Richard McCabe. 2016.
"Ungainefull Arte":
Poetry, Patronage, and Print in the Early Modern Era.
Oxford: Oxford University Press

Nora Rodríguez-Loro
Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

Studies on patronage have generally been marked by a misconception of this system, since it has only been considered in economic terms. Alexander Beljame's *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century* (*Le Public et les hommes de lettres en Angleterre au dix-huitième siècle: 1660–1744*) published in 1881, offered an inaccurate portrayal of aspiring professional authors as being entirely dependent on court favorites and praising them primarily for their nobility rather than their literary credentials. Similarly, in *The Dedication of Books to Patron and Friend* (1887) Henry Benjamin Wheatley referred to the dedication of plays as a literary fashion, which consisted in "praising men according to a scale of the more pay the more praise" (1887, 2). According to Wheatley, the dedications of the seventeenth century were marked by "slavish adulation," which is "something sickening to think of" (1887, 14). These scholars particularly criticized the praising of the patron, and they failed to understand that praise functioned as a literary convention.

Richard McCabe's *"Ungainefull Arte": Poetry, Patronage, and Print in the Early Modern Era* (2016) considers the importance of patronage to a writer's career, examining not only the rhetoric of dedications, but also how traditional modes of literary patronage were influenced by the challenge of print, as the economies of gift-exchange contended with those of the marketplace. To that end, he builds on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and associates patronage with systems of "generalized exchange" or "gift economy," although he stresses the importance of considering "how such concepts relate to that of the emergent book-market, and what the aesthetic implications of this relationship might be" (2). McCabe believes that the issue of patronage is often studied as purely contextual or biographical, while matters of self-presentation and self-reflexivity,

which are vital to the literary expression of patronage, are marginalized. He attempts to supply a more nuanced view of the literary and social construction of patronal relationships, exploring the implications of print and book marketing and emphasizing the relationship between poet, patron, publisher, and reader.

Following the work of social anthropologists such as S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, McCabe regards patronage as being part of a "macro-societal" context involving issues of hierarchy, social asymmetry, status anxiety, locality, kinship, credit, and obligation. In fact, literary patronage "was often exercised through presentation to a benefice or chaplaincy, appointment as private secretary or household tutor, or recommendation to some office of state, judicial appointment, or courtly sinecure" (3). Different forms of patronage may all converge, functioning through influence, connection, and direct power. The networks through which patronage was sought and gained were extremely diverse: "access to influence might be institutional (through schools, universities, Inns of Court, guilds), regional (connected to ancestral loyalties), religious (engaging with partisan or sectarian sympathies), familial (including extended groupings of clients and dependants as well as blood kin), or factional (exploiting or promoting divisions)" (4).

In McCabe's view, patronage was a dynamic social process endlessly negotiated and renegotiated between the parties concerned. The lack of a professional career structure or any formal mode of public recognition, forced writers to resort to various idealized paradigms in an attempt to flatter, or shame, prospective patrons into a sense of "obligation" (4). This "art of dedication" developed its own peculiar rhetoric with recurrent images, tropes, and themes, and allowed writers to establish what the ancient rhetoricians termed "ethos," an authorial worthiness designed to cultivate a privileged relationship with both dedicatee and readers (4). Through illustrious patronage poets might gain canonicity and by sponsoring a great talent patrons might accumulate "symbolic capital," which was an essential component of the "magnificence" expected of a person of rank (6).

All the parties involved struggled to "define the activity in mutually advantageous terms, typically involving altruism and beneficence on the one part and worthiness and gratitude on the other" (15). Authors attempted to define patronage in affective

terms, refusing to discuss it in terms of economics or clientage. Poets had an acute interest in "representing themselves as 'friends' rather than 'clients', and their poetry as independent art rather than mercenary homage" (16). At the heart of the matter is "a negotiation between the patron's present celebrity and the poet's future fame—and only through the latter can the patron's memory endure" (17). Moreover, the receipt of patronage conferred "authority" on talent: "the greater the patron's authority, the better the prospects; the highest authority might even confer the laurel crown" (17).

In addition, McCabe draws on examples from classical antiquity and Renaissance Italy to look at patronal relationships from the patrons' point of view. From this perspective, he observes, "patronage became the 'art of the powerful' and magnificence its aesthetic" (46). Magnificence functioned both as an expression of status and as a means to gain it. The terms in which the practice of dedications is customarily described transform it into "something incontestably sublime—magnificence, charity, patriotism, or simply noblesse oblige—the latter equally if not more important to those who were not of the ancient nobility or whose claims to pre-eminence were questionable" (46). While humanists encouraged the cultivation of letters as an expression of true nobility, patronage was commonly driven by an intense competition between families (such as the Sforza, Gonzaga, Medici, and Estensi).

McCabe further discusses the relevance of the advent of print for the patronage system. The printing press fundamentally altered the way in which poets thought about their careers and handled their relationships with patrons. It afforded authors the alluring economy of the open market, although it "threatened, at its worst, to downgrade the author to the level of hired penman, a mere employee of some printer or publisher" (7). There arose for the first time "the 'stigma' not of print per se, but of a remuneration from print that could not easily be represented as a 'gift' rather than a fee" (7). The expansion of print culture demanded "some mark of illustrious patronal recognition that distinguished an author from the rising number of writers promoted by the new medium" (7). The fear was that mass publication would destroy literary standards. Nevertheless, printing posed less of a threat to the system of patronage than might have been expected: "the new technology created new methods of policing and control, and publishers, no less

than authors, needed the protection of powerful patrons" (8). In fact, printing fostered "a new set of social networks that radically altered conditions for the composition, editing, and reception of letters" (8). McCabe argues for the complementarity of patronal and print economies: "while illustrious patronage enhanced authorial status, both functioned as marketable commodities" (65).

Dedications extended patronal relationships to a wider audience. The circulation of a growing number of printed dedications "enhanced a patron's visibility while recommending the dedicator to a network of other influential writers, printers, and patrons" (65). The dedication was used to offset the "stigma" of hired labor by offering "gifts" to the public through the dedicatee, characterizing selling as gifting. Since the rhetoric of patronage served to idealize its economy, certain tropes were recurrent: dedicated works are "gifts," and unworthy of the recipient; the gesture is made as a "token" of love, service, friendship, respect, or gratitude; social disparity notwithstanding, author and patron are linked by bonds of affection, kinship, origin, or loyalty; the giver seeks "protection," "favor," or "acceptance" and relies on the recipient's courtesy or grace; association with the dedicatee will lend luster to the writer because he or she is the true arbiter of worth; in supporting, protecting, favoring, or accepting the author's tribute, the dedicatee acts in the public as well as the private interest; dedicatees are noble, gentle, benevolent, learned, fair-minded, patriotic, godly, or loyal, a credit to their class, court, guild, arms, or blood" (73). In addition, assertions of sincerity, loyalty, impartiality, and veracity are common topoi aimed at establishing an orator's ethos, or moral character, and consequently common to eulogist and flatterer alike (74).

McCabe explains that the peculiarity of the art of dedication is that it embodies panegyric in epistolary form. A major purpose of the epistle was to facilitate acceptance of the gift by fashioning the recipient in idealized terms. For this reason, there are appeals, for instance, to honor, courtesy, friendship, kinship, grace, loyalty, and favor, as well as negotiations between familiar and formal modes of address. An illustrious patron bestows luster on both writer and work, and when he or she is alleged to have "accepted" an author's approach, the correspondence could be imagined as reciprocal (79). McCabe considers further topoi of dedicatory writing, such as the

"humility topos," which derives from the social disparity between author and patron, signaled in the blazoning of titles, formality of address and conventionally apologetic tone (83). In addition, as McCabe explains, "the function of rhetoric is to persuade, and that of persuasion to attain a clearly defined end" (85). An appeal for support may be expressed in terms of public utility, with an emphasis on the cultural, moral, or political "use" of an author's work as well as establishing some form of "fictive kinship" with the dedicatee, but in all cases, one needs to interrogate convention for intent (85).

The second section of the book deals exclusively with literary patronage in Renaissance Italy. McCabe traces the development of Petrarch's attitudes towards patronage, examines his association with, among others, Robert of Naples, Cola di Rienzo, the Colonna, the Visconti, and the Emperor Charles IV, and studies the presentation of patronage in the *Africa* and a number of verse and prose epistles (108–21). He also considers Ariosto's literary career, contrasting his attitudes to his Estensi patrons both in script and print, and examining the various strategies used to ironize an apparently straightforward eulogy (123–32). Finally, McCabe relates Tasso's uneasy relationship with Alonso II d'Este and its implications for his major writings, particularly the *Aminta* and *Gerusalemme Liberata* (136–45).

The last section explores English literary patronage, from 1500 until 1625, considering the careers of Caxton, Skelton, Elyot, and Udall. McCabe traces the advent of the printer/publisher as an increasingly central figure in canon formation, and in the production of new vernacular works (150–67). He also studies the impact of female sovereignty on traditional modes of patriarchal patronage, comparing Elizabeth to Mary Tudor. He analyses the various strategies that Queen Elizabeth employed to maintain her independence from the different factions attempting to appropriate her authority, or control her image (173–93). An examination of the dedications addressed to the Earl of Oxford and the Countesses of Pembroke and Bedford demonstrates the extent to which coteries operated in Elizabethan and Jacobean England (199–211). Drawing on the fact that membership of elite groups conferred considerable status on emerging authors, he argues that the notion of coterie might be essential for commercial as well as creative reasons. With

regards to career trajectories, he illustrates how three very differently positioned poets (Gascoigne, Spenser, and Daniel) negotiated patronage and print, "professional" careerism, and "laureate" status (229–66). Furthermore, McCabe discusses the implications for literary patronage of the accession of James I, who had an already well-established print persona (288–309). To the inherent difficulties of the production of courtly literature, the Stuart accession added those of a rival court, for Prince Henry cultivated a different literary aesthetic. A final chapter examines the consequences of the creation of a poet laureateship by Charles II, and its effect on the professional career and public reputation of John Dryden (314–20).

In conclusion, McCabe offers a comprehensive analysis of literary patronage in the Renaissance, with particular attention to the rhetoric of dedication. In it, he points out the impact of print on the traditional modes of literary patronage, when the economy of gift-exchange was challenged by the marketplace. His work is an essential resource for all scholars interested in literary patronage and its rhetorical conventions.

References

Beljame, Alexandre. (1881) 1948. *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Bonamy Dobrée. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner.

Wheatley, Henry Benjamin. 1887. *The Dedication of Books to Patron and Friend*. London: Elliot Stock.

Author's contact: nrodriguez6@us.es

Postal address: Dpto. de Literatura Inglesa y Norteamericana – Universidad de Sevilla – C/ Palos de la Frontera s/n – 41004 Sevilla, Spain