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Continuity and Rupture: Comparative Literature and the Latin Tradition[1]

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In this contribution I aim to do two things: to start to think about potentially productive dialogues between the minimally theorized discipline of Neo-Latin studies and the (perhaps) excessively theoretically self-conscious discipline of Comparative Literature; and to make a case that the Latin tradition – and Neo-Latin literature in particular – should interest the comparatist because it exemplifies, and engages with, some of the key problems currently at issue in Comparative Literature.

In particular, in this essay I discuss theoretical models of continuity and rupture in the criticism on the Latin tradition, before considering how Neo-Latin poets themselves reflected in their own works on the continuities and ruptures that were constitutive of their meaning. My focus in the final part of my argument will be on the *recusatio* ('refusal'), a prominent convention of classical and Neo-Latin elegiac poetry that gave modern Latin authors a poetic language and a set of reference points with which to interrogate their own status as heirs to a coherent and unified literary identity, and to confront threats to that identity.

Latin is fatally entwined with 'literariness'. In the Western tradition, Latin was for many centuries *the* literary language: at the risk of overstatement, we could even say that for much of the post-classical era in the West (and at least until the end of the European Renaissance), Latin meant literature, and literature meant Latin. For the majority of its

history as a written language, and even well before the 'death' of Latin as a spoken first language, Latin had the special distinction of being the privileged, 'marked' form of language within situations of diglossia or bilingualism.[2] And it is a fact not often enough acknowledged that the vast majority of surviving works written in Latin date from the post-classical era, and a significant part of all of what we call literature written in that era was written in Latin.[3] In the early modern period, the quality of 'literariness' was proper to Latin,[4] whereas the vernaculars had to await their champions to enrich, illustrate and defend them. Even later, the 'literariness' of Latin, the promise of Latin – what Latin *meant* more than what Latin could *say* – sometimes more perhaps than the practical considerations of social prestige, patronage, and wider international readerships, continued to motivate the choice to write in Latin.[5] Any comparatist with a passing interest in the history of European literature would ignore Latin at her peril.

And yet Latin is routinely ignored. For us, post-classical Latin literature, and more specifically Neo-Latin literature (Latin literature since the age of Dante and Petrarch, from around 1300 to the present day), remains a dark continent which still awaits exploration and exploitation. I do not wish to insist on that ugly colonialist metaphor, perverse as it is. But there is an irony in that Latin, for so long synonymous with hegemonic authority and tradition, whose dominance excluded and suppressed 'other voices', is now itself marginalized in literary studies and Comparative Literature. The study of Latin literature, and particularly of the vast body of literature in Latin written after the fall of Rome, is seen as an enterprise marginal to the real business of literary studies, where that is taken to mean the study of vernacular national and post-colonial literatures and their interactions.[6]

First, a word on Neo-Latin as a discipline. While it is customary for Neo-Latinists, not unlike Comparative Literature scholars, to adopt a siege mentality and to lament the

marginality and endangerment of their discipline, Neo-Latin studies, so often characterized by its defensive proponents as a discipline in its infancy, appears to be coming to maturity – or at least entering adolescence.[7] A flood of reference works – Brill's *Encyclopaedia* (2014), an Oxford *Handbook* (2015) and a Cambridge *Guide* (2017) – has risen in recent years to swell the steady stream of monographs, collective publications, and editions. Chapters on Neo-Latin now feature in many of the Classical 'Companions', one consequence of the re-orientation in recent years of the discipline of Classics towards reception studies.

Another customary complaint among the more reflective Neo-Latinists has been the troubling absence within the discipline of any serious methodological and theoretical basis, and a conservative approach slow to absorb new insights of critical theory.[8] But from the apparent lack of theoretical clarity or coherency in Neo-Latin studies it does not follow that literary theoretical questions do not interest Neo-Latinists. Indeed, they must interest Neo-Latinists, because Neo-Latin writers themselves were so self-consciously focused on these questions in their works. The very questions that constitute the focus of this collective volume – whether literature can bridge cultural and historical difference; whether 'literariness' should be understood as a universal or a particular phenomenon; how to negotiate the shifting axes of text and world and of form and content – were precisely the issues that Neo-Latin writers found themselves compelled to address, in order to justify a practice of literature viable across time and cultures.

Attempts were made to tackle such questions in philology, rhetoric and poetics, and most urgently in humanist imitation theory.[9] The 'Ciceronian' debates that raged in the first part of the sixteenth century were essentially about the issue of language and its relation to the world; the problem of finding a linguistic and a literary form capable of authentic expression.[10] Neo-Latin writers reflected deeply and in diverse ways on the

problems that preoccupy comparatists today: on the circulation and reception of literature, on ideals of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, of bilingualism and the dynamics of interactions between languages.

CONTINUITY

In making the attempt to align some of the central issues and debates in Comparative Literature with those in Neo-Latin studies, we must acknowledge their shared origins. Foundational figures such as Ernst Robert Curtius and Paul van Tieghem are deeply rooted in the history of both, for better or worse. (Certainly van Tieghem is a foundational figure for what we know as Comparative Literature mainly in the sense that it was *against* him that other tendencies in Comparative Literature defined themselves.)[11] Both wished to establish a generalist or universalist project of literary study, setting themselves against narrow conceptions of 'national literatures'. Both saw their project as being in the service of the 'preservation of Western culture' in the face of the onslaught of Fascism and the global conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century.[12]

For Curtius, Latinity was the 'universal standpoint' from which to perceive the unity and continuity of the European tradition.[13] European literature was an 'intelligible unit',[14] and Latin was the fixed point from which such a universalist project as his became possible. Latin was synonymous with literature itself, in all its 'imperishable treasures of beauty, greatness, faith'; it could furnish 'a reservoir of spiritual energies through which we can flavor and ennoble our present-day life'.[15]

Curtius presented a diachronic view of the 'Latin continuity'[16] that unified the European tradition. Van Tieghem, in his efforts to reorient what he saw as the excessive

privileging of national literatures in favour of what is now called Neo-Latin literature, perceived its unity in a synchronic perspective:

La littérature en langue latine de la Renaissance, une dans toute l'Europe civilisée en dépit des différences qui séparaient les races, les Etats, les langues et les littératures nationales, offre l'exemple, unique jusqu'ici et tel qu'on n'en reverra probablement plus d'autre, d'une littérature européenne internationale, fondée sur l'emploi d'une langue commune, due à la coopération consciente d'écrivains des pays les plus divers, qui se sentaient solidaires et qu'unissaient des goûts, des idées et des tendances littéraires semblables; destinée à un public de même formation intellectuelle et de même culture; riche en oeuvres de tous genres, qu'anime le souci de l'art, et qui s'efforce vers un idéal de beauté.[17]

(Renaissance Latin literature, a unity throughout all of civilized Europe in spite of the differences that divided races, states, languages, and national literatures, is the exemplary case – unique to date and probably never to be repeated – of an international European literature, grounded in the use of a common language, which owed its existence to a conscious effort of cooperation between writers from the most different of backgrounds, who felt a sense of solidarity and who were unified by the same tastes, ideas and literary inclinations; intended for a readership who shared the same intellectual formation and the same culture; rich in works of every genre, motivated by devotion to art and endeavouring to realize an ideal of beauty.)

For Curtius and van Tieghem, the unity of Latin literature in both diachronic and synchronic perspectives was guaranteed by the classical tradition, which could reach across divisions in time and space. The Latin literature of the European Middle Ages and Renaissance was defined by its relation to a classical – primarily Roman – reference culture. The integrity of classical Roman literature itself was in turn guaranteed by its relation to its Greek reference culture, on which it had been founded and through which it defined itself.

The insistence of these twentieth-century scholars on the continuity and unity of the Latin tradition is, however, belied in a sense by the very form of their works. Curtius's unified vision of a European literature held together by the Latin rhetorical tradition must be assessed in the context of the necessarily fragmentary and miscellaneous form of his great work.[18] Likewise, while van Tieghem insisted on the unity, and commonality of motivation, that underpinned Renaissance Latin literature, at the same time he made 'variété' the watchword of his survey. Curtius was sensitive to the dangers of a polarization between the universal and the particular in approaches to literary study, a concern encapsulated in his memorable formulation: 'Specialization without universalism is blind. Universalism without specialization is inane'.[19] In any case, if Latin literature did indeed represent a continuous tradition spanning two millennia, and Neo-Latin literature did indeed represent the singular example of a literature transcending all national, cultural and linguistic boundaries, then Latin literature (in the broadest possible acceptation) would not in itself be a suitable field for Comparative Literature in any meaningful way. Van Tieghem, indeed, wanted Neo-Latin literature to come under his category of 'general literature' as opposed to 'comparative literature', a distinction rightly rejected as useless by René Wellek in 1959.[20] Wellek's critique described van Tieghem's approach as a naïve 'positivistic factualism', a mere 'study of sources and influences'. In Neo-Latin studies this kind of traditional approach prevailed for much longer than it did in Comparative Literature; only recently is it starting to be disrupted by more theoretically sophisticated approaches.

RUPTURE

Although there have been attempts in recent years to refresh the vision of Latin literature as a 'continuum', constituting 'a true expression of the Pan-Western European memory',[21] modern critical accounts of the Latin tradition have tended to shift the emphasis away from models of unity and continuity to focus more sharply on the fault lines and ruptures that such models paper over. In part this was because accounts of the 'universalism' of the Latin tradition in early twentieth-century criticism either passed over in silence, or explicitly endorsed, the elitism, Eurocentrism and gender bias inherent in their approach, which was fundamentally at odds with developments in literary studies more broadly. Other critiques challenged the errors of periodization, and the faulty assumptions underpinning the entire enterprise of 'literary history'. Furthermore, the anti-positivist and deconstructionist current in classical reception studies associated with Charles Martindale and others questioned the model of linear influence that had tended to be associated with the label 'the classical tradition'.

Recent accounts of the longer history of Latin have, accordingly, made efforts to reframe the notion of the 'continuity' of the Latin tradition, and to rethink where the ruptures were.[22] In place of a totalizing view of Latin as monocultural and univocal, these accounts place emphasis on its diversity and polyphony. The classicist Joseph Farrell writes: 'Instead of a language that silences all others, Latin is better appreciated as one among many. Instead of a language realized ideally in the stylistic preferences of one author or one historical period, it is appreciated as richer and more appealing for the diversity that it gained through time and space in the contrasting voices of many speakers.' [23]

There is also a better appreciation of the ways in which later Latin writers themselves conceived of the tradition in which they wrote as being marked by rupture and cultural difference. Thomas Greene's influential study of Renaissance literature, *The Light in Troy*,

subtly analysed the fundamentally ambivalent and paradoxical poses Latin authors struck towards the classical past, to which they felt simultaneously close and distant. An understanding of the anxieties and conflicts underpinning Renaissance Latin writing gives the lie to van Tieghem's idealized picture of its unproblematic unity.

At the same time, however, recent work has highlighted that whereas there might have been anxieties about the viability of Latin as a modern literary language, equally Latin could be seen by early modern authors as something freer and less restrictive for literary expression, since it furnished a shared reference space of complicity between author and reader. Indeed, if scholarly views of the relation between classical and post-classical Latin literatures have shifted from an emphasis on continuity and universality to an emphasis on rupture and diversity, scholarship on the relation between Neo-Latin and the vernaculars has tended to move in the opposite direction.[24] The adversarial model of separate realms occupied by these different languages and their literatures (the learned versus the popular, the artificial and restrictive versus the natural and authentic) is no longer valid. Rather than a zero-sum game, in which Latin ultimately lost out to the triumphant vernaculars, there is greater recognition in recent criticism of the 'dynamics' or 'symbiosis' of their interactions.

All of this adds up to a more nuanced picture of Latin literature, one that takes account of difference, dynamism and disruption. The model of the Latin tradition's unity, continuity and universality has been exposed to critique in recent scholarship. Such accounts recognize that the critique was already happening in the works of humanist Latin writers themselves, who suspected that a common language might not in fact be able to bridge the historical and cultural break with the classical past, and that the desired continuity, stability, fixity and transcendent unity of the Latin tradition was always under threat of rupture.

REFUSAL

In order to examine in finer detail how Neo-Latin literature confronted threats to the ideal of continuity and unity, I will now focus on some Neo-Latin uses of a classical poetic theme that is particularly relevant to this issue, the *recusatio*. The *recusatio* is a stylized 'refusal' on the part of the poetic persona to write one kind of poetry (usually in the 'higher' genres of epic and tragedy), and the expression of a preference for another kind. Its staging often incorporates a 'theophany': the appearance of a god who addresses the poet directly and compels his change of heart.[25] My examples will be taken from the genre of Latin love elegy, since 'refusal' is the programmatic trope of that adversarial and contrarian genre.[26] In what would become the dominant model for the *recusatio* among Neo-Latin love elegists, Ovid's *Amores* 1.1, the god Cupid forces the poet to abandon his epic ambitions in favour of love elegy by shooting him with his arrows, and by reaching into the poetic text itself to 'snatch a foot away', transforming the hexameter line into a pentameter and so literally altering the heroic metre to one better suited to love poetry.

At one level the *recusatio* is a modesty topos and a means of negotiating the demands of patrons and rulers.[27] More fundamentally, it is about negotiating and defining a literary identity. Because it expressed a preference for a specific set of generic and stylistic models, and functioned as a 'trope of intertextuality',[28] it enabled Neo-Latin poets to stake a claim for their place in a tradition stretching back to classical antiquity, the 'Latin continuity' described by Curtius. It also helped them to reinforce the idea of cross-cultural community of poets and readers, the 'unity' of Renaissance Latin literature described by van Tieghem. At the same time, however, the structure of the *recusatio* compelled Neo-Latin poets to reflect on the ways in which the desired continuity with the past, and the

ideal unity of Neo-Latin literature in the present, were marked radically by cultural and linguistic difference.

When Neo-Latin elegists used the *recusatio* theme in their work, they had at their disposal a range of established poetological images, figures, and patterns of wordplay and allusion (largely derived from the Roman elegists Ovid and Propertius, but ultimately going back to the Hellenistic poet Callimachus).[29] Relying on their readers' readiness and capacity to recognize and interpret such techniques, they deployed them to emphasize their continuity with the ancient models, and assert a common sense of purpose and identity with them. Thus, they used the fixed conventions of the *recusatio* and theophany to anchor their texts to a classical authorizing model. Simultaneously though, the *recusatio* must inevitably mark the Neo-Latin poet's distance and difference from the classical models. The poetic language of the *recusatio* taken up by Neo-Latin poets was distorted by an absence at its centre: the text on which the ancient Roman poets had modelled their refined aesthetic, Callimachus's *Aetia* prologue, was unknown to Renaissance readers.

The very incompleteness of this poetic language is perhaps what suited it to reflecting on the potentialities and the limitations of the whole humanist project of *imitatio*. One of the paradoxes of Renaissance literary identity was that classical imitation always risked being both *too much* and *not enough*. The French poet Joachim Du Bellay (ca.1522-1560) writes an elegiac *recusatio* (*Amores* 1) stitched together from near verbatim quotations from classical poems.[30] The ostentatiously imitative nature of this almost centonic *recusatio* implies a total effacement of the Neo-Latin author, who is condemned merely to transcribe the words of others: Du Bellay, indeed, complains at the end of this poem that he has been deprived of his 'ingenium' ('individuality', we might say) and his 'solitasque in carmina vires' ('poetic force') together with his abducted beloved. The suggestion is

that the adoption of the overdetermined formal conventions of classical elegy threatens to squeeze out the poet's own voice, so that the text becomes mere empty form. The Dutch Neo-Latin poet Johannes Secundus (1511-1536) uses his imitation of the Ovidian *recusatio* (which advertises the fact that falling in love is little more than a pretext for the writing of poetry) to make an argument about the problem of confronting the conventional with the personal.[31] Secundus adds a further twist to his Ovidian model: Cupid's intervention is superfluous, he says, because he has already freely ('sponte') *chosen* to write love elegy. On this account he pleads with Cupid not to hurt him: he is already on his side. But Cupid whets his arrows and shoots him anyway, and the poet experiences the sensation of the 'god entering his veins' ('in venas sensimus isse deum.'). In posing the problem of the *recusatio* in terms of an opposition between formalistic imitation and deeply felt inspiration, Secundus touches upon the questions at the heart of humanist imitation theory: what does it means for a modern poet to adopt the language, metrical forms and generic conventions of ancient poetry; how can the new poet imbue these forms with meaning?

Neo-Latin elegists frequently used the *recusatio* to construct and legitimize fictions of continuity. They followed the example of the classical elegists' own efforts to insert themselves into a poetic line of succession and establish a Roman elegiac canon.[32] These poets used the *recusatio* to draw an unbroken line from the ancient to the Neo-Latin elegists, constructing a continuous poetic heritage and asserting the commonality of classical and humanist literary endeavour. Of course, the historical reality was that the elegiac succession was self-evidently not a continuous one: the Middle Ages had produced no works worthy of mention in the genre of Latin love elegy – at least as the Renaissance humanists saw it.[33] The Neo-Latin elegists needed to create it. They needed their own foundational figures to bridge the divide that separated them from classical antiquity:

depending on the time and place of writing, the bridging figure in the catalogue of love poets could be Petrarch, Pontano, Lotichius Secundus, or Johannes Secundus.[34] Poets in northern Europe had a further difficulty to contend with when fashioning models of continuity. Whereas Italian poets might rely on notions of geographical, linguistic and cultural affinity to assert their continuity with the ancient Romans, poets beyond the Alps needed to do more to bridge a cultural divide in space as well as in time. When Johannes Secundus wished to establish the continuity between ancient and modern elegy (*Elegiae* 3.7), his personified 'Elegia', who characterizes herself as culturally Italian, locates the succession explicitly in Italy: Italian poets, both ancient and modern, are the only ones mentioned. The bridging role is here played by the figure of Andrea Alciato, the Italian humanist who had taught Secundus at Bourges; and the divide is not between ancient and modern, but between Italy and northern Europe.[35]

The international nature of Neo-Latin literature made such models of cross-cultural transmission plausible, but linguistic and cultural specificity and difference were never entirely effaced. Giovanni Pontano's (1426-1503) elegiac collection *Parthenopaeus* – whose title means 'the Neapolitan' – reconfigures the landscape of elegy in ways expressive of local identity. The *recusatio* poem 1.18 is modelled on Prop. 3.3, but the figures of Apollo and Calliope are replaced by the nymph 'Umbria', foregrounding Pontano's own Umbrian birth, which he shared with Propertius.[36] Thus Pontano both ties his poetic destiny to his own birthplace, and asserts his identity with his ancient model.[37] A French Neo-Latin poet framed the idea quite differently. Du Bellay composed – and set – his love elegy collection *(Amores*) in Rome. Du Bellay's poet-lover's fantasy in *Am*. 2 of storming the house in which her husband has confined his beloved ('Faustina') recalls Du Bellay's own famous exhortation, in a work written in French, that the modern poet should storm the citadels of Rome and ransack its literary heritage.[38] In the *Amores*,

Faustina stands for Latin poetic composition, and the classical Roman literary tradition more broadly, and the love relation speaks of different possibilities for poetic expression. In *Am.* 3, Du Bellay re-stages the Ovidian Cupid theophany; but the mocking Cupid now laughs and reaches into Du Bellay's text to lock Faustina in a convent. Faustina's confinement in a convent amplifies the elegiac anxiety about her unattainability. The fundamental point here is not that Du Bellay is rejecting the conventions of the classical elegiac discourse in favour of a 'christianized' version; rather he is using the association of that discourse with the expression of loss, separation and self-division to articulate a sense of precarious identity fractured by conflicting languages and allegiances.[39]

Implicated in these confrontations between universal and local and ancient and modern is the question of language choice, not only in terms of the high style versus the middle and low, but also in terms of Latin versus the vernacular. One might expect to find in Renaissance *recusationes* an association of Latin with the higher genres and with public, encomiastic poetry, and of the vernacular with 'smaller', lighter and less formal kinds of poetry. But the reverse could be the case, so that the *recusatio* could function as a refusal of the vernacular in favour of Latin. In the Neapolitan court context in which Pontano was writing, indeed, elevated styles of public poetry had become associated more readily with the Iberian vernaculars: the choice of Latin necessarily signified something distinct from those traditions.[40] Du Bellay, writing in a very different context, played on a similarly counterintuitive opposition between poetry in Latin and poetry in French (for which he was, of course, far more famous). In one of his Latin poems he personified the Latin Muse as his 'puella' (girlfriend) and 'domina' (mistress) – both words specifically evoke the genre of love elegy – and French as his 'nupta' (bride) and mother of his children:[41] the choice of Latin is associated with a certain licence and sensuality in contrast with the familial duties of the vernacular.

Elegiac theophanies often dramatized the competing demands of Latin and vernacular traditions of poetry. Tito Strozzi (1424-ca.1505), for example, opened the early versions of his love elegy collection with a theophany poem set in a specific place and time: the *palio di San Giorgio*, a horse race which took place in Ferrara every year on the 23 April.[42] The appearance of Cupid himself, when it comes, is all the more disruptive for its being in such a concrete contemporary setting; and his intrusion is as much a disruption of genre as it is of cultural milieu, since the scene-setting is more evocative of the Petrarchan *innamoramento* than of anything in Roman elegy.[43]

Nicodemo Folengo (1454-1499), like Strozzi, adopts for his elegiac theophany poem (*Elegiarum liber* 2)[44] a concrete setting evocative of the Petrarchan *innamoramento*: in this case, a wedding taking place on the Nativity of John the Baptist. Cupid's chariot appears, leading in chains a group of youths who, to judge from the language that is used to describe their plaints, could even be the ancient elegiac poets themselves. The appearance of the enchained procession of lovers, their utterances marked by pointedly elegiac language, serves to shift the frame of reference away from the initially Petrarchan setting. The scene of the triumphant Cupid leading prisoners in chains evokes Ovid *Amores* 1.2.23-52, but also Propertius 3.1.11-12, where the youths following Love's chariot are specifically identified as writers. What the poet is being compelled to do is not just to devote himself to love: it is to serve the genre of Latin love elegy itself – not in preference to epic, but in preference to the vernacular and contemporary alternative genres of love poetry. In contrast with Du Bellay's conception of Latin elegy as a space of freedom and play, here the association of the genre with the trope of servitude (*servitium amoris*) is being used to express ideas about the oppressive weight of tradition.

The elegiac *recusatio*-theophany, then, might express a range of different refusals and preferences beyond the narrow genre opposition of hexameter epic and elegiac love

poetry. It could oppose Latin and the vernacular, the universal and the local, the ancient and the modern. But the choice was rarely posed in absolute terms. More often the *recusatio* expressed ambivalence about the poet's allegiances, as he engaged in negotiations around identity and with the cultural and ideological pressures that shaped it.

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The ways in which Latin poets used the fixed conventions of the *recusatio* and theophany both to anchor their texts to a classical authorizing model, and simultaneously to assert their distance and difference from the classical models, can be traced through into later uses of these topoi in vernacular literature. I will give two quite disparate examples.

Goethe's *Roman Elegy* 13 ('Amor bleibet ein Schalk') – part of a collection addressed, like that of Du Bellay, to one 'Faustina' – re-enacts the Cupid theophany of Ovid *Amores* 1.1. In common with the Neo-Latin treatments, the poem foregrounds its status as a replay of a scene that has taken place many times before in ancient poetry; Goethe's Cupid, in his speech to the poet, reminds us of this fact:

> Those, I mean, whom at work I always used to look up.
>
> Their creations – I shaped them myself![45]

But the situation differs from Ovid's, in fact being much closer to that of Secundus's *Elegiae* 1.1: the poet has *already* made the choice to dedicate his life and his poetry to love, so that the intervention of Cupid need not demand a shift from epic to love elegy. There is no *recusatio* as such: rather, a 'grand' style is said to be entirely appropriate to –

indeed the sole preserve of – love. Again, the conceit recalls Secundus, whose elegiac persona protests to Cupid that no other poetic direction is open to him, since Cupid's victory over the entire world is already complete. Instead, Goethe's Cupid offers to revive his poetic powers by (re)introducing him to the school of the ancients (antiquity is equated with youth) and by giving him 'matter' for his poems. But this Cupid is a 'sophist', 'treacherous in keeping his word'. His promise creates an impossible demand: he forces the poet on the one hand to imitate the ancient models and on the other to take on his theme by being in love, two things which prove to be in conflict with each other. Cupid gives him subject matter ('Stoff') for his poetry, but in so doing takes away his capacity to compose it: love's fulfilment makes poetic creation impossible; or, alternatively, the artifices of an ancient poetic tradition prove to be incompatible with real life and real love. The poem explicitly positions itself as a replay of the ancient topos, but is distanced from it in that it results in poetic failure. Or is it a failure? Like the Neo-Latin elegists, Goethe uses the discourse of love elegy to probe anxieties about imitation, and in so doing transforms it. As Peter Godman argued, the *Roman Elegies* represent a triumphant resolution of the problem of imitation, a 'living symbiosis of antiquity and actuality', collapsing the antitheses of art and nature. [46]

My second vernacular example is from Blake Morrison's 2018 novel *The Executor*, whose narrative incorporates a sequence of love poems discovered by the first-person narrator (the titular executor) among the papers of a deceased poet named Robert Pope. (Most of the poems are then collected at the end as a free-standing collection.). The poems are adaptations of Roman love elegy, although this fact is withheld in the narrative, its revelation being a key thematic development. One of them, 'Love and War', is a modern take on the elegiac *recusatio* poem: 'I was all set to write the epic of the twenty-first century, / […] when you came in and put the hex on me'. The poem, is indeed, closely

modelled on Ovid *Am.* 1.1: it updates the Ovidian conceit of the verse-snatching Cupid with the device of a word processor's autocorrect function. It appears at first, in the narrative, to be part of a pattern of troublingly personal self-exposure. This is how the novel's first-person narrator first encounters it: 'What the fuck? These weren't Rob's kind of poem […] Where was the impersonality, the elusiveness, the ambiguity? The word 'I' screamed from every stanza […] Why would someone whose poems had been described as "hermetic" suddenly allow himself to appear naked?'[47] But this reading is radically reframed when it is revealed that all of the poems are versions of elegies from Ovid's *Amores*. What seemed at first to be a text of intimate self-exposure, giving rise to qualms about the appropriateness of its publication, in fact proves to be a poetic re-performance, a product of creative imitation.

These vernacular imitations of classical elegy both continue and reconfigure the debates that had animated the Neo-Latin versions of elegy. Goethe poses the problem of the incompatibility of authentic feeling ('being in love') with the writing of poetry in imitation of the ancients. Morrison's version suggests that poetic imitation is a delicate negotiation between self-revelation and concealment. Both speak of an anxiety about the confrontation of the personal and the conventional, of the individual poet's voice and the voice of tradition.

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I hope to have shown that there is great potential for productive ongoing dialogues between Neo-Latin studies and Comparative Literature, despite the distance separating the two disciplines from their shared origins. It is undoubtedly true that Curtius's 'Latin continuity' and van Tieghem's Latin 'unity' were fundamental to the self-image that Neo-

Latin authors wished to present in their works; at the same time, though, these authors did not shy away from acknowledging the complexity and the contested nature of these ideals. They asked how a literary identity authorized by classical models might be fractured and diminished as it crossed temporal and cultural boundaries, and became just one among many competing traditions and allegiances. Even within the highly restrictive code of the *recusatio,* Neo-Latin authors were able to give voice to a great diversity of perspectives on these issues. Superficially about aesthetic choices and the definition of genre, the *recusatio* functioned at a more fundamental level as a site of negotiation with the past, and of a struggle with the problem of what it means for literary forms and a literary language to cross historical, cultural and national borders, and so become divorced from the contexts that gave meaning to those forms and that language.

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[2] On this point see for example Jürgen Leonhardt, *Latin: Story of a World Language*, trans. by Kenneth Kronenberg (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 124, 146.

[3] Leonhardt, *Latin*, p. 2, estimates the ratio of post-classical to classical Latin texts at ten thousand to one.

[4] The fullness of the concept of 'literariness' probably has no direct counterpart in the classical and humanist tradition of rhetoric and poetics. 'litterae' ('letters') was a broader category than our 'literature'; 'litteratura' meant grammar and poetry (*grammatice*). It could make sense to align what we understand by 'literariness' with the concept of 'elegantia' as theorized by Lorenzo Valla and others. Cf. D. C. Feeney, *Beyond Greek: The Beginnings of Latin Literature* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 153-155, who engages with Antoine Compagnon on the question of 'literature' as transhistorical category, but argues that it is meaningful to speak of classical Greco-Roman 'literary culture'.

[5] Françoise Waquet, *Latin, or, the Empire of a Sign: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, trans. by John Howe (London; New York: Verso, 2001).

[6] Christopher Celenza's *The Lost Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univerity Press, 2004) gives a useful account of the general historical reasons for the lack of visibility of Neo-Latin in comparative studies.

[7] A sample of the ways in which Neo-Latinists characterize their discipline: Ingrid De Smet describes it as a 'campsite'; Craig Kallendorf as 'a marginal enterprise'; James Hankins calls Neo-Latin literature a 'lost continent', an 'Atlantis'; Walther Ludwig 'an impenetrable forest' in contrast to classical philology's 'well-preserved garden'. The absence of concrete venues or even of clear contours for Neo-Latin as a discipline can be seen as a weakness, but also may be a strength – as it may be, indeed, for Comparative Literature – since it lends diversity, mobility, and resilience. Ingrid A. R. De Smet, 'Not for Classicists? The State of Neo-Latin Studies', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 89 (1999), 205–209; Craig Kallendorf, 'Recent Trends in Neo-Latin Studies', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 69.2 (2016), 617–629; James Hankins, 'A Lost Continent of Literature', in *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance: Humanism* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), pp. 541–49. For the Ludwig quotation see Toon Van Hal, 'Towards Meta-Neo-Latin Studies? Impetus to Debate on the Field of Neo-Latin Studies and its Methodology', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, 56 (2007), 349–365 (p. 354 n.14).

[8] Van Hal, 'Towards Meta-Neo-Latin Studies?'

[9] Colin Burrow, *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); M. L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[10] *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. by Joann Dellaneva and Brian Duvick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Erasmus, 'Ciceronianus' in: *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 28, ed. by A. H. T. Levi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

[11] René Wellek, 'The Crisis in Comparative Literature (1959)', in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature*, ed. by David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 161–174.

[12] This formulation is Curtius's: Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R Trask, new edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. xxvi.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. viii

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. x

[16] *Ibid.*, p. vii

[17] Paul van Tieghem, *La Littérature latine de la Renaissance* (Paris: E. Droz, 1944; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1966), p. 7. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

[18] Cf. the remarks of Colin Burrow in the introduction to the 2013 edition of Curtius's work (p. xviii).

[19] Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, p. xxv.

[20] Van Tieghem, *La Littérature latine*, p. 9; Wellek, 'The Crisis of Comparative Literature', pp. 162-163.

[21] The quotations are from Wim Verbaal's introduction to the volume *Latinitas Perennis. Volume I: The Continuity of Latin Literature*, ed. by Jan Papy, Wim Verbaal, and Yanick Maes (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 11-12. Verbaal and other contributors to the volume do in fact give a somewhat more nuanced picture than the presentation of the volume might suggest.

[22] In addition to Waquet and Leonhardt, see Joseph Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture: From Ancient to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[23] Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture*, p. 123.

[24] Philip Ford, *The Judgment of Palaemon: The Contest Between Neo-Latin and Vernacular Poetry in Renaissance France* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); *Dynamics of Neo-Latin and the Vernacular: Language and Poetics, Translation and Transfer*, ed. by Tom Deneire (Leiden: Brill, 2014); *Bilingual Europe: Latin and Vernacular Cultures: Examples of Bilingualism and Multilingualism c. 1300-1800*, ed. by Jan Bloemendal (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[25] The best concise overview of the *recusatio* in Roman poetry is R. O. A. M. Lyne, *Horace: Behind the Public Poetry* (Yale University Press, 1995), 'Appendix: The *recusatio*', pp. 31-9. Also essential is Ruurd R. Nauta, 'The *Recusatio* in Flavian Poetry', in *Flavian Poetry*, ed. by Ruurd R. Nauta, Harm-Jan van Dam, and Johannes J. L. Smolenaars, Mnemosyne Supplementa (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 21–40.

[26] The generally adversarial character of Roman elegy – its positioning against the social order, the dominant poetic tradition, conventional gender roles, and so on – has long been a commonplace of criticism, but some have urged caution about the extent to which the is to be understood in ideological and political terms: whether Roman elegy really is 'resistance literature'. See for example Elaine Fantham, 'Roman Elegy: Problems of Self-Definition, and Redirection', in *L'histoire littéraire immanente dans la poésie latine: huit exposés suivis de discussions*, ed. by Arnd Kerkhecker and Jürgen Paul Schwindt (Geneva: Droz, 2001), pp. 183–220 (213).

[27] On this aspect see in particular Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 81.

[28] For the term see Alessandro Barchiesi, 'Tropes of Intertextuality in Roman Epic', in: *Speaking Volumes: Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and Other Latin Poets* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), pp. 129-140.

[29] The key Roman poetic texts are: Virgil, *Ecl*. 6; Horace, *Sat*. 1.10.31-9, *Epistles* 2.1. 250-9, *Odes* 1.6, 1.19, 2.12, 4.2, 4.15, *Epodes* 14; Propertius 2.1, 2.10, 2.13, 2.34.61ff., 3.1, 3.3, 3.9, 4.1.71ff.; Ovid, *Am*. 1.1, 2.1.11-22, 2.18, 3.1.

[30] Du Bellay, *Oeuvres latines: Poemata,* ed. by Geneviève Demerson (Paris: Nizet, 1984), p. 135.

[31] Johannes Secundus, *The Amatory Elegies of Johannes Secundus*, ed. Paul Murgatroyd (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 18. For analyses of the poem, see Clifford Endres and Barbara K. Gold, 'Joannes Secundus and his Roman Models: Shapes of Imitation in Renaissance Poetry', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 35.4 (1982), 577–589 (585); and Paul Murgatroyd, 'Johannes Secundus *Elegies* 1.1 and Augustan Poetry', *Renaissance Studies*, 9.3 (1995), 259–266.

[32] Prop. 2.34b.87-94 (Catullus, Calvus, Gallus, himself); Ovid *Am*. 1.15.27-30 (Tibullus, Gallus); Ovid, *Tr*. 2.445-468 (Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, himself); Ovid, *Tr*. 4.10.51-3 (Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, himself).

[33] For a slightly more favourable account of the fortunes of the genre in the Middle Ages, see Marek Thue Kretschmer, 'The Love Elegy in Medieval Latin Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy*, ed. by T. S. Thorsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 271-289.

[34] For example, Petrarch is mentioned as a bridging figure by Ugolino Verino, *Flammeta* 2.1; for Pontano and Strozzi as bridging figures, see Girolamo Bologni, *Candidae libri tres* 1.1; Petrarch and Lotichius stand in this this role in Paulus Melissus, *Elegiae* 4.2; Johannes Secundus is a bridging figure in Janus Dousa, *Cupidines* 2.1, 2.2.

[35] Johannes Secundus, *Elegiae* 3.7. cf. V. Leroux, 'Ecriture et réseau: la dimension sociale et collective de la composition poétique chex Jean Second et ses frères', *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Vindobonensis*, edited by Astrid Steiner-Weber, Franz Römer (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 71-101 (86-7).

[36] Giovanni Pontano, *Carmina: ecloghe, elegie, liriche*, ed. Johannes Oeschger (Bari: Laterza, 1948), pp. 87-9.

[37] For an analysis of this poem, see Matteo Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 34-6.

[38] 'Conclusion de toute l'œuvre' in: *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549).

[39] Generally on Du Bellay's ambivalent relationship with Latin poetic composition see: Marc Bizer, *Imitation et conscience de soi dans la poésie latine de la Pléiade* (Paris: Champion, 1995); Perrine Galand-Hallyn, *Le 'Génie' latin de Joachim Du Bellay* (La Rochelle: Rumeur des Ages, 1995); and Philip Ford, *The Judgement of Palaemon*, esp. Ch. 2 'Joachim Du Bellay: Language and Culture'.

[40] Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity*, pp. 19, 27-8.

[41] *Oeuvres latines*, p. 79.

[42] *Erotica* 1.2 in: *Tito Vespasiano Strozzi poesie latine tratte dall'Aldina e confronte coi codici,* ed. Anita Della Guardia, (Modena: Blondi & Parmeggiani, 1916).

[43] For an analysis of Strozzi's use of both Ovidian and Petrarchan elements in this poem, see Christoph Pieper, 'Medievalisms in Latin Love Poetry of the Early Italian Quattrocento' in *Early Modern Medievalisms*, ed. Alicia C. Montoya, Sophie van Romburgh, and Wim van Anrooij (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 45–65 (59-63); see also Nina Mindt, 'The Inner-Poetic History of Latin Love Poetry in Tito Vespasiano Strozzi's *Eroticon*', in *Renaissance Rewritings*, ed. by Helmut Pfeiffer, Irene Fantappiè, and Tobias Roth (De Gruyter, 2017), pinpointing some of the elegiac intertexts (175-6).

[44] Nicodemo Folengo, *Carmina*, ed. Carlo Cordié and Alessandro Perosa (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, 1990), pp. 64-6.

[45] Translation quoted from *Roman Elegies and Other Poems*, trans. M. Hamburger (London: Anvil, 1998).

[46] Peter Godman, '"Johannes Tertius": Goethe and Renaissance Latin Poetry', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53 (1990), 250–265 (p. 263). Godman's article discusses Goethe's engagements with Neo-Latin poetry, specifically that of Johannes Secundus, but does not mention Secundus's *Elegiae.*

[47] Blake Morrison, *The Executor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2018).