David Rutherford

Early Renaissance Invective and the Controversies of Antonio da Rho

Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 301. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005. Pp. x, 359.

A statement I recently read in a review of Norman Mailer's novel *A Castle in the Forest* seems strangely appropriate to this volume devoted to the invectives of Antonio da Rho (1395–1447) against his frequent nemesis, Antonio Beccadelli, better known as Panormita (1394–1471). It goes as follows: "Ours is an age of mockery and sarcasm, when even irony is belittled for being secretly sincere about its lack of conviction" (*New York Times Book Review*, January 21, 2007, 13). While we must account for the differences in place and time, and indeed genre, politically motivated *ad hominem* attacks and nauseous charges of (often sexual) impropriety against one's enemies were no less rife half a millennium ago than they are in our own litigious and opprobrious society.

David Rutherford's new edition of the invectives and *controversiae* of Antonio da Rho features the heated exchanges between the Franciscan friar, a professor of theology and court orator to the Duke of Milan, and Panormita, the author of the infamous *Hermaphroditus*, a corpus of bawdy Latin epigrams modeled on ancient Roman models, chiefly Catullus, Martial, and the *Priapea*. In his expansive and informative introduction, Rutherford describes the revival of classical invective (*convicium* or *maledictum*) to excoriate an opponent's ignorance or vice. Within the faction-driven humanist circles of Milan and Pavia in the 1420s and 1430s, charges and countercharges flew. The early *quattrocento* being, like ours, an era of religious conformism and publicly avowed piety, controversies arose over the value and appropriate use of the pagan works of Greece and Rome, many of which had been recently recovered. Too close a connection with the more scabrous genres, such as epigram, might brand one an "Epicurean" or worse. Thus Panormita, at first admired for his *Hermaphroditus*' revival of classical Latin verse, came under increasing criticism not only by Rho, but also by Lorenzo Valla and Pier Candido Decembrio who, each touting himself as the most devout and Christian, but motivated more by ambition and job security, impugned Panormita's character, as signaled by the filth of his poetry, until Panormita lost his position as *poeta aulicus* to Filippo Maria Visconti. Rho's *animus* against Panormita had been sparked by various literary attacks against him purportedly written by Panormita himself, possibly in retaliation for a statement made about him in Rho's *Apology* of 1427–28.

Rutherford performs a useful service by including in a single volume Rho's *Philippics* and other invectives against Panormita; Panormita's and Decembrio's

letters to Rho; Panormita's fawning *De effigie solis* (to Filippo Maria Visconti); and Rho's "Words We Ought to Use Only to Execrate Vice," which is, in effect, a glossary of Latin obscenities. Some of the selections, while they may not seem at first related to Rho's invectives, serve to provide a broader background picture of the Milanese court's politics and pretensions. Thus they help paint what amounts to an unflattering self-portrait of the man Rho: prolix in his display of erudition, carping, envious, defensive, and, in his tireless catalogue of sexual vices, especially sodomy (a charge leveled often against Panormita), highly prurient.

Rutherford provides an accurate, if at times infelicitous (e.g., "wise guy" for *homo prudens*), English translation, with critical apparatus and extensive annotation, though he leaves the obscene invectives and Panormita's *De effigie solis* untranslated and without explanatory notes, thus closing them off to readers without Latin. This is a pity, since those portions would be of great interest to scholars in English and the Romance languages who work on such genres as the fabliau and the broadside. This is a book that will be of value chiefly to classicists interested in reception studies, particularly the Renaissance revival of classical invective as a political tool.

EUGENE O'CONNOR, *The Ohio State University Press*

Matthew Reynolds

Godly Reformers and their Opponents in Early Modern England: Religion in Norwich c. 1560–1643

Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005. Pp. xvi, 310.

Early modern Norwich has long been regarded as one of the urban hotbeds of radical Puritanism. Situated in what A. G. Dickens termed "the heartland of the English Reformation," Norwich has been described by Patrick Collinson as "a self-contained East Anglian Geneva." As Matthew Reynolds explains, this radical identity has been cultivated with pride by the citizenry of Norwich and a "regional religious mythology" has developed. Reynolds does not doubt that extreme Protestantism thrived in Norwich: he simply suggests that other religious sensibilities coexisted alongside it. Throughout the period, internecine squabbles raged among the city's clerical and political elites. "It is striking how contested the Reformation became within the city," Reynolds concludes: "it is inadequate to gloss over early modern Norwich as a puritan citadel."

Reynolds identifies four key stages in the city's religious development. During the first decades of Elizabeth's reign, under the episcopate of John Parkhurst, sig-