

John C. Leeds. *Renaissance Syntax and Subjectivity: Ideological Contents of Latin and the Vernacular in Scottish Prose Chronicles*.

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010. vii + 232 pp. index. bibl. \$99.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-5812-2.

This book is intellectually challenging: it deploys detailed readings of important texts to underpin a far-reaching thesis about the relationship between language, both in practice and in theory, and social and political understandings of the subject and the individual. While its core evidence might appear to demand a specialist audience, its arguments and conclusions, engaging as they do with

Ockham, Calvin, Hegel, Marx, Adorno, and Saussure, demand a broader readership and a more general application than a straightforward discussion of sixteenth-century Scottish historiography.

Each of the four chapters focuses on specific writers of Scottish history. The first concentrates on Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historia*, and its translations by John Bellenden and Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie: the analysis here concentrates on the presentation of subjects — in several senses — and Latin's ability to permit a grammatical object to be also a subject and thus to express a particular political relationship. The second chapter examines firstly Bellenden's understudied translation of Livy's first five books, and secondly John Knox and George Buchanan as Reformation historiographers. The differences between Latin and Older Scots, and, therefore, between the world views they express, are evident: "At all points in Bellenden's text . . . the syntactic patterns of . . . Scots . . . enforce an immediate conjunction of actions with persons and . . . the centering of historical narrative on human 'individuals'. Livy's original . . . illustrates many of the grammatical and syntactic devices that mediate between historical persons and their actions in Golden Latin prose" (64).

John Lesley, whose works are discussed in chapter three, wrote history in both Scots and Latin, thus providing a perfect stylistic comparison. The most striking part of the analysis here is Leeds's indication of concrete nature of Latin idiom: that words such as *inflammare* are always as applicable to objects as to emotions, thus making the Latin text much more vivid. The last chapter deals with the earliest text, John Mair's *Historia Maioris Britanniae*. Leeds examines it in relation to Mair's distinguished career as a philosopher, theologian, and teacher. The analysis of Mair's difficult and apparently illogical Latin is particularly interesting, and Leeds uses it as a springboard to examine what he argues are the continuing influences of nominalism and realism. His discussion of philosophical implications of the key differences between Latin and Older Scots — or, he suggests, vernaculars more generally — is a constant throughout the volume.

Indeed, from the title, one might infer that the book would discuss semantic concerns such as the relationship between *res publica* and commonweal, or whether *Scoti* or *Scotia* was the more common term, and discuss such items more or less exclusively. While Leeds provides fascinating examples of close reading, taking apart Latin syntax and idiom and contrasting it with vernacular translation and articulation, in order to demonstrate different modes of thought and understanding in each language, he does not consistently consider his findings in relation to the audiences for whom the texts were written. So questions of whether Robert Lindsay's audience was the same as John Bellenden's, or whether the different circumstances and backgrounds of George Buchanan and John Knox affected aspects of their prose style, remain unexamined. Even if we acknowledge that the peculiarities of sixteenth-century Scotland are not the sole purpose of this work, nevertheless there are points at which the Scottishness might have been explored more. One particular absence from the bibliography is very striking: Alexander Broadie has written extensively on John Mair, and his place within

a Scottish philosophical tradition. Discussion of Broadie's work might have further supported Leeds's intent that his argument be generalized across European vernaculars, by identifying what might be Scots and thus not always replicated, without denying its central aim. Since an argument of the book is that the particular features and limitations of the vernacular evident in these texts have had a significant effect on the way we now think of ourselves and our societies, it is surely important that specific detail does not interfere with wider application. However, such complaints, at least partly the result of scholarly bias, should not detract from the intellectual drive and seriousness of this volume.

NICOLA ROYAN  
University of Nottingham