

A Forgotten English Translation of Barclay's "Argenis"

Author(s): Edward Bensly

Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Apr., 1909), pp. 392-395

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3713233>

Accessed: 28/06/2014 19:13

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Modern Language Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

arche, che sarebbe incredibile a dire el numero d' essi con molte ossa dentro. Sono da Venegia a qui centovinti miglia. Stemmo due dì.'

(Ed. Moreni, Firenze, 1822, pp. 6—7.)

The great Roman amphitheatre at Pola stands to this day, but nothing is now to be seen of the numerous sepulchres referred to by Dante and later writers. In his work on *Dalmatia, the Quarnero and Istria*, published in 1887, T. G. Jackson, after mentioning the tradition that Dante once sojourned within the walls of the Convent of San Michele in Monte at Pola, writes as follows:

'Between the convent and the town is supposed to have been the ancient cemetery, to which Dante likens the rows of arks or sarcophagi in which at a white heat the heresiarchs expiate their theological difficulties:

Si come ad Arli, ove Rodano stagna, &c.

At Arles twenty years ago one could still walk between avenues of sarcophagi as in the days of Dante.... At Pola all traces of the cemetery have disappeared; but Signor Rizzi (the conservator of ancient monuments at Pola) tells me that fragments of ancient tombs with Pagan inscriptions abound in the rough walls that divide the fields of the neighbourhood.' (Vol. III, p. 300.)

PAGET TOYNBEE.

BURNHAM, BUCKS.

A FORGOTTEN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF BARCLAY'S 'ARGENIS.'

Not long ago I was attracted by the mention, I think in a book-seller's catalogue which I have unfortunately mislaid, of what appeared to be an English translation of the *Argenis* by John Jacob, published at Dublin in 1734. Such a version was quite unknown to me and seemed generally to have escaped the notice of students of Barclay. No reference is made to it under Barclay's life in the *D.N.B.* nor is it included in the long list of translations given in the second chapter of K. F. Schmid's *John Barclays Argenis* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1904)¹. It is not to be found in the British Museum, and, as I am informed, it is not in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. At the suggestion of

¹ Mr Schmid's useful monograph requires to be corrected and supplemented in several particulars. For example he is sceptical on p. 139 as to the existence of the 1643 (Rouen) edition of de Mouchenberg's continuation of the *Argenis* mentioned by Mr Albert Collignon (p. 179 of the latter's *Notes sur L'Argenis de Jean Barclay*, Paris and Nancy, 1902). I can vouch for this being no ghost-book as I have a copy in my own collection.

Mr Alfred de Burgh I applied for information to that authority on Irish bibliography, Mr E. R. M^cC. Dix, who most courteously lent me a copy of the book in his own possession. This has enabled me to give the following account.

The title runs: The | Adventures | Of | Poliarchus | And | Argenis |
Translated from the Latin of John | Barclay. | By the Revd. Mr. John
 Jacob. | Dublin: | Printed by James Hoey, at the Sign of *Mercury* | in
Skinner-Row, opposite to the Tholsel, 1734.

The collation is Title 1 p., 1 p. blank, Dedication ('To Her Grace, the Dutchess of Dorset') 3 pp., 1 p. blank, preface pp. i—xiii, 1 p. blank, pp. 1—274. The recipient of the dedication was apparently chosen as being the wife of the Lord Lieutenant.

On p. i of the preface the reader is informed that 'the Original of this Translation was written by the learn'd *John Barclay*, on purpose, (as most suppose,) to amuse King *Henry* the III^d. of *France*, a Prince unfit for the Reins of Government, into his Duty under a diverting Relation of the Adventures of two chaste and constant Lovers.' The translator has plainly troubled himself but little about the chronology of his author's life. Barclay was seven years old at the time of Henry the third's assassination! We are told that James I 'not only settled a yearly Pension of some Thousands of Crowns on him, but also made him one of his Privy Council; Honours, which enroll him among the great Heroes of the learn'd World.' On the same page Virgil and Homer, who 'have only one principal Design in their poems' are contrasted with 'the soaring genius of Barclay.' As regards the details of the story Mr Jacob is anxious that his readers' faith should not be too severely strained. One thing he apprehends 'may perhaps be thought on first sight to exceed the bounds of what Criticks call the Marvelous' and that is—the mention of artificial ice. But having heard that the 'Virtuoso's of *France*' have produced artificial snow 'for the Entertainment of *Louis XIV*' he is 'humbly of Opinion it may be as possible to make artificial Ice too.' Jacob is aware that the *Argenis* has been translated already. 'Before I undertook this Performance, I found there was extant an old *English* literal Translation of *Barclay* of almost an Hundred Years standing' (it would seem, if this is to be taken literally, that the second edition of Kingsmill Long (1636) had come under the translator's eye). 'The original,' he continues, 'is pursu'd in so close and servile a Manner by the Translator, that, as Mr *Dryden* says of *Holiday's* Version of *Juvenal*, he loses the Spirit of the Author when he thinks to take his Body....His *English* besides is...obsolete

and his Translation in many places false' (Long's accuracy can certainly be impugned).

But it is not merely the style of his previous translator but much of the substance of Barclay's book that the Rev. John Jacob feels would be distasteful to the audience whom he has in view. 'I question,' he writes, 'whether the best Hand in being could Translate *Barclay* verbally into *English*, so as to satisfy meer *English* Readers,' the reason being that 'Allusions to antient Poets as well as to the Customs of the Heathen World, tho' they are beautiful to the highest Degree in the Original *Latin*, yet would make an uncouth Figure in *English*.'

Mr Jacob certainly had the courage of his literary convictions. He laid violent hands on *Argenis*, retrenched the 'Allusions to antient Poets,' under which he seems to have included Barclay's own verses which are so freely interspersed in the original, and, in order to bring the tone still more into harmony with his readers' taste, Christianized the characters, changing the time of action from the days before the world had owned the rule of Rome to 'about the Declension of the fourth Century.' Thus when Poliarchus disguised as a girl displays unexpected heroism in defence of the king and his daughter, he is mistaken, not for the goddess Minerva, but for an angel.

It need hardly be said that the long discussions that break Barclay's narrative receive little mercy from Mr Jacob, although on the night before the attack on *Argenis* and himself Meleander edifies the company by relating a conference he has had with an Epicurean Atheist.

The style is such as might be expected. We read 'how king Poliarchus when in the Capacity of a private Man in Sicily had fall'n a Victim to the Princess' exact Harmony of Features, and her many endearing Charms of Virtue,' and, when all obstacles to the lovers' union have been finally overcome, 'Description can give but a faint Image of their Happiness: Sweet Blessings, soft Transports, and Downy Exstasys attended their Lives from the Hour of their Marriage.'

Though the performance here described is scarcely a translation in the stricter sense, but only an English rendering of the bare story of Barclay's book, yet it undoubtedly possesses a certain interest. It must have a place in the literary history of *Argenis*, as an attempt to offer this romance in an English dress, coming between the versions of Kingsmill Long (1625 and 1636) and Le Grys (1629) on the one hand, and Clara Reeve's *The Phoenix; or the History of Polyarchus and Argenis* (1772) on the other. The tastelessness of the adaptation fairly

illustrates the attitude of the day towards the literature of this earlier period.

More than a century before Jacob, indeed only three years after the appearance of the original, Bishop Coeffeteau had produced a French abridgement of the *Argenis*. This differs in detail from the present work.

EDWARD BENSLEY.

ABERYSTWYTH.

NATHANIEL FIELD AND JOSEPH TAYLOR.

The dating of the plays in the collection ascribed to Beaumont and Fletcher depends to some extent on the succession of actors in the King's company. In particular, the actor-list attached to *The Laws of Candy* in the Folio of 1679 includes the name of Joseph Taylor, but not that either of Richard Burbage or of Nathaniel Field. It is therefore of interest to know when Taylor joined and Field left the company. Burbage and Field are in the license of March 27, 1619 (Hazlitt, *English Drama and Stage*, 50), but Burbage had died on the previous March 13, presumably while the document was in preparation. On the following May 20, Lord Chamberlain Pembroke wrote to Lord Hay of a play 'which I being tender-hearted could not endure to see so soone after the loss of my old acquaintance Burbadge' (*Athenaeum*, 1882, I, 103). It is known from the actor-list of Webster's *Duchess of Malfy* (1623) that Taylor succeeded to Burbage's part of Ferdinand, and Mr Fleay conjectures (*Biographical Chronicle*, I, 173) that Field 'was disappointed at Taylor's being imported as Burbage's successor, and retired disgusted' in 1619. Conjectures are all the better when there is some evidence to support them, and it is therefore worth while to call attention to two documents calendared amongst Lord De La Warr's manuscripts (*Hist. MSS.* IV, 299) and doubtless belonging to the papers of Sir Lionel Cranfield, afterwards Earl of Middlesex, the Master of the Wardrobe. They are warrants by the Lord Chamberlain for the allowances due to the players for liveries, and are dated May 19, 1619 and April 7, 1621. In the 1619 warrant the names are the same as those in the license of that year, with the exception that Joseph Taylor replaces Richard Burbage. But by 1621 there is a further change in the substitution for Nathan Field of John Rice. Field, therefore, had left the company between May, 1619 and April, 1621. It is probable