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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. The poem presents an acerbic debate between an unnamed, but presumably Anglo-Saxon, student and his Welsh teacher, Iorwerth (= Iorwerth). The student mocks his teacher's competence, derides his Welsh background, and puns on his name:

nomine, tuque piger, recto uocitaris 'Iorue<ç=t', 2
peruetens 'Iorumn' false sintagnmate uerum. (54-1)

(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 -wurt of the Welsh element gwurth ('worth, value') in the name Iorwerth. 'Uert' could stand for verus 'truthful', or verterr (to turn, subvert'. Iorwerth himself translated it as 'truthful', a sense these poems constantly dispute. The Responsio tells how Iorwerth vaunted his 'truthful' name ('nonne pudicum' / 'veridicumque' / 'te fore iectas'/ 'optime Iorwert?', 8-10), 3 even while he falsely ('falso') maligned his students' poetry (11-16). 6 According to the satirist, the less favourable meaning 'subvert' characterizes Iorwerth's name, for Iorwert pervertis the truth ('peruetens ... uerum') with falsehood (5).

Sections of both Altercatio and Responsio turn on the truthful/twisted pun: Iorwerth offers tortuous arguments ('scismate falsidico', 40; cf. 'falsidicus', 93), although urged to confess the truth: ' ... faterc' / 'non fore uerum' / 'ore scelsto' / 'teque locumtor' (20-4). If his students could only learn from him, he might be considered a 'ueraex ... doctor' (87). At least his challenger speaks with true words ('ueris sermonibus', 99). Elsewhere Iorwerth is a 'peruere senex' (94), who claims that no one will dare to overturn the ancient customs: 'nemo catus priscas audibit uerttere normas' (109). 6 Therefore he will teach brutes, lest they try to subvert the old order: 'brutos ... monebo / contentur ueterem ne uertere conditionem' (110-11). 9

Such allusions illustrate how the Welsh element gwurth is reinvented as
Latin. But what about ior? Recall that Ioruert perverts the 'iornum' (truth) (11). 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'? 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/.10 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),11 but here he is specifically jig 'lazy' (14), 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 superere fugacem
cursu testudo desideret ac feritate;
si lepus atque canem tempter laniare ferocem,
scorpius exilis tunicatum si crocodillum ...

(If the lazy tortoise wanted to surpass the running tiger in swift flight and in ferocity; and if the rabbit tried to rack 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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NOTES

1 The hexameter work was edited in Michael Lapidge, 'Three Latin poems from Æthelwold's school at Winchester', Anglo-Saxon England, 1 (1972), 81–137 (pp. 108–21). The Alteratio bears the rubric 'versus L. de quodam superbo', and Lapidge suggests (after Henry Bradshaw) that it may have been penned by Lanfrede of Winchester, a continental emigre.

2 The name is twice spelled 'Ioruert' in the Alteratio (51, 14) and once 'Ioruert' (121); it is spelled 'Ioruer' in the Responsor (11).

3 The Responsor follows the Alteratio in the manuscript. It is written in adonies.

4 Ceiriadwr Prifysgol Gymru, ed. R. J. Thomas et al. (Cardiff, 1951), l.s.

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

Lapidge, ‘Three Latin poems’, p. 115 (note to line 31). 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 Redeyr ‘the Isle of the Mighty’, attested in later works.

As far as I am aware, this kind of word-play in Anglo-Latin is not found outside these verses. Nevertheless, Latinized Old English abounds. Principal sources treating such neologisms include: F. Liebertmann, Die Gesetze der Anglesachsen (repr. Tübingen, 1960) (see the ‘Quadriparitus’); H. Gneuss, Lebensbilder und Lebensbedeutungen im Alten English (Berlin, 1955); Carolus du Fresne, Glossarium media et infima Latinitatis (repr. Graz, 1934), X (Indices), pp. cxci-cxcii; The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources, ed. R. E. Latham, D. P. Howlett et al. (London, 1971–).

Lapidge, ‘Three Latin poems’, p. 109, note to lines 14–18. The Saitres were a source for many terms of abuse in the Altercation: usher, furseter, usritus, balatru, spwrus, opose, garrulhus, nehulo. In addition to which we also find non-Horacian words: stiophanta, babrus, babbrger, insipidus, monstrum, furribundus, silicenus.


‘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 [kóméde] respectively in early Romance), and the pun on franco in line 1068, have ensured that this section has received considerable critical attention. 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