

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of THE CLASSICAL REVIEW.

DEAR SIR,

Professor Conway is to be congratulated upon undertaking, in *The Making of Latin*, a task that is too frequently neglected by his confrères, who studiously hold themselves aloof from modern linguistic work. A distinguished professor of Greek once told the writer that he cared not a jot how Greek was pronounced, and it mattered nothing to him that his pupils were ignorant of its alleged pronunciation. Then, turning from the language of the dead to that of the living, 'Why,' he asked, 'should we expect our honours students of French to pronounce French well, so long as they know something about their French literature?'

Literature is safe in the hands of such zealous champions, but in the meantime language perishes. Speech does not normally exist apart from pronunciation, and in the main, casting aside for a moment syntax and semantics, the history of language is an affair of the much despised pronunciation.

Professor Conway does not share this restricted outlook, and he has made a serious attempt to describe the phonetic structure and the origin of Latin. It is a contribution that students of Romance philology especially will be grateful for, and it is in the hope that certain errors will be removed in future editions that the following remarks are made.

The study of phonetics, to which some attention is devoted in this country, has made it clear that in dealing with speech-sounds, it is essential that some attempt at scientific method should be adopted in classification. A more accurate classification of speech-sounds, both vowel and consonant, would have been of great help in this book. Moreover, to talk of vowels, consonants, and sonants is to lead the student to imagine that 'sonants' are a class of sounds that are neither vowel nor consonant. The definition of vowels as 'sounds produced by the voice passing through the mouth while the tongue and lips are held in some particular position' is inaccurate. According to this definition *l* is a vowel, and the diphthong *ou* is not. Vowels are voiced sounds in which there is neither complete obstruction nor any narrowing of the speech organs such as to cause audible friction.

The definition of a consonant as a sound that cannot be heard unless it is accompanied by a sonant is inaccurate. The sounds usually represented by the letters *s*, *z*, *v*, *f*, are all consonants, and they can, of course, be heard without any accompanying sonant.

It should be made clear that these ∇ sonants, *l*, *m*, *n*, *r*, are in reality syllabic consonants; their sonority is so little inferior to that of vowels that they are able to form syllables without the help of vowels.

The semi-vowels are not well explained. The English words 'way' and 'low' do not end in semi-vowel sounds. Is Professor Conway guilty of confusing sound and symbol?

The *l* sound is produced when the air-passage is stopped in the middle by the tip of the tongue, and the voice emerges at one side or at both sides. To say that when *l* is produced the sides of the tongue are vibrated is not in accordance with fact.

The palatal plosive is not heard in the English words 'kin' and 'get,' but a slightly fronted velar plosive. The initial sound of 'shut' is not a palatal fricative, but an alveolar fricative.

In the production of nasal consonants, *all* the air, not part of it, passes through the nose. It is in the production of nasalised vowels that a part only of the air escapes through the nose. The palatal nasal consonant does not occur in English.

To say that 'in vulgar Southern English *wh* is pronounced as *w*,' is to accuse of vulgarity many who will be quite justified in resenting the aspersion. Professor Wyld's view of the matter is different.

The question of Professor Conway's symbols is too wide to be discussed here. Modern phonetic teaching, acting upon psychological grounds, discourages the use of diacritics. Why use ∇ for a sound that is so generally represented by *w*?

Most university students, coming from schools where modern languages are taught on modern lines, are acquainted with a phonetic alphabet that is used effectively for the transcription of speech sounds in scores of books. If Professor Conway had made use of this alphabet, and given transcriptions of Latin prose and verse, marking length and stress, he would have added very considerably to the value of his work. Also he would not have had to repeat the list of Latin vowels from the 'table issued by the authority of the Classical Association.' This list would be criticised by any Fifth Form boy who had been taught French by a competent teacher; \bar{e} is described as being 'as *e* in prey, or French *é* as in *blé*.' The English and French sounds have nothing in common.

I is described as being as 'feed or French *amie*.' Why is *amie* feminine? All final vowels in Parisian French are short, whether masculine or feminine. It is only in certain dialects that distinctions of length are made between masculine and feminine words.

The foundation of any linguistic work must be the student's native tongue. Until he knows the structural details of the tongue he uses daily, he is not likely to talk with intelligence about the languages long since dead. It is in the provision of this essential preliminary information that Professor Conway's book falls short, and if in future editions he would rewrite the earlier chapters in the light of modern phonetic teaching, he would add much to our gratitude.

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