

BOOK REVIEW

Latin of New Spain. By ROSE WILLIAMS. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishing, 2015. Pp. xx + 280. Paper, \$19.00. ISBN 978-0-86516-833-6.

Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of extant Latin derives from later than, and not infrequently from places geographically outside, the historical core of the Roman Empire, the study of Latin is far too often confined to works from authors on a narrow list of canonical classical authors. Williams seeks to combat this trend by making available a well-rounded selection of Latin written about, and even sometimes in, the territories comprising a more recent empire, namely New Spain.

Three genres are represented in the volume: Erasmian prose (with selections from Jesuit José de Acosta, Columbus, and Cortés); epic poetry (Jesuit Rafael Landívar and Francisco José Cabrera); and dialogue (Francisco Cervantes de Salazar). Supplementary materials include a map of Columbus's voyages, 36 generally well-chosen illustrations, and five separate appendices. Appendix 1 is comprised of 15 pages of background notes on significant persons, places, and terms ranging from Aristotle to Lactantius to Lake Texcoco. Appendix 2 is a historical timeline including what the author considers benchmark dates and events in both Europe and the Americas germane to the texts included in the volume. Especially helpful, appendix 3 provides concise definitions of 24 common figures of speech encountered in the text's selections. Appendix 4 (on rhythm and meter in poetry) expands, perhaps unnecessarily, beyond the scope of what is immediately useful to the actual selections in the text, which are exclusively dactylic hexameter. Appendix 5 is a master list of Latin neologisms coined by the primary authors. There are also a 34-page Latin-to-English glossary and a short bibliography.

Each set of selections is prefaced by a biography of its author, and each individual Latin selection preceded by an introductory paragraph designed to provide the context necessary to allow the reader to dive directly into the text. Separate sections with vocabulary, neologisms, grammar and word use questions, comprehension questions, and poetry questions (for the verse selections) follow the Latin text, though not every Latin selection contains all of these. The

introductory paragraphs and the Latin text always begin on the left-side page, but there seems to be precious little uniformity of formatting beyond that. When the text is longer than would fit on a single page, it sometimes continues on the facing right-side page, but sometimes picks up again on the next left-side page, with vocabulary for the first page of text facing it on the right instead. For shorter selections, the vocabulary can even begin on the selfsame page as the Latin text itself, though apparently not in order to maximize efficient use of space. (There are countless large blank spots throughout the edition.)

Unfortunately, predicting where exactly it will be relative to the Latin text is the least problematic aspect of the vocabulary section. As is true also (and perhaps most especially) of the ‘Grammar and Word Use Questions,’ the vocabulary section evinces a less-than-clear/-unified picture of the entire edition’s target audience (supposedly an intermediate reader, if the introduction is to be trusted). The words chosen for glossing beside/below the text don’t seem to have been chosen by any set of established criteria, but rather at the whimsy of the author. Very often, individual vocabulary sections will simultaneously contain one or more words that no intermediate reader should need, while conversely omitting many others that they are unlikely to know (*quam* and *ut* are glossed, e.g., but not *improbare* meaning “disprove” [22–23]; *pater* but not *egregius* [36–37]; *eo* and *indigenus*, but not *vehemens* [45]; *praeo* and *vinculum*, but not *ostrum* or *crista* [52–53]; *factum* and *foveo*, but not *vexare* meaning “inspire” or the “indeclinable” *frugi* [58–59]; etc.).

And while most words used in the Latin text can be found in the master glossary at the back, several words (such as *advento* [67] and *partio* [82]) cannot be found there either. And while not often, occasionally a vocabulary word will be placed in the section before or after the one it belongs in (as with *fluito* [91]). I also noticed that an archaic dat./abl. ending in *quercubus* [91] was misconstrued as a nominative singular (despite being contextually impossible) and granted its very own dictionary entry as a 2nd-declension noun. More generally frustrating, the system of dots used to separate stems from endings is often misleading, representing not actual stems, but simply the point in the word up to which all forms are spelled identically (as *tru.x -cis* [67]). Questionable also is the choice to gloss a single case of a word rather than its standard dictionary entry, as with the genitive *uniuscuiusque* [passim]. Several of these choices seem to overlook, if not outright prevent, opportunities for learning.

Perhaps the single biggest frustration this reviewer found was with the lack of grammatical help/notes. While still somewhat useful, the ‘Grammar and Word Use Questions’ section often feels like a “now find this,” hunt-and-peck scavenger hunt. Many questions are asked, obviously, but without the direct guidance/oversight of a teacher, many (if not most) intermediate students will feel lost without confirmation that their answers are or aren’t right. Of much more use would be (even very short) explanations of exactly what is happening syntactically. Not all intermediate students will be able to follow the leading questions to the logical conclusions to which the author seeks to guide them. And to be completely honest, sometimes there aren’t even leading questions when you want them. Several constructions (especially the ones idiosyncratic to later Latin) for which there is little-to-no specific help will be outside even the more advanced high-school student’s ken. In brief, the bar is simply set too high for the alleged target audience.

In the end, *Latin of New Spain*’s major contribution to the field—and this is not to be underestimated—will be the access it grants large audiences to various texts that would most likely otherwise remain inaccessible. While this reviewer would hesitate to recommend the edition to students wanting to hack through the texts on their own, any teacher willing to put together a not-insignificant “grammatical notes” section will find herein a solid skeleton upon which to flesh them out.

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