

IAN THOMSON

HUMANIST PIETAS

THE PANEGYRIC OF IANUS PANNONIUS ON GUARINUS VERONENSIS

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Janus Pannonius spent seven years studying in Ferrara, where he lived in the home of his teacher and hero Guarino Veronese. When he left for home in 1454, he presented his master with a panegyric as a parting gift. It is a lengthy poem, consisting of a preface of eighteen elegiac couplets and the panegyric proper of 1073 hexameters; it was regarded by its author, then barely twenty years old, as his first major work. It is an astonishing achievement by any standards. By its very nature it has to be adulatory, hence it exaggerates the virtues of the recipient and the shortcomings of his rivals. The young student must also display his erudition, which he does with countless references to the classics, sometimes extremely obscure. His prosody must be impeccable, as indeed it is, though he complains about the difficulty of writing in even simple metre (line 773); and the whole poem must be well-constructed. Janus excelled in Latin verse technique, and here shows that his skill was not confined to the better-known short poems and epigrams. His panegyric contains some splendid purple passages like the hymn to the sun (lines 920–957); it also contains hints of the audacity he displayed in his epigrams. The ending, however, is a disappointment: his vision of the Golden Age and Guarino's birth comes as something of an anticlimax.

For the modern reader the panegyric is an outdated and obsolete form of verse; the closest equivalent is the mercifully shorter tribute customarily paid by a poet laureate to the monarch, a genre that often produces embarrassing results. In the humanist age, however, it was a show-piece to display the author's talents and to further his career; the poet alone chose characters for inclusion or rejection — Janus, for example, mentions only one of Guarino's numerous children by name, and that was his own particular friend Battista.

Ian Thomson's edition is a model of its kind. The introductory study is comprehensive, though inexplicably it omits any reference to Anthony Barrett's bilingual edition of the epigrams (Budapest, 1985). The Latin text of the poem is based on that edited by László Juhász (1934), the foremost Hungarian scholar of the period. The translation into English is admirable; it is faithful yet modern, and deals successfully with Janus's more lush passages which if too literally interpreted would cause most readers to squirm. The accompanying critical commentary is superb; scholarly, detailed and informative, it makes fascinating reading in its own right and provides a fine introduction to the whole and works of Janus Pannonius.

The unusual experimental typeface is generally acceptable, though the similarity between *I* and *l* has caused some problems, mainly in the middle of words. Among minor misprints *Dalmatia* for *Dalmata* (line 477 and note) is predictable. And the final word in line 17 should be transferred to the beginning of the next line. These, however, are minor blemishes in a splendid edition which deserves the highest praise.

G. F. Cushing