

CHARLES BURNETT - NICHOLAS MANN (edd.), *Britannia Latina: Latin in the Culture of Great Britain from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*. Warburg Institute Colloquia 8, London – Torino: The Warburg Institute, 2005, x + 230 pp., ISBN 0-85481-137-0.

In view of the deplorable paucity of Neo-Latin journals (*Humanistica Lovaniensia*, *Neo-Latin News* – which appears as an appendix to *Seventeenth Century News* – and *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* seem to be the only three), *cahiers* volumes resulting from conferences and congresses acquire an importance for Neo-Latinists rare in other academic disciplines, for they collectively serve as a makeshift supplement to journals, providing a necessary outlet for article-length papers. Hence I trust I will be pardoned for writing a somewhat lengthy and detailed summary of the contents of this volume and making a few observations along the way.

The present collection has its origin in a conference held at the British Academy in April 2003, subsidized by the Fondazione Cassamarca, who also funded the publication of the book. Thirteen of the fifteen papers delivered at the conference are printed in this volume, together with one article not presented there, five on Medieval subjects and nine on early modern and modern ones: one does not especially regret the absence of Patrick Sims-Williams' discussion of Roman and post-Roman Latin and Celtic inscriptions in Britain, since he has published a book on the subject, but one distinctly misses Roger Green's treatment of Scottish Latin, for as soon as one gets beyond the great George Buchanan the amount of scholarship devoted to the subject becomes very thin.

Michael Lapidge's "How 'English' is Pre-Conquest Anglo-Latin" (pp. 1-13) takes for its starting-point a dictum of J. N. Adams' recent study of Latin bilingualism, "Learners of L2 [the target language] inflict interference from L1 [their native

language] on the acquired language, and that interference may become a defining feature of the whole regional variety of the language,” and inquires whether there are any features of the Latin of this period that can be regarded as reliable markers of Anglo-Saxon authorship. Lapidge is ultimately obliged to admit (pp. 12-3) “In the end, my search for linguistic criteria which would help to identify an anonymous Latin text as ‘English’ ends in failure...The overwhelming impression which one carries away from the study of Anglo-Latin literature is how ‘correct’ in general it is.”

In “*Arbor eterna: A Ninth Century Welsh Latin Sequence*” (pp. 14-26) Peter Dronke struggles heroically to make sense of a garbled lyric, transcription printed by A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs in 1869, and to produce a superior text. It would be possible to have more confidence in his tentative reconstruction had he said something about the poem’s metrics, which are, to my (admittedly unschooled) eye, very difficult to understand.

Maria Amalia D’Aronco’s “How ‘English’ is Anglo-Saxon Medicine? The Latin Sources for Anglo-Saxon Medical Texts” (pp. 27-41) demonstrates how Bald’s *Laecebec* and other vernacular Anglo-Saxon medical and pharmacological works are based on Latin sources, concluding (p. 35) that in such works “...the knowledge inherited from antiquity is re-elaborated, summarized, abridged; the resulting works are for the most part syntheses or anthologies of previous literature, with a mainly practical intent.”

In “Roger Bacon and Language” (pp. 42-54), David Luscombe’s intent is “to try to bring closer together some of [Bacon’s] thoughts about *cognitio linguarum* and some of [his] thoughts about signs and terms, about signification. Enquiry into the theory of signs, Bacon argued, is essential to a knowledge of languages.” For, as Bacon wrote at *Opus maius* 2.3, *praeter sensum literalum potest vox significare tres alios sensus, scilicet, allegoricum et tropologicum et anagogicum*. It is difficult to know what importance to attach to Bacon’s thinking, since Luscombe discusses it *in vacuo* and the reader is given no information about the originality (or lack thereof) of Bacon’s approach. If it indeed was new and different, then, obviously, it represents a significant milestone in the history of

philosophizing about language and requires much more careful and detailed consideration than Luscombe was able to give it in this rather short exploratory piece.

In “Robert Holcot and the Pagan Philosophers” (pp. 55-67), John Marenbon takes issue with the view advanced by Janet Coleman and others that Holcot anticipated Chaucer and Langland in displaying a friendly interest towards so-called virtuous pagans, as a result of which “Holcot has come to be considered as an extreme exponent of the view that, as a result of using their natural reason, the pagan philosophers were given the knowledge that enabled their salvation” (p. 57). Marenbon’s careful and nuanced examination of Holcot’s works reveals this view to be quite exaggerated: “Holcot is unusual among [fourteenth-century English philosophers] in holding that some of the great philosophers went to heaven – but that is about *all* he allows them” (p. 67).

It is generally accepted that the Renaissance began in England with the generation of More, Colet, and Lily (stimulated, of course, by Erasmus’ repeated visits to that country), with a revived interest in the Classics and a new enthusiasm for writing “clean Latin.” The notion that Englishmen of the fifteenth century were still barbaric and uncouth is not exactly discouraged by remarks of some contemporary Italian Humanists, such as that of Poggio, who reported that during a visit to England he found *homines ventri deditos et peni satis reperire possumus; amatores verum litterarum perpauca et eos barbaros ac disputatiunculis et sofismatis eruditos potius quam doctrina*. David Rundle’s “Humanist Eloquence among the Barbarians in Fifteenth-Century England” (pp. 68-85) is the most recent in a series of articles in which the author chips away at this stereotype and argues for a more nuanced understanding, by showing that during this century, in such figures as Tiptoft, Capgrave, and Duke Humphrey of Gloucester one already can discern stirrings of Humanistic interests and an enthusiasm for Classical authors.

In “The English Bibliographical Tradition from Kirkestedede to Tanner” (pp. 86-128) Richard Sharpe examines the work of four important English bibliographers whose work spanned the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Henry de Kirkestedede,

John Leland, John Bale, and Thomas Tanner. Noting (p. 125) that “Modern use of these bibliographers has almost always been to learn from their researches into medieval manuscripts rather than to judge their intellectual achievements.” Sharpe attempts to write a corrective account of their activities, placing stress on the nationalistic impulse that inspired them, and the results are highly welcome (English research-oriented intellectuals such as Leland, Bale, and William Camden tend to be sadly neglected by modern scholarship). The only criticism one could perhaps make of his essay is that there is no meaningful line to be drawn between bibliographical research and systematic book-collecting, so that it would not have been amiss to make some mention of Sir Robert Cotton’s assemblage of his private library, which deserves to be regarded as a significant intellectual achievement in its own right.

Some Welshmen who wrote in Latin during the Tudor and early Stuart periods are fairly well known (the Aristotelian Griffith Powell, the poet-playwright Matthew Gwinne, the epigrammists John Owen and Sir John Stadling). In “Two Welsh Renaissance Latinists: Sir John Prise of Brecon and Dr. John Davies of Mallwyd” (pp. 129-44) Ceri Davies looks at two less familiar ones. In his *Historiae Brytannicae Defensio* the antiquarian and historian John Prise (ca. 1503 - 1555) sought to uphold the validity of the kind of historical traditions one associates with Geoffrey of Monmouth, which earned him the scorn of Polydore Vergil. Dr. John Davies (born ca. 1567, died sometime in the 1640’s) was a student of the Welsh language who published both a grammar and a lexicon in Latin. It is useful to have some light thrown on these neglected figures.

Any new contribution dealing with an important body of work by a major Humanist is highly welcome, especially when the work in question is unedited and untranslated, and Philip Ford’s “Scottish Nationalism in the Poetry of George Buchanan” (pp. 145-55) is a substantial one that commands the attention of all Buchanan students. There is only one point at which Ford goes off the rails. On p. 153 he writes “Nevertheless, there is one more abstract cause to which the Scotsman devotes himself after his return to Scotland, and that is Calvinism. Far from leading to a narrow support of Scottish causes, even though Buchanan was

a member of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland from 1563 to 1566, his involvement with the Kirk seems to have led to an internationalist approach to religion," as if there was something unusual about a member of the Kirk's General Assembly manifesting "internationalist" proclivities. The words *even though* appears to imply a serious misreading of Scots Calvinism, for the Presbyterians, far from being tainted by any insularity, were intensely aware of being part of an international alliance against the Catholic Church, so Ford discerns a paradox where none exists. In Buchanan's case this is important to realize, for subsequently, when he served as a prominent spokesman for the government of the Earl of Moray (and hence, in effect, for the Kirk), the major works of his old age (*De Maria Scotorum Regina, De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus*, and, at least in part, *Rerum Scotarum Historia*) were in large part written to justify the disposition of Mary Queen of Scots for the benefit of foreigners.

Stella P. Revard's "The Latin Ode from Elizabeth to Mary: Political Approaches to Encomia" (pp. 156-69) looks at Latin encomiastic odes written during Elizabeth's lifetime and also at the university anthologies issued to mourn the deaths of Elizabeth and Mary, in 1603 and 1694 respectively, stressing the importance of such poetry as barometers of the political trends of the moment. This sensible approach could easily be extended to all of the numerous such anthologies put out during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to mark similar public occasions, usually albeit not invariably involving royalty. As Revard wisely points out, their political aspect is precisely what recommends these volumes to the modern reader, even if the quality of much of the poetry is considerably less than first-rate. Then too, these volumes are also political in a sense not considered by Revard: they collectively served as a vehicle whereby the universities attested their institutional loyalty to crown and church, and it is striking that they felt the need to do so down to the end of the seventeenth century. One hopes that this article might provoke an upsurge of interest in these often-neglected academic anthologies.

It is impossible not to agree with the thesis of James Binn's "The Decline of Latin in Eighteenth-Century England" (pp.

170-7) that the position of Latin was not as strong at the end of the century as it had been at the beginning. But the the degree of this decline need not be exaggerated: Latin was not yet moribund, that was reserved for the following century. It still retained its hegemony in the educational system, and throughout the period England continued to produce Latin writers of distinction, ranging from Addison at the beginning to Bourne in the middle to Landor at the end (and, to some extent, we are perhaps dealing with an optical illusion, since Anglo-Latin authors of the eighteenth century have not been the recipients of anything like the amount of scholarly attention lavished on their predecessors). And, while a census of printed books would no doubt provide a statistical basis for Binns' thesis by showing that Latin volumes appeared in ever-decreasing numbers, they did not cease utterly. One remark by Binns requires modification. On p. 177 he writes "The narrowing of focus to stress an idealized classical Latinity is, I believe, a sign of the incipient preciosity of the Latin tradition, a sign that it is on the way out." But one could equally well argue that this stress on "idealized classical Latinity" was a cause of the decline of Anglo-Latin literature as well as an effect, since fear of ridicule or punishment for committing solecisms, no doubt, had the effect of rendering potential Latin authors tongue-tied. It is probably no accident that the last Englishman to write first-rate original poetry in Latin, Walter Savage Landor, had the great good fortune to have been expelled from both Eton and Oxford, and so escaped the clutches of an educational system which, one suspects, would have murdered his talent. Surely the substitution of translations of set-pieces for original compositions as the verse composition part of the Oxbridge Classical tripos did much to discourage the long and honorable tradition of writing Latin poetry in England.

The next two contributions both resonate with Binns' article. In his usual urbane way, in "A Little of it Sticks': The Englishman's Horace" (pp. 178-93) E. J. Kenney describes Horace's place in English life from the eighteenth century down to the present, and his description of the progressively declining interest taken in Horace as English Latinity faded can be taken as a case study illustrating Binns' point.

The second is Christopher Stray's "Scholars, Gentlemen, and Schoolboys: The Authority of Latin in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century England" (pp. 194-208). Stray's concern is "with cultural authority, its various forms, and its social attachments; and my underlying concern in this discussion is with the changing nature of the authority of Latin" (p. 195), and he traces the history of this change, which is of course one of decline. I must admit that, when I first saw the title of this collection, I had hopes that it would be entirely devoted to a kind of "sociological" investigation of the role played by the Latin language within British, or at least English, culture, a very promising approach to English Latinity. My only criticism of Stray's piece is that he begins his story *in medias res*, at a period when, as pointed out by Binns, Latin's cultural grip had already started to relax. It might have been better to start the story with, say, the sixteenth century, when its dominance was secure, in order to measure precisely how far Latin has fallen from its pedestal. By that time Latin was already used, as Stray puts it on p. 208, to "reinforce the boundaries of social groups: solidarity within, exclusion without," and a Latin education was an important mediator in male bonding within a well-defined social elite and a key prerequisite for opening all manner of professional doors. But, possibly, the significance of Latinity was considerably more profound. Since in Renaissance Anglo-Latin literature Roman words were not infrequently used for English institutions (so that, e. g., *senatus* designated Parliament, *senator* an alderman, and *praetor* the Lord Mayor of London), and since the sovereign was routinely written about in the terminology of the Caesar cult, the specter seems to be raised of a certain tendency of educated Englishmen to form a psychological identification with the Romans, and, if there is any validity in this observation, its consequences need to be plumbed. In any event, one wants to see the kind of research pioneered by Stray pursued, for it promises to be immensely fruitful.

The contributions in this volume are otherwise presented according to the at least approximate chronological order of their subjects. Jean-Noël Guinot's "Importance culturelle et politique de la Britannia Latina dans l'antiquité tardive et le haut

Moyen Age” (pp. 209-22) is not banished to the back of the book for being written in French, but rather because its author (the Director of the Institut des Sources Chrétiennes), who had been present at the 2003 conference, did not read it there and only later submitted it for inclusion. In this brief survey he offers an overview of British contributions to Latin scholarship prior to 1300, writing from a “sociological” perspective not entirely unlike that adopted by Christopher Stray.

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