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Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr. (with contributions by Mary Moffitt Aycock), *The Other Middle Ages: A Medieval Latin Reader.*


Professor Kitchell’s *The Other Middle Ages: A Medieval Latin Reader* represents, for him, the manifestation of an ongoing conversation (and collaboration) between himself and his students, Mary Moffitt Aycock, in particular. Conceived, by no means, as the definitive collection of medieval Latin texts for teaching, Kitchell presents this collection as selection of just some of the texts available and appropriate to intermediate Latin students. Moreover, Kitchell argues that medieval Latin may be particularly well-suited for bridging the gap between the “made-up” Latin of our textbooks and the often-complicated Latin of Cicero, Suetonius, and others (xiv).

Kitchell posits that the complexity of classical authors, such as Vergil, and the long length of passages that cannot possibly be completed in the span of a night, causes unnecessary frustration for our students (xv). Rather than demanding classical purity, he suggests that we utilize manageable passages of medieval Latin, both in terms of length and complexity, to instill in our students a “sense of accomplishment” and so encourage them to continue their language studies at higher levels (*ibid*). In this regard, Kitchell’s position is one in which medieval Latin study becomes an integral part of a classical Latin education rather than an appendix.

Kitchell’s reader is constructed specifically to “attract more students and teachers into reading medieval Latin” and broadly to contribute to the process of learning the Latin language (xvi). At the same time, Kitchell wants to “show aspects of medieval life often overlooked in traditional ML readers [through] pieces that differ widely in style” (*ibid*). The texts edited in this book are fairly short in length—between 10 and 60 lines—and each is accompanied by an introduction providing context and a section of “notes and vocabulary”.

The selection of readings in this volume, seventy-nine in all, represents a great contribution to teaching Latin. Undoubtedly due to the fact that this reader reflects the work of countless exchanges between students and teacher, Kitchell’s choice of readings is excellent. A smart mix between serious matters and delightful anecdotes, the variety of styles and genres should keep even the most reluctant Latin learner engaged. The short introductions to each selection are also masterfully crafted, giv-
ing just enough context to get the reader started without spoiling the finer points of the narrative. The passages are well glossed, with notes giving hints and clarity to the text without ruining the reader's ability to uncover meaning for herself.

The seventy-nine readings are broken into eleven sections. There does not seem to be any particular rationale behind the ordering of the sections, nor is there a clear pattern in the difficulty of the readings or the chronology of the authors. Nevertheless, the clear presentation of each reading and the helpful apparatus of notes and vocabulary outshines the rather loose nature of its thematic structuring. With some care, readers and instructors should be able to pick and choose readings with relative ease, so long as they remain conscious that notes to subsequent readings sometimes build upon, or depend upon, prior readings in the collection.

In addition to the notes to each text, Kitchell’s “Introduction” provides important general resources to the intermediate Latin student without becoming too overbearing (seemingly the guiding theme of this volume). He provides a discussion of how to use the reader, a short introduction to “Medieval Latin”, and a limited discussion of how medieval Latin departs from classical models in terms of orthography, grammar, and syntax. This discussion should prove helpful to students approaching medieval texts, such as those edited in this reader, for the first time. It was not entirely clear, however, to what end these notes were constructed: does Kitchell want students to understand where medieval Latin “loses” qualities and becomes “less precise” than classical Latin, or does he want them to recognize differences in a developing language?

The texts selected for this reader are intended for an intermediate student of Latin, and so Kitchell assumes a background of vocabulary appropriate to that level. While all Latin words within the reader are glossed in the Lexicon, only those assumed by Kitchell to be new to the student are glossed at the end of a passage. Kitchell makes this distinction based on the word list of the former New York State Regents Latin Exam, a standardized test for high school students (xvi). Latin words with “obvious English derivatives” are also not glossed in the accompanying vocabulary lists for each text. If medieval grammar differs from classical grammar, this difference is provided in the first three instances when it occurs. Kitchell’s goal is readability and immersion: he wants his students to read and to figure out the text rather than to rely wholly on glossaries and editorial notes.

The central question with which I was left, having first read through Kitchell’s introduction to his material and then the passages that he has edited, is the following: what does Kitchell want students to think about medieval Latin vis-à-vis classical Latin? Kitchell opens his book with a strong case for using medieval Latin
as a tool to bridge the gap between the introductory “made-up” Latin of textbooks and the complex Latin of classical authors. On the one hand, he introduces medieval Latin as something derivative, a vulgar version of something more beautiful, a stepping stone on the path to a greater prize; on the other hand, he presents medieval Latin as the vibrant language of a rich and exciting period of history. While I think that his reasoning behind teaching medieval Latin to intermediate language students as a means for exposing them to more advanced, but still readable, Latin is valid, I cannot help but wonder as to his presentation of medieval Latin as such. Moreover, while I understand Kitchell’s decision behind providing shorter passages in order to encourage the sense of accomplishment that students feel when finishing a translation, I think that a limited selection of longer passages would also help to prepare intermediate students for more advanced work.

Overall, Kitchell’s *The Other Middle Ages: A Medieval Latin Reader* is an important contribution for teachers of Latin, particularly teachers of medieval Latin. The presentation of his selections, edited and with a readily available set of glosses, provides relatively pain-free entry into the medieval Latin world, which should be appreciated by both student and teacher alike. Kitchell rightly praises his students for helping him to construct a valuable tool for Latin language learning, and we should likewise praise both them and him for his contribution to our classroom.

*NECJ* 44.1

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