholarly inquiry central to the project are historical processes predicated upon suppression, conquest, and colonization. Nicola Miller’s contribution, eschewing elite cultural production exemplified by epic poetry, historical writing, and political thought, analyzes the classical references of popular poetry, sayings, and song, with examples from Argentina, Cuba, and Chile, to demonstrate how “marginalised groups deployed classical references both to debate and dispute

creole visions of the future of their nations” (146) in a learned double-speak that appropriated classical references for distinct aims. Miller’s analysis concludes with a nuanced reading that places this cultural production “in between the conventional poles of opposition and acceptance” (154). Andrew Laird’s analysis of the local histories of three indigenous Mexican chroniclers who used classical references as a means of “affirming a global value for their histories” (100) elevates the writings of indigenous thinkers as working within but also rivaling traditions of European antiquarian learning. Where elite or European cultural production is the focus of study, the approach is one that thoughtfully complicates familiar reception narratives. Desiree Arbo demonstrates that the 18th-century treatise of the Catalan José Manuel Peramás comparing the Jesuit mission in Paraguay to the ideal society projected in Plato’s *Republic* functioned to “[present] the indigenous communities in the missions as ordered societies . . . composed of active and intelligent citizens” (121) within broader debates concerning identity, nation, and the condition of the indigenous. Similarly, Stuart McManus documents the transmission of Greco-Roman theories and practices of exemplarity among the colonial elites of New Spain through an examination of the funeral obsequies of Philip IV of Spain conducted in Mexico City in 1666, with a special interest in the funerary orations of the creole poet Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and his role in the exequies.

Exceptionally successful moments in the collection as a whole occur in those case studies whose arguments unveil a cultural syncretism occupying an intermediary space that defies the “the facile Manichean dualities” identified by Cañizares-Esguerra as especially problematic (“Envoi,” 199): those of indigenous and colonialist, center and periphery, local and global, or European and Latin American. The commitment of the contributors to the avoidance of antiquated hierarchies that subordinate Latin American literature and culture to European succeeds in creating space for the recognition of far more complex, and thus inherently interesting, engagements with classical antiquity that function to dismantle old narratives that attempted to trace a strictly linear cultural influence. For example, the significance of Natalia Maillard Álvarez’s discussion of the book trade and circulation of classical texts in Latin America comes to life in the vivid opening frame presenting the case of the student San Clemente, whose private book collection curiously included both the biographies of Saint Francis and the pagan Julius Caesar, resulting in his questioning by the Inquisition. Similarly, Alejandra Rojas Silva’s discussion of the 1552 *Libellus de medicinalibus indorum herbis*, a handbook on medicinal plants of Mexico presented to Philip II of Spain, demonstrates a “blending of conventions” between European and indigenous Mexican traditions simultaneously evoking Greco-Roman myths of the Golden Age by which the authors of the treatise “sought to demonstrate their dual status as civilised Christians” (43). Erika Valdivieso’s lucid discussion of the Neoplatonic Spanish translations of León Hebreo’s Italian *Dialoghi d’amore* by the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega relies on “the construction of the Inca’s *mestizo* or mixed race identity” and the role of classical antiquity in forging dialogue

between disparate poles of identity and cultural traditions (75). In each case, it is the direct juxtaposition of ancient and post-classical material and the exploration of mixed identities that opens the door for especially provocative inquiries.

The material that is the subject of many of the studies presented in the volume contains complexities that require a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of reception of antiquity, displaying a richness not always recognized in studies of Latin American classical reception. Such an approach enacts a decolonization of the narrative of cultural progress while succeeding to elevate Latin American cultural production. To cite one such example, Byron Ellsworth Hamann analyzes the semiotic significance of the *higa* in the mid-16th-century *Codex Magliabechiano* of Central Mexico, a symbol of European origin in a pre-Hispanic indigenous artistic context. In it, he describes the work as a “painted meditation on two contrasting regimes of visibility” that simultaneously displays distinct messages to European and indigenous viewers, providing “a camouflage for a complex indigenous discourse” (69). An interest in such semiotic multiplicities inherently democratizes classical antiquity, bringing into focus historical agents and audiences otherwise overlooked or omitted in narratives of the processes of cultural transmission. Robert Conn, as well, reinforces this sense of a multiplicity of classical traditions in a survey of differing approaches to reception of antiquity across centuries and in various parts of Latin America.

Perhaps predictably, the culmination of this cultural democratization and relativization is the emergence in Latin American cultural production of a tendency towards the direct disruption of linear historical teleologies originating from antiquity, a theme thoughtfully explored in the studies concerning 19th- and 20th-century phenomena. Rosa Andújar’s analysis of the innovative hellenism of Pedro Henríquez Ureña, exemplified in his three influential essays on education, the humanities, and nationalism, demonstrates how the early 20th-century Dominican intellectual “sought to free the new Latin American nations from the claims of an imperialist Spanish literary tradition” by forging direct links with a Mediterranean past and bypassing colonial power structures (176). Eric Cullhed’s discussion of the “unclassical” is the most explicit case of the complete rejection of idealizing notions of classical antiquity available in the volume. Here he traces the conceptual history of Byzantium (a polyvalent symbol which Cullhed describes as “a relational antonym to the classical”) in Spanish American literature of the 19th century and the *modernismo* movement of the 20th century in order to “relativise the importance of the classical tradition alongside other pre-modern narratives” (183). Similarly, Elina Miranda Cancela discusses how a classical education informed the thinking of the Cuban liberator José Martí concerning the contemporary colonial state of Cuba and shaped his conception of a “magnanimous and thoughtful revolution” (166) deriving from Greek aesthetic and tragic ideals and his understanding of *lo griego* (“Greekness”).

The volume merits praise as an exemplary work of responsible scholarship at every level of the project. The papers achieve a truly interdisciplinary scope, with topics in history, literature, oral culture, visual arts, material culture, and popular

culture. The volume thus succeeds in reaching a broad academic audience both within and beyond Classics, while doing the necessary work of bringing the various disciplines into dialogue with one another. This is achieved not least of all by the diversity of its contributors, who not only span academic disciplines—Classics, History, Latin American Studies, Anthropology, among others—but also represent a diversity of voices and include scholars at different career stages, from the pre-doctoral stage to senior scholars. From the perspective of intellectual approach and ideology, the volume successfully avoids the potential pitfall of reinforcing the master European narratives that codified a hierarchy of texts and languages which privileged the Greco-Roman and European over the Latin American, a problematic approach to reception that “presupposes the centrality of classics, even as [it seeks] to reaffirm it” (Laird, “Introduction,” 10).

The studies in the volume individually offer intriguing close examinations of various phenomena produced within Latin America and of interest to classicists. Considered side-by-side, they form a compelling argument for the continuing development of further research in this area. The deconstruction of a European literary and cultural hegemony over the classical tradition is provocatively set as a challenge to scholars in the salvo that closes the volume, when Cañizares-Esguerra questions the exclusionary processes of canonization that long subordinated the cultural production and classical receptions in the Americas to those of Renaissance and early modern Europe (199): “There should now at least be no question about whether there have long been muscular classical traditions in Latin America . . . We should instead ask why these traditions in the Americas, distinctive as they were, are not held to be as deep and as significant as those of, say, early modern France, Germany or Britain?” The volume firmly establishes how fertile the field is for classical inquiry and interdisciplinary collaboration while providing original conceptual frameworks for successfully embarking upon such important scholarly work.

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FIONA COX. *Ovid's Presence in Contemporary Women's Writing: Strange Monsters*. Classical Presences Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xii + 251 pp. Cloth, \$74.00.

Contemporary studies which set out to engage with, and challenge the meaning of, the work of the Augustan poet Ovid are not uncommon. Indeed, the innumerable ways in which Ovid's imagination can be re-interpreted and re-formed lends itself to renewed analysis by contemporary scholarship. However, where Fiona Cox's contribution to this trend differs is in its specific focus on Ovid's presence in the work of thirteen contemporary female writers. In this