

### Yasmin Haskell

*Prescribing Ovid: The Latin Works and Networks of the Enlightened Dr Heerkens.*

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. Pp. 280. Hb, \$110.00.

The latest book by Yasmin Haskell, author of *Loyola's Bees: Ideology and Industry in Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry* (2003), deals with Latin culture in the Enlightenment and focuses on Dr. Gerard Nicolaas Heerkens (1726–1801). Dr. Heerkens, virtually unknown today, was a Dutch physician, poet, and follower of Ovid. He was a cosmopolitan Catholic intellectual, as well as an amateur antiquarian and scholar, who could easily be dismissed as a prolific author of curiosities. Fortunately, Haskell moves beyond the literary quality of Heerkens's poems and the criticism he received from his contemporaries: matters that lie outside Haskell's main area of interest.

It required great courage to devote a sizeable monograph to a person who is unfamiliar even to neo-Latin scholars. The book therefore serves as a model to anyone who intends to study one of the hundreds of neglected writers who devoted themselves to Latin literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Haskell writes the following at the end of her introduction: "The book is not intended as the intellectual biography of a figure who, even by the standards of his day, was no first-order scientific thinker, natural historian or even classical scholar. Nor do we pretend to offer a comprehensive analysis of each and every Latin work by Heerkens. We present, rather, a study of the interaction of his Latin works and networks – the latter projected on multiple axes, to include, in addition to his contemporary correspondents, the various virtual networks of ancient and recentiores with whom he had daily commerce" (32). It should be added that the diversity of people within Heerkens's intellectual network was impressive; it included Voltaire, among others.

There are several important research problems covered by the book. First, what was the point of writing in Latin at a time when vernacular languages were sufficiently developed to become the tool of poetic expression and when French had become the new universal language of the educated? Heerkens himself was an advocate in the battle which had, in fact, been lost a dozen years before his birth (the battle of the ancients and the moderns). Despite this, he wrote many books in Latin and treated this language as a tool of self-expression. Second, what was the relationship of Latin to the new enlightened philosophy? Did the Latin Enlightenment exist at all or was it—as d'Alembert stated—a contradiction in terms? Third, was there a genuinely new paradigm of Latin writing or was it a continuation of the previous one? Haskell argues that Suetonius was the new model of prose.

Haskell also explores the Ovidian autocreation of Heerkens, who modeled his own life on the Roman poet's elegies and considered his native Groningen as a gloomy place of cultural and intellectual exile.

Finally, Haskell looks at the Jesuit context of Heerkens's writing. He was educated at the Meppen collegium in Westphalia. Throughout his life he maintained close relationships with its members (especially his former teacher Ignatius Beucker) and dedicated some of his poems to them. Among his Parisian contacts were Pierre-Joseph Thoulier d'Olivet, a former Jesuit and the editor of the anthology *Poemata didascalica* (1749), and Guillaume-Françoise Berthier, editor of the *Journal de Trévoux*—a publication to which Heerkens contributed. During his travels Heerkens had the opportunity to use the Jesuit library in Cologne where he read poems by Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski—though perhaps not his unpublished manuscripts, as Haskell states, but rather the recently published (Dresden 1743) edition of *Iter Romanum* which Heerkens later used in the description of his own journey to Rome. All the Jesuit houses in Germany and Italy were open to Heerkens thanks to the letters of introduction provided by the Elector Clement August. In Ulm, Heerkens met Joseph Grangier and Francis Xavier Schwartz, and in Munich he visited the Jesuit church and library. Among his friends from the *Collegium Romanum* were several scholars and Latin poets: Girolamo Lagomarsini, Archangelo Contucio Contuccini, Giulio Cesare Cordara, and Bartolommeo Boscovich. Haskell's conclusion is that “[p]robably the most important network of living Latin writers with which Heerkens engaged was that of the Society of Jesus. From the German-speaking lands through France and Italy, the marginal Dutch Catholic received encouragement and practical support from and was active within an extensive and largely still flourishing Jesuit Republic of Latin letters” (232).

The book's structure is as follows. It begins with a lengthy “Introduction: Cultivating the Two Apollos” which informs us about Heerkens's biography and his numerous travels—including visits to France and Italy. Six subsequent chapters describe his various works (1. Finding His Feet: Six or Five; 2. Stepping Out: Healing the Republic of Letters; 3. Tomi Callings: Letters to/from Italy; 4. Writing Home: Lessons from Italy; 5. Patriots in Portraits: From National to Natural History; 6. Inscriptions and Prescriptions: The Art of Healing in Long and Short). The book's conclusion offers a brilliant analysis of Heerkens's place on the intellectual map of his time. There is not enough space here to characterize all his works but two facts showing the aporia of his intellect should be mentioned. The first was his discovery of an unknown Roman tragedy, which was in fact an early play by one of the Italian Renaissance humanists. The second was his annotated edition of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*.

This book is truly fascinating. It presents Heerkens as a man from the provinces who, thanks to his literary activity and travels, encountered many people from the mainstream Enlightenment movement and the cultural, intellectual, and religious life of his times.

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