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An Onomastic Pun in a Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Poem

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NOTES

AN ONOMASTIC PUN IN A TENTH-CENTURY ANGLO-LATIN POEM

Although few Anglo-Saxonists would characterize tenth-century hermeneutic Latin as 'light' or 'jocular', many works of the period do offer glimpses of wit. For example, the pedantic *Altercatio magistri et discipuli*, probably composed at Æthelwold's school at Winchester, has some of the most buoyant word-play in pre-Conquest literature.[1] The poem presents an acerbic debate between an unnamed, but presumably Anglo-Saxon, student and his Welsh teacher, Ioruert (= Iorwerth). The student mocks his teacher's competence, derides his Welsh background, and puns on his name:

> nomine, tuque piger, recto uocitaris 'Iorue<r>t',[2]
> peruertens 'iornum' falso sintagmate uerum. (54–5)

(You sluggard are called 'Iorwerth' by a 'correct' name, perverting the 'iornum' (truth) with your false teaching.)

The meaning of this Latin pun, difficult to capture in Modern English, affects readings in this work as well as in its companion piece, the *Responsio discipuli*.[3]

Much of the joke here depends on the Latinization *-uert* of the Welsh element *gwerth* ('worth, value')[4] in the name Ioruert. 'Uert' could stand for *ver(us)* 'truthful', or *vert(ere)* 'to turn, subvert'. Ioruert himself translated it as 'truthful', a sense these poems constantly dispute. The *Responsio* tells how Ioruert vaunted his 'truthful' name ('nonne pudicum' / 'ueridicumque' / 'te fore iactas' / 'optime Ioruert?', 8–10),[5] even while he 'falsely' ('falso') maligned his students' poetry (11–16).[6] According to the satirist, the less favourable meaning 'subvert' characterizes Ioruert's name, for Ior*uert* per*verts* the truth ('peruertens ... uerum') with falsehood (55).

Sections of both *Altercatio* and *Responsio* turn on the truthful/twisted pun: Ioruert offers tortuous arguments ('scismate falsidico', 40; cf. 'falsidicus', 93), although urged to confess the truth: '... fatere' / 'non fore uerum' / 'ore scelesto' / 'teque locutum' (20–4).[7] If his students could only learn from him, he *might* be considered a 'uerax ... doctor' (87). At least his challenger speaks with true words ('ueris sermonibus', 99). Elsewhere Ioruert is a 'peruerse senex' (94), who claims that no one will dare to overturn the ancient customs: 'nemo catus priscas audebit uertere normas' (109).[8] Therefore he will teach brutes, lest they try to subvert the old order: 'brutos ... monebo / conentur ueterem ne uertere conditionem' (110–11).[9]

Such allusions illustrate how the Welsh element *gwerth* is reinvented as

Latin. But what about *ior*? Recall that Ioruert perverts the 'iornum' (truth) (55). Recognizing that *ior* means 'lord', Lapidge queried: 'has the poet coined a word (meaning 'lordly' or something similar) by adding a Latin adjectival suffix to a Welsh stem?'.[10] This solution is one of many and ignores the problem that *ior* does not seem to have been understood as 'lord'. At least no pun on the element appears in either poem.

In my view, the neologism *iornum* is not meant to represent Welsh *ior* plus the adjectival suffix *-num*. It disguises the Old English term *georn* 'eager, zealous', the initial consonant of which would have been pronounced /j/.[11] In this poetic idiom, 'iornum uerum' means 'zealous truth'. The phrase suits this Welshman because of his equivocal name. Ioruert is called everything in the book (Horace's *Satires!*),[12] but here he is specifically *piger* 'lazy' (54), just the opposite meaning of OE *georn*. Ioruert does not tell the truth; he perverts it. Ioruert is not zealous; he is lazy. He ultimately exemplifies the oppositions in the opening lines:

> Si torpens celeri tigrem superare fugacem
> cursu testudo desideret ac feritate;
> si lepus atque canem temptet laniare ferocem,
> scorpius exilis tunicatum si crocodrillum ... (1–4)

(If the lazy tortoise wanted to surpass the running tiger in swift flight and in ferocity; and if the rabbit tried to rake the fierce hound, and the weak scorpion the armoured crocodile ...)

What would happen? The whole world would crumble (13). With his counterfactual name, Ioruert epitomizes this topsy-turvy universe,[13] and the onomastic bilingual pun reinforces his gross ineptitude.

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[1] The hexameter work was edited in Michael Lapidge, 'Three Latin poems from Æthelwold's school at Winchester', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1 (1972), 85–137 (pp. 108–21). The *Altercatio* bears the rubric 'uersus .L. de quodam superbo', and Lapidge suggests (after Henry Bradshaw) that it may have been penned by Lantfred of Winchester, a continental emigré.

[2] The name is twice spelled 'Ioruet' in the *Altercatio* (52, 54) and once 'Ioruert' (121); it is spelled 'Ioruert' in the *Responsio* (11).

[3] The *Responsio* follows the *Altercatio* in the manuscript. It is written in adonics.

[4] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, ed. R. J. Thomas *et al.* (Cardiff, 1952), *s.v.*

[5] 'Do you not boast that you are modest and *truthful*, my dear Ioruert?'

[6] Ioruert, it seems, was given to tiresome boasting (26–45), and he must have mentioned the double sense of his name all too often.

[7] '... confess that it was not true and that you spoke with a villainous tongue'.

[8] 'No cunning man will dare to overturn the ancient customs.'

⁹ 'Therefore, I will instruct brutes lest they strive to overturn the old order.'

¹⁰ Lapidge, 'Three Latin poems', p. 115 (note to line 55). The poet plays tricks with another Welsh term, *cadarn*, when he calls the English *tenaces* 'tenacious', 'strong' (24). Lapidge supposes that the term refers to the name of England, *Ynys y Kedeyrn* 'the Isle of the Mighty', attested in later works.

¹¹ As far as I am aware, this kind of word-play in Anglo-Latin is not found outsde these verses. Nevertheless, Latinized Old English abounds. Principal sources treating such neologisms include: F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (repr. Tübingen, 1960) (see the 'Quadripartitus'); H. Gneuss, *Lehnbildungen und Lehnbedeutungen im Altenglischen* (Berlin, 1955); Carolus du Fresne, *Glossarium media et infima Latinitatis* (repr. Graz, 1954), X (Indices), pp. cxci-cxcii; *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. R. E. Latham, D. P. Howlett *et al.* (London, 1975–).

¹² Lapidge, 'Three Latin poems', p. 109, note to lines 14–18. The *Satires* were a source for many terms of abuse in the *Altercatio*: *uafer, furcifer, cerritus, balatro, spurcus, agaso, garrulus, nebulo*. In addition to which we also find non-Horatian words: *sicophanta, baburus, babbiger, insipidus, monstrum, furibundus, silicernus*.

¹³ On this *adynata* trope, see E. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. Trask (Princeton, NJ, 1967), pp. 94–8.

'COMED, CONDE': THE CID'S USE OF PARODY

The concluding section of the first *Cantar* of the *Poema de Mio Cid* narrates an important incident involving the Cid's defeat and capture of the count of Barcelona, Berenguer Ramón II, the count's short-lived hunger-strike, and his subsequent release. The Cid's victory over such a high-ranking figure and its key position at the end of the first *Cantar*, together with the Cid's extensive use of word-play both in his repeated 'Comed, conde' (Latin *comed* and *comitem* having given [koméde] and [kómede] respectively in early Romance), and the pun on *franco* in line 1068, have ensured that this section has received considerable critical attention.[1] However, despite the best efforts of the critics who have analysed this incident, some doubt still remains over basic questions such as why the characters choose to act in the way they do, and what the exact implications are of the words they speak. The many centuries separating modern readers from the original context of the work inevitably make it difficult for us to pick up the full implications of the actions and the dialogue and, equally importantly, make it difficult for us to be certain that we are picking up no more than the full implications.

The basic outline of the episode is immediately clear to any reader: following his defeat, the count tries to seize the initiative by refusing the Cid's offer of food; the Cid regains the initiative by overcoming the count's rather weak resistance; and the count is then released, although he, unlike the audience, is not certain that the Cid's generosity will last (1079). The count's hunger-strike can be viewed as a re-run of the battle: the Cid establishes his