

Some Early-Modern New College Poetical Miscellanies, With Thomas Master's Poem on his Cat

Early-modern New College was a literate place, and many of the fellows wrote poetry in English and Latin, especially epigram, a habit they had often picked up at Winchester College. In 1587 New College released a poetic collection to memorialise the death of the poet and courtier Philip Sidney, the *Peplus, illustrissimi viri D. Philippi Sidnaei supremis honoribus dicatus*, a very early work of the revitalised Oxford press.¹ One contributor became the most famous Latin epigrammatist of the period, the Welshman John Owen ('Audoenus', 1563/4-1622), whose Elizabethan epigrams were read all over Europe for centuries, going through at least 45 continental editions to 1800 and translated into everything from Spanish to Danish. Although he is scarcely remembered today, he is probably the best-selling fellow so far in college history if his longevity in print is taken into account.²

Alongside Owen we might also recall John Hoskyns (1566-1638) and Thomas Bastard (1565/6-1618), two fellows who were thrown out for being too witty. Hoskyns made an indecorous speech as *terrae filius* in 1592 and was stripped of his degrees and banished from the university. In exile as a schoolteacher, he toiled over a Greek lexicon as far as the letter 'M'. The aptly named Bastard had been ejected the previous year for writing libellous poems. Three variant copies of his suspect verses survive, as well as one of his attempted recantation. It is easy to see why Bastard was accused of libel and deprived of his fellowship by the college itself; in his recantation he recalls that Warden Culpepper in particular had had it in for him, and the other fellows, including Hoskyns, then deserted him in his hour of need.³ His recantation is a pastoral lament between two shepherds, Jokey and Jenkin, and written in cod-West Country ('Na then cham zory Jenken, for I knowe / twould greiue a man that should be zerved so'). In the early Jacobean period the college again published as a collaborative venture a volume of Latin and Greek verses on the death of Ralph Warcop (1605), printed again on the Oxford press, but with the college arms on the title-page, flanked by 'WW' for William of Wykeham.

Several later Jacobean/Caroline manuscript collections of poetry assembled by Wykehamists in the period survive too. One is MS Malone 19, full of topical poems on the Spanish Match, copies of verses by well-known poets such as Donne, John Hoskyns, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Corbett, many university poems, especially on the infamous Cambridge dramatic success *Ignoramus* and the no less infamous Oxford flop *Technogamia*, and specifically Wykehamist poems, such as one on the Winchester baker (p. 8), 'Vppon the Horseman of N. Coll: who fell from a hay house & died' (p. 41), and poems on the death of the popular Benjamin Stone of New College (pp. 53, 59, 60, 61), including one by the famous college civilian Richard Zouche. Some surviving collections show a strong New College interest, even if they may not have been owned or collected by a Wykehamist, e.g. MS Malone 21, including poems on the Lady Elizabeth Paulet's needle-work, a tapestry presented to Oxford University and the subject of an entirely New College-authored

¹ Incidentally, Sir Philip Sidney's first passport is held in the college archives: see John Buxton and Bent Juel-Jensen, 'Sir Philip Sidney's First Passport Rediscovered', *The Library* 25 (1970), pp. 22-6, from MS 328(2), part two stored in the archives. It was presented in 1851.

² *Joannis Audoeni epigrammatum*, ed. John R. C. Martyn, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1976-8); P. N. Poole-Wilson, 'A Best-Seller Abroad: the continental editions of John Owen', *Theatrum orbis librorum: liber amicorum presented to Nico Israel*, ed. T. C. van Uchelen, K. van der Horst, and G. Schilder (Utrecht, 1989), pp. 242-49.

³ Allan G. Chester, 'Thomas Bastard's "lost" satire', *Notes & Queries* 195 (1950), pp. 533-4; James L. Sanderson, 'Thomas Bastard's Disclaimer of an Oxford Libel', *The Library* (1962), pp. 145-49. The texts, all differing, are MS Rawl. poet. 212, fols. 123v-26v; MS Corpus Christi 327, fols. 17v-21r; Rosenbach Foundation MS 186, fols. 45v-49r. The sole copy of Bastard's attempted recantation is Bodleian, MS Add. B. 97, fols. 5r-10v.

reciprocal presentation manuscript (now MS Bodley 22, dating from 1636), and poems again by Zouche and Stone. MS Rawl. poet. 84, a Restoration miscellany, contains the only recorded copy a poem on the recasting of the New College bells, as well as an inscription taken from the Cloisters, the verses on Paulet and her needle, and elegies on a Winchester Fellow and on a New College scholar.⁴ Other Oxford students, of course, wrote poems about New College matters too: a slightly later example is a Queen's College effort, probably written by Robert Southwell, a later President of the Royal Society, on the New College choirboy who fell out of a mulberry tree and brained himself. This was in 1655.⁵

Of miscellanies constructed by New College students for their own entertainment, the most representative manuscript is probably Bodleian MS Rawl. poet. 206, a Caroline collection compiled by an unknown college member. Its New College identity is proclaimed by its opening page, a hand-painted image of the college arms, encircled by a floral motif. The manuscript is not all poetry, for there are medical receipts and other miscellaneous included too, quite a common phenomenon in such manuscripts, and an indication that such collections were still personal belongings. There are poems in this collection from all sorts of (mainly) Oxford sources, for instance several by Edward Lapworth, the physician and poet of Exeter College, including his interesting poem on 'Chess Play'. New College poems include 'On Mr Rives, and Mr Griffiths recovery both Fellowes of New Coll' (pp. 47-8): the former swallowed a bone; the latter had to have one reset by a joiner. Such collections will obviously contain many overlaps, and poems occurring in both Malone 21 and Rawl. poet. 206 include Benjamin Stone on the Oxford sheriff, and a longer poem 'On my Lute-strings. Catt bitten.' Now this latter poem is by Thomas Master (1602/3-1653), poet and amanuensis, one of the more interesting New College writers of the Caroline years. In the 1630s Master worked as the scribe of philosopher, poet and historian Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and Master's copies and collections for Herbert's celebrated *The Life and Raigne of King Henry the Eighth* (eventually published in 1649) are now in Jesus College, as MSS 71-4. Many of Herbert's printed books are there too, including some fine presentation volumes from writers including Herbert's fellow philosopher Francis Bacon.

Master published little in his lifetime, but his reputation grew after his death with several posthumous publications: the historical oration *Monarchia Britannica* (Oxford, 1661), edited by the Camden Professor John Lamphire, also of New College; a famous sermon originally preached at New College in 1641, *The Virgin Mary* (London, 1665, editions of 1709, 1710); and *Iter Boreale* (Oxford, 1675), a 1637 topographical letter in verse and prose about a journey from Montgomeryshire to Lincolnshire addressed to his father and published by his companion the physician George Ent. Master also wrote the single-sheet *Mensa Lubrica*, on the board game shuffleboard, addressed to Cherbury (c.1651). Among his lost poems is one on the Authorised Version translator, Warden, college benefactor, and finally Bishop of Bath and Wells, Arthur Lake.

Master wrote poetry in Latin and Greek as well as in English, but his best-known English poem at the time was probably 'On my Lute-strings. Catt bitten', a diatribe against his cat. We know this poem was popular because it survives today in at least five Oxford manuscripts, and it was printed, unattributed, in a miscellany of 1655.⁶ The following text is

⁴ This MS was initially owned by 'Egigius [i.e. Giles] Framton' in 1659, but is then signed by an 'RN' in 1663. The cloister inscription is on Woodgate (fol. 1v); the verses on the dead scholar are titled 'In Mortem Sanctissimi juvenis Dni: Gulielmi Smith hujus Collegij Quondam Scholaris nuper defuncti', beginning 'Accipe Wicchamici querulum breue tamen Alumni' (fol. 52v).

⁵ Bodleian, MS Eng. poet. f. 6, fols. 25r-6r, 'On the Death of – Cornish Coyrister of New. Coll: who fell in the Morning from a Mulberry Tree and broke his neck against a Stone underneath on Monday Aug 25. ([16]55) The day they went to Winch: Election.'

⁶ See the Union First Line Index of English Verse (<http://firstlines.folger.edu/>). It was printed in the *Musarum Deliciae* (London, 1655), pp. 52-5, a collection ostensibly edited by and containing the poems of Sir John

taken from MS Rawl. poet. 206, pp. 59-61. I have preserved the original spelling and punctuation, bar a very few silent emendations.

On my Lute-stringes. Catt bitten

Are thes the Stringes that Poets faine
Have cleerd' th' Ayre, and calm'd the Mayne
Charmd' Wolves, and from the Mountaines crests
Made Forrests dance with all their Beasts?
Could thes neglected shreds, wee see,
Inspire a lute of Ivory
And bid it speak? oh think then whatt
Hath bine committed by the Catt
That in the silence of this night
Hath Knawne these Knots & mard them quite
Sparinge such Reliques as may bee
For Fretts, not for my Lute, but mee,

 Puss I will curse thee, maist thou dwell
With some dry Hermite in a Cell
Where Ratt nere peepte' where mouse nere fedd
And flyes goe supperless to Bedd
Or with some close-parde Brother, where
Thou'st fast each Sabboth in the yeare
Or els (prophane) bee hangde on Munday
For butcheringe a Mouse on Sunday
Or maist thou tumble from some Tower
And miss to light vpon all fower.
Takinge a fall that may vntie
Eight of nine lives, and let them flye
Or may the Mid-night Embers sindge
Thy dainty Coate, or Jane beeswindge
Thy hide, when she shall take thee biting
Her Cheese-Clouts or her house be-----

 What? was ther nere a Ratt? nor Mouse?
No Buttrey open, nought in th'house
But harmeless Lute-stringes could suffice
Thy Paunch, and draw thy glaringe Eyes?

 Did not thy consciouse Stomacke finde
Nature profande? That Kind with Kinde
Should staunch his hunger? think on that
Thou Caniball and Cyclop-Catt.
For know thou wretch that every stringe
Is a Catts-gutt which Art doth spinn
Into a thred, And now suppose
Dunstane that snufte the Devills Nose
Should bidd those gutts revive, (as once
Hee raisd' a Calfe from naked bones)

Mennes and James Smith; but many are clearly not by them and they may not even have been involved in the edition at all: Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs, and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith, and the Order of the Fancy* (Newark, 1994), pp. 217-18.

Or I to plauge thee for thy Sinn
 Should drawe a Circle and beeginn
 To Coniure (for I am looke toote'
 An Oxford Scholler, and can doe't)⁷
 Then with three setts of mopps, and mowes
 Seaven of odd-Names, Motley-Showes
 A Thousand tricks which might bee taken
 From Faustus, Lambe, or Fryar Bacon)⁸
 I should beeginn to call my strings
 My Catt-lings, and my Minnikins
 And they (re-called) straight should falle
 To mew, to Purr to Catter-wall
 From Pusses Belly? sure as death
 Puss should bee an Engastromyth⁹
 Puss should bee sought too farr and neere
 As shee some cunninge woman were
 Puss should bee given to the Kinge
 Like to some wonder, or rare thinge
 Puss should be carried vpp and downe
 From Shire, to Shire, from Towne, to Towne,
 Like to the Cammell, leane as Hagge
 The Elephante, or Apishe-Nagg
 For a strange sight; Puss should be sunge
 In lousie Ballads' midst' the thrunge
 At Markets with as good a Grace
 As Agin-Court, or Chivy-chase.
 The Troy-sprunge-Britton should forgoe
 His Pedegree, hee chanteth soe
 And singe that Merline long deceast
 Returnd' is in a Nine-livd' Beast

Thus Puss thou seest' what might betide thee
 But I doe spare to hurt, or Chide thee
 For may bee Puss twas Melancholly
 And for to make her blith and Jolly
 Findinge thes strings sheed have a fit
 Of myrth, well puss if that were it
 Thus I revenge mee that as thou
 On them so I've playd on thee nowe
 And as thy touch was nothings fine
 So I've but scratchte these Notes of mine

Tho: Master: of New Coll.

⁷ Interestingly, two New College students were indeed accused of conjuring thus in the 1566 Visitation of the college. Thomas Hopkins, a junior member of the college, admitted to possessing 'a book of conjurations' that had been given to him by John Fisher, also of New College, who in turn had been given the book by an M.A. of Christ Church.

⁸ Faustus and Bacon need no introduction; Lamb is John Lamb the astrologer (1545/6-1628), murdered by the London mob for being a supposed conjurer.

⁹ The Greek equivalent of 'Ventriloquist', etymologically in both cases someone who speaks from their belly. It probably entered English via Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas, a very popular poem amongst New College, as other, students in the Jacobean period. See *OED*.



(Ms130, f.41r, 12th century, Caecilius Cyprianus: Opera Varia)

Will: Poole: of New Coll.