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St John's College, Cambridge, MS S.23

St John's, MS S.23 is a miscellany of fifty-seven poems, consisting of lyrics, odes, elegies, dialogues, songs and a brief epithalamium, a variety of forms linked thematically by its compiler's interest in works which are in dialogue with both other poems and other people. These are social poems, intended to persuade, delight, commemorate or denigrate their addressees, and to initiate a conversation with their wider audience. Several mingle the rivalries of writers with a contemplation of the bonds forged between men as close friends or as fathers and sons (both biological and adoptive). Almost all are composed in the idiom of dialogue and mimic in their forms and themes the social rituals of conversation and exchange.

This is a small miscellany, its writing block measuring 17.5cm x 14.5cm, bound in paper covered in thin vellum, a standard practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which made use of recycled scraps of vellum to provide tough, durable and cheap covers. The presence of catchwords throughout suggest the text was copied before being folded, stitched and bound and the edges of some lines came dangerously close to being trimmed during the cutting process. Stiff sewing supports are visible in the spine and extend into the covers. The secretary hand used to enter the majority of the miscellany's poems is intended to facilitate quick copying, but both the titles and authors of poems are carefully entered in an italic hand, revealing a concern with attribution that is not always found in miscellanies from this period. This may stem partly from the printed sources which the compiler uses for some of his texts, such as his elegy on Donne, which agrees in almost every particular with the text printed in the posthumous edition of Donne's poetry, *Poems by J.D* (1633), including the compiler's shift to italic hand to match a similar change in his source from Roman to italic type. On the other hand his copy of Jonson's 'Ode to Himselfe' is not taken from the printed version appended to *The New Inn* (1631) but is a more pointedly insulting version which circulated in manuscript, before being printed in Jonson's *Poems* (1640). The miscellany's version is not from this text, however, but comes from manuscript circulation, and it agrees in substance with the version of the same poem copied in Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Ashmole 38, a miscellany which dates to circa 1638. This use of both printed and manuscript sources is not unusual and it reflects a desire on the compiler's part to create a bespoke miscellany which reflects his or her particular interests. The compiler's interest in occasional poems, written for specific occasions, means several of these poems can be dated, with the latest being Thomas Carew's epithalamium, written for Cecilia Crofts' marriage which took place in 1636 (ff. 82v-83v), and so the majority of the datable work clusters in the mid- to late 1630s.

Identifying the compiler is more difficult. The name John Nutting is written in a later hand on the left-hand margin of ff. 26r and 56r; 'John' appears again on f. 38r and f. 43r and in a pair of pen trials on the endleaf f. 6v; the name John Susan appears on the pastedown at the end of the miscellany. One owner (and possible compiler) may then be the John Susan,

the gentleman of London, who entered St. John's College, Cambridge in 1614 and then Gray's Inn in London in 1619 to train for a career in law. The contents of the miscellany point to a copyist with access to and interest in the works of two generations of writers who clustered within a London environment, at the Royal Court, the Inns of Court and the professional theatre in the 1620s and 1630s, and whilst clearly it may be a work which may have appealed to a man like Susan, who spent time in similar environments, it may not have been compiled by or for him. A John Nutting was admitted to Peterhouse, Cambridge in January 1672 and took his BA in 1677 but the difficulties of definitively identifying an owner on the basis of name alone is highlighted by the fact that a John Nutting also entered Pembroke College, Oxford in 1687, whose interest in the miscellany might have been sparked by the works of several Oxford-based poets contained within it.

The text's index does points to an owner who took a particular interest in one aspect of the miscellany. In a hand which is difficult to distinguish from the hand which enters the main body of the text, the owner compiles a list of the ten poems by Thomas Carew in S.23, followed by a list of further fifty-five poems by Carew, which must be drawn from another poetic collection in the indexer's possession, one which appears to be no longer extant but must have been an important and authoritative collection of Carew's work.¹ Forty-three poems in the second part of this list appear in Carew's posthumous 1640 *Poems*, and in groupings which correspond loosely to its order, but the list is clearly not copied from the *Poems*. It may be a record of poems from a collection of unbound quires, the latter suggested by the fact that clusters of titles in this list agree at times almost exactly with the order of poems in another authoritative collection of Carew's poetry, the Gower manuscript, but do not do so consistently.² The Gower manuscript also serves to stress the quality of the poems by Carew in S.23. The former contains corrections to its poems made in Carew's hand, corrections which agree with S.23's readings in the texts they share, thereby highlighting the latter's textual reliability and arguing for its importance as a witness to Carew's work.

However, to treat this miscellany solely as a repository of texts that might be used to construct an individual author's canon reads against the grain of its intentions, which places heavy emphasis on the idea of poetry as a product of imitation, emulation, and exchange between poets. The majority of the writers featured in it are linked to each other and to their addressees by the bonds of friendship, patronage and affection and the miscellany is carefully organised to deliver a sense of response, dialogue and continuity between its poems. These are not randomly selected but are structured by a number of interlinked themes and ideas. The compiler has gathered work which invited answers from other writers: it begins with Jonson's 'Ode to Himself' (ff. 1r-2r) and Carew's response, 'To Ben Jonson vpon occasion of his Ode to himself' (ff. 2v-3v); Aurelian Townsend's poem to Carew written 'vpon the death of the King of Sweden' (ff. 71v-72v) is immediately followed by 'Thomas Carew his Answere' (ff. 73r-75r); Alexander Gill's scathing attack 'Vppon Ben Iohnsons Magnetick Lady' (ff. 81v -82v) is followed by a defence

¹ Scott Nixon, 'The Manuscript Sources of Thomas Carew's Poetry', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, 8 (2000), 186-224.

² Peter Beal, 'An Authorial Collection of Poems by Thomas Carew: The Gower Manuscript', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, 8 (2000), 160-185.

entitled 'Zouch Townley to his friend B.I.' (f. 82v) and 'Mr Austinn to his friend Ben Iohnsonn' (ff. 15r-16v) is followed by its companion poem 'To Iohn Blencow whereby' (f. 17r).

This interest in dialogic poetry is manifested in the forms chosen. The compiler transcribes a number of dialogues which themselves turn on personal relationships: Thomas Randolph's 'An Eclogue to his worthy father Mr. Ben Ionson' (ff. 32r-36v) and Carew's 'A Hymneall Dialogue in the person of the Bride and Groome' (ff. 60v-61r) use the dialogue form to represent personal relationships modelled on exchanges of promises and vows. Poems which are represented as gifts or letters for the recipient such as Davenant's 'Sent (with Mellons) to the Lady Kingsmell after a report of my death' (ff. 62v-63r) or Richard Corbett's satirical 'To Mr John Hammond' (ff. 46r-48r) use the verse-letter to communicate their esteem or disdain for their addressee to a wider audience, using the overtones of exclusivity and confidentiality that inheres in epistolary exchange to emphasize the sincerity of their sentiments.

Other connections are thematic: there are sixteen elegies, the genre best-represented in the miscellany, recording and commemorating the death of friends and patrons. All are concerned to stress the virtue of those deceased but emerging from this is a repeated concern with the role and ability of poetry to sustain a reputation after death, a willingness to interrogate the idea of the poem as the best monument to the dead, whether those poems are written by the deceased (as the elegies for John Donne make clear) or for them. Other poems are linked by a shared idiom: the praise of angelic singing in Johnson's 'A Dialog' (ff. 53r-v) is echoed in the next poem, Robert Gomersall's elegy on Anne King, (ff. 54r-55r) which depicts her as a saint recalled to heaven. This poem is followed by a poem in praise of a different Anne King, the dead woman's sister-in-law (ff. 55r-57v), and shared names and family relationships also unite Richard Corbett's pair of poems on his son and his father which are placed nearby (ff. 51v-52r; ff. 52v-53r).

The combination of named poets and addressees with forms which are governed by the principle of exchange and response develop a number of related ideas. What is immediately evident is the predominance within the miscellany of the work and influence of two figures, Ben Jonson and Thomas Carew, and the themes this miscellany associates with these figures are ones of friendship, rivalry and fatherhood. Jonson was renowned or notorious for the convivial evenings he enjoyed at London taverns in the company of fellow wits, poets and playwrights. Francis Beaumont, another professional playwright and a close friend, alludes in his verse-letter—which the compiler entitles 'F Beaumont to his friend B Iohnsonn' (ff. 48r-49v)—to entertainments they enjoyed together 'at the Mermaid', a fashionable London tavern patronised by a society of wits in the first decade of the seventeenth century, a group that also included John Donne and Inigo Jones. Jonson continued these habits into the 1620s and he emerged at the centre of a group of younger playwrights and poets, whom he jokingly referred to as the 'Sons of Ben' or the 'tribe of Ben', a pun on the biblical tribe of Benjamin, to which all the Apostles, except Judas, belonged.

Seven poems in the miscellany are addressed to or concern Jonson directly, ranging from the affectionate and slight awestruck admiration of Randolph's dialogue, which represents Jonson as his guide and mentor, to the insults contained in Gill's verdict on 'The Magnetic Lady'. The miscellany's

willingness to combine both praise and abuse of Jonson underlines the fact that with the important exception of Beaumont, the group of poets who address works to Jonson in this miscellany are up-and-coming writers, anxious to stake their claim to the status of heirs to the most significant figures of the early Stuart period, Jonson and Donne. This sense of transition is underlined by the fact that Donne features here only in the elegies on his death by King and Carew, and it is Carew, in fact, who has the highest number of poems in the collection. Although the miscellany opens with Jonson's poem, Carew's reply points out that the weakening of Jonson's skill as a dramatist made inevitable the failure of Jonson's play *The New Inn*: 'thy comique muse, from the exalted line / Toucht by thy Alchymist, doth since declyne / from that hir Zenith' (f. 2v). As a result, the younger poet counsels, Jonson's wisest course should be to stop supplying material for his critics and to 'trust to after dayes' to proclaim his talents.

A further five poems in the miscellany are by William Davenant, and another three by Randolph, both of whom positioned themselves as symbolic or actual successors to Jonson's literary legacy. In Randolph's dialogue, conducted between Tityrus and Damon, the younger writer explicitly casts himself as a son and potential heir to Jonson's poetic crown, as Tityrus/Jonson says: 'of all the sonnes I have by legacie / to have bequeated my pipe thee thee of all / I mean it should hir second Master call.' (f. 32v) Davenant, who like Carew and Aurelian Townsend, wrote masques in collaboration with Inigo Jones when Jonson was out of favour at court, succeeded Jonson as unofficial poet laureate after the latter's death in 1637. He also belonged to Carew's circle, along with Townsend and another poet featured in the miscellany, Thomas May, as well as two addressees, John Crofts (ff. 64r-v) and his sister Cecilia.

The characterisation that emerges in this miscellany of Jonson as poet and as parent suggests that its choice of poems is intended to create a sense of transition between poetic generations and literary coteries. The compiler mediates this passage by copying other poems on fathers and sons written by figures within Jonson's circle. Robert Herrick's 'His Age' entitled here 'Mr Herrick to his friend Mr Weekes' (ff. 77v-81r) captures another idea of poetic generation as the speaker's son recites the songs his father composed 'on my Mrs. breast, / or such a blush at such a feast' (f. 80r). The child in his person and in his recitals promises to endlessly recall his father's youth. In this context too, Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 2', (ff. 38r-38v) an impassioned exhortation to his addressee to have a son to preserve his beauty, is reinterpreted to become part of the compiler's wider interest in poetic and paternal succession.

There is also a third literary coterie represented in the miscellany, one centred on poets educated at Westminster School in London and then at Christ Church, Oxford. There are six poems by Richard Corbett, later dean of Christ Church and bishop of Oxford; three by his chaplain, William Strode, the orator of Oxford university; two by Henry King, later Bishop of Chichester, and one by Jasper Mayne, another Westminster and Christ Church student who succeeded Corbett in one of his clerical livings. The lives of all these poets were closely linked as the poems in S.23 reveal: Mayne, who had Randolph as a contemporary at Westminster, writes the poem in praise of the artistic talent of Henry King's sister, Anne; Robert Gomersall, the elegist of King's

wife, is another former student of Christ Church. This group too had a link to Jonson, who was himself a former pupil at Westminster, and who, when he was awarded an honorary degree by Oxford, apparently spent time at Christ Church with Corbett. Here he may have first met Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, the centre of another intellectual network, the Great Tew circle and Jonson commemorates Cary's friendship with Henry Morrison in 'Ode Pindarique' (ff. 23r-25v). The links between the coterie the miscellany depicts reinforce the relationships it displays, and its choice of poems, themes and forms reflects the rituals, performances and negotiations which bind a community together, within which poetry takes its place as both model for and an expression of those relationships.

The compiler's interest in social bonds also extends to the dangers inherent in their corruption, and several poems are dedicated to wider social critique. Massinger's 'London's lamentable estate' (ff. 26r-30r) dated here to the plague of 1625, evokes a deserted city where the bonds of family, friendship and fraternity have been irreparably damaged by a disease which makes sons fear to touch their dead fathers' bodies for fear of contracting the disease and infants suck in poison with their mothers' milk. This corruption of natural bonds is linked in Massinger's polemic to London's appetite for luxury and novelty which has brought the divine punishment of plague to correct the sinful city. The subversion of social bonds is figured in another way in Corbett's anti-Puritan satire, 'To mr Iohn Hammond', in which the 'fraternity' of Puritans is explicitly contrasted with the communal rituals of the Maypole dancers, and the former group revealed as hypocrites who cry down traditional festivities but indulge in their own prurient behaviours under cover of darkness and overt claims of virtue. The same writer's 'Iter Boreale' (ff. 4r-14v), however, is a good-humoured account of a journey taken with his father-in-law and two friends from Oxford. The poem conducts the reader on a tour of mythical, historical and literary England, and it conveys its findings in a style of reportage which gives this long poem the spontaneity of a letter.

The idea of the poetic miscellany as a collection of poems gathered through copying and exchange which serve a snapshot of the environment of its compiler is neatly reversed here. Instead the miscellany is a carefully constructed depiction of the environment of its poets in which this manuscript takes its place as a document of their rituals and relationships. The well-advertised links between these writers provides the basis for this compiler's selection of poems, and provides a route to exploring his own concern with dialogue and exchange as a poetic form and as a means of cementing communities together. The compiler uses the social nature of the miscellany's poetry to explore the fundamental bonds which held its poets and readers together, reconstructing in his compilation the tense dynamics of literary coterie which themselves relied on such representations to construct an understanding of their competitive, complex and affectionate relationships to each other and to their wider communities.

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