



***Brill's Companion to Classics in the Early Americas*, ed.
Maya Feile Tomes, Adam J. Goldwyn and Matthew
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When Wolfgang Haase and the late Meyer Reinhold founded Boston University's Institute for the Classical Tradition in 1980, the Americas did not escape their notice. In the annual bibliographies published in *Classical and Modern Literature*, as well as in the very call for contributions to their newly formed *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (which continues to publish contributions in Spanish, among other European languages), Haase and Reinhold recognized the long shadow that Greco-Roman antiquity had cast outside of Europe. In fact, the pair planned an ambitious six-volume series that would cover 'The Classical Tradition in the Americas', including individual volumes on Latin America and Canada. Unfortunately, there has been no follow-up to their first volume, which appeared in 1993.¹ Luckily, though, since the turn of the century, interest in classical reception – within and beyond the traditional boundaries of Renaissance Europe – has only increased. This present Brill Companion is a welcome addition that takes fruitful stock of some recent research on the classics in the early modern Americas.

Interested readers should feel comfortable skipping the introduction and jumping right to the chapters, as the volume gets off to a slow start. After first problematizing the terms of the work's title, Maya Feile Tomes underscores the siloed nature of scholarship on the topic. One of the promises, which this volume does make good on, is the sheer diversity of subject matters, geographies and academic disciplines on display. This truly is a transhemispheric account of the classics. Not all places in the early Americas, however, have received equal scholarly treatment. Contending

¹ *The Classical Tradition and the Americas, I: European Images of the Americas and the Classical Tradition*, ed. W. Haase and M. Reinhold, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993.

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that the traditions of classical education and reception in Anglo-America have ‘long loomed large in mainstream classical scholarly consciousness’ and led to an ‘over-inflated sense of the role of Anglo North America’, Tomes presents this volume as ‘[d]ecentering from the U.S.A’ (pp. 2–3, 13). This is a confusing claim. Aside from the enduring, yet largely amateur genre of the so-called ‘founders’ and the classics, the United States has never been even close to the centre of scholarship on early modern classical reception. We cannot point fingers at a phantom surfeit of scholarship to explain the apparently poor scholarly treatment of Ibero-America. It is only with the rise of the research university and professional philology in the mid-nineteenth century that the US begins to loom large in our historical accounts. In fact, studies of the classics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England have actually been playing catch up to those focused on Latin America. In other words, the scorekeeping in the introduction about who has received the shortest shrift (what about New Netherlands? or New Sweden?) confuses rather than clarifies the interventions of the volume. A far more apt – and more concise – framing would have been the state of classical reception research in the early Americas compared to early modern Europe.

Luckily, things pick up after the introduction. The chapters that comprise this volume are fittingly wide-ranging, evidencing the varied uses that the classical past could be put towards in the early modern period. David Luper incisively demonstrates how Bartolomé de las Casas evoked the Roman conquest of Spain as a word of caution against contemporary cruelty in the Caribbean (though the English in Virginia drew the opposite message from the ancient past, equating their colonizing efforts with the ‘civilizing’ project of the Romans). Meanwhile, as Matthew Duquès elucidates, the famed Pequot minister William Apess centuries later drew attention to the settler violence inflicted on indigenous North Americans. Dethroning Philhellenism, which had permeated nineteenth-century American art, architecture and literature, Apess emphasized how ancient Greece and the United States were aggressive empires rather than benign democracies. Also exploring the theme of violence, Nicole Spigner shows how Phillis Wheatley recast Niobe’s mythological hubris into a form of justifiable rebellion, highlighting the possibility of precarious Black mothers in early America to respond to the dehumanizing rule of white patriarchs.

Recognizing the theme of *translatio studii*, numerous chapters fruitfully explore education. Andrew Laird deftly highlights how learning Latin in sixteenth-century Mexico was less about lumbering through classical texts and more about developing skills of oratory and rhetoric that students could employ in Latin petitions to the Spanish crown as well as other writings in Spanish and Nahuatl. Adam J. Godwyn, Zachary Yuzwa and John Gilmore each explore how humble writings (Gilmore is somewhat unimpressed with the Latin student poem that forms the basis of his chapter) become entangled with issues of national identity, making the ‘new world’ legible to Europeans, or the divide between the peripheries and centres of empire. Dan-el Padilla Peralta drives a similar point home about the far-reaching implications of language instruction: ‘the project of stabilizing and teaching language went hand in hand with the imperatives of empire; in fact, it was the metastasis into empire that had propelled Spanish grammar’s evolution into a technology of domination’ (p. 192).

Finally, the subject of censorship crops up in some chapters, though pursued differently and with varying degrees of clarity. Joanne van der Woude offers a rich book

historical account of how Juan de Miramontes Zuázola's 1608 epic *Parnaso antártico* came to be published and served as a point of pride in the Americas and a critique of European inattention. Meanwhile, Connie Bloomfield-Gadêlha's chapter on a rather late (1875) erotic Brazilian poem makes frequent references to a 'classical canon' and 'contemporary positivist politics' that are subject to subversion, but largely eschews concrete elaboration on either of these points. Assertions like 'censorship removed *Mênstruo* from the textual tradition for several years' beg questions about the details of publishing at this particular time and place (p. 81). Who exactly is 'censorship'? Rather than 'erotic dialectics', I would have preferred a more empirical, historical examination of this unique work's fate, fortune and contemporary commentary.

Some of the chapters, while interesting in their own right, do not offer very cogent accounts of classical ideas received or transformed. Ivy Schweitzer's desultory reading of John Winthrop's 'Model of Christian Charity' would have benefited from far more direct attention to Winthrop's familiarity with and attitudes towards classical works, not to mention engagement with the last few decades of foundational scholarship on New England Puritanism (the outdated bibliography alone betrays a point that Schweitzer admits in her first note: this is a largely recycled piece from decades prior). William Barton and Jean-Nicolas Mailloux's contribution suffers from a similar imprecision. We are told, *iterum iterumque*, that Virgil's depiction of bees serves as the model for Jesuit François Du Creux's use of beavers in epitomizing human society. Yet, this is never actually shown. In fact, the authors quote De Creux comparing beavers to ants! Again, this is strong essay – among the strongest, in fact, of the entire volume in my opinion – that sheds light on Jesuit colonial worldviews but does not tell us very much new in the way of classical reception. More forthright, Artur Costrino admits that parallels between early modern Brazilian poetry and its ancient antecedents are 'rather distant from what one might expect', as 'classical reception here does not reside in the poetic canon itself, but rather in how philosophy and rhetoric were used to create these poems' (p. 107).

Such criticisms, though, should not detract from the valuable contribution of this volume taken as a whole. These chapters are positive proof that the early Americas remain a fecund field for classical receptionists to continue tilling.

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