

# Leeds Studies in English

New Series XLI

2010

Essays in Honour of Oliver Pickering

Edited by

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*Leeds Studies in English*

<[www.leeds.ac.uk/lse](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse)>

School of English

University of Leeds

2010

# For Honour and Glory: Reading Selden and Sylvester in the Seventeenth Century

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Much of the best recent scholarship that has explored the histories of early modern reading has followed the counsel offered, and the priorities established, by Francis Bacon, when he offered 'Advice to Fulke Greville on his studies' (c. 1599–1600). There Bacon argued that instrumental reading, and the notes taken from it, must fall into one of two kinds: 'He that shall out of his own reading gather for the use of another, must (as I think) do it by epitome, or abridgement, or under heads and common places.'<sup>1</sup> Reading for one's own use or for the use of another may well be, of course, very different activities; but Bacon's separation between on the one hand 'epitome, or abridgement', notes whose organization follows that of the text from which they derive, and on the other 'heads or common places', notes systematically organized by topic, concept or theme, has retained real force. So too has his strong preference for one kind of note-taking over the other. 'The epitome of any special book', Bacon wrote, 'is but a short narration of that which the book itself doth discourse at large', a compression but not a useful reorganization of the source text. On the other hand, 'collections under heads and common places', he argued, offered 'far more profit and use': 'they have in them a kind of observation, without the which neither long life breeds experience, nor great reading great knowledge'.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent historians of reading have expanded the field they survey to include, alongside Bacon's epitomes and commonplace books, the marks that early modern readers left in their books and the notes they made there also, bringing new materials (and new materiality) to their and our studies.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the priorities established by Bacon have meant in practice that much more attention has been paid to the subsequent organization of reading notes in commonplace books — 'notions in garrison', in the phrase of Thomas Fuller's made famous

<sup>1</sup> *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 102–06 (p. 102); the attribution to Bacon is confirmed by Vickers in his 'The Authenticity of Bacon's Earliest Writings', *Studies in Philology*, 94 (1997), 248–96, having been questioned by Paul E. J. Hammer, 'The Earl of Essex, Fulke Greville, and the Employment of Scholars', *Studies in Philology*, 91 (1994), 167–80.

<sup>2</sup> 'Advice to Fulke Greville on his studies': *Bacon*, ed. by Vickers, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

as the title of Peter Beal's foundational article — than to the records of the stages of reading that may intervene.<sup>4</sup>

Writing a quarter of a century after offering his advice to Greville, Bacon had scarcely changed his opinion of reading notes taken by epitome, dismissing them *de haut en bas* in his essay 'Of Studies' (1625): 'distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things'.<sup>5</sup> But need the reading of all such notes be, as Bacon's adjective implies, 'insipid, tasteless, vapid' (*OED* a2b)? The survival of two examples of such reading notes in Birmingham may suggest not. The first manuscript, Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, MS KWH 16/26, is a series of well-ordered reading notes taken from John Selden's treatise, *The Titles of Honour*, first published in 1614, revised and expanded by Selden for a second edition in 1631, and then printed again, long after Selden's death, in a third edition of 1672.<sup>6</sup> Occupying ten leaves over five folio sheets, the notes themselves are not dated, but they may well be datable to the years immediately following the publication of the second edition in 1631: they follow the pagination of this edition, the mixed hand in which they are transcribed is typical of the period, and so are the two paper stocks that make up the manuscript.<sup>7</sup>

One of Bacon's earliest objections to epitomes had been that they moved simply from beginning to end, and that their readers (and by implication their compilers), 'like men that would visit all places, pass through every place in such post' — that is, 'at express speed, in haste' (*OED* n3, †P4) — 'as they have no time to observe as they go, or make profit of their travel'.<sup>8</sup> These anonymous notes from the 1630s might in some ways be thought to give evidence for such an intellectual itinerary: they begin at the beginning, 'The first Part | sheet the first' the transcriber notes (fol. 1r; see figure 1), and end at the end, transcribing and in effect co-opting Selden's motto, 'Deo servatori Honor & Gloria' (fol. 10v; 'honour and glory to God [our] saviour'). Moreover, though the early pages of the manuscript are thick with notes, their density very obviously lessens the further they move through the *Titles*.<sup>9</sup> There are, to give just one measure, thirty-nine lines of notes excluding the heading on fol. 1r; fol. 10v has only three. To give another, fol. 3r has seventy-three lines of notes excluding headings; while fols 7v–8v are in fact blank. If not 'in such post' throughout, the speed of reading recorded here through the frequency of note-taking does seem to vary, accelerating and decelerating over the course of the manuscript.

The use to which these notes might once have been put remains to be explored; but certainly they were intended for use. Bacon starchy invited challenge in deprecating epitomes: 'let him that never read Livy tell me what he is the wiser for Florus's epitome'.<sup>10</sup> But the

<sup>4</sup> Peter Beal, 'Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book' in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991*, ed. by W. Speed Hill (Binghampton, NY: RETS, 1993), pp.131–47.

<sup>5</sup> 'Of Studies', in *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral* (1625): Bacon, ed. by Vickers, p. 439.

<sup>6</sup> The manuscript's provenance is unknown before its having been bequeathed to Birmingham University Library by the estate of its former Librarian, K. W. Humphreys (1916–1994) in 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Two watermarks are present in the manuscript, both of kinds widely used across the decade, as the *Thomas L. Gravell Watermark Archive* makes clear: that in the first sheet (fols 1–2), comprised of a column and grapes, is similar to Gravell COL.017.1 (pages measure approximately 278 x 190mm); that in the last four sheets (fols 3–10), comprised of a shield, posthorn and fleur-de-lis, is similar to Gravell SLD.105.2 (pages measure approximately 295 x 187mm). See Daniel W. Mosser and Ernest W. Sullivan, with Len Hatfield and David H. Radcliffe, *The Thomas L. Gravell Watermark Archive* (1996–), online at [www.gravell.org](http://www.gravell.org); accessed 10 September 2010.

<sup>8</sup> 'Advice to Fulke Greville on his studies', in *Bacon*, ed. by Vickers, pp. 102–03.

<sup>9</sup> Contractions in manuscript transcriptions will be expanded in *italics*; deleted material will be shown [-thus].

<sup>10</sup> 'Advice to Fulke Greville on his studies', in *Bacon*, ed. by Vickers, p. 103.

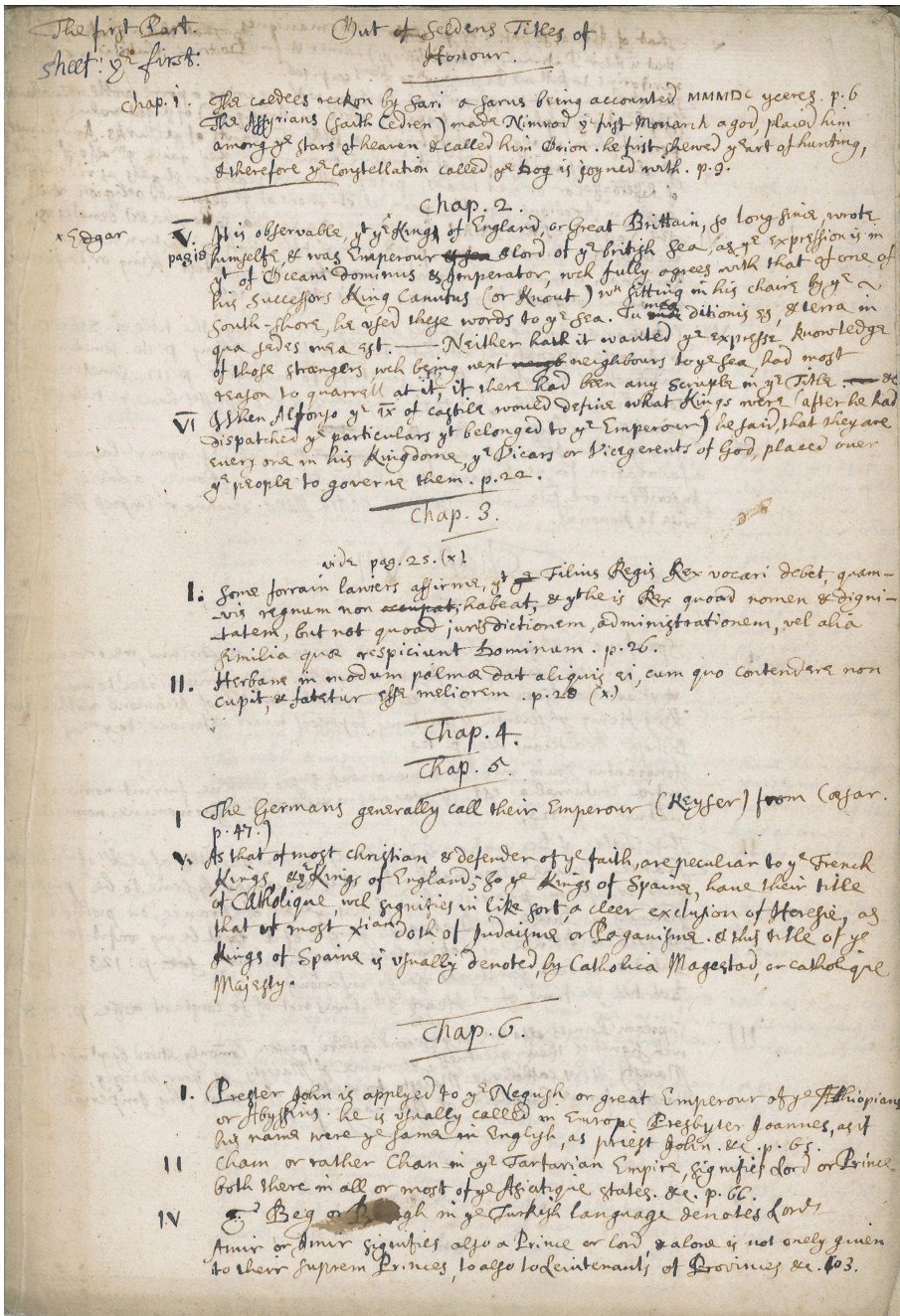


Figure 1: University of Birmingham, MS KWH 16/26, fol. 1r. Image by courtesy of Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

structure of the manuscript can allow us today to be wiser about the ways in which its transcriber anticipated its later functioning. This is not, for important reasons, a gathered manuscript: the five bifolia of which it is comprised are simply stacked one on top of another. That the first recto of each successive bifolium is annotated with its place in the sequence ('Sheet: y<sup>e</sup> 2<sup>d</sup>: | Seldens Titles of Hon.:', fol. 3r), in combination with the absence of stabbed stitching holes, may additionally suggest that they were not at first bound, since the numbering would provide a way of re-ordering the sheets if they at any stage became shuffled out of order. Nonetheless, the presence of increasingly large areas of blank space on the later folios, throws into relief the organization that they still possess: even if no notes are taken from particular sections of Selden's book, its internal articulations are still noted by part, chapter, and numbered sub-division between and before the notes recorded. This manuscript, then, and its compiler, were concerned to preserve not only an abridgement of the contents of its source text (a selective activity) but a record of its arrangements and organization (a neutral activity). The manuscript may condense Selden's long treatise, but the form it takes over that length is still preserved.

This question of arrangement leads naturally to (I think) the more interesting of the two manuscripts, Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, MS 421 (formerly MS 6/iii/6), for here the sense a reader will have of the nature of the manuscript depends in large part upon the direction from which it is approached.<sup>11</sup> The catalogue record for MS 421 accurately describes it as a 'Notebook containing poems and notes on a variety of subjects', attributing them to an 'unknown writer'; the manuscript itself is a single sextodecimo gathering, sewn through its centre between fols 8 and 9, a format, as Peter Beal has noted, commonly used in the early modern period 'for small pocket-books, notebooks, and the like'.<sup>12</sup> The texts it contains have been transcribed by a single amateur copyist, able to write both a mixed and a purely italic hand, generally though not consistently using that distinction of script to differentiate titles from texts or for particular emphasis. What the catalogue record cannot make clear, however, is the disposition of the material within the manuscript; and here its being a sewn booklet, rather than a set of unsewn bifolia as is the case for MS KWH 16/26, matters, for the poems and notes transcribed in the manuscript are separated by their placement within the booklet, which was used from both ends. One sequence of twelve poems transcribed in the manuscript shares a common orientation, occupying fols 1r–5v; a second sequence of extracts, notes and other poems begins at the other end of the reversed booklet, occupying fols 6v–16v, but the first transcription in this orientation begins this foliation on fol. 16v, where it appears to be upside down to a reader approaching from the direction of fol. 1r. This second sequence then proceeds in its inverted orientation to fol. 6v; it is written in a smaller, more compact variation of the hand used by the scribe for the first sequence of transcription. This practice of reversing a manuscript, as Beal records, is common in the period, and whatever apparent inconvenience it may occasion ('whichever way the volume is held the writing at the other end will be upside down', he notes), it often had the practical purpose of serving to keep apart different kinds of texts, or texts dealing with different subjects, within a single booklet.<sup>13</sup> Reversed use, in the case of MS 421, certainly does, as we shall see,

<sup>11</sup> MS 421 was purchased from H. M. Fletcher in August 1957; the firm has no record of its provenance before this point (I am grateful to Keith Fletcher for his assistance).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology, 1450–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 377 ('SEXTODECIMO').

<sup>13</sup> Beal, *A Dictionary*, p. 344 ('REVERSE').

keep apart two kinds of material — as we shall see: one secular, the other religious — while at the same time inviting questions as to their possible connections.

The first sequence of material in MS 421, as described above, represents over fols 1r–5v a brief miscellany of predominantly secular and amatory lyric verse of the kind familiar from many miscellanies of the earlier and mid-seventeenth century. None of the poems in this first sequence is attributed in the manuscript, and of the dozen only three — to be explored in greater detail — seem to have circulated elsewhere. The ninth poem transcribed, ‘A short funeral Elegie on the death of | E:M: who departed this life 27<sup>th</sup> Jan: | ~56’, offers a likely *terminus ad quem* for the transcription of the majority of this section: the tenth poem, ‘Another on the same E:M:’, and the eleventh, a doggerel quatrain — ‘What mortal eye is here | That wil not drop a teare | And be extreamly sorry | For his great loss of B: Murrey’ (fol. 5v) — both explicitly follow the ninth, and may by implication supply a full name for a loved and lost ‘Elizabeth Murrey’ (Bess) who together the three poems commemorate. The lighter ink in which the twelfth poem is transcribed suggests that it was a later addition to a section already substantially complete, extending but substantially altering what amounts to a short, personal selection of verse apparently circulating in the mid-1650s.

Though it ends, as we have seen, with poems of loss, this section of the manuscript had begun with gentle, amatory lyric. Its opening lines strike a familiar masculine lyric pose, lit here with pre-nuptial unconcern: ‘It is *your* beauty fairest not the wealth | *Your* father meanes to giue you, but *yourselfe* | That I do court’ (fol. 1r). The tone, and the lifting iambic metre, are continued through the poems that follow across fols 1v–2r: ‘To a Gentlewoman on a Sigh’ (‘Fairest you desire to know’), ‘To excuse the abrupt takeinge of a kisse’ (‘If that I did offend, *and* do amisse’), and ‘Of one *which* had been faire *and* now troubled with the green sicknesse’ (‘If I were young as you are, would I proue’). These first four poems appear unique to the manuscript, an argument perhaps that like the closing four poems in this transcription sequence (and also the sixth), they are the work of an unknown, amateur versifier, whose fair copy notebook the manuscript might represent.<sup>14</sup>

Of the three poems transcribed in MS 421 that have been more or less plausibly attributed in other sources, two were recorded by Peter Beal in his *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* and one (it now appears) misidentified by Margaret Crum.<sup>15</sup> These poems, as well as raising questions of attribution, might be thought to have a thematic connection with the otherwise anonymous poems in this first transcription sequence. The poem beginning on fol. 2v, ‘A contention betwixt a wife, a widow, *and* a Maid’, is a compressed and re-organized text of Sir John Davies’s poem, beginning at what is line 25 of the printed text first published in the second edition of Francis Davison’s *A Poetical Rhapsody* (1608). The text in MS 421 (Beal’s DaJ 287) was unknown to Robert Krueger, Davies’s last editor, and in its treatment of Davies’s poem adds another variation to the textual tradition as represented by the three textual witnesses on which that edition drew. Two of these witnesses, one printed, *A Poetical Rhapsody* (1608), and one in manuscript, Oxford, All Souls College, MS 155 (DaJ 286), broadly support one another in their ordering of the poems’ stanzas; the third, London, British Library, MS Additional

<sup>14</sup> The poems have no recorded matches in the online Union First Line Index of Manuscript Poetry (firstlines.folger.edu), which records poetry from the collections of seven institutions — the Bodleian, Beinecke (Osborn Collection), British Library, Folger Shakespeare Library, Harvard, Huntington and Leeds (Brotherton Collection) — and two printed first-line indexes.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, Volume One: 1540–1625*, 2 parts (London: Mansell, 1980); Margaret Crum, *First-Line Index of English Poetry, 1500–1800, in Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library*, 2 vols

22601 (DaJ 285), Krueger takes to be ‘an early, unrevised version [...] with variant readings and with the speeches arranged in eccentric sequence’.<sup>16</sup> The sequence of lines in MS 421 is not identical with that in MS Additional 22601, but in its different organization of the poem as it is represented in print and in the All Souls manuscript, it does give evidence of another version in which the poem must once have circulated, tightening the body of its exchanges through omission and recasting its end through transposition. The text in MS 421 clearly does derive from a witness now apparently lost as its first line shows a case of self-corrected eyeskip, the scribe having anticipated the line’s ending in its centre, jumping from the indefinite article to the wrong noun and then back again: ‘If to be bourne a [-g] Maide, be such a grace’ (fol. 2v). The adjustments to the poem’s line ordering cast it in MS 421 not as an occasional poem so much as a more general reflection on the equally uninviting choices that in this ordering its last two lines offer: ‘do *what* you wil marry or marry not | both this stage *and* that repentance breeds’ (fol. 4r).<sup>17</sup>

The adjusted text of Davies’s poem keeps company with the poem that follows it in MS 421, and this poem, too, is a rare poem in manuscript: ‘On the complexions *and* constitutions’ (‘The faire to folly is easy to be led’). Here, though, matters of attribution become more problematic. Margaret Crum noted a text of this poem in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poetry 213, fol. 80r (Crum T548), a post-Restoration miscellany owned and transcribed by one Robert Fleming, some of whose own autograph verse it also contains. Crum was misled by this into supposing the poem Fleming’s own, but in fact his own notes on fols 30v and 82r *rev.* make clear that it this is simply a copy in his hand of a poem he first encountered elsewhere, a copy that probably dates from the last third of the century. A second, shorter scribal text, under the title ‘Verses of women’, is found in London, British Library, MS Additional 18044, fol. 71v, but this, too, is a later text, part of the ‘Collections out | of seuerall | Authors by Mar= | maduke Raudon | Eboriencis 1662 | Hodsden’ (fol. 1v). It is easy to see how the poem might have attracted Fleming, Raudon, and the anonymous compiler of MS 421 if one is attracted by the masculine misogyny that can characterize much manuscript verse of the period. After its first ten lines survey and find fault with women of various kinds for their various attributes, much as the text of Davies’s poem had looked wryly at the various possibilities open to maids, wives, and widows, the poem closes with a couplet whose outlook chimes with the earlier poem’s reluctance: ‘In time my friend for thy more quiet life | too far trust no complexion with thy Wife’ (MS 421, fol. 4r; the text in Fleming’s miscellany varies this ending, softening its mistrust). What might have been the source of this text? It clearly is a text taken from an intermediate witness, for its final line again shows a transcription error, the initial consonant of ‘Wife’ written over an *l*-graph, caught up from the previous line’s rhyme. The poems, rare in themselves, are perhaps even rarer in combination; and MS 421 extends, therefore, the evidence of a limited early modern circulation, if present-day survivals are a reliable guide, and extends the circulation of this poem back into the century.

The same cannot be said of the third poem in this section of the manuscript, the lyric ‘Aske me no more’, which has until recently been commonly attributed to Thomas Carew following

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. by Robert Krueger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 412; the two manuscripts are discussed more fully in Gabriel Heaton, *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments: From George Gascoigne to Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 114, 197–99.

<sup>17</sup> Taking Krueger’s line-numbering, DaJ 287 runs: 25–36, 41–52, 67–72, 77–96, 105–16, 133–44, 161–68, 213–20, 201–04, 181–84.

publication in his *Poems* (1640), but, as Scott Nixon has suggested and Margaret Forey recently confirmed, is a poem in fact written by William Strode.<sup>18</sup> Unscribed as this poem is in MS 421 its authorship is not here at issue, though it suggestively amplifies the problems of manuscript attribution raised by the anonymous poem, ‘On the complexions *and* constitutions’. What does matter, however, and what seems clear, is that the compiler of MS 421 encountered these three poems, and perhaps others as yet unrecognized among the unattributed verse in the collection, through manuscript circulation, rather than through print, as the order of stanzas in ‘Aske me no more’, different in manuscript from print, confirms here. The majority of the other manuscript texts of ‘Aske me no more’, as Forey reminds us, date from the 1630s and 1640s, making this a relatively late example; the two other extant manuscripts of Davies’s poem are both earlier, probably dating from no later than the first decade of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> MS 421 is rare, and accordingly valuable, then, for preserving alongside its early evidence of one poem’s circulation such late evidence of two other poems’ continuing circulation among manuscript circles.

The dating of this sequence of transcription is of course aided by the date, terminal in more than one sense, at which they arrive: ‘27<sup>th</sup> Jan: | ~56’. The poems, having shared a materiality in manuscript, share also an interest in courtship and marriage, composing (one might imagine) a narrative sequence of sorts, beginning with poems of attraction and social intercourse, progressing through poems that debate the ills that may be in marriage, including a poem — ‘Aske me no more’ — that seems to signal a resolution to this debate in pleasure and possibility, only then for that narrative to be closed abruptly by the three elegies on ‘E:M:’, and an *envoi* added later. But how might this imagined narrative be aligned with that within which the other material in the manuscript might be located? For if the secular poems that the manuscript contains in its first orientation offer to be read within one kind of history, the religious poems that it contains in its reversed orientation shape themselves within a very different history and a very different textual culture.

To turn MS 421 through 180 degrees, head to foot, is to begin a very different reading of the manuscript from a very different starting point. Here, rather than complete poems, are a series of short extracts from a much longer, initially unidentified poem, a poem abbreviated here to epitomes; and here, too, rather than the rising iambic lift of mid-century couplets, is an altogether more commanding metric, and an altogether longer historical perspective:

The 1<sup>l</sup> day *of the* 1<sup>l</sup> weeke

Know bold blasphemers that before he built  
A hel to punish the presumptuous guilt  
Of those ungodly whose proud sense dares cite  
And censure too his wisdom infinite. (fol. 16v, rev.)

A side-note, ruled off on the left-hand margin of the page further glosses this command: ‘The Atheist confuted questioning *what* god did before he made the world’ (fol. 16v, rev.). A further eighteen pages of similar extracts follow this opening, some as short as a single line and others as long as eighteen lines, generally accompanied by their side-notes, and headed by a record of the poem’s progression, day-by-day and week-by-week; the extracts are interspersed, on fols 12v to 11r, rev., and on fol. 9v–r, rev., with numbered prose summaries of the same source.

<sup>18</sup> Scott Nixon, ‘“Aske me no more” and the Manuscript Verse Miscellany’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 29 (1999), 97–130; Margaret Forey, ‘Manuscript Evidence and the Author of “Aske me no more”: William Strode, not Thomas Carew’, *English Manuscript Studies, 1100–1700*, 12 (2005), 180–200.

<sup>19</sup> *The Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. by Krueger, pp. 435, 445.



This beginning, ‘The 1<sup>l</sup> day of the 1<sup>l</sup> weeke’, is recalled later in the manuscript, in the last of the extracts, whose source it serves to identify and confirm:

Say not my hand this worke to end hath brought  
Nor this my virtue hath attained to  
Say rather this, this God by me hath wrought  
Gods author of the little good I do.

*The end of the weekes of du Bartas* (fol. 7v, rev.)

The beginning here, clearly, has been the beginning: creation as narrated in the two hexameral epics, *La Semaine ou Création du monde* (1578) and *La Seconde Semaine* (1584), written in French by Guillaume de Salluste, sieur du Bartas, and translated into English — the source here — by Josuah Sylvester as *Du Bartas his Divine Weekes and Workes*, first published in complete form in 1608, ‘corrected and augmented’ in 1611, and then variously aggrandized in later, larger editions up to and after Sylvester’s death in 1618.

Seven further poems by Sylvester follow on from ‘*The end of the weekes of du Bartas*’ on fols 7r–6v, rev., and their presence establishes their source with some certainty. The seven additional poems comprise: the two dedicatory sonnets from Sylvester’s *Urania* (first published independently in 1605), four selections from his *Epigrams and Epitaphes Upon Warre and Peace* (first published independently in 1599), and the poem ‘Of a King’, translated by Sylvester from the Latin of Henry Smith and included in *The Parliament of Vertues Royal* (first published in 1614). The order in which these texts are transcribed, and their presence as a grouping immediately following on from the much longer series of extracts taken from the *Divine Weekes and Workes*, confirms that the source text for the transcriptions from Sylvester must have been one of the three folio editions of his ‘collected works’ printed in 1621, 1633, and 1641, *Du Bartas His Divine Weekes and Workes with a Complete Collection of all the other [...] Workes Translated and Written by [...] Josuah Sylvester*. Discrimination between these three editions is more difficult for they are substantially derivative one of another: the two later editions in 1633 and 1641, as Susan Snyder has argued, are simply reprints of the 1621 collection, 1641 in fact reprinting 1633 page-for-page, adding only one gathering of new material, none of which is transcribed in MS 421.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth remarking again on the rarity of this material. There is little evidence for the reception of Sylvester in manuscript in the seventeenth century, and the survival in MS 421 of such a full record of a full reading of *The Divine Weekes and Workes* from start to finish substantially extends the known record.<sup>21</sup> Manuscripts do record other, smaller readings of Sylvester: Thomas Grocer’s ‘Dayly Obseruations both Diuine & Morall’, dated by him to 1657 and now San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 93, has twenty pages of extracts from Sylvester’s other writings; and there are short extracts from the *Weekes and Workes* distributed among much other material in a slightly later manuscript, probably of the 1680s, now Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection, MS Lt 91, first catalogued by Oliver Pickering in the BCMSV database and now available in wonderful detail through the online Scriptorium project.<sup>22</sup> The well-known trajectory of Sylvester’s larger reception history only

<sup>20</sup> *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur Du Bartas, Translated by Josuah Sylvester*, ed. by Susan Snyder, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), I, 104–06.

<sup>21</sup> Birmingham University Library 16.D801, a copy of the 1611 edition of Sylvester’s translation, is also worth recording: it carries marginalia and manuscript notes, and records of earlier ownership: ‘Hugh Greene his Booke | November the 14<sup>th</sup> :1666: | August the 20<sup>th</sup> in 1669 this Book was Giuen | by Hugh Greene to John Flock’.

<sup>22</sup> *Scriptorium: Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts Online*: <http://SCRIPTORIUM.english.cam.ac.uk>.

serves to add further interest: ‘the speed with which his reputation plummeted from a peak of glory in the late Renaissance where he has for the most part languished since’ is the starting point for Anne Lake Prescott’s recent ‘update’ on Du Bartas and his English translators.<sup>23</sup>

One effect of these extracts and their intercalated reading notes is to miniaturise in manuscript what by the middle decades of the century had become monumental in print. The scribe miniaturises, moreover, in ways beyond the format of his manuscript and the size of his hand: these notes can be considered an epitome of Sylvester’s Du Bartas, that is, in more than one condensed sense. Contractions are rare in the first sequence of largely lyric transcription in the first orientation of MS 421, but they are used systematically in the transcription of the extracts and notes from Du Bartas. The system employed is a variation of that set out by Thomas Shelton in *Tachygraphy* (1638), advertised by the title-page of its 1641 edition as presenting ‘*The Most Exact and compendious methode of shorte and swift writing that hath euer yet been published*’. Shelton’s was the method adopted by Pepys for his Diary; there, as in MS 421, commonly occurring words such as ‘of’ and ‘the’ are abbreviated to the graph used by Shelton to represent their initial letter, a graph similar to a miniscule ‘c’ for ‘of’, and an oblique, rising from left to right, for ‘the’. Other regular substitutions in MS 421 include the numeral ‘2’ for ‘to’, and for ‘God’ Shelton’s g-graph, similar in appearance to a squared-off y-graph, written so that its bowl, the open stroke to the left of the stem, sits in the top half of the writing line, and the stem, which in a regular y-graph would ordinarily be a descender, ends at its foot.<sup>24</sup>

‘Of’ and ‘the’, the two most commonly occurring of Shelton’s abbreviations employed by the scribe, are found together in a boxed-off shoulder note on fol. 6v, *rev.*, a note that serves to draw together the two different transcriptional practices demonstrated in the two different orientations of MS 421. This two-line note is written vertically downwards in the top right-hand corner of a page filled to its foot with transcribed text; its placement here, rather than on the following page in the manuscript, fol. 6r, which remains its only blank recto or verso, clearly links the note to the sequence of transcriptions from Sylvester (see figure 2).

5586 since *the creation of the world* in this  
present year *of our Lord* — 1658

A system lies behind this calculation just as a system lies behind the form in which it has been entered into the manuscript. The calculation rests on the arguments for the dating of creation advanced by John Lightfoote in *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (1644).<sup>25</sup> In the first of the Prolegomena to his *Harmony*, Lightfoote used the evidence of scripture to compile a chronology of the world into which Christ’s birth could be inserted:

Now the scripture carrying on a most faithfull reckoning of the times, from the beginning of time to this fulnesse of it, hath laid this great, wondrous, and happy occurrence of the birth of the Redeemer in the yeere of the world, three thousand nine hundred twenty and

<sup>23</sup> Anne Lake Prescott, ‘Du Bartas and Renaissance Britain: An Update’, *Oeuvres et Critiques*, 29 (2004), 27–38 (p. 27), following her classic *French Poets and the English Renaissance: Studies in Fame and Transformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> These letter forms are illustrated in the plate facing p. 6 of Thomas Shelton, *Tachygraphy* (London: Samuel Cartwright, 1641), ‘The letters of the Alphabet’, and in the volume’s unpaginated ‘Table’ of words and their abbreviations.

<sup>25</sup> A larger context for mid-seventeenth century creationist thinking is briefly provided by Anthony Grafton, ‘Dating History: The Renaissance and the Reformation of Chronology’, *Daedalus*, 132 (2003), 74–85; see also James Barr, ‘Why the World was Created in 4004 BC: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 67 (1984–85), 575–608.

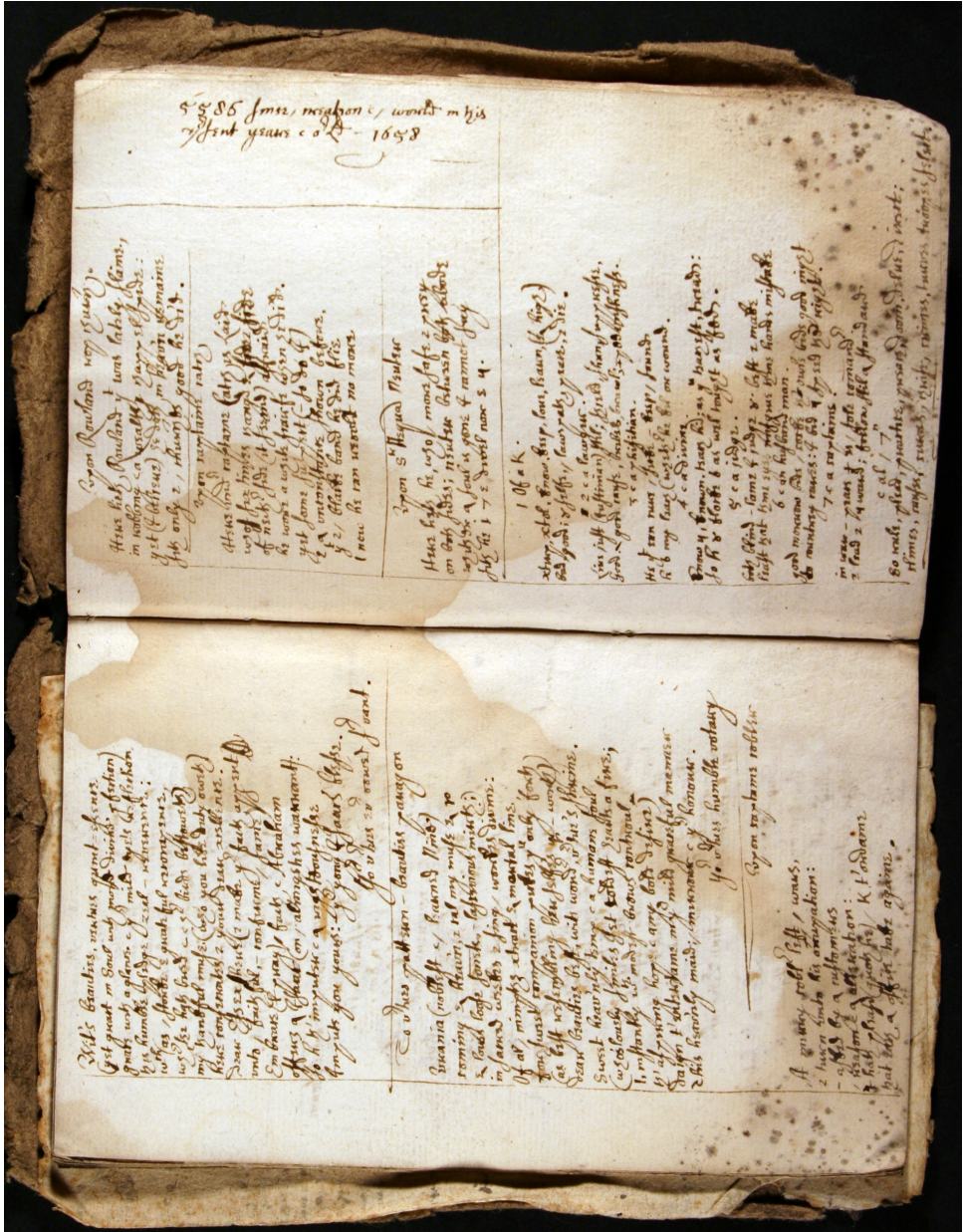


Figure 2: University of Birmingham, MS 421, fols 6v–7r, rev. image by courtesy of Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

*For Honour and Glory: Reading Selden and Sylvester in the Seventeenth Century*

eight. Which that wee make good, and fixed among so much variety and difference, may the Reader gently have the patience to see and to examine the particular summes by which the Scripture accounteth to make up this total.<sup>26</sup>

That readerly patience invited by Lightfoote, if carried through the following 19 pages, would arrive at the moment of publication in 1644; the date of 1658 recorded in MS 421, '5586 since *the creation of the world*', simply extends that calculation on through the century. The connection with Sylvester's *Du Bartas* is startling: although Lightfoote is not named as a source for the long perspectives within or against which this reading is suddenly located, the shoulder note places a reading of an epic poem of creation squarely in relation to a reading of current theological scholarship on the same topic. Both readings, the one recorded in MS 421 through the extracts and notes taken from Sylvester, and the one implied by the reliance on Lightfoote's chronological calculations, lock literary history into the larger history of revealed creation.

But there are, of course, two dated histories of reading in MS 421, and in closing we might consider how the two, 1656 and 1658, both ending very different sequences of reading, writing and note-taking, might be located one against the other, and against the larger histories of reading with which I began. Seen from one angle, the two histories of reading might be thought to be reversed and oppositional in MS 421, as the manuscript that records them is reversed. Where one sequence of reading and transcription is predominantly secular, and comes from a culture of manuscript circulation that relies on a public availability of texts within a coterie or social economy, the other, separated perhaps by more than the physical format of the manuscript document, is predominantly religious, and comes from a culture that is both printed and, one might think, private, these notes being then not so much the record a reader's wider interaction with a domestic and textual society but instead the record of a particularly Protestant engagement as an individual believer and reader with the matter of divine creation. But seen from another angle, the two readings might equally make concurrent, rather than disjunctive, sense, being seen as the record of two contemporary patterns of reading, one slightly longer than the other. After all, had it simply been a matter of our reader's moving from the secular to the divine upon his bereavement in 1656 there would not necessarily have been a need to reverse the manuscript; notes from Sylvester could easily have followed on the blank fol. 6r or begun, indeed, on any of the then-blank pages in the sewn booklet. This is to say, in effect, that the orientation of the manuscript cannot finally date for us the records of reading that it contains: no one single way of holding it — in our hands or in our minds — can resolve its contradictions. But why should we wish its contradictions resolved? Instead, then, what we might see in MS 421, as in MS KWH 16/26, are the ongoing, nuanced and irresolvable interactions between manuscript and print, between the worldly and the holy, and between the reading recorded by epitome or abridgement and the reading recorded and re-ordered by commonplace. Both anonymous readers and transcribers studied in this piece had the singular virtues of linearity in their reading, beginning at the beginning, and ending at the end; one of the pleasures involved in studying them today is that we have the luxury of exploring their reading not only as a start or as the close of any given process but in the fullness of an historicized time in which we continue to recover new riches.

<sup>26</sup> John Lightfoote, *The Harmony of the Foure Evangelists* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1644), sig.¶2r.