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# From the Medieval Historiography of Latin Literature to the Historiography of Medieval Latin Literature<sup>1</sup>

*by* Ralph Hexter

Let me begin by saying what a great honour it is to have been invited to the Centre for Medieval Studies, where I am pleased to find many friends, some of long standing, others of more recent vintage. It is above all an honour to have been asked to deliver the annual J.R. O'Donnell Memorial Lecture on Medieval Latin Studies, particularly humbling when I think of the many great scholars who have given O'Donnell Memorial Lectures before me. Never has a humility topos been more sincere, although I am aware that the title I have chosen hardly bespeaks humility. It would indeed be hubris to imagine I could ever give a full account of the topic I have announced. Accordingly, I trust you will understand that my remarks here are exploratory in nature. Considering the topics I have chosen to broach, I strongly suspect that even as we advance a step or two, new perspectives and new questions will arise, starting – so I anticipated when I delivered the lecture – with the comments and questions of my first audience, which included, naturally, the many experts on Medieval Studies and Medieval Latin who have the Centre as their home.

An exculpatory or at least explanatory word or two on the temerity of the broad topic I have announced will be in order. I seem to have a fatal attraction to puzzles and sectors of the map marked “danger: do not enter.” When I first started to study Medieval Latin in earnest, I recall being quite nonplussed by the attitudes of the classicists who were, after all, teaching me Greek and Latin. (Alas, I did not have the good fortune to study Medieval

<sup>1</sup> This paper closely follows a presentation I was honoured to give to the Centre for Medieval Studies of the University of Toronto on November 12, 2004. The text has been adapted somewhat for publication but still bears clear signs of its origins as a public lecture, as David Townsend, to whom I am much obliged for his kindness, patience, and wisdom, recommended. The notes do not conceal that this is a topic on which I have worked over a number of years and from a number of different angles, some quite different from my current perspective; it remains one to which I hope some day to return in greater depth. I further thank Michael Herren and Uwe Vagelpohl for assistance in the final stages of preparation.

Latin in Toronto.) That vast regions were dismissed (when they were not simply passed over in silence in the manuals and overviews I was then reading) only rendered them more tempting to me. Characteristic also was my morbid interest in subliterary texts, especially commentaries, which at that time had not yet attracted all the attention they are now, quite deservedly, receiving. Of course I made a bee-line for them as well. I could be a poster child for the old saw about fools and angels.

The matter of literary history, in general, medieval or otherwise, is a rather different case, for it has hardly been ignored. Here the notoriously vexed status of literary history may have been what attracted the temerarious fool. Literary history has been under a conceptual cloud for quite some time. Well before the advent of “new historicism” and “new philology,” numerous twentieth-century scholars had pointed out the considerable methodological difficulties involved in the dubious enterprise of “literary history.”<sup>2</sup> Theorists have questioned whether “literature” can have a history, by which they do not mean to deny the possibility of chronicling literary activity, but rather only to remind us all that literary production is not subject to the standard dynamics of cause and effect. Among the other disputed issues are: precisely what is the status of the relations that obtain between and among literary works? What is the status of “periods”? Is there a necessary or even likely correlation between “period” and aesthetic valuation? These and other questions are variously linked. A Benedetto Croce would argue for the radical isolation (and individual evaluation) of each work, but even an historically-minded E.R. Curtius can have Crocean moments. Of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, for example, he famously wrote: “It rises out of the rubble of the centuries as the three slender columns of the Temple of the Dioscuri rise above the Campo Vaccino in Piranesi’s views. Works of such budding beauty” – he is speaking of Apuleius’s “Cupid and Psyche” as well – “could flower in the most decried times of decadence – and our thoughtless concept of history is again revealed in all its dubiousness.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Not that this ended the enterprise. For a trenchant critique of a more recent grand outing of Latin literary history with, along the way, many observations I find very much in the spirit of my essay, see Charles Martindale, “Troping the colours, or how (not) to write literary history: the case of Rome” [review essay of G.B. Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1994)], *History of the Human Sciences* 9 (1996) pp. 93–106. David Perkins’ *Is literary history possible?* (Baltimore and London, 1992) is an indispensable discussion of the enterprise of literary history, though Perkins quite intentionally treats “literary histories of reception and impact” only briefly in his introduction (pp. 23–27); relevant to my focus in this essay is his observation that “[r]eception history is acutely vulnerable to the difficulties of structuring and grouping” (p. 27).

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), p. 400; hereafter *ELL*.

Sensibly, it seems to me, more recent practitioners of various schools, however much or little they strive to erect a theoretical position, take literary history to involve an historical account of literary culture and institutions. Even the most text-focused do not present timeless works or even works connected to history only via their authors' biographies. Rather, they underscore literary practice as an ongoing process of writing and reading, with a whole range of forces continually changing the expectations readers have of any particular kind of literary work, and even of literature as a cultural institution.<sup>4</sup> Among these readers are of course the authors of new works. In this way what used to be called "influence" is refigured as "reception" and "intertextuality," and the study of tradition is no longer a study of continuity but one of selection and appropriation, dialogue and difference.

These theoretical debates are by no means over, and even the newer "cleaner" models – including the above-mentioned intertextuality and reception – are fiercely contested, and deservedly so, as they are by no means simple.<sup>5</sup> Even a committed student of reception history like myself has moments of deep doubt as he entertains some troubling questions: what do all the instances of reception of, for example, Ovid's *Heroides* have to do with one another? What kind of history do they constitute? And, what, finally, does any or all of it really have to do with Ovid?<sup>6</sup>

In the present context I do not want to trouble us with such fundamental doubts. Instead, I propose to come at the problematic from the perspective of Medieval Latin studies, or, rather, at some of the perspectives, because one

<sup>4</sup> I think above all of the three multi-volume sets *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica* (Rome, 1989–1993), *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo* (Rome, 1992–2004), and *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica* (Rome, 1992–).

<sup>5</sup> The explosion of work around the concept of intertextuality since the late 1980s is particularly exciting. I mention only (and hardly randomly) Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds., *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison, 1991); Stephen Hinds, *Illusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (New York, 1998); Richard F. Thomas, *Reading Virgil and His Texts: Studies in Intertextuality* (Ann Arbor, 1999); Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London and New York, 2000); Lowell Edmunds, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry* (Baltimore, 2001); and Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge, Oxford and Malden, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> I pick the *Heroides* not merely because they are among my favourites among Ovid's works, but because their reception history received early on one of the most extensive chronicles in Heinrich Dörrie, *Der heroische Brief. Bestandsaufnahme, Geschichte, Kritik einer humanistisch-barocken Literaturgattung* (Berlin, 1968); though of course by no means exhaustive, it is valuable still despite its age. I discuss at somewhat greater length these larger doubts about histories based on the reception of a single author's works in "Literary History as a Provocation to Reception Studies," forthcoming in Charles Martindale and Richard Thomas, eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 23–31.

of the issues will be that Medieval Latin is by no means reducible to only one point of view. This is but one of the ways in which the field of Medieval Latin offers a particularly productive set of “provocations,” to borrow a term made famous in the context of literary history some thirty-five years ago by Hans Robert Jauss.<sup>7</sup>

While we students of Medieval Latin are often engaged in reception studies, we tend to stand somewhat to the side of the central debates about the validity of literary history itself. For one thing, the field of Medieval Latin is so vast that, far from disparaging standard surveys, we are hungry for ever fuller chronicles and surveys that describe schools of poets, define and track a genre, and identify influence and receptivity. Furthermore, the critique of positivistic literary history was mounted primarily against those who work in the so-called “national literatures,” where the standard literary historical narrative, along with the works they canonize, promoted identities, ideologies and aesthetic standards that could no longer remain unquestioned.

Medieval Latin has never experienced either the splendours or the miseries of the canonical; indeed, it has been all too frequently marginalized in histories even of medieval literature and history, much less of those great world-cultural processions of “great books.” Medieval Latin has been swept to the side, if included at all, in histories of Latin language and letters, and is usually relegated to the excurses and bridge passages in histories of medieval letters that are almost invariably organized around the vernacular or “national” languages, indeed, usually around the medieval forms from which the spoken tongues of modern nation states developed.<sup>8</sup> When will the great Medieval Latin books be recognized and taught, in translation, to hordes of undergraduates?<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, “Rezeptionsgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturgeschichte,” in Rainer Warning, ed., *Rezeptionsästhetik*, 4th ed. (Munich, 1994), pp. 126–62. The idea is expressed with characteristic directness and pungency by A.G. Rigg: “Much Anglo-Latin writing challenges the concept of ‘literature’ (and finds it wanting),” *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 1066–1422* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 6) Alone the first eight pages of this work would clear the clouds of misprision from the benighted.

<sup>8</sup> The assumed congruence of vernacular and national language (not to mention popular access) deserves to be put under considerable sceptical pressure, but, obviously, cannot be in the present essay.

<sup>9</sup> Hitherto, the “great books” in Medieval Latin, when they are read at all, tend to be received via one of the national literary traditions, e.g., Boethius and Bede through Alfred. One could construct an impressive Latin-centred syllabus, starting perhaps with Augustine and Boethius and ending with More and Erasmus, depending on how broadly one wanted to construe “medieval.” One would be hard pressed to keep the selections at a number fitting a survey because there is so much to choose from, but the very challenges of the selection process would be instructive. Much in the medieval “canon” would put into question students’ expectations of the “literary” as well as our peers’ in other fields. Why not excerpts

To conclude this long prologue, finally, a word about the title itself. Its two elements, “the medieval historiography of Latin literature,” on the one hand, and “the historiography of Medieval Latin literature,” on the other hand, are by no means equally represented in the present essay. For the first, I offer, I believe, real substance; the second must remain for now largely opinion and speculation, a posing of questions. Hence the “from-to” construction and the implied metaphor of a journey. Of course there is a journey or trajectory implicit in the first stage alone. To give a full account of the historiography of Medieval Latin literature would require us to move well into Renaissance humanism, when – and this is not a new point – the recognizable outlines of that periodized history of Latin literature emerged that classicists, at least, find familiar and therefore satisfying. In the present context, however, I want to highlight only some of the strictly medieval phases of the story, again not so that they can serve as a model for a new historiography of Medieval Latin, but rather under the sign of the provocative, the defamiliarizing. I emphasize this because I have observed that some of the best historiography of Medieval Latin, like some medieval “histories” of Latin literature, are ad hoc, contrived, customized, and by no means “natural.” And the second element of the essay will be represented by a concluding movement that proposes, and that tentatively and provocatively, some possible future histories of Medieval Latin.

## I

It is almost banal to observe that literary histories are themselves historical and can furnish insights to intellectual historians as well as students of the literatures and periods that produced them. Medieval views of the Latin literary heritage neatly bring the historicity of literary history into clear focus, because they are instructively different from both earlier and later accounts.

One of the initial difficulties of my current enterprise is that there is no obvious medieval corpus of literary histories to which one can turn. This may, however, be a blessing in disguise, forcing us to articulate our criteria for literary history. It is interesting that Peter Lebrecht Schmidt, in an article published in 1982 with the tantalizing title “Das Compendiloquium des Johannes Vallensis – die erste mittelalterliche Geschichte der antiken

from Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermons on the Song of Songs as much as the poetry of Walter of Châtillon?

Literatur?,"<sup>10</sup> after making initial acknowledgment of the problematics of literary history – he was writing in Jauss's Konstanz, after all – still seems to equate literary history with authors' biographies. He places the Franciscan John of Wales, active in the second half of the thirteenth century, and his lives of a few select literary and philosophical figures on the threshold of a development he describes as follows:

It was Renaissance Humanism which, in the context of an attempt to reconstruct as much of antiquity as possible in all its aspects (even including archeological research), an attempt which we could almost call historical, which began to pay increasing attention to literary history, and which attempted to put the bits and pieces of the mosaic together and to combine them into a more systematic representation, a process which culminated conspicuously in Sicco Polenton's *Scriptores illustres linguae Latinae* of 1430.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, authors' biographies constitute a type of literary history. The Roman *de poetis* tradition from Varro to Suetonius had already vanished into fragments by the medieval period, but some of the anecdotes about the poets from these and other Roman grammarians were accessible in multiple contexts, from Gellius and Macrobius to Servius and other commentaries and *accessus*.<sup>12</sup> The tradition of chronicling authors lived on in the Christian perspective of Jerome's *De viris illustribus* and his continuator Gennadius, and even more in the series of reading lists which a number of scholars have taken for literary history – Conrad of Hirsau, Vincent of Beauvais, Hugh of Trimberg are only the best known names. These are all important documents, and they indeed form a part of the story of medieval literary history. Karl Langosch seems to have regarded Hugh of Trimberg's

<sup>10</sup> In D.H. Green, L.P. Johnson and Dieter Wuttke, eds., *From Wolfram and Petrarch to Goethe and Grass. Studies in Literature in Honour of Leonard Forster*, Saecula Spiritalia 5 (Baden-Baden, 1982), pp. 109–23.

<sup>11</sup> "Erst der Renaissance-Humanismus, der im Rahmen eines möglichst umfassenden, fast historisch zu nennenden Rekonstruktionsversuches der Antike in all ihren Aspekten (bis hin zu archäologischen Forschungen) auch der Literaturhistorie zunehmend Aufmerksamkeit schenkte, versuchte die Mosaiksteine systematischer zusammensetzen und darstellend zu kombinieren, ein Prozeß, der in Sicco Polentones *Scriptores illustres linguae Latinae* um 1430 sinnfällig kulminiert," *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> The name "Varro" provides the opportunity to cite the latest in the tradition of sequential biographies: Wolfgang Ax, ed., *Lateinische Lehrer Europas: fünfzehn Portraits von Varro bis Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Cologne, 2005).

*Registrum Multorum Auctorum*,<sup>13</sup> which he edited, as an advance on earlier efforts in part because of the great number of authors and works mentioned, but neither the number of entries nor even their chronological disposition should automatically qualify the text as literary *history*, in the same way chronicle is not history. Neither – to return to Schmidt’s author – does the seemingly biographical analysis in John’s *Compendiloquium*, as the end to which biographical information is put there indicates. As Schmidt shows on the basis of a transcription of John’s treatment of Cicero, John organizes his information into individual sections which exemplify a series of exemplary characteristics or *qualitates*: *quam studiosus fuit, quam cautus, quam discretus* (p. 114). This might recall the exemplary universe of Valerius Maximus, but with its structure revolving around a series of *qualitates*,<sup>14</sup> John’s description of Cicero is not unlike descriptions of the camel-leopard, pelican or magnet found in the *Physiologus* or any of the medieval bestiaries and lapidaries in its wake. John’s arrangement is also adequate to his purpose: to supply pre-digested anecdotes to preachers in need of exemplary matter.

If one were merely seeking author-centred medieval literary history, one could find examples both earlier and, I firmly believe, more apposite in the well-known *accessus ad auctores*. These potted introductions to individual works, cast according to one of several schemes that typically include *vita auctoris, titulus* and *materia operis, intencio auctoris, utilitas*, and the question *cui parti philosophiae supponitur* (a question to which the answer is almost without exception “to ethics” [*ethicae*]), appear widely in high-medieval school texts as prefaces to the works they introduce. In a small number of twelfth-century manuscripts, a whole series of them has been gathered together. Indeed, Bruno Sandkühler already called the compilations in two Munich manuscripts (clm 19474 and 19475) “eine Art mittelalterlicher literarhistorischer Handbücher.”<sup>15</sup> “Eine Art,” indeed – but what kind of “Art” is the question.

Having dodged the issue for some time, I must now provide at least a provisional and partial definition of what I take literary history to be. I start from the unsatisfactory equations of literary history and biography, on the

<sup>13</sup> Karl Langosch, *Das “Registrum Multorum Auctorum” des Hugo von Trimberg. Untersuchungen und kommentierte Textausgabe*, Germanische Studien 235 (Berlin, 1942). For the edition of Conrad of Hirsau, see Huygens (n. 16, below).

<sup>14</sup> Fundamental to any understanding of the *qualitates* and interpretation is Christel Meier, “Das Problem der Qualitätenallegorese,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 8 (1974) 385–435.

<sup>15</sup> *Die frühen Dantekommentare und ihr Verhältnis zur mittelalterlichen Kommentartradition*, Münchener Romanistische Arbeiten 19 (Munich, 1967), p. 28.



one hand, and literary history and chronology, on the other, and cast my reasoning as follows: literary production is played out on a wider stage; even authors do not exist in a vacuum and do not simply succeed one another: if nothing else, they read one another. Whatever literary history is, and if we permit it to exist at all, it must include relations among authors, on the one hand, and between authors and the milieu in which they work and are read, on the other. In the genial phrase of the series of volumes I referred to earlier, I am speaking of *lo spazio letterario*: literary space.

Even according to these minimal criteria, the *accessus* have a greater right to be called literary history than several later and in other ways more elaborate productions for which the name has been claimed. To begin with the *accessus* to Cato, we learn that “there were two Catos at Rome, Cato the Censor and Cato of Utica.”<sup>16</sup> We learn why each had these names, and why Cato the Censor wrote this book, originally to his son.<sup>17</sup> Of Avianus we are told that he was a Roman citizen requested by the Roman noble Theodosius to write him some stories in which he could take pleasure (p. 22). In explaining that Avianus satisfied not only this criterion but saw to it that each had an allegorical sense and a moral value, the master remarks on what we today would call the genre of the fable. Closely paraphrasing Isidore of Seville’s definition (1.40.2), he writes: “Fables are either libistic or aesopic; libistic when there is a fictional presentation of conversation of men with beasts or vice versa, aesopic when animals or inanimate objects, trees and such like, are presented as talking among themselves” (p. 22).

Of Theodulus<sup>18</sup> we are told that he was born and raised in Italy by parents who were Christian and not lowly and that as an adult he studied in

<sup>16</sup> R.B.C. Huygens, ed., *Accessus ad auctores. Bernard d’Utrecht. Conrad d’Hirsau, Dialogus super auctores* (Leiden, 1970), p. 21. I follow Huygen’s edition of 1970 unless otherwise noted; on the order in the manuscripts, see Huygens, *Accessus*, p. 5, and my *Ovid and Medieval Schooling. Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid’s Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto and Epistulae Heroidum*, Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung 38 (Munich, 1986), esp. pp. 144–49. (The general bibliography on *accessus* has been so often cited it need not be trotted out again.)

<sup>17</sup> We also learn what some other scholars believe the source of the name was.

<sup>18</sup> Long undervalued compared to its medieval significance (and wide circulation), the so-called *Ecloga Theoduli* has recently received fresh attention. Important are Roger Green, “The Genesis of a Medieval Textbook: models and sources of the *Ecloga Theoduli*,” *Viator* 13 (1982), 49–106; Harry Vredeveld, “Pagan and Christian Echoes in the ‘*Ecloga Theoduli*’ – A Supplement,” *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch* 22 (1987) 101–13; and Francesco Mosetti Casaretto, *Teodulo, Ecloga: Il Canto della verità e della menzogna* (Florence, 1997). I note Patrick Cook, “The *Ecloga Theoduli*: A Carolingian Textbook for Cultural Literacy,” *Medieval Childrens’s Literature*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (New York, 2003), pp. 188–203, which should at least make the *Ecloga* more easily accessible. Although I have not examined this collection, it appears the editor and contributors understand that few (if any) of the texts

Greece, Athens in particular, to the point of bilingualism. The particular genesis of the *Egloga* lay in his having heard pagans and Christians debating; the few incorrect verses in the poem resulted from his being unable to put final revisions on the poem before death overtook him.<sup>19</sup> Shades of Vergil!

When we come to Arator, we get historical background any literary historian might consider relevant for *De actibus apostolorum*:

Arator was a pagan and Roman citizen at a time when both Christians and pagans inhabited Rome together. In the time of Pope Vigilius, Rome was besieged by Theodoric, king of the Goths. Vigilius saved the Romans with God's help from bodily death, and some he saved from the death of their souls by conversions. After Arator saw how strong Vigilius's God was, by whose aid Vigilius saved him, he decided to convert and was baptized by Pope Vigilius. After converting, he learned letters and so advanced in virtue, that he was made a Roman subdeacon. His learning advanced so far that he wrote this book (p. 27).

There are several canonical schemata of the categories of the *accessus*, with a formal recitation of which not a few of the *accessus* begin. Would that there were comparably authentic medieval schemes for literary history! But even if medieval texts offered us a fully articulated set of terms with which they discussed literary history, one might prefer an analysis according to other criteria. We do not limit our analysis of medieval literature, even of medieval criticism, to *vita poetae, materia, intentio, finalis causa, cui parti philosophiae subponatur* (to quote the *Accessus Prosperi*, p. 28). For a preliminary sounding of the material, I selected three admittedly arbitrary but I think not irrational headings under which to group a sampling of views and remarks of Late Latin and Medieval Latin authors on their Latin precursors: (1) imitation; (2) period and value; and (3) patronage. While many other possible criteria for analysis might be developed, these three headings seem to bring out what I take to be the issues Medieval Latin

anthologized are like "children's literature" in our modern understanding of the term; the *Egloga* was certainly widely read in schools, and thus by young people. A new translation is forthcoming in Michael Herren, "Reflections on the Meaning of the *Egloga Theoduli*: Where is the Authorial Voice?," to appear in *Poetry and Exegesis*, ed. Karla Pollmann et al., Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (2006).

<sup>19</sup> An example of a hexameter ending *scire secretum* is provided (exhibiting an impermissible shortening of the first syllable of *secretum*); Casaretto, *Teodulo*, p. 26. The etymology of *eglogas* as *caprinus sermo* can hardly count as a generic remark, but the note that the poet's "matter are sententiae collated from ecclesiastic and pagan writings" is certainly true (p. 27).

writers considered when thinking about what I mean when I say “literary production.” Given the scope of the present essay, I focus my remarks on the first two of these three only, and even in those two cases in abbreviated form; I will have to omit entirely discussion of their remarks concerning “patronage,” which I do with regret, since I take the frequent awareness of and interest in the sponsors of *auctores* to reflect the importance of patronage for the literary and pedagogical endeavors of medieval authors and teachers.<sup>20</sup>

Discussions of Latin authors and their models show that as we advance from first and second century texts to medieval texts, the picture of Latin literary history flattens and the perspective is foreshortened. As Latin texts, especially early texts, are first displaced in popularity and, in many cases, eventually completely lost, and as distance increases, sensitivity to, even awareness of the differences in usage between periods within “Classical Latin” (early, Republican, Augustan, “silver,” archaizing) disappears. The deceptive synchrony of the late grammarians from whom medieval writers learn Latin and who themselves preserved many bits of the earliest writers not for any intrinsic literary interest but because they found obsolete grammatical forms and usages there, only hastened the process. The modern reader, carefully attuned to the historicity of certain grammatical and lexical features in Classical Latin, not to mention deliberate archaizing and grecizing, may identify anachronisms in Medieval Latin usage that were not anachronisms for the author. A medieval author like Sextus Amarcus, who about the year 1100 produces future imperatives or present active infinitives in *-ier*, is not intending to archaize, at least no more than writing Latin at all at this time is archaizing. Such forms were part of *grammatica*, the grammar

<sup>20</sup> For example, even from the brief excerpts of the *accessus* cited so far, it is clear that medieval schoolmasters were often keenly aware that texts were frequently written at the request or even direct bidding of a superior of some sort. The career of the patron provides another opportunity for mention of the wider historical context, e.g. the battle of Actium as a turning point in Augustus’s career. Augustus was recognized as a particularly significant patron: as Hugh of Trimberg writes, Augustus “diligently rewarded poets and philosophers, feeding, entertaining and dressing them, and enriching them with gifts. Through them he thus amplified the glory of Rome and perpetuated the commendation of his renown through their writings”: “Poetas et philosophos hic diligens ornavit / Cibans, potans, vestiens et xeniis ditavit; / Nam Romanam gloriam per hos ampliavit/Laudumque preconia scriptis perennavit” (88–91; Langosch, *Das Registrum*, p. 162). The following two lines involve some uncertainty, but seem to refer to the parallel procession of the fame of Augustus and each poet who celebrated him (“In quo sui nominis famam dilatavit, / Quod [et?] per mundi climata laus eius volavit”). Hugh’s *vestiens* seems more appropriate to the Archchancellor and Archpoet than Augustus and Horace or Vergil. – In the case of Ovid, one might better speak of Augustus as anti-patron, but that only underscores the dependence of poets on their patrons.

of Latin, present and legible in the works of someone like Persius for everyone to imitate.

In accounts of literary influence and imitation, any real appreciation of the Greek originals or subtexts in particular is lost. Literary scholarship of the first centuries of the common era, to be sure, preserved information of such literary relations even after the originals or access to them were virtually or actually impossible. So Servius begins his commentary on *Aeneid* 4 with the words “Apollonius wrote the *Argonautica* and in its third book presents Medea in love; from this source hence this whole book derives.”<sup>21</sup> Even Servius, or the Servius of the commentary, does not engage in any of that kind of comparative work one finds in the *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellius, but Servius’s sense of Vergil’s Greek precursors, Theokritos, Hesiod, Homer and Apollonios, however attenuated and impoverished in contrast to that of Vergil’s contemporaries, was firmer and more nuanced than what followed.

The extent to which information about the relationship between Vergil’s and other Latin poetry and its Greek models, already radically simplified in Servius, suffers further degradation and simplification as it is disseminated is well exemplified by the so-called *Accessus Homeri*, which has a determinedly Latin perspective.

Homer made two books in the Greek language, *Odissa* and *Ilias*, in which Vergil imitated him, in the first 6 [sc. books of the *Aeneid* – note how this goes without saying] in the *Odissa* (which is to say a poem of praise, for ode is “praise”; and as the former shows Ulysses in his book *Odissa* to have survived the dangers of the sea, so the latter does Aeneas), [and] in the latter 6 [books] the *Ilias*. *Ilias* is a tale composed about the destruction of Troy, in which Vergil again imitated him in the war of Turnus and Eneas. (pp. 25–26)

Now comes a very interesting bit about the *Ilias Latina*, the actual text before the accessus-writer and his students.

But because Vergil did not exhaustively [*non plenarie*] describe everything, a certain Latin Homer imitated the Greek Homer in that part, and it is his intention to imitate the Greek or to describe the Trojan war. (p. 26)

The 1070-hexameter poem which these sentences served to introduce was in fact a product of Roman schools, quite likely the work of one Baebius

<sup>21</sup> “Apollonius *Argonautica* scripsit et in tertio inducit amantem Medeam; inde totus hic liber translatus est,” George Thilo and Hermann Hagen, eds., *Servii Grammatici qui fervitvr in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1923), 1.459.

Italicus, later consul, but as a youth composing his Latin *Iliad* under the impress of that wondrous first lustrum of Nero's reign – so that it may not only be Nero's own productions which Petronius was sending up in the *Troiae Halosis* of the *Satyricon*.<sup>22</sup> Whether by Baebius or, as earlier scholars thought, by Silius Italicus, or by another, this is a product of what we now call “silver Latin.”

Mention of “silver Latin” leads us “naturally” to the second rubric, “period and value.” I hardly need remind you that throughout modern histories of Latin literary history, discussions about so-called “silver” Latinity recur frequently.<sup>23</sup> The continual reassessments of its representatives reveal the underpinnings of the various ideologies, aesthetic or other, on the basis of which such evaluations have been made. What is, or was “silver Latin”? Roman authors through the Augustan period expressed the view that Latin literature was improving, i.e., they were better or at least more refined than their predecessors; medievals would probably have most often come across such sentiments in Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles*, the works of Horace that were most widely read.<sup>24</sup> Within a generation, many Latin authors

<sup>22</sup> For a text and Italian translation of the Latin *Iliad* as well as discussion of its authorship, manuscript and tradition, see Marco Scaffai, ed. and trans., *Baebii Italici Ilias Latina* (Bologna, 1982). Baebius went on to serve as Legatus Augusti pro praetore in Lycia-Pamphylia in the mid 80s and was consul in 90 (p.18).

<sup>23</sup> A flash forward: about to offer a cycle of lectures on Statius's *Sylvae* and Quintilian in Florence in the early 1480s, Politian felt called to defend his choice of these texts rather than the Humanist idols Vergil and Cicero. “Let us not immediately call that worse which is but different,” he says. This is not, however, a call for complete aesthetic relativism. Politian readily admits that these authors are second-rate and do not equal their predecessors. Still, the challenge remains: to distinguish between change and decline, and to understand what the standards are by which each is measured. What are the criteria according to which the market in “silver Latin” rises and falls? What are the issues beyond or behind the stylistic? Is there a political agenda that prefers Republican to Imperial authors, or a vision of ideal poet-patron relations which may privilege perceived independence and disparage perceived toadying? Such views may arise either in scholars and poets who enjoy one or both ideal situations, or among those who emphatically do not. What role do these extra-textual considerations play in stylistic assessments, even preferences, and literary evaluation? Not working in a vacuum, Renaissance and early modern poets and scholars could hardly be free of extra-literary considerations. The story of Latin letters elaborated at a given time and place will likely have more to say about the age and culture of the literary historian than about any “real” history of Latin literature.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Manitius, ed., *Gunzo, Epistola ad Augienses, und Anselm von Besate, Rhetorimachia*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Die Deutschen Geschichtsquellen des Mittelalters 500–1500, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 2 (Weimar, 1958 [repr. 1983]), here *Epistola* 3, p. 23, in fact cites Horace *Satires* 1.4.9–10 (Lucilius dictating 200 lines/hour standing on one foot) against the poetry of his enemies; in Gunzo's text, the Horace follows two citations from Persius.

expressed the view that the great age of creation was behind them. As it happens, the most interesting first-century Roman treatments of the perceived cultural and literary decline, by which I mean Velleius Paterculus's brief diagnosis of the state of literary activity under Tiberius or the fuller debate in Tacitus's *Dialogus*, appear to have been secreted in rare or unique exemplars in the Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup> Tacitus's *minora* had to wait for the fifteenth century and Velleius for the sixteenth for dissemination, when contemporary debate was only too ready to assimilate these earlier treatments of decline and had long since begun to think in terms of periods of Latin.

In marked contrast, it seems that in general, high medieval students of literature did not regard historical period as a primary category, and they quite clearly did not imagine that date or period were predictors of literary value or quality. In Aimeric's *Ars lectoria* (1086), literary history has nothing to do with his classification of authors as gold, silver, tin or lead.<sup>26</sup> The four metals are first applied to four categories of Christian writings: gold are the "libri autentici," also known as "canonici" and "regulares." Here Aimeric places 30 books, excluding not only *Daniel* but *Wisdom* and the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, which he places in the second or silver class, which include not only what we consider apocrypha (for example, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Esther*, *Tobit*, *Judith*, and *Macchabees*) but a selection of patristic authors – Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Hilarius, Augustine and Gregory, and canons of the four principal councils. The "tin" or "common" books include Bede, Sedulius, Prudentius, Arator, and *expositores ceteri*, whom Aimeric does not bother to enumerate. In the fourth or leaden category, for which he reserves the word *apocripha*, Aimeric places the "passions of the holy martyrs and

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, L.D. Reynolds, ed., *Texts and Transmission. A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 431–33.

<sup>26</sup> Aimeric's classification has frequently been highlighted: Paul Lehmann, "Literaturgeschichte im Mittelalter," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatschrift* 4 (1912), 569–82, esp. p. 573 (repr. among Lehmann's collected essays, *Erforschung des Mittelalters* [Stuttgart, 1959–1962], vol. 1); Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1911–1931), 3:180; Curtius, *ELLL* (as above, n. 3), pp. 464–65; and Günter Glauche, *Schullektüre im Mittelalter. Entstehung und Wandlungen des Lektürekansons bis 1200 nach den Quellen dargestellt*, Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung 5 (Munich, 1970), pp. 73–75. It has been most recently discussed in Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989–), vol. 2 (The Middle Ages), pp. 122–23. For the text, see Harry F. Reijnders, "Aimericus, *Ars lectoria*, in 3 parts," *Vivarium* 9 (1971), 119–37, and 10 (1972) 41–101, and 124–76; this portion is in 10 (1972), pp. 168–70. On the whole of Aimeric's *Ars lectoria* as tractate on metrics, see Jürgen Leonhardt, *Dimensio syllabarum. Studien zur lateinischen Prosodie- und Verslehre von der Spätantike bis zur frühen Renaissance*, Hypomnemata. Untersuchungen zur Antike und zu ihrem Nachleben 92 (Göttingen, 1989).

the lives of the saints whose authors are unknown and in which there is more fable than unadulterated truth, and more adulation than accurate reporting,” as well as certain works, such as those of Origen, to be repudiated.

If there is any link between category and antiquity in this system, it is largely accidental. The canonical books of the Bible do indeed antedate the Church fathers and councils; nonetheless, it is authenticity in the sense of truth value itself which determines the classification. Almost as an after-thought Aimeric adds that “likewise among the pagans”<sup>27</sup> there are *libri autentici, hoc est aurei*. The first “books” he lists are not books at all but also the seven liberal arts; then come the *novem auctores*: Terence, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Sallust, Lucan, Statius, Juvenal and Persius. Except for the postponements of Sallust<sup>28</sup> and Persius, the list is chronological, but time can hardly be a factor in constituting it: the period from Terence to Juvenal stretches over three hundred years. The second or silver category is even vaster, including Plautus, Ennius, Cicero, Varro, Boethius, Donatus, Priscian, Sergius, Varus (= Varius, known as the editor of the *Aeneid*), and Plato *translatus*. Here Aimeric adds: “Plato in his original language was among the first authors, in the golden class. Why in translation he is reduced a rank this is not the place to explain.”<sup>29</sup> In the third or “common” classification – this had been equated with tin in the Christian list above – we find the primary reading texts: *Disticha Catonis (Catunculus)*, *Ilias Latina (Homerulus)*, Maximianus,<sup>30</sup> Avianus, and Aesopus.<sup>31</sup>

For most modern students of Latin literature, the non-Christian constitutes the Classical. This was for the most part not true in the Middle Ages, and the list of favoured *auctores* was not coextensive with the modern canon of classical writers. As has often been remarked, the *auctores* included both Christians and non-Christians, and from the point of view of most high medieval school masters, what Vergil and Sedulius had in common as *auctores* outweighed what separated them. This was not a by-product of ignorance or uncertainty; as the *accessus* discussed above, for example, make clear, medieval authors knew perfectly well whether an

<sup>27</sup> *gentiles*, by which I do think he meant “pagan,” despite the appearance of Boethius later in the list.

<sup>28</sup> *N.b.*: the only prose writer among the nine.

<sup>29</sup> “cur vero in translatione degradatus sit, non est hic disserere.”

<sup>30</sup> Much later, in the fifteenth century, the elegies of Maximianus would be attributed to Gallus, enabling any number of sixteenth century printers to provide their readers omnibus editions of the Latin elegists Catullus-Gallus-Propertius-Tibullus-Ovid. *Habent sua fata libelli*.

<sup>31</sup> He does not announce a fourth or leaden category here, merely concluding, “Enlightened here, judge the other writings by your self” (“Ceteras scripturas hinc edoctus per te ipsum iudica”).

author was pagan or Christian; few mistakes were made here, and the spectacular cases of Christianization, e.g., Statius and Seneca, tended to be more popular at the end of the Middle Ages than earlier.<sup>32</sup> Aimeric provides two separate lists, Christian and non-Christian, each of which includes golden and silver authors, in other words, authors of the highest value. While it is clear what the criteria for ranking Christian authors are, and that these criteria themselves tend to form the categories into roughly chronological periods – as a secondary phenomenon – it is quite clear that chronology has nothing whatsoever to do with the evaluations embodied in Aimeric’s ranking of pagan or secular works. Here there is no sense of period whatsoever. In an odd reversal, Christian letters have history, while pagan letters seem to inhabit an eternity where a work from any period could be gold, silver or tin.

About one hundred years later, Walter Map, in *De nugis curialium*, voices a relativism about the adoration of the antique, his bemused cynicism itself very much in the manner of Horace. “I know what will become of me. For as soon as I shall start to rot, then for the first time will my work take on savour, all my defects will be repaired by my death, and in my most distant posterity antiquity will make of me an authority (*auctoritatem*), since then as now old copper will be preferred to new gold.”<sup>33</sup> But note that, although this vision turns on a radical separation of new and old, and the reversal upsets an expectation that it is gold that should be valued and copper not, there are no stable periods which have inherent value; rather, the new always becomes the old, gaining in appreciation for that reason alone.

The *accessus* compilations mentioned above provide an interesting contrast to modern expectations in this regard. Whatever “literary history” scribes, students and manuscript users would have got out of the individual *accessus*, and whatever cumulative impression a series of 15–30 such entries would have made, the order of the *accessus* would have added nothing, at

<sup>32</sup> Statius the Christian is known best from Dante, *Purgatorio* 21. See, for example, Riccardo Scrivano, “Stazio personaggio, poeta e cristiano,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 13 (1992) 175–97. The correspondence of Seneca and St. Paul is available in C. W. Barlow, ed., *Epistulae Senecae ad Paulum et Pauli ad Senecam (quae vocantur)* (Rome, 1938); long considered apocryphal, it has found champions on – where else? – internet websites!

<sup>33</sup> “Scio quid fiet post me. Cum enim putuerim, tum primo sal accipiet, totusque sibi supplebitur decessu meo defectus, et in remotissima posteritate mihi faciet auctoritatem antiquitas, quod tunc ut nunc vetustum cuprum preferetur auro novello,” *De nugis curialium* (ca. 1180–92), ed. M.R. James (Oxford, 1914), p. 158.15ff. Quoted by Curtius, op. cit. (as above, n. 3), pp. 255–56, n. 23. A provocative perspective on *De nugis curialium* is offered by Robert Levine, “How to read Walter Map,” *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch* 23 (1988), 91–105; this particular passage is cited on p. 95.



least according to our chronological expectations of history.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the order in which students took up the works in their curriculum is more important as an ordering principle than chronology. And there is no room for value, even relative valuation in the *accessus* scheme or the known compilations; the value of these works is fully expressed in their inclusion in the teaching canon.

To be sure, one can go back as early as the tenth century, to the remarkable *Epistula* of Gunzo for hints, perhaps not yet conscious, of another view.<sup>35</sup> Travelling north from Italy for the emperor Otto in 965, Gunzo spent a night at St. Gall, where he unfortunately perpetrated a solecism – he mistakenly employed the accusative where he ought to have employed an ablative – for which he was publicly ridiculed. His revenge came years later, in a brilliant prosimetrical letter to more sympathetic monks at Reichenau. The situation and letter are interesting from many perspectives, but here I wish only to highlight a few of its notable features. That to shine as a scholar one paraded as much Greek learning as one possibly could was common. However, I must admit it is a bit astonishing to see Gunzo assert that *syllapsis* is frequently found in Homer and quote Greek, even if it is the case that he derived this from Servius's comment on *Aeneid* 10.698.<sup>36</sup> His Homer, like all his Greek, is second-hand, but the implication that he recognizes Homer as the ultimate authority is inescapable. Noteworthy too is the fact that almost without exception the models of elegant Latinity he adduces are pre-Christian.<sup>37</sup> At several junctures he seems to suggest an awareness of temporal and linguistic difference: "I know that men of the Church have written poetry, but I wonder if in our day it is possible for the writer of a true poem to be

<sup>34</sup> The Vatican manuscript [Palatinus Lat. 242; Huygens' P] best preserves what appears to be the ordering principle at the core even of the more elaborate compilations, what Günter Glauche has called the "natural, pedagogically-sensible progression of the teaching program" from Cato, in other words, the *Disticha Catonis*, via Avianus, Maximianus, "Homer" (the Latin *Iliad*, "Homerulus" as Aimeric calls the author), *Ecloga Theoduli*, Arator, Prosper, Sedulius, Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, and – this seems the right cap for the twelfth-century schools – concluding with Ovid's elegiac poetry, both amatory and exilic. (The citation is "der natürliche, pädagogisch sinnvolle Ablauf des Lehrprogramms" – Glauche, *Schullektüre*, p. 120.)

<sup>35</sup> Edition as above, n. 24.

<sup>36</sup> Gunzo, 4, p. 25 n. 2 and 10 n. 4.

<sup>37</sup> The exception is sacred scripture, i.e., the Vulgate; e.g. Gunzo, 4, p. 27.

found.”<sup>38</sup> But as the following lines establish, the problem in his view is simply that no one takes sufficient time to polish his poetry.<sup>39</sup>

Gunzo’s entire mode of argumentation is based on the assumption that the practice and usage of Homer and Cinna, neither of whom he could have read, and Vergil and a host of authors he obviously did read, is authoritative for him. One need only take sufficient care. “Since then the series of divine writings” – the last example was Vergil –

is considered such, who is there so mad that he would dare to criticize or change such expressions? Falsely did that monk of St. Gall think me distant from the science of the art of grammar, although sometimes I am a bit slowed by the usage of my vulgar tongue, which is close to Latin (*licet aliquando retarder usu nostre vulgaris lingue, que Latinitati vicina est*). We err also sometimes either by carelessness or human imperfection, about which Priscian says, “I believe there is nothing to be found in human inventions which is perfect in every way.” We err by carelessness, as Horace says of Homer, “sometimes even good Homer nods,” in other words, writes carelessly.<sup>40</sup>

Gunzo seems to straddle a divide. If one looks at what he does in privileging pre-Christian authors over Christian Latin *auctores*, Gunzo can seem the proto-Humanist. But if one considers what he says, one hears another story. The place Gunzo gives to the liberal arts – they dominate the last half of the epistle – is of a piece with his explicit optimism: study and care were required by the ancient poets, and if applied today can still yield results. Gunzo exemplifies well the point I made above, that the grammarians themselves promoted a synchronic view of the whole range of what we call Classical Latin. It is from Priscian and to a lesser extent Servius and Donatus that Gunzo takes his examples from every period of Roman letters, and from Greek as well. As he begins his section on the art of grammar, Gunzo writes, “The ancients expended enormous labour on ordering and defining things.”<sup>41</sup> By *antiqui* here Gunzo means Donatus and Priscian – they too have joined in the very synchrony they promote. The fact that Gunzo sees no historically-based differentiation in the millennium of

<sup>38</sup> “Ecclesiasticos etiam viros poemate usos invenio, sed miror, si nostro tempore queat veri poematis scriptor inveniri,” 3, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> His counter-examples range from Cinna’s *Smyrna*, which he knows about from Servius on *Eclogue* 9.35, to Vergil, Horace, and Statius, with supporting remarks from Persius and Juvenal.

<sup>40</sup> Gunzo, 4, pp. 27–28.

<sup>41</sup> “Maximum siquidem laborem expenderunt antiqui in ordinandis et determinandis rebus,” 10, p. 39.

Latinity he cites as authoritative is a corollary of his conviction that careful study and application of these rules can lead to successful composition.

It is probably not earthshaking to suggest that the rediscovery or “invention” – a word with a broader range for Latinists than most modern speakers – of periods within Latin literary history would come at the same time when it came into the consciousness of contemporary authors to think of themselves in a specific literary period. Or perhaps even that is not enough, for as one progresses through Mapes and into thirteenth-century chroniclers such as Hugh of Trimberg, we do find *veteres* and *antiqui* clearly distinguished from *moderni*. The more subtle questions to ask are: is this categorization accidental or essential? Can *moderni* reach the same literary heights as the *veteres* and achieve comparable classical status? Up to a point, yes: our friend Walter of Châtillon achieved *auctor* status for his *Alexandreis*, and the epic is accompanied by an *accessus* in standard form and, in some manuscripts, glosses and comments. Some of the great grammarians – Matthew of Vendôme, Alexander of Ville-Dieu, Geoffrey of Vinsauf – stand, singly or together, in certain compilations on equal footing with Priscian and Donatus, just as at about the same time Peter Lombard’s *Sententiae* came to become the set text for university lectures in its own right, practically displacing scripture itself.<sup>42</sup>

As one looks ahead and searches for explanations of what will come, perhaps one should look more closely at a distinction like Hugh’s between *ethici minores* and *ethici maiores*; in other words, perhaps achievements equal to those of the *antiqui* can be made in works of lesser scope, appropriate for the lower reaches of the curriculum, but not at the highest levels of creation. Or perhaps these works of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century *moderni* had become “classical” and “authoritative” to such an extent, that one might see Humanist rejection of them and preference for the works of a distant past as a strategy to escape their influence and impress.

Returning to slightly less stratospheric speculations on sense of period, I am even on this point unprepared to suggest a cause, or express a hunch about which came first. I *suspect* that a sense of the present as period and a sense of periods in the past developed in tandem. It was the achievement of individuals and schools largely between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries gradually to recover a sense of the history of both Latin style and Latin literature, in the sense of history we understand. This achievement of the so-called “Humanist” scholars is the foundation of our modern historical

<sup>42</sup> Also relevant for this study is Michael Meckler, “Traditional Teaching or Modernist Manifesto? Matthew of Vendôme’s Criticisms of Ancient Poetry in the *ars versificatoria*,” *JMLat* 8 (1998), 192–205.

and philological perspective, but not only does it need to be examined historically: we ought to challenge the very bases of our expectations of what “literary history” is. It is in this light that what may appear to have been “medieval literary non-history” may have its greatest value. As it demonstrates, there are ways to think about literary relations and production that do not presuppose either a myth of development or the determinism of periodization. Though one might well argue that the equation of authority and value one finds in, say, Aimeric verges on the tautological, from another perspective one could regard this as a radically user-based system of value.

## II

From one perspective, early modern scholarship will simply *correct* the medieval optic that, as I described it above, foreshortened and flattened the contours of Latin literary history. For example, the view of Latin literature, and of the history of Latin literature, changed in a significant way once Latin texts were again being read against the backdrop of Greek literature. Of course, due to the vagaries of preservation and availability, the two series were not completely the same; it remains an open question at what point classical scholars became able to appreciate the extent to and ways in which Roman authors drew upon Greek. The well-documented humanist debates on Latin language, both Latin versus vernacular and the question of the correct style for Latin (especially prose), are invaluable resources in reconstructing the development of a sense of history of Latin style. This also raises issues running from the perceived relationship between style and literary quality to the development of Latin and to the origin and development of language itself. When and why did some scholars become interested in authors we now consider archaic (e.g., Ennius) or in authors we now consider late (e.g., Apuleius)?<sup>43</sup> These terms are, obviously, themselves relative: when and how did they become to seem absolute?

I promised that, in the final section of this essay – the point towards which the “to” of the title was to lead – I would turn to the historiography of Medieval Latin itself and try see if the exercise I have engaged in so far might be of help in the task of grappling with the octopus, even hydra, that is “Medieval Latin.” If it has played a role in decentering and defamiliarizing, it will have achieved my aim for it. The first part, though itself a partial

<sup>43</sup> For a wonderfully close reading of a humanist teaching Apuleius, see Julia Gaisser, “Reading Apuleius with Filippo Beroaldo,” in Philip Thibodeau and Harry Haskell, eds., *Being There Together. Essays in Honor of Michael C. J. Putnam on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Afton, MN, 2003), pp. 24–42.

narrative, was intended to deconstruct narrative as a natural form of literary history. As I noted above, Medieval Latin, however one draws its boundaries, is already a “provocation” to the kind of literary history formulated and perfected to describe the course of canonical literary works in a “natural” language that is spoken within the bounds of a nation – which certain political forces would like to imagine, or have others imagine, are themselves “natural.” But what is the nation of Medieval Latin? Its geographical borders constitute a conundrum, as do its temporal bounds.

The temporal dimension is particularly warped in the time-space continuum that is Medieval Latin by the fact that “classical” Latin, or, less anachronistically, the Latin of the “*auctores*” (though that assemblage was malleable enough) is omnipresent and serves as a model, here more intensively, there less. The terms “here” and “there” could be taken to mean “at different times,” but clearly not always trending in one direction as far as adherence to an auctorial model; but could also be, indeed, must also be taken literally to refer to one locality as opposed to another. There were great differences between regions, but an imaginary map of literary isoglosses, if you will, would not look like linguistic isoglosses, since there could be more similarities in what was going on in a particular monastic foundation or cathedral school, say, with what was going on in another foundation a thousand miles away but with closer links to the first than in a nearby foundation with allegiance to a different order. Things could be going on in a unique manner in one place simply because a Roman text was available there that was not available somewhere else, or was in fact available nowhere else on the continent. There was, to be sure, throughout the Middle Ages a healthy exchange of materials for copying, but this, too, varied in intensity, and though the advent of print made an enormous difference, the network of exchange that the humanists had erected by the early fifteenth century already anticipated and prepared the way for what would become possible once Mr. Gutenberg’s invention was available. One should not overlook or underestimate the networks that existed even earlier. In other words, we should not overinvest in the supremacy of a “pan-European humanist network” just because it was extensive and essentially unbroken. Every advance comes at a cost, and there were massive exclusions and losses.

It should be clear that what I won’t be doing is giving an account of all surveys of Medieval Latin literary history, much less assigning grades. As I said above, so great is the wealth of material that it is a necessity and a noble task for someone in each generation or two to offer a complete overview with updated bibliography. These days we can look to the web to offer an incrementally expanded conspectus with a continually updated bibliography.

The sheer cataloguing of material, not to mention the by no means simple tasks of establishing each text and its date, provenance and, if possible, audience – all these require immense historical skill and are pre-conditions to inquiries that, for all their seeming impossibilities, could lead us into the heart of the matter, into the various systems of production, schooling, patronage, intertextuality and reception – nor is this intended to be an exhaustive list. What I especially prize and feel we need many more of are what I have called “shaped” histories. These can be of all shapes and sizes, but critical is a keen awareness of the contingency of each shaping, each sizing, that will be brought to the fore. A model – and I would maintain this everywhere and not merely in Toronto – is, of course, Professor Rigg’s *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature 1066–1422*,<sup>44</sup> by no means a micro-history. This was really a breakthrough book, in multiple senses breaking the mould of such monumental projects as those of Manitius and later Franz Brunhölzl and Karl Langosch, to name only those working in the German tradition. Rigg explains precisely what the inner and usually unexpressed linkage is between writing a history *ab ovo* – whatever that would be in this case! – to 1200, on the one hand, and constructing a pan-European Medieval Latinity, on the other. That Rigg’s project opens up vast riches of chronically understudied material and by its very design focuses on one region, which has sufficient geographical complexity, I need hardly rehearse here. Within a history already shaped are smaller shapings, from the chapters set out to follow political contours and *ad hoc* subsets, whether “northern writers” or “writings in response to Becket’s death.” The very *ad hoc*-ness of these sets is not suppressed, it is explicit. As full as the account is, Rigg takes the time to celebrate the stylistic and creative achievements of the stand-out individuals; he is not held hostage to any sense that literary worthies are distributed regularly and evenly so that, to each author, decade, or century a requisite number of pages must be dedicated.

We have been taught, as new literary historians, to be wary of metaphor. The organic metaphor had a long run in literary history, from ancient times certainly through the nineteenth century of Lamarck and Darwin. I believe, though, we need more metaphors, at least as spurs to our thinking, and in the explosive realms of scientific research we can find many. I mean to employ them as thought experiments, in no sense as causal models. One I have toyed with on and off is that of the ecological niche. One could think of any number of these, whether it is Canterbury, say, or Oxford, any number of abbeys, or, less rigidly fixed, the houses of a given order or the court. These are not cut off from external influences, and, indeed, they

<sup>44</sup> Cambridge, 1992.

are recognizable as niches precisely because they offer a particular set of conditions within that larger world of currents. I do not, I assure you, want to encourage a literary Darwinism, a “survival of the fittest” books, but if we think more on the ecological side than on the evolutionary side, I think we could find ways to describe and appreciate the qualities of each niche: what, for example, makes it similar to some other niches but unique in its own way, and what the contribution is of each individual, including transplants – “exotics” if you will – both at a point of stasis and in the ongoing development of the niche itself.

One could exemplify this in many ways, but I wish only to suggest that this could enable us more easily to negotiate and possibly describe the complexity of the different sets of relevant conditions that obtained in each cultural “tidal pool” or niche – the schooling in Latin *auctores*, liturgy, the particular vernacular or vernaculars floating about. As George Rigg points out, Nigel Whiteacre’s “father spoke French, his mother spoke English” (p. 102). Different combinations would arise for different individuals. And such individuals could find themselves in a place where the spoken vernacular was something entirely different, and this as well as the different Latin and vernacular experiences of all the individuals in the niche at any one time would subtly affect the language used, for we do well to remember that Latin was not a dead language but very much in “daily use” (*ibid.*, p. 239).

It might also help us deal with one of the most vexing but also fascinating features of Medieval Latin – the paradox that it is at once continuous with and discontinuous from Classical Latin. To approach Medieval Latin solely from a Classical perspective involves gross misprision, yet a considerable part of the Latin training of medieval readers and writers involved reading of *auctores*, many of whom were classical according to our own more restrictive criteria. To handle this one might turn not to ecology but to some of the more abstruse and novel explanatory modes of modern cosmologists and astrophysicists. Certainly, there are strange warps to the space-time-continuum in the force-field of Medieval Latin, and I was delighted by the inventiveness of Sylvia Parsons when I saw, in her recent dissertation, that she invoked the idea of the “wormhole,”<sup>45</sup> valuable as a metaphor whether it be something astrophysicists seriously entertain or merely the stuff of science-fiction. But the point is the image, and the point is clear: circulating in our niche are not

<sup>45</sup> “The Representation of the Body in Twelfth-Century Latin Epic: the *Alexandreis* of Walter of Châtillon and the *Ylias* of Joseph of Exeter” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1968), pp. 3, 61.

merely contemporary texts, Latin and vernacular, but texts of multiple preceding ages. There is a reality to this synchronism. And our imaginary organisms are programmed to accord texts by *auctores* very great esteem.

As far as the larger geographical boundaries are concerned, perhaps it is time to see how things look from more eccentric, even peripheral vantage points. It is not that I don't have sympathy with some of his points, but when, a few years ago I picked up a Manfred Fuhrmann's essay *Europas kulturelle Identität*,<sup>46</sup> I became rather exercised when he asked, rhetorically, "What is Europe other than what Christianity and the forces unleashed by the humanists' reception of antiquity have brought forth?"<sup>47</sup> I rejected the rhetorical nature of that question, scribbling angrily in the margin of my copy, "a landmass!!!" As it so happens, not long before I had for the first time visited Sicily, home to multiple cultural traditions yet undeniably European. And as we know now if we weren't aware some years ago, there's a lot going on in Europe that has nothing to do with Christian tradition.<sup>48</sup> What might an account of Medieval Latin look like if one tried the experiment of writing its history from the perimeters instead of from the centre?

Let me just leave that thought – where it might lead must be left for another time and place – and conclude with what may seem a radical "reverse course." As the brutal rhetorical question of Fuhrmann I cited shows us, master narratives are potent. Recent events have shown once again that simple sound bites quash complex reasoning and analysis. We need the smaller, shaped literary histories, but we had better work towards a larger and compelling narrative, but one *we* craft, for who better?

One of the great master narratives was the one the humanists, faced with the hypertrophy of late Medieval Latin and its creativity in production as in language, devised as a way to clear the space and order the overwhelming material. They "cleared house" simply by declaring a change in standards. I don't mean to imply one or two humanists plotted this, but the value shift certainly had this effect.

There is something in us all that craves narrative; we even crave literary history. We know what a wealth of beauty, interest and wisdom is to be found in Latin texts of the Middle Ages. What if we were to return to the

<sup>46</sup> Stuttgart, 2002.

<sup>47</sup> "Was ist Europa anderes als das, was das Christentum und die durch die humanistische Rezeption der Antike freigesetzten Kräfte hervorgebracht haben?" *ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

<sup>48</sup> As I proofread the final version, Muslims in Europe and the Middle East are rioting over the publication of images of the prophet Muhammad in European newspapers.



idea of Latin *auctores* without respect to time? What if we were to turn back to Aimeric? Augustine, Boethius, Erasmus all would be classified as the golden authors they are.

I hope not to be misunderstood. We must have more of the most nuanced and subtle “literary histories” for the profession, but we must also speak to those for whom Erasmus and Boethius have more in common with Vergil and Cicero than not. And for our contemporaries, is that not, in fact, true?

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