

Jasper Mayne's Translation of Donne's Latin Epigrams

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Included in the 1652 edition of Donne's *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters* are sixty poems purporting to be Jasper Mayne's translations of Donne's Latin Epigrams.¹ Donne scholars generally have regarded these translations as spurious, though on rather scant internal evidence: some references in a few of the poems are historically and biographically inconsistent with authorship by Donne. Several Donne scholars, without any real evidence, have attributed the poems to Jasper Mayne, variously entertaining also the possible connivance of his friend John Donne, Jr. However, such speculations seem immaterial in view of the discovery that soon after publication of the translations Donne's Latin Epigrams themselves were apparently printed by the same publisher. Unfortunately, no copy of this volume—*Fasciculus Poematum & Epigrammatum Miscelaneorum*—is known to be extant. Nevertheless, reviewing both internal and external evidence, this essay will raise the question whether, despite some anachronistic references, Mayne's translations are not after all based for the most part on Donne's Latin Epigrams.

Since 1873 most Donne scholars have agreed with Alexander Grosart, who argued that Mayne's translations must be spurious because they contain some references Donne cannot have written.² About half of the poems in Mayne's "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams" refer to the war in the Netherlands. Grosart pointed out some obviously anachronistic references in a few of these, most significantly references to the 1629 siege of "Dukes-Wood" (i.e., s'Hertogenbosch). Three couplets, for example, are entitled "To the Prince of *Aurange*, on his famous Victory over the *Spaniards* in *Dukes-Wood*."³ Another poem, "A *Panegyrick* on the *Hollanders* being Lords of the Sea. Occasioned by the Authors

being in their Army at *Dukes-wood*," contains in addition to its anachronistic title references to events as late as the Dutch capture of the Spanish plate-fleet on the coast of Cuba in 1628.⁴ In the title of a fifth poem occurs a reference to its author's being "at the siege of *Duke's-Wood*."⁵ As Donne scholars since Grosart have agreed, the only victory by a Prince of Orange at a siege of s'Hertogenbosch took place in 1629. By 1629 Donne was the fifty-seven-year-old Dean of St. Paul's and unlikely to have been fighting a siege or still to have been writing his Latin Epigrams, early works probably written before 1591 and certainly antedating 1611. In any case, we know that Donne spent 1629 in England, not in the Netherlands. Since Donne cannot have been in the Dutch army at the siege of s'Hertogenbosch, scholars have reasoned that all Mayne's translations must be spurious.⁶

However, Grosart's five poems (occurring as a group toward the end of the "sheaf" of sixty) are the only ones that can perhaps be excluded on grounds of anachronism. Further, what no one seems to have noticed is that references to the siege of s'Hertogenbosch, though prominently placed in the titles of a few poems, are not related to the main subject of most of the thirty-two Epigrams on the war in the Netherlands. For example, the first twenty of these poems refer not to the 1629 Dutch siege of s'Hertogenbosch by Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, but, in a detailed and precise way, to the Spanish siege of Antwerp by Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma, between the summer of 1584 and the spring of 1585. The first five of these Epigrams, dealing with the construction of a town where a forest had stood, clearly refer not to s'Hertogenbosch (an established town since the twelfth century) but to the construction by Parma of his headquarters for the siege of Antwerp at Calloo. A sleepy, wooded village, "with a dozen cottages, with storks' nests on their roofs, sprinkled here and there among pastures and orchards—suddenly saw itself changed, as it were, into a thriving, bustling town. . . ." ⁷ As Mayne's translations phrase it:

A Wood into fair buildings chang'd we see;
And th'Oke stands City where 'twas fel'd a tree.

Falne Okes the Axe doth into Timber hew;
And a Town stands where Trees demolisht grew.

From a Woods ruines did these Buildings rise,
And it stood Grove where now it Rafters lies.

This naked Beam which beares up Roofes from
ground,
Was once with *branches* & fair *green top*, crown'd.

Wood yeelds to *stone*, boughs are made joyces here,
And where a *Cops* stood now fair streets appeare.⁸

True, the common title given to these five couplets makes reference to s'Hertogenbosch ("Upon a town built in the place where a wood grew; From whence 'tis called *Dukes-Wood*, or the *Burse*"). But the Epigrams that follow this heading have no connection to s'Hertogenbosch, which as a matter of fact had undergone no such dramatic change but was so named merely because of its magnificent park and forest that had once been the residence of the Dukes of Brabant.⁹ At Calloo, on the other hand, had taken place the very singular transformation that is the subject of the Epigrams.

Similarly, a second group of five Epigrams, on the artificial creation of a river running through the town, seems to refer to Parma's twelve-mile canal from Calloo to Steeken, dug during the summer of 1584 by hundreds of pioneers working day and night. "Through this artificial channel . . . came floats of timber, fleets of boats laden with provisions of life and munitions of death, building-materials, and every other requisite for the great undertaking, all to be disembarked at Calloo."¹⁰ Thus the five Epigrams of 1652, "Upon a navigable River cut through a Town built out of a Wood":

Horsmen turn sailers, *waves* roll where grew *woods*
And against *Nature* Art make ways [*sic*] through
floods.

The drownd land here a Crystall garment wears,
And her own trees, made Barges, once more bears.

The tree her womb bred on the back now floats
Of this o're-flown field, now in wandring Boats.

The ground whose head was once enricht with Okes,
Her Temples now steept in sea-water sokes.

The place where once grew Ash for warlike spears
The *Maze* makes *drunk* now with his brinish
tears[.]¹¹

A very different triumph of art over nature took place at the siege of s'Hertogenbosch, where two natural rivers, the Dommel and the Aa, had to be dammed up by the attacking Dutch forces.¹²

During the summer and fall of 1584 the Antwerpers, with the idea of hampering if not preventing a successful siege of the city, had caused sluices to be opened near Saftingen so that water flowed in a general inundation nearly to the gates of Antwerp. "A wide and shallow sea rolled over the fertile plains, while church steeples, the tops of lofty trees, and here and there the turrets of a castle, scarcely lifted themselves above the black waters, the peasants' houses, the granges, whole rural villages, having entirely disappeared."¹³ And according to a third group of five 1652 Epigrams:

The *Medows* which their perfum'd *locks* did boast
Ore-flown with waters have their perfumes lost.

The hungry Cow here lately did mistake;
And seeking grasse was cosen'd with a lake.

Here Fishes dwell, till now not us'd to fields;
And pasture ground here sportful *Gudgeons* yeelds.

Mere pleasant fields drownd by the wandring *Maze*,
See scaly flocks swim where once sheep did graze.

Dukes-wood where once thick bushes did appear,
Like a new Iland now stands in a meer.¹⁴

But s'Hertogenbosch, unlike Calloo, never did appear as an island surrounded by water. The mention of "Dukes-Wood" in the last of these five Epigrams is incongruous, considering that at the siege of s'Hertogenbosch the Dutch pioneers labored successfully to prevent the flooding of their siege works founded not on verdant fields but on swampy areas which they first had set about to drain and fill. At s'Hertogenbosch the general transformation was in effect to divert and block water from around the besieged town.¹⁵ At Antwerp, however (as in the Epigrams), just the opposite occurred.

This inundation of the fields around Antwerp did not disturb Parma's camp at Calloo, which was on high ground, out of reach of the flood. But the surrounding meadows were covered over, including former Spanish camp-sites where earlier "white tents [had]

dotted the green turf in every direction.”¹⁶ Thus the fourth group of five 1652 Epigrams, “Upon a piece of ground ore-flown, where once a Leaguer quartered”:

Here where Tents stood, *Mars* now to *Neptune*
yeelds,
And *Sea-nymphs* tread moist dances ore the fields.

Fishes now quarter where pavilions stood;
And the smooth Tench dies the sharp hook with
blood.

Finn'd Soldiers here in *Belgick* Quarters jar;
And the fierce Pike in troubled streams makes war.

Dutchman! This Grove once hatcht the Warlick
Speer,
Which angry Perches on their backs now wear.

Gudgeons, where soldiers lay, ly trencht in Sand,
Fearing the bloudie Colours of the Land.¹⁷

Dutch tents around s'Hertogenbosch in 1629 had to be pitched during and after the draining of the marshes; it was the other way around with the Spanish tents at Antwerp, which suffered the inundation described in the Epigrams.

Summing up the internal evidence of inauthenticity, then, we find that five of the sixty Epigrams, occurring as a group near the end of the “sheaf,” contain anachronistic references (especially references to the siege of s'Hertogenbosch) that cannot have been translated from Donne's Latin. In addition, a preceding group of twenty Epigrams about the siege of Antwerp contains two incongruous mentions of “Dukes-Wood.” But these twenty Epigrams, because of their clear emphasis on events of 1584-85, cannot simply be dismissed as spurious on grounds of anachronism. Moreover, seven additional Epigrams on the war in the Netherlands contain no datable references; and twenty-eight of the Epigrams have nothing to do with the Netherlands at all. All things considered, the case that has been made against Mayne's translations depends on slender evidence.

Why has this case been so generally persuasive? One reason is that both sides in the argument over inauthenticity have focused attention mainly on internal evidence, while at the same time they

have been to varying degrees unaware of important external evidence about the circumstances of the Epigrams' publication. Conclusions about authenticity based on purely external evidence have generally come down to judgments about the moral character of Jasper Mayne or of Donne's son, who have variously been characterized as perfect scoundrels. But this remains matter of opinion.

The earliest external evidence concerning Donne's Latin Epigrams is his own letter to Sir Henry Goodyere during the spring of 1611. In this letter Donne requests the return of some manuscripts, among them "*epigrammata mea Latina*," which had apparently been lent to Goodyere some time previously.¹⁸ The next evidence of such Epigrams in a Stationers' Register entry to publisher Humphrey Moseley, which refers to the licensing on 15 March 1650 of "a small tract called *Fasciculus poematũ & Epigramatũ miscellaneorum*, by Dr Jno Donne late Deane of St Pauls."¹⁹ Moseley did not immediately publish a book with this Latin title. Instead, he published Mayne's translations in the 1652 edition of *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters*. This volume was introduced with a dedicatory letter by John Donne, Jr., who wrote that the book contains "Things of the *least* and *greatest* weight, that ever fell from my *Fathers Pen*." Following this letter appears Ben Jonson's poem in praise of Donne as an epigrammatist.²⁰ Thus far the external evidence points to the existence of a copy of Donne's Latin Epigrams in the hands of Humphrey Moseley, and to the belief by Moseley and John Donne, Jr., that the Mayne translations published in 1652 did substantially represent Donne's Latin originals.

Further important evidence about the Epigrams is found in Moseley's advertising catalogs—lists of books available or soon to be available from his firm. A catalog published in 1653 lists "Paradoxes, Problems, Characters, &c. by Dr. *Donne D.* of *St. Paul's*, to which is added a Book of Epigrams, written in Latin by the same Author; translated by *Jasper Mayne D. D.*"²¹ A revised catalog Moseley produced in 1654 again includes Mayne's translations listed under the same title; however an appended section of this 1654 catalog, headed "These Books I do purpose to print very speedily," gives a separate listing of "*Fasciculus Poematum & Epigrammatum Miscelaneorum Authore Iohanne Donne D. D.*"²² Moreover, in a 1656 version of his catalog Moseley again listed the "Paradoxes, Problems, Characters, &c."; but this time a separate listing of "*Fasciculus Poematum & Epigrammatum Miscelaneorum*" appears under the heading "Bookes lately printed for Humphrey

Moseley.”²³ On the evidence of Moseley’s catalogs, by 1656 he had published both Mayne’s translations and, separately, the Latin text of Donne’s Epigrams.

Though no copy of the *Fasciculus* is known to be extant, evidence corroborating that of Moseley’s catalogs may be found in William London’s *Catalogue of The most vendible Books in England* (1658). London lists not only Mayne’s translations in the 1652 edition but also (in a separate section headed “Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Bookes”) “D. *Donn* Fasciculus Poematum & Epigrammatum Miscelaneorum.”²⁴ Significantly, in his preface “To the Most Candid and Ingenious Reader” London makes a special point of claiming that, as for the Latin books he has included in his catalog, “I take only such as come in my way . . . ; such as I mention are to my own knowledg usually sold in most places of repute in the Country.”²⁵ It is possible (though unlikely) that, notwithstanding London’s testimony, Moseley merely advertised but did not actually publish the book.²⁶ But whether or not Donne’s Latin Epigrams were actually published, their simultaneous advertisement with Mayne’s translations by two different booksellers after 1654 makes it unlikely that the translations were not in some way connected to Donne’s Epigrams in the *Fasciculus*. In particular, why would Moseley advertise the Latin originals, unless the translations he had printed were indeed based on Donne’s poems, albeit containing some anachronistic additions?

Yet further evidence from Moseley’s catalogs suggests even more strongly a connection between Mayne’s translations and the *Fasciculus*. In a catalog apparently produced in 1660, Moseley again listed separate issues of the Mayne translations and the *Fasciculus*. But in addition here, in a section headed “Bookes now in the Presse, and to be Printed,” he advertised “*Fasciculus Poematum et Epigramatum Miscelaneorum Authore Johanne Dome* [*sic*] D. D. and Englished by *Jasper Maine*, Doctor in Divinity.”²⁷ In other words, by 1660 Moseley at least intended to publish in a third volume both the Latin Epigrams and Mayne’s translations. Again no copy of this edition is known to be extant, and again it is possible that Moseley merely intended to publish but did not actually publish the book.²⁸ But whether or not this combined edition was ever actually published, Moseley’s advertising it in his last catalog (Moseley died in early 1661) makes it virtually certain that Mayne’s translations were somehow based on Donne’s Latin Epigrams. Why would Moseley advertise a combined edition of the

English and Latin poems unless the translations were indeed based on Donne's poems, albeit containing some anachronistic additions?

Finally, there is also evidence that the 1660 edition advertised by Moseley was not the earliest combined edition of Donne's Latin Epigrams and Mayne's translations. Anthony à Wood, following his brief biography of Donne in *Athenae Oxoniensis*, listed among Donne's works "*Fasciculus Poematum & Epigrammatum Miscellaneorum*. Translated into English by Jasp. Mayne, D. D. with this title, *A sheaf of miscellany Epigrams*. Lond. 1632. oct."²⁹ Again, no copy of such a 1632 volume is known to be extant. But Wood's 1632 date makes sense in that the references in Mayne's translations to events of 1628 and 1629 would still have been current in 1632. It seems more likely that Mayne would have included these topical references for publication in 1632 than that he would have added them in 1652 when their import would already have become obscure. Moreover, in 1632 John Donne, Jr., and Jasper Mayne were students together at Christ Church College, Oxford. Mayne was more likely to have been translating poetry at Oxford in 1632 than in 1652, when his career as a poet was finished and he had directed his literary energies to the writing of pamphlets and sermons. On the whole we have reason to credit Wood's listing of a 1632 edition of the *Fasciculus* with translations by Mayne.

In conclusion, regarding the internal evidence we can now point to the distinct possibility that Mayne for some reason may have inserted anachronisms into his translations of poems originally written about a unique combination of events that occurred half a century earlier, at the time when Donne was beginning at Oxford. What more likely explanation can there be for the bizarre and superficial appearance of references to the siege of s'Hertogenbosch in poems primarily about the siege of Antwerp? Surely neither Jasper Mayne nor John Donne, Jr., was likely to have written poems on this subject. As for external evidence, we can now ask what was the relation between Mayne's versions and the Latin Epigrams Moseley evidently published? Final answers to these questions and others must await discovery of the *Fasciculus*. But pending that discovery, Donne scholars should look again at the translations, most of which contain nothing contradicting their claim to be based on Donne's Latin Epigrams.

Notes

¹ "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams. Written in Latin by J. D. Translated by J. Main D. D.," pp. 88-103, in Donne's *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters, Written By Dr Donne Dean of Pauls: To which is added a Book of Epigrams: Written in Latin by the same Author; translated into English by J: Maine, D. D. . . .* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1652). One of the translated Epigrams is preceded by its Latin original (*ibid.*, p. 101).

² Controversy on the point began with Augustus Jessopp's introduction to Donne's *Essays in Divinity* (London: J. Tuppel, 1855), p. xiii. Jessopp was refuted by Alexander Grosart, *Complete Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. (London: Robson & Sons, 1873), I, xix-xxiv. See also Jessopp's "Donne's Epigrams," *The Athenaeum* (19 July 1873), p. 81; R. D., "Donne's Epigrams," *ibid.* (2 August 1873), p. 148; Grosart, "Epigrams Mis-assigned to Dr. Donne," *ibid.* (9 August 1873), pp. 179-80; Brinsley Nicholson, "The So-Called Donne Epigrams," *ibid.* (16 August 1873), pp. 210-11; Jessopp's untitled note, *ibid.*, p. 211; E. K. Chambers' edition of Donne's *Poems*, 2 vols. (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1896), II, 308-11; Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of Dr. John Donne*, 2 vols. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959), I, 16; Evelyn Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), pp. 134-35; Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of Dr John Donne* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1958), p. 73, n. 3; and, finally, Baird W. Whitlock, "Donne's University Years," *English Studies* 43 (1962), 15-19. Alone among Donne scholars, Whitlock has held that "students of Donne have been robbed of much potentially important material by editorial suppression of the 1652 epigrams" (*ibid.*, p. 19). Whitlock's charge came after Sir Herbert Grierson and succeeding editors had not so much as mentioned the poems in their editions. Despite Whitlock's assertion, R. C. Bald did not even mention Jasper Mayne or the 1652 Epigrams in his (still the standard) biography, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970).

³ "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams," p. 97.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶ Whitlock pointed out the synecdochical illogicality of this judgment ("Donne's University Years," p. 19).

⁷ John Lothrop Motley, *The History of the United Netherlands*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1861), I, 157.

⁸ "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams," pp. 93-94.

⁹ Daniel Heinsius, *Histoire du Siège de Bolduc* (Louvain, 1631), p. 27.

¹⁰ Motley, *United Netherlands*, I, 158.

¹¹ "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams," pp. 94-95.

¹² Heinsius, *Siège de Bolduc*, pp. 50-51.

¹³ Motley, *United Netherlands*, I, 160.

¹⁴ "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams," p. 95.

¹⁵ Heinsius, *Siège de Bolduc*, pp. 48-53.

¹⁶ Motley, *United Netherlands*, I, 157.

¹⁷ "A sheaf of Miscellany Epigrams," pp. 95-96.

¹⁸ John Donne, *Poems* (London: John Marriott, 1633), pp. 351-52. E. K. Chambers first pointed out Donne's reference to the Epigrams in his edition of the *Poems*, II, 310-11. Thus the first discussions, in 1873, had been carried on without even recognizing Donne's reference to "*epigrammata mea Latina*," as if it were still distinctly possible that Donne never wrote such poems.

¹⁹ *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, 1640-1708*, 3 vols. (London: Stationers', 1913), I, 423. The entry in the Stationers' Register is dated 10 July 1653, but includes mention of the date of the licensing in 1650. First to point out this entry was Evelyn Simpson, *Prose Works* (1924), p. 134.

²⁰ *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters*, sigs. A2-A2v and A8v. Augustus Jessopp first cited the evidence of John Donne, Jr.'s dedicatory letter in "Donne's Epigrams," *The Athenaeum* (19 July 1873), p. 81. The proximity of the Jonson poem to the letter of Donne's son was first pointed out by Chambers, *Poems*, II, 308.

21 One of these 1653 catalogs is at Harvard University's Houghton Library, bound in at the end of a copy of [Gregorio Leti's] *The Scarlet Gown*, trans. Henry Cogan (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1653). Headed "Courteous Reader, These Books following are printed for *Humphrey Moseley*, and are to be sold at his Shop at the *Prince's Armes* in St. Paul's Church-yard," the catalog is a separately printed octavo (A⁸), including 140 consecutively numbered items, among which Mayne's translations are No. 127 on sig. A7v. Much information (some inaccurate) about Moseley's catalogs is in John Curtis Reed, "Humphrey Moseley, Publisher," *Oxford Bibliographical Society Proceedings* 2 (1927-30), 117-18.

22 One of these 1654 catalogs is bound in at the end of the Houghton Library's copy of Philip Massinger, *Three New Playes* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1655). Here "Courteous Reader," still a separately printed octavo (A⁸), has been enlarged to contain 180 consecutively numbered items among which Mayne's translations are No. 39 on sig. A2v; and the *Fasciculus* is No. 177 on sig. A8v.

23 One of these 1656 catalogs is bound in at the end of the Houghton Library's copy of Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1656). Here "Courteous Reader" is a separately printed octavo (a⁸, b²), including 246 consecutively numbered items among which Mayne's translations are No. 39 on sig. a2v; and the *Fasciculus* is No. 181 on sig. a8.

24 William London, *A Catalogue of The most vendible Books in England* (London: William London, 1658), sigs. V2v and Gg1. London's reference to an edition of the Epigrams was noted first by Keynes, *A Bibliography* (1958), p. 73, n. 3. But Keynes did not understand or did not notice London's separate listing of both the Latin poems and Mayne's translations.

25 London, *Catalogue*, sig. C1.

26 A number of the books advertised by Moseley between 1641 and 1660 have not been found. John Curtis Reed was unable to find any copies of 105 books Moseley entered or advertised, including the *Fasciculus* ("Humphrey Moseley, Publisher," pp. 125-31).

27 One of these 1660 catalogs is at the University of Pennsylvania's Van Pelt Library, bound in at the end of a copy of Philip Massinger's *Three New Playes* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1655). Here a 1656 "Courteous Reader" has been truncated, its final two leaves (b²) having been replaced with eight new octavo leaves (B⁸, with B3 signed "b3"). This gathering is headed "New Additions to the Catalogue [*sic*]" and includes 166 items numbered consecutively from No. 198 to No. 363, among which the combined edition of Donne's Latin Epigrams with Mayne's translations is No. 339 on sig. B7v. Geoffrey Keynes, though he gave no reference, evidently had seen a copy of this a⁸, B⁸ catalog; since the 1914 version of his *Bibliography*, he has quoted inaccurately the listing of a combined edition without noticing either that it was a combined edition, or that the same catalog also included (on sigs. a2v and a8 respectively) separate listings of the Mayne translations and of the *Fasciculus*. Cf. Geoffrey Keynes, *Bibliography of the Works of Dr John Donne* (Cambridge: Baskerville Club, 1914), p. 50, n. 1; and *A Bibliography* (1973), p. 94, n. 3.

28 John Curtis Reed was unaware of any Moseley catalog later than 1656 and, consequently, was unaware of the advertisement of a combined edition of the Epigrams.

29 Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Bennet, 1691-92), I, 475. Wood later in his list cited the familiar 1652 duodecimo edition of the *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes, Characters*, evidently intending to distinguish these two editions. Wood's mention of the Latin title of the Epigrams is the only seventeenth-century mention I have found apart from the ones in the Stationers' Register and in Moseley's editions. Since Wood undoubtedly did not get the Latin title from the Stationers' Register, he almost certainly had seen a copy of the *Fasciculus*, either a 1632 edition or one of Moseley's after 1654 that he dated incorrectly. It should be noted that, if a 1632 edition was the source of Wood's citation, he has misrepresented the title-page in at least one respect: Jasper Mayne was not doctor of divinity until 1646. Keynes dismissed as an error the listing of a 1632 edition of the Epigrams in William Lowndes, *The Bibliographer's Manual of English Literature*, 2 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1834), I, 598. But Lowndes undoubtedly took his information from Wood and did not, as Keynes seems to suppose, independently mistake the date (cf. Keynes, *A Bibliography*, p. 94, n. 3).