

English School Exercises

1420–1530

One of the basic tasks of boys in grammar schools in England up to the 1530s was to compose and study Latin sentences. Collections of such sentences survive in manuscripts and printed books from the 1410s to the 1520s. They can often be traced to particular schools or teachers, and provide a rich source of evidence about education and society during the period.

All the exercises contain material in Latin and some in English. They record vocabulary, spelling, and the conventions of writing prose and verse in both languages. They show how schoolrooms worked, and how pupils were stimulated and disciplined during lessons. They also reveal how late-medieval Latin came to be superseded by “humanist” Latin in the years around 1500.

Beyond the classroom, the sentences provide valuable information about the contemporary world: information largely unknown to social and cultural historians. References are made to the cycle of the year; to clergy, worship, and calendar customs; to government, law, the economy, and the Hundred Years War; and to everyday life, from families, food, and play to epidemics and lawlessness. Numerous proverbs, maxims, and riddles record the wisdom, morality, and ingenuity of those days.

This book contains an edition of eleven manuscript collections of exercises and one printed collection. Together with four collections of the early sixteenth century that have already been published, it makes available to readers the vast majority of this genre of evidence. A general introduction explains the nature and contents of the exercises, and there is a detailed introduction to each text. Translations of Latin and Middle English are provided, along with copious footnotes and an index listing all the topics of the exercises.

STUDIES AND TEXTS 181

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Abbreviations

CCA	Canterbury, Cathedral Archives
EETS	Early English Text Society
Förster	Max Förster, “Die mittelenglische Sprichwörtersammlung in Douce 52,” in <i>Festschrift zum XII. Allgemeinen Deutschen Neuphilologischesentage in München, Pfingsten 1906</i> , ed. Eugen Stollreither (Erlangen, 1906), 40–61.
<i>Initia</i>	Hans Walther, <i>Initia Carminum ac Versuum Medii Aevi Posterioris Latinorum</i> , Carmina Medii Aevi Posterioris Latina 1 (Göttingen, 1959).
Nelson	<i>A Fifteenth Century School Book, from a Manuscript in the British Museum (MS. Arundel 249)</i> , ed. William Nelson (Oxford, 1956).
NIMEV	Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards, <i>A New Index of Middle English Verse</i> (London, 2005).
n.s.	new series
ODEP	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs</i> , ed. W.G. Smith, rev. F.P. Wilson, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1970).
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , ed. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 2nd ed., 20 vols. (Oxford, 1989).
o.s.	old or original series
Pantin	W.A. Pantin, “A Medieval Collection of Latin and English Proverbs and Riddles from the Rylands Latin MS 394,” <i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i> 14 (1930), 81–114.

- PL Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–1906.
- Proverbia* Hans Walther, *Proverbia Sententiaeque Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, 6 vols., *Carmina Medii Aevi Posterioris Latina 2* (Göttingen, 1963–69).
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