

Fraunce, Abraham. *The Shepherds' Logic and Other Dialectical Writings*. Edited by Zenón Luis-Martínez. Cambridge: MHRA, 2016. ix + 214 pp. ISBN: 978-1781881248. \$17.50 paper.

Webbe, William. *A Discourse of English Poetry*. Edited by Sonia Hernández-Santano. Cambridge: MHRA, 2016. ix + 164 pp. ISBN: 978-1781881255. \$17.50 paper.

Abraham Fraunce and William Webbe are among the earliest witnesses to the excitement provoked by *The Shepheardes Calender* in the years following its publication in 1579. The two books here under review, valuable new editions of Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetry* (1586) and Fraunce's roughly contemporaneous *Shepherds' Logic* (British Library Add. MS 34361), are indeed important documents in the history of Spenser's reception; and yet neither text goes so far as to name the man whom exoteric readers knew merely as Immeritô or "the new Poete." Webbe, half-daring, gets as far as "Master Sp." (84, 101); Fraunce, more of a literary insider and writing, in manuscript, to and for Sidney's friend Edward Dyer, omits the name entirely but happily talks of "our *Calendar*" (139), a piece of semi-public property. Both texts have much to teach us about Spenser, Sidney, and the literary watershed they crossed; Webbe's is also an instructively "minor" work of poetics and Fraunce's a testament to the mid-Elizabethan vogue for Ramistic logic. But both texts can easily be labelled strange or limited responses to their literary moment, and we must hear their strangenesses in concert with their lessons: here is literary criticism on a hobby-horse. Webbe was one participant in that quixotic quest for quantity in English versification sparked by Ascham in *The Scholemaster* (1570) and finally killed off by Daniel in the *Defence of Ryme* (1603); in the *Discourse* we see him trying sincerely to decide between a rather theoretical predilection for quantity and the clear evidence (given its due by Webbe) of nature, custom, and aesthetics on

the side of accent, syllables, and rhyme. Fraunce's exemplification of the precepts of Ramist logic with extracts from *The Shepheardes Calender* offers us an understanding of textual experience which can seem alien even to those well-versed in Elizabethan literature; while most of us are primed to detect and respond appropriately to rhetorical figuration, few devote much thought to dialectical arguments "of the adjunct" (82-84) or "of privatives" (91), even when such terms of art merely encode the commonsensical.

In offering us such distinctively situated points of view on the discursive world of their time, Webbe and Fraunce can help to defamiliarize our picture of Elizabethan literature. What did they see, and what did they fail to see, in the literature of their own time? What would literary history look like if viewed wholly through Webbe's or Fraunce's eyes? What different stories about the 1570s, 80s and 90s might we tell? Both works belong to a moment pregnant with possibilities, before the publication of *The Faerie Queene*, before the widespread dissemination of the works of Sidney (including the *Defence*, which Webbe seems not to have known), before Marlowe, Nashe, Shakespeare, Daniel, Drayton; we are still in a literary world that sounds most like Ascham, Phaer, Gascoigne, Lyly. Fraunce, as Steven May has argued, had considerable access to the works of Sidney and Spenser in manuscript; but little hint of that appears in *The Shepherds' Logic*.¹ In short, these two works of the mid-1580s preserve visions of two possible literary futures, each the product of earnest engagement with their literary presents, but neither of which quite came to pass. This makes them very interesting documents, if we can set them in their proper contexts—which both of these editions try hard to do.

It can, indeed, be helpful to remember that literary history could easily have been very different. Enter, for a moment, the mind of Wolfgang Zündelin, politic humanist, who was inclined to worry about Philip Sidney's health. The concern is reiterated in a series of letters

¹ Steven W. May, "Marlowe, Spenser, Sidney and—Abraham Fraunce?" *Review of English Studies*, 62 (2011), 30-63.

written to Sidney, then in Venice, in the winter of 1574-75.² The last of this series is framed as a warning: on his health depend all the benefits that may accrue not only to himself but to the wider world (“*commoda non tam tua, quam reipublicae*”); the fruits of his studies may wither on the vine if Sidney exhausts himself “*ante tempus*.” Readers of Sidney need no help to share in Zündelin’s mortal dread: they know already about things broken off before their time, the lost profits of the republic of letters. This particular illness did not finish Philip off, but the sense of the perilous near-miss recurs throughout his life-records, as of many a contemporary. Smallpox in 1562. Flight from Shrewsbury School and plague in 1566. Recurrent enfeeblement by excessive study. Perhaps most dangerous of all, a fever in the first year of Sidney’s life, recorded in the notes of his astrologer, serious enough that most gave up hope of his survival.³ The reader of literature is led to ask: if no Sidney—then what? Literary history is tragicomedy—a volatile compound, made of chances and miracles, bescummed by dross. The period of English literature which C.S. Lewis and common parlance conspire in calling Golden might have been alloy of a darker hue, absent the efficacy of some infant antibodies, or of one (to our eyes) stranger and brighter had Sidney not removed his *cuisse*s at Zutphen and so “disarm[ed] that part where God, it seems, resolved to strike him.”⁴ Spenserians can feel the same: plaguey Cambridge and colonial Ireland were not always places conducive to long life.

The canonizing of Sidney and Spenser seems, in contrast to these contingencies, an unproblematic process, settled: their achievements were soon recognised by their contemporaries, both on their own terms and as the basis for a new phase and new kinds of English writing. Webbe’s *Discourse* and Fraunce’s *Shepherds’ Logic* show that process

² *The Correspondence of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. and trans. Roger Kuin, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), I, 329, 347, 368-69.

³ James M. Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney, 1572-1577* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 518.

⁴ *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 77.

close-up—from which distance, I have suggested, it looks decidedly odd. Both texts respond to the invitation made by Immeritô and E.K. to treat *The Shepheardes Calender* as a new direction in English poetry, offering fresh intellectual and imaginative resources to its readers and its national literature. The challenge to account for that novelty and its implications for the whole discursive world of the vernacular, as theorised by the *trivium* and by poetics, is heard by Webbe and Fraunce loud and clear; whether they are fully up to answering it is another question. Neither writer has been treated particularly kindly by posterity. Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588), a polyglot primer of schemes and tropes which plunders then unpublished works by Sidney and Spenser, wins him credit for his literary connections and its enduring utility; but his more eccentric *Lawiers Logike* (1588) remains little studied, and his own verse, most of it quantitative, continues to suffer from Jonson's damnation: "Abraham Fraunce in his English hexameters was a fool."⁵ Webbe's *Discourse* is commonly plundered for critical or theoretical statements on particular points, but rarely studied in its own right. C.S. Lewis reserved for Webbe his profoundest scorn:

William Webbe is in a class by himself, uniquely bad. His *Discourse on English Poetry* (1586) displays an ignorance even then hardly credible. He is a perfect specimen of the literary "hanger-on" who without knowledge, sensibility, or sense volunteers support for all that his betters are doing when they are least wise and praises all who are already popular. One need hardly add that he is very fierce against "rhyming Ballet makers" and "unlearned Pamphlets."⁶

Lewis's evaluative idiom may be out of fashion, but the charges are perspicacious and instructive, even to the cooler head of a less impassioned literary historian. Lewis makes the useful point that revolutions in literary history may fail to be understood in their own time—

⁵ "Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden," ed. Ian Donaldson, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), V, 362.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 429-30.

indeed, may happen in spite of the misdirected intensity of their own propagandists. Webbe, for Lewis, makes some of the right judgements but for all the wrong reasons (this being the burden of his last, withering sentence).

Against such censures of these two earnest literary devotees we must set some notable attempts to redress the balance. Michael Bath has argued that the three works published in Fraunce's (and England's) *annus mirabilis* of 1588—two, already mentioned, on logic and rhetoric, the third a Latin treatise on emblems and *imprese*—represent an intellectually serious “attempt to lay the basis for an English theory of the arts of language, logic and sign.”⁷ *Pace* Lewis, *A Discourse of English Poetry* has been deemed “excellent” and “highly intelligent” by Gavin Alexander, for whom Webbe displays a “relish for contemporary English verse” and “a good ear”; “as a theorist of accentual-syllabic metres,” Alexander writes, “he is perceptive and in no way blinded by dogma.”⁸

The wide variety of opinion which Webbe in particular has attracted suggests the difficulty of determining the correct historical and evaluative frameworks within which to make sense of his and Fraunce's contributions to the literary and linguistic theory of the 1580s. In their editions, Luis-Martínez and Hernández-Santano answer this challenge by offering richly detailed accounts of the local contexts and particular intellectual genealogies from which their works arose. Luis-Martínez gives a thorough account of Ramistic logic, its reception in England, and the specific books on which Fraunce drew; and he charts in as much detail as one could possibly want the evolution of Fraunce's various logical works from their early drafts towards their final version, *The Lawiers Logike* (although he insists upon the status of *The Shepherds' Logic* as a distinct document in its own right and not just a work-in-progress). Hernández-Santano places Webbe firmly in the Cantabrigian literary world of the

⁷ Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 143.

⁸ William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. xlii, 208; *Sidney's "The Defence of Poesy" and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. lxxii, 414.

1570s and 1580s—or rather, more valuably, she shows how his poetics emerges from a marginal relationship with that world, the work of a man with one foot in the literary door who aspires, deferentially, to fuller membership of a very desirable club. Both editions therefore offer arguments that go both with and against the grain of their respective texts: for Hernández-Santano, Webbe’s *Discourse* is both a scholarly piece of poetic theorizing and a calculated bid for cultural capital, motivated by “Webbe’s desire to be noticed by those to whom he alludes” (29). For Luis-Martínez, *The Shepherds’ Logic* must be understood both as a fully engaged study in Ramistic logic and as an implicit poetics: “Fraunce’s logic for shepherds is chiefly a book for poets and about poetry, a first-hand document showing how scholarly training in the arts of discourse could enlighten the composition and interpretation of poetic texts” (3).

Aided by these two new editions, students of Elizabethan literature might see more clearly the larger story about poetics that Fraunce, Webbe, and others at the time were trying to write. Their big idea—one that poetic practice and the flux of literary history could only ever partially bear out—is that writing might happen in a wholly artful way, guided by the better judgement of a mind conscious of what it is doing at every turn. The quest for such “artificiality” was one motivation behind the quantitative versification advocated by both Webbe and Fraunce; but this literary rationality extends beyond local choices of form. At all points, Webbe is inclined to advocate and to praise “the right practice and orderly course of true poetry” (61), the methodical execution of a transmissible skill. Rhyme is bad because it is “tinkerly” (77), a hotchpotch bodge job. Webbe must instead promote the “curious handling of our verse,” “polished and bettered by men of learning, judgement, and authority” (95)—the kind of careful art shown by Virgil, who “always fitteth his matter in hand with words agreeable unto the same affection which he expresseth” (96), and visible too in the “excellent skill and skilful excellency showed forth” in *The Shepheardes Calender* (101). Of

course, Spenser's pastorals are not works of unrhymed quantitative verse, and Webbe, to his credit, deals sensitively with the contradictions inherent in his own position; but it is nevertheless the rational skill of the ideal poetic artist to which he directs our aspiring vision. Fraunce the logician is, of course, more evidently connected with such a rationalizing project, to the extent that all human activity, including the making of fictions, is ultimately a form of reasoning and thus explicable by logic: "Whatsoever it be, nay, whatsoever thou canst imagine to be, although it be not, yet by reasoning it is invented, taught, ordered, confirmed" (60). This extension of logical invention into the realm of the poetic imagination is a move Fraunce shares with his fellow Ramist and Sidney-client William Temple, who said that anyone who makes things up is making logical arguments ("*Qui fingit, is logica argumenta fingit*") and that the art of making fictions therefore belongs to dialectical invention rather than to poesy ("*ars fictionis non ad poesin sed ad dialecticam inventionem pertinebit*").⁹ Temple makes this claim in the context of what seems, to most modern eyes, a perverse misreading of Sidney's *Defence*, blinded by Ramistic procedures of textual analysis; and in Fraunce too one catches glimpses of ideas that bear a distant family resemblance to some of the dicta of Sidneian poetics. Sidney's assertion of the unique independence of the poetic imagination, in contrast to the ontological dependency of the other arts and sciences, becomes, in Fraunce's vision, a freedom known only to logic: "Other arts are tied to certain subjects, as Arithmetic to numbers, Astronomy to the motion of the stars, and so of others. But Logic is [...] the instrument of all learning." (60). In fact, Fraunce's statement was commonplace in the period; it is Sidney's that is more daring, if better known to readers of *Spenser Review*. Once again, we see an almost familiar literary history from an instructively oblique angle.

It remains to address some of the more specific aspects of the two editions. In both cases, there are reasons to quibble about some of the editorial decisions, though in neither

⁹ William Temple's *Analysis of Sir Philip Sidney's Apology for Poetry*, ed. and trans. John Webster (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1984), p. 80.

case do these concerns significantly diminish the utility of the work. In Hernández-Santano's edition of Webbe's *Discourse*, some elements of the editing are frankly supererogatory: the decision to collate the quarto text (surviving in two copies) with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions of Arber, Haslewood and Smith seems to this reader unnecessary, especially when (as is often the case) this merely records those editors' transcription errors. (Sensible emendations borrowed from earlier editions could simply have been noted in a lighter *apparatus criticus*.) Principles of modernization and emendation are not always applied as consistently or transparently as one might wish. Webbe borrows a number of English translations of Horace and Virgil from Sir Thomas Elyot and Thomas Phaer; the frequent minor differences between Webbe's text and theirs Hernández-Santano chooses sometimes to emend and sometimes to retain (51), but the criteria by which variants are judged to be deliberate or the result of printing errors seem opaque and inconsistent. We are told (49) that the Latin forms of classical names (like "*Hesiodus*" for "Hesiod") will be retained; but, for example, Webbe's "*Lucanus*" is silently rendered as "Lucan" (74). Hernández-Santano, like Luis-Martínez, chooses to modernize quotations from Spenser; and sometimes the loss of information this entails extends to other aspects of the text's modernization. Webbe's quarto uses roman type to distinguish the titles of books from the blackletter of the main text; sometimes, as in the case of "Sextus Propertius in his *Elegies*" this distinction is retained, but what Webbe refers to in roman type as the "Æglogues" of Theocritus become merely "his eclogues" (74), shedding the erroneous spelling to which Spenser and E.K. had so ostentatiously cleaved in *The Shepheardes Calender*, and therefore flattening some of the suggestive detail of Webbe's sense of transhistorical intertextuality.

These are, it must be said, minor criticisms: by and large, Webbe will be well served by the ready availability of a modernized text, and by the detailed introduction, in which most of the book's real value lies. Hernández-Santano provides a clear account of Webbe's debts

to Ascham and Elyot, a careful assessment of his links with Spenser and Harvey, and a thorough survey of his place in the debate over quantitative verse (leaning heavily, of course, on the work of Derek Attridge). She also considers judiciously the irresolvable question of which of the two Cambridge graduates named William Webbe should be identified with the author of the *Discourse*, preferring the earlier candidate who graduated B.A. from St John's in 1573, but leaving room for prudent doubt. While declining to take critiques like that of C.S. Lewis head-on, Hernández-Santano is also clear-eyed about the limitations of the *Discourse*: its reliance on Horace and his continental mediators, on Elyot and on Ascham; its lack of originality and ambition when compared to the work of Sidney and Puttenham (whose works of poetic theory Webbe had not read). The materials are here for a fuller reintegration of Webbe's *Discourse* into our understanding of Elizabethan humanism, poetics, and cultures of reading.

Zenón Luis-Martínez's edition of Fraunce offers similar strengths and opportunities, with (again) some scope for nit-picking on textual matters. This reviewer's spot-checking of the text discerned some instances where errors of transcription made by the text's earlier editor, Sister Mary Martin McCormick, are perpetuated (e.g. "So an art" [57] for the manuscript's "Is an art" on the first page of the treatise proper), and instances in the textual notes where McCormick is wrongly corrected for readings which are, in fact, accurate: the misreading of the juxtaposition of "i" and long "s" as "y," and the attempt to read line-fillers at the right-hand margin as words, are among the sources of mistranscription (although these issues do not affect the main, modernised text).¹⁰ Luis-Martínez occasionally follows McCormick in emending some of Fraunce's technical and semi-technical vocabulary: the manuscript's "coherence or inconsequence," for example, becomes "consequence or inconsequence" (64). This may iron out some inconsistencies in the text, but for one portion

¹⁰ Sister Mary Martin McCormick, "A Critical Edition of Abraham Fraunce's *The Sheapheardes Logike and Twooe General Discourses*" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, St Louis University, 1968).

of the book's readership—those specifically interested in the history of vernacular dialectic—it removes to the textual endnotes evidence of Fraunce's evolving and sometimes instructively fluid logical terminology.

Such quibbles aside, Luis-Martínez gives as rigorous and detailed an account of the work's genesis and immediate context as most readers could possibly wish for, offering much greater precision about Fraunce's sources than earlier studies have been willing or able to provide. There are useful appendices which present excerpts from Fraunce's later and fuller *Lawiers Logike*, a list of Fraunce's quotations from Spenser's *Calender*, and a clear tabulation of the contents of the two versions of Fraunce's logic (pastoral and legal) in parallel with his main source, Piscator's edition of Ramus's *Dialecticae libri duo* (published at Frankfurt in 1580 and then in London the following year). Readers will find in the introduction a good account of English Ramism, considered from several angles (sometimes this started to feel a little repetitive, and could have benefitted from a bit more Ramistic method). All in all, Fraunce has found a well-informed and sympathetic editor who can guide readers through what will be, to most, the unappealing thickets of humanistic logic, and direct their attention, instead, to the instructive value of this idiosyncratic Elizabethan voice.

Michael Hetherington

St John's College, Oxford