

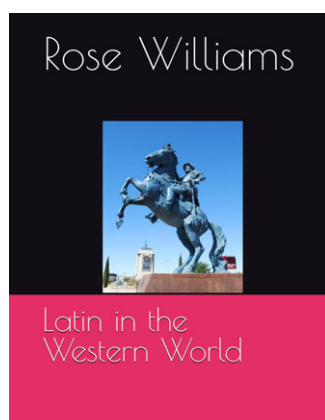
## Book Review

### Latin in the Western World

Williams (R.) Pp. 171, ills. Independently published, 2023. Paper, US\$18.99. ISBN: 9798395933539

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*Latin in the Western World* is an anthology of Latin texts produced in and on the subject of 'New Spain', i.e. the Spanish-speaking parts of the Americas. It presents a series of unaltered excerpts from Latin texts dating from the early modern period to the 20th century that were either produced within the Spanish-speaking Americas or written on the topic of the Spanish-speaking Americas. Examples of excerpts included within this anthology include, but are not

limited to, the 16th-century Jesuit priest José de Acosta's description of the location and geography of the Americas, the letters of Spanish explorers Hernán Cortés and Christopher Columbus in which they describe their voyages and early interactions with indigenous peoples, and the epic poetry of 20th-century Mexican neo-Latin writer Francisco Cabrera. These texts are presented in roughly chronological order (in terms of chronology of subject matter, if not publication). It holds the potential to act as a valuable introduction to a realm of Latin literature that is not often covered by Anglophone curricula.

This anthology is presented with the intermediate student in mind and offers scaffolding and support appropriate to this level. Each excerpt is accompanied by a prose introduction that contextualises and introduces the text, a glossary of key terms and neologisms used in each extract that students of classical Latin may not have previously encountered (e.g. *caravella*, -ae to denote the small sailing ships commonly used during the 15th and 16th centuries), and a series of comprehension and grammar questions that test and enrich students' interpretation of the excerpts in question. These are further supported by an appendix that includes a complete glossary of neologisms used throughout the anthology, a guide to common figures of speech

and linguistic formulae deployed by the writers featured, and an explanation of rhythm and metre in Latin poetry. By the author's own admission, these glossaries sometimes border on exhaustive, but this has been done consciously to ensure that as many students as possible are able to access these texts. *Latin in the Western World* thus offers a useful self-contained teaching or study resource to the Latin scholar who wishes to practise and broaden their familiarity with neo-Latin texts.

More than this, it offers a valuable and unique exposition of writers, texts, and subject matter that are otherwise omitted from most classical and neo-Latin curricula within the English-speaking world. Through these texts, students are given the opportunity to explore the initial interactions between European writers and explorers and the New World. From their initial understandings of global geography informed by the writings of Aristotle, all the way through to the emergence of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, these excerpts give readers a unique insight into the history of the Western Hemisphere and the evolution of European understandings of the Americas and their peoples.

The geography, culture, and history of Central America may be relatively unfamiliar to Anglophone students, especially those from Europe who do not have the osmotic exposure to this world through proximity that Anglophone North Americans may have experienced. This anthology thus has the potential to be relatively opaque to such unfamiliar readers, who might be forgiven for confusing their Quetzalcoatl and their Tezcatlipocas. The author capably predicts and pre-empts this. In addition to contextualising each set of readings, she regularly illustrates the text with maps, diagrams, and other such illustrations. She has included a highly comprehensive 'Notes' section within the appendix that thoroughly explains the background, lives, and influences of the various writers and other figures featured throughout the anthology, and has even included a brief timeline of key events in Europe's relationship with the Western Hemisphere. As such, even complete novices to the Spanish-speaking Americas and their associated historical and literary traditions are provided with the necessary apparatus to access and engage with the texts throughout this anthology.

The presentation and appearance of this volume is simple. Images are black and white and of medium resolution. There are no running headers at the top of pages to indicate what section is being displayed. The typesetting is relatively rudimentary. The exact same bold formatting is used to indicate the line numbers of the selected excerpt, the descriptive title of the excerpt, the headings of the vocabulary, Grammar and Word Use, and Comprehension Question sections, and the actual text of each excerpt. This results in a visually noisy and unvariegated page, in which up to three-quarters of the words on a given page may have the same bold formatting, requiring a concerted effort to interpret and identify what each section displays. This is not a significant problem in itself and would not pose a barrier to motivated students. Nonetheless, this does limit the extent to

which one can simply dip into the text at leisure and explore individual extracts.

In its totality, this is a very valuable anthology. It could be an excellent resource for intermediate autodidacts and educators wishing to challenge and broaden their experience with neo-Latin while also being exposed to potentially novel subject matter and literary historical traditions. One could foresee how the inventive educator may extract individual texts and their supporting materials from this volume and introduce them to classroom settings as a counterpoint or extension to classical texts traditionally included within the Latin curriculum. The extracts

from Columbus and Cortés in which they describe their early encounters with indigenous populations and their political structures would, for example, make for a particularly good comparative exercise alongside common curriculum texts such as Caesar's description of the organisation of Gaul from his *Gallic Wars*. The author ought to be commended for this valuable anthology that meticulously curates and contextualises a corpus of material that might otherwise be overlooked within the Anglophone world.

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