

## Raphael Lyne

### St John's College, Cambridge, MS S.34

The issues facing the reader of this manuscript are related to those arising from King's College MS 840.5 (about which I have also written on the *Scriptorium* site), even though they are separated by a century. It is not so much that they are both written by Cambridge students and are related to academic study (though they do, in their different ways). It is more that in both cases we need to work out how to integrate the weak concept of miscellaneity evoked by the modern word (a relatively disparaging way of saying 'diverse') into a culture where the high profile of miscellaneous collections in manuscript and print implies their very mixedness might have offered potential for significance. In the case of Alexander Bolde's book, St John's MS S.34, there are stronger signs of a project with an interest in self-fashioning. In recording exercises arising from academic work, and writings relating to major events in the University, Bolde seems to want to enshrine a version of his student self: talented, involved, and adding up to something. Like Edward Pordage, compiler of King's MS 840.5, he became a Cambridge Fellow (of Pembroke College) and was ordained soon after. Unlike Pordage (though of course it is risky to extrapolate too far from two manuscripts that might not be particularly representative) he performed his academic aspirations in his notebook.

Many of the items in this manuscript are academic essays which take philosophical questions and turn them into rhetorical exercises, in which the goal seems to be to impress with technique rather than to engage with the depth of the issue. Perhaps to any student, now or then, a topic such as 'Hominumne an Angelorum numerosor multitudo, non constat' ('Whether the number of men or angels is greater, is not certain') is not liable to transcend technicalities. The first essay is entitled 'Memoria & Reminiscentia differunt Subiectiuè' ('Memory and Recollection are inherently different'), and it has some typical features. It starts with florid self-regard: 'Iam portum inveni: Spes & fortuna valete' ('Now I have found port; goodbye, hope and good fortune!'). This then leads into lengthy flattery of his audience and a long, repetitive essay that makes a lot of use of Aristotle's thoughts on the subject. He ends up affirming the proposition and signing off with a proud 'Dixi' – 'I spoke', perhaps suggesting 'That's what I said', in an oral presentation. This is highly self-conscious work. This is taken to extreme in items (such as 43 and 44) that reflect on his own studies. These two orations on his experience of learning Greek are in some ways memoir-like, but there is also a good deal of preening before an imagined or actual audience.

The concept of self-regard, already mentioned, is often present, but it is a rather more subtle and sympathetic thing that one would initially expect. This tendency comes into interesting contact with a series of topical items. In this book Bolde is showing off his capabilities, but he also seems (I think) to be trying to shore up a sense of the world in which he and his studies mean something. He proudly records them, but accompanies them with windows on a wider world, as if to protest almost too much that his University life really meant something. This, of course, is rather an imposition on a collection in which the rationale and connecting features are for the most part implicit. It arises most of all from a sense that the personal and the topical are quite carefully arranged in one telling sequence.

Item 8 is a Latin poem entitled 'In mortem Patris charissimi Carmen Elegiacum' ('An elegiac song on the death of a very dear father'). The poem is full of conventional praises and comparisons. For example, he was as devoted to his wife as Ulysses was to Penelope. This could actually be a rather edgy comparison given the Homeric hero's relationships during his ten-year absence, but here it seems to convey only loyalty. One poignant feature is that on the first page of the poem (f. 14r) we find him punning on his (and his father's) name, Bolde, with the Latin word 'audax'. A marginal note – perhaps from a later reader linking this manuscript to its compiler – has put an asterisk next to 'audax' in the poem, and noted when Bolde joined Pembroke. It is probably hard to overestimate how many times the young Bolde, as he pursued his studies, had his name punned upon, but in this poem it comes across as a proud link back to his father.

Name-punning arises again in another personal elegy, 'The sighes of a sorrowful Muse for the death of honest and religious Mr Swithyn Butterfield', also of Pembroke College (item 12). The heartfelt nature of the poem is in tension with its attempts at ingenuity. I choose to take this as a rather poignant indication that Bolde's audacity (the pun works in English too, after all) and pretension were tempered by loss and doubt. His friend's surname proves irresistible, and both 'field' and 'butter' are used even before the final lines:

O Butterfield, thou arte become a Field wch god hath bleste  
 Making theron the showers of his glory reste.  
 Aduē therefore, adue for ay our frende so deare  
 Thy paines are paste: thy ioyes do now appeare. (f. 17v, ll. 19-22)

After the poem there is an envoy in Latin initiated by a multilingual pun, this time on his Christian name. Swithyn is an Old English name, deriving from the word 'strong'. This is something Bolde probably did not know, so it is ironic where his etymological efforts took him. He divides it into two parts: Sui | ὄυνη. (The significance of the vertical line between these two words in the

manuscript is not clear. I am taking it to be a kind of separator between the two false etymologies.) The Greek word (*dynē*) is not common, but can plausibly be related to the key verb *δύναμαι*, I am able / strong enough. The Latin word comes from the reflexive pronoun 'se'. The combination suggests 'powerful over himself', 'capable in himself', or some other configuration of these. It is not easy to tell how the poses of ambitious and clever students relate to grief for a contemporary and friend. Even in the case of Milton's 'Lycidas', the greatest poem written on the death of a Cambridge student, some (perhaps uncharitably) see its intensity and anxiety as predominantly self-oriented. For them, Milton sees his own death in Edward King's, and that is what animates the poem. Of course, Bolde's little poem has nothing like Milton's vast, contemplative scope, but it too might need careful handling if we are not to miss the poignant side of his manuscript because its self-promotion is so prevalent.

The concept of topicality, and the question as to which events are part of his life, and which aren't, continue in the items around and following the two elegies. Bolde is in the middle of the miscellaneity of his collection: it's interesting to wonder whether, and how, he holds it together. Item 9, 'In obitum Doctoris Cowell' – a poem about the death of Dr John Cowell, Professor of Law, is poised between the personal and the topical. We cannot know what connection there was between Bolde and Law, so we are unable to make biographical information into a key to understanding the poem's place here. Items 14-17 are larger in scope but still local: they are verses about the visit of King James to Cambridge. It might be rash to assume Bolde wrote all of these, though he could have. The royal visit was a sensational event that would have involved some festivities that included Bolde, and some that excluded him. Recording the verses here captures the news of the moment, but also connects the person being fashioned in the manuscript (a talent, a chronicler, someone at the heart of things) with the thing everyone would have been talking about.

Item 13 is yet more outward-looking: a poem 'In obitum Henrici Principis', on the death of Prince Henry in 1612. This was not a Cambridge event but a national catastrophe, at least in the eyes of those who preferred Henry's robust anti-Catholic foreign policy to his father's more tentative approach. This only links to Bolde's world via the broadening umbrella of topicality that holds these national events alongside much more personal ones. Items 24-33, for the most part, are also concerned with politics, but now with an international vista. They relate to the controversies surrounding plan to marry Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, to a Spanish bride. This was the matter of great interest to writers of controversial libels between around 1618

and 1623.<sup>1</sup> In Bolde's manuscript they complete the opening-out of topicality from the family, to the University, and into the world. The detailed description of the manuscript on this website recognises the difficulty of dating these entries: there is a ten-year gap between the events covered and those featured in earlier items. I think this suggests more design, rather than less, as Bolde compiles a manuscript partly shaped by an interest in recording and implicitly mapping the (possibly bygone) scope of his talent and ambition.

In keeping with this, he includes some letters that, rather tantalizingly, record his interactions with some major figures. Items 52 and 53 are both letters addressed to Lancelot Andrewes, then the Bishop of Winchester and a former fellow of Pembroke. The *Scriptorium* description notes that the layout of the letter resembles letters in print, 'although there is no evidence that this letter itself was printed'. This seems suggestive: perhaps Bolde set it out so formally because it was a memorable close encounter with a great man. The manuscript does not include a reply. The letter itself has a good deal of pompous self-regard but yet again pretension and poignancy are combined. Bolde is appealing for inclusion 'in Clientelam tuam', 'within your patronage'. He may have been proud of the letter, but at this distance it looks like what must have been a commonplace event: an educated but under-successful man writing in the hope of preferment (and probably in vain) to someone higher up the social scale.

The relatively coherent picture created by these items dissipates considerably after item 67, where we have recipes against the plague, and then a miscellaneous collection (item 71) of commonplaces on varied topics. The presence of a partial index for this section suggests that at some point this was deemed worthy of organisation. Here (as the detailed description records) questions as to the scribe and the date become very complex, so it is hard to see it as somehow the culmination (or confounding) of whatever Bolde was starting when he first set out to write down a showy oration about memory. This manuscript might be approached as a source of insight into the academic practices of early seventeenth-century Cambridge. It shows typical tasks in which intellectual and linguistic skills were tested. It can also be explored as other miscellaneous manuscripts can, as something in which the diversity of material can generate, extend, and aspire towards some sort of evolving unity, rather than defying it.

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<sup>1</sup> The Early Stuart Libels project has a special section dedicated to these: [http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/spanish\\_match\\_section/N0.html](http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/spanish_match_section/N0.html).

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