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# The humanist reform of Latin and Latin teaching

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Despite the many changes which were made during the Renaissance, humanist Latin represented a development of both the forms and the functions of medieval Latin. Latin was the language of the educated and of, if not the ruling, at least the governing classes. Not knowing Latin demonstrated that one did not belong to these social groups. In the Middle Ages, Latin was the international language of secular and ecclesiastical administration, of diplomacy, of liturgy and of the educational institutions where students were prepared for positions in these spheres. Interest in Latin was motivated by practical concerns. Official correspondence in Latin was the most important task of those engaged in church and secular administration. The *ars dictaminis*, or art of letter-writing, had been a central feature of late medieval education in Italy, but less so north of the Alps, where university education was directed towards theological rather than legal training. In post-medieval Italy, Latin retained all these functions, and the art of writing letters and composing orations remained important aspects of Latin education.

In no area were prestige and presentation of greater importance than in matters of state. International affairs were transacted in Latin through the exchange of letters and through orations delivered by envoys. Humanist Latin emerged in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in Italy among men in the highest ranks of ecclesiastical or civil administration. Chancellors of Florence, such as Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini, both of whom had also served as secretaries to the pope, were prominent exponents. The power of this new style of Latin diplomacy was exalted (with some exaggeration) by a humanist of the next generation, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II; he reported that Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan was frequently heard to say that Coluccio Salutati's writings had done him more harm than 1,000 Florentine horsemen.<sup>1</sup> Prestige was what humanist educators in Italy aimed to enable their students to achieve for their employers or their patrons.

Although humanist education and humanist Latin drew in part on French learning, they essentially grew out of Italian traditions and needs, and from Italy spread throughout Europe. Since knowledge of Latin was a sign of status, the more advanced one's command of the language, the greater the social cachet attached to it. The standard by which the achievement was to be measured was in no doubt: the superiority of the Latin written by the great authors of the classical past – Cicero, Terence, Virgil, Horace and Ovid – had been central to the curriculum of medieval schools and remained so in humanist schools, although the list of authors who were frequently read was extended. The claim made in Italy that the new Latin emulated the best ancient Latin was generally regarded as justified.

The international political function of Latin as a language of power is clearly expressed in the introduction to Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* (1441–9), a title which is perhaps best translated as 'Advanced Idiomatic Latin'. There he describes how, although the Roman empire had perished as a political force, in a deeper and truer sense it still survived: 'To us belongs Italy, to us belongs France, to us belong Spain, Germany, Hungary, Dalmatia, Illyricum and many other nations. For the Roman empire is found where the Roman language holds sway.'<sup>2</sup> He emphasizes Roman supremacy by using the phrase *lingua Romana*, as against the normal *lingua Latina*. Valla's *lingua Romana* could lay claim to superiority over all of learned Europe because it was not filled with the unclassical expressions and syntax introduced by invading hordes of barbarians; it was instead, as he sets out in detail in the book, the accomplished and polished language of ancient – and modern – Rome. This is partly to be understood in connection with Valla's contention that there was an unbroken linguistic tradition in Rome: even the Italian vernacular now spoken by the people of Rome was distantly related to the colloquial Latin of the ancient Roman masses.<sup>3</sup> Valla's linguistic empire was ostensibly unattached to any political entity. He even dissociated it from the ancient Roman empire: the subject peoples had had good reason to reject its laws and decrees, which to them were merely tools of oppression; but while they had rejected the political dominion of Rome, they had retained the benefit of the Roman language. Nevertheless, Valla's programme was not merely to establish humanist Latin as the international language but to give priority to the Latin of papal Rome – a programme which, not coincidentally, would facilitate a career for himself at the papal curia.

It is easy to detect an anti-imperial attitude in Valla's words. The Holy Roman Empire derived its political legitimacy from a supposed continuity of power transferred from the ancient empire of Rome. Valla's definition of proper Latin was an attack on this political heritage. Anti-imperial and

therefore anti-German propaganda is frequently found in Italian humanist circles in the fifteenth century. Its motivation was partly political – imperial troops interfered directly in the affairs of Italian city states, culminating with the Sack of Rome by the German emperor's troops in 1527 – and partly economic. The controversy concerning the transfer of capital from Germany to Rome through ecclesiastical dues, which was to become a central issue in the Reformation, was already perceived as a serious problem in the fifteenth century. The specific form given to anti-imperial propaganda was often that of reminding Germans of their barbarian forebears, who were responsible for the destruction of ancient civilization. What clearer sign of their continued barbaric nature than their barbarous Latin? Thus, in addition to the function of humanist Latin as an indication of personal social status, and its role in the political rivalries between Italian states, it carried a clear political message of Italian cultural supremacy over the rest of Europe – despite the political realities.

German authors were painfully aware of this line of attack. Johannes Santritter, a German settled in Venice, complained that the astronomical works of his compatriot Johannes Regiomontanus had not had the reception in Italy which they deserved. He explained the Italians' failure to appreciate Regiomontanus's writings by their hatred of everything German. This hatred was put down to envy of the technically competent Germans, who had invented printing and who championed all the practical sciences. Only in one area did Italians have the advantage: Germans had not yet learned to write Latin as elegantly as they did. 'But even in Italy proper Latin was once forgotten', wrote Santritter, 'and I hope that it will not be long before eloquence, the queen of all things, will attain perfection in our country as well. Our Roman empire shall not long be deprived of the language which is its own. The Roman language (*lingua Romana*) shall rejoice in rejoining its own empire.'<sup>4</sup> We hear an echo of Valla's words in the phrase *lingua Romana*, but his argument has been turned round to claim the Roman language for the Holy Roman Empire. The point, none the less, was conceded that the proper form of Latin was that used by Italian humanists. Similarly, when Dietrich Gresemund, a well-educated son of a Mainz patrician family, went to Padua to study law in the 1490s, he had an unhappy time. His friends could only accept him by maintaining that his good qualities proved that he was not a real German. Gresemund could usually console himself by his sense that the attacks were unjustified; when, however, the Italians laughed at his Latin, he had to admit that they were right.<sup>5</sup>

By the late fifteenth century, Italian superiority on the cultural and linguistic level was well established. The main goal of educational reformers

throughout Europe was to achieve the same command of classical Latin as that which was found in Italy. If they failed to compete, they would lose their best students. Jakob Wimpfeling, who promoted reform in German schools from around the end of the fifteenth century, explained in his book, *Isidoneus Germanicus de erudienda iuventute* ('A Doorway to Learning for German Youth', c. 1497), why it was imperative for good Latin to be taught in Germany: 'To foreigners we seem barbarians, because the few Germans who get a good education spend their lives on grammatical trivialities . . . If the need were to arise, they would be unable to receive a distinguished foreign visitor with an elegant speech or to address them courteously.'<sup>6</sup> In another work, *Germania* (1501), Wimpfeling warned the burghers of Strasbourg that reform of their school was essential if they wished their young men to be able to compete and obtain high positions in the administration of the Church or the Empire or to be able to undertake diplomatic functions for their city. Here again we see that a career either in civil or ecclesiastical administration or in diplomacy was the goal of the educated members of the higher strata of society.

The allure of Italian education was by no means confined to Germany. 'I am purposid', wrote an early sixteenth-century Englishman, 'to leue my cuntre and go in-to italie and that oonly for the desire of latyn and greke, for thought I can fynd here in ynglonde that can tech me, yet by-cause I thynke I can lerne better ther than her I haue a gret desire to goo thether.'<sup>7</sup>

In the years before 1430, Guarino of Verona composed a Latin grammar for pupils just beyond the elementary stages of education, who had already learned how to decline nouns and conjugate verbs. The topics with which his textbook dealt, and the way in which it dealt with them, show the continuity between humanist Latin grammar and the elementary Latin taught in the late Middle Ages. Guarino's chief reform was a significant reduction in technical vocabulary: he stressed the desirability of brevity and simplicity as principles for grammatical instruction. After Guarino, many other Italian writers composed grammars and, aided by the opportunities offered by the invention of printing, some of these works were widely distributed throughout Europe. They differ in matters of detail, some being more prone to retain aspects of late medieval terminology, others less so; but all are basically similar in their approach to the topic.

In a textbook first published in the mid-1480s, an anonymous Low German author, in a chapter entitled 'Complaint that schoolboys are made to spend too much time on obscure, long-winded and useless aspects of grammar' recommended an approach modelled on that used in Italy:

Italian teachers have this praiseworthy habit with boys whose education is entrusted to them: as soon as they have learned the most elementary grammar they are immediately set to work on the best poet, Virgil, and the comedies of Terence and Plautus. They study the *Epistulae ad familiares*, *De amicitia*, *De senectute*, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* and other works by Cicero. This is why they outshine all other nations in writing rich and elegant Latin . . . Little boys need a few brief rules which will lead them rapidly to their goal.<sup>8</sup>

This sums up an outsider's view of the reasons for the success of Latin teaching in Italy. Medieval grammatical textbooks were considered to be too complicated. This criticism was two-pronged. Partly it was directed against normative grammars, where rules were laid down: for instance, the *Doctrinale* (1199), a popular grammar in verse by the Frenchman Alexander de Villa Dei. Alexander's rules were obscurely phrased in poor verse; in addition, they were often incorrect according to the new standard set by humanists aspiring to imitate classical authors. Alexander's grammar became a symbol of the bad Latin taught in the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> In Italy, national considerations here too played a role. The author of a Latin grammar printed in Venice in 1480 expressed his frustration that until recently Italians had been compelled to learn Latin – their own language – from the works of barbarian foreigners.<sup>10</sup>

The other aspect of grammar which was condemned was the theoretical approach found in many medieval works. Perhaps the most severely criticized was the Danish author Martinus de Dacia, who came to symbolize a speculative, philosophical approach to grammar. Martinus was a *modista*, that is, he was engaged in the study of how words refer to the world (the *modi significandi*); he therefore viewed language as a logically explicable structure. Neither normative nor descriptive, modist grammar set out a philosophy of meaning. But the grammatical terminology created by the *modistae* for philosophical purposes was also employed by normative grammarians. This link between philosophy, especially logic, and the description of Latin was fiercely resisted by humanists. For them, the sole aim of grammar was to teach Latin usage. The study of grammar therefore had no value in itself: grammar was a tool, and as such it should be dealt with as succinctly as possible.

Francesco Priscianese, author of a Latin grammar first published in Rome in 1540, declared that modern languages could be learned without any great effort, whereas Latin and Greek could only be acquired at the cost of much sweat and labour. It took a long time, and most of those who began ended in failure. This was because both ancient and more recent grammarians of Latin and Greek had been inclined to teach their pupils grammar rather than language.<sup>11</sup> The tendency to organize the material in grammars

without a view to the needs of the teaching process was frequently criticized. But while this complaint was often repeated, no thorough attempt at finding a solution was made by any humanist grammarian. The very hostility of humanists to the theoretical approach to grammar made it difficult for them to develop a radically new concept of their own. Like the grammars produced by their late medieval predecessors, the textbooks written by humanists continued to be based on ultimately philosophical considerations of the structure of language rather than being organized around a clear notion of which aspects of grammar might be more conveniently taught before others.

In *De ratione studii* ('On the Method of Study', 1511), Erasmus gave advice as to the best textbook of Latin grammar:

There is not much difference to detect among contemporary Latin grammarians. Niccolò Perotti seems the most accurate, yet not pedantic. But while I grant that grammatical rules of this sort are necessary, I want them to be as few as possible, provided they are good. I have never approved of the approach found among run of the mill grammarians who spend several years inculcating such rules in their pupils.<sup>12</sup>

Niccolò Perotti's *Rudimenta grammatices* ('Elementary Grammar', 1468) was the most widely diffused humanist Latin grammar of the late fifteenth century. Much longer than that of Guarino, it is chiefly distinguished from earlier works in the genre by its exclusion of many words and types of construction which derived from medieval, as opposed to classical, Latin, and by its provision of extensive discussions of classical words which had not previously found their way into elementary grammars. Much of the information contained in Perotti's grammar would appear to us to belong properly in a dictionary. In this respect he followed his late medieval predecessors. But there was a difference. Vocabulary which had been in general use in late medieval Latin was now subjected to careful historical and philological scrutiny.

In the later Middle Ages it had been commonly accepted that words achieved their meaning by social convention. While a theoretical link could be established between the things referred to by words and the mental processes which lay behind the meaning of words, phonetic structures bore no logical relation to the objects which they signified. The consequence of this was that linguistic correctness depended on the consensus of users; so words could be made up when convenient, and language could be manipulated for the purposes of those who employed it. Late medieval Latin is characterized by highly flexible rules for creating new words. Philosophers,

theologians and lawyers all devised a vocabulary and a phraseology specific to their disciplines. The deviation of philosophers from classical usage (*usus*) was attacked by Valla in his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* ('Reworking of Dialectic and Philosophy', three versions, produced from the 1430s to 1457).<sup>13</sup> While humanists agreed that usage determined linguistic correctness, contemporary Latin usage had no normative value in their eyes. Only the usage of ancient authors was acceptable, whereas that which had grown up in the various scholastic disciplines seemed to humanists to rest on the mistaken assumption that language could be created by an act of rationality. The concept of usage thus became linked to the concept of authority (*auctoritas*): knowledge of linguistic correctness was to be derived from ancient texts. The proper meaning of words was now to be firmly based on the usage current in classical times.

Much of the effort of humanist grammarians was directed towards purifying the Latin language of words which could not be found in classical authors. The aim was to banish medieval neologisms and replace them with classical equivalents. In the absence of a thorough lexicography of ancient Latin, this was no easy task and largely depended on an individual's assimilation of the classical idiom through extensive reading and memorization of approved authors. Even more difficult was the eradication of the unclassical use of classical words.

The demand for a precise understanding of classical usage was not merely antiquarian. Schoolteachers responded to the needs of men engaged in professions where the correct understanding of classical texts was essential. Physicians, for instance, were required to understand the Latin terminology found in the Elder Pliny's *Natural History* in order to ensure that they had an accurate knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants or minerals. Lawyers needed to understand the exact meaning of classical words in order to provide correct interpretations of the law – the section of the *Digest* (the main corpus of Roman law, compiled under Emperor Justinian) entitled 'On the Meaning of Words' became the basis of humanist legal education.

Perotti's *Rudimenta grammatices*, in the version which he himself produced, laid down rules for a more classical Latin than that presented in the textbooks of his medieval predecessors. In subsequent editions, however, late medieval constructions and words which Perotti had excluded or even explicitly rejected were reinstated as prescribed usage. A similar tendency can be observed in relation to Perotti's description of the correct style for a humanist letter, which was explicitly directed against the recommendations of medieval letter-writing manuals. In later editions of his work, we

find that his rules were reversed, and phrases and forms rejected by him were once again advocated.

The establishment of a proper understanding of the ancient Latin vocabulary was a central concern for Valla in his *Elegantiae*. This book was not, however, a viable tool for teaching classical usage to schoolboys. His information was too descriptive and insufficiently normative; moreover, the work itself was too long and too expensive. Compendia based on Valla's treatise were soon made in order to provide small reference books on the meaning and proper construction of words. As in the case of Perotti's grammar, these compendia did not invariably prescribe the sort of Latin which Valla himself had proposed. This is certainly true of those compiled in Italy;<sup>14</sup> and across the Alps the distance between Valla's Latin and that found in works claiming to be based on him was even greater. One grammar first published in Basel around 1485 purports to be an adaptation of Valla but in reality bears no relationship to any of his works.<sup>15</sup> We are therefore confronted with a discrepancy between claims to follow the new humanist model of Latin and a practice which turns out to be rather different.

There were many reasons for this reluctant adoption of the new linguistic norms, despite declarations of support for their underlying principles. Part of the explanation is to be found in the difference between the types of school where Latin was taught. While mastery of Latin could help gain access to influential positions because of the importance attached to presentational skills, the foundation on which these skills were built was often laid in humble schoolrooms by humble schoolteachers. Some Italian masters, Guarino for instance, ran private boarding schools for pupils from the ruling élite. Humanist education was initially reserved for pupils at such institutions; only gradually did it penetrate into less exclusive schools. For municipal schools, cities usually hired teachers whose status was not particularly high, whose qualifications were not always the best and whose remuneration was slight. The comprehensive reform of the Latin language attempted in the foremost humanist schools was emulated, with varying degrees of success, by modest teachers of students with lower social ambitions.

A second explanation of this conservatism is the commercial nature of the publication of school texts. Wimpfeling, in his *Isidoneus*, blamed greedy printers for attempting to sell outdated textbooks.<sup>16</sup> Their greed would not, however, have been satisfied had they not catered for a market. Conversely, a printer would be reluctant to embark on the speculative publication of a revolutionary textbook which ran the risk of not being accepted by a sufficiently large number of teachers. Schools, moreover, were dependent on

the books which were at their disposal. Even in a wealthy book-producing centre like Nuremberg this could be a problem: in 1511 a newly appointed schoolmaster explained that the grammar which had previously been in sole use was the only printed textbook available.<sup>17</sup>

In the third place, schools are by nature conservative institutions. Teachers teach what they themselves have been taught. Furthermore, they are subject to the demands of parents who worry that untried modern methods might put their children at a disadvantage. Giovanni Sulpizio, in a grammar written around 1475, made it clear that parents were the greatest obstacle to a reform of the curriculum: 'What is the use of it all if parents insist that their children are brought up on Alexander [de Villa Dei]? Our corrupt values are the misfortune of our children. Alas, I could weep and cry out in protest.'<sup>18</sup> In 1511 a Netherlandish author, Hermannus Torren-  
tinus, mentioned objections even to modifications of Alexander's grammar. Those who remembered how they themselves had sweated over Alexander's obscure rules demanded that youngsters should be put to the same hard work and not be corrupted by an easy life.<sup>19</sup>

While the conservatism of parents, teachers and educational institutions was an important factor, the slowness with which the new linguistic norms were assimilated was also influenced by the fact that Latin was still a living language. Words were not merely learned from books, grammars and commentaries but also from the spoken language, where unclassical words of long standing could not be easily expunged. This underlines the element of continuity between late medieval and humanist Latin and also highlights the difficulty of radically reforming a language which is part of an ongoing tradition.

Although progress towards the widespread adoption of a more classical Latin was hampered by conservatism, grammar books and other newly written school texts played a role in the gradual reform of the language by increasingly describing and prescribing a classically based vocabulary. Some grammars were structured almost like dictionaries: they abandoned the systematic description of types of verbal construction and instead listed verbs alphabetically, with an indication of the construction after each verb. Nevertheless, rules of grammar and of classical usage were not taught through manuals alone, nor was it thought possible to do so, if only because many aspects of classical Latin grammar found no place in humanist grammars.

It was a commonplace that the brevity of grammatical instruction provided by humanist grammars enabled pupils to leave manuals behind and progress to the reading of ancient authors. Since the theory behind

grammar was found to have no value in itself, a quick move on to practice was desirable. Further grammatical instruction and further acquisition of a classical vocabulary were to be gained through the meticulous examination of ancient texts.

This sounds more straightforward than it actually was, for ancient authors had not written their works with the teaching of Latin as a foreign language in mind. Classical texts were not graded by difficulty, and no work was written with complete beginners in mind. For elementary reading, a group of eight texts had been much used in the late Middle Ages. These are often found together in manuscripts and printed books and are known collectively as the *auctores octo*. They are all texts with a moralizing tendency; but, from a humanist point of view, none of them was notable for elegant Latin. Of the eight works, two – the *Disticha Catonis*, morally uplifting verses attributed to Cato, and a Latin translation of a collection of Greek fables ascribed to Aesop – survived as school texts well into the sixteenth century, even in schools which aspired to humanist ideals of Latinity. The others disappeared from the curriculum in Italy before the advent of printing and, towards the end of the fifteenth century, even in northern Europe. Another collection of moral sayings in verse, organized alphabetically and known as the *Proverbs*, had gained a wide readership because it was erroneously thought to be by the philosopher Seneca. Erasmus published it in 1514, pointing out that the ascription to Seneca was false. Thereafter, it soon fell out of use in schools.<sup>20</sup>

Humanists could not, however, do without elementary introductory texts. One of the *auctores octo* was an anonymous text, *Facetus*, which prescribed manners for schoolboys. In a more humanist curriculum this work was often replaced by Giovanni Sulpizio's versified set of instructions on good table manners.<sup>21</sup> Classical works were still read after texts composed for introductory purposes. First published in 1500, Erasmus's *Adagia*, a collection of moral sayings, was used in schools much like the *Disticha Catonis*. Erasmus also composed a collection of phrases for use in daily conversation, *Familiarium colloquiorum formulae* (1518), organized by topic; these were later reworked into little dialogues or *Colloquia* (1522–33), widely adopted in schools.<sup>22</sup> Erasmus and others who wrote in this genre aimed at teaching colloquial Latin by describing humdrum, daily events and thus providing pupils with a vocabulary for their everyday needs.

Later in the curriculum classical works were introduced. Many texts read in humanist schools had also been common in late medieval syllabuses. As with the more elementary texts, classical authors were chosen for their moral as well as their linguistic qualities. Terence's comedies, school texts

throughout the Middle Ages, retained their position as one of the most frequently read works in schools. Plautus, the other surviving Roman writer of comedies, was also studied, but to a lesser extent. He belonged to an older generation than Terence, and his language did not reflect the usage which students were supposed to imitate, although his comedies were a marvellous source of colloquial Latin. Plautus' comedies were also generally thought to be less edifying than those of Terence, which could – with some good will – be read as exhortations to sexual continence, marital fidelity, obedience to one's parents and other secular virtues.<sup>23</sup>

The letters of Cicero to his friends (*Ad familiares*) also became a central part of the curriculum. Relatively unknown until the 1490s, they were probably the single most important addition to the basic canon of school authors. Like the comedies of Terence, they were important because they displayed a classical Latin which, although polished, was, if not colloquial, at least informal. Cicero's orations and works on moral philosophy, particularly *De amicitia*, *De senectute* and *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, were read at a higher level, partly for their moral content, but mainly because they provided an excellent pattern to follow in linguistic and stylistic matters. By contrast, Seneca's letters, another body of philosophical texts, were not regarded as desirable models for imitation; however, on account of the widely diffused spurious correspondence between him and St Paul, Seneca acquired the status of an honorary Christian.<sup>24</sup> Some classical works were read at a more advanced level as textbooks of rhetoric: most frequently the Pseudo-Ciceronian *Ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De oratore*; the *Institutio oratoria* of Quintilian, on the other hand, the complete text of which was rediscovered by Poggio in 1416, never became part of the curriculum.

Humanists often emphasized the importance of historical works in the syllabus, deploring the bad old days when ancient historians had not been read in schools. While the *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* of Valerius Maximus had been studied in the Middle Ages and remained an important text in humanist schools, other historians, previously less read, now became more common. Livy, above all, to a lesser degree Sallust and, in Germany, Tacitus were read as examples of the exalted style suitable for describing the momentous feats of great men of the past. These authors also provided much information on the institutions of the Roman republic and the early empire. Studying history was part of linguistic training, but it also contributed to the student's moral and political education. The glorious and virtuous acts of heroes and heroines were held out as examples to be imitated, if not in one's own life, at least in one's writing. Celebrated figures of the past were used as literary *exempla* in Latin works about notable contemporaries, whose character and actions were compared to those of

their ancient precursors. Caesar, the mainstay of nineteenth-century classical education, had different stylistic aspirations from Roman historians in the grand manner; in addition, he wrote few stories from which a moral could be drawn and did not offer much information on the political institutions of the Roman state; consequently, he was less frequently read in schools.<sup>25</sup>

Poets had been the most important element in the more advanced level of the medieval education, and they remained fundamental in humanist schools: Virgil, mainly the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, but also the *Aeneid*; Horace's *Odes*; the epics of Statius; Lucan's *Bellum civile*; Juvenal's *Satires*; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Tristia*; and the tragedies of Seneca. Like their prose counterparts, they were read mainly for their linguistic features. Grammar books contained rules for composing in the classical metres, since poetry was regarded as a skill which could be learned – more difficult than, but in essence no different from, other types of literary production. In 1526 the German humanist and religious reformer Philipp Melanchthon wrote that anyone unable to write poetry was not entitled to hold an opinion in learned matters, nor indeed could such a person be said to be a competent writer of prose.<sup>26</sup> The vast quantity of poems produced by humanists for specific occasions – political events, marriages, births, deaths, the publication of new books – demonstrates that poetry was viewed as a practical accomplishment rather than an inspired art.<sup>27</sup>

It must be stressed that not all humanist schools had a reading programme as extensive as this. Historians were read at the best schools only. In good but small schools students would not get much beyond Cicero's letters, Terence and Virgil. Some schools – even among those which sought to teach humanist Latin – retained a very conservative curriculum. For example, the 1518 statutes for St Paul's School, drawn up by John Colet and highly praised by Erasmus, described a syllabus that, with a few exceptions, any late medieval schoolmaster would have recognized.<sup>28</sup>

Reproducing the style of ancient authors was the chief aim of teaching written Latin in schools. Exercises consisted in writing prose or poetry which emulated a particular author's manner of expression. Melanchthon's belief that good prose writing depended on knowing how to compose poetry reflects what in the course of the fifteenth century had become one of the distinguishing aspects of humanist Latin: a concern for linguistic decorum. Whereas much medieval prose writing had contained poetic words, this was shunned in humanist Latin; and it was only by acquiring familiarity with the poetic vocabulary that one could avoid using it in a prose context. A poem should not include informal phrases found in Cicero's letters, while a letter should contain neither the high-flown prose of

the historians nor the distinctive phraseology of the poets. Classical authors were to be imitated, but with discrimination.

The stylistic ideal of imitation required that the Latin language be purified of medieval words and phrases, since – as we have seen – classical usage was the criterion of correctness. It was obvious, however, that ancient authors wrote very differently from one another. Until the end of the sixteenth century, Seneca was not usually recommended as a model, nor was Sallust and even less Tacitus. Among the poets, few would have thought that Catullus or Martial were suitable to be imitated. There was a need to define a linguistic canon; and in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the most radical solution to this problem was that proposed by the Ciceronians, who contended that only words found in Cicero were acceptable. This, in fact, posed insurmountable problems, and the movement always had more adherents in theory than in practice. It was opposed by many fifteenth-century humanists, among them Lorenzo Valla, who argued that new words were demanded by the contemporary social situation, which was very different from that which had existed in Cicero's day.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, arguments against Ciceronianism could be found in writings by Cicero himself, who had been quite happy to coin new words, particularly in the field of philosophy, when he felt they were needed.

The Church was an institution that had grown up in the post-classical period, and consequently numerous non-classical words were used to describe its structures, functions and functionaries. Many words had been borrowed from Greek; others were created in the Middle Ages, on the basis of classical words but not in accordance with classical morphology. Ciceronians sought to replace such terms with truly Latin words, that is, words found in Cicero. This involved using pagan terminology in Christian contexts: nuns were described as vestal virgins, priests as *flamines*, churches as temples. Erasmus, following Valla – as he so often did in both linguistic and religious matters – ridiculed this movement in his *Ciceronianus* ('The Ciceronian', 1528), which, with typically Erasmian irony, he wrote in the form of a Ciceronian dialogue, employing highly polished Latin. Erasmus saw Ciceronianism, which had found particular favour in papal Rome,<sup>30</sup> as an expression of the excessive worldliness and paganism of the papacy. Recognizing, but rejecting, the ideological link between the Church and ancient Rome, he had one of his characters say: 'Rome is not Rome. Nothing remains but ruins and debris, the scars and remnants of ancient calamities.'<sup>31</sup>

Ciceronianism disappeared from Roman circles shortly thereafter, not so much because of the blows dealt it by Erasmus as because of the new intellectual and religious climate associated with the Counter-Reformation.

Stronger links to the Church Fathers were demanded, which resulted in the stylistic and linguistic norms of patristic literature becoming dominant in the Rome of the late sixteenth century. But despite the criticisms levelled at it, the cult of Cicero continued as a force outside Rome. Soon France, with its new claims to cultural and political supremacy, became a centre of Ciceronianism.

Ciceronianism required the rejection of vocabulary which over a period of centuries had been adapted to fit every aspect of daily life, ranging from words for household implements to titles of public positions, institutions and functions. Such sweeping changes were very difficult to achieve. As we know from contemporary societies where linguistic reform has been attempted, much less radical reforms create problems for cultural and literary continuity. So, for instance, when Bishop Richard Foxe drew up statutes for Corpus Christi at Oxford in 1517, he wrote a general preface in humanist Latin; but he had to issue a warning that *barbara uocabula* ('barbarous words') were unavoidable for describing the workings of the college.<sup>32</sup>

The consequences were even more drastic for those academic disciplines which had developed a refined technical vocabulary during the late Middle Ages. In particular, the non-classical terminology used in logic and metaphysics came under attack. Valla's critique of late medieval logic had grave implications for all philosophical disciplines – indeed, for everything taught at university. Valla's attitudes were echoed in Martin Luther's rejection of metaphysics in the early 1520s. Precise technical terms were denounced as meaningless and as serving only to disguise the simple truth of faith. In this area neither the polemics of the humanists nor those of their Protestant followers were entirely successful. Philosophical discourse at universities continued to depend on medieval terminology.

Nevertheless, the general acceptance of humanist Latin as the norm had a profound impact on many university disciplines. Students who were used to reading humanist Latin and had been taught to judge works on their stylistic merit sometimes found it difficult to muster a profound interest in texts which were far from elegant, no matter how intellectually challenging they might be. In 1530 a small, easy textbook of natural philosophy by Giorgio Valla was edited by Heinrich Sybold, a professor of medicine at Strasbourg and also a publisher. Sybold wrote a preface in which he expressed the wish that the book would entice students back to the study of philosophy. He hoped Giorgio Valla's elegant Latin might arouse an interest among students whose apathetic attitude towards philosophy was due to their pedantic concern with style. Their disregard for philosophy, he asserted, had dire consequences for all university subjects.<sup>33</sup>

A danger inherent in the humanists' passionate interest in presentation and style was a disdain for factual knowledge. Teaching students to collect phrases and commonplaces from the works they read was an essential part of their training in imitation. Expressions they had excerpted were to be reused on suitable occasions, thus allowing ignorance of a topic to be disguised behind a skilful display of conventional utterances. Melanchthon, in his elementary rhetoric textbook, pointed to one of the problems brought about by the success of humanist educators when he warned against the attitude that compiling a list of sentences from classical poets and orators was equivalent to true knowledge. While he maintained that the use of commonplaces was necessary for both thought and expression, he insisted that a commonplace could not be understood without careful study of the discipline to which it belonged.<sup>34</sup>

Two trends played a role in limiting the undoubted success of humanist Latin. In the first place, the attitude of Christian writers to their elegant pagan counterparts has always been ambivalent. Should one read them in order to learn their skills of persuasion, which could then be directed against them? Or did one thereby run the risk of moral and religious contamination, and should one therefore reject them totally? This theme, articulated by the Church Fathers, remained a topic of discussion for centuries. Lorenzo Valla, like others before and after him, had rejected scholastic terminology partly because it was based on pagan philosophy and because its complexity served to obscure the divine simplicity of Christian faith.<sup>35</sup> But Valla's insistence on the need to imitate the style of pagan authors exposed him and other humanists to similar criticisms. Ciceronianism in particular was open to the charge that a return to paganism was its hidden agenda. Some feared that ancient pagan authors posed a threat to Christian society. Wimpfeling, despite his enthusiasm for improving the Latin taught at German schools, prescribed a curriculum which was almost entirely made up of late fifteenth-century writers. He was particularly anxious that the poems of Baptista Mantuanus should replace the works of Virgil, whose *Eclogues*, if properly understood, could not but ignite the most deplorable sexual desires in adolescent students. In the midst of humanist Florence, the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola attempted to institute an anti-classical Christian programme, which would entail prohibiting the reading of ancient pagan authors;<sup>36</sup> this was closely related to his moral crusade against gambling, carnival songs and all forms of materialism – symbolized by the bonfire of vanities. The sixteenth century saw writers and teachers whose aim was to eliminate classical works from their schools. Sebastian Castellio composed a book of colloquies to replace Terence in the

curriculum, for, as a pagan, he was as dangerous to the soul as he was delightful to the ear.<sup>37</sup> Martin Bucer, a radical Reformer, perceived that humanist Latin was a political instrument, an expression of the Roman Catholic claim to a unity between their church and ancient Latin culture. He therefore wished to abolish Latin entirely from his school and to teach instead Greek and Hebrew, the two languages of Scripture.<sup>38</sup> More moderate reformers, such as Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin, insisted on the importance of a classical curriculum in Protestant schools. But the paganizing tendencies of Ciceronianism were as firmly rejected by the reformers as they were by the leading lights of the Counter-Reformation.

Melanchthon, the major figure in the creation of a Lutheran school system in northern Europe, was wholeheartedly behind the stylistic ideals of humanist Latin. A pupil of his, Olaus Theophilus, headmaster of the cathedral school in Copenhagen 1565–75, listed the reasons for teaching Latin: ‘Why is the teaching of Latin composition necessary? Without it God cannot be known. Without it we are mired in damnation. Through Latin composition we weaken – no, overthrow – the empire of the devil. It is necessary for the salvation of our souls.’<sup>39</sup> But although Melanchthon’s curriculum was centred on Latin, its goals were fundamentally different from those of the early Italian humanist educators. Guarino and others had taught pupils from the very highest levels of society, while lesser Italian humanist schools had prepared their students for a university education, most often in medicine or law. By contrast, schools inspired by Melanchthon’s educational programme were designed first and foremost for pupils destined to study theology and become vicars. In this they continued a late medieval, northern European tradition of providing education geared to the needs of future theologians.

Like Luther, Melanchthon insisted on central control of the educational system and a uniform curriculum, which was regarded as necessary on account of the bitter religious controversies. The Roman Catholic Church achieved an even greater degree of uniformity through the Jesuit schools, which began to spread throughout Europe from the middle of the sixteenth century. Jesuit educators put together an overall plan, called the ‘Ratio studiorum’, designed to act as an educational blueprint for all their schools.<sup>40</sup> As in the Protestant schools with which they competed, the Jesuit curriculum was centred on the Latin language and its use. The dependence of Jesuit schools on aims defined by humanists some 200 years earlier is reflected in the names chosen to designate the various classes: after grammatical instruction, students progressed from *humanitas* to *retorica*.

With greater institutionalization the concept of humanist education changed. The uniform syllabuses adopted in sixteenth-century schools,

whether Protestant or Jesuit, encouraged tremendous growth in the production and use of manuals, often in separate editions for different levels of educational achievement. Although educators of both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation endorsed the stylistic ideals of humanist Latin, the didactic trend of early humanist teachers was reversed: schools used ever more textbooks, and classical authors were read ever later in the curriculum.

NOTES

- 1 Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *De Europa*, in his *Opera* (Basel, 1551), p. 454.
- 2 See E. Garin, ed., *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento* (Milan, 1952), pp. 594–601, at 596.
- 3 M. Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: storia di una questione umanistica* (Padua, 1984), pp. 117–69, especially 156–7. Valla's views on the colloquial Latin of ancient Rome were similar to those of Leonardo Bruni: see chapter 2 above, pp. 39, 41.
- 4 For Santritter's letter, dated 31 October 1492, to Augustinus Moravus from Olomouc, who had studied at Padua, see King Alfonso X, *Tabulae astronomicae* (Venice, 1492), sig. A3<sup>r-v</sup>.
- 5 See his letter, dated 1495, in Jakob Wimpfeling, *Briefwechsel*, ed. O. Herding and D. Mertens, 2 vols. (Munich, 1990), I, pp. 239–40 (Letter 54).
- 6 Jakob Wimpfeling, *Isidoneus Germanicus de erudienda iuventute* (Strasbourg, c. 1500), f. 7<sup>r</sup>.
- 7 Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London, 1989), pp. 123–51, at 147 (section 77: MS London, British Library, Royal 12 B xx, f. 48<sup>r</sup>).
- 8 *Exercitium puerorum grammaticale per dietas distributum* (Hagenau, 1491), sigs. a1<sup>v</sup>–2<sup>r</sup>.
- 9 See, e.g., the complaint of Aldus Manutius, in the preface to his *Rudimenta grammatices Latinae linguae* (Venice, 1501), that he had been forced as a boy to study grammar by means of Alexander's 'inept poem': *Aldo Manuzio editore*, ed. G. Orlandi, 2 vols. (Milan, 1975), I, pp. 39–40, at 40.
- 10 Franciscus Niger, *Grammatica* (Venice, 1480), sigs. dd1<sup>v</sup>–4<sup>v</sup> ('Peroratio').
- 11 See the letter of dedication to Francis I of France in Francesco Priscianese, *Della lingua romana* (Venice, 1540), ff. ii<sup>r</sup>–iii<sup>v</sup>.
- 12 Erasmus, *Opera omnia* (Amsterdam, 1969– ), I.2, pp. 111–51, at 114–15 (*De ratione studii*, ed. J.-C. Margolin); see also the English translation in Erasmus, *Collected Works* (Toronto, 1974– ), XXIV: *Literary and Educational Writings 2*, pp. 661–91 (*On the Method of Study*, trans. B. McGregor).
- 13 Lorenzo Valla, *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, ed. G. Zippel (Padua, 1982). On this work, see chapter 5 below, pp. 85–6.
- 14 Most importantly, the *Elegantiolae* by Agostino Dati, which was first published in Ferrara in 1471 and then went through at least another 112 editions in the fifteenth century.
- 15 See the metrical colophon of *Compendium octo partium orationis* (Basel, c. 1485).

- 16 Wimpfeling, *Isidoneus Germanicus*, f. 7<sup>r-v</sup>.
- 17 See Johannes Cochlaeus's prefatory letter to his *Grammatica* (Strasbourg, 1515), f. 1<sup>v</sup>, referring to the grammar of Gianfrancesco Boccardo (Pylades Buccardus), which he describes as 'composed in heavy-handed verses clouded over by a baffling commentary'.
- 18 Giovanni Sulpizio, *De arte grammatica [opusculum]* (Perugia, c. 1475), f. 31<sup>v</sup>.
- 19 Hermannus Torrentinus, *Commentaria in primam partem Doctrinalis* (Cologne, 1508), f. 85<sup>r-v</sup>.
- 20 Erasmus first published the *Proverbs* in *Opuscula aliquot* (Louvain, 1514); for the dedicatory letter, in which he assigns them to Publilius Syrus, author of the *Mimes*, instead of Seneca, see Erasmus, *Collected Works*, III: *Letters 298 to 445, 1514 to 1516*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, pp. 2–4 (Letter 298). Only the first half (up to the first few sentences beginning with the letter 'N') are now attributed to Publilius Syrus; the remaining sentences are by one or more unknown later Christian writers.
- 21 Giovanni Sulpizio, *Il carne giovanile: De moribus puerorum in mensa ser-uandis*, ed. M. Martini (Sora, 1980).
- 22 Erasmus, *The Colloquies*, trans. C. R. Thompson (Chicago, 1965).
- 23 See, e.g., Erasmus's advice on how to teach a comedy by Terence: Erasmus, *Collected Works*, XXIV, pp. 682–3 (*On the Method of Study*).
- 24 See, e.g., Erasmus's disparaging comments on Seneca's style in the preface to his 1529 edition of his works and also his denunciation of the Seneca-St Paul correspondence as a forgery: Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, ed. P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen and H. W. Garrod, 12 vols. (Oxford, 1906–58), VIII, pp. 25–41 (Letters 2,091–2).
- 25 In general, see E. B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography* (London, 1983).
- 26 See his 1526 letter to Jacobus Micyllus in Philipp Melanchthon, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindseil, 28 vols. (Halle etc., 1834–60), I, cols. 782–4 (Letter 364).
- 27 See, e.g., F. J. Nichols, ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Neo-Latin Poetry* (New Haven, 1979); A. Perosa and J. Sparrow, eds., *Renaissance Latin Verse: An Anthology* (London, 1979).
- 28 For the statutes, see J. H. Lupton, *A Life of John Colet ...*, second edition (London, 1909; reprinted Hamden, CN, 1961), pp. 271–84; see also J. B. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley, 1989), ch. 9.
- 29 I. Scott, *Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero ...* (New York, 1910), pp. 10–14.
- 30 J. F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome: Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation* (Baltimore, 1983), pp. 123–34.
- 31 Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, I.2, pp. 599–710, at 694 (*Ciceronianus*, ed. P. Mesnard); see also the English translation in Erasmus, *Collected Works*, XXVIII: *The Ciceronian*, trans. B. I. Knott.
- 32 See J. McConica, 'The rise of the undergraduate college', in *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1984– ), III: *The Collegiate University*, ed. J. McConica, pp. 1–68, at 18.
- 33 Giorgio Valla, *De physicis quaestionibus* (Strasbourg, [1530]), sig. A1<sup>v</sup>.
- 34 Melanchthon, *Opera*, XIII, cols. 412–506, at 452 (*Elementa rhetorices*).

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- 35 See, e.g., Lorenzo Valla, 'In praise of Saint Thomas Aquinas', in L. A. Kennedy, ed., *Renaissance Philosophy: New Translations* (The Hague, 1973), pp. 17–27.
- 36 Girolamo Savonarola, *Apologeticus de ratione poeticae artis* (Pescia, 1492).
- 37 Sebastian Castellio, *Dialogorum sacrorum ad linguam simul et mores puerorum formandos libri iiii* (Antwerp, 1552).
- 38 E.-W. Kohls, *Die Schule bei Martin Bucer in ihrem Verhältnis zu Kirche und Obrigkeit* (Heidelberg, 1963), pp. 69–73.
- 39 Olaus Theophilus, *Paraenesis seu praeceptiones sapientes et utiles de vitae ac studiorum honesta formatione ...* (Copenhagen, 1573), cited in K. Jensen, *Latinskolens dannelse* (Copenhagen, 1982), p. 13.
- 40 A. P. Farrell, *The Jesuit 'Ratio studiorum' of 1599* (Washington DC, 1970).