

John Lynch
Lucubrations
(edited by Jason Harris)

John Lynch (1600-1677) was one of the most important Irish antiquarians of the seventeenth century and a significant contributor to debates about Irish Catholic allegiance in the wake of the Cromwellian wars. Born in the Old English town of Galway, in the west of Ireland, Lynch travelled to the continent 1618 to further his education. He studied at Jesuit colleges in Dieppe, Douai and Rouen, before returning to Ireland c.1624. He was ordained priest early in 1625 and, c.1630, became archdeacon of the diocese of Tuam. When Galway was conquered by parliamentary forces in 1652, Lynch fled to France and seems to have lived in Saint-Malo for the rest of his life, publishing texts anonymously to defend the reputation of Irish Catholics, particularly those of Old English descent whose hopes of securing toleration of Catholicism from the English monarchy had proven illusory in the wake of the Restoration. In the late-1640s, Lynch acquired copies of some of the manuscripts of his fellow antiquarian, the Irish Jesuit Stephen White (c.1574-c.1645), perhaps with a view to publishing them. White had written numerous works about Irish saints, refuting Scottish claims that most of the medieval saints referred to as *Scoti* were in fact Scottish, not Irish. The ‘Scotic debate’ attracted much international attention, from riots in the streets of Paris to the banning of books and breaking of reputations, as Irish and Scottish exiles vied for prestige and patronage at the courts of Europe. Lynch’s poem in honour of Stephen White is found attached to the sole surviving copy of White’s *Scoto-Caledonica Cornix Deplumanda*, and was probably composed during the late 1640s or early 1650s. It is an eloquent expression of scholarly esteem as well as an important statement of the animosities involved in the Scotic debate.

**In Reverendi Patris Stephani Viti e societate Jesu Theologiae Lectoris et
Professoris emeriti eruditissimas et acuratissimas pro Hiberniae defensione
Lucubrationes
Carmen
Ioannes Linchaeus Archidiaconis Tuamensis**

Andromade ad cautes strictis affixa catenis
terribilis monstri fauce voranda stetit.
Perseus innocuae miseratus fata puellae
alta per astra volans attulit ultor opem:
Vinclis afflictam soluit, soluitque periclo, 5
caedis anhelantem perdomuitque feram:
Andromaden Iuerna refert, innoxia probris
quae petitur, miseris concutiturque modis.
Nam velut Andromadae fera formidanda minata est,
perpetitur similes mitis Ierna minas. 10
Nulla Caledonio fera quondam immanior urso.
Nunc ursis catuli plus feritatis habent.
Namque Caledoniis in finibus orta propago
Iuernam matrem rodere dente parat.
Verum subsidio venit alter Perseus, hostis 15
proterit eloquio qui probra foeda suo.
Quique venenatae linguae fera tela retorquet,
et nimis infensis hostibus ora premit.
Vite, sacrae vitam patriae famamque decusque
conservas, scriptis restituisque tuis. 20

Intumuit cornix alienis scotica plumis

et sprevit, pennis quos spoliavit, avis.

Extrahis has, patriae proprias, et vestis Iernae.

Nunc ornamentis fulget Ierna suis.

Quisquis es, invitus Vito sua iura rependes; 25

invictus ne sis, haec lege, Vitus eris.

Suscipis his magnos cumulandis, Vite, labores

et patriam in tenebris non imis esse tuam.

Inter amatores patriae numerabere claros,

famamque a tota posteritate feres. 30

**A poem upon the most learned and precise labours for the defense of Ireland by
Reverend Father Stephen White of the Society of Jesus, a lecturer and emeritus
professor of theology.**

John Lynch, Archdeacon of Tuam.

Andromeda stood, bound to the harsh rocks by tight chains,

to be devoured in the jaws of the terrible monster.

Perseus the avenger, pitying the fortune of the innocent girl,

brought help, flying through the high stars.

He freed the poor girl from chains and danger, 5

and tamed the wild beast as it panted from the slaughter.

Harmless Ireland brings to mind Andromeda, by slanders

attacked, beaten about in piteous ways.

For, just as the fearsome beast menaced Andromeda,

so gentle Erin endures similar threats. 10

Once, there was no beast more monstrous than a Scottish bear;
now the cubs are more savage than bears.

For an offspring born within the borders of Scotland
is preparing to bite at its mother, Ireland, with its teeth.

But yet comes another Perseus to the rescue 15

who tramples the enemy's foul slanders with his eloquence,
deflects the wild weapons of the venomous tongue,
and shuts the mouths of his excessively enraged foes.

White, you preserve the life, reputation and honour
of your holy country, and you restore them with your writings. 20

The Scottish jackdaw puffed himself up with the feathers of others
and scorned the birds whose plumage he stole.

You snatch them back, the property of your country, the clothes of Erin;
now Erin glows amid its ornaments.

Whosoever you are, reluctantly you will pay White his dues; 25
be not undefeated – read this, you will be White.

You undertake, White, great labours in amassing these works
to prove that your country is not in deep darkness.

You were numbered among the noble lovers of your country
and you will be celebrated by all posterity. 30

Commentary

This poem is taken from MS 258 (55), *Médiathèque François-Mitterrand*, Poitiers.

The work to which the poem is attached is Stephen White's *Scoto-Caledonica Cornix*

deplumanda ab avibus orbis, written in the early 1640s. The transcription of the Latin text and the English translation are by Jason Harris (University College Cork, Ireland). The poem is written in elegaic couplets as befits the genre.

Lines 1-6: Andromeda is the mythical daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia, rulers of Phoenician Ethiopia. Her mother boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids and so, as punishment, Poseidon had Andromeda chained to rocks as a sacrifice to a sea monster. She was saved by Perseus, who then married her. The opening image of the poem may have been suggested by Martial's epigram 7 in his *Liber Spectaculorum*, in which he compares the fate of an actor, who was savaged by a Scottish bear while enacting the crucifixion of the bandit Laureolus, to that of Prometheus bound to a Scythian rock.

The spelling *Andromade* in lines 1, 7 and 9 is unusual and does not seem to have any obvious explanation.

Line 6: *caedis anhelantem*: The text reads *adhelantem*, which must be an error. The metre requires that *caedis* is genitive, thus 'panting on account of the slaughter', rather than 'panting for slaughter', cf. Silius Italicus, *Punica*, book 15, verse 718: *longique laboris anhelos*.

Line 7: *innoxia*: Bede had referred to the Irish as a *gens innoxia* in his *Ecclesiastical History* (chapter 26), associating the pious nature of the Irish with the lack of poisonous flora and fauna in Ireland. Irish Catholic exiles frequently alluded to this in the seventeenth century to rebut English and Scottish claims that they were, and had always been, barbarians.

Line 11: *Caledonio ... urso*: A reference to Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum*, epigram seven. See note to lines 1-6 above.

Lines 12-13: *catuli ... propago*: An abusive reference to the Scottish antiquarians who claimed the heritage of medieval *Scotia* for Scotland, whereas in fact *Scotia* denoted Ireland until the later middle ages.

Line 19: *Vite ... vitam*: The first of a series of puns upon the Latinised version of White's name, *Vitus*.

Line 21: *scotica cornix* is a reference to the title of Stephen White's *magnum opus*, the *Scoto-Caledonica cornix deplumanda ab avibus orbis*. White refers to the main target of his work, the Scottish historian Thomas Dempster, as a *cornix* in allusion to Horace's *Epistles* 1.3, where he says that the crow (or jackdaw) steals the peacock's feathers to make itself look more impressive. Thus, the Scots are said to be stealing Irish saints to bolster their own image and reputation.

Lines 25-26: *invitus vito ... invictus ... vitus*: a series of puns upon White's latinized name.