John Donne Journal
Vol. 33 (2014)

John Donne's "Mr. W. H."

Daniel Starza Smith

The Holgate Miscellany: An Edition of Pierpont Morgan Library Manuscript MA 1057, ed. Michael Denbo, Renaissance English Texts Society vol. 35 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012). xxiv + 358 pp.

Manuscript miscellanies are enjoying something of a vogue in early modern studies. Because they contain such a vast range of materials, literary and otherwise, these rich and often disorientating texts offer enormous research potential—but they also demand particularly complex reading strategies. Thanks to the work of scholars such as Joshua Eckhardt, Arthur Marotti, Steven May, and Michelle O'Callaghan (among others), our ability to interpret miscellanies has advanced considerably in recent years. This has been exciting news for Donne scholars in particular, since Donne's writings were so frequently transcribed into and out of miscellanies. Where editors once extracted canonical writing from these challenging volumes in the search for "best" texts, attention can now focus as much on what readers read, and in what context, as on what authors wrote.

Like early modern collectors presented with a rare Donne poem, academics who encounter very good work on miscellanies can feel like they have acquired something rather exclusive. To those with access to the right digital coteries, Michael Denbo's 1997 CUNY PhD on the Holgate MS—Pierpont Morgan Library, MA 1057 (*Variorum* siglum PM1)—counted highly among them as copies of it circulated furtively, burned on CD or zipped over file-transfer websites. The manuscript on which the study is based, containing mainly poetry, was probably

compiled by William Holgate (*b.* 1590), a Queens' College, Cambridge man who later lived in Saffron Walden, Essex, and who was once investigated by the managing director of Quaritch in case he was Shakespeare's "Mr W. H." Although the Shakespeare connection seems improbable, he clearly had access to many text-sharing networks, including those transmitting Donne's works. Although not explicitly dated, the manuscript is unlikely to have been started any earlier than 1619.

Denbo's thesis was acknowledged as the outstanding work on the manuscript. But something very odd happened when Denbo's typescript went to press, and mistakes were somehow introduced into the printed book. To those of us who admired and enjoyed the dissertation—I was lucky enough to read it alongside the Holgate MS itself—all these errors cannot credibly be attributed to the same person whose painstaking scholarship produced the groundbreaking PhD. Joshua Eckhardt's recent *Renaissance Quarterly* review of Denbo's book detailed a number of those mistakes, mainly in the references, and subsequent scholarship will be obliged to acknowledge them. No doubt RETS has already investigated what happened, and whether it could happen to other authors publishing with them. Yet the edition contains a great deal of unique and important information about early modern literature and culture, and Denbo has significantly contributed to the field by making the manuscript more widely available. Scholars of early modern poetry and scribal culture are advised to read the book with care—but they should certainly be urged to read it.

The Holgate MS, compiled *c.* 1619–49, is particularly important to early modern literary scholars because it contains so many poems by Strode (15), Corbett (10), and Donne (16, plus "When myne heart was mine owne, and not by vows," attributed to him by the manuscript's scribe or source). Other authors it witnesses include Ralegh (2 texts), Jonson (4), Drayton (2), Dekker (1), Henry Wotton (3), the Earl of Pembroke (6), and Shakespeare (Sonnet 106, here beginning "When in the Annalls of all wastinge Time"). There are seven poems probably by William Holgate himself. Denbo's edition enables scholars to read these poems (and a few prose extracts) in the unique environment of the verses that surround them. Indeed, the Holgate MS invites a full-scale "Eckhardtian" reading, in which context subtly modulates literary and political meaning and the

collector's agency in accessing and arranging his texts can be factored into the hermeneutic process.

The edition lists 184 entries, some of which, like a concluding series of 29 prose characters by John Earle, contain multiple texts. There are indexes by author and first line, but no initial list of contents. Pages 1 to 224 reproduce the main body of the Holgate MS, with brief textual and bibliographical notes at the foot of the page. The collection appears to have been arranged broadly by genre: epigrams, funeral elegies, Corbett's long "Iter Boreale," short lyrics, then poems commemorating Prince Henry. Political poems are dotted throughout; humorous verse is hardly to be found at all. Pages 225 to 346 are devoted to poem-by-poem commentary with information about author, context, sources, and further reading. In his dissertation, Denbo reproduced all the poetry in the manuscript, both that which was collected by Holgate, and later text added by Holgate's eighteenth-century descendent John Wale. In the printed edition, text in Wale's hand is omitted; "even eighteenth-century scholars" would not find *his* entries interesting, Denbo insists, to my guilty amusement. Although some textual evidence is thus lost, the edition more accurately represents the manuscript as a seventeenth-century artifact.

Denbo reproduces diplomatic transcripts of each entry, noting brackets, underlining, tildes, floral decorations, plus-signs and even the squiggly paraphs which frequently mark the end of an entry. The text is clear and legible despite the considerable textual fussiness required by a diplomatic edition, and I found no errors in the main text when spot-checking. However, because there is no list of editorial conventions it is not clear how one should read, say, "New<m>↑w↓arke". Is the *m* in angle brackets a deletion or an editorial interpolation? Do the arrows indicate that the second *w* has been inserted in superscript? Presumably not since elsewhere we have "w^{ch}" and "shipwra$_{\wedge}$^{c}ke." Has it therefore been inscribed over the *m*? One assumes not because the useful policy elsewhere is to add a note at the foot of the page, such as "**eschewe**] *s* overwrites *c*." Sometimes notes to words with these arrows indicate a difference of ink, but not always. Some justification of the method might have helpfully explained the rationale for a diplomatic over a modernized edition, or a semi-diplomatic text that smoothed out such infelicities while still

noting original forms in the notes, thus increasing a text's legibility for modern readers. I for one appreciate the faithful reproduction of a word such as "cullours" as "c$_{\wedge}$^{u}<l>lo<?>rs" but I am aware that some colleagues still need convincing.

The Donne poems that Holgate included in his collection were as follows (with entry number in parentheses): Elegy XIX, on going to bed (9), "Twickenham Garden" (43), "Womans Constancy" (44), "The Expiration" (45), "Witchcraft by a Picture" (46), "A Fever" (50), "The Legacy" (51), "The Perfume" (52), "The Anagram" (71), "A Hymn to Christ at the Author's Last Going into Germany" (86), "The Storme" (87), "The Cross" (88), "Song" ["Go, and catch a falling star"] (89), "Elegy on the Lady Markham" (92), "The Bracelet" (106), and "Break of Day" (126). It is interesting to note that some of these were grouped (43–46, 50–52, 86–89), but others were not, and that those which run together do not fit all that comfortably. One can propose a rationale for pairing a poem expressing doubts about a journey into war-torn Europe with another about the dangers of sea travel (86 and 87), but neither these nor Donne's meditation on the cross seem natural companions for "Song." If there was a rationale for these groupings, how might it be characterized?

My own particular interests in the Holgate MS are Donne-related, but are not specifically to do with these texts. Instead, they coalesce around a number of verses that overlap with British Library, Add. MS 23229 (*Variorum* siglum B11), a collection of literary manuscript separates owned by the early Stuart secretary of state Edward Conway. The Conway Papers contain some Donne poems, but not the same ones Holgate owned. However, folios 51r–54v and 62r–64v in Conway's collection (in two different hands) replicate runs of poems in the Holgate MS almost exactly, as Denbo was the first to note, including verses by the Earl of Pembroke, Benjamin Rudyerd, Thomas Carew, and Robert Ayton.[1]

One of the most intriguing is entitled "On the Money Newes so generally Currant in Frankenthal about Iune: 1621." Denbo identifies this anonymous poem as "a biting satire about the siege of Frankenthal," a key Bohemian stronghold which stayed loyal to the

[1]See the tables in Appendix II of my *John Donne and the Conway Papers* (Oxford: OUP, 2014) for more details.

Elector Palatine after the fall of Heidelberg, but which capitulated a year later. It is written from the perspective of a soldier in the siege, but it finishes with the words "Jacobus Dei Gratia," as if it was signed off by King James himself. Intriguingly, it apparently survives only in the Holgate MS and Conway's collection, and possibly in the same hand, distinguished by its regular use of a trefoil paraph. Denbo uses this manuscript for his cover image, and no wonder, since it is probably the Holgate text with the most intriguing implications both about Holgate's politics and his connections to manuscript-sharing networks.

It is perhaps no surprise to find a poem on this subject among the papers of the Calvinist Conway, a one-time ambassador to Bohemia, but what is the relevance of Holgate's ownership? Who supplied whom, and why, and what are the connotations for the study of Donne's contemporary readers? Holgate and Conway share some poems about love, but the appearance in both collections of "On the Money Newes" alongside Hugh Holland's "Written to a friend in the Low Countries" and Sir Henry Wotton's popular verse on Elizabeth of Bohemia points to joint concerns about Continental politics and religion. Both Conway and Holgate seem to share an interest in poems that libeled or attacked the Duke of Buckingham. We might sometimes naively assume that ownership of a poem implies the enjoyment of its contents, but Buckingham was Conway's pre-eminent patron, so Conway was likely following attacks on him with disapproval and perhaps even an eye on retribution. Might Holgate have been the kind of well-connected individual who passed on sensitive material to the secretary of state? The evidence may have been more conclusive had Conway's collection not been so extremely damaged over the years. It is intriguing to speculate how the practically unknown Holgate's well-preserved collection might have been interpreted had it been owned by a better-known figure such as Conway.

The miscellany may offer other testimony relevant to the study of Donne, though certain mental leaps are required to make the case. The Holgate MS contains a poem titled "Off Freindshippe" (entry 98), attributed by Denbo to Donne's friend Rowland Woodward. Scholars know relatively little about Woodward (an entry for him will appear in the next update of the *ODNB*), so we ought to be slow to jump to conclusions, but Denbo's publication of this poem, in this context, and with this attribution, throws a welcome scrap of evidence

to those of us with an interest in Donne's friends and earliest scribes. If you are seeking a life-affirming meditation on the joys of amity then look elsewhere, for this is a bleak poem indeed: "Friendshippe on earth wee may as easly finde / As hee the North East passage, that is blind." It seems natural to ask whether—if this poem has been attributed correctly—this poem could reflect on Woodward's friendship with Donne. The two men evidently felt warmth for each other as young men, expressed in a series of flirtatious verse letters, and the friendship must have continued into the second decade of the seventeenth century, since Donne gave Woodward a copy of his 1610 *Pseudo-Martyr*. Probably not then—and yet William Empson (among others) considered that the two men may have drifted apart, or even that they suffered a more violent rupture.

Conway's collection contains six of Donne's verse letters that parallel the text and order of Woodward's own Donne compilation, the Westmoreland MS (New York Public Library, Berg Collection, *Variorum* siglum NY3; the poems are *ED*, *TWPreg*, *TWHence*, *RWZeal*, *RWMind*, and *CB*). Given the other textual overlaps, might there be some biographical connection that links Conway, Holgate, and Woodward? The possibility seems to open up new opportunities for the study of Donne's early circulation in manuscript. Like many other contemporaries Holgate also collected verses on the Overbury affair and the Spanish Match (including "A Spanish Iournall: 1623," only otherwise witnessed in British Library, Add. MS 78662). This is poetry that clearly engages in contemporary cultural debates, and since the poems' meaning is mediated by their presence and placement in the Holgate miscellany they have the potential to illuminate the reading practices of an important early collector of Donne. However, the reader really needs to hear more about the connection between Woodward and this poem. In making the attribution Denbo claims to follow Arthur Marotti, who was probably following the ascription "R.W." in Huntington HM 198, pt. 1, p. 174.[2]

[2]Incidentally, the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts* does not contain the Huntington reference, despite having a document entry for HM 198, pt. 1, and another for the poem (PeW 70–83), where it is attributed to Pembroke. The Folger First Line Index confirms Denbo's assertion, though, and Vanessa Wilkie at the Huntington kindly sent me an image of the page to be sure.

But there is no footnote pointing the reader to the appropriate part of Marotti's voluminous output (I do not find it in *John Donne, Coterie Poet* or *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*); neither is there a list of cited works that might help narrow down the field. Most importantly, since the poem is more commonly attributed to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, the Donne-hunting reader is, once again, advised to proceed with caution.

The editor's 21-page introduction touches on such matters only briefly, and I would have liked to hear more of his own opinions and literary interpretations either here or in the notes. Despite the significant growth in studies of early modern manuscripts, not enough has yet been done to show the place of the manuscript medium in the development of English literature itself. Perhaps a tension still persists between the kind of editorial work required of a complex edition like Denbo's and the literary critical work it enables. One hopes that as more editions like *The Holgate Miscellany* are produced, editors will feel increasingly comfortable merging the two: after all, no-one is more expert in a miscellany's contents and arrangement than they are. Certainly miscellanies have moved in from the periphery over the last 50 years. Doctoral students began to edit miscellanies as part of their dissertation submissions in the 1960s. Steven May (University of Chicago) and Mary Hobbs (University of London) produced doctoral editions which were later published (in 1988 and 1990 respectively); along with Ruth Hughey's work on the Arundel Harington Manuscript (1960) and Hobbs's monograph *Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellany Manuscripts* (1992), these works set in motion a trend which has happily continued. May, Marotti, Cathy Shrank, and Alan Bryson have recently overseen the completion of three doctoral dissertations at the University of Sheffield, so one anticipates that three new published editions will be printed in due course. Peter Beal's online *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts* allows one to search by individual manuscript rather than simply by author as the printed *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* had done. The miscellaneous nature of English literary manuscripts' contents is thus highlighted in the most influential database presently devoted to them. The flexibility of presentation afforded by digital resources means that scholars can build miscellaneity into their research tools—

witness Michelle O'Callaghan and Alice Eardley's *The Early Printed Poetry Miscellanies, 1557–1621: A Digitised Edition.*

Miscellanies are difficult texts to work with but they offer fascinating research opportunities to scholars who wish to ponder the "socialized" nature of textual production and closely integrate traditional literary-historical criticism with issues of authorship, agency, and materiality. Eckhardt and I attempted to bring together recent developments in miscellany criticism in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England* (Ashgate, 2014), a volume which hopefully speaks to the miscellany-focused volume 16 of *English Manuscript Studies*, edited by Richard Beadle and Colin Burrow in 2012. As more miscellanies become available in modern printed editions—one thinks of Claire Bryony Williams's edition of National Art Library, MS Dyce 44, forthcoming with RETS—researchers will be compelled not only to develop innovative new interpretive strategies, but to integrate more closely the textual and interpretive work they require. New and unexpected connections will emerge linking texts, forms, and ideas, and the interpretive and creative agency of scribes and compilers will receive more sustained attention. Miscellanies are particularly powerful vehicles for promoting the combined study of textual materiality, historicist contextual analysis, and formalist literary criticism. Michael Denbo has made an important manuscript miscellany accessible to future scholars, and it is not only Donne studies that will benefit from more thorough analysis of its contents.

King's College London