



Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature

Sean Keilen

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This original book challenges prevailing accounts of English literary history, arguing that English literature emerged as a distinct category during the late sixteenth century, as England's relationship with classical Rome was suffering an unprecedented strain. Exploring the myths through which poets such as Geoffrey Whitney, William Shakespeare, and John Milton understood the nature of their art, Sean Keilen shows how they invented archaic origins for a new kind of writing.

When history obliged English poets to regard themselves as victims of the Roman Conquest rather than rightful heirs of classical Latin culture, it also required a redefinition of their relations with Roman literature. Keilen shows how the poets' search for a new beginning drew them to rework familiar fables about Orpheus, Philomela, and Circe, and invent a new point of departure for their own poetic history.



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