

teaching of Old Norse at Melbourne, which was swept away in a cold 'wave of managerialism' (p. x) in 2007. One cannot help but be reminded of the sometimes precarious status of medieval Celtic languages within modern university systems.

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ROBIN CHAPMAN STACEY, *Dark Speech: The Performance of Law in Early Ireland*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, 354 pp, RRP US\$59.95, ISBN 978-0-8122-3989-8.

I do not think I have recently heard a conference paper that has anything remotely to do with early Irish law (not to mention a few that have nothing to do with it) that has not quoted or referred to *Dark Speech*. There is no doubt that this is an important and thought-provoking book, which I read with rapt interest. Nonetheless, it left me disgruntled, not just because of the use of inconvenient endnotes where footnotes would have been far more practical, nor because of the way the book stops rather than finishing, and not even because the last chapter (misnamed a Conclusion) is not about Irish law. The problem is that the book seems to me to be holding itself out to be something it is not. The subtitle, and indeed much of the rhetoric within the book, would have us believe that this is a book whose principal concern is the performance of law. I do not believe that it is: what it is primarily concerned with is the uses of language. This renders it no less interesting or useful, but leaves undone what it says it will do. This is perhaps the cause of my disgruntlement: an investigation of the performance of law in early Ireland is crying out to be done.

Certainly, the book begins very promisingly, with evocative descriptions of the procedures of *tellach* and *distrain*, pointing out their distinctness from everyday transactions. This distinction is what lies at the heart of Stacey's book, and is an important one that is intelligently and thought-provokingly discussed. In the same way, the difference in register when reported speech of particular legal significance (including but not limited to *rosc*) appears in legal texts is discussed in a very useful way. Stacey goes on to make a case for these 'framed' speech events to be considered as performance, in the theatrical sense. She distinguishes performance from ritual, with the qualification that the significant element of performance is danger. Whereas ritual derives safety from its predictable and repetitive nature, performance involves an element of risk or danger, since every iteration is subtly different. This, Stacey argues, is what characterises the operation of early Irish law. It is an attractive suggestion, but in my opinion Stacey stops short of providing sufficient evidence to make her argument compelling.

Such evidence may not exist, but here, as elsewhere in the book, the point is not sufficiently well-made to be convincing.

Stacey has some extremely interesting points to make. One is that legal procedures that mimic unlawful acts—such as distraint, which is not very dissimilar to theft—are the most closely circumscribed in early Irish law. She argues convincingly that the closer in nature the procedure is to a crime, the more carefully it must be theatricalised to mark it out as not being a crime. This sort of analysis is of huge interest and utility to scholars of early Irish law.

Stacey discusses the apparent conflict faced by poets during the period in which some of the laws are recorded, suggesting an attempt by the lordly and juridical classes to remove legal affairs from the jurisdiction of poets. She makes a very interesting case for this, citing texts where it seems to be the best explanation, but she seems to give less than adequate consideration to the fact that texts arise from different times and different schools of legal scholarship, and so this conflict may have been a very localised phenomenon, rather than the pervading issue she makes it out to be. This is certainly not a problem unique to Stacey—it characterises much of early Irish legal scholarship. Intriguingly, it coexists in *Dark Speech*, as occasionally elsewhere, with an important discussion in another chapter of the possible regional and chronological variety in the early Irish legal system. This latter discussion is extremely welcome, recognising as it does the importance of politics, geography and other such considerations to the practicalities of the legal system(s) of early Ireland. The same practical concern with what was actually going on in Ireland at the time the laws were recorded is reflected in Stacey's very powerful suggestion that, rather than a secular-ecclesiastical division, differences might be better explained in terms of an Armagh-Iona division. This accords much better with the clear blurring of the lay-clerical boundary engaged in by figures such as Columba.

Stacey certainly brings a more nuanced consideration of some details than previous scholars have done. Her discussion of fasting refers to Professor Binchy's assertion that this practice was originally viewed as 'quasi-magical' and had become 'purely symbolical' by the ninth century. Stacey's rebuttal centres on her assertion that the practice is not presented in the texts as 'obsolete', which is far from being the same thing as 'purely symbolical', and this is regrettable—nonetheless, her explanation of the practice as intelligently practical is to be preferred over Binchy's primitively magical. This is, of course, a perfect illustration of the changing attitudes of scholarship, and indeed of society, in the thirty or so years since Binchy's time.

Dark Speech is filled with many useful observations and juxtapositions. It may not be what it sets out to be, but it is a very useful

book, which will doubtless continue to be cited by those who discuss early Irish law for many years to come.

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PHILIP O'SULLIVAN BEARE, *The Natural History of Ireland included in Book One of the Zoilomastix of Don Philip O'Sullivan Beare*. translated and edited by Denis C. O'Sullivan with a foreword by Keith Sidwell, Cork: Cork University Press, 2009, 296 pp. RRP €39.00 ISBN 9781859184394.

Wonderful things are happening in Cork. The Centre for Neo-Latin Studies and *Renaissance Latin Texts of Ireland* project in University College Cork, directed by Keith Sidwell, has since 1999 been steadily unearthing, examining, publishing (so far on the web) and sometimes translating many of the more than 1000 printed works and equivalent number of manuscripts in Latin estimated to have been written between 1500 and 1750 by more than 300 Irish authors. Don Philip O'Sullivan Beare (1590–1636), best known for his propagandistic *Historiae Catholicae Hiberniae Compendium* (Lisbon 1621), is one of the chief authors in this pantheon and *The Natural History of Ireland*, suitably, represents the 'first of (we hope) a very large number of such translations (some with Latin text) which will appear in various places over the next few years' (Sidwell, 'Foreword' p. 8). This edition both translates into English and publishes entirely for the first time the first part of a long, unfinished fragment of a difficult manuscript, the *Zoilomastix* ('Scourge of Zoilos'), completed c.1626 and lost to the ages until its discovery in the University of Uppsala in 1932. This edition, with its facing translations is clearly written, well-annotated and well-indexed in an attractively produced volume, and so represents a tremendous boon to the scholarship of early modern Ireland.

On a more general level, the book is an annotated catalog, an entertaining read for those curious about Ireland's flora and fauna (especially birds) as well as ancient and contemporary beliefs about them (many of them culled from classical authors, such as Virgil, Martial and Pliny). Who knew that the golden oriole 'by a wonderful cleverness... sleeps suspended by its feet from a twig; it is held that it protects from jaundice those who spot it' (p. 127)? Or that the cuttlefish 'has a rather soft mouth which is useful in the work of people handling silver' (p. 177)? Or that flax when beaten soft makes good underwear (p. 209), that the magpie carries its eggs with a home-made yoke (p. 113), that rue 'brings clarity to the eyes and restrains sexual impulses' (p. 215; Shakespeare's Ophelia knew this well enough), or that the skin