

John S. Richards

“A Newly Discovered Collection of Poems by Ippolito Grassetti, S.J., (1619-1663), at the William Oxley Thompson Memorial Library, The Ohio State University.”

Early modern Jesuit Latin poetry has proven a fruitful area of research for Neo-Latin studies, as indicated, for example, in the works of James J. Mertz (*Jesuit Latin Poets of the 17th and 18th Centuries: An Anthology of Neo-Latin poets*. Bolchazy-Carducci, 1989) and Yasmin Annabel Haskell (*Loyola's Bees: Ideology and Industry in Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry*. Oxford, 2003). Jesuit poetry constituted a very unique and distinct genre in and of itself as it developed in the 16th through 18th centuries, where these compositions largely served as intellectual recreation for members within the Society of Jesus. This paper further develops the work of Mertz and Haskell by introducing a number of new poems by Ippolito Grassetti of Modena.

Ippolito Grassetti (1619-1663), a Jesuit humanist writer, poet and eventually rector of Piacenza, left four extant works listed in the *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* (1892): *Anatome Necis proditoriae* (1660), *Epigrammatvm Liber Primus* (1660), *Libri Carminum, Chironis Achillei, atque Heracliti* (1662), and *De Miraculis, de Actibus humanis, de Fide, Spe et Charitate, de Contractibus Decisiones casuum quam plurimae* (undated). A heretofore unedited collection of his poetry, however, can be found in a manuscript held by The Ohio State University (Columbus [Ohio], William Oxley Thompson Memorial Library, Latin MS 12), a manuscript that has as yet received no scholarly attention and contains a collection of poems which, to my knowledge, exist nowhere else. Under the title “Poetici Lusus”, this hand-written codex was compiled in Ferrara by a Jesuit colleague of his, a certain Tullius Bertus of Mantua in 1631. The poems on average tend to run about 8-15 lines, with a small number running three or four times longer. The manuscript organizes the poems by genre: 3 poems under “Poemata” (entitled “De S. Francisco Xaverio”, “De Christi cruciatibus,” and “Iuuentutis a Phebo ad Bacchum, siue a studio ad Ludum defectio”), 36 poems under “Descriptiones”, (on an extraordinary diverse set of topics, ranging from gambling, to games, to fishing, to hunting rabbits, to capturing frogs), 54 under “Epigrammata Laeva” (all dealing with religious subjects, especially saints), 30 under “Profanae” (all dealing with Classical subjects), 11 under “Iocosa” (variously dealing with the weather, old age, donkeys, and more) and 7 under “Odae” (again on various matters, ranging from Hercules’ fight with a snake to a curse against garlic).

This manuscript provides a rare and in-depth vignette into the composition and style of 17th-century Jesuit poetry, one all the more special considering both its early stage in Grassetti’s career and the inherent informality involved in many of these works. The concept of “poetici lusus”, therefore, is indeed an intriguing one, as these works offer light-hearted but well-wrought compositions done for practice and/or amusement. This paper situates these poems in the larger context of Grassetti’s career and provides new information helpful to the study of early modern Latin poetry and of Jesuit poetry more specifically. Furthermore, it serves to focus scholarly attention on the wealth of unexplored manuscript material, Neo-Latin and otherwise, found in North American libraries.