

Thursday, 29 August

Dear Sir Mayor of the City of Antwerp,

Dear Honourable Rector of the University of Antwerp,

Dear participants of the Euroclassica-conference,

Dear friends and colleagues,

In preparing the initial words for this Euroclassica 2019 conference, I felt happy but at the very same time, a bit desperate.

I wanted to express in just a few words the main and fundamental reason we gather here – classicists from over fifteen different European countries. Now the first word that came to my mind was ‘joy’. Indeed, we mainly come together, because we so much like to grasp the opportunity to share our knowledge and passion about classics. But then, so many subjects are enjoyable to discuss and practice in good company – think of sudoku puzzles, Esperanto or klingol language. So, the enjoyable aspect by itself does not really justify a conference of this scale, for three continuous days.

Ne serait-il pas mieux de parler quelques minutes de l’importance des langues et de la culture classique? Mais, sur ce sujet, ils existent des milliers de pages, livres et articles. Et sûrement, dans la compagnie d’aujourd’hui, il y a presque personne qui doit encore être convaincu de l’importance de notre sujet, et surtout pas notre bourgmestre d’Anvers, comme savent tous qui suivent l’actualité politique en Belgique, et comme les autres découvriront dans quelques minutes.

So, in utter despair, I sought help with a text that comes close to my heart, and about which I published an article back in 2006. It is a fictitious letter addressed

to Quintilian, the great Latin rhetorician and writer of the *Institutio Oratoria*. I will come back to the author of this letter, but let me tell you right now that it has been written by an Italian author in the seventies of the last century. In those days, education and schools were the subject of fierce political and societal debates (when are they not, nothing changes). Seeking answers in a dialogue with Quintilian, the author develops the following comparison. Imagine a young child, desperately wanting to see and view concerts and other spectacles. He faces at least two problems. What to choose? And how to properly view, given his small stature? Luckily, he had a caring parent. Not only did he choose excellent spectacles (a canon, indeed) – he only lifted up his child on his shoulder. Standing, or rather sitting on the shoulder of a giant, the child had the best view possible of truly nice performances. I bet he enjoyed a lot.

Dear colleagues – I find this a truly honest and beautiful metaphor of what we as classicists use to do in schools. We lift up our students and pupils in order to make them experience the best views of what has been cherished for centuries as highlights of culture. And such is by no means a passive process. It surely involves a constant dialogue (“what are we going to watch, and why”). It requires the educator to make the student an active viewer, and to teach him why the piece is to be particularly appreciated. Surely, there is an element of preselected choice here (again, dear mayor, the canon), but it does not exclude at all the freedom of the student. In later life, he can after all appreciate what he has been shown, or choose not to like it at all. But isn’t this, after all, the best and logical way to do things? How would one ever learn by discovering all by himself, when so many knowledgeable and caring people have done the exploration before you?

Dear friends and colleagues, this was a thought and metaphor I liked to propose to you at the beginning of this conference. Classics teachers lifting up students, to reach out to a cultural multiple treasury of many centuries. Before we start the

drinks, I will tell you who the author of this letter to Quintilian is (guess who?).<sup>1</sup> But before this, it is my pleasure and honour to give the floor to, Dr. John Bwler, a scholar with an outstanding reputation in the history of education in classics throughout Europe, and President of our Euroclassica association.

Friday 30 August,

Dear friends and colleagues,

I opened yesterday evening reception with a thought in Albino Luciani's *Illustrissimi*, in a fictitious letter to Quintilian on education: classics as lifting up students, and enabling them to stand on the shoulders of giants.

Let me now turn to another hotly debated issue: European identity. I. L. Pfeijfer, in his recent novel *Grand Hotel Europa*, develops some thoughts on the cultural identity of Europe. Now, this is an endless debate, and early in the morning for what is still for most of you a vacation day, I am not going to open a debate on this. Let me just say that, according to Pfeijfer's analysis, Europe is drenched in its own history, it is as Europe itself smells of history. And this history is essentially multilingual: there is not one single language which throughout history had the monopoly of cultural expressions. Exactly this awareness of its own history, the constant interrogating itself about its own history, can be a sort of weakness – an old continent, which is pretty much aware of its own decline. But the whole question remains, thus Pfeijffer, whether such awareness should necessarily constitute a weakness. I invite you all to read Pfeijffer's novel – the answer at least is multi-layered.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Laes, "Alia tempora, aliae scholae. Albini Luciani Epistula ad Quintilianum", in F. Deraedt-Licoppe (ed.), *Navigare necesse est. Miscellanea Gaio Licoppe dicata* (Brussels, 2006) p. 119-132.

*Polis Europa.* C'est une immense honneur pour moi de vous introduire le Professeur Herman Van Goethem, actuellement recteur de l'Université d'Anvers. Herman Van Goethem c'est fait connaître comme une autorité dans le domaine de l'histoire de la Belgique: le roi Leopold III, la questions des langues, et surtout les pages noires de notre histoire pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale: la collaboration (son livre le plus récent a le titre sec mais révélat: *1942. L'année de la silence*). Son intérêt et son engagement pour l'humanité et les droits de l'homme ont été décisifs pour la fondation du Musée de l'Holocaust et des Droits de l' Homme, la cazerne Dossin, à Malines. Mais surtout, Herman Van Goethem est un recteur humaniste et un intellectuel omni-présent sur la télévision et les media, qui, dans ces orations inaugurales pour l'année académique n' hésite pas de traiter des questions fondamentelles comme 'Identité et valeur culturelles de l'Europe, et l'enseignement supérieur', ou, pour cette année, 'le futur de l'enseignement en Flandres'. Le titre: *quo vadis* – voilà un recteur qui utilise même le Latin pour un titre – une raison en plus pour l'entendre avec le plus grand intérêt. Et déjà en avance avec les plus grands remerciements pour vouloir nous adresser la parole.

#### Friday 30 August (Greek house)

Εἰ ἡμῖν προσηγόρευον τῇ τῶν παλαιῶν Ἑλλήνων γλώττῃ χρώμενος, φοβητέον μὴ μηδεὶς συνιῆ, ὥσπερ ἔπαθεν οὗτος ὁ Βαρὺς Johnson, ὕμνον Ὀλυμπιακὸν ἐπαινῶν ἐν τῷ ἔτει 2012.

Ομως δε, πιο ευκολο να μιλησουμε στα νεα Ελληνικα. Ειμαστε χαρουμενοι οτι μπορούμε να γιορτασουμε εδω με εξαιρετικη παρεα. Να ειστε ολοι καλα και να πουμε στην γεια μας!

Saturday 31 August (after my election as the new president)

*I did not write out the full speech, but sketch the outline here:*

I first praised our former presidents, and compared them to Roman kings. John Thorley, as the founding father, obviously is or Romulus. The thoughtful and considerate John Bwler is our Numa Pompilius. Impetuous and always enthusiast Alfred Reitermayer, *sit ei terra levis*, was Tullus Hostilius. José Luis Navarro, under whose reign many projects came to a good end, is the architect and builder Ancus Marcius.

I also mentioned the almost stereotypical claim for ‘change’ that characterises new elected presidents. Honestly, Euroclassica rather needs continuity. Our many book projects, the Vestibulum and Ianua contests, the Academiae, newsletter and journal Cursor, website with useful links and reviews, the yearly conferences – these are all things to cherish.

But of course, we will go for some ‘new ideas and initiatives’:

1. Linking with American and Asian organisations dealing with foundational languages and civilisations (Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, ...)
2. The questionnaire which will give us a research tool for journalists all over the world, when they want statistics and numbers concerning classics in Europe.
3. Ensuring the participation of other European countries which are not yet member.
4. Above all: a new project, due for 2021 for the 30th anniversary of Euroclassica. For this, we need the pioneers of the first hour, like Ramón Martínez Fernández, José Luis Navarro and ... former president Francisco Oliveira, who as a true Tarquinius Priscus, an Etruscan with intellectual and organisational skills, who will ensure that also this ambitious project comes to a good end.