Aiming at the Wider Audience:

Strategies for Embedding Latin in Elizabethan Popular Prose

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Literary scholars have long tended to view the communicative power of Latin insertions in Renaissance English prose in plus/minus terms. Like the scholarly commentary apparatus, insertions appearing in humanist texts were seen as fostering bilingual dialogue across the ages, strengthening the vernacular, both in form and content, with the seriousness and prestige of classical Latin. On the other hand, when incorporated into popular prose, the same material was seen as disrupting the text with essentially non-communicating, often comic tokens of a distant culture that was being overrun, literally and figuratively, by the energetic new vernacular and modern culture.   In such texts, the Latin was thought to be essentially non-communicating because the audience involved a broad, socially and educationally varied spectrum of readers, many of whom had little or no Latin competence.

This paper argues that, while the traditional schema reflects how Latin functions in many earlier Renaissance vernacular works, it does not reflect what is happening linguistically and stylistically in English by the end of the sixteenth century. Indeed, as the eminent historian of literary English, Morris Croll, observed years ago, the end of the sixteenth-beginning of the seventeenth century was "the period when the literary claims and pretensions of Latin and the modern languages were almost evenly balanced, when it was easiest to pass

from one to the other without a change of subject matter or style" (1966: 181).

Easy for whom?   That is the question.

One problem with the traditional view is that it does not take into account the needs of a new kind of professional writer who appeared precisely at this time: the university graduate who had to earn his living by his pen and had to reach the widest audience possible so as to insure his works would sell, his reputation rise and a patron found.   Thomas Nashe—a contemporary of Shakespeare known for his linguistically exuberant popular prose fiction and pamphlet writing—writes bitterly about living in philistine times, when a Bachelor's degree and writing skills were neither prized nor rewarded. He and others like him lived economically precarious lives that could include stints in debtors' prison and starvation. It stands to reason that such a writer would use Latin—a register available to him as a university graduate—only if the Latin would communicate, and contribute stylistically to enrich that communication. Moreover, while Nashe was a great jester, he was also very serious about the value of learning, and serious about his Latin as well. Unlike Rabelais, another great verbal entertainer earlier in the century, Nashe does not play with Latin or ridicule the culture it embodies. Rather, to extend Croll's observation about language to the level of the individual writer, Nashe uses Latin as one of the numerous registers available to his variegated stylistic repertoire, as one of the voices to be orchestrated authoritatively in a period of rapid cultural exchange and transition.

The particular focus of this presentation is how Nashe embeds Latin in the vernacular so as to assist communication to readers with less and even no Latin. Examples are drawn from *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell,* of all Nashe's works the one most widely read during his lifetime, published in five editions between 1592 to 1595, with three rapidly successive editions in 1592 alone.[1] That the writer was sensitive to reader tolerance of Latin is clear: in the third 1592 edition, the last he corrected (McKerrow,1965:147), Nashe drops eight of the opening 13 Latin side-notes from the English-Latin scholarly apparatus appearing in the work's first two pages.

With its comical personification of the 7 Deadly Sins as well known Elizabethan social types, the stylistically heterogeneous *Pierce Pennilesse*, is certainly written to draw a broader audience than Nashe's Latin-educated peers. In addition to the latter, this wider audience also consisted of potential patrons, especially aristocrats but also men of wealth, including the newly wealthy, who would not be university graduates but might—or might not—be Latin-educated. A quite important segment included grammar school graduates who, like Shakespeare with his "smalle Latine and lesse Greeke,"[2] had learned their Latin by reading, translating and performing classical authors and school colloquies. Finally, at the base of the reading pyramid, Nashe could count on a remarkably literate general populace that had developed over recent years thanks to a variety of peculiarly Elizabethan factors: a well established system of petty schools which taught reading and writing in English; a rising, utilitarian-minded middle class that prized education as a means of social mobility; the Protestant

emphasis on individual reading of the Bible and the religious controversies debated publicly in the early 1590s in fiery pamphlet exchanges (some of which Nashe himself authored).

The state and stability of the vernacular available to Nashe and his audience in the early 1590s also requires comment. The entire sixteenth century was a period of astonishing lexical expansion and experimentation, a time when linguistic heterogeneity reflected the nation's continuously expanding political, commercial and geographical horizons. According to various estimates, 39 out of 100 words, or a conservative grand total of 10,000 words entered the vocabulary during the years 1500-1600; during the period 1450-1600, the lexical treasury is said to have doubled.[3] While some of these neologisms stem from native stock, most were what Elizabethans picturesquely dubbed "overseas" words. Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Greek and Latin—representatives from an estimated total of fifty languages, from the new world as well as the old—found their way into the English vernacular. The largest contributor to this lexical explosion was Latin, followed by French.[4]

Some new words crossed directly into English; others were naturalized in any one of several of ways. Not all new coinages survived, but their very presence, *en masse*, must have caused severe dislocations in the lexical economy and in the minds of speakers and readers. The age is rich in expressions grounded in the notion of confused mixture and random combination; for example, "farrago," "gallimaufrie," "hotch-potch," "jumble," "medley," "mingle-mangle," "motley," "miscellanie," and "satura." [5]

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Readers were constantly bombarded by the new, the unfamiliar, the foreign. The global apprehension of, and tolerance for, linguistic novelty were facts of everyday life. The devising of strategies to cope with the unfamiliar must also have proceeded apace. In this heated linguistic environment, the language of Rome—even for those with less or even no Latin—was not so much an "alien" obstacle to communication as part of the "hodgepodge."

To reactivate the communicative power of Latin in the sixteenth century so as to better speculate how readers of various competences might have coped with Nashe's Latin register, I adapted Halliday's and Hasan's notion of register (1977: 22-23), which describes situational styles according to the dimensions of field, mode and tenor. By passing the Latin in Nashe's text through the grids of these three dimensions—and with the ample help of dictionaries and critical editions of Latin authors and studies by Latin philologists—it was possible to recuperate much of the material's lost or fuzzy linguistic, stylistic and cultural significance and regenerate a sense of Latin's stylistic vitality. The results of the register analysis performed first on individual insertions were then assembled for a composite portrait of what can be called Nashe's "Latin register." This information was subsequently used for stylistic analyses of different sorts, including embedding. Embedding—studying how the Latin interacts grammatically and stylistically with the English matrix—proves highly suggestive not only about Thomas Nashe's bilingual competence but also on how different types of sixteenth century readers were able to process code-switched material. Such speculations are possible because register, as a pragmatic concept of

style, assumes meaningfulness in communication even though such meaningfulness may not be immediately apparent. What follows is a selection of certain aspects and results of register analysis, the ones most directly related to the study how Nashe embedded his Latin so as to promote communication with his wider audience.

Field is the dimension that classifies varieties of language as indicating a particular situation, activity, task, or profession. Field description shows the Latin in *Pierce Pennilesse* to come from 11 different spheres.

Field analysis of Latin insertions in *Pierce Penilesse*

Field	Number of entries
Law	5
Theology and religion	7
Philosophy	2
Proverbs	8
Literary-proverbial crosses	12
Literature	31
Grammar school	6
Salutations	4
Printing & copying	2
Music	1
Drinking	1

Total number of fields	**11**
Total number of items	**79**

The list shows that 20 entries or almost 25% of the total come from traditional medieval fields of Latin: religion, law and proverbs. This breakdown is significant because, at the time Nashe is writing, numerous phrases coming from traditional fields are already part of the English vocabulary, some of them in fact known for centuries by the wider populace. These words and expressions

appear in both spoken and written language, but it is as part of the oral vocabulary that they are familiar to most readers. Individual items from these three traditional fields appearing in *Pierce Penilesse* are the following:

Law

- *Non est domi*
- *Noverint*
- *Bona fide*
- *Sine coitu*
- *Nisi prius*

Religion

- *Miserere mei*
- *Exugat Deus & dissipentur inimici eius*
- *Placebo*
- *Per Iesum ChristumDominum nostrum*
- *Deus bone*
- *Diabolus, quasi deorsum ruens*

Proverbs

- *Sed caveat emptor*
- *Dulce bellum inexpertis*
- *Cucullus non facit Monachum*
- *Consuetudo peccandi tollit sensum peccati*
- *Homo homini Daemon*
- *Plenus venter nil agit libenter, + plures gula occidit quam gladius*
- *Secreta mea mihi: Frustra sapit, qui sibi non sapit*

Embedding techniques vary according to the length as well the grammatical structure and complexity of the Latin item.   A basic form of embedding occurs with *Nisi prius*, a legal term for a civil action brought to trial

before a judge and jury in the court of assize. The term is derived from the first two Latin words of a writ which orders the sheriff to establish a jury on a certain day "unless (*nisi*)" the judges of the court come to the county "sooner (*prius*)." Nashe's text reads as follows (bold type my own):

> Be aduertised, Master Os feotidum, **Bedle** of the Blacksmithes, that **Lawyer**s cannot **deuise** which way in the world to **begge**, they are so troubled with **brabblements** and **sutes** euery **Tearme**, of Yeomen and Gentlemen that fall out for nothing. If *John a Nokes* his henne doo but leap into *Elizabeth de Gappes* close, shee will neuer leaue to haunt her husband, till he bring it to a ***Nisi priu*s**. One while, the Parson **sueth** the parishioner for bringing home his tythes: another while, the Parishioner **sueth** the Parson for not takinge away his Tythes in time.
>
> <div align="right">*Pierce   Penilesse*</div>

189.1-10

In terms of reaching the wider audience, the *Nisi prius* example points to two strategies. The first is definition by collocation. *Nisi prius* is used appropriately in a text that deals with abuse of the law. It is collocated with a series of eight other legal terms indicated in bold: "bedle," "lawyers," "deuise," "begge," "brabblements," "sutes," "Tearme" and "sueth."   It should be noted that the specifically legal meaning of "deuise," "begge" and "brabblements" (4th or 5th in the OED) is not activated in this passage, but the existence of that narrowed meaning can be seen to contribute to the overall legal density of the text. Field appropriate collocation thus helps define the Latin term as some kind of lawsuit.

The second strategy comes not from the writer but from certain structural qualities of the English language—in particular the fixed order of the English sentence and its basic constituent, the word group—elements that go back to the

earliest foundations of the English prose tradition. Fixed but flexible sentence structure means that insertions can be integrated syntactically without any obligatory alteration of their source morphology. English in fact relies on the same procedure for integrating many new loanwords**.**   Thus, with *Nisi prius*, Nashe integrates a Latin adverbial expression as a substantive, headed by the indefinite article, and functioning as indirect object. As long as the Latin term's syntactical position in the English matrix is clear, the reader can make at least basic grammatical sense of any new word. Context and collocation will help with further definition.

Other Latin words and phrases are integrated the same way, making use of a variety of English syntactical functions: predicate, subject, object of preposition, direct object. A similar technique is to integrate short and simple Latin sentences as interjections as occurs here with the opening words of a well-known psalm:

> *Miserere mei*, what a fat churl it is! Why, he hath a belly as big as the round church in Cambridge, a face as huge as the whole body of a base viol, and legs that, if they were hollow, a man might keep a mill in either of them.'
>
> From the Complaint of Gluttony, *Pierce Penilesse* 199.33-200.3

A more complicated operation is the integration of subordinate Latin clauses to complete the sense of the principal vernacular clause.

> …and let him not (whatsoeuer he be) measure the weight of my words by this booke, where I write *Quicquid in buccam venerit*, as fast as my hand can trot; but I haue tearmes (if I be vext) laid in steepe in Aquafortis, & Gunpowder, that shall rattle through the Skyes, and make an Earthquake in a Pesants eares.

Notice also how the phrase from Martial is Englished in a highly colloquial vein.

Parataxis was frequent in English prose throughout the Renaissance. Nashe makes frequent use of parataxis to integrate less inflected Latin sentences, as with this proverb:

Experto crede, Roberto, there is no mast like a Marchants table.

Appearing here in its medieval as opposed to classical Latin form, this is a proverb well known to Elizabethans; its first two words, moreover, have multiple cognates in English, so the English sentence that follows develops the thought of the proverb without being a translation or variation on the Latin. By juxtaposition with the Latin, the English sentence seems to acquire a proverbial cast of its own.

Embedding can involve greater linguistic complication and stylistic effect, as illustrated in by another Latin proverb, a simple sentence, which is integrated as the second unit of a compound sentence:

A close periwig hides all the sins of an old whore-master; but the *Cucullus non facit Monachum,* 'tis not their new bonnets will keep them from the old boneache.

In this passage, Pierce has vehemently attacked the false pride manifested by using make-up and other disguises to hide the physical ravages wrought by age, disease and dissoluteness. Here another familiar medieval proverb is introduced

and domesticated into the dynamics of the English sentence by use of the definite article. The coordination with "but" then sets the Latin in parallel opposition to the English phrase that precedes it, so that the authority of the Latin seems to deny the assertion of the English and condemn the hypocrisy of vain sinners: in the English, **A** periwig hides sins; in Latin, **THE** "cucullus" (cowl) does not. Noteworthy here also is the fact that the dynamics of reading is not interrupted insofar as the word order of *Cucullus non facit Monachum* basically imitates that of the English sentence: Subject-Verb-Object. The inflections of Latin are not needed to interpret the grammar. Nashe further clarifies the Latin proverb by concluding with a bawdy metaphorical vernacular riff—"tis not their new bonnets will keep them from the old boneache"—on the periwig/cowl opposition. This addition is a very Elizabethan sort of translation of the Latin material which reflects the Renaissance humanists' compositional principle of *variatio*, synonymic shift to avoid monotony. A grammar school textbook example of variations on "*pereo*," one of Nashe's frequent Latin words illustrates how translation encouraged *copia* or abundance as well as *variatio*:

> *Perij*.
>
> I am undone; my joy is past in this world; my good daies are at an end; I am a man of another world; I am quite cast away; I am but dead; God have mercy upon me; Woe is me; out alas; ah, weladay.'
>
> From Richard Bernard's *Terence in English* (1598)[6]

The next example, from the field of religion, involves strategies of a more literary/cultural than systemic order. Searching out the Devil so as to deliver his

petition for patronage, Pierce goes first to Westminster and then to the mercantile Exchange where:

> …thrusting myselfe, as the manner is, amongst the confusion of languages, I asked (as before) whether he were there extant or no? But from one to another, *Non noui Daemonem,* was all the answer I could get.
>
> *Pierce Penilesse* 162.29

The Latin sentence is a playful calque on Peter's denial of Christ in *Matthew* 26: "*non noui hominem,*" a well-known part of the Maunday Thursday liturgy, which would be known at least orally by readers as Christians. The satire's effect depends on the reader's recognizing the original religious situation, the comically antithetical substitution of "devil" for Christ and the satirical barb of merchants denying they know the devil. The Latin is simple in lexis and grammatical construction; except for the pre-positioning of the negative "non," the word order is that of English.   If pronounced, the Latin verb "*noui*" [no-wee] suggests its English counterpart [know]. *Daemon* is a word of Greek origin, Latinized at the time of Apuleius, which early on passed into Christian Latin with the sense of "infernal spirit" it has here*.* The insertion is a complete sentence, highlighted by the italics which serve as a sort of quotation marks; the insertion is in fact integrated as speech into the English matrix without interrupting the flow of the sentence. In this strategy, one which Nashe employs with a certain regularity, the insertion's oral character is enhanced by the highly oral flavor of the English. When the Latin sentence is considered semiotically rather than semantically—to borrow a useful distinction made long ago by Emile Benveniste[7]—it adds a mock religious seriousness that the Englishing of the insertion could not convey.

Latin is an inflected language, where grammatical function is indicated by case endings and rhetorical dislocation marks high formality or literariness. What about the many insertions from classical literary Latin? How did Nashe work with those complications?   One way to smooth over the differences was to select material from classical authors like Horace and Ovid, who figured prominently in the grammar school curriculum and used the "*sermo*" or polite spoken form of Latin, where word order more closely approximates the linear dynamics of English.

In the next example, Latin solemnly concludes a vivid description and paean to the English victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, a proud memory still, for Nashe and his readers, 4 years after the event:

> …So perished our foes; so the heavens did fight for us. *Praeterit Hippomenes, resonant spectacula plausu*.
>
> From the Complaint of Envy, *Pierce Penilesse* 185.14-15

Notice the repetition of "so" that adds seriousness and balance to the English that precedes the Latin, qualities that find echo in the paratactical Latin. Syntactically and culturally, however, this Latin poses certain difficulties for the wider audience.   Nashe circumvents the problem by including what are, in effect, two separate closures with a high level of formality in each. The two closures are aimed for the wider and the narrower audiences respectively. The prestige of Latin, however, sounds the appropriate note of finality regardless of whether the content communicates or not.

In other instances, Nashe hammers home his point by surrounding the Latin front and back with English variations.

> Those that care neither for God nor the devil by their quills are kept in awe. ***Multi famam***, saith one, ***pauci conscientiam verentur***. Let God see what he will, they would be loath to have the shame of the world.
>
> From the Complaint of Wrath, *Pierce Penilesse* 193.26-3

The topic here is poetry's impact on human action, specifically on how the desire to be celebrated by poets can direct men's actions towards the good. The concision and impersonality of the Latin maxim is countered by the moralizing religious emphasis of the English. The "saith one" emphasizes this impersonality while embedding the rhetorically structured Latin into the vernacular matrix as speech but its high formality and authority is recalled by a marginal note attributing the thought to Pliny.

Examples illustrate, but too many examples can obfuscate. I shall close here by noting that *Pierce Penilesse* is too small a sample to argue for any preferred strategies, but the examples brought forward do highlight the structural and historical receptivity of English as the embedding matrix and uncover a greater variety in Renaissance Latin, in terms of field, mode and tenor than we—mostly poor Latinless scholars of the twenty-first century—would ever suspect. They highlight the code-switching skill of the bilingual author and his care to communicate with the widest audience possible.

[1]Endnotes

[1] Nashe, T. (1965) Pierce Peniless His Svpplication to the Divell, vol. 1 in The Works of Thomas Nashe, R.B.McKerrow (ed). New York: Barnes and Noble.
[2] Baldwin, T.W. (1944) William Shakepeare's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke. Urbana, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press.
[3] Nist (1966:214); Bateson (1961: 31); Baugh (1963:280).
[4] Baugh (1963: 273).
[5] Oxford English Dictionary (1971), Compact Edition. All lexical work for the study was done with this edition.
[6] Nelson (1952:138).
[7] Benveniste (1974:224-229).

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