Among the numerous works of Latin literature produced in Denmark (which then included Norway and Iceland) and Sweden (which then included Finland) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, drama is conspicuous by its relative absence.¹ Thus this article does not tell a story of the flourishing Neo-Latin drama and its prominent writers in the early modern period in the Nordic countries. Rather it consists of a few notes concerning Latin drama, or phenomena closely related to it that can be traced in the margins of vernacular drama. The playwrights used native languages almost exclusively and only a few Latin plays were composed. Latin plays were performed, but they were either classical dramas or imported from other countries, from Germany and the Netherlands in particular, or written by foreigners visiting or having a connection of some sort with one of the Nordic countries.

The absence of Nordic drama in Latin invites the question of why Nordic scholars, who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries eagerly produced Latin verses and orations and had them printed, did not direct their energies to the writing of Latin dramas too. Was it possibly because there were many dramas, classical and contemporary, written by European playwrights already available? Why make the effort since good plays were there ready to be staged? Considering that the same generations of scholars educated according to the principles of studia humanitatis did not content themselves with the wide range of handbooks on rhetoric and epistolography written by European scholars but instead published their own, the availability of relevant material hardly suffices to explain the situation.

Perhaps drama is a form of art that was not at home in the Nordic culture, as Lynette R. Muir suggests in her work on biblical drama in medieval

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Europe. She argues that biblical drama was absent in the Nordic countries partly due to the late date of their conversion to Christianity, and partly for the following reasons: ‘Perhaps also the strong tribal and family traditions of the Northmen were less suited to community drama than to poetry and saga. The court and aristocracy were well versed in popular epics and romances of the day, and the Church, at least in Sweden, has some dramatic forms of its own, but once again the Roman ‘civilisation’ in its most literal sense of the civis\(^2\) or town is absent’.\(^3\) As far as folk poetry and saga are concerned, it should be noted that they were often of a dramatic character, including substantial portions of spoken and sung dialogues. It worked the other way round too: folk poetry had a strong impact on Nordic school drama.\(^4\) Muir’s fundamental idea is that not only the Roman Church but Roman occupation in the past exerted a great and lasting influence on the development of religious drama. Although in the Middle Ages the Catholic Church also prevailed in the Nordic countries, biblical drama did not make itself felt there to such an extent as it did in the parts of Europe which had been occupied and civilized by the Roman Empire during its Christian era. This leads us to trace Latin drama from the Catholic period of the Nordic countries. The main section of this chapter attempts to position Latin drama in relation to vernacular drama after the Reformation and the third section discusses panegyric and propagandistic functions of two Latin dramas on a Swedish king.

**Before the Reformation**

Medieval church drama was introduced into the Nordic countries by the Catholic Church but only a few plays have survived. Medieval church art, which was influenced by dramatic performances, suggests the kind of settings and characters employed. A number of limestone paintings in Danish churches show, for example, that the figure of the jester was often found in dramatic performances.\(^5\) A number of fragments of Breviary texts containing portions of the liturgy for Easter Day (*Visitatio sepulchri*...