Humanism in the Low Countries. Jozef IJsewijn.

Jozef IJsewijn (1932–98) is one of the pioneers of Neo-Latin studies, along with Harry Schnur, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and Henry de Vocht, for instance. By founding the International Association of Neo-Latin Studies, the Seminarium Philologiae Humanisticae in Louvain, and the journal Humanistica Lovaniensia, he can even be considered the founding father of the field. The Louvain research group has already honored IJsewijn with two collections of essays written by others: Ut Granum Sinapis: Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Honour of Jozef IJsewijn (1997) and Myricae: Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Memory of Jozef IJsewijn (2000); and now, seventeen years after his death, he is being honored by a collection of twenty-one of his own studies on humanism in the Low Countries, presented by his pupil Gilbert Tournoy.
Humanism in the Low Countries is a volume for insiders and outsiders. The outside, general reader will find general studies on “The Beginning of Literature in Brabant” (1969), in which IJsewijn poses the important question as to the nature of humanism and the humanist; on “The Coming of Humanism to the Low Countries” (1975), in which he poses the question of how humanism came from Italy to Belgium and the Netherlands; and on “Humanism in the Low Countries,” first published in Rabil’s three-volume Renaissance Humanism (1988), which gives an overview of early humanism there. The reader might also enjoy studies on the international scope of humanism in “Latin and the Low Countries” (1993), about students’ geographical mobility and the Low Countries’ contribution to Latin literature; “L’humanisme, les Pays-Bas et l’Espagne” (1975); and “Humanistic Relations between Scandinavia and the Low Countries” (1996). These studies are published in their original language (the French one was published in a bilingual catalogue, in both Dutch and French). Another study, “Humanisten uit de Nederlanden in Portugal,” was translated into French. Of some narrower scope, but still interesting for the more general reader, are his two studies on Latin drama in the Low Countries: “Annales theatri Belgo-Latini: Inventory of Latin Theatre from the Low Countries” (1980), and “Theatrum Belgo-Latinum: Neo-Latin Theatre in the Low Countries,” both of which were translated from Dutch versions.

The specialized inside reader will be more interested in the three essays in Latin: “Erasmus ex Poeta Theologus sive de Litterarum Instauratarum apud Hollandos Incunabulis” (1969), of which the content might have been valuable for many more readers were it in a modern language; “Supplementum Phoenissis seu Thebaidi Senecanae Adiectum ab Henrico Chifellio Antverpiensi” (1986); and “Theognidis Sententiae a Francisco Craneveldio Latine Versae (1541)” (1987). The collection brings together studies in English, Latin, French, and Italian, as well as essays of a more detailed kind, on “Un poème inédit de François Modius” (1966), “Lo storico e grammatico Mattheaus Herbenus di Maastricht, allievo del Perotti” (1981), “A Correspondent of Lipsius: Roeland van Winckele/Rolandus Vinchelius” (1988), and “Emblems in Honour of a Dead Poet (Natalis Rondininus)” (1999).

Jozef IJsewijn was an amicable man, but also a sharp critic. He himself might have wondered why, for instance, in the table of contents, the titles of the “Annales theatri Belgo-Latini” and “Theatrum Belgo-Latinum” are given in their translated forms, with the addition of “[= English translation of:]” and the original Dutch titles, whereas “Humanisten uit de Nederlanden in Portugal” is given its Dutch title, with the addition of “[French translation],” and the essay itself bears the French title “Humanistes de anciens Pays-Bas au Portugal.” The same way of working can be found in the essay “Het humanisme, de Nederlanden en Spanje,” of which the actual essay is entitled “L’humanisme, les Pays-Bas et l’Espagne.” However, the name of the translator or translators (Tournoy himself, perhaps) remain shrouded in mystery.

Anyone wishing to know more about humanism in the Low Countries will find in this volume a valuable collection of essays on the topic. We are now in a better position to assess IJsewijn’s contribution to Neo-Latin studies. He was a keen researcher and an
excellent Latinist who, by way of his history-driven research, considerably advanced knowledge of humanism, humanists, and Latin in the Low Countries — and on many other topics related to humanism and Neo-Latin in general. He lived and worked in an age in which theoretical reflections on the field were not yet common, and neither is he a theoretician, as he himself would readily admit and even consider to be to his credit. Now we, the next generation, may profit from his tremendous achievements and build on them in our attempts to advance our understanding of Neo-Latin culture. His monumental two-volume *Companion to Neo-Latin Studies* (1990 and 1998, the latter in conjunction with his successor, Dirk Sacré) is still invaluable, and has not been superseded by modern collections such as *Brill’s Encyclopaedia of the Neo-Latin World* (2014) and the *Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin* (2015); these works are more like sequels to the *Companion*, broadening and deepening our knowledge, and giving the Neo-Latin world new contexts and theoretical reflections. That development is another valuable tribute to Jozef Ijsewijn as the founding father of Neo-Latin studies.

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