

## Speaking Out

Peter Davidson (University of Aberdeen)

A review of

Jason Harris and Keith Sidwell (eds.) *Making Ireland Roman: Irish Neo-Latin Writers and the Republic of Letters* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009) ISBN 978-185918-453-0 Hardback 254pp €49, £45.

This book is a timely and welcome introduction to the work in Latin produced in the early-modern period by Irish writers of all communities. This collection of essays reflects the sheer energy of the group of scholars working on the renaissance and baroque Latinity of Ireland, many of them based around the Centre for Neo-Latin Studies at University College Cork. The publisher promises that this book ‘aims to rewrite Irish cultural history through recovery and analysis of Latin sources’: it does exactly that, and does so with style, verve and profound learning. It whets the appetite for the forthcoming *Cambridge Handbook to Irish Neo Latin* and makes one grateful for the Irish Latin texts already published electronically by the Centre.

The contemporary academy, especially in the Anglophone world (however loosely we might use that term), has inherited a skewed and partial attitude to the Latin writings of the period 1500-1750 covered by this book. Like the whole complex system of the Baroque arts in visual symbol and emblem, the international system of Latinity which this book celebrates is supra-national, profoundly international, encompassing those important early-modern communities – exiles for example, or Jesuits – who might be said not to have had a nationality in any simple sense. England was not perhaps the most enthusiastic participant in the international republic of Latin letters, which has left a specific legacy of perceptibly low enthusiasm for renaissance Latin. To some degree all literary and historical study based on the vernaculars of the nation-states finds Latin writing for an international audience to some degree anomalous or embarrassing.

But no real study of the early-modern period is possible without taking full account of Latin. As Keith Sidwell and Jason Harris remind us in their Introduction:

Despite the onset of both literary and scholarly production in the vernacular languages of Europe, it is a fact that up to 1680 most books exhibited at the Frankfurt Book Fair were in Latin ... Latin survived one upheaval that might have spelled its doom, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, before it gradually fell victim to another, the rise of the twin gods of nationalism and utilitarianism.

These facts will not go away, however much ‘renaissance studies’, in some quarters, seem to be in the process of redefining ‘renaissance’ as ‘Anglophone printed books easily available via *Early English Books Online*’. To understand the early-modern world at all, and to understand the self-perception of nations and religious confessions, we have to look to the language which all communities used when facing outwards, explaining themselves, engaging in debate or controversy – Latin. This is particularly true of nations whose vernaculars were marginal – Poland, Scandinavia, the United Provinces – or overshadowed by a dominating imported vernacular as is the case, in different degrees, in Scotland and Ireland.

After the admirably concise introduction with its closing reminder that ‘the culture of learning’ was crucial to both sides in the religious debate, the book begins with Diarmaid Ó Catháin’s survey of the Latinity of Ireland through the renaissance. This offers a strongly-argued case for seeing a Renaissance culture among Irish magnates of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, offering the example of the correspondence between the Fitzgeralds and the City of Florence, which played on a shared origin-myth of Trojans in Etruria. The letter of 1440 in which Florence made overtures to the seventh earl of Desmond was written by the pioneering humanist Leonardo Bruni (1370?-1444) – correspondence from the heartlands of the Italian renaissance as it was gathering its full strength. It is unsurprising, with this background, that the eighth earl of Desmond, in 1464, was instrumental in the attempt to found a university at Drogheda, four years before he fell foul of the English government for his intimacy with the Gaelic élite, and the initiative failed.

We move in the second chapter to the world of the recusant Catholics in Ireland, and the important figure of Richard Stanihurst (1547-1618) in whose lifetime the status of the ‘Old English’ changed dramatically, as English hostility to Catholicism hardened into outright persecution and Stanihurst himself had to flee to the continent. John Barry’s thoughtful essay explores the play between Stanihurst’s Ciceronian re-casting of works by Giraldus Cambrensis, *De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis*, published at Antwerp by the celebrated firm of Plantin in 1584, and John Derricke (fl.1580), whose illustrated *Image of Irlande* was published in 1581, itself drawing on Stanihurst’s earlier ‘Description of Ireland’ contributed to Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. This account of Stanihurst is amplified by Colm Lennon’s fine account of his later career on the continent, at one point as an alchemist working at the Escorial in the laboratories of Philip II of Spain, but chiefly as the correspondent of the distinguished Netherlandic humanist Justus Lipsius, whose own reconciliation to Catholicism and appointment as professor at Louvain took place in 1592. This correspondence is not only of lasting interest as the record of two profoundly educated men trying to make sense of the political and religious conflicts of their times, but also as a testimony to the high place which Stanihurst was accorded by one of the leaders of the northern renaissance.

The fourth chapter is Keith Sidwell and David Edwards’s account of Dermot O’Meara’s *Ormonius*, an epic poem celebrating the career of ‘Black’ Thomas Butler, 10<sup>th</sup> earl of Ormonde. This was published in London in 1615, facing outwards to an Ireland in process of further rapid change, partly speaking to the ‘New English’ but also clearly addressing a learned class among the Catholics both ‘Old English’ and Irish. Thus it works within one of the most interesting and problematic linguistic territories of Latin. In Ireland Latin is the potential language of communication between those who do not share a vernacular, therefore an area of some danger to the ‘New English’ in their attempts to represent the Irish Catholic community as uncivilised and inarticulate. It is also pragmatically a useful medium of communication in a country filling up with diverse settlers. The authors emphasise the adroit way in which the *Ormonius* remains almost entirely a battlefield epic, thus avoiding some of the political and religious questions which were growing ever more problematic through the lifetime of the epic’s subject, to the degree that the English government (and, later, Rinnunccini the Papal Nuncio) doubted from different viewpoints whether it was possible to be a loyal Catholic in Ireland at all.

The book then opens out to consider the Irish community in Spain, and, in Hiram Morgan's contribution, specifically Philip O'Sullivan Beare (c.1590-1636). His *Historiae Catholicae Hiberniae Compendium*, published at Lisbon in 1621, emphasised the illegality of English actions in Ireland, and was itself considered by the generation of Spanish academic jurists who, in some degree, championed the rights of indigenous peoples in the Spanish colonies. O'Sullivan is also the subject of David Caulfield's elegant chapter on his controversial work *Tenebriomastix* directed against Scottish (in the modern sense) claims to the ancient designation 'Scotus' and thence to Irish properties, such as the successful Scottish annexation of the Irish monasteries in Franconia. The target of O'Sullivan's very adroit (and very funny) invective is David Chambers (Camerarius) and the large claims advanced in his 1631 publication *De Scotorum Fortitudine*. O'Sullivan has little mercy on the 'porridge-maker' (*lablalyarius*) of 'Calvindonia', indeed on the whole Scottish historical tradition from Hector Boece onwards who are *tenebriones Picti* to a man. Chalmers comes under particular attack for dedicating his book to the heretical King Charles I, an indication of the way in which attitudes were hardening yet further. On this count (not that I am defending Chalmers, or the Scots, or anything) O'Sullivan is wrong: some copies are dedicated with a rather double-edged epistle to Charles, some bear a completely different epistle to the Cardinal Protector of the Scottish nation.

The seventh chapter is Jason Harris' excellent analysis of the stylistic and rhetorical devices of Stephen White's two *Apologiae* for Ireland, against the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis and Stanihurst's *De Rebus* of 1584. White (1574-late 1640s) was the first student of the Irish College in Salamanca to become a Jesuit, and his work, even if it lacks a final authorial polish, has much of the baroque elegance which characterises Jesuit writing.

Controversy and invective are also the subject of Gráinne MacLaughlin's witty and able analysis of Fr Robert O'Connell's 'virulent' use of his Latin learning, the verses peppered throughout the famous *Commentarius Rinuccinianus* written at Florence in 1661-6. The opening of this chapter makes an excellent point about English words quoted in contemporary Irish-language verse, almost all of them curses and profanities, thereby proposing that 'civilised people speak Latin and Irish.' The same technique is also used by the Scottish Gaelic poet, Iain Lom.

The last chapter is Elizabethanne Boran's comprehensive account of the manuscript collecting activities of the Protestant archbishop, James Ussher, emphasising at once that there were some scholarly networks operating internationally which transcended confessional divisions, but also that there were specifically Protestant international circles of collectors and scholars, as for example those touching on the new University of Leiden. This study of 'the economy of exchange' is particularly interesting in its emphasis on the importance of transcriptions to early-modern scholars, and on the frequent purpose of early-modern manuscript research being 'the preparation for publication of national histories'.

This collection is, without exaggeration, of international importance. It also sets an urgent agenda for the revision of the cultural history of early-modern Scotland. Early-modern Scots used Latin for all the purposes for which it was used by their Irish contemporaries, but there was also a distinctive cult and culture of Latin, so much so that two of the most admired Latin authors of early-modern Europe were, without question, George Buchanan and John Barclay. There are serious recent studies of these two writers, but much more is needed. It would be

possible to assert that Latin is the primary means of Scottish literary expression between 1603 and 1715, as well as the language in which all serious debate about identity and history is conducted, especially in the northern half of the country. This splendid volume shows that Ireland has done what Scotland still needs to do.

