



Reviews

DONALD CHENEY and BRENDA M. HOSINGTON, ed., with the assistance of D.K.MONEY, *Elizabeth Jane Weston: Collected Writings*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xxxi, 448. 10 illus., ISBN: 0-8020-4472-7. \$80.

Weston (1518–1612), an English expatriate who lived a short, turbulent life in Bohemia, authored a variety of poems in Latin, nearly all in elegiac couplets, that appeared in two volumes, *Poëmata* (1602) and *Parthenica* (1608; see p. xxx, n. 12), and in pamphlets and anthologies. The present book contains all the Westonian works the editors could find, including her prose correspondence, arranged in critical, bilingual, easily navigable format. The Introduction briefly surveys her life and publications and adds a valuable discussion of ‘Weston in the Context of the Neo-Latin Literature of Her Day’ (pp. xiv–xxv). The book embraces writings to or about her by contemporaries, among them notables such as Janus Dousa and Julius Scaliger’s son Joseph, frequently avowing awe before the skills of a woman, and such a young one. Her present-day obscurity, decidedly out of scale with the wide fame she garnered in her own time, is attributable to the combination of her location beyond Britain and her choice of Latin as her vehicle.

Thematically, Weston’s losses and misfortunes dominate her output. Orphaned of her natural father as an infant, she ended up in Prague with her mother, brother, and her solicitous stepfather Edward Kelley, and acquired a classical education. Kelley, Rudolf II’s court alchemist, was implicated in a murder in 1591 and left the family destitute at his death six years later. The attendant troubles precipitated an outpouring of poems by Weston addressed to Rudolf or influential courtiers, heaping lavish praise on addressees and begging assistance in disentangling the Westons’ finances from judicial snarls. Characteristic is her plea to Rudolf’s chancellor:

Non ego vulgarem quaero mihi carmine plausum;
 Non abs te posco munera larga mihi.
 Ne miseram viduâ patiaris matre puellam,
 Quod queror, indigni mole perire mali.
 [I seek no vulgar applause by my poetry,
 nor do I ask any great gifts from you.
 What I beg is that you not let a wretched maiden and her
 widowed mother perish under the weight of an unfair evil.] (pp. 12–13)

Weston’s bold insistence, at the age of twenty-one or less, is characteristic. The translators provide a lucid prose version, in which each English line fits closely with

ARTHURIANA 16.1 (2006)





its Latin counterpart. Weston's own habitual clarity of expression, enriched but not cloyed by classical allusions, invites spontaneous participation in her predicaments, her pleasures, her griefs and amusements.

She can be charming; the editors rightly call attention to her 1608 poem 'On the Palm Tree' (p. 344), which likens a noble couple's marriage to palms intertwining, sharing affection and bearing progeny. She can indulge in self-pity, as in the epitaph to her mother (p. 336), whose death evokes the sad train of her losses (father, grandmothers, stepfather, brother). Her own hard luck, rather than that of her deceased relatives, occupies the foreground. (Indeed, at her death she had borne seven children, only three of whom survived her.) Similarly, she considers herself a more miserable exile than Ovid because his banishment was for cause, whereas her only offense was family loyalty (*pietate*; p. 72). The case is strained; Weston's removal to Bohemia happened so early in her life as to raise questions even about the genuineness of her nostalgia for England. On the other hand, she persistently solicits compassion for her mother, and her eulogy to her brother (p. 56) regrets the curtailment of his budding literary career. The editors allow that 'The depth of Weston's feelings for friends is not easy to gauge,' and they note that 'female friendship is totally absent from the *Parthenica* and her other writings' (p. xx).

Cheney and Hosington have performed a demanding task with exemplary editorial care. The book belongs in any collection of basic Neo-Latin texts. It offers a reservoir of engaging pieces suitable for anthologizing whether in Latin or English; witness Hosington's own selection reprinted in Volume 3 of *Women Writing Latin* (ed. L. Churchill et al.: N.Y.: Routledge, 2002, pp. 217–45). Some passages would lend themselves to annotation for excerpted use in intermediate language courses. This is the definitive edition of Weston's works, one that no study of woman Neo-Latin writers can ignore, and a starting point for further exploration.

EDWARD V. GEORGE
Texas Tech University (Emeritus)