

Introduction

The literary culture of early modern England was bilingual; literature of all kinds, including poetry which is the focus of this book, was read and written in both English and Latin throughout the whole of the period that we call Renaissance or early modern.¹ Both the overlap and the *lack* of overlap between Latin and English poetry makes a difference to our understanding of this literary culture. It matters that so many apparently innovative moves in English poetics – including the fashion for epyllia, epigrams and Cowley’s ‘irregular’ Pindaric odes – can be traced back to continental Latin poetry: that is, to ‘neo-’ Latin rather than primarily classical verse. It is important that so many popular poems circulated bilingually, in both Latin and English versions, or with answers or ripostes in the other language. But it also matters that there are some forms – such as sonnets in English and (until Marvell’s ‘First Anniversary’) short panegyric epic in Latin – that were a characteristic feature of verse in one language but not the other.

The quantity of neo-Latin poetry in surviving manuscript and print sources from early modern England is vast, and to a large extent still unmapped and unexplored.² Most first-line indexes of poetry do not

¹ Poetry was, of course, also read and (less often) written in England in other languages, especially French, Italian, Dutch, ancient Greek and Hebrew. But both the consumption and the output of poetry in all these languages put together is dwarfed by the activity in Latin.

² The only surveys are Binns, *Intellectual Culture* (covering Elizabethan and Jacobean material only, and with minimal coverage of manuscript sources) and Bradner, *Musae Anglicanae* (only very partial coverage of print, and almost none of manuscript; omits discussion of the Protectorate altogether). This book draws on data from a large project I have been running since 2017, conducting the first survey of post-medieval (‘neo-’) Latin verse in early modern English manuscripts (‘Neo-Latin Poetry in Early Modern English Manuscripts, c.1550–1700’, generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust). At the time of writing, the project has identified 28,080 probably or certainly post-medieval items of Latin verse in 1,237 manuscripts held in 40 archives and collections. This is far from a complete survey even of English holdings. The knowledge I have gained from this project has transformed what this book has been able to cover, and I am very grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for their support.

include any Latin.³ Indeed, the vast majority of scholarship on the (English) poetry of this period is written as if contemporary Latin poetry simply did not exist.⁴ This book outlines some of the ways in which developments in Latin poetry were related to – both influencing and influenced by – the landmarks of English poetry with which scholars, students and lovers of English literature are familiar. In so doing, it attempts to chart some of the vast and largely unknown field of Latin poetry that was read and written in early modern England between around 1550 and 1700 in a way that is both accessible and, I hope, engaging to readers who have no Latin themselves: to convey something of the particular pleasures and expectations of this poetry, of how it works, what it is like to read, and how and why it was enjoyed. But I aim also to demonstrate how English verse culture as a whole looks, feels, sounds and makes sense differently if we stop pretending that all that Latin is not there.

Landmark works and authors recontextualised by this ‘bilingual’ approach include Tottel’s *Songs and Sonnets* (Chapter 1); the Elizabethan interest in quantitative metrics (Chapters 2 and 3); the Sidney psalter (Chapter 3); the so-called ‘Ovidian’ epyllia of the 1590s (Chapter 10); Marvell’s ‘Horatian Ode’ (Chapter 4); his ‘First Anniversary’ and Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis* (Chapter 9); Jonson’s and Cowley’s experiments in Pindaric lyric (Chapter 5); the unclassical tradition of didactic and allegorical epic (Chapter 11), including Fletcher’s *Purple Island*; Herbert’s *Temple* and the development of religious lyric through to the hymns of Isaac Watts (Chapters 3 and 6); Jonson’s *Epigrams* (Chapter 7); and the conception and practice of satiric, humorous and invective verse (Chapter 8).

Other surprises relate to the *lack* of obvious contact: there are no sonnets in Latin, and no ‘standard’ way of translating a sonnet in Latin emerges at any stage; conversely, the extraordinary popularity of Latin ‘free verse’ and ‘literary inscriptions’ in the later seventeenth century, though connected to the increasingly ‘free’ Pindarics produced in the latter part of that period in English, has no direct English analogue (Chapter 5). It is hard to imagine any serious English poem attempting, as David Kinloch’s *De hominis procreatione* does, a detailed description not only of sexual

³ The exceptions are the first-line index to the Nottingham Portland manuscripts, and Hilton Kelliher’s addendum to the index of verse in British Library manuscripts. The latter covers only manuscripts acquired between 1894 and 2009, and excludes a single manuscript containing over 700 Latin epigrams (BL MS Add. 73542).

⁴ This is unfortunately mostly true even of scholarship focusing on classical reception. A recent exception is Wong, *Poetry of Kissing*.

intercourse but also of all the various ways in which sex may fail to lead to conception, a rather startling literalization of the frustrated erotics of the Elizabethan epyllion to which Kinloch's poem is closely related in style (Chapter 10); or, as in the second book of Cowley's *Plantarum Libri Sex* (dating from c.1660), to stage a debate between personified herbs on the causes of female menstruation and the ethics of abortion (Chapter 11).

Such an approach is not intended to denigrate the poetry of the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth century written in English. On the contrary, I consider the period stretching from Spenser to Pope to be uncontroversially the most brilliant 150 years of English poetic history. This is poetry that I love and know well and have been reading since childhood. But it is also poetry which arises from, draws upon and feeds back into a wider literary culture that was intensely bilingual: it is not just that enormous quantities of Latin verse were both read and written, often by the same poets whose English verse we still read and teach, but that the Latin and the vernacular poetry are in constant conversation. The book arises from a strong desire to understand better where that English poetry comes from as much as it does from my enthusiasm for the Latin poetry of the period.

Education and Readership

Educated early modern men (and some women) wrote, read and circulated Latin verse intensively because they had been trained to do so: Latin was central to both secondary and tertiary education not only because Latin literature was the main subject of study at school (though this is certainly true), but also because Latin was the medium of education. Boys and young men at grammar school and university – in modern terms, from upper-primary to the end of secondary school age – were educated *in* Latin.⁵ There are obvious parallels with the use of 'world' languages (such as English or French) in secondary and tertiary education today in many parts of the world where they are not a mother tongue.

Latin literary dexterity – including multiple modes of transformation between languages and forms, such as the rendering of themes in both prose and verse, or recasting an hexameter extract into a lyric, as well as

⁵ Though some students matriculated at 18, most were younger. The average undergraduate in early modernity was (in modern terms) of upper secondary rather than university age, and some were younger still: Andrew Marvell, for instance, matriculated at Cambridge aged 13; John Donne at Oxford aged only 12.

translation into English and back into Latin (so-called ‘double translation’) – was central to educational success.⁶ While there is little evidence that schoolboys were regularly asked to compose English poetry as such, especially before the mid-seventeenth century, there is no question that anyone who had completed secondary education (regardless of university experience) had been required not only to read but also to compose a considerable quantity of Latin verse.⁷ The small proportion of girls who were educated were probably instructed in similar ways to boys, though perhaps with a lesser emphasis upon active oral and written skills as opposed to passive comprehension.⁸

Due to the almost exclusive focus upon Latin, early modern schoolboys read a great deal more Latin than even students specialising in the classics do today, and in particular the chronological range of the Latin texts studied was much wider than ours.⁹ Too much scholarship on ‘classical reception’ in early modern England has assumed, implicitly or explicitly, that ‘the classics’ of the Renaissance schoolroom were, more or less, those of a good Classics BA degree today. This is a particularly distorting assumption in a British context, since the British ‘Classics’ curriculum has been and to a significant extent remains one of the narrowest in the world. Of course early modern schoolboys read a great deal of Cicero, Livy, Ovid, Virgil and Horace. But this was far from all they read in Latin

⁶ On the importance of oral Latin proficiency and performance, see Knight, ‘Neo-Latin Literature and Early Modern Education’.

⁷ Charles Hoole, *A New Discovery of the old Art of Teaching Schoole* (1661) is the earliest example of which I am aware that recommends verse composition in *English* as part of the standard chain of translation, paraphrase and retranslation. Existing studies, which have drawn largely upon surviving statutes and curricula, are a good source for what school and university students were reading, but less informative on composition (though see e.g. Hale, *Milton’s Cambridge Latin*). For school composition, surviving manuscript records represent a largely untouched trove of evidence. I am aware of surviving examples of verse exercises or collections from the following institutions: Blundell’s School; Bristol Grammar School; Bromley School; Dorchester School; Durham Cathedral School; Eton College; Kingston Grammar School; Ludlow School; Merchant Taylors’ School; Newport School (Essex); Nottingham School; Saffron Walden School; Stamford School (Lincolnshire); St Paul’s School (London); Tavistock School (Devon); Westminster School; Winchester College; Witney School; Witton Grammar School; Woodstock School (Oxfordshire). For discussion of the teaching of Latin metre and the prizing of metrical variety, see Chapter 2.

⁸ Some highly educated women, such as Queen Elizabeth, plainly had excellent active Latin. The number of women who had a reading (that is, passive) knowledge of the language has perhaps been underestimated, given the very large number of Latin poems addressed to women throughout the period. In a handful of cases, surviving Latin exercises by girls suggest a similar approach to that taken with boys (see for example the discussion of Ann Loftus’ Latin epigrams in Chapter 7). See also Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*.

⁹ This is particularly true of modern Anglophone classical teaching and scholarship. Latin teaching elsewhere in Europe, for instance in Germany and the Netherlands, has traditionally been much more likely to include at least some examples of medieval and early modern Latinity.

and in most cases it wasn't what they read first, either: many children, for instance, read Mantuan's Christian eclogues, the *Adulescentia*, before they read the Virgilian original. Mantuan (1447–1516) was a Carmelite monk whose work was popular in the northern European schoolroom because it is easy to construe, highly quotable and excerptable, and conveniently hostile to the papal Curia. Other works known to have been widely read in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century classroom include Palingenius' (fl. c.1530) *Zodiacus Vitae* (an extraordinary philosophical epic, composed in deceptively straightforward hexameters, discussed in Chapter 11) and the so-called *Disticha Catonis* (*Cato's Distichs*), a late antique work consisting entirely of moralizing epigrams in single hexameter couplets (discussed in Chapter 7). Indeed, two of only a handful of Latin texts that we can be sure Shakespeare knew – because he refers to them in his early work – are Palingenius and Mantuan.¹⁰ These are two enormously influential Latin works which most modern Latinists have not even heard of, let alone read.¹¹ Extracts of both these poems, alongside some other works commonly read at school, are found very frequently in manuscript commonplace books and personal notebooks, including those of adults as well as schoolboys, suggesting that they were remembered, read and revisited into adult life.¹²

What early modern readers and poets meant by and expected from 'epigram' and '(didactic) epic' were shaped by works in the tradition of *Cato's Distichs* and Palingenius' *Zodiacus Vitae* as much as they were by Martial or Lucretius. Whereas a modern classicist associates dactylic hexameter exclusively with medium to long works, such as epic, satire and verse epistle, medieval and early modern readers encountered hexameters initially as the medium of moralizing and mnemonic verse, frequently in single couplets. What difference it makes if we read early modern poetry in these genres with this in mind is explored in Chapters 11 (for didactic epic) and 7 (for epigram).

Mantuan and Palingenius were both writing what would now usually be termed 'neo-' (that is, post-medieval) Latin, but early modern schoolboys also often read late antique and early Christian material such as works by

¹⁰ Palingenius: *As You Like It* 11.7; Mantuan: *Love's Labours Lost* 1v.2. Mantuan's *Adulescentia* is a model for Spenser's *Shepherds' Calendar*. The influence of Palingenius, and to a lesser extent Mantuan, is discussed in Chapter 11.

¹¹ *ESTC* records 11 printings of Palingenius in Britain between 1536 and 1638, and 28 of Mantuan before 1682. Both were also printed repeatedly elsewhere in Europe; Palingenius was particularly popular in France (Beckwith, 'A Study of Palingenius' *Zodiacus Vitae*).

¹² On the manuscript evidence for the reading of Mantuan and Palingenius, see further Chapter 11.

Ausonius, Claudian, Prudentius and Augustine (not to mention *Cato's Distichs*), which are now rarely read even at university in the Anglophone world. In the commonplace book prepared by the future Charles I as a gift to his father James I, for instance, Claudian is the sixth most frequently excerpted author, with 44 quotations (more than Virgil with 41), and Ausonius the ninth (not far below Virgil, with 27).¹³ Finally, there are several works – such as the *Satires* of Persius or the poetry of Statius and Silius Italicus – which we would recognise as ‘classical’ but which held a more prominent place in early modern education than they do in typical Latin literature survey courses today.

Early modern readers were encouraged to think of the full range of Latin – and indeed Greek, Hebrew and vernacular – literature in relation to one another, as valuable in large part for their consonances and similarities, rather than in terms of their stylistic uniqueness or diverse historical contexts. The pervasive habit of ‘commonplacing’ contributed strongly to this type of reading, since collating material from a variety of texts under the same heading (such as ‘the brevity of life’) tends to reinforce the ways in which works resemble rather than differ from one another. Some surviving commonplace books attest to this very dramatically: one unusually well-filled example, made almost certainly in the mid-1630s, repeatedly juxtaposes the compiler’s favourite classical authors (particularly Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Pindar, Seneca and Boethius) with modern extracts drawn especially from the Latin drama of George Buchanan (1506–82), the Latin lyric verse of Casimir Sarbiewski (1595–1640) and (in English) Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (first published 1621) and the poetry of Michael Drayton (1563–1631).¹⁴

The level of practical Latinity produced by the early modern education system was no doubt variable, but it is obvious from its widespread use even for relatively informal purposes such as letters, diary entries, jokes, comic songs and private prayers, that it was a living language for a large number of people, and at least accessibly comprehensible for many more. This is not least because Latin literacy – like learning an international language today – was the gateway to almost all advanced knowledge, including the learning of other languages. The journal of Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605–75) reports that following his parents’ move to London around 1615, he joined

¹³ BL MS Royal 12 D VIII. The three most frequently quoted are Ovid, Seneca and Horace. Excerpts from Ovid are dominated, as is typical, by the exile poetry (*Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*).

¹⁴ CUL MS Dd. IX. 59. It also includes extracts from Donne and Shakespeare, the latter without attribution. Entries in this manuscript are not recorded in *CELM*.

Merchant Taylors' school aged 11 (having previously been briefly at Eton); that at 13, during a period of heated and violent rivalry between the boys of Merchant Taylors' and those of St Paul's, he made a Latin oration on the miseries of Civil War and the benefits of peace; and that in 1619, aged probably still only 14, he went up to St John's College, Oxford, already excellent in Latin and Greek and well versed in Hebrew.¹⁵ Grammars and elementary texts in both Greek and Hebrew at this period were in Latin. Similarly, when Bartholus Herland, a Danish Latin poet, moved to London in the early 1660s, his notebook records his study of English grammar, with a particular focus upon English strong verbs. Even though the English verbal system is linguistically close to that of Danish, and certainly much more so than to Latin, all of Herland's notes on English grammar and even his glosses of English vocabulary are in Latin, not in Danish.¹⁶ As Hans Helander has put it: 'Up to the eighteenth century, educated people learnt *nearly everything they knew* by means of literature written in Latin.'¹⁷ Ann Moss has written of Latin in this period as a 'verbal environment in which to live': no-one's mother tongue, but not what we mean today by a 'dead' language either.¹⁸

Given the intense Latinity of educational and professional institutions, and the status of Latin as the international language of scholarship and science, it is unsurprising that a large number of Latin books were published in Britain throughout early modernity.¹⁹ But the great majority of Latin works available in England had not been printed there: whereas almost all works in English were printed in Britain (and are therefore recorded in the *ESTC*), most modern Latin works by authors elsewhere in Europe, as well as a fair number by British authors – that is, the great majority of neo-Latin works overall – were read in England in imported

¹⁵ BL MS Add. 53726, fols. 7^r–8^v. Spalding, 'Whitelocke, Bulstrode'.

¹⁶ BL MS Sloane 2870, fols. 148^r–50^v. Joe Moshenska has mentioned this manuscript, which includes correspondence with Sir Kenelm Digby, as evidence of Digby's international contacts; in fact the Digby material belongs to the part of the manuscript dating from after Herland was already in London (*A Stain in the Blood*, 521).

¹⁷ Helander, *Neo-Latin Literature in Sweden*, 13 (italics original).

¹⁸ Moss, *Renaissance Truth*, 3 and *passim*.

¹⁹ Books catalogued by the *ESTC* as Latin works comprise between 49 per cent and 3 per cent of the total printed Latin and English output between the start of the sixteenth century and first decades of the eighteenth. The overall trend in this period is a decrease in the proportion of Latin works, though an increase in the numbers of Latin items (from 168 in 1500–9 to over 800 a year in the first decades of the eighteenth century). This data does not include the many works with some Latin sections, such as Latin dedicatory or paratextual material to an essentially English work, or verse anthologies including some Latin poems.

continental editions.²⁰ Even where particularly popular continental Latin works were eventually printed in England, the date of those English printings is often misleading. Hils' 1646 selection of the Polish poet Casimir Sarbiewski's (1595–1640) Latin verse, with facing translation, for instance, and the 1657 London edition of Angelin Gazet's (1568–1653) comic verse collection, *Pia Hilaria*, both significantly post-date the increase in the popularity of those works: that is, they are a response to market demand, and reflect an existing readership relying initially on continental editions.²¹

For this reason, surviving library lists and booksellers' catalogues, as well as careful analysis of commonplace books, manuscript miscellanies and patterns of allusion and reference, are better guides to the modern Latin works that were read than the *ESTC*. From such data, the cultural importance of certain works of recent or contemporary Latin become clear: even small or largely non-literary libraries in the early seventeenth century, for instance, typically included a copy of the Latin psalm paraphrases of George Buchanan (1506–82), sometimes bound with those of the French Calvinist Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605); the epigrams of John Owen (c.1564–c.1622); and, very often, one or both of the Latin novels of the Franco-Scot John Barclay (1582–1621).²² These three works

²⁰ See Roberts, 'The Latin trade'. Only 26 per cent of Ben Jonson's largely Latin library, for instance, was printed in Britain (London, Oxford, Cambridge or Edinburgh). Jonson's library, as traced today, included 38 works of classical Latin, 25 works of classical Greek (mostly with parallel Latin translations) and 88 volumes of post-classical Latin (66 prose, 20 verse, 2 drama). In contrast, he owned only 12 volumes of English poetry (five of them translations of classical works), 19 of English prose and a single volume of English drama (McPherson, 'Ben Jonson's Library'). Most Latin texts printed in Britain were school texts, or works by British neo-Latin authors, such as John Owen and George Buchanan (though in both cases their works were also printed frequently elsewhere in Europe). Even some of the most influential works of British neo-Latin, such as the *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum* (Amsterdam, 1637), were however not printed in Britain.

²¹ *Pia Hilaria* was first published in Amsterdam in 1618; Donne's 'Vota Amico Facta' is a translation of one of the poems. Sarbiewski's poetry began to appear in print in 1624; as the Cambridge commonplace book mentioned above demonstrates, it was certainly known in England by the 1630s.

²² The library list of Lincoln's Inn in 1646, for instance (BL MS Harley 7363), is limited largely to works of law, divinity and philosophy; of only around 20 'literary' titles, most are classical, but include the (Latin) epigrams of Owen and Huntingdon as well as Barclay's *Argenis*. A probably late seventeenth-century book list (BL MS Harley 6396), focused on science, mathematics and theology, contains no English poetry at all apart from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but includes the verse of Buchanan and Sarbiewski, the *Adagia* and *Moriae Encomium* of Erasmus, and Barclay's *Argenis*. Barclay's novels lie largely beyond the scope of this book, though it is very striking how often his novels are excerpted, sometimes very extensively, in commonplace books of the early to mid-seventeenth century. In William Brackston's commonplace book (CUL MS Dd. VIII. 28, c.1630), extracts from Barclay's *Argenis* stand first under many headings; another fragmentary commonplace book from around the same time (CUL MS Dd. XI. 80) consists almost entirely of

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are without doubt among the most widely read works of contemporary literature in Jacobean England, and not only in England: they are also the works that would be cited by any educated contemporary elsewhere in Europe if you asked them to name a famous British author.

Buchanan, Owen and Barclay are figures who have dropped almost completely out of English literary history, although without them major English literary developments – including, for instance, Jonson's *Epigrams* (1616); the tradition of English hymnody (an early eighteenth-century development deriving in large part from psalm paraphrase); and the English novel – would have developed quite differently, if at all. We may notice that, with their inclusion, British literary history looks strikingly more European than we are used to, and less centred either on England or on London: Buchanan and Barclay are Scots, though Barclay was educated by Jesuits in France and was culturally French, and Buchanan spent time in France, where he taught Montaigne as a boy; Owen was a Welshman educated in England, who became a schoolmaster in Warwickshire.

Moreover, these are British authors who – unlike any writers writing in English at this period – were influential across Europe: in the seventeenth century Latin, much like English today, was an international language. A good deal of important recent work has explored the relationship between English poetry and that of other European vernaculars, especially French, Italian and Dutch.²³ But vastly more people in early modernity could read Latin than any vernacular language and very few educated readers of the period would have read French or Italian more easily than they read Latin: there is very little evidence for the systematic teaching of any modern language at school until the late seventeenth century at the earliest, and, as Peter Davidson has pointed out, contemporaries who spoke several European languages well were singled out for their prodigious achievement.²⁴ It makes no sense to try to map the European-wide

extracts from Barclay's *Satyricon* alongside several references to Palingenius. Barclay's works were considered as serious objects of study and as a source of improving as well as amusing extracts.

²³ See e.g. Smith, 'Cross-Channel Cavaliers'.

²⁴ Davidson, *Universal Baroque*, 30; Southampton grammar school, which educated two future translators of Du Bartas in the 1570s, Josuah Sylvester and Robert Ashley, very unusually specialized in French under the mastership of Hadrianus Saravia, a Belgian Protestant émigré. The dissenting academies were some of the first to teach modern foreign languages systematically, though still in curricula in which the classical languages dominated. Hoole's guide for schoolmasters (*New Discovery*, 1661) makes no mention of instruction in any language other than English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

exchange and cross-fertilization of poetic styles and forms without putting Latin at the heart of any such study.

English poets were, then, steeped in Latin poetry from their schooldays on, and by ‘Latin poetry’ I mean the Latin poetry of all periods, including their own. Any poet who wished to achieve – as, for instance, Milton did – a European-wide reputation naturally wrote in Latin, and just as many poets of the period, like Hoskyns, Campion, Herbert, Crashaw, Marvell, Milton, Cowley, Addison or Watts, produced work in both languages, so too were there many (now forgotten) poets who made their careers largely or entirely in Latin. Alongside Owen, we could mention in this category Scipio Gentili, Giles and Phineas Fletcher, Thomas Watson, William Gager, Elizabeth Jane Weston, Payne Fisher, Raphael Thorius, Maurice Ewens, William Hogg, William King and Anthony Alsop. Several major figures, such as Andrew Melville and Théodore de Bèze, remembered today for their achievements in other fields, were famous at the time for their Latin verse. Indeed, Calvinists of many nations produced a great deal of innovative Latin poetry in the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth century in their attempt to craft a Protestant Latin poetics. Even poets like Ben Jonson, who, unusually for their period, wrote in adulthood only in the vernacular, were undoubtedly *reading* widely in Latin.

Most students and even scholars of early modernity, if they are aware of Latin literary culture at all, think of Milton, the only poet whose Latin work has received sustained attention. This makes Milton’s Latinity appear unique. Milton’s Latin verse is unusually *good*; but in its existence, range, choice of forms and genres and in its relationship to his vernacular poetry it is on the contrary typical and even rather conservative. There is nothing in Milton’s Latin corpus as original, for instance, as Herbert’s Latin verse sequence on the death of his mother, *Memoriae Matris Sacrum* (1627).

Whereas we would tend to distinguish sharply between classical and post-classical Latin, and often even between classical and late antique Latin literature, early modern teachers and readers alike did so much less: for them Latin literature was a going concern, a matter of fashion and innovation as much as of tradition and the ancient world. If we want to understand Anglo-Latin poetry as a living literature interacting with other Latin and vernacular poetry across Europe, we have to set aside an assumption that (our conception of) the ‘classical’ was always the most highly valued or most carefully imitated, as well as the distorting tendency of the still limited quantity of specialist criticism on ‘neo-Latin’ to treat all post-medieval Latin literature as monolithic. Poets writing Latin verse in the 1550s, just like those writing English or French verse at the same time,